An Exploration of the Strategies for Students' Silence in Junior High School English Classes

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Abstract

In the context of the ongoing globalization, English, as a crucial tool for international communication, plays a significant role in various fields such as economy and culture. However, in current junior high school English teaching in China, the phenomenon of classroom silence is widespread. This not only hinders the improvement of students' English communication skills but also runs counter to the goals of modern Chinese education. This paper analyzes the causes of classroom silence in English classes and attempts to propose improvement methods and countermeasures, aiming to contribute to the enhancement of the teaching efficiency of English classes.

Keywords

Junior high school English classes, Students' silence, Cause analysis, Strategy exploration.

1. The Definition of Classroom Silence

As a phenomenon that has received much attention in the field of education, many scholars have explored the definition of classroom silence from different perspectives.

Brody (1992) defined classroom silence from the perspective of behavioral manifestations as the lack of obvious verbal expression behavior of students in class. That is, students do not speak actively for a long time and remain quiet during teacher-questioning or discussion sessions. This view emphasizes the external behavioral characteristics of classroom silence, which are easy to observe and identify. However, some other scholars pay more attention to the psychological factors behind classroom silence. For example, Krashen (1982) proposed that classroom silence may be a self-protection mechanism of students caused by psychological factors such as language learning anxiety. Students choose to remain silent because they are afraid of making mistakes or being criticized. This definition closely links classroom silence with students' internal psychological states. From the perspective of social interaction, Cazden (1988) believed that classroom silence is an interruption state in classroom interaction, which breaks the normal communication rhythm between teachers and students and among students, and may be caused by factors such as poor communication, unequal power relations, or cultural differences.

Domestic scholars such as Wang Tan (2002) also studied classroom silence. He pointed out that classroom silence refers to the silent phenomenon that occurs during the communication process between teachers and students or either of them in the classroom. This silent phenomenon can be either negative, such as students' lack of enthusiasm for participation and stagnation of thinking, or positive, such as students' in - depth thinking.

2. Reasons for Students' Silence in Junior High School English Class

2.1. Learning Motivation

The self - determination theory proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985) suggests that intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation have an important impact on students' behavior. In junior

high school English classes, if the learning content cannot stimulate students' internal interests, and students can hardly obtain pleasure and a sense of achievement from English learning, resulting in insufficient intrinsic motivation, they are likely to choose to remain silent. For example, dull grammar explanations and mechanical word memorization cannot meet students' needs for novelty and challenges, so students may lack the motivation to actively participate in the classroom.

Dornyei (2001) emphasized the situational nature of motivation and pointed out that the classroom environment has a significant impact on students' learning motivation. In junior high school English classes, if teachers' teaching methods are monotonous and the evaluation methods are unscientific, and students cannot feel the value of learning English, their learning motivation will decrease, and they will remain silent in class.

Domestic scholar Wen Qiufang (2001) believed that instrumental motivation and integrative motivation affect students' classroom performance from the perspective of the types of learning motivation. In junior high school English learning, if students only regard English as a tool for further education or obtaining certificates and lack love for English culture and interest in English learning itself, when the learning difficulty increases or external incentives decrease, their learning motivation will weaken, leading to classroom silence.

2.2. Learning Ability

Cognitive strategy ability in language learning has a profound impact on students' classroom performance. In junior high school English classes, some students lack effective cognitive strategies, such as the inability to organize knowledge reasonably or use memory techniques. This makes English learning difficult for them. For example, when memorizing vocabulary, they do not know how to use techniques such as association and word - formation, resulting in low learning efficiency. Facing classroom questions or interactions, they choose to remain silent for fear of making mistakes (Bialystok, 1978).

Sternberg (1985) proposed the triarchic theory of intelligence, in which practical intelligence is particularly crucial in the practical application of language learning. Some junior high school students have certain English knowledge but lack practical intelligence, and they find it difficult to flexibly apply the learned knowledge in oral expression and English communication situations. Over time, their self - confidence is frustrated, and they gradually become silent in class.

Wang Chuming (2003) proposed the "synergistic effect of foreign language learning", emphasizing the importance of the coordinated development of language ability and practical application ability. In the process of junior high school English learning, if the development of students' language input and output abilities is unbalanced, for example, their listening and reading abilities are relatively strong, but their speaking and writing abilities lag behind, they will remain silent in classroom activities that require oral expression due to their own ability shortcomings.

2.3. Student Personality

Jung (1921) proposed the personality type theory, which divides people's personalities into introverted and extroverted types. Introverted students pay more attention to their internal world. Although they have rich inner thoughts, in junior high school English classes, such students are often reluctant to speak actively due to excessive concern about their own performance and fear of making mistakes. For example, in English class discussion sessions, they may have already formulated answers in their minds but choose to remain silent for fear of speaking incoherently or being laughed at by classmates.

In Cattell's (1946) 16 - personality - factor model, factor Q4 (tension) is also related to classroom silence. Students with high tension are prone to anxiety when facing English class

interactions and find it difficult to participate relaxedly. In oral English practice, they may blank out even at a little pressure and dare not speak even if they know the answers, thus remaining silent in class for a long time.

Domestic scholar Lin Chongde (2002) pointed out in his research on the relationship between students' personality development and education that introverted and self - confident - lacking students are more likely to be silent in English learning. They have a low evaluation of their own English abilities. When facing complex English learning tasks and classroom interactions, they will shrink back for fear of exposing their shortcomings in junior high school English classes by not actively participating in discussions or answering questions.

2.4.   Learning Habits

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) proposed the learning strategy theory, which closely links learning habits with learning strategies. Some students have long - formed the habit of relying on teachers' explanations and lack the awareness of active exploration and autonomous learning. In junior high school English classes, when facing open - ended questions raised by teachers or group discussion tasks, they are used to waiting for teachers to give answers instead of thinking actively and participating in discussions. For example, in English reading classes, for the in - depth meaning of the article, they are used to relying on teachers' analysis and do not actively use learning strategies such as reasoning and induction to understand, so they choose to remain silent in classroom interactions.

Schunk (1991) emphasized the interaction between self - efficacy and learning habits. Some students do not develop good review and preview habits during the process of English learning, resulting in poor knowledge acquisition and unsatisfactory learning effects. This makes them doubt their own English learning abilities and reduces their self - efficacy. In class, when required to answer questions or participate in oral expression activities, they remain silent for fear of performing poorly, gradually forming a vicious cycle and further strengthening bad learning habits.

In addition, students who lack the habit of cooperative learning are also prone to be silent in English classes. In junior high school English classes where group cooperative learning is becoming more and more common, such students are not good at communicating and cooperating with classmates, and do not know how to share their views and listen to others' opinions. When discussing English topics in groups, they often stand by and are reluctant to express their thoughts, resulting in classroom silence. (Zhang Dajun, 2004)

2.5.   Learning Anxiety

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) proposed by Horwitz (1986) involves anxiety caused by differences in learning habits. Some students are used to rote learning. In junior high school English learning, when facing a large amount of knowledge that needs to be flexibly applied, such as the application of grammar in different contexts and diverse expressions of vocabulary, their original learning habits are difficult to adapt, thus generating anxiety. In the classroom questioning session, once required to answer questions using flexible English knowledge, these students will be nervous and anxious for fear that their learning habits cannot cope, and then choose to remain silent and dare not answer questions.

The research of MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) shows that the mismatch between learning habits and the language learning environment can also trigger anxiety. In junior high school English classes, if students are used to studying alone while the class mainly adopts the group cooperative learning model, they will feel uncomfortable in group activities, fearing that their performance will affect the group's performance or that their learning habit defects will be exposed during cooperation.

Wang Caikang (2003) pointed out in his research on middle school students' English learning anxiety that some students do not develop the habit of regular review and summary in English learning, and knowledge gaps continue to accumulate. As the learning content increases and the difficulty intensifies, they have severe anxiety about upcoming English tests and classroom performances. In English classes, when facing situations where they may be questioned or required to show their learning achievements, these students are overwhelmed by anxiety due to their extreme lack of confidence in their knowledge mastery and can only remain silent to avoid possible failures.

2.6. Teaching Model

The "whole language teaching" concept emphasizes that language learning should be carried out in real and natural situations. On the contrary, the traditional teacher - centered teaching model of lectures is still widely used in junior high school English classes. In this model, teachers dominate the classroom, and a large amount of time is spent on knowledge explanation, while students passively accept. For example, in English grammar teaching, teachers simply explain grammar rules, and students lack opportunities for practical application and interaction. The classroom atmosphere is dull, and students' enthusiasm for participation is low, gradually forming the habit of silence. (Goodman, 1986)

The "input hypothesis" theory points out that language learning requires a large amount of comprehensible input. However, some teachers do not fully consider students' language levels and interests in teaching, and the teaching content and methods lack pertinence. For example, when selecting English reading materials, if the difficulty is too high or the topic is boring, students find it difficult to understand and are not interested, resulting in low classroom participation and silence in response. (Krashen, 1982)

Gu Lingyuan (2007) emphasized in his teaching reform research that interactive teaching is crucial for improving students' classroom participation. If teachers fail to effectively carry out interaction in junior high school English classes, such as chaotic group discussions and unenlightening questions, students cannot obtain a sense of achievement from the interaction and will gradually lose their enthusiasm for participation, showing silence in class.

2.7. Teaching Methods

Nunan (1991) proposed the communicative approach, aiming to cultivate students' ability to use language for communication in real situations. However, some teachers rely too much on the traditional translation teaching method in junior high school English teaching. When explaining English knowledge, they pay too much attention to the word - by - word and sentence - by - sentence translation of vocabulary and grammar, ignoring the training of students' oral expression and practical communication abilities. For example, in the process of text explanation, teachers mechanically translate English into Chinese, and students lack the opportunity to think and communicate in English. Over time, students gradually become silent in oral interaction sessions and lose their enthusiasm for expression.

Brown (2001) emphasized the importance of effective questioning in stimulating students' learning interests and participation. In junior high school English classes, the problem of single - form and unstratified questioning by teachers is relatively common. Some teachers always ask questions that only require simple "yes" or "no" answers, or the questions are too difficult and far beyond the students' ability range, which cannot stimulate students' thinking and enthusiasm for participation. Take English reading classes as an example. If teachers only ask "Is this word mentioned in the article?", without guiding students to analyze the main idea and structure of the article, students are likely to feel that the class is boring and choose to remain silent when faced with questions.

Li Jilin (2006) advocated the situational teaching method, proposing to create vivid and vivid teaching situations for students to enhance their learning experiences. However, in actual teaching, some teachers fail to create effective teaching situations, and the teaching content is divorced from students' real - life experiences. For example, in English writing teaching, if the given writing topic is too abstract and students lack relevant life experiences as a support, it is difficult for them to develop ideas, so they are reluctant to actively participate in discussions and speak in class, showing a silent state.

In addition, Richards and Rodgers (2001) pointed out that some teachers lack flexible application of teaching methods in teaching and cannot select appropriate teaching methods according to teaching content, student characteristics, and teaching goals. In junior high school English teaching, the same teaching method is used for vocabulary, grammar teaching, reading, and writing teaching, resulting in frustrated students' learning enthusiasm and frequent occurrence of classroom silence.

2.8. Teacher-Student Relationship

The student-centered educational concept emphasizes that a good teacher-student relationship should be based on respect, understanding, and trust. However, in actual junior high school English teaching, some teachers still act as authorities and lack equal communication with students. For example, in class, teachers only impart knowledge directly and do not attach importance to students' ideas and feedback. When students put forward different opinions, teachers do not give sufficient respect and patience to listen, which makes students afraid to speak actively in subsequent classroom interactions and gradually become silent (Rogers, 1983).

Freire (1970) criticized the "banking - concept" of education, that is, teachers pour knowledge into students like putting money into a "piggy bank". In this model, the teacher - student relationship is unequal, and students are in a passive receiving position. In junior high school English classes, this unequal teacher - student relationship leads to students' lack of learning initiative and participation. For example, in English class discussion sessions, if teachers overly dominate the discussion direction, students' opinions cannot be fully expressed. Over time, students will lose interest in class discussions and remain silent in class.

Domestic scholar Wu Kangning (1998) pointed out in his research on educational sociology that the emotional relationship between teachers and students has a significant impact on students' learning behavior. If there is a lack of emotional communication between teachers and students and the relationship is cold, students' enthusiasm for learning the subjects taught by the teachers will also decrease. In junior high school English teaching, when students do not establish a good emotional connection with English.

3. Suggestions to Solve the Problem of Students' Silence in Junior Middle School English Class

3.1. Establishing a Good Classroom Atmosphere

Teachers need to establish a good classroom atmosphere, in order to create a relaxed and pleasant learning environment, promote students' learning interest, and then break the silence of the classroom atmosphere. (Zhu Lin,2023) Teachers keep a cordial and kind attitude in class and use humorous language to relieve students' tension. For example, when explaining grammar knowledge, use some interesting examples or short stories to help students understand, making the classroom atmosphere more relaxed and pleasant. At the same time, the teaching rhythm should be reasonably arranged to avoid the teaching content being too compact or boring, and appropriate rest and thinking time should be set aside for students, so

that students can actively participate in the class in a comfortable environment and avoid being silent due to excessive pressure.

3.2. Adopting Appropriate Teaching Methods

The following will be from the question, error correction, feedback three aspects to put forward suggestions.

3.2.1. Asking Questions

Socrates, the ancient Greek philosopher and educator, said: "The problem is the midwife, who helps the birth of new ideas." There are several ways teachers can ask questions to avoid silence in class to some extent.

First, ask a variety of questions. Compared with closed questions, open questions can stimulate students to think more. For example, In a class studying the present simple tense, a teacher might ask, "In your daily life, what do you usually do after school?" There is no fixed answer to this question. Students can answer it according to their actual situation. Examples such as "I usually play basketball with my friends." or "I usually do my homework first." can make students more actively participate in expression and exercise their language skills. In addition, heuristic questions are put forward to inspire students to think deeply about the content of the text or knowledge points. When learning the text about environmental protection, teachers can ask: "If we continue to pollute the environment like this, what will happen to our earth in the future?" Guide students to think about the consequences of environmental pollution from different angles, so as to open discussion and avoid silence in class.

Second, optimize the way of asking questions. Teachers can ask questions in different layers according to students' English level and learning ability. For students with weaker foundations, ask simple factual questions such as "What is the main idea of the first paragraph?" For students with better fundamentals, questions can be more challenging, such as "How do you think the author's opinion on this issue can be improved?" In this way, students at every level can participate in class questioning and have the opportunity to answer questions. Teachers can also conduct interesting questions to increase the interest of questions and attract students' attention. Teachers should try their best to choose some interesting questions closely related to students' lives. (Chen Yang, 2020) When learning animal-related vocabulary, teachers can imitate animal calls and then ask, "What animal makes this sound?" This fun way allows students to actively answer questions in a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere and break the silence in class.

Third, give enough time to wait. When the teacher asks the question, do not rush the students to answer, should give 3-5 seconds of waiting time, so that students have enough time to think about the answer. For example, after explaining a reading comprehension, ask students: "What is the author's attitude towards the new technology?" Waiting a while for students to review the content of the passage, organize the language, and then answer the questions can improve the quality and enthusiasm of students to answer the questions.

3.2.2. Error Correction

First of all, teachers can guide students to self-correct mistakes by asking questions, repeating students' answers, and improving their pronunciation and intonation. For example, when a student translates "I have two apples," they say "I have two apples." The teacher can ask, "We have learned that when the subject is' I, 'what form should the verb use? Think again." Let students think for themselves and correct mistakes to enhance their understanding and memory of knowledge.

Secondly, the use of group mutual help correction, in group activities, encourage students to listen to each other and correct. For example, in group English conversation practice, members can point out pronunciation, grammar and other mistakes to each other and make progress

together. Teachers visit each group, give guidance and encouragement at the right time, so that students can accept mistakes and correct them in a relaxed atmosphere.

3.2.3. Feedback

First, the feedback content should be specific and targeted, for example, after the students have completed the English grammar, the teacher should not just say "right" or "wrong", but should point out in detail.

Second, the feedback methods should be diverse. In classroom interaction, teachers should give verbal feedback in a timely manner with enthusiasm and encouragement. For students' written assignments, tests, etc., teachers can annotate detailed feedback next to them. According to the performance of individual students, teachers should give individual feedback after class or in the interval of classroom interaction. In the classroom, when students are found to have common problems, teachers should give collective feedback.

Third, the flexible use of immediate feedback and delayed feedback. In the process of classroom interaction, teachers should give immediate feedback for simple question answers or behavior performance, while teachers can use delayed feedback for complex questions or tasks that require students to think deeply.

Fourth, the feedback should be based on encouragement. Teachers should be good at finding the progress of students, even if it is a small progress, they should also give affirmation. When students make mistakes, teachers should try not to use critical language, but should use more positive language to guide students, so as to protect their self-esteem and avoid remaining silent in class for fear of being criticized.

3.3. Changing the Traditional Teaching Mode

The traditional teaching mode emphasizes teacher-centered. To improve classroom silence, we must shift from teacher-centered to student-centered, and improve the teaching mode by stratified teaching, task-driven method and situational teaching method.

3.3.1. Student-centered Approach

Changing the traditional teaching mode With the deepening of the new curriculum reform, the traditional teaching mode has hindered the development of students to some extent. Therefore, it is necessary to implement the "teacher-oriented, student-oriented" education concept. Teachers should give full play to the main role of students, in the classroom teaching, more use of group cooperation, role playing, project learning and other ways, so that students become the main body of learning. In addition, teachers should change their roles from knowledge imparts to facilitators, guides and organizers.

3.3.2. Differenciated Teaching

To have a thorough understanding of students' English level, learning ability and needs, and formulate teaching objectives that meet students' actual conditions. Teachers can comprehensively evaluate students' English level through classroom performance, homework completion, test scores and other aspects. For example, for students with solid basic knowledge, strong learning ability and positive learning attitude, they are classified as level A; Students who have a good grasp of basic knowledge, but are slightly insufficient in knowledge application and expansion, and have a more serious learning attitude are divided into Layer B; Students with weak basic knowledge, learning ability to be improved and low learning enthusiasm are included in the C layer. At the same time, we should pay attention to the dynamic changes of students and adjust the stratification in a timely manner. In addition, in the teaching process, targeted teaching content is designed for students at different levels. According to the stratification of students, the teaching objectives are formulated to match them.

3.3.3. Task-driven Approach

English classroom consists of a series of closely linked tasks and is the key place for teachers and students to carry out teaching activities. Teaching with task-driven as the core can guide students to express their thoughts naturally in the process of active exploration and effectively stimulate their learning curiosity. With the help of tasks, students are encouraged to take the initiative to communicate, boldly express their opinions in the process of learning from others, and build the classroom into a free and interactive learning paradise. In the task-led classroom, students can use a variety of learning resources, explore problems with doubts, and more easily identify the key and difficult points of course learning. Teachers create a variety of tasks, so that students can choose freely, find more problems in the process, and then realize the omission and fill the gap. At the same time, we respect the development differences of students and encourage them to raise difficult problems and share solutions in group interaction, so that students can continuously accumulate profound perception and experience in communication. Teachers should also actively participate in the discussion of students, carefully listen to their opinions and suggestions, and help students develop keen language perception ability in continuous expression and active attempts. Encourage students to stimulate their thinking inspiration in mutual discussion, allow them to create tasks according to the actual situation, constantly think and summarize in the process of solving problems, and gradually form a link and progressive learning thinking method.

3.3.4. Situational Teaching Method

Teachers can adopt situational teaching method to create vivid and interesting situations according to the teaching content. For example, when learning tourism-related English knowledge, they can simulate the scenes of airports, hotels, scenic spots, etc., and let students have dialogue exercises in the situation, such as booking air tickets, inquiring about scenic spots, etc., so that students can be immersed in the situation and stimulate their desire to speak English. Teachers can stimulate students' learning motivation by creating realistic situations and encouraging them to think positively and show boldly. In the situational mode, students can get rid of the limitation of textbooks, give free play, and fully show their advantages and talents. (Zhang Jintang, 2019)

3.4. Strengthening Comprehensible Input of Knowledge

Teachers need to carefully prepare readable learning materials before class, and carry out in-depth analysis of learners' needs. When preparing materials, it is important to carry out scientific and systematic research and consider students' interests in all aspects to ensure that the topics covered by the selected materials can arouse students' strong interest. In this way, when students face these learning materials, as long as they make some efforts, they can gradually narrow the gap between their starting level and the learning goal, and finally achieve the learning goal. It is very important for learners to input language materials with appropriate difficulty and novel topics. It can effectively activate the language acquisition mechanism in the brain of learners, just like injecting strong impetus into the engine of language learning, promoting learners to steadily move forward on the road of second language learning and achieve efficient second language acquisition. (Zhang Qingyang, 2023)

3.5. Establishing a Good Teacher-student Relationship

An American psychologist once said, "Successful education depends on a sincere understanding and trust between teachers and students." Therefore, teachers should fully respect students' personality differences, interests and opinions. For example, in class discussion, teachers should encourage and affirm students' unique opinions, even if they are different from mainstream views. Take the initiative to communicate with students in spare time to understand their study puzzles, life troubles and views on English learning. Regular one-on-one

meetings can be held, or small symposia can be organized to create a relaxed atmosphere and encourage students to speak freely. Be objective and fair when evaluating students, focusing not only on grades, but also on students' efforts and progress. Encouraging evaluation is given to students who actively participate in class but give wrong answers.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to provide a useful reference for improving the silence of students in junior middle school English classroom, hoping to help teachers improve the quality of English teaching and promote the all-round development of students' comprehensive English literacy. The solution of student silence is a long and complicated process, which requires teachers' continuous attention and exploration, and there is still room for further research in the future.

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