

# A Study on Nonintellectual Factors in Middle School Oral English Teaching and Improvement Strategies

**ChunLi Huang**

School of Foreign Languages,  
China West Normal University,  
Nanchong, P. R. China  
E-mail: [1090992804@qq.com](mailto:1090992804@qq.com)

## **Abstract**

*This study aims at exploring the influence of nonintellectual factors on oral English learning. Some improvement strategies for oral English teaching will be discussed and put forward through the survey to help students improve their oral English proficiency.*

**Key words:** Nonintellectual factors; Oral English; Middle School; Strategies

## **1. Introduction**

With the implementation of quality education and the provocation of new curriculum in china, teachers and students have spent a lot time and energy on English teaching and learning. But most people are only concerned with written score in each exam and ignored the importance of oral English. The new teaching mood of students-centered requires a high standard of students' oral English. Therefore, to improve students' speaking ability not only reflects the true meaning of language communication, but also responses to the requirements of new curriculum standard.

At the beginning of the 20th century, with the application of humanistic psychology in the second language acquisition, the majority of researchers and language teachers show great interest in the nonintellectual factors which affect students' language learning. In 1935 American psychologist W.P. Alexander in the intelligence: concrete and abstract, for the first time, put forward the concept of "non-intelligence factors". in 1943, another American psychological test master Wechsler. D put forward the concept of "intelligence and non-intelligence factors".

According to Shen Deli (2001), nonintellectual factors should include achievement motivation, interaction motivation, cognitive interest, learning awareness, learning anxiety, learning responsibility, learning stamina, attention stability, emotional stability, etc. MacIntyre & Gardner( 1989, 1991) put their main concern on

language anxiety, so they believe that learners tend to feel worried and nervous when they are to perform or speak in a kind of foreign language, which can be called foreign language anxiety. In this detailed study of anxiety, three components of foreign language anxiety are clearly analyzed: communication apprehension anxiety, negative social evaluation anxiety and test anxiety. Foreign Language anxiety, as an affective factor, brings a challenge to language learning, especially spoken English.

Fan Xuejing (2010) said that three main nonintellectual factors including anxiety, motivation and self-esteem, are chosen to explain the relationship between oral English proficiency and learners' affective factors comprehensively. Furthermore, according to Jane Arnold (2000:19), affective factors can be classified into two facets. One is learners' individual factor, which is composed of motivation, foreign language anxiety and self-esteem. The other is extrinsic factor—sociocultural variables.

From the above discussed, some specialists narrow the definition of nonintellectual factors into some nonintellectual factors. Some scholars choose a specific affective factor, such as foreign language anxiety, to analyze its affect for oral English proficiency. Some just focus on students' emotional mood, such as high motivation, high self-esteem. Although there are many studies on nonintellectual factors, most of them just explore the nonintellectual factors from the students' perspective, that is internal reasons. Some external elements of nonintellectual factors have not been analyzed clearly or even been neglected, so the problems caused by them have not been solved entirely. Much attention has been paid to the intelligence factors and students' internal factors, meanwhile, teacher, as teaching facilitator, can also put great influence on oral English proficiency.

Thus this paper attempts to analyze the influence of the nonintellectual factors (individual factor and extrinsic factor) in oral English learning and explore how to improve students' oral English ability in middle school teaching.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Research purpose**

This research explores the influence of nonintellectual factors in oral expression, aiming at finding an effective solution to the problem of students' oral English learning and expression. Teachers' instructing attitude and teaching philosophy exerts a great influence on students' affective mood, to a deeper degree, plays irreplaceable roles in their oral expression performance.

### **2.2 Research subjects**

The study is conducted in one key middle school in Nanchong of Sichuan province in China. The total number of students who fill in the questionnaire is 150, 55 are students, 95 of them are female students. They are selected from the same grade with ages ranging from 16 to 17. They are fresh students for senior high school because they are not so dull, or not so accustomed to English teaching as grade 3 high school students. Meanwhile, they have much more professional language basis than students in junior middle school. Furthermore, for good performance in the college entrance examination, they would like to pay much attention to the reading and writing language skills other than the speaking skill. All these reasons make it more possible to make sure the objectivity of the result.

## **2.3 Research instrument**

### **2.3.1 Teachers and students interview**

Except for questionnaire, this research is conducted by another way of students' and teachers' interview. In this part, three open questions are prepared for students, another three for teachers. Their answers are recorded as a data for research analysis. Moreover, the form of interview provides another chance for students and teachers to express their comprehensive thoughts and comments about oral English learning and teaching.

Three English teachers from three grades are invited to be interviewed with three questions. Actually the interviews are more like conversations, so as to get teachers' attitude to students' different oral English proficiency and their reactions to students' unsatisfied performance.

The three chosen students who were interviewed are at different levels, one of them got 140 mark in the final exam of last semester, one got the mark of 110, and one just got 90.

### **2.3.2 Questionnaire**

The questionnaire is designed to reveal the relationship between effective factors and oral English competence, including 9 questions. It is expected to find out the teaching and learning strategies on the basis of internal factors and external factors of nonintellectual factors.

The first step is to hand out 150 questionnaires to senior students who are at random to make sure the objectivity and validity of the research. Finishing the questionnaire may cost each student about 15 minutes and before that they are told their answers will not be open, and just for analysis.

Although questionnaires can be used to explore the general link between nonintellectual factors and oral English competency, the face-to-face talk can get more detailed and direct responses to the questions about students' thoughts of oral English performance. The questionnaire provides objectivity, meanwhile the interviews reveal the result more subjectively.

## **3. Results and Data Analysis**

### **3.1. Analysis of teachers' interview**

From the Q1 (What do you think is the biggest obstacle in students' oral English expression?), all the three teachers agreed on the sense of anxiety. When it refers to the reason for sense of anxiety, only one teacher mentioned that teachers' reaction to students' oral English performance. In fact, a better job will be done if a teacher allows students to make mistakes or errors. Teachers should try to build a cooperative and democratic relationship between them and students, which will be helpful to ease learners' sense of anxiety. The rest two teachers strongly believed that students' sense of anxiety comes from their poor English. That is to say, those students who get low marks in tests are more possible to show a higher degree of anxiety. For teachers of this kind, direct relation between oral English proficiency and test scores is built up.

The Q2 is that if a student is unwilling to speak English or has poor spoken English, what will you do to help him or her? According to the data collected, only one teacher can express her specific strategies to help the students. This teacher is exactly the one who believes that teachers' attitude plays a vital role in students' oral English learning. The rest two clearly state that they will help students, but then when it refers to the corresponding strategy, there are not effective ways.

The Q3 is about their opinions to oral English teaching. One of the teachers with open and positive thought is glad to accept students' mistakes or errors. The other two traditional teachers who follows regular and fixed teaching mode are reluctant to accept mistakes. They show a great tendency to correct students as soon as a mistake or error appears. In fact, Li Qian(2014) emphasized that the instructing attitude determines the specific teaching behavior.

### 3.2 Analysis of students' interview

For the Q4(what do you think is the most nonintellectual factor that hinders you learning oral English , and why?), all of the three students agree on the sense of anxiety. One student replies that he is always afraid to make mistake when speaking in front of teacher and classmates in the class. One answers that she feels nervous because of peer pressure and teacher's expectation and attitude. One says he always fear that his bad performance will disappointed his teacher. So we can see that mistakes, pressure from teachers, poor English would lead to the students' sense of anxiety. It is concluded that the relaxed class atmosphere and democratic teaching belief would encourage the students to speak and students can become more bold and confident to practice their oral English. In the oral English learning practice, especially for students at the introductory stage, teachers should adhere to the gradual, progressive principle. Only in this way of creating relax situation and encouraging students to speak English, will the psychological factors have the least influence.

Related to Q5 and Q6, The three students answered they do not like oral English learning in different degrees. They said they were more comfortable and relaxed in reading and writing classes than in oral English class. They regard writing and reading as individual work which is not involved in communication with others. While in oral English class, They have to express themselves and understand the others with much anxiety.

### 3.3 Analysis of questionnaire data

The number of questionnaire given to students is 150 in all and 140 back. Among the 140 questionnaires, 5 are invalid. The data of questionnaires is in the table below.

Answer	A	B	C	D	E
Percentage					
Questions					
Q(1)	33.3%	66.6%			
Q(2)	10%	34%	15%	40%	1%
Q(3)	24%	76%			
Q(4)	50%	12%	18%	17%	3%
Q(5)	24%	14%	40%	22%	2%
Q(6)	10%	85%	5%		
Q(7)	10%	30%	26%	34%	
Q(8)	30%	14%	35%	21%	
Q(9)	25%	8%	17%	40%	10%

In case of the data result, according to Q(3) and Q(6), 79% hold the view that nonintellectual factor is a more important reason than cognitive factor in the oral English learning, which show us the crucial role of nonintellectual factors, and give us a new information that students tend to attribute their successful learning result to nonintellectual factor instead of intelligence factor. Meanwhile, much more concerns are paid to nonintellectual factors, which maybe a good start of new research.

From Q(4) and Q(5), the sense of anxiety from oral English performance is the biggest obstacle in their ideas. The majority of students about 62% think that they feel different levels of anxiety or nervousness when they are learning or speaking English. When are asked why they feel nervous when oral English communication, 40% worried about teachers' criticism before speaking English. 22% are afraid to make mistakes, thus they try their best to reduce the chance to speak in public with the reason of protection of their self-esteem. about 14% students say that they are limited by their introverted personality. On most occasion, they feel timid and are not willing to speak in public.

Q(7) and q(9) are referring to the extrinsic factors of teachers' attitude and teaching styles. 35% regard their teachers as traditional teacher-centered class controller. Teachers adopt traditional approach and arrange teaching process in stereotypical model, so that students are forced to learn without any interest or motivation. 30% think that teachers who are strict with them make them feel stressful. They feared to make mistakes before speaking instead of speak freely in a relax atmosphere. In a sum, most students regard the teachers' teaching belief and teaching styles as one of the most important nonintellectual factors that exerts great influence on oral English performance.

#### **4. The suggested strategies for oral English teaching**

Based on the above data analysis, there are some suggested strategies for oral English teaching to help students to improve their oral English learning.

##### **4.1 Identifying the role of teachers**

Due to the long time influence of the traditional teacher-centered educational mode, teachers impart knowledge to students mainly by explanations and "spoon-feeding" and neglect the students' determined roles. The learners become passive recipients of knowledge, being firmly confined to learning knowledge points in the classroom. In the communicative activities, teachers' roles should be defined as the participant, the organizer, the facilitator, and the resource provider, instead of the controller (Wang Qiang 2006). So teachers should change the dominant roles in the students teaching process, from the "teacher" to "mentor", from "teaching" learners to "guiding" learners. Teachers should set up the thought of "students-oriented" and adhere to the dominant role of the students in the process of English teaching and learning. Teacher should cultivate the qualities of sincerity, love and patience to help students to lay down their psychological baggage in the oral English learning (Zhang ke, 2004).

##### **4.2 Strengthening students' self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy is an individual's judgment and perception about whether he or she can be competent for a certain task. The individual's self-efficacy has a direct influence on the persistence of the behavior, on the attitude towards the difficulties, and on the individual's state when involved in a certain activity ( Zhang

Dingkun,1998). Therefore, it is of great significance to strengthen the sense of self-efficacy and enhance students' self-confidence to break through the psychological barrier of oral English learning.

In the process of English learning, students should cultivate the high self-esteem, develop the positive self-confidence, prefer long-range goals to short-term or immediate needs, overcome the anxiety, enjoy community involvement, do a lot practice with much enthusiasm and make a certain study plan to fulfill the target of learning (Chen Xueling, 2001).

## **5. Conclusion**

### **5.1 Major findings of the study**

Nonintellectual factors which exert a great influence on oral English learning are mainly composed of students' internal factors and external factors of teachers.

From the aspect of students' internal factors, The level of anxiety, motivation and self-esteem show strong correlation with oral English learning. a student with high level of anxiety and low level of self-esteem show a poor oral English performance. Students with high oral English proficiency, are more motivated to learn oral English. In other words, higher self-esteem and motivation has a positive correlation with oral English learning, while inferiority and anxiety has a negative influence on the oral English learning.

From the external factors of teachers, Teachers' positive attitude toward students plays a critical role in oral English learning. Teachers' positive attitude encourages students to learn in their personalized behavior, including: to appreciate students, to help them improve learning ability, enhance their self-esteem and self-confidence and to ease their anxiety.

### **5.2 Limitations of the study**

The number of subjects involved the survey and the approach to the data have much room for improvement. the subjects of this research are only 150 students in senior high one, not all the students in this grade are involved, so the data collected from the questionnaire are not so comprehensive and the result are not so recapitulative. The answers from the questionnaire are chosen by students themselves, so the authenticity of the data is another limitation.

Although this research takes the internal and external factors into consideration, the scope of external factors is confined to teachers' attitude, so for further study, it is absolutely necessary to enlarge the research scope in the field of oral English learning and teaching, such as social and family cultures, educational evaluation system, etc.

## **Appendix A:(questions for interview of teachers and students)**

Questions for teachers:

Q1:What do you think is the biggest obstacle in students' oral English expression?

Q2: If a student is unwilling to speak English or has poor oral English, how do you help him or her?

Q3: What is your opinion on oral English teaching?

Questions for students:

Q4: what do you think is the most nonintellectual factor that hinders you learning oral English , and why?

Q5: Can you communicate with your classmates in English freely and smoothly ?

Q6: Do you like oral English learning? Why?

**Appendix B:( Questionnaire for students)**

Q(1): What is your sex?

- A. Female B Male

Q(2): What do you think is the most important ability in the English learning?

- A. Writing B. Examination C. Reading  
D. Listening and speaking E. Others

Q(3): Which do you think is more important for oral English learning? Affective factor or cognitive factor?

- A. Cognitive factor B. Affective factor

Q(4): What factors do you think would influence your communication with others?

- A. anxiety B. nervousness C. pressure  
D. self-confidence E. Others

Q(5): What causes your anxiety when you communicate with others?

- A. making mistakes B. introverted personality  
C. teachers' criticism D. fear for learning English

Q(6): Do you think the intelligent factors play the determined role in the oral English improvement?

- A. Yes B. No C. not so clear

Q(7): What kind of attitude of teachers would become the barrier for you to learn oral English?

- A. Let it be B. Correct the mistakes strictly  
C. Scoff at the academically poor students D. Others

Q(8): How do you evaluate the teacher's attitude or methods in the teaching?

- A. Have a high demand B. Open thoughts and relaxed atmosphere  
C. Traditional mode

Q(9): How often does the teacher arrange oral practice in the teaching? If

- A. Once a week B. Twice a week  
C. Once two week D. Others E. Never

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