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An Analysis of the Causes and Intervention Strategies for Struggling English Learners in Senior High School

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Abstract

The poor English students in High school refer to those with normal intelligence who, due to various subjective and objective factors, experience difficulties in English learning and fail to meet the curriculum standards. The existence of this group not only affects students' personal academic development and psychological well-being but also poses a challenge to the overall improvement of English teaching quality. Based on a review of relevant studies, this paper systematically analyzes the causes of English learning difficulties from two dimensions—internal factors and external factors—and proposes targeted transformation strategies, including stimulating learning interest, consolidating language foundation, strengthening learning method guidance, cultivating good habits, implementing tiered instruction, enhancing psychological counseling, and constructing a home-school-community collaborative education mechanism. The study suggests that the transformation of students with learning difficulties is a systematic project requiring the joint efforts of teachers, students, families, and society. Only through a multi-pronged approach can these students overcome their difficulties and achieve development in English learning.

Keywords

High School English; Poor Students; Cause Analysis; Transformation Strategies

1. Introduction

In high school English teaching practice, it is not uncommon to witness significant disparities in student performance. Within the same class, the gap between high achievers and those struggling with English can sometimes reach tens or even hundreds of points. Some students fail to master even the most basic vocabulary, and the weakness of their English foundation is astonishing. These students, who exhibit difficulties in English learning, are precisely what the educational academia refers to as "poor students."

The problem of students with learning difficulties is not unique to a particular class, school, or country but is a prevalent educational challenge worldwide (3). At the individual level, these students are prone to forming negative self-perceptions, which affects their learning confidence and potential development. From the perspective of educational equity, this issue constrains the overall improvement of educational effectiveness and poses a challenge to the sustainable development of education. High school is a critical period for students' physical and mental development, as well as a significant stage where their outlook on life and values gradually take shape. If students develop aversion to a particular subject during high school, this negative experience may generalize to other subjects, subsequently affecting their overall learning attitude and future developmental trajectory. As a core subject in the college entrance examination, English scores directly impact students' opportunities for higher education. Therefore, helping students with English learning difficulties address their problems in the learning process is not only an inherent duty of teaching but also an inner requirement of educational equity.

Regarding the definition of students with learning difficulties, there are different views in academia. This paper adopts a more commonly accepted definition: students with learning difficulties refer to those with normal physical and mental intelligence who, due to various reasons, fail to achieve academic performance commensurate with their intellectual level, experience low learning efficiency, and thus suffer from academic underachievement. The academic difficulties faced by such students are not irreversible but can be transformed through appropriate educational interventions. The essence of education lies in promoting the development of every student, which requires educators to pay attention to this special group, deeply analyze the causes of their difficulties, and explore effective transformation strategies.

2. The Connotation and Main Manifestations of High School Students with English Learning Difficulties

2.1. Definition of Students with Learning Difficulties

The term "students with learning difficulties" is a relatively broad concept, generally referring to students who exhibit learning difficulties or poor academic performance during the educational process. This group of students may face various learning challenges, such as reading obstacle, writing difficulties, and problems with memory and comprehension. In the classroom, they often struggle to keep up with the normal teaching pace, and their academic performance generally falls below the average level of their peers. At the same times, the long-term frustration from academic failure may also lead to psychological distress, manifested as decreased self-confidence, diminished interest in learning, and even resistance to learning itself. (7)

The "students with English learning difficulties" discussed in this paper are a specific type within this group, specifically referring to students who encounter significant difficulties in the process of learning English, resulting in unsatisfactory academic performance and a lack of confidence in learning English. The intelligence level of these students is within the normal range, but compared to their peers, they find English learning exceptionally challenging and their learning outcomes are poor. It is particularly important to point out that students with learning difficulties are not equivalent to "poor students." The former emphasizes a state of difficulty in the learning process, a state that can be changed; the latter carries a value judgment, easily labeling students and hindering the effectiveness of educational work.

2.2. Main Manifestations of Students with Learning Difficulties

Through daily observation and classroom records of students with English learning difficulties, they generally exhibit the following characteristics. (1)

First, their interest in learning is generally low. English is a subject that requires sustained investment and repeated practice. However, students with learning difficulties often lack enthusiasm for English learning and are unwilling to actively participate in classroom activities. In class, they are often distracted, either remaining silent or engaging in activities unrelated to learning. During morning reading time, while other students read aloud, these students might just mechanically move their lips or even daydream. This lack of interest makes it difficult for them to gain pleasure from learning, thus forming a vicious cycle.

Second, their learning attitude is relatively negative. Students with learning difficulties generally lack the intrinsic motivation to actively engage in learning and often adopt a perfunctory attitude towards learning tasks. Homework assigned by the teacher might be completed hastily or not at all; content requiring memorization might only be crammed at the last minute. This negative attitude not only affects their learning outcomes but can also negatively impact the overall learning atmosphere of the class.

Third, their learning methods are obviously flawed. Students with learning difficulties often lack scientific and effective learning strategies, and their methods are simple and mechanical. When memorizing words, they tend to rely on rote learning, unaware of how to use word formation rules or contextual clues to aid memory; when reading articles, they don't know how to use strategies like prediction, skimming, or scanning, leading to low reading efficiency; when doing exercises, they lack analysis and summarization of question types, often making the same mistakes repeatedly.

Fourth, their psychological state is relatively fragile. Long-term academic frustration makes students with learning difficulties prone to negative emotions such as inferiority, anxiety, and timidity. They may fear being called on in class, worrying about exposing their inadequacies; fear failing exams, unable to bear the pressure

from grades; fear comparison with others, isolating themselves in group activities. These psychological problems are both the result of learning difficulties and the cause of further exacerbating them, intertwining and trapping these students in an inescapable predicament. (2)

3. Analysis of the Causes of High School Students with English Learning Difficulties

The formation of high school students with English learning difficulties is not due to a single factor but is the result of long-term interaction among multiple factors. This paper systematically analyzes the causes from two dimensions: internal factors and external factors.

3.1. Internal Factors

3.1.1. Lack of Learning Motivation

Learning motivation is the internal force that drives students to learn, determining the intensity, persistence, and direction of their learning behavior. Students with strong learning motivation can actively engage in learning, overcome difficulties, and persevere; those lacking motivation are prone to give up halfway when encountering difficulties. (4)

For many high school students with English learning difficulties, the lack of learning motivation is a significant reason for their predicament. On one hand, due to regional development disparities and limited educational resources, some students have a vague perception of their future development, finding it difficult to connect current English learning with their future personal growth. In their view, English is merely an exam subject to be dealt with, not closely related to their life plans. On the other hand, the long-term and gradual nature of English learning means that the effects take a relatively long time to manifest, and students with learning difficulties often lack the patience and perseverance for such long-term investment. When significant progress isn't seen in the short term, their learning enthusiasm quickly wanes.

3.1.2. Scarcity of Learning Interest

Interest is the best teacher, an educational maxim that highlights the crucial role of interest in learning. Students highly interested in English will actively seek learning resources, enjoy participating in English activities, and unconsciously improve their language skills in a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere. Conversely, students lacking interest in English will instinctively avoid English learning, viewing it as a burden and pressure.

A prominent issue in current high school English teaching is the lack of an authentic language environment for students. Classroom learning primarily revolves around textbooks and exercises, mainly taking the form of memorizing words, analyzing

grammar, and many doing practice questions. This learning style is boring and uninteresting, making it difficult to ignite students' learning passion. For students with learning difficulties who already have weak foundations, this lack of interest is particularly detrimental. They already need to exert more effort than others just to keep up, and the boring content fails to provide sufficient emotional support, causing their learning enthusiasm to drain rapidly.

3.1.3. Weak Knowledge Foundation

Differences in knowledge foundation are a significant cause of learning difficulties. Language learning has absolutely cumulative characteristics; the effectiveness of subsequent learning largely depends on the mastery of prior knowledge. If students fail to build a solid foundation in junior high school, they will naturally feel overwhelmed when facing the more difficult and voluminous high school English curriculum. (5)

Many students with learning difficulties had already given up on English in junior high school. By the time they enter high school, their English knowledge foundation is severely insufficient. In terms of vocabulary, they may not even master the most common words; regarding grammar, their understanding of basic concepts like sentence components, tenses, and voices is unclearly; in reading, they lack sufficient vocabulary and a sense of the language to understand even moderately complex texts. These problems from junior high school, like a poorly laid foundation, cannot support the edifice of high school English learning.

3.1.4. Fragile Psychological Quality

Students with learning difficulties common exhibit prominent psychological problems. These problems are both the result of learning difficulties and the cause of further exacerbation, forming a vicious cycle. Specifically, the psychological issues of students with learning difficulties mainly manifest in the following types.

One is an inferiority complex. After experiencing multiple academic failures, students with learning difficulties easily begin to doubt themselves, thinking they are "not cut out for English." If this self-denial is not addressed in time, coupled with external pressure from classmates, teachers, or parents, they may gradually give up on themselves and abandon effort entirely.

Another is timidity. Fearing exposure of their weaknesses, students with learning difficulties often dare not speak in class or ask questions of teachers and classmates. This timidity causes them to miss many opportunities for learning and improvement, allowing problems to accumulate and difficulties to grow.

A third is repressive psychology. Some students with learning difficulties actually put in considerable effort, but due to inappropriate methods, the results are unsatisfactory. The mismatch between effort, along with insufficient attention from teachers, can easily trap them in anxiety and self-doubt.

3.2. External Factors

3.2.1. The Transition from Junior to Senior High School

here are significant differences between junior and senior high school English teaching in terms of content difficulty, teaching requirements, and learning methods. If not handled properly, these differences can easily lead to student learning difficulties.

Regarding content difficulty, high school English textbooks represent a substantial increase in vocabulary, grammatical complexity, and text length compared to junior high school. Junior high focuses on basic vocabulary and simple sentence patterns, while senior high requires mastery of numerous abstract words, complex sentence structures, and diverse discourse patterns.

Regarding teaching requirements, junior high English teaching emphasizes the transmission of basic knowledge and the cultivation of fundamental skills, whereas senior high English places greater emphasis on the development of comprehensive language application ability and thinking quality. This improvement in requirements necessitates strong learning adaptability from students.

3.2.2. The Role of the Family Education Environment

Family is the first school for students' growth, and parents are their first teachers. The family education environment has a subtle yet profound influence on the formation of students' learning attitudes and habits.

Parents' educational idea directly impacts their emphasis on and investment in their children's learning. Parents who value education will create a good learning environment for their children, monitor their learning progress, and provide timely support and encouragement when their children encounter difficulties. Conversely, parents who do not prioritize education may completely shift the responsibility to the school, remaining indifferent to their children's learning situation.

Parents' education level also affects their ability to provide academic guidance. Parents with higher education levels can offer effective guidance when their children face learning difficulties; parents with lower education levels, especially in rural areas, often cannot provide effective help with English learning, leaving their children's question unanswered.

3.2.3. The overwhelming of Social Environmental Factors

Students are situated within a social environment, and social trends, values, and cultural atmospheres can subtly influence their learning attitudes.

In the information age, high school students have more diverse and convenient access to information, but the complex information also contains negative content. Speeches promoting "the uselessness of education" or "the uselessness of English" can spread through the internet, potentially affecting students' value judgments and weakening their learning enthusiasm. Especially for students already tired of

learning, such speech provides a "reasonable" excuse to give up effort.

The prevalence of online games is another factor affecting student learning. Some students become addicted to online games, investing much time and energy into the virtual world, neglecting their studies, and causing their academic performance to plummet.

3.3. Transformation Strategies for High School Students with English Learning Difficulties

The transformation of students with learning difficulties is a systematic project requiring multiple approaches and measures. Based on the above cause analysis, this paper proposes transformation strategies from the following seven aspects.

3.3.1. Stimulate Learning Interest and Strengthen Learning Motivation

Interest is the best teacher. Stimulating the learning interest of students with learning difficulties is the primary task of transformation work. Teachers should start from the actual situation of these students and adopt various methods to mobilize their learning enthusiasm.

Regarding the selection of reading materials, priority should be given to content that matches students' interests and is of appropriate difficulty. Starting with simplified readers, such as abridged versions of classics like "The Little Prince," can help students experience a sense of achievement in reading, gradually building the confidence that "I can read." As reading ability improves, the difficulty and breadth of materials can be gradually increased.

Regarding the arrangement of teaching content, focus should be on connecting with students' life experiences. Designing teaching content around topics and scenarios familiar to students in their daily lives allows them to reduce learning difficulty with the support of existing experience, making them feel the practicality of English learning.

3.1.2. Consolidate Language Foundation and Bridge Knowledge Gaps

A solid language foundation is a prerequisite for subsequent learning. For students with learning difficulties, helping them complement knowledge gaps and bridge the junior-senior high transition is crucial.

During the freshman orientation period, a certain amount of time should be allocated for systematic review of junior high knowledge. The review should focus on key points, identify and fill gaps, helping students consolidate their vocabulary foundation and clarify grammatical branches. For students with particularly weak foundations, the review period can be appropriately extended to ensure they have the knowledge store necessary for high school learning.

In vocabulary teaching, emphasis should be on hierarchical instruction and methodological guidance. First, lay store by phonics instruction, helping students

establish the connection between sound, form, and meaning, freeing them from the plight of rote memorization. Second, teach word formation rules, guiding students to infer word meanings using roots and affixes, improving the efficiency of vocabulary learning. Third, create specific contexts, allowing students to understand word meanings and master usage within contexts, achieving deep learning of vocabulary.

In grammar teaching, emphasis should be on gradually and connecting with reality. Guide students to start with basic grammar rules, gradually master sentence structure analysis methods, learn to disassembly complex long sentences into simple short ones, and apply rules based on understanding. Examples and exercises close to life can be designed, allowing students to realize the application of grammar rules in authentic contexts.

In reading teaching, emphasis should be on cultivating reading strategies. Guide students to master basic reading skills such as prediction, skimming, and scanning, learning to grasp the main idea and key information of texts. As reading ability improves, gradually guide students towards deep reading, cultivating critical thinking.

3.1.3. Strengthen Learning Method Guidance and Cultivate Autonomous Learning Ability

Helping students with learning difficulties master scientific learning methods and cultivate their autonomous learning ability is the fundamental solution to help them out of their predicament. (6)

In cultivating strategic awareness, students should be guided to recognize that different learning tasks require different strategies. Teachers can consciously demonstrate the use of various learning strategies during the teaching process, such as memory strategies, comprehension strategies, and organizational strategies, and guide students to experience and apply them in practice.

In cultivating planning ability, students should be helped to formulate practical and feasible study plans. Plans should be specific, clear, and operational, such as how many words to memorize daily or how many reading passages to complete weekly. simultaneously, students should be guided to self-monitor and reflect on plan execution, adjusting learning strategies in a timely manner.

3.1.4. Cultivate Good Habits and Standardize Learning Behaviors

Good study habits are an important guarantee of learning outcomes. For students with learning difficulties, cultivating standardized learning behaviors is particularly important.

In time management, students should be guided to reasonably plan their study time. Daily or weekly reading plans can be developed jointly with students, fixing study periods in the schedule to help students develop time awareness. As habits form, students can gradually arrange their study time autonomously.

In preview and review, students should be guided to develop the habit of

previewing before class and reviewing after class. Preview helps students understand learning content and identify difficult points; review consolidates learned knowledge and deepens memory and understanding. The formation of these two habits can significantly improve learning outcomes.

3.1.5. Implement Tiered Instruction and Emphasize Teaching According to Individual Differences

Differences among students are objective facts. Respecting differences and teaching according to individual differences is a fundamental principle of education. For students with learning difficulties, implementing tiered instruction is particularly important.

In tiered teaching objectives, different learning goals should be set based on students' actual situations. For students with learning difficulties, requirements can be appropriately lowered, focusing on mastering basic knowledge and core content. As learning ability improves, goals can be gradually raised.

In tiered teaching tasks, differentiated learning tasks should be designed for students at different levels. For students with learning difficulties, more basic exercises can be assigned, reducing overly difficult problems. This design allows students with learning difficulties to gain a sense of achievement by completing tasks, enhancing learning confidence.

3.1.6. Strengthen Psychological Counseling and Implement Emotional Education

The transformation of students with learning difficulties is not only about cultivating knowledge and skills but also about shaping psychological quality. Strengthening psychological counseling and implementing emotional education are important dimensions of transformation work.

In establishing psychological advantage, students with learning difficulties should be helped to see their own progress. Even minor progress should be affirmed and encouraged promptly, allowing students to feel "I can do it too." Teachers can guide students to establish personal progress files, recording every progress in the learning process, reinforcing their psychological advantage.

In cultivating self-confidence, the flash of students with learning difficulties should be actively discovered. Every student has their own strengths and specialties. Teachers need to be observant, promptly identifying and affirming these strengths. A sincere word of praise, a public recognition, can become an opportunity for students with learning difficulties to exert themselves.

In guiding attribution style, students with learning difficulties should be helped to establish positive attribution patterns. Guide students to recognize that academic performance depends not only on ability but also on effort level and method choices. When students attribute failure to insufficient effort rather than lack of ability, they are more likely to adjust strategies and continue working hard.

3.1.7. Construct a Home-School-Community Collaborative Education Mechanism

The transformation of students with learning difficulties is not only the responsibility of the school but also requires the joint participation of families and society. Constructing a home-school-community collaborative education mechanism, forming educational synergy, can achieve twice the result with half the effort.

In home-school communication, a regular contact mechanism should be established. Teachers can maintain frequent communication with parents through various means such as parent-teacher conferences, home visits, phone calls, and WeChat. On one hand, tickle the student's performance at school; on the other hand, learn the student's performance at home, both parties jointly discussing educational strategies.

In parent guidance, parents should be helped to establish correct educational concepts. Guide parents to recognize that education is not only the school's business; family education is equally important. For parents unable to provide academic guidance, suggestions can be made for them to play a role in emotional support and habit formation, such as urging children to study on time and creating a quiet learning environment.

In utilizing social resources, learning channels should be actively expanded. Schools can organize activities like English broadcasting, English corners, and speech contests to enrich students' learning experiences; can invite foreign teachers for exchanges to increase students' language practice opportunities; can utilize community resources to organize social practice activities, broadening students' horizons.

4. Conclusion

The transformation of high school students with English learning difficulties is a long-term and arduous task, impossibly achieved overnight. It requires educators to invest sustained patience and effort. Every student has their own growth rhythm. As the educational adage goes, every flower blooms at a different time. Teachers should not give up on any student, especially those with learning difficulties who need teachers' care and help even more.

The transformation of students with learning difficulties is also a systematic project requiring multiple approaches and measures. Teachers should deeply understand the specific situations of these students, identify the crux of their learning difficulties, and formulate targeted transformation strategies. Attention should be paid both to cultivating knowledge and skills and to shaping psychological quality; both to the effectiveness of classroom teaching and to the specificity of after-school tutoring; both to playing the leading role of the school and to mobilizing the participation enthusiasm of families and society.

During the transformation process, teachers should continuously improve their professional quality, explore diversified teaching models, and make English classes

more active and engaging. They should be adept at using incentive evaluation to help students with learning difficulties regain learning confidence; should emphasize learning method guidance to help them master scientific learning methods; should focus on students' emotional needs to help them overcome psychological barriers.

For students with learning difficulties, the value of English learning lies not only in improving exam scores but also in broadening horizons and enriching life. The ability to read English materials fluently can open a window for future professional development; the ability to communicate in English can enhance cross-cultural understanding and enrich life experiences. Regardless of the path these students eventually take, the effort invested in English learning will bring substantial rewards.

The true essence of education lies in promoting the comprehensive development of every student. Paying attention to and helping students with learning difficulties is not only an inherent requirement of educational equity but also a manifestation of teachers' professional value. It is believed that with the joint efforts of teachers, students, families, and society, students with learning difficulties will surely overcome their predicament and welcome the spring of English learning.

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