

# Analysis of the Impact of English Teaching in the Compulsory Education Stage on English Learning Emotions of Higher Education Students

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## Abstract

Emotions play a crucial role in second language acquisition, influencing learners' cognitive engagement, motivation, and ultimate proficiency. Emotional factors such as anxiety, self-efficacy, and joy are increasingly recognized as key factors affecting language learning. According to Horwitz (1986), foreign language anxiety (FLA) could hinder oral expression and comprehension, while positive emotions like curiosity and pride enhance persistence and memory retention. Recent studies focused on the dynamic interaction between emotional states and learning environments, especially in digital or multicultural contexts. Progress being made, there are still gaps in understanding how English teaching systems and teacher performance reshape emotional experience in English learning. Moreover, the long-term impact of emotion regulation on students' English learning has been under-explored. Investigation in these dimensions is essential to designing pedagogical approaches that foster emotionally supportive classrooms and adaptive e-learning platforms, ultimately optimizing global English education outcomes. This study aims to bridge these gaps, and comprehensively figure out the mechanisms of emotional influence in English learning. To investigate and analyze the long-term impact of English teaching in the compulsory education stage on the emotional aspect of higher education students in English learning, the present study has taken into account the long-term effects of the English teaching system and teacher performance in classrooms during compulsory education, and mechanisms by which they influence future English learning emotions of the students. Through bidirectional information collection involving both teachers and students, in combination with current findings of research on English teaching philosophies and teacher factors affecting students' emotional responses, this study generally explains how multifaceted factors impact on students' English learning emotions. Furthermore, this paper has also revealed negative effects of uneven distribution of educational resources, outdated educational philosophies, and insufficient cultivation of learning initiative during compulsory education, among other factors, on the formation of good habits in early English learning, as well as issues stemming from these effects. With respect to the issues, attempts are made to seek solutions, including enhancing the balance of English teaching content, intensifying teacher training, diversifying forms of English teaching, attaching importance to fostering personalized and proactive English learning, and promoting shared aspirations among teachers and students for improvement in the English teaching system during compulsory education. By providing long-term innovative research outcomes from multiple perspectives on English learning emotions, this paper offers valuable insights for future improvement in English teaching practices.

## Keywords

## English proficiency, emotion regulation, anxiety about English, teacher-student relations, multiple education stages

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### 1. Introduction

As rapid changes occur in the international landscape and domestic development in the company of increasingly close connections between countries around the world, the proposition of a common destiny for humanity is raised, which underscores the importance of exchanges and cooperation among nations. To that end, acquisition of proficiency in foreign languages has become crucial for individuals, and all the more so for undergraduates and postgraduates that are important reserve talents for future development. High proficiency in a foreign language can not only alleviate their academic and life burdens but also enhance their overall capabilities. However, it is easily observed that many students tend to reduce their focus and effort on English learning after entering universities, or even develop negative emotions like resistance and anxiety towards English learning, resulting in a decline in their English proficiency. This forms a vicious cycle. Findings in Cui's (2024) article indicate a positive correlation between interest and performance in English, suggesting that maintaining a positive attitude towards English learning is essential for students to achieve desirable outcomes.

By analyzing the impact of English teaching (including the teaching system and teacher performance) on students' learning in the compulsory education stage, this paper has probed into emotional changes of higher education students in English learning and causes of the changes, with the combined influence of the teaching system and teacher performance on students taken into account, intending to make up the gap of absent long-term analysis in current research regarding emotions in English learning emotions.

### 2. Basic Emotions Analysis

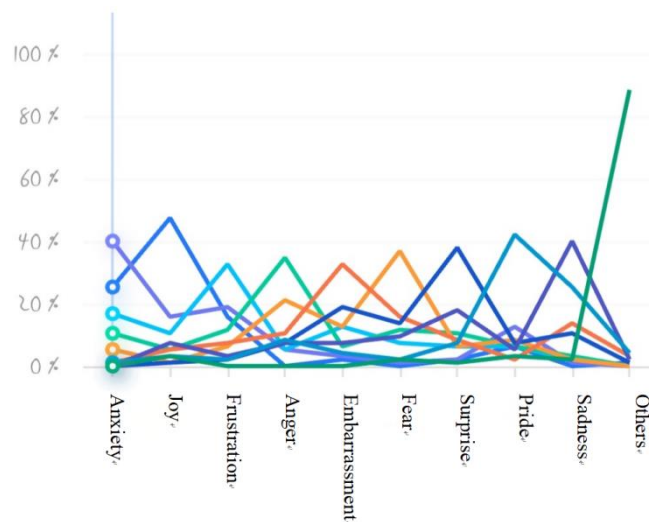
In learning English, students may have varied emotions, either positive or negative, such as joy, pride, anxiety and sadness. Cui and Meng (2023) presented the following findings through research in multiple dimensions: Non-English major college students exhibit relatively low self-efficacy and average enjoyment in learning English; self-efficacy closely relates to students' emotions, and further affects their English proficiency; correct attribution, a supportive learning environment, and high concern for students' mental health can effectively improve students' mood and willingness to learn English. A study by Li and Han (2022) revealed that foreign language anxiety has a significant impact on exam performance and learning outcomes, suggesting that emotions in learning notably affect students' foreign language acquisition.

For the purpose of the present study, a survey involving more than 100 higher education students from higher education institutions offering undergraduate or higher education level programs and 9 English teachers in compulsory education from two schools in Beijing was conducted by using questionnaires. The surveyed subjects were selected, representing better-than-average English proficiency among peer students and a higher standard of educational quality. Following the survey, valid data was collected, screened and sorted out for integrated analysis, in combination with existing research findings. According to the analysis, over one third of the students experienced little to no joy in English learning, and more than 50% felt anxiety. Among the emotions, anxiety topped the ranking. This means college students tend to have more negative than positive emotions in English learning. Such outperforming negative emotions can adversely affect students' academic performance in English, and hold back their motivation to learn English.

The survey found that English teachers might also experience anxiety, frustration and other negative emotions, and the proportion of teachers with these negative emotions was not lower than that of students. Despite the different roles that teachers and students play, the emotional state of teachers can significantly influence their students. According to a study by Xu (2023), occupational burnout or other bad psychological conditions of teachers may negatively affect the teacher-student relations, and produce adverse effects on students' academic performance and interest in learning. In the compulsory education stage when students

are still not well-developed physically and mentally to maturity, emotions of teachers in English teaching may play a role in shaping the students' attitudes toward English learning. That means negative emotions of the teachers are likely to result in less effective teaching which directly relates to students' English learning, while affecting students' emotions to incur indirect impact on students' motivation in English learning.

Figure 1: Ranking of students' emotions in English learning



### 3. Discussion about Factors Affecting Emotions

#### 3.1 Students' Perspective

Emotions arise from diverse sources. For students, anxiety mainly springs from underdeveloped abilities and skills, and insufficient practice. According to the survey, the lack of confidence in English learning among students can be attributed to the following: limited occasions for use of English in daily life, low priority of English proficiency cultivation in the education system, outdated educational philosophies and methods, lack of initiative in learning English, shortage of outstanding teachers for enlightenment and guidance, peer pressure, influence of exam-oriented education, and others. It can be clearly noted that students are more inclined to attribute their negative emotions and poor outcomes in English learning to personal or life circumstances, rather than educational factors, and among the factors, the influence of exam-oriented education stands out. This is understandable, as the educational mode is more directly felt by students than educational philosophies.

The influence of exam-oriented education is also reflected in the data. Only a few cities and provinces, including Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Zhuhai in Guangdong Province, Hangzhou in Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Mianyang in Sichuan Province and Hunan Province, have incorporated oral and listening tests in the middle school entrance exams (Zhongkao); similarly, only cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou in Guangdong Province, Zhejiang and Jiangsu have included listening and speaking tests in the college entrance exam (Gaokao), with the English test scores counted for grant of admissions. In these provinces and cities, greater importance is attached to expression in and practical use of English due to the prevalence of more advanced educational concepts that accommodate the more developed economy. Comparatively in other less economically developed provinces, outdated educational concepts lead to low priority of English listening and speaking in English learning. Notably, it is in recent years that some economically developed provinces have introduced listening and speaking exams into practice. Among the survey participants, there were four doctor candidates and ten master candidates, who had completed their compulsory education quite a few years ago; for them, the popularization of listening and speaking exams would have even less impact. The survey showed that most students excel at reading English, but most poor at listening and speaking. This further evidences the negative impact of an outdated education system on English learning.

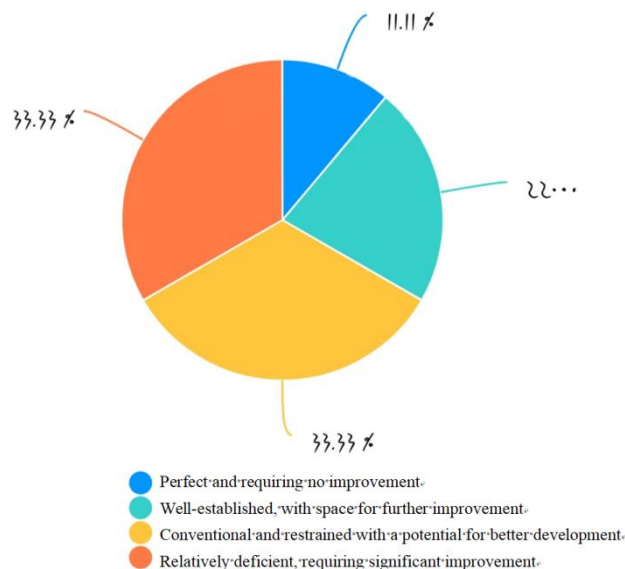
A study by Miao (2024) expressly expounded the impact of exam-oriented education on students' learning attitudes. The single evaluation method, strict discipline management, and intense competition environment encoding exam-oriented education have incurred significant psychological changes in students. Exam-oriented education, apart from its negative impact on students' emotions during learning, is detrimental to the development of students' learning abilities or effective application of learning methods. English learning should incorporate listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing in a balanced manner. The adoption of a one-sided and simplified exam evaluation system will lead to weakness in listening and speaking, while the development of anxiety and other negative emotions is likely to further erode students' passion and confidence in English.

Students will, following entry into universities, start to learn college English courses that are intended to prepare them for CET-4, CET-6, or competitions such as the English speech contests. However, they may find themselves unable to keep up with the courses or practice correctly due to their early exam-oriented education that fails to focus on the all-round development of English skills. To effectively address this issue, popularization of scientific English teaching concepts and systems is required.

### 3.2 Teachers' Perspective

Teachers' anxiety mainly comes from educational factors. Teachers are generally dissatisfied with the English teaching system currently in force, due to the restriction on expansion, narrow and one-sided in-class resources, heavy burden of workloads and tight time constraints. A study by Xia (2024) revealed some challenges in teachers' emotion management, including the neglect of emotion management, the suppression of emotion expression, emotion masking in interactions with students, difficulties in perceiving emotions in interactions with parents due to different educational philosophies, conflicts of interest with colleagues, pressurized control and hindrance of emotion expression in interactions with leaders, and conflicts with role expectations in interactions with experts. Teachers' emotions can infect students. The excessive expression of negative emotions by teachers during teaching can have an adverse effect on students' attitudes toward English learning. To this point, it is a hope of the teachers that the English teaching system can be improved to alleviate pressure and allow them to work in better moods.

Figure 2 Teachers' Views of the Teaching System



Aside from higher expectations for the education system, teachers are also exerting themselves to help students learn English more effectively and control their negative emotions. Specifically, approaches are tailored based on specific characteristics of different students with respect paid to their preferences, and diverse teaching methods are employed to help students develop a positive mindset and interest in English learning, so as to enhance their proficiency in the language. For students with poorer English performance,

teachers will provide guidance on learning strategies, offer foundational English enrichment, help students preview upcoming lessons to boost confidence, collaborate with parents to improve students' academic performance, engage in frequent communication, simplify after-class tasks, and seek to retain students' interest in English learning. In daily teaching, teachers will strive to diversify classroom learning formats by incorporating extracurricular resources, while respecting and appreciating students, and avoid the use of pure exams as the sole measure of students' abilities.

#### **4. Impact of English Teaching in the Compulsory Education Stage on the Emotions of Higher Education Students in English Learning**

On top of the above-mentioned efforts made by teachers to help students develop a positive mindset towards English learning, it is also believed that English learning in the compulsory education stage can help students cultivate good English learning habits and lay a solid foundation in English. This, in turn, will foster their effective learning of English in the future. Nevertheless, these expectations do not fully come true ensuing the entry of students into universities, due to the lack of initiative to learn English. Most college students learn English for participation in required courses and English tests, and only a few pursue English in their spare time. This is a major source of negative emotions students have in English learning. Most students acknowledge that their current English proficiency depends largely on their compulsory education experiences, but their good learning habits and interest nurtured by teachers during this period have gone. The reason for this lies in the different teaching philosophy of higher education from compulsory education during which students rely heavily on teacher guidance without developing stable self-directed learning skills or high levels of autonomous learning awareness.

Whether in compulsory education or higher education, students learn English mainly through classroom instruction, homework, and extracurricular activities. Classroom instruction constitutes a large part of the learning, which means English learning is basically a mandatory requirement rather than a spontaneous act of seeking self-improvement or habit formation. Since it is impossible for teachers to control students' out-of-class activities, especially in the compulsory education stage, which are largely determined by parents and students, the lack of guidance from parents and spontaneous activity in this key period for cultivating the initiative in students for English learning causes English learning habits formed in early education to generally diminish during higher education, even though the students may have been encouraged by outstanding teachers to actively engage in English learning outside of class, since such encouragement does not secure the prioritization of English learning by all students.

When it came to the receipt of advanced and scientifically-based English education during the compulsory education stage, the students expressed high expectations for better emotional responses towards English learning and willingness to improve their English proficiency. Students clearly pointed out that their negative emotions arose from ineffective teaching methods, lack and uneven distribution of educational resources, emphasis on reading and writing at the expense of listening and speaking, limitation of the language environment and low availability of opportunities, which were resulted from inadequate English education during the compulsory education stage.

In consideration of the foregoing, it is proposed in this study to immediately improve the English teaching system and philosophy by establishing comprehensive and balanced English curriculums that prioritize the balanced development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It is also crucial to supplement extracurricular learning resources to foster students' autonomy in learning English, reduce teachers' workloads, and provide psychological counseling and training for teachers. These measures can serve to address the root causes of students' negative emotions and enhance overall English proficiency.

#### **5. Conclusions**

## 5.1 Research Results

(1) Emotions of higher education students in English learning are significantly influenced by their experiences in the compulsory education stage. Early high-quality English education can markedly prevent the generation of negative emotions in English learning.

(2) There is considerable room for improvement in the English teaching system of the compulsory education stage. Both teachers and students look forward to better educational philosophies and teaching modes.

(3) Emotions are infectious between teachers and students. Future educational efforts should place greater emphasis on the mental health of both teachers and students, fostering positive and mutually beneficial teacher-student relations.

(4) In the compulsory education stage, continued emphasis should be placed on English teaching. Specifically, efforts should be made to rationalize the allocation of educational resources, update educational philosophies, emphasize the mental health of both teachers and students, cultivate students' interest and initiative in learning, and prioritize the development of good learning habits.

(5) This paper intends to provide a more comprehensive perspective for the study of English learning emotions, having proposed a bidirectional investigation method involving both teachers and students. It also suggests the inclusion of long-term longitudinal samples for research on emotions in English learning, so as to achieve better understanding of these dynamics over time.

## 5.2 Limitations

Due to limited survey resources, the teachers' perspective in this survey does not fully represent the real teaching experiences that the surveyed students have received during their compulsory education. Future research may focus on investigating teachers corresponding to the students' English learning to obtain more accurate results.

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### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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