

Original Paper

Study on the Development of High School Students' English Language Ability from the Perspective of Informal Learning

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to study the development of high school students' English language ability from the perspective of informal learning. The results of the study show that, theoretically, informal learning can indeed improve high school students' English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, English language awareness and sense of language, and cross-cultural communication ability. Simultaneously, the results of the questionnaire survey show that high school students' informal learning on English language ability may result in normative, continuity, and bias problems. In view of these problems, the paper proposes optimization strategies from the perspectives of correctly orientating the role of high school English teachers, perfecting the organizations and shaping the culture of English informal learning in high schools. The paper contributes to guiding how high school students can improve their English language ability through informal learning and how to play the roles of schools and teachers in it.

Keywords

Informal Learning, High School Students, English Language Ability

1. Introduction

In the context of exam-oriented education, high school students mainly absorb English knowledge through formal classroom learning. In the traditional high school English class, what students learn, how they learn, and to what extent they learn are basically within the teachers' predetermined scope. Moreover, the evaluation indicators of learning are relatively centralized, making it difficult to comprehensively evaluate students' English language ability. In traditional English classrooms, the teaching mode is relatively fixed and the teaching method is relatively single, coupled with the differences in students' personality characteristics and learning abilities, it is difficult to achieve a satisfactory learning outcome for all students. Therefore, teachers should create a free language environment from the perspective of

high school students' personality development needs in order to stimulate their interest in learning English. Under the influence of the deepening concept of quality education, teachers usually develop and utilize the non-classroom learning resources to create various forms of "informal learning" environment so as to fully stimulate high school students' passion to learn English.

General High School Curriculum Standards: English (2017 Edition, Revised in 2020) has put forward the educational concept of "student-oriented". In this context, in addition to implementing the basic English language knowledge, high school English subject should also improve students' humanistic literacy. It is very important to realize the unity of instrumental and humanistic nature of English learning. The construction of a "learning society" and the proposal of the concept of "lifelong education" have made it necessary for teachers to change the goal of education from "teaching" to "educating". Specifically, teachers should shift from focusing simply on students' academic performance to focusing on students' all-round development. However, due to the fact that high school English occupies an important position in the examination, traditional classroom teaching purely centers on language teaching requirements and language knowledge. It is difficult to have the time and space to realize the development of students' humanistic qualities. Therefore, the high school English learning mode needs to be optimized. Under the perspective of informal learning, teachers can guide students to combine learning activities with life, recreation and social practice in a brand-new environment detaching from the classroom, so that students can change from pure English language learning to the comprehensive improvement of humanistic literacy.

At present, due to the influence and constraints of China's traditional education system, the concept of score-only theory is deeply rooted. Therefore, in the field of educational research, scholars have mostly focused on formal learning and to a certain extent neglected the study of informal learning. However, in the context of building a learning society, informal learning has become an important way for human beings to acquire knowledge and skills. Compared with the breadth and depth of foreign research results on English informal learning, most of the domestic research on English informal learning still remains on the introduction and exposition of foreign research results. In addition, the research content mainly focuses on English language learning in elementary school and there are only a few studies exploring the guiding strategies of informal learning in high school English. Therefore, it is of practical significance and theoretical value to carry out the research on the development of high school students' English language ability from the perspective of informal learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Research on English Informal Learning

Informal learning is often based on peer support or teamwork, and students can communicate with multiple individuals or groups, greatly increasing the breadth, depth and frequency of communication in English (Lu, 2023). In today's society, students should fully recognize the value of the Internet. Informal learning styles outside the classroom include media presentations, storytelling, song rendering, drawing

displays and games. These styles can encourage students to deepen their perception and grasping of linguistic knowledge, and to complete the construction of a knowledge system in a relaxed and comfortable state (Ju, 2023).

Schools can create an English learning atmosphere by organizing informal learning activities such as English fairy tale plays, English speaking corners and English life salons. Not only that, schools can also utilize mobile terminals to build English communication platforms so that students can receive English knowledge easily and pleasantly (Ma, 2021). Music-on-demand and e-learning are also important ways of English informal learning. By recording the vocabulary words encountered in e-learning, students' vocabulary can be enhanced and their English skills can be improved quickly (Sockett *et al.*, 2012).

English Informal learning is important for the improvement of students' learning outcomes, including the ability to enhance students' self-confidence in English, the ability to make students feel the fun of practicing English, and the ability to make students more active in the process (Xie, 2024). Informal English learning activities, such as listening to English music online and chatting with others in English, contribute significantly to improving learners' communicative competence (Nugroh *et al.*, 2022). Informal learning environments are important for second language acquisition, and participation in project-based informal learning activities enhances not only language learning but also social experience (Feuer, 2009).

However, some scholars believe that English informal learning has a negative impact on the improvement of students' learning effectiveness. The knowledge gained from English informal learning is fragmented, and "fragmented learning" will bring about the weakening of the ability to think in depth. Simultaneously, due to students' weak discernment and self-control, they are easily distracted during informal learning, which wastes valuable learning time and seriously affects learning effectiveness (Ma, 2021).

Students should communicate more with their peers about their informal learning outcomes in English in order to further optimize their informal learning styles. Students can flexibly choose English performances, English games, English speeches or other ways to show informal learning outcomes through individual or group sharing. Learning English in an informal style requires not only the active cooperation of students but also the ability of teachers to effectively master the way of guiding informal learning. Teachers can communicate with colleagues and do a good job of daily reflection (Mao, 2022). Similarly, some scholars point out that English teachers should give full play to their own supervisory role in the process of students' informal learning. Teachers can keep track of students' informal English learning process by using a portfolio assessment to record the length of time they are involved in informal learning and the level of participation in the activities (Ma, 2021).

2.2 Research on English Language Ability

Existing studies have found that improper learning methods are important factors that affect learners' English language ability. Improper learning methods, such as native language interference, excessive categorization, literal translation, inappropriate strategies, and individual negligence are the main factors of influencing learners' English language ability (Che, 2013).

Besides, learning environment and teaching methods also impact English language learning. Students' lack of an oral environment for using English and their lack of extracurricular practice are the key factors affecting the improvement of English language ability (Jia & Zheng, 2004). Appropriate teaching methods are crucial for improving students' English language ability (Fan, 2001). Some scholars studied the effect of ability grouping teaching methods on students' English language ability. It was found that ability grouping could help lower-achieving students improve their English language ability, but had no significant effect on higher-achieving students (Sheppaer *et al.*, 2018).

Existing studies have found that enhancing communication is one of the ways to improve English language ability. The core of language learning is communication which relies heavily on listening and speaking skills. Therefore, improving English speaking skills should be the focus that students pay more attention to. This includes a lot of oral practice through imitation, reading aloud, repetition, and memorization (Kang, 2009). Online chatting can enhance communication, and the longer students engage in online chatting, the faster their English language ability improves (Coniam & Wong, 2004).

In addition to strengthening communication, students are often afraid to speak English for fear of making mistakes, and this phenomenon of "mute English" is widespread. Teachers and learners need to work together to overcome this dilemma. Teachers should encourage students to express themselves bravely and not to be discouraged even if they make mistakes, so that they can improve their English language ability quickly (Xie, 2017).

Not only that, teachers play an important role in the process of enhancing students' English language ability. English teachers should know about students' language foundation, think about their possible problems and preset relevant solutions, which will improve students' English language ability (Jiao & Xiang, 2022). Forming an active classroom atmosphere and designing appropriate teaching situations can help teachers to improve high school students' English language ability (Xu, 2019). Teachers need to consider the cognitive level of students' communication and pay attention to students' physical and mental experiences in the communication process, so as to effectively guide students to improve their speaking skills (Zhang & Feng, 2023).

2.3 Conclusion of Existing Literature

Studies by scholars at home and abroad on English informal learning styles and the effectiveness of English informal learning have shown that there are many ways to carry out informal English learning, but different styles will have different effects on students' English language ability. Moreover, scholars at home and abroad have done some research on the influencing factors of English language ability and the ways to improve English language ability. However, domestic and foreign scholars have not made any systematic research on the influence of informal learning on the development of students' English language ability. It is necessary to study what are the reasons for informal learning to enhance students' English language ability, what are the problems resulting from informal learning on students' English language ability, and how to optimize students' English informal learning activities.

3. Reasons for Informal Learning to Enhance High School Students' English Language Ability

3.1 Reasons for Enhancing English Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing Skills

Informal learning activities such as watching English movies can greatly enhance high school students' English listening skills. First of all, English movies provide a real and vivid language environment so that high school students can be exposed to authentic English oral expressions and natural changes in intonation. By watching movies, high school students can better understand the context in which English is actually used, thus improving their listening comprehension. Secondly, English movies cover a wide range of different accents, dialects and speeds of speech. For example, English movies from the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and other regions are different in all these aspects. By watching English movies from different countries, high school students can be exposed to different pronunciations and language styles. This variety helps students adapt to different listening challenges and improves their comprehension of a variety of language styles. Moreover, English movies also provide rich contexts that enable high school students to learn the use of vocabulary, phrases and idioms through character dialogues and situational descriptions. By observing the actual use of language in a movie, high school students can gain a deeper understanding of the meaning and usage of vocabulary, thus enhancing their listening skills.

High school students can quickly improve their oral expression skills by participating in informal learning activities such as English corners, English clubs and peer communication. First of all, these English informal learning styles can stimulate students' interest in English oral expression and make oral practice more spontaneous. Compared with boring classroom teaching, high school students can choose the content and form of oral practice more freely through the peer effect, which makes it easier for them to absorb knowledge and improve their oral expression. Secondly, by participating in informal learning activities such as joining English clubs, high school students can better integrate into the English environment and improve their oral expression. By communicating with native English speakers through English clubs, high school students can be exposed to more authentic English expressions and learn more practical speaking skills. In addition, English corners, English clubs, and peer communication can help students develop self-confidence in oral expression. High school students express themselves by taking the initiative to communicate with others, which can help them build self-confidence and overcome language barriers.

Informal learning activities such as reading English novels and magazines are conducive to improving high school students' English reading ability. First of all, extracurricular reading can help students expand their vocabulary. By understanding the context, students can gradually master the meaning and usage of these new vocabularies. Through extracurricular reading, high school students will find that some words have different meanings in different contexts, thus enriching their vocabulary knowledge. Secondly, informal learning activities carried out by reading English novels and related magazines help to improve high school students' reading speed and comprehension. In the process of reading, high school students need to understand the content of the articles quickly and form an overall thinking framework in their

minds. Through a lot of extracurricular reading, students' reading speed will gradually increase, and they will also be able to better understand the themes and main points of the articles. Besides, extracurricular reading can help students improve the depth and breadth of their reading. In traditional classroom learning, high school students are usually only exposed to some classic literature and textbooks. Through extensive extracurricular reading, students can be exposed to more types of English articles in a variety of fields, including science and technology, literature, news and so on, which can help students broaden their reading scope and increase their reading depth, thus improving their English reading ability.

High school students' participation in informal learning activities such as mutual evaluation of peer writing and English writing competition help to develop writing skills rapidly. Firstly, participating in mutual evaluation of peer writing can provide a relaxing and pleasant writing atmosphere for high school students, which enables them to make subtle progress in their English writing skills. In the process of mutual evaluation of peer writing, students can share their opinions equally and improve their self-confidence in writing. Secondly, by reviewing other students' essays, high school students can discover their spelling and grammatical errors. Learning from the experiences and lessons through the mistakes of others warns them not to make similar mistakes in the writing process. Because the mistakes are discovered by themselves, students tend to be impressed and improve their English writing skills faster. Thirdly, participating in English writing competitions can provide students with more writing opportunities so that they have more chances to practice. Because quantity creates quality, students can improve their writing skills. Through repeated practice and real situation simulation in the competition, students are prompted to write more fluent and vivid English essays.

3.2 Reasons for Enhancing English Language Awareness and Sense of Language

As a kind of informal learning style, family education has an irreplaceable role in enhancing high school students' English language awareness and sense of language. First of all, parents can enhance high school students' sense of language by creating an English language context. If there is rich and varied English input in the home environment, high school students will naturally be exposed to English language, and their English language awareness and sense of language will naturally be enhanced. For example, parents can expose high school students to the English language at home by posting English word cards and making English learning plans. Simultaneously, parents make use of language situations such as shopping and traveling can enable high school students to apply English in real-life situations so as to enhance their language awareness and sense of language. Secondly, family education also plays a crucial role in developing high school students' interest in language learning. Parents can increase students' interest in English learning and enhance students' English language awareness and sense of language by providing them with targeted English learning resources and participating in English learning activities with them. Informal learning activities in the form of e-learning not only provide a more convenient way of learning, but also can effectively improve high school students' English language awareness and sense of language. First of all, e-learning provides high school students with a more flexible way of learning. Through e-learning, students can choose the learning content according to their own time and reasonably arrange

the learning progress. This flexibility not only allows students to better adapt to their own learning pace, but also better exercises their language awareness. In the online learning environment, high school students can explore and discover the fun of learning, so as to improve their English language sense. Secondly, e-learning provides high school students with a more interactive way of learning. Through the e-learning platform, high school students not only share their learning experiences and learning resources with each other, but also have a better understanding of English. Direct communication and conversation in English can lead to a rapid improvement in English language awareness and sense of language.

3.3 Reasons for Enhancing Cross-cultural Communication Ability

Reading English novels is an informal way of learning to enhance cross-cultural communication ability. First of all, through reading English novels, high school students can learn about the characters, lifestyles and values of different cultures, thus broadening their horizons and enhancing their understanding of different cultures. Secondly, reading English novels can help high school students improve their language skills and increase their confidence in communicating with foreigners. They are exposed to authentic English expressions and idioms, and improve their reading comprehension and language skills, thus, high school students can express their ideas more fluently and avoid the language barriers when communicating with foreigners. In addition, in cross-cultural communication, it is very important to understand other people's cultural backgrounds and ways of thinking. This can avoid misunderstandings and conflicts arising from cultural differences. Reading English novels can help high school students understand ways of thinking and behavior of foreigners so that they can communicate and cooperate better.

Traveling to English-speaking countries as a form of informal learning can also develop high school students' intercultural communication skills. Firstly, travelling to English-speaking countries can help break down the cultural limitations of high school students. Each country has its own unique cultural traditions and values, and when traveling abroad, high school students will be exposed to different cultures. This allows them to be more open to accepting and understanding different cultures, thus expanding their cultural horizons. Secondly, travelling to English-speaking countries can also enhance high school students' cross-cultural communication skills. Different cultural environments have different customs. Travelling to English-speaking countries allow high school students to improve their experience of these customs. As a result, they can enhance their cross-cultural communication skills and cooperate with people of different cultural backgrounds better.

With the development of the Internet, e-learning has become an increasingly popular form of informal learning. It is an effective way to enhance high school students' intercultural communication skills. For example, e-learning breaks down geographical constraints and allows high school students to access knowledge from a variety of cultural backgrounds anytime. Through e-learning, students can gain access to teachers from different countries and regions, learn about values of different cultures, and enhance their understanding and inclusiveness of cross-cultural communication. Then, e-learning provides rich and diverse learning resources and communication platforms, which promotes interaction between

different cultures. On the platform of e-learning, high school students can communicate with learners from all over the world through discussion forums. They can share their views and experiences, promote cross-cultural communication and enhance friendship. Through e-learning, high school students can also choose the courses and topics they are interested in to learn about the history, art, customs and habits of different cultures, so as to enhance their cross-cultural communication ability.

4. Problems Resulting from Informal Learning on High School Students' English Language Ability

4.1 Questionnaire Survey on High School Students' English Informal Learning

In the paper, the questionnaire was designed around the aspects of informal learning styles, communication with English teachers, ways of accessing informal learning resources, frequency of informal learning, school organization of informal learning activities, topics of informal learning, and purpose of informal learning. The details of the questionnaire are shown in the appendix. The main purpose of the survey is to comprehensively capture the problems encountered by high school students in the process of English informal learning.

The survey respondents were students from a high school in Nanjing. They came from different grades to ensure the breadth, diversity and randomness of the data. The survey finally collected 36 valid questionnaires. The paper organized and analyzed these questionnaires, and then summarized the specific problems that occurred in high school students' English informal learning.

The results of the survey on basic information showed that the proportions of male and female students among the respondents were basically balanced, accounting for 47% and 53% respectively. Survey respondents involved freshmen, sophomores, and seniors in high school. The largest number of students were freshmen, accounting for 56%. Moreover, in Table 1, a large number of high school students preferred to learn English informally through peer communication and other styles, accounting for 39%. 36% of high school students regarded online learning as the main style of English informal learning. 16% of high school students engaged in informal learning by reading English novels or watching English movies. However, only about 8% of high school students joined in informal learning activities by participating in English corners or English clubs.

Table 1. The Survey on Informal Learning Styles

Survey Options	Results	
	Numbers	Percentage
Joining an English Corner or English Club	3	8%
Reading English Novels or Watching English Movies	6	17%
Internet Learning	13	36%
Peer communication and Other Styles	14	39%
Total	36	100%

4.2 Normative Problems

The paper investigated the question “Do you communicate with your English teachers about your feelings after informal learning?” The results of this question were shown in Figure 1. Most high school students never communicated with their English teachers about the problems and difficulties they encounter in informal learning, accounting for 47%. 25% of high school students occasionally discussed their informal learning experiences with their English teachers. 17% of high school students frequently communicated with their teachers about the informal learning process, and only 11% of them tended to communicate with their teachers in a timely manner after each informal learning activity.

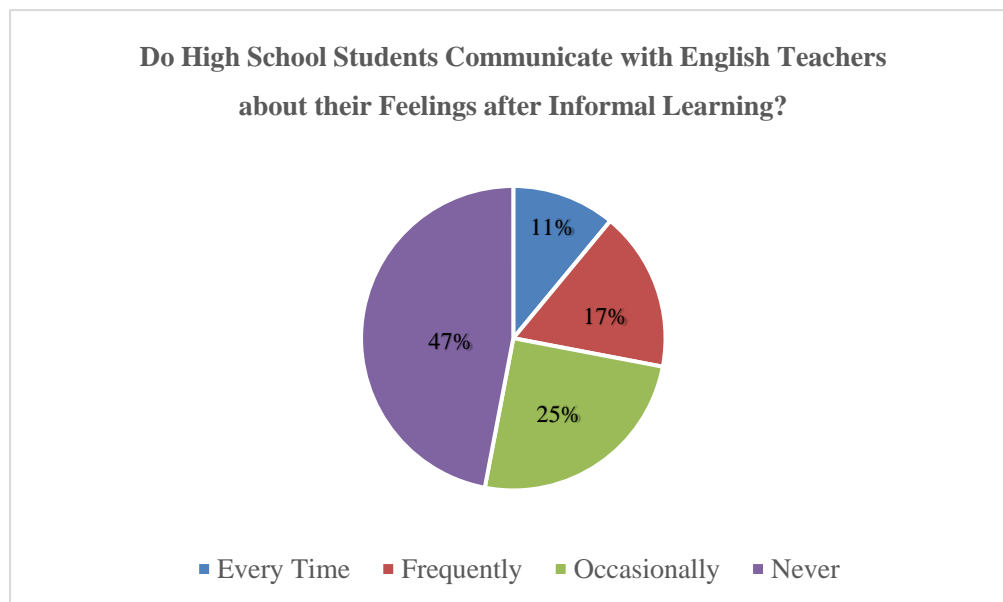


Figure 1. The Survey on Communication with English Teachers

The above findings indicated that a significant percentage of high school students lack professional guidance and correction from teachers in the process of English informal learning, which can lead to normative problems. For example, in informal learning processes such as mutual evaluation of peer writing, high school students tended to study respectively without the guidance and correction of teachers. As a result, students were prone to grammatical errors and spelling errors in writing. Since they were not corrected in time, these errors may affect students' English language ability for a long time.

As another example, when watching English movies and listening to English songs, high school students may be exposed to some irregular and non-standard English expressions, such as internet terms and spoken slang. If high school students are exposed to these irregular English expressions for a long time, it will affect the accuracy and standardization of their oral expressions in the absence of teachers' supervision and guidance. Simultaneously, in the process of watching English movies, students often passively received language input. They could understand other people's English expressions, but could not express their own ideas fluently. This situation would lead to students' lack of expressive ability in

oral communication, which affected their English speaking skills.

In addition, in Figure 2, the results of the survey on “How do you obtain informal learning resources?” showed that 39% of high school students look for appropriate learning content according to their interests. 36% of high school students automatically got learning content through big data push. Only 19% of high school students accessed informal learning resources through their English teachers’ recommendations. The remaining 6% of them obtained informal learning resources through the recommendations of their classmates.

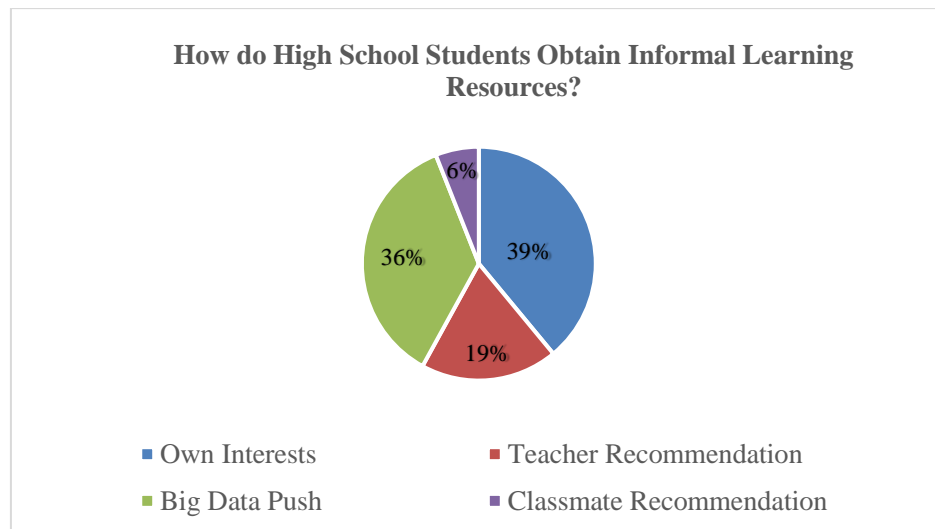


Figure 2. The Survey on the Ways to Obtain Informal Learning Resources

Learning resources pushed by big data may expose students to information of varying quality. Without being screened by teachers, it is difficult to ensure the standardization of English knowledge. If students are unable to recognize the authenticity of information, they will be easily misled. This not only fails to improve English language ability, but also forms wrong cultural concepts, which may have a negative impact on the comprehensive development of high school students.

4.3 Continuity Problems

The paper investigated the question “How often do you engage in English informal learning?”. The results of the survey were shown in Figure 3. 47% of high school students engaged in English informal learning activities occasionally. About 19% of high school students regularly or never participated in English informal learning. Only about 14% of high school students consistently joined in daily English informal learning activities.

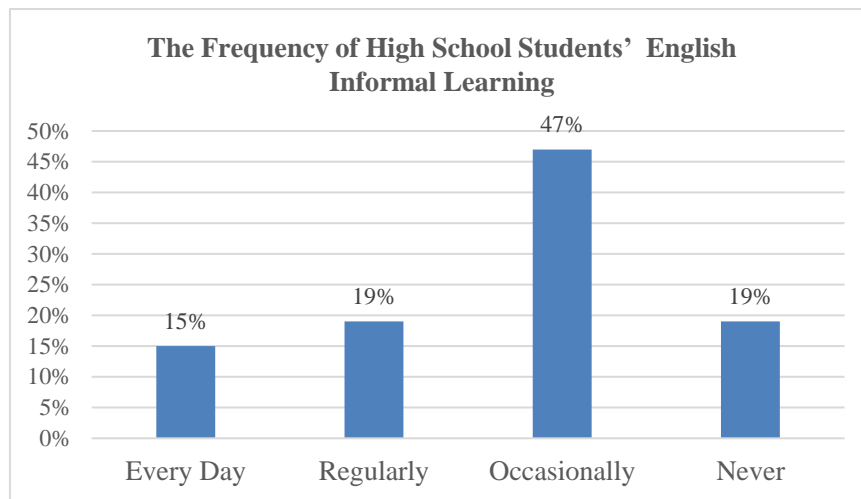


Figure 3. The Survey on Informal Learning Frequency

The above survey results showed that the total proportion of “occasionally learning” and “never learning” is as high as 66%, which means that there is a lack of continuity in the English informal learning. The main reason may be that there is no systematic informal learning organization. For example, in the informal learning activities carried out by reading English novels and English magazines, high school students may only browse some short articles or fragmented information without systematic reading and thinking. Since there is no fixed institution or group to organize students’ systematic extracurricular reading, informal learning activities such as reading English novels tend to be “fishing in three days and drying the net in two days”. Such a learning method cannot cultivate high school students’ ability to think and analyze problems in depth, which is not conducive to improving students’ reading skills.

The reason why there is no systematic informal learning organization is that it takes a lot of manpower and material resources, which often leads to the fact that schools do not regularly organize relevant activities. Therefore, although senior high school students are willing to participate in this informal learning activity subjectively, there is no corresponding activity to participate in objectively. This makes informal learning appear contingency, discontinuity and other discontinuous problems.

In addition, although informal learning is generally self-driven by senior secondary students, if there is no corresponding organization for assessment, it may also make students unable to continuously focus on a task. For example, in the informal learning process of online learning, if the assessment is not organized, high school students may switch learning content frequently and spend more time on entertainment. Such impetuous learning attitude will make students lack perseverance and patience, which will influence the effect of English learning.

4.4 Bias Problems

In the paper, a survey was conducted on the question “What topics do you cover in your English informal learning?” The results were shown in Figure 4. The majority of high school students chose English informal learning topics according to their interests, accounting for about 42%. 25% of high school

students chose topics related to the content of English course. About 22% of high school students randomly chose informal learning topics. Only 11% of them were involved in all aspects of topics when they joined in informal learning activities.

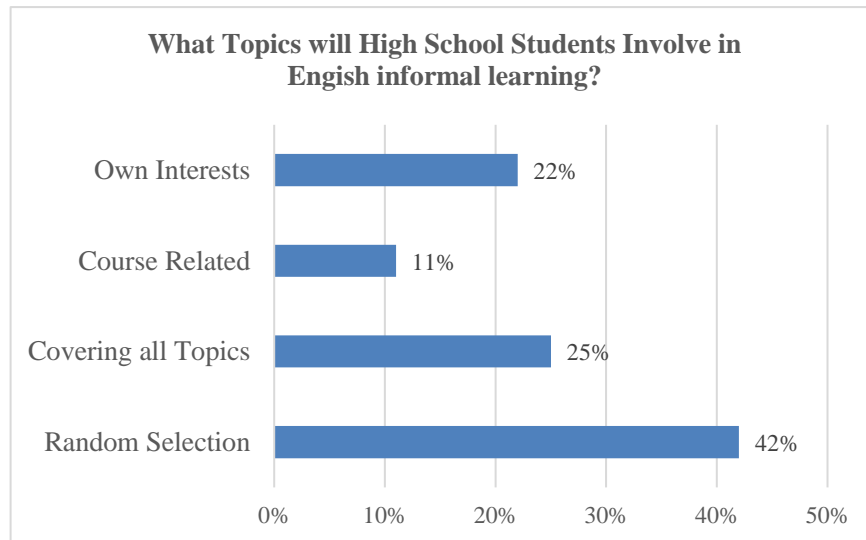


Figure 4. The Survey on Informal Learning Topics

The above results show that in the process of informal English learning, senior high school students rarely cover all kinds of topics, which will lead to biased problems and affect their comprehensive development. The findings show that high school students carry out informal learning activities more often based on their own interests. For example, in informal learning activities such as online learning, if high school students click on a learning topic they are interested in, then the Internet big data will constantly push similar content to them. Over time, students tend to learn only relevant content in depth but have a limited understanding of other topics, which cannot promote the comprehensive development of high school students and results in “information island”.

Simultaneously, the paper also investigated the question “What is the purpose of your English informal learning?”. In Figure 5, the results of the survey showed that most of the high school students, about 64%, engage in informal learning for the purpose of improving their academic performance. About 14% of high school students participated in English informal learning with the purpose of enhancing humanistic literacy. About 19% of high school students aimed at achieving comprehensive development, and 3% of them did not have any purpose.

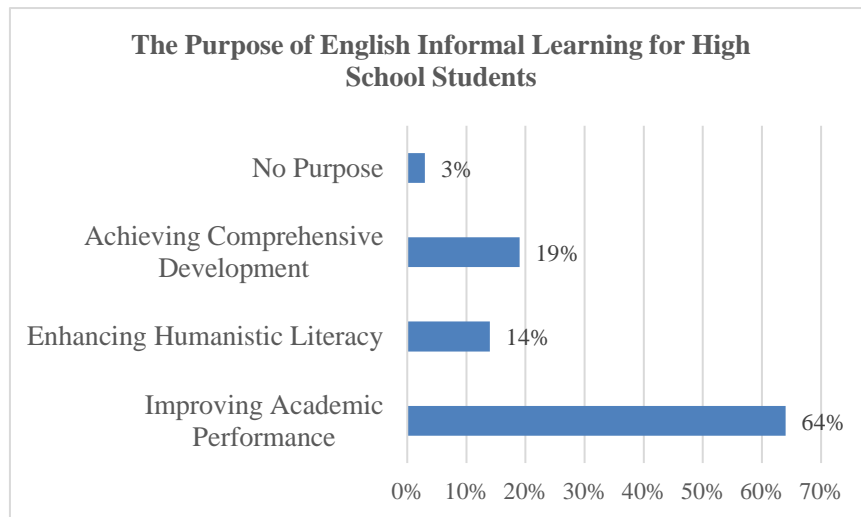


Figure 5. The Survey on the Purpose of Informal Learning

It is predictable that the majority of high school students focus only on academic performance, which will negatively affect their comprehensive competence. For example, when high school students participate in informal learning activities such as peer communication and English writing competitions, they often focus more on improving their basic language abilities such as listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, while neglecting the development of language awareness and sense of language, and cross-cultural communication ability. Such a biased learning concept may lead students to develop a “test-oriented” learning attitude, which only focuses on memorizing English knowledge while neglecting the cultivation of critical and creative thinking. This is extremely detrimental to the comprehensive development of students and cannot meet the demand of future society for talents with critical and creative thinking.

5. Optimization for the Development of High School Students’ English Language Ability from Informal Learning Perspective

5.1 Correctly Orientating the Role of High School English Teachers

In order to rectify the normative problems that may arise in high school students’ English informal learning, it is crucial to correctly orientate the role of English teachers who need to strengthen guidance, supervision and correction. First of all, high school English teachers should guide students to choose suitable learning contents from a large amount of extracurricular learning materials. In e-learning, there are a lot of English learning materials on the Internet, but some of them are of low quality. Teachers should choose rich, authoritative and reliable extracurricular learning materials for students to avoid wasting time and energy in informal learning.

Secondly, high school English teachers should monitor students’ informal learning efficiency through regular tests. For example, in informal learning activities conducted through reading English novels and English magazines, teachers can organize some regular English quizzes to test students’ learning results.

Through this approach, teachers can know well the informal learning situation of students, identify their shortcomings, and provide timely assistance. The above measures can encourage students to better improve their English reading skills.

Finally, English teachers should require students to regularly report on their situation in informal learning in order to promptly correct their mistakes. In informal learning activities such as English corners, English clubs, peer communication and so on, high school students will inevitably make some grammatical mistakes or pronunciation errors. At this time, teachers can correct these errors by providing correct examples or reminding students of precautions. Timely correction can help students avoid forming bad habits and improve learning outcomes.

5.2 Perfecting Organizations of English Informal Learning in High Schools

Regarding the continuity problems of informal English learning, it is particularly important to establish sound informal learning organizations. High school students may put aside informal learning due to other learning tasks when reading English novels and magazines, which often lacks continuity. In order to ensure the continuity of students' extracurricular reading process, schools can solve this problem through hardware facilities investment. For example, schools can set up bulletin boards at the entrance of the classroom, some of which can present dynamic content with information technology support. In this way, students can receive English information every day, their English listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills will naturally improve over time. Moreover, campus bulletin boards can be divided into Chinese and English sections, so that students can read comparatively. Through such continuous informal learning, students can effectively enhance their English language awareness and sense of language.

Informal learning activities such as English corners, English clubs and peer communication are effective ways to enhance students' cross-cultural communication ability. Schools should improve the construction and management of English corners and English clubs, such as paying special attention to the content of activities which should be conducive to cultivating students' cultural judgment ability and cross-cultural awareness. In the process of organizing activities, schools should ensure that the activities are safe and orderly. Starting from each academic year, teachers should submit application forms that clarify the rules and participation conditions of English corners or English clubs to the dean's office. The dean's office of the school should regularly organize inspections and promptly correct problems in these activities.

In the process of informal learning such as e-learning, in order to avoid students lacking self-control and becoming restless, schools should require each informal learning organization to strengthen assessment. Firstly, schools need to conduct standardized assessments. Based on three major abilities of high school students through English informal learning, teachers should design relevant indicators to assess the learning effectiveness. Then, schools should conduct a trajectory-based assessment, using a form filling method to record the duration and degree of student participation in e-learning. By strengthening assessments, informal learning organizations can help high school students become more disciplined and improve their English language ability.

5.3 Shaping the Culture of English Informal Learning in High Schools

The solution to the bias problem among high school students in English informal learning is to shape informal English learning culture and create active learning atmosphere. Due to subtle influence of culture, students' enthusiasm for achieving comprehensive development through informal learning will be stimulated by creating comprehensive development atmosphere. Schools can create comprehensive cultural atmosphere by establishing typical figures who develop comprehensive abilities, which can guide students to embark on a path of comprehensive development through informal learning, avoiding the formation of "information island" due to the continuous push of big data in a certain aspect.

Schools should establish the culture that calls for students to be impartial in informal English learning. Schools can guide students to balance the development of English listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills with the cultivation of cross-cultural communication ability by establishing the campus culture that emphasizes the comprehensive development of students. For example, schools should not reward students who focus only on the improvement of English listening and reading skills but neglect the development of cross-cultural communication ability in the process of English informal learning. This kind of campus cultural construction can enable students to comprehensively improve themselves.

6. Conclusion

The paper studies the development of high school students' English language ability from the perspective of informal learning and carries out relevant research in three aspects: reasons for informal learning to enhance high school students' English language ability, problems resulting from informal learning on high school students' English language ability, and optimization for the development of high school students' English language ability. The results of the studies show that informal learning can indeed enhance high school students' English language ability theoretically, but there are some non-negligible problems such as normative problems, continuity problems and bias problems. Aiming at these problems, the paper proposes optimization strategies in terms of correctly orientating the role of high school English teachers, perfecting organizations and shaping the culture of English informal learning in high schools. Informal learning's ways are various and theories are profound. The paper discusses several common styles in high school students' English informal learning and analyzes the effects of these styles on students' English language ability. The depth of the research still needs to be strengthened and the methodology still needs to be optimized, which are not only the limitations of the paper but also the indications for future research on high school students' informal English learning.

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