

Study of English Learning Motivation of College Students

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ABSTRACT. *Motivation is a crucial element to second or foreign language learning. Research shows a positive correlation between motivation and achievement. Hence knowledge of the factors that facilitate motivation to learn and achieve is critical for a teacher to be truly effective or for a student to achieve. This study mainly focuses on the college students' motivations of the English learning. First of all, the paper introduces the importance of motivation in the second language learning. Then, this thesis introduces the theoretical basis of the motivation, its definition, three kinds of motivation theories, motivation factors. Then a study is conducted to analyze the motivations that influence English learning of the college students. Then this thesis summarizes some implications of the study.*

KEYWORDS: *Motivation, Social-educational model, Extrinsic motivation, Intrinsic motivation*

1. Introduction

Motivation is often regarded as one of the most important variables in learner differences to determine foreign or second language learning achievement. Large amount of research have done in terms of motivation in foreign or second language learning during the last decades. It is a very important, if not the most important factor in language learning, without which even “gifted” learners cannot accomplish long-term goals, whatever the curricula and whoever the teacher.

This study tries to investigate the learning motivations of Chinese-foreign cooperative vocational college students. It aims to arouse an awareness of the learners' motivational intensity, with the hope that this awareness will improve their English learning motivations and change their learning strategies and lead to the improvement of their English learning.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1 Definition of Motivation

William and Burden (1997:120) define motivation as “a and emotional arousal which leads to a conscious decision state of cognitive to act, and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to attain a previously set goal (or goals)”. Thus the concept of language learning motivation has become central to a number of theories of second language acquisition, and motivation has been widely accepted by teachers and researchers as one of the key factors influencing the success of second/foreign language learning. It could be said that all other factors involved in second language acquisition presuppose motivation to some extent.

2.2 Motivation Theories

2.2.1 Dornyei's Three-Level Categorization

Dornyei (1994a) proposes a three level categorization of the different components involved in L2 motivation. In an attempt to extend the social-educational model, Dornyei(1994:273) proposes a more pragmatic, education-centered approach to motivation.

According to Dornyei (1994), the most basic level of the construct is the language level. The language level centers on various orientations and motives related to aspects of the L2, the culture and the community, the usefulness of the language, which is in accordance with Gardner's Social-Educational Model. The second level of this categorization is the learner level. It involves individual characteristics or personality traits and two motivational components need for achievement and self-confidence. The learning situational level is the third one. It involves motivational components concerning three areas related to the course, the teacher and the group dynamics: the course-specific motivational components, the teacher-specific components, and the group-specific components. The course-specific components refer to interest, relevance, expectancy, and satisfaction. The teacher-specific motivational components include affiliative drive to please the teacher, authority type, and direct socialization of student motivation (modeling, task presentation, feedback). The group-specific motivational components consist of goal-orientation, norm and reward system, and group-cohesion and classroom goal structure.

2.2.2 Extrinsic Motivation and Intrinsic Motivation

Cognitive psychology makes a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in an attempt to explain the reasons for one choosing to act in certain ways. Extrinsic motivation refers to motivation that is based on external factors such as rewards and punishment. The use of extrinsic motivators in the form of awards,

grades, privileges, or praise is clearly wide spread and will continue to be so; but reliance on extrinsic motivation and reinforcement has been criticized. Research has found that in situations that are intrinsically interesting, the use of extrinsic rewards results in decreased motivation and interest. Intrinsic motivation finds value and motivation within the activity itself, regardless of the outcome. It means learning for its own sake. Intrinsic motivation is regarded as the enjoyment or interest in performing the activity itself.

2.3 Motivational Factors

Motivation is a crucial element to second or foreign language learning. Research shows a positive correlation between motivation and achievement. Hence knowledge of the factors that facilitate motivation to learn and achieve is critical for a teacher to be truly effective or for a student to achieve. So does knowledge of the factors that debilitate motivation. In this part, we will focus on such factors of learners' internal factors that have important impacts on learners and the classroom environment. Learner internal factors mainly center on self-concept, self-determination, beliefs (about ability, self-efficacy, self-worth, and control beliefs), attitudes and anxiety.

2.3.1 Self-Concept

Self-concept is defined as “the totality of a complex and dynamic system of learned beliefs which each individual holds to be true about his or her personal existence and which gives consistency to his or her personality” (Purkey and Novak, 1984; cited by M. Williams and R.L. Burden, 1997). That is, self-concept is one's collective self-perceptions formed through experiences and interpretations of the environment, and heavily influenced by significant other persons. Self-concept is developed as a result of internal and external comparisons, using other people or other aspects of the self as frames of reference. Self-concept is a more global construct that contains many perceptions about the self, including self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-confidence

2.3.2 Self-Determination

Self-determination or autonomy is one central component of intrinsic motivation. Self-determination refers to the experience of choice and control in initiating one's behavior. Self-determination is the capability to choose and to have those choices to be the determinants of one's actions. But self-determination is more than a capability; it is also a need (Deci and Ryan, 1985:39). Self-determination is not concerned with control over outcomes, but rather with the initiation and regulation of behavior.

Classroom environments that support student self-determination and autonomy are associated with greater student interest, sense of competence, creativity, conceptual learning, and preference for challenge. Then the problem is what teachers can do to support student self-determination or autonomy.

2.3.3 Learners' Beliefs

2.3.3.1 Beliefs about Ability

Ability is a stable and uncontrollable trait. According to this view, some people have more ability than others, but the amount each person has is changeless. An incremental view of ability, on the other hand, suggests that ability is unstable and controllable (Dweck, 1983:144). By hard work, study, or practice, knowledge can be increased and thus ability can be improved.

Students who hold an entity view of ability tend to set performance goals. They seek situations where they can look smart and protect their self-esteem. They keep doing what they can do well without expanding too much effort or risking failure, because one, working hard or failing indicate slow ability. To work hard but still fail would be a devastating blow to their sense of competence. Another protecting strategy is to make no effort at all. Any grade above passing is a success. Blaming anxiety for poor test performance can be also a self-protective strategy.

2.3.3.2 Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to beliefs about personal competence in a particular situation. Self-efficacy concerns judgments of one's capability to perform a specific task. Self-efficacy affects choices of activities. Feelings of efficacy motivate students to take a task. And this sense of efficacy can foster the ability to concentrate on the task at hand, whereas inefficient feelings can lead to feelings of incompetence (Bandura, 1986; 1993).

Research on self-efficacy and achievement suggests that performance in school is improved and self-efficacy is increased when students (a) adopt short-term goals so it is easier to judge progress; (b) are taught to use specific learning strategies such as outlining or summarizing that help them focus attention; and (c) receive rewards based on performance, not just engagement, because performance rewards signal increasing competence.

2.3.3.3 Self-Worth

Self-worth is an affective reaction or evaluation of oneself. Self-worth theory stresses that people need to remain competent and to avoid anything that might imply low ability or incompetence. Students can avoid the perception of low ability through deliberate failure either by pursuing easy goals that guarantee success or by avoiding a negative situation. Self-worth theory stresses ability as the primary influences on motivation.

2.3.3.4 Control Beliefs

Perceived control is central to both of self-efficacy and outcome expectations. People who perceive a high sense of control over what they learn and perform and the consequences of their actions are more apt to initiate and sustain behaviors

directly toward those ends than those who hold a low sense of control over their capabilities and outcomes of their actions.

When people believe that the events and outcomes in their lives are mostly uncontrollable, they have developed learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975). Learned helplessness refers to the expectation that all one's effort will lead to failure based on previous experiences with a lack of control. Learned helplessness appears to cause three types of deficits: motivational, cognitive, and affective.

2.3.4 Goals

Educational and developmental psychologists developed goal theory to explain and predict achievement behavior, especially in the classroom. Goals motivate people to expand more effort and persistence in their learning tasks in order to improve their performance. When we have a clear goal, we are less likely to be distracted or to give up until we reach the goal. The types of goals we set influence the amount of motivation we have to reach them. A central feature of goal theory is its emphasis on how different types of goals can influence behavior in achievement situations. (Pintrich&Schunk, 1996)

2.3.5 Attitudes

Attitudes develop early in childhood and are the results of parents' and peers' attitudes and contact with different people. They form a part of one's perception of self, of others, and of the culture in which one is living.

To learn a new language means to adopt a new self-image and to think in another pattern. One's attitude towards the foreign culture itself influences how one experience the second or foreign language learning process. If this attitude is negative, there may be strong internal barriers against learning and if learning has to take place because of external compulsion, it may proceed only to the minimum level required by these external demands.

2.3.6 Anxiety

Anxiety has probably received more attention than any other emotion in terms of both research and theory. Anxiety plays an important affective role in second language acquisition. It is difficult to define anxiety in one simple sentence. Anxiety is associated with feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, or worry (H.D.Brown,1994).It is assumed that anxiety is one element that has the strongest correlation with language achievement.

Language anxiety refers to a type of situation-specific anxiety in terms of attempting to learn an L2 and communicate in it. Research in SLA indicates that learners frequently experience language anxiety. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) define language anxiety as fear or apprehension occurring when a learner is expected to perform in the second or foreign language. Horwitzetal (1986:31) define foreign anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the

language learning process". They also argue that learners' self-perceptions are threatened in a foreign language classroom setting. Language anxiety is not just a general performance since anxiety directly linked to performance in the target language.

2.4 Methodology and Procedure

2.5 Subjects

The subjects in the investigation were 50 students, who are students of international school of SICT. The international school is a Chinese-foreign cooperative department of SICT. There are 18 girls and 32 boys. They are students in grade 1.

2.6 Instruments

The instruments used in this study were a questionnaire. The questionnaire is designed to elicit information about the students' motivations in learning English.

The questionnaire consists of two parts.

Part A concerns the participants' personal information. This section deals with personal information, including name, sex, and an estimate of time spent every week in studying English outside of class. The time estimate is used as the indicator of "effort".

Part B establishes the students' motivations of learning English. This part is downloaded from the internet, which is designed by a postgraduate of Southwest University. The items were based on the theories of Dbmynei (1994a), Tremblay and Gardner (1995), etc, and adapted on the studies of Zhang(1998), Gao, C hen, Zhao and Zhou(2003), Li, Gao and Qian (2003), and Yang and Ding (2004). This 30-item scale was answered on a Likert scale of one to five to assess students' motivation in English learning. The points on the scale are (1) strongly disagree; (2) basically disagree; (3) don't know; (4) basically agree and (5) strongly agree. There are five subscales: level of effort, intrinsic interest, external requirements, learning situation, and learning value. The motivation scale is based on five categories, which presents as follows:

The internal consistency reliability coefficient of the motivation scale (n=30), assessed by means of Cronbacha, presents as .67.

1) Level of effort (n=6; a=.31; items: 3, 11, 10, 6, 12, 8). This six-item scale assesses to what extent learners' motivation in English learning is.

2) Intrinsic interest (n =5; a=.51; items: 5, 9, 1, 4, 13). This measure consists of five items. It assesses to what extent learners' intrinsic interest in English learning is.

3) External requirements(n=8;a = .62; items: 14,2 ,7 ,29,15,17,30,25). This scale

consists of eight items, concerning self-development and respect from peers. It assesses how learners are influenced in English learning by external requirements.

4) Learning situation (n=7; a= .51; items: 19, 24, 18, 23, 27, 16, 21). This part includes teaching process, students' feeling about their textbook, their teachers and their fellow classmates. This seven-item scale assesses how learners feel about their learning situation.

5) Learning value (n=4; a=.67; items: 26, 28, 20, 22). This measure consists of four items concerning social status, being well-educated, and adaptation to society. It assesses what learning value students place on learning English. It assesses how learners consider the importance of English learning.

In order to guarantee the comprehension of the question and more a spontaneous response, the questionnaire was made in Chinese.

2.7 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The study was conducted in the international school. The survey was conducted during regular class time, providing the same conditions for all the students. The principal conditions required were that time spent for the completion of the questionnaire is not to exceed 20 minutes, and that there be no communication between students during the completion of the questionnaire. The students were informed that their participation was voluntary and their responses would remain confidential.

The results of the questionnaire and scores on the grade-unified test were put into the computer. The data were analyzed by using factor analytic methods. The analysis process was divided into the following steps. First of all, descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviation, was computed to summarize the students' responses to the learning motivation. Then product-moment correlation was conducted to examine how the learning motivation were related to proficiency, and to assess the correlation between motivation and proficiency. Finally, step-wise regression was conducted on students' proficiency to identify the best predictors from the motivation.

2.8 Results and Discussion

The results of the questionnaire are set out in Table 1 -7.

Table 1 Level of Effort Note: n= Students Number, P=Percentage

Item	5		4		3		2		1	
	n	p	n	p	n	p	n	p	n	p
3	17	34%	25	50%	6	12%	2	3%	0	
6	30	60%	15	30%	5	10%	0		0	
8	36	61%	14	28%	0		0		0	

10	5	10%	6	12%	0	30	60%	9	18%
11	14	28%	22	44%	0	10	20%	4	8%
12	3	6%	5	10%	0	30	60%	12	24%

As it is indicated in Figure 1, the majority of the students have the similar ideas to the first three items. They can finish what the teachers require them to do in time. They are passive in classroom and depend on the teachers. They are easily influenced by the teacher's attitude, teaching methods. However, they have the different ideas to the last three items. Some of them can spend more effort to study and practice English. The initiative studies of the students are different from each other.

Table 2 Intrinsic Interest Note: n= Students Number, P=Percentage

Item	5	4	3	2	1
	n p	n p	n p	n p	n p
1	2 4%	3 6%	10 20%	27 54%	8 16%
4	5 10%	15 30%	26 52%	2 4%	2 4%
5	10 20%	25 50%	5 10%	7 14%	3 6%
9	10 20%	5 10%	20 40%	10 20%	5 10%
13	5 10%	10 20%	25 50%	6 12%	4 8%

Interest plays an important role in learner's motivational behavior as well. Interest influences learner's level of effort and persistence they put forth on English.

From the Figure 2, we can see that the students do not have clear ideas about why they should study English. The students do not seem to have the clear ideas that whether they are interested in studying English. Maybe, the vocational college students just regard English as a required course.

Table 3 External Requirement n= Students Number, P=Percentage

item	5	4	3	2	1
	n p	n p	n p	n p	n p
2	0	0	0	30 60%	20 40%
7	5 10%	3 6%	32 64%	5 10%	5 10%
14	24 48%	26 52%	0	0	0
15	5 10%	3 6%	30 60%	8 16%	4 8%
17	14 28%	26 52%	6 12%	4 8%	0
25	14 28%	26 52%	6 12%	4 8%	0
29	26 52%	24 48%	0	0	0
30	26 52%	24 48%	0	0	0

As for the external requirement, according to Figure 3, the pressure from the further study and family are the major motivational factors of studying English. Most students regard English as a required course of school and a means of the future employment. Most students are forced to study English.

Table 4 Learning Situation n= Students Number, P=Percentage

Item	5		4		3		2		1	
	n	p	n	p	n	p	n	p	n	p
16	5	10%	15	30%	6	12%	20	40%	4	8%
18	15	30%	30	60%	5	10%	0		0	
19	15	30%	35	70%	0		0		0	
21	10	30%	15	30%	20	40%	3	6%	2	4%
23	15	30%	20	40%	5	10%	8	16%	2	4%
24	20	40%	20	40%	0		6	12%	4	8%
27	16	32%	24	48%	0		8	16%	2	4%

As for the learning situation, there are a number of factors: the teachers, the text books, the classroom environment, and the examination results. From the Figure 4, the examination results more or less have some influences on their studying enthusiasm. The text books also have some impact on their English studies. Most students like to read the text books that are interesting and applicable. Some students have good interactive communication each others.

Table 5 Learning Value n= Students Number, P=Percentage

Item	5		4		3		2		1	
	n	p	n	p	n	p	n	p	n	p
20	0		10	20%	25	50%	15	30%	0	
22	0		6	12%	34	68%	10	20%	0	
26	20	40%	22	44%	0		8	16%	0	
28	25	50%	18	36%	0		7	14%	0	

Learning value means the evaluation of the importance of English learning and the evaluation of the learning cost. From the Figure 5, it seems that the vocational college students do not have the high value of English. They do not usually have the long-term expectation. They just study English for examination.

2.9 Implications of the Study

Researchers (Ellis, 1994; Gardner, 1985) tend to describe second language learning as a cyclical process: strong motivation, positive attitudes, and effective learning effort may result in increased language attainment and the feeling of progress, which may in turn enhance motivation and facilitate further efforts.

The evidence also suggests that high motivation makes some people choose to

study a foreign language and that the study of the language creates motivation. Both teachers and researchers have quite agreed to the claim that motivation is one of the affective factors influence the rate and success of foreign language learning. Motivation provides strong strength to start learning the L2 and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tiresome learning process. Indeed, all the other factors involved in L2 acquisition presuppose motivation to some extent.

This study demonstrates that learners with high proficiency tend to devote more efforts into their English learning and that their degree of motivation has significant positive variance on their proficiency. Motivation encourages greater overall effort on the part of learners and thus greater success in language performance. Therefore, it is desirable to offer some suggestions that enhance students' motivation

First, teachers should help students foster positive cognition/ beliefs about language learning, in other words, enhance their self-image as language users, and their own effectiveness at learning a language

Second, it is very important for teachers to promote students' intrinsic motivation to learn English well. On the other hand, teachers should pay much attention to those who are pressured by external requirements, help students reduce the pressure and anxiety, and assist them in learning English smoothly.

Third, it is necessary for teachers to explore the role of teacher-learning interaction in facilitating self-directed learning, and in identifying pedagogical approaches in an attempt to nurture intrinsic motivation in a student's learning process.

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