

Analysis of Learning Motivation in Foreign Language Acquisition

How Do Non-English Majors' Motivation Impacts Learning Outcome?

Fang Huang

School of Foreign Languages
Qingdao Agricultural University
Qingdao, China
huang311fang@163.com

Yuhuan Wang*

School of Foreign Languages
Qingdao Agricultural University
Qingdao, China
wangyuhuanalice@163.com

*Corresponding author

Abstract—Learning motivation has been a hot issue in the sphere of foreign language acquisition for years. Studies proved that motivational factors are critical to the achievement of language learning. In order to have a better understanding of students' English learning motivation and how their motivation impact learning outcome, a survey is conducted among 100 non-English majors in Qingdao Agricultural University by using a self-designed questionnaire. The results show that 68% of the participants prefer instrumental motivation in English learning; students who prefer integrative and intrinsic motivation achieve better in CET-4 and CET-6. Based on the research findings, transforming students' learning motivation and building a harmonious learning atmosphere are suggested so as to enhance students' learning proficiency.

Keywords- foreign language acquisition; learning motivation; learning proficiency

I. INTRODUCTION

Motivation is a term that has been making a point of by many scholars. It is regarded as a wake-up state of cognition and emotion, which usually encourages people to spare no effort to achieve the established objective. In foreign language learning, motivation is defined as the learner's overall goal or direction. Motivational factors are considered as one of the most dynamic factors, which help to improve learners learning proficiency. Chinese scholar Guokun Zhao defined motivation as a significant variable in English learning and it is in direct proportion to the foreign language achievements^[1]. It is also believed that given motivation, anyone can learn a language (Skehan, P., 1989)^[2]. Therefore, the research of motivation in language learning is not only of great theoretical significance, but also has a vital practical value. Based on these concepts, the research aim is to explore non-English majors' English learning motivation in Qingdao Agricultural University, so as to better guide English teaching and learning, as well as the further English educational reform.

II. MOTIVATION

A. Definition

Although different explanations of motivation have been given, due to its complexity, there has been no uniform definition for motivation. Being one of the most subtle concepts in the field of the applied linguistics, motivation is also a delicate term in the field of educational psychology (Dornyei, 1999)^[3]. Based on cognition and social constructive theory, Williams & Burden believe that motivation is the action that would arouse people's cognitive and emotional consciousness, and it determines the continuity and periodic feature of people's mental and physical efforts^[4]. Motivation is the driving force for reaching the target. Ellis, R (1994) defines it as the effort which learners put into learning a second or foreign language out of their need or desire^[5].

Among all the definitions, the most influential definition of motivation is given by Gardner and Lambert, that is, motivation refers to the extent of efforts one spends for successful language acquisition as well as the satisfaction experienced in this activity (Gardner, R. 1985)^[6].

B. Classification

Recently, college English course in China is suggested by foreign language educators to be characterized as both instrumental and humanistic. This suggestion is quite in line with the concepts that were put forward by two of the most influential linguists Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert, who classified motivation into two types, which are instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. As for instrumental motivation in foreign language learning, it is the practical and concrete advantages of learning a new language, and it refers to the motivation produced for the purpose of achieving a certain objective, such as, earn a handsome salary or raise a high social status. Comparatively, integrative motivation refers to a sincere and personal interest in the people, and the understanding of the diverse culture of the target community or country, by using the target language. In another word, it is produced due to the learner's inner interest in the culture or lifestyle of that country, or to further communicate with the natives, expecting to participate in or

integrate with the life of the community, even to be a member of it (Lambert, W.E. 1974) [7].

Besides, based on educational psychology, motivation can be divided into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (Edward & Ryan, 1985) [8]. Intrinsic motivation refers to the motivation caused by inner interests in learning. Learners engage in the activities for their own sake, instead of external reward. While, extrinsic motivation derives from external forces, namely, learners are pushed by external forces to learn, and their purpose is not to obtain knowledge itself but the external rewards. In foreign language study, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are indispensable, they can interact and even transform into one another.

III. METHODOLOGY

In order to study students' English learning motivation and give some implications in foreign language teaching, a survey was conducted among 100 non-English majors in Qingdao Agricultural University. Their majors range from Plant Protection, Botany Science and Technology, Life Science, Resources and Environment, Animal Science to Veterinary Medicine. They all have learned English for more than 10 years. Among them, 33 are males and 67 are females. They are sophomores taught by the same English teacher.

The questionnaire is self-designed including two parts. The first part is mainly designed to survey students' personal information, such as major, age, and time of starting to learn English. The second part is concerned with 14 items concerning learning motivation, in the form of Likert scale from "Strongly Disagree=5", "Disagree=4", "Uncertain=3", "Agree=2" to "Strongly Agree=1". The questionnaire is written in Chinese, for making it clear and avoiding misunderstanding.

During the survey, each sample student is given a questionnaire. All of them are required to fill in the questionnaire truly and responsibly within 10 minutes at the same time and in the same classroom, under the supervision of an English teacher. After collecting all the questionnaires, the data are analyzed.

IV. DATA ANALYSES AND MAJOR FINDINGS

All the data collected from the 70 questionnaires (the other 30 questionnaires are invalid) were calculated and analyzed using Excel worktable. The major findings are showed below:

A. Types of motivation

The four types of motivation discussed above are calculated.

TABLE I. MOTIVATION TYPE

Type of Motivation	Percentage
Instrumental	68%
Integrative	32%
Intrinsic	51%
Extrinsic	37%

Table I indicates 68% of the sample students prefer to embrace instrumental motivation and only 32% of them

possess integrative motivation. In addition, 51% of the participants have extrinsic motivation and 37% of them have intrinsic motivation.

TABLE II. INSTRUMENTAL MOTIVATION

Instrumental motivation	SA	A	U	D	SD
Finding a satisfying job	37%	29%	18%	12%	4%
Passing CET-4 or CET-6	40%	35%	15%	8%	2%
Studying abroad	23%	30%	18%	15%	14%
Getting diploma	16.5%	25%	13.5%	30%	15%

(SA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, U: Uncertain, D: Disagree, SD: Strongly Disagree)

Table 2 indicates the detailed number of the four items in instrumental motivation. Among all the items, finding a satisfying job and passing exams take a larger percentage (66% and 75% respectively). Comparatively, students do not have a strong tendency for studying abroad or getting the diploma.

TABLE III. INTEGRATIVE MOTIVATION

Integrative motivation	SA	A	U	D	SD
Understanding the culture and lifestyle of English speaking countries better	12%	14%	21%	45%	8%
Communicating with the natives	15%	15%	20.8%	41.2%	8%
Participating or integrating into the community	13.5%	23%	30%	18%	15.5%

(SA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, U: Uncertain, D: Disagree, SD: Strongly Disagree)

As for integrative motivation, 53% of the participants with integrative motivation do not learn English because of the interest in understanding of the culture and lifestyle of the target language community, which is beyond teachers' expectations. Also, 49.2% of them do not want to communicate with the native speakers, only 30% of them have willingness to communicate with native speakers. As for participating or integrating into the target community, only 36.5% of participants agree with this concept.

TABLE IV. INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION

	SA	A	U	D	SD
Being interested in English (intrinsic)	5%	32%	30%	28%	5%
Getting an English certificate (extrinsic)	11%	40%	18%	16%	15%

(SA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, U: Uncertain, D: Disagree, SD: Strongly Disagree)

It is obvious that only 37% of them possess intrinsic motivation, that is, they are interested in English. It is strange that 30% of them are not sure about whether they are interested in English, which suggests students' immaturity. In addition, 51% of all the participants have extrinsic motivation. Namely, they learn English for getting a certificate, such as CET-4 or CET-6 certification.

B. Correlation between motivation and English proficiency

It is also found that language learners' achievements have something to do with their motivation.

TABLE V. CORRELATION BETWEEN MOTIVATION AND ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

	Pass CET-4	Pass CET-6
Instrumental	15%	17%
Integrative	30%	32%
Intrinsic	43%	40%
Extrinsic	12%	11%

English learning motivation is positively related to English proficiency. More students (30%) who have integrative motivation pass CET-4 than those who have instrumental motivation (15%). Similarly, among the participants who have passed CET-4, 43% of them have intrinsic motivation, while, only 12% of them have extrinsic motivation. The same situation happens in CET-6 examination.

So, the more they are interested in the target language, the higher achievements will they have.

V. INSPIRATIONS FOR ENGLISH EDUCATION

From the above analyses, some corresponding measures shall be taken to cope with the existing problems. Here are some suggestions:

A. Promoting the transformation of students' motivation

The above tables clearly illustrate most of the sample students own instrumental and extrinsic motivation; and students who have these motivation do not achieve better than those who have integrative and intrinsic motivation. Therefore, teachers are supposed to spur the transformation of students' motivation from instrumental and extrinsic into integrative and intrinsic ones.

As the designer of the course, teachers are supposed to insist in the student-centered and task-based teaching pedagogy. Teachers are responsible for arousing students' learning interests by thoughtful thinking and design of the teaching materials. It is acknowledged that interest is half success. For students, some parts of a foreign language like grammar and vocabulary are boring. Comparatively, students are more willing to join in the activities, such as debate, speech and group discussion. Teachers should strive to stimulate students' enthusiasm in learning and put an emphasis on interaction. Moreover, teachers should encourage students to participate in more activities like English corner, summer camp, or cultural

exchanges that make them better infuse into environment for language acquisition. Some mock interviews and role plays with native speakers are also helpful to make them be more acquainted with the English thinking and speaking pattern. In the long run, improvement of the language is out of question.

Besides, with the rapid improvement of modern educational technology, various new teaching equipments can be employed to make English teaching diverse and interesting. Multimedia technology, which combines viewing together with listening and speaking, provides students with more authentic language learning environment, so its influence cannot be neglected.

B. Cultivating students' confidence

Building of students' self-confidence for foreign language learning also matters much. Confidence is one of the most fundamental factors in language acquisition. Psychological research shows that positive emotions can burst out amazing strength (Krashen, 1982) [9]. Confidence is also a precondition for achieving self-worth certain goals, as well as the premise for the output of a large amount of language.

If the students are full of confidence, they are more willing to communicate with native speakers, and in conversation, they may have strong desire to know about their customs, patterns of thinking, and their way of behavior, which are believed to be helpful to improve English proficiency. On the contrary, if they are deficient in confidence, they may lose interest and motivation in learning. Therefore, teachers should encourage them, praise them appropriately and make them realize their potential and hope of progress.

C. Building a Harmonious Learning Atmosphere

Learning never takes place in a vacuum. Intense classroom atmosphere can trigger anxiety of students, and they maybe unlikely to develop intrinsic or integrative motivation to learn. While a relaxed atmosphere is conducive to the students' free expressing of thoughts in English, and they will not feel embarrassed when making a mistake, hence it is of great necessity for a teacher to create a relaxed and pleasant learning atmosphere, so that students' anxiety is minimized and their potential is maximized. Teachers who can establish a supportive learning climate is likely to enhance students' persistent effort towards English learning.

Nowadays, teachers come to realize that they should change the traditional teacher-controlled teaching activities. Instead of being the monitor or controller, teachers should act as a facilitator. Therefore, effective measures, such as group discussions, presentations and debates are suggested in language learning process to reduce students' anxiety.

The establishment of a harmonious relationship between students and teachers is of great significance. Teachers must be approachable and understanding. A good teacher-student relationship is a key to success, especially in language learning class of China. Chinese have collectivist and high-context preference. They value harmony to a large extent. A student may be interested in a subject because of teacher's charm, which is what we say "Love me, love my dog".

Besides, teachers need pay attention to the way they criticize students so as to make them feel they are being helped and protected. Teachers should also be enthusiastic and humorous in teaching to keep the students in a high psychological state.

To form a good teacher-student relationship, a basic element is mutual trust and respect. Teachers should play a role not only as an instructor, but also a friend. Teachers' influence on students not only comes from the contents they teach, but also from their behaviors. Teachers are supposed to seize every possible opportunity to chat with students during the intervals. They may ask about their study and even problems in their daily life. A closer relationship will undoubtedly minimize the psychological distance between them.

What should be pointed out is that a harmonious relationship not only benefits students by stimulating their motivation in foreign language learning, but also benefits the teachers at the same time, making them more interested and devoted to their work. In a word, only in such a vigorous and harmonious learning atmosphere, can students improve English proficiency.

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