A Survey on Online English Learning Motivation of Chinese College Students

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ABSTRACT
This paper implements investigations about the motivation of online English learning among the college students in China. 160 college students are investigated based on Gao Yihong's classification of motivation type. The result shows that individual development motivation, achievement motivation, learning situation and going-abroad motivation contribute a lot to Chinese college students' online learning. High achievers and low achievers bear some similarities in going-abroad motivation, social responsibility motivation, and individual development while they differ in learning situation motivation. Compared with the high achievers, the low achievers are much affected by the learning situation.

Keywords: motivation, online English learning, achievement

I. INTRODUCTION

Motivation is an important research topic in language learning. It is also a solution to the problem of online learning incentive, and an analyzing measure to students' online learning enthusiasm. To understand students' online learning motivation and cultivate students' interests in English online learning appropriately can improve English online learning and teaching quality. For this reason, this paper carries out investigations and analysis about the online learning motivations of ELT (English Language Teaching) students, hoping to improve students' English learning effectiveness and English teaching quality.

II. MOTIVATION IN THE ELT RESEARCH

Research about motivation can trace back to the fifties in the last century when Lambert and Gardner first took up the study about motivation of second language acquisition. In the 1980s, research in this field quieted down for quite a while until 1990s the study of motivation in second language acquisition aroused linguists' interest again.

Many researchers have done a lot of studies on L2 motivation and put forward different ideas. Most of them focus on the language learning result, and the relationship between motivation and other factors such as anxiety, learning strategy, cognitive style, self-

efficacy and attitude to environment. A more systematic investigation of affective and personality factors in language learning has interested researchers since the early fifties. The most consistent research over a period of twenty-five years has been undertaken in Canada by Gardner and Lambert at McGill University. These studies focus on learners' social attitudes, values and the motivation of learners in relation to other learner factors and the learning outcome.

Gardner and Lambert's research was made in the framework of social psychology. The studies were first undertaken in Montreal, and afterwards in Maine, Louisiana and Philippines. Other important studies on attitudes to the language learning were made by the research team of the National Foundation for Educational Research in Britain under Burstall's direction (Stern, 1983: 39). Both of Gardner-Lambert studies and the Burstall studies recognized that there is a positive association between measured learning outcomes and attitudes towards the target group and the language (Stern, 1983). When type of motivation was taken into account, Gardner originally thought that an integrative motivation counted more for a successful L2 learner, for "many of Lambert's studies and one study of Spolsky found that integrative motivation generally accompanied higher scores on proficiency test in a foreign language" (Brown, 1994: 43). Yet, studies also indicated that in some settings, an instrumental motivation proved to be more powerful. Based on a social and psychological emphasis, Gardner conducted a study to examine the effects of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation on the learning of French/English vocabulary. The results simply showed that both integrative motivation and instrumental

motivation enhanced learning. Such findings led Gardner to modify their original assumption that interactively motivated learners were more successful than instrumentally motivated learners (Gardner, 1985).

In recent years, the research achievements in educational, cognitive and constructional psychology provided enlightenment to those linguists who study the motivation of second language acquisition. Therefore, the research is no longer merely restricted to the single perspective, the one of social psychology. A Hungarian linguist, Domyei, Domyei does his research in Hungary where it is hard for the language learners to get involved in the context of the target language. In 1994, he put forward the famous three-level motivational theory, the language, learner and setting level, including three factors, course, teacher and group specific components. This theory corresponds perfectly to the three basic elements (language, learner and setting) in ESL teaching process.

Research on EFL in China has paid a great deal of attention to motivation since the 1980s. Most Chinese scholars lay their stress on exploring the positive influence of motivation on achievements and the relations between motivation and other individual learning factors from the perspective of socio-education. Among them, Gao Yihong's research is based on the special situation of Chinese college students, which divided the motivation of Chinese college students into seven categories. In recent years, with the development of online learning, some scholars began to investigate the students' motivation in an online environment. Liu Wenyu studied the motivation of graduate students, postgraduate students and doctors in a web-based environment. His study showed there was a significant correlation between education levels and learning motivation. However, the students' motivation at the same education level and online learning motivation for different subjects remain to be further explored.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research questions

In the context of the Chinese specific English learning situation, this paper attempts to answer the following questions on the basis of previous motivational research. The current study has been designed to investigate the interrelations between online learning motivation and English achievement of students. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

1) What types of motivation do students have for learning English online?

2) Is there any significant difference between high-achievers and low-achievers with regard to motivation type and how are they related to one's English achievement?

B. Measure instrument

The research tool is Questionnaire investigation, which adopts the Likert Scale, 5=disagree; 4=slightly disagree; 3=undecided; 2=agree; 1=strongly agree.

Questionnaire: The participants' level of motivation to study English online was measured by a modified version of the Gao scale (2003). This version consisted of 35 items divided into two parts. Part I included demographic questions (3 items) regarding participants' gender, family background, and English level. Part 2 consisted of seven sub-scales (32 items) measuring the types of motivation.

Before the questionnaire, all the subjects are told that all the questions have no right or wrong answers, and they are asked to express what they are really thinking about motivations of learning English online.

C. Subjects

The subjects for this study are 160 students from a university in China. All of them are selected by using simple random sampling. They are all ranged in age from 18 to 24 years. As far as sex is concerned, the subjects are divided into 52 female students and 108 male students. In the investigation, students passed College English Test Band 6 (a standard English proficiency test in China) are regarded as high-achievers, the others are low-achievers.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS

The questionnaires were administered to the students after class. Answering these questions took the students approximately 15 minutes. Since the data were collected personally rather than by correspondence and also the instructions were given clearly by the researcher herself, the missing response rate was therefore very low. There were 158 valid questionnaires after excluding invalid ones. Then all data were descriptive analyzed and information it reflects is discussed.

A. Motivation types and the relationship

According to Gao's research, the items are divided into seven factors: learning situation motivation, development motivation, going abroad motivation, interest motivation, achievement motivation, responsibility motivation and medium motivation.

Learning situation motivation mainly refers to the online courses, teachers, use of books or the online resources, and the effect of the online classes; development motivation is that to gain an ideal position and achievement in personal development; going

abroad motivation means to going abroad for the foreign education or job chances, or to migrate; interest motivation means to love English itself; achievement motivation means to study for pass exams and to get the diploma; responsibility motivation means to study for sever the country and the parents; medium motivation means that learning English because it is a way to other lessons.

B. Analysis of the seven motivations

The means and standard deviations of seven motivation factors are calculated. The highest mean is for situation motivation (m=4.5), followed by development motivation (m=4.11), then by achievement motivation (m=3.79). The lowest means among the seven motivations was going abroad motivation (m=2.34). The elements of achievement motivation are interest in "fulfilling foreign language requirement" and "getting high grade". Also students wished to use the target language to understand spoken language. The mean for situation motivation (m=4.5, SD=1.21) is higher than the mean for development motivation (m=4.11, SD=1.07). The students in this study were more strongly motivated by situation motivation than by development motivation. The result is shown in "Table I" and "Table II".

TABLE I.   ANALYSIS OF THE SEVEN MOTIVATIONS: MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND RANK

Motivational factors: means, standard deviations, and rank (n=80)			
Factor	Mean	Sd	Rank
Situation	4.5	1.21	1
Development	4.11	1.07	2
Going Abroad	2.34	1.48	7
Achievement	3.79	1.13	3
Responsibility	3.07	1.39	5
Interest	3.18	1.13	4
Medium	2.98	1.09	6

TABLE II.   DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR RATING OF MOTIVATION TYPES BY LEVEL

Variable	CET 4(n=39)		CET 6(n=17)	
	M	Sd	M	Sd
Situation	25.44	4.20	20.25	3.67
Development	23.99	4.29	22.10	2.70
Interest	13.20	3.11	14.98	2.34
Abroad	12.11	3.19	13.91	3.28
Achievement	11.10	5.05	15.26	3.80
Medium	17.74	2.20	15.37	2.22
Responsibility	12.29	2.95	14.56	2.22

The analysis showed students who passed the CET-4 (College English proficiency Test Band 4) were more motivated than those who passed the CET-6 (College English proficiency Test Band 6). There were no significant differences between different participants in their abroad motivation and responsibility motivation.

However, there were significant differences in the situation motivation and achievement motivation.

C. Discussion

1) Motivation types of students: According to Gao's research, there are three types of motivation: cultural, instrumental and situational and seven sub-types of motivation (learning situation motivation, development motivation, going abroad motivation, interest motivation, achievement motivation, responsibility motivation and medium motivation). In the research, among the seven sub-types of motivation, individual development stands out in terms of its importance to the students. Individual development includes job-hunting, training, further education and so on. In China, English learning is one or even a primary factor that will affect learners' future. Then it is understandable that students lay much emphasis on English learning. Therefore, undoubtedly the awareness of the importance of English can motivate students to learn. Achievement motivation is another important component of the students' overall motivation. Many students learn English to pass CET-4 or CET-6 test. But some researchers (Gao, 2004) have critically pointed out that too much emphasis on achievement or certificates can energize learners to work hard for a short period of time but from a long run it will undermine learners' intrinsic interest in English learning because once external requirements are satisfied, this kind of motivation will stop supplying sustaining perseverance to continue learning.

Next comes learning situation motivation, which proves to be a significant type in the survey. However learning situation doesn't play such an important role as the students thought. Through further exploration, we have found lower-achieving learners tend to be controlled by learning situation. It is understandable that lower-achieving learners contribute their failure to situational factors, such as teachers, materials or other learners; therefore, they are more sensitive to and liable to be influenced by outer intervention while higher-achieving learners tend to seek internal regulating mechanism. The next is intrinsic interest. From the survey, we can find most of the participants show weak interest in English. Intrinsic interest can be derived from favorable attitudes toward native speakers or their culture or from preference for the language. Learners' intrinsic interest is not well developed in terms of current Chinese English teaching for non-English majors. Social responsibility relates to living up to parents' expectations and a sense of responsibility to our country. It reflects the traditional educational principles and the close relationship between English education in China and the social development (Gao, 2003).

The last one is going-abroad motivation. According to the survey, the participants show weakest tendencies to go abroad, which may be due to the fact that most of the participants do not think they have such opportunities to go abroad. It is worth pointing out that learners' motivation consists of both integrative and instrumental components. Few students learn English purely for interest or purely for pragmatic benefits. Among these three types of motivation, instrumental motivation is the most important one for students learning English in China as a foreign language. That is to say, students are motivated by utilitarian purposes, such as striving for a career, meeting an educational requirement to learn English. Cultural motivation is another important one among the students. Usually foreign language learners have very limited opportunities to contact with the target language community. Therefore, they can only form very general attitudes and beliefs towards the target language. They regard the English language as an information medium. In addition, situational motivation proves to be another factor that exerts its impact on the students in this study. As online English course is still a required course taught by teachers with textbooks, we can imagine that teachers, online environment, textbooks and students play a role in the students' English learning.

2) Motivation and learner's achievement: From discussion above, we know that most participants are strongly instrumentally orientated in terms of the proportion it accounts for in learners overall motivation. On the whole, it results from social requirements of learner command of English. For the role it plays in English learning, we shall see the two sides of the coin. On the one hand, instrumental motivation is one of the most important incentives initiating learners' attention or persistence. But on the other hand, we shall also know that it doesn't exert a direct influence on learner's achievement.

This result means that students who have the desire to affiliate with native speakers or the culture of target language tend to expend more effort automatically and as a result, make higher achievement in L2 learning. We have also found that learners' English proficiency level influences the efforts they expend on English learning. The finding is consistent with the principle of attribution theory that high achievement can bring about sense of ability which can generate more input of efforts in English learning.

3) High-achievers and low-achievers: In light of the current situation of EFL teaching in China, the fact is that seeking individual development or passing the test of College English proficiency Band 4 (CET-4) or graduate entrance examination or some other pragmatic reasons are main factors pushing the learners to learn English. With respect to the learning situation motivation, we have found that low-achievers tend to be driven to learn by these outer factors (the most important force among all the motivation sub-types) while high-achievers seem to be less influenced by learning environment. As has been expected, the high motivated learners and low motivated learners have much difference in interest and achievement motivation. Or we can put it another way, different attitudes to native speakers or language learning cause the gap in their achievement. The results of analyzing the differences in motivational types of the two groups indicate that learners with higher levels of English proficiency exert much more effort, time and attention as well as persistence on English learning than learners with lower levels of English proficiency. In other words, to be high-achievers, the learners have to commit themselves to English learning. The finding accords with our common sense that "no pains, no gains".

V. CONCLUSION

A. Major findings

As Wen (1996) has pointed out, four out of seven learner modifiable factors stand out in term of their predictive capacity to English achievement. Two are effort and deep motivation, and the other two are learning strategies (form-focused strategy and mother-tongue-avoidance strategy). The significance of the present study lies in pointing out the relationship of second language achievement to the motivation types. Generally speaking, the present research has tested the following results:

High achievers and low achievers bear some similarities in some of the motivational types, such as going abroad, social responsibility, and individual development while they differ in some others, such as learning situation motivation, intrinsic interest, and achievement.

Learners' motivation can influence learning outcomes directly or indirectly.

And although the research is based on Gao's results, especially Gao's classification of motivation types, here are some differences. In this paper, the abroad motivation and medium motivation have a little lower influence in the students' English learning, while the situation and achievement motivation a little higher. There are some reasons for it. The most important one is that Gao's investigation is under the classroom situation, while this paper is under the online learning environment. For the low achievers, they are easily affected by the learning environment, or the external factors of learning.

B. *Implications for English teaching and learning*

We know that motivational components are modifiable by learners themselves and are usually shaped through the intervention by the teachers. The significance of the study lies in revealing the interrelations of motivation types and achievement on the one hand and supplying some suggestions for learners and teachers in light of findings from the study on the other. Based on these findings, we shall consider some implications for English teaching and learning online. In the circumstances in which the learner lacks motivation, it seems that he or she is unlikely to achieve success no matter who the teacher is or what the curricula are, whereas the highly motivated students can succeed in whatever conditions. Therefore, arousing students' motivation has become an important element in foreign language online teaching. First, in this study, students are mainly instrumentally motivated to learn English; some certain instrumental motivation (self-development) can be strengthened to arouse their interest in English online learning. Second, emphasis should be given to developing intrinsic and cultural motivation. After all, intrinsic motivation is the only factor which directly and indirectly influences learning effort and achievement at a statistically significant level among all the motivation types. Understanding the English people and English culture by using internet can stimulate learners' intrinsic interest and motivate them to a greater initiative in English learning. According to the survey, learning situation motivation is one of the major types of motivation for the students. Students can be influenced by the quality of the online class. It is advisable that teachers learning more online teaching skills to find out learners' attitudes towards the online learning environment so as to promote teaching and learning.

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