

Factors Influencing the Learning Motivation in Online Course of Second Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

With the development and widespread of online courses in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classes and the outbreak of COVID-19, the learning motivation of online courses plays a significant role in second language learning. Since the 1990s, researchers have done plenty of studies of learning motivation in online courses, but a limited number of reviews on the topic of EFL. Therefore, this review aims to examine the existed literature on the learning motivation of online courses in EFL. Google Scholar was used as the research database and “online course” “learning motivation” “EFL” “influencing factors” as the search keywords, including the research of EFL classes in different countries and different educational levels from young learners to university students. This review presents a systematic view of the influencing factors on learning motivation, specifically internal factors, and external factors, and how these factors enhance or reduce the motivation, laying the foundation for related work.

Keywords: Learning motivation, English as Foreign Language, Online course, Influencing factors.

1. INTRODUCTION

The traditional teaching scenario in teaching English as Foreign Language (EFL) class for a long time has been a classroom with a lecturer elaborating language points to students and the students listening, taking notes, doing the quiz, and occasionally interacting with group members [1]. With the advanced technology, especially the widespread of the Internet, AI applications, and digital tools, novelties in teaching methods like online courses have, however, challenged the traditional attitudes to class [2].

Besides the technological development, the outbreak of COVID-19 has pushed forward the development and implementation of online courses in second language teaching, to keep a safe social distance. COVID-19 pandemic is a phenomenon that appears in 2019 and continues in 2022, spreading to every country all around the world. This pandemic has greatly changed people's life. People are not allowed to gather in one place and are forced to do social distancing, meaning there is no face-to-face interaction [3]. Particularly, in school, face-to-face interaction is especially important in the traditional teaching and learning process, but then students and teachers can only stay at their own homes. Online education is needed now more than ever.

Learning motivation is a highly complex facet of human behavior. Motivation is closely related to academic achievement and desired outcomes; the topic of learning motivation has long been pursued and studied by many researchers and educators. Motivations refer to learners' desire to participate in the progress of language acquisition [4]. Dörnyei defines motivation as an important part to overcome the complicated tasks in the learning process [5]. Without it, learners can hard to succeed even if they are talented. Therefore, motivation is the first condition in completing the learning task. Some researchers found out that motivation offers the essential drive to trigger the process of second language learning [6, 7]. Meanwhile, some researchers also discovered that some factors both can enhance and hinder learners' motivation [8, 9].

Furthermore, researchers studied the correlations between online education and learning motivation in second language courses. Several researchers emphasized the influencing factors of online learning [10-13], or design of teaching methods, or design of teaching platform [14].

With the increasing demand of online EFL courses, rising importance of learning motivation, and the limited number of reviews about learning motivation in EFL courses, this literature review mainly summarizes the

factors that influence learning motivation in EFL online courses, which can make a summary for the study in this field, and, in the meantime, provides implications for further studies in this field, or the clues for online course designers. Various factors have been studied and found out their interactions with online learning to enhance learning motivation and address the issues of participation and attrition. For a better understanding of the influences of EFL online courses on motivation, researchers elaborated factors on two aspects, internal factors, and external factors [15]. In this literature review, both sides of these factors are reviewed. First, internal factors, including learners' self-need and self regulation, have been examined. Then, in terms of external factors, containing course related elements (course materials and course content), participants (teachers and classmates), and other problems (organizational ones and situational ones), this review focuses on how they can enhance or reduce the learning motivation.

2. FACTORS AFFECTING MOTIVATION IN EFL ONLINE COURSES

In response to the advancement of technology and the pandemic of COVID-19, online learning has been applied in different educational sectors, and this review will mainly focus on EFL. Due to the close relationship between learning motivation and learning achievement, plenty of course designers and researchers spare no efforts on the studies of learning motivation. Motivation in online learning is quite a complicated phenomenon that is impacted by various elements, including some internal factors, like personal traits, and some external factors, like course materials or classmates [16]. It is worthwhile to put focus on motivation in online courses since, as Kyewski and Kramer explored, students, are likely to participate less, in another word, high attrition rate, and to help learners acquire desired outcomes [17]. In this review, influencing factors are divided into two categories, namely, internal factors and external factors.

2.1. Internal Factors Affecting Motivation

2.1.1 Need for communication and further development

Motivations are triggered or weakened by the self-need of learners, which is an important internal factor. Here two types of needs are reviewed, namely the need for communication during or after the class, and the need for further development.

Learners' need for communication plays a role in the motivation of online courses. In a study, learners took a negative stance towards online courses because their need for communication can be satisfied by these courses [15]. Results in that study show that it is hard for students to stay motivated in online courses as they look for

socialization. To be specific, according to the data analysis in this study, students put their relationship with classmates in an important position, showing their desire to know each other.

Besides the need for communication, the role of English plays in the job or daily life matters too. Recent research in China Macao described that young EFL learners take part in online courses mainly for instrumental reasons. That is, they learn because they put the value of language to help them acquire some external benefits [12]. In the study by Qunfei et al. [18], they specify the need for further development, including the need for better job prospects after graduation, for convenience of traveling abroad in the future, and for convenience of studying abroad in the future. As the students can predict the important role that English will play in the future, their learning motivations towards the learning goals are promoted.

2.1.2 Self-regulation

Self-regulation is not only a challenging part of online courses but also one of the crucial internal factors that can influence motivation. In the study of Murday et al., a correlation between learning motivation and self-discipline was discovered through empirical experiment and their data analysis [19]. Their experiment presented that those learners, who have already got used to the traditional class, on the one hand, welcomed the newfound freedom in online courses, but also, on the other hand, admitted that it was difficult to stay motivated and self-disciplined to study on a regular basis. Moreover, according to Meşe and Sevilen, learners are required to be self-disciplined in the online learning atmosphere and need to develop new studying habits as online educations are equipped with plenty of learning tasks, activities, and materials and students need to take the initiative to make use of them [15]. Some students are inclined to lose motivation at times as they called online courses "boring" while some other students enhance their motivation as they can get enjoyment and self-determination from the course.

Besides self-regulation, learning autonomy cannot be ignored. In the online learning environment, almost all learning materials and relevant information, such as teaching texts, online practice, or additional reading materials, were all posted on the online platform. Students have more freedom to plan their studies under the guidance of teachers or tutors. Through interviews and data analysis, the research described that learning autonomy can promote motivation as students can take advantage of the online sources to go back to review the part they could not fully understand or enrich learning resources as they have more choice. Previous studies confirmed this theory of autonomous study that learners can take more initiative when they are the

leader in their learning, choosing their techniques and materials, and determining their learning goals [20, 21].

2.2. External Factors Affecting Motivation

2.2.1. Course materials

Course materials in online courses, including textbooks, online practice, additional reading materials, and other online-related resources, are related to motivation. Early in the study Hartnett et al. discover the significance of regulation in an online setting to motivation [16]. Moreover, in a recent study, Çebi and Güyer discovered that when students can be more active in making use of the course materials, their motivation can be enhanced [22].

2.2.2. Course content

Students' satisfaction with the online course content can promote intrinsic motivation or motivation. In the study of Meşe and Sevilen, they mentioned that students were demotivated when the course aimed to train students just for the proficiency exams, the materials were not presented coherently, or the mock exams were not challenging enough [15]. Students were motivated when their expectations were matched with the content.

Another factor that needs to mention in the course content is the gamification in the online courses, which is a significant part. Gamification refers to the use of video game elements in a non-game context, here in the educational sector [23]. In the educational sector, it is a pedagogy that utilizes the game design principles in learning scenarios to generate motivation and interest in students [24]. Researchers examined the relationship between motivation and gamification in online courses. Ozhan, Seyma, and Selay, through a 13-week study by the implementation of the gamified online learning environment and data analysis, found out that learners experienced motivation in the learning activity and this motivation mostly originated from the sensation of flow and emotional engagement [25]. According to Csikszentmihalyi, flow refers to a psychological condition of losing track of time and other external factors as people are immersed in an activity [26].

2.2.3. Participants – teachers and classmates

Teachers or instructors are important participants in online courses. In 1995, Thach and Murphy categorized fourteen types of competencies that teachers or instructors should have in distance learning, including setting up learning objectives and teaching aims, offering real-time and useful feedback, facilitating information presentation, monitoring and evaluating student progress, organizing and facilitating learning activities, initiating and facilitating discussions, and determining learning

needs and preferences, etc [27]. Several studies identified the significance of teachers in enhancing the motivation in online courses. According to Meşe and Sevilen, in their experiment, learners emphasized the importance of teachers in the aspect of teaching method, lesson presentation, feedback, and interaction [15]. They reported that the competency of teachers mainly influenced learners' motivation extrinsically. Rovai even offered ways to encourage students' motivation by facilitating effective online discussions[28].

Besides the role of teachers, classmates or partners also play an important role in the learning motivation of online courses. The interaction among learners is one of the three types of interaction in distant education including sharing the information or understandings, cooperating to complete learning tasks, solving problems, sharing personal views towards teaching content [29]. Hirumi pointed out with the aid of technology, learners can collaborate actively in knowledge acquisition in online discussion [30].

Tanaka proved that classmates with a positive attitude are one of the motivations to promote students' online English learning [31]. In the study by Qunfei et al., they examined that, according to the online English learning platform records of attendance and the performance, students are inclined to compare with their peers, which means peers can have a positive or negative influence on students' learning motivation [18].

2.2.4. Organizational problems

Organizational problems, which were resulted from the arrangement of the online courses, were also studied by a number of researchers as a factor that may enhance or decrease students' motivation. One thing mentioned by Meşe and Sevilen is the lack of group cohesion [15]. Because online classes were arranged to contain both strong and weak students, some students felt unchallenged enough or the tasks were simplified, which, in turn, demotivate strong students.

Also, technology proficiency can be problematic for some students. Learners with the highest level of comfort and confidence using online learning technologies, or in other words with the highest technical proficiency, encountered fewer barriers during the learning process and enhance learning motivation [32].

2.2.5. Situational problems

Situational issues in the online learning environment were also examined in some studies. These problems are usually triggered by the learning environment. Meşe and Sevilen pointed out that online course learners usually study at home and feel less motivated without face-to-face interaction. Students can be distracted [15]. Some researchers also mention some different opinions.

Nicholson defines the classroom environment as an objective perspective of students towards the social and emotional features of a class [33]. While, according to Qunfei et al., online English learning created a relatively relaxed environment and peaceful emotion which can trigger English learning motivation [18].

3. CONCLUSION

Based on the previous studies about learning motivation on online courses of EFL, this literature review summarizes the internal and external factors which may influence learning motivation for these online courses, varying from different countries and different levels of education. For the internal factors, learners' needs play an important role in enhancing learning motivation while the freedom in the online environment set a challenge for learners' learning motivation as self-regulation is required. In terms of the external factors, as courses and participants are directly related to learners, their influence cannot be ignored when considering the learning motivation. Moreover, other indirect elements are also confirmed, including organizational problems and situational ones, the influence on learning motivation.

This conclusion can further provide online course designers with certain clues when designing attractive and high-quality online courses to help learners achieve their learning goals as, in the forthcoming future, online courses are still in great demand. Moreover, this study could contribute to further investigations on how to maximize the efficiency of online courses for EFL learners when combining these factors.

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