



An Empirical Study on the Influence of Motivation on English Learning A Case Study of Non-English Majors in Dongguan City College

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Abstract. Affected by economic globalization and the novel coronavirus, countries worldwide are increasingly strengthening cooperation, and humans are closer to each other than ever. English, the international language, also plays a significant role. Using the abundant Internet resources and available information to learn English well is also a big issue for English learners. Several factors influence the effects of language acquisition. It includes objective factors, such as environment and resources, self-factors, learning burnout, anxiety, or depression. The theory of learning motivation is also constantly applied to English teaching. Therefore, this paper aims to study the role of Motivational factors in English learning to help English learners adjust their learning approach. Aiming at the influence of motivational factors on language learning, this paper also reviews some comparative studies and focuses on the impact of intrinsic and external factors on English learning. In terms of research methods, this paper takes Non-English significant students at Dongguan City College as the research object to analyze the influence of the learning motivation of non-English important students on their English learning outcomes. In studying this correlation, this paper makes an empirical study of significant non-English students at Dongguan City College in a questionnaire to analyze the data and results and explore the correlation between students' learning motivation and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Intrinsic factors · External factors · English learning · Non-English major

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Significance

With the constant growth of economic globalization and the novel coronavirus, international communications have become increasingly important to the young generation,

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also reflected in the cohesive cooperation between countries and the frequent cultural exchanges between people from different countries. In this context, English plays an indispensable role as an international language and is still the language that non-English speakers choose to learn. Many theories have addressed and discussed students' learning motivation in Educational Psychology. Moreover, some have also noted the correlation between students' learning motivation and academic performance [11].

In language learning, the effectiveness will be influenced by objective factors, such as environment and resources and the learners' motivation. Regarding second language learning, the motivational difference among individuals is also an essential factor influencing the learning outcome. Therefore, motivational factors, especially Chinese English learners, may influence English learners' learning [9].

As stated above, English is widely used worldwide; thus, it has become an essential requirement for jobs. Nowadays, many college students pay less attention to English learning. Some claim they must learn English to pass the exam and obtain a diploma. Others remarked that CET-4 and CET-6 are helpful for job-hunting. Although many English learners spend a long time learning English, such as taking English classes, most cannot achieve good results. In other words, their input-output ratio is too low. Hence, this article aims to solve this problem from motivational factors and provide suggestions for learners with different motivations to improve their English learning efficiency [10]. Wang (2000) concluded that motivational factors such as self-esteem, inhibition, anxiety, risk-taking, introversion/extroversion, and so on have a particular impact on foreign language learning; [17] they adopt different learning strategies to fit for diversified purposes. Also, Hou (2014) showed that students with different motivations employ different English learning strategies. And the aim of her paper concentrates on the relationship between the English learners' motivations and English learning strategies, which is helpful for English learners to adjust their study tactics to better their English proficiency [4]. This paper can provide suggestions to learn. By analyzing the data, this paper can give examining to learners based on different learning motivations actors can explore effective teaching strategies for cultivating students' motivation and learning interests. By understanding and mastering the internal relationship between students' motivational factors and foreign language teaching, they can pay attention to students' various emotional needs during foreign language learning. It is conducive to strengthening students' language learning ability and improving the efficiency of foreign language teaching [3].

2 The Definition of Learning Motivation

Learning motivation refers to learners' desire and internal drive for foreign language learning. Pintrich & Schunk (1996) [13] believed that motivation is the process of stimulating and maintaining goal-oriented activities. William & Burden (1997) [16] define motivation as temporary emotions before actual behavior. Motivation is the arousal of cognition and emotion. This arousal can lead to conscious behavioral decisions that trigger long-term intellectual or physical efforts to achieve goals [3].

2.1 Intrinsic and External Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is considered essential for learning success in face-to-face settings (Dent and Koenka 2016; Fortier et al. 1995; Zimmerman 1990) and gain additional relevance when students face a situation such as distance learning with less external structure and guidance (Dabbagh and Kitsantas 2004) [5] Furthermore, intrinsic motivation, goal setting, and SRL are influenced by perceived competence, that is, by the learner's feeling of being able to handle given tasks (e.g., Cho et al. 2011; Ferla et al. 2010; Miller et al. 1993) [14] A lack of intrinsic motivation and self-regulation has been associated with higher passive procrastination (Steel 2007), associated with various detrimental behaviors and outcomes (Howell and Watson 2007; Steel 2007) in an academic context [6].

Dornyei (2011) put forward that the language level a learner can reach is primarily affected by some external factors, such as the expectations of teachers or parents. Pintrich & Schunk (1996) proposed that the motivational components of situational level include three parts related to the teaching environment, teachers, and learning devices. Li (2017) believes that job hunting significantly impacts language teaching and acquisition as an instrumental motivation. Lambert (1972) pointed out that teachers' teaching style, ability level, and learners' lack of practical guidance are the main factors inducing negative motivation in foreign language learning. [8] Guo & Xu (2014) proved that outdated learning equipment, teachers' weak pronunciation explanation ability, and boring teaching materials are the main negative motivations in foreign language learning. It can be seen that many external factors have a significant impact on Learners' English learning motivation.[7].

2.2 The Role of Intrinsic and External Factors in Language Learning

Gardner (1985) believes that high motivation is vital to learning the English language; motivation is "the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus the favorable attitudes toward learning the language. [11] Csizér & Dörnyei (2005) emphasize that motivation can be generated, maintained, and terminated depending on learners' varied EFL learning experiences. Internal motivation exists independently of external stimulation (to obtain a reward or escape punishment). In contrast, some researchers consider that internal motivation can influence internal motivation in later laboratory research. Cameron et al. [13] (1994) found that the negative impact of external motivation will occur when the reward is intangible and unpredictable [9]. The evaluation of individual learning depends on the learning outcome. The reward as such could significantly undermine learners' learning motivation [14]. Furthermore, Ryan et al. (2000) introduced the self-determined theory, which breaks down the duality of motivation, gives a complete explanation of the external and internal reason, and argues that external motivation may be internalized to play a role alongside internal motivation [1]. Internal motivation provides the basis for transforming exterior to internal motivation. Research has also shown that students' sense of belonging to the external environment and students' self-awareness of their cause can facilitate the process of internalization [10].

However, when the external control is relatively strong, although internalization will still occur, it often only stays in the stage of introjected regulation. Introjected regulation refers to people's "acceptance" of external pressure and "expected" behavior to avoid feeling guilty, maintain self-esteem, and enhance their self-worth. Gardner (1972) found that a teaching environment that hinders self-regulation and autonomy may weaken the degree of internal motivation. Specifically, if students think that teachers control themselves, their intrinsic motivation will be significantly reduced [2]. Wang (2021) found that although the subjects' English learning motivation level is relatively strong, their degree of transforming motivation into actual learning behavior is limited. The study found that too much emphasis on English academic achievement will hurt students' English self-concept. Therefore, the teaching environment should support the internalization of learning motivation. English teachers should focus on stimulating students' internal interest in English learning [15].

3 Research Design

3.1 Research Hypothesis

Based on the above research, this study attempts to summarize the types of English learning motivation of Chinese college undergraduates through the systematic investigation and analysis of large samples. Its primary purpose is to identify the common types of motivation and then investigate the influence of personal factors on the kinds of inspiration. The following are the specific research questions:

- what are the primary motivational factors affecting non-English college students' English learning at Dongguan City College?
- What are the correlations between students' learning motivation and learning outcomes?

3.2 Research Participants

English primary students at Dongguan City College are the subjects of this study. The survey was conducted in the form of a questionnaire. A total of 152 valid questionnaires were collected. These questionnaires were randomly distributed to non-English primary students, from first-year to seniors at Dongguan City College.

3.3 Questionnaire Design

When designing the questionnaire, the questions are mainly divided into three parts. The first part is a survey of the basic information of primary English students at Dongguan City College. The second part is a survey of the personality of primary English students at Dongguan City College and the learning activities they usually participate in. The third part is a survey of the English listening primary English students' English listening, speaking, reading, and writing outcomes. The questions are in the form of single choice and multiple choice.

3.4 Methodology

The survey is mainly conducted as a questionnaire, which requires the respondents to fill in the questionnaire about their learning attitude and personality. After collecting data, this research explores the English learning outcomes from motivational perspectives, mainly focusing on intrinsic and external factors. The independent variable of this study is intrinsic and external factors, and the dependent variable is learning outcomes such as students' listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills. Through the analysis of independent and dependent variables, this paper analyses the correlation between intrinsic and external factors and English achievement and examines the impact of motivational factors on English learning.

4 Data Analysis

Since this paper aims to determine the relationship between students' motivation and English academic performance, it is necessary to know how intrinsic and external factors lead to outstanding academic performance.

Figure 1 reflects the teaching proficiency of teachers in the classroom, the influence of English teaching materials, and the classroom environment on students' learning motivation. The respondents believe that the English teacher's professional level and class environment influence their English learning motivation, and the two motivational factors account for 63.5% and 62.1%, respectively. However, 64.8 percent of the students said that the textbooks' quality did not make them more excited to learn English. The fact that they don't care about the quality of the books, maybe because of their "average level of English," makes it hard to tell the difference between good and harmful teaching materials. Hence, the selection of teaching materials has little impact on their English learning. However, 35.1% of students still think that the motivation to learn English depends on teaching materials. It can be seen that a majority of students still value

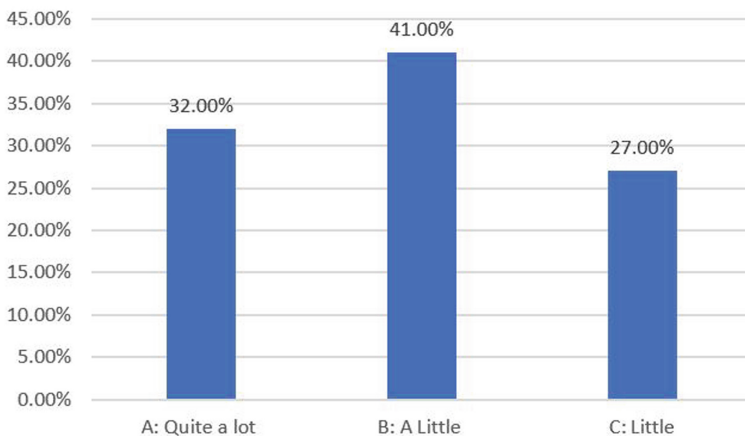


Fig. 1. Influence of Teaching Proficiency and Classroom Atmosphere.

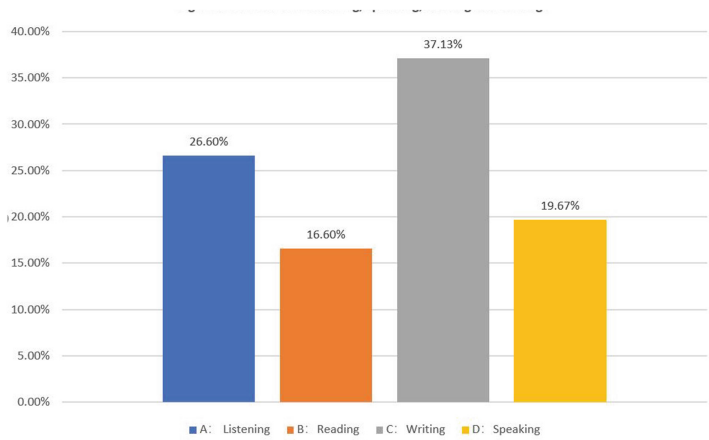


Fig. 2. Performance on listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

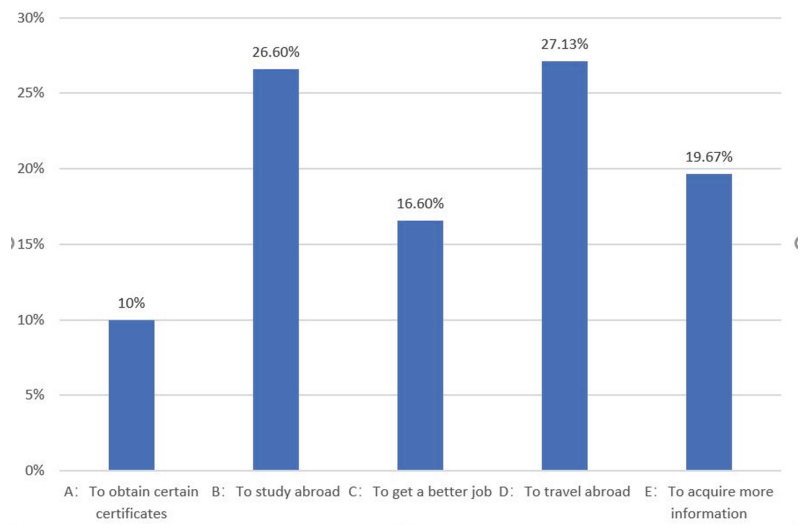


Fig. 3. Purposes of Learning English.

textbook selection, believing that selecting good textbooks is critical to their English study.

Next, these students’ English performances are investigated. The figure above (See Fig. 2) shows Non-English primary students’ evaluations at Dongguan City College. As we can see, among all the different parts of English Learning, good reading performance account for the highest proportion, around two-fifths, followed by writing at just over one-fifth. At the same time, there is little difference between oral English and listening, accounting for 11.49% and 12.64%, respectively. It also indicates that students’ intrinsic factors, such as obtaining a certificate, account more for English Learning.

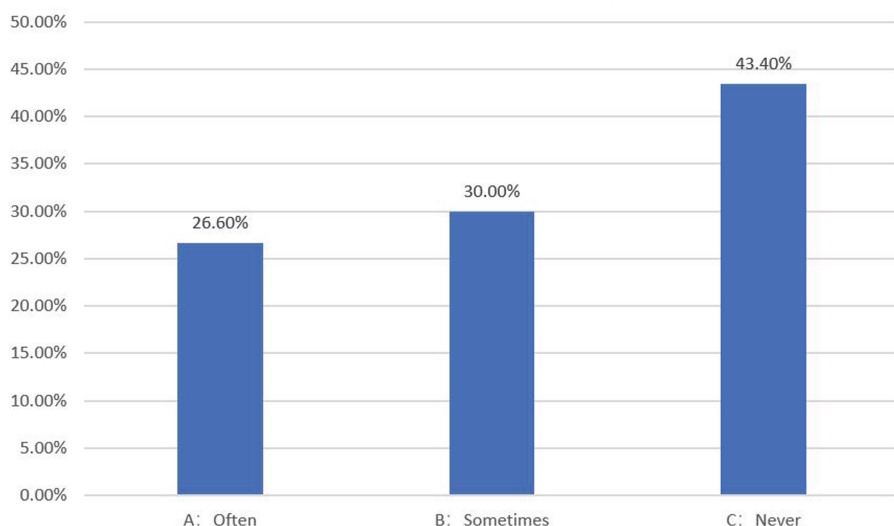


Fig. 4. Interaction with teachers in English classes.

The bar chart above (See Fig. 3) reflects that the keywords in this question are related to “hobbies, interests, travel, and understanding the world.” These questions reflect the respondents’ interest in English learning. Traveling abroad and learning about the world as potential motivations to influence students’ English learning did not prove as an attraction to respondents. For non-English majors, the reasons they want to pass the college English test and get a graduation certificate” can be seen as more direct factors affecting their motivation.

The drawing above (See Fig. 4) demonstrates students’ interaction with teachers during English classes. Those with better English skills communicate with teachers actively in English class, among which 20% accustom themselves to interacting with teachers. In comparison, only 10.36% of students whose comprehensive English skills are relatively low will interact with teachers in English class and are reluctant to get involved in English class. Overall, it is evident that students with better academic performance in English are likely to interact with teachers, answer questions, and give some expressions in class. On the contrary, students with low-level English skills tend not to show themselves in style; they are more willing to be an audience and a receiver. It also reveals that intrinsic factors such as students’ self-esteem and learning attitudes generated different learning outcomes.

Figure 5 shows that students are willing to participate in English-Learning activities when they have spare time. It is evident that most students enjoy reading English newspapers and magazines and participate in English corners, which are platforms for them to exercise their eloquence and ability to put English into practice. About reading and listening, both sides are nearly balanced. In conclusion, external factors such as English learning activities can increase students’ interest and involvement in learning English. Moreover, it promotes comprehensive English skills, contributing to better learning outcomes.

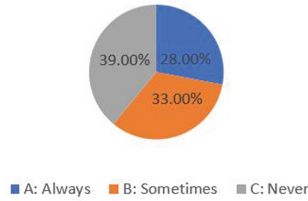


Fig. 5. Activities in the spare time.

5 Major Findings

The Self-determined Theory proposed by Ryan et al. (2000) breaks through the dualistic division of Gardner’s motivation theory. It provides a more detailed explanation of external and internal motivation, arguing that external stimulus can work with intrinsic motivation. Internal and external motivation offers the basis for external stimulation. Based on Gardner’s motivation theory and Deci & Ryan’s Self-Determined theory, this paper will look at internal and external motivation and how they work together.

The findings of this study are divided into three parts: basic psychological need (internal motivation), social, environmental factors (external motivation), and integration of internal and external stimulation.

5.1 Internal Motivation

Basic psychological needs refer to a developmental condition that exists in every individual. Questions 2 to 3 of the questionnaire reflect that over half of the respondents have a lazy attitude toward learning English, i.e., they are unsure if it is vital to learn English well. In addition, an average of 31.7% of the students expressed interest in English, indicating that some are more interested in English materials such as songs, movies, and literary works. Studies have shown that the satisfaction of basic psychological needs is positively related to people’s experience of happiness, and it can also stimulate personal needs. Individuals’ intrinsic motivational potential can continue to guide people to engage in certain beneficial behaviors for ability development. Intrinsic motivation is the foundation of learning English and is influenced by extrinsic motivation. Therefore, the internal motivation state of English learners needs self-monitoring and the correct guidance of good extrinsic motivation.

5.2 External Motivation

From the perspective of external factors, many factors affect the English learning motivation of non-English majors. Deci & Ryan (2008) say that several external factors make people feel like they did well. The factors include rewards, feedback, communication, protection from negative evaluations, etc. These factors can help students be more motivated to do what they want.

Some external factors, such as passing the exam 67.5% and finding a job in the future 72.9%, significantly impact the motivation of these non-English majors to study English

in college. However, going abroad to look at 36.4% has little effect on their learning motivation. In comparison, the prospect of exams and foreign jobs has a relatively more significant impact on students' English learning.

In addition, the more important external factors affecting the English learning motivation of the respondents include the English teacher's class level or the teaching quality of English classes 63.5%, the quality of textbook content 35.1%, and the classroom environment 62.1%. The interviewed students believed that the textbook content quality had little effect on their English learning motivation. Moreover, the other two factors, "the quality of teaching in English classes" and the classroom environment, "have a much more significant impact on students' motivation to learn English. Deci & Ryan (2008) believe that the need for belonging is also related to intrinsic motivation. When individuals are in the sense of security, there will be more intrinsically motivated behaviors in an environment with a sense of security and belonging. Students want university lecturers to teach English differently from how they learned it in high school. They might be more comfortable and engaged in a lively English class where they don't have to be called up to answer questions. They want teachers to explain interesting English knowledge and culture. They want teachers to arrange exciting classroom activities to avoid classroom confusion.

Nevertheless, that is not conducive to cultivating students' intrinsic motivation, namely, self-study ability. Therefore, university teachers should consider maintaining students' interest in learning English and find ways to convert that interest into the inherent reason for students to continue learning English after class.

5.3 Internal and External Motivation Integration

Knowing how to convert positive external motivation into internal motivation is the most important. An environment that satisfies people's autonomous needs can also promote intrinsic motivation for behavior. According to Deci & Ryan's Cognitive Evaluation Theory (2008), learners must feel that their behavior is self-determined. They could experience a sense of accomplishment or efficacy, wherein intrinsic motivation can be genuinely promoted. Schools and teachers should create a suitable environment for students to learn English.

Questions 10 to 11 reflect the motivational state of the respondents in English learning after class. The survey results show that respondents rarely use English or have access to English-related materials after class. This indicates that students have fewer opportunities and resources to acquire English after college English classes. Students lack the environment and external motivation to use and learn English. Thus, the learning environment of school English is essential for non-English majors who want to learn English. Schools can organize English corners, competitions, and clubs to create a school English learning atmosphere and stimulate students' motivation. Despite the abundance of online and English learning resources, students generally have a negative attitude towards learning English outside the classroom. Students may have a poor attitude about learning English because they don't speak very well in English. The poor attitude shows that students' effort in English after school is linked to how well they think they speak English and how much they want to know. Students' overall weak

internal motivation causes them to ignore after-school English learning resources. Therefore, teachers should improve their counselling to students on English language exams and career planning and employ engaging and well-informed educational resources, which will affect students' effort and motivation to learn English after class.

6 Conclusion

It has been proven that some motivational factors influence English learning results, and we should consider them in English learning. The conclusions summarized from this study may provide some implications which might be helpful for English learners and English teaching.

Firstly, English learners, students can lay a good foundation for better career prospects and solid professional skills by planning the English test and career path. Meanwhile, students can also use effective learning habits to transform external motivational factors into internal motivation for Learning English. It is essential to remember that sometimes, the greater the reason, the less likely it is to be converted into actual learning behavior. In addition, there may be times when academic achievement may not match with effort. Therefore, students should be aware of how to effectively and reasonably maintain a stable level of motivation and make continuous efforts. This way, they can achieve satisfactory results through efforts and improve their sense of self-efficacy.

Educators, primarily, Teachers, need to avoid cramming teaching and using boring content. Monotonous teacher-centered teaching mode to supervise students' learning motivation and need to properly use extrinsic motivation to stimulate and cultivate students' intrinsic motivation subtly. In addition, the teaching environment should support the internalization of learning motivation, and English teachers should focus on promoting students' inherent interest in English learning.

It is hoped that the present research findings are conducive to teachers and learners, especially poor learners; just ask Rubin (1975) suggested that results of how successful learners learn might enable teachers to teach these strategies to poor learners to improve their learning.

This survey has certain limitations. One is the measurement method. This questionnaire is different from the professional language proficiency measure. The evaluations of the subjects themselves could not represent their accurate language level. The other is various personal factors of the surveyed non-English college students make a tremendous difference in this motivation study. Thereby, the question set of the questionnaire may not cover all possible situations that affect English learning motivation.

The research investigating the relationship between learning motivation and English learning outcomes is still not that perfect. Due to the limited samples of subjects for investigation, it is suggested that a more comprehensive analysis with larger pieces of issues can be conducted to prove the study's findings. Another critical area for future research is how motivational factors can be applied to generate more effective learning outcomes.

Authors' Contributions. Lifang Chen is responsible for revising the paper, Liying Zhu mainly charges for the data collection, and Jiexuan Yang is responsible for data processing and analysis.

Appendix 1

Learning Motivation of Non-English Majors in Dongguan City College

The Questionnaire consists of 11 questions. It aims to investigate the correlations between English learning motivations and learning outcomes. Data collected is used only for research purposes, and your privacy will be protected. Please make the choices based on the facts.

1. What's your grade?

A: Freshman B: Sophomore C: Junior D: Senior.

2. Do you like English?

A: Yes B: No C: Not sure.

3. What's your motivation for Learning English?

A: Compulsory Course B: Interests C: Benefits D: Other reasons.

4. Do you think external factors will affect your learning outcomes?

A: Yes B: No C: Not sure.

5. What's your purpose for learning English?

A: To obtain specific certificates B: To study abroad.

C: To get a better job D: To travel abroad E: To acquire more information.

6. How do you think the learning atmosphere plays a vital role in your English learning?

A: Quite a lot B: A Little C: Little.

7. Will you interact with your English teacher in the classroom?

A: Often B: Sometimes C: Never.

8. What are your strengths in English learning?

A: Listening B: Reading C: Writing D: Speaking.

9. What is your weakness in English learning?

A: Listening B: Reading C: Writing D: Speaking.

10. What kind of activities would you prefer to attend to improve your English?

A: English Corner B: Reading English Newspapers.

11. C: Vocabulary building D: Listening to English News.

Apart from learning English in the classroom, would you study English independently?

A: Always B: Sometimes C: Never.

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