



A Study of the Motivation of the Chinese College English Learners

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Abstract. Learners' learning motivation is one of the essential concerns in second language acquisition. Researchers have found that motivation is an important factor affecting second language achievement. The existing research on second language learners' motivation is mainly based on integrative and instrumental motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. However, because these two classifications are proposed from different perspectives, there is still a lack of systematic understanding in the specific analysis of second language learners' learning motivation. This paper is based on the former research about the classification of motivation, combined integrative and instrumental, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and from two perspectives of learners' psychology and social culture to analyze Chinese college English learners' motivation in detail. This paper systematically classifies Chinese College English learners' diverse and complex motivation into four types: integrative intrinsic, instrumental intrinsic, integrative extrinsic, and instrumental extrinsic motivation. The study found that the above four types of motivation exist among Chinese College English learners, but their proportions differ. It also found that the achievement of interest-oriented is higher than that of external factors. In second language teaching, teachers should understand students' learning motivation. This paper also puts forward some suggestions for English teaching.

Keywords: motivation · English learning · second language acquisition · Chinese college English learners

1 Introduction

With the informatization of society and the globalization of the economy, English has become one of the main languages to communicate with the world. Furthermore, as China's overall national strength has continued to increase, the demand from all walks of life for using English to assist in work, communicate and cooperate with international is also growing. As significant Chinese English learners, Chinese college students are required to learn English in college and their future careers. However, the current English level of Chinese college learners is not optimistic, although the learners have more free learning space and more learning time. According to the passing rate of CET-4 (College English Test Band 4) and CET-6 (College English Test Band 6) over the years, the

national one-time passing rate of CET-4 is about 40%, and the rate of CET-6 is only 16%, and the pass rate has been declining in recent years. According to Ellis's definition of motivation, motivation refers to some kind of internal or external human driving force in humans. Learning motivation is commonly thought of as an intrinsic drive, impulse, emotion, or desire that prompts learners to take specific actions in language learning [1]. Student motivation is naturally related to their desire to participate in learning, so motivation is undoubtedly one of the most important factors in the learning process and a key factor in promoting people's success in second language learning. While students' motivation may be the same, the sources of motivation may be different or complex, so it is necessary to sort out the classification of motivation.

Reviewing previous studies, motivation can be mainly divided into three pairs, namely, integrative motivation and instrumental motivation, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, global motivation, situational motivation, and task motivation.

Gardner and Lambert divided motivation into integrative motivation and instrumental motivation [2]. Integrative motivation mainly reflects learners' interest in the culture and people of the target language country. Instrumental motivation is practical motivation. Learners learn specific knowledge and regard it as a tool to achieve a particular goal.

Brown divides motivation into three categories [3]. One is global motivation, the general attitude towards foreign language learning; the Second is situational motivation, which refers to the motivation generated by learners under the condition of the natural acquisition, which is different from classroom learning. The third is task motivation, the learning motivation generated to complete a specific task.

Deci and Ryan divided motivation into two categories: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation [4]. Intrinsic motivation is a kind of interest and hobby from the heart of learners. It is an internal form of reward and an internal factor for learners. Extrinsic motivation mainly comes from external inducement and cause. Extrinsic motivation is often the complement of intrinsic motivation.

In the above three categories, the first pair and the third pair are widely accepted and utilized. Integrative motivation and instrumental motivation are proposed from the perspective of social culture because language learning is affected by many factors that significantly differ from other disciplines' learning. These influencing factors mainly include social environment, social culture, individual differences, learning atmosphere, etc. The intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is based on learners' individual psychology, which pays more attention to why learners choose to learn the language and the factors that affect their choices. However, due to the complexity of learners' learning motivation and the diversity of influencing factors, it would be insufficient and biased no matter which pair is selected as the standard to analyze learners' learning motivation. Therefore, combining the two pairs would be more conducive to comprehensively analyzing learners' learning motivation. According to Two Dimensions of Classifying Motivation (based on Bailey, 1985), combined two pairs, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, integrative motivation and instrumental motivation, and integrated two dimensions, learners' individual psychology and social culture, to analyze the L2 learners' motivation (Table 1).

Western scholars proposed the above motivation classification. However, due to the long history and culture of China and the vast differences between Chinese and

Table 1. Two Dimensions of Classifying Motivation (based on Bailey, 1985)

Motivations	intrinsic	extrinsic
integrative	Second language learners wish to integrate with the second language culture	Someone else wishes the second language learners to know the second language for integrative reasons
instrumental	Second language learners wishes to achieve goals utilizing a second language	External power wants the second language learners to learn the second language

English, many Chinese experts and scholars have done detailed research on Chinese college students' learning motivation from different perspectives and different investigation methods, among which four are the most typical and prominent:

In 1994, according to the different goal structures of students, Guo Dejun and Li Yuan divided learning motivation into self-centered, moral, and task mastery motivation systems [5]. In 1995, Zhao Weimin proposed that college students' learning motivation mainly consists of low-level, intermediate, and noble motivation [6]. In 2001, Wen Qiufang divided English learning motivation, from the perspective of educational psychology, into surface motivation for external material stimulation such as a diploma, a good job, and a high salary and deep motivation for deep material stimulation such as interest and increasing knowledge [7]. In 2003, Gao Yihong et al. conducted a large number of sampling surveys. They summarized seven foreign language learning motivation types: intrinsic interest, achievement, situational, overseas, external demand, personal development, and communication media motivation [8].

Although there have been considerable studies on the motivation of Chinese college English learners, they failed to provide a systematic understanding of motivation classification. Based on this situation, this paper will adopt Bailey's model to analyze and integrate the learning motivation of Chinese College English learners from the two motivation categories of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation, internal motivation and external motivation, and the perspective of social culture and learners' individual psychology. Moreover, to test whether Bailey's motivation classification model applies to Chinese College English learners.

2 An Analysis of the Motivation of Chinese College English Learners

2.1 Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation refers to students having personal interests in learning something. They are intrinsically motivated not because of a reward or punishment from others but because they regard learning itself as a reward. As say, students with intrinsic motivation

can decide whether they need to participate in a learning activity or not, and all activities they participate in are motivated by their own enthusiasms, no one can force them.

Integrative intrinsic motivation

According to Skehan, Integrative motivation can be defined as the desire to be proficient in a new language in order to understand other cultures and to be able to participate in the life of the community that speaks it [9]. Students with integrative motivation learn the second language (L2) in order to meet with, talk to, or even make friends with people who come from the target language community. Students with integrative motivation learn not only the language but also pragmatics and culture. To some extent, they want to be like native speakers.

Integrative intrinsic motivation refers to L2 learners' wishes to integrate with the L2 culture for their own interests. The most typical integrative intrinsic motivations are immigration, marriage, and studying abroad for learners' own purposes. The following will analyze these three motivations based on the situation of Chinese college English learners.

The first is immigration. Immigration is an act that people want to integrate into the target language culture for their own purposes, and it meets the conditions of integrative intrinsic motivation. However, as China's overall national strength continued to increase, the trend of Chinese immigrants overseas has declined. The current Chinese college students are the new generation born in the 21st century (after the Millennium). Since its birth, China has entered a new stage of historical development, they have witnessed outstanding new achievements in China, and they have a strong sense of national pride and belonging. Chinese college students may have vital interests and hobbies in the culture of English-speaking countries (for example, watching Hollywood blockbusters, listening to popular English songs, or being interested in some brands). However, in the information age, even if they stay at home, they can learn about the world's affairs, always pay attention to the schedule of their favorite stars on the Internet, and buy things directly on the website. Therefore, immigration does not account for a prominent proportion of the integrative intrinsic motivation of Chinese College English learners.

After 40 years reform and opening, Chinese people become increasingly open-minded and international marriage in China is more and more common. In this trend, dating and marrying a foreign person has become an important intrinsic motivation of Chinese English learners. Contemporary Chinese college students' marriage and love views exhibits four characteristics: diversified love motives, diversified mate selection criteria, rational marriage attitude and open sexual concepts [10]. Most college students are serious about love and pay more attention to each other's personal characteristics and shared interests when choosing a partner. Therefore, nationality, family status and economic conditions are not the main factors affecting college students' mate selection. However, in response to the questionnaire about how to view the phenomenon of marriage in college, only 0.3% of college students chose to love and marry in college. In comparison, 85.3% of college students were opposed to marriage in college, believing that marriage would affect their studies and future career. 2.7% of college students supported or hoped to marry in college, and the remaining 12% of college students maintained a neutral attitude [11]. It can be seen that although contemporary Chinese college students have a more accessible and open outlook on love and marriage, and it

has become common to fall in love and marry foreigners, facing various unknown pressures, it is difficult for college students to balance their studies and marriage. Therefore, the vast majority of college students will not choose to marry during school. Therefore, among Chinese college students, the proportion of the integrative intrinsic motivation that takes marriage and love as guidance to actively study English is tiny.

Among the integrative intrinsic motivation, the motivation oriented to studying abroad accounts for the most significant proportion. In recent years, it has become an upsurge for Chinese college students to continue to study for master and doctoral degrees abroad. Many Chinese universities also have cooperative projects with overseas universities, and they will select students to exchange and study abroad every year. In terms of countries of study, Chinese students' choices are more diverse, but they are mainly concentrated in English-speaking countries. For college students, studying abroad in English-speaking countries has many advantages: it can immerse them in a new language environment, enable them to learn a purer language, understand local traditions and culture well, have a broader vision and world outlook, and provide more opportunities to study abroad. Therefore, the number of Chinese college students studying abroad for their own interests is enormous. Culture is the most critical factor among the many factors that affect Chinese college students' choice to study abroad. With China's strategy of rejuvenating the country through science and education, many colleges have expanded their teaching resources. They can hire experts and scholars in a certain field at home and abroad to teach and give lectures to students. In this era, one of the crucial factors for Chinese college students to choose to study abroad is cultural factors.

Based on the above three case analyses, among Chinese college English learners, the proportion of integrative intrinsic motivation guided by studying abroad is large. When guiding learners who study English with integrative intrinsic motivation as the driving force, teachers should not only consider the teaching of the language itself but also add the proportion of cultural orientation to the lectures so that these learners' interests can be continued and obtain better acquisition results. In the teaching process, teachers can create a pleasant and supportive learning atmosphere, provide activities for communication, and choose interesting teaching materials for students [12].

Instrumental intrinsic motivation

Instrumental motivation can be defined as the desire to acquire a language for utilitarian purposes (Bailey, 1983). Learners with instrumental motivation have less interest in the culture of the target language community, and they regard language as a tool to help them achieve their goals. Generally speaking, learners with instrumental motivation can achieve high scores in exams (such as listening tests, reading tests, and writing tests), but they are often lower than expected in the actual use, that is, learners with instrumental motivation pay little attention to language and culture.

Instrumental intrinsic motivation refers to L2 learners wish to achieve goals utilizing an L2. Among Chinese college English learners, instrumental intrinsic and instrumental extrinsic motivations are the two most common motivations, but there is a clear distinction between the two. Instrumental intrinsic motivation is that learners learn English based on their own interests and expectations for their future career development, without others or explicit requirements to force learners to learn or achieve established academic

achievements and standards. Instrumental extrinsic motivation is that learners themselves are not interested in English learning. However, external factors force learners to learn, usually requiring them to achieve a certain level of English, obtain a sure-level certificate, etc. The most common instrumental intrinsic motivation of Chinese college English learners is to assist in expanding their professional knowledge through English learning. For example, a student majoring in agriculture needs to read the literature of foreign scholars when studying his professional problems. Through English learning, he can have the ability to read foreign literature to assist his development in the professional field. In this case, the student studied English spontaneously. However, his focus on English learning was narrow because he only regarded English as a tool to assist his career development, which was instrumental intrinsic motivation. In China, in addition to the general English courses for junior students, many colleges also offer professional English elective courses in the senior stage. Teachers teach most professional English elective courses in corresponding majors but with a high level of English to ensure accuracy and professionalism in interpreting and teaching professional knowledge. Hotel Management and Tourism Management majors in college regard English as an indispensable tool. Although some positions do not require proof of English level when employed, these two majors may involve contacting foreign guests in their future career development plans. Therefore, learners will learn English for their interests and have better career development prospects. It is worth mentioning that in the research of Gao Yihong et al., High-level students focus on interest, low-level students focus on achievement [8]. Cultivating students' inner interests is conducive to improving students' English level, and achievement motivation should not be excessively strengthened. Their study also shows that although instrumental intrinsic motivation learners are not required to achieve a certain level of English, they are self-interest-oriented and can generally achieve a higher level of English. They take English as a valuable tool to assist professional courses and timely and accurately obtain new information from domestic and foreign academic circles. Their English learning positively impacts the development of their professional fields.

2.2 Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation refers to an anticipation of rewards, such as teachers' praise, competition awards, etc., and a fear of punishment. An extrinsically motivated student does a task in order to obtain some rewards or to avoid punishment. He/she may feel pressured rather than gets a sense of achievement. Extrinsic motivation has some negative influences. Students may stop learning when the rewards or punishments are no longer available. If somebody gives external rewards to those students with intrinsic motivation and personal interests, they will harm the excellent effect motivated by intrinsic factors.

Integrative extrinsic motivation

Integrative extrinsic motivation means that learners are expected or required by others to learn L2 and integrate into the L2 community. Among Chinese college English learners, there are situations where they learn L2 and integrate into L2 culture and community because of the requirements of others. The most typical is that parents hope learners can study abroad in English-speaking countries to improve their English level and academic

qualifications, enrich their resumes, expand their horizons, etc. There are similarities between integrative intrinsic motivation and integrative extrinsic motivation; they have one thing in common: requiring learners to learn the target language culture and pay attention to the practical level of learning. However, the difference between the two is that the integrative intrinsic motivation is from the learners' own wishes, while the integrative extrinsic motivation is that external factors and others influence learners, and they feel much pressure.

Chinese parents' love for their children is meticulous. In western countries, parents may not have to bear their children's expenses after they reach adulthood at 18, but Chinese families are different. Most Chinese parents believe their children need their care before finding a formal full-time job, so most Chinese students' study abroad expenses are borne by their families. Chinese students are socialized to feel responsible to their families, whose need and expectation always influence their motivations in English learning [13]. Therefore, in future study life, Chinese college students will listen to their parents' opinions and then make choices. Parents want their children to get a better education, so they usually fully support their children to continue their studies after obtaining a bachelor's degree. Nowadays, most Chinese college students are the only child of a family. Therefore, parents usually try to give their children the best educational environments and opportunities. Parents believe that their children studying abroad can feel a different learning style and communicate with people from all over the world, to obtain more opportunities. If they return to China for employment in the future, they can also be competitive.

Compared with Chinese college students who study abroad for their own interests, Chinese college students whose parents expect them to study abroad are usually slightly inferior to the former in language acquisition. Brechet et al. believed that the main factor affecting language acquisition differences in studying abroad is the frequency of effective dialogue with native speakers. They believe that students' language progress is different due to the different frequency and quantity of communication in the target language after going abroad [14]. Wilkinson argued in 1998 that students were reluctant to interact with native speakers because of cultural conflicts and misunderstandings while abroad. The main reason is the lack of cultural sensitivity among students. According to Wilkinson, the more culturally sensitive students are, the easier it is to overcome cultural differences, increasing the chances of communicating with locals in the target language [15]. Compared to students who are forced to study abroad, students who study abroad for their own interests tend to be interested in the culture of the target language country and are therefore more culturally sensitive, so they actively interact with native speakers to promote their acquisition results. Therefore, learners with integrative extrinsic motivation do not achieve as good acquisition results as learners with integrative intrinsic motivation. This comparison also shows that interest is the best teacher in the process of foreign language learning, and it is imperative to cultivate learners' interest in the target language culture.

Instrumental extrinsic motivation

Instrumental extrinsic motivation refers to external power that wants the L2 learners to learn the L2. Compared with instrumental intrinsic motivation, learners with instrumental extrinsic motivation are often reluctant to learn English. However, they have to learn

English because of the explicit English level restrictions and requirements for the future entrance examination and employment. Among Bailey's four model classifications, Chinese college English learners' instrumental extrinsic motivation accounts for the most significant proportion because most Chinese college students have limited interest and enthusiasm in English learning. However, they have to learn English according to school requirements. Among the instrumental extrinsic motivations of Chinese college English learners, the most prominent is the learner's motivation oriented by passing CET-4 and CET-6, getting a higher degree, and getting employed. Many Chinese colleges have written regulations that if students cannot pass CET-4 (English majors cannot pass TEM-4), they cannot graduate. Therefore, students with poor English foundations and no interest in English must also learn English. In order to encourage students to pass CET-4 and CET-6, some colleges also set up a reward system, that is, if students pass CET-4 or CET-6, they can obtain the college English exemption qualification. The outstanding characteristic of instrumental extrinsic motivation is to encourage college students to learn English through the college's reward and punishment measures. If college students keep good grades in their professional courses, they can also obtain the qualification of recommended graduate students by the senior stage. However, most of the postgraduate guarantee documents of colleges require students not only to pass CET-4 and CET-6 but also to obtain a CET-6 mark higher than 500 and an IELTS mark higher than 6.5, which is undoubtedly a new challenge to college students who expect to obtain a postgraduate guarantee. From the perspective of employment orientation, no matter whether the type of company involves overseas trade or whether it needs to contact and cooperate with foreign friends, the company hopes that its employees have a certain level of English, just as the popularity of computers in early years made many companies attach applicants need to have good computer skills when recruiting. From the perspective of learners' psychology, learners with instrumental extrinsic motivation are often very painful when learning English because they may face the situation that they fail to pass several exams. However, they must work harder and prepare for the exam again. Therefore, when teaching English to students with instrumental extrinsic motivation, teachers should give appropriate praise to students. Moderate praise is more effective than criticism, and teachers should allow students to make mistakes [16].

3 Conclusion

By analyzing the learning motivation of Chinese College English learners from the perspective of learner's psychology and social culture, this paper finds that although the motivation of Chinese college English learners is different and complex, it can still be systematically divided into four categories: integrative intrinsic motivation, instrumental intrinsic motivation, integrative extrinsic motivation and instrumental extrinsic motivation. Among the integrative intrinsic motivation, according to the characteristics of the analysis group, among Chinese College English learners in the new era, the motivation guided by studying abroad accounts for the most significant proportion. In contrast, due to academic pressure, the improvement of comprehensive national strength and other reasons, the proportion of marriage motivation, immigration motivation is relatively small. However, the above results are only based on the particularity of Chinese college

students' age, and there is a lack of detailed data support. Future research should also investigate and analyze the specific proportion of the above three factors here. Most Chinese college English learners guided by integrative extrinsic motivation are expected by their parents to study abroad. Compared with the students who study abroad voluntarily, the students who study abroad passively lack interest in the culture of the target language country. As a result, they are not as culturally sensitive as those who voluntarily study abroad; therefore, their language acquisition outcomes are inferior to those who voluntarily study abroad. Compared with the instrumental intrinsic motivation and the instrumental extrinsic motivation, although both regard English as a tool, the former is for learners' interests, while the latter has to learn English due to the requirements of external factors. The analysis also found that the achievements of the former were higher than those of the latter. After analyzing the motivation of Chinese College English learners, it is found that among the four major types of English learning motivation, the learners guided by instrumental extrinsic motivation are the most, accounting for the largest proportion. This phenomenon may be related to the requirements of Chinese colleges for students' English level. Even if not all Chinese college students are interested in learning English, they are limited by the graduation requirements of the school during their study life or driven by the employment pressure after graduation, they all have to learn English. This paper's main contribution is to systematically and precisely classify English learners' motivation in Chinese colleges. The classification helps understand the motivation of Chinese college English learners and provides a reference for English teaching in Chinese colleges. However, due to the limited research resources, this study has not yet combined the latest data to analyze the learning motivation of Chinese English learners, and the research group is only limited to Chinese college students. Future research should expand the subject group in combination with the real-time survey to improve the limitation of this study.

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