An Analysis of NPU Students' English Learning Motivation
Case Study of Freshmen in Honors College

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Abstract. This research aims to find out the general and specific features of Northwestern Polytechnical University (NPU) students' English learning motivation. 34 NPU freshmen in Honors College are invited to finish the questionnaire adapted from Gao et al. [1]. The study findings show that NPU students have high immediate achievement and individual development motivation as well as have relatively high information medium motivation, while they have low going abroad motivation. Noticeably, both "English scores" in "immediate achievement" and "English teacher" in "learning situation" present a declining trend of influence on motivating NPU students to learn English after they go to NPU. From the theoretical perspective, this study validates the questionnaire of Gao et al. [1]. Besides, it adds one motivation factor – "face", which can make the questionnaire of Gao et al. [1] more complete. From a practical point of view, this study summarizes NPU student's English learning motivation features, which can shed some light on both NPU's personnel and students.

Keywords: English learning motivation · university students · Northwestern Polytechnical University

1 Introduction

Second language (L2) motivation has been widely discussed in recent decades. Motivation is regarded as one of learners' affective factors [2, 3]. In Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, there are a quantity of affective variables including motivation, self-confidence and anxiety [4].

As China becomes the largest English education market around the world [5], Chinese students' English learning motivation arouse general concern. Noticing this research trend, this study aims to find out the general and specific features of NPU students' English learning motivation with the help of questionnaire.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Motivation

As for motivation types, there are mainly 2 kinds of classification. From Gardner and Lambert's social psychological perspective, two forms of motivation are identified:
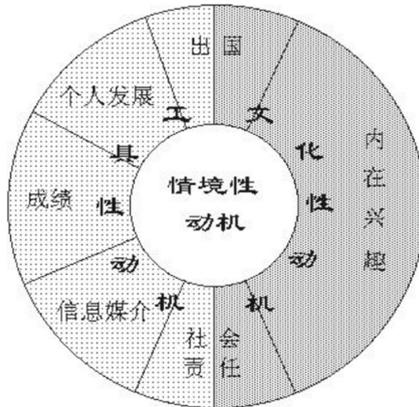
Fig. 1. Conceptual classification of motivation. (Cited from: [1])

instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivation is the reflection of external needs while integrative motivation is internally generated wants [6]. The other classification is contained in the L2 Motivational Self System, which consists of 3 components: the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience [7].

Specifically, as for Chinese students' motivation types, Gao et al. classified Chinese learners' L2 motivation into seven types: intrinsic interest, immediate achievement, learning situation, going abroad, social responsibility, individual development, and information medium based on Gardner and Lambert's classification (see Fig. 1) [1].

Among these factors, "intrinsic interest" is related to "integrative" motivation in the classical model. On the other hand, "immediate achievement", "individual development" and "information medium" all possess some features of "instrumental" motivation, while with different focuses on different goals. In addition, "going abroad" has both "integrative" and "instrumental" elements. What's more, "immediate achievement" and "social responsibility" might be characteristic of the Chinese EFL context [1].

Moreover, Chinese scholars like Wang (2012), Wang et al. and Liu believed that "face" is also an important motivation for Chinese students to learn English [8, 9].

2.2 Related Studies on Motivation

L2 motivation has been researched extensively in the past decades, with interest concentrating on affective factors and the relationship between motivation and related concepts and the study perspectives are mainly from Gardner and Lambert or Dörnyei.

As for affective factor studies, Shu & Zhang, Zhang et al. and many other researchers scrutinized the effects of learners' affective factors [3, 10]. As for studies on the relationship between motivation and related concepts, scholars like Qin, Jiang and Hu et al. explored the causal attribution's impact on motivational behavior [11–13]. Guo and Ni analyzed the relationship between autonomy in English learning and motivation [14, 15]. As for study perspectives, Shi and Gao et al. studied on college students English learning motivation from Gardner and Lambert's social psychological perspective [1,

16]. Csizér &Tankó, Gei & Jin, and You & Dörnyei studied on motivation from the perspective of the L2 Motivational Self System [17–19].

Though many Chinese scholars like Gao et al. introduced Chinese university students' motivation types [1], face motivation emphasized by many other scholars like Wang, Wang et al. and Liu are not mentioned in Gao et al.'s study [8, 9, 20].

3 Method

3.1 Research Questions

The present study aims to answer the following questions:

1) What are the features of NPU students' motivation in general?
2) What are the features of NPU students' motivation specifically?

3.2 Participants

The researcher invites 39 freshmen in Honors College, NPU who choose the class named "Spoken English" this semester as this research's participants. Among these participants, there are 35 males and 4 females whose age are between 16 to 20. Their English learning span is between 3 to 17 years. Many of the participants have been learning English for 10 years (12 participants) and 9 years (7 participants). The mean value of English learning span is 11.7 years.

They are selected as the focus of this study because they are students in Honors College, which indicates that they are almost the top students among all the students in the same grade. Studying on their English learning motivation can be meaningful to shed some light on English teaching in universities.

3.3 Instrument

One major instrument is applied in this study— the Likert-scale questionnaire mainly adopted from Gao et al. [1], which has been cited for 1515 times till May 30, 2021 according to China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI). As for the previous questionnaire designed by Gao et al. [1], there are 30 questions regarding 7 types of learning motivation mentioned above. The relations between questions and different types of motivation are shown in Fig. 2.

Based on the researcher's previous study— Chinese Students' English Learning Motivation—Case study of an English Major Postgraduate Student, this research adds one more motivation factor—"face " [8, 9, 20] and 2 corresponding questions— "学好英语会让我在其他人面前更有面子" and "我希望能够通过学好英语给其他人留个好印象" [9] to make the questionnaire of Gao et al. more complete [1].

3.4 Procedures

At first, 39 participants are asked to fill the questionnaire. Next, according to the questionnaire, the researcher will identify the participants' English learning motivation and discuss the general and specific features of their motivation.

因子 负荷 原始题	因子1 内在兴趣	因子2 成绩	因子3 学习情境	因子4 出国	因子5 社会责任	因子6 个人发展	因子7 信息媒介
Q21 喜欢语言本身	.81 (.80)						
Q19 对学语言有爱好	.79 (.78)						
Q4 对英语一见钟情	.73 (.73)						
Q20 喜欢英语歌/电影	.58 (.58)						
Q23 喜欢英语文学	.56 (.57)						
Q18 喜欢英语文化	.47 (.56)						
Q4 学习成绩（入学前）		.70 (.64)					
Q6 学习成绩（入学后）		.59 (.56)					
Q3 为升学考试		.58 (.61)					
Q11 获取毕业证书		.54 (.58)					
Q2 父母/学校要我学		.41 (.45)					
Q8 英语课的质量			.78 (.75)				
Q9 英语教材			.73 (.71)				
Q10 英语班			.69 (.68)				
Q7 英语老师（入学后）			.66 (.70)				
Q5 英语老师（入学前）			.42 (.50)				
Q26 出国寻找教育和工作机会				-.78 .76)			
Q28 移民国外				-.77 .75)			
Q27 出国体验文化				-.73 .73)			
Q24 为中国富强尽力					.64 (.66)		
Q25 不辜负父母期望					.56 (.55)		
Q22 让世界了解中国					.51 (.54)		
Q29 人生路上敲门砖						-.69 .70)	
Q30 教育/修养的象征						-.62 .64)	
Q16 找一份好工作						-.56 .60)	
Q13 有用的交流工具						-.53 .56)	
Q14 获得成就感						-.51 .54)	
Q15 学好其他专业							-.72 .69)
Q17 了解世界经济、科技发展情况							-.68 .68)

Fig. 2. Factor structure and loading. (Cited from: [1])

Table 1. NPU students' motivation types

Type	Answer				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither/nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Immediate Achievement	2.45% (5/(34*6))	17.16% (35/(34*6))	14.71% (30/(34*6))	39.71% (81/(34*6))	25.98% (53/(34*6))
Individual Development	7.06% (12/(34*5))	10.59% (18/(34*5))	19.41% (33/(34*5))	40% (68/(34*5))	22.94% (39/(34*5))
Information Medium	4.41% (3/(34*2))	11.76% (8/(34*2))	29.41% (20/(34*2))	39.71% (27/(34*2))	14.71% (10/(34*2))
Social Responsibility	11.76% (12/(34*3))	9.80% (10/(34*3))	33.33% (34/(34*3))	43.14% (44/(34*3))	1.96% (2/(34*3))
Face	11.76% (8/(34*2))	11.76% (8/(34*2))	35.29% (24/(34*2))	33.82% (23/(34*2))	7.35% (5/(34*2))
Intrinsic Interest	12.25% (25/(34*6))	25.00% (51/(34*6))	32.84% (67/(34*6))	22.55% (46/(34*6))	7.35% (15/(34*6))
Learning Situation	10.00% (17/(34*5))	28.24% (48/(34*5))	35.29% (60/(34*5))	19.41% (33/(34*5))	7.06% (12/(34*5))
Going Abroad	29.41% (30/(34*3))	19.61% (20/(34*3))	20.59% (21/(34*3))	17.65% (18/(34*3))	12.75% (13/(34*3))

4   Results and Discussion

Since 5 questionnaires which are not fully completed are regarded as invalid, only the left 34 questionnaires will be discussed in this section. What needs to point out is that when the participants choose positive answers like "agree" and "strongly agree", it indicates that there is great possibility for them to have such kind of motivation behind the questions and vice versa.

4.1   General NPU Students' Motivation Features

Table 1 shows the proportion of different motivation types of answers in the 34 questionnaires. There are 8 types of motivation and 5 kinds of answer.

1) As for the 6 questions about "immediate achievement", major students choose "agree" and "strongly agree", which accounts for 65.69% (39.71% + 25.98%) and indicates that NPU students have high immediate achievement motivation. 2) As for the 5 questions about "individual development", 62.94% (40% + 22.94%) students choose "agree" and "strongly agree", suggesting that NPU students also have high individual development motivation. 3) As for the 2 questions about "information medium", there are 54.42% (39.71% + 14.71%) students choosing "agree" and "strongly agree" and 29.41% students holding a moderate attitude, which implies that NPU students have relatively high information medium motivation. 4) As for the 3 questions about "social responsibility" and 5) the 2 questions about "face", 45.10% (43.14% + 1.96%) students choose "agree" and "strongly agree" to answer questions about "social responsibility", among which 43.14% (33.82% + 7.35%) choose "agree", and 33.33% students choose "neither/nor agree". 41.17% students choose "agree" and "strongly agree" to answer questions about "face", among which 33.82% choose "agree". At the same time, 35.29% students choose "neither/nor agree". Therefore, the researcher thinks that NPU students possess some social responsibility and face motivation.

6) As for the 6 questions about "intrinsic interest", many students choose "disagree" and "strongly disagree", accounting for 37.25% (25.00% + 12.25%). Besides, many students hold a moderate attitude, accounting for 32.84%. And other 29.9% (22.55% + 7.35%) hold a positive attitude. Similarly, 7) as for the 5 questions about "learning situation", 38.24% (28.24% + 10.00%) students choose "disagree" and "strongly disagree", 35.29% choose "neither/nor agree" and the left 26.47% (19.41% + 7.06%) choose "agree" and "strongly agree". The results show that NPU students may have a little intrinsic interest and learning situation motivation.

8) As for the 3 questions about "going abroad", 49.02% (19.61% + 29.41%) hold a negative attitude and 20.95% hold a neutral attitude. This suggests that NPU students have little going abroad motivation.

4.2   Specific NPU Students' Motivation Features

Among those high or relatively high motivations, as for 1) "immediate achievement", 82.35% (28/34) NPU students think that they started learning English because of the requirements from school and parents, and the major factor that influence their English

Table 2. Proportion of different answers to questions 4 and 6

Questions	Answer				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither/nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
4: Before going to university	2.94% (1/34)	14.71% (5/34)	8.82% (3/34)	52.94% (18/34)	20.59% (7/34)
6: After going to university	5.88% (2/34)	29.41% (10/34)	26.47% (9/34)	26.47% (9/34)	11.76% (4/34)

* 4. 上大学前, 我学英语的劲头很大程度上取决于我的学习成绩。6. 上大学后, 我学英语的劲头很大程度上取决于我的学习成绩。(Cited from: [1])

learning are English scores. 61.76% (21/34) of them learn English in order to get diplomas finally. Noticeably, when it comes to English scores, there is an obvious change of attitude towards it after these students receive tertiary education, as shown in Table 2. Before these 34 participants went to university, 73.53% (52.94% + 20.59%) of them cared much more about their English scores. After going to university, they care less about scores. Only 38.23% (26.47% + 11.76%) students hold the view that the major factor that influence their English learning are still English scores. The reason may be different criteria of subject assessment between high school and university. In China's high schools, scores can be regarded as the most important pursuit. Without good scores, students couldn't go to good universities. However, in universities, academic assessment criteria are various. Scores are not the only factor to define ones' "success" in learning career. Besides, the requirement of score is less strict. Passing exams may be enough for many university students. In addition, since these students' major are not English, learning English is not their priority, so they care less about the influence of scores on learning English after going to university. 2) As for "individual development", 85.29% students (29/34) regard English as a stepping-stone to future and 67.65% of them (23/34) regard English as an important vehicle of communication in today's society. 64.71% of them (22/34) think learning English well can help them find a good job in the future. But they show relatively obvious different attitudes towards the opinion that learning English well can make them have a sense of achievement and learning English well is a symbol of good self-cultivation and high-level education, where we can see that nowadays, there is a declining trend of English status. 3) As for "information medium", 82.35% (28/34) students learn English in order to have a better understanding of other majors.

Among those moderate motivations, 4) as for "social responsibility", 64.71% (22/34) try to learn English well so that they can make China prosperous and strong. 50% of them (17/34) try to learn English well to meet their parents' expectation. But only 20.59% (7/34) try to learn English well to let the world know more about China. 5) As for "face", 47.06% (16/34) students want to leave people a good impression through learning English well. 35.29% (12/34) thinks learning English well can make them gain face.

Among those potential motivations, 6) as for "intrinsic interest" 44.12% (15/34) students agree that English songs and movies arouse their interest in learning English.

Table 3. Proportion of different answers to questions 5 and 7

Questions	Answer				
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither/nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
5: Before going to university	8.82% (3/34)	20.59% (7/34)	38.24% (13/34)	23.53% (8/34)	8.82% (3/34)
7: After going to university	8.82% (3/34)	32.35% (11/34)	35.29% (12/34)	14.71% (5/34)	8.82% (3/34)

* 5. 上大学前, 我学英语的劲头很大程度上取决于是否喜欢英语老师。7. 上大学后, 我学英语的劲头很大程度上取决于是否喜欢英语老师。(Cited from: [1])

Meanwhile, 29.41% (10/34) of them learn English because they are interested in the people and their cultures in English-speaking countries. But 26.47% (9/34) don't think so. More students don't think their English learning motivation is from the interest of English itself or English literature works. 7) As for "learning situation", similar to English scores, there is also a decline of the influence of English teacher (see Table 3). Besides, more students care about the quality of English course but care less about learning material and their English class.

8) As for the low motivation—"going abroad", 91.18% (31/34) students have no intention to emigrate. 52.94% (18/34) of them want to study or work abroad. 32.35% (11/34) of them want to experience the culture in English-speaking countries through learning English and 32.35% (11/34) of them don't want to.

Generally speaking, according to the 34 questionnaires, NPU students have high immediate achievement and individual development motivation as well as have relatively high information medium motivation. Besides, NPU students also have some social responsibility and face motivation. What's more, NPU students may have a little intrinsic interest and learning situation motivation. However, at the same time, NPU students have low going abroad motivation.

Specifically, as for 1) "immediate achievement", NPU students started learning English because of the requirements from school and parents, and the major factor that influence their English learning are English scores and diplomas. 2) As for "individual development", NPU students regard English as a stepping-stone to future and an important vehicle of communication in today's society. They think learning English well can help them find a good job in the future. 3) As for "information medium", NPU students learn English in order to have a better understanding of other majors. 4) As for "social responsibility", many NPU students try to learn English well so that they can make China prosperous and strong and meet their parents' expectation. 5) As for "face", some NPU students want to leave people a good impression through learning English well. 6) as for "intrinsic interest" some students agree that English songs and movies rather than English itself or English literature works arouse their interest in learning English. 7) As for "learning situation", similar to English scores, more NPU students care about the quality of English course rather than learning material or their English class. 8) As for "going abroad", NPU students have less intention to emigrate, but Some

of them want to study or work abroad. Besides, both "English scores" in "immediate achievement" and "English teacher" in "learning situation" present a declining trend of influence on motivating NPU students to learn English after they go to NPU.

5   Conclusion

5.1   Implications

From the theoretical perspective, this study validates the questionnaire of Gao et al. in analyzing the NPU Freshmen's motivation to some extent [1]. Besides, it adds on more motivation factor – "face", which can make the questionnaire of Gao et al. more complete [1]. From a practical point of view, this study summarizes and classifies NPU student's English learning motivation types into high, relatively high, moderate, potential, and low. Researchers, students and teachers can get some learning or pedagogical ideas form this research. For example, since NPU students learn English in order to have a better understanding of other majors, NPU can provide more English for specific purpose (ESP) courses for students. In addition, since English songs and movies can arouse NPU students' interest in learning English, students can have more access to listening to English songs and movies to get more input.

5.2   Limitations

In some special questionnaire, most of the answers are "strongly disagree" and "disagree" or "agree" and "strongly agree", which indicates that the participants may have very low or high motivation and deserves further analysis through interview. More participants need to be invited to make this research more valid and reliable. In addition, whether face can be regarded as a motivation factor whether its corresponding questions can well reflect this factor need further discussion.

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