

# A Survey and Quantitative Analysis of Chinese Students' English Learning Motivation

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**Keywords:** English learning motivation; Chinese students; Empirical study.

**Abstract.** Based on the questionnaire of college students' English learning motivation developed by Gao Yihong, the paper aims to discuss the intensity of students' English learning motivation as well as the most common motivation content, and compare different types of students' English learning motivation. The results show that the intensity of students' English learning motivation are above average, which are in the following descending order: personal development, social responsibility, information media, inherent interest, achievement, going abroad and learning situation. The most common five main motivation contents are related to personal development. Students who have done part-time jobs have distinctive higher inherent interest motivation, going abroad motivation, social responsibility motivation, information media motivation than those of students who have no working experiences, however, the differences of English learning motivation in gender, grade, only child, student status, autodidacte, majors have not been found.

## Introduction

Learning motivation has been seen as one of the important factors affecting foreign language learning. It is a kind of inherent process or inner psychological state which stimulates and maintains individual learning activity, and drives learning behavior heading for certain goals. Many scholars at home and abroad study on motivation in different approaches. Scholars abroad such as Gardner[1-2] and Lambert[3] study on motivation from social psychological perspective, while Norton[4-5] research on motivation from social cultural perspective, and Chinese scholars such as Zhou[6] and Gao[7] also have many findings on motivation. With the increasing problems about college students' learning motivation and the growing needs to enhance their language quality, educators, under modern information technology, explore their language learning, especially English learning motivation for many years, in the aspects of its type, characteristics, stimulating strategy and cultivation. For research contents, the domestic scholars represented by Gao Yihong have made a systematic study on the type, characteristics of college students' English learning motivation. With regard to research method and measurement tool, it is represented by college students' English learning motivation questionnaire from Gao Yihong at present, though both Shi Yongzhen (2000) [8] and Zou Huimin (2005) [9] develop questionnaires for measuring students' English learning motivation. The subjects are mainly from undergraduates in big city universities. Less attention is paid to undergraduate students in local colleges.

Based on educational environment in local universities, this study aims to provide basis for stimulation and cultivation of English learning motivation in the like-kind universities through its investigation and empirical analysis. Two kinds of questions are chiefly discussed in this paper. To be specific, investigating the type and intensity of students' English learning motivation, and the most dynamic learning content; and students' English learning motivation varies in different gender, grade, educational background, the only child, student status, part-time job and autodidacte and so on.

## Methods

**Participant.** In a method of randomly cluster sampling, this paper draws 307 college students as the research subjects from a local college in Shaanxi province in 2009, among which 304 are effective subjects, in other words, the effective rate is 99%. Among the total samples, 127 freshmen, 141 sophomores, 36 juniors have their relative proportions being 41.78%, 43.38% and 11.84% respectively. It is included 167 students of liberal arts, 85 science students, 52 art students, 48 urban students, 53 township students, 203 rural students; 195 undergraduates, 109 junior college students; 55 boy students, 249 girl students; 43 only children, 261 non-only children; 112 students having working experience, 192 students without working experience; 15 students who have participated in autodidacte, 289 students who haven't.

**Measurement.** Based on the questionnaire of college students' English learning motivation developed by Gao Yihong(2000)[10], this questionnaire samples college students from 30 universities in 29 provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities directly under the central government, and uses five score, 1=完全 disagree, 5=totally agree. It analyses data factors in 2278 valid questionnaires available, and finally fixes 30 items, 7 dimensions, to be specific, inherent interest motivation (6 items), achievement motivation (5 items), learning situation (5 items), going abroad motivation (3 items), social responsibility (3 items), personal development (5 items), information media (2 items). Research shows that the questionnaire has good reliability and validity. The inner consistency coefficient of the dimensions in the questionnaire are larger than 0.61 except information media factor (0.50), the total internal consistency coefficient is 0.81. In the study number 12 is not included within the seven factors and the total score, for the existing research finds that it involves a number of questions. In addition, some questions for the basic information of college students are designed in the questionnaire, such as gender, grade, the only child, student status, subject type, part-time job and autodidacte and so on.

**Research Procedure, Data Analysis and Statistics Processing.** Subjects are required to read the guide carefully, then complete the entire questionnaire according to their own conditions. Questionnaire filling is done in class, which also require to fill student ID. And it takes 15 to 20 minutes to finish the whole questionnaire. After questionnaires are taken back, it is required to eliminate invalid ones, use SPSS11.5 to input data, and analyse statistical data by methods such as descriptive statistics, t test, variance analysis.

## Results

**The Intensity Comparison and Content Analysis of Students' English Learning Motivation.** Results in table 1 shows that the intensity of college students' English learning motivation in local universities are above average, which are in the following descending order: personal development, social responsibility, information media, inherent interest, achievement, going abroad and learning situation.

Table 1 The Intensity of College Students' English Learning Motivation

factors	Inherent interest	achievement	Learning situation	Going abroad	Social responsibility	Personal development	Information media
value	3.13±0.77	3.08±0.78	2.68±0.64	2.69±0.84	3.21±0.82	3.82±0.72	3.16±0.88

Results in table 2 shows that the most common motivation contents are mainly related to personal development, and its frequency is above 60%.

Table 2 The Most Common Motivation Contents

Order	(Items) Contents	Frequency (%)
1	(13) To learn English well is very important to me, because it is a useful tool for communication in today's society	82.6
2	(29) English is an important open sesame to the life forward	76.0

3	(14) Learning English well can give me a sense of achievement	71.4
4	(30) Fluent English is the symbol of education and cultivation	69.4
5	(16) Based on good English I might find a good job in the future	60.9

**Comparison of different students' English learnning motivations.** After the difference comparison of 7 factors and total score of college students' English learnning motivation varying in education background, gender, only child, working experience, autoditacte, using t test for independent samples, it is found that different education college students are only significantly different in the factor of interest motivation( $p<0.05$ ), in other words, undergraduates' intrinsic motivation is significantly lower than that of junior college students( $3.05\pm0.79; 3.28\pm0.73$ ), there is no clear difference existing in other factors and the total score; College students who have done part-time jobs are strikingly different from those have no working experiences in interest motivation, going abroad motivation, social responsibility motivation, personal development motivation, information media motivation and total score( $p<0.05$ ). To be specific, college students who have done part-time jobs have higher scores than those of students who have no working experiences; and there are also no significant differences in the 7 factors and total score of English learning motivation among college students who are only children or non-only children, who are participating in autoditacte or not. With single factor analysis of variance, comparing the 7 factors and total score of college students English learning motivation varying in grade, subject and residence, the study doesn't find remarkable difference( $p>0.05$ ).

## Discussions

The study results show that there are 7 English learning motivations among local college students, and its intensity is above average, which are in the following descending order: personal development, social responsibility, information media, inherent interest, achievement, going abroad and learning situation. Further study shows that the most common motivation contents are mainly related to personal development. To be specific, 82.6% students believe that to learn English well is very important to me, 76% students think that English is an important open sesame to the life forward, 71.4% students hold that learning English well can give me a sense of achievement, 69.4% students consider that fluent English is the symbol of education and cultivation, 60.9% students think that based on good English I might find a good job in the future. The above research results show that, the main driving force of college students' English learning in local universities is not English learning itself, but the disadvantage of English learning for personal development, such as passing examination, getting graduation, etc. It is consistent with the study results from Shi Yongzhen (2000), that is, most of college students' English learning motivation are certificate motives. On the other hand, The research above also shows that local university students get the desire for personal development through English leaning.

This study results show that college students with different education backgrounds are different in the factor of interest motivation, in other words, undergraduate is lower than junior college student. This is different from existing study results. Theoretically, undergraduates' intrinsic motivation in English learning should be higher than those of junior college students But such particularity appearing in this research is worth exploring. This college upgraded to the university in 2006, all aspects of undergraduate education are not yet good enough, and together with the number of undergraduates is limited. Thus, the university doesn't have a good learning atmosphere for undergraduates. It is slowly developing in the advanced process, and some kind of teaching for undergraduates is not fine. The psychological blow caused by this environment when undergraduates in this university are comparing with the ones in other universities, may lead to the decline of their inherent motivation. In contrast, as junior college, it has a long history and rich experience in college education and management. For junior college students, they have clear and definite direction for employment and further education in future, which may work as the reason for their strong English

learning motivation, that is, they have a stronger learning motivation despite the low academic degree. The study shows that college students who have done part-time jobs are strikingly different from those have no working experiences in interest motivation, going abroad motivation, social responsibility motivation, personal development motivation, information media motivation and total score. To be specific, college students who have done part-time jobs have higher scores than those of students who have no working experiences. Referring to the reason, it is likely that students who do part-time jobs feel and experience more the importance of English theory and practice in the process of working, thus they have stronger learning motivation. The differences of English learning motivation varying in gender, grade, only child, student status, autodidacte, majors have not been found in this research. And this shows that these --- gender, grade, only child, student status, autodidacte, majors are not main factors leading to the difference in college students' English learning motivation.

## Conclusion

This study can conclude mainly as follows. The intensity of college students' English learning motivation is above average. The intensity of college students' English learning motivation is in the following descending order: personal development, social responsibility, information media, inherent interest, achievement, going abroad and learning situation. The most common motivation contents are related to personal development. Undergraduates' intrinsic motivation is lower than that of junior college students. College students who have done part-time jobs have higher motivation than those of students who have no working experiences.

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