

A Study on the Motivation of College Students in Oral English Learning

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Abstract. This paper applies the motivation theory to analyzing the current situation of college students' English learning and the existing problems involved. Through questionnaire and interview internal and external factors are discovered. As a result some suggested measures are put forward such as: build good relationship between students and teacher; creating English learning atmosphere and setting up realistic goals. The research indicates that learning motivation has immense impact on English learning; it can promote learning enthusiasm, maintain learning motivation and accomplish study goals. The research aims to improve college students' spoken English proficiency through learning motivation.

1. Introduction

Communicative competence in English or oral English competence has become more and more important in China today, as the rushing demands for new talents with high English proficiency increase. However, the majority of graduates fail to meet the requirement of mastering English skill of learning and speaking. Many students have learned English over ten years, but their spoken proficiency still need to be improved. Researches show that students with strong learning motivation are highly enthusiastic about English learning while students without learning motivation need to increase learning consciousness to improve their oral English grades. Obviously, learning motivation is an important factor in term of college students' oral English learning.

Since the 1950s, the study of learning motivation of second language acquisition and get more attention at home and abroad. The most influential figures are Gardner, Lambert and their colleagues. The research began in the 1950s and continues today. In Gardner's theory of motivation, there are two reasons for second language learning: integrative reasons and instrumental reasons. Dörnyei & Csizer (1998) investigated 200 teachers of English in Hungary. Dörnyei, Z. & Kormos, J. (2000) explored 46 Hungarian students aged 16 to 17 studying English at an intermediate level in four classes. Their purpose of the study was to probe the effects of motivational and social variables on L2 learners' engagement in oral tasks. The result turned out that motivational variables, especially the motives, made a significant impact on the learners' task.

The study of foreign language learning in China began in the early 1980s, which was divided into descriptive research and empirical research. Qin Xiaoqing(2002) asked 500 non-English majors in Nanjing and Wuhan to complete the questionnaires. He noted that controlled attributes and interest in the study had both direct and indirect influence on motivation and had a good prediction on motivation levels. In 2003, Gao Yihong and his associates presented the research project on Chinese college undergraduate' learning motivation of English and self-identity changes.

So far, it can be seen that a large number of researches on the theoretical and empirical studies concerning learning motivations have provided this study with well established research basis. However, most researches about learning motivation focus too much on the research goals. It lacks useful suggestions for teachers to help students improve their spoken English proficiency. In addition, we find that the research on private university students' learning motivation is rare. More comprehensive researches are needed to study the relationship between motivation and students in oral English learning. So the author of this paper conducts an empirical research trying to find the influence factors of students in their oral English learning so that some workable strategies can be provide to help college students improve their oral English level. Two hundred students from school of Architecture Engineering are chosen as subject from Zhengzhou University of Industrial

Technology. in order to find the influence factors of students in their oral English learning and put forward some workable suggestions to help college students improve their oral English level.

2. The Development of Motivation Theory

2.1 The Definition of Motivation Theory

Gardner (1985) defines motivation as “the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity”. In 1993, he developed the definition as “the desire to achieve a goal, effort extended in this direction and satisfaction with the task.” Then in Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), he believed that motivation subsumes three contents: motivational intensity, desire to learn the language and attitudes towards learning the language.

2.2 The Development of Learning Motivation Theory

Atkinson (1974) is the first one to put forward the comprehensive model of achievement motivation theory, which is considered to be an early theory at today. But in the theory, many components have been adopted by contemporary models, the achievement and fear of failure are the most two important elements among them.

While Dörnyei (1998) put forward that motivation has been widely accepted by both teachers and researchers as one of the key factors which influence the success of foreign language (L2) learning. Exactly speaking, motivation could be defined as the accumulation of dynamic change around people, frank, harmonious, reinforces, stagnates, appraises the cognitive, to assess the movement process and the cognitive, the original wishes and desires to be selected, considered, and acted out (Dörnyei & Otto, 1998).

So the word “motivation” provides a real mystery: people use it widely in daily life and professional context, and opinions diversify at an alarming rate-researchers disagree strongly on almost everything relevant to the concept (Dörnyei, 2001).

3. Case Study

3.1 The Problems of College Students in Oral English Learning

The motivation is complex and significant in the English study. Communication in English is always regarded as one of the most difficult aspects owing to lack real language learning atmosphere in the oral English learning. There are the problems that influence the English learning motivation as following.

In the traditional teaching mode, the class is boring that can not attract students. Teachers do not give patient guidance because they do not know the real level of each students. Teachers just ask a few students to answer the question because there are so many students in class. Meanwhile, language learning environment is one of the necessary factors during the oral English learning. Because it seriously influence the listening and speaking skills for students. There are few opportunities for students to communication with English due to the few foreign teachers.

What’ s more, some college students have little interest in oral English learning. They do not set up proper goals for English learning and listen carefully in class. Some college students lack enthusiasm for oral English. They are afraid of failure and short of confidence. Many college students spend little time on English in their free time because they do not realize the importance of oral English.

The author comes from Zhengzhou University of Industrial Technology which is a privately-run technology university. The students of this school have some different problems, such as: their spoken English proficiency is low before enter the school, most of them come from countryside where the spoken English level is lower than the students in city, they have few opportunity to practice oral English, the English teacher usually speak Chinese on the class and some low-level teachers influence the effectiveness of teaching, the spoken English score not included into the total scores in College Entrance Exam. So the author took research about English learning motivation on this school.

3.2 Research Participants

Two hundred 2015 year students were chosen as subjects from Zhengzhou University of Industrial Technology. There are three classes with one hundred and thirteen female students and eighty seven male students from School of Architecture Engineering. Though they have learned English several years, many of them can not speak English well. They said they do not know how to learning English well even though they want to improve spoken English ability.

This research is means to find out the motivation types of 2015 year students from school of Architecture Engineering of Zhengzhou University of Industrial Technology. The correlation of the motivation types and oral English proficiency. The students in each class are not going to be divided into good learners and poor learners.

They had acquired strikingly different levels of oral English proficiency because they had the same oral class as a compulsory one. Furthermore, they also have different basic English abilities indicating their oral English ability.

3.3 Research Method

3.3.1 Questionnaire

To survey college students' general learning motivation for oral English development, a questionnaire is designed on the oral English motivational factors according to Gardner's social-educational model. The whole questionnaire is designed in Chinese in order to help the participants fully understand, which is convenient for collecting authentic data.

The students chose the answers in the form of 5-point scale, strongly disagree=1, disagree=2, not sure=3, agree=4, strongly agree=5. The students answered the questions based on their own situations. The items presented different motivation types: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, instrumental motivation and integrative motivation, as well as surface motivation and deep motivation. The questionnaire is a suitable way to assess the motivation types to develop oral English proficiency.

3.3.2 Interview

Interview is not only widely used but also very useful technique for collecting in the study. As Merriam (1998, p.72) suggests that interview is a tool for data collection when we can not "observe behaviors, feeling, or how people interpret the world around them". Interview could help to find out the meaning in learners' head.

During the study, the interview questions are designed for what the students were thinking after filled out the questionnaire. So interviews with 6 teachers and 40 participants to find related information about oral English learning motivation. Each interview was done face to face and took about half an hour. Every interview was in Chinese for make it easier to communicate with everyone without misunderstanding.

In the interview, participants were encouraged to give any information or suggestions that they felt rationalize for the topic. The questions were flexible, such as "Could you tell me your viewpoint about the learning of oral English?" The purpose for these questions is to avoid any bias.

3.4 Finding and Analysis

The whole data collection procedure took about three months from November 2015 to January 2016. 200 questionnaires were collected 190 valid, the validity is 95%. The results show that 76% of students study English to pass graduation examinations, and 9% of students really like English and be willing to continue learning English. The other 15% of students think learning English can help them improve English proficiency to study or travel abroad.

The analysis follow these steps. Firstly, descriptive statistics was used to summarize the participants' English proficiency and their responses to motivation. Next, the correlation was conducted to examine how motivation was related to oral English proficiency. Then, check the collected data to identify if there were any remarkable differences in terms of motivation types or problems during the oral English learning.

Results show that there are five main types of learning motivation among non-English majors: interest, development, achievement, environment, examination. Interest motivation refers to students' interest in English culture or English learning. 15% of students with development

motivation concerns improving personal competitive ability or social status through mastering English. Achievement is related to the students' satisfaction in learning. Environment motivation shows the importance of the language atmosphere during learning. 76% of students with examination motivation have the purpose of passing exams or getting certificates. The first three have some features of integrative motivation; the last two have features of instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation indicates an interest in learning, and it play an important role in long-term success when learning a second language. Instrumental motivation means a motivation to acquire some advantages by learning a second language, and learners regard second language as an instrument to get a reward.

4. The Relationship between Motivation and Oral English Learning

4.1 The Influence Factors in Oral English Learning

The motivation is complex and significant in the oral English study, and it is easily affected by internal factors and external factors. As for the non-English students of Zhengzhou University of Industrial Technology, the influence factors as following.

4.1.1 Internal Factors

First of all, personality factor is an important factor of students from Zhengzhou University of Industrial Technology during oral English learning. Because student who is introverted directly affects the foreign language learning, because introverted students are lack of confidence and easily get anxious. They are likely to give up practice opportunities, so the oral English ability can be improved slowly.

On the other hand, psychological is another influence factor during oral English learning. Because their basic skill of English is low and are afraid of difficulties and laughed at by others. Thus most graduates does not have effective language communication ability.

Interest is the best teacher and it is an important reason for learning English. Stimulating students' interest in English learning and mobilizing students' learning enthusiasm and initiative are necessary to promote spoken English proficiency.

4.1.2 External Factors

Owing to lack of language environment, communicating in English is often regarded as one of the most difficult aspects during the English learning. There are few opportunities for students from Zhengzhou University of Industrial Technology to speak English except English class. The non-English majors only have Extensive reading class without foreign teacher. Such a language environment seriously affected the development of the listening and speaking skills for students.

Meanwhile, teachers give the topics for students to discuss in class are too difficult for their English level. Most teachers speak more Chinese than English in class because non-English majors could rarely understand their English. Most students are not able to answer the questions due to they afraid of making mistakes in class. All of these cause the students' anxiety and failure in oral English activities.

Last but not least, oral practice is usually drab, boring, and the practice time in class is very limited, so part of students do not have enough enthusiasm for oral English learning. The size of each class is more than 50 and class hour is 45 minutes. It seems that every students' oral practice time is not more than 1 minute. The students do not spend much time to practice oral English in the free time because they have too much homework of the major. Most students not take part in the oral English activities after class because they do not realize the importance of spoken English. All of these affect spoken English proficiency for the students.

4.2 Suggestions to Improve Spoken English Proficiency

The author finds the internal factors and external factors of students in the oral English learning through the research. During the study, most students agree that they learn English in order to pass the final examinations or CET band-Four. They spend time learning English in order to prepare examinations rather than use English as a language. It means that most students have stronger instrumental motivation than integrative motivation. The thesis concludes that teachers should work

on how to create the basic motivational conditions, to generate, maintain and stimulate motivation both inside and outside the classroom.

At present, English teachers are entitled with new roles in helping students improve their English learning ability. It is necessary for the teachers to transfer the instrumental motivation to the motivation of intrinsic interest for students in oral English learning. So the author of this paper puts forward some workable suggestions to help students improve their spoken English proficiency in the next chapter.

5. Suggestions for Oral English Teaching and Learning

5.1 Suggestions for Teachers

It is well known that factors which contribute to language learning can be classified into two categories: affective factors and intellectual factors. Affective factors include attitude, anxiety, inhibition, motivation, personality. Students are trained to be obedient since primary school, so they are not responsible for learning and still waiting for teachers' arrangements, seldom volunteer to answer questions. So, teachers should actively encourage and assist the students to speak English because they play the role as a guide in the classroom activities.

Next, strategy awareness is very important in language learning. The teacher should help the students find their problems in speaking English. For example, some students have difficulties in carrying out their plans because they are afraid of making mistakes and losing face. Finally, teachers need know learners' learning styles since learners can change learning styles through strategy training and then change their beliefs and behaviors, which contribute to be an autonomous learner. To sum up, teachers could help the students create more opportunities to practice out of class.

5.2 Suggestions for Students

In China, students are influenced by the proverb "rapid in thinking but reflective in speaking" (敏于思而慎于言). Chinese students spend a longer time to consider before arriving at a conclusion. They are in favor of getting good feedback and praise from the teachers and others. They would like to a harmonious learning environment. By setting up realistic goals, the students can overcome the weaknesses and make progress systematically and efficiently in cooperation with teachers in class. Students need to formulate their short-term goals because it can help overcome difficulties and make progress systematically and efficiently in cooperation with teachers on the class.

Teacher need to help students set appropriate goals in different periods of time, because sometimes students set too goals for them to reach. They may feel frustrated and lose heart to continue fulfill their plan if they fail to achieve, with the proper goals, the students can concentrate on the learning, reflect their problems and exchange their views with teachers, and they can gradually learn to set appropriate short-term goals in English learning.

6. Conclusion

Nowadays, English has become one of the most popular languages in the world. Most business documents, research findings and academic works are written in English. English is becoming more and more important for college students. So the author starts from analyzing the students' oral English learning situation from the perspective of learning motivation theory. Then the author conducts a case study by questionnaire and interview to find out the internal and external factors affecting spoken English learning. Based on the research results he puts forward some workable suggestions at last chapter to help college students improve their oral English level.

This thesis also explores the relationship between motivation and oral English learning for college students based on the current situation of oral English learning in China. Oral English learning is a comprehensive and complicated process which involves many factors and elements. As one of the most important factors in English learning, motivation has great influences on both the learning process and result. No one can achieve any long-term learning goals without learning motivation.

Of course there are limitations exist in the present study. Not all the motivation types are covered in the questionnaires and the size of sample is small. So the results of the study cannot represent the situation of all students. The author of this paper hopes that it will arouse the interest of more researchers in this field and provide basic research methods and references for the future research.

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