

Attitude and Motivation for English Learning

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Abstract

The present study has taken motivation, one of the key factors that influence the process and outcome of second and foreign language learning, as the focus. On the basis of analyzing different distinctions of motivation, an empirical research has been made, with the main findings that most of the present non-English-major university students are instrumentally motivated, and students from Science Department are a little more motivated than students from Arts Department. Through the research, it is expected to bring some enlightenment to the present college English language teaching.

Key words: Motivation; Second / foreign language learning; College English teaching

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INTRODUCTION

Language, as a communication coding system that can be taught as a school subject, as an integral part of the individual's identity involved in almost all mental activities, and also as the most important channel of social organization embedded in the culture of the community where the language is used, is such a complex system. Motivation, as one of the key factors that influence the process and outcome of second and foreign language learning, is also a multifaceted construct. Different kinds of descriptions have been given to define motivation, from

the day when this term began to attract the attention of psychologists. And numerous factors are involved in the research of motivation.

a) Motivation. Since motivation is a major factor in language learning, L2 motivation has been the target of a large quantity of EFL and ESL research in the past decades. In the aspect of early psychological research, there have been two distinct traditions of explaining human behavior. They are social psychologists, which regards behavior as the function of the social context and the interpersonal relational patterns, and motivational psychologists, with focus mainly on the internal factors in the individual instead of the social environment, such as drive, arousal and cognitive self-appraisal (Dornyei, 1998). And as for the study of explaining human behavior in second / foreign language learning, more and more factors are being taken into consideration, both the factors from social psychological approach and those from motivational psychological approach.

The original impetus in L2 motivation research came from Gardner and his associates through social psychological approach. According to Gardner and Lambert (1972), motivations are grouped into a bipolar contrast between integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation refers to a wish, by a learner, to integrate into, become an accepted member of the community whose language that person is learning. It concerns the learner's perceptions of himself or herself in the second language community, such as having a share in the culture, being a member of another culture, even actually changing cultural allegiance. Instrumental motivation refers to a wish by a learner to benefit practically from language learning. It concerns the individual's place in his or her own culture, such as having access to better jobs, being regarded as an educated person, being more successful in business dealings with native speakers of the target language.

Another important distinction within motivation can be drawn between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic

motivation deals with behavior performed for its own sake, in order to experience pleasure and satisfaction, such as a sense of achievement, self-esteem, pride in solving the problem, enjoyment of the class, being able to use the languages desired. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation involves performing a behavior as a means to an end and usually involves other consequences of success on the task: such as prizes for doing well, getting the job of one's choice, a higher position, gaining some certificate on a test score. As Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991) have pointed: Extrinsic motivation is no longer regarded as an antagonistic counterpart of intrinsic motivation. Instead, they can be combined together to form a continuum according to the degree from the most external one to the most internal one. In this aspect, we can't give absolute distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation either, as this pair of category is closely related with the pair of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. According to Chambers (2001), integrative motivation is to a large extent intrinsic, and instrumental motivation is extrinsic. Therefore, the items on the questionnaire in this research are grouped by their orientation, dependent mainly on whether they're more integrative oriented or instrumental oriented.

b) Studies about motivation. In the past two decades, the theoretical and empirical researches concerning L2 motivation are largely expanded, typically by Richard Clement et al. (Clement, Gardner, & Smythe, 1977) introduction and then extended framework (Gardner & Tremblay, 1994) of self-confidence construct in L2 learning; Dornyei's (1994) extended framework, which points to a tripartite motivation construct, consisting of integrativeness, linguistic self-confidence, and the appraisal of the classroom environment; Gardner & Tremblay's (1994) suggestion of novel element, as goal salience, valence and self-efficacy; and Schumann's (1998) neurobiological models, which includes novelty (degree of unexpectedness / familiarity), pleasantness (attractiveness), goal / need significance (whether the stimulus is instrumental in satisfying needs or achieving goals), coping potential (whether the individual expects to be able to cope with the event), and self and social image (whether the event is compatible with social norms and the individual's self-concept). What's more, a lot of empirical researches have been done in some special social-cultural context. And a lot of other factors concerning motivation are being studied, such as gender differences in learner motivation, the role of classroom-specific variables in shaping learner motivation, the effects of parental influence on motivation, group-specific motivation, teacher motivation, i.e. teacher's level of enthusiasm and commitment in L2 classroom.

In China, such an enormous developing country, there are a large number of English learners. The age of learning English is greatly advanced. More and more children are being sent to different kinds of English classes even before

they go to school to accept systematic school education. And English is a compulsory subject from middle school in most areas of China. However, a factor which can't be neglected is that English learning is always closely associated with various kinds of examinations, from the entrance examination to university to the examination for the application of Ph. D candidates. And for the university undergraduates, whether they can pass the examination CET 4 is the greatest concern for most university students. Hence, this study is to take some understanding towards the present university students' attitude and motivation to English learning.

1. METHODOLOGY

1.1 Research Questions

Through this study, two questions are expected to be explored:

(a) What is the dominant orientation of motivation of present university students, integrative orientation or instrumental orientation?

(b) Is there any differences concerning motivation between the students majoring in Science and the students majoring in Arts?

1.2 Subjects

Subjects of this study are 66 undergraduates at Shandong Normal University. All of them are sophomores in the first school term, studying English for the second year in university, aging from 19 to 21 years old. 30 of them are from Arts Department, majoring in Chinese Language and Literature. 36 of them are from Science Department, majoring in Chemistry. And they are studying English with the same teacher, an associate professor. The percentage of the subjects is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Percentage of the Subjects

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid arts	30	45.5	45.5	45.5
Science	36	54.5	54.5	100.0
Total	66	100.0	100.0	

1.3 Instrument

A questionnaire was designed on the basis of the motivation questionnaire by Kormos and Dörnyei (2004). On the basis of the original questionnaire, a few items were deleted and a few were rearranged according to the cultural and social context in China as well as the purpose of this research. Thus, the questionnaire adopted in this research included 32 statements and one open question in the end, and it was measured by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree". (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Uncertain / No view, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree.)

The questionnaires were distributed to the subjects during English class and collected after an anonymous completion

lasting about 10 minutes. Before the questionnaire distribution, subjects were informed that they were helping with a small-scale investigation aiming at finding out the present situation of their English study with focus mainly on motivation. And they were expected to provide true answers freely, without any anxiety, as their answers would be used only for the purpose of study, without any influence on their academic performance evaluation.

2. DATA COLLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis was performed with SPSS10.0, and consisted of three parts. First, descriptive statistics was

conducted to make a list of the mean of each variable. Second, the answers to the open question at the end of the questionnaire on “The most important reason for you to learn English” were categorized and the frequency was analyzed. Third, a graph was made to make a comparison about the motivation between students in Arts Department and those in Science Department.

2.1 Dominant Motivation

The content of the questionnaire and descriptive analysis are presented in the following Table 2 and Table 3. All of the items in the Questionnaire were classified on the basis of theoretical frameworks about motivation discussed in part 1 of this passage.

Table 2
Content of the Questionnaire

General problems investigated	Number of items	Items in the questionnaire
Attitude to English and English learning	5	English is the most important language in the world today. Learning English is important. I learn English because one cannot achieve any kind of success in modern society without it. I wish we had more English classes at school. I would like to spend a lot of energy learning English in the future.
Integrative oriented motivation	7	I learn English because I would like to spend some time abroad in the near future. I learn English because I would like to get to know the culture and art of its speakers. I learn English in order to be able to get to know the life of English speaking people better. I like people from English-speaking countries because they are modern and open-minded. I really like the English language. I enjoy the English classes. Learning English often causes me a feeling of success.
Instrumental oriented motivation	10	I learn English because I may need it for finding a job later. I learn English because it is necessary to get permission of further education (such as postgraduate, Ph. D) later. I learn English so that I can get information through English books, magazines and newspapers. I learn English because I can get to know and make friends with many people from all over the world through it. I learn English in order to understand English songs, English speaking films, videos and TV programs. I learn English because it might be useful during my travels. I learn English in order to become more educated. I learn English because the content we learn in the English classes is useful. My parents ask me to learn English and push me hard. The final purpose of I learning English is to avoid failure in CET-4.
Confidence to English learning	3	I'm very glad to speak English with somebody. I think I have a fairly good language aptitude. I am sure that I'll be able to learn English.
L2 use anxiety	2	When I have to speak in English classes, I often lose confidence. I generally feel uneasy when I have to speak English.
Self-evaluation of performance in English learning	3	I am satisfied with the work I do in English classes. Learning English is one of the most important activities for me. I am pleased with my current level of English.
English level students want to achieve	2	I would be pleased to be able to master an intermediate level of English. I would like to get to an advanced level in English.

Table 3
Descriptive Analysis

	<i>N</i>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attitude to English and English learning	66	2.00	5.00	3.7606	.6356
Integrative oriented motivation	66	1.43	4.43	3.1580	.6113
Instrumental oriented motivation	66	2.50	4.60	3.5076	.4615
Confidence to English learning	66	2.33	5.00	3.4848	.6620
L2 use anxiety	66	1.00	5.00	2.9924	.9667
Self-evaluation of performance in English learning	66	1.00	4.33	2.8131	.6435
Intermediate level students want to achieve	66	1.00	5.00	3.9394	1.0210
Advanced level students want to achieve	66	1.00	5.00	4.1212	1.1165

From the above table, we can see that for the second year university students, the motivation they learn English is more instrumental-oriented (integrative oriented—3.1580, instrumental oriented—3.5076). Therefore, the instrumental orientation is more prominent. Under most circumstances, English is learnt as an instrument to achieve practical goals rather than as an interest or desire to identify with the target culture. It is general agreed that they have confidence to learn English (confidence to English learning—3.4848), while they show low self-evaluation towards their real performance (self-evaluation of performance in English learning—2.8131), which means they're not so satisfied with their performance and devotion to English learning. (These two numbers are compared because the standard deviation of these two groups are very near (0.6620

Table 4
Most Important Reason to Learn English

Answers available	<i>T</i> number of the same answer	Valid percent
To pass exams CET4 & CET6	13	19.70
To get permission for further education	11	16.67
To find a good job (with one answer of "to earn more money")	9	13.64
To use it in future life (with one answer of "to solve problems")	8	12.12
It is important and useful	6	9.09
To learn culture of English-speaking countries	4	6.06
To obtain some knowledge	3	4.55
For further development	3	4.55
Because I like English	3	4.55
I'm interested in English films	1	1.52
It is school requirement	1	1.52
To have an ability to live	1	1.52
To live comfortably	1	1.52
To improve myself	1	1.52
Because my parents ask me to learn	1	1.52

From the above list, we can see that the most important reasons for the subjects to learn English which ranks the first three are: "to pass exams CET4 & CET6", "to get permission for further education" and "to find a good job later". All of these are apparently instrumental orientation, actually examination oriented. And for the fourth one "to use it in the future", it is not so clear in what aspect English is used, but it is really surprising to find 7 answers with exactly the same expression. This indicates some students are still befuddled about the exact purpose of learning English. Even if they are aware of the usefulness of English, they are not clear about how to use

& 0.6435), which indicates the opinions to these two problems are to a large extent commonly shared by all the students investigated). Besides, it seems that more students investigated prefer to achieve an advanced level of English (4.1212) rather than only an intermediate level (3.9394). They have high expectancy towards English as well as English learning.

2.2 The Most Important Reason for English Learning

The answers to the open question "The most important reason for you to learn English is _____." are presented and analyzed in the following Table 4. In order to classify the answers, some necessary changes about the expressions subjects use have been rearranged, but no change has been made concerning the content of the answers.

or where to use English in the future. And for the seventh one "to obtain some knowledge", students, who have got this opinion, regard English as an approach to get more educated, and this is also instrumental orientation. Among all of the answers, only 7 are entirely integrative orientation, with 4 of them "to learn culture of English-speaking countries" and 3 of them "because I like English".

2.3 Differences About Motivation

In order to look into the differences concerning motivation between Arts Department and Science Department, a

graph was made to make a comparison. As what is shown in the following graph, students from Science Department attach more importance to English and English learning. They demonstrate distinctly more positive attitude towards English language and English classes. Besides, students from Science Department are a little bit more motivated no matter for integrative orientation or instrumental orientation. But their differences about the instrumental orientation are more obvious, with students for Science Department being more instrumental motivated, as they have to use English much more often to obtain the latest development about their discipline in the world from either academic books or journals. What's more, since it is more likely for the students from Science Department to pursue further education abroad after graduation, they are more aware of the significance of good command of English language for their post graduate application.

In addition, both of the two groups of the students have English use anxiety at almost the same level. They feel somewhat uneasy when talking with others in English. While students from Science Department seem

to have more confidence towards English learning, they believe they have the ability to learn English well. But at the same time, the self-evaluation of the students from Science Department towards their own performance is much lower. They seem to be less satisfied with what they've done in English as well as their current English level. Later, when talking with their teacher, I got the information that students from Science Department are a little more active in English classes, and they like to get fully involved in the class and speak loudly when a question is put forward by the teacher. While, students from Arts Department are more steadfast in the classroom, it seems that they would speak out the answer to a question after a period of consideration instead of shouting out loudly without any hesitation. This may help us to find out the reason why students from Science Department are more confident while speaking English—they would like to speak immediately no matter their answer is right or wrong, but when they find they've made a wrong answer, they become less satisfied with their current performance on English learning.

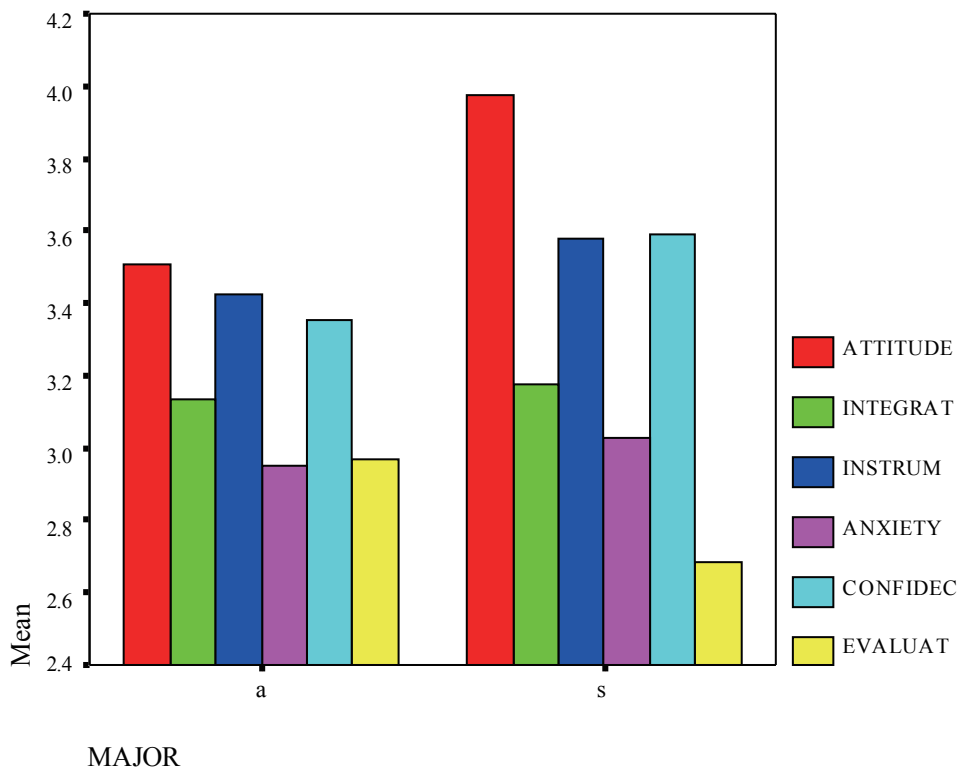


Figure 1
Comparison Between Art and Science

Notes. As full name of each item compared couldn't be typed under SPSS program, some incomplete expressions are used here. The full expression should be: a—subjects from Arts Department; s—subjects from Science Department; ATTITUDE—attitude to English and English learning; INTEGRAT—integrative oriented motivation; INSTRUM—instrumental oriented motivation; ANXIETY—L2 use anxiety; CONFIDEC—confidence to English learning; EVALUAT—Self-evaluation of performance in English learning.

CONCLUSION

Although this is only a research at a small scale, it reflects the present situation of university students' attitude and motivation towards English learning.

Firstly, most of the non-English-major students learn English out of instrumental orientation with focus primarily on “to pass exams CET 4 & CET6”, “to get permission for further education”, “to find a good job”. Only a few students learn English out of the real love and

interest to the language itself and to the culture of English-speaking countries.

Secondly, for the subjects in this research, students from Science Department are a little more motivated than students from Arts Department, as they attach much more importance to English and English learning. However, they're far less satisfied with their devotion to English learning as well as their current English level.

Above all, the traditional classification towards motivation, i.e. the classification of integrative & instrumental vs. intrinsic & extrinsic motivation, is not so appropriate in describing the type of Chinese students' motivation. It is necessary and essential to classify Chinese students' motivation according to its own learning and cultural context, so as to better understand the present situation of Chinese learners of English.

Next, as most of the students' purpose of learning English is for exams, no matter the compulsory exams CET 4 or other exams as CET 6 or postgraduate entrance exam, the role of exams in students' motivation towards English learning is worth of consideration. Does it really facilitate English learning or prohibit the students' practical development of the skills about how to use English? Can students really develop their language competence through the stimulus of exams? How many students would like to learn English without the pressure of exams? As the new "Requirement of University English Teaching" has been put forward since January 2004, in which the development of students' listening and speaking abilities are stressed, what kind of exams can better examine the students' practical English level without bringing so many burdens to the students?

Lastly, the reason why students from Science Department attach more importance to English and English learning is worth of consideration and further investigation. Right now, students' language abilities has been taken into consideration and worked as basic criterion to group students while the college English classes are designed in most of the universities in China. It is the most encouraging achievements in college English curriculum reform for the past decade. English classes for non-English-majors in most Chinese universities are classified and organized on the basis of students' English proficiency at present. In the near future, it's time to put the element of major distinction into consideration as well. Different learning requirements should be set and English classes designed according to the need of the students with different majors. Teaching materials can be chosen in accordance with the students' major as well as their practical necessity.

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<http://www.zoltandornyei.co.uk/uploads/2004-kormos-dornyei-zif.pdf>

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