

Study of English Learning Motivation of Chinese Middle School Students

Rong Miao

School of Foreign Languages & Literature, Shandong University, Jinan 250100, China

Abstract

Motivation has been widely accepted as one of the cardinal factors that affect the success of second language Learning. This article focuses on the motivation type of the middle school students in English learning and their learning characteristics. The participants of the study are 188 middle school students from Middle School affiliated to Shandong University. Questionnaires and semi-structure interviews are used to collect the data. The results of this study demonstrate that the middle school students have five types of motivation. The learning characteristics are described from aspects of learning attitude, learning strategies, learning habits and so on.

Keywords

Learning Motivation; Motivation Types; English Learning Characteristics.

1. Introduction

Motivation has been widely accepted as one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second or foreign language (both referred to as L2) learning (Ellis, 1994). Studies have showed that motivation has close relation with the achievement of English learning. A vital factor to learn English efficiently is to ensure the middle school students to have proper motivations and optimistic learning attitudes toward English learning. This article focuses on two questions. One is the motivation type that the middle school students have and the other dimension is to analyze their learning characteristics.

2. Literature Review of Motivation

2.1. Definitions and Classifications of Motivation

There is no consistent definition and classification because of the complexity of motivation. The most influential L2 motivational researchers Gardner (1985) defined motivation with three components: motivational intensity, desire to learn the language and attitudes towards learning the language. Williams and Burden (1997) believe that motivation involves a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, sustaining interest, and exerting effort and pursuing. The universally accepted concept is that motivation concerns the direction and magnitude of human behavior, which includes three dimensions: the choice of a particular action, the persistence with it, and the effort expended on it.

Motivation has many classifications because of its definitions from different perspectives. Gardner and Lambert put forward integrative motivation and instrumental motivation, Deci and Ryan (1985) divided it into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. In China, Wen Qiufang focused on surface motivation and deep motivation, Gao Yihong put forward 7 factors of motivation and classified them into three types.

2.2. Motivation Theories in L2 Learning Context

Early studies of motivation originated from behaviorism. Skinner (1957) put forward the stimulation and response theory holding that the hedonic behaviors are positively reinforced

with reward tend to increase in frequency. Humanistic psychologist considers motivation as people's attempt to fulfill their potentials as human beings, which is closely associated with Abraham Maslow's needs theory. Cognitive motivation theory in educational psychology is seen to be a function of human thought processes. Those theories focus on different aspects of the complexity of human motivation and make great contribution to L2 motivation theories.

The most influential motivation theory in the L2 fields has been proposed by Gardner and his colleagues who were the pioneers of scientific research in L2 context. The motivation theory has four distinct areas: 1) the construct of the integrative motive; 2) the socio-educational model; 3) the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB); 4) the extended L2 motivation construct. Gardner (1985) pointed out that integrative orientation includes three components: integrativeness, attitudes towards the learning situation and motivation. Since Deci and Ryan's (1985) put forward the theory of intrinsic/extrinsic motivation and self-determination theory (SDT), it has a widespread influence on mainstream psychology. An aspect of self-determination theory that has been applied to the L2 field has been the emphasis on fostering learner autonomy to increase student motivation.

Dörnyei constructed a framework of motivation and he conceptualized motivation on three levels: 1) language level; 2) learner level; 3) learning situation level. According to Gardner's theory, Dörnyei divided it into integrative motive and instrumental motive. He also proposes L2 motivational self-system which has three notions at its center: 1) Ideal L2 Self, 2) Ought-to L2 Self, 3) L2 Learning Experience (Dörnyei, 2009).

2.3. Research Gap and Research Questions

A great deal motivation studies in China initiated from 1980s, but observational method is rarely used. This study uses Gao's questionnaire and classification to research the motivation of Chinese middle school students. The author has observed the middle school students for a month intending to find the type of motivation and analyze their learning strategies by their behaviors and interviews.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants and Instruments

The participants of the study are 188 middle school students from Middle School affiliated to Shandong University. The interviewees were typically selected by their motivation analysis and performance after observation.

The instruments used in the study include two questionnaires, an interview and SPSS 25.0. The motivation type questionnaire consists of participants' information and 30 items that are designed on the base of the Undergraduates' English learning motivation study by Gao et al (2003). The learning strategy questionnaire is from Oxford in his book *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know*.

3.2. Data-Collection and Analysis

The valid questionnaire is 188 and there were 6 middle school students were selected in the interviews. This interview questions focused on students' current situation of English learning, their study habits the attitude on motivation. The author has stayed with the students for a month to analyze their learning characteristics. This article describes the main motivation type and analyzes the valuable items. The learning characteristics were analyzed by the interview and the students' daily performance.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Motivation Types of Chinese Middle School Students

Table 1. Results of Descriptive Analysis of Motivation Type

N	Factors	Description	Mean Value	Grand Mean
1	Individual Development	Item 13 Useful communicative tool Item 30 Symbol of being well educated Item 29 Steeping stone to success Item 12 Getting good result in future Item 14 Acquiring a sense of achievement Item 16 Finding a job Item 7 Proving study ability Item 10 Gaining acceptance	4.09 3.66 3.56 3.54 3.54 3.53 2.89 2.55	3.42
2	Immediate Achievement	Item 15 Learning the other subjects well Item 17 Keeping informed of world	3.47 3.10	3.29
3	Grade	Item 11 Entering a key high school Item 2 Demands of parents and colleges Item 4 Learning result Item 3 Desire to enter a good school	3.53 3.24 3.13 3.11	3.25
4	Intrinsic Interest	Item 20 Liking English song/movie Item 18 English culture and people Item 19 Liking English learning Item 23 Liking English literature Item 21 Liking English itself Item 1 Liking English at the first sight	3.60 3.36 3.05 3.03 2.92 2.86	3.14
5	Social Responsibility	Item 24 Contributing to the prosperity of China Item 25 Living up to parents' expectation Item 22 letting the world know about China	3.24 3.22 2.81	3.09
6	Going Abroad	Item 26 Searching for better opportunities of being educated and employed abroad Item 27 Experiencing the culture abroad Item 28 Emigrating broad	3.49 3.46 2.02	2.99
7	Learning Situation	Item 8 Quality of the English lessons Item 5 English teacher Item 9 English teaching materials Item 6 Class environment	3.18 2.85 2.26 2.20	2.62

The results are shown in Table 1. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the validity. The overall mean of motivation is 3.11 (>3), which indicates that the participants responded with a medium degree of motivation in learning English. The main English learning motivation type of middle school students are listed in the first five factors.

Factor 1 is about improving personal ability. Most of the middle school students have this motivation. English as a compulsory course, the students can undoubtedly realize its importance. Factor 2 is concerning achievement. The learners aim to know well about the world and improve themselves by learning English. Grade is the direct factor to push the middle school students to learn English from the result of factor 3. As can be seen from factor 4, amount of middle school students do not like English itself while they enjoy the culture. The interest can be cultivated by English literature and English songs/movies. Factor 5 relates to social

responsibility. To meet the parents' expectation and contribute to the prosperity of China can also be a positive force for students to learn English. According to the survey, the participants show strong tendencies to go abroad to experience the culture and search for better opportunities of being educated and employed.

Among the three types of motivation, instrumental motivation is the most remarkable one that students have. The mean score of instrumental is 3.32, and the first three factors all belong to instrumental motivation, which indicates that most of the students have strong instrumental motivation. The extrinsic motivation from outside pressure can inspire and maintain their learning, but it is harder to last than the intrinsic motivation. In this research, participants not only show the inner interest for English but also express their desire to disseminate Chinese culture in English.

4.2. English Learning Characteristics

English learning characteristics were analyzed by a questionnaire and an interview as well as the research's observation. The learning characteristics include learning strategies, learning style, learning habit and so on.

The students are classified into two groups: group A are the top students and group B are the ordinary students. They all have strong instrumental motivation and regard English as a useful tool. They have applied different study strategies (cognitive strategies, social strategies and affective strategies) during English learning and they always think independently and bravely express their ideas in class. Under the teachers' instruction, they have formed some good habit, but rarely have their own plan to learn English.

The students have some different characteristics. With regard to learning strategies, cognitive strategy and metacognitive strategy are used more frequently in group A. It's worth noting that group B students have higher frequency of use in affective strategies. Group B students attach importance to their affective state and they try to control the anxiety caused by the English learning process. Group A students have more verbal participation, dominating others and self-assurance. Both the two groups are active participants during the class discussion and they always volunteer to answer questions with high accuracy.

5. Conclusion

First, according to Gao's questionnaire, five types of learning motivation of middle school students are found: individual development motivation, immediate achievement motivation, grade, Intrinsic Interest motivation and social responsibility motivation. Second, according to the classroom observation, this article states the learning characteristics from the aspects of learning attitude, learning strategies, and learning habits. The findings of the study indicate that it is important to motive learners to study English and analyze their learning characteristics. This study will benefit English teachers and learners in their practice.

The teachers can consciously train the students in cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies and instruct students to apply learning strategies appropriately. The learners should keep concentration and effort in the face of various situations and organize some activities to exchange their learning strategies in order to benefit from other valuable approaches.

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