

LEARNING MOTIVATION OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE

LEARNING

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Abstract

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The problem presented in this paper is to identify what is the relationship between the college students' motivation and their foreign language learning? To what extent does college students' motivation affect their enthusiasm for foreign language learning? Also, another objective is to discover the corresponding countermeasures for college students in their English learning. A brief review of literature on the previous studies of learning motivation was conducted. A second review of literature relating to the related definitions, classifications, causes for the existence of foreign language learning motivation, and relations with other variables were conducted. Through a review of the literature, based on the actual situation of college students, a list of corresponding countermeasures of what students and teachers should do were summarized and recommendations were made.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Scholars and experts from different countries focused on the study of learning motivation. Since education has become increasingly important in the world today, motivation has been a major research topic in psychology and education. The topic is, of course, important in the context of English Language Learning (ELL also called English as a Second Language (ESL)

It is customary for people to divide the motivation into extrinsic motivation and the intrinsic motivation. According to Deci and Ryan (1985), extrinsic motivation is considered when it comes from a person's outward environment. Within the learning context, students' desire to get peers' respect, teachers' or parents' praise, high grades or admission to a university belongs in the domain of extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation occurs when people do activity for their own sake, when no external pressure is applied or promise of reward is offered (Deci and Ryan, 1985).

In the context of language learning, motivation has been connected to learners' attitudes towards the culture and the target language. This approach to viewing motivation has been widely adopted since Gardner and Lambert (1972) began distinguishing motivation into instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. According to Gardner and Lambert (1972), integrative motivation leads people to learn for the sake of learning. That is, one has an inner desire to learn, for example, some students learn foreign language because they want to become residents in a new society that uses the target language. Instrumental motivation is normally characterized by the desire to obtain something practical. It leads people to learn for external reasons, such as getting good grades, or passing an examination.

Statement of the Problem

The questions to be addressed in this paper include the following:

1. What is the relationship between the college students' motivation and their foreign language learning?
2. To what extent does college students' motivation affect their enthusiasm for foreign language learning?

Definition of Terms

Motivation: Motivation is the internal process that initiates, maintains and guides external behavior, and has always been an important variable in education and learning (Slavin, 2003; Woolfolk, 2004).

Extrinsic motivation: Extrinsic motivation has traditionally been seen as it refers to engaging in an activity because of its outcomes Deci and Ryan (1985).

Intrinsic motivation: Intrinsic motivation deals with the behavior performs for its own sake, in order to experience pleasure and satisfaction such as the joy of doing a particular activity or satisfying one's curiosity Deci and Ryan (1985).

Integrative motivation: Integrative motivation has been identified as the learner's direction with regard to the goal of learning Gardner and Lambert (1972).

Instrumental motivation: Instrumental motivation is normally characterized by the desire to obtain something practical Gardner and Lambert (1972).

Delimitations of Research

The research was conducted in and through the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, over ninety (90) days. Primary searches were conducted via the

Karrmann Library through EBSCO host with ERIC, Academic Search Elite and Google/Google Scholar as the primary search engines. Key search topics included “learning motivation”, “foreign language learning”, and “ESL”.

Method of Approach

A brief review of literature on the previous studies of English language leaning motivation was conducted. In addition, a second review of literature relating to the related definitions, classifications, causes for the existence of foreign learning motivation, and relations with other variables were conducted. The findings were summarized and recommendations were made.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In recent years, educational experts from different countries pay more and more attention to personal factor in teaching. Among these factors, motivation has been widely accepted by teachers and researchers as one of the key factors that can influence the rate and success of learning. Teaching method is a form, and the purpose of taking a teaching method is to stimulate the learners' motivation.

There are many aspects which can influence the students' motivation, only when we realize the explicit direction of teaching method, can we get successful achievement. This chapter provides previous studies on some definitions for the terms in the study and a review of the research work on the cause of existence of learning motivation, the classifications of it and the relationships between affect and motivation.

Definitions of Motivation

Motivation is defined in different ways by different researchers, but they seem to agree that motivation is in psychological terms that which is responsible for determining human behavior by energizing it and giving it direction. In other words, motivation is the reason behind a certain action.

Lumsden (1994) believes that learners' motivation includes the desire to participate in the learning process, and McCombs (1999) states that motivation generates a predisposition to learning and a perception of the value of that learning.

Motivation is also defined by psychologists. According to Brehm and Self (1989), the aspect of motivation often used in psychology involves potential and arousal motivation. Potential motivation "is created by needs and/or potential outcomes and the expectation that

performance of a behavior will affect those needs and outcomes” (Brehm & Self, 1989, p. 111).

Arousal motivation, on the other hand, only occurs “to the extent that the required instrumental behavior is difficult, within one’s capacity, and is justified by the magnitude of potential motivation” (Brehm & Self, 1989, p. 111).

Classifications of Motivation

To satisfy different needs of research into motivation, researchers classify motivation into different categories.

Intrinsic Motivation and Extrinsic Motivation

One of the most general and well-known distinctions in motivation is intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation as Vallerand (1997) reports. Intrinsic motivation deals with the behavior performs for its own sake, in order to experience pleasure and satisfaction such as the joy of doing a particular activity or satisfying one’s curiosity. It refers to engaging in an activity without receiving any apparent reinforcement, such as simply for enjoyment (Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1992). There are three types of intrinsic motivation have been identified: intrinsic motivation to know, intrinsic motivation to accomplish things, and intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation. Intrinsic motivation to know involves performing an activity because of the pleasure that is experienced when one learns something new. Intrinsic motivation to accomplish things is defined as participating in an activity because of the satisfaction that is derived from achieving or creating something. Intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation involves performing an activity because of the stimulating sensations one receives from participating. Therefore, intrinsic motivation is seen as a characteristic of self-determined behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

According to Dornyei (1994), extrinsic motivation has traditionally been seen as

something that can undermine intrinsic motivation, and it refers to engaging in an activity because of its outcomes, such as job performance, pay, or promotion. In language learning, motivation usually refers to learners' desires and efforts to learn. However, in China, most students are affected by a lot of extrinsic motivators, such as English is a compulsory course, or success on examinations may be required for graduation.

Unlike intrinsically motivated behaviors, extrinsically motivated behaviors are not caused by an intense interest in a particular activity. Extrinsically motivated behaviors are instrumental in nature and are considered a means to an end (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991).

According to Deci et al (1991), there are three types of extrinsic motivation: external regulation, interjected regulation, and identified regulation. These three types of regulation are ordered along an autonomy continuum with external regulation being the least self-determined and identified regulation being the most self-determined. However, it is important to note that extrinsically motivated behaviors should be conceptualized as more controlled behaviors when compared with intrinsically motivated behaviors.

Integrative Motivation and Instrumental Motivation

Integrative motivation has been identified as the learner's direction with regard to the goal of learning. According to Gass and Selinker (1994), integrative motivation refers to people learning for the sake of learning. That is, one has an inner desire to learn. For example, some students learn foreign language because they want to become residents in a new society that uses the target language in its social communication. Finegan (1999) also states that Integrative motivation typically underlies successful acquisition of a native-like pronunciation.

Instrumental motivation is normally characterized by the desire to obtain something practical. It refers to people learning for external reasons. For example, some students learn

foreign language because they need to improve their language skills in order to receive a promotion or pass a language exam (Gass & Selinker, 1994).

An earlier assumption is that an integrative orientation might be better at promoting motivation because such a goal is more likely to sustain the long term effort (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Later research also shows that the two factors are related to each other (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). More recently, however, Gardner and Masgoret (2003) demonstrate the positive relationships between the attitudinal and motivational variables and achievement, based on a number of studies. They argue that the conflicting results in the literature are more likely due to mutability in conceptions of motivational constructs in different studies.

Causes for the Existence of Foreign Language Learning Motivation

Gardner (1985) defined foreign language (FL) learning motivation as “the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity”(p.10). Motivation is thus a complex set of variables referring to such aspects as effort exerted to fulfill a goal, a desire to learn the language, and favorable attitudes toward language learning. While Gardner and Lambert’s (1972) constructs of integrative and instrumental orientation have received the most empirical attention, recent research demonstrates that the construct is much more complex and fluid than what these two categories can cover (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991).

In a more recent study, Tremblay and Gardner (1995) addressed the problem associated with the FL-specific conceptualization of motivation and investigated the relationship of new measures of motivation to each other, to existing measures of attitudes and motivation, and to achievement. All these findings seem to point to the need for an alternative approach that better accounts for motivation in EFL contexts.

Note also that there has been a surge of theoretical and empirical studies in motivation research in the field of general education. Learners are often described as being purposeful and motivated by the achievement goals they are pursuing, for example, mastery goals and performance goals (Dweck, 1986). With a mastery goal, learners are oriented toward developing new skills, enhancing their level of competence, or achieving a sense of mastery based on self-referenced standards (Ames, 1992). Performance goals, on the other hand, indicate that the task choice and pursuit process are built on learners' concerns about their ability level (Dweck, 1986).

To these two types of goal orientations, Meece et al. (1988) added a third category, work-avoidant goals. Learners who adopt this goal often finish their work with a minimal amount of effort, eliciting help from others or simply guessing at answers when they are expected to complete their work. Hayamizu, Ito, and Yoshizaki (1989) also found three achievement goal tendencies but categorized them differently: a learning goal similar to a mastery goal, a performance goal 1, and a performance goal 2. Learners with a performance goal 1 orientation have a tendency to work in order to gain approval and avoid negative judgment from their parents, teachers, and peers. By contrast, learners with a performance goal 2 orientation work at their studies for utilitarian reasons, such as achieving good grades, passing examinations, and advancing in school.

Foreign Language Learning Motivation and Other Variables

Affect is a state of emotional feelings, concerns and passions of a learner. Four types of learning activities must be present in every learning experience, such as inclusion, attitude, meaning and competence (Wlodkowski, 2008). Utilizing attitudinal activities during a learning process promotes favorable attitudes toward learning. Meaningful activities support positive

attitudes toward learning. For example, motivation and self-assurance are found to be important in promoting successful in learning. Doubting about one's ability is related to worse performance (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995). Affect is also influenced by organizational and individual factors such as organizational culture and climate, opinions of co-workers and supervisors, attitude towards change, degree of frustration and degree of determination and gratification in utilizing newly acquired knowledge and skills (Wlodkowski, 2008).

Another development in the motivation literature informs the current research into foreign language anxiety. While motivation has traditionally been considered to stem from the learners, recent researcher suggests it as a multifaceted and dynamic variable (Dornyei, 2005). It is seem as related to instructor and instructional practice and the types of activities students are engaged in, and thus evolves continuously in the interaction between the learner and the learning environment (Julkunen, 2001). Thus, the role of motivation is likely to differ according to cultural contexts as well. For example, Mizuno (1992) found that Japanese students were more concerned about what others would think of them, with a strong tendency toward ego-social goals. On the other hand, non-westernized female learners of English in Bombay attained higher scores on a cloze test when they had instrumental motivation. The fact that motivation correlates with and thus affects language self-confidence (Dornyei, 1994) and that learner in different instructional settings and cultural contexts are associated with different types of motivations also underscores the need to link anxiety and motivation and to examine the variables in relation to context-specific factors.

Reviews on early studies revealed that there were associations between students' perceptions towards their classroom environments and their motivations. Nowadays, many classroom environment studies continue to investigate environment-outcomes associations for

different classrooms in different countries that using different outcome variables (Chua, 2006). In recent years, researchers continue to work on classroom environment studies using classroom environment dimensions as a variable to evaluate different independent variables. For example, Allen & Fraser (2007) did the investigation of the differences in perceptions of students and their parents towards the actual and preferred language learning environments in South Florida, USA. What's more, in the study of Nair and Fisher (2001), the independent variables investigated were the differences between students' and instructors' actual and preferred perceptions of their classroom learning environments at the senior secondary and tertiary levels of education. These recent studies also found there were associations between students' learning motivations and their perceptions of psychosocial characteristics of their classroom environment.

The importance of research on motivation has many implications for teaching. In the next chapter a brief summary of conclusions from the research is provided and teaching suggestions are discussed.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Clearly, the affective state of interest is a connective component of motivation and activity. The interest links motivation, affect and other activities. And the feeling of interest involves motivation, affect, directed attention and cognition. Fredrickson (2001) defines interest as a momentary thought-action tendency that involves an impulse to explore. It is very important for teachers to develop students' interest to improve their motivation of the foreign language learning.

An interesting finding was the interaction effect between students' group status (successful or unsuccessful) and heritage connection. It was found that successful non-heritage students had more positive attitude toward the foreign language they were learning and had lower anxiety than unsuccessful non-heritage students. However, heritage students exhibited no differences, with both groups having high positive attitude and overall low anxiety, which can be considered protective factors for learning. It is students without heritage connection that need teachers' special attention as their attitudes and anxiety levels can be influenced by their success or failure. Upon developing negative attitudes toward the foreign language class and having high anxiety, maladaptive learning patterns can arise, which may result in low achievement (Hsieh, 2008).

The significant impact of students' self-efficacy and attitude towards the language learning on students' persistence and success is without question. However, the key is to identify ways to help learners develop high self-efficacy perceptions and positive attitudes and optimize their motivation to reach success. Researchers have suggested that teachers may be able to increase students' self-efficacy and attitude by encouraging students to set concrete and realistic goals and

providing positive but accurate feedback. Teachers should also implement strategies to improve students' quality of work and teach students to appreciate the effort they put into each learning task. In addition, beginning a foreign language lesson with open-ended questions, setting realistic expectations for performance, and using a variety of teaching methods and learning strategies can also help students develop high self-efficacy for learning the language, reduce anxiety, and optimize the learning experience.

In addition, many academic institutions are now moving towards greater incorporation of online learning environments, remarkably few questions have been asked about how students' motivation might impact their achievement in these environments and their preferences for them. According to Palloff and Pratt (2003), online learning might not match students' preferred learning style, according to their study, learners want engaging learning environments that promote direct interaction and immediate feedback with professors and students. Consideration of these criteria in light of students' motivation will likely inform the design of effective learning environment for all students, both online and offline.

In a word, the best way of language learning is considered to be self-motivated learning. When students are intrinsically motivated to learn a language, they not only want to learn the language, but also achieve more positive results (Chan & Ahern, 1999).

This study is limited in that we only examined college students. Future research is needed to determine whether similar relations between motivation and language learning are present for younger students. If we tell the importance of English, we will help their learning. They must understand that they will learn English for themselves.

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