

A Correlative Analysis between Senior High School Students' English Learning Motivations and English Achievements

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Abstract

There are some problems in English learning of high school students, which is mostly caused by lack of learning motivation. How to improve the students' learning motivation is a difficult problem to the teachers. This article will discuss four aspects of learning motivation: learning interest, extrinsic goal, self-efficacy and knowledge values. The writer conducted a questionnaire survey of English learning motivation on high school students, and used SPSS (21.0) software to analyze the overall situation and difference of high-school students in these four categories of motives. In this paper, according to the research results, the writer put forward several suggestions to enhance the students learning motivation, to improve the students' English level, which has the important enlightenment function for English teaching.

Key words: learning motivation learning interest, extrinsic goal, self-efficacy, knowledge values

1. Introduction

In recent years, the problem of learning motivation has attracted much attention of researchers who discussed it from different perspectives, and the foreign research mainly refers to the theoretical construction of students. However, its research results in foreign language teaching is difficult to apply in China because

of the different environment. From the domestic point of view, the object of study of foreign language learning motivation is mainly college students, while the primary, middle, and senior school students lack systematical study of learning motivation. But, we should recognize that students begin to learn a foreign language in primary or secondary school, and the foundation of foreign language is laid down in the primary stage, which is a very important period of foreign language learning. The study of foreign language learning motivation in primary and middle school is of great significance to teaching (Qiu Chuanwei, 2005). In fact, because students learn a foreign language in the school, so they often do not have a chance to use the language in authentic context. For a start, the student can actively participate in classroom teaching activities for interest, but when the language learning becomes more complex, the students will find that they often make many mistakes, then they will gradually lose interest, eventually abandoning the effort. (Gong Yafu, 2003).

In high school, some students lose interest in learning English. Therefore, investigation and analysis of senior high school students' English learning motivation is helpful to improve English teaching. Motivation is the drive for learning, which can affect the students how to make use of all opportunities to use or to practice English in a great extent, and it is one of the most effective factors to predict learning achievement. Stimulating and maintaining students' English learning motivation are crucial problems in English teaching.

There are two trends of learning motivation research: one is to discuss the components of motivation from the theories and proposed theoretical framework; the other is to use the empirical method to investigate the inner structure of learning motivation. However, the latter only lists the components of motivation, did not discuss the relationship between them, what's more, its lack of empirical support. (Qin Xiaoqing and Wen Qiufang, 2002).

The study of English learning motivation in China shows that most researchers follow the classical and extension mode to explore the ways to promote learning motivation. The objects of those study are mostly college students, and they account for 80% in all empirical studies, while the study of students in middle and primary schools are rarely involved (Wang Xiaomin, Zhang Wenzhong, 2003). The objects of this study are senior high school students and attempts to explore the impact of learning motivation on English achievement from four aspects: learning interest, extrinsic goal, self-efficacy, knowledge values, and to propose some suggestions to promote learning effects.

2. Literature review

2.1 The research in abroad

In the 1830s, Murray put forward "need for achievement". At the end of the 1840s, McClellan used Thematic Apperception Test to measure achievement motivation, and studied Murray's theory of "need for achievement". In the mid 1860s, Atkinson put forward the mode of achievement motivation. In the early 1980s, Timothy's research confirmed that the effect of external reinforcement on the original intrinsic motivation. Bandura thought that people generate intrinsic motivation for activities on the condition of that they recognize their own ability, and then he put forward the "self-efficacy ". Dornyei absorbed the relevant theoretical research of mainstream psychology of motivation and presented a three dimension structure model of foreign language learning motivation. The model from the language level, the learner level and

learner situation level to define and measure the foreign language learning motivation.

At the end of 1950s, Gardner and Lambert proposed the learning motivation of the classic mode from the perspective of social psychology: instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. Most of the scholars and researchers have accepted the dichotomy of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation, with integrative motivation is more important. Another classical concept is "intrinsic motivation" and "extrinsic motivation". The former is the order from the activities of language learning to obtain happiness and satisfaction from the activities of language learning, while the latter will regard it as a way to reach a goal. The two is considered corresponding, that is, integrative motivation is intrinsic motivation, instrumental motivation is extrinsic motivation. Krashen analysis foreign language learning motivation from the linguistic point of view, and put forward the famous monitoring mode.

2.2 The research in China

In China, many researchers have also found that the learning motivation plays an important part in English learning, Wen Qiufang (1996; 2002), Qin Xiaoqing (2002), Liu Xiaoling (2002). Many Chinese researchers, such as Hua Huifang made many of contribution to this field. The research on Chinese English learners' motivation has mostly followed Gardner's (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) classic model and its expansions concerning motivation types (e.g., Gao Yihong, 2004; Qin Xiaoqing & Wen Qiufang, 2002; Shi Yongzhi, 2000; Wang Xiangling & Liu Xiaoling, 2002; Wen Qiufang & Wang Haixiao, 1996; Wen Qiufang, 2001; Wu Yi'an, 1993). Hua (1998) and Shi (2002) both affirmed that most of the Chinese learners have a "certificate motivation". Wen's (1993, 1996, 2001) research shows that it is common among Chinese learner to have surface motivations. Gao Yihong (2004) put forward that the motivation of Chinese English learners can be classified into instrumental motivation, cultural motivation and situational motivation. Those motivations also can be divided into intrinsic motivations and extrinsic motivations. The long-term success is relative to intrinsic motivations, while the short-term success is closely with extrinsic motivations (Hua Huifang,1998). Shen Deli (1991) points out that the learning motivations are correlative with the achievements.

3. Research design

3.1 Research question

The research questions of this study are following:

- (1) What is the overall situation of English learning motivations in senior high school?
- (2) Are learning motivations and English achievements correlated with each other?
- (3) Are there any differences in English learning motivations between male and female students?

3.2 Research subject

The participants of this research were 150 students from two classes in the same grade of a senior high school (The second Middle School in NanBu). The two classes were from different majors, but in the same English level. They also shared the same language learning context and materials and English teacher.

3.3 Research instruments

The writer used a questionnaire, SPSS(21.0) to analyze the data. The questionnaire used five Likert-scales from “totally disagree” (1 point) to “totally agree” (5 points). There were 20 questions, including 4 items of learning interest, 4 items of extrinsic goal, 5 items of self-efficacy and 4 items of knowledge values.

3.4 Data collection

On November 13, 2014, the writer sent out questionnaires in person and gave some explanation and instructions to the subjects. 150 questionnaire papers were sent out and 139 are valid. The valid rate was 93%.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 The overall analysis of English motivation

In order to obtain a detail and full description of the whole situation of English learning motivation of senior high school students, we used descriptive statistics to analyze all the data and the comprehensive results are showed in the table below.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of the Overall Situation of Learning Motivations

	N	minimum	maximum	mean	standard deviation
Learning interest	139	1.25	5.00	3.3058	.74761
Extrinsic goal	139	1.50	4.75	3.6504	.61895
Self-efficacy	139	1.75	5.00	3.4424	.62794
Knowledge values	139	1.00	5.00	3.3748	.86004
Total number	139				

From this table, we may find extrinsic goals (mean=3.6504) are the highest. That is most students think that getting high scores of English is the only way they can further their studies by attending university. Since the subjects are grade three students, they have much stronger desires to get the high scores. However, among these items, learning interest (mean=3.058) are the lowest. In term of this data, it shows that subjects lack of the interest of learning English. As the says going, interest is best teacher. Only the subjects have interest in learning English, can they have a good master of it. So the English teachers may take advantage of pictures, videos, multimedia to make English classes more meaningful and interesting.

Besides, we may read from this table the overall motivation is relatively low, and the knowledge values are not too high. That implies that most of the subjects understand the importance of English scores, not recognized the useful of English.

4.2 The relationship between English learning motivations and English achievements

In order to test the correlation between English learning motivations and English achievements, the writer used a correlation to analyze the data. The results show in the table:

Table 2 Correlation between Learning Motivations and English Scores

	Learning interest	Extrinsic goal	Self-efficacy	Knowledge values
Score Pearson Correlation	.220**	-.079	.236**	.043
Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.354	.005	.615
N	139	139	139	96

From this table, we may know that learning interest has a positive relation with English achievement at the level of 0.05, and self-efficacy also has a significant relationship with English achievement at the level of 0.01, although the Pearson coefficient between these two variables and English scores are very low. That indicate the high learning interest and self-efficacy can contribute to getting high scores. For this reason, English teachers should try their best to improve the learning interest and self-efficacy of subjects. Extrinsic goals have a negative relationship with English scores. That implies the higher extrinsic goals the subjects have, the lower scores they get. Because the subjects want to get high scores, to be in the top, to get praise, so they have strong extrinsic motivation to learning English. However, when the motivation became press, it will have an adverse effect on English learning. Thus the utility psychological of subjects does not lead to a higher score, instead of making them got lower scores. While the Pearson coefficient of knowledge values is relatively high. It also can help the subjects to get the high scores. Nevertheless, we know knowledge values (mean=3.378 Table1) is relatively low. So it is necessary to make subjects recognize the importance of knowledge values.

4.3 Comparison of learning motivations between the male and female students

The writer conducted Independent Samples T-test to analyze the differences in English learning motivations between female and male students, and the results show in the table3.

Table 3 Independent Samples T-test

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(two_tailed)
Learning Interest	Equal Variances Assumed	.495	.483	-3.054	137	.003
	Equal Variances Not Assumed			-3.028	127.139	.003
Extrinsic goal	Equal Variances Assumed	3.182	.077	.253	137	.801
	Equal Variances Not Assumed			.259	136.231	.796
Self-efficacy	Equal Variances Assumed	.003	.954	-2.596	137	.010
	Equal Variances Not Assumed			-2.602	133.419	.010
Knowledge values	Equal Variances Assumed	9.067	.003	-1.819	137	.071
	Equal Variances Not Assumed			-1.742	98.129	.085

From this table, we can read that there is significant difference between females and males in learning interesting of English learning motivations. That is females have more interest than males have in English learning. This result agrees with of Bacon and Fineneman (1992) and Gardner and Lambert (1972), who

reported that females tend to show more favorable feelings to English learning. There are many reasons that may cause the difference. For example, males are more logical than females, while females have a stronger ability of memory and expression in language learning. What's more, it seems that females are born with interest in learning languages. Besides, imitation is one of the most important skills in learning a foreign language, and the language imitation ability of females is better than males. Therefore, females have higher self-concept of foreign languages, which means they have more interest in English learning than males. There are great differences between females and males in English movies, songs or literary works. Obviously, the learning interest is a significance aspect for the gender difference in English motivation of senior high school students.

However, there is no obvious difference between males and females in extrinsic goal, self-efficacy, and knowledge values.

4. Suggestions to improve English learning motivation of high school students

As the results show, the overall learning motivation of the subjects are relatively low, so it is indispensable to improve it. But English learning motivation of high school students are diversified, which demands English teachers to make good use of favorable factors to stimulate English learning motivation in the teaching process, and to promote English learning more efficiently. At the same time, the teachers also should avoid or eliminate the unfavorable factor which may reduce the accumulation of English learning, and raise interest in learning English in high school.

1. Raise teachers' awareness to lead students' motivation

Teachers play a key role in improving students' motivation. In order to achieve this purpose, teachers can create a positive language learning environment, take proper teaching methods and encourage students to learn. However, teachers often stress knowledge and ignore psychological factor in real teaching. Especially for English teachers in China, they are eager to implant knowledge, and they pay little attention to emotional objectives, so it's urgent to improve teachers' motivation awareness.

2. Create a positive learning environment

Many students attribute their failure in studying to bad learning environments, so English teachers should try their best to create a good classroom environment. A warm learning environment is good for students to study, such as put up some English newspapers and list some good articles. In relaxed learning environments, students can express their ideas freely, but in strict environments, students' motivation can't be motivated and their learning effect is poor.

3. Guide students to attribute correctly

According to attribution theory, the attribution in success and failure will have great influence to learning. Teachers should guide students to attribute correctly, but for most of excellent students, teachers should tell them that their ability is very important. Teachers should emphasize formative evaluation rather than summative evaluation and pay attention to develop students' overall language ability.

4. Help students to set up learning objectives

Setting up a correct objective is useful for students' learning. We can lead them to evaluate their performance, which can improve students' motivation and independence.

5. Focus on the understanding of teaching contents and forms

Teachers should be familiar to teaching contents, materials and students, take various methods to attract students and keep teaching contents in proper difficulty so that students can achieve learning objectives through their efforts. When students encounter difficulties in learning, teachers should solve problems with them.

Improving English achievement needs the teachers' and the students' integrated efforts. Except the suggestions to English teacher the writer refer in the fifth parts. For students' part, they should have a clear aim of learning, and establish positive attitudes towards English. What's more, it is very important for students to hard working. Only the students and English teachers make great efforts to improve learning motivation together, can they get great English achievement.

6. Conclusion

From the above findings and discussions, we can draw some conclusions:

1) Subjects do not have strong motivations in English learning. But, the motivation of extrinsic goals are comparably stronger, which contribute to their further learning. The subjects have realized that only gets high marks, can they get into university or go abroad.

2) Learning interest has closely relationship with English achievement, and the stronger favor they have, the higher scores they get.

3) Females and males have significance difference in English learning interest. Females have stronger memory ability and expressive ability, so it seems that females are born with favor in learning language.

The writer made a clear research between English learning motivation and English achievement, gave a detailed explanation of overall situation of learning motivation, the relationship between learning motivation and English achievement, and the difference of learning motivation between female and male students. Moreover, the writer gave some suggestions to improve learning motivation. Of course, there must be some disadvantage and limitations in this research. For instance, the size of subjects is not big enough and all of them are from the same school and the same grade. The results would be more convincing if the size of subjects is bigger.

All in all, English learning motivation is the source in learning, and it relates to students self-development and has direct influence to English grade. The writer hopes this thesis could cause educators to reflect and have a further exploration, which can improve English teaching.

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