

Research Paper Received Dec. 28, 2012 Revised Feb. 25, 2013 Accepted Mar. 10, 2013

An Investigation on the Relationship between Motivation and Learning Efficient

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Abstract: *In foreign language learning, motivation is a kind of drive and momentum which impluses to study foreign language. Regarded as the most important element in so many individual factors of language learning, the effection to learning efficiency can not be ignored. By introducing the definition of motivation , research situation about motivation in western countries and in our country and the motivation theories and its types, by analyzing the function of some correlation theories with motivation in language learning, the author carried on the motive investigation to junior II students from Changxing middle school in Guangzhou, and tried to prove that the good motivation can enhance learning efficient. Meanwhile, this paper is also attempt to enumerate some strategies and methods about how to motivate and train learning motivation so that foreign teachers can motivate learners' motivation and make it to be maintained, and then learners' study efficiency can be improved.*

key words: *motivation; foreign language learning; stratege; interesting; learning efficient*

1. Introduction

1.1 The background of the paper

In the past, people thought that if a student didn't do well in his study, it was the teaching method to be blame. As a result, much effort has been made to improve teaching methods, and countless theories of teaching method emerged accordingly, while little attention were paid to learners themselves. However, with the development of learning psychology, there have been more and more studies on learner motivation in the past four decades. Nowadays, learners' motivation has become an important concept in learning psychology. It is commonly believed that learning motivation has great effects on whether one can achieve success in his study

or not. Therefore, psychologists have divided motivation into different types and tried to identify what kinds of motivation can lead to success in study.

1.2 The purpose of the paper

Infants and young children appear to be propelled by curiosity, driven by an intense need to explore, interact with, and make sense of their environment. As one author puts it, "Rarely does one hear parents complain that their pre-schooler is 'unmotivated' " (James Raffini 1993). Unfortunately, as children grow, their passion for learning frequently seems to shrink. Learning often becomes associated with drudgery instead of delight. A large number of students--more than one in four--leave school before graduating. Many more are physically present in the classroom but largely mentally absent; they fail to invest themselves fully in the experience of learning

Student motivation naturally has to do with students' desire to participate in the learning process. But it also concerns the reasons or goals that underlie their involvement or noninvolvement in academic activities. Although students may be equally motivated to perform a task, the sources of their motivation may differ. A student who is intrinsically motivated undertakes an activity "for its own sake, for the enjoyment it provides, the learning it permits, or the feelings of accomplishment it evokes" (Mark Lepper 1988). An extrinsically motivated student performs "in order to obtain some reward or avoid some punishment external to the activity itself," such as grades, stickers, or teacher approval (Lepper). The term motivation to learn has a slightly different meaning. It is defined by one author as "the meaningfulness, value, and benefits of academic tasks to the learner--regardless of whether or not they are intrinsically interesting" (Hermine Marshall 1987). Another notes that motivation to learn is characterized by long-term, quality involvement in learning and commitment to the process of learning (Carole Ames 1990).

1.3 The layout of the paper

The body of this paper can be divided into 4 parts according to the definition of

motivation, the importance of motivation, the training up of the motivation, the maintenance of the motivation. Each part contains four aspects: firstly the theories that are related to the main idea; secondly the investigation in Changxing junior school, from which the data is collected; thirdly the analysis of the data, which includes the problems presented and at last several suggestions for solving the problems.

2. Literature review

2.1 Definition of motivation

Motivation can be defined in a number of ways. Generally, it is defined as a driving force that initiates and directs behavior. In other words, motivation is a kind of internal energy which drives a person to do something in order to achieve something. It is a temporal or dynamic state within a person which is not concerned with his/her personality. There are different types of motivation such as achievement motivation, affiliation motivation, competence motivation, power motivation, and attitude motivation. Learning is somewhat interrelated to motivation. In education, instructors also use motivation techniques in order to motivate the students to learn. It is essential to increase student motivation as it can make a student more competent. Also, motivation encourages self confidence and problem-solving skills. However, Learning motivation is a key factor determining whether students are successful or not in their learning.

2.2 Recent researches on learning motivation

All kinds of human behavior are caused by certain motivation. Keller defined motivation as the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid, and the degree of effort they will exert in that aspect. (H.D. Brown 2002:152) Ausubel (1968: 368-379) defined motivation from an angle of needs and identified six needs undergirding the construct of motivation: (1) the need for exploration; (2) the need for manipulation; (3) the need for activity; (4) the need for stimulation; (5) the need for knowledge; (6) the need for ego enhancement. While

Marion Williams and Robert L. Burden defined motivation from both the cognitive view and the social constructivist perspective: motivation is a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, which leads to a conscious decision to act, and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to attain a previously set goal (or goals). No matter how these definitions differ, motivation is commonly considered by psychologists as an inner drive, impulse, emotion, or desire that moves one to a particular action.

However, motivation is far more complicated. It varies from person to person and even intraperson. Therefore, psychologists came to divide motivation into different types as to gain a deeper understand of motivation. Atkinson considered achievement motivation, the need to achieve, as the core of motivation. And an individual's level of need to achieve interacts with the chances of success and the value that is placed on a successful outcome. Brown (2002:153) divided motivation into global motivation, situational motivation and task motivation. In Wen Qiufang's opinion, motivation falls into surface motivation and deep motivation. The most well known distinction is drawn between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. According to Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura's definition, when the only reason for performing an act is to gain a reward from outside, such as money, prizes, praise, the motivation is likely to be extrinsic. When the reason for performing an activity lies in the interest and enjoyment that generated by the activity itself rather than outside rewards, then the motivation is likely to be intrinsic. (H.D. Brown 2002:123) Though extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are not definitely exclusive from each other, a lot of research on motivation (see Crookes and Schmidt 1991; Brown 1990) strongly favor intrinsic motivation, and indicate that intrinsic motivation can keep an individual engaging in something longer.

2.3 The related theories

Under the great influence of cognitive psychology, people gradually realize that learners should be the subject in language learning, and their motivation has

significant influence on whether they can achieve success in language learning. But what kinds of motivation would lead to higher achievement in language learning?

The classification of motivation in language learning varies a lot. H.D.Brown (2002:153) divided motivation in language learning into global motivation, situational motivation, and task-oriented motivation. In his opinion these three types of motivation exist simultaneously in the process of foreign language learning, but with different level. Motivation in language learning is also divided into intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivated language learners learn foreign language out of their interest toward the language itself. While extrinsic motivated ones learn foreign language for extrinsic rewards such as passing an exam. Intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation are not mutually exclusive. In most cases learners are motivated by both of them. However, extrinsic motivation has obvious weakness, that is, when extrinsic rewards disappear, learners' desire to study would also be extinguished. One of the best-known and most influential classification of motivation in second language learning was made by Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1972), who classified it into integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation means the learner learns the language in order to take part in the culture of its people, to identify themselves with and become a part of that society. Instrumental motivation refers to motivation to learn the language for a career goal or other practical reason, such as reading technical material, translation and so forth.

With the development of the study of language learning, learning motivation has been found to be influenced by many factors such as emotions, age, gender, aim, anxiety and so on. Especially, the emotion plays the most important role in learning English. S.Krashen thought that emotion is controlling the motivation. Therefore, a questionnaire was designed to find out the relationship among these factors.

3. Method of the investigation

3.1 Subjects

All the students who did the questionnaires are from Guang Zhou ChangXing Middle School, including 95 students (43 girls, 52 boys). These students are

studying at the intermediate level.

3.2 Questionnaire

Learning Process Questionnaire was used in this investigation. This questionnaire is composed of 20 items, with each item representing a typical learning behavior or attitude. (Note: content of items can be found in the appendix.)

3.3 Data collecting

The questionnaires were handed out by teachers in ChangXing Middle School. Before the students do the questionnaires, the following points were explained to them to reduce the emotive influence on the objectiveness of the investigation,

① The aim of the questionnaire is to get a better understand of their feeling towards learning and their learning style.

② There are many different learning methods exist and the way to judge whether a learning method is good or not is to see whether it suits you instead of the correctness of the method itself. You are expected to answer the questions according to your true feeling, and you don't need to worry about whether it's correct or not.

③ This investigation is for the use of study, and it won't have any negative influence on you. Please finish the questionnaire by yourself and feel free to answer each question. If you have any question about the questionnaire, please ask your teacher.

After that, they were told what do the numbers following each item mean and how to make their own choice. The students were also required to write down their sex, grade and seat number.

The questionnaires were recollected when the students finish them.

Students' total scores of all the subjects as well as their English scores in last term's final exam were collected from their teachers.

Among the 95 questionnaires that were collected, all of the papers are valid. The valid proportion is 100%.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Data analysis of high score students

Among the 95 students, there are about 34 students that usually got high marks in English tests. The marks are collected from their unit test in this term. These 34 students always get more or less 80 points in each test, so they are classified to the superior section. The data collected for these 34 high score students are shown in table 1 .

Table 1 (more than 80 points)

| | strong / clear | weak / unclear |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Motivation | 29 | 5 |
| Interest | 19 | 15 |
| Aim | 28 | 6 |

According to the analysis, students with strong motivation may not have strong interest in learning tasks themselves, but they have strong desire to get better results in their study, to hold a higher status in their class, as well as to gain praise and rewards from others, and they usually adopt various learning methods such as rote learning, plan making to ensure good results in their study. Students with deep motivation have great interest in what they learn and they learn for developing themselves as well as understanding the world better, and accordingly they would use deep strategy like probing into the subjects they learn and the related areas, reading widely, getting a good mastery of study methods and so on. Deep motivation here is in fact intrinsic. Students with such kind of motivation are long-term motivated and initiatively.

4.2 Data analysis of middle level students

Based on the data, there are 47 students who studying in the middle level. Their scores are always just crossing the ruled lines. The data collected for these 47 students are shown in table 2 .

Table 2 (60-79 points)

| | strong / clear | weak / unclear |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Motivation | 39 | 8 |
| Interest | 12 | 35 |
| Aim | 18 | 29 |

Obviously, students with surface motivation are lower motivated. They neither have any interest in learning nor any desire to learn. What they do is just to cope with some tests and pass the exams. Since they learn passively, rote learning is used most in their study and no effort is made to gain a deeper understanding of what they learn.

4.3 Data analysis of inferior students

The last 14 students whose English is poor. They hardly passed any of their exams. The data is shown in table 3:

Table 3 (less than 60 points)

| | strong / clear | weak / unclear |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Motivation | 2 | 12 |
| Interest | 0 | 14 |
| Aim | 1 | 13 |

Quite clearly, these 14 students haven't any interest in learning English, either in learning other subjects. Their interests just focus on computer games, or just nothing. They also want to get a good mark, but without working hard. They just fantasizes success in one night, but never set a goal for themselves.

4.4 Discussion

The result shows that nearly 70% junior students are lack of learning motivation. One of the key reasons is that students are not aware of the value of English, and most students are not really conscious why they should learn English. they regard it as a

burden for they learn it simply because their parents or teaches ask them to. they learn it simply because they have to, or else they cannot receive their degree or cannot find a satisfactory job.

the characteristics of current English teaching are language-centered, teaching-centered and text-based. its ineffectiveness lies in the fact that it is difficult for students to apply what they have learned in communication. moreover, traditional deep-rooted teaching approaches are still popular in many schools, thus, learners are deprived of learning autonomy. The teacher and the student are not in a cooperative position, with teachers gaining absolute control over classroom activities. When students can't learn independently and creatively, their learning motivation is unconsciously affected.

5. Suggestions

5.1 arouse students' awareness of the value of English

the first step to help stimulate and maintain students' motivation (especially integrative motivation), is to build up students' awareness of the value of English. For instance, I let the target group's students discuss why they are not interested in English, and the group leader takes the main reason on the notebook. For example, "I can't go abroad. I needn't learn English". "English is very difficult and boring", and so on. Then ask the superior group's students to discuss what advantage to learn English well in their future career. The group leader takes main idea on the notes. For example, "If I know English, I can find a job easier." The two groups discuss each other. Then choose a representative in each groups to have a debate. The result shows that students can help students to realize the importance of learning English. What's more, English is more than a tool of communication. it is a carrier of culture.

5.2 Make the instruction interesting

In order to make students enjoy the English lessons as much as possible, in the process of teaching, teachers can use some flashcards, pictures, introduce the background of text, play recorder and English songs to attract the students. As we know, the more practice teacher give students in communicating in English, the more

able they will be to use English in the real world. Moreover, teachers should adopt student-centered teaching. Student-centered teaching is that students are enabled to reflect on what and how they have learned. The students' enthusiasm of learning can be aroused by this teaching method.

5.3 Setting up goals

Effected by traditional education system, learners study hard in the primary school, they overcome a lot of difficulties uneasily. At the beginning of entering middle school, they suddenly don't know what they aim to next. Only minority of the learners can rush out of the maze and helplessness and set up their correct goals. While the majorities are lack of the consciousness to have clear aims. As foreign teachers, they should help students set up learning goals, do rational near-future and future aims. It's proved that near-future and future aims can both play important roles in language learning. To integrative motivation and intrinsic motivation of learners, such as passing an examination, getting praises from teachers, teachers can not negative them peremptory. On the contrary, their endeavor should be positive, their improvements should be seen by themselves. Affirmation to their study potentials, maintenance to their choices and continuity of study tasks, all above can improve learners' confidence, can be useful to stimulate and maintain learners' intrinsic motivation, they can set up higher study goals.

5.4 Reading

“Motivation is of great importance when reading”. (Fancoise Grellet, 1981,18)
One reason is that we usually read is what we want to read. Another reason is being motivated means that we start reading the next prepared to find a number of things in it, expecting it find answers to a number of questions and specific information or ideas use are interested in.

6. Conclusion

Motivation is the most important aspect of affecting foreign language learning, and it is also one of the most initiative factors. If one has high motivation, especially integrative and intrinsic motivation, he or she has more chances to succeed. In foreign

language teaching, teachers should motivate and train integrative and intrinsic motivation. To those learners who are lacking in motivation, teachers could not hurry too much. Give them initiative feedback for their endeavor and stimulate their extrinsic motivation in order to let them enjoy learning. In the process of this, their intrinsic motivation can be stimulated and improved. Once learners have strong learning motivation, they would put their potentials into practice as possible as they can., the learning efficiency naturally can be improved at high bound.

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