



A Study on Strategies to Remotivate Chinese Vocational Students in English Learning in the Era of Informatization

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Abstract: This paper attempts to address, through qualitative research, the strategies to remotivate Chinese vocational students in English language learning. To achieve the objectives of the study, a questionnaire was designed to share the expectations. The study results showed that the same group of students ($n = 52$) were tested College English Test (CET) Band 4 respectively in 2022 and 2023 after receiving one-year Chinese Vocational Teaching for Autonomous Learning (CVTAL). The total scores obtained one year later turn out to be significantly different 1.684 ($df=48$), $P<0.05$. This was predicted by the authors' expectations. The two groups of paired results are correlated ($r=0.575$), showing the CVTAL method used by the authors did produce some impact to remotivate the Chinese vocational students' foreign languages Autonomous Learning (AL) ability. These findings highlight a new perspective for researches in motivation: the campus and the classroom.

Keywords: Demotivation, Remotivation, Strategy, Autonomous Learning (AL), Autonomous Learning Ability.

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

This part deals with the research background and literature review including the concept of motivation and its role in Chinese Vocational Teaching for Autonomous Learning (CVTAL) practice. Research on motivation for foreign language learning originated from Gardner and Lambert [1]. Their classic model of learning motivation constructed from a socio-psychological perspective and subsequent studies on second

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language learning motivation had a profound influence on motivation research for decades to come. Ellis [2] defined motivation as the efforts made by learners for language learning due to their needs and desires. Actually, as early as in 1938, Murray [3] had divided motivation into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to the interest in language learning itself, while extrinsic motivation stems from factors such as parental pressure, academic requirements, social expectations, rewards, and punishments.

Today, motivation is widely regarded as a key factor in the success of language learning. In the authors' research, the motivation for English learning among Chinese vocational students is greater than that of graduates, indicating a decline in motivation for English learning as time progresses in the investigation of "students' information-based autonomous English learning abilities"[4]. Currently, the primary driving force for university students' English learning is long-term instrumental needs. When third-year students lack the basically instrumental needs of English certificates and exam scores, their motivation for English learning weakens, leading to "demotivation" [5]. In 2018, the Chinese Ministry of Education issued the "National Standards for the Quality of Education in Foreign Language and Literature" for the first time, explicitly listing Autonomous Learning (AL) abilities as one of the competencies that foreign language majored students should possess [6]. Therefore, it is worthwhile to study how to stimulate motivation for foreign language learning, carry out "motivation rebuilding" [7], and improve students' autonomy and learning outcomes in foreign language learning.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the socio-psychological perspective of learning motivation faced challenges. As a result, research on motivation for foreign language learning gradually shifted from social-psychological environments to school and task contexts, and from singularity to diversity. Gui Shichun [8] conducted an initial investigation and analysis of the learning motivation among Chinese students of English majors from the perspective of social psychology. The study revealed a significant correlation between learning motivation, learning habits, and learning methods. Students with robust learning motivation were observed to actively engage in class discussions, demonstrate attentive listening, and display a greater sense of conscientiousness. The Deep Approach (DA) proposed by American professor François Victor Tochon [9], emphasizes open projects and peer collaboration to foster deep reflection in education. It prioritizes student autonomy and personalized curriculum based on their needs and interests. Tochon underscores three theories - self-efficacy, attribution, and self-determination - as crucial for motivating students in project-based learning. Cai Shenrong and Wei Zhu [10] investigated the impact of an online learning community project on university students' motivation in learning Chinese as a foreign language. Pimanmas Ninsuwan [11] found out both reading aloud technique and motivation are required to develop students' abilities in term of reading comprehension. A very influential researcher about motivation is the Gizem Girgin Öztürk [12] who conducted an empirical study demonstrating the effectiveness of Tochon's DA techniques in increasing Turkish student motivation and proficiency English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

Since 2012, foreign scholars such as Falout have conducted dedicated research on “motivation rebuilding” [7], but there is a lack of related research results in China. In recent years, only two articles have been found in core journals: “From Motivation to Demotivation to Motivation Rebuilding: A ‘New Path’ for Motivation Research” by Xie Guimei[13]and “Research on Demotivation and Motivation Rebuilding of Learners at Different Second Language Proficiency Levels” by Yin Xiaoqin, et al. [14]. In the authors’ opinion, most of the aforementioned studies explored the influence of motivation on the process of foreign language learning and the relationship between motivation and other individual learner factors. However, there is limited literature on how to rebuild Chinese students’ motivation for English language learning in foreign language teaching and how to internalize learning motivation through foreign language teaching. In this context, based on all the previous researches, the authors attempt to address through qualitative research the strategies to remotivate Chinese vocational students in English language learning, aiming to explore effective ways to reinvigorate Chinese students’ motivation in learning English language. It is expected that this study will yield positive impacts on English teaching practices in China.

2 Method

2.1 Hypotheses

The present research problem is formulated in the following research hypotheses:

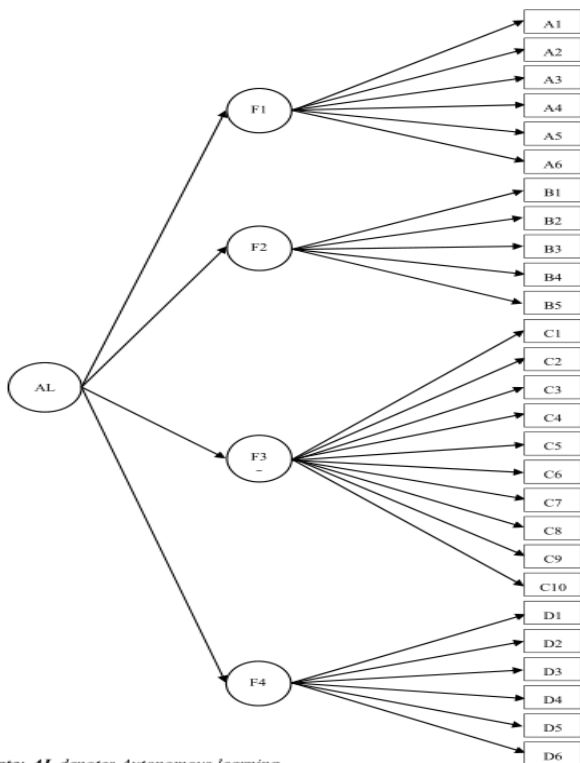
Hypothesis 1: Implementing CVTAL practice will not lead to a significant improvement in English learning motivation among Chinese students in vocational colleges.

Hypothesis 2: Through the implementation of CVTAL, students’ English listening and reading comprehension, writing, and translation abilities will not be enhanced, leading to an overall improvement in their English language proficiency.

Hypothesis 3: There will not exist any differences in AL among Chinese vocational students in an EFL context due to gender.

2.2 Questionnaire

To collect the data, a questionnaire with a 5-Likert scale was designed as shown in Figure 2.1.



Note: *AL* denotes Autonomous learning

Fig. 2.1 Diagram of Questionnaire

Participants were asked to fill out the digital questionnaire specifically developed for this study. The questionnaire comprised of four factors: Factor A involved learning concepts and attitudes; Factor B, learning motivation; Factor C, AL strategies and Factor D, teacher’s role. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted. Both Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) and Bartlett’s Test are presented in Table 3-1 below.

2.3 Participants

A total of 52 Chinese vocational students of business English majors from a vocational university in Guangdong Province, China provided valid answers to the questionnaire.

2.4 CVTAL conducted by the authors

From September 2022 to July 2023, the author implemented a one-year CVTAL teaching program for 52 vocational college students. In the first semester, the author taught the “International Exhibition English (Listening and Speaking)” course for three classes, aiming to cultivate students’ English listening and speaking abilities. In the second semester, the author was responsible for teaching the English

correspondence for International Trade course for the same three classes, with a greater emphasis on developing students’ translation and writing skills. The CVTAL teaching approach is primarily reflected in the following four points:

(1) Encouraging students to establish positive learning attitudes and improve their autonomous-learning abilities with the help of information technology.

(2) Emphasizing the importance of the humanistic characteristics of English learning to stimulate students’ intrinsic motivation. This is because the Deep Approach indicates that cultural understanding and global harmony are the main aims of language learning.

(3) Teaching strategies and methods for autonomous-learning, enhancing students’ autonomous-learning abilities with the help of information technology.

(4) Strengthening the supervisory role of teachers. Research showed that “the overall autonomous-learning ability of vocational college students is not strong, with a notable reflection in their lack of self-management skills” [4]. Therefore, enhancing teachers’ guidance and supervision of vocational college students is crucial.

3 Results and discussions

In this section, results and discussions will be focused on EFA analysis, T-test results and CET-4 scores.

3.1 EFA analysis

To ensure the reliability and feasibility of the research, the authors conducted EFA on the four factors possibly inherent in the questionnaire as shown in Figure 2.1. The results thus obtained are shown in Table 3.1 below.

KMO and Bartlett’s Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.61
	Approx. Chi Square	955.6
Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	df	435
	sig	.000

Table 3.1 KMO and Bartlett’s Test

As we know, the sphericity test is used to test whether it is suitable for factor analysis. KMO checks whether the partial correlation between variables is small; Bartlett’s spherical test is to test whether the correlation matrix is a unit matrix. The closer the KMO value tends to be 1, the more suitable for factor analysis. As indicated in the above table, KMO value is 0.61, which means that the questionnaire designed by the authors needs further improvement so as to be very well suitable for factor analysis. However, one thing worth mentioning is that prior to conducting EFA, it is

not necessary to know how many factors are to be used and what kind of the relationship between each factor and the observed variables. When conducting EFA, since there is no prior theory, the factor structure of the data can only be inferred by perception through factor loading. In research, it is difficult to obtain scientific results if only starting from data, and may even contradict existing theories or experience. Therefore, EFA is more suitable for the tentative analysis of data without theoretical support. The 52 fully answered questionnaires were obtained, and they are valid ones. Figure 3.2 shows the scree plot based on the data.

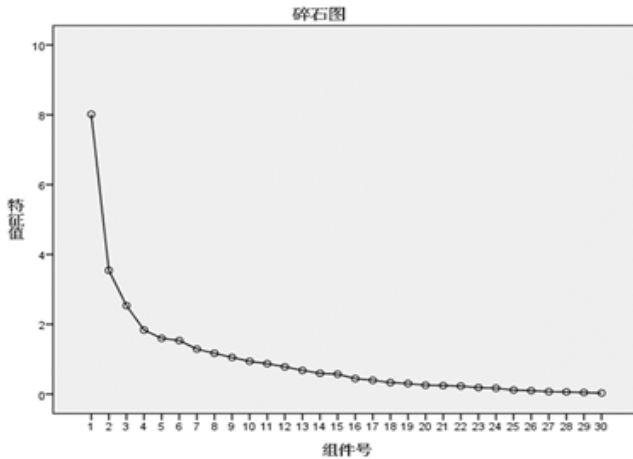


Figure 3.2 Scree plot for the factors possibly inherent in the questionnaire

In EFA analysis, the scree plot shows the possible number of factors that might be involved in the questionnaire design. As shown in the figure above, starting from the fourth factor downward on the abscissa, the curve tends to be decreasingly smooth. Therefore, we retain the first four factors. Or, it can be interpreted that the first four factors we conceived are specified. In the actual research process, it is often necessary to observe the reflected phenomena from multiple angles. Therefore, researchers often design multiple observed variables and collect a large amount of data from multiple variables to analyze and find the regularity. In the authors' opinion, although a large multivariate sample will provide us with rich information for our research, it increases the difficulty of data collection and processing as well. More importantly, there exists a certain correlation between or among many variables, which leads to the overlapping of information, thus increasing the complexity of problem analysis. To our understanding, factor analysis is to merge and synthesize much relevant and overlapping information in the research work and turn the original multiple variables and indicators into a few comprehensive variables and comprehensive indicators to facilitate analysis and judgment. Therefore, in this sense, we prefer to use fewer factors to analyze the various types of information that exist in each variable. Or, we use a few factors to describe the relationship between/among many indicators and use a few factors to respond to the original data to obtain most of the information [15].

3.2 Descriptive statistics

T-tests were conducted to examine whether the two groups of CET-4 scores obtained in 2022 and 2023 respectively from the same group of the students differed significantly. To examine relations between variables, Pearson's correlations with pairwise exclusion of cases to include all available data per test, were calculated for all measures as shown in Table 3-2 to Table 3-6 below.

Table 3-2 below shows CET scores obtained from the same group of students taking the tests in both 2002 and 2023 separately.

ID	S ex	2022 L	202 2R	2022T &W	Tot al	202 2L	202 2R	2022 T&W	Total
21105020210	F	108	140	126	374	130	161	118	409
21105020218	M	138	139	146	423	130	168	131	429
21105020234	F	108	123	118	349	120	111	129	360
21105020221	F	114	140	136	390	145	154	132	431
21105020204	F	126	128	111	365	155	140	118	413
21105020233	F	150	127	126	403	169	145	132	446
21105020244	F	150	119	130	399	115	126	127	368
21105020230	F	97	134	131	362	105	134	137	376
21105020245	F	162	92	129	383	130	128	105	363
21105020209	F	156	158	99	413	135	169	122	426
21105020227	M	103	112	87	302	145	102	99	346
21105020226	F	132	119	97	348	164	104	103	371
21105020239	F	120	121	110	351	115	124	134	373
21105020235	F	87	111	124	322	135	159	127	421
21105020246	F	87	119	104	310	105	116	101	322
21105020208	F	138	147	129	414	179	159	127	465
21105020206	F	120	127	131	378	135	136	135	406
21105020232	F	138	128	134	400	155	140	134	429
21105020237	F	150	127	123	400	115	140	132	387
21105020203	F	144	127	142	413	120	143	123	386
21105020320	M	103	119	117	339	140	151	106	397
21105020312	F	132	153	131	416	125	164	133	422
21105020326	M	114	119	109	342	160	143	104	407
21105020345	F	162	127	112	401	115	166	137	418
21105020330	F	138	151	120	409	115	171	102	388

21105020315	M	132	126	126	384	110	180	123	413
21105020321	M	144	134	137	415	125	145	118	388
21105020344	F	103	142	125	370	130	95	113	338
21105020350	M	87	103	122	312	135	108	105	348
21105020324	M	132	155	131	418	135	145	144	424
21105020316	F	114	132	116	362	120	127	114	361
21105020343	F	138	117	116	371	125	171	112	408
21105020342	F	114	117	120	351	120	131	115	366
21105020425	F	150	107	119	376	140	152	143	435
21105020415	F	173	110	139	422	120	142	131	393
21105020406	F	138	153	107	398	115	94	136	345
21105020423	M	120	125	111	356	135	104	113	352
21105020424	M	138	119	166	423	120	177	151	448
21105020417	F	103	160	126	389	110	158	120	388
21105020405	F	138	153	130	421	169	161	131	461
21105020401	F	108	145	107	360	135	154	99	388
21105020435	F	126	139	142	407	150	143	169	462
21105020410	M	126	122	111	359	120	147	122	389
21105020436	F	114	124	117	355	115	129	135	379
21105020446	F	162	121	131	414	145	158	131	434
21105020439	F	138	130	114	382	115	122	140	377
21105020444	F	91	128	119	338	100	124	130	354
21105020404	F	0	151	121	272	120	122	141	383
21105020411	M	114	107	153	374	130	145	132	407
21105020434	F	144	136	119	399	120	158	121	399
M		124.48	129.26	122.94	376.7	130.32	140.9	124.74	396
ID	S	2022	202	2022T	Tot	202	202	2022	Total
	ex	L	2R	&W	al	2L	2R	T&W	

Table 3.3 below shows the descriptive statistics based on the CET-4 scores obtained from the same group of vocational students (N=52).

CET-4	Listening	Reading	Writing & Trans	Total	Cut-off score
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Full score	248.5	248.5	213	710	425
2022 Mean	124.5	129.3	122.9	376.7	
2023 Mean	130.3	140.9	124.7	396	
2022 Passing R				0	
2023 Passing R				21%	

Table 3.4 below shows correlations based on the CET-4 scores of listening, reading, translation-writing and total scores obtained from the same group (N=52) in 2022 and 2023 respectively.

Table 3.4 The correlations of CET scores obtained from the same group of vocational students in both 2022 and 2023.

CET-4	2022 L	2022 R	2022 T&W	Total
2023 L	0.16			
2023 R		0.23		
2023 T&W			0.54	
				0.57

Table 3.5 below shows correlations based on all the female students' CET-4 scores of listening, reading, translation-writing and total scores (N=37) in both 2022 and 2023.

Table 3.5 The correlations based on all the female students' CET-4 scores

CET-4	2022 L	2022 R	2022 T&W	Total
2023 L	0.24			
2023 R		0.21		
2023 T&W			0.43	
				0.5

Table 3.6 below shows correlations based on all the male students' CET-4 scores of listening, reading, translation-writing and total scores (N=12) in both 2022 and 2023. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to verify the validity and consistency of the study tool.

Table 3.6 The correlations based on all the male students' CET-4 scores

CET-4	2022 L	2022 R	2022 T&W	Total
2023 L	-0.54			
2023 R		0.35		
2023 T&W			0.82	
				0.79

This result is attributed to the nature of the age and gender that require the learners to be evaluated by systematic observation. In addition, the nature of the courses and assignments makes it necessary for the teacher to follow up on the performances inside and outside the classroom and the authors' use of active CVTAL strategies in teaching.

CET-4 scores Table 3-2 shows the CET-4 scores obtained from the same group (N=52) of Chinese vocational students of business English major in both 2022 and 2023. These are actually the two parallel tests with different yet well equated test items annually administered to Chinese students of non-English major in China. CET-4 comprises of four parts: Listening, reading, writing and translation.

T-Test results T-test was calculated. Table 3-7 below shows the T-test results based on the CET-4 paired total scores obtained from the same group of vocational students in two different years.

Table 3.7 The T-test results based on the CET-4 total (paired) scores obtained from the same group of vocational students in both 2022 and 2023.

CET-4	Total
	5.06

N=52, 1.68 (df = 48), P<0.05

The T-test result above shows that there were statistically significant differences at the significance level of (0.05) between CET-4 total (paired) scores obtained from the same group of vocational students in both 2022 and 2023. The differences were in favor of our hypothesis. The result is attributed to the fact that after one year implementation of CVTAL, the overall improvement was achieved. As the test equating for CET-4 is conducted very well each year in China, we have every reason to believe that the scores thus obtained are valid and reliable.

3.3 Results and Discussion of the research hypotheses

The results do not support our hypotheses (2.1) in general. Instead, they verify that

(1) CVTAL will lead to a significant improvement in English learning motivation among Chinese vocational students;

(2) Chinese students' English listening and reading comprehension, writing, and

translation abilities will be enhanced, leading to an overall improvement in their English language proficiency, and

(3) There does exist differences in AL among Chinese vocational students in EFL context due to gender.

Our major concerns are concentrated on the following five aspects:

Firstly, there is a significant difference in the total scores obtained from the two CET-4 exams, indicating that the results obtained by taking the exam again after a one-year gap through the actual CVTAL are satisfactory. At the same time, it indicates that CVTAL practice plays a positive role in enhancing students' learning motivation. We have very reason to believe that test equating for CET-4 has been conducted very well each year in China. Therefore, the scores are valid and reliable.

At the same time, attentions are also paid to the following two details.

(1) As shown in Table 3-5, the scores of female students' CET-4 scores of listening and reading are not correlated, and the scores of translation and writing indicate very low correlation. Our interpretation is that CVTAL may not have a significant effect on female students, or it may be the underlying reason that the teacher is female. To confirm this, we check the results from the questionnaire only to find 17 out of 37 female students accepted the CVTAL method.

(2) As shown in Tables 3-6, the male students' CET-4 scores of listening, reading, translation, writing, and total scores are all correlated. However, there turns out to be a negative correlation in the listening part. For this, we have two particular questions:

Q1 Why were all the male students with poor performance in their first CET-4 exam doing better in their second exam? And

Q2 Why were those with good performance in their first exam doing poorly in their second exam? We resort to the questionnaire results again to find out that 73.3% of male students highly accepted CVTAL; therefore, their scores are highly correlated. However, Male students have stronger self-reflection ability yet with weaker learning initiative than those of females [4]. After seeing their poor scores in the listening part, boys, after reflection, strengthened their motivation to improve their listening skills. They must have spent more time practicing listening in their regular studies, resulting in a significant improvement in their listening performance in the second test. However, the questionnaire survey also showed another underlying reason: 93.3% of boys believe that "they use the Internet for English AL in order to find well-paid jobs", indicating that their intrinsic motivation [3]for English learning is insufficient, leading to unsustainable learning motivation. Therefore, male students who performed well in their listening part in the first CET-4 test tend to perform poorly in the second CET-4 exam, leading to a negative correlation.

Moreover, CVTAL has significantly improved students' ability to apply knowledge, especially in translation and writing that require language understanding and expression of complex concepts. As shown in Table 3.4 and 3.6, the correlations of 2022 T&W and 2023 T&W are respectively 0.54 and 0.82. This in some way

indicates that CVTAL method is more effective in improving students' translation and writing abilities than in improving their listening and speaking abilities.

Furthermore, CVTAL has to some extent improved students' autonomous-learning abilities. According to the questionnaire results (Table 3.6), our practice can stimulate students' willingness to engage in self-directed learning, encouraging them to explore and understand the English language and culture more actively. In the authors' opinion, such proactiveness can greatly facilitate the accumulation of learning outcomes. Self-directed learning enables students to study at their own pace and according to their needs, thereby better comprehending and applying the knowledge acquired.

Finally, CVTAL has heightened students' interest in learning and intrinsic motivation, thus stimulating students' interest in English and related cultures, leading them to become more involved in the learning process and sustaining their motivation to learn. As indicated in the responses to Question B1, "I use Internet resources for English autonomous-learning to communicate with foreigners and understand the cultures of English-speaking countries," 46.15% of students chose "basically applicable," and 11.54% chose "completely applicable." This implies that CVTAL has increased the learning interest and intrinsic motivation of the majority of students.

4 Conclusion

The focus of this article has been on the exploration of strategies to reignite Chinese students' motivation in English learning. This exploration is conducted through CVTAL implementation. This approach holds promise for not only addressing immediate challenges but also for establishing a robust foundation for sustained and effective English learning in vocational education in China.

4.1 Implications

Implications of this study might be of interest to both English teaching in vocational colleges and educational management department in China. Chinese teachers should be aware of the impact their expectations have and are advised to take that into account when communicating these expectations with their students. Forming expectations is an inevitable part of teaching, but it is difficult to do so reasonably and to correctly interpret them. They should accept and acknowledge this and be aware of both the potential positive and negative consequences regarding their students' language development. On top of that, teachers will most likely shape their learning environment and activities according to their expectations and are therefore invited to critically reflect on how their expectations relate to their daily classroom practices and be aware of self-fulfilling prophecies. Since the campus and the classroom are the two main environments in which students develop, it is of utmost importance that the students in those systems are aware of their unique but also their combined impact. To conclude, the results of this study demonstrate that CVTAL does play a positive role in vocational colleges in China.

4.2 Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into rebuilding Chinese vocational students' motivation for English language learning within the framework of CVTAL, three limitations remain. The first limitation of this study is the sample size was fairly small to conduct other statistical analyses due to the difficulty of collecting valid data in vocational college setting. The second limitation would be the way in which students' English ability was measured. We used CET-4 scores as the only indicate to check the improvement of both teaching and learning. Outcomes of the study regarding strategies to re-motivate Chinese vocational students in English learning from the perspective of CVTAL could have been different when more data results would have been included since English learning practice on campus of vocational colleges often involve productive activities such as speaking and professional communication. The third limitation is the small number of teachers participating in this study, which made it difficult to measure certain (indirect) effects of AL. This would be, in turn, made difficult to generalize our findings to a more diverse population of vocational students who will be enrolled in vocational colleges across China Mainland.

In the author's view, such a study should be taken as merely the first step in examining the unique contribution of CVTAL to English teaching to vocational students of English major in China. Future research could examine the possible mediation effects of CVTAL on listening, reading and writing. More teachers will be needed to participate then. That, together with the use of observations instead of questionnaires only, should yield a more solid and reliable representation of classroom practices by CVTAL in China.

4.3 Further Research

To advance our understanding of foreign language education, there are at least two more avenues for future research. First, exploring additional dimensions and facets of CVTAL could offer a more comprehensive understanding of its impact on language learning motivation. Additionally, conducting comparative studies across diverse linguistic settings would shed light on the generalizability and adaptability of the proposed strategies. The authors believe that this would open new avenues for enhancing Chinese vocational students' learning experiences and outcomes.

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APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE IN CHINESE OMITTED BUT CAN SUPPLY UPON REQUEST.

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