



A Study on the Obstacles and Methods to Promote English Learning Motivation among English Majors

Zhongqin Fan

School of International Studies, Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China

3210105972@zju.edu.cn

Abstract. Motivation is one of the most salient factors for learning a second language proficiently. As English major students' motivation to learn a language declines, the discussion about the factors demotivating them to study and how to avoid those adverse effects should be paid more attention. By reviewing relevant references, this paper pointed out English language learning traits of English majors from the perspective of learning styles, strategies, and emotions, and delved into barriers that undermined their language learning motivation. The external demotivating factors encompass a substandard learning environment, improper curriculum and pedagogy, and adverse peer influences. The internal ones consist of a lack of confidence and interest, experience with failures, distorted conceptions towards learning English, low English proficiency, and over-reliance on technical tools. Based on these two chapters, the study finally proposed practical suggestions for different agents involved in the educational process. It is advised that policy-makers account for improving the learning environment, that schools enhance institutional management, that instructors transform their teaching methods, and that students modify their self-regulation approaches.

Keywords: English Language Learning, Motivation, Demotivating Factors, English Majors.

1 Introduction

English is one of the most spoken languages in the world and the main language that people from various groups use to communicate with each other. People in several countries learn English as a second or foreign language from a young age. Institutions of higher education also set up English majors to cultivate talents with English language talent and learning interests.

However, various factors are demotivating English major students to learn the language, as well as numerous challenges to remotivate them ^[1]. Motivation is a combination of desire and effort to study a specific subject or acquire a certain skill, which is strongly correlated with students' academic performance ^[2]. According to Dörnyei, the second language (L2) learning motivation is a complex and fluid process with fluctuations ^[3]. It suggests that the motivation of L2 learners is influenced by changes

© The Author(s) 2024

Y. Li et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2024 3rd International Conference on Science Education and Art Appreciation (SEAA 2024)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 866,

https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-291-0_50

in other external and internal factors, such as learning environment, pedagogy, individual attitudes, etc. ^[1].

Most of the extant studies adopted quantitative methods, conducting statistical analysis on data collected through questionnaires and establishing relational models concerned with several factors. Besides, much research focused on English majors' motivation in a specific period or a specific region, and participants' English proficiency levels are different. Critically drawing on the previous findings, this paper shed light on English majors' particular features of learning English and conducted a qualitative analysis of the potential barriers that hurt English majors' language learning motivation in the current social background from a general perspective. The research aimed to explore the possible common demotivating factors for English majors to learn English, and to put forward suggestions for different groups to increase learners' motivation more effectively.

2 The English Learning Traits of English Major Students

2.1 The English Learning Styles and Strategies of English Major Students

English major students feature particular learning styles and strategies, among which they prefer writing, reading, reciting, and thinking.

Learning styles refer to the general approaches that students employ when they are acquiring a new language or studying other subjects. They can be divided into four categories according to different sensory preferences: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile. Visual learning engages with using diagrams, charts, and pictures, or watching videos. An auditory learner prefers to learn by listening and speaking, and a kinesthetic one is inclined to physical activities and hands-on tasks. Given the attribution of English language acquisition that hardly requires learning by touching learning materials, tactile learning can be dismissed in the chapter. Based on previous research, English major students are more likely to use visual learning styles than auditory and kinesthetic ones ^[4]. In their process of learning English, probably only a minority of students partake in lectures or debates, listen to audiobooks or podcasts, and engage in games or other practical experiences. Instead, more learners seem to prefer the approaches of seeing and reading.

Learning strategies can be defined as specialized behaviors, actions, or techniques adopted by learners to make their learning more smooth and successful. The L2 learning strategies can be classified into six groups: cognitive, metacognitive, memory-related, compensatory, affective, and social. English majors were proved more prone to memory strategy, cognitive strategy, and metacognitive strategy than compensation strategy, social strategy, and emotional strategy, and students with higher learning autonomy seemingly avoid settling on memory-related and compensatory strategies ^[5].

2.2 The English Learning Emotions of English Major Students

Like other EFL students, English majors also experience foreign language enjoyment and foreign language anxiety in terms of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and under different circumstances like in a classroom or public. In addition, it is revealed that students intend to show a high degree of boredom when doing monotonous or repetitive things, or when the tasks are not challenging in practical English classes [6]. Meanwhile, English majors are prone to show after-class English learning boredom as well. To be specific, they are normally unwilling to learn English, fail to find interesting language activities, lack creativity and concentration, as well as feel that their language ability is underused and learning tasks are monotonous after class [7].

3 The Importance and Obstacles Analysis

3.1 The Importance of Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation is a paramount factor contributing to a learner's success in second language acquisition, which provides both the main driving force to initiate learning and the impetus to sustain the long and often dreary learning process [8]. It exerts a great impact on how much energy a learner devotes to learning a foreign language and how long he or she can persist [1]. Language learning requires a host of recitation, imitation, and practice, which therefore probably entails lasting and sustainable motivation to maintain learning enthusiasm and energy. There are two types of language learning motivation: instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation refers to a desire to learn a language for pragmatic gains such as getting a salary bonus or getting higher scores, while integrative one is associated with learners' interest in the language itself and its culture, and a desire to integrate themselves into the target language community. Both of them are effectively loaded goals that can sustain learning [9].

Moreover, motivation is strongly associated with emotions in language learning. It is possibly conducive to diminishing negative emotions such as burnout and anxiety, as well as enhancing positive affections including grit, enjoyment, and engagement [10,11]. In addition, motivation has a critical effect on language learning outcomes such as achievement, performance, skills, attendance, etc. Studies consistently show that learners who are more motivated to learn will also have higher second language proficiency [2,9].

3.2 The Potential Obstacles of Increasing Language Learning Motivation for English Majors

External Factors.

Based on the extant studies, learning environments such as school facilities and classroom conditions, curriculum and pedagogy, and peer influences are predominant external concerns contributing to demotivating college English majors in English learning [1].

School facilities have been complained about, such as insufficient electricity supply and inadequate equipment, to be accountable for students' frustration because they might assume that they do not receive enough educational support. Besides, they would feel a sense of tension and thereby fail to concentrate well on class study if the classroom is too crowded.

Learning materials and contents, teaching modes and styles, teachers' competence and personality, assignments, examinations, etc. constitute another group of elements that hold significance in students' language learning motivation. For instance, outdated textbooks are probably devoid of cutting-edge theories and intelligible expressions that enable learners to acquire knowledge more swiftly, which could decrease their interest and patience. If instructors are highly dependent on textbooks, cannot organize interesting activities in class, and keep assigning monotonous, repetitive tasks, students would show a high level of boredom and feel dissatisfied.

Besides, negative peer influences also play a critical role in impeding learning motivation, including classmates' unfriendly and uncooperative attitudes, vicious competition, etc.

Internal Factors.

Underlying internal motivation is influenced by factors such as lack of self-confidence and interest in learning English, experience with failures, distorted perceptions of learning English, low language skills, and over-reliance on digital tools.

A lack of self-confidence may make students anxious to answer professors' questions and express their ideas freely due to their fear of making mistakes. Besides, English language learning is not one's interest but if he or she is forced by his family to choose an English major, it would be hard to boost his or her learning motivation [1].

Experience with failures may comprise low exam marks, no or low progress, bad performance in class, negative feedback, and so forth. This kind of experience probably induces a series of unpleasant emotions like self-doubt, shame, and guilt, which may militate against the improvement of motivation.

Distorted conceptions such as a job-oriented mindset, utilitarianism, and immediate results-driven approach, seem to be detrimental to improving motivation in learning English. In contemporary modern society, employment entails comprehensive and mixed abilities instead of only language skills. Therefore, a large number of English majors might consider their specialty to be less useful than other subjects and thereby lose learning enthusiasm. Meanwhile, L2 learning is a gradual process that requires consistent effort and dedication. Focusing solely on immediate goals and expecting instant fluency are likely to cause frustration and demotivation when faced with inevitable challenges and setbacks.

English proficiency refers to the degree of ability in using English, involving listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Low proficiency might in turn exert a negative influence on learning motivation as a result of the interaction with poor self-confidence.

Furthermore, with the advent of the AI tool called ChatGPT, it is possible that more language majors assume that professions related to language will be replaced

one day, which undermines their learning motivation. Besides, over-reliance on digital tools that help them complete assignments probably leads to a lack of critical thinking and a decline in language competence, leading to negative learning emotions.

4 Suggestions

4.1 Enhancing Learning Environment

Since students are susceptible to classroom conditions, it is necessary for governments or educational departments to make more efforts to provide them with pleasant learning environments. The first method is to distribute a larger amount of funding on both traditional and digital facilities supply, for many incompetent schools complain about the insufficiency of the construction budget. In addition to financial support, policymakers are supposed to formulate general regulations that are more forcible for lower-level institutions to implement. They can set standards of classroom size and its corresponding capacity, considering whether a classroom is crowded or not depending on both of the two elements. The criteria are advised to be specified based on survey data from students in different types of schools. Furthermore, equipment quantity and quality for specific courses also need to be standardized. Good teaching devices appear to be a substantial precondition for teaching and learning, in that less time and energy is wasted on operating facilities and students might perceive that their study is supported by authoritative powers.

4.2 Improving Institutional Management

As the organizers of teaching and learning, colleges and universities specify curriculum arrangements. The relevant officers are supposed to take students' feedback into account and design more reasonable teaching schedules and syllabi. Moreover, learning materials should be lined with students' proficiency and keep pace with the times, especially textbooks concerning linguistics, English language education, and cross-culture. As the manager of teachers, there is a need for schools and faculties to refine teacher assessment systems to attach more heed to both their professional knowledge and affective-motivational characteristics. In some cases, they ought to organize teacher training on the application of electronic devices.

There is also the possibility to establish a working relationship between schools and businesses for English major students to utilize their language skills and expertise in practical matters, to improve their instrumental motivation.

4.3 Incorporating Innovative Pedagogy

English major instructors are responsible for improving students' language learning motivation through the following feasible approaches. Firstly, organizing interactive and learner-centered activities in class will probably stimulate students' interest and advance their classroom engagement. For instance, games are more popular than

group work, presentations, and quizzes [4]. The flipped classroom model has been proven to prompt students to involve themselves in-class learning, and interact with instructors and classmates, thus promoting their self-management learning ability and willingness to communicate [12].

Secondly, to provide enough instructions on tasks is essential as well [1]. Students might lose patience on difficult assignments owing to a lack of explanation about obscure requirements, or feel frustrated when teachers do not impart more information and skills. It is proposed that teachers compile a digital course pack involving course slides, relevant exercises, audio and video materials, and references. It is also considerable to offer feedback to students so that they can revise mistakes and perform better in the future.

Moreover, it should not be ignored to apply technology more effectively, which probably makes teaching more convenient and offers students knowledge from a larger range of sources. Instructors could use multimedia that caters to individual needs and enhances students' learning autonomy. Multimedia learning tools encompass a wide range of standalone and web-based tools. The former requires installation and updates on each device, and the latter relies on a stable internet connection. The learning environment and learning content influence the choice of teaching tools. For example, teachers can produce their teaching materials or ask students to take advantage by applying digital tools. It is also feasible to integrate classroom teaching with Massive Open Online Courses.

In addition, it is also viable to help students recognize the significance of learning English. Teachers could offer concrete real-life examples to illuminate the idea in class, which might awaken their interest in English learning.

4.4 Adopting Self-Regulation Approaches

In light of the role of poor English proficiency and experience with failures playing in demotivating students to learn English, it is suggested that they modify learning strategies and styles. No ample evidence shows which strategies and styles are the best. Therefore, it is advised to choose ones that suit oneself and make adjustments in time.

Emotion regulation probably makes a difference [13]. When suffering negative emotions, learners can change their learning environment, pour out concerns with family, teachers, and peers, lower expectations and make goals more aligned with their learning competence. It is also important for students to maintain a realistic and patient mindset, realizing that language learning is a continuous journey rather than a quick fix.

When it comes to the use of technology, learners are encouraged to apply AI tools, learning apps, and search engines within proper frequencies and avoid over-reliance on them. Research reported that the ideal L2 self (the ideal image that learners expect to become as L2 users in the future) motivates students [9]. In this way, they could establish their own ideal L2 self by engaging themselves in practical activities or tasks that need the use of English.

5 Conclusion

By reviewing English majors' characteristics of learning English and combining the existing results, the paper deduced the external and internal factors detrimental to their language learning motivation. External factors are an unpleasant learning environment, inappropriate curriculum and pedagogy, and bad peer influences. Internal ones consist of a lack of self-confidence and interests, experience with failures, negative attitudes towards learning English, low language proficiency, and over-reliance on technology. Finally, pedagogical implications were provided to policymakers, administrators in schools, and teachers. Students were recommended to adjust their learning styles and strategies, apply effective emotion-regulation approaches, and use learning digital devices properly.

References

1. Wang, S., Littlewood, W.: Exploring students' demotivation and remotivation in learning English. *System* 103, 102617 (2021).
2. Dunn, K., Iwaniec, J.: Exploring The relationship between second language learning motivation and proficiency. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 44(4), 967-997 (2021).
3. Dörnyei, Z.: *The psychology of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2009).
4. Khánh, N. N., Vy, L. N. K., Thao, L. T., Xuan, L. T. T.: An investigation of English-Majored students' learning styles and their preferable interaction activities: a case study in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. *International Journal of Science and Management Studies* 60-71 (2021).
5. Shang, W. P.: A correlation study on language learning strategies and autonomous learning ability of English majors. Bohai University (2021).
6. Pawlak, M., Zawodniak, J., Kruk, M.: The neglected emotion of boredom in teaching English to advanced learners. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 30(3), 497-509 (2020).
7. Pawlak, M., Kruk, M., Zawodniak, J., Pasikowski, S.: Examining the underlying structure of after-class boredom experienced by English majors. *System* 106, 102769 (2022).
8. Nurhidayah, R.: The role of motivation in second language acquisition. *Journal Ilmiah Spectral* 6(2), 96-104 (2020).
9. Tahmouresi, S., Papi, M.: Future selves, enjoyment and anxiety as predictors of L2 writing achievement. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 53, 100837 (2021).
10. Y, Q.: A review of foreign language learners' emotions. *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2022).
11. Xue, Z., Dai, S., Ardasheva, Y.: Contributions of (de)motivation, engagement, and anxiety to English listening and speaking. *Learning and Individual* (2020).
12. Marashi, H. Eghtedar, D.: Applying the flipped classroom model to foster motivation and willingness to communicate. *Iranian Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 10(2), 70-89 (2021).
13. Bielak, J., Mystkowska-Wiertelak, A.: Investigating language learners' emotion-regulation strategies with the help of the vignette methodology. *System* 90, 102208 (2020).

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

