

INCREASING INTRINSIC MOTIVATION OF NON-ENGLISH MAJORS  
IN LEARNING ENGLISH

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Date: 5/4/2011

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A Seminar Paper

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty

University of Wisconsin-Platteville

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In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirement for the Degree

Master of Science

in

Education

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by

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2011

## Abstract

# INCREASING INTRINSIC MOTIVATION OF NON-ENGLISH MAJORS IN LEARNING ENGLISH

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Many non-English majors do not want to learn English, but they have to learn. Because schools require them to learn it, the paper focuses on this very typical and important problem in academic circles, especially in China, and many scholars and professors find it is very important to increase students' language learning motivation. Many scholars have researched the problem, and the results are fruitful. In China, every non-English major in the universities should pass the CET-4 and CET-6. If they have not the certificate, they tend to be eliminated in the competition, so almost all the universities are paying more attention to English learning. In addition to those English majors and English experts, those non-English majors in China urgently need to improve their English fluency levels. In terms of this urgently need of English improving, the paper summarizes those research findings made by many scholars which could be learned by Chinese college students. Firstly, the chapter one gives a whole introduction of the situation about English learning in China, and states the problem toward learning English. Then in chapter two, the paper focuses on "motivation", which is the key word could solve the English learning problem in China. As for "motivation", many scholars find "intrinsic motivation" and "extrinsic motivation". At last, my paper tends to pay attention to the "intrinsic motivation", and "cooperative learning" which is a popular method to increase students' intrinsic motivation will be researched in the paper. In chapter three, there are some conclusions and recommendations for English learning.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In China, an increasing number of people are learning English in response to the rapid economical development. In Chinese colleges and universities, many students have a poor command of English even after many years because many non-English majors do not want to learn English and therefore find it boring. Generally speaking, English learning has become a problem area for non-English majors.

There are many scholars, educators and teachers who have paid much attention to improving English learning for non-English majors. They find motivation to be an important factor in learning English. There is a need to conceptualize just how motivation helps learning occur. For example, Gardner and Lambert (1972) have suggested that there are two types of motivational orientations of learning another language: integrative and instrumental. According to Dörnyei (1991), integrative motivation, which refers to the English skills, attitude and so on, is a “socio-educational model”. Meanwhile, instrumental motivation is utilitarian in Baker’s description (2006), which means people learn language for their own reasons, such as a good job, a high salary or other praise.

Another definition for the purposes of this paper is the popular classification of motivation as intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is a self motivation, and the simplest definition is somebody likes to do something, while extrinsic one is from the outside world, which could push somebody to do something. The two classifications are helpful for the understanding about motivation, and people can easily notice that outer motivation can be easily achieved, while inner motivation is more difficult. So the common challenge of teachers is how to motivate students

and how to move the student toward self-motivation.

In China, many scholars and professors have researched many methods to motivate students. One of the most popular methods is cooperative learning in many western countries. Consequently, many Chinese professors began to study the advantage of cooperative learning in to increase students' intrinsic motivation. Cooperative learning is a very useful method for increasing motivation and helping students to learn English, and interdependence and individual accountability are the two important elements for cooperative learning, so there are many aspects are very well worth researching about the topic.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem expressed as a question is What is the relationship between intrinsic motivation and English learning for non-English majors?

### **Definition of Terms**

*Motivation*: the characteristic that helps you achieve your goal (Terry, 2009).

*Intrinsic Motivation*: the motivation of an individual to take part in activities that actually increase that person's self-esteem. Simply put, a person will do something just because it is enjoyable and interesting for him or her to do it, and for no other purpose (Le, 2009).

*Extrinsic Motivation*: the motivation comes about because of the promise of a tangible, marketable reward. It is the desire to do something because of the promise of or hope for a tangible result (Tileston, 2004).

*Cooperative Learning*: a successful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject (Kagan, 1994).

*Individual Accountability*: the measurement of whether or not each group member has achieved the group's goal (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1998).

### **Delimitations of the Research**

The research will be conducted in and through the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, over ninety five (95) days. Primary searches were conducted via the Internet through EBSCOhost with ERIC, Academic Search Elite and Google/Google Scholar as the primary sources. Key search topics include: "motivation," "intrinsic motivation," and "cooperative learning."

### **Method of Approach**

A brief review of the literature about the definition and classification of motivation was conducted. A second review of literature on increasing motivation was also performed.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### The Current Situation

Due to the effects of globalization and the need for communication, English has become more and more important, so the Chinese government pays much attention to English education. In China, besides English majors in the colleges, other students also should learn English. Passing the exams such as CET 4 and CET6 is a very important thing for non-English majors. Learning English is not always well-received by Chinese students. Jakobovits, as cited in Jia Guanjie (1996), finds that the main influential factors to English learning are motivation (33%), aptitude (33%), intelligence (20%) and others (14%). In view of the large part motivation plays in learning, many teachers and scholars are trying to find teaching methods that could stimulate students' motivation. Improving students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are all very important and useful methods to let students study English actively.

My paper concentrates on the intrinsic motivation that could change students' learning attitude. Their attitudes could be changed from "I should do something" to "I want to do it." In 1970, Maslow preferred intrinsic motivation, and he mentioned extrinsic motivation is inferior to intrinsic one definitely. My paper also emphasizes the intrinsic aspect. Scholars have found many ways to excite students' intrinsic motivation towards English study. Cooperative learning, which is widely used by many western countries because it can improve students' individual accountability and also achieve other positive results, is central to this study. In this chapter, I will introduce the definition of motivation, the classification of motivation, and how to move students to intrinsic motivation through cooperative learning.

## **The Definition of Motivation**

Many scholars around the world have acknowledged that motivation as one of the most important factors for getting good study results. According to Bainbridge (n.d.), when completing or even working on a task, one person could get joy from the task itself or from the sense of satisfaction, and the motivation comes from here. If a person has the right motives in learning, he or she will want to do something or finish something on his or her own initiative. Consider this situation: one student studies very hard, and displays great initiative in his or her work, while the other student always puts off his or her work. What element makes them behave so differently?

Motivation. In psychology, motivation is a force that energizes and directs behavior towards a goal (Paul and Don, 1994). So motivation is a force which can promote people's behaviors. WordNet of Princeton University defines *motivation* as "the psychological feature that arouses an organism to action toward a desired goal; the reason for the action; that which gives purpose and direction to behavior." Yu Dongdong (2004) has summed up many definitions of motivation which emphasize different aspects. According to his description, motivation is a skill, the "will to learn" and "purposeful striving." Gardner suggested that it was "the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitude toward learning the language" (p. 4). Paris and Oka and Snow and Farr emphasize the conscious choice and applied awareness (attention) in the individual, while Gardner defines motivation in terms of social-psychological aspect. In Gardner's description, motivation is an inner power that can stimulate people to complete something; motivation is a desire that can drive people to achieve something; motivation is a favorable attitude that can help people to do something. Generally speaking, for students, motivation is a desire to finish a task, to undertake somebody's study and

to complete the requirements of somebody's course (Lintern, 2002).

Thus, many scholars have researched the definition of motivation, and one can see the common point is that motivation is an energy which could stimulate people to achieve or finish something. Language leaning motivation is the cognitive which is actively changed and added and the stimulation, and these two elements can push learners to put more effects and long effects (intellectual and physical) for a fixed goal (Yu, 2004, p. 6). In terms of these descriptions, one may find that many scholars at home and abroad have paid much attention to research about motivation, just because of the need of education. They all want to make use of their research findings to stimulate youth to study hard. The relationship between motivation and learning is close. Of course, the learning motivation is certainly related to language learning.

In China, motivation also plays an important role in affecting students' learning activities, especially in the Chinese colleges and universities. The learning atmosphere in the Chinese universities is loose, and teachers usually do not interfere with students' lives, so students need to learn how to manage their own lives. If a student is not in the English department, English often becomes less important for him, and nobody forces him or her to learn it. In this situation, learning motivation must be the most important element. If students are really interested in learning English, they will learn the language well and happily. Even without their teachers' supervision, students could learn English actively if they find their learning motivation.

### **The Classification of Motivation**

Two major classifications of motivation are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Bainbridge (n.d.) explains that intrinsic motivation refers to motivation that comes from the internal world, not those external or outside rewards. So the intrinsic motivation is in an individual's heart, so to speak, or we could say it comes from inside. The motivation comes from

the happiness, pleasure, and satisfaction one gets in finishing a task. He describes extrinsic motivation as coming from the outside world, such as money and grades. It means that the factors affecting the activity of a person are external, or from outside, such as some rewards. People can get pleasure and satisfaction from the reward rather than the task itself. In his opinion, the extrinsic motivation motivates somebody to finish the task, even though the person is not interested in it. The person could get satisfaction from some rewards, but once the rewards disappear, he or she would not be interested in it. In Chinese colleges, those non-English majors often study English without any rewards. In this situation, if those students all study English because of those rewards, it would not work. "Extrinsic motivation does not alter the attitudes that underlie our behaviors. They do not create an enduring commitment to a set of values or to learning; they merely, and temporarily, change what we do" (Kohn, 1993, p. 54). The extrinsic motivation may reduce a person's interests toward something. For example, a boy gets a high score on an examination, so his parents reward him. From then on, the boy always wants to get rewards through getting a high score, but he is not interested in studying itself. The reward as the extrinsic motivation reduces the boy's interest on studying.

Intrinsic motivation means that the learner wants to learn something on his or her own initiative. "I want to learn it" is the outward manifestation of this motivation. So learning which has the goal of learning itself is stimulated by the intrinsic motivation.

According to those definitions and analyses, we find that extrinsic motivation is helpful for learning English to some extent, but intrinsic motivation mostly influences our English learning. For many scholars, they think intrinsic motivation is more important than extrinsic motivation. Dickinson (1987) claims that "success enhances motivation only in children who are focused on learning goals, that is, who are intrinsically motivated." And according to the late psychologist Maslow (1970), extrinsic motivation is inferior to intrinsic motivation.

In China, in the process of learning English for those non-English major students, the

certification of CET4 or 6 is like extrinsic motivation, and this could help some to learn English. But once they fail the exam, they would lose confidence, patience, and extrinsic motivation. If they could find their intrinsic motivation of learning English, they would get more benefits from learning English; they would learn to use English in practice; they would use the language to communicate with each other. Even though they can not get the certification of CET4 or 6, they would not give up. If they have got the certificate, they would continue to learn it because of the intrinsic motivation. According to these analyses, non-English majors should pay more attention to intrinsic motivation and make good use of extrinsic motivation.

### **Increasing Intrinsic Motivation**

How do we increase intrinsic motivation? According to Brown (2001), there are a few methods which focus on intrinsic motivation, while most methods of promoting motivation focus on extrinsic motivation. People often take advantage of some rewards or punishments to stimulate themselves or others. Hobbies and interests are the best intrinsic motivators. However, “far more research has been done in the past to identify various motives and validate motivational theories than to develop techniques to increase motivation” (Dornyei 2001). Recently, more and more scholars are paying more attention to developing intrinsic motivation of English learning. They have realized the importance of intrinsic motivation.

Increasing intrinsic motivation is not giving a child a piece of candy to make him or her be obedient or giving a student some rewards to make him or her work hard. For non-English majors, receiving English certificates is not enough. All these behaviors could be used to stimulate their motivation, but they are not intrinsic motivation. Increasing intrinsic motivation is more complicated than that. They need to know that learning English is not only for passing English exams or finding a good job. Due to globalization, people from all over the world are communicating more and more. English has become a global language, and a growing number of people are speaking it. So for those Chinese college students, it is meaningful to learn English

well. Meanwhile, English is regarded as one of the most beautiful languages in the world. For those students, maybe they could find “another-self” in the English world. When those students find satisfaction from learning English, they are successful. They will love the language and love to learn it well. The intrinsic learning motivation would motivate them naturally.

Of course, there are many methods to drive non-English majors’ intrinsic motivations. This paper highlights one popular method, which is called cooperative learning.

### **Cooperative Learning**

Cooperative learning is based on learners’ cognitive levels, personal experience, and especially on their learning interests. Psychologists Marcia and James (2000) have claimed that cooperative learning is “one variety of active learning which structures students into different groups with defined roles for each student and a task for the group to accomplish” (p. 96). They describe how to create an environment conducive to cooperative learning. Every student has a role in the group. Every student should be responsible for his or her group. That is the special characteristic of cooperative learning. According to popular advocate of cooperative learning Spencer (1994), cooperative learning is a very successful teaching strategy in which students with abilities of different levels could improve their understanding of a subject. Spencer regards cooperative learning as a strategy that could improve the effects of studying. In many advanced countries or educational organizations, many teachers include cooperative learning in the communicative language teachers’ toolbox. It provides “so many opportunities for students to communicate” and “a means of integrating listening, speaking, reading, and writing” (McCafferty, Jacobs, & DaSilva Iddings, 2006). In a cooperative learning environment, learners can trust each other, and they are dependent and cooperative. The atmosphere of cooperative learning is democratic, relaxed and friendly, and the group members work hard together for the same goal. Besides, cooperative learning can give students individual accountabilities that can be structured in several common ways, according to Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991):

controlling the group size the smaller the group, the greater individual accountability; giving every student an individual test; asking one student questions randomly, with the student representing the whole group or class; observing every group and knowing the contributor in each group; assigning one student in each group the role of checker who would motivate his or her group's answers; conducting "simultaneous explaining (having students teach what they learned to someone else)." By doing these activities, students become more active in English learning, participate with enthusiasm, feel that they are parts of the group, try their best to study and are motivated and study English more effectively.

One of the most prolific researchers of cooperative learning, Slavin (1980), says students should work in small groups and receive rewards or cognition based on the group performance. Slavin's review summarizes the results of 28 primary field projects lasting at least two weeks, in which cooperative learning methods are used in elementary or secondary classrooms. The pattern of research findings proves the cooperative learning method is helpful for increasing students' motivation for learning and achievement. Slavin defines cooperative learning as class techniques that encourages students to perform all kinds of learning activities in small groups. He also thinks it could help some students to learn something from those who study well or get achievements in the group, enhance teacher-student, and student-teacher interactions, and promote students to carry out a cooperative learning efficiently (Salvin, 1990).

Cooperative learning requires group learning. Generally, there are four to six students in a group. If there are too many students in a group, students cannot communicate effectively and show their abilities fully. If there are too few students in a group, students do not get as many viewpoints from their peers. Every student has his or her own duty in the group, and is responsible for the progress of the whole group. Through cooperative learning, students' nonintellectual factors can be cultured. Every student cooperates with others, support others and

finishes the learning task.

There are three marked features of cooperative learning. The first feature is it can involve students from different levels. Cooperative learning can create learning advantages for different levels of students. Low-level students can ask questions and gain new knowledge, while high-level students can consolidate knowledge through answering those questions, and their logical thinking ability and language ability can be improved. Middle-level students can reach to the high level in the learning environment. Every student can be improved and developed through cooperative learning.

The second feature is cooperative learning gives students a chance to learn by themselves. Cooperative learning can enhance communication among students and between students and teachers. Students have more chances to take part in studying and learning by themselves, which can stimulate students' creative abilities and improve students' learning abilities.

The third feature is study is not boring; it is an engaging activity. Students can finish tasks through observing, operating, testing, exploring and communicating. The activity helps students gain new knowledge as well learning skills. Independent thinking is the premise of cooperative learning. Teachers should give students some time to think independently, and dissuade students from following others' opinions blindly. Cooperative learning also encourages good listening skills and positive participation and active opinion expressing. In cooperative learning, students can raise a query, express their ideas, and refute others' opinions. Students cannot interrupt others' speaking, and should learn to grasp the gist of others' speaking. Lastly, in cooperative learning environments, students can observe the discipline of class and group learning, and avoid disputing.

In China, non-English majors have no incentive to study, and they think their professional courses are the most important ones. For them, English is unnecessary. They have no intrinsic motivation for learning English. So many scholars have applied cooperative learning to English learning. They want cooperative learning can exert a powerful influence in English learning. Students can communicate with each other in the cooperative learning classroom. High-level students can help low-level students, and improve their English at the same time. Low-level students often have some fears when they talk with teachers. They can try to vanquish their fears about speaking English in the group, because it is easier for students to talk with classmates in English. They will also prepare more before class, and revise after class. Meanwhile, students can feel learning English is not an assignment or task but an interesting activity, and they can communicate with other students. Teachers could create a contest or debate to stimulate students' interest of learning English. According to these, people can easily find that cooperative learning can enhance learners' cooperation ability, strengthen their responsibilities. The most important one is it can stimulate learners' interests towards English, and the interests are exactly people's intrinsic motivation. So cooperative learning can be one method to stimulate students, especially non-English majors, to learn English.

## CHAPTER 3

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a developing country, China should be brought in line with international practice. English has become a communicating tool with people from other countries. Except for experts in English, most people should learn something about English. College students represent the image of the country, so learning English should be very important to them. But if those students see learning English as a forced task they are less motivated and consequently learn less. There are many other problems they have met, such as lack of language and language learning environments and not paying attention to English learning in ideologies, so increasing motivation becomes crucially important.

Many scholars and educators find intrinsic motivation is more important than any other forms of motivations. Meanwhile, many Chinese scholars and western scholars believe interests could inspire people to learn. Interests is just the intrinsic motivation, so increasing motivation is not enough, while driving intrinsic motivation is the key word.

People believe that there are many approaches about increasing learning motivation. Ur (2000) proposes motivating learners by means of feedback, topic and visual aids, while Deci and Ryan(1995) proposes using films to stimulate learners' motivation. Music, films, Internet and that multimedia bring colors to our learning. Through a comprehensive analysis, cooperative learning has become a popular method to increase students' intrinsic motivation.

As technology develops, more and more new methods will be definitely introduced to our learning. But increasing intrinsic motivation is the basic idea. Every method should serve it. If those non-English majors want to learn English well, they should firstly foster their interests in

English. Cooperative learning is a very good way to give full play to the initiative and help students to form learning interests. But it is not the only way. Every student may have his or her own method to stimulate learning motivation, as long as those students could begin to learn English actively, as long as those students could let English serve their future, teachers should encourage this method. Scholars should do more research and gather more information about English learning methods from those extraordinary students.

Education needs to be reformed, Chinese college students should be challenged, and Chinese education could be developed. Many scholars from foreign countries have done a lot in promoting education. But because China has a large population, and because historical culture emphasizes the dignity of a teacher, many useful methods about driving students' learning motivation cannot be adopted enough. It is a big problem for Chinese education. Chinese scholars should conduct more research on it, assimilate the essences of those wonderful findings, combine Chinese situation with them, and promote Chinese education.

Besides, Chinese education needs more professors and teachers. Professors and teachers should do more research about English education, and improve their teaching. English learning has been a big problem in Chinese education system. It is important to improve students' interest or motivation toward English, but teachers' quality is also very important. Competent teachers are needed urgently in China. Many excellent teachers and professors often teach English majors, while some incompetent teachers teach non-English majors. Non-English majors' motivation cannot be motivated by those incompetent teachers, so there will be a vicious circle. Good teaching method should be adopted by good teachers; if not, students will get half the results with twice the effort. Chinese education department should pay more attention to culture competent

teachers for non-English majors, and encourage teachers to learn experience from western countries.

English education can be an arduous task. Increasing intrinsic motivation of non-English majors is one of the most influential ways to make learning less arduous, more enjoyable, and more effective.

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