

The Influence of Learners' Motivation and Attitudes on Second Language Teaching*

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Abstract—Learners' motivation and attitudes have great impact on the second language learning and teaching. This thesis first introduces the theories concerning learners' affective factors and then gives a brief definition of motivation and attitude. In order to reveal the co-relation between motivation and attitude of language learners and the second language teaching, the research designs two questionnaires to investigate the students' learning attitude and the attribution for success or failure. Through discussion of the two surveys, the teaching tips in respect of a learner's motivation and attitude are recommended with the purpose of eliminating students' negative emotional reactions as well as developing students' autonomous learning abilities. In summary, this paper intends to improve the teaching effect by means of exploring the influences that a learner's motivation and attitude bring about to foreign language teaching.

Index Terms—motivation, attitude, attribution, teaching methods, emotion

I. INTRODUCTION

At the present English teaching, the teacher in the university lays too much emphasis on students' cognitive factors in language learning and the affective factors of the students are neglected. Western scholars have found that cognition and emotion are two aspects that have close relationship with language learning. Emotional problems have important impact on language acquisition. The study of affective factors of language learning in China began in the 1980s. Many researches analyze the influences that affective elements have from the angles of cognition and emotion. Negative affective factors such as anxiety, fear and depression hinder a learner's potential learning abilities. Positive emotions such as motivation and attitude contribute to learning. Therefore, English teaching should pay more attention to the study of the emotional factors to help students eliminate their negative psychological factors and promote positive affection to learning.

II. THEORIES RELEVANT TO LEARNERS' AFFECTIVE FACTORS

A. *Dörnyei's Three-level Motivation Theory*

In the 1990s, the Gardner's motivational theory was faced with several challenges, a number of researchers tried to reopen motivational research. They began with a new belief that changes from social-center study to educational-center significant study. Educational orientation has become the mainstream of current research. The learner's classroom environment became more and more important, and it immediately impacts their L2 learning motivation. The intention of the changing makes the motivational theories more suitable for the classroom setting.

Dörnyei, one of the most influential researchers, he has proposed three-level extended motivational framework based on Crooks and Schmidt's (1991) approach of examining motivation. Moreover, there are three main factors which decided L2 learners' motivation that is integrativeness, the classroom environment and self-confidence was investigated by Dörnyei and Noels (1994). In 1994, a more general framework of L2 motivation was broadened by Dörnyei, with the method of integrating the various issues put forward by other scholars.

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Language Level	Integrative Motivational Subsystem Instrumental Motivational Subsystem
Learner Level	Need for Achievement Self-confidence Language Use Anxiety Perceived L2 Competence Causal Attributions Self-efficacy
Learning Situation Level Course-specific Motivational Components Teacher- specific Motivational Components Group- specific Motivational Components	Interest Relevance Expectancy Satisfaction Afflictive Drive Authority Type Direct Socialization of Motivation Modeling •Modeling •Task Presentation •Feedback Goal-orientedness Norm and Reward System Group Cohesion Classroom Goal Structure

Dörnyei's Framework of L2 Motivation (Dörnyei, 1994)

Dörnyei's three-level motivational framework contains three levels: language level, learning situation level and learner level (Dörnyei, 1994). The table above clearly illustrates Dörnyei's framework of L2 motivation. The three levels of motivation are consistent with the three fundamental components, which are the learning environment, the learners, and the target language.

B. Attribution Theory

Attribution is a concept in social psychology addressing the processes by which individuals explain the causes of behavior and events; Attribution theory is an umbrella term for various models that attempt to explain those processes (Kassin, Fein&Markuss, 2008). Attribution theory provides an important method for examining and understanding motivation in English settings. It examines individuals' beliefs about why certain events occur and correlates those beliefs to subsequent motivation. The basic premise of this theory is that people want to understand their environments and, therefore, strive to understand why certain events happen. In the classroom, the understanding students have about the causes of past events influences their ability to control what happens to them in the future. For example, if students fail a test, they will probably attribute that failure to a specific cause, such as (1) lack of ability, (2) lack of effort, or (3) poor instruction. The selected attribution will affect their subsequent motivation to engage in similar learning activities. (<http://www.Education.com>)

The attribution theory by Fritz Heider (1958), often described as "the father of attribution theory", provided a method used for evaluating how people perceive the behaviors of themselves and other people, which were subsequently developed by others such as Jones and Davis, Harold Kelley and Bernard Weiner. Heider pointed out that reasons for people's behavior can be divided into internal and external causes. The internal causes are individuals themselves factors, such as need, emotion, interest, attitude, belief, effort, and so on; The external causes are factors in the surrounding environment of individuals, such as others' expectation, reward, punishment, instruction, order, good or bad weather, the degree of difficulty of work and so on (Heider, 1958, cited in Zhang Qingzong, 2011:113—114).

III. FACTORS AFFECTING SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

A. Motivation

Motivation refers to goal-directed behavior (cf. Heckhausen, 1991), and when one is attempting to measure motivation, attention can be directed toward a number of features of the individual. The motivated individual spends effort, is persistent and attentive to the task at hand, has goals, desires, and aspirations, enjoys the activity, experiences reinforcement from success and disappointment from failure, makes attributions from success concerning success and/or failure, is aroused, and makes use of strategies to aid in achieving goals. That is, the motivated individual exhibits many behaviors, feelings, cognitions, etc., that the individual who is unmotivated does not. (A.-M.Masgoret & R.C.Gardner, 2002) Motivation can be classified into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. The following are brief definitions of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.

1. Intrinsic Motivation

"Intrinsic motivation occurs when we act without any obvious external rewards. We simply enjoy an activity or see it as an opportunity to explore, learn, and actualize our potentials."(Coon & Mitterer, 2010) "Intrinsic motivation refers to the reason why we perform certain activities for inherent satisfaction or pleasure; you might say performing one of these activities in reinforcing in-and-of itself."(Brown, 2007) The factors that they identify as increasing intrinsic

motivation are:

- **Challenge:** People are more motivated when they pursue goals that have personal meaning, that relate to their self-esteem, when performance feedback is available, and when attaining the goal is possible but not necessarily certain.
- **Curiosity:** Internal motivation is increased when something in the physical environment grabs the individual's attention (sensory curiosity) and when something about the activity stimulates the person to want to learn more (cognitive curiosity).
- **Control:** People want control over themselves and their environments and want to determine what they pursue.
- **Cooperation and Competition:** Intrinsic motivation can be increased in situations where people gain satisfaction from helping others and also in cases where they are able to compare their own performance favorably to that of others.
- **Recognition:** People enjoy having their accomplishment recognized by others, which can increase internal motivation. (<http://www.psychology.about.com>)

2. Extrinsic Motivation

"Extrinsic motivation refers to our tendency to perform activities for known external rewards, whether they be tangible (e.g., money) or psychological (e.g., praise) in nature." (Brown, 2007) "Motivation can come from the outside, such as the motivation to win medals, receive financial rewards, and attract attention from the media. This is known as external, or extrinsic, motivation because it involves participation in sport for some kind of reward that is external to the process of participation." (Karageorghis & Terry, 1969)

B. Attitude

Gardner proposed that "attitude is an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent." (Gardner, 1985, P. 9). Attitudes towards the learning situation refer to the individual's reaction to anything associated with the immediate context in which the language is taught. There are many factors that need to be considered with respect to the learning attitudes, such as the evaluation of the teaching environment, the English class and classmates. Learning attitude is concerned with a learner's learning experiences, beliefs, values as well as a learner's educational background. The attitude of learning is one of the important individual factors that plays a vital role in the learning behaviors. It has great effect on the learning process and learning outcomes. It determines a learner's success or failure to a great extent. Therefore, more attention should be paid to the problem of the students' attitude toward learning.

(a) Baker (1988) summarized the main characteristics of attitude as follows:

- 1) Attitudes are cognitive (i.e. are capable of being thought about) and affective (i.e. have feelings and emotions attached to them).
- 2) Attitudes are dimensional rather than bipolar—they vary in degree of favorability/unfavorability.
- 3) Attitudes predispose a person to act in a certain way, but the relationship between attitudes and actions is not a strong one.
- 4) Attitudes are learnt, not inherited or genetically endowed.
- 5) Attitudes tend to persist but they can be modified by experience.

(b) Types of attitudes

Most of the research on attitudes with regard to language learning has tended to concentrate on attitude towards target language and their speakers. In 1950s, Gardner and Lambert investigated a number of different attitudes which they consider relevant to L2 learning. Stern (1983) classifies these attitudes into three types:

- 1) attitudes towards the community and people who speak the L2;
- 2) attitudes towards learning the concerned; and
- 3) attitudes towards languages and language learning in general. These attitudes are influenced by the personality of the learner, for instance whether he is ethnocentric or authoritarian.

IV. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

In order to find out the influences that motivation and attitude bring about to language learners, a thorough self-administered questionnaire survey is conducted in an attempt to draw a conclusion about the impact that learners' motivation and attitude have on students' learning process. The students investigated are Mongolian students in Inner Mongolia University for the Nationalities. They are all majors in clinical medicine chosen from two classes of different grades. One hundred valid replies are received in the research. They differ from each other in their English levels, learning motivation and attitude. Some students have a good command of English while others can not master English very well. In addition, the variety of their learning motivation as well as their learning attitude shown by their classroom behaviors also prove the differences between students. Through the survey, an overall knowledge of the students' learning status is to be investigated and the corresponding teaching strategies are to be explored. The survey is made in the following steps.

B. Research Design

(a)The teacher means to search for the correlations between the second language learners’ motivation and attitudes to second language learning. A study is conducted from the perspective of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and attribution. A question is raised by the teacher to find out what students’ motivation of learning English is. The answers diversify as follows.

Some students are motivated intrinsically in that they learn English for the purpose of communicating with foreigners, or for an interest in American culture, or even learning English is their hobby. Some students are motivated due to the extrinsic factors such as for the purpose of career development, higher education, access to information or travel.

(b) In the following two tables, the teacher means to search for the correlations between the second language learners’ attitudes to second language learning. Two surveys are conducted from the perspective of students’ learning attitudes and the attribution of students’ success or failure in learning. In table one, a question is raised by the teacher about the students’ attitude towards learning English. Six items are proposed with three alternatives for the students to choose. In table two, a survey about students’ attribution for success and failure is made to figure out the major problems that discourage students from learning.

C. Procedure

The survey is made in the following steps

(a) The teacher collects some typical questionnaires that investigate the attribution of students’ success and failure of second language learning and their attitudes towards English learning. A major purpose of the investigation is to estimate the magnitude of the contributions that the attribution theory and attitudes make to the achievement of second language learning.

(b)The teacher asks students to fill in the investigation form with regard to the affective factors that have influence on students’ learning abilities. The content of the forms are researches in the matter of students’ attitudes and attribution theory for failure and success. Afterwards, the teacher collects the data and counts out the percentage of each item. The table and the chart are shown below.

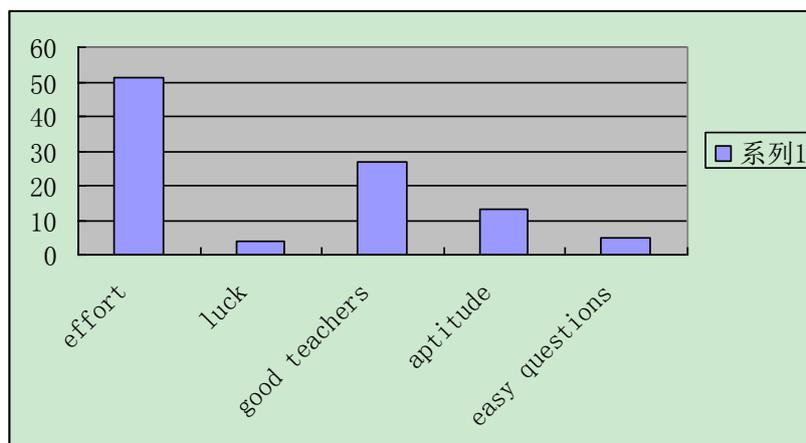
TABLE 1.
WHAT IS YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS LEARNING ENGLISH?

Items	options	AA(%)	BB(%)	CC(%)
My attitude toward learning English in class is	A.I will not learn if I don’t understand the teacher’s words B.I will listen if the teacher is good C.I will listen carefully	13%	35%	52%
In English class I will	A. never answer the teacher’s questions B. answer some easy questions C. answer questions actively	4%	51%	45%
If there is an English corner in university,	A.I will never attend B. Sometimes I will attend C.I will attend with great interest	6%	58%	36%
When I meet with some difficulties in learning English,	A.I will neglect them B. Ask for help only before the exam C. Ask the teacher immediately	9%	29%	62%
Why didn’t you want to learn English?	A. Because my English is poor B. Because English is difficult to learn C. Because English lesson is boring	32%	52%	16%
What will you do, if there is no English classes in the university?	A.I will not learn English B.I will learn English in daily life C.I will manage to attend some other English classes.	31%	42%	27%

TABLE2
ATTRIBUTIONS FOR FAILURE AND SUCCESS

Items	Distributions(%)
effort	51%
luck	4%
Good teachers	27%
aptitude	13%
easy questions	5%

THE CHART OF TABLE 2
ATTRIBUTIONS FOR FAILURE AND SUCCESS



D. Results and Discussions

(a) From the data analysis of table 1, we can get the conclusion that students' attitudes toward learning English is positive. Over half of the students would like to listen to the teacher carefully. However, 35% of the students will learn English carefully in class simply because they like a good teacher. Only a small part of the students take a passive attitude toward learning English. In English class, a large majority of the students are willing to answer the teacher's questions and only 4% of the students keep silent in class. More than half of the students take part in school activities concerning English learning occasionally. 36% of the students take part in the English corner actively and only 6% of the students take no interest in the English corner activities. When students suffer from difficulties in learning English, 62% of the students will choose to ask the teacher for help. 29% of the students may settle the problem when the exam is near at hand. Less than 10% of the students will do nothing but ignore the questions they don't know. As for the underachievers, they are not willing to learn English partly because of their poor English level and partly because they are in fear of difficulties when they learn English. A small number of the students lose interest in English due to a dull and boring English lesson. 31% of the students hold the idea that English is not a necessary lesson and they will not learn it unless they are obliged to. About half of the students like to learn English daily and 27% of the students intend to attend the English classes if there are no English lessons arranged in school. Table one reveals us a fact that over half of the students take a positive attitude toward English learning. Besides, the type of a teacher and the content of a lesson also have an impact on English learning.

(b) The survey in table two is concerned with the factors that affect a learner's success. Over half of the students believe that efforts are the key factors to achieve success. 27% of the students attribute their success to the help of a good teacher. 13% of the students consider a good learning aptitude as a reflection of success. No more than 5% of the students take success for granted because they think they are lucky enough or they have got easy questions in the exam. effort and aptitude are internal factors that weigh heavily on learners' grades. Failure to get a good command of English are ascribed to a lack of efforts and poor performance in language learning. In addition, a teacher of high level promotes the learning abilities of students. A good teacher may use various kinds of teaching methods to attract their students and the classroom environment is generally relaxed and lively. It is popularly believed that some students have a knack for learning languages, yet others are rather poor at it. This is because of their different learning aptitudes. Aptitude has almost invariably been used in connection with students in classrooms. It does not refer to the knack that students have for learning in real-life situations but to the ability to learn from teaching. It is the fact that some students have more aptitude for learning second languages than others. Predictions about success need to take into account the kind of classroom that is involved rather than being biased towards one kind or assuming there is a single factor of aptitude which applies regardless of situations.

V. TEACHING STRATEGIES IN VIEW OF AFFECTIVE FACTORS

A. Teaching Tips on Motivation

(a) Stevick (1971) introduces the concept of any second language learning course needing to have the 'strength' to carry its own 'weight' by means of the rewards that it provides for success. The effort of learning the second language should be made worthwhile for the learners, by what they eventually achieve as a result of having learned successfully. He suggests that any second language learning course can provide five types of reward to encourage learner motivation and success:

At syllabus-level the course will only have the 'strength' to carry its own 'weight' of it:

- i) is relevant---the content of the syllabus is seen by the learners to be relevant to their reasons for learning the L2.

ii) is complete--- includes all the language necessary for the learners to achieve their goals in the L2.

iii) is authentic--- the materials used are, and can be seen to be, linguistically and culturally authentic.

At lesson level to have strength the learners need to feel that what is taught is:

iv) satisfying---so that they leave the classroom each time feeling that they have benefited from being there.

v) useful---so that they can leave the classroom and use what they have learned immediately.

Therefore, the teacher can take advantage of the rewards to stimulate students' learning motivation. Moreover, in a learner-centered classroom, the learner's emotional needs must be taken into consideration and a positive and non-threatening classroom atmosphere has to be established so that the learner's learning motivation can be stimulated to a large extent.

(b) It is undeniable that the role of teachers is of great significance to stimulate and maintain students' foreign language learning motivation, and teachers are more concerned about motivating students' learning style. Teachers should try their best to help the students to develop their own sense of self efficacy. External factors, such as teaching resources, learning tasks, and course design contribute to improving students' self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the key factor for the students to achieve success. A learner with strong self-efficacy is likely to select challenging tasks and they can stick to their goals though they are difficult to accomplish. Furthermore, the teacher should emphasize that aptitude and effort are the most important factors to reach one's goal. The learners must rethink their learning behaviors and make efforts to grasp the language skills.

(c) The teacher should cultivate students' autonomous learning abilities.

Dickinson (1995) put forward that autonomous learning was not only an ability to learn independently, but also an attitude. He explained the attitude is the responsibility for making decisions for one's own learning; the ability referred to decisions and reflections for learning process. The mode of foreign language teaching should be student-centered and the teacher's role should be changed from the explainer to the enabler. That is, the teacher is aware of the thoughts and feelings of his students and knows well of the subject matter. In most of the cases, the teacher regards himself as someone whose job is to create the conditions that enable the students to learn for themselves. In such classroom environment, cooperation and negotiation are encouraged and a lot of autonomous learning will go on smoothly.

B. Teaching Tips on Learning Attitude

As for the students' learning attitude, there are some teaching methods to be followed. First of all, the teacher should help the students to set up the correct learning attitude. The teacher may take some good examples of learning English to let the students be aware of their wrong concepts about language learning and help them correct their false ideas. Secondly, the students' negative learning attitudes have something to do with the teacher's teaching methods. A rigid teaching method and boring teaching content usually make the students lose interest in the course. It is necessary for the teacher to change their teaching methods and stimulate students' learning interest. The teacher should employ heuristic teaching methods to inspire students' critical thinking. A novelty and diverse teaching method is bound to arouse the students' learning interest. Finally, it is the teacher's duty to eliminate students' negative learning experiences. Students' negative learning attitude results from their setbacks and failures encountered in the learning process. Students are rather frustrated by their unsuccessful learning experiences and they may feel inferior to the top students. Therefore, the teacher needs to encourage the students to learn from their poor performance with no criticism or condemn. Besides, the teacher can create a positive and happy classroom atmosphere for the students to ease their nervousness.

VI. CONCLUSION

In order to achieve successful language teaching, the teacher must pay attention to the affective factors of the students. Motivation and attitude are the most often discussed emotional factors. They play a vital part in foreign language learning. Students' learning interest can be motivated by enhancing their positive emotional experiences. With regard to the individual affective reactions, it is suitable for the teacher to take humanistic measures to eliminate students' negative emotional experiences and develop their positive learning attitudes. Moreover, learner-centered learning is believed to be enhanced by harmonious classroom relationships between teachers and students and by ensuring that the learner's affective needs are considered. A teacher's care, encouragement and rewards add weight to developing students' learning abilities. A variety of teaching methods as well as the cultivation of students' autonomous learning ability is considered to be feasible to improve the teaching standards.

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