

The Influence of Motivation on English Learning Initiative of Undergraduate Art and Sports Students

Yang Cao^{1,a}, Jiale Yi^{2,b}, Qianyu Yu^{3,c,*}

¹Conservatory of Music, Yangtze Normal University, Chongqing, 408000, China

²School of Physical Education, Hunan Normal University, Hunan Changsha, 410000, China

³School of Foreign Languages, Renmin University of China, Beijing, 100080, China

a. 202011551115@stu.yznu.edu.cn, b. 202130174112@hunnu.edu.cn, c. 2020202211@ruc.edu.cn

*corresponding author

Abstract: This article adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis, in order to explore the relationship between motivation and learning initiative of art and sports students. The respondent of the study is the undergraduate art and sports student from several comprehensive universities in China. The analysis establishes the connection between different types of motivation and learning initiative. Learning motivation is divided into six categories: intrinsic interest, learning context, stage achievement, future development, social expectation, and intermediary tools. Data is collected through questionnaires and is analyzed with the help of SPSS software. The results indicate that the English learning initiative of art and sports students shows a decreasing trend after college entrance examination. In terms of motivation, intrinsic motivation is low, while the extrinsic and instrumental motivation are relatively high. It presents a characteristic of “ought-to L2 self”. The higher the proportion of instrumental motivation accounts the total motivation, the lower the initiative for English learning. English learning initiative is also influenced by the degree of dispersion of motivation proportion. The more average the motivation types, the higher the initiative. Both educators and art and sports students need to work together to enhance students’ ideal L2 self motivation for English learning, and thus raise their initiative for English learning.

Keywords: art and sports students, English learning, motivation, initiative

1. Introduction

English learning is a multidimensional and dynamic process. Motivation is an important factor that affects this process, which is often inextricably linked with English learning initiative and outcome. Study initiative, efficiency and motivation always present a certain degree of positive correlation.

Second language learning motivation has gradually become a research focus in the field of applied linguistic since 1950s. Gardner and his colleagues proposed the social educational model. This model includes six factors that have relation and impacts on motivation: ability, attitude, integrative motive, instrumental motive, language anxiety, and language achievement. Gardner’s theory highlights integrative motive which refers to the motivation of becoming integrated with the target language community [1]. However, because of the increasing globalization, integrative motive under many conditions becomes less persuasive.

Since the 1990s, some scholars have proposed that psychological theories should be more widely used to expand Gardner's classic motivation model [2]. Factors concerned originally by theories of behavioral, cognitive, and humanistic psychology have been more often considered. The main source theories include Hierarchy of Needs, Achievement Motive Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Achievement Goal Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and so on [3–7]. Multiple classifications of motivation have been concluded. For instance, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, personal and situational motivation [8]. Earlier research on language learning motivation mainly focuses on learning outcomes [1]. Later, increasing emphasis has been put to self and situational factors in the process of English learning [9]. Research on language learning has also paid more attention to the differences in individual characteristics of learners, including age, gender, and different learning strategies.

In the 21st century, based on the theory of Gardner's integrative motive, Dörnyei drew on the basic psychological needs theory and the self-determination theory, and founded the L2 Motivational Self System. The L2 Motivational Self System consists of three main factors: ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience [9]. The theory of situated cognition also has an impact on Dörnyei's research. Compared with Gardner, Dörnyei emphasized more on the learning context and the social dynamic perspective [10]. Dörnyei's research reveals the complexity and diversity of motivation factors in foreign language learning, thereby strengthening the practical significance of language learning motivation theories. Nevertheless, few further assumptions have been made about the intrinsic structure of motivation, and the relationship between various motivation factors is seldom discussed.

Recent years, there have been large amounts of research in China concerning the correlation between motivation and undergraduate students' English learning initiative [11]. Many of them have found a weakening trend in students' English leaning initiative and achievement after college entrance examination, and have been doing research around the demotive factors [12]. However, there are few research concerning Chinese art and sport students, who are examined under a different standard when entering university. This article mainly focuses on the group of Chinese undergraduate art and sport students. The data of this study is collected through questionnaires, and is analyzed with the help of SPSS software. The study aims to find out the correlation between motivation and the respondents' English learning initiative.

2. Method

The study conducted a sampling investigation in several universities located at different regions of China. There are grossly 116 undergraduate art and sports students participating in the survey, and 116 effective questionnaires were received, with a rate of 100%. Among the respondents, there are 13 males and 103 females. The vast majority of respondents are between the ages of 19 and 22, with only 6 students aged under 19 and over 22. In grade, there are 20 freshmen, 44 sophomores, 44 juniors, and 8 seniors. In terms majors, 50 students major in arts, accounting for 43.1% of the total number, and 66 people major in sports, accounting for 56.9%.

The questionnaire is mainly divided into two parts, which respectively test the English learning initiative and motivation of art and sports students. The first part is a multiple-choice question, asking 'How has students' English learning motivation changed after college entrance examination?' The question mainly aims to qualify the initiative of art and sports students in English learning. Respondents are asked to choose between three options: 'decreasing', 'basically unchanged', or 'increasing'. The second part uses a Likert Scale, which is adopted by researchers such as Yihong, Gao in studies concerning English learning motivation [13]. The scale divides learning motivation into six types: intrinsic interest, learning context, stage achievement, future development, social expectations, and intermediary tools. The Likert Scale consists of 16 questions, referring to different

types of learning motivation factors. Students choose between “very disagree”, “relatively disagree”, “average”, “relatively agree”, and “very agree” based on their actual situation to the questions. The questionnaire was distributed online in July 2023. An average time of 1.5 minute was taken by each respondent to finish all the questions.

The six types of learning motivation included in this study refers to different motivational factors adopted from existing second language learning motivation theories. The the factors include: integrated motivation and instrumental motivation in social educational model; L2 learning experience , ideal L2 self, and ought-to L2 self in the self system of second language motivation; and social motivation emphasized in many psychological theories. While drawing on the classifications above, this study also provides contemporary supplements and explanations to the existing motivational factors, and endows motivation theories with more specific significance.

3. Results

3.1. An Overview of English Learning Initiative

Through one-way ANOVA using SPSS software, it was found that there was no significant difference in learning motivation between art students and sports students. In terms of learning initiative, there are slight differences between the two groups. The average score of art students’ initiative is 1.82, slightly higher than the average of 1.59 for sports students. However, the results of the ANOVA shows a weak significance in the difference between the two groups ($p=0.098$). Therefore, the status of art and sports students can be considered as a whole for analysis.

In the question concerning initiative transformation, as many as 42 and 55 respondents choose “unchanged” and “decreased” respectively, accounting for 36.2% and 47.4% of the total number. Only 19 respondents believe that their learning initiative have increased, accounting for merely 16.4%. In addition, the average score of learning initiative is 1.69, which is lower than the ideal average score.

3.2. Learning Motivation and the Rankings

The result of weighted average calculation shows the average values and rankings of different types of motivation, as are illustrated in Table 1. The stage achievement motivation scores the highest among all types, reaching 3.89, followed by future development, intermediary tools, social expectations, and learning context. The intrinsic interest motivation scores the lowest with only 3.03. There are slight differences between art students and sports students in the ranking of learning motivation types. The average intrinsic interest motivation of art students is 3.17, ranking the fifth, and the average learning context motivation is 3.13, ranking the sixth. On the contrary, sports students have learning context motivation ranking the fifth and intrinsic interest motivation ranking the last, with average score of 3.06 and 2.92.

Table 1: Average score and ranking of various types of learning motivation.

Rankings	Motivation types	Average scores
1	Stage achievement	3.89
2	Future development	3.68
3	Intermediary tools	3.43
4	Social expectations	3.25
5	Learning context	3.09
6	Intrinsic interest	3.03

3.3. The Connection Between Motivation and Learning Initiative

Statistics of individuals with high levels of learning motivation (i.e., the number of individuals who choose “relatively agree” and “strongly agree” for each question in the second part of the questionnaire) reveals a connection between motivation and learning initiative. The following two bar charts illustrates their relationship.

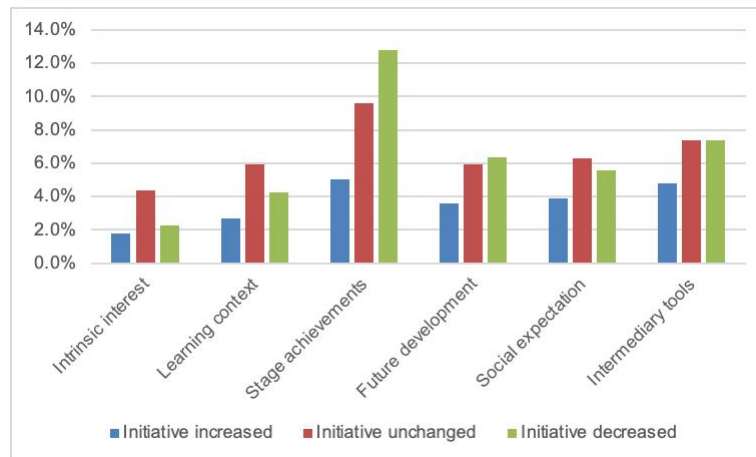


Figure 1: The proportion of different learning initiative in each motivation group.

Figure 1 demonstrates that the intensity of stage achievement motivation is negatively correlated with English learning initiative. The stronger the stage achievement motivation, the lower the learning initiative. The proportion of students with decreased motivation is up to 12.8% of the total number. Students with different levels of initiative exhibit a normal distribution in terms of internal interests and learning context. Among students who have stronger learning motivation in future development, social expectations, and intermediary tools, the proportion of different motivations is relatively average.

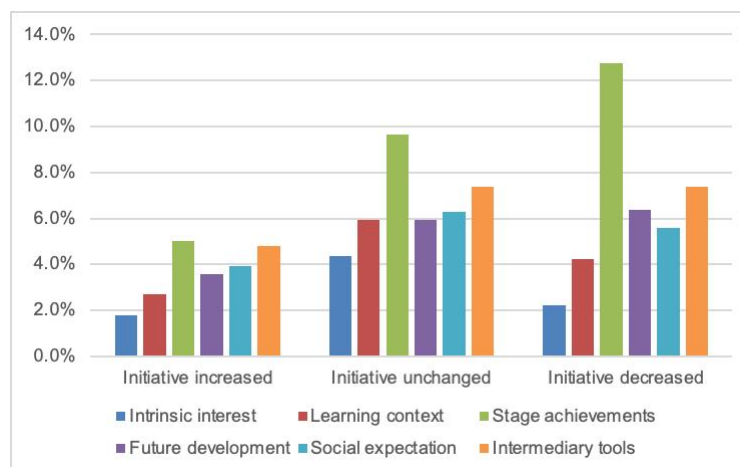


Figure 2: Proportion of different motivation in each initiative group.

Figure 2 illustrates that stage achievement motivation accounts for the highest proportion among students with different levels of initiative. It is the most significant in the group with decreased initiate. On the contrary, intrinsic interest motivation occupies the smallest proportion in all groups. Moreover, the group with higher learning initiative has a smaller degree of dispersion. Compared

with the increased and unchanged groups, the difference of motivation intensity among students with decreased initiative was particularly significant.

4. Discussion

4.1. Analysis Based on the Statistics

It can be concluded that overall, the initiative of undergraduate art and sports students in English learning have generally decreased compared to their high school stage. From the perspective of motivation types, after entering university, the motivation for art and sports students in English learning is mainly external and instrumental motivation, while the internal motivation is relatively low. Moreover, the data shows that art students have higher interest in the English language itself than sports students, while sports students have higher sensitivity to English learning experiences than art students.

Combining that the stage achievement motivation has the highest average value among the respondents, the statistics based on Figure 1 indicates that under the common requirements of undergraduate students and various competitive exams in universities, the learning motivation of art and sports students exhibits a strong “should be second language self” characteristic. However, when such instrumental motivation with low internalization value is too strong, it will have a negative impact on the learning initiative of art and sports students. Besides, students with unchanged learning motivation are the mainstream, while the number of students with increased and decreased motivation is relatively small. It reveals that art and sports students with small changes in learning initiate are more sensitive to their intrinsic motivation and learning experience, and pay more attention to their subjective feelings about the English learning process.

As for Figure 2, for one thing, social and external motivation have a relatively small impact on the respondents’ English learning initiative. For another thing, it also reflects that due to professional needs, English learning has limited influence on their future life and career. Different degrees of dispersion give more supplemental information. It demonstrates that the diversity and balance of motivation has benefits to the English learning initiative of art and sports students. Overly singular motivation is not conducive to the improvement of learning initiative.

4.2. Suggestions and Limitations

In response to the declining initiative, schools, educators, and students themselves need to work together to create a good learning atmosphere, promote the balanced development of students’ different learning motivations, and thus improve learning initiative. Schools and teachers should provide assistance in the education process, such as providing psychological support, setting up after-class tutoring system, encouraging self-interest development, and emphasizing the recognition of learning outcomes. Students themselves need to confirm their learning goals and career plans, actively communicate with teachers and interact with peers, establish a positive attitude towards English learning, in order to better face the pressure of graduation and employment under the trend of globalization.

Nevertheless, there are still some drawbacks in this study. The sample scale of this study is relatively small. Since the art and sports students are all from comprehensive universities in specific regions, the universality is also limited. Because of these limitations, the results may not be applicable to other regions and different types of universities. For another thing, this study adopts a cross-sectional design and is unable to observe the long-term changes and more causal relationships between motivation and learning initiative. Future research could consider combining longitudinal research to better track students’ changes throughout their studying process.

5. Conclusion

Existing studies shows a general decline in English study enthusiasm among undergraduate students. This study finds through sampling survey and data analysis that the English learning initiative of art and sports students also goes downward during the undergraduate stage. This phenomena is closely related to the various types of learning motivation. The discussion proposes suggestions for optimizing motivation and improving learning initiative from the perspectives of teachers, students, and parents. Finally, a discussion is made after the study and the limitations are listed.

Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

References

- [1] Gardner, R. C. (1968). *Attitudes and Motivation: Their Role in Second-Language Acquisition*. *TESOL Quarterly*, 2(3), 141–150. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3585571>
- [2] Oxford, R., & Shearin, J. (1994). *Language Learning Motivation: Expanding the Theoretical Framework*. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78(1), 12–28. <https://doi.org/10.2307/329249>
- [3] Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and Personality*. New York: Harper & Row.
- [4] McClelland, D. C., Atkinson, J. W., Clark, R. A., & Lowell, E. L. (1953). *The Achievement Motive*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- [5] Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). *Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being*. *American psychologist*, 55(1), 68.
- [6] Dweck, C. S. (1986). *Motivational processes affecting learning*. *American psychologist*, 41(10), 1040.
- [7] Schunk, D. H., & DiBenedetto, M. K. (2020). *Motivation and social cognitive theory*. *Contemporary educational psychology*, 60, 101832.
- [8] Chen, qi, & Liu, ru de. (2007). *Contemporary Psychology of Education*. Beijing Normal University Publishing Group.
- [9] Dörnyei, Z. and Ushioda, E. (2010) *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- [10] Dörnyei, Z. (1994). *Motivation and Motivating in the Foreign Language Classroom*. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78(3), 273–284. <https://doi.org/10.2307/330107>
- [11] Qiuju Liu & Xiangzhe Cui. (2023). *Development of the English Learning Motivation Scale for Non-English Majors*. *Advanced Management Science*(1). doi:10.7508/AMS.01.2023.20.32.
- [12] Gao Lixiang & Liu Honggang. (2022). *Revisiting students' foreign language learning demotivation: From concepts to themes*. *Frontiers in Psychology*. doi:10.3389/FPSYG.2022.1030634.
- [13] Gao, Y. et al. (2003) 'The Relationship between English Learning Motivation Types and Motivation Intensity: A Quantitative Study of Undergraduate Students', *Modern Foreign Languages*, 01, pp. 60–64.