



The Relationship between Motivation and Achievement  
——A Survey of the Study Motivation of English Majors  
in Qingdao Agricultural University

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**Abstract**

The survey conducted in Qingdao Agricultural University reveals the relationship between motivation and achievement as follows: instrumental motivation influences both high achievers and low achiever; while high achievers have greater integrative motivation than lower ones; Interest plays an extremely important role in study and high achievers have a strong sense of achievement.

**Keywords:** Motivation, Interest, English Learning

**1. Introduction**

Among the factors influencing students' learning, motivation is thought to be a very important reason for different achievement. Qin Xiaoqing (2002) says that motivation is a very important factor which determines the success or failure in second language learning, for motivation can directly influence the frequency of using learning strategies, willpower of learning, goal setting, and the persistence in learning. Qin (2003) also says that learning motivation influences the learners' autonomous learning ability, and determines the learners' confidence in overcoming learning difficulty. These theories on motivation demonstrate that motivation, as one of the crucial factors determining the success in language learning, attracts much attention of the researchers.

Theorists define motivation differently, which reveals the difficulty of describing it in clear and simple terms. Motivation is commonly thought as an inner state of need or desire that activates an individual to do something to satisfy them. Motivation is typically defined as the forces that account for the arousal, selection, direction, and continuation of behavior. Williams and Burden (2000) also give a proposed definition of motivation. In their opinion, motivation maybe constructed as a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, which leads to a conscious decision to act, and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and physical effort in order to attain a previously set goal.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) defines the integrative motivation as those that indicate an interest in learning the language in order to communicate with members of the second language community. It is characterized by those who learn the second language so as to identify themselves with the language speaking group and ultimately join it. They describe instrumental motivation as a motivation to acquire some advantage by learning a second language. A learner with instrumental, motivation regards language as an instrument to get a reward.

In the same line with Gardner and Lambert, Deci and Ryan (1985) put forward intrinsic and extrinsic motivation theory. More specially, intrinsic motivation refers to the motivation to engage in an activity which the learner thinks is enjoyable and satisfying. Extrinsically motivated behaviors are those actions carried out achieve some instrumental end, such as earning a reward or avoiding a punishment.

As mentioned above, motivation plays an important role in the learning of a foreign language, and most previous studies on the role of motivation have been greatly influenced by the classical model (Gardner and Lambert 1972) and their expansions. These studies focus on two types of motivation: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation.

An interactively motivated L2 learners show an interest in learning about the culture of the target language. "Learners with an integrative attitude have a compelling purpose for learning, which is an intrinsic force to learn a language and those learners will achieve more than the others" Ellis (1994). Though instrumental motivation is tied to a specific goal, its influence tends to be maintained only until that goal is achieved. On the other hand, if the goal is continuous, it

seems possible that an instrumental motivation will also continue to be effective. Students with strong instrumental motivation can also achieve a lot, if the kind of motivation is strengthened in the process of learning (Gardner 1972). Deci and Ryan claim that learners who are interested in learning tasks and outcomes for their own sake (intrinsic) rather than for rewards (extrinsic) are likely to become more successful and effective learners. They also claim that when someone is told to have done a task well, this external events will enhance feelings of competence. Intrinsic motivation is likely to increase. By contrast, events that lead to feelings of incompetence are likely to undermine intrinsic motivation.

In China, a lot of researchers pay attention to learners' motivation. The notion is accepted that motivation can lead to successful learning. (Shu Dingfang & Zhuang Zhixiang 1996; Wen Qiufang & Wang Haixiao 1996) Therefore, understanding the situation of students' motivation will be helpful for the organization of various teaching activities, the adoption of effective teaching approaches and the promotion of English teaching. Wu Heping (2001) points out that researchers on motivation of foreign language teaching (FLL) can help us to understand the individual difference, the psychological process of learning foreign language and to come up with effective methods to promote students' motivation.

Currently, scholars design and conduct a lot of studies on motivation, but in these studies, non-English major students are often chosen as subjects, while the achievement of English majors is seldom studied. People often think that it is reasonable for English majors to learn English, since they choose English as their majors. In this paper, juniors of English majors are chosen as the subjects and their scores of TEM4 as the symbol of achievement to explore the relationship between motivation and achievement.

## 2. Methodology

In order to understand English majors' motivation, a survey was conducted on 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2007. The study is intended to answer the following questions:

1. Is instrumental motivation very important in English majors' study?
2. Which type of motivation has more influences on high achievers, integrative motivation or instrumental motivation?
3. Is interest the key factor influencing students' achievement?
4. Are there any differences in the sense of achievement between high achievers and low achievers?

The participants are 65 juniors from two classes and they are divided into three groups: low achievers, moderate achievers and high achievers according to their TEM-4 grades.. Most of them began to learn English when they were in junior middle school. When they entered the university, there were not so much differences in their records of exam. Then, they choose the English as their major for various motivations. Three years have passed and they have different achievements which may be explained in terms of different motivations.

The questionnaires were handed out by their teacher, and the students were told to answer the questions carefully and did not worry about the results. Since there are no right or wrong answers, they did not need to feel worried about their choices, they can make their own decisions according to their own situation. Therefore, the data can truly reveal their response to the questions.

The questionnaire was designed according to the GaoYihong's Motivation Questionnaire, but some items had been changed to be appropriate to the particular situation under research.

The questionnaire consists of 15 questions. Each was designed to have a test of students' motivation. They were grouped by instrumental motivation, integrative motivation, interest and sense of achievement.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Instrumental Motivation and Achievement

Table 1 (statements 1--5) was designed to study the different motivation between high achievers and low achievers. Statements are listed as following: (1)"One important aim of learning English is for the certificate of graduation." ; (2)"My first aim to learn English is to get good results in the test for going abroad and further education." ; (3)"It is very beneficial for me to learn English very well since it is a very important instrument in the modern world." ; (4)"As long as I learn English well, I can find a good job." ; (5)"The purpose of my learning English is to better understand the situation of economy and technology of foreign country." The results are as follows:

Insert Table 1 Here.

From the above table, it can be seen clearly that instrumental motivation plays a very important part in each group. Almost every student has instrumental motivation. They choose English major for graduation, job-hunting, going abroad and better knowing the world. It is extremely obvious that students who choose English as a useful instrument are very high. The rate is 83.3%, 80.5%.100% respectively in each group.

It is beyond the expectation to find the fact that English majors' attitude and motivation towards learning English is just opposite to my original opinion. It can be explained from the following reasons. As the world is becoming more and more open, traveling, doing business and other international activities are popular and frequent, as a result, English as a popular language is being learned by more and more people. It is required that almost every person needs to understand and speak English well. If a youth wants to get well off in the modern world, he had better master English very well. Therefore, choosing English as one's major is a good selection for most students. Under the guidance of this principle, they put their efforts to study English, whether they are low achievers or high achievers.

It is also easy to find the second reason. As the job-hunting is both hard and fierce in our modern society, "will choose a major for finding a better job" is a common reason for students to make their choices. English as a new subject in our country is still popular while most people still do not have a good command of English and a lot of people are not skillful at it. As adults, students choose English as their majors and they hope to find a relatively good job in the future.

The last reason is not as obvious as the first two ones. It is for practical use. It is well known that we need to pass a fixed grade in TOEFL exams, and then we can have the qualification for further education in foreign countries. Therefore, most people think that if they choose English major, they will have more chances to communicate with foreigners in order that their English will be improved a lot. Thus the high rate of choices of instrumental motivation is easy to understand as the specific reasons have been listed.

### *3.2 Relationship between Integrative Motivation and Achievement*

Statements that focus on students' integrative motivation are listed as following (6) "I learn English because I am interested in the social relationship and culture of English speaking people." (7) "Since the European and American countries have their unique ways of thinking, I learn English for a better knowledge of them.", (8) "I learn English to have my personal experience of their foreign culture." A comparison between students' choices of integrative motivation is as following:

Insert Table 2 Here

It can be seen from the table that the high achievers and the low achievers have the most significant distinction in integrative orientation. As analyzed above, both high-achievers and low-achievers are instrumentally motivated and influenced by the learning situation to some extent. They both attach considerable importance to extrinsic goals. However, their achievement is quite different from each other. The complicated reasons will be analyzed one by one.

Motivation consists of motivational intensity, attitude toward English and desire to learn English. Motivation is positively and significantly related to students' achievement. It is understandable because it is also consistent with the results of some researchers. Motivation has been widely accepted by teachers and researchers as one of the key factors influencing the success of foreign language learning (Ely 1986; Dornye 1994; Williams and Burden 1997). When the subjects really have a positive attitude towards the target culture and English -speaking people, they will enjoy learning English and plan to learn English as much as possible and thinking English as an important part of learning program, and they will also put great efforts to learn it. Therefore, they will improve their listening, reading and writing ability.

With integrative motivation, students will have a better understanding of the culture, technology of English-speaking countries, and their horizon will be broadened. Those students will make long-termed and short-termed study plan according to their own learning situation. They will also arrange the studying time reasonably, and take part in some activities related to English in order to achieve the best learning results (Wei Zhaomin 2006). In the process of participating, their performances are improved a lot day by day, the high achievers learn much in the course of it.

"Students with surface motivation usually have a very clear purpose of learning English---passing the English tests or finding a better job." (Liu Xianhong 2005) They hope to turn their "dream" into reality as soon as possible and do not realize the importance of management strategies that play an important role in improving learning efficiency. They are not concerned about the learning process and only care about the final result. So they seldom make a study plan, arrange a proper study time and assess their progress. They spend less time on reading, listening, speaking and writing which require great efforts. When they learn English, they just turn to the mother tongue for help and do not use other strategies to improve their English. It is because they are only motivated by external purpose without internal motivation. As a result, the goal of their study is simple and they are easily influenced by learning environment. Therefore, "they have less power to sustain efforts to learn and cannot achieve a lot; as a result, they become unsuccessful learners" (Wei Zhaomin 2006).

"Internal motivation is related to the long-termed success, whereas, external motivation with short-termed success." (Hua Huifang 1998) Successful language learners can overcome the anxiety of competition and are propelled to study better rather than overwhelmed by difficulties (Ellis 1986). This result is consistent with the strategy of successful learners, successful learners have a strong desire to communicate with the English-speaking people, they do not fear mistakes, and they are not frightened to lose faces, and can bear the vagueness of language to some extent (Rubin 1975). Successful learners are risk-taking, and are good at making full use of every chance to improve them.

(Beebe 1983)

The great majority of the less successful students learn English for pragmatic or extrinsic reasons, such as finding a good job or passing tests. Once they meet difficulties, most of them choose to stop learning; they fear to lose faces and are afraid of making mistakes. Therefore, it is quite reasonable for them to become less successful learners.

### 3.3 Comparison between Different Achievers in Terms of Interest

Interest comes from inside the learner--love of the language, internal curiosity and it can be explained to be a love of the target language and target culture and its people. Interest plays an important role in the learning process. Deci and Ryan (1985) argue that internal motivation becomes very important in education setting because learning is most likely to bear fruit when the environment provides opportunities for the learners to satisfy their natural curiosity.

Statements 9, 10 and 11 focus on learners' interest, they are listed as follows: "I have special interest in language."; "I am interested in English because I have the hobby of watching English movies."; "My love for the English magazines makes me feel interested in learning English." The data are collected as follows:

Insert Table 3 Here

It is easy to find the positive correlation between interest and achievement from the above table. Students exhibit an internal orientation, participation in the learning task which provides its own motivation: it is the desire. And students exert efforts because the task itself stimulates curiosity and interest through uncertainty or challenge or promotes satisfaction through feelings of competence or control.(Brophy 1998; Butler1988; Goltfried 1985;Lepper 1988).

Learners with high motivation tend to be more successful in learning. The source of motivation can be derived from interest, which then fuels the desire to learn and continue to influence the learners' conscious decision to act and the effort that they will put into learning. Learning is not a burden for them but a moment of enjoyment, they will feel very happy to learn, and the efficiency will be greatly improved. (Gardner 1972).

It is also reported that the persistence of learners is positively affected by having internal interest (Qin Xiaoqing 2003). The chances of success will be greatly enhanced if the students come to love the learning process. It is common for students to meet difficulties in learning such as getting low results in test, poor pronunciation and so on. However, if the students have strong interest in learning the language, they will try to analyze the situation and find the solutions to the problems. At last their efforts will be sustained rather than lessened.

American psychologist A.I.Lasarus' study shows that students will enjoy great advantage of highly intelligent persons if they have great interest in learning. The reason is associated with the strategy of interest. It can be put in this way when students have to face the dull, repeated task, their internal motivation will be improved and their interest toward the present activities and situation will finally benefit their performances (Wang Zhenhong 2000). High achievers take advantage of this strategy and can feel the enjoyment of learning and finally internal motivation is aroused and achievements are improved.

On the contrary, students who have no interest in learning are likely to feel anxious and achieve low in the end. The learning is just a burden to them (Wen Qiufang (1996), students with interest learn something because they want to learn, but the opposite group is just to have to learn without internal motivation. They won't use proper strategy to learn and they do not put great efforts and they never feel the enjoyment of learning. Without initiative and interest, they just finish the homework hurriedly and never go deep to learn more, and learning becomes dull to them and their little sense of responsibility of learning is lessened, at last they lose their interest forever.

### 3.4 Comparison of Sense of Achievement between Different Achievers

Sense of achievement refers to the fact that people need a sense of success and satisfaction in the process of their learning English, and become confident in their ability to learn.

Sense of achievement is categorized as one of the subjects of internal motivation. McClelland and Atkinson (1953) suggest that people have different levels of need for achievement according to the previous learning experiences. High achievers are those who expect the world to contain reasonable challenges and respond to such challenges and believe that even if tasks or situations are beyond their present abilities, they can achieve with some efforts on the basis of encouraging and successful earning experience. In contrast, low achievers are those who have discouraging and unsuccessful learning experiences and prefer challenges and tasks which are either excessively demanding or very easy. If tasks are very easy, they can feel confident in their success. If tasks are too difficult, the failure is endurable because they do not have to worry themselves about their failure, although it is contrary to our intuition (Skehan 1989).

Since the sense of achievement is very important for second language learning, statements 12~15 are designed to have a better understanding of different achievers' motivation. Statement 12 is "I got a strong sense of achievement in the process of learning English." Only 33% of low achievers agree with the item, whereas it is 36% and 100% for moderate achievers and high achievers respectively. Statement 13 is "if I make a great progress in learning English after

overcoming a lot of difficulties, I will love English very much.” The rate is 41.6%, 76.5%, 83.3% respectively for each group. Statement 14 is “If I often get low scores in learning English, I will think I am unable to learn the subject well” The positive response to is 33.3%, 17.02%, 0% of the low achievers, moderate achievers and high achievers respectively. Statement 15 is “when I can not do well in the English test, I feel gloomy and do not want to go on studying”. The positive rate is 25%, 25.53%, 0%.

From the data listed above, we can easily find that low achievers relatively have lower sense of achievement. However, the higher the students achieve, the higher their sense of achievement is. And also, low achievers are easily defeated by difficulties, on the contrary, the high achievers will not stop studying when they meet difficulties and they are not easily discouraged as other group members.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) suggest that motivation is the independent variable and achievement is the dependent one in the L2 acquisition. High motivation enhances learning and success or perceived success can sustain motivation (Xie Xiajun 2003). In other words, motivation is interdependent with achievement. Students’ motivation promotes their achievement. On the other hand, achievement can lead to higher motivation. As Burn Stall (1975) and McNamara (1993) argue, the successful experience in the process of language learning affects motivation at a later stage. The reason can be easily found as following:

High achievers tend to attain self-perfection through language learning. They have a desire to promote their abilities to learn, which in turn leads to effective efforts such as listening carefully in classroom, seeking chances to talk with people who speak English well, and they will also do a lot of activities to improve themselves since they tend to be perfect. They are not easy to be satisfied with the present situation and achievement and they will also compete with others due to the fact that they have a strong sense of competition.

Besides, high achievers are more willing to accept challenges than low achievers. When the challenge is too demanding, low achievers tend to avoid it and seek for other chances of challenging in which they may feel competent. On the contrary, high achievers can feel competent even in the excessive challenges. In the process of employing the strategy of challenges, they make more progress and they become more confident than before, which in turn gives their strong sense of achievement.

The more efforts they make, the more fruits they will reap. High achievers are good at carrying out a plan about realizing the aim of language. Moreover, they could persist in carrying out their plans. With their scores in exams getting higher, the high achievers may get the sense of achievement more frequently and they are more internally motivated to learn. (Lai Xuefang 2005)

On the other hand, low achievers often lose their sense of achievement because of too low scores which result in their weaker and weaker internal motivation of learning English. They are just satisfied with the low scores although they are not willing to accept the fact. They never try to attain to be perfect in language learning since it is far beyond their abilities.

Students who get high scores in the exams can continue their learning behaviors more easily than those with low scores, and the former, who get sense of achievement in the process of learning English more frequently are internally motivated to continue learning more effectively. On the contrary, students who have no success in the process of learning English may give up their learning behaviors which may lead to their failure in exams.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The results of the survey reveal the correlation among motivational factors and their influences in students’ English learning. To sum up, the major findings include:

Instrumental motivation plays an extremely important role in English majors’ learning; both high achievers and lower achievers have higher instrumental motivation; high achievers have higher sense of achievement while low achievers have lower sense of achievement.

Students with higher motivation always achieve greater success in their language learning, while those lacking in motivation make no attempts in the process of language learning and often fail the exam.

If a student lacks motivation, it seems that he is unlikely to achieve success no matter who the teacher is or what the curricula are, whereas the highly motivated students can succeed in whatever conditions. Therefore, arousing students’ motivation has become an important part in foreign language teaching. Teachers should concentrate on increasing students’ motivation and developing the skills or strategies to make them more competent so that they are able to take ownerships of their own learning.

Admittedly, it is unavoidable that there are some limitations in the survey, since the questionnaire used in the survey is not perfect. Another limitation perhaps lies in the sample used in the survey. The participants are all from the same grade, so they may not fully represent all English levels of majors.

This paper only emphasizes the effects of motivation in language learning. In fact, motivation is just one of the many factors which influence the learning process and the learning results. So, teachers should also pay attention to other factors such as learners' learning style, personality and language aptitude, etc. to get them actively involved in class. What is more, the motivational strategies discussed above need to be supplemented and justified by further empirical research.

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Table 1.

Achievement Groups	Statements				
	1	2	3	4	5
Low- Achievement Group	50%	58.3%	83.3%	75%	41.6%
Moderate- Achievement Group	34.04%	21.2%	80.85%	59.5%	34.0%
High- Achievement Group	16.6%	16.6%	100%	83.3%	33.3%

Table 2.

Achievement Groups	Statements		
	6	7	8
Low-Achievement Group	25%	8.3%	16.6%
Moderate-Achievement Group	17%	29.78%	46.8%
High-Achievement Group	66.6%	66.6%	83.3%

Table 3.

Achievement Groups	Statement 9	Statement 10	Statement 11
Low-Achievement Group	41.6%	50%	41.6%
Moderate-Achievement Group	44.6%	63.8%	63.8%
High-Achievement Group	66.6%	66.6%	83.3%