

# *An Analysis on the Influencing Factors of English Learning Motivation of Higher Vocational Students*

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**Abstract:** This study explores the elements that affect the motivation of higher vocational students in learning English. By employing a questionnaire approach and systematic cluster analysis, this study revealed that intrinsic factors are crucial in mastering English, acting as the main source of motivation. These factors include goals and planning, differences in English foundation, learning methods. Extrinsic factors such as teacher support, teaching methods, and classroom environment offer vital additional support. The results indicate that educators should focus on strategies to boost students' intrinsic motivation. Therefore, educators should focus on enhancing students' intrinsic motivation and consistently improve teaching strategies to comprehensively boost English language learning outcomes.

## **1. Background**

The current situation regarding English language learning among students in higher vocational colleges is a cause for concern. Many students have a weak grasp of basic English skills, which leads to difficulties in their classes. This lack of proficiency makes it challenging for teachers to keep up with instruction. Some students exhibit disruptive behaviors that affect their learning and classroom environment. It is crucial to build students' confidence and boost their motivation to learn English. In second language acquisition, motivation plays a vital role in determining success. Understanding what drives higher vocational students to learn English is important for adjusting their attitudes, increasing their interest, and enhancing their motivation.

Recent studies on college students' English learning motivation have concentrated on several areas. Researchers have confirmed that intrinsic motivation stems from internal needs, serves as a lasting incentive, and plays a vital role in successful English language acquisition. Students with stronger intrinsic motivation are more likely to actively participate in English study. Some researchers have examined the lack of motivation among college students, finding that most students are motivated by external and instrumental factors<sup>[1]</sup>. Others have investigated links between college students' anxiety in English classes, motivation, attitudes, and other factors affecting learning outcomes, suggesting a structural simulation model<sup>[2]</sup>. Researchers have also examined emotion, cognition, and behavior in learning input, identifying motivation, interest, and teachers as key factors<sup>[3]</sup>. This study, which focuses on senior students, aims to identify the factors affecting their motivation to learn English. Through a questionnaire survey, this study seeks to

determine which factors have a greater impact on senior students' motivation, providing empirical evidence for higher vocational English teaching reforms.

## **2. Research Design and Implementation**

### **2.1. Research Methodology and Steps**

This study employed literature analysis, peer reviews, questionnaire surveys, and hierarchical clustering methods. Through a literature review on college students' motivation for learning English, various influencing factors were identified. A questionnaire survey was conducted to investigate the factors affecting English learning motivation among higher vocational education students. The results were analyzed using SPSS21.0 software, and factors contributing to insufficient motivation were clustered using hierarchical clustering techniques.

### **2.2. Questionnaire Design**

The questionnaire comprised three sections. The first section collected basic demographic information, including gender, academic grade, college affiliation, interest in English, and perceived importance of English acquisition. The second section comprised questions on 25 factors influencing college students' motivation to learn English. The third section solicited optional feedback. Through literature review, five major categories of factors were identified: learning environment, teacher-related factors, teaching-related factors, peer-related factors, and personal factors, with 25 specific influencing factors delineated. The questionnaire structure underwent peer review and small-scale distribution to evaluate its reliability. Two factors demonstrating lower reliability were removed, resulting in a final questionnaire with 25 items. A ten-point scale was used, where 10 indicated greatest influence, 5 moderate influence, and 1 least influence.

### **2.3. Sample Analysis**

Random sampling was used to distribute paper questionnaires to sophomore students at Hubei Business College. Out of the 200 questionnaires distributed, 168 valid responses were obtained, resulting in an 84% response rate. The respondents included 85 males (50.6%) and 83 females (49.4%) from the Schools of Urban Construction, Accounting, and Economics and Management. SPSS 21.0 was used to analyze reliability and validity: Cronbach's alpha was 84.1%, KMO value was 0.83, and Bartlett's test of sphericity significance level was less than 0.001, indicating a reasonable and effective questionnaire design suitable for factor analysis.

### **2.4. Factor Clustering Statistics**

This research utilized SPSS21.0 software to process the questionnaire data. Initial statistics revealed that 32.1% of students were highly interested in learning English, 11.3% showed no interest, and the remainder were neutral. However, 71.4% of students acknowledged the significance of learning English, and only 4.2% considered it unimportant. To analyze the 25 factors influencing English learning motivation, this study employed a systematic cluster analysis. This approach lacks explicit sample classification criteria and instead calculates the variance in the sample data, subsequently regrouping the classifications based on the magnitude of the differences among the samples. Given that systematic cluster analysis categorizes the 25 factors into several groups, and dividing these factors into three primary categories is more representative, we can classify all factors into three main categories: core, important, and general factors, affecting English

learning motivation based on each factor's score level. The specific classification results are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Factor Classification Result

Factors	Classification Results
Core Factors	Goals and Planning, Differences in English Foundation, Learning Methods
Important Factor	Textbook, Teaching content, Negative Teacher Personality, Teacher Self-centered, Cognitive Deficits, Motivational Tools, Homework
General Factors	Self-improvement Needs, Employment Needs, Examination Needs, Going Abroad Needs, Honor needs, Teaching Equipment, Extracurricular Practice, Teacher's Positive Personality, Teacher's Professional Competence, Updating Teaching Methods, Teaching Enrichment, Teaching Feedback, Negative Peer Guidance, Positive Peer Guidance, Personal Intrinsic Interest

### 3. Analysis of Factors of Insufficient Learning Motivation

#### 3.1. Core Influencing Factors

Analysis of the grouping of factors reveals that the higher vocational students interviewed predominantly perceived personal elements, such as "goals and planing" "differences in foundation" and "learning styles," having the most substantial influence on their motivation to study English.

##### 3.1.1. Differences In Management Models and Lack of Goals

Students in higher vocational college often lack clear goals or plans, which is linked to the differing management styles between middle and higher vocational education. In secondary education, teachers primarily direct student management, with students in a passive role following simple methods. In the college, students have the autonomy to organize extracurricular activities, provided they meet academic requirements. The sudden shift from passive management in high school to self-directed management in college often leaves students undisciplined, unable to set reasonable learning objectives and development plans, and lacking the initiative for self-improvement<sup>[4]</sup>. Based on the author's teaching experience, even when homework is assigned, only a minority complete it as instructed, with some failing to submit despite reminders. This scenario shows that without clear goals and planning, students struggle to complete basic tasks set by instructors, resulting in low course participation, poor process assessment performance, and increased risk of course failure.

##### 3.1.2. The Challenge of Diverse Student Sources

Higher vocational colleges are expanding enrollment criteria to maintain student numbers, resulting in significant variations in student quality that affect teaching. The primary source is high school graduates, with secondary school students as the additional source. These students often have a weak English foundation and perform poorly in college entrance exams, showing partiality. Freshmen frequently seek assistance, expressing inadequate English foundations, with bad college entrance exam scores. Some students studied Japanese in high school, raising concerns about learning English in the college. In English classes, students at the back of the classroom, often lack motivation to engage, claiming they do not know the answer or understand the question when they are prompted. Due to their weak foundation, these students have developed a fixed mindset that they cannot excel in English, leading to a lack of initiative in learning. When confused, they struggle to articulate questions, become disinterested, and lose motivation. Their lack of self-

discipline often results in non-learning activities, such as using cell phones, sleeping, or chatting, which hinders learning outcomes and negatively affects the classroom environment and other students' motivation.

### **3.1.3. Lack of Learning Methods and Adaptations**

Higher vocational students often struggle to maintain motivation in learning English due to ineffective strategies. They reported obstacles such as memorizing vocabulary, pronunciation, translation, listening, reading comprehension, and writing skills. These difficulties lead to the perception that progress in "listening, reading, writing, and translating" is unattainable, hindering the identification of suitable learning approaches. This results in an aversion to learning English and decreased motivation. To address this, students should strengthen their foundational knowledge and develop a systematic learning approach. For vocabulary, a structured study plan that begins with high-frequency words is essential. For sentence learning, starting with simple sentences and practicing dialogue enhances understanding. Listening practice should begin with slow-paced materials that increase in difficulty to identify key information. For reading, students should build skills through extensive reading and understanding the text structure. In writing, accumulating common sentences and practicing simple composition are beneficial. Learning methods vary individually; therefore, students should learn from teachers and peers, adapting to their characteristics, experimenting, and developing effective personalized methods.

## **3.2. Important Influencing Factors**

Important factors, such as "teaching materials," "teaching content," "incentives," and "homework assignments" are integral to the educational structure. Aspects such as "negative teacher personality" and "teacher self-centered" pertain to teacher-related factors, while "cognitive deficits" are considered inherent factors.

### **3.2.1. Discrepancy between Teaching Content and Vocational Requirements**

Teaching content is crucial to education, serving as essential resources for instructors and learners. They are fundamental to teaching and encompass knowledge dissemination and skill development. Textbooks in higher vocational college face issues like lack of alignment with real-world needs, poor structure, outdated presentation, insufficient specialization, and superficial updates. For example, the New Comprehensive Course of Practical English is a public textbook in our college, however with little relevance to higher vocational students. Although its content and topics are outdated each semester, failing to keep pace with contemporary English language, society, and culture. These updates are limited to minor adjustments and awkward inclusion of ideological content; the overall content has not improved, drawing criticism from teachers and students. Enhancing English teaching content in higher vocational institutions should focus on students' vocational needs and learning motivation, increasing practicality, interactivity, and engagement. By integrating modern vocational topics, multicultural contexts, and real-world scenarios, more interactive exercises should be developed to address students' vocational learning requirements and improve teaching effectiveness. Materials should be thoroughly updated to ensure current content and strengthen professionalism and vocational training functions.

### **3.2.2. Motivational Strategies to Enhance Teaching Effectiveness**

Motivation is a strategy used by educators to stimulate students' interest in learning and enhance their motivation to acquire the English language. Pan(2014)<sup>[5]</sup> suggested establishing incentive

mechanisms in higher vocational English instruction through intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, learning reflection, and a conducive environment. This strategy fosters collaboration between students and teachers, shifting from passive to active English-learning habits and improving teaching outcomes. The adaptable reading circle method in English classes can boost students' engagement and enthusiasm. The teacher stratifies the class and forms diverse groups based on abilities and styles, assigning reading materials and roles such as leader, word master, recapitulator, and problem-solver. During group reading, the teacher uses a "task-driven" strategy for collaborative inquiry, acting as a guide. In the presentation stage, each group selects a representative to present outcomes, assess effectiveness, and enable class-wide learning. Finally, the teacher evaluated and rewarded each group's performance.

### **3.2.3. Homework Assignment and Instructional Feedback**

Homework assignments are integral to the feedback and evaluation processes in education. They reinforce knowledge and assess learning outcomes while playing a vital role in enhancing students' motivation to learn English. Through well-designed homework, educators can evaluate students' learning progress and promptly reflect on classroom effectiveness to improve teaching quality. According to Peng(2013)<sup>[6]</sup>, thoughtfully designed after-class tasks not only promote active learning and foster students' exploratory and problem-solving skills but also enhance their ability to identify and address issues and engage in critical thinking. The author suggests that college English homework should integrate practicality with personalization, aiming to help students consolidate their knowledge while developing their comprehensive skills and preparing them for future career opportunities.

### **3.2.4. Teachers Negative Personality Traits**

Among the factors related to educators, "teacher's negative personality" or "teacher's self-centered" can adversely affect pedagogical methods, students' attitudes towards learning, and the overall classroom environment. When educators exhibit impatience, excessive strictness, or indifference during instruction, they may neglect students' emotions and needs, resulting in ineffective communication. This can diminish the quality of instruction and disrupt teacher-student relationships, negatively impacting students' learning experiences and classroom atmosphere. For instance, educators who merely "read PPT Lesson Plan" in class without engaging students lead to a one-sided teaching style that can bore students, making it difficult for them to concentrate and fostering a dislike for learning. Some educators focus excessively on their own teaching pace, disregarding students' comprehension, which leaves students without sufficient time to grasp previous material before progressing. This approach reduces the effectiveness of learning. Additionally, some educators employ a "one size fits all" teaching strategy, failing to tailor instruction to diverse student needs. The lack of differentiated teaching makes it challenging to address the learning needs of the entire class.

### **3.2.5. Homework Assignment and Instructional Feedback**

Cognitive deficits in students are characterized by an inability to recognize the significance of learning English. This issue is particularly evident in their failure to fully comprehend the importance of English education and their struggle to transform the external benefits of learning English into intrinsic motivation for learning. This challenge is prevalent among students in contemporary higher vocational colleges. Many students perceive English as irrelevant to their daily lives and see no future utility in learning it, resulting in a negative attitude towards English education. This cognitive bias directly impacts motivation and learning. To address this, educators

in higher vocational college should implement positive guidance strategies to help students create authentic English learning environments. They should consistently emphasize the crucial role of English learning in students' future career development, closely link English education with students' career planning, and assist students in developing a correct understanding.

### **3.3. General Influencing Factors**

General factors are predominantly shaped by the learning environment, teaching and teacher-related aspects, and peer dynamics. Learning environments include both social and educational contexts; pedagogical factors encompass essential components such as teacher expertise, instructional strategies, curriculum planning; and peer factors involve peer interaction, peer support and group effect .

#### **3.3.1. Inadequate Perception of Socio-environmental Factors**

Given the limited understanding among students regarding social environmental factors such as "self-improvement demand" "employment demand" "examination demand" "overseas demand" and "honor demand" educators must implement comprehensive guidance strategies. This will help students comprehend social development trends and the employment landscape, enabling them to plan their future scientifically. At the cognitive guidance level, it is essential to elucidate English's pivotal role in enhancing academic qualifications, particularly its impact on advancing higher education and graduate studies. The advantages of English in the job market should be emphasized, highlighting that passing CET4 or CET6 can enhance employment competitiveness. The practical importance of English in international work settings should be underscored, especially in foreign trade, cross-border e-commerce and international logistics. Students should be encouraged to excel in all subjects and strive for higher honors to enhance their overall abilities. Colleges should actively pursue modernizing the English teaching environment, including timely updating of multimedia teaching tools to transform classroom English teaching in the digital intelligence era and improve teaching effectiveness. They should organize diverse language practice activities, such as English culture festivals and English corners, to provide immersive English-learning experiences. This dual approach of cognitive guidance and environmental creation can significantly enhance students' motivation and effectiveness in learning English.

#### **3.3.2. Teacher Professionalism and Teaching Style**

The professionalism and pedagogical approach of educators are pivotal in shaping students' motivation. Educators with strong foreign language competencies, such as fluency, pleasant intonation, and profound understanding of English culture, can inspire students and ignite their intrinsic motivation. A humorous teaching style can mitigate students' language anxiety and foster a relaxed classroom environment. An enthusiastic teaching performance can enhance classroom energy and promote positive teacher-student interactions. Such engagement cultivates harmonious relationships and enhances students' motivation to learn, transforming them from passive recipients to active learners. As the primary venue for English instruction, the classroom serves to acquire language knowledge and to stimulate learning motivation. Teachers should update their strategies, design diverse and engaging activities, and provide timely feedback to develop students' sense of accomplishment. This positive classroom experience can enhance students' intrinsic motivation and support sustainable English learning development.



### 3.3.3. Peer Support and Self-efficacy

Peer factors have both positive and negative effects on English-learning motivation. Peer support can enhance learners' self-confidence and motivation to learn English. When recognized and helped by peers, learners tend to maintain a positive attitude towards learning, believing they must progress together with their peers. Conversely, if peers hold negative attitudes towards English learning, such as disinterest, slackness, or rejection, these emotions can weaken learners' motivation, potentially leading them to give up. This phenomenon is especially obvious in the classroom: when some students talk, play with cell phones, sleep, or display behaviors unrelated to the lesson, these actions distract nearby students and may trigger a chain reaction, causing others to lose interest in learning and form a negative group effect. Prolonged exposure to this negative English learning atmosphere can gradually decrease students' self-efficacy, further aggravating their loss of motivation.

## 4. Conclusions

An in-depth analysis of the factors influencing higher vocational students' motivation to learn English indicates that intrinsic factors within the students themselves are crucial for language acquisition, acting as the primary impetus for their learning endeavors. In contrast, external factors related to educators and instructional methods play a significant role in providing the necessary support and guidance. Other external influences have a relatively minor impact. Therefore, in English teaching, educators should adapt their teaching strategies to enhance students' intrinsic motivation to learn the language.

### 4.1. Cultivating Interest in English Learning

Interest is pivotal to effective teaching and fosters student engagement. Human actions and motivations are driven by the fulfillment of needs, as articulated in Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. In English classroom instruction, an engaging environment serves as a direct motivator for learning, whereas uninspiring content fails to capture students' attention. Educators should present captivating material using diverse methodologies to ignite students' interest and intrinsic motivation. Teachers might introduce suspense or pose questions at the start of the lesson, followed by animations, micro-lessons, or videos to stimulate curiosity and encourage content exploration. The "problem chain" strategy, which involves distributing questions throughout the lesson, can stimulate problem-solving interest and guide students to find solutions collaboratively. Game-based teaching and task-driven methods are effective for cultivating interest in English learning. Engaging games can enhance students' enthusiasm and invigorate the classroom atmosphere. Group activities enable collaboration towards goals, augmenting intrinsic motivation for independent learning. By implementing these strategies, educators can integrate interest into teaching, allowing students to develop their English skills in an enjoyable environment.

### 4.2. Plan Rationally and Performance Evaluation

Recognizing that higher vocational students often lack specific learning objectives, educators should guide them from "passive management" to "self-management." Establishing learning goals and feedback mechanisms helps students to acquire self-management skills. Educators can aid students in setting clear English learning objectives by organizing activities such as sharing English learning experiences, preparing for College English Test, and participating in college English competitions. Educators should monitor students' learning processes and provide timely and objective evaluations. They should enhance communication with students, identify learning

challenges, and offer targeted guidance to help students adjust to college life and improve their academic outcomes. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, students require respect when they achieve progress and seek recognition from teachers and peers. Students who lack self-monitoring skills often procrastinate or abandon tasks when they face difficulties. When assigning tasks, educators should select moderately challenging tasks based on students' abilities. If students perceive that they cannot achieve the goal despite their efforts, they will lack motivation; if the task is too simple, they may complete it superficially. Educators should monitor progress, offer support, and guide students to maintain motivation until task completion by providing feedback on their overall performance.

### 4.3. Targeted Tiered Teaching Methods

Layered teaching exemplifies humanistic education and offers a pragmatic approach to customizing instruction according to students' abilities, bridging the gap between diverse English proficiency levels and standardized teaching<sup>[7]</sup>. By acknowledging variations in students' English skills, educators can classify them into three tiers—high, middle, and low—based on overall English proficiency. This classification enables teachers to identify the zone of proximal development for each level, assist students in setting appropriate learning objectives, and implement them through targeted, differentiated teaching strategies. For advanced students, educators can facilitate medium-and long-term goals, such as encouraging them to pass the College English Test and excel in English competitions. Teachers can guide these students to participate in extracurricular exams and contests to enhance their comprehensive English application, thereby augmenting their sense of accomplishment and motivation. For intermediate students, teachers should focus on short- and medium-term goal planning, regularly evaluating whether they have met unit teaching objectives, assigning moderately challenging tasks, and providing prompt feedback to help students recognize their progress and stimulate intrinsic motivation. For lower-level students, the emphasis should be on short-term goals, consistently assigning simple tasks to reinforce basic English knowledge, and offering timely support to help them experience the joy of learning English and gain self-confidence.

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