

Motivation in University Students in China: Research Design

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Abstract: This paper firstly gave a brief introduction about the motivational theories and then proposed a research design about Motivation in University students which limited in Chinese context. This research considered more about the confounding factors based on gender and grades differences and it conducted in another context in China. The research presented here shows that girls have higher language learning motivation compared to boys. The results in this finding may have some implications for Chinese teachers in the university, they should teach students in various way based on their gender and grade-related difference which may create a better English learning motivation.

1. Introduction

According to Gardner, motivation plays quite an essential role in the second language acquisition. In the field of sociolinguistics and psychology, researchers have recognized the importance of motivation in acquiring a foreign language [1]. It has been noticed by Gardner and other language experts that learners' positive attitudes towards studying another language and their interest in integrating into this language are important factors in improving their second language competence [2]. The study of second language motivation has gone through different stages in the past 60 years. First, I will give a brief introduction of the development of L2 motivation. Then, critical analyse three relevant researches. The research design is being proposed based on these three findings. Based on gender and grades-related difference, the study explores university students' motivation differences and also identify some confounding factors which may influence their motivation.

2. Literature review

2.1. Social psychological period (1950- 1990)

Integrative and instrumental motivation was proposed by Gardner, which is a major theory in this period. Lambert proposes learners who have integrative motivation may because he wants to be part of that community [3]. In Gardner and Lambert (1985)'s research, they found identification, desire to be engaged in target language community will be the basis for the motivation to learn a

second language.

Gardner (1979) claimed that learners who have a more positive attitude towards learning target language are likely to achieve a higher proficiency in second language learning. Learners who have integrative motivation may be interested in being engaged in the target language community which will enhance second language learning. This is also agreed by Giles and Byrne in “Accommodation theory”, in which the relationship between the learners and target language communities is related to the success of second language acquisition [4].

As for instrumental motivation, which underlines the aim to acquire some individual benefits, such as social, financial reward through second language learning. It refers to more utilitarian reasons for learning a foreign language, Eg: in order to acquire a decent and high-salary job or pass exam. In my research, the integrative motivation and instrumental motivation will be considered.

2.2. The cognitive-situated period(1990s)

Since the 1990s, cognitive development in psychology have been introduced into second language acquisition. In this period, more emphasis has been added in specific learning contexts. Noels have added extrinsic and intrinsic motivational components to Gardner’s motivation theories [5]. Noels mentioned that intrinsic motivation factors may require the additional values of the instrumental motivation to keep the long-term goal of second language proficiency [5]. In this regard, learners’ autonomy has been increased. Intrinsic motivation is based on instrumental motivation as it has intrinsic influences. These motivations are significant in pushing for the success of second language acquisition. But the L2 scholars denotes that Gardner's social-educational model ignores teachers’ ability but only focus on students themselves. From this period, Gardner’s model has been transferred to pay more attention on the social environment and situational conditions.

2.3. The process-oriented period (2000-2004)

During this period, researchers have emphasized the temporal nature of the dynamics and fluctuations of L2 motivation [6]. Dörnyei & Otto (2003) created their model of L2 motivation into two areas: action sequence and motivational influences. Action sequence are wishes and when they have goals, learners can use this goal to enhance their motivation and then evaluated by themselves [6]. The other area of this model is motivational influences which is the foundation of behavioural process. The motivational influences refers to the quality of learning experience, autonomy, social impact, reward, goal structure, and self-regulation strategies. Therefore, motivation can be seen as a shifting process in this period.

2.4. Socio-dynamic period (2005-Now)

In the socio-dynamic period of L2 motivational research, it mainly discusses Dörnyei’s L2 motivational self-system and the L2 learning experiences from a more complicated perspective[7]. Dörnyei (2009) combined the concepts of “self” and “identity” to enhance L2 motivational self-system which is a more complicated synthesis of the previous research. Dörnyei (2009) challenged Gardner’s motivation theory and proposed two possible selves: “the ideal L2 self” and the “ought-to L2 self”.

The ideal L2 self is a powerful motivator as it reduces the individual difference between the “actual self”and “real self”. According to Dörnyei (2009), it can be regarded as the product of learner’s inner expectations. In this regard, it has similar component with integrative motivation as both of them focus on learner’s inner thoughts. The ought-to L2 self means what other people believes one ought to meet their expectations. For example, their parents’ encouragement or

teacher's expectation. There is a high correlation between instrumental orientation and the ought-to L2 self as both of them have utilitarian causes to study a second language.

The L2 learning experiences is third component in Dörnyei's theory. It involves learner's previous learning experience, the social learning environment and learner's version. The L2 motivation self-system has some implication of theoretical innovation. It is the inheritance of Gardner's theory. The core notion of integrative orientation is learner's own interests to the target language community [8]. When learners have integrative orientation, they may eager to achieve the ideal L2 self. But the L2 Motivational self-system is more applicable since it not only focus on individuals but also their learning process and experiences.

3. Research design

The research design is comparative because it allows the researcher to make comparisons across two different genders, and two age groups freshman and graduates. The data were collected over a period of three months and were analyzed to determine if the predictor variables have an effect on English learning motivation. The purpose of this research was to investigate whether there were differences in the motivation of university students based on gender and grade related differences. A sample of 100 students from these two grades and half of them are boys and girls were tested using questionnaire. The students I have chosen are all university students, they may from different universities but they are all from "Nine Eighty Five" university. I will conduct an interview for 15 people and design my questionnaire. The questionnaire may consist of scale scores of intrinsic goal orientation, extrinsic goal orientation, their attitudes to English as a lingua Franca, parent's encouragement, cultural influences, Ideal-L2 self and Ought-to L2 self.

3.1. Research questions:

In this research, I want to identify the following questions.

- 1) What are the differences in English learning motivation of university students based on gender? whether girls have higher motivation compared to boys? What kind of motivation do they have?
- 2) What are the differences in English learning motivation of university students based on grades (freshman and graduates). Whether graduates have more instrumental motivation and freshman have more integrative motivation?
- 3) What other confounding factors may influence their motivation?

4. Methodology

In order to identify the research question, a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches as being suited for analysing these research questions, given the advantages of mixed methods. Qualitative methods are suitable for exploring the deep meaning of learner's inner thoughts. They may provide more in-depth answers to explain their motives. Quantitative methods are more suitable to compare the difference between these motivations and give a specific data about these questions. The integrated of these two methods can make the research more reliable. Methodological triangulation is frequently cited as a rationale for mixing qualitative and quantitative method in a study [9].

4.1. The participants

The context is in China. A sample of 100 students from two different grades and half of them are boys and girls were tested using questionnaire. The students I have chosen are all non-English major university students, they may from different universities but the university are all university

titled with “Nine Eighty-Five”. The participants are all non-English major university, as English major students may have more integrative orientation.

4.2. The interviews

In order to conduct a questionnaire, I want to base on interviewee’s answers to create questions. Interviews are semi-structured interviews and will be audio-recorded, 10 interviewees were randomly sampled. According to Dominguez & Metzner (2016), semi-structured interview is more flexible compared to other interviews. These involves having some questions that keep the interview on track. I will ask their how they divide their motivations. And their opinions towards instrumental and integrative motivations. First, I will explain them these two terms. So in this step, I will ask question like: what do they think integrative motivation may include? They might answer: learner’s interests, their curiosity about the outside world. And as for instrumental motivation, they may answer: they want to pass the exam, get a demand job, study abroad. And ask some personal questions, such as where did you finish your high school study? Private high school or public school? Are you from urban or rural areas? Based on these answers, I will create the questionnaire.

4.3. The questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of 20 questions and the participant are asked to agree or disagree with different variety of statements on a seven-point Likert-type scale; which ranging from I agree strongly to I disagree strongly. The questions may include some of these statements.

Attitudes to the international status of English-the extent to which learners are willing to learn English as a second language.

Milieu: the attitude of other people. Eg; many of my classmates are learning English.

Integrative motivation: interest in learning English, socialize with members of English language communities.

Instrumental motivation: utilitarian reasons to learn English. Eg: get a better job, pass the exam.

Cultural interest: interested in the target language community.

Parental encouragement: parents who ask their children to learn English.

Ideal-L2 self: beliefs of being like a native speaker.

Ought-to L2 self: learner’s opinion towards other people.

5. Data collection and analysis

Data were collected mainly by the questionnaire. The questionnaire may provide regarding participant’s motive orientation based the questions listed above. Interview will be audio-recorded and the interview will be conducted approximately fifteen minutes to ask these questions which listed above. Every interviewee answered about ten questions regarding their motivation to learn English and were then be recorded and transcribed. The interview will be member checked. The interview transcripts should be validated by the interviewee to make sure they agree or disagree with the statements which can be called member validation[9]. So qualitative data and quantitative data were all gathered for triangulation purpose.

The data can be analyzed by grounded theory. Inductive approach can be used in this research based on the motivational theory. The statistical tool SPSS can be used to analyze questionnaire data. And interview transcripts will be analyzed by the researcher and then give some descriptive comments on these transcripts.

6. Ethical consideration

The ethical issues should be considered when conducting a real world research which involves

human beings [10]. Participant consent form, privacy and confidentiality should be considered when researchers conduct a research design. According to Merrill and West [11], “the informed consent” should be used in the process of research. And they are totally volunteer and they can withdraw the questionnaire or interview at any time.

7. Expected outcomes

It is expected that there are some differences in motivation between gender and grades. As students in different grades may have different motivations. Freshman are more likely to learn English for integrative motivation while graduates tend to focus more on instrumental motivation as they are ready to work soon. But there seems no big difference between their desire to know cultural difference, attitudes to the international status of English and parental encouragement. It seems that graduates develop more complex ideal L2 self, they have more free time to study and succeed in English learning. As for freshman, they tend to develop ought-to L2 self as they are more easily listen to other people’s opinions. But generally, the Ideal L2 self plays a bigger role than the ought-to L2 self.

8. Conclusion

This assignment firstly gave a brief introduction about the motivational theories and then analyzed three relevant studies. And then proposed a research design which limited in Chinese context. Although there are some similarities between this research and the previous study, this research considered more about the confounding factors based on gender and grades differences and it conducted in another context in China. The research presented here shows there is an agreement with the previous study that suggests girls have higher language learning motivation compared to boys. This research also shows that there are gender differences and grades-related changes in motivation. Freshman shows more integrative motivation while graduates have more instrumental motivation. The results in this finding may have some implications for Chinese teachers in the university, they should teach students in various way based on their gender and grade-related difference which may create a better English learning motivation.

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