

Analysis of Motivation in My English Learning Experience

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Abstract: In recent decades, China has witnessed great developments in its economy, intercultural communication, and English education. English was a compulsory course taught in secondary schools and first two years of universities as a foreign language in most places. The large number of English learners leads to many sophisticated researches focusing on English education in China. Motivation is an essential factor in mastering a second language. This essay aims to investigate the motivation in my 13 years' English learning and its influences on my actual learning process, and thus promote English education in China. Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System was chosen as a guided theory since it combines a lot of important theoretical L2 approaches and elaborated motivation in a rather comprehensive way. In this essay, I will first briefly discuss the concept of L2 Motivational Self System. Then, I will analyse how the motivations affect my learning process with the guidance of L2 Motivation Self System. Finally, I will explore the effective application of this theory in teaching English to Chinese speakers.

Keywords: Motivation, Ought-to L2 Self, Ideal L2 Self, English Learning Experience.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, China has witnessed great developments in its economy, intercultural communication, and English education. English was a compulsory course taught in secondary schools and first two years of universities as a foreign language in most places. The large number of English learners leads to many sophisticated researches focusing on English education in China. Motivation is an essential factor in mastering a second language.^[1] This essay aims to investigate the motivation in my 13 years' English learning and its influences on my actual learning process, and thus promote English education in China. Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System^[1] was chosen as a guided theory since it combines a lot of important theoretical L2 approaches and elaborated motivation in a rather comprehensive way. In this essay, I will first briefly discuss the concept of L2 Motivational Self System. Then, I will analyse how the motivations affect my learning process with the guidance of L2 Motivation Self System. Finally, I will explore the effective application of this theory in teaching English to Chinese speakers.

2. A Brief Overview of L2 Motivation Self System

In 1980s, motivation was first included in the causes of individuals' perceived success or failure in their academic lives.^[2] Motivation affects people's behaviour and effort and thus leads to success or failure in L2 learning. Several theories were raised to explain motivation from different perspectives. Deci and Ryan proposed Self-determination theory to categorize motivation into three dimensions, including intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation.^[3] Then, Dörnyei put forward process-oriented approach which divides motivation in terms of pre-actional phase, actional phase and post-actional phase.^[4] Four years later, Dörnyei came up with L2 Motivational Self System focusing on "identification aspects and on the learner's self-concept".^[1]

According to Dörnyei, The L2 Motivational Self System mainly includes three aspects: the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience. It reflects two focuses: promotion and prevention. The Ideal L2 Self is promotional and refers to an ideal self image of a L2 learner, which is always related to hopes, aspirations and desires. The L2 learner finds the gap between his or her expectation and actual status, and therefore is motivated to put more efforts in L2 learning. The Ought-to L2 Self is preventive and concerns an image that one believes he or she ought to be in order to fulfil others' expectation. The L2 learner is usually motivated to avoid undesirable results because of duties, obligations, responsibilities and so on. The L2 Learning Experience is about motivations concerning the L2 learner's actual learning experience, such as examinations, peers, teachers.^[1]

This theory synthesizes several previous approaches in L2 motivation researches and illustrates motivation in a more comprehensive way. It has been successfully used to direct motivation surveys in different countries, such as Hungary^[5], China, Japan and Iran^[6]. Therefore, I adopt this approach to guide my motivation analysis.

3. L2 Motivational Self System and My English Learning

I was brought up in Anhui, a province in the middle of mainland China. English was a compulsory course taught since junior high school in the first decade of the 21st century. After junior high school, students were sent to a new senior high school mainly based on their test score in senior high school entrance examination organized by the local Municipal Education Bureau. There was a College Entrance Examination (CEE) in the third year of senior high school which is so important that it generally decided which university students would go or even how far they could go in the rest of their lives. I survived this education system and lived a unique life mostly because of the different ability, effort^[7] and motivation which drove my behaviour. Guided by L2 Motivational Self System, I'm going to analyse my

motivation in English learning in three perspectives: Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 Self, and L2 Learning experience.

3.1. Ought-to L2 Self Affects My English Learning

On the one hand, the government policy promotes English learning. As I explained above, I started learning English because it is a compulsory course that the Education Bureau required me to take. They arranged senior high school entrance examination and CEE and many other examinations to guide my English learning in my secondary school years. I was supposed to pass all the examinations and get a basic master of English to get a high school graduation certificate. My rank in CEE would decide which university I could attend and thus affect my competence in the future job market. I must work hard to avoid being left behind by my fellow students.

On the other hand, my parents gave me a lot of expectations over the years which motivated me to work hard in my English learning. They were not well-educated since they were brought up in poor rural families where education was not available. Thus, they trudged 200 kilometers from our rural hometown to the city and worked hard trying their best to provide me the best education they could give so that I can live a different life from theirs. A good master of English would make my parents feel proud of me. I must work as hard as I could to prevent failing my parents' expectations.

3.2. Ideal L2 Self Affects My English Learning

When I first started learning English, I got innate propensity to learn it well. I enjoyed being a good student praised by my parents, teachers, and classmates. I hoped I could study in an elite university and live a qualified life in the future, although I did not really know how different it could be at that time. This ought-to self image transformed into ideal self image influencing me through my 13 years' English learning. Therefore, I got up very early in the morning to read English articles aloud, memorize the important language points taught by the teacher, and did tones of exercises to improve my English skills.

During my undergraduate years, students who ranked the first ten in my class would get a chance to study in Britain, Germany or Denmark in the third year. I desired to study abroad to experience different cultures, so I tried my best to get the highest marks in all the courses. I exposed myself to books, movies, dramas, academic works and use English as much as I could to improve my English and achieve the professors' requirements. Finally, I got the chance to study in Denmark.

When I was studying in Denmark as an exchange student, I expected to use English comfortably so that I could make more foreign friends and expose to more English materials. English is a second language for Danish, but most of them speak very good English. I hoped I could speak English as good as them so that little attention would be paid to my language during our communication and they would treat me in the same way as their other friends. Understanding many English literature works calls for high language proficiency and cultural background knowledge. During that period, I watched many English movies and imitated those characters to train my accent. I made friends with English speakers to use English in real situations. I read classical English literature works and improve my English along the way.

I had different ideal self image in different stages of English

learning process. Those motivations drove me to put my expectations into practice and pushed to to the next ideal self image.

3.3. L2 Learning Experience Affects My English Learning

I'm not a machine heading directly to my goals. English learning experience may change my mood, motivation and behaviour in different stages. For example, when I was a primary school student, I loved English and spend a lot of time on English since I get good marks in the examinations and the teacher liked me. Situation was different when I went to a better senior high school. More difficult knowledge was covered and my classmates were more competitive than the previous ones. The fact that English teacher seemed never to notice me depressed me. My overall motivation was relatively lower despite of the existence of my ideal self and ought-to self motivation, which was reflected on my lower rank in the class.

When I went to university, I enjoyed English learning and it became a part of my life. I touched authentic English readings, watched movies of different cultures, wrote stories, which I did out of my willingness and under professors' instructions. I even keep reading and writing at present because I really enjoy those English related activities. Even though no one pushes me or I would get nothing from those activities, I would continue those activities.

I also enjoy the world successful English learning brought me, which is very important for my learning motivation and action. My good result in CEE sent me to Sun Yat-sen University, which first made me realize good performance would give me more chances. My first two years' good grades in university sent me to Denmark and my overall excellent performance in the past, especially English, brought me to HKU, which enhanced my view. I can know many excellent people, experience more in this world, get in touch with many English materials with better English.

My Ideal Self, Ought-to Self and L2 Learning Experience are interrelated. Firstly, my positive English learning experience influenced my ideal self image. If I didn't get some knowledge about the outside world from my professors as an English major, I would not have the strong desire to study abroad to experience different cultures. Secondly, to some extent, my ought-to self shaped my ideal self. I would not conceive the idea to get into a good university or study abroad if I did not follow the rules set by the Ministry of Education.

4. Implications of My English Teaching

Analysing my own English learning experience inspires me to enhance some elements to motivate my students in my future English teaching. First of all, I will set a good model for my students. As a successful English learner, I went to the best universities, travelled around the world, make friends with people from different countries, and appreciated masterpieces written in English. I may teach them based on my own experience, for example, my picture taken in Copenhagen may stimulate my students' expectation to spend some time in a fairy tale like world. The students would respect me from the bottom of their hearts and realize knowledge, especially English learning can change their lives.

Secondly, I will try my best to expose my students to the English language and its colourful culture to improve their

English learning experience. When they come to my class, I will tell them English is not just about listening, speaking, reading and writing, but about the development of human being. I will instruct them to appreciate English movies, music, literature works, and help them find out the beauty of the language itself and the culture. I will encourage them to study or work abroad for some time so that they can use authentic English and experience what they have learned in my class.

In addition, a more motivated and appropriate English learning guidance will be set within the current Chinese education system if I don't have the power to change the system. Apart from the government required CEE, I will plan some stimulus for the students to motivated themselves in a rather short period of one or two years to learn English comprehensively. My students should not only be able to get good marks in their national examinations, but also enjoy their after-school reading and writing within arrangement. In this way, students would have more enthusiasm in English learning and the learning outcomes would be ensured.

Finally, I will talk with the students frequently to know their psychological changes and highlight the students' duties and responsibilities. Students may know what they need to do, but they may not be able to control themselves. Thus, reminding what they need to do is needed. This ought-to self image may comes from his or her parents, his or her own view of the position in the society and so on.

5. Conclusion

Dörnyei's L2 motivation system successfully guided me to analyse my motivation through my 13 years' English learning experience comprehensively in this essay. It inspired me to enhance several elements in my future English Teaching in

mainland China in terms of the shape of ideal self image, ought-to self image and L2 learning experience.

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