

# The Research on the Relationship between College Students' Self-conscious Emotions and Foreign Language Learning Motivation

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**Abstract:** Self-conscious emotion serves the social needs of individuals and has positive significance for the development of individual morality and other aspects. In this study, 262 undergraduates from a comprehensive university in China were studied to explore the relationship between guilt and shame and English learning motivation, and to explore the role of emotional intelligence. The results show that: (1) Guilt has a significant positive effect on learning motivation, but plays a significant negative effect on shame. (2) Both guilt and shame are positively predictive of emotional intelligence. (3) Emotional intelligence plays a mediating role between guilt emotion and English learning motivation, but it has a mask effect between shame emotion and English learning motivation. Guilt and shame are closely related to the motivation of foreign language learning. How to guide students to use emotional intelligence to adjust the two emotions to improve the motivation of foreign language learning, promote students to learn independently, and improve the foreign language learning experience is worthy of in-depth attention and exploration of the academic community.

**Keywords:** Guilt, Shame, Emotional Intelligence, Learning Motivation.

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## 1. Introduction

Self-conscious emotion refers to a special emotion in which an individual is aware of something or a scene affecting their self-evaluation, including shame, guilt, pride and embarrassment. Unlike basic emotions, the generation of self-conscious emotions is accompanied by complex cognition of self, including self-evaluation and self-reflection. It can be seen that the core of self-conscious emotions is the concept related to self, and academic study is the most important factor affecting students' self-concept, so students' self-conscious emotions come more from academic aspects. According to the theoretical framework of the control value of achievement emotions proposed by Pekrun, emotions will affect the subsequent motivation, learning related behaviors and academic achievement.

In recent years, the focus of the field of two language acquisition is the relationship between emotion and academic level. More and more scholars use the "whole human" perspective of two language learners: namely, pay attention to their individual happiness (well-being)<sup>[1][2]</sup>. And guilt, shame is inevitable in the process of foreign language learning emotions, guilt and shame are often produced, both are similar, but it belongs to different emotions, and previous studies shows that the two emotions have important influence for students' learning motivation, and its influence effect is larger gap. On the other hand, the level of emotional intelligence will affect students' emotional regulation ability, and affect students' individual emotional state, thus having an indirect impact on foreign language learning. This study intends to explore whether the emotional intelligence level of Chinese college students plays a role in the relationship between students' guilt, shame emotion and learning motivation, in order to provide some enlightenment for English education and teaching in China.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Guilt, Shame, and Foreign Language Learning

Guilt and shame are subordinate to self-conscious emotions (self-conscious emotions), the classification of self-conscious emotions relative to other basic emotions (basic emotions). Self-conscious emotions include shame, guilt, embarrassment, and pride, while basic emotions include anger, fear, sadness, happiness, disgust, and surprise<sup>[3]</sup>.

In the typical emotional experience of shame, the overall self is the focus of foreign language learners, and they pay great attention to others' views, evaluation and judgment of the overall self<sup>[6][7][8]</sup>. Shame mood will cause learners to escape or retreat behavior<sup>[10]</sup>. In other words, ashamed students choose to escape or retreat in order to avoid embarrassment<sup>[8]</sup>. In contrast to shame, the focus of the foreign language learners with guilt is on their individual behavior rather than their overall self<sup>[9]</sup>. Guilt can motivate students to make up for it<sup>[8]</sup>, in addition, because the overall self of foreign language learners is not damaged, the negative impact of guilt on students is less than that of shame<sup>[6]</sup>. Therefore, when foreign language learners feel guilty, they will be more inclined to remedy the wrong behavior they do so as to stimulate students' self-change motivation. Other studies have shown that foreign language learning individual guilt, shame through cognitive factors affect the production of learning motivation, shame of ability and external motivation (caused by external motivation) has a predictive effect, and guilt to ability and internal motivation (individual interest in learning itself motivation) has a predictive effect<sup>[11]</sup>. Teimouri The study further found that guilt emotion positively predicted students' learning motivation and academic achievement, while shame emotion significantly negatively predicted students' learning motivation and academic

achievement<sup>[12]</sup>. In conclusion, guilt and shame play an important role in learners' foreign language learning, and they have an important impact on the development of students' learning motivation. However, at present, there is little exploration on the relationship between guilt and shame and learning motivation, especially in the field of foreign language learning. Therefore, this paper will focus on college students and discuss the relationship between the situational shame and guilt emotion scale and learning motivation scale, hoping to contribute to the current foreign language teaching environment.

## 2.2. Emotional Intelligence and Learning Motivation

There was a moderate significant correlation between emotional intelligence and learning motivation, which was able to positively predict learning motivation<sup>[13]</sup>[14]. Some scholars have found that emotional intelligence can positively predict students' writing motivation<sup>[15]</sup>. Among the students of different ages, some scholars have discussed the relationship between emotional intelligence and learning motivation. Chang & Tsai found a positive relationship between emotional intelligence, learning motivation and learning motivation<sup>[16]</sup>. In the process of exploring the relationship between learning input and emotional intelligence of high school students, Sun Hongmei et al. found that learning motivation plays a mediating role between the two<sup>[17]</sup>. Rong Jubing explored the relationship between middle school students' learning motivation, emotional intelligence and academic performance. The results showed that his understanding of emotion and reasoning are the main factors affecting students' internal motivation, and their influence on internal motivation is two-way and positive<sup>[18]</sup>. Lee explored the effects of emotional intelligence, learning motivation, self-efficacy and social skills on their adaptability, and found a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and learning motivation<sup>[19]</sup>. This shows that the positive correlation between emotional intelligence and learning motivation has been verified several times and is generally applicable to most students at their academic stages.

## 3. Research Technology

### 3.1. Research Questions

The aim of this study is to explore the factors of self-conscious emotions in two-language study in a comprehensive university in North China. Considering the basis and status provided by the previous research and current academic discussions in this field, this study will specifically focus on the following research issues

(1) How does the emotion of guilt and shame affect the learning motivation of non-English major undergraduates?

(2) Can emotional intelligence play a regulatory role between guilt, shame, and learning motivation?

To answer the above questions, we will combine quantitative and qualitative research methods to collect data through questionnaire survey, evaluate students' emotional experience and emotional intelligence scores, and analyze the dynamic relationship between guilt, shame and emotional intelligence through correlation analysis and regression analysis.

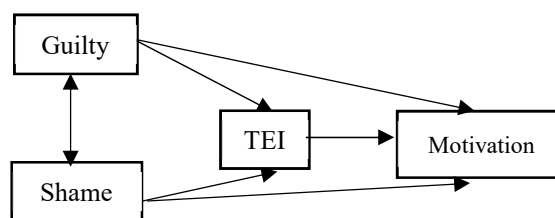


Figure 1. Theoretical model of the research

### 3.2. Subjects

In this study, the convenience sampling method was selected from the non-English majors from a comprehensive university in North China. After data collection and collation, a total of 262 subjects participated in the survey, including 69.85% (183) male subjects and 30.15% (79) female subjects. All the subjects were students of the same class taught by the public English teachers. In order to ensure the representativeness of the sample, this study is universal in comprehensive universities in North China, which provides strong support for subsequent data analysis and research.

### 3.3. Measurement Tools

This study used a quantitative method using a combined questionnaire to obtain quantitative data. Measurement tools include the trait Emotional Intelligence Scale (reduced version), the Two Language Shame and Guilt Emotion Scale, and the English Learning Motivation Scale.

(1) Characteristic Emotional Intelligence Scale (reduced version). The Trait Emotion Scale (Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire, TEIQue) is based on the theory of emotional intelligence<sup>[20]</sup>, and the Likert scale contains 153 entries. The scale contains four dimensions: emotion, self-control, sociability and well-being, with high reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha=.89$ ), the internal consistency was higher for each dimension than for each dimension.75<sup>[21]</sup>. A reduced version of the scale was used in this study with 30 items, 15 categories, each measured by two specific items. A series of cross-cultural studies show that the reliability and validity of the reduced scale are ideal<sup>[22]</sup>[23]. Shao et al. used the Chinese version of the reduced scale to measure the emotional intelligence of Chinese college English learners and reported a high reliability of the scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha=.86$ ). In this study, the internal consistency reliability of this scale was .832 (n =262).

(2) Shame and guilt emotional scale. Tangney The compiled self-awareness emotion test scale and its adapted version (Test of Self-conscious Affect, TOSCA) are often used to measure individual shame and guilt in the field of social psychology, and have high credit validity<sup>[7]</sup>. However, Tahmouresi believes that although this scale can better measure shame and guilt, it is not fully applicable to the field of second language acquisition<sup>[12]</sup>. Therefore, Tahmouresi designed the Shame and guilt sentiment scale (the Second Language Test of Shame and Guilt Affect, L2-TOSGA) to measure the shame and guilt of individuals in the acquisition field. It included 13 scenes and 46 items, which were divided into four subscales: shame, guilt, anger and apathy. In the four scales, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient was higher than that.80, with a relatively high internal consistency<sup>[12]</sup>. In this study, two subscales of shame and guilt were selected to form the two-language shame and guilt emotion scale. A total of 13 two-language learning scenarios and 25 items, whose Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient was 0.907, showed high internal

consistency.

(3) English Learning motivation Scale. The English Learning motivation Scale is given by Tahmouresi et al. It is a Likert scale, with 10 items, which is divided into three dimensions: expected effort, two language communication willingness and attention allocation, with good reliability and validity<sup>[12]</sup>. In this study, the internal consistency of this scale was given as follows.94 (n=262), with a high internal consistency.

### 3.4. Data Collection and Processing

First, the Chinese translation of the Characteristic Emotional Intelligence Scale (reduced version, TEIQue-SF), the Shame and Guilt Emotion Scale (L2-TOSGA) and the English Learning Motivation Scale were completed by the author and a professional translator. During translation, any disagreement in translation is resolved through in-depth discussion to ensure the accuracy and cultural adaptability of the translation of the scale. In order to ensure the validity of the questionnaire design, the researchers conducted a pre-test in a comprehensive university in North China. At this stage, 47 students who did not participate in the formal questionnaire completed the questionnaire filling, and the researchers also interviewed 5 students to obtain understanding and feedback on the content of the questionnaire. Based on these data, the investigators made necessary adjustments to the questionnaire to improve its clarity and comprehension.

Subsequently, the researchers used the online survey platform questionnaire star to distribute questionnaires and collect data in the university campus. After a period of collection, 262 valid questionnaires were obtained in this study, which will form the basis for the subsequent analysis. During data collection, the investigators strictly followed the ethical guidelines to ensure the information security of all participants and ensure the anonymity and voluntariness of the survey. In addition, the researchers clearly explained the purpose, process and the rights of the participants at the beginning of the questionnaire to gain the full understanding and voluntary participation of the participants.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Statistical Analysis of Students' TEI, Shame and Guilt

In order to investigate the performance of Chinese college students in emotional intelligence and shame and guilt, the descriptive statistical analysis and normal distribution test were conducted using SPSS 26.0 software, and the results are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of college students' TEI, shame and guilt

Variab le	Score interval	Average value	least value	crest value
Shame	13-78	37.8969	15	75
Guilty	13-78	54.355	17	78
TEI	30-210	121.5611	54	190

Table 1 shows that the average emotional intelligence level was in the middle area (120-150) see Shao et al.(2013:920), indicating that most of the participants had a moderate level of emotional awareness and emotional regulation ability. The

shame level was in the lower area (13-39) and the guilt level was in the middle area (39-52), indicating that most subjects experienced moderate and lower levels of guilt in foreign language learning. Furthermore, the standard deviations, maximum and minimum values in Table 1 reflect individual differences in emotional ability and emotional experience.

### 4.2. The Correlation of TEI, Guilt, Shame, and Motivation

Based on the results of normal distribution test in Table 1, SPSS 26.0 and the results are shown in Table 2. The results showed a significant positive correlation between guilt and learning motivation ( $r=0.576, p < 0.001$ ), indicating that when students feel guilty, they tend to study harder to compensate for previous deficiencies or errors. Guilt emotions can serve as a positive feedback mechanism to stimulate students' learning motivation and encourage them to focus more on learning tasks. In contrast to the guilt emotion, there was a significant negative correlation between the shame emotion and the learning motivation. When students feel ashamed, they may doubt their abilities and even develop a sense of inferiority, which can weaken their motivation to learn. Shame emotions may lead students to avoid participating in learning activities so as not to experience failure and shame again.

**Table 2.** Correlation matrices of TEI, shame, guilt and motivation

	TEI	Shame	Guilty	Motivation
TEI	1			
Shame	366**	1		
Guilty	576**	652*	1	
Motivation	459**	-.385**	488**	1

In addition, there was also a significant positive correlation between emotional intelligence and learning motivation ( $r=.459 ** , p < 0.001$ ), which means that students with higher emotional intelligence, the more they can adjust their mentality and maintain the motivation to learn. At the same time, there was a significant positive correlation between shame and guilt ( $r=.652 ** , p < 0.001$ ), indicating that the appearance of guilt is often accompanied by the appearance of shame emotions.

### 4.3. Discussion of the Mediating Role of Emotional Intelligence

Firstly, all the measured variables were standardized, and then according to the mediation model test procedure recommended by Wen Zhonglin and Ye Baojuan (2014), model 4 in PROCESS was selected to verify the two mediation models: the independent variable in model 1 is guilt, the dependent variable is learning motivation; the mediation variable is emotional intelligence; the independent variable is shame; the dependent variable is learning motivation, and the mediation variable is emotional intelligence. The test results are shown in Table 3, and each path coefficient showed high significance ( $p < 0$ ), so the model is established. And guilt significantly positively predicted learning motivation ( $\beta = 0.276, p < 0$ ), while shame played a significant negative prediction of learning motivation ( $\beta = -0.142, p < 0$ ).05.001.005.

**Table 3.** Examination of mediation models of emotional intelligence on guilt, shame mood, and learning motivation

	Item	EFFECT	SE	t	p
Direct effect	Guilt → Motivation	0.276	0.048	5.75	0.00
	Shame → Motivation	-0.142	0.047	-3.03	0.00
Indigo effect process	Guilt → EI	0.4670	0.101	4.63	0.00
	Shame → EI	0.243	0.089	2.72	0.01
	EI → Motivation (guilt)	0.196	0.028	6.91	0.00
	EI → Motivation (shame)	0.265	0.280	9.43	0.00
Gross effect	Guilt → Motivation	0.368	0.050	7.33	0.00
	Shame → Motivation	-0.206	0.041	-5.03	0.00

Following the model fit, the Bootstrap test of the constructed mediation model was repeated sampling 5000 times, with 95% confidence intervals for each pathway detailed in Table 4. According to Wen Zhonglin's new mediation effect test process (Wen Zhonglin and Ye Baojuan, 2014), the results show that the direct, indirect and total effects of guilt are significant, of which the indirect effect accounted for 25%; the direct, indirect and total effects of shame are significant, but the direct and indirect effects are different. Therefore, students' emotional intelligence does not mediate between shame and learning motivation, but has a concealment effect ( $\beta = 0.265$ ,  $se = 0.280$ ,  $95\%CI = [0.2093, 0.3197]$ ), and the absolute value of the ratio of indirect to direct effect is 0.49.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Guilt Positively Predicts Motivation, and Shame Negatively Predicts

This study found that when students encounter setbacks in the process of foreign language learning, if they lead to guilt, attribute the mistakes to their own efforts and feel sorry, it will cause students' desire to make up for it, and then stimulate students to change themselves and improve themselves. The results of this study once again verify the previous view that the focus of guilt learners is the behavior itself<sup>[8][9]</sup> And the guilt can motivate students to remedy the wrong behavior<sup>[8]</sup>. However, when setbacks cause students to feel shame, students will feel self-pity and belittle themselves. When they make mistakes, they will think that other students or teachers are laughing at themselves, unwilling to speak and express themselves, and this kind of psychology will eventually lead to the state of self-giving up and hit students' learning motivation. The above findings validate the idea that shame causes learners to escape or retreat<sup>[6][10]</sup>, Shame students choose to escape or retreat to avoid embarrassment<sup>[8]</sup>.

In conclusion, guilt emotion has a positive prediction effect for learning motivation, while shame emotion negatively predicts learning motivation, which is consistent with the Teimouri study results<sup>[12]</sup>. Therefore, this paper believes that in the foreign language teaching classroom, teachers should guide learners to formulate specific, measurable and achievable learning goals, and decompose them into small milestones and gradually realize them. By achieving these goals, Help learners build confidence and motivation, Through a regular objective assessment and feedback, Guide learners to adjust their learning strategies; in addition, In the teaching process, learners should be encouraged to focus on

efforts and continuous improvement in the learning process, Instead of focusing solely on the final academic performance, Develop the learner's sense of self-efficacy, Believe them in their abilities and potential, To reduce the feelings of guilt and shame resulting from failure; at the same time, Give learners timely, specific and positive feedback, Praise the progress and efforts made by learners in the learning process, Encourage learners to share their successful experiences and learning strategies, To promote a positive learning atmosphere and opportunities for mutual learning; in addition, To advocate a learning culture of respect and tolerance in the classroom, Let learners feel the support and understanding in the face of failure and frustration, Through mutual aid groups, group activities and cooperation tasks, Cultivate the spirit of cooperation and teamwork among learners.

### 5.2. Discussion on the Mediating Role of TEI in Guilt, Shame and Motivation

In the mediation model test described above, a positive relationship was found between guilt and shame and emotional intelligence. This result shows that the appearance of guilt and shame will be accompanied by the improvement of students' emotional consciousness and regulation ability to regulate their emotional fluctuation level. Secondly, emotional intelligence showed a significant positive relationship with learning motivation in both models, and this study confirmed the previous hypothesis that emotional intelligence can positively predict learning motivation<sup>[25][14]</sup>. In the subsequent study, guilt for foreign language learning motivation not only has a direct impact, and can play indirect influence through emotional intelligence, it can be concluded that the hypothesis of this study, the improvement of emotional intelligence level can help students in the face of guilt to stimulate their remedial psychology, in order to stimulate students' learning motivation.

However, in the process of exploring the relationship between shame and learning motivation, it is found that although shame has a significant direct impact on learning motivation, emotional intelligence is not a mediating role, but a concealment effect. Therefore, the third hypothesis of this study is not true. According to the principle of concealment effect, the force of the independent variable on the dependent variable will become greater after controlling the concealment variable 错误!未找到引用源。. It shows that in this study, shame emotion has a significant negative prediction effect on foreign language learning motivation, and the negative influence of shame emotion on learning motivation will increase after controlling the emotional intelligence level

variables. Therefore, it can be concluded that the existence of emotional intelligence can help students to regulate the level of shame emotion and weaken its negative impact on learning motivation.

The higher the level of emotional awareness and regulation ability, the stronger the ability to regulate guilt and shame, and the more conducive to play their positive role in foreign language learning motivation. Therefore, the positive prediction of learning motivation can stimulate the compensatory learning motivation; the negative influence of shame level on learning motivation can be weakened through the intervention of emotional intelligence. Students can weaken the escape and withdrawal psychology by exerting emotional consciousness and adjustment level, so as to avoid the negative influence on students' learning motivation. Therefore, this study shows that schools should encourage students to actively participate in collective and practical activities to enhance students' communication ability; carry out systematic emotional ability and behavior training, give students specific guidance on emotional communication and interpersonal communication; adjust the cultivation of emotional intelligence and integrate it into the teaching classroom, and help students to regulate the negative emotions such as shame, guilt and practice, so as to improve the level of emotional intelligence regulation and maximize the positive role of emotional intelligence.

## 6. Conclusion

This study examines the relationship of guilt, shame emotion level and learning motivation among Chinese college students, and explores the mediating role of emotional intelligence in it. The results confirm the positive effect of guilt on learning motivation and the negative effect of shame on learning motivation, and verify the mediation effect of emotional intelligence between guilt and learning motivation, but we should pay attention to the concealment effect of emotional intelligence in shame emotion and learning motivation. This study found that it has important educational and teaching enlightenment, and highlighted the importance and necessity of educators' attention to the emotions of two learners. However, this study also has some limitations, which did not deeply explore the influence of the internal correlation of guilt and shame on learning motivation, and future research can be deeply studied from this perspective.

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