

The English Learning Motivation of Chinese High School Students: Cross-grade Survey Analysis

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ABSTRACT: *Existing literature indicates that motivation is the most powerful determining factor that influences the rate and success of second language learning (Jiang, 2016; Kramsch & Yin, 2018; Li & Edwards, 2017; Liu et al., 2016; Liu, 2016; You & Dörnyei, 2016; Zhi & Wang, 2019). Currently, there is a growing body of empirical research indicating the changes in second language learning motivation in different grades at the same or different schools (Chambers, 1999; Kim, 2011, 2012a, b; Lamb, 2007; Williams et al., 2002). The findings of previous studies have mostly shown that student second language learning motivation increases with increasing school grades. Dörnyei (2000) suggested that concentrating on the time dimension of second language motivation is crucial for comprehending the second language motivation of students. However, the temporal variations of second language motivation, particularly motivational changes at different Chinese high school grades, have not been sufficiently emphasized by second language motivation researchers, therefore, this quantitative research investigated the changes in Chinese high school students' English learning motivation from Grade 10 to Grade 12. An English learning motivation questionnaire was used and administered to 3000 students from Grades 10 to 12 in public high schools across mainland China, and employed the reliability analysis and analysis of variance to analyze quantitative data. The statistical results revealed that Grade 12 students ranked highest in English learning motivation, followed by Grade 11 and Grade 10 students. Furthermore, the college entrance examination had a positive impact on Grade 12 students' motivation to learn English.*

KEYWORDS: English learning motivation, Chinese high school students, college entrance examination, cross-grade analysis

INTRODUCTION

This study adopted a quantitative research method to investigate the changes in Chinese high school students' English learning motivation from Grade 10 to Grade 12. Existing literature indicates that motivation is the most powerful determining factor that influences the rate and success of second language learning (e.g., Jiang, 2016; Kramsch & Yin, 2018; Li & Edwards, 2017; Liu et al., 2016; Liu, 2016; Luo & Gong, 2015; Xu & Case, 2015; You & Dörnyei, 2016; Zhi & Wang, 2019). Contemporary research by many researchers (e.g., Lai & Lyu, 2020; Nana & Sidhu, 2019; Xu & Case, 2015; You &

Dörnyei, 2016; Zhi & Wang, 2019) have underlined the temporal fluctuation and dynamic nature of second language motivation in recent years. They have shown that motivation undergoes continuous fluctuations, indicating a dynamic changeability in learning across varied time spans (You & Dörnyei, 2016).

According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), "motivation does not remain constant throughout months, years, or even a single session. It ebbs and flows in complex ways in response to various internal and external influences" (p. 6). Given that second language learning is a long-term activity, it is expected to go through diverse phases (Dörnyei, 2005). More specifically, motivation ranges from taking a single second language class to studying a language for months, years, or even a lifetime. Furthermore, students' second language learning motivation varies throughout school grades (i.e., Grade 10, Grade 11, or Grade 12). Students may be less motivated to acquire a second language in Grade 10 and Grade 11, but highly motivated in Grade 12.

There is a growing body of empirical research indicating the changes in learning motivation in different grades at the same or different schools (e.g., Chambers, 1999; Kim, 2011, 2012a, b; Lamb, 2007; Williams et al., 2002). The findings of previous studies have mostly shown that student motivation increases with increasing school grades. Dörnyei (2000) suggested that concentrating on the time dimension of second language motivation is crucial for comprehending the second language motivation of students.

However, the temporal variations of second language motivation, particularly motivational changes at different Chinese high school grades, have not been sufficiently emphasized by second language motivation researchers. By adopting a quantitative research method, which uses a motivational questionnaire, this research investigates (1) changes in Chinese high school students' English learning motivation from Grade 10 to Grade 12 and (2) changes in Chinese high school students' English learning motivation's subcomponents from Grade 10 to Grade 12.

English education in China

In the educational sector of the People's Republic of China (hereafter China), the significance of English has been increasingly highlighted. According to Jiang (2003), the Chinese government urged children to learn English early in their education, because English is the official language of 53 countries and is spoken by around 400 million people across the globe, and it is the most common second language in the world (Jiang, 2016; Kramsch & Yin, 2018). Many countries also include English as a second language in their school syllabus and children start learning English at a young age. Furthermore, English is also a commonly used language in science, aviation, computers, diplomacy, and tourism, knowing English can increase students' chances of getting an excellent job in these sectors' companies.

In order to enhance English learning, the Chinese Ministry of Education (hereafter MOE) enacted new curriculum reforms. Taking into account regional disparities in schooling, the reform was carried out in two batches: Beginning in the fall of 2001, primary schools in cities and counties were required to provide English programs for Grade 3 students and higher, while all other schools were required to do

so in the following year. The reform, meant to increase students' overall language proficiency, had five interconnected components: language skills, linguistic knowledge, emotional attitude, learning techniques, and cultural consciousness (MOE, 2001).

According to this new reform, objectives during primary school were to stimulate and raise children's interest in English study. Compared with the primary school learning context, for junior high school students, English is regarded as one of the three core school subjects along with Chinese and Mathematics. In addition, junior high school students must pass a high school entrance exam, which includes English. English accounts for a significant share of the college entrance examination for high school students - 150 out of the total score of 750 marks. Therefore, English performance is seen as a key element that determines whether high school students can enroll in a prominent institution in China.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on the second language learning motivation of Chinese students (e.g., Chen et al., 2005; Gao et al., 2004, 2007; Hao & Hao, 2001; Hua, 1998; Shi, 2000; Tachibana et al., 1996; Taguchi et al., 2009; Wu et al., 1993) have noted that students have a high level of instrumental motivation to learn English. Further, instrumental motivation often reflects Chinese cultural and educational traditions.

For instance, Hua (1998) and Shi (2000) identified certificate motivation, or the motivation to learn English in order to obtain a certificate stating it, as the primary motivational type for many Chinese high school learners and defined it as their desire to learn English in order to achieve high scores. Chen et al. (2005) explored the effect of Chinese culture on the second language learning of Taiwanese learners. They developed a motivator, the Chinese imperative, which focuses on the social pressure exerted on Chinese students' second language learning by parents, instructors, and the whole Chinese community. Similarly, Taguchi et al. (2009) also identified a mostly exam-oriented motivation among Chinese students' second language learning.

However, the majority of research on Chinese students' English-learning motivation has concentrated on higher education, particularly undergraduates (Wang & Zhang, 2005). It is uncommon to find a comprehensive study on comparative the motivation of Grade 10, Grade 11, and Grade 12 students. Moreover, Chinese second language motivation studies have often ignored the temporal variation of second language learning motivation.

Consequently, this quantitative research emphasizes the temporal dimension of second language learning motivation. As previously stated, its significance has been underscored by second language motivation researchers (e.g., Do`rnyei, 2001, 2005; Do`rnyei & Ushioda, 2009, 2011; Kim, 2009; Shoib & Do`rnyei, 2005), despite the rarity of related studies, as Do`rnyei (2001) indicates:

Although most practitioners with sufficient classroom experience are aware that student motivation does not remain constant during such a lengthy process, hardly any research has been done on analyzing the dynamics of second language motivational change and identifying typical sequential

patterns and developmental aspects. (p. 82).

In addition, current researches often examine changes in motivation between grades at the same school level (e.g., Chambers, 1999; Kim, 2011, 2012a, b; Koizumi & Matsuo, 1993; Lamb, 2007; Tachibana et al., 1996; Williams et al., 2002). For instance, Williams et al. (2002) and Chambers (1999) found that the second language learning motivation of British students increased between the seventh and ninth grades, and Tachibana et al. (1996) found that the motivation for learning English in both Chinese and Japanese students increased from Grade 10 to Grade 12.

Lamb (2007) investigated the English learning motivation of Indonesian junior high school students over twenty months using surveys and interviews. The investigation revealed interesting findings: As the students got more aware of their motivation, they used various self-regulation tactics to sustain their English learning drive.

Recently, Kim (2012a) administered a questionnaire to 2783 Korean students in Grades 3 through 12 to examine changes in motivation among Korean second language learners. The data suggested that second language learning motivation among Korean students tends to exhibit a curving pattern. Specifically, the motivation of Korean students consistently fell from Grades 3 through 9 and then showed an upward tendency between Grades 10 and 12.

As indicated in the findings of previous studies, students' second language learning motivation undergoes dynamic changes at different school grades (i.e., Grade 10, Grade 11, and Grade 12). According to most researches, students' second language motivation tends to increase as they advance throughout the school grades and therefore shows a positive trend (e.g., Kim, 2012a; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). They indicate that teacher-related factors are the most beneficial factors that encourage students' second language learning (Hamada, 2011; Kikuchi, 2009).

However, few studies have investigated the changes in second language learning motivation from Grade 10 to Grade 12 in China. In addition, considering the Chinese educational framework, in which English remains one of the major subjects until the end of high school, it is essential to comprehend students' second language learning motivation at different stages of education. Therefore, two research questions were developed:

- (1) How does English learning motivation change in Chinese high school students from Grade 10 to Grade 12?
- (2) How do English learning motivation's subcomponents change in Chinese high school students from Grade 10 to Grade 12?

METHODS

According to second language motivation researchers, a quantitative research method study is a promising direction for future second language motivation research; hence, this method merits academic attention (Do`nyei, 2007; Do`nyei & Ushioda, 2011; Kim & Seo, 2012). Therefore, the quantitative research method was chosen for this study, as it has particular value in achieving an elaborate and comprehensive understanding of complex topics within an educational context

(Do'nyei, 2007; Mertens, 2005). This research looked into the changes in English learning motivation of Chinese high school students from Grade 10 to Grade 12 by using the English learning motivation questionnaire.

Instruments

This study used the English learning motivation questionnaire (see "Appendix 1"), which was designed by Qian-Mei Zhang and Tae-Young Kim (Zhang & Kim, 2013) with a total of 35 questions and adopted a five-point Likert scale (i.e., 1=strongly agree, 5=strongly disagree). The measurement covers seven subcomponents: self-development motivation, academic motivation, patriotic motivation, achievement motivation, integrative motivation, pragmatic motivation, and other-regulated motivation. *Self-development motivation* reflects students' realistic understanding of the importance of English, eagerness to communicate with others in English, desire to expand their own opinions/knowledge, and anxiety to strengthen self-development; *academic motivation* reflects students' internal forces in English learning, and also it reflects students' ability to learn English and actively evaluate themselves; *patriotic motivation* reflects the phenomenon that English is used as a tool to realize students' patriotic aspirations in China; *achievement motivation* shows students' needs for achievement, records their use of English to meet the requirements of school and expectations of parents and themselves; *integrative motivation* exhibits students' positive attitude towards the target language and target language group; *pragmatic motivation* demonstrates the motivation of students to learn in order to obtain practical and utilitarian benefits from English learning (such as getting good grades on exams, doing better than others, getting an English certificate, finding a good job, or getting a better salary); *other-regulated motivation* proves that students' learning motivation can be influenced by others (such as friends and classmates), their own role models, or the social learning environment. Among them, self-development motivation, patriotic motivation, achievement motivation, and pragmatic motivation refer to using English to achieve specific, pragmatic goals, and they are produced by tool orientation.

Participants

The sample for this quantitative research was comprised of 3000 students from Grades 10 to 12 in public high schools across mainland China. The sample collection was based on convenience sampling and students who were willing to respond to the survey.

Data collection and analysis

The research was carried out from January to March 2023 by employing an English learning motivation questionnaire. Before administering the main study, the researcher conducted a pilot study in December 2022 in which a total of 300 high school students participated. The pilot study's findings revealed that the questionnaire items had high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.773$), which can be used for subsequent research. Finally, with the help of public high schools' English teachers, 3000 students from Grade 10 to Grade 12 in public high schools across mainland China completed the questionnaires through the China's largest online questionnaire platform (wjx.cn). All the resulting data were processed using the Statistics Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 29.0, employing two statistical measures: reliability analysis and analysis of variance.

RESULTS

This study involved 3000 high school students, covering three grades from Grade 10 to Grade 12, with 1000 students in each grade, including 1847 male students, accounting for 61.57%, and 1153 female students, accounting for 38.43%.

The current situation of high school students' English learning motivation**Table 1. Current characteristics of high school students' English learning motivation**

English learning motivation's subcomponents	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Self-development motivation	1.00	4.80	2.66	0.67
Academic motivation	1.14	4.86	2.62	0.60
Patriotic motivation	1.00	5.00	2.61	0.73
Achievement motivation	1.00	4.75	2.72	0.69
Integrative motivation	1.00	4.60	2.69	0.66
Pragmatic motivation	1.00	4.80	2.66	0.67
Other-regulated motivation	1.00	5.00	2.75	0.86
English learning motivation	1.15	3.91	2.67	0.49

It can be seen from Table 1 that the mean of high school students' English learning motivation is 2.67, indicating that high school students' English learning motivation is in a lower intermediate state. At the same time, the types of English learning motivation among high school students are other-regulated motivation, achievement motivation, integrative motivation, self-development motivation, pragmatic motivation, academic motivation, and patriotic motivation from high to low. That is, the motivation of high school students to learn English is mainly influenced by others (such as friends and classmates), their own role models, or the social learning environment.

The changing trend of English learning motivation in different high school grades**Table 2. Analysis of variance of English learning motivation in different high school grades**

Dependent variable	High school grades	M	SD	F	sig	Scheffe
English learning motivation	Grade 10	2.47	0.57	202.074	<0.001	Grade 12>Grade 11>Grade 10
	Grade 11	2.64	0.42			
	Grade 12	2.88	0.37			

Through analysis of variance, it is found that the English learning motivation difference among different high school grades is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Further analysis showed that the motivation score of Grade 12 is significantly higher than that in Grade 11 and Grade 10; the motivation score of Grade 11 is significantly higher than that in Grade 10 (Table 2). In other words, English learning motivation develops toward a continuously increasing trend, with a consistent and obvious growth trend from Grade 10 to Grade 12.

Table 3. Analysis of variance of English learning motivation's seven subcomponents in different high school grades

English learning motivation's seven subcomponents	High school grades	M	SD	F	sig	Scheffe
Self-development motivation	Grade 10	2.46	0.68	93.290	<0.001	Grade 12>Grade 11>Grade 10
	Grade 11	2.68	0.64			
	Grade 12	2.85	0.63			
Academic motivation	Grade 10	2.45	0.67	137.789	<0.001	Grade 12>Grade 11>Grade 10
	Grade 11	2.56	0.55			
	Grade 12	2.86	0.50			
Patriotic motivation	Grade 10	2.44	0.73	64.264	<0.001	Grade 12>Grade 11>Grade 10
	Grade 11	2.58	0.70			
	Grade 12	2.80	0.72			
Achievement motivation	Grade 10	2.46	0.71	138.664	<0.001	Grade 12>Grade 11>Grade 10
	Grade 11	2.75	0.61			
	Grade 12	2.95	0.65			
Integrative motivation	Grade 10	2.49	0.69	123.205	<0.001	Grade 12>Grade 11>Grade 10
	Grade 11	2.65	0.63			
	Grade 12	2.93	0.57			
Pragmatic motivation	Grade 10	2.44	0.71	102.762	<0.001	Grade 12>Grade 11>Grade 10
	Grade 11	2.67	0.62			
	Grade 12	2.86	0.63			
Other-regulated motivation	Grade 10	2.60	1.00	45.737	<0.001	Grade 12>Grade 11>Grade 10
	Grade 11	2.70	0.80			
	Grade 12	2.95	0.73			

Through analysis of variance, it is found that there are statistically significant differences in English learning motivation's seven subcomponents of self-development motivation, academic motivation, patriotic motivation, achievement motivation, integrative motivation, pragmatic motivation, and other-regulated motivation among different high school grades ($p < 0.001$), as shown below.

The motivation score of Grade 12 is significantly higher than that in Grade 11 and Grade 10; the motivation score of Grade 11 is significantly higher than that in Grade 10 (Table 3). Put another way, the above English learning motivation's seven subcomponents develop toward a continuously increasing trend, with a consistent and obvious growth trend from Grade 10 to Grade 12.

DISCUSSION

This research employs the quantitative research methodology to investigate the changes in Chinese high school students' English learning motivation across various school grades and the changes in Chinese high school students' English learning motivation's subcomponents across various school grades. According to the statistical results of surveys, Grade 12 students ranked highest in English learning motivation, followed by Grade 11 and Grade 10 students (see Tables 2 and 3).

It should be noted that the questionnaire revealed a positive trend in second language learning motivation in Grade 12 English classes. The types of English learning motivation among Grade 12 students are other-regulated motivation, achievement motivation, integrative motivation, self-development motivation, pragmatic motivation, academic motivation, and patriotic motivation from high to low. That is, the motivation of Grade 12 students to learn English is mainly influenced by others (such as friends and classmates), their own role models, or the social learning environment.

Additionally, preparation for the college entrance exam also influenced Grade 12 students' second language learning positively. This is consistent with earlier research on Chinese Grade 12 students (e.g., Liu, 2011; Liu & Chen, 2007; Tachibana et al., 1996). Liu and Chen (2007) and Liu (2011) found that Grade 12 students tended to be motivated in English learning, which researchers ascribed to the college entrance exam. Namely, Grade 12 students' English learning motivation are greatly motivated by the college entrance exam; consequently, the college entrance examination motivates students' second language learning (Hamada & Kito, 2008; Kirkpatrick & Zang, 2011; Tachibana et al., 1996).

Moreover, in this exam-oriented educational environment, instructors prefer to utilise exam-oriented teaching approaches in second language classes, and this positive consequence is attributed to the effect of college entrance exam (Magid, 2011). Grade 12 students were comfortable with the teacher's grammar-translation teaching techniques and the exam-oriented teaching approach. It has been stated that the primary job of Chinese Grade 12 English instructors is to prepare their students for college entrance exam, and hence English classes are largely grammar-focused and teacher-centered (Magid, 2011). Exam-oriented teaching approaches are therefore considered a motivational factor for Grade 12 students (Hamada & Kito, 2008; Kikuchi, 2009).

Furthermore, Grade 12 students in China are required to take entrance examination: college entrance examination for Grade 12 students. A majority of college-bound Grade 12 students face the college entrance examination, which will affect students' fate and the situation of their families (Xu, 2008). As a result, compared to Grade 10 and Grade 11 students, Grade 12 students are more driven to achieve good grades on college entrance examination. This study employed a quantitative research method to provide empirical evidence that Grade 12 students' English learning become motivated because of college entrance exam.

CONCLUSION

This quantitative study investigated how Chinese high school students' English learning motivation changed from Grade 10 to Grade 12. Chinese Grade 12 students had the highest level of English learning motivation, while Grade 10 students were the least motivated. Besides, the college entrance examination had a positive impact on Grade 12 students' English learning motivation.

This study has following limitations. First, though this research aimed to examine the changes in Chinese high school students' English learning motivation from Grade 10 to Grade 12 and the changes in Chinese high school students' English learning motivation's subcomponents from Grade 10 to Grade 12, the research design was quasi-longitudinal. This study was only able to present differences

in English learning motivation at school grades, and by looking at these differences, the participants' changes in motivation were inferred. Therefore, future research needs to concentrate on longitudinal changes by exploring the temporal variations of second language learning motivation (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Kim, 2006; Ushioda, 2001).

Second, this quantitative study only adopted a questionnaire to investigate the changes in Chinese high school students' English learning motivation from Grade 10 to Grade 12 and the changes in Chinese high school students' English learning motivation's subcomponents from Grade 10 to Grade 12, and did not conduct semi-structured interviews with students to explore the reasons for second language learning motivational changes across grades. Therefore, interviews with a diverse student population should be conducted in future research to explore students' perceptions of their English learning motivation in a more thorough manner (Zhang & Kim, 2013).

Pedagogical implications

Notwithstanding the contributions, limitations, and suggestions, the pedagogical implications of the study should also be discussed. First, English teachers should encourage high school students to actively take part in Chinese high school English class activities (Nana & Sidhu, 2019; You & Dörnyei, 2016), and create an opportunity for them to use English, may generate a feeling of success in high school students (Chong, 2016), which could in turn increase their English learning motivation (Zhang & Kim, 2013; Zhi & Wang, 2019). Second, providing plenty of input on the target language serves as an essential element to boost high school students' English learning motivation when they are placed in an English-speaking environment (Kramsch & Yin, 2018; Lai & Lyu, 2020).

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Appendix 1: English learning motivation questionnaire

Grade: Gender:

I learn English because.....

1=Strongly Agree; 2=Agree; 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree; 4=Disagree; 5=Strongly Disagree					
	1	2	3	4	5
(1) English is interesting.					
(2) I would like to learn as many languages as possible.					
(3) I am interested in English culture and history.					
(4) I like British/Americans.					
(5) It would help me while traveling abroad in the future.					
(6) Learning English often gives me a feeling of success.					
(7) Fluent English is a symbol of good education and accomplishment.					
(8) Learning English is a challenge.					
(9) English is an important international language in the world.					
(10) My parents expect me to learn English.					
(11) I want to do better than others.					
(12) English is an important tool for my grade.					
(13) English is a required course in school.					
(14) I want to get a high score on English exams.					
(15) I like my English teacher.					
(16) My role models are good at English.					
(17) Learning English is fashionable.					
(18) Others (friends, classmates) are learning English.					
(19) I want to serve my motherland in the future.					
(20) I have talent in English learning.					
(21) I want to get the certificate of English in the future.					
(22) I want to make friends of different nationalities.					
(23) I want to attend a good university.					
(24) It is my dream to learn English well.					
(25) Learning English will broaden my insight/knowledge.					
(26) It can help me find a good job.					
(27) It can help me get a good salary in the future.					
(28) I want to understand foreign movies, magazines or newspapers.					
(29) I want to study abroad.					
(30) Learning English is important in China.					
(31) English is an important tool for communication.					
(32) English can enhance my understanding of the world.					
(33) I want to introduce my hometown to the world.					
(34) I want to become a good English speaker.					
(35) I hope the world understands China more.					