Two Motivations and Learning Autonomy in Non-English Majors

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Abstract. Taking learning motivation as an important factor which has a great influence on non-English majors’ autonomy, this paper focuses on comparing the effects of instrumental and integrative motivation on students’ learning autonomy. With the quantitative questionnaire and qualitative investigation, 112 students are chosen to be the subject of this paper. Results are following: although two motivations are highly correlated with autonomy, instrumental motivation is more closed correlated with autonomy than integrative motivations in four aspects of students’ autonomy: self-monitoring, self-regulation, goal setting and plan making.

Introduction

Many scholars (Gardner, 1985, Biggs, 1987; Ushioda, 1996; Xu Jinfen, 2004; Ni Qingquan, 2010; Wang Lina, 2014) argued that learning motivation is helpful for fostering students’ autonomy. Classed into the instrumental motivation and integrative motivation, however, there existed totally different views. When autonomous learning ability is promoted by these two motivations, which motivation is more closely correlated? If indeed there is one, which can better students’ autonomy, what dimensions of students’ autonomy are involved?

Literature Review

The Relationship between Motivation and Autonomy

Motivation plays a crucial role in students’ English learning. According to Garner and Lambert (1972) there are, based on social-educational model, two main kinds of motivations: instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivation refers to a pragmatic reason for language study, such as professional advancement, exam pressure, employment and promotion etc, while integrative motivation is the drive for the a language learner to establish the communication, and find out foreign culture.

Although the definitions of autonomous learning given by scholars are various, they have proved that people who have the ability to carry out autonomous learning can determine his own learning goals, formulate and implement learning plans actively and independently; can monitor his learning process and evaluate his own leaning; can choose favorable learning environment actively and independently.

Related Research Home and Abroad

The concept of learner autonomy originated in the field of philosophy of education. The debate about learner autonomy in foreign language had been raised in the 70s. Until 1981, Henri Holec published Autonomy and Foreign Language, in which he firstly described the definition of learner autonomy.

Since then, studies abroad covered a wide range of aspects. Among them, they mainly researched on the definition and connotation of learner autonomy, the principle and different aspects and the theoretical basis of learner autonomy, cultural appropriateness of learner autonomy, the establishment of learner autonomy center, autonomous learning strategies, the training methods and contents of learner autonomy, etc. In more than 20 years, major academic researches are: autonomy
and foreign language learning; cultivation of learner autonomy; the individual and autonomy of language learning; the learner strategies in learner autonomy; planning and implementation of the language learning; learner autonomy: from theory to classroom practice; the autonomy and independence in language learning; and so on.

In China, Yin Huadong (2014) retrieved core journals about foreign language autonomous learning in Academic Journal Network Publishing Database, and after statistical analysis, he pointed out that the largest number of relevant researches is on cultivating and promoting autonomous learning ability, which included how to train students and teach them learning strategies, how to raise students’ autonomous learning ability by reforming curriculum design and teaching models, how to focus on advancing foreign language autonomous learning ability under the environment of internet and multimedia, etc.

The second largest number of the related researches is on internal and external factors which influence learner autonomy. Such researches have appeared from the year of 2005, and the result of these researches suggests that learner autonomy is affected by a variety of individual internal factors, such as self-efficacy, attribution, goals setting, cognitive and metacognitive strategies, wish, learning motivation, learning styles, self-esteem, age, gender, etc., and that it is influenced by a variety of external factors, such as family, teachers, educational technology, peer attitude, learning environment, culture, etc. However, the researches focused on self-evaluation, peer evaluation and cultivation of autonomous learning ability.

To be concluded, most relevant researches focus on the relationship between autonomous learning and internal factors, such as metacognition, English learning motivation, self-efficacy and attribution. In the researches on the relationship between autonomous learning and learning motivation, based on the data in CAJNP from 1997 to 2017, the author found that most relevant researches have been studying learning motivation from the dimension of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, while few researches study learning motivation from the dimension of integrative and instrumental motivation, and their research subjects are not aimed at non-English majors. Therefore, this paper put emphasis on studying the relationship between university non-English majors’ autonomous learning ability and integrative and instrumental motivation.

Research Results and Data Presentation

Research Questions, Subjects and Instruments

To compare the effects of instrumental and integrative motivation on students’ learning autonomy, the research mainly address the following questions: which motivation is more closed correlated with autonomy? And in what dimensions of learner autonomy the motivation has the effect?

The subjects of this research are 112 non-English-major sophomores in China West Normal University.

Questionnaires and interviews are designed to survey 112 students’ preference and the dimensions in learner autonomy. After collecting the data, SPSS for windows 2000 version 17.0 is used to process the data. Descriptive Statistics analyzes the characteristics of English leaning motivation and learner autonomy; Pearson correlation analysis is employed to find out the relation between English learning motivation with learner autonomy.

Data Presentation

Based on the data collected, it is clear that the majority of non-English majors have enthusiasm for English learning (the mean value is 3.35). The mean value of instrumental motivation (3.61) is higher than integrative motivation (3.09), which indicates most of English majors to learn English is out of practical or pragmatic reason, such as exam purposes, employment, further education, etc.

After inspecting non-English majors’ two different motivations, it is the time to explore the correlation between the motivation and learner autonomy. According to Pearson correlation, the finding is that learning motivation is significantly correlated with learner autonomy (r=0.291), which confirms the view of many scholars (Xu Jinfen 2004; Hua Weifen, 2009, etc.).
From the contrast between the two subtypes of motivation and learner autonomy, it can be seen that instrumental motivation and learner autonomy have significant correlation at the 0.01 level, and the coefficient of the correlation between instrumental motivation and self-monitoring, self-regulation, goal setting and plan making are the highest ones, which means these variables are most closely related with instrumental motivation.

Discussion and Implication

Major Findings

Instrumental motivation is stronger for Chinese non-English majors to learn English than integrative motivation does. And among these instrumental reasons, the exam purposes, employment, further education are the main ones for students to pursue English. Therefore, university education in non-English majors should satisfy the needs of students in these three aspects. Such situation also offers a suggestion that teachers should find a way to stimulate students’ integrative motivation because integratively oriented learners could ensure them to study a foreign language more persistently and systematically, based on Biggs’ empirical study.

The result of the study confirm that there is a correlation between the two subtypes of motivation and learner autonomy, and that instrumental motivation is highly positively correlated with autonomy, but the correlation between integrative motivation and learner autonomy is not significant. Meanwhile, the empirical evidence shows that self-monitoring, self-regulation, goal setting and plan making are most closely correlated with instrumental motivation, which implies that at the goal setting and plan making stage, it is necessary for them to go through The Teaching Syllabus for Non-English Majors; at the monitoring stage, students should keep track of the whole learning process and take proper means to cope with problems that appear in the learning process; at the regulation stage students should make an assessment on how much they have finished in their learning plans and objectives and make suitable adjustments.

Implication for Pedagogy

Ways to Stimulate Motivation

In order to satisfy students’ different learning motivation and needs, teachers should conduct needs analysis in class, because feedbacks from students can enable teachers to understand what sort of English learning materials will increase student’s learning interest and stimulate their learning motivation and what degree of difficulty suit them. For example, the university non-English majors with strong instrumental motivation may prefer the Band-4 or Band-6 materials while students with strong integrative motivation possibly have more interest in the materials about English literature and history. Therefore, school and teachers should provide the relevant learning materials according to their different needs.

Secondly, teachers should try to cultivate students’ integrative motivation. Relatively, integratively oriented learners were more persistently and intensely motivated in learning foreign language than instrumentally oriented learners. However, non-English majors’ integrative motivation is relatively low in the present study. Therefore, there are following ways to promote learners’ integrative motivation. Firstly, create authentic learning materials or texts. According to Guariento & Morley (2001), one of the main functions of authentic texts is that it can develop or increase students’ motivation in learning. Guariento & Morley proposed that authentic learning materials can make learners feel that they are learning the real language; that they are learning the target language as it is used by the members in the target community. By this way, students’ interest in English and its culture can be gradually raised in an authentic learning environment. Then, teachers should provide more time for students to participate in activities which make them interested in and that in a way they can easily accept. Through engagement in the language teaching and learning, students’ interest in learning English is gradually fostered.
Ways to Foster Learner Autonomy

(1) Goals setting stage
At the goals setting stage, non-English majors should understand their learning goals and objectives in university and ways to set goals and make plans for their English learning. Understanding the requirements of The Teaching Syllabus for non-English majors is essential for autonomous learning, and teachers should analyze the Teaching Syllabus according to students’ individual needs and their current English capacity. After this preconditioned step for goal setting, teachers should guide students to set appropriate learning plans. The goals and objectives should be set in accordance with learners’ real conditions, and should not be too unrealistic to be achieved. Ordinarily, students should set a short-term goal and long-term goal. Learning plan should also be made based on learners’ real condition. It ought to be more specific and goal-oriented, involving pronunciation, vocabulary, listening, reading, translating, cultural attainment, etc.

(2) Monitoring and evaluating stage
Monitoring stage refers to keep track of the whole learning process and take proper means to cope with problems that appear in the learning process. Similar to the monitoring stage, evaluating stage means that learners make an assessment on how much they have finished in their learning plans and objectives.

Additionally, self-monitoring stage can be concluded in the goals-setting stage. Students need to identify their learning goals and objectives. Teachers should guide students to raise questions for students themselves, such as “what are the learning goals and objectives that I want to attain”, “how to achieve them”, etc. This is the self-monitoring that students conduct to their learning goals and plans. Besides, teachers need to encourage students to actively reflect on their learning process. Teachers can ask them to write down what they have learned in class and whether some difficulties occur in their learning process. By this way, students can review the learning strategies and methods they have used in the learning process and whether these methods are effective to them. Encouraging students to write learning diary after class is another ideal approach to reflect and evaluate their language learning.

Assessment is an indispensible part in autonomous learning. It can provide feedback to students so that they can adjust their plan. There are many ways to make self-assessment, such as watching English news, movies, taking tests from the test database on the English On-line or other channels. Definitely, students can make use of peer assessment form to monitor themselves in the learning process.

With the purpose to change students from being monitored by external environment to self-monitoring, teachers have to give up the concept that they are the power center of class. Instead, teachers should make the students be the center of the class and allow them to monitor themselves in the learning process.

Ways to Construct Favorable Environment to Autonomous Learning

(1) Create a suitable classroom environment
An appropriate classroom environment for language learning is one that strengthens the trust that needed to communicate and that strengthens confidence and self-esteem. Teachers should provide a friendly learning environment, in which students can naturally use the expression they have just learned to communicate with classmates and teachers with confidence.

(2) Establish self-access center
There are many components that school should take fully consideration before constructing self-access center, such as language learning materials, technical equipment, staff and their training, etc.

Materials should be carefully selected to meet students’ different learning motivations and needs. In terms of the form, there are three types of materials: published language learning materials (such as books, magazines, newspaper, etc.), audio-visual materials (such as cassette tapes, video tapes, films, etc.), computer-assisted learning materials (such as multimedia lectures, CO-ROM discs, materials from campus networks or from Internet, etc.). The learning materials in self-access center
are not only favorable to promote students’ language ability, but also to develop students’ learning strategies and stimulate their learning interest, and make them know that they are applying language in the meantime of learning it. In the process, students will gradually take responsibility for their learning, and become a real autonomous learner in the end.

Self-access center in university should equipped with technical equipment, such as computers, satellite TV, tape recorders, video disc player, printer, etc. and basic equipment, such as desk, chair, bookshelf, etc.

The counselors should be equipped with in the self-access center, because they can not only encourage students and give them guidance in autonomous learning, but resolve some practical problems, such as operating technical equipment and providing professional guidance to students. Thus, it is necessary that the counselors be trained about skills of instructing and the use of technical equipment, so that they can really give some guidance in students’ autonomous learning.

Ways to Establish Students’ Sense of Responsibility

It can not be denied that there are some students who are neither integrative nor instrumental motivated learners. Such students do not want to put any time and energy in learning English. As for them, teachers should cultivate their sense of responsibility in learning their English. Many scholars like Scharle and Szabo (2000) believe that to promote learner autonomy, we should cultivate learners’ sense of responsibility first. In the questionnaire and interview, many students with instrumental motivation stated that “for their parents’ anticipation, for a good job and for a higher education” are the main reasons for them to learn English very hard, and such reasons to a certain extent can reflect these students’ sense of responsibility. Therefore, for the students without motive in learning English, teachers should make students come to realize that the importance to strengthen their professional knowledge, no matter for students themselves or our social development.

Limitation of the Study

Because of the insufficient personal ability and limited time, there are some limitations in this paper. Firstly, it was carried out in one university of one area, thus whether the findings can be generalized to be the universal characteristics of all the non-English majors may be uncertain. Secondly, there still exits many other factors that have a correlation with learner autonomy, such as age, gender, educational background and so on, but in this paper, only two subtypes of motivation is considered.

This research might not be able to fully explore the correlation between learner autonomy and learning motivation because some students investigated may be an instrumental motivated learners at onstage of learning process, a mixed motivated learners at the next stage, and be changed into an integrative motivated learner at another stage. Further research can be expanded into more fields.

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References


