Research Article

Learning Motivation among University English-language Majors under Hierarchical Teaching Model[*]

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Abstract

Leaning motive is a key factor in foreign language learning. Recognizing different learning motivations among English-language majors on varied levels under a hierarchical teaching model, this paper conducts surveys on learning motivations among English-language majors, and identifies that these students have stronger motivation than intrinsic motivation. Under a hierarchical teaching model, we should enhance students' awareness of hierarchical teaching model, develop their learning interests, stimulate their intrinsic motivation, develop free and harmonious classroom environment, and cultivate immersive learning motivation.

Keywords

Hierarchical Teaching • Learning Motivation • Research

Learning motivation is the internal drive to promote an individual to learn, and motivate him or her to progress towards a certain target (Depasque & Tricomi, 2015). Sound learning motivation plays the role to fully untap an individual's motivation in learning. China's research on learning motivation in foreign language study was first started in the 1990s. Along with the deepening of reform on university English-language programs, especially after launch of Requirements on University English Courses by the Ministry of Education, hierarchical teaching has been adopted by more and more universities. Increasingly, educators focus on the impact of learning motivation on leaning results. So, using hierarchical teaching model, with full respect of students' emotional factors, it is increasingly important to stimulate students' interest in learning, and help them find steady leaning motivation (Tas, Brown, Esen-Danaci, Lysaker & Martin, 2012). Based on hierarchical teaching, this paper utilizes questionnaire survey to support analysis on learning motives among university English-language majors from varied levels of language competency and capacity, and discuss the strategy on cultivating learning motivation under this teaching model, so as to provide an effective solution to simulate and maintain students' learning motivations. In this way, this paper sets to provide valuable references to reform for university English-language teaching.

Hierarchical Teaching and Learning Motivation

Hierarchical Teaching

In order to provide good guidance on reform of English courses among universities, the Ministry of Education has stipulated requirements in its Requirements on University English Courses that: due to differences in teaching resources, leaning capacities and social demands among universities, universities should set up scientific and tailored teaching systems for English-language courses, and provide personalized teaching and hierarchical guidance in teaching practices. In response to these requirements, a number of universities have started to adopt teaching reform and pilot programs on hierarchical teaching in the area of English-language teaching. By hierarchical teaching, it means admitting the individual differences of students, establishing a student-centered consciousness, developing teaching objectives and teaching content accordingly, fully recognizing students varied needs, and enabling students to fully achieve their targets (Markou *et al*., 2013).

Briefly, hierarchical teaching model, when utilized in university English-language teaching, means that with students' consent, students are taught in varied levels in accordance with their competency and capacity of learning. Among different levels, teaching content and method vary in order to meet needs of students with varied language competency and capacity. The hierarchical teaching model fully supports the teaching principle of respecting personalized needs.

Learning Motivation

From a psychological perspective, leaning motivation means the intrinsic drive to stimulate individual activity, and to propel him/her to work towards realization of certain goals (Patanakul Pinto & Pinto, 2016).

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Motivation includes needs, instinct, and willingness. Learning motivation is a direct push to drive a student to learn, a need to motivate and guide students in learning (Zhang, Small, Yang & Wang, 2010).

Role of Learning Motivation in Hierarchical Learning

On the relation between leaning motivation and learning results, according to previous studies, these two are positive-correlated (Klimova, 2011). It means the stronger learning motivation a student has, the better leaning results he/she will achieve. Vice versa, if a student has lower learning motivation, he/she tends to have worse leaning results. So learning motivation is an important factor impacting learning results. Under the hierarchical teaching model, students' learning motivation should also be encouraged. Compared to conventional teaching models, hierarchical teaching can better address students' personalized needs (Prasangani, 2015). To achieve good teaching results under a hierarchical teaching model, we need to help students gain awareness of their own learning capacity and competency, provide students with learning goals suitable to themselves, and facilitate students in developing good learning motivation.

Status Quo on Learning Motivation under Hierarchical Teaching Model

Research Subject and Method

This paper selects English language majors from a normal university in Shandong Province as research objects, totaling 176 persons. Based on results of entrance exam and placement test they had taken in freshman year, these students are grouped into two classes, Class A and Class B, whereas the former has higher performance than the latter. Class A has 91 students, and Class B has 85. Details see Table 1.

Table 1
Basic Situation of the Respondents

Class	Number of people
A	91
B	85

This paper uses questionnaire for surveying purpose. A total of 176 questionnaires were delivered and recollected, representing an effective rate of 100%. SPSS17.0 was used to calculate and analyze survey results.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Analysis results on survey results are included in Table 2.

Based on origin, motivation can be categorized as intrinsic motivation and external motivation (Rifai, 2010). The so-called external motivation means that it is external-driven, such as the one's future prospect. But intrinsic motivation is self-driven, making it a driving force originating from the individual internally (Jain & Sidhu, 2013), for example, interests and passion for the major in a student. Based on the above results, learning motivations in university English-language majors have demonstrated below features:

Table 2
Survey Results of College English Majors' Learning Motivation

Motivation to learn English major	Class A	Class B
Learning English is because I like English	38%	11%
Learning English is to understand the cultural customs of Western countries.	88%	39%
Learning English is to better appreciate English literature	66%	22%
Use English as a tool to grow and increase the amount of information	88%	28%
English is an important international communication tool	83%	19%
In order to pass the grade test, get a diploma	71%	99%
In order to find a good job in the future	96%	64%
In order to be able to take a graduate or go abroad	55%	14%
Lay the foundation for future work	86%	46%

Intrinsic interests. On the question "learning English is because I like English", the results show that 38% students from Class A and 11% students from Class B replied yes. There is a higher proportion of students choosing English out of personal interests in Class A than in Class B, but still about half students in Class A not choosing English major out of personal interests. In the meantime, on the question regarding intrinsic interests, about 88% students from Class A hopes to understand western culture, while only 39% students from Class B replied the same. Generally speaking, Class A students have demonstrated stronger interests in learning and higher level of initiative in learning process.

External motivation. According to survey results, 96% of Class A students learn English because they want to find a good job, while 64% of Class B students replied so. 71% of Class A students learn English to pass certification exams and obtain diploma, while 99% of Class B students replied so. Results show that a majority of students learn English to pass certification exams or get a degree, such as CET-4, CET-6, TEM-4, and hope to find a good job after graduation with these certificates.

Overall, based on survey results on learning motivation among Class A and Class B students, students on varied learning levels learn language out of different reasons. In terms of intrinsic motivation, Class A students prefer to learn about western culture and read foreign literature, while Class B students show less motivation in this regard. Overall speaking, the external motivation in language learning is stronger than intrinsic motivation.

Learning motivations are not mutually exclusive. For example, intrinsic motivation and external motivation can co-exist. Also learning motivation is not immutable. Through survey results, it is indicated that some students may start out choosing the English major not out of personal interests, but after some time, they have developed increasing interest in English language learning. In other words, motivation is dynamic, and external motivation can be turned into intrinsic motivation. So under the hierarchical teaching model, teachers should find ways to develop students' interests in language learning.

Strategy on Stimulating Learning Motivation under Hierarchical Teaching Model

Increase students' awareness of hierarchical teaching model

Presently, many universities have been using hierarchical teaching model in English language teaching. It is a goal of this model to promote development in every student. For student in their first year, universities

should promote the awareness of hierarchical teaching so that students can be fully informed of the importance of hierarchical teaching, and the teaching method under this model. It prevents students being resistant to hierarchical teaching model thinking that it is simply pegged to exam performance. According to psychological research, student's approval of a teaching method is directly relevant to learning motivation in him or her (Iwaniec, 2014). Universities should make students aware of the concept of hierarchical teaching model and its purpose. Awareness is not achieved by simply categorizing students into varied levels. It should be a teaching system covering content and methods. The goal of hierarchical teaching is to offer personalized teaching based on different needs of students on varied levels of competency and capacity, and to help students improve their performances.

When improving students' awareness of hierarchical teaching, universities should also work on improving the model, the approach on categorizing in particular. Sound categorization should be the basis for implementing hierarchical teaching model. Universities should comprehensively understand differences among levels of students before they make categorizations and offer hierarchical teaching.

Develop learning interest and stimulate intrinsic motivation in students

Intrinsic motivation is self-driven and long-lasting, while external motivation is subject to implications of external elements. Compared to external motivation, intrinsic motivation provides enduring driving force effect. English-language teachers should work on stimulating students' intrinsic motivation. According to previous research, students having different levels of intrinsic motivation have different learning results. So in order to stimulate intrinsic motivations in students, the key is to cultivate their interests and passion for the language. It is said that interest is the best teacher in the world. If students have strong interest in language learning, they will have endured drive in language study. According to survey results, it is popular among universities students to want to learn about western culture. Based on this, teachers should utilize knowledge to the interest of students in order to cultivate further interest in language learning, and help students understand that language learning should not just serve the purpose of exams and certifications, nor is it all about vocabulary or grammar. There is so much more to language study, such as the western culture and western values. In the process of teaching, teachers should provide access to knowledge that students are interested in, so as to stimulate their curiosity and interest. Through this, student will develop enhanced initiative and intrinsic motivation for language learning.

Create harmonious and free classrooms, develop immersive learning motivation

Psychosocial studies have shown that people are at their best psychological state in a free and harmonious environment. Under the best psychological state, people tend to develop learning passion and creativity. So for English language teaching, it is effective to develop a free and harmonious classroom environment to enhance teaching and learning results. Teachers should follow below instructions in creating and maintaining favorable classroom environment: First change teaching methods. It is widely known that conventional application-based teaching and hierarchical teaching are fundamentally different, as the former is group-oriented and the latter

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being individual-oriented. Personalized teaching requires exchanges and communications between teachers and students. Teachers are no long the figures of authority, but should serve as guide and partner for students. In this environment, students' initiative can be fully realized, and their status being dominant player will be highlighted. They are in a free and active state of mind, which is good for forming strong immersive learning motivation and achieving better learning results. Second diversify teaching content. A basic requirement of hierarchical teaching is to align teaching content with students' levels. For higher capacity students, teachers should tailor content to their needs, and for lower capacity students, teachers should place a focus on the fundamentals. Selection of teaching content should not be limited to textbooks, but should involve cases and references from domestic and foreign sources, so as to provide opportunities for students to develop immersive motivation. Third, use varied teaching methods. In the hierarchical teaching model, teachers should adopt varied teaching methods such as case study, situational language teaching, and multi-media teaching. Secondary English class should also be offered, such as English corner, salon, and singing competitions, to enhance students' learning motivation.

Conclusion

Learning motivation is vital to foreign language learning. Along with reform of English language teaching in universities, hierarchical teaching model is widely adopted now. The student-oriented model recognizes differences among individuals, focuses on stimulating learning motivations, and seeks to obtain better learning results. Through questionnaire survey, it is found out by this paper that university English major students have stronger external motivation than intrinsic motivation. In response to survey results, this paper proposes that students' awareness of hierarchical teaching should be enhanced, their interest in learning should developed, their intrinsic motivation should be stimulated, free and harmonious classroom environment should be created, and immersive learning motivation should be cultivated.

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