

Study of College Students' Learning Motivation in English Corner-Take Xi'an Innovation College of Yan'an University as an Example

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Abstract: There are many factors affecting English learning, and motivation of learner is crucial to it. The purpose of this paper is to explore some measures to stimulate English learning motivation and help college students to learn English better. Based on the investigation of college students' participation in English corner, this paper focuses on the main factors affecting the English learning motivation of Chinese college students. The paper investigates the situation of college students taking part in English corner, and analyzes what is the English learning motivation of college students, based on a questionnaire survey of 180 random students in Xi'an Innovation College of Yan'an University, as well as uses other relevant scholars' ideas for reference. And then puts forward some efficient measures to promote college students' English learning.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, English has become increasingly important worldwide, being widely used in various fields such as international business, science and technology, and diplomacy. For Chinese people, particularly the youth, learning English is of vital significance. As society develops, English learning and application have become more common. Practice is crucial for mastering a foreign language, and the emergence of English corners provides learners with convenient opportunities to practice spoken English and immerse themselves in western culture. Topics related to student's lives can enhance their understanding and promote the smooth development of English teaching[1].

Among factors influencing English learning effectiveness, motivation is key. Stimulating students' motivation can improve their interest and efficiency in learning. Motivation is a complex subject with various interpretations. Maslow (1970) described motivation as constant, fluctuating, and universal. Crookes and Schmidt (1991) defined it as interest, persistence, and concentration. Lv (2021) noted that English corners offer a space for college students to train their oral English and create an immersive learning environment[2].

This paper will conduct a questionnaire survey on the learning motivation of students from Xi'an Innovation College of Yan'an University. Based on the data, the author will analyze issues related to students' motivation and propose solutions to enhance the effectiveness of English corners and improve students' learning efficiency. The thesis includes four parts: an introduction to the purpose and methods, a discussion on motivation including its definitions and classifications, an introduction to English corners, and measures based on the discussion. Finally, a brief conclusion summarizes the findings[3].

2. Motivation

Ever since 1980s, a variety of researches and studies have emerged to study second/foreign language learning motivation, up to now, there are a large number of theories are concluded and applied.

2.1. The definitions of motivation

Motivation is a pivotal factor in language learning, particularly in second language acquisition. Despite its importance, there is no universally agreed-upon definition of motivation. Researchers

have proposed various interpretations, reflecting the complexity and multifaceted nature of this concept[4].

Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory posits that motivation starts with basic biological needs and progresses to higher psychological needs, including self-actualization. This theory suggests that motivation is constant, fluctuating, and complex (Maslow, 1970). Gardner and Lambert's social-psychological model defines motivation as a combination of effort, desire to achieve language learning goals, and a positive attitude toward learning the language (Gardner, 1985). According to Gardner, these three components must be integrated to fully understand motivation.

Crookes and Schmidt (1991) describe motivation as interest, enthusiasm, persistence, concentration, and enjoyment in the learning process. H.M. Brown views motivation as the cognitive and emotional arousal that stimulates action toward specific objectives (Brown, 2000). These definitions highlight that motivation encompasses both cognitive and emotional elements, driving learners to invest effort and persist in their language learning journey[5].

In summary, language learning motivation is the central force driving individuals in the language learning process. It involves cognitive and emotional arousal and determines the effort learners consciously make to achieve their goals. While various theories offer different perspectives, they collectively underscore the complexity and multifaceted nature of motivation in language learning.

2.2. The classification of motivation

Motivation is classified into intrinsic and extrinsic types from perspectives of cognitive, behaviorism, social psychology, and sociology. Extrinsic motivation includes integrative and instrumental motivation[6].

2.2.1. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

Motivation is classified into intrinsic and extrinsic forms. Intrinsic motivation, rooted in psychology, involves engaging in activities for their own sake, driven by natural curiosity and interest (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Pintrich & Schunk, 2020). Reeve (1996) defines it as the propensity to engage in interests and seek optimal challenges. Wlodkowski (1998) adds that intrinsically motivated actions are self-rewarding. Intrinsically motivated learners enjoy tasks and derive satisfaction from the activity itself, leading to higher motivation and better performance[7].

Extrinsic motivation, influenced by external factors such as rewards or social expectations, can be fostered by teachers through supportive and encouraging attitudes. While teachers cannot create extrinsic motivation, they can help students develop a positive attitude towards learning. This preparation involves taking responsibility for their learning journey and creating an environment that encourages engagement and reduces criticism[8].

2.2.2. Integrative and instrumental motivation

Integrative and instrumental motivation are key concepts in language learning. Integrative motivation involves the desire to learn a language to participate in and understand the culture of its speakers, driven by interest and cultural appreciation (Gardner & Lambert, 1959). This form of motivation is intrinsic, as learners engage with the language for personal fulfillment and cultural connection.

Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, is extrinsic and focuses on practical outcomes such as career advancement, social status improvement, or academic success (Ellis, 1994; Dörnyei, 1996). Learners motivated instrumentally see language learning as a means to achieve specific goals rather than for cultural engagement.

Research indicates that integrative motivation often leads to higher proficiency levels in language learning. Studies by Gardner (1985) and Spolsky (1969) show that learners with strong integrative motivation tend to achieve greater success, suggesting that a genuine interest in the target culture and community significantly enhances language acquisition[9].

Conversely, while instrumental motivation can also drive successful language learning, it may not always result in deep cultural understanding or long-term language use. However, in contexts where language proficiency directly impacts career or educational opportunities, instrumental

motivation can be highly effective (Lukmani, 1972).

Overall, both integrative and instrumental motivations play crucial roles in second language learning, with integrative motivation often linked to deeper cultural integration and higher proficiency, while instrumental motivation drives practical achievements and immediate benefits.

Instrumental motivation, while driving practical outcomes, has it may lead to decreased effort, 1991)and Ellis (1999), who argue that a combination of both motivations predicts greater success than either alone. Integrative learners tend to be more active in class and less likely to drop out compared to those solely instrumentally motivated[10].

3. English corner

English corner activities can complement classroom teaching by fostering students' interest and enthusiasm in English, enhancing oral skills.

3.1. The English corner

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3.1.1. The definition of English corner

English corner is an extracurricular activity where students gather in a relaxed atmosphere to practice oral English, complementing classroom learning and fostering communication and cooperation. It serves as both a training ground for language skills and a social platform. (Lv, 2014).

3.1.2. The characteristics of English corner

The English corner is a vital supplement to classroom teaching, functioning as a second classroom for students to enhance their English proficiency. It promotes effective English communication and serves as an essential link in language education. Several key characteristics define the English corner:

(1) Natural Environment: Unlike traditional classrooms where one person speaks and others listen, English corners foster an environment of collective communication, encouraging more natural interactions and increasing opportunities for student participation[11].

(2) Cooperative Relationship: Students join English corners with the common goal of practicing oral English, fostering a sense of community and mutual support. This cooperative learning aligns with traditional Chinese cultural values (Littlewood, 1999).

(3) Relaxed Atmosphere: The absence of formal assessment and the presence of peers create a less intimidating environment. This reduces anxiety and nervousness, making students more willing to speak up and practice their language skills[12].

(4) Autonomous Choice: In contrast to the passive nature of classroom instruction, English corners allow students to choose their conversation partners and topics, leading to greater engagement and interest in communication.

(5) Considerable Practice: English corners provide extensive opportunities for listening and speaking practice, which are limited in traditional classroom settings due to time constraints and larger class sizes. This increased practice is crucial for developing comprehensive language communication skills[13].

3.2. Research

This part can be divided into two parts: data collection and data analysis.

3.2.1. Data collection

The questionnaires were conducted at the end of the first semester of 2016-2017 academic year, the subjects were 200 students at random from X'ian Innovation College of Yan'an University. To avoid unnecessary problems in language understanding and obtain more spontaneous responses, the questionnaire were delivered to the subjects in Chinese version. Moreover, 200 questionnaires were

delivered and 188 questionnaires were returned, and there were 180 questionnaires regarded valid.

3.2.2. Data analysis

Table 1 Gender and grade

	Male	Female	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
Number	54	126	7	47	68	58
Percentage	30%	70%	4%	26%	38%	32%

As shown in Table 1, there appears to be an existing trend of fewer males engaging in foreign language learning, which is also reflected in the current survey under analysis. The number of female respondents is 40% higher than that of males, and participants are distributed across all four academic years in the college (see Figure 1).

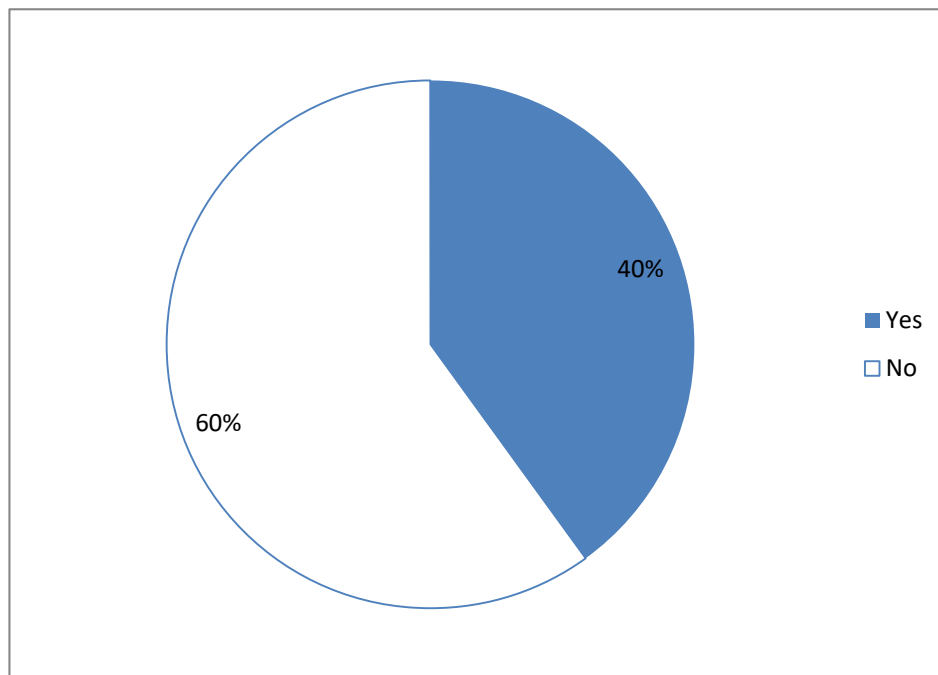


Figure 1. Are you major in English

From the above table, we can see clearly that the respondents of English major less than non-English major.

Table 2 The frequency of you taking part in English corner

	Number	Percentage
Always	22	12%
Usually	40	22%
Occasionally	118	66%
Never	0	0%

Table 2 shows that 66% of the respondents join the English corner occasionally, 22% usually attend, and only 12% always participate. Notably, all respondents have attended the English corner at least once; no one reported never participating.

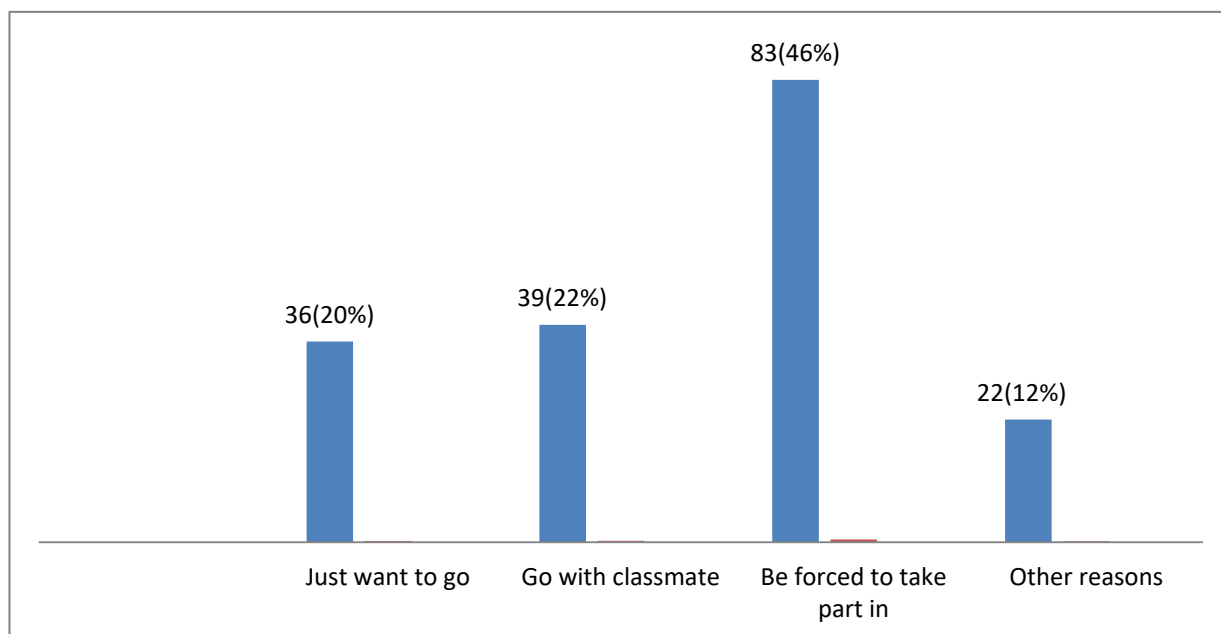


Figure 2. The reason of you taking part in English corner

There are four reasons provided in Figure 2, it can be seen that nearly half of them forced to take part in the English corner, and 22 percent of students just to company their classmates, furthermore, there are just 20 out of 100 students going to English corner because they want to, there are other reasons among 12 percent of the respondents. We can know that the enthusiasm of students to participate in English corner is not high.

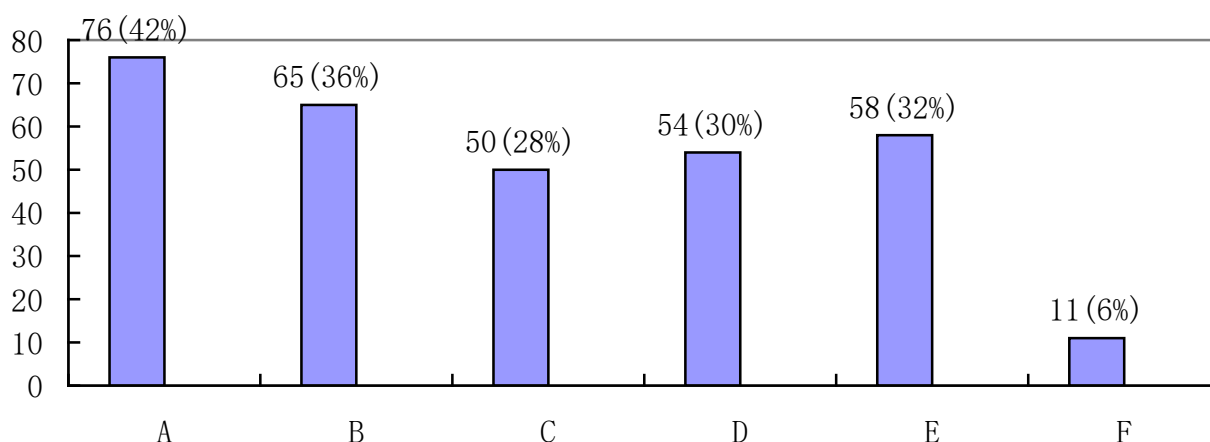


Figure 3. The purpose of you taking part in English corner

The Figure 3 provides the six purposes for taking part in the English corner. To improve oral English ranks the first, with a percentage as high as 42. The second purpose comes to improving listening. The next purpose listed is that students are curious about foreign teachers, so they just come to have a look at the foreign teachers, or talk to them. And more than 30 percent participants think they can learn more about western culture through the English corner. Another purpose is that students feel they can make friends in the English corner. And there still are 6 percent of them go to English corner with other purpose.

In Figure 4, there are five harvests to choose for students. The ability of listening improved through taking part in the English corner is at the top of the list. The next is oral English improved, with 46 percent supporters. The third main harvest through taking part in the English corner is that the ability of language production improved. Among the respondents, 32% reported a significant improvement in their enthusiasm for learning English. However, a few students felt that they did not

gain anything from participating in the English corner.

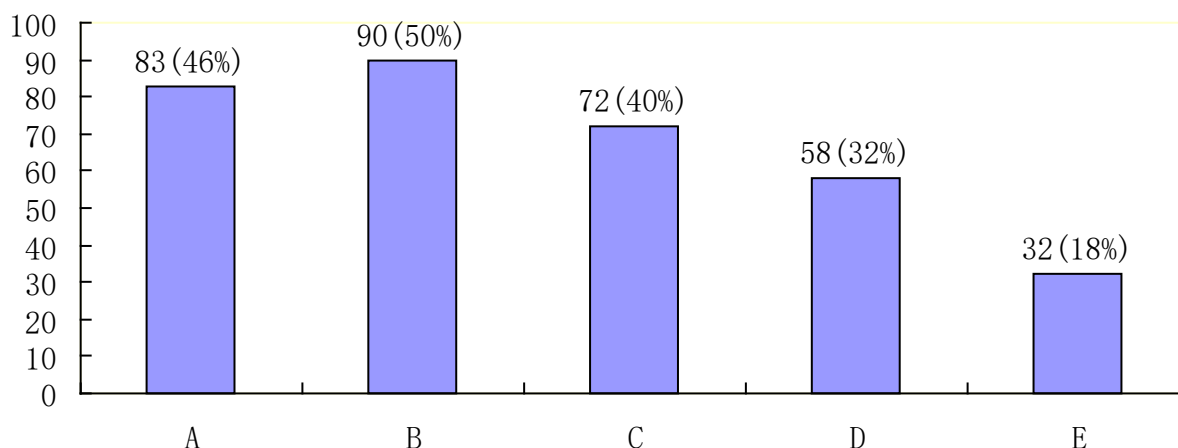


Figure 4. What have you harvest after you take part in the English corner?

Table 3. The atmosphere of English corner in your school

	Number	Percentage
Enthusiastic	22	12%
Everyone has a chat	46	26%
Only some of students chat	72	40%
Awkward	40	22%

From the above table 3, we can see that 40 out of 100 participants think that there are just a part of students who communicate in the English corner. About 26 percent students and 12 percent students think everybody can communicate with others or the feeling in the English corner is very high, this occupies about 38 percent. And other 22 percent of them hardly talk in the English corner, and feel a little embarrassed.

Table 4. Your performance in the English corner

	Number	Percentage
Mainly listening	68	38%
Can speak English fluently	50	28%
Chinese and English mixed	44	24%
Dialogic communicate	18	10%

As shown in Table 4, 38 percent of the students mainly listen rather than speak during the English corner. The remaining 62 percent participate more actively: 28 percent can express themselves fluently in English, 24 percent speak using a mix of Chinese and English, and 10 percent are able to communicate using simple English sentences.

Table 5 The general communicatee of you in English corner

	Number	Percentage
Classmates	44	24%
Teachers or foreign teachers	86	48%
Unknown schoolmates	25	14%
Not sure	25	14%

From the table 5, we can conclude that students like communicate with teachers most, which ranks the first with 48 percent. Approximately 24 percent students mainly communicate with the

people they familiar with. What come third are unfamiliar people and not sure about who they are talk to, which have the same response percentage (40 percentage).

3.3. Measures

Here are three key measures to enhance the effectiveness of English corners:

(1) Picking Interesting Topics: The right topic is crucial in an English corner. Organizers should select topics that are comprehensible, interesting, and interrelated to students' daily lives, avoiding emphasis on grammar and quantity. This ensures that students have something engaging to talk about. Teachers should provide guidance and keep conversations lively.

(2) Making Activities Attractive: To create a vibrant atmosphere, organizers should cultivate a group of fluent English speakers who can actively engage and lead by example. Incorporating games like watching English movies, singing English songs, or performing plays in English can make the environment enjoyable and relaxed, encouraging more participation.

(3) Creating Proper Language Context: A suitable context is vital for foreign language learning. It enhances language acquisition and cultural understanding, promoting rapid improvement. Students should be made aware that mastering oral English requires practice, emphasizing that practice makes perfect.

4. Conclusion

Learning motivation is crucial in English learning; both learners and educators should focus on stimulating it to enhance efficiency.

Motivation is a crucial factor in successful language learning, with highly motivated students consistently outperforming those with low motivation. Learning motivation can strengthen learning behaviors and stimulate greater eagerness for studying. It is an internal driver that promotes student activities and a powerful incentive for learning. English learning motivation, characterized by a strong desire for knowledge, is an intrinsic motivator for learners, reflecting their proactive and positive psychological state.

The English corner serves as a vital supplement to traditional classroom teaching, acting as a second classroom that enhances students' English expression skills. Economic development has diversified learning methods, and the English corner significantly boosts college English education by addressing the communicative needs of society. This activity aims to improve students' communicative competence, making full use of the English corner as an engaging platform for free expression. It allows students to demonstrate their personalities and improve their English comprehension and application skills.

This thesis begins with an introduction to the main topics: motivation and the English corner. The author explains the forms of the English corner and defines motivation, classifying it into intrinsic and extrinsic, as well as integrative and instrumental types. A questionnaire was conducted, and the collected data were analyzed. Finally, the author proposes several measures to enhance students' English learning through the English corner.

The study has limitations: it's a questionnaire-only survey with a small, college-restricted sample, lacking broader representativeness.

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