

# A Study on English Learning Motivation of Chinese Philosophy Majors

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**Abstract.** In this paper, 102 sophomores and juniors from 11 universities in southern China were selected to study the relationship between English learning motivation and its effects among Chinese philosophy majors. SPSS data analysis software was then used to analyze the collected data by frequency analysis, cross-analysis and linear regression analysis to explore the correlation among learning motivation, methods and effects. The analysis showed several main learning motivations and their corresponding learning methods. The results showed that the top three motivations were "for school exams", "for studying English literature of philosophy" and "for school exams". Among them, students who take "for studying English literature of philosophy" or "for school exams" as English learning motive will not take any specific way to learn English and students who take the "for studying abroad examinations" as their motivation for English learning generally adopts a specific way to study English, which is "situational communication". In addition, there is no significant correlation between learning methods and learning outcomes, and an obvious correlation between learning motivation and learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** Philosophy-major students; English learning motivation; Learning methods and effects.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Research Background

Nowadays, the use of English occupies a dominant position in the world, both in the number of users and the scope of use. The learning of English is of vital importance.

Ludwig Sc Wittgenstein, in his book *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*, proposed, "The limits of my language are the limits of my world [1]." For philosophy-major learners, due to the specific nature of their major, many professional terms and expressions can be more precisely understood only through mastering English and then comprehending the original English material. It is often difficult to find accurate Chinese versions of many original works. Therefore, in order to have a further breakthrough in the study of foreign philosophy, it is necessary for Chinese philosophy-major students to have a good command of English as a second language.

Historically, there have been two major theories of motivation in language learning. The first type is "internal motivation" and "external motivation" proposed by Atkinson, McClelland, Clark and Lowell [2]. They believe that the former is for the satisfaction of students' inner pleasure, while the latter is for the satisfaction of students' external goals. The second category is "instrumental motivation" and "integration motivation" proposed by Gardner and Lambert. The former is to use language as a tool, such as to help find a better job, and the latter is to use language to integrate into other cultures.

According to Gao Yihong and the fellow scholars, English learning motivations of Chinese undergraduates can be divided into seven types: 1) intrinsic interest; 2) immediate achievement; 3) learning situation; 4) going abroad; 5) social responsibility; 6) individual development; 7) information medium. Plus, according to the same research by Gao Yihong and her fellow researchers mentioned above, whether being an English major or not generates different English learning motives [3].



Multivariate analysis of variance shows that majors and English level have a significant influence on the formation of learning motivation. In addition, there is an interaction between majors and English level, and between grades and English level.

According to existing researches, to a certain extent, grades can reflect the strength of students' learning motivation. Motivated students work harder and get better grades [4]. The goal of language learning motivation is embodied in learning outcomes, among which the easiest one to quantify is learning performance. In other words, all the criteria for evaluating learning motivation are whether one sort of motivation can improve learning outcomes, and to what extent it can improve learning outcomes.

The existing researches on college students' English learning motivation in China focus on the promotion effect of different kinds of learning motivation on learning effectiveness, and the interrelation and interaction between learning motivation and other factors that affect learning outcomes. The existing relevant researches abroad focus on the influence of students' inherent factors (such as personality, age, gender, family environment, etc.) on learning outcomes.

This paper is aimed at finding out the connection and interaction between different learning motivations and outcomes.

## **1.2. Research Significance**

In Dörnyei and Ushioda's view, "Motivation is the bridge that connects language learners to their goals and aspirations [5]." Learning motivation is of great significance to language learners. However, although there is a lot of academic research on learning motivation, there is not much research on the English learning motivation of contemporary Chinese philosophy-major students. Therefore, this study has innovative significance. This study can find out the corresponding effects of different English learning motivations among contemporary Chinese philosophy-major students, stimulate the learning momentum, and then better help this group of people to learn English. It can be seen that this study has its special significance both in practice and theory. For philosophy-major students and teachers, they can learn what kind of motivation can help them to stimulate their English learning potential, so as to better understand foreign culture and understand the world.

## **1.3. Research Objectives**

Based on an English learning motivation questionnaire of Chinese philosophy-major college students, this study analyzes the general situation of philosophy-major students' English learning motivation and attempts to present the relationship between philosophy-major students' learning motivation and their learning effect more clearly with objective data.

There are three research questions in this article:

- (1) What is the proportion of each learning motivation and method mentioned in the questionnaire and which ones are significant?
- (2) What is the relationship between the top 3 learning motivations and different learning methods?
- (3) What are the learning effects of these methods mentioned above?

## **2. Method**

The survey subjects were 102 sophomores and juniors from the philosophy department, mainly from 11 universities in southern China.

### **2.1. Questionnaire**

The method of this study is a questionnaire designed for the English learning motivation of Chinese philosophy majors, including their current situation of English learning (attitude, motivation, achievement), their views and values on the future of English learning, their investment in English

learning (time, energy, etc.), and whether their English performance has improved. The online questionnaire is the main one and the paper questionnaire is the assistant one. After receiving the data, we filtrated and transformed the data, such as deleting duplicate data, classifying the data, using SPSS data analysis method to explore the relationship between learning motivation and English performance, and finally summarizing and describing the research results through the paper. The evaluation of the learning effect is divided into five levels.

## **2.2. Questionnaire Collection**

The researchers compiled a questionnaire about "English learning motivation of college students in the Chinese philosophy department". The questionnaire was completed by Chinese college students from January 17, 2024, to February 16, 2024. The questionnaires were distributed in two ways: online electronic questionnaire and offline paper questionnaire.

For familiar students, paper questionnaires can be filled out, and almost every questionnaire has a response, but the number and scope are limited. Therefore, the online questionnaire is the main one and the paper questionnaire is the assistant one.

## **3. Result**

### **3.1. Learning Motivation and Learning Methods**

In the survey of the main reasons for learning English, 50 people chose "for school exams", accounting for 49.02% of the total number, while 50 people also chose "for studying English literature of philosophy", accounting for the same proportion as "for school exams". Secondly, 47 people chose "to study abroad examination", accounting for 46.08% of the total number. 40 people chose "to improve competitiveness", accounting for 39.22%, and 32 people chose "hobbies", accounting for 31.37%. In addition, only 15 people chose "to develop their language talent", and only 11 people chose "to better understand and appreciate the art and culture of English-speaking countries", accounting for 14.71% and 10.78% respectively.

In the survey on the main methods of learning English, the most selected option is "regular English training courses", with 32 people, accounting for 31.37%, followed by "situational communication", with 26 people, accounting for 25.49%. The least chosen option is "Situational understanding" with 3 participants.

### **3.2. The Relationship between Three Main Learning Motivations and Learning Methods**

When studying the relationship between learning motivation and learning methods, this paper chose the top three reasons in 3.1 survey, including "for school examination", "for studying English literature of philosophy" and "for studying abroad examinations". When studying what kind of learning methods would be adopted for these three learning reasons, this paper adopted cross (Chi-square) analysis, and the following results were obtained.

There is no significant difference between the sample of "for school examination" and the sample of "for studying English literature" in the main methods of English learning for philosophy students. The P-value of the former is 0.880 (greater than 0.05), and that of the latter is 0.772 (greater than 0.05). This means that students who take these two as English learning motives will not take any specific way to learn English, so the correlation between the two is low.

However, the samples of "for studying abroad examination" showed significant differences in all the "main methods of learning English", and the P-value was 0.041 (less than 0.05). It shows that students who take the "for studying abroad examinations" as their motivation for English learning generally adopt a specific way to study English. Among these methods, "situational communication" takes the highest proportion, followed by regular English training classes. It can be seen that students who want to study abroad will generally improve their English through the mentioned two ways (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** The relationship between “for studying abroad examination” motivation and learning methods

Cross (Chi-square) analysis results						
		For Studying abroad examinations (%)		Total	$\chi^2$	p
		Selected	Not Selected			
Main methods for English studying	Memorizing English word every day	16(29.63)	7(15.22)	23(23.00)	9.976	0.041*
	Taking English classes regularly	19(35.19)	13(28.26)	32(32.00)		
	Situational communication	8(14.81)	18(39.13)	26(26.00)		
	Cramming	9(16.67)	8(17.39)	17(17.00)		
	Situational comprehending	2(3.70)	0(0.00)	2(2.00)		
Total		54	46	100		

\*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$

### 3.3. The Relationship between Learning Methods and Learning Outcomes

In the analysis of learning method and learning effect, this paper takes the main method of learning English as the independent variable, and the learning effect (the change of learning performance) as the dependent variable for linear regression analysis. According to the analysis, the R-square value of the model is 0.019, which means that the main method of English learning can explain 1.9% of the change in English achievement. In addition, when F-test was conducted on the model, it was found that the model did not pass the F-test (F-value was 1.851 and P-value was 0.177, which was greater than 0.05), indicating that the main methods of learning English did not affect the improvement of English scores.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Top Three Kinds of Learning Motivation and Their Causes

The top three motivations that account for the largest proportion is "for the school examination", "for the study of philosophy English literature" and "for studying abroad examination", which is in line with our initial expectation. It is speculated that the reasons for this phenomenon are as follows.

(1) The requirement of college students' English learning (such as passing CET-4 to get the graduation certificate) makes most students have the utilitarian goal of passing the examinations.

(2) Philosophy majors require students (especially those who study Western philosophy, and, according to preliminary statistics, they account for 69.61%) to read a lot of English literature. Coupled with the impenetrability of philosophical concepts themselves and the imprecision of translations, students need to have a relatively high level of English reading ability.

(3)"Study abroad examination" was the third most important reason for studying. First, the development of domestic philosophy itself is different from that of Western countries, "Chinese philosophy is different from that of Western countries in the discipline system." Western philosophy is usually divided into ethics, metaphysics, logic and other disciplines, while Chinese philosophy includes Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism, Legalism and other schools. This difference in disciplinary systems reflects the ways of thinking and emphases of the two cultures." Secondly, the competition of postgraduate recommendation and postgraduate entrance examination in China is fierce, and the

number of universities offering postgraduate education in philosophy is small, which makes many students have to find another way out and go abroad for further education.

## **4.2. Analysis of Learning Methods**

### **4.2.1. The method with the largest proportion.**

The most popular method is to attend English training classes regularly. The reasons are as follows.

In China, educational training institutions have a longstanding history, with a significant surge in their number in recent years. Consequently, they have become one of the most prevalent learning tools for students. A majority of college students report that when selecting an extracurricular training class prior to taking the CET-4 and CET-6 exams, they feel as if an integral part of the learning process is missing if they forego this training. Moreover, they indicate that not signing up for such courses prior to the exam could label them as exceptions. Thus, it is evident that applying for training courses before exams has become a prevalent practice among contemporary Chinese college students. In a bid to effectively promote and enroll students, numerous educational institutions even jointly foster an "education-first" atmosphere, advertising after-school classes as a necessity for students. Under the sway of this climate, many students select extracurricular classes passively, indicating that they merely follow the current, without comprehending their specific needs or deficiencies. In other words, they perceive this choice as ordinary and disregard its outcomes.

### **4.2.2. The majority of students studying abroad tend to adopt situational exchange and training courses for the following reasons.**

(1) Students who are required to pass the study abroad examination generally engage in study abroad and exchange scenarios. The decision of these students to choose situational communication is closely related to their English learning objectives. Their choice to study abroad signifies that they will study and live in an English-speaking country. Consequently, English will not only be used in their academic pursuits but also become the primary language tool for their future studies and daily life. Hence, simulated situational communication lays the foundation for their subsequent learning. Furthermore, in the exams for going abroad, such as IELTS and TOEFL, there are stringent requirements for oral English proficiency. Even if students meet the total score requirements, their oral English must also meet a higher standard, which is even more stringent than their total score.

(2) English training institutions, having extensive test-taking experience, generally yield better learning outcomes compared to other methods, such as self-study. For students intending to study abroad, taking English training courses can significantly enhance their English proficiency in a short period.

### **4.2.3. Learning methods adopted by students with "Passing exams" and "studying English literature" as learning motivations.**

This type of student does not adopt a specific learning method. The reasons are as follows.

(1) College students majoring in philosophy all have experience in college entrance examination, and have their own special ways to prepare for CET-4 and CET-6. The form of CET-4 and CET-6 have many similarities with the college entrance examination, and students can prepare for the exam in their more effective way.

(2) Studying English literature is not a requirement. Students can use various translation software to fill the gap in strength. Therefore, students with this motivation will not learn English in the way that they otherwise would under a particular strong motivation.

(3) Studying English literature requires the combination of multiple learning methods (for example, it is necessary to memorize words and put the learned knowledge into the corresponding situation to understand). Stubbornly adopting a single learning method may lead to low learning efficiency.

### 4.3. The Relationship between Learning Methods and Learning Outcomes

There is little relationship between learning methods and learning outcomes for the following reasons:

- (1) The above learning methods and other unmentioned learning methods are only part of the reason for the change of English learning performance, and the improvement of English learning performance is also affected by many other factors, such as mood, family environment, economic conditions and so on.
- (2) Each learning method has its own merits, so it is difficult to measure and compare the effects of different learning methods.

### 4.4. Suggestions

In recent years, the increasing prevalence of English usage has corresponded with the growth of globalization. In order to align with international standards, most universities and vocational colleges in China have made English a mandatory course, thereby positioning it as one of the essential skills for students to master. According to the research and survey report, a significant number of college students exhibit a relatively passive attitude towards English learning, primarily driven by instrumental motivation. This implies that they employ English as a "bargaining chip", a form of "certificate motivation", and "test-passing motivation" in their future careers. Some even perceive English as a significant challenge and an arduous burden. It is evident that the external impetus for English learning is conspicuous. Students from various majors possess distinct necessities for English proficiency, resulting in disparate learning attitudes and expectations for specialized knowledge and practical courses. A substantial number of students do not sustain a proper learning attitude while acquiring English knowledge. Under such circumstances, educational institutions and educators are required to steer students towards establishing a lasting learning motivation, rectifying their learning attitude, and fostering their cognizance of self-learning. This is attributed to the fact that the foundational motivation for students' learning emanates from their learning attitude and motivation. A positive learning attitude can indirectly impact and augment students' cognitive abilities, creativity, and learning propensity. In the course of education, instructors should foster and stimulate students' learning motivation in a timely manner. Specifically, for first-year students, their curiosity should be aroused in an educational environment distinct from that of basic education. They also possess a higher interest and anticipation for future learning, rendering this period ideal for instructors to nurture and inspire their enthusiasm for learning English. As time elapses, some students may become captivated by the vibrant campus life. As their interest scope gradually broadens, students with weak determination might stray from their initial intentions, leading to a decline in English learning motivation. In such cases, instructors should tailor learning programs for students, eschew monotonous and laborious routines, and rekindle their enthusiasm for learning. It is crucial to note that the number of instructors is finite, and their time and energy cannot facilitate the creation of numerous personalized programs in a brief period. Consequently, schools can employ learning planners to facilitate online video sessions and offline interactions for students. Learning planners can also assist English teachers in devising professional and personalized learning plans, enabling students to gradually develop the awareness and interest in active learning, thereby enhancing their learning motivation.

Confident learners are propelled forward by an "internal drive engine". Thus, to boost students' motivation for learning English, it is crucial to bolster their confidence in their English abilities. Firstly, educators must approach their teaching duties with fervor. When assigning online tasks, teachers should ensure a gradual increase in difficulty, while simultaneously motivating students during offline lessons. By doing so, students can comprehend that English proficiency is a gradual process. Even when faced with challenges during the learning journey, they will possess the resilience and confidence to overcome obstacles. Concurrently, teachers should direct students to employ scientific learning methods and capitalize on the benefits of blended learning. By fostering students' incremental confidence in their learning, we can cultivate their capacity to manage their emotions and

augment their courage and confidence in confronting difficulties and setbacks. Teachers can divide learning tasks into different steps and difficulties to provide opportunities for students at different levels of success. In other words, teachers can distribute learning resources in a hierarchical manner according to different learning objectives, and let students complete the assessment one by one, so as to improve their level step by step. In this process, timely feedback from teachers will have a positive impact on students, ensuring that students remain motivated and interested. The interest of English knowledge can also effectively stimulate and improve students' English learning motivation, such as situational communication and role playing. In this fun way, students can feel that they are users of English, not spectators, so that they can experience the fun and practical use of English

## **5. Conclusion**

The study in this paper explored the relationship between learning methods and outcomes. By analyzing the SPSS data, the authors found that there is no significant association between learning methods and learning outcomes. What remains significantly associated with learning outcomes is students' motivation. Students are motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic drivers to learn English in various ways. In the process, they explore the learning methods that suit them to achieve the desired outcomes. It is worth noting that English is one of the many foreign language courses, and the learning methods of English will not be very different from those of other languages.

Still, some limitations are remaining:

(1) Due to the specialty of the philosophy major, the number of people studying philosophy is relatively small, and the survey respondents are concentrated in the largest range within the investigator's reach, with a more concentrated distribution.

(2) Due to the lack of research on English learning motivation in this subject area, this study can only make a preliminary inquiry and give more general conclusions and recommendations.

A wider range of research and more focused exploration depends on future exploration.

## **Authors Contribution**

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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