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The Study on Strategies for Promoting and Maintaining EFL Learning Motivation in Senior High School

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Abstract

Driven by globalization and curriculum reform, this paper aims to examine approaches for motivating and sustaining senior high school student' engagement in English language learning. Students today commonly suffer from insufficient and unstable learning motivation, primarily stemming from exam-oriented thinking patterns and traditional teacher-centered teaching methods. Enhancing learning motivation is crucial, as it directly determines students' engagement, persistence, and ultimate academic outcomes. Through theoretical and literature analysis, this paper proposes strategies to enhance high school students' English learning motivation. On one hand, optimizing external support through differentiated instruction and classroom activities; on the other hand, stimulating intrinsic motivation by empowering students with autonomy, setting personalized goals, and cultivating a sense of accomplishment. The conclusion emphasizes the necessity of adopting systematic teaching strategies to promote the internalization of motivation, thereby transforming students from passive recipients into active, self-directed learners.

Keywords

Senior High School Students; English Learning Motivation; Teaching Strategies; Intrinsic Motivation; External Support

1. Introduction

1.1. Research Background

Globalization, a distinguishing feature of the twenty-first century, has profoundly reshaped the world's economic, cultural, and educational landscapes. English, as the universal lingua franca, is critical to the globalization process, serving as a bridge connecting diverse cultures and civilizations. As a result, improving students' English ability and increasing their learning motivation have become especially important in the context of globalization. Accordingly, the "General Senior High

School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition, Revised 2025)" explicitly state that stimulating students' interest in English and cultivating strong learning motivation are key guiding principles, emphasizing that motivation is the foundation for sustained engagement in English learning.

1.2. Definition and Importance of Learning Motivation

Learning Motivation refers to the internal psychological forces that drive students to engage in learning activities, stimulate, sustain, and direct their learning behaviors (Li Mingshun, 2018). It is a key non-cognitive factor influencing learning outcomes. According to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2017), motivation can be categorized into intrinsic motivation (e.g., driven by interest or a sense of accomplishment) and extrinsic motivation (e.g., driven by rewards or evaluations).

In English teaching, the strength of learning motivation directly impacts students' classroom engagement, goal setting, persistence, and language application development (Wu Xuan, 2019). Specifically in senior high school English education, learning motivation remains a core factor influencing student outcomes, directly determining their attitude, effort, persistence, and acquisition effectiveness. Foreign language learning motivation serves as a highly driving element that not only sparks students' initial interest in acquiring a new language but also sustains their engagement and effort throughout the learning journey. Thus, foreign language learning motivation is one of the core driving forces shaping individual language learning effectiveness.

1.3. Research Objectives

Some students without intellectual deficits still cannot improve their English. One main reason is that they do not have enough motivation. This paper tries to connect the ideas in the curriculum standards with real teaching practice. It focuses on what learning motivation means, what problems students face, what affects their motivation, and what teachers can do to help. By combining classic literature from both domestic and international sources with the current situation of Chinese middle school students' English learning motivation, this paper provides reasonable suggestions to enhance their English learning motivation.

2. Issues of English Learning Motivation Among High School Students

2.1. Teachers lack support in students' learning motivation

Despite curriculum standards explicitly emphasizing the cultivation of learning motivation, current high school English instruction still exhibits significant deficiencies in the targeted and effective stimulation of motivation. At the teaching methodology level, traditional lecture-based and drill-heavy approaches remain dominant. Classrooms often lack authentic language application scenarios and interactive experiences, failing to meet the cognitive needs and interests of high

school students and easily inducing learning fatigue (Li Xiaoping, 2019). Many teachers fail to design differentiated instructional tasks based on students' varying abilities and interests. This results in under performing students falling behind while high-achieving students become bored, leaving both groups' motivation inadequately stimulated (Kong Yanxia, 2018).

Current assessments remain centered on summative exam scores, neglecting formative assessment that tracks learning processes, progress, and skill development. Students struggle to receive sustained positive feedback during the learning journey, preventing them from experiencing the intrinsic value and sense of accomplishment in language learning (Zhu Zhu, 2013). Moreover, insufficient emotional support in teacher-student interactions warrants attention. Some instructors fail to address individual student differences, fostering rigid classroom atmospheres lacking equal dialogue and encouraging feedback. This undermines students' sense of belonging and learning autonomy, preventing the external learning environment from fully nurturing intrinsic motivation (Gao Wenwen, 2012). Simultaneously, insufficient exploration of English cultural connotations in teaching struggles to stimulate students' interest in cross-cultural inquiry, resulting in motivation cultivation lacking deep cultural underpinnings (Okonkwo, J. C., & Nwankwo, A. C. , 2023).

2.2. Students lack learning motivation

Senior high school students' English learning motivation generally exhibits characteristics of insufficient intensity and weak stability, with a pronounced decline across grades (Lu Guojuan, 2013). This issue fundamentally stems from an imbalanced motivational structure. Most students view English as a tool for exam preparation, with instrumental motivation dominating. While intrinsic motivations, such as interest in the language itself and a desire for cross-cultural communication, are severely lacking (Huang Xinli, 2014). Many students engage in passive learning solely to meet the pressures of college entrance exams and other academic advancement requirements, overlooking English's essential value as a medium of communication. This leads to a lack of sustained enthusiasm for learning; once exam pressures temporarily ease, motivation rapidly declines (Li Xiaoping, 2019).

Simultaneously, students' attribution styles and self-perceptions further exacerbate this motivational dilemma. Some attribute success or failure in English learning to uncontrollable factors like inadequate ability or luck, rather than their own effort. This negative attribution easily triggers learned helplessness, undermining confidence in sustained learning (Wang Ying, 2022). Moreover, high school students are in the developmental stage of self-identity formation. Some students, due to weak English foundations and lack of success experiences, gradually develop the fixed belief that English is difficult to learn. (Zhu Zhu, 2013). A minority of students possess learning willingness but lack clear personalized goals, resulting in scattered and aimless study behaviors that hinder the accumulation of motivation through

incremental achievements (Chen Yinyou, 2014).

3. Factors Influencing Motivation in English Learning

3.1. Teacher-Related Factors

A teacher's personal qualities profoundly influence student growth and development, while also impacting students' learning motivation. As the Chinese proverb states: "Love the teacher, trust the path, delight in the learning." (Gao Wenwen, 2012). For students, exceptional teachers possess innate influence, with every word and action shaping students' behavior and attitudes.

3.1.1. Teachers' Professional Competence

Teachers must possess solid theoretical grounding, such as a deep understanding and application of motivational theories like the Expectancy-Value Theory. Using this theory, teachers should scientifically assess each student's expectations of success and perceived value regarding learning tasks, enabling precise differentiation and personalized instruction. Teaching proficiency is directly reflected in a teacher's ability to translate unified curriculum goals into multi-tiered, optional differentiated tasks based on keen insight into students' individuality, interests, abilities, and learning styles. For instance, when designing original text reading challenges for high-ability students, teachers must possess profound linguistic and literary literacy alongside critical thinking guidance skills. Building "scaffolding" and providing targeted support for struggling learners, it tests the teacher's patience and diagnostic expertise in designing incremental steps for success experiences.

3.1.2. Teachers' Classroom Instructional Strategies

The effectiveness of teachers' classroom strategies directly impacts student motivation(Qiao Yuhan&Li Jiuliang, 2022). Flexible, engaging, and interest-aligned teaching methods more effectively ignite and sustain students' enthusiasm and confidence. Monotonous traditional approaches, overemphasizing lecture, rote reading, memorization, and repetition, diminish motivation and ultimately undermine learning outcomes.

3.1.3. Teachers' Emotional Support

The process of learning English is not merely about students passively listening to teachers' lectures. It also involves an emotional and spiritual exchange between teachers and students. A look of affirmation, a smile of appreciation, a targeted word of encouragement. These subtle gestures convey the teacher's attention and expectations, fully embodying the "Hawthorne Effect." When students perceive that they are valued and cared for by their teachers, their sense of intrinsic worth and belonging significantly increases. When students experience a favorable learning environment and feel the teacher's warm care, their intrinsic motivation for English

learning is greatly enhanced. They strive toward the teacher's expectations and sustain their motivation to learn.

3.2. Student-Related Factors

3.2.1. Students' Success and Failure Attribution

Attribution influences students' goal orientation. It tends to foster learning goal orientation rather than achievement goal orientation, thereby stimulating stronger learning motivation. Renowned American psychologist Bema Weiner (1974) proposed the attribution theory of success and failure, identifying four factors in individuals' explanations of outcomes: ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck. Among these, ability and effort are internal, controllable factors, while task difficulty and luck are external, uncontrollable factors. Due to differences in student personalities, their attribution styles for behavioral outcomes also vary. Similarly, when failing an English exam, pessimists may resign themselves to their perceived lack of ability, severely damaging their self-esteem and confidence, which affects their subsequent attitude toward English learning(Wang Ying, 2022). Optimists, however, attribute the outcome to insufficient effort and resolve to study English diligently, leading to significant improvement in their future English learning due to this positive attitude.

3.2.2. Students' Learning Interests

Interest is the best teacher and one of the foremost factors in learning motivation. For most senior high school students, English serves primarily as a tool for achieving good exam scores, emphasizing immediate utility over intrinsic value. Only a minority are genuinely interested in the language itself and its associated culture. Different learning attitudes determine the strength of motivation, with a positive attitude fostering strong motivation. Students with strong motivation possess clear learning objectives, employ effective study methods, and achieve high efficiency. Conversely, those lacking motivation tend to be passive.

3.2.3. Students' Sense of Achievement

A sense of accomplishment can boost high school students' confidence and courage in learning English, empowering them to overcome challenges when facing difficulties in the language. In high school English studies, some students possess strong motivation while others struggle with weak motivation. This stems from their personal sense of achievement. Students with strong motivation continually progress in their English studies, as a sense of accomplishment fuels their courage to embrace challenges. Conversely, students with weaker motivation often struggle due to frequent mistakes in their learning, preventing them from experiencing the joy of success. Over time, this leads to a loss of self-confidence and diminishes their interest in learning English.

4. Methods for Stimulating and Sustaining Motivation in senior high School English Learning

The strength of learning motivation directly impacts both teaching effectiveness and a student's ability to absorb knowledge. Therefore, throughout the English learning process, teachers should prioritize cultivating and stimulating students' motivation. By mastering methods to ignite and sustain this motivation, teachers can encourage more proactive learning, guiding students from passive learning to active desire to learn.(Wang Jinling, 2023)

4.1. Enhancing Students' Extrinsic Motivation

In English instruction, teachers play a pivotal role in stimulating and sustaining student motivation. Educators should employ diverse teaching methods tailored to specific instructional objectives, learner characteristics, and subject matter to guide and motivate all students to actively engage in learning.

4.1.1. Designing Tiered Instructional Tasks Accordingly

Upon entering high school, the scope of English learning significantly expands, encompassing a substantial increase in vocabulary and heightened grammatical complexity (Zhao Wenxin, 2019). This is a challenge for many students. To address these changes, educators can adapt teaching strategies using Expectancy-Value Theory to better stimulate English learning motivation among diverse students. Expectancy-Value Theory emphasizes two key factors influencing student motivation: the student's expectation of successfully completing a task (expectancy) and the student's perception of the task's value (value). By effectively applying expectancy-value strategies, teachers can not only help students adapt to the new demands of high school English learning and effectively stimulate their intrinsic motivation but also design tiered instructional tasks tailored to students' diverse characteristics, meeting their varied learning needs. For instance, academically strong students can be provided with more challenging tasks, such as reading English classics or engaging in creative writing, to unlock their learning potential. Students facing learning difficulties should receive additional guidance and support, including after-school tutoring or study groups, to gradually improve their academic performance. Teachers can also adopt personalized teaching strategies, tailoring instructional content to students' learning styles and interests (McCann, E.J. &Garcia, T.,1999). For instance, students who enjoy music can be introduced to English songs as teaching materials; those who love films can participate in activities like English film appreciation or dubbing exercises.

4.1.2. Diversifying Classroom Formats

Teachers can employ diverse teaching methods in the classroom to engage students, enhance their sense of agency, stimulate learning motivation, and improve instructional outcomes. During lessons, educators can seamlessly incorporate activities such as humorous anecdotes, riddles, tongue twisters, adapted texts, and rapid error-correction contests to fully unleash students' learning potential and creativity. For instance, during text study, teachers may select passages for student

adaptation—particularly engaging excerpts suitable for role-playing or creating dialogues. These flexible activities align with middle students' psychological characteristics and needs, boosting both interest and proficiency. Teachers should also integrate current events into classroom instruction, introducing relevant vocabulary to expand students' lexical knowledge and broader understanding. Furthermore, teachers should actively utilize modern teaching methods to broaden perspectives, increase information exposure, emphasize key points, and provide authentic language environments and materials. This approach expands students' cognitive horizons and fosters greater enthusiasm for learning.

4.1.3. Creating an Engaging Classroom

Teachers can create English bulletin boards in classrooms and subscribe to English-language newspapers and magazines to foster an immersive English learning environment. In class, organizing lighthearted activities such as quick error-correction contests, riddle-guessing games, and tongue twisters helps reduce students' emotional anxiety, encouraging them to feel confident in trying new things and eager to participate in a safe atmosphere.

4.2. Fostering Internalized Learning Motivation

According to Self-Determination Theory, student motivation can be categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, with intrinsic motivation demonstrating a more significant impact on learning outcomes. Therefore, a key task for teachers is to stimulate students' intrinsic motivation, encouraging them to engage in English language learning proactively, autonomously, joyful, and effective English language learning(Deci, E. L. et al.,1994).

4.2.1. Establishing Personalized Learning Goals

In the teaching process, helping students establish learning goals that align with their individual circumstances is crucial (Chen Yinyou, 2014). When goals are self-determined rather than externally imposed, people tend to be more engaged and put in greater effort. Therefore, when setting specific learning objectives, English teachers can collaborate with students to guide them in developing personalized goals based on their interests and actual situations(Kong Yanxia,2018). For instance, through group discussions, teachers can assist students in identifying their areas of interest and strengths, thereby formulating goals that are both challenging and achievable.

4.2.2. Fostering students' interests

(Dong Manxia, 2018) reported that teachers must base their instruction on students' actual circumstances and interests, thoroughly prepare lessons, grasp the progression of the curriculum, and apply teaching materials scientifically and flexibly. Educators should strive to cultivate students' interest in English learning through diverse teaching approaches. For instance, establishing English corners in

classrooms; regularly organizing English drama performances and English song recitals; and watching English films weekly can fundamentally stimulate students' enthusiasm for learning English.

In daily English instruction, teachers should leverage multimedia platforms to create an immersive learning environment, mobilize students' initiative, stimulate their interest, and cultivate self-directed learning awareness(Yang Lin, 2017). For instance, when teaching the Understanding Perspectives section of Hamlet Meets Peking Opera in Unit 4 Stage and Screen of the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press's Compulsory English II textbook, teachers can center on the theme How Chinese and Western Theaters Collide and Integrate. During the introduction, they can showcase excerpts from the classic play Hamlet and Peking Opera performances, guiding students to compare differences in presentation styles, music, costumes, and other aspects. Teachers should also design thought-provoking questions to facilitate deeper engagement. such as: What might happen when Shakespeare meets Peking Opera? How can traditional Chinese art tell a Western story? What emotions do you think are expressed differently in these two forms?

These questions spark students' interest in English learning, help them master proper English usage, cultivate situational communication skills, and foster self-directed, proactive English learning.

4.2.3. Cultivating Students' Sense of Accomplishment

By applying Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory, teachers can set expectations based on the gap between each student's current developmental level and their potential. This means goals should be attainable through students' own efforts combined with teacher support and guidance. Such ZPD-based goal-setting builds student confidence while encouraging them to continually challenge themselves, thereby most effectively stimulating intrinsic motivation and consistently nurturing their sense of accomplishment. Teachers must accurately assess the gap between students' current level and potential level, implementing the Zone of Proximal Development principle in classroom questioning, task assignments, and homework. Questions should be structured progressively, starting simple and building complexity step by step. When assigning homework, teachers should maintain appropriate difficulty levels to ensure students can complete tasks comfortably. Overly challenging assignments risk discouraging students and eroding their confidence. Therefore, educators must regulate motivation levels by adjusting task complexity, accurately assess each student's capabilities, and assign homework of suitable difficulty. This sense of accomplishment fosters continuous progress, enhancing and sustaining students' motivation to learn English（Zhao Xuan, 2023）.

5. Conclusion

This study systematically examines the current issues, influencing factors, and corresponding strategies regarding English learning motivation among senior high

school students. The findings reveal that students' motivation is often insufficient and unstable, characterized by an overreliance on extrinsic, exam-oriented drives and a lack of intrinsic interest. Key contributing factors include teacher-centered instructional methods, a uniform assessment system, and students' negative attribution styles and absence of successful learning experiences.

The research underscores the necessity for a systematic and dual-path approach in teaching practice. Teachers should prioritize fostering students' intrinsic motivation by promoting autonomy, establishing personalized goals, and creating opportunities for a sense of accomplishment. Simultaneously, extrinsic support must be optimized through differentiated instruction, engaging classroom activities, and a positive emotional environment. The ultimate goal is to facilitate the internalization of motivation, shifting learners from passive recipients to active, self-directed participants.

This study is primarily based on a synthesis of existing literature and theoretical analysis. Consequently, the proposed strategic framework, while theoretically informed, lacks validation through empirical data and controlled classroom experiments. Research should employ mixed-methods designs, including longitudinal studies and action research, to empirically test the effectiveness of the proposed motivation-stimulating strategies. Investigations should explore how these strategies function across different student demographics and school environments. Furthermore, research could delve deeper into the interplay between digital learning tools, motivational dynamics, and the sustained development of core English competencies.

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