

Language Learning Exposure and Motivation of Chinese Non-English Major Undergraduates

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This paper investigated language learning exposure and motivation of non-English major students in Chinese public universities. The results of the research indicated that the Chinese students had a medium level of language learning exposure and that the Chinese students' integrative motivation and intrinsic motivation were lower than their instrumental and extrinsic motivation. Based on the findings, the researcher suggested that the Chinese students' language learning exposure should be reinforced and that more attention should be paid to their integrative and intrinsic motivation so that the Chinese students can better enhance English proficiency.

Keywords: language learning exposure, extrinsic motivation, integrative motivation

Language Learning Exposure

According to Magno et al. (2009), language exposure refers to time and effort which the learners spend in learning a foreign language. Exposure to English occurs when the learners engage in English conversations; when they read English books, magazines, and newspapers; and when they come across English language when surfing the Internet.

In language acquisition, the learners need to listen to and read authentic language materials so that they can take in the target language. Language exposure, in some sense, is to increase the learners' language input, which is essential for language acquisition to take place. Previous studies have shown that exposure to English is one of the key elements that can enhance students' English proficiency.

Lamb (2002) found that the more exposure to the English language the children can get outside the school, the more quickly they learn the English language. Indeed, outside school activities are important for students to get exposed to authentic English language and practice English language skills. In formal classrooms, the learners are getting exposed to similar conditions of language learning, but outside the class there are arrays of language learning opportunities and activities (Odo, 2019). Pascual (2017) highlighted the significance of Philippines students' exposure to English both in class and outside class activities and suggested that if student want to make improvement in spoken English, there is a critical need to foster both in class and outside class activities, which provide significant opportunities for students to get access to English and practice using English in different ways.

Yin Mengmei (2015) made an investigation on the significant role of language exposure in improving English listening comprehension. The result of the research suggested that activities such as having native speakers speaking authentic English around and reading authentic English are proven to be positively correlated with the learners' listening comprehension skill and contribute to improvement in English listening comprehension. In exploring language learning exposure and reading skills, Taghavi and Aladini (2018) also found that reading authentic English materials contributes to language learning exposure, which has a significant positive effect on the Iranian EFL learners' English reading comprehension.

Mahmoud (2018) investigated the impact of exposure on English language acquisition. According to the results of the study, there was significant positive correlation between exposure to English and developing the four basic skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Domingo (2018) explored the students' exposure at home, school, and communities and found the students' exposure to the foreign language had a positive correlation with the level of motivation whereas a negative correlation with foreign language anxiety.

However, few studies have been made on the investigation of Chinese students' language exposure in English learning so far. To fill this void, this research attempted to deal with the Chinese students' English exposure in class and outside class activities.

Language Learning Motivation

Language learning motivation can be viewed as learners' orientation or drive with regard to the goal of learning a language. As Dornyei (2001) claimed, motivation is an abstract, hypothetical concept that is used to explain why people think and behave as they do. Dörnyei and Skehan (2003, p. 614) also put that motivation is responsible for why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, and how hard they are going to pursue it. Therefore, language learning motivation not only acts as a trigger to initiate language learning, but also increases the chances of maintaining the exertion and effort to learning the language.

Language learning motivation can be classified into different types according to different orientations or desires to learn the language. There have been two important divisions of language learning motivation: integrative vs. instrumental motivation and intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation. Gardner (2007) suggested that integrative motivation involves an open interest in the target language or community. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, focuses on purely practical value such as passing the exams or finding better jobs. Intrinsic motivation means that the learners want to engage in language learning because it is enjoyable or they feel sense of satisfaction in the learning activity (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Noels, Clement, & Pelletier, 2001). Thus, intrinsically motivated students learn the language due to their internal urge. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, refers to a desire to get a reward from outside. It focuses on external factors such as teachers to persuade the learner to take part in English learning (Oletić & Ilić, 2014).

Since the four types of motivation are considered important in language learning, this research intended to find out the level of the Chinese students' motivation in English learning. Also, the study aimed to figure out the correlation between language learning exposure and the four types of motivation among the Chinese students.

Methodology

The researcher utilized the descriptive method in the study. With this descriptive method, the researcher analyzed the extent and level of the Chinese students' language learning exposure and motivation respectively.

In addition, the descriptive method enabled the researcher to find out the significant relationship between language learning exposure and motivation among the Chinese students.

The participants in the research were 219 Chinese college students in public schools and they were non-English major students. The researcher distributed the questionnaires to the students who were required to answer with honesty. In language learning exposure, there were 11 items about the students' exposure to English in class and after-class activities. In language learning motivation, there were 15 items covering students' instrumental, integrative, intrinsic, and extrinsic motivation. The reliability of the instruments for language learning exposure and motivation are all good. And the researcher used the four-Likert scale to measure the extent of exposure and motivation.

Results and Discussion

The results of the data show that the composite mean of language learning exposure is 2.51, which indicates that on the whole, the Chinese students have a medium level of language learning exposure.

Specifically, the item that "My English teacher and classmates speak in English" ranks first, followed by the item that "I listen to English songs" and the item that "I watch English movies". The means of the three items are all above three, which indicate that in language learning exposure, the students frequently listen to their English teacher and classmates speak English in English classes, listen to English songs, and watch English movies. Besides, the students have a medium level of exposure in speaking English in English class, engaging in English projects with classmates such as making English posters or playing English dramas, practicing learning English at home, reading English passages, and watching English videos.

However, the weighted means of the items that "I participate in English contest", "I speak English with foreigners", and "I send English messages to others" are all below two, which indicate that the students have a quite low level of language learning exposure in these activities.

The item that "I speak English with foreigners" ranks last with the mean score of 1.72. Next to it were "I participate in English contests" with the mean score of 1.76 and "I send English messages to others" with the mean score of 1.90. The reason why the mean scores of the items are so low may be that the Chinese students are not very proactive in English communication and that they can be shy or lack confidence and feel anxious to communicate with others in English. In addition, taking part in English contests can be demanding, which requires much initiative and preparation for the contests.

The study shares similar findings with Magno et al. (2009) that students in non-English speaking countries have limited exposure to English. In China, though the students are exposed to formal instruction in English class, yet they badly lack of social communication in English and have a lower extent of participation in out of class English activities.

In language learning motivation, the students' instrumental motivation and extrinsic motivation are higher than their integrative and intrinsic motivation. More specifically, the students' extrinsic motivation ranks first, followed by instrumental motivation. Students' integrative motivation ranks last and their intrinsic motivation ranks second to last.

In instrumental motivation, the mean score of the item that "I learn English to get the English certificates" ranks first, followed by the item that "I learn English to get a good job". In integrative motivation, the item that "English learning can improve my thinking and expressive ability" ranks first with the weighted mean of 2.93.

However, the weighted mean of the item that “I learn English to better understand foreign culture” is 2.41, the lowest in integrative motivation.

In intrinsic motivation, the item that “I learn English because it helps me become a better person” ranks first. However, the item that “I am interested in English” ranks last in intrinsic motivation. In extrinsic motivation, the results show that the students pay more attention to their language learning environment and their English teachers’ teaching methods. The item that “The learning atmosphere is important to English learning” ranks first with the weighted mean of 3.36. The item that “I study hard to learn English if my English teacher has good teaching methods” ranks second with the weighted mean of 3.28. As a result, the study indicates that the Chinese students are more instrumentally motivated and extrinsically motivated.

The result of the study also suggests that language learning exposure is significantly positively correlated with motivation. Therefore, the more exposure the students get to English language, the more motivated they are in English learning. Besides, the results of the study show that integrative motivation and intrinsic motivation are more positively correlated with language learning exposure. The research shares similar findings with the investigation of English learners in other countries, in which the ESL students have a relatively high level of extrinsic motivation (Wimolmas, 2012; Nikoopour, Salimian, Salimian, & Farsani, 2012).

Implication

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher suggests that the Chinese students should be encouraged to take part in English contests and to communicate with others in English so as to foster their language learning exposure. In integrative motivation, more attention should be paid to the students’ thinking and expressive ability. In intrinsic motivation, the teachers should reinforce the students’ interest and help them derive more sense of satisfaction from English learning. In instrumental motivation, the important role of the English exams should not be neglected. In extrinsic motivation, the English teachers should focus on improving their teaching methods and the learning atmosphere.

Since the study also found that language learning exposure is highly significantly correlated with motivation and more positively correlated with integrative and intrinsic motivation, the Chinese students should foster their language exposure as well as their integrative and intrinsic motivation so as to achieve better performance in English learning.

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