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## Motivation's Influence on Strategies for English Learning and Improving

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### Abstract

Autonomous study emphasizes the learner's initiative, enthusiasm and creativity. In all fields of education, there is growing emphasis on "learner-centered" teaching methods and the ability of learner autonomy. Many experts and scholars have found that learning strategies play an important role in English language learning, but the importance of affective strategy use in English learning is often ignored by people. Therefore, this paper focuses on the frequencies of affective strategies use in English learning and their relationships so as to enable college students to use positive affective strategies effectively to improve their autonomous learning ability. The article also focuses on the relationship between motivation and English learning, the influence of motivation on English learning (That is, English learning motive may be simply viewed as the reason of learning English; different motives will lead to different learning methods; generally speaking, surface motive does not endure longer than deep motive; strong motivation can lead to final success) and six strategies of improving English learning (That is, developing proper attitudes towards English learning and letting students know the pressure of it; goal and feedback; praise and criticism; contest and cooperation; expectation and appraisal; achievement motive).

**Key words:** Affective strategies; English learning; Motivation

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### 1. MOTIVATION, AFFECTIVE FACTORS AND ENGLISH LEARNING

D. K. Wilkins points out in his *Linguistics in Language Teaching*, "Motivation is a term which occurs in discussions of the second rather than the first language learning." We know that motivation is a complex phenomenon, it includes many components such as the individual's drive, need for achievement and success, curiosity and desire for stimulation and new experience, communicative need, attitudes toward the second language community and teachers, self-image and so on. All these factors play a role in English learning.

### 2. CASE STUDIES

#### 2.1. Interview With Liu Ying

Liu Ying was an 18-year-old girl from an urban family in a small city in south of Shan Dong Province. She started to learn English in a junior middle school. The English class was lively. Students were always encouraged to take part in activities. Liu was interested in learning English. It was helpful to improve her English proficiency. Of course, she obtained good English achievements when she graduated from the middle school. When she went to college, she also had great interest in English learning. She belonged to the high-proficiency students. She studied English very hard to deal with examinations to enlarge her knowledge of different cultures. She told me she seldom had the experience of being nervous in English class, because English was one of the subjects she loved most. She did well in classroom activities and had good performances in tests, which in turn stimulated her in her English studies. Teachers and classmates often praised her for this. All this increased her self-confidence.

### 2.3. Interview With Li Nan

Li Nan was a 20-year-old boy from a small town in south of He Bei Province. He has studied English for six years. He told me when he came to the college, he did not work hard at English any more. In the first term, he was often absent from English class. At the end of the term, he failed the English examination. In the second term, he realized there was a distance between him and his classmates in English learning. He said there were so many new words and the teacher speaks English too fast. He could not understand the long English sentences. When it was his turn to answer questions, he felt it was painful. He had stimulated and encouraged himself many times, but each time it ended in failure. Because he was afraid of being laughed at by his classmates, he did not want to open his mouth any more. When asked about his plan on English learning in the future, he said there was not much hope for him to catch up with his classmates. Moreover, he did not want to try his best to study English, and that he totally lost his interest and confidence in learning English well

### 2.2. Interview With Li Xiang

Li was a 19-year-old girl from a rural family in a small village in south of Liao Ning province. When asked about all the things considered, how she evaluated herself, she answered that her self-evaluation experienced several stages. Before studying in the vocational middle school, she felt just all right. When she was in the vocational middle school, she was one of the top students and had a very good relationship with her classmates. Almost all the classmates thought highly of her at that time. When she went to college, she found her achievements were not as good as others, especially English achievements, that was because teachers and students did not pay much attention to English learning in the vocational middle school, and students learned English just to pass very simple exams. She was in an awful state at college because she was not as proud as she used to be. Her grades were not desirable any more; instead, sometimes they may be very low in her class. She could not establish a good relationship with some of her classmates

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## 3. INFLUENCE OF AFFECTIVE FACTORS ON ENGLISH LEARNING

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From the results of the analysis we could find several main factors which influence autonomous English learning as the following four points.

### 3.1 Anxiety Factor

Anxiety is a nervous state of mind which formed by one who can't achieve the desired purpose or deal with the difficulties, resulting in self-esteem and self-confidence were frustrated. This mental state often caused by the psychological pressure when learners face contradictions and but their mental disordered. The modern psychology

divided anxiety into low, medium and high levels. Appropriate level of anxiety can be transformed into motivation to increase learning, but the excessive, high anxiety will lead adverse effects.

### 3.2 Motivation Factor

Motivation refers to an intention, plan or psychological impulses which provoke a so-called action or suppress a person's actions, that people have a clear purpose for certain activities and certain efforts will be made for this purpose. Motivation is the underlying cause which cause people to act or inhibit some action and that is a direct driving force to promote the action. Obviously, motivation is a group of crucial factors which excite behavior and lead the directions in developing learners' autonomy. Learners should first strengthen the motivation to study autonomously and improve their learning ability. Motivation is the subjective intention of learners when they do learning activities and the inner strength to promote learners' study. School authorities and teachers should create a good learning atmosphere and environment to inspire learners to correctly understand the social needs and expectations and to create conditions to help learners' self-direct and self-position, in order to stimulate learners' correct motivation to learn. Secondly, to foster interests in learning. If learners want to be active and creative in learning, they should cultivate great interests in their learning. English learning motive may be simply viewed as the reason of learning English. From the angle of educational psychology, the reason of learning English is two: one is the material stimulation of surface layer, for instance, a diploma, a good job, a higher salary, etc. The other is the material stimulation of deep layer, for instance, interest, increasing knowledge, etc. The former is called "surface motive", and the latter is called "deep motive".

Researches show that different motives will lead to different learning methods. Logically speaking, surface motive does not endure longer than deep motive, For instance, when a diploma is taken or a good job is found, original stimulation becomes useless. However, non-material stimulation usually has no limit. For instance, the increase of knowledge is endless.

Those people who have deep motive do not consider passing examinations as their last goal. Whether they can grasp and use English is their real goal. They show great enthusiasm to learn English. And they try their best to hear more, say more, read more and write more English. Obviously, these people's English learning will make more progress than people who rely on surface motive.

Some surveys show that the reason why students learn English often does not come from one motive. It is more universal that people have two motives simultaneously (surface motive and deep motive). But if we analyze their motives in details, we will find that there must be at least one reason which takes a leading position.

### 3.3 Attitude Factor

The attitude refers to views and dills about something-including several components: 1) cognitive component, namely, the belief of a target.2) emotional component, that is, the extent likes and dislikes of a target.3) conative component, namely, the intention of a goal and the action. Clearly, attitude plays an important pan in the specific implementation and the degree of final success as an affective factor. Attitude and motivation are closely related. When people have a good impression of a subject and eager to learn the knowledge of it, this is an affective factor that is good to learn this subject. On the contrary, if one has the attitude of contempt or dislike a subject, he cannot be serious about the learning.

## 4. USE AFFECTIVE METHOD IN ENGLISH TEACHING

English affective strategy in teaching refers to “student-focused” in the teaching, teachers consciously use psychological theories and methods to inspire and mobilize students to form positive emotional factors of language learning; cultivate interests in learning, enhance motivation, self-confidence, initiative and purpose, which improve the English teaching effectiveness in order to achieve the harmonious development of teachers and students to participate in and promote the improvement of the over-all quality of students. We can motivate students’ positive factors from the following aspects.

### 4.1 Carry out A Variety of in-Class Activities to Develop Students’ Interests of English Learning

As the old saying goes that interest is the best teacher and it is quite true that the students’ initiative in learning is difficult to spur without interest. English is the most widely used language in the world, and people are aware of the importance and necessity in English learning. But English is a second language to us, so learning it is more difficult than the acquiring of our native language. Interest is the internal power to spur students’ learning. So how to spur the students’s interest in English learning is the main problem discussing in it. To mobilize the enthusiasm of the students, teachers need to change teaching methods. Such as design some in-class activities for students to participate in because students are masters of the classroom and the teacher is the designer. The activities should be based on the teaching methods that suit the characteristics of students and let students participate in it to experience the fun of learning.

### 4.2 Find Which Students Interest in Learning and Look for the Stimulus Points

Teaching researchers found that students like to listen to the teacher introduced the cultural background of the text in a new class. Teachers could grasp this characteristics

of students and excavate cultural background materials of the text purposefully to strengthen the teaching of cultural background. Teachers should explain the cultural background knowledge to students and guide them pay attention to the accumulation of cultural backgrounds, social customs, social relations, etc. Be sensitive to class response. If the students look bored or lost, change the activity or the pace of the class. It is essential that teachers come to class prepared and organized, with a clear lesson plan, and with activities that will stimulate the students. Sometimes teachers need to prepare some interesting activities, such as games, humorous short story and interesting debates.

### 4.3 Cooperative Learning Is an Effective Way to Eliminate Negative Affective Factors

Cooperative learning, which based on meeting the psychological needs of students, emphasize the concept of human nature. Promoting group cooperation is a good way to remove anxiety, develop learner’s self-esteem and motivation. during the course of foreign language learning and teaching. Cooperative learning activities in class can especially create an active classroom atmosphere and foster wide-based student participation. Therefore, teachers must do all they can do to encourage student-to-student collaboration in the learning process to achieve a positive learning environment. Group cooperation improves the overall climate of the classroom.

Researches show that when learners interact in the groups, the level of anxiety is much lower than they answer questions in front of the class. When students are divided into groups to do activities, they are generally not timid, shy and willing to participate in and communicate with other members in the group. Cooperation among group members also helps to strengthen the learner’s self-confidence and self-esteem, thereby stimulating higher motivation to learn

### 4.4 Encouraging Learners to Make Positive Self-Talk

Encouraging learners to make positive self-talk removes their affective factors and brings them benefits of building a healthy concept and developing a positive optimistic attitude to life. Learners, especially those low-achievers and less self-esteem usually have been strongly influenced consciously or half consciously by long years of negative self-talk: “I’ll never be a good language learner”, “I can’t avoid making mistakes”, and so on. Teachers can encourage them to tell

Themselves “I can do that well”, “I can succeed next time”, and so on. Such positive self-talk helps the students overcome the feelings of inferiority. It reinforces learners’ beliefs about their learning abilities, increases their motivation, even when learners are in Learned Helplessness or low self-efficacy

## 4.5 Methods for Activating English Learning Motivation

Researchers suggest that strong motivation can lead to final success. Therefore, as language teachers, we should understand it and try to motivate the students in several aspects.

### 4.5.1 Developing Proper Attitudes and Letting Students Know Pressure

According to motivation theory, one of the most important factors influencing students' success or failure in learning English is their attitudes, which includes their attitude toward the language teacher. English teachers should try to make students like and be interested in them.

Students' attitude toward English learning is also an important factor influencing their success or failure. Teachers should try to help students to set up proper attitude to English learning.

Pressure sometimes also plays a role in English learning. So teachers should arrange tasks in different stages. This is always helpful to English learning.

### 4.5.2 Goal and Feedback

In English learning process, students must have a goal of learning, especially a specific goal in some special stages. English learning goals can be designated by teachers or set up by students themselves. For instance, some students want to achieve the level of the CET -6, and their strong English learning motive is aroused.

Teachers should feedback in time, and let students know their learning results, which will stimulate students' English learning motive and arouse their learning initiative effectively.

### 4.5.3 Praise and Criticism

In English learning activities, teachers should not only make top students to know their success but also praise and reward them in order to arouse their happy mood and encourage them to study with great efforts; teachers should not only make students of low achievement to know their failure but also criticize and punish them in order to arouse their depressed mood and urge them to study again with great efforts. By and large, both praise and criticism are helpful for activating students' learning motive.

When utilizing praise and criticism, teachers should consider three aspects. First, both praise and criticism cannot be abused. Second, teachers should use more praise and less criticism, especially for those students of low achievement; Third, teachers should use praise and criticism according to the characteristic of students. In a word, the utilization of criticism and praise is a kind of art. Teachers must be quick-witted and flexible to use them.

### 4.5.4 Contest and Cooperation

Contest is the comparison between individuals and others. It also includes the competition between one's present and

past. Cooperation is the contest between groups. It also includes the contest between a group's present and past. Researches show that both contest and cooperation can strengthen students' English learning motive and activate learners to surmount difficulties constantly, finish learning tasks and get excellent achievements.

There are several points teachers should pay attention to when they use contest and cooperation. First, although contest and cooperation are helpful to promote students' learning initiative, teachers should use them properly. Second, although the effect of group contests is not as good as individual contests, teachers should still properly advocate group contests in order to train students' cooperative spirit. Third, teachers should offer opportunities for success as much as possible so that more students can succeed, which can foster students' self-respect and self-confidence.

### 4.5.5 Expectation and Appraisal

Expectation includes teachers' expectation for students and students' expectation for themselves. Both of them play a useful role in strengthening students' English learning motive and promoting students' English learning initiative. Teachers should be good at using the expectation of students, and tell students whether their expectation is feasible or not in English learning so that students can have appropriate expectation. Teachers' expectation for student may reflect on teachers' appraisal for students' learning behaviors and learning results. The form of appraisal is varied such as the praise and the criticism.

### 4.5.6 Achievement Motive

It is an essential method to stimulate students' achievement motive in English teaching. So teachers should often talk about ideal with students and enumerate some sample students to them so that students can feel a fulfillment to learn English. Besides encouraging students, teachers should also create various situations to help students to realize their ideal so that they can transform it into a correct achievement motive.

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## CONCLUSION

When make a comprehensive view about this research, we have to focus on the positive use of affective strategies, because positive affective factors can actively mobilize the internal potential and motivation in autonomous English learning to better positive learning outcomes. Teachers must pay attention to developing students' positive affective factors in English language teaching, which needed to not only take full account of the cognitive factors in teaching but also pay full attention to affective factors in foreign language learning process, and strive to play its positive factors and avoid the negative impact of the negative factors to promote the comprehensive development of students' foreign language learning and their all-round quality. In this paper I have

talked about the influence of motivation on English learning and six strategies of improving English learning. They are guidance to both learners and teachers. In a word, motivation is very important in language learning. As language teachers, we should understand it and try to motivate the students so as to be successful in language teaching. As learners, they should pay attention to the factors of motivation so that they can learn English efficiently.

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