

# English Learning Demotivating Factors Among Non-English Majors in Medical University\*

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**Abstract**—Learning motivation is closely related to second language acquisition. Strong learning motivation can make up for the lack of language competence and poor learning conditions to a certain extent, while lack of motivation or demotivation will hinder language-gifted learners from achieving their expected learning goals. This study investigates the demotivating factors of learning English among non-English majors in medical university by interviewing 60 undergraduates. The findings show that the demotivating factors mainly involve the teachers, teaching contents, learning environment and the learners. The study further puts forwards some practical suggestions for stimulating and maintaining students' learning motivation.

**Index Terms**—demotivating factors, English learning, medical university, non-English majors

## I. INTRODUCTION

Learning motivation is the most dynamic factor among the individual factors of language learners. It has always been one of the focuses in language teaching field. In the early 1970s, Gardner & Lambert and other scholars studied learning motivation from the perspective of social psychology. They introduced the concept of motivation into the field of second language teaching and research, put forward the theory of integrative and instrumental motivation, and designed the attitude motivation test scale AMBT, which laid the basic theoretical framework of learning motivation research.

In the 1990s, motivation research extended from the social psychological perspective to other perspectives like physiology, behaviorism, sociology and so on. A variety of motivation models appeared. Williams (1997) constructed an extended theoretical framework of motivation from the perspective of psychology to study the internal structure and external factors of motivation. Dornyei (1998) put forward the three-level theory of foreign language motivation, emphasizing that learners' motivation should be stimulated from the level of school environment. Schumann (1998) proposed a continuous deep learning model from the perspective of neurophysiology, trying to explore the strategies to stimulate learners' learning motivation. These motivation theoretical models have laid and expanded the theoretical foundation of motivation and broadened the vision of motivation research, but failed to put forward further assumptions on the internal structure of motivation, only listed the components of motivation and did not discuss the relationship between them (Qin, 2003).

With the deepening of motivation research, scholars at home and abroad inevitably pay attention to a significant phenomenon in the context of foreign language education - the decline of foreign language learning motivation (Dornyei, 2001). Dornyei pointed out that demotivation involves some specific external forces that reduce or weaken behavioral motivation. These external forces include teacher behavior, teaching methods, teaching behavior and classroom environment and so on. They have a negative impact on learners' learning attitude and learning behavior, reduce the vitality of learning groups, and lead to long-term and extensive negative learning results. In the field of language acquisition, demotivation refers to the phenomenon that language learners once had strong language learning motivation, but lost this interest and investment for some reason (Dornyei, 1998), which has a negative impact on their language learning attitude and behavior.

Many scholars began to study the reasons for the decline of foreign language learners' learning motivation from the reverse of motivation. The researches on learning motivation shifted from exploring the positive influencing factors that stimulate or improve learners' motivation to exploring the negative influencing factors that block or reduce learners' learning motivation. The previous studies just focus on the external factors. Now researchers gradually combine the internal and external factors, which provides a new perspective of educational psychology and an all-round perspective for the research of foreign language learning motivation (Zhou & Wang, 2012).

The study of demotivation enables researchers to examine learners' learning motivation from the opposite aspect, and provides front-line teachers and teaching managers with a new perspective to understand students' learning demotivation caused by their own negligence and shortcomings. What kind of teachers' words and behaviors make students gradually lose their motivation to learn a foreign language? Which aspects of teaching management may have a negative impact on students' foreign language learning motivation? Different from previous motivation studies, demotivation studies pay more attention to the students who once had a strong interest in foreign language learning but

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had a decline in motivation for some reasons. For these students, factors such as lack of learning interest and low linguistic competence may be the reasons for their demotivation, but the external environment and other factors shouldn't be ignored. Some learners may gradually lose their interest in learning English because of the negative influence of external factors. Therefore, foreign language teachers and relevant teaching managements should pay attention to the reasons why some foreign language learners gradually lose their motivation to learn the target language to better avoid or reduce demotivation in the learning process. We should know more about the status quo, the focus and development trend of learning demotivation.

From a macro point of view, the research on motivation decline is the transformation of research perspective: from the positive factors that stimulate or improve learners' learning motivation to the negative factors that hinder or reduce learners' learning motivation. The study of motivation decline has greatly enriched the motivation theory, from only focusing on external factors to taking into account both internal and external factors. The significance of the research is to focus on the students with reduced learning motivation, and point out the possible negative factors affecting students' learning motivation in education and teaching.

Studies on learning demotivation are mainly conducted in Europe, America and Asia. Most of the studies take primary school students, junior and senior high school students and college students as research subjects. The present study investigates the demotivating factors for learning English among non-English majors in medical university by qualitative analysis.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### A. *Research Subjects*

The present study selected 60 students from Xinxiang Medical University in Henan Province as the research subjects. The subjects include 20 freshmen, 20 sophomores, and 20 juniors, who major in clinical medicine, pharmacy, forensic medicine and nursing. Based on the observation of the selected students' classroom performance, the writer, as a teacher, confirms that they suffer from demotivation for learning English.

### B. *Research Method*

The interview method is used to investigate the demotivating factors that influence non-English majors' English learning in medical university. Kikuchi (2009) investigated Japanese high school students' demotivation by the method of interview. Based on his outline for interview, this study also provides an interview outline for the subjects. The main contents are as follows:

- (1) The subjects' status quo of learning English.
- (2) The reasons for the decline of subjects' learning motivation.
- (3) The factors that could help the subjects get rid of demotivation.

Each interview lasted about 20 minutes. The writer recorded the interview for further sorting out and analyzing the contents of the interviews.

## III. MAJOR FINDINGS

According to the interviews, the writer found that all the subjects had the problem of demotivation in English learning. After the conversation with the writer, most of the subjects had strong desire to stimulate their motivation to learn English. The writer found that the demotivating factors mainly concentrated in teacher, learner, teaching contents and learning environment. All the subjects mentioned that teacher was the most important factor for their learning demotivation, including teachers' personality, teaching ability, teaching attitude, teaching methods and so on. Students in grade one also mentioned teaching content, which mainly refers to the difficulty, interest of teaching materials and other supplementary materials. Sophomores focused on the learning environment, including teaching equipment, class size and so on. The junior students claimed that teaching content is also a crucial factor for the decline of their motivation. Medical English is quite difficult for them to learn, which involves difficult words, complex sentences and formal discourse.

Next, the writer will elaborate the interview results from four aspects: the teachers, teaching content, learning environment and the learners.

### A. *The Teacher Factor*

During the interview, the question "Whether your English learning motivation is related to the teachers" was asked. The subjects' response was positive. Teachers are one of the main reasons for the decline of their learning motivation. Some students claim that there are no foreign teachers for their English learning and their English teachers mainly teach in Chinese. They can't get access to more pure and native English in class. Besides, Teachers mainly deal with the texts and introduce little foreign cultures. They gradually lose interest in listening to the teacher in class. Some teachers' teaching methods are single, lacking innovation and flexibility. The teachers cannot adjust the teaching methods and teaching contents according to the needs of students. Some teachers stand in front of the podium to read the information on the courseware in class. The classroom atmosphere is quite dull. Teachers mainly use traditional method to give class.

In the classroom, usually the teacher is doing the speaking, while students are just listening passively, having few opportunities to participate in classroom activities. Some teachers even have no communication with students and they stick to their own style.

During the interview, the author believes that the teacher factor, including teachers' personality, teaching methods and professional ability, is just one of the reasons for the decline of students' learning motivation, but it is far-fetched to attribute students' poor achievement and unwillingness to learn English to teachers.

### *B. Teaching Contents*

Teaching content is one of the factors leading to the demotivation of some students' English learning. During the interview, some students told the writer that the teaching materials they used were old-fashioned, lack of novelty and attraction. Teachers rely too much on courseware in class, rarely play audio-visual materials, and the text is boring. In addition, there are many professional courses for medical students, including both theoretical courses and experimental courses. They spend most of their time dealing with a large number of professional courses and have little time for learning English. The juniors said that medical English was quite difficult for them to learn. They have to memorize a lot of medical English words, which are long and complex. They put much time to the words, but will soon forget what they have memorized. Besides, the sentences for medical English are usually not easy to understand, with complicated and intricate sentence structure. Most of the discourses are very formal, relating to different fields of medicine. Their basic competence of English is quite poor, therefore, learning medical English well is a great challenge for them.

### *C. Learning Environment*

When asked whether academic achievement and motivation are related to the learning environment, all subjects hold a positive attitude. The subjects think that if one wants to learn a foreign language well, the learning environment is very important. If they go to the target language country and have a good language environment, they can learn a foreign language well. It is difficult to learn a foreign language well in the Chinese-speaking environment. Some students believe that there is no natural external language environment; meanwhile, the learning environment in classroom is not ideal. English classes are given in large classes, with more than 100 students attending class at the same time. It is difficult for teachers to organize classroom activities, and students have few opportunities to participate in activities in class.

The writer believes that it is far from being enough to learn English well by the limited time in the classroom. Students can take the initiative to create learning opportunities by participating in various extracurricular activities, making full use of rich network resources and advanced information technology.

### *D. The Learner Factor*

In terms of learners' individual factors, subjects all believe that internal factors are the main source of learning motivation. During the interview, the writer learned that most medical students' motivation for English learning is instrumental motivation. Some students told the writer, "We medical students need to read a lot of foreign language literature. The researches we are doing involve reading many foreign literature. It is very necessary to learn English well." Some students study English hard in order to pass CET-4 and CET-6 and reserve more certificates for finding jobs in the future, because many employers take English level as a standard when recruiting new members. Some students study English to prepare for studying abroad in the future. Of course, there are also subjects whose motivation belongs to integrative motivation. Some students learn English out of their own interest; some are interested in western culture and hope to contact a new culture by learning English. Both instrumental learning motivation and integrative learning motivation can promote language learning. Students' learning motivation can come from both interest in the target language and external factors, but internal interest is the motivation that will have a long-term influence.

## IV. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION

### *A. Improving Teachers' Quality*

Teachers have a great influence on students' learning motivation. Teachers' personality, behavior, teaching style and evaluation methods will affect students' learning motivation. If a teacher is rigorous, amiable, humorous, and imaginative, he will be a good example for students to learn. Students' learning behavior will be greatly affected and their enthusiasm for learning will be mobilized. Teachers should correctly treat the differences in students' foreign language level and make reasonable evaluation of students at different levels and different personalities, so as not to frustrate students' enthusiasm and affect their learning motivation. They should make positive comments on students, praising and encouraging them instead of criticizing them. On the one hand, teachers should try to find out the advantages of each student; on the other hand, they should not ignore the shortcomings of students. Teachers should sincerely and kindly point out what students need to correct in the teaching process. Meanwhile, they should also improve their professional quality, learn new teaching ideas and methods, and make their teaching more effective with the help of advanced teaching means.

### *B. Creating Good Learning Environment*

A good learning environment first refers to the social environment. Language has a social nature, and learners' learning motivation will change with the change of social environment. Therefore, the social environment directly affects learners' language learning motivation. A strong learning atmosphere and a good language environment can mobilize learners' learning motivation. For example, in areas with relatively developed economy and more foreign exchanges, there is a great demand for English talents. With many people speaking and using English, a strong atmosphere for English learning will be created. This good language-learning environment can mobilize learners' enthusiasm in learning English to a great extent.

In addition to the social environment, learning environment also refers to the small environment of the class in which the learners live and study. Good class learning atmosphere is an important factor affecting learning motivation. If learners study in a strong English learning atmosphere with students helping each other mutually, they will have strong autonomy to learn and good learning effect. A good learning atmosphere can also help learners eliminate their anxiety and fear of learning English and enhance their sense of security.

### *C. Enriching Teaching Contents*

The content of foreign language teaching should be adjusted timely to better meet the needs of students. The setting of foreign language curriculum should be based on the analysis of students' needs, formulate teaching contents in line with the actual situation of medical students, and reasonably select teaching materials and teaching methods. Teachers should grasp the progress of class and recommend some popular science books, English books and proper English materials for students to read in their spare time. In addition, many medical colleges offer medical English courses, which is a good opportunity for medical students to combine their professional learning with English learning.

The writer believes that teachers can try to give some lectures on medical knowledge and basic medical English courses in grade one and grade two, so that students can get in touch with the relevant knowledge of medical English as soon as possible and improve students' interest in English. Medical English is the integration of foreign language disciplines and natural science disciplines. By taking some medical English courses like medical English listening and speaking, medical English reading, medical English terminology, medical English writing, medical English translation and so on, students can get to know the characteristics of medical English, and further strengthen their listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating competence. The ultimate target is to improve their comprehensive application skills of English language, and cultivate students' ability to communicate in English in pharmaceutical enterprises and relevant health departments.

### *D. Mobilizing Students' Learning Initiative*

#### *1. Reasonable Attribution*

The attribution analysis of learners' learning results is an important factor affecting their learning motivation. When learners attribute their poor learning results or even failure to their lack of ability, they may lose their confidence in learning. If they attribute their poor learning result to improper learning strategies, they will try to change their learning strategies. If they think they do not work hard enough, they will pay more efforts to their study. Therefore, guiding students to have correct attribution in the teaching process is of great significance to stimulate their learning motivation. Psychologists believe that the ideal attribution model is that success is attributed to ability and effort, and failure is attributed to insufficient effort. Such attribution helps to enhance learners' expectation of success to achieve goals, strengthen their sense of self-efficacy and increase their possibility of continuing their learning. In the process of teaching, teachers should consciously cultivate students' habit of reasonable attribution, correctly treat the difficulties and setbacks encountered in learning, and make students realize that effort is controllable, and language learning depends on diligence rather than luck. Only when students realize that they can succeed by adhering to their efforts can they enhance their motivation and self-confidence in learning.

#### *2. Clear Learning Goals*

Learning goals have a great impact on learning motivation. After conducting many experiments, American psychologists Knight and Remmers found that if the subjects recognize the learning goal, they will have strong learning motivation, almost three times that of the control group. Therefore, stimulating learning motivation by clarifying learning goals is also an important factor that cannot be ignored in teaching. Students should first have clear general learning goals, such as the learning goals for their academic years in university, or learning goals for a certain academic year. They should also have clear specific learning goals, such as short term learning goals, unit learning goals and even the learning goals for a course. Many students have such personal experience: they just generally put forward their learning goals that they should improve their foreign language level, but they often have no way to start because they are not clear about the direction. If a student has a clear learning goal, such as passing CET-4 in the first semester of sophomore year, he will set a phased goal and show strong learning motivation.

Learning goals can be divided into long-term and short-term goals. Qin (2003) believes that both long-term goals, such as finding a good job, professional needs, future development, etc., and short-term goals, such as passing the final term, CET-4 and CET-6, etc., have a positive and direct impact on motivational behavior. Short-term goals have specific characteristics in different stages. If learners only set short-term goals for themselves, it is easy to terminate learning once the goals are achieved. Therefore, in English teaching, teachers should guide students to learn English with the

combination of long-term goals and short-term goals. Long-term goals are the direction of efforts and the driving force of progress. They are gradually realized by achieving the short-term goals one by one. At the same time, when setting short-term goals, students should pay attention to the practical feasibility of the goals, so that they can achieve short-term goals as expected and produce a sense of satisfaction and excitement, enhance their courage and motivation to learn English, so as to forge ahead towards their long-term goals.

### 3. Strong Learning Interest

Cultivating students' interest in learning is an effective way to stimulate students' learning motivation. Teachers should try their best to use various teaching methods and use sound and picture materials to replace the traditional learning materials and methods. At the same time, they can supplement some background or relevant knowledge that is not in textbooks but is very important for understanding the text. In addition, teachers can play some classic English songs to the students after class or let students choose the songs they like to listen to, which creates a relaxed and comfortable classroom language-learning environment. Doing this can meet students' psychological needs, reduce their anxiety to the minimum, and make students' interest in learning English develop slowly.

Self-confidence plays a very important role in the process of English learning. Students with strong self-confidence may have good English scores. They dare to take risks. They are not afraid of making mistakes in language learning. They can boldly communicate with others in English. They are also active in class and can actively answer teachers' questions and even discuss problems with teachers. In teaching, teachers should make good use of the positive transfer of language, respect individual differences, show their own sense of trust to each student, make positive evaluations for students, and sow the seeds of self-confidence in the bottom of students' hearts. Students with poor grades often show a state of timidity, inferiority and anxiety in learning language. Teachers should more consciously communicate with students at this level, recommend proper learning methods, give them more opportunities to show themselves in class so that they can have a sense of self-appreciation and enhance their internal motivation of learning English.

## V. CONCLUSION

The present research investigates the demotivating factors of learning English among non-English majors in medical university by interviewing. Among the factors causing the decline of students' English learning motivation, teachers, teaching content, learning environment and learners are the most influential ones.

To stimulate medical students' English learning motivation and avoid the decline of their learning motivation, we should first improve the quality of foreign language teachers, strengthen the selection and training of foreign language teachers, and cultivate their innovative ability. To create a good foreign language-learning environment for students, we can recruit some foreign teachers and enrich the students' second classroom activities. Based on the analysis of students' foreign language learning needs, we can set up foreign language courses and make the curriculum more reasonable. At the same time, we should make full use of the medical English course to guide students to develop into inter-disciplinary talents who master both medical and English knowledge. In addition, students themselves should reasonably attribute the demotivation of learning English, give full play to their learning initiative, clarify their learning objectives, establish self-confidence and cultivate interest in English learning.

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