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Academic Self-Efficacy, Family Socioeconomic Status, and Language Learning Motivation: Mechanisms and Intervention Pathways

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Abstract. From the perspective of educational psychology, this paper will explore the ways in which academic self-efficacy and family socioeconomic status (SES) jointly influence the motivation for language learning. Research has found that the family's SES does not directly affect students' learning motivation; instead, it can raise students' self-efficacy by providing economic resources and transmitting cultural capital, and it may also influence family interaction. Self-efficacy is a necessary condition for students to have stronger and wider motivation to learn Chinese in the four dimensions of goal setting, effort investment, perseverance and strategy modification. Together, these two sets of factors form a chain-like transmission model of "external environment - internal cognition - behavioural motivation". Based on this analysis, the paper proposes attribution training as the main intervention path and believes that by guiding students to attribute their academic failures to controllable process factors, teachers can help them build stable ability beliefs incrementally and promote sustained intrinsic motivation. The paper will also outline the range of application for the intervention measures and multi-tiered support paths to provide practical and feasible educational recommendations for language teaching.

Keywords: Language learning motivation, self-efficacy, family socioeconomic status, attribution training, educational psychology

1. Introduction

With the change brought by globalisation, foreign languages are now tools to access a wider range of ideas and innovations around the world. However, the actual results of language learning often depend not only on talent and environment but also on a "psychological engine" inside the learner: motivation. Xu Menglin has shown that the psychological state of motivation also affects students' willingness to learn. This paper aims to explore from the perspective of educational psychology to explore in depth the interwoven mechanism between "learning self-efficacy, " an internal belief, and "family socioeconomic status, " an external environment. This paper puts forward a relational hypothesis between the two types of variables in advance: family socioeconomic status does not directly affect learners' language learning motivation; instead, it shapes learners' self-efficacy through pathways such as the provision of learning resources, parental expectations and emotional

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support, etc., and thus further influences the strength and persistence of learning motivation by strengthening this belief in one's own ability. Together, they form a transmission chain of "external environment – internal cognition – behavioural motivation". This paper will investigate the path of influence for this chain and put forward corresponding practical educational suggestions [1].

2. Language learning motivation: concept, theoretical foundations, and classification features

Motivation for learning a language is an internal drive that makes students want to study and be interested in learning that language. Motivation is not a single psychological factor but rather an integrated system of social influence, thought and emotion in the area of educational psychology [1]. The first behaviourist schools thought that behaviour is caused by external rewards and punishments. After the cognitive revolution, researchers began to pay more attention to learners' inner beliefs, goals and self-regulation [1].

Among all the theories, Self-Determination Theory by Deci and Ryan has been gaining popularity and receiving much attention in academia. The two types of motivation in this system are not divided into internal and external. However, it thinks that extrinsic motivation gradually becomes internalised in a series of steps: first, behaviour is motivated by external rewards and punishments; next, it is introjected regulation based on self-esteem and guilt; then, it reaches identified regulation, and people voluntarily adopt the values of the behaviour; finally, it attains integrated regulation, which is deeply rooted in self-worth. The degree of internalisation of extrinsic motivation is positively correlated with its autonomy and, to some extent, with the state of intrinsic motivation. Theoretically, it is believed that the internal motivation of learners is higher when they feel autonomous, competent in their tasks, and related to others [2].

Based on the analysis, the family's socioeconomic status (SES) does not directly affect students' learning motivation; instead, it influences students' self-efficacy indirectly through factors such as the provision of economic resources, the inheritance of cultural capital, and patterns of family communication.

After 2000, Dörnyei's second-language (L2) Motivational Self-System became one of the most influential explanatory frameworks in the field. The three types of motivational sources in this system are: the ought-to L2 self, the L2 learning experience, and the ideal L2 self. Among them, the ideal L2 self is the learner's envisioned future self as an advanced user of the target language, and it can explain why some learners have continued to be motivated in their learning despite weak external incentives.

According to the traditional classification criteria, the two main types of motivation for learning languages are instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation regards language as a means to achieve other goals and thus focuses on the practical purposes of learning, such as passing proficiency tests, obtaining a degree, and advancing in one's career. Integrative motivation arises from a desire to learn about and be involved in the culture of the target language through participation in the target language community.

Research has shown that the two types of motivation are not in opposition and can exist simultaneously in the same learner. However, the conditions for maintaining learning vary greatly. The driving force of instrumental motivation is the clarity of external goals and the predictability of rewards; after achieving the goal, the motivation generally decreases. Integrative Motivation is relatively stable; however, continuous cultural interaction and identity support are still needed. The relative strengths of the two types and whether they can be internalized as the learner's own goals will directly affect the sustainability of learning interest and the selection of learning methods.

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At the same time, the two kinds of motivation do not have to exist separately, and under certain circumstances, they can be combined. Giving cultural connotations to instrumental goals can offer stronger value support for cultural learning in practice. Conversely, cultural interest can also be turned into a specific study plan or career goal, and the integrated motivation can then be applied to learning behaviour.

For example, when career goals are combined with participation in the target language culture, the instrumental benefit of career development can enhance the sense of purpose in language learning, and identification with the target culture can lead to a long-term study plan and test preparation.

The motivation to learn a language changes all the time and can be affected by the learning environment, difficulty of tasks, and emotions. Therefore, in the study of motivation for learning a language, both relatively stable personal attributes and often-changing environmental factors need to be considered.

Gardner's socio-educational model connects the motivation of second-language learning closely with learners' attitudes towards the target-language community and emphasizes the particular role of cultural integration tendency in L2 learning. After 2000, Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System has become one of the more explanatory theoretical models in this field. The three sources of motivation in this system are: the ought-to L2 self, the L2 learning experience, and the ideal L2 self. Among them, the ideal L2 self-concept is a learner's desire to use the target language proficiently in the future; thus, it can explain why some learners have a prolonged interest in learning despite weak external motivation.

3. Academic self-efficacy and language learning motivation

Self-efficacy is a person's belief in their own ability to organise and implement the necessary actions to complete a particular learning task; it is not general self-confidence. One of the reasons for differences in students' willingness to learn is a factor of motivation. Self-efficacy affects learning motivation in the following ways. First of all, in terms of goal setting, students with high self-efficacy are more likely to set high-difficulty, long-term goals; they are not afraid of failure and, thus, set low-difficulty goals. Second, in terms of the investment of effort, those who are positively disposed towards their own abilities will be more willing to study diligently. Third, in terms of persistence, they are less likely to give up in the face of learning difficulties and more likely to continue to complete the task. Fourthly, in terms of strategy adjustment, after failing, they will actively learn from their mistakes and correct their study methods rather than avoiding the task.

This is shown in the learning of languages. In fact, the process of language learning is a repeated trial-and-error method that constantly receives feedback. Learners' Understanding of the feedback directly impacts their sense of self-efficacy. The same error can be considered a modifiable improvement item or a lack of ability. Learners who view errors as indications of low ability will reduce their self-assessment of language ability more rapidly and thus lose the will to learn. Those who believe the errors are related to the process are more likely to be interested. In daily life, students are unable to read fluently or comprehend audio materials, and thus they become self-conscious about this deficiency in their own ability.

The study by Zhou, X. L., Zhang, J., and Jiang, K. X. Further verified the above. Based on the above studies, the path from a student's college entrance examination scores to their college self-efficacy is not direct but goes through learning motivation and learning emotion. Students with high self-efficacy are more likely to have positive learning emotions and lower anxiety; these positive emotions will, in turn, enhance their motivation to learn. Students with low self-efficacy are more

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likely to experience negative emotions and are thus unable to engage in learning motivation effectively. Emotion and self-efficacy are associated in an interaction whereby each can strengthen the other in a cyclic fashion. Higher self-efficacy can reduce anxiety and increase positive emotions, and prolonged positive emotions and successful performance will reinforce learners' beliefs in their abilities and further strengthen self-efficacy [3]. The review by Xu, M. L. has also shown that at present, the main direction of research on L2 motivation is shifting from "external reward design" to "learners' self-cognitive mechanisms", and among these, self-efficacy is increasingly prominent.

The four main sources of self-efficacy according to Bandura are enacted mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and physiological-emotional states. All four have their own applications in language teaching and are suitable for different situations. Mastery experiences in enactment may be more closely related to self-efficacy, but they are not always so. Only when the task difficulty is moderate and learners attribute the success to their own controllable efforts and strategies can successful experiences effectively enhance self-efficacy.

If the task is too easy or too difficult, and the results are due to luck or other reasons, they will not lead to stable ability beliefs. For example, in a speaking task of moderate difficulty, learners who believe that their fluent expression is the result of self-study and adjustment of methods will experience a greater rise in speaking self-efficacy than those who achieve incidental success in an excessively difficult task [4].

Vicarious experience refers to the enhancement of self-efficacy beliefs that occurs when individuals observe peers with similar abilities achieving learning results through practice.

Verbal persuasion is only effective if the content of the information is specific and credible. General or vague praise is not very effective; therefore, specific feedback on how to improve and supporting data for that improvement will have a longer-lasting effect. For example, a teacher can tell a student that they have taken fewer breaks; at this time, cohesion may have begun to emerge, and it will help motivate the student to make better use of their time without needing to say, "You can do it".

Physiological and emotional states are frequently associated with anxiety and are particularly noticeable in speech. Learners may interpret physiological arousal in the speaking situation as a lack of ability and thus reduce their self-efficacy for speaking.

The impact of the aforementioned factors on different languages may be different. The most substantial negative correlation is between speaking anxiety and speaking self-efficacy; it is possible that due to the public and immediate nature of speaking performance, people are more prone to evaluation anxiety.

Listening and reading, on the other hand, enable learners to set their own pace, attract less external attention, and are linked to lower anxiety. Writing is a form of expression, but it is also labour-intensive; therefore, the pressure is generally lower than that of oral presentation. Therefore, in research on the relationship between self-efficacy and learning motivation, "English learning self-efficacy" should not be treated as a general factor; instead, specific domains of language skills need to be identified.

Self-efficacy influences the goals and learning motivation of students. High-self-efficacy learners are likely to set mastery goals focused on improving real-life abilities. Those with a low sense of self-efficacy are more likely to have performance-avoidance goals, such as avoiding doing poorly or saving face, and these defensive goals are less likely to motivate deep learning engagement. It should be noted that there is no need to link low efficacy with avoidance goals; instead, the climate of classroom evaluation significantly moderates this tendency. In classrooms focused on peer comparison and public ranking, low-efficacy students are more likely to be marginalised. In a

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growth-oriented evaluation environment that promotes development, this tendency is greatly reduced.

Zhu, K. X's intervention study of secondary vocational students showed that tiered instruction can enhance students' English self-efficacy and academic achievement. The three parts of the mechanism are: Firstly, the problem of mismatch refers to the difficulty of setting learning goals within students' ability range. Second, the creation of successful experiences enables students at all levels to feel competent by completing tasks. Third, targeted feedback offers improvement suggestions according to the students' abilities. Thus, the tiers of instruction can gradually enhance students' belief in their abilities and improve performance. At the same time, the effects of such interventions are limited. Their effects are generally limited to specific areas of application, and for these changes to become more stable in people's minds, continuous learning is required. Short-term, single-focus improvements in effectiveness are not conducive to cultivating an all-round ability in language learning. Therefore, it can be concluded that self-efficacy is not an inborn trait but can be developed through organised teaching. With improved ability judgments by individuals, their general learning conditions will also improve [5].

Given the sources of these factors, self-efficacy and learning motivation are not hierarchically related; instead, they work together to support one another. Self-efficacy guides the selection of goals, effort commitment and strategy adjustment; therefore, it is required for the generation and maintenance of motivation. On the other hand, the good results of prolonged learning engagement and high motivation also bolster one's self-efficacy. Instead of repeatedly stressing the importance of the English subject, it is better to help students accumulate positive experiences of "I can do it" in their learning to enhance their motivation for learning. These compliments are not just words; they are the outcomes of learning skills by solving real-life problems step-by-step and setting a clear goal for achieving measurable results. Repeatedly stressing the necessity of English may only lead to short-term compliance in behaviour; however, accumulated experiences of competence are more likely to foster stable intrinsic motivation.

4. Family socioeconomic status and language learning motivation

Family socioeconomic status (SES) is generally a comprehensive index of the social and economic conditions of the family, such as parental education level, type of occupation, and family income. The Paths through which the three affect language learning are different. Parents' educational levels are related to the family's culture and parenting. Occupational Status relates to Social Resources and Educational Levels. Family income affects material conditions and the quality of learning for children. These are related but different forms of influence, and the three pathways for analysis are: the supply of economic resources, the penetration of cultural capital, and family interaction processes. It will not only affect the students' grades but also continuously shape their learning psychology and behaviour through daily parenting.

The impact of family SES on language learning is not limited to providing resources but can also occur through a multi-level mechanism. First of all, there is a resource base that provides economic, cultural and social support for the family. Second, there is a level of parental cognition that includes the parents' educational expectations, parenting style and communication with their children. The third level is the psychological state of students, which affects their self-efficacy, emotions and goals. Finally, these are transmitted to the fourth level of learning behaviours, namely learning engagement, persistence and motivation. The model of influence is not simply the idea that "financial wealth leads to good language learning"; instead, it is the result of many factors interacting and spreading over time.

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According to the theory of cultural capital, there are differences among them. Support for families with a high SES can be divided into explicit "hard resources" and implicit "soft support", and the two function differently in the process of language learning. Hard resources refer to imported original-language reading materials, systematic private tutoring, and cross-cultural study tours; they directly increase the supply of language-learning curricula, practice facilities and authentic communication opportunities. Soft support includes creating a good cultural atmosphere and educational environment in the family; this will provide a solid foundation for development. The study by Gao, Y. H. and Zhao, Y. showed that adolescents who grow up in a culturally rich environment are more likely to form an ideal "L2 self"-concept; they can envision themselves using a foreign language proficiently in an international setting. This self-concept is not imposed by others; rather, through daily life, it has naturally developed, and now learning English has become an intrinsic desire for self-actualisation, thus boosting the impetus for study. In other words, in families lacking cultural capital, the parents may themselves have little experience in learning foreign languages; thus, it is difficult for the children to set learning goals and identity imaginings, and their motivation can easily be lost [6].

Parental attitude towards learning languages and the style of parent-child communication are basic factors at the family level. In high-SES families, although the parents have high hopes for their children, they are more likely to use autonomy-supportive communication. The above type of communication is based on reason and logic; it gives children some freedom to set their own learning goals, and instead of judging them solely by the results, offers feedback on their efforts and strategies. The above interactive mode helps children build a strong belief in themselves and is likely to boost self-efficacy. It should be pointed out that parents in low-SES families are also able to provide strong support. Even if there are few foreign language resources and no prior experience in learning a foreign language, parents can provide strong emotional support through stable emotional encouragement, ensure sufficient study time, and confirm the value of education.

The Parenting Environment of Lower-SES Families is relatively more complicated. Liu Y. and Zhang J. conducted a study. W. pointed out that parents of such families often view formal education as the only way to change their lives, have very high expectations for their children, and are also under considerable stress. Phrases that sound encouraging in daily life, such as "You need to learn English well to improve your life", can be very stressful for young children. High expectations without corresponding practical support reduce students' desire to learn. The will to learn is not driven by one's own interest but by a desire to avoid criticism or to prevent disappointing one's family; therefore, such motivation is unstable. After being out of practice for a while, some students lose the will to learn and believe they are incapable of improving [7].

Wan Y. H. and Wang, R. X. showed that children from low-SES families are generally under more psychological stress and have a much higher risk of anxiety and depression. There are three types of causes for this psychological stress, and they will affect language learning in different ways. First, generalised anxiety due to economic uncertainty constantly exhausts the learners' emotional resources. Secondly, there are emotional fluctuations caused by family stress that directly affect attention and stability in learning. The third is anxiety about future development due to limited educational opportunities; thus, long-term learning motivation is reduced. There will be considerable interference from these negative emotions during the language learning stage. For example, in the case of speaking practice, learners who have been under prolonged stress will feel anxious and lack confidence in themselves. This feeling directly affects their self-perception of their language ability, leading to a continuous negative cycle: family stress causes emotional problems, emotional problems lower self-assessment of ability, and low self-assessment of ability reduces the motivation

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to learn. Note that only to show the mechanism of action is this scenario described, and it does not replace experimental data; the actual pathway has not yet been verified in practice [8].

The study by Feng, S. K. and Zhu, Y. F. Also found that way. The impact of the family's growing-up environment on students' academic performance is mainly exerted indirectly through mediators such as self-worth identity, emotional state, and learning engagement; it does not directly determine the results of learning. At the same time, it should be noted that the same family pressure does not lead to the same results for all students. Significant individual differences were found in the research due to the buffering effects of protective factors. Teachers' emotional support, positive peer relationships, previous successful learning experiences and individual positive coping strategies can all reduce the negative effects of family pressure and serve as psychological protective factors [9].

Low family SES is not necessarily the reason for academic failure. Nong S. has conducted research. Y. found another way. Some low-SES students have developed a very strong instrumental learning motivation and believe that English is a way to improve their grades. This strong will to change their own fate makes them strive more than many other young people from wealthier families. Therefore, it can be concluded that although family social class has an impact on development, it is not the sole reason. Cognitive appraisal of one's own circumstances by adolescents is also a type of moderation. If people can turn bad circumstances into a will to live and improve, rather than letting them become reasons for self-denial, they will be able to overcome environmental limitations. Thus, it can be seen that the core idea of self-efficacy is to reduce the impact of the external environment by enhancing one's sense of capability. At the same time, it should be pointed out that the moderating effect of cognitive appraisal is limited. It will not replace the function of basic learning resources and institutional support. Improving the learning environment for disadvantaged groups still requires joint efforts in terms of resources and concepts [10].

In short, the impact of family SES on the motivation to learn languages is transmitted through several links: it begins with the initial supply of economic resources and cultural capital by the family, then influences parental expectations, parenting style and parent-child interaction, affects children's sense of self and emotions, and finally results in different learning motivations and behaviours for the children. As it is an ongoing chain with many links in between, there are opportunities for intervention at each link, and the necessary entry point for educators to join is here.

5. Educational recommendations: starting with attribution training

The analysis in the previous two chapters has reached the same conclusion. An important reason for the lack of intrinsic motivation in language learning among school students may be their doubt in the ability to complete learning tasks, rather than a simple unwillingness to learn.

Low self-efficacy at the individual level and negative cognitive changes caused by a low socioeconomic status of the family may work through various paths and are not exclusively related to self-efficacy. Family resources and learning experiences influence motivation via the path of ability cognition. Parental Expectations and family pressure affect students' motivation to learn through emotion. Cultural Capital and Identity Shape Long-Term Motivation via the Goal-Setting Pathway. Among all the paths in this model, self-efficacy is closer to the origin and directly influences motivation more strongly. Based on the above analysis, the intervention approach in this paper is proposed. Compared with repeatedly emphasizing the instrumental value of foreign language learning, Compared with repeatedly emphasizing the instrumental value of foreign language learning, adjusting learners' attributional patterns following failure may provide a more

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actionable intervention target, and attribution training is the core intervention method for this approach.

At the core of attribution training is the idea that a person's attribution of failure will influence their subsequent behaviour. If the problems of test failure, expression difficulty and listening comprehension problems are attributed to stable internal factors (such as "I naturally lack language talent"), individuals will tend to avoid future challenges and lose the will to study. If they are due to controllable process factors, such as "poor preparation", "inappropriate methods", or "lack of practice", then learners can improve their performance by altering strategies and increasing input. Attribution training is not to be regarded as mere cognitive correction. Its effect depends on coordination with learning resource support, appropriate task difficulty, and the accumulation of successful experiences. Only when the modification of failure explanations is accompanied by practical improvement paths, and learners can feel the results in subsequent activities, will the new attributional pattern be stable and lead to continuous learning motivation.

Dong L. Z. studied the effect of this way on high school students in 2023 and found it effective. The experimental group received systematic attribution-oriented training in the study, and as a result, they attributed their failures in English learning to effort and learning methods rather than to an inability of the language. Based on the above experiments, the experimental group was more intrinsically motivated in its learning of English and performed better academically than the control group. When learners develop the cognition that "modifying methods and increasing input lead to improvement", they are more likely to maintain long-term interest in learning. On the other hand, if they believe that "talent determines the ceiling", they will be reluctant to take the initiative in basic work [11].

Attribution guidance in the classroom can be incorporated into regular teaching. After regular tests, the teacher can have the students engage in all-around self-assessment. Present the score data, and at the same time, help the students identify the specific reasons for their scores. For students who are prone to attributing failure to a lack of ability, teachers can help them focus on the role of controllable factors, such as vocabulary accumulation, practice frequency and problem-solving strategies. For example, "The drop in points for the reading section is due to insufficient vocabulary review in the past few weeks," or "The weaker coherence in speaking directly stems from the lack of daily oral practice." If such attributional guidance is continuously provided in the form of daily feedback, students' attributional styles will gradually shift to a controllable and specific direction, thereby forming action-oriented thinking habits.

Intervention should be provided for students from low-income families to differentiate between types of failure attribution and offer different support based on this. The students' academic failures are generally accompanied by one of the following three types of self-blame. First of all, family-responsibility attribution is to blame oneself for disappointing one's family and feel guilty. The second is self-worth-based shame attribution; learners attribute failure to a lack of self-worth and thus engage in self-denial. The third is ability attribution; therefore, one believes that the person is not naturally talented in learning foreign languages. The Intervention Paths of the three types differ. For family-responsibility attribution, the first step is to sever the association between "failure" and "disappointing the family", and have students learn that school is for their own growth. For shame-based attribution, the first step is to recognise the emotion and then focus on improving specific behaviours. To attribute abilities, direct guidance can be provided for controllable attributions.

Divide the responsibilities of support modes, offer practical help according to one's role, and set up a referral path for support. For learning problems, teachers can provide several tiers of study plans and suitable learning materials, offer targeted process-oriented feedback, and help students

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create a positive path for improvement. Help students who are under emotional stress and assist them in coordinating with their families and schools. If the students' anxiety and depression are prolonged or serious, the school's psychological support system should be utilized for professional intervention to avoid converting the family's economic pressure and deep psychological problems into the teacher's extra workload. Through such tiered support, a protective buffer for negative emotions can be built for students; gradually, self-denial, such as "I can't do it," is replaced by a positive cognition of "adjusting methods can lead to improvement," thus fostering more stable learning motivation.

6. Conclusion

From the perspective of educational psychology, this paper has investigated the influence of self-efficacy and family socioeconomic status on the motivation for learning languages. Both paths of inquiry will lead to the same question: Do students believe that they "can learn well"? Attribution training can reduce maladaptive low-efficacy beliefs and motivate students to try learning again after academic failure. The first type of intervention for teachers is usually the guidance of routine attribution. In the future, a longitudinal study could be conducted over several semesters or years to track changes in motivation, strategy use and grades of students with different social economic backgrounds (SES), language abilities and initial self-efficacy after attribution training.

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