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Research on Motivation-based Second Language Teaching Strategies

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Abstract: Motivation, especially achievement motivation, is an important intrinsic factor that affects the outcome of learners' second language learning. Starting with an introduction of theories of motivation and achievement motivation, this paper reviews research findings on the relationship between motivation (including achievement motivation) and learning strategies. Based on the positive collaborative mechanism between motivation (including achievement motivation) and learning strategies, the paper aims to provide insights for teachers' second language teaching: during the process of teaching, teachers should take measures to appropriately increase students' motivation levels and help them make good use of learning strategies. Meanwhile, teachers are supposed to provide timely and appropriate guidance and feedback to students.

1. Introduction

Motivation has long been of particular interest to educational psychologists and language teachers because of its crucial role in second language learning. Achievement motivation is a special kind of motivation that can lead people to overcome difficulties and pursue success, which plays a particularly prominent role in second language learning. As a result, it has received increasing attention from researchers in recent years.

Research has shown that there is an interactive relationship between motivation (including achievement motivation) and learning strategies. Studying the collaborative mechanism between the two may provide helpful insights into second language teaching. Therefore, this paper begins with an introduction of motivation and achievement motivation theories, then reviews current research findings on the relationship between motivation, achievement motivation, and learning strategies. In the end, it tries to provide some implications for second language teaching.

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2. Motivation and Achievement Motivation Theory

2.1. Overview of Motivation Theory

Motivation involves factors not only activate behavior but also guide and maintain goal-directed actions. In Psychology, motivation is a process by which thoughts influence behavior. Prominent theories include Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's two-factor theory, Alderfer's ERG theory, Self-Determination Theory, etc.

As for its application in language learning, according to Marie J. Guilloteaux, motivation provides the primary impetus for initiating second or foreign language learning and later for sustaining the long and often tedious learning process. Professor Muriel Saville-Troike wrote in her work *Introducing Second Language Acquisition*: Motivation largely determines the level of effort expended by learners at various stages of L2 development, often a key to the ultimate level of proficiency.

Integrative motivation and instrumental motivation are the most widely recognized types of motivation. Integrative motivation generates from interest in learning L2 because of a desire to learn about or interact with the people who use it, or to participate and integrate into the speech community where it is used; instrumental motivation involves a perception of the purely practical value of learning L2.

Research has shown a high correlation between reported strength of motivation and levels of L2 achievement, indicating that there may be a reciprocal influence in the process of language learning.

2.2. Overview of Achievement Motivation Theory

As one of the common types of motivation, achievement motivation refers to the intrinsic desire that drives an individual to pursue accomplishment or to master skills with self-discipline and high standards. Studying issues concerning achievement motivation is a meaningful attempt to explain the complex social activities of human.

The term—Need for achievement (i.e. N-Ach) was first used by American psychologist Henry Murray in the 1930s, providing the starting point for future studies of personality, especially those relating to needs and motivation.

In 1961, greatly influenced by Murry, David McClelland published *The Achieving Society*, which articulated his model of human motivation. McClelland contended that three dominant needs: need for achievement, need for power and need for affiliation, are the basis of human motivation. John William Atkinson developed the expectancy–value theory in the 1950s and 1960s in an effort to understand the achievement motivation of individuals.

Bernard Weiner introduced cognitive factors into the achievement motivation system and proposed the attribution model, emphasizing that achievement depends on different attributions for past successes or failures. Weiner's attribution theory has been widely used as one of the primary methods for achievement motivation training in classroom settings. In the field of Educational psychology, David Paul Ausubel categorized achievement motivation in the school context into three areas of internal drives.

Based on previous research on achievement motivation theories, several researchers have conducted further study and developed more achievement motivation theories, such as the Achievement Goal Theory (Dweck, 1986; Elliot, 1999; Nicholls, 1984, 1989), Expectancy-value Theory of Achievement Motivation (Eccles and Wigfield 2000, 2002) and Self-Regulation theory (Zimmerman, 2000).

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3. Relationship Between Motivation, Achievement Motivation and Learning Strategies

3.1. Relationship Between Motivation and Learning Strategies

Existing research shows that motivation and learning strategies are positively correlated and that they are mutually reinforcing—moderately higher levels of motivation encourage learners to use learning strategies more frequently, therefore improve better second language performance. In contrast, excessively high levels of motivation tend to trigger anxiety and have a detrimental effect on second language performance. In turn, when learners are successful in using learning strategies, they are likely to achieve better results. Hence, their motivation levels increase accordingly, creating a virtuous cycle.

Results of the study conducted by R. Oxford and M. Nyikos (1989) indicated that motivation was the most significant factor affecting the strategy use in language learning; Chen Fang and Qin Xiaoqing(2004) investigated 221 non-English major masters with a questionnaire and found that the strength and type of motivation had a significant effect on their choice of learning strategies; Park (2005) studied the relationship of language learning strategies to motivation and English proficiency among Korean EFL students and found that students with stronger motivation used learning strategies more frequently.

3.2. Relationship Between Achievement Motivation and Learning Strategies

The relationship between achievement motivation and learning strategies is somewhat similar to the relationship between motivation and learning strategies: achievement motivation levels and the levels of learning strategies use are positively correlated. Those with high achievement motivation levels are more likely to use learning strategies more frequently and achieve better results; in turn, better use of learning strategies contributes to promoting academic success and increasing learners' achievement motivation levels.

Empirical study results are generally consistent with the claim above: Ellis, R.(1994) suggested that learners' strength of achievement motivation might have a causal effect on the numbers of learning strategies they use; Okada, Oxford and Abo(1996) conducted an exploratory study on the relationship between learners' use of learning strategies and motivation levels and concluded that there was a significant correlation between learners' achievement motivation and learning strategies; Jiang X. (2001) investigated the achievement motivation levels and English learning strategy use of 307 non-English major college students with questionnaires. Results indicated that learners' levels of achievement motivation influenced their selection on learning strategies; Zhang Yaling et al.(2001) studied the effectiveness of learning strategy instruction on the motivation levels of high school students with questionnaires and experiments, which found that students had significantly higher achievement motivation levels after receiving strategy instruction.

4. Implications for Second Language Teaching

Based on the discussion of the correlation between motivation (including achievement motivation) and learning strategies above, we can draw the conclusion that the positive collaborative mechanism between motivation (including achievement motivation) and learning strategies can effectively contribute to second language learning. As significant guiding roles in second language teaching, teachers should gain a comprehensive understanding of the above mechanism and apply it fully in second language teaching. To be specific, teachers are supposed to help improve learners' motivation levels, to instruct students on how to choose and make good use of learning strategies and to provide them with timely and appropriate feedback.

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4.1. Moderate Improvement in Learners' Motivation and Achievement Motivation Levels

4.1.1. Making Changes to the Teaching Model

Teaching activities in traditional second language classrooms center on the teacher's lecture, and students mainly learn by listening. As Chinese researcher Yuan and Lin once put it, due to the lack of interaction, students do not have a strong sense of participation. Therefore, it's not easy for them to concentrate for an extended period, and they may quickly lose interest in teaching content. Over time, a decrease in students' motivation (including achievement motivation) level is likely to appear, which can seriously impair the learning effect.

Therefore, the teaching model which relies heavily on teachers' lecture should be changed and give full play to students' motivation and initiative. Teachers can design innovative and diverse teaching activities that arouse students' interest in participating in teaching interaction. By making these changes, students' interest in learning a second language can be developed, strengthened and gradually transformed into stable motivation for learning. Making students aware of their subjective status in learning activities and having enjoyable and engaging learning experiences is conducive to increasing their levels of motivation to learn a second language. Consequently, it's advisable for teachers to provide appropriate instructional goals and activities tailored to learners' specific needs.

4.1.2. Guiding Students to make Correct Attributions

Achievement motivation includes two tendencies—the tendency to pursue success and the tendency to avoid failure. The reason why some students have low levels of achievement motivation is not that they are insufficiently motivated to pursue success, but that they are over-motivated to avoid failure. How students attribute their past success or failure affects their motivation levels, as well as how they use learning strategies and their final achievement.

As a result, in teaching activities, teachers should try their best to guide students to make positive and correct attributions and eliminate negative ones in time. For example, if students can analyze their academic performances properly, they can gain both experience and self-confidence from their success, as well as learn from their mistakes and try to avoid the adverse effects on their future learning. As Chinese researcher Jiang X. once put it, teachers are supposed to help students shape positive beliefs by learner training in goal-setting and self-assessment.

4.2. Encouraging Learners' use of Learning Strategies

4.2.1. Gaining more Knowledge of Learning Strategies

Due to the lack of comprehensive knowledge of learning strategies' types and effectiveness, in traditional teaching settings, teachers attach more importance to knowledge imparting than to conducting training on learning strategies use. Hence, most students are unaware of using strategies while learning a second language. It was found that many students only used a single learning strategy, which can not effectively contribute to second language learning.

Having recognized that using learning strategy appropriately can be conducive to the improvement of both motivation levels and second language proficiency, firstly, teachers should have a comprehensive understanding of learning strategies. Then teachers are supposed to diagnose the current situation of students' learning strategy use. For example, teachers can learn about students' awareness, type and frequency of their strategy use through observation, questionnaires and interviews. In the next step, by analyzing students' second language performance, teachers can determine the effectiveness of current learning strategies.

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4.2.2. Conducting Training on Learning Strategies

In daily teaching, it's advisable for teachers to pay more attention to the training of learning strategies. On the one hand, it is important to raise students' awareness of using learning strategies; on the other hand, teachers have the responsibility to help students make good use of the strategies to improve their second language performance.

For instance, students should be encouraged to discuss their own experience of using strategies, because classmates sometimes can understand the challenges or difficulties others may encounter in learning better than teachers. Students should be encouraged to try adopting various learning strategies during their process of second language learning. Then, if those strategies have a positive effect on learning, students will spontaneously develop an awareness of adopting learning strategies in their future learning. Gradually, they can make good use of them, which will ultimately benefit their second language performance. After achieving better results, students will naturally gain a sense of achievement, which can contribute to the improvement of their motivation levels. The reciprocal process above can finally create a virtuous circle.

4.2.3. Paying Attention to Individual Differences

Professor Muriel Saville-Troike once wrote in her work *Introducing Second Language Acquisition*: Inclusion of strategy training for SLA is generally viewed positively in any case… A danger is that a researcher or instructor may have preconceived ideas as to "what works" and disrupt a student's successful strategy by imposing or encouraging a different one.

Since the learning strategies used by most successful learners are not entirely universal, it is inappropriate for teachers to force all students to adopt a uniform learning strategy. However, teachers should focus on individual differences, such as students' personal needs and emotional factors, and help students find learning strategies that are suitable for themselves.

4.3. Providing Timely Feedback and Guidance

To some extent, students' level of achievement motivation is somehow related to their teachers' guidance and recognition. As a consequence, in teaching activities, it's advisable for teachers to provide timely encouragement towards students' progress and specific feedback on their second language performance. For instance, teachers should give particular comments on students' assignments and quizzes, pointing out their strengths and weaknesses, instead of simply marking them. In this way, students can be informed of their learning: they can see their progress and generate stronger motivation or identify their shortcomings, correct the mistakes in time to achieve better results.

Teachers' guidance and feedback plays a similarly important role in improving students' strategy using levels. Due to students' limitations (e.g. young learners have not reached very high cognitive levels, have limited learning capacity, or do not have enough knowledge about learning strategies), teachers need to provide timely feedback and guidance to help them adopt learning strategies appropriately, based on the effectiveness of the learning strategies and learners' characteristics. For example, if a student who had used the cognitive strategy for some time failed to reach his/her goal of improving second language communication skills. Having noticed this phenomenon, his/her teacher should advise the student to try social strategies (e.g. increase interaction with native speakers of the target language), which may be more effective.

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5. Conclusion

Having a review of the existing research findings, it is not difficult to conclude that there is a positive correlation between motivation (including achievement motivation) and learning strategies. They constitute a virtuous collaborative mechanism that may effectively improve second language performance—a moderately higher level of motivation promotes the use of learning strategies, therefore improve second language performance; a higher application level of learning strategies contributes to better results in second language learning, which in turn makes learners highly-motivated.

Based on the findings above, during the process of second language teaching, in order to improve the teaching effect, it's advisable for teachers to improve students' motivation (including achievement motivation) levels and learning strategy application levels as well as providing appropriate feedback and guidance.

However, despite the above inspiring findings, the paper also suffers from some limitations:

Firstly, since second language acquisition is a complex process influenced by various internal and external factors, reaching these goals places high demands on teachers' teaching skills. To be specific, teachers need to have a good knowledge of both the collaborative mechanism between motivation (including achievement motivation) and learning strategies and the characteristics of learning strategies. Furthermore, teachers should adopt appropriate teaching methods and give helpful guidance according to the actual teaching situations and learners' individual differences.

Secondly, the pedagogical implications proposed in this paper mainly base on the analysis of theoretical research results. Due to the lack of experimental research on the practical effectiveness, these implications are not universally applicable to all teaching contexts. In the future, more empirical studies should be conducted to test these implications' effectiveness in order to improve them.

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