

The Relationship Between Chinese Students' Learning Concepts and Extracurricular Foreign Language Learning

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Abstract: Research on the impact of learning concepts and extracurricular language learning activities on language acquisition is still insufficient, with a significant research gap. This study aims to investigate Chinese students' learning concepts and attitudes towards extracurricular language learning activities, provide insights for teaching practice. The study sampled 284 college students and collected data on the respondents' learning concepts and extracurricular language learning activities through electronic questionnaires. The results show that students generally have a positive attitude towards language learning. The motivation for them to learn English is largely driven by the pursuit of material benefits, and influenced by Confucian culture, they tend to adopt a passive learning approach. Students face dual challenges in time management and resource acquisition during their extracurricular learning process. It is recommended that educational institutions provide necessary learning resources and encourage students to improve their time management skills, make full use of free resources.

1 INTRODUCTION

Compared to other Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) research areas that focus on individual learning differences, the study of language learning motivation has not received adequate attention. Hosenfeld proposed that language learners bring their beliefs into the language classroom (Hosenfeld, 1978). Motivation has been proven to significantly influence the learning behaviors of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, such as the selection of learning strategies and self-regulation (Yang, 1999; Wenden, 1999). Research on the relationship between learning beliefs and ESL language achievement has also yielded findings (Huang & Tsai, 2003; Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Ellis, 2008). Out-of-class language learning activities are similarly an under-researched area in TESOL studies. The correlation between out-of-class language learning activities and learner autonomy has been discovered (Gao, 2009). As Nunan suggested, it is crucial for learners to apply the skills they are developing outside the classroom for their second language development (Nunan, 1991). These activities are important because they contribute significantly to the learning of ESL learners (Hyland,

2004).

In China, students' learning beliefs and their participation in foreign language learning activities outside the classroom have a significant impact on their foreign language learning capabilities. However, despite the important roles these factors play in the educational process, there has been relatively little research, leaving a certain gap. This study provides key insights into the field of foreign language teaching, forming a component of a broader research effort that primarily focuses on learners' and teachers' perceptions of learning concepts, motivation, and out-of-class language learning activities. The research findings offer multifaceted implications for foreign language teaching practices and support teachers in innovating their teaching methods. Combining out-of-class activities with classroom instruction can effectively promote the enhancement of students' foreign language learning and cultural understanding capabilities. This study extensively collects data from Chinese students regarding their learning concepts and attitudes towards out-of-class learning and conducts in-depth analysis to understand students' belief systems and learning strategies, providing educators with reference for developing effective teaching strategies. The study aims to provide empirical data support for

educational policymakers, helping them to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities currently faced in foreign language teaching. Based on these research findings, policymakers can plan educational resources more rationally and formulate educational policies that are more aligned with students' actual needs, in order to cultivate foreign language talents with stronger competitiveness in the context of globalization.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Subjects of the Survey

In this study, the author has selected a sample that is easily accessible as the subjects of the survey. Specifically, these subjects include 284 students who are currently pursuing undergraduate education. The academic fields chosen by these students are concentrated in the arts, covering several sub-disciplines such as painting, music, dance, and design. By surveying these art-major students, the authors hope to gain an in-depth understanding of the various issues, needs, and attitudes and methods they face in their learning process.

2.2 Survey Method

For this survey, the author decided to employ a quantitative research method to ensure the objectivity and statistical nature of the data. Specifically, the author designed a computer-based questionnaire. The computer-based questionnaire is completed through electronic devices such as computers or smartphones. Through this form of questionnaire, the author hope to widely collect the respondents' individual thoughts and opinions on learning concepts and foreign language learning activities outside the classroom. the author will meticulously record the respondents' attitudes, motivations, methods for learning foreign languages, and the specific activities and frequency of their foreign language learning outside the classroom. This data will help me gain an in-depth understanding of the respondents' learning concepts and actual learning behaviors, thereby providing rich first-hand material for my research.

3 SURVEY RESULTS

Figure 1 illustrates the main purposes for which

people learn foreign languages. Figure 1 is divided into four sections, each representing a different purpose of learning, with the corresponding percentage indicated. Here is a detailed analysis.

- A. Academic needs: This has the largest share at 60.92%. This suggests that over half of the people learn foreign languages to meet academic requirements, such as studies or research at school.

- B. Career development: This accounts for 24.3%. This indicates that about a quarter of the people learn foreign languages for career advancement, such as using a foreign language at work or to secure better job opportunities.

- C. Personal interest: This makes up 10.21%. This shows that some people learn foreign languages out of personal interest, possibly due to a fondness for the culture of the language or as a personal hobby.

- D. Others: This category represents 4.58%. This part may include other purposes for learning foreign languages that are not specifically listed.

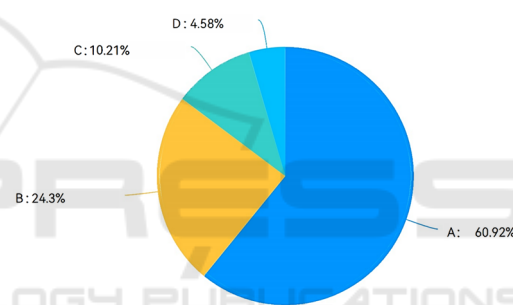


Figure 1: Answers to “What is the main purpose of your foreign language learning?” (Sample size = 284).

Figure 1 provides an overview of the motivations behind people learning foreign languages, showing that academic needs are the primary motivation, followed by career development, with personal interest and other reasons accounting for a smaller share.

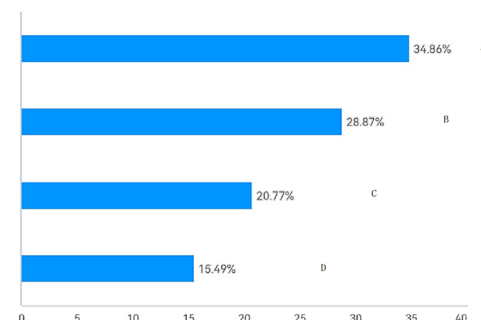


Figure 2: Answers to “When you learn a foreign language outside of the classroom, what is the most commonly used learning material?” (Sample size = 284).

Figure 2 shows the most commonly used learning materials when people study foreign languages outside of the classroom. The bar chart is divided into four sections, each representing a different type of learning material, with the corresponding percentage indicated. Here is a detailed analysis.

- A. Books: With the highest percentage at 34.86%, this indicates that books are the most commonly used material for learning foreign languages, possibly because they offer systematic learning content and exercises.

- B. Online Resources: Account for 28.87%. This shows that online resources are the second most commonly used learning materials, which may include websites, blogs, online courses, etc., providing flexible and diverse ways of learning.

- C. Videos: Make up 20.77%. The proportion of videos as learning materials is also relatively high, likely because they offer visual and auditory input, which aids in language comprehension and imitation.

- D. Apps: Account for 15.49%. Although apps have the smallest share, they are still an important learning tool as they can provide an interactive, portable, and convenient learning experience.

Figure 2 provides an overview of the learning materials used by people when studying foreign languages outside of the classroom, showing that books are the most popular choice, followed by online resources, with videos and apps also having a certain proportion of use. This may reflect the characteristics and advantages of different learning materials, as well as the personal study habits and preferences of learners.

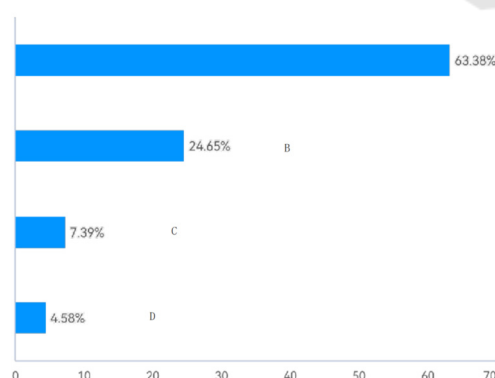


Figure 3: Answers to “What is the source of motivation for learning a foreign language?” (Sample size = 284).

Figure 3 is a horizontal bar chart that illustrates the sources of motivation for learning a foreign language. The bar chart is divided into four sections, each representing a different source of motivation,

with the corresponding percentage indicated. Here is a detailed analysis.

- A. Self-motivation: With the highest percentage at 63.38%, this indicates that the majority of people learn foreign languages due to internal self-motivation, possibly because of an interest in language learning or personal goals.

- B. External Pressure: Accounts for 24.65%. This shows that a significant number of people learn foreign languages due to external pressures, such as job requirements, school mandates, or other societal expectations.

- C. Encouragement From Others: Makes up 7.39%. This suggests that a small portion of people learn foreign languages because they have been encouraged by others, which could be the support and motivation from family, friends, or teachers.

- D. Others: Represents 4.58%. This category may include other motivations for learning a foreign language that are not specifically listed.

Figure 3 provides an overview of the sources of motivation for learning a foreign language, showing that self-motivation is the primary source of motivation, followed by external pressure, while encouragement from others and other reasons account for a smaller proportion. This likely reflects the importance of intrinsic motivation in the learning process, as well as the impact of external factors on learning motivation.

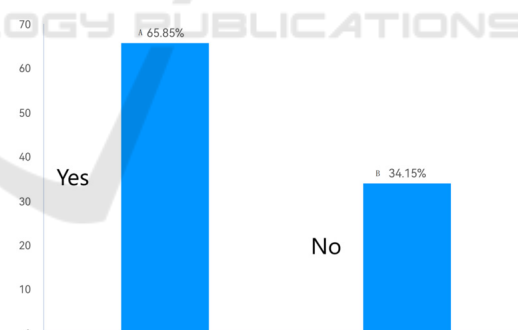


Figure 4: Answers to “Have you ever participated in online language learning courses?” (Sample size = 284).

Figure 4 is a vertical bar chart that shows the participation in online language learning courses. The bar chart is divided into two sections, each representing a response option, with the corresponding percentage indicated. Here is a detailed analysis.

- A. Yes: Accounts for 65.85%. This indicates that in the surveyed sample, over two-thirds of the people said they have participated in online language learning courses.

– B. No: Accounts for 34.15%. This shows that about one-third of the people said they have not participated in online language learning courses.

Figure 4 provides an overview of whether people have participated in online language learning courses, showing that the majority have experience with online learning, which may reflect the prevalence and acceptance of online learning in language education.

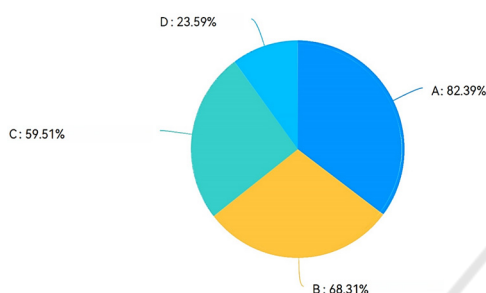


Figure 5: Answers to “What is the purpose of learning a foreign language?” (Sample size = 284).

Figure 5 shows the distribution of purposes for learning a foreign language. The pie chart is divided into four sections, each representing a different purpose of learning, with the corresponding percentage indicated. Here is a detailed analysis.

– A. Pass Exams: This has the largest proportion at 82.39%. This indicates that the main purpose for most people to learn a foreign language is to pass relevant language exams.

– B. Improve Communication Skills: This accounts for 68.31%. This shows that a significant number of people learn a foreign language to enhance their communication abilities.

– C. Enhance Professional Competitiveness: This is at 59.51%. This suggests that nearly six out of ten people believe that learning a foreign language can improve their competitiveness in the job market.

– D. Others: This category makes up 23.59%. This part may include other purposes for learning a foreign language that are not specifically listed.

Overall, the main motivations for learning a foreign language are to pass exams and to improve communication skills, followed by career development. While other purposes have a smaller share, they also represent the learning motivations of a segment of the population.

4 DISCUSSION

It can be distinctly observed that Chinese students generally hold a positive and optimistic attitude towards foreign language learning. They are not limited to traditional classroom learning but also actively participate in various extracurricular activities to improve their foreign language proficiency. These activities include, but are not limited to, watching foreign language movies and TV programs, reading foreign books and articles, listening to English songs, tuning in to English radio stations, and engaging in self-study through various foreign language learning software and media resources. Additionally, they enjoy face-to-face oral communication with others to exercise and enhance their practical language application skills. This method of learning not only helps them better understand the culture behind the language but also improves their listening and speaking skills in actual conversations.

Survey results further reveal the close link between Chinese students' learning concepts and their participation in extracurricular foreign language learning activities. Students who believe that extracurricular language learning activities are helpful for improving language skills tend to have a more positive and favorable attitude towards foreign language learning. At the same time, students who actively engage in extracurricular language learning activities usually place greater emphasis on the practical application of languages, especially English conversational skills. They have high confidence and expectations for learning English, believing that through their own efforts and a combination of various learning methods, they can effectively improve their language proficiency.

Based on the latest research findings, the author observed that in traditional foreign language teaching classrooms, teachers are encouraged to adopt innovative teaching methods and media to enrich the content and forms of teaching. These new teaching approaches can not only significantly enhance students' interest in learning but also effectively increase their sense of participation and interactivity, thereby improving learning outcomes. For example, by using multimedia technology, interactive whiteboards, online learning platforms, and other modern educational tools, a more vivid and intuitive learning environment can be created for students, making it easier for them to understand and master foreign language knowledge. Moreover, these tools can help teachers present teaching content in more flexible and diverse ways, thus stimulating students'

enthusiasm for learning. Secondly, the research also emphasizes the importance of extracurricular foreign language learning activities. By organizing various forms of extracurricular activities, such as language corners, language exchanges, and cultural experience activities, students' interest in continuing to learn foreign languages outside the classroom can be stimulated. These activities not only help students consolidate and apply the knowledge learned in the classroom but also enable them to improve their language use and enhance their cross-cultural communication skills in actual communication.

Overall, these survey results indicate that Chinese students, in the process of learning foreign languages, not only value systematic learning in the classroom but also pay great attention to enriching and expanding their language learning experience through extracurricular activities. This comprehensive learning concept and positive learning attitude will undoubtedly have a positive impact on their foreign language learning outcomes. They recognize that language learning is not just for dealing with exams, but also for effective communication and interaction in the real world.

5 CONCLUSION

In this study, the author analyzed the far-reaching impact of English in China and the dual benefits of material and knowledge it brings, which has prompted Chinese students to learn English generally out of material interests. This learning motivation, combined with the humility emphasized in Confucian culture and the extreme importance attached to personal face, has led to an interesting phenomenon: students prefer to participate in relatively passive extracurricular activities, such as reading English newspapers, watching English videos, and browsing English content online. These activities do not require direct face-to-face communication, thus avoiding potential embarrassment and loss of face. However, this learning method also raises a significant issue: it limits the fluency and confidence of students in real English communication environments, especially in situations where they need to actively use English for conversation and correspondence. Therefore, although students may excel in reading comprehension and understanding, they may face significant challenges in effectively communicating in English in practical applications. This phenomenon not only affects the development of students' individual language skills but may also have a

profound impact on the overall quality of English education and international communication capabilities in China.

To address the aforementioned issues, educators and policymakers must take measures to promote students' English application abilities in real contexts. First, the education system should emphasize the communicative function of language and encourage students to participate in more interactive learning activities, such as role-playing, debates, and English corners. Second, teacher training should be strengthened to enhance teachers' professional abilities in communicative teaching methods to better guide students in practical language use. In addition, schools and educational institutions can cooperate with international organizations to provide students with opportunities for overseas exchanges, allowing them to practice and improve their English abilities in real language environments.

At the same time, families and society should also play their roles in creating more opportunities for students to use English. Parents can broaden their children's language practice platforms by encouraging them to participate in international summer camps, online English learning communities, and so on. Media and publishing institutions should also increase the output of English content, such as English radio programs, English magazines, and e-books, to enrich students' learning resources. Furthermore, the government should formulate corresponding policies to support the reform of English education, ensure the rational allocation of educational resources, and especially tilt towards remote and resource-poor areas to reduce educational inequality.

In summary, through the joint efforts of the education system, families, society, and the government, the practical application ability of Chinese students in English can be effectively improved, thereby promoting the improvement of the quality of English education in China and the enhancement of international communication capabilities. This will not only help the comprehensive development of students but also lay a solid linguistic foundation for China's international status and competitiveness in the context of globalization.

In this study, the author employed a questionnaire survey method to collect data. However, this approach has some limitations. Firstly, the sample size of the questionnaire survey may not be large enough to comprehensively cover students from all regions and different backgrounds. Secondly, the complexity of questionnaire design may lead to

certain questions not accurately reflecting the motivations and deeper thoughts of the respondents.

To address these limitations, future research can adopt the following improvements: First, expand the sample size to ensure the diversity and representation of the sample, so as to better reflect the situation of English learning in different regions and backgrounds. Second, combine other research methods, such as interviews and observation, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of students' motivations and behaviors in English learning. Through these improvements, the complexity and diversity of English learning can be more accurately revealed, providing stronger support for the improvement of English education.

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