

The Impact of Teacher's Attention on the Learning Motivation of Students with English Difficulties in Senior High School in China: The Perspective of Teacher-student Interaction

Yanting Zheng

Nanchong No.1 Middle School, Nanchong Sichuan 637000, P.R. China

ABSTRACT

Faced with abundant students with English learning difficulties in senior high, transformation has become the top priority. Senior high school students in China, especially those with learning difficulties, rarely spend time on English after class. As a consequence, more concern on them in the classroom cannot be neglected any more. The research tends to investigate whether teacher-student interaction in the classroom influences learning motivation of students with English learning difficulties. Based on Self-efficacy Theory and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development Theory, the paper is aimed to find out the relationship between teacher-student interaction in the classroom and students' English learning motivation. In terms of the findings, specific suggestions and strategies will be proposed for future teaching.

KEYWORDS

Students with English learning difficulties; Teacher-student interaction; Learning motivation; Self-efficacy

DOI: 10.47297/wspiedWSP2516-250008.20230702

1 Introduction

Education should face the world and the future, which emphasizes that it should start from the nature of human beings and the nature of society, and emphasizes the development of all students.

^[1] The so-called English learning difficulties refer to students with English learning difficulties, who have normal intelligence, but have difficulties in English learning due to acquired and external reasons, and fail to meet the basic requirements of the English Curriculum Standards.^[2] In this paper, the term "Students with English Learning Difficulties" will be applied. Students in the same class in ordinary high schools show great differences in academic level, especially in English subject. Students come into the classroom with differential amount of prior experience and accumulated knowledge. Teachers' negligence of differences between students may leads to polarization potential in scores, which suggests that we should pay more attention to students with difficulties in English.

Students with English learning difficulties have weak learning ability in English subjects, whose poor English scores lead to fear of difficulty, and lack of efficient learning methods makes them unwilling to spend less time on English after class. Zoltán Dörnyei points out that motivation is one of the main determinants of the second/foreign language learning achievement.^[3] English, as a second language, baffles Chinese students by its vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and so on. Therefore, other than subjects such as math and chemistry, students are required to recite some formulas and theorems so that they can figure out some relevant prompt instantly. Instead, language learning is a long-term process with learner's great persistence and perseverance. To sum up, in order to improve

the academic performance of a student with English learning difficulties, what is fundamental is to raise his or her awareness of learning English well, which means improve his or her English learning motivation.

Scholars have done a lot of research on the intervention of students with learning difficulties. Yingqi Liu focused on the cognitive structure and motivation level of students with learning difficulties, who made a large number of theoretical explanations and lacks of empirical action intervention research. Yu Yan explored the causes of learning difficulties of junior middle school students, and conducted intervention studies mainly from the aspects of learning strategies and non-intelligence factors. Taking a high school in Guangdong as an example, Haiying Zhou studied the causes of high school English learners with learning difficulties, analyzed the internal and external factors that led to the formation of students with learning difficulties. However, there is no further analysis and exploration on the adjustment of classroom teaching. Binyu Chen made a sufficient study on the learning motivation of English learners with difficulty in senior high school and gave suggestions from a macro perspective.

Through literature review, there exist deficiencies in previous studies. Firstly, few study centered on Senior students or Senior one students specifically. Secondly, looking through the transformation strategies of students with learning difficulties, few studies chose the perspective of classroom interaction. Therefore, in this paper, the author is committed to exploring the influence of teacher-student interaction on the learning motivation of students with learning difficulties in senior high school, hoping to find out the correlation between the two, so as to provide ideas for front-line teaching.

2 Basic Concepts

(1) Definition of students with English learning difficulties

The educational community defines students with learning difficulties according to the following criteria:

1) Students with learning difficulties are those who have significant differences in academic performance and potential due to psychological disorders.

2) Struggling students are those who do not achieve the average scores of an entire class, school, town, or even the national assessments used to assess a student's academic performance.

3) Students with academic difficulties are those who do not meet the standard requirements of the syllabus. The most notable characteristic of students with academic difficulties is that their academic performance does not meet the standard requirements of the syllabus, even if their physical development is normal.^[4]

In this paper, the students with learning difficulties mentioned by the author refer to the students with learning difficulties in high school English.

(2) Definition of English learning motivation

Zoltán Dörnyei and István Ottó identified the second language learning motivation as "the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritized, operationalized and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out".^[5] Robert Leslie Ellis regards motivation as efforts which language learners devote into language learning because

they have the desire to learn it.^[6]

In China, the second language learning motivation can be specified as English learning motivation. In short, English learning motivation matters a lot in completing tasks concerning English subject. Therefore, the author believes that in order to help students with English learning difficulties get out of this dilemma in the first grade of high school, more efforts should be made to improve students' learning motivation to enhance their enthusiasm for English.

3 Theoretical Foundation

(1) Lev Vygotsky's zone of proximal development theory

The theory of proximal development zone was put forward by Lev Vygotsky in *Thinking and Language* in the 1920s, which indicates that students may face two levels of development in the process of development: the first level is the current level of students, the second level is the possible level of students' development, and the gap between the two levels is the proximal development zone for students. In the teaching process, it is necessary for teachers to know about what students already know, and thus use slightly difficult tasks to stimulate students' subjective learning motivation.^[7]

In this study, Lev Vygotsky's proximal development zone theory provides a good teaching idea for effective teacher-student interaction in the classroom. Teachers firstly make an assessment of students' basic situation. Secondly, teachers assign suitable tasks for each student respectively. Finally, teachers can provide appropriate support for students with learning difficulties in class and after class.

(2) Self-efficacy theory

The theory of self-efficacy was first put forward by the famous American psychologist Albert Bandura from the perspective of social learning.^[8] This theory has been widely used in the field of learning motivation in language learning. Self-efficacy theory refers to people's judgment about their ability to complete a certain task. Self-efficacy not only directly determines how people feel and think, but also influences self-motivation and behavior. According to this theory, an individual's sense of self-efficacy affects the achievement of their goals. If the individual has a high sense of self-efficacy, he will tend to focus on the task and put great effort into completing the task. Therefore, how to improve the self-efficacy of students with English learning difficulties in senior high school through classroom teacher-student interaction has also become a concern of this study, and the answer can be found in the following content.

4 Research Methodology

Quantitative methods were applied, aimed to demonstrate that teacher-student interaction in the classroom has a positive effect on learning motivation of students with English learning difficulties. The first close-end questionnaire was adopted by Sujuan Ye in her paper, first created by Lu Yang and Xiaowei Liu.^[9] Among them, questions 1-34 are from Yang Lu's questionnaire, and questions 35-48 are from Xiaowei Liu's questionnaire. The second close-end questionnaire was created and first used by Yanzhi Liu in her paper.^[10] The independent variable is students' class engagement, and the dependent variable is students' English learning motivation. Statistics collected were analyzed by SPSS 26.0.

(1) Research participants

Questionnaire was assigned to 380 students from a senior high school in Nanchong, Sichuan Province. The average score of the mid-term examination and the monthly examination in May is proposed as the basis for screening. After the assessment, students with scores of 70 or below were selected as potential objects of this study. To sum up, In July 2023, the author issued a total of 380 questionnaires, recovered 249 valid questionnaires and selected 173 students with English learning difficulties.

(2) Research Instrument

1) English learning motivation questionnaire for senior high school students

The 48 projects in the questionnaire are divided into two parts with different purposes. The first part ranges from question 1 to 25, centering on the current situation (type and intensity) of learning motivation of English learners with difficulties in high school. The second part ranges from question 26 to 48, which aims to explore the factors that influence learning motivation of English learners with difficulties. The questionnaire is mainly structured as Table 1.

The questionnaire was measured by a Likert five-point scale ranging from "Not true", "Mostly not true", and "Not either true or untrue" to "To some extent true" and "True". After completing each question of the questionnaire, the score was positively accumulated. For example, if the respondent chooses "Not true", the minimum score is 1, and the following points are increased, and "True" accounts for 5 points.

Table 1. Variables in English learning motivation questionnaire

Motivational variable	Variable meaning interpretation	Number
Convergent motivation	Interests and aspirations to understand and integrate into the target language community	1-5
Instrumental motivation	Use English as a tool to achieve certain practical needs	6-10
Intrinsic motivation	Personal interest or need to learn English	11-15
Extrinsic motivation	Some external factors as a drive such as praise and rewards	16-20
Motivation intensity	The persistence, efforts and energy that are put into learning English	21-25
Self-efficacy	Beliefs about the ability to complete certain English tasks	26-30
Attribution	Explanations of students' previous success or failure	31-34
Needs	The real need to learn English	35-39
Goal setting	The purpose to learn English	40-48

2) Classroom teacher-student interaction questionnaire

The questionnaire all together includes 15 items, which are students' evaluation or attitude about T-S interaction. The distribution of items in the questionnaire is shown in Table 2.

The Liker T-Scale five-point measurement is adopted, ranging from "Not true", "Mostly not true", and "Not either true or untrue" to "To some extent true" and "True". After completing each question of the questionnaire, the score was positively accumulated. For example, if the respondent chooses "Not true", the minimum score is 1, and the following points are increased, and "True" accounts for 5 points.

Table 2. Structure of classroom T-S interaction questionnaire

Item	Verbal Interaction			Nonverbal interaction	Students' willingness in participating T-S interaction	Possible factors affecting T-S interaction
	Patterns of T-S interaction	Teacher's questioning	Teacher's feedback			
Item Number	4,5,6	12,13	10,11	7,8,9	1,2,3,12	13

3) The interview

The semi-structured interview includes interview with students and interview with teachers. The outline of interview with students originates from Siying Wang in her paper.^[11] Four students agreed to attend the interview and they were selected in terms of their English proficiency and learning motivation as well as classroom participation. The outline of interview with teachers originates from Min Gao in her academic paper.^[12] Three English teachers in Senior one agreed to attend the interview.

5 Results and Discussion

(1) Descriptive statistics of the learning motivation of students with English learning difficulties

Table 3. Students' learning motivation

Types	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.Deviation
Convergent Motivation	1.00	5.00	2.5341	.88083
Instrument Motivation	1.00	5.00	3.3121	.82724
Intrinsic Motivation	1.00	5.00	2.2277	.96264
Extrinsic Motivation	1.00	5.00	2.4543	.98550
Intensity of learning	1.00	5.00	2.3283	.80950
Self-efficacy	1.00	5.00	2.2775	.80276

According to data in the table 3. , it can be found that the mean of instrumental motivation is higher than that of convergent motivation for English learners with difficulties. In other words, students perform well in terms of instrumental motivation. The mean of extrinsic motivation is relatively higher. This shows that many students with English learning difficulties learn English for the sake of some external benefits.

(2) Descriptive statistics of T-S interaction

Table 4. Students' willingness of classroom participation

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Item 1	173	1	5	2.25	1.090
Item 2	173	1	5	2.01	.982
Item 3	173	1	5	2.37	1.137

Item 1. I'm delighted to answer my English teacher's questions in class.

Item 2. I will take the initiative to ask teachers questions for repeating or explaining the unknowable knowledge.

Item 3. I love participating in interaction with my English teacher in class.

According to the statistics results (Mean=2.25<3) from item 1, and statistics results of (Mean=2.01<3) Item 2, it demonstrates students' unwillingness to take the initiative to ask questions or answer questions. From the mean of item 3, we can see that interaction in class are welcomed than direct "ask

and answer”, indicating that students show the preference for being invited to take part in classroom activities.

(3) The correlation between T-S interaction with English learning motivation

The main goal of this research is to explore whether teacher-student interaction in the classroom has an impact on their learning motivation. So in this part, the author will resort to SPSS26.0 to conduct correlation analysis.

The variables used for correlation analysis are motivation intensity, willingness of interaction and self-efficacy. Apart from that, self efficacy together with overall result of learning motivation questionnaire will be included in the analysis. And the final results are presented in table.

Table 5. Results of correlation analysis

	Intensity of learning motivation	Willingness of interaction	Overall motivation	Self efficacy
Willingness of interaction	.514**	1		
Overall motivation	.706**	.589**	1	
Self efficacy	.724**	.527**	.711**	1

** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: overall motivation refers to statistics of the whole questionnaire.

As the above Table 4-8 demonstrated that the four variables were almost positively and significantly correlated with each other. It has been confirmed that there exist correlation between students' learning motivation with their interaction in class. The correlation coefficient between willingness of interaction and intensity of learning motivation is 0.514, and the correlation coefficient between willingness of interaction and overall motivation is 0.589, indicating that teacher-student verbal interaction in class will have an impact on students' learning motivation.

It was noteworthy that the correlation coefficient between self-efficacy and intensity of learning motivation is the highest, at 0.724. This can explain why Self-efficacy Theory works as one of the theoretical foundation. The more self-efficacy students maintain, the more they are willing to learn English.

Table 6. Results of regression analysis

Model	Unnormalized coefficient		Normalized coefficient	
	B	Standard error	Beta	p
1 (constant)	1.088	.167		.000
Willingness of interaction	.133	.017	.514	.000

The above table uses regression analysis to study the influence of teacher-student interaction on students' learning motivation. Since the correlation between the two has been analyzed previously, it can be further seen from the above table:

The regression coefficient value of “teacher-student interaction” is 0.133, and the significance level is 0.01 ($p < 0.01$), which means that “classroom teacher-student interaction” will have a significant positive impact on “students' learning motivation”.

6 Conclusion

(1) Major findings

Firstly, students with English learning difficulties usually learn English for some specific purposes, which means they lack interest in English or enthusiasm for the language itself. What's more, students with English learning difficulties have poor performance in self-efficacy. Challenging tasks are not suitable for students with English learning difficulties, for these tasks will baffle them and frustrate them.

According to correlation analysis and regression analysis, teacher-student interaction is related to and is expected to have a positive impact on students' learning motivation. Therefore, it can be concluded that increasing interaction with students with English learning difficulties would strengthen their learning motivation to some extent.

(2) Suggestions for practical teaching

Firstly, patterns of classroom activities should be diversified and teachers can attach more importance to group work. Students with learning difficulties in each group can be chosen as the "spokesperson" of the group to express the ideas of this group. In challenging tasks those with learning difficulties can solve these problems through group cooperation, and finally answer the question on behalf of his or her group.

Secondly, stratified questions serve as a great way of meeting different needs. For example, students with learning difficulties would be asked to answer some of the most basic questions like vocabulary transformation or fixed collocation, because such questions do not require analysis and reasoning, but only test whether they work hard.

Thirdly, broadening their vocabulary and making their attention maintained for a long time is an effective solution for this situation. There are some methods for reference:

1) Teachers can guide students to do review and memory of vocabulary in warm-up. Specifically, the key words and phrases of the previous class will be listed on the blackboard, and students will be taught to read and then given three minutes to recite and do dictation.

2) Multimedia equipment can be used to play bilingual videos concerned with current news or upcoming significant festivals in both Chinese and English to arouse interest.

3) "Blackboard corner" activity can also be designed, which requires the student on duty that day to write down the relevant three words, and share his or her ideas of selection in class.

(3) Implications for further studies

It is worth highlighting that T-S interaction applied to transforming students' with learning difficulties is a relatively new issue that needs more relevant studies. The findings illustrated above can provide a reference for further research. According to the limitations mentioned, some practical suggestions for future research will be proposed in this part.

First of all, a larger scale of participants from different schools and grades should be taken into consideration, because it can make findings more convincing and comprehensive.

In addition, with the aim of ensuring the validity and significance of the future research, scientific and authoritative research instruments are required. In terms of the research methods, more qualitative methods are expected to be adopted, like classroom observation as well as communication

with teachers and parents.

Lastly, a majority of previous studies have explored learner's motivation, but rare studies focused on one specific aspect of motivation to make the research more targeted.

About the Author

Yanting Zheng is senior high English teacher of Nanchong No.1 Middle School, and her research field is educational psychology, English language education and teaching.

References

- [1] Yao J. (2013) .A study on the learning motivation of high school students with English learning difficulties. Thesis of Suzhou University, 2013: 1.
- [2] Lin F. (2010). Emphasizing the cultivation of effective learning strategies for high school students with English learning difficulties. Education and Teaching Forum, 03: 77.
- [3] Dörnyei, Z. (1994). Motivation and motivating in the foreign language classroom. Modern Language Journal, 78 (3): 273-84.
- [4] Qian Z. (1995). Educational theory and practice for students with learning disabilities. Shanghai Education Press, Shanghai.
- [5] Dörnyei, Z., Ottó, I. (1998). Motivation in action: A process model of L2 motivation. Working Papers in Applied Linguistics (Thames Valley University, London), 4: 43-69.
- [6] Ellis, R. (1999). The study of second language acquisition. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, Shanghai.
- [7] Vygowski, L. (2010). Thinking and language. Peking University Press, Beijing.
- [8] Bandura, A. (1993). Perceived self-efficacy in cognitive development and functioning. Educational Psychologist, 28: 117-48.
- [9] Ye S. (2022). An investigation on the factors influencing learning motivation of high school students with English learning disabilities. Thesis of Central China Normal University, 2022: 54-55.
- [10] Liu Y. (2018). Research on teacher-student interaction in high school English classroom. Thesis of Central China Normal University, 2018: 55-56.
- [11] Wang S. (2022). Research on the relationship between English classroom assessment and English learning motivation in senior high school. Thesis of Central China Normal University, 2022: 66.
- [12] Gao M. (2012). Sociological analysis of the impact of teachers' attention on students' academic performance. Thesis of Qufu Normal University, 2012: 40.