

## **Fostering Child English Language Learning Motivation through Needs Satisfaction**

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**Abstract:** *It is proved that motivation, esp. intrinsic motivation plays a very important role in students' English language learning process. As intrinsic motivation is mainly influenced by internal factors which indicates the five needs, i.e. safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem need, apprehension need and self-actualizing need, the primary objective of this research is to find out how the five needs are satisfied in child English language learning process and how to stimulate and maintain their motivation to learn through needs satisfaction. The findings in this research suggest that the importance of learning English and the achievement of needs satisfaction should be fully acknowledged for both teachers and students.*

**Keywords:** *learning motivation, needs satisfaction, student-centered activity, interaction.*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1. Background of the Research**

As the affective objective was taken as one of the teaching goals in National English Curriculum Standards in China, much more attention is paid to learners' affective factors. Affective elements in foreign language teaching area involve motivation, anxiety, self-confidence, self-image, self-esteem, interest, inhibition, empathy, extroversion and introversion, etc. (Lu, 2004, p.17), all of which lead to differential success among second language learners, while motivation is often recognized as the first major factor.

Motivation involves the attitudes and affective states that influence the degree of effort that learners make to learn a second language (Rod Ellis, 2000). One of the most successful language learning experiences is still impressive in our mind. Towards the end of the Second World War the American military needed to train their personnel in the languages of the countries they would have to deal with. They arranged their short intensive courses, consequently, the students learnt fantastically fast. Why? Many linguists agreed that the reason was both the teachers and the students were highly motivated. They had the desire to learn, and there was the immediate need to learn the languages.

Language teachers and researchers often present a question to themselves: why do we frequently find individual differences among the same group of learners in terms of learning languages? Stephan Krashen's affective filter (motivation, self-confidence and anxiety) explains why, and among the three factors, motivation leads the list and is the primary determinant of second language proficiency. Additionally, if we have a thorough study of some popular teaching approaches, it is not difficult to find that virtually all experts value learner's motivation to learn.

Factors that influence language learning motivation have already been studied for a long time. Wang Duqin took five needs (i.e. safety need, belongingness and love need, esteem need, apprehension need

and self-actualizing need) into consideration in his book which was published in 2004 and took them as the main factors that may influence the intrinsic motivation which is much stronger and more stable than extrinsic motivation for language learning and then promoted a principle for learning encouragement in relation to Maslow's Need Theory. Shu Kangyun and Jin Hehua (2013) have also elaborated in their paper that interest and motivation are quite critical in child language learning when referring to field theory.

## **1.2. Significance of the Research**

Language learning is a lifelong endeavor. It could be a pleasant experience as long as language learners have continuing motivation for learning. English has been an obligatory course at the primary level of grade 3 since 2001 according to the new curriculum by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and even grade 2 in most developed cities and some developing cities these days, including Nanchong, a medium-sized city where the author works. Then, developing the students' motivation, confidence and interest have been given the priority.

What is more, since the child students (from grade 2 to grade 6) are now the pioneers in ESL (English as a second language) education, it is necessary to pay serious attention to their learning and try to improve the ESL program. However, most researches have been carried out to find ways to facilitate college English language teaching while the maintaining of child language learning motivation is paid less attention to. Thus, our present study will emphasize the maintenance of child English language learning motivation through the satisfaction of the five needs. This study, it was hoped, would lead to a better understanding of this issue and the subjects mentioned above, and help the teachers, school administrators, and language researchers to develop a more individualized instruction and appropriate methodologies that lead to effective child English language teaching.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Motivation and Factors for Consideration**

Motivation is the factors that determine a person's desire to do something (Richards, Platt & Platt, 2000, P.298) It is believed by some scholars that motivation can result in a conscious decision to act with a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to attain a previously set goal or goals. Motivation, commonly admitted as one of the important factors for one's success, can help us step out of boredom and go into interest, and keep us go on and on whenever we come across difficulties.

No matter what kind of motivation it is, according to Williams and Burden (1997), it is made up of four main parts:

- The desire and determination for an action.
- The interest for an object or an activity.
- The energy one holds.
- The maintenance of the interest and participation.

Thus, whether the motivation is strong or not depends not only upon the attitude one holds, but also how he indulges himself in language learning.

Previous studies have generally laid stress on how to promote children's interest in learning English so that children can learn spontaneously to some extent. Moreover, most foreign language teaching researchers emphasized the function of interest for English learning when they were talking about the motivation, and some of them even placed the two factors in an equal position. Actually, interest and

motivation are two of the affective factors that may influence foreign language learning. Sometimes the former is regarded as one aspect of the latter. Interest can be divided into active interest and positive interest according to its final efficiency, and be also divided into temporary interest and constant interest according to the time it lasts (Yu, 2005, p.27). Positive interest cannot benefit language learning, while active interest may transform into motivation which might have good influence on language learning.

Lack of motivation is a key factor in ineffective language learning. It can explain why most child students have great interest in learning English before starting to learn and in the early period of learning while their interest gradually decreases as they pursue learning and finally they lose enthusiasm for English study. Motivation promotes language study. Once a learner is motivated, their will to learn increases.

Motivation factors are usually divided into two main categories: external and internal factors. External factors include expectations from teachers and parents, educational system, learning feedback, encouragement and punishment, and challenging tasks (Wang Duqin, 2004). High levels of expectation and fine feedbacks like encouragement and praise stimulate motivation to learn, while criticism and boring changeless activities and tasks lead to the decrease of motivation. Internal factors originate from the basic needs promoted by Abraham, H. Maslow (1999) in his Need Theory, and language learners also have five needs in their language learning process which can stimulate and help maintain children's intrinsic motivation and will be analyzed in details in the following. Emphasis on external factors in language teaching tends to make the students foster extrinsic motivation, but because of the significance of intrinsic motivation for child language learners, internal factors must be more insisted in language teaching process.

### **2.2. Need Theory and Need Analysis**

Arguments for the learning and teaching of foreign languages are of many different kinds, but in one way or another they are all statements of underlying needs (Byram, 2001, p.467). Abraham, H. Maslow, the great American humanistic psychologist, has set up a hierarchic theory of needs (1999). All of his basic needs are instinctoid, equivalent of instincts in animals, and unconscious. These basic needs are physiological need, safety need, belongingness and love need, esteem need and self-actualizing need.

Those five basic needs above are talked about in general. Since a better understanding of learning needs help language teachers determine appropriate instructional syllabuses and teaching methodologies so as to motivate the learners in foreign language learning, Wang Duqin (2004) has already proposed five needs in student language learning process according to Maslow's Need Theory. Each of them is going to be illustrated in the following.

Safety need emphasizes learning environment, teachers and learning assignments, each of which can make the students feel safe and comfortable instead of fear towards language learning. Language context is emphasized here in order to meet the need for safety, which involves comprehensive input and anxiety banishment and in which use of native language is advocated.

Belongingness and love need indicates students wish to be accepted in a foreign language learning community and ask for friendship from the teacher and their classmates.

Esteem need bears some similarity with belongingness and love need, which suggests learners want to gain motivational support from others, praise and encouragement.

Classroom interaction have to be made much of in language teaching in order to meet the need for belongingness, love and esteem, which refers to the forms of interaction patterns taking place in the

classroom (Wang, 2003, p.138). Patterns popular with teachers are the following: pair work, group work and whole class activities.

**Pair work:** Pair work is where children work in pairs. It could be a competition over a game or cooperation in a task or project between two children. They could also do certain exercises or oral practice together. When children are doing pair work, the teacher usually circulates around the classroom, answering questions or providing help when necessary.

**Group work:** Group work is where children work in small groups. What each children do in group work is similar to pair work, only there are more members in the group. Group work is most beneficial when the activity requires contributions from more than two children. The teacher can join in each group for a while, but only as a participant not as the leader or inspector. (Wang & Chen, 2000, cited in Wang, 2003, p. 139)

**Whole-class activities:** Whole-class activities are teacher typically begins a lesson by reviewing prerequisite material then leads the group in a recitation or supervised practice or application activity, and then assigns seatwork or homework for students to do on their own. The teacher may occasionally teach small groups rather than the whole class and provide a degree of individualized instruction when “making the round” during individual seatwork. (Good & Brophy, 1987, p.353, cited in Richards & Lockhart, 1996, p.147)

Praise and encouragement can be employed in these interaction patterns, which facilitate the love and esteem need satisfaction.

Apprehension need means the desire to acquire knowledge and solve problems during student’s foreign language learning. It depends mainly upon the teachers in classroom teaching who should try to explore fresh and interesting questions and make the students indulge in classroom study.

Students need to identify themselves and experience success when we talk about the need for self-actualization. To achieve this goal, task-based teaching model pointed out by William (1996) should be introduced which emphasizes the utility of the language being studied. The main focus in this model is to accomplish tasks closely related to the daily life through the cooperation with others so as to identify student himself and get success. The teacher plays a critical role in this teaching model because he must guarantee the sense of reality when designing various activities and assignments.

Additionally, adoption of Flow Theory put forward by the famous psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi in 1975 and John W. Keller’s ARCS Model of Motivational Design had better be used for reference. The former points out most people worked efficiently with time flying when they indulged themselves into their work, such as dancing, surgical operation and solving math problems (Sun, 2005, p.64). All these feelings are called “flow experience” by Csikszentmihalyi, which can make students feel happy and belonging to the foreign language community rather than unsafe, nervous and depressed that would only lead to passive English language learning. The latter is a valuable model that involves four concepts in getting child students motivated to learn: attention; relevance, confidence and satisfaction. There are a variety of strategies a teacher can use to motivate the student to learn. However, when the student is not motivated according to Keller (1983), the teacher must work to first gain the learners’ attention, make sure the instruction is relevant, ensure that the student has a level of confidence, and be certain there is satisfaction in what they have learned. If used properly, these four concepts can stimulate and maintain the motivation for language learning and achieve effective teaching.

### **3. RESEARCH AND DISCOVERIES**

#### **3.1. Research Design and Results**

Due to the lack of focus on children's five needs in their English language learning process and the relation between the needs and motivation for English study, the purpose of the present study are as the following:

- To find out whether child students have the needs mentioned before.
- To identify the main obstacles in promoting and maintaining child English language learning motivation.
- To determine teaching plans and ways in child language learning according to the results of needs analysis which will help maintaining child students' motivation to learn.
- To test the hypothesis participating in present research will enhance the consolidation of child's motivation to learn English or not.

The subjects observed in this study are students who are studying in the Cambridge Young Learners English (CYLE) School in the city Nanchong and in Langzhong. Most of the students are pupils, aged 7 to 12 from Grade two through Grade six , who have little experience in English language learning. The teachers involved in this research are the teachers working in school of foreign languages of China West Normal University. They all have two or more years teaching experience, and teach the students on every weekend. The textbook used in CYLE School is "Cambridge Young Learners English Pupil's Book", which includes three levels: starters (primary 1-2), movers (primary 3-4), and flyers (primary 5-6). The general background information of the students and teachers participating in this study are listed in the following:

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Degree</b>	<b>Teaching experience</b>	<b>Students' grade</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Teaching materials</b>	<b>Study places</b>
T1	BA	3 year	Grade one	39	Starters(2)	Langzhong
T2: the researcher	MA	10 years	Grade one	38	Starters(2)	Langzhong
T3	MA	2 years	Grade one	35	Starters (2)	Nanchong
T4	MA	6 years	Grade two	25	Movers(3)	Nanchong

Video capturing device and interviews are the main instruments used in this study as the subject is child students and questionnaire is not easy to handle. The purpose of keeping the video image is that the researcher could check the transcriptions and examine the results at any time she wants to. And the main questions concerning the satisfaction of needs in child English language learning and motivation maintaining are in the following.

*Questions for students (in Chinese):*

1. Why are you leaning English?
2. Do you think English is a very useful language?
3. How do you feel when your teacher speaks English in class?
4. What are your favorite class activities?
5. How do you think of your English teacher's teaching in your English language classroom? Satisfied or not?
6. Do you usually become tense or nervous when you are studying or using English?

7. Have you ever tried to practice English with others no matter during the class or in your spare time?

*Questions for teachers (in Chinese):*

1. Have you taken notice of the use of native language in your teaching process?
2. What do you think is the major reason for lack of motivation in child English language learning?
3. What are your purposes of using interaction patterns in your classes?
4. What are the characteristics of interaction in your classroom?
5. What are your favorable classroom activities?

More specific questions were raised during the observation and interviews. Some of the questions were asked immediately after class in order to get immediate information and references. But most of the questions were asked in their spare time. Teachers participating in this study were invited to discuss together after class so that the researcher can get prompt answers at any point of their lessons. All the teachers found it was an effective way to reflect their teaching.

According to the result of observation and interviews with teachers and child students in the research, three main causes of lack of motivation in child English language learning are listed below:

- Unawareness of the value of English: As far as the author is concerned, one of the key reasons why child students are not highly motivated in learning English is that they are not aware of the value of English, and most of them are not really conscious of why they should learn English. Most of them regard it as a burden for they learn it simply because their parents or teachers ask them to. And some of them own ambiguous learning motivation. They learn it because they have to, or else they cannot get good marks and will be criticized or scoffed at by others.
- Pressure of competitive educational system: Lists of students are still made after an English language exam in some districts even though it was abandoned by Ministry of Education in China. It indeed encourages some child students who get high scores and have their needs for love and esteem satisfied, but meanwhile hurts the others who do not behave well in language learning and as a result, due to the lack of satisfaction of needs for belongingness and esteem their motivation to learn decreases a lot.
- Boredom in the classroom: The characteristics of current child English language classroom teaching are still teacher-centered and text-based. Its ineffectiveness lies in the fact that learning subjects and tasks are not closely related to the reality and it is difficult for students to apply what they have learned in communication. Moreover, advocacy of bilingual language teaching and emphasis on much use of target language in classroom teaching have led to incomprehensive input which makes child students feel upset and depressed in their language learning. Thus, as classroom teaching cannot meet the needs for safety, apprehension and self-actualization, students' learning motivation is unconsciously affected.

### **3.2. Pedagogical Implication and Workable Approaches**

#### *3.2.1. Awareness of the Value of English Language and Culture*

The first step to help stimulate and maintain child students' motivation (especially intrinsic motivation) is to build up students' awareness of value of the target language. For instance, English is more than a tool of communication. It is a carrier of culture, equipped with which students can appreciate many great works, expand their outlook, and in the end become the winner of life who enjoys what others

that are not good at English cannot enjoy, such as famous novels in the world, beautiful English novels and fantastic paintings. Therefore, teachers should inculcate this idea into their students through classroom teaching activities like story reading that introduces the culture of English-speaking countries, which arouses learner's interest for language learning so as to maintain their motivation to learn.

### *3.2.2. Maintenance of Motivation through Needs Satisfaction*

Suggested ways will be given in this section in which needs in child language learning can be satisfied to some extent in order to maintain intrinsic motivation to learn English and thereupon facilitate child English language teaching.

Firstly, we have to diminish child students' anxiety in their language learning process, since anxiety is an unpleasant emotion characterized by a feeling of vague, unspecified harm, which is seen as a drive, or motivator, of behavior in learning theory and one of the three affective factors which determine the degree of success in second language acquisition and learning (See Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, 1981). Use of native language must be stressed in classroom teaching. One point that cannot be ignored is that teaching materials and class activities should be understandable and meaningful. Imagine how students can participate in class activities if they cannot understand the teaching materials and what the teacher said. Franklin's (1990) has tried to find the reasons why teachers found it difficult to use the target language with the students who were learning French in secondary schools in Scotland, which include the size of classes, how the class is grouped and confidence in speaking the second language, etc. According to his analysis, we could find besides the teacher himself, the most important reason for using native language instead of the target language is the learning situations and students' reactions. Therefore, even though bilingual teaching is now popular with the schools and teachers in big cities like Beijing and Shanghai, much use of native language in classroom teaching for the purpose of explaining teaching instruction, teaching materials and classroom activities should be insisted according to the situation of child students in small cities and towns where big classes are common and target language context is usually absent. Understanding language instructions makes the students feel less fearful in their English learning process and avoid anxiety.

Secondly, interaction contributes greatly to child language learning because it is not only a medium of language practice, but also the means by which language learning takes place. Teachers are the key factor in maintaining their interaction with child students. First of all, teachers must try to remember all of the students' names so as to get rid of embarrassing situations in which he can only utter a "hey" instead of the name when he wants to say "hello" to his students or ask them to answer questions in class. Then teacher should keep an eye on students, listen to their opinions and beliefs and give immediate feedback. Besides, in order to make the students feel accepted by their English language learning community and maintain their motivation to learn, group work and whole-class activities should be favored more than pair work in child language classroom, especially those in small-and-medium cities.

Thirdly, using teaching materials creatively means to design English language courses in accordance with the real life. Only teaching contents are closely related to daily life would the students be more interested in language learning and have the desire to gain much more knowledge in order to identify themselves in language activities. Furthermore, lesson plans are suggested to be made aiming at satisfying children's apprehension need. For example, if the child students are going to learn food, the teacher could not only show the pictures of different food, but also bring some into the classroom.

After we finish all the activities, food will be distributed to each student or part of them depending on the size of the class. In addition, when teaching the words of movement, yoga can be introduced in classroom teaching in which children might learn some specific words and keep their interest in learning.

Fourthly, language-centered and student-centered teaching are favored in child language classroom teaching. It is the teacher's responsibilities to make use of the strong points of all those teaching approaches, such as the Silent Way, Communicative Teaching, and Community Language Learning (CLL), all of which claim that students should be encouraged to learn by using discovering methods and through problem-solving activities (Richard and Theodore, S. Rogers, 2000). Instead of a silent listener and passive receiver, child learners should be a principal actor in language learning classrooms who discovers or creates rather than remember and repeat what is to be learned. Only in this way can students have a sense of achievement, and at the same time they may become more interested in the language and in consequence intrinsic motivation can be stimulated and maintained.

Two proposals are emphasized here to achieve this goal. Firstly, teacher must be good at asking questions, considering when and how to ask and give feedbacks. This indicates that teachers should stop their presentation when necessary to invite students who have different ideas and answers, because discussion on different answers in which child students are fully respected might be a better way to facilitate student-centered teaching and encourage the identification of students, which is also promoted by Chen Yanlei in his article on children's lack of motivation in their primary school study in 2013. Secondly, task-based teaching is one of the approaches which emphasize student-centered language learning. Tasks designed in this approach must be meaningful and related to the reality according to Zeng Wenxiong(2005, p.35). Ma Xiaohui(2005, p.47) also places emphasis upon analysis on the tasks after which teacher should help the students understand what language forms and patterns can facilitate their task accomplishment.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

It is proved that motivation, esp. intrinsic motivation plays a very important role in students' English language learning process. As intrinsic motivation is mainly influenced by internal factors which indicate the five needs generalized by Wang (2004), i.e. safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem need, apprehension need and self-actualizing need, the primary objective of this study is to ensure the existence of learning needs, find how the five needs are satisfied in child English language learning process and how to stimulate and maintain their motivation to learn through needs satisfaction. Finally, we find that needs exist in child English language learning process, which are safety need, belongingness and love need, esteem need, apprehension need and self-actualizing need and which have not been well satisfied. Therefore, there's an urgent demand for needs satisfaction in English language classroom teaching. As most of the children are learning English in language schools, school teaching should be emphasized in maintaining child English language learning motivation, and the outcomes rely upon the teachers. A pleasant teacher-student relationship is required in child foreign language teaching. A delightful relationship could encourage the children to become interested in language learning before they have classes. And it is proved in the research that more classroom activities can make the children more likely to indulge themselves in English language learning. An interesting activity could help the teacher go on with his/her lessons more easily as the students tend to participate in it, and as a result, learn the target language from this activity. As a matter of fact, the satisfaction of the needs can not be fully achieved during one lesson only. Each step of satisfaction must take certain time to get up. So further research could take the factors above into account and additionally, take the study under longer-period observation and in larger scope.



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