Reflecting the Study of Foreign Language Learning Motivation in China from 2012 to 2021

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Abstract. This paper reviews the articles on foreign language learning motivation published in the core journals of Peking University and on CSSCI in the past decade from 2012 to 2021. The articles are collected from 31 journals, mainly from the theoretical research and empirical research on foreign language learning motivation in China, and from the development trend, research content, research object The research methods and tools are statistically analyzed. The results show that the number of studies on foreign language learning motivation in China has generally declined in recent years. Also, the number of empirical research is generally more than that of theoretical research. Then. the number of articles about the relationship between motivation and learning effectiveness is the largest in the research content. The overwhelming majority of the literatures studied by questionnaire alone or jointly; Among the research objects, undergraduates are the major groups that being researched as participants. Finally, this paper reviews the current situation of foreign language learning motivation research in China.

Keywords: Foreign language, Learning motivation, Reflections.

1. Introduction

Learning motivation is one of the key factors that affect the effectiveness of second language acquisition [1]. Scholars have different definitions of learning motivation because of different periods and research angles. In 1985, Gardener first proposed the concept of motivation. He believed that motivation includes four items: 1. learning objectives 2. Degree of effort in learning 3. Desire to achieve goals 4. Positive attitude towards learning [2]. Williams and Burden believed that motivation was a temporary emotional state before deciding whether to take an action, but the effort behavior was not included. Dörnyei's definition of motivation no longer emphasizes that learners' positive attitudes or emotional experiences must be accompanied by motivation, but more emphasizes the two dimensions of goal and effort in Gardner's concept of motivation [3]. Gardner and Lambert's paper was the first to study foreign language learning motivation. They conducted research on language learning from the perspective of social psychology and established the classic models of "fusion" and "tool" learning motivation, which deeply influenced the research on foreign language learning motivation in the following decades. Since the 1990s, scholars have expanded the concept of motivation from social, cognitive, psychological, and other perspectives, at which time foreign language learning motivation has shown diversified and dynamic characteristics. Since the 1980s, Chinese scholars began to study learning motivation. In the mid-1980s, the study of foreign language learning motivation also appeared. In the early stage, it focused on the relevant research of motivation theory and gradually developed into a combination of theoretical and empirical research. For many years, the research on foreign language learning motivation has developed rapidly in China and has made some achievements. Wu summarized the research and pedagogical importance of the relationship between motivation and other elements of learners and detailed the building of the primary motivation theory proposed since the 1990s [4]. The final model of motivational causality was developed by Qin and Wen using the structural equation model (LISREI) analytical approach after they identified 13 English learning motivation factors and a fictitious causal model of motivation for learning foreign languages [5].

2. Reviewing Foreign Language Learning Motivation in China

The author retrieved 48 articles on foreign language learning motivation published in the core journals of Peking University and CSSCI source journals from 2012 to 2021 through CNKI full-text database advanced retrieval academic journals. There are 31 Chinese core (Peking University) journals, CSSCI source journals and CSSCI extended source journals that have been searched.

The contents of these articles include motivation theory review, practical application research, motivation strategies, learning motivation influencing factors and motivation changes, internal structure and types of learning motivation. This study searches the collected papers from the theoretical and empirical research viewpoints and reviews the foreign language learning motivation research in China from 2012 to 2021 from four aspects: the development trend of foreign language learning motivation research achievements, the content of foreign language learning motivation research, research methods and research tools, and research objects.

2.1. The Development Trend of Foreign Language Learning Motivation Research In China

According to the article data retrieved by the author of this paper, the number of research results is counted according to the year, and the broken line chart in Figure 1 is drawn

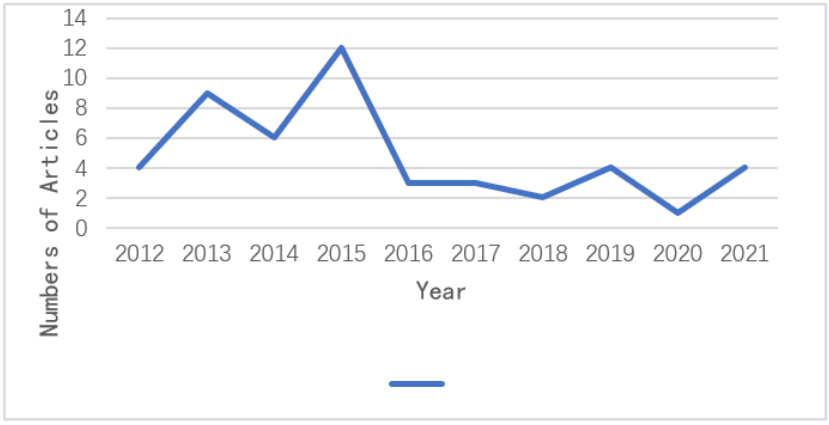


Fig 1. Development trend of research results on foreign language learning motivation in China from 2012 to 2021

From 2012 to 2021, the number of foreign language learning motivation research achievements in China has changed every year, but the overall trend is downward. The number of research achievements increased from 2012 to 2015, reaching a peak of 12 in 2015. At this stage, some scholars with high academic attainments also emerged, such as Zhou Cibo [6], Wang Wenbin [6], Wen Xiaohong [7], Zheng Yongyan [8], Wen Zhisheng [8], Lǔ Zhongshe [9], Yang Yuanchen [9], Li Jiongying [10], Liu Penghui [10], etc. Later, there was a turning point. The number of studies decreased significantly in 2016, and the number of articles fluctuated from 1 to 4 each year from 2016 to 2021. Judging from the number of citations of research results, the number of citations in 2012-2016 was far more than that in 2017-2021. The most study results were downloaded in 2015 as well, and in the years that followed, there was a sharp decline in downloads.

2.2. Theoretical Research on Foreign Language Learning Motivation in China

Among the 19 articles on foreign language learning motivation retrieved by the author, the research focuses on the following aspects: an overview of foreign language learning motivation research (Guo Xiaohua, 2013 [11]; Li Jiongying, Liu Penghui, 2015 [10]; Shan Yan, 2015 [12]), development of foreign language learning motivation theory and its practical application in teaching (Jin Haiyun, 2013 [3]; Zheng Yongyan, Wen Zhisheng, 2013 [8]; Chang Haichao, 2016 [13]; Liu Yudong, 2019 [14]), learning motivation Influential factors of individual differences such as linguistic competence (Yang Lifang, 2017 [15]; Zhu Ying, 2013 [16]), strategies to stimulate learning motivation (Wang Zhimin, 2012 [17]; Zhang Xiuping, 2012 [18]; Yu Qinglan, Wang Meiqian, 2015 [19]), etc.

2.3. An Empirical Study of Foreign Language Learning Motivation in China

Zhou Cibo [6]and Wang Wenbin [6] conducted a study of 766 non-English majors at a university in Zhejiang Province using a combination of literature research and questionnaire survey to examine their negative motivation behaviors and performance in the process of learning a foreign language. This study was one of 29 empirical research literatures that the author had retrieved. [6] In the same year, Liu Zifu [20] conducted a questionnaire survey on 992 left behind children from 10 township middle schools in Hanzhong, Ankang and Shangluo. Later, empirical research articles on foreign language learning motivation continued to emerge, and the research contents, research objects, research methods and research tools were also more diverse.

2.3.1 Research contents of foreign language learning motivation

The author carefully studied and retrieved 29 empirical research articles on foreign language learning motivation and divided their research contents into eight areas: motivation research status, motivation research of distance learners, internal structure of motivation, development characteristics and influencing factors of motivation [21]. The other areas include negative motivation and its influencing factors [6], the relationship between motivation and learning effectiveness, motivation adjustment strategies, and the theory of L2 motivation self-system and its implications for teaching. The number and proportion of research in various fields are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The number and proportion of empirical studies on foreign language learning motivation in various fields in China

Name	Current situation of motivation research	A study on the motivation of distance learners	The internal structure of motivation	Developmental characteristics and influencing factors of motivation	Negative motivation and its influencing factors	The relationship between motivation and learning effectiveness	Motivation adjustment strategy	Second Language Motivational Self System Theory and its pedagogical implications
Number	3	1	2	5	4	7	6	1
Proportions	10.3%	3.4%	6.9%	17.2%	13.8%	24.1%	20.7%	3.4%

It can be seen from Table 1 that the number of relevant research articles on the relationship between motivation and learning effectiveness is the largest, reaching 7, accounting for 24.1% of the total number. Learning motivation serves a strategic and propelling role. According to several research, pupils who are highly motivated to learn are better able to stick with their studies and perform better than those who are less motivated [22]. Learning motivation is mediated by the degree of effort. To effectively improve students' academic performance, efforts should be made at the same time to enhance students' learning motivation and degree of effort [23]. The proportion of research articles on motivation adjustment strategies was 20.7%. From the research article, it is found that most students maintain their learning motivation by improving their grades and mastering their goals, and less use ways such as improving their interest and imagining the results to stimulate their learning enthusiasm [24]

2.3.2 The research object of foreign language learning motivation

Among the 29 empirical research articles on foreign language learning motivation retrieved by the author, the research objects include four categories: undergraduates, postgraduates, middle school

students and other professions. Undergraduate and postgraduate students are divided into English majors, non-English majors, and mixed majors (including different majors); Middle school students are junior high school students; Other occupations are on-the-job policemen who take part in various police training at the Chongqing Public Security Bureau.

Statistics show that the number of articles in the research group of undergraduates is the largest, with 21, accounting for 72.4% of the total number. Among them, there are more related research on mixed major undergraduates, reaching 11, and the number of research articles on English major undergraduates and non-English major undergraduates is 5. The number of other articles on graduate students, middle school students and other occupations is small, totaling 8. The research on foreign language learning motivation in China mainly focuses on undergraduate students, while the research on foreign language learning motivation of junior college students, senior high school students, primary school students and preschool children is blank.

The author finds that most of the research objects use large samples, with the number of samples reaching hundreds to thousands. The number of samples used in four research articles is dozens, while the number of samples used in one small sample study is only four (Yuan Shuhou, Ji Yuhua, 2017 [21]).

2.3.3 Research methods and tools of foreign language learning motivation

From 2012 to 2021, empirical research on foreign language learning motivation in China has adopted a variety of research methods, mainly including questionnaires, interviews, test scales, data statistical analysis, teaching experiments, teachers conduct comprehensive assessment, video text analysis, final exam results, etc. Among them, 27 articles were collected by questionnaire alone or jointly, accounting for 93.1% of the total. The author believes that the reason for this phenomenon may be that the questionnaire survey method is relatively easy to implement, especially after many paper questionnaires are changed into electronic ones, many survey samples can be carried out without being limited by time and place.

3. Reflections on the Study of Foreign Language Learning Motivation in China

The study of foreign language learning motivation in China began in the 1980s. At first, it only introduced foreign research theories, and gradually developed into an all-round and multi angle thinking based on the teaching practice in China. In a word, the study of foreign language learning motivation has made gratifying achievements both in theory and practice, but there are still obvious shortcomings [25].

First, among the 48 articles on foreign language motivation in China from 2012 to 2021 retrieved by the author, there are 29 empirical studies and 19 theoretical studies. It can be seen that domestic scholars lack theoretical research. The research direction also focuses on the development, current situation, application, influencing factors, motivating strategies, etc. of foreign language learning motivation. There is less research on the internal structure of motivation, and there is no complete local motivation theory and theoretical innovation [26].

Second, many of the subjects in the empirical study are undergraduate students, and there are few research articles on the motivation of postgraduates and other professionals to learn foreign languages. Even research on the motivation of junior college students, seniors in high school, primary school students, and preschoolers to learn foreign languages is lacking. Each age group's motivation for learning a foreign language is unique, so more research on how different learning groups is motivated is required. Since motivation is changing, dynamic longitudinal research is required.

Third, the combination of foreign language learning motivation research results and practical teaching is insufficient. How to apply the research results of foreign language learning motivation effectively into practice, the strategies, and methods it adopts, and the feedback formed in the process of practice are closely related to teaching and students, which should be paid more attention to.

4. The Enlightenment of Foreign Language Learning Motivation Research on Teaching

4.1. Help Students Establish the Awareness of Learning Objectives and Formulate Reasonable Goals and Scientific Learning Plans

Research has confirmed that setting reasonable goals can improve the level of motivation. Each student has a different foundation, so they need to set different learning goals. Teachers need to have a deep understanding and objective understanding of students, correctly analyze students' strengths and weaknesses, develop strengths, and avoid weaknesses, and have a target [27]. When making a study plan, students must be aware that foreign language learning is not achieved overnight. It needs to be accumulated over time and persevered. They must be prepared for long-term efforts.

4.2. Pay Attention to Stimulating and Cultivating Students' Learning Motivation

Teachers can use students' instrumental motivation, result motivation, internal motivation, etc. gradually transform students' surface power into deep power. Make students change from "want me to learn" to "I want to learn". Therefore, the task of foreign language teachers is not only to impart foreign language knowledge, training students' language ability, and pay attention to the stimulation and cultivation of students' learning motivation. This is an important content that cannot be ignored in teaching [28]. In the process of teaching, we should first help students establish self-confidence in learning foreign languages and stimulate their learning motivation. Self-confidence is an important factor to maintain internal motivation, so students should be praised and encouraged more. Secondly, building a relaxed and pleasant classroom environment can improve students' learning motivation. Psychologist Bruner believes that the best stimulus to learning is to retain interest in the knowledge learned. When a person is interested in a problem, his efforts will reach an amazing level [17]. Through topic debate, group discussion, situational teaching, speeches, songs, and other forms of activities, fully mobilize the students' subjective initiative and stimulate their interest in learning.

5. Conclusion

This study examines and evaluates the findings of the research on motivation for learning foreign languages conducted in China between 2012 and 2021. It then conducts a theoretical and empirical analysis to identify the research's limitations, suggest areas for future research, and advance the practice of teaching foreign languages by integrating scientific research and teaching.

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