Journal of Education and Educational Research
ISSN: 2957-9465 | Vol. 4, No. 2, 2023

The Multimodal English Learning Strategies, Motivation, and Engagement among College Students in China

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Abstract: In China, traditional English teaching is teacher-centered, and students only passively accept knowledge. In addition, online language learning that is teacher-directed also needs to be further investigated. There is a glaring gap in how teachers explicitly examine how individual differences play a part in multimodal English learning. A questionnaire was distributed to 527 college students including English major and non-English major in China in total. With the results obtained from the data gathered, it was found out that EFL learners prefer to use metacognitive strategies more than affective, social, memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. They exhibit a stronger desire for career and economic enhancement, as well as a keen interest in becoming global citizens than communicating and affiliating with foreigners, seeking self-satisfaction, and integrating with other cultures. EFL learners demonstrate a relatively high level of social engagement, followed closely by cognitive engagement. Affective engagement and behavioral engagement also receive favorable ratings, albeit slightly lower. It is hoped that this research may be beneficial to the cultivation of English learning strategy use and to improve the overall English proficiency of EFL.

Keywords: Multimodal English Learning; Learning Strategies; Learning Motivation; Student Engagement.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, most colleges and universities in China generally adopted the traditional teaching mode, that is, teachers conducted face-to-face daily teaching to students through blackboards, multimedia and other teaching tools. In addition, some teachers prefer online teaching. However, its negative impact cannot be ignored. Some students get lost in the ocean of information when using the Internet for learning, resulting in low learning efficiency, and some students are addicted to online chatting and games, leading to the spread of Internet worms. How to give full play to the value of online teaching resources in offline teaching activities requires further research.

A few research have given insight on multi-model language learning, particularly in relation to the significance of individual differences in L2 learning. Lin et al. (2017) evaluated the influence of motivation and such methods in the feeling of self-regulated learning by looking at how learners are motivated and how they apply learning strategies in a variety of online language courses.

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on learning engagement. According to Steinbrenner and Watson (2015), measuring and comprehending engagement is a crucial step in figuring out how to give students high-quality, effective services because it is related to education quality and predicts children's later skills. Therefore, this study aims to determine the respondent's learning strategies, identify students' motivation, explore engagement, and hope that it can be helpful for the English teaching of Chinese college students.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Learning Strategy

Regarding the definition of learning strategies, different scholars or experts have different views. Badral (2017) stated that Learning strategies are intentional behavior and thoughts that learners use during learning to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information. A person's method of organizing and employing a certain set of skills to learn material or complete other activities more quickly and effectively in academic and non-academic environments is known as a learning strategy.

Oxford unveiled the strategies Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). This list describes the numerous language learning strategies that a learner uses to aid in the acquisition of a new language. Direct and indirect language learning methodologies were separated out by Oxford. The three types of direct techniques are memory strategies, cognitive strategies, and compensation strategies. Direct strategies entail direct learning and demand mental processing of the language. Indirect learning strategies—which include metacognitive, affective, and social strategies—support learning indirectly but are very effective (Zhang, 2021).

The variety and frequency of learning strategies used are correlated with language proficiency levels. In particular, highly proficient learners frequently use a wider variety of learning strategies than their less proficient peers (Giang & Tuan, 2018), as well as using those strategies more frequently (Foster et al., 2017) and more effectively (Chen, 2009) than their low proficient classmates.

Students who are highly motivated employ more strategies and do so more frequently than their less motivated classmates (Al-Qahtani, 2013). In fact, motivated students use a wider variety of strategies and are also better able to choose the most effective ones. In other words, motivation affects the learner's choice of strategy in addition to the general frequency of strategy implementation. This is consistent with other research showing that motivation and LLS enable students to create a strategic learning plan (Griffiths, 2013). When compared to discrete strategies, motivation does indeed

influence one's strategic plans and aid in combining metacognitive awareness with more general learning objectives. The completion of learning tasks is also motivated by motivation. Griffiths (2013) made the claim that both internal and external motivation have an impact on a learner's success. Therefore, motivated learning may result from positive experiences; however, this can be difficult in a setting with mixed-ability students. In other words, a learner's level of language learning confidence can either support or impede their language acquisition.

2.2. Student Motivation

Parsons, Hinson and Brown (2001) defined motivation as an important component or factor in the learning process. Learning and motivation have the same importance in order to achieve something. Learning helps students gain new knowledge and skills, and motivation pushes them or encourages them to go through the learning process.

The type of motivation answers the question of why a person is learning a language. The motivation here refers to the goal of learning a language. Many different reasons for learning a language could be listed such as: to be able to speak with members of that language community, to get a job, to improve one's education, to be able to travel, to please their parents, to satisfy a language requirement, to gain social power, etc.

Brown (2000) decided that studies on the motivation of foreign language students rarely refer to a distinction between two kinds of motivation namely, instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. According to Saville (2006), the integrative motivation in foreign/second language learning was defined as the desire to be a part of recognized or important members of the community or the society that speaks the language. On the other hand, the instrumental motivation involves the concepts of purely practical value in learning the foreign/second language in order to increase learners' careers or business opportunities, giving them more prestige and power, accessing scientific and technical information, or just passing a course of their study in school.

In general, motivation is broadly classified into two main categories of extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation refers to a desire to get a reward or to avoid punishment. It emphasizes the external need to persuade students to take part in learning activities such as homework, grade, or doing something to please teachers (Arnold, 2000). Both integrative and instrumental motivations are also grouped under the branch of the extrinsic motivation (Nasser & Majid, 2011). Extrinsic motivation is based on external outcomes such as rewards or punishments. This type of motivation could bring a negative impact on the students. Intrinsic motivation refers to learning having its own reward (Arnold, 2000). It means that the students are willingly and voluntarily (not compulsorily) trying to learn what they think has worth or is important to them.

Empirical research by Asadifard and Biria (2013) revealed the importance of motivational tactics for English learning for students. The need is the source of motivation, according to Wang (2009), who also noted the cognitive and emotional demands of middle school pupils in China. Hua (2020) noted that Chinese students' primary incentive is to earn their certificates. According to Zhang (2021), motivation is one of the probable characteristics that could affect how motivated first-year students are to learn.

2.3. Student Engagement

Student engagement was described by Kuh (2009) as the amount of time and effort that students invest in educational activities in order to achieve the intended and anticipated results. Students' engagement was viewed as a broad concept that could include both exceptional academic and certain non-academic facets of the student experience, and other researchers defined student engagement as the level of participation in activities that are associated with excellent learning outcomes (Kondal, 2015).

Engagement in learning consists of mental, emotional, and linked behavioral components. According to Fredrick et al. (2004), there are three distinct elements that make up learning engagement: behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement.

A comprehensive foreign language learning engagement was described by Philp et al. (2016) as a state of high attention and participation. Engagement affects one's social, behavioral, and emotional well-being in addition to cognition.

There has been a lot of international research on the factors that influence learning engagement, including environmental, personal, and social aspects. According to Skinner and Belmont (2010), students were more inclined to interact socially with peers who shared their level of interest in the subject matter. According to Stephen and Shaun (2011), the learning task and material, student assessment, different relationships, and instructional methods all had an impact on students' involvement. Pike (2013) discovered that teachers' focus, attitudes, and actions needed to be more supportive of their students' learning engagement. Learner engagement in online courses has been studied, and the online course context has recently been acknowledged as an important contextual component similar to offline instructional contexts (Deng et al., 2019).

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

The learning strategies, motivation, and engagement of Chinese students on multimodal English learning were examined using the descriptive design in this study. Descriptive methods are used to characterize phenomena and their traits. When gathering information, observation and survey methods are frequently utilized because this is more interested in what occurred than in how or why something occurred (Cresswell, 2015).

3.2. Participants of the Study

The 527 college student participants were from two universities where the researcher teaches. Raosoft software was used to determine the minimum required sample size. Researcher's classes for liberal arts (non-English) majors comprising 89 students, liberal arts (English major) 160, while for science and engineering majors 278 with a total population of 527 respondents were randomly selected.

3.3. Instruments

The primary tool used in survey research for data collection is the questionnaire.

Part 1 is an adapted Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Version 7.0 developed by Oxford (1990) employed to measure the strategy use of the participants.

Part 2 is the questionnaire based on a validated instrument the Foreign Language Learning Motivation Questionnaire

(FLLMQ-6), which has been applied for collecting data (Gonzales & Lopez, 2016).

Part 3 is student engagement scale (Lam et al., 2014). The four dimensions of engagement feature 4-items per scale and include: cognitive, affective, behavioral and social.

3.4. Data Gathering Procedure

In order to determine the extent of internal consistency between the three questionnaires' 124 total items, Cronbach's Alpha was first used to test their reliability. Thirty students were invited to participate in the pre-test by filling out a questionnaire. After pre-test, the questionnaire was distributed through the applet of the "Questionnaire Star" on the WeChat platform.

3.5. Data Analysis

The questionnaire was used to gather data, which was tallied first. The weighted mean was then utilized to analyze the variables. According to the verbal interpretation of the Likert scale, Strongly Agree went from 3.50 to 4.00, Agree from 2.50 to 3.49, Disagree from 1.50-2.49, and Strongly Disagree from 1.00 to 1.49.

4. Result and Analysis

The summary table1 provides an overview of the learning strategies across different key result areas. The composite mean scores indicate the level of agreement with each area, with higher scores indicating stronger agreement. The Grand Composite Mean is 2.98.

Metacognitive strategies have the highest composite mean of 3.03, indicating agreement. This suggests that individuals engage in metacognitive processes such as self-reflection, goal setting, and monitoring their own learning progress to enhance their English language skills.

The affective and social strategies categories both have a composite mean of 2.98, indicating agreement. Individuals employ affective strategies to manage their emotions, fears, and attitudes towards learning English.

In terms of memory strategies, the composite mean is 2.97, indicating agreement. This suggests that individuals employ techniques to enhance their memory retention and recall when learning English.

For cognitive strategies, the composite mean is 2.96, also indicating agreement. This implies that individuals utilize cognitive processes such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and analysis to support their English learning.

In the compensation strategies category, the composite mean is 2.94, indicating agreement. Individuals employ compensatory techniques such as guessing words, using gestures, or substituting words when faced with language challenges.

The provided summary table 2 presents the learning motivation of the participants across different key result areas. The Grand Composite Mean of 3.03 indicates an overall agreement among participants across all key result areas, suggesting a positive orientation towards learning and motivation.

With a composite mean of 3.15, this key result area: desire for career and economic enhancement is ranked first. Participants agree with the notion that learning is motivated by the desire to enhance their career prospects and improve their economic situation. This indicates that they recognize the importance of acquiring new skills, knowledge, and language proficiency as a means to advance their professional opportunities and increase their earning potential.

Ranked second with a composite mean of 3.14, participants show a high level of agreement regarding the desire to become global citizens. This suggests that they value the broader perspective and mindset associated with being connected to the global community. They aspire to be culturally aware, socially responsible, and engaged with global issues, acknowledging the role of education and learning in fostering a sense of global citizenship.

The third-ranked key result area: desire to communicate and affiliate with foreigners has a composite mean of 3.01. Participants express a strong motivation to communicate effectively and form connections with individuals from different countries and cultural backgrounds.

Ranked fourth with a composite mean of 2.98, participants express a positive agreement with the motivation for self-satisfaction through learning. This indicates that they derive personal fulfillment and a sense of accomplishment from their educational endeavors, which serves as an intrinsic motivator for their learning journey.

The fifth-ranked key result area, with a composite mean of 2.87, highlights the participants' motivation to be integrated with other cultures. While slightly lower in rank, this still indicates that they value cultural integration and intercultural experiences as a reason for learning.

Table 3 provides a summary of the learning engagement results across various key result areas. The grand composite mean for all the key result areas is 3.04, indicating an overall agreement in learning engagement. This suggests that, on average, students display agreement across different aspects of their English class.

Social engagement demonstrates a composite mean of 3.12, indicating an agreement level among the participants. This signifies that students agree or strongly agree with the statements related to interactions and collaboration within the English class. Achieving the top rank, the results highlight the significant importance placed on social engagement, indicating active participation, cooperation, and respect for peers and teachers.

The participants' cognitive engagement, as indicated by a composite mean of 3.10, reflects a positive agreement level. This suggests that students show agreement with the statements related to cognitive involvement in the English class. The second rank signifies the significance placed on cognitive engagement, indicating that students actively apply critical thinking skills and actively participate in their learning.

Affective engagement refers to emotional involvement and personal investment in an activity or task. When individuals are emotionally connected and invested in what they are doing, they are more likely to be motivated, persistent, and willing to exert effort. This emotional investment can fuel a sense of purpose and drive individuals to go above and beyond mere behavioral engagement.

With a composite mean of 3.00, affective engagement indicates an agreement level among the participants. This implies that students display agreement with the statements related to emotions and attitudes in the English class. While ranking third, the results indicate a positive level of interest, motivation, and enjoyment in their learning experience.

The participants' behavioral engagement received a composite mean of 2.95, reflecting an agreement level. This suggests that students generally agree with the statements related to observable actions and behaviors in the English class. Though ranking fourth, the results indicate the need for

further enhancement in terms of active participation and going beyond minimum requirements.

5. Conclusion

EFL learners prefer to use certain strategies over other strategies in multimodal English learning. Generally, they prefer to use Metacognitive strategies more than affective, social, memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. EFL learners exhibit a strong desire for career and economic enhancement, as well as a keen interest in becoming global citizens. They also demonstrate a positive inclination towards communicating and affiliating with foreigners, seeking self-satisfaction, and integrating with other cultures. EFL learners demonstrate a relatively high level of social engagement, followed closely by cognitive engagement. Affective engagement and behavioral engagement also receive favorable ratings, albeit slightly lower. Overall, the findings indicate that students are actively and positively engaged in their learning experiences.

For future researchers, more personal information of participants may be included to the analysis of differentiation, such as age, personality, city and region, Internet service provider, and equipment used for online classes. The sample of participants may also be further refined for other courses, and the sample size could be expanded as well.

Acknowledgments

We thank Dr. An, Dr. Beverly, Dr. Precy, Dr. Garcia, and many other professors for their significant contributions to my academic journey. This work was also supported in part by a grant from my friends and my family.

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