Business English Learning Motivation and Effort on Proficiency among Junior College Students

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Abstract

Language acquisition has a close relationship with learners' individual characteristics. The purpose of this study is to investigate the learning motivation and effort of technical students in learning business English. How they affect learning proficiency, and how all of them correlate with each other.

The results of this study are as follows. Females' learning attitudes are significantly superior to males'. There is a significant correlation between attitude and proficiency. Also, it exists between motivation and proficiency. The interaction effects among learning attitude, motivation and effort on proficiency are insignificant. The attitude, motivation and effort in combination accounts for 19.5% of the variance of proficiency. But, the predictor, "motivation," explains the most variance of proficiency, followed by "attitude." The conclusion is that the most effective method to obtain higher proficiency in business English learning is to increase students' motivation.

Key words: business English, learning motivation, proficiency, regression analysis

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商用英文學習動機與努力程度
對於技專學生學習成效之影響

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摘要

語言學習之成效與學生個人的學習特性有密切相關。本文之目的為探討技專學生在商用英文中之學習動機與努力程度，並研究其對於學習成效之影響及其相互間之關係。研究結果顯示：女性之學習態度明顯高於男性。學習態度與學習成效之相關性達顯著水準；學習動機與學習成效之相關性亦如此。學習態度、動機、努力程度三者間對於學習成效無明顯的交互作用。在學習成效的迴歸分析中，學習態度、動機、努力程度三個變項之聯合解釋變異量為 19.5%，其中以學習動機最具預測力，學習態度次之。可知，增進技專學生商用英文學習成效之最有效方法為提高學生的學習動機。

關鍵字：商用英文、學習動機、學習成效、迴歸分析

1. Introduction

Many factors affect the achievement of EFL learning. Two of the most significant factors are attitude and motivation. Learning attitudes refer to language learners' belief of their roles or abilities in learning a language, their feelings and their performances (Wenden, 1991). Learning motivation is "the tendency to expend effort to achieve goals" (Johnson, 1979) or "the extent to which you make choices about (a) goals to pursue and (b) the effort you will devote to that pursuit" (Brown, 1994).

It is shown that attitude and motivation are keys to learning. Brown (2000) claimed that if a learner has a positive attitude toward himself/herself and the native culture as well as the target culture, he/she tends to learn a second or foreign language with success. Psychologists consider motivation as one of the major determinants of academic achievement and work productivity (Keller, 1987). Researchers have indicated that it is very important to examine the individual differences in student motivation in order to describe and understand the connection between students' personal characteristics and academic achievement (Pintrich & de Groot, 1990). The stronger motivation and the more positive learning attitudes EFL learners have, the more effort and more progress they will make (Dulay and Burt, 1977). Oxford and Nyikos (1989) also pointed out that motivation has a great influence on how and when learners use certain language learning strategies. With positive motivation, language learners are encouraged to learn target languages, and thus they promote their language proficiency.

The effect of English learning attitudes, motivation and effort is worth investigating. Although there are many studies on EFL learning motivation in Taiwan, few researchers pay attention to junior college students' English learning. This study aims to investigate the relationships of junior college students' learning attitude, motivation, effort and their academic achievements in business English.

2. Literature Review

The roles of learning attitude and motivation in second language acquisition have been studied for four decades. Many of these researches have been initiated and inspired by Gardner and Lambert (1972). Gardner, and his associates constructed a framework for studying EFL motivation that has been influential since 1950s (Gardner & Lambert, 1959, 1972; Gardner, 1985, 1988). This social psychological theory has dominated the language learning motivation scene for about three decades (Oxford, 1996). Gardner and Lambert (1972) categorized two types of motivation: integrative and instrumental. The former is a desire to integrate and to identify with people speaking target languages, while the latter is a desire to use the target languages to attain practical goals, such as getting a good job. They extended their attitudinal research to three American states, and found that the English-speaking students who were highly motivated to learn French received good grades in French. Gardner's experiment (1979) also showed that 27% of the variability in second language grades was explained by ability or affective factors. Taking this into consideration, teachers should promote students' language proficiency and encourage students' interest in learning the language. Oller and his colleagues (Oller, Baca, & Vigil, 1977; Oller, Hudson, & Liu, 1977; Chihara & Oller, 1978) investigated the correlation of language proficiency and attitude with subjects including Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican students.

Learning motivation can be referred to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation behaviors are aimed at bringing about certain internally rewarding consequences, namely, feelings of competence and self-determination (Deci, 1975). Extrinsic motivation relates to learning behaviors performed to receive extrinsic rewards such as good grades or to avoid punishment (Dörnyei, 1998). Dörnyei (1994) developed a more general framework of EFL motivation to synthesize various issues of language learning. In addition, Williams and Burden (1997) investigated the motivational components related to EFL instruction and constructed a framework with internal and external factors. The framework has been tested in a sample of 75 Canadian students learning French (Tremblay and Gardner, 1995). Other empirical data were collected by Dörnyei (1990) and Schmidt et al. (1996).

In Taiwan, Zeng (1984) and Hsu (1986) found that junior high school students' learning motivation was significantly correlated with English grades. High achievers have greater motivation for achievements than low achievers in junior high school students' English learning. Tang (1989) indicated that there was a significant correlation between males and females, high achievers and low achievers in motivation, attitude, and teacher-student interaction. Chou (1989) suggested that Chinese children's English proficiency had a close link with their interest. Besides, Chang (1997) concluded that learners' negative emotions had a negative correlation with their learning motivation. Chen (1998) conducted a quantitative study to investigate college students' metamotivation in English learning. Ho (1999) investigated the relationships between technological university student's English learning strategy use and factors such as motivation, proficiency. Chang (1997, 1999) studied junior high school students' motivation in English learning. Chang (2002) found that students in higher level of intrinsic motivation group outperformed students in lower level of intrinsic motivation group. Su (2003) compared English learning attitudes, motivation and strategies between vocation-oriented students and college-oriented students. Huang (2004) investigated university freshmen's learning motivation, willingness to communicate (WTC), and frequency of communication in English. She also explored the relationships among these three components.

3. Methodology

The attitude/motivation/effort instrument consists of 38 items with a 5-point likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1 point) to "strongly agree" (5 points). It is a revised business English learning questionnaire adapted from Gardner's and Ho's questionnaires. Attitude and motivation questionnaire designed by Gardner (1985) includes three sub-scales: attitude toward learning English, motivation intensity and desire to learn English. Effort questionnaire (Ho, 1999) was adopted to examine the extent of effort that students generally invest in learning English. Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach alpha) was analyzed to show how well a group of items measures the same concept. The proficiency was evaluated by the average of midterm and final examination. The subjects are 93 two-year junior college students in Department of Applied Foreign Languages at Nanya Institute of Technology in 2003. Among 93 subjects, 7 were males and 86 were females. All of these subjects have the same training programs in business English course.

In data analysis, the author adopted SPSS 10.0 statistical package to compute collected data. There are three independent variables including motivation, attitude

and effort. The only dependent variable is learning proficiency. Descriptive statistics were analyzed, such as means and standard deviations. And then, the author ranked all of the items.

A number of t-tests were conducted to determine if there is a significant difference of learning attitude, motivation, effort and proficiency between males and females. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to understand relationships between three independent variables and a dependent variable. The probability level of significance for t-test and correlation analysis is set at 0.05. To reveal the main and interaction effects of attitude (low/high), motivation (low/high) and effort (low/high) on learning proficiency of the subjects, a three-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) method was used. Multiple linear regression analysis was adopted to determine the best combinations of motivation, attitude and effort predictors. Also, it evaluates the relative importance of each predicator in the relationships between predictors and learning proficiency.

4. Results and Discussion

The internal consistency reliability of each group of the questionnaire is analyzed firstly, and the result is listed in Table 1. Cronbach alpha values are 0.85, 0.93 and 0.90 for attitude, motivation and effort groups respectively. The overall Cronbach alpha reliability is 0.94. Nunnally (1978) provided a widely accepted rule of thumb that alpha should be at least 0.70 for a scale to demonstrate internal consistency. In this study, the Cronbach alpha values are all above 0.7. It shows that the present questionnaire is with a good reliability.

Table 1. Results of reliability analyses

Group	No. of Items	Cronbach Alpha
Attitude	10	0.85
Motivation	20	0.93
Effort	8	0.90
Motivation/ Attitude/ Effort	38	0.94

Table 2 shows mean values and standard deviations of various independent and dependent variables. The mean values of attitude and motivation are 3.94 and 2.80 respectively. It means that student’s attitude is positive toward learning business

English, but their effort should be improved. Two strongest attitude items are ”Business English is an important part of the school program.” and “I think that learning business English is useful.” The top three strongest motivation items are: ”After I finish this course, I will continue to study business English.”, “If there were English-speaking families in my neighborhood, I would look for opportunities to practice business English.” and “I often think about how I can improve my English.”

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for each variable

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Attitude	3.94	0.50
Motivation	3.48	0.51
Effort	2.80	0.61
Proficiency	3.27	0.98

The differences of learning attitude, motivation, effort and proficiency between males and females were analyzed with t-test. The outcome is listed in Table 3. The data in Table 3 indicate: 1. Females have higher learning attitude than males, and the difference achieves a significant level ($t = -2.59$, $p < 0.05$). 2. Females tend to have slightly higher learning motivation than males. 3. Although males work harder in business English learning, their proficiency is lower than females’.

The bivariate correlations between three predictors and proficiency are listed in Table 4. Both the students’ attitude ($r = .35$, $p = 0.012$) and motivation ($r = .43$, $p = 0.002$) are significantly related to their proficiency. A further look can be taken at the link between the students’ learning motivation and their effort in learning business English. The quantitative data suggest that the students’ motivation intensity is significantly correlated with effort ($r = 0.69$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 3. T-test of attitude, motivation, effort and proficiency for both sexes

Variable		Number of Subjects	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	p
Attitude	Male	7	3.47	0.41	-2.59	0.013*
	Female	86	4.00	0.48		
Motivation	Male	7	3.43	0.74	-0.27	0.788
	Female	86	3.49	0.48		
Effort	Male	7	3.06	1.03	1.13	0.266
	Female	86	2.76	0.54		
Proficiency	Male	7	2.67	0.98	-1.63	0.109
	Female	86	3.35	0.96		

* $p < 0.05$

Table 4. Bivariate correlations between variables

Variable	Attitude	Motivation	Effort	Proficiency
Attitude	1.00	0.60**	0.34*	0.35*
Motivation	0.60**	1.00	0.69***	0.43**
Effort	0.34*	0.69***	1.00	0.27
Proficiency	0.35*	0.43**	0.27	1.00

* $p < 0.05$
** $p < 0.01$
*** $p < 0.001$

Table 5 shows the results of three-way ANOVA of learning proficiency for these subjects by attitude, motivation and effort. The interaction effects among attitude, motivation and effort on learning proficiency are not significantly different. Therefore, the main effect of individual variable is more explainable. The p values of motivation are lower than 0.01. It is concluded that the influence of learning motivation on proficiency is significant for 2-year junior college students. This tendency is consistent with that of Pearson product-moment correlation analyses and that of Oxford and Nyikos' results (1989).

Table 5. Three-way ANOVA of learning proficiency by attitude, motivation and effort

Source	SS	df	F	p
Attitude	0.03	1	0.03	0.86
Motivation	2.71	1	2.84	0.099**
Effort	0.34	1	0.36	0.55
Interaction:				
attitude*motivation	0.03	1	0.03	0.87
attitude* effort	0.56	1	0.49	0.45
motivation*effort	0.13	1	0.13	0.72
attitude*motivation*effort	0.03	1	0.03	0.87
Error	39.99			

** $p < 0.01$

How do the three student characteristics as predictors influence the outcomes of proficiency? The information presented in Tables 6 and 8 provides the results of the multiple linear regression analyses for the sets of predictors.

Two multiple regression analyses were conducted to predict the students' learning proficiency. One analysis only included motivation as predictor, while the second analysis included attitude and effort predictors other than motivation. The regression equation with the motivation measure was significant, $R^2 = 0.18$, F change = 10.568, p = .002. However, the regression equation with the attitude, motivation and effort measures was not significant, $R^2 = .195$, F change = 0.406, p = 0.669. Based on these results, the student's motivation appears to be better predictor of proficiency index. Table 6 also reveals that the attitude, motivation and effort in combination accounts for 19.5% of the variance of proficiency, and the motivation alone accounts for 18.0% of the variance of proficiency. According to the observation of standardized coefficients in Table 7, the predictor, "motivation," explains the most variance, followed by "attitude." Both of p values of two models in ANOVA analyses (Table 8) are smaller than 0.05. It means that two regression models are suitable. But, the results of t-test

of regression coefficients in Table 7 indicate that the first model is better (p of motivation predictor < 0.05).

Table 6. Results of regression analyses for two sets of predictors (model summary)

Model	R	R^2	Change Statistics			
			F Change	df1	df2	p
1	0.425[a]	0.180	10.568	1	91	0.002
2	0.441[b]	0.195	0.406	2	89	0.669

[a] Predictors: (constant), motivation

[b] Predictors: (constant), motivation, attitude, effort

Table 7. Results of regression analyses for two sets of predictors (coefficients [a])

Model		B	Standardized Coefficient, β	t	p
1	Constant	0.413	-	0.465	0.644
	Motivation	0.821	0.425	3.251	0.002
2	Constant	-0.118	-	-0.109	0.913
	Motivation	0.670	0.347	1.588	0.119
	Attitude	0.286	0.147	0.877	0.385
	Effort	0.025	-0.016	-0.084	0.933

[a] Dependent variable: proficiency

Table 8. Results of regression analyses for two sets of predictors (ANOVA [c])

Model		SS	df	F	p
1	Regression	8.50	1	10.568	0.002 [a]
	Residual	38.61	91		
	Total	47.11	92		
2	Regression	9.17	3	3.706	0.018 [b]
	Residual	37.94	89		
	Total	47.11	92		

[a] Predictors: (constant), motivation

[b] Predictors: (constant), motivation, attitude, effort

[c] Dependent variable: proficiency

5. Conclusions

The research investigates the effects of learning attitude, motivation and effort on proficiency in learning business English. According to the results, conclusions are drawn as follows. Learning attitudes of males and females are significantly different. Females' learning attitudes are superior to males'. Pearson product-moment correlation analyses reveal that there is a significant correlation between motivation and proficiency. There is no interaction effect among attitude, motivation and effort on proficiency. The predictor, "motivation," explains the most variance of proficiency, followed by "attitude." The attitude, motivation and effort in combination accounts for 19.5% of the variance of proficiency, and the motivation alone accounts for 18.0% of the variance of proficiency.

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