

## MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS ON HIGHER VOCATIONAL COLLEGE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN CHINA

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### ABSTRACT

*This study at first investigated and confirmed 10 most effective motivational strategies in English teaching in a higher vocational college in China. And then a 10-week quasi-experiment were conducted to verify the effectiveness of these motivational strategies. After in-depth qualitative and quantitative analysis, the results showed that: these motivational strategies are proved to be helpful to stimulate higher vocational students' enthusiasm for learning English; applying these motivational strategies to higher vocational English classroom is conducive to improving the classroom vitality of higher vocational English; higher vocational English teaching based on effective motivation strategies is beneficial to the common progress of teachers and students.*

Keywords: Motivational strategies, Motivation, English language proficiency.

### INTRODUCTION

Stimulating students' learning motivation is an important issue that can not be ignored when all subject teachers carry out teaching design and teaching practice, which can directly affect the achievement of teaching objectives (Ahmed, & Al-Ward, 2020). This means that if students' learning motivation cannot be effectively stimulated, it is difficult for students to actively participate in classroom interaction and learning. More importantly, they mechanically cooperate with teachers to complete teaching tasks. The classroom effect is not obvious, and the teaching quality is naturally greatly reduced. Over the years, as a manufacturing power, China has been vigorously developing vocational education, because Chinese vocational education shoulders the important function of cultivating technical and skilled talents for China and is a key link in China's implementation of the talent power strategy (Zhang, Dai, & Wang, 2020). As a public basic course for all majors in Higher Vocational and technical colleges, vocational English in higher vocational education plays a very important role in cultivating professional and technical talents with good comprehensive quality for the country.

Facing the current situation of the rapid development of economic globalization, the development of higher vocational education requires further deepening teaching reform. In the higher vocational education requirements issued by the Ministry of education of China in 2020, it is proposed that "while cultivating students' practical operation ability, we should also cultivate students' lifelong learning ability, which is in line with the development trend of modern education, improve students' learning attention and stimulate students' learning motivation." (Yang, 2020) On this basis, it is proposed that teachers should carry out heuristic, inquiry, discussion and participatory teaching.

Therefore, on the basis of theoretical analysis, firstly, through questionnaires and interviews with higher vocational teachers and students, this study determines 10 most effective higher vocational English motivation strategies in higher vocational English teaching. Then a teaching design based on these motivational strategies will be made for the higher vocational college English teaching. After that, quasi-experimental research will be implemented to verify the effectiveness of these motivational strategies in the process of English Teaching in higher vocational colleges in China.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Learning motivation

Motivation is one of the key non-intellectual factors that determine the success or failure of foreign language learning. Its role is to stimulate the original motivation of foreign language learning and provide sustainable motivation for the follow-up learning process (Dörnyei, 2020). However, because foreign language learning is a long and difficult process, there will be many interference factors in this process, such as boring learning tasks and external influence, learners' learning motivation will inevitably fluctuate, or even reduce or lack of motivation (Teng, Yuan, & Sun, 2020; Susanto, 2018; Ranellucci, & Bergey, 2020). In the face of this situation, learning motivation must be adjusted and strengthened before learners can stick to it.

Learning motivation has different classification basis, different classification standards, and different types of learning motivation. According to the source of learning motivation, learning motivation can be divided into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (Ranellucci, & Bergey, 2020; Papi, & Hiver, 2020).

Intrinsic motivation is caused by students' internal learning expectations and needs, such as students' curiosity and interest in something, students' expectations and pride. The impact of external environment and conditions is extremely weak. Students study in order to satisfy their curiosity and use their curiosity to stimulate themselves to explore something. extrinsic motivation is caused by some factors other than students' own external environment, such as parents' reward, teachers' praise and students' recognition. Generally speaking, students with strong intrinsic motivation have a longer learning duration; Students with strong extrinsic motivation often have intermittent and short learning duration. Both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation play an important

role in English learning (Fadilah, 2018; Dörnyei, & Ushioda, 2021).

In the process of foreign language learning, both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation belong to the most dynamic factor among learners' many individual factors. Most scholars believe that learning motivation plays a key role in learners' foreign language learning results, but the effective motivational strategies to stimulate foreign language learners' learning motivation are different under different learning backgrounds (Kryshko, Fleischer, Waldeyer, Wirth, & Leutner, 2020; Hussain, Akram, & Hussain, 2021).

### **Motivational Strategies**

Dörnyei (2001) believes that motivational strategy is a means to promote learners' individual goal related behavior. It refers to the motivation behavior consciously taken in order to achieve the lasting positive effect of the system. Its purpose is to stimulate, strengthen and maintain learners' motivation and prevent them from being affected and weakened by other competitive behaviors. When continuous monitoring shows that the learning process slows down, stagnates or retreats, the use of motivation strategies can increase learners' investment and save learning behavior. In terms of empirical research on motivational strategies, Guilloteaux & Dörnyei (2008), based on Dörnyei's (2001) motivational strategies framework, proved the internal relationship between motivational strategies and learning motivation with empirical data for the first time.

In recent years, more and more scholars have paid attention to the study of motivational strategies in China. For example, Chen (2019) explored the relationship between learning achievement and motivational strategies through questionnaires and interviews, found that students' language learning achievement is significantly related to motivational strategies, and found that strategies that have a great impact on language include teachers' appropriate classroom teaching behavior, creating a relaxed learning environment, holding a positive attitude towards students' learning and protecting learners' self-confidence. Zhang (2020) investigated a college English teacher's understanding and use of motivational strategies using a questionnaire and found that the motivational strategies that teachers think are important are not often used in practical teaching. Wang (2020) used questionnaires and interviews to investigate the awareness of English teachers in a higher vocational and technical college on the importance of motivational strategies and their use frequency in actual teaching. It was found that the differences in the importance and use frequency of motivational strategies are mainly reflected in students' English language level, English learning evaluation mechanism and so on. Yang (2021) conducted a questionnaire survey and interview on a college English teacher's understanding of the importance and frequency of the use of motivational strategies. The results show that the teacher attaches importance to the use of seven macro strategies, but ignores and uses less strategies related to the target language culture, and pays more attention to but uses less other strategies.

In a word, most of these studies aim to explore a set of teaching strategies that can effectively stimulate students' motivation (Chen, 2018; Yu, 2019; Zhang, 2020; Wang, 2020; Yang, 2021), but there are few empirical studies to investigate and analyze motivation strategies and prove the effectiveness of these strategies by classroom teaching experiments. Therefore, this study will integrate the two research methods of investigation and experimental research, in order to explore the effective motivational strategies in Higher Vocational English Teaching in China and verify the effectiveness of these motivational strategies in practical classroom teaching.

## **RESEARCH THEORETICAL BASE**

### **Expectancy value theory**

Expected value theory is summarized by Atkinson on the basis of Lewin's synthetic price-effect theory (Liu, Wang, Reeve, Kee, & Chian, 2020). Its core idea is: individual motivation towards success = achievement need \* expectation level \* incentive value, in which achievement need refers to the individual's desire to strive to complete a task, which is embedded in the individual's personality and has stability; Expectation level refers to the individual's inner evaluation of whether they can complete a task. There are great differences among individuals, so their expectation level is also different, and their achievements in completing a task are very different; Incentive value refers to the individual's satisfaction or pride in their excellent achievements. In this case, the more complex the tasks provided by teachers, the more efforts individuals are willing to make, and the more satisfaction or pride they gain after completing the learning tasks. For example, when a person plays a game, the satisfaction of trying hard to pass the pass is always stronger than that of passing the pass at one time.

### **Self-efficacy theory**

Psychologist Bandura put forward self-efficacy. He believes that self-efficacy is an individual's judgment that he is competent and can complete an event with quality and quantity. Bandura believes that there are many sources of self-efficacy, mainly manifested in the results of achievement performance, alternative experience, verbal persuasion and emotional stimulation, that is to say, these four main sources constitute self-efficacy (Lee, Gardner, & Lau, 2020). Among them, the results of achievement performance refer to individuals' efforts to harvest fruitful results according to their own knowledge and experience, is the main aspect of self-efficacy. Generally, if an individual feels successful in learning a task, his self-efficacy will naturally increase, but if an individual is frustrated again and again in learning a task, his self-efficacy will decline sharply; Alternative experience, in addition to relying on self diligence and hard work, individuals also choose objects they yearn for and admire from their living environment (family, school and social environment), observe and imitate their behavior, and form a sense of self-efficacy; Verbal persuasion, individuals can ask their relatives and friends for suggestions or motivate themselves, so that they can confidently do tasks that have not been completed before and improve their sense of self-efficacy. This method is relatively simple to implement, but the sense of efficacy generated through it is weak and short-lived; Emotional stimulation, individuals rely on their own high emotions to stimulate the generation of self-efficacy. Self efficacy is an individual's prediction of his problem-solving ability, which is easily disturbed by the individual's evaluation of self-expression and the impact of the external environment.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

### Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the most effective motivational strategies in Higher Vocational English teaching?
- (2) Can the English teaching design based on effective motivation strategies improve higher vocational students' English learning motivation and English learning proficiency?

### Research Objects

The first stage of this study is to study and analyze the effective motivation strategies in English Teaching in Higher Vocational Colleges in China. The subjects of this phase are 400 non-English majors and 40 teachers engaged in higher vocational teaching in a vocational college in southern China. These students have received one year of higher vocational English teaching, and these teachers are experienced teachers who have been engaged in higher vocational English teaching for many years.

In the second stage of this study, a quasi-experiment will be conducted to verify whether the higher vocational English teaching design based on effective motivational strategies can improve higher vocational students' English learning motivation and English learning achievement. The subjects of this stage are two non-English teaching classes in grade one of a vocational college in southern China, namely the experimental class and the control class. In order to avoid the ethical problems caused by experimental control, this study refers to the quasi-experimental research design of Moskovsky et al. (2013) and Alrabai (2016), and matches the experimental class and the control class according to the students' major, English level, teachers' education, professional background, teaching age, students' teaching evaluation scores and other indicators. There are 49 students in the experimental class and 50 students in the control class. There was no significant difference in English level between the experimental class and the control class ( $P = .58$ ), and the teachers of the experimental class and the control class were the same person.

### Research Tools and Data Collection

In this study, teachers' motivation strategies questionnaire, English learning motivation scale, group interview outline and standardized English test questions are used to collect the data of teachers' motivation strategies, students' motivation level and students' English achievement. The overall reliability coefficients (Cronbach's alpha) of teachers' motivation strategy questionnaire and English Learning Motivation Scale were .85 and .78. The outline of group interview and standardized English test questions have been evaluated by English teaching experts and meet the requirements of reliability and validity.

### Data Analysis

The researchers input the quantitative data of motivational strategies and English learning motivation into SPSS 20.0 for further analysis. The qualitative data of the group interview adopts the coding method of the combination of established coding and open coding (Miles & Huberman 1994), which focuses on the topics of motivation strategies, English learning motivation, English learning interest and so on. In order to ensure the reliability of data analysis, the two researchers independently completed the interview data coding, and reached an agreement on the inconsistent parts after consultation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on all the analysis of the investigation on both students and teachers in the first phase, combined with the requirements of the text book and the syllabus of the course, the experts finally determined the ten most effective motivation strategies for Higher Vocational English teaching, as shown in the table below:

**Table 4.1 The most effective motivational strategies recognized by the experts**

Item	Most effective motivational strategies
1	Show enthusiasm for teaching and be a good example for students.
2	Establish good rapport with students.
3	Teachers' sharing EFL learning experiences with students
4	Make students know that it is normal to make a mistake during learning process.
5	Recognize students' efforts and achievement.
6	Provide students with positive feedback.
7	Encourage students to cooperate with each other through group activities
8	Make class easy to understand.
9	Increase learners' goal-orientedness
10	Promote effort attributions.

In the second phase of the study, before the experiment, pre-test and post-test were implemented. And the results on the pre-test and independent-Sample T test on the data of the pre-test marks of the two classes were concluded through the SPSS25.0 system. The results showed that there was no significant difference. After the experiment, the post-test was given to the experimental class (Class A) and the control class (Class B) respectively. And then descriptive statistics on the post-test (Table 4.2) and independent-Sample T test on the data of the post-test marks of the two classes (Table 4.3) was concluded through the SPSS25.0. The results are as follows.

**Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics on the Post-test of English language proficiency**

Class	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
A	49	80.6413	9.0465	1.13537
B	50	89.7825	7.3582	.90885

**Table 4.3 Independent Samples Test (the Post-test) of English language proficiency**

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means				
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
.487	.479	-6.348	97	.000	-9.15478	1.50269

After 10-week experiment, we can see that the average score of Class A was 80.6413, while the average score of Class B increased to 89.7825. We can see that the average score of Class B is 9.1412 points higher than that of Class A after the experiment. In the variance homogeneity test, sig(2-tailed)=.000 <.05, there is statistically significant, showing the English language proficiency of two classes has significant differences, and the Class B is much better than Class A on the learning.

**Table 4.4 Comparison of Descriptive Statistics on the Motivational Intensity**

Motivation Intensity	Class	N	Mean		Std. Deviation
			Before experiment	after experiment	
	A	49	2.315	2.127	0.732
	B	50	2.278	3.493	0.765

As is shown in Table 4.4, in terms of motivational intensity, after implementing the motivational strategies experiment, the average motivational intensity of Class A is 2.127, which is 0.188 less than that of pre-implementation phase. The average motivational intensity of Class B is 3.493 points, which is 1.215 more than that of pre-implementation phase. The comparison means that the subjects of the experimental class has reported a moderate high level of being motivated, which is significantly higher than that of pre-implementation phase (mean difference=0.95). There was a highly significant difference between the two classes in terms of motivation intensity before and after the motivational strategies modules implementation (t=5.426; sig.(2-tailed)=.002 >.05). The pre-implementation and post-implementation data have indicated that the teaching based on the effective motivational strategies have exerted obviously positive effect on vocational college students' motivational intensity.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the investigation of the current situation, this study puts forward 10 effective motivational strategies in line with the reality of higher vocational English teaching, and uses these motivational strategies to carry out application research in higher vocational English classrooms. The first finding of the study is to summarize the ten most effective motivational strategies recognized by students and teachers. Another finding of the study is that these motivational strategies are proved to be helpful to stimulate higher vocational students' enthusiasm for learning English. It is found that these ten effective strategies can arouse and maintain students' attention, improve students' inquiry ability, and promote higher vocational students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in English learning. At the same time, these strategies can also improve students' self-efficacy, enhance students' English learning confidence, cultivate students' learning willpower, and improve students' language expression ability, cooperation ability and understanding ability to a certain extent.

The results also show that applying these motivational strategies to higher vocational English classroom is conducive to improving the classroom vitality of higher vocational English. Based on these 10 motivational strategies, the teaching design of motivational strategies is carried out. In the teaching application, the forms of situation simulation, role play and problem exploration are used to attract and maintain students' attention; By clarifying the learning value, guide students to establish the relationship between new knowledge and old knowledge, life and work, and clarify the value of learning content; Set an example for students and enhance their expectation of learning through guest interpretation, "little teacher teaching" and other forms; In the dimension of self-confidence, clearly show students the learning objectives or evaluation criteria, and properly attribute the learning results, so that students can form a psychological set to accumulate successful experience; In addition, it also allows or encourages students to decide learning steps and choose learning tasks, and control behavior and feedback through such autonomous decisions, so as to enhance students' ability of self-management. Promoting the application of motivation strategy in higher vocational English teaching in this way not only breaks the shackles of traditional teaching methods, improves the vitality of higher vocational English classroom, and creates a relaxed and pleasant classroom atmosphere and harmonious teacher-student relationship, and makes students have full autonomy in higher vocational English classroom, but also makes them have a stronger sense of participation.

The fourth finding is that higher vocational English teaching based on effective motivation strategies is beneficial to the common progress of teachers and students. Motivation strategies can effectively stimulate students' learning motivation, enhance students' learning enthusiasm, and provide the possibility for students to make great progress. It is found that students' increasingly significant learning motivation and strong thirst for knowledge will also stimulate teachers' interest in active teaching. In order to meet students' needs for learning, teachers must spend more time and energy on teaching design, which can promote the improvement of teachers' teaching skills. In addition, in the teaching preparation stage based on motivation strategies, teachers must construct or screen motivation strategies according to the teaching content and the learning situation of teaching objects, which can help teachers further enhance their teaching design ability. The application of various motivational strategies also tests teachers' abilities of language organization, knowledge construction and classroom control. After class, teachers should evaluate the teaching effect according to the classroom atmosphere, teaching order and students' performance, which is also helpful to the progress of teachers' reflective ability. It can be seen that English Teaching in Higher Vocational Colleges Based on effective motivation strategies can not only promote the enhancement of students' learning ability, but also promote the improvement of teachers' teaching level, which is conducive to the common progress of teachers and students.

To sum up, English teaching in higher vocational colleges based on effective motivation strategies has a positive impact on students' progress, teaching development and teachers' improvement, enriches the form of teaching design, and has certain practical significance in theoretical reference and practical guidance.

This study also has the following deficiencies: due to the limitation of the scope and quantity of investigation and research, the effective motivational strategies investigation in higher vocational English teaching may not be fully representative. The English teaching design based on motivational strategies is mainly aimed at the first grade students in a higher vocational college, and this design may be incomplete; Finally, due to the factors affecting students' learning motivation, in addition to the influence in school learning and life, there are many other objective factors. This experiment ignores the general environment, such as society and family. The problems involved are more one-sided and need further reflection.

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