

Students' learning motivation in English for specific purpose in Chinese universities

Xu Guosheng, Zhang Xiaoyu, Qian Baihui

Department of Basic Subjects, Shandong Huayu University of Technology, Dezhou, China

Article Info

Article history:

Received Nov 29, 2023

Revised Dec 26, 2024

Accepted Jan 23, 2024

Keywords:

Chinese private university
English for specific purposes
Language learning
Learning motivation
Teaching practices

ABSTRACT

A large number of studies at home and abroad have demonstrated the importance of university students' English learning motivation, but few studies have focused on a certain field, or students' major particularly under the context of Chinese private university. This research explores students' motivation to learn English for specific purposes (ESP), and 123 student participants majoring in mechanical and electronic engineering in Shandong Huayu University of Technology participated in the research. Data are presented qualitatively and quantitatively. Students filled in a quantitative questionnaire about learning motivation, then SPSS27 was used to analyze relevant data. In addition, focus group interview, as a qualitative means, was used in the research, and 12 student participants who were going to attend ESP class showed their opinions in the group interview. The results showed that students' learning motivation comes more from teachers' personal charm, harmonious teacher-student relationship and comfortable and warm learning environment, while setting difficult tasks for them is not their main motivation. The research results provide a useful reference for teachers to adopt teaching practices that motivate students to learn in ESP class.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](#) license.



Corresponding Author:

Xu Guosheng

Department of Basic Subjects, Shandong Huayu University of Technology

Dezhou, Shandong, China

Email: 1315329804@qq.com

1. INTRODUCTION

With the policy of "reform and opening up" in China, English has become increasingly important as an international lingua franca. In order to cultivate applied talents and English talents in professional fields, English for general purposes (EGP) teaching has been shifted towards English for specific purposes (ESP) teaching in Chinese universities to meet the needs of English learning in different majors and sectors. Therefore, the training for English talents can be accelerated if students' learning motivation in ESP teaching and the most inspiring ESP teaching strategies are found out. There are a lot of explorations about EGP learning motivation and teaching strategies at home and abroad, but there are few studies on the relationship between ESP learning motivation and teaching strategies. In a few studies on ESP learning motivation, most participants are English majors, like business English majors, and there are even fewer studies on ESP learning motivation for non-English majors.

A number of empirical studies have shown the importance of motivational strategies in strengthening students' acquirement of knowledge in EGP class. In other words, the motivational strategies adopted by teachers are obviously positively correlated with students' learning outcomes. Dörnyei [1] pointed out that learning motivation, as one of the fundamental factors that determine students' learning outcomes, can help students acquire the language knowledge persistently. According to the study of Rahardjo and Pertiwi [2],

there is a significant correlation between motivation and learning achievement for secondary school students. A stronger learning motivation makes students more immersed in the learning process, and the enhancement of immersion improves students learning outcomes [3]. Chinese government in recent years, attached great importance to immersive learning by encouraging teachers to adopt corresponding motivational strategies.

Studies both at home and abroad show the important role of teachers in motivating students' English learning. In China, a country where Confucianism is emphasized, the teacher gains a lot of respects from students, and a Chinese knowledgeable English teacher is more likely to motivate students to acquire English grammar knowledge [4]. Yang [5] held that English teachers' non-verbal behaviors including gestures and smiling, significantly impact students' English learning motivation in Chinese senior high schools. Studies in other parts of the world also suggest the important role of teachers in students' English learning. Students' knowledge gained in second language learning is related to teaching style, and teachers play an important role in influencing students' second language acquisition [6]. Khalilzadeh and Khodi [7] argued "teachers' conscientiousness personality trait had a positive effect on students' intrinsic-motivation-knowledge", while "their extraversion personality trait had a negative effect on students' intrinsic-motivation-accomplishment, and knowledge". Students, under special context, are more likely to set a high requirement for EGP teachers, for example, students are expected to master good methods and have good personality "in teaching and learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic" [8].

The personality traits of teachers and students are correlated with "the teacher-student relationship in terms of affiliation or influence" [9], so the bilateral relationship can also make the students more motivated to learn. Henry and Thorsen [10] pointed out that a harmonious relationship between teachers and students is "important for students' second language motivation" and "interpersonal interactions stimulate motivated behavior". Specifically, a "supportive teacher-student relationship" is also conducive to the motivational improvement of struggling English learners who have "medium intrinsic and utility value and low self-efficacy" [11]. Both teacher's charming personality and a harmonious teacher-student relationship can contribute to a warm learning atmosphere. Bugaj *et al.* [12] argued that a relaxing learning atmosphere, in which students are encouraged to express opinions and mistakes are "not seen as something bad", together with teachers who are "kind and open towards their students", can make student more motivated to learn. In terms of Chinese EFL learners, a learning atmosphere where students are not afraid of speaking, and are willing to take risks, is more likely to "stimulate students' learning motivation in college English" (EGP for Chinese college students) [13].

A moderately difficult task or project can to some degree enhance students' motivation to learn English. As for college English teaching, Chinese government greatly advocates the educational concept - outcome-based education (OBE), that means, students can complete a task or project to improve their English proficiency and overall individual ability, thus enhancing their interest in English learning. Sometimes, a challenging task, can motivate students to learn, and help them obtain a sense of achievement. "The project-based learning (PBL) -based pedagogics under OBE concept" enhanced students' ability to coordinate with each other within a team, and the ability to put the knowledge into practice, thus motivating them to better acquire knowledge [14]. Shin's study results also support the idea that "PBL has a positive influence in students' motivation and is able to enhance their cooperation skills as well" in EGP [15]. The setting of a task can encourage the vocational high school teachers to enjoy teaching, and the students to enjoy learning, "if the teaching strategy is more PBL style" [16]. While the PBL does not always work for the improvement of students' motivation. The most obvious factor demotivating students to learn in EFL learning is the setting of a very difficult task of the study [17]. Even for the learning of other languages, a too much difficult project discourages students' willingness to learn. The setting of a difficult project in Chinese learning to large degree demotivates students who do not consider Chinese useful in the UK [18].

From the above-mentioned literature, it can be seen that much attention is paid to student's attention in English learning or EGP learning, while little attention is paid to ESP, particularly with the non-English majors as the class attendees. Different from EGP, ESP involves many types, such as business English, medical English, bank English, and mechanical English. It aims to help learners use English flexibly in specific fields. The purpose of this research is to explore students' learning motivation sources and their attitudes towards teaching practices in ESP classes for non-English majors. The research results can effectively help ESP teachers adjust their teaching practices in time, thus creating a more inspiring ESP class. Here two research questions are posed: What are the most inspiring and least inspiring macro teaching practices in ESP course? What are the most and least inspiring micro teaching practices in ESP course?

2. METHOD

The research adopts questionnaire survey and focus group interview as research methods. The questionnaire mainly refers to the questionnaire survey developed by Mauludin [19] to rate the importance of different motivational practices in Hungarian English classes. In terms of the sample size, the larger the sample is, the lesser the likelihood that findings will be biased [20], [21]. Measurement of the entire

population is one of the six sample size determination approaches (measurement of entire population, resource constraints, accuracy, a-priori power analysis, heuristics, and non-justification), by which a researcher can specify the entire population, which is finite, so it is possible to measure (almost) every entity in the population [22]. There are totally 123 ESP students in Shandong Huayu University of Technology, all of whom were research participants, and among whom 47 were going to take the postgraduate entrance examination, 50 were going to be employed, 9 were going to take the postgraduate entrance examination, and the rest had other plans. A total of 123 questionnaires were distributed, with 123 valid questionnaires collected. The questionnaire efficiency reached 100%, and 12 people participated in the discussion of relevant topics. The questionnaire contains 39 micro teaching practices used in ESP course, and the students answered the motivation degree of each micro practice for them to learn ESP courses. Each participant scored based on the five-level scoring method, and the ESP learning gauge is as follows in Table 1.

Values in reliability and validity have specific meanings. Values between 0.5 and 0.7 are mediocre, values between .7 and .8 are good, and values between .8 and .9 are excellent [23]. SPSS [24] was used to obtain these two indexes of macro teaching practices. The Cronbach coefficient was .893, which was close to .9 and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of validity analysis was .878, also close to .9, showing that both were excellent.

In terms of questionnaires, there were some matters needing attention. They were distributed at the beginning of the academic year to avoid students' prejudice after they study the ESP course. Before filling in the questionnaire, the authors told the students that the questionnaire was filled only for research purposes, and it had nothing to do with their grades in this course. Moreover, the research was conducted based on students' voluntary participation, and personal information would not be leaked. The questionnaire could be completed within 20 minutes. In addition, students could review their previous English learning experiences when filling out the questionnaire.

Focus group interview is a method by which materials are collected on specific topics drawn up by researchers through communication and dialogue among team members [25]. In the focus group interview adopted in the research, 12 mechanical students were randomly selected, and a senior ESP teacher (there are three ESP teachers in Shandong Huayu University of Technology, and each of whom has rich ESP teaching experience) was selected as the moderator, to deeply explore the students' views on learning motivation. There is no question posed to students for reference in this interview, and students can freely express their ideas about the motivational teaching practices, and provide some useful suggestions for ESP teaching. In the whole process, the moderator did not interrupt them.

Table 1. ESP learning gauge

Score	Score meaning
1	This micro teaching practice/macro teaching practice does not improve students' learning motivation.
2	This micro teaching practice/macro teaching practice slightly improves students' learning motivation.
3	This micro teaching practice/macro teaching practice improves students' learning motivation to some degree.
4	This micro teaching practice/macro teaching practice improves students' learning motivation.
5	This micro teaching practice/macro teaching practice greatly improves students' learning motivation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Questionnaire survey

SPSS [24] was used to make a descriptive analysis of the questionnaire and obtain information such as mean and standard deviation. Questionnaires were used to explore and reveal students' cognition of micro teaching practice in the process of ESP learning. In view of this, the average value of each micro teaching practice is ranked from high to low, so as to find the most and least inspiring teaching practices. In the data analysis, the macro teaching practice was also ranked. Based on the students' point of view, 39 specific teaching practices were ranked, and Table 2 is a descriptive statistical analysis of specific teaching practices involving macro teaching practices, micro teaching practices, mean value and standard deviation.

Table 3 shows four micro teaching practices that give students the most learning motivation. Here, the scale adopts a five-level scoring method. These practices have the same mean, suggesting they play an equal part in motivating students to learn. Table 4 shows four micro teaching practices that make students least motivated to learn in ESP course. Here, a five-level scoring method is adopted. The teaching practice scores are arranged from high to low.

Table 5 represents the descriptive statistical analysis of macro teaching practices, covering the mean value and standard deviation of various macro teaching practices. Based on students' views, 16 macro teaching practices were ranked, a five-level scoring method adopted. Some had the same mean value. For example,

“personal relevance” and “goal setting” had the same mean value of “4.77”. Table 6 shows four macro teaching practices that make students most motivated to learn. The scale also adopts a five-level scoring method. The first two practices share the same mean value, and the last two share the same one. Table 7 shows four macro-teaching practices that make students least motivated to learn. The teaching practice scores are arranged from high to low, with a five-level scoring method used. The three least ones share the same mean value.

Table 2. Descriptive statistical analysis of micro teaching practices

Macro teaching practices	Micro teaching practices	Mean value	Standard deviation
Teacher's personality	Dedication and passion	4.61	.743
	Full preparation for lessons	4.63	.682
	The teacher is natural and sincere.	4.70	.626
	The teacher is considerate.	4.72	.631
Learning atmosphere	Creating a pleasant learning atmosphere	4.65	.689
	Bringing humor and laughter to the classroom	4.67	.647
	Carrying out activities or games	4.39	.989
Project arrangement	The teacher provides clear project instructions.	4.59	.778
	The teacher provides help on how to complete the project.	4.67	.636
	The teacher clarifies the purpose of each project.	4.67	.649
Harmonious teacher-student relationship	Development of a good relationship between teachers and students	4.72	.605
Self-confidence development	The teacher constantly encourages students.	4.72	.631
	The teacher ensures that students often experience the sense of accomplishment brought by success.	4.67	.695
	The teacher gives positive feedback and evaluation to students.	4.72	.605
	The teacher arranges tasks for students that they are capable of completing.	4.60	.797
Interest enhancement	The teacher tells students that making mistakes is normal in learning.	4.67	.695
	Arrangement of all kinds of activities	4.47	.926
	Students are provided with some unexpected information to stimulate students' curiosity in the classroom.	4.64	.691
Autonomy development	Selection of interesting topics and teaching contents	4.67	.659
	The teacher sets a difficult task for students	4.24	1.190
	Students are encouraged to exert their creativity and imagination.	4.61	.796
	Students are encouraged to ask and answer questions.	4.50	.944
Personal relevance	Students complete tasks related to themselves (knowledge and skills).	4.52	.899
	Goal setting	Demand analysis is conducted on students' goals and needs.	4.59
English culture	A number of specific learning objectives are set.	4.37	.944
	The teacher helps students design study plans.	4.46	.899
	The teacher helps students learn to set practical goals.	4.49	.872
	Students' sense of purpose and direction is enhanced.	4.46	.926
	Native English speakers are invited to teach.	4.35	.949
	Students are familiarized with English cultural background.	4.51	.823
Teamwork	Students can learn about their team members.	4.41	.958
	Extracurricular activities are organized in groups	4.50	.833
	Ensure that every team member participates in team activities as much as possible.	4.43	.976
Effort value	Regular team projects are arranged.	4.32	1.066
	Students truly realize that efforts will lead to success with the teacher's guidance.	4.53	.803
Practical value	The use value of language is emphasized.	4.57	.769
Reward and incentive	The teacher appropriately awards prizes to the students.	4.54	.813
Project and program	Students are asked to complete the project or program and show the project or perform the program.	4.20	1.166
Comparison avoidance.	(Comparison) Comparison between students is avoided.	4.54	.880

Table 3. Four most motivational practices

Serial number	Micro teaching practices	Average value	Standard deviation
1	Teachers are considerate.	4.72	.631
2	Development of a good relationship between teachers and students	4.72	.605
3	The teacher constantly encourages students.	4.72	.631
4	The teacher gives positive feedback and evaluation to students.	4.72	.605

Table 4. Four least motivational practices

Serial number	Micro teaching practices	Mean value	Standard deviation
1	Students are asked to complete the project or program and show it.	4.20	1.166
2	Setting of a difficult task for students.	4.24	1.190
3	Arrangement of regular team projects	4.32	1.066
4	Invitation of native English speakers for teaching.	4.35	.949

Table 5. Descriptive statistical analysis of macro teaching practices

Serial number	Macro teaching practices	Mean value	Standard deviation
1	Teacher personality	4.83	.507
2	Learning atmosphere	4.85	.438
3	Project arrangement	4.81	.502
4	Harmonious relationship	4.84	.468
5	Self-confidence development	4.85	.438
6	Interest enhancement	4.84	.468
7	Autonomy development	4.81	.502
8	Personal relevance	4.77	.555
9	Goal setting	4.77	.570
10	English culture	4.82	.496
11	Teamwork	4.79	.532
12	Effort value	4.80	.538
13	Practical value	4.80	.527
14	Reward and incentive	4.50	.783
15	Project and program	4.72	.647
16	Comparison avoidance	4.72	.672

Table 6. Four most motivational macro teaching practices

Serial number	Macro teaching practices	Mean value	Standard deviation
1	Learning atmosphere	4.85	.438
2	Self-confidence development	4.85	.502
3	Harmonious relationship	4.84	.468
4	Interest enhancement	4.84	.468

Table 7. Four least motivational macro teaching practices

Serial number	Macro teaching practices	Mean value	Standard deviation
1	Comparison avoidance	4.72	.672
2	Project and program	4.72	.647
3	Personal relevance	4.72	.555
4	Goal setting	4.77	.570

3.1.2. Focus group interview

The focus group interview was conducted mainly to further explore the research questions. A total of 12 students volunteered to participate in the focus group interview. In order to prevent the group members from being disturbed by the outside world, the interview was selected in an empty classroom booked in advance, and there were round tables in the classroom. Therefore, all the participants were seated in a circle. There were only the interviewees and the host in the classroom and the interview environment was quiet. The purpose and significance of this focus group interview were explained to the interviewees in advance, and the researcher promised to protect participants' personal privacy. If they did not accept it, they could leave directly. The interview was conducted with the focus on the research questions, that is, the macro/micro teaching practices that make them most and least motivated to learn. The interview result would be discussed and analyzed in the discussion section.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. Questionnaire survey

It can be seen from the survey result that teacher-related motivation matters most. Table 4 shows that the four micro teaching practices that make students most motivated to learn are all related to teachers: the teacher is considerate (teachers' personality); development of a good relationship between teachers and students (harmonious relationship); the teacher constantly encourages students (self-confidence development); the teacher gives students positive feedback and evaluation to students (self-confidence development). All participants hoped that the teacher could put himself/herself in their position; that the ESP course would be beneficial to their future development, and that the course would not interfere with their efforts to fulfill future plans. Therefore, teachers should understand students' learning motivation related to teaching style before deciding how and when to use incentives [26]. Establishing a good teacher-student relationship is conducive to stimulating students' learning motivation and improving the quality of English teaching [27]. It can be seen from Tables 3 and 6 that ESP students hoped to establish a harmonious relationship with the teacher, showing that the realization of ESP teaching objectives depends not only on the teacher's skills of imparting knowledge, but also on the quality of teacher-student relationship, that is, teachers and students in a harmonious relationship are more likely to understand each other. Giving an easy task in language learning

would likely be seen as having a negative impact on learning motivation, therefore, language learning success originates from not the individual's own levels of competence but low task difficulty [24].

As can be seen from Table 4, teaching practices that make students least motivated are related to teams and courses: students are asked to complete projects or programs and show them or perform programs (project and program); a difficult task is set for students (interest enhancement); regular team projects are arranged (team cooperation); native English speakers are invited for teaching (English culture). The research in the US shows that project-based language learning could help students complete the project, thereby improving their language proficiency despite a number of difficulties [28], while setting up a difficult task under the context of a Chinese university fails to meet the students' needs nowadays, and the setting of difficult tasks will enhance students' psychological burden. In addition, if they can't complete such tasks, their self-confidence will be dampened. Possibly the arrangement of regular team projects takes up ESP students' after-class time, while they may need to use their after-class time to do something beneficial to their future development. There are significant differences between native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) and non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) in terms of their students' perceived attitudes and motivation with respect to English learning [29], however, these differences varied depending upon the type of class. Teaching by native speakers in this study cannot attract students very much possibly because on the one hand, some have poor English proficiency, and teaching in English language is likely to lead to their failure to understand the content. On the other hand, English knowledge about words or grammar doesn't meet the students' demand for future development at this stage, that is, English is of no great practical significance. From a macro perspective, teaching atmosphere, self-confidence development, harmonious relationship and interest enhancement can motivate students most, while comparison avoidance, projects and programs, goal setting and personal relevance can motivate students least. Teachers' encouragement can stimulate students' initiative and creativity [30]. In terms of the first four items that can best stimulate students' motivation, the overlapping item reflected by micro teaching practices and macro teaching practices is the self-confidence development, which further shows that students in ESP class possibly need teachers' appreciation, praise, encouragement and recognition. The students' learning outcomes were significantly improved as a direct result of the project, particularly, the PBL had a significant impact on the learners' ability to communicate effectively in speaking [31]. Indeed, PBL works very much for learning outcomes, while students do not necessarily like it under the context of a Chinese university. In terms of the last four items that can stimulate students' motivation least, the overlapping item reflected by micro and macro teaching practices is project and program, which further shows that students are unwilling to participate in the project.

3.2.2. Focus group interviews

Teachers' charm, teaching style, and class atmosphere [32], are all learning motivation influencing factors. Table 3 suggests that, teachers' constant encouragement helps a lot in motivating students to learn ESP. As student A said: "to have good learning motivation, teachers should make us gain self-confidence, encourage us constantly", and student D said "if the teacher lets us feel the sense of accomplishment brought by English, we will be encouraged a lot". English teachers "have strong personal characteristics that help them to complete their work and do the required tasks" [33]. It can be seen from Table 5 that teachers' personality plays a very important role and interest enhancement plays a moderately important role in influencing students' motivation. As student A said: "teachers who prepare lessons fully, and talk naturally and sincerely are excellent ones in my eyes. If the topic is interesting, we can be involved in it through various forms. I dislike teachers following the script, because it makes me fall asleep easily". The saying of students A and D in terms of the teaching practices that motivate them most is consistent with the questionnaire, but when answering the teaching practices that motivate them least, student A mentioned that the mode no longer meets the needs of ESP teaching, which did not appear in the scale. Classroom atmosphere may enhance L2 learners' learning motivation and protect these "particular social affiliations" leading to better learning result for Indian students [34]. Table 6 shows learning atmosphere plays the biggest role in the ESP. As student C said: "what matters most is to create a pleasant learning atmosphere, because if I feel comfortable amid the class, I am willing to learn. If students feel nervous and uncomfortable, they will not learn very comfortably", which echoes the saying of student B: "I don't think teachers with excessively rigid tone are good teachers. Their tone should be cadenced. I prefer humorous teachers, and humor is the most motivating factor in my eyes. If the class is too tense to make me relaxed, I may lose the motivation to study", and that of student H: "it is very important for teachers to be approachable, and a relaxing learning atmosphere matters a lot for the improvement of learning efficiency. Without a relaxing environment, it's hard for us to immerse ourselves into English learning". These three students preferred a learning atmosphere rather than attending classes under pressure. When answering the teaching practice that makes them motivated to learn least, all made a reverse extension, that is, the classroom without a good learning atmosphere made them the least motivated to learn ESP courses.

Some students also mentioned the practical value of English, and connected ESP learning with future career planning, which did not appear in the above tables. “Instrumental motivation measure students utilitarian reason in learning English” [35], some students consider the practical value as the only motivation for English learning. As student E said: “I think I can use English for postgraduate entrance examination, CET-4 (college English text for Chinese students) and CET-6 and my future work, so I have to learn English, and the right medicine should be prescribed for English learning. I don’t want to learn English that is not useful for our future job”; student F said: “for the students who are about to step into job market in the field of mechanical and electronic engineering, the keys of operating instruments are all marked in English. We should understand them, instead of pressing them incorrectly and leading to safety accidents; student G said: “in recent years, China has been learning from the West, absorbing its essence and discarding its dross. Statisticians, accountants and table makers in all walks of life will see English characters such as ‘sum’ and ‘mean’. That means we students should master some basic English.”; student H said: “at present, we need English for postgraduate entrance examination and employment. If we go to an international company, we have to communicate with foreigners. One of my family members works for BMW, and she speaks English when traveling abroad, so I think English speaking is very important in terms of its pragmatic value, without which it is not necessary to learn it”. Students E and H when answering the teaching practice that makes them motivated to learn least, made a reverse extension, and other students did not express their views on the most uninspiring teaching practices.

Table 5 demonstrates that the mean value of teacher personality is 4.83, only secondary to 4.85 and 4.84, proving the importance of teacher personality. Istiqamah *et al.* [36] argued that “the intonation, pitch, rhythm, volume, speed, accent and emphasis and types of teachers’ nonverbal communication” impacted young students’ English learning motivation. As Student I said: “I think I benefit from proper speaking speed and cadence. Teachers who speak too fast or too slow will make me feel uncomfortable.” The question of speaking speed mentioned by student D can be reflected in the macro teaching practice: teacher personality, however, under which, teachers’ speaking speed, and cadence are not listed as a micro teaching practice. This has certain enlightening value for improving the questionnaire. This student also, made a reverse extension when answering the teaching practices that motivated them least, that is, the inappropriate speech speed makes him least motivated to learn.

The result suggests, grammar learning discourages ESP students. Komara and Tiarsiwi [37] found that Indonesia EFL learners thought “grammar was difficult but essential to be learned and mastered”, making them confused in determining their English learning motivation. Some students in this study provided some suggestions about the grammar that was beyond the questionnaire for the ESP class. As Student J said: “learning English words really matters since I can get sense of achievement, but learning grammar knowledge doesn’t. I dislike learning grammar knowledge due to my poor English learning proficiency. It’s suggested that ESP teachers teach English words instead of grammar.” This is possibly because students’ grammar system has been finalized at the stage of graduation in senior year, and the number of words learned in class can affect their sense of accomplishment and acquisition, that is, ESP teachers can lead students to learn more about English words rather than grammar. Actually, the student also said: “I really enjoy a relaxing learning atmosphere.”, which is in line with the saying of students C, D, and H.

In summary, the teacher-related motivation plays the biggest part. Students hope to be relaxed and happy in class, and teachers should be more considerate. The teacher’s personality and learning atmosphere are good facilitators for a successful ESP class. Here, focus group interviews can be used as an extension and supplement to the questionnaire survey, which further reflects students’ views.

The study is of significance. It provides enlightenment for ESP teaching, particularly under the context of Chinese private universities where students’ English proficiency is not as good as that of students in Chinese public universities. The English learning motivation of the former is very likely to be influenced by the teachers, therefore, who can optimize the teaching practices by improving their personal charm. The study is conducive to boosting students’ motivation in ESP class and applying motivational teaching model in ESP class in Chinese universities, especially in private ones. Also, both quantitative and qualitative methods are used in the ESP motivational research, with the quantitative one as the main method and the qualitative one as the supplement, providing inspiration and enlightenment for future research on L2 learning methodologically. The research suggests that Chinese central and local governments should map out the policy that boosts the development of ESP teaching, and Chinese universities, particularly private ones, should establish proper ESP teaching evaluation mechanism featured by encouraging education.

4. CONCLUSION

In both questionnaire survey and focus group interview, the study shows teacher-related motivation plays the important role in ESP learning. Based on ESP learning motivation, this study mainly discusses the curriculum learning motivation of senior non-English majors in a private university of Shandong. Through

quantitative and qualitative mixed analysis, the teaching practices that can stimulate students' motivation most and least are analyzed. Participants in this study help English teachers of ESP course understand students' English motivation and optimize teaching practices according to the survey results. The participants in this study are senior non-English majors in a private university, so the results may be different for students at other stages (juniors, sophomores, freshmen) in stated-owned universities in China. According to the results of the two methods, the following suggestions are put forward for ESP class: i) create a good learning atmosphere and build a harmonious teacher-student relationship. Students like a course because they can learn knowledge from this course, more importantly, enjoy the comfort and pleasure brought by the class; and ii) the teacher establishes content of moderate difficulty and assign tasks of moderate difficulty. Difficult content will make students feel pressure in class and difficult tasks make students feel pressure after class, and students will pay more attention to the relaxed feeling brought by ESP courses, and they will be discouraged by the difficulty or heavy tasks.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to extend gratitude to the research participants for their feedback; to colleagues who provided help in the data collection; and to Liu Wentao, a professor in Department of Basic Subjects, who gave some insightful views amid data collection, and article writing. The authors would particularly like to thank Kevin Balchin, the Ph.D. supervisor of the first author, who pointed out problems in the paper and gave some suggestions in the whole process. In addition, the university where the authors work also greatly observed and tracked the writing of this academic article, and even provided sponsorship for it.




REFERENCES

- [1] Z. Dörnyei, *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Routledge, 2014.
- [2] A. Rahardjo and S. Pertiwi, "Learning motivation and students' achievement in learning English," *Journal of English Language Teaching and Literature (JELITA)*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 56–64, 2020.
- [3] W. Li, *et al.*, "The influence of immersion on the improvement of learning outcomes," *E-education Research*, vol. 44, no. 12, pp. 55–63, 2023, doi:10.13811/j.cnki.eer.2023.12.008.
- [4] J. Liu, "Influence of teacher's professional knowledge structure on students' English learning," *Journal of Heihe University*, vol. 12, no. 6, pp. 95–97, 2021, doi: 10.3969/j.issn.1674-9499.2021.06.032.
- [5] L. Yang, "Influence of teachers' non-verbal behaviors on senior high school students' English learning motivation," M.S. thesis School of Foreign Language, SNU, Jinan, China, 2017.
- [6] A. Roohani and K. Dayeri, "On the relationship between Iranian EFL teachers' burnout and motivation: a mixed methods study," *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 77–99, 2019, doi: 10.30466/IJLTR.2019.120634.
- [7] S. Khalilzadeh and A. Khodi, "Teachers' personality traits and students' motivation: a structural equation modeling analysis," *Current Psychology*, vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 1635–1650, 2021, doi: 10.1007/s12144-018-0064-8.
- [8] P. Subakthiasih and I. G. A. V. W. Putri, "An analysis of students' motivation in studying english during COVID-19 pandemic," *Linguistic, English Education and Art (LEEAA) Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 126–141, 2020, doi: 10.31539/leea.v4i1.1728.
- [9] R. de Jong, T. Mainhard, J. van Tartwijk, I. Veldman, N. Verloop, and T. Wubbels, "How pre-service teachers' personality traits, self-efficacy, and discipline strategies contribute to the teacher-student relationship," *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 84, no. 2, pp. 294–310, 2014, doi: 10.1111/bjep.12025.
- [10] A. Henry and C. Thorsen, "Teacher-student relationships and L2 motivation," *Modern Language Journal*, vol. 102, no. 1, pp. 218–241, 2018, doi: 10.1111/modl.12446.
- [11] L. Ma, Y. Jiao, L. Xiao, and J. Liu, "Moderation of teacher-student relationships in the link between motivation and English performance of struggling learners in China," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, pp. 1–18, Nov. 2022, doi: 10.1080/01434632.2022.2151603.
- [12] T. J. Bugaj *et al.*, "Peer-assisted learning (PAL): skills lab tutors' experiences and motivation," *BMC Medical Education*, vol. 19, no. 1, p. 353, Dec. 2019, doi: 10.1186/s12909-019-1760-2.
- [13] J. Ho, "Gamifying the flipped classroom: how to motivate Chinese ESL learners?" *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, vol. 14, no. 5, pp. 421–435, Oct. 2020, doi: 10.1080/17501229.2019.1614185.
- [14] W. Deng, "PBL learning based on the concept of STEAM (in Chinese)," *Chinese Journal of Chemical Education*, vol. 44, no. 23, pp. 59–66, 2023, doi: 10.13884/j.1003-3807hxjy.2022090015.
- [15] M.-H. Shin, "Effects of project-based learning on students' motivation and self-efficacy," *English Teaching*, vol. 73, no. 1, pp. 95–114, Mar. 2018, doi: 10.15858/engtea.73.1.201803.95.
- [16] C. L. Chiang and H. Lee, "The effect of project-based learning on learning motivation and problem-solving ability of vocational high school students," *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, vol. 6, no. 9, pp. 709–712, 2016.
- [17] W. A. Holbah and V. Sharma, "Listening to saudi efl learners' voices: demotivating factors affecting learning," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, vol. 11, no. 12, pp. 1717–1723, 2021, doi: 10.17507/tpls.1112.26.
- [18] Y. Zheng, Y. Lu, and J. Li, "Motivating and demotivating factors for Chinese as a foreign language learners in a British CLIL program," *Foreign Language Annals*, vol. 56, no. 3, pp. 720–739, 2023, doi: 10.1111/flan.12681.
- [19] L. A. Mauludin, "Students' perceptions of the most and the least motivating teaching strategies in ESP classes," *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 139–157, 2021, doi: 10.30466/IJLTR.2021.120980.
- [20] H. Taherdoost, "Sampling methods in research methodology; how to choose a sampling technique for research," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2016, doi: 10.2139/ssrn.3205035.
- [21] H. Taherdoost, "Determining sample size; how to calculate survey sample size," *International Journal of Economics and Management Systems*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 237–239, 2017.
- [22] D. Lakens, "Sample size justification," *Collabra: Psychology*, vol. 8, no. 1, Mar. 2022, doi: 10.1525/collabra.33267.
- [23] J. H. Sim, W. T. Tong, W. H. Hong, J. Vadivelu, and H. Hassan, "Development of an instrument to measure medical students' perceptions




- of the assessment environment: initial validation,” *Medical Education Online*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2015, doi: 10.3402/meo.v20.28612.
- [24] S. Graham, “Self-efficacy and language learning – what it is and what it isn’t,” *The Language Learning Journal*, vol. 50, no. 2, pp. 186–207, Mar. 2022, doi: 10.1080/09571736.2022.2045679.
- [25] J. Sim and J. Waterfield, “Focus group methodology: some ethical challenges,” *Quality & Quantity*, vol. 53, no. 6, pp. 3003–3022, Nov. 2019, doi: 10.1007/s11135-019-00914-5.
- [26] J. H. Lee and Y. Y. Lo, “An exploratory study on the relationships between attitudes toward classroom language choice, motivation, and proficiency of EFL learners,” *System*, vol. 67, pp. 121–131, Jul. 2017, doi: 10.1016/j.system.2017.04.017.
- [27] C. Zhao, “Correlation between teaching strategies and learning motivation in vocational college,” in *the 9th TXZ R Sem*, 2023, doi: 10.26914/c.cnkihy.2023.035456.
- [28] F. Kato, R. Spring, and C. Mori, “Incorporating project-based language learning into distance learning: creating a homepage during computer-mediated learning sessions,” *Language Teaching Research*, vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 621–641, May 2023.
- [29] T.-I. Pae, “Effects of the differences between native and non-native English-speaking teachers on students’ attitudes and motivation toward learning English,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 163–178, Apr. 2017, doi: 10.1080/02188791.2016.1235012.
- [30] L. Yu and J. Shen, “Analysis of the correlation between academic performance and learning motivation in English course under a corpus-data-driven blended teaching model,” *Scientific Programming*, vol. 2022, pp. 1–11, May 2022, doi: 10.1155/2022/3407270.
- [31] D. Hidayati, H. Novianti, M. Khansa, J. Slamet, and N. Suryati, “Effectiveness project-based learning in ESP class: viewed from Indonesian students learning outcomes,” *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 558–565, May 2023, doi: 10.18178/ijiet.2023.13.3.1839.
- [32] L. Mengying, “A case study on the learning motivation of a 20-year-old Chinese college student,” *Applied & Educational Psychology*, vol. 4, no. 10, pp. 120–125, Nov. 2023, doi: 10.23977/appep.2023.041018.
- [33] A. M. H. Alrishan, S. A. Alwaeli, A. K. Alshammari, R. K. Alshammari, and M. A. S. Khasawneh, “The impact of the teacher’s personality on the motivation of learning the English language among governmental school students in Saudi Arabia,” *Information Sciences Letters*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 1223–1230, Mar. 2023, doi: 10.18576/isl/120313.
- [34] S. K. Doley, “Stimulus appraisal-based L2 attitude and motivation among Indian ESL learners,” *International Journal of Instruction*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 603–622, Apr. 2023, doi: 10.29333/iji.2023.16232a.
- [35] U. R. Swari, S. Masluha, I. Noor, and D. Kusuma, “A survey on the instrumental and integrative motivation among students in learning English,” *Innovative: Journal Of Social Science Research Volume*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 4293–4301, 2023, doi: 10.31004/innovative.v3i2.825.
- [36] Istiqamah, S. Baa, and Samtidar, “Teachers’ non-verbal communication influencing students’ motivation in learning English for the young learners,” *Klasikal: Journal of Education, Language Teaching and Science*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 1–24, May 2023, doi: 10.52208/klasikal.v5i1.611.
- [37] C. Komara and F. Tiarsiwi, “Exploring Indonesian EFL learners’ perception of English learning grammar,” *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, vol. 6, no. 2, p. 459, Aug. 2021, doi: 10.21462/jeltl.v6i2.564.

BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS






Xu Guosheng    is a university lecturer at Department of Basic Subjects, Shandong Huayu University of Technology in China, and a Ph.D. student in Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) in the UK. He was appointed lecturer in the university in 2022 and went on to pursue his Ph.D. program in English education at the CCCU. He can be contacted at email: 1315329804@qq.com.



Zhang Xiaoyu    is a lecturer in Shandong Huayu University of Technology, was born in October, 1994. She mainly researches on ELF and ESP, and has worked in education sector for 3 years. She once gained a state-level award in English teaching, and presided over 1 municipal-level education project and 2 university-level education projects. She can be contacted at email: 958974506@qq.com.



Qian Baihui    with masters’ degree, mainly researches on ELF and ESP. She has worked in the education sector for three years, and issued 5 provincial-level papers in recent 5 years. In addition, she has presided over 1 university-level education project, and 1 municipal-level education project. She can be contacted at email: 704216412@qq.com.