Study on College Students' Autonomous English Learning Motivation in Guangdong Province P. R. China

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Abstract: Students in autonomous learning situations choose their own learning objectives, carry out their own learning assignments, and learn independently while still being supervised by their instructors. Significant progress has been made in higher education as of late due to the widespread use of English-learning websites and apps by English professors as a supplement to their regular teaching. The "bottleneck" of autonomous English learning is "lack of motivation," despite the fact that learning motivation appears to be a critical factor in supporting autonomous English learning. A small percentage of today's college students in Guangdong P.R. China's domestic colleges have difficulty grasping English. The majority of the comments at the bottom of the page focus on issues that make it difficult to learn English on one's own, such as a lack of interest, a lack of knowledge about how to learn English, a lack of excitement for studying, etc. The majority of college students are unable to adequately build the awareness of English independent learning, despite the fact that this is the most effective approach for learning English according to this theory. It is feasible to acquire a comprehensive picture of college students' motivation by assessing the current condition of English self-study in our country and by analyzing all of the factors that influence their motivation. This thesis will next provide practical ideas and recommendations for fostering autonomous in English language acquisition among college students, having first highlighted such crucial aspects.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the geography of this study

Guangdong Province, also known as "Guangdong," has its capital in Guangzhou and is located on the coast of the Chinese mainland's southern tip, south of Nanling, on the coast of the South China Sea, bordering Hong Kong, Macau, Guangxi, Hunan, Jiangxi, and Fujian, and facing Hainan Island across the sea, sees below Figure 1 Map of Guangdong Province.

Figure 1: Map of Guangdong Province

1.2 Education status in Guangdong

China has 2,956 institutions of higher education, comprising 2,688 ordinary colleges and universities (including 257 independent colleges) and 268 adult colleges and universities. Guangdong Province, the second-largest province in China, has 154 ordinary colleges and universities as of 2019. There are 38 public undergraduate colleges, 25 private undergraduate colleges, 2 Sino-foreign cooperative colleges, 2 cooperative schools between the mainland and Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan, 62 public colleges, and 25 private colleges. The distribution of colleges in the cities of Guangdong Province is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Higher Education Resources Distribution in each city of Guangdong Province

CITY	Guang Zhou	Dong Guan	Fo Shan	He Yuan	Hui Zhou	Jiang Men	Jie Yang
COLLEGE QUANTITY	82	7	6	1	5	5	2
CITY	Qing Yuan	Shan Tou	Shan Wei	Shao Guan	Shen Zhen	Yang Jiang	Yun Fu
COLLEGE QUANTITY	3	3	1	2	8	1	1
CITY	Zhao Qing	Zhong Shan	Zhu Hai	Chao Zhou	Mei Zhou	Mao Ming	Zhan Jiang
COLLEGE QUANTITY	5	3	6	1	1	5	6

As education scale developing year by year, college students' quantity is increasing steadily in recent 5 years. Until 30 June 2022, there are 174 colleges and universities in Guangdong Province, including 65 undergraduate schools; 2 undergraduate vocational schools; 93 higher vocational (junior college) schools; and 14 institutes of higher education for adults. There are 32 postgraduate training institutes, including 29 conventional colleges and universities and 3 institutions of scientific research. The number of students enrolled in higher education increased by 304,300 from the previous year to 4,088,200. It can be seen below Figure 2 College Students (Undergraduate and Junior College Students) Enrolment Quantity, whose source is from Department of Education of Guangdong Province.

There were 751,900 students enrolled in general and vocational colleges, a fall of 165,300 or 18.0% from the previous year. There were 6,388 vocational undergraduate enrolments, down 2,891 from the previous year, down 31.2%; and the enrolment of higher vocational (junior college) decreased by 174,700 or 30.5%.

There were 2,539,800 students enrolled in general and vocational colleges, an increase of 139,600 students, or 5.8%, from the previous year. There were 1,266,600 general undergraduate students, an increase of 56,900 or 4.7% from the previous year; 19,100 vocational undergraduate

students, an increase of 6,259 or 48.7% from the previous year; and 1,254,100 higher vocational (junior college) students, an increase of 76,400 or 6.5% from the previous year. It can be seen form figure 3 college students' quantity change status (unit: 10,000), whose source is from Department of Education of Guangdong Province.
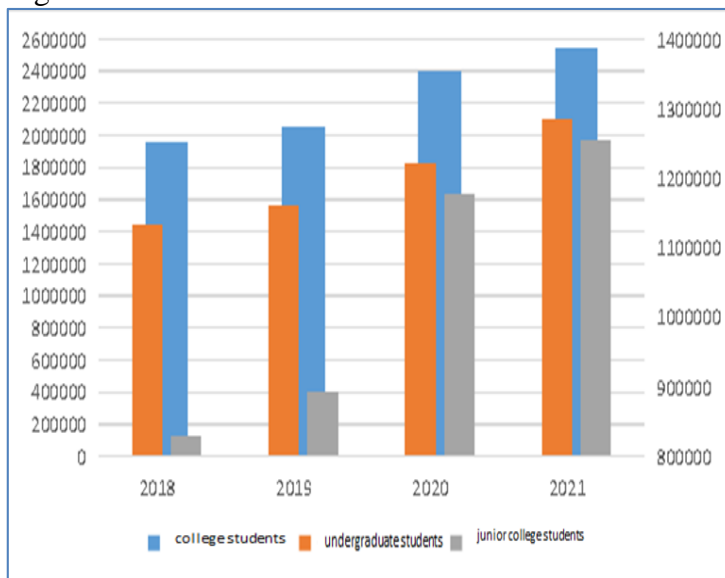
Source: Department of Education of Guangdong Province

Figure 2: College Students (Undergraduate and Junior College Students) Enrolment Quantity
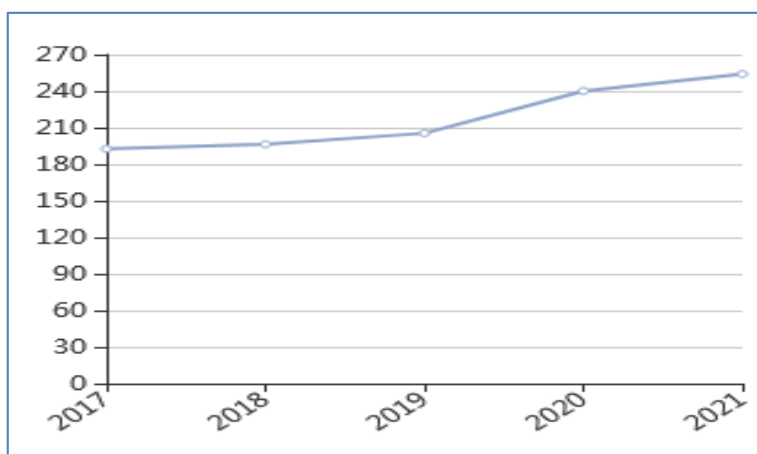
Source: Department of Education of Guangdong Province

Figure 3: College Students' Quantity Change Status (unit: 10,000)

2. Relation between Motivation and English Learning Autonomous

It's been proven time and time again that having a strong internal drive to learn English is crucial (Deornyei and Ushioda, 2013). Researchers have shown connections between students' intrinsic motivation and factors such as their own attitudes and affective traits, the nature of their learning environments, and the communicative goals they set for themselves (Deornyei, 2006; Rasool and Winke, 2019; Shaaban and Ghaith, 2000). Deornyei (2005) argues that a person's level of intrinsic drive is the single best predictor of their success in learning a foreign language. Contrarily, studies have shown that a lack of motivation can hinder one's ability to learn English. This tendency, known as "language learning demotivation," exemplifies the flip side of motivation (Deornyei,

2001). It's possible that demotivation has both external (teacher behaviors, class characteristics, classroom atmosphere, and classroom materials) and internal (a lack of self-interest, and experiences of failure) causes (Hassaskhah et al., 2015; Kim, 2011; Kikuchi, 2013; Krishnan and Pathan, 2013; Sahragard and Alimorad, 2013).[1]

Language learning motivation and demotivation are two poles on a continuum (Xaypanya et al., 2017). EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes also experience demotivation (Deornyei, 2001). Consequently, English learners need assistance. To help EFL students overcome demotivation and re-engage with their studies, several research have explored resilience factors (Kim et al., 2019; Shin and Kim, 2017). Resilience means overcoming obstacles and growing (Martin and Marsh, 2006). Resilience means students can overcome classroom challenges (Martin and Marsh, 2006). Resilient people thrive. Resilient students are driven, problem-solvers, socially competent, and self-directed (Wang and Gordon, 1994). Resilience also affects EFL learners' motivation and demotivation (Kim et al., 2017, 2019; Shin and Kim, 2017). Resiliency, conscientiousness, and openness to experience affect language learners' aptitude, motivation, and success (Clark and Schroth, 2010; Freund and Holling, 2011; Piechurska-Kuciel, 2018). Khany and Nejad (2017) revealed that Iranian college students' WTC is strongly influenced by their readiness to try new things. However, Ghonsooly et al. (2012) found that openness to experience had a strong indirect effect on college students' WTC through their perceptions on international communities. These discrepancies suggest that additional research is needed on how openness to experience affects EFL acquisition. This study examines how this personality trait affects losing interest in English. Dinius (2013) found that conscientiousness significantly demotivated EFL college students to study English. Because ID characteristics affect English language acquisition, demotivation in English language learners should be studied in relation to personality (Dornyei and Ushioda, 2013).[2]

Autonomous learning allows students to set goals, complete tasks, and learn with teacher support. Many English professors in colleges and universities use English-learning websites or apps to supplement their everyday instruction, which is a huge step forward in higher education, especially for student autonomy. As convenient as it is, it has many drawbacks, one of which is that "lack of motivation" has become the "bottleneck" of autonomous English learning, even if learning motivation appears to be a key factor in boosting it. [3] Few Guangdong domestic school students struggle with English today. The majority of comments focus on concerns like lack of desire, not knowing how to learn English, lack of excitement to study, etc., which discourage English independent learning. Most college students cannot learn English autonomously. The current state of English self-study among college students in our country and all of the variables that motivate them can be used to understand their motivation. After emphasizing such critical elements, this thesis will offer practical suggestions for college students' English language learning autonomy.

Planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation can help students feel ownership over their learning.[4] Thus, intrinsic motivation is optional yet advantageous. To drive students more naturally, he thinks professors should give comments as they share rather than evaluate. Deci agrees that feedback should incorporate action information and self-directed development reinforcement. (in Weiner, 1980). Dornyei and Csizer's (1998) "ten commandments" for engaging college students include learner agency. [5]He discusses learner autonomy in a chapter of his motivating tactics book. Kim Noels and colleagues (2000) used self-determination theory in their model of language learning motivation to show how teacher support for learner autonomy affects learners' self-determination. According to academics, students seek more "self-determined forms of motivation" when they have "freedom of choice and perceived competence." "Low perceptions of freedom of choice and perceived competence" inspire them. They also claim that learners will be motivated if their behaviors have no impact on the results. Hidi and Harackiewicz (2000) disagree that extrinsic rewards always reduce intrinsic desire. They believe internal vs. extrinsic motivation depends on

job duration and difficulty.[6] Numerous studies on learner autonomy show that taking more responsibility for education motivates students. (Lamb, 2001; Sakui, 2002, Ushioda, 2003, 2007). Spratt, Humphrey, and Chan (2002) argue that motivation precedes autonomy.[7]

They further claim that Asian students may favour teacher-centered training over learner autonomy and that coerced English learners are less likely to engage in self-directed learning. Roth et al. (2007) found that students liked teachers who encouraged freedom and responsibility. Students respected teachers who felt encroachment. They add that argentic engagement is a positive aspect of learner engagement that helps teachers see how students deeply engage in academic work to learn, improve, and create a more motivating environment for themselves. Because blogs are created for a wide audience rather than one teacher, [8]Lee et al. (2010) say they motivate college students. Blogging shows students' self-directed learning, but online connectivity affects class engagement. Ushioda (2011) suggests that teachers can assist students achieve their goals by encouraging them to talk genuinely and enhance their autonomy. The working memory system links accomplishments to bigger goals, according to Mizuno et al. (2011). The working memory saves crucial knowledge for immediate use, which is very valuable for kids in school. Working memory causes purposeful activity. According to Figure 4 Cyclical process of motivation, autonomy, and achievement in EFL learning whose source from Stroet et al.'s (2013) systematic review, there are 71 experimental studies on autonomy-supporting education and learner motivation.[9]
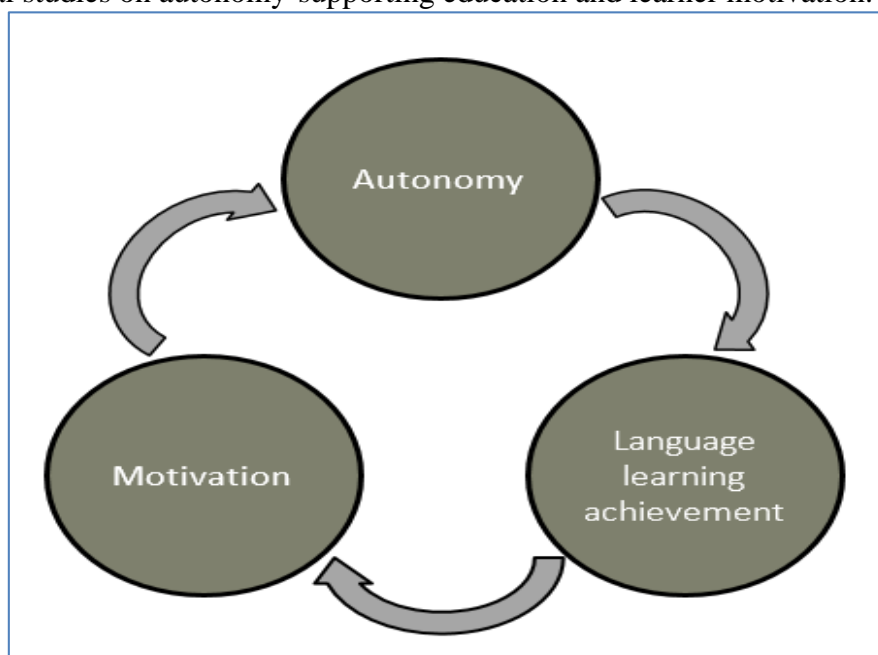

Figure 4: Cyclical process of motivation, autonomy, and achievement in EFL learning

3. Setting and Participants

According to Frequency of students by academic program and Term (Table 2) and Participants' self-perception of their motivation for learning English (Table 3), the study was conducted in Ecuador in 2015. The participants were students from a language center of a public university in the province of Manabí The sample consisted of 862 students from seven different academic programs and 10 terms. They were taking English as a compulsory subject as a graduation requirement. The frequency of participation was heterogeneous from 26% from the first semester and 1.5% from the tenth semesters. About participants' gender, 50.7% were female and 49.3% were male. Almost all participants were teenagers and young adults (average age=20.50; Standard Deviation SD=2.73).

Table 2: Frequency of students by academic program and Term

Academic Program	Frequency	Academic Term	Frequency
Agricultural Engineering	85	First Semester	222
Agroindustrial Engineering	100	Second Semester	132
Business Administration	232	Third Semester	153
Computer Engineering	69	Fourth Semester	103
Environmental Engineering	217	Fifth Semester	83
Tourism Management	77	Sixth Semester	38
Veterinary Medicine	82	Seventh Semester	43
		Eighth Semester	46
		Ninth Semester	29
Total	862	Tenth Semester	13
		Total	862

Source: ESPAM (2015).

Table 3: Participants' self-perception of their motivation for learning English

Categories	Frequency	Percentage	Validated Percentage	Accumulated Percentage
Not at all motivated to learn English	54	6.3	6.3	6.3
Slightly motivated to learn English	83	9.6	9.6	15.9
Motivated to learn English	300	34.8	34.8	50.7
Well-motivated to learn English	222	25.8	25.8	76.5
Highly motivated to learn English	203	23.5	23.5	100.0
Total	862	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey (2015).

4. Instruments and results

A four-part questionnaire was distributed to college students learning English as a foreign language in order to collect data. The first component requested the participants' gender, age, and English language learning experience.[10] The second component was a questionnaire on demotivation for English language learners. The third component contained a quiz on resiliency, while the fourth contained quizzes on the two personality traits (e.g. conscientiousness and openness to experience). With the author's permission, the current study utilized Kikuchi's (2011) 40-item English language learning demotivation questionnaire. This examination is based on four external and two internal demotivating factors. The outside demotivating elements connected to instructor behaviours, classroom atmosphere, class features, and class materials, whereas the internal demotivating factors centered on the failure experiences and lack of willingness to study English of the language learners. This scale contains the statement, "The English textbooks used in my English class were not appropriate for me."

According to Table 4, the lowest source of demotivation for university EFL learners was teacher behaviours (M=2.81, SD=0.85), followed by class environment (M= 3.05, SD=0.87), classroom materials (M =3.01, SD =0.84), and class characteristics (M =3.02, SD = 0.86). In addition to "institutional associated demotivating variables," there are self-related elements that negatively influence the motivation of language learners (Hassaskhah et al., 2015). As shown in Table 4, EFL university students were also demotivated by their own lack of interest (M = 2.95, SD = 0.89) and failure experiences (M = 2.95, SD = 0.89) in learning English. These data indicate that demotivation among EFL students was widespread. These outcomes also reflect the English language teaching and learning difficulties in Guangdong, People's Republic of China (Akram, 2017; Manan, 2019).

Table 4: College EFL learners' causes of less motivation in Guangdong of P.R. China

Factors impact on motivation	Mean	SD
Teacher behaviors	2.81	0.85
Characteristics of classes	3.02	0.86
Classroom environment	3.05	0.87
Classroom materials	3.01	0.84
Lack of interest	2.95	0.89
Experiences of failure	2.95	0.88

5. Countermeasures to cultivate college students' learning English

5.1 Cultivate the awareness of autonomous English learning

Motivation and inherent ability are crucial when it comes to independent study.[11] In other words, students who are able and ready to assume responsibility for their learning determine for themselves what they want to learn, how they want to acquire it, and how they will evaluate their progress. From early elementary school through high school, many students have been accustomed to passively accepting information from their teachers and following their every direction without considering whether or not they are the best individuals to teach themselves. Therefore, now that the incoming freshmen have enrolled, it is necessary to educate them about autonomous learning, including introducing the fundamentals of autonomous learning, inviting those who have achieved some success in autonomous learning to share their insights, or with the participation or assistance of teachers, establishing learning objectives and developing study plans, etc. Students must feel like they belong in a community that supports their need for independent learning after they enter college. And encourage youngsters, with the assistance of teachers, to get an understanding of the advantages of independent study.

5.2 Establish a correct concept of autonomous English learning

It is crucial to establish a correct concept of autonomous English learning for college students because it will affect their learning behavior and learning styles, which in turn will reinforce or change their concept of learning. However, many students have a skewed perspective on how to study English on their own. Thus, in this scenario, English teachers should steer students to develop a proper understanding of autonomous learning through a series of guided activities. It's crucial that college students take responsibility for their own education and use the time spent studying English to develop skills in self-analysis, goal-setting, content-determination, resource-selection, pace-setting, method-selection, evaluation, and monitoring and adjusting.[12]

5.3 Arouse students' active English learning motivation

The first step for educators is to ignite a fire in their students to become fluent in English. Teachers should instil in their students the knowledge that a command of the English language is essential for future success in the competitive global talent market. Because of this hope for the future, students' intrinsic motivation is increased. Teachers can also foster an informal, engaging classroom environment to encourage students to take the initiative in their English studies.[13] Additionally, educators can implement strategies like network teaching, English corner, recitation contests, speech contests, debates, English parties, and so on to pique their students' interest in the second language. In the meantime, we'll instil in them a thirst for knowledge and a motivation to constantly advance their capacity for autonomous learning.

5.4 Ensure proper meta-cognitive skills be acquired by students

Teachers of English in higher education have a responsibility to ensure that their students acquire sound meta-cognitive skills.[14] The key to learning English is the learner's effort and persistence, and they can master the appropriate learning strategies to improve their learning efficiency. The process of learning English is a cognitive process under the control of the learners. Students will stop passively accepting knowledge and instead choose the best method for studying on their own initiative once they understand that they are the cognitive topic of their English learning. Leaving students to flounder or wander aimlessly on the path to autonomous learning is unrealistic. Teachers should direct students to undertake the following in order to hone their capacity for adopting meta-cognitive technique consciously:

Firstly, get started by making some sensible academic objectives and plans. Teachers could help students grasp the micro skills of college English learning by introducing a self-evaluation/mutual table of students' English competence at the beginning of the course. On addition, instructing students on how to conduct a self-reflective analysis of their current and future training needs is essential. Meanwhile, it's helpful to think about the kinds of educational materials people have at their disposal. And from there, we can deduce the stage-appropriate learning objectives and agendas.[15]

As a second step, make sure you're keeping a close eye on your progress in second. In order for students to make appropriate adjustments to the idea or to the learning methods at the appropriate times, teachers should encourage and remind them to monitor the execution of the milestones throughout the process of autonomous learning. Teachers should also make extensive use of network tools like E-mail, blogs, and the campus network platform in order to improve student-teacher collaboration. Therefore, instructing students to keep tabs on their own progress is preferable.[16]

Third, be deliberate in your self-evaluation. The ability to objectively assess one's own progress in learning and keep tabs on one's own progress over time is an integral aspect of the educational process. It has been noted by certain researchers that the extent to which English language learners are self-aware or how high their self-evaluation level is can have an impact on how well they acquire the language. Teachers can help students self-evaluate in five areas—listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation—based on standards established by "teaching requirements of College English," which they can then use to inform their own learning arrangements and adjustments. Learners' autonomy does not represent a static condition but rather a dynamic process of constant accumulation, generation, adjustment, and perfection. This procedure also takes shape and matures as a result of the college students' on-going education and development. In light of the current state of college students' ability to learn English on their own, it is imperative that English teachers at the collegiate level begin with the factors influencing these students' ability to learn English on their own, then implement strategies designed to help those students understand autonomous learning correctly and fully, spark genuine interest in such study, and ultimately achieve the goals outlined in the document titled "Teaching Requirements for College English."[17]

5.5 Implement the flipped classroom model in contemporary English education

The College English Flipped Classroom teaching model has changed the simplified teaching methods to improve students' autonomous learning ability, enhance their autonomous psychology, stimulate their autonomous motivation, and activate their autonomous behaviour through the use of modern information technology. And it proves the new approach to education can work. College students, because to education informationization that promotes autonomous learning, are prepared to take on and successfully accomplish the learning activities inherent to the flipped classroom

model. Observations of the experimental class reveal a more peaceful instructional environment. Students engage in lively classroom debate and show great passion for the lesson's activities. [18]

Group work is enhanced by the cooperative nature of the students in the experimental class. The concept of a teacher-led, student-cantered classroom has been implemented. The strengths of the modern classroom make up for those of the old one. Students have the freedom to plan their study around their schedules, interests, and other personal factors, as well as their current knowledge, skills, and abilities. The new framework has the potential to arouse students' inquisitiveness and creative potential, boost students' confidence and alleviate their stress and anxiety while studying, and ultimately lead to a more positive outlook on education. Students who participated in interviews reported growing in their ability to self-evaluate and take responsibility for their own learning, as well as improving their interpersonal skills, working together more effectively, and working harder overall. However, various issues were also uncovered by the study. [19]

Some college students were found to lack self-discipline, according to the interviews. At initially, students were able to keep up with professors, but they eventually fell behind because they were unable to complete learning activities on time and because they stopped contributing to class discussions. Students who are more reserved may find it difficult to adjust to this new method of instruction. Students still relied too heavily on teachers for explanations and missed out on important information because of this. Therefore, in order to accommodate students' differing levels of development, the flipped classroom-based autonomous learning paradigm of College English requires the creation of a flipped classroom learning platform. Simultaneously, it should enhance the monitoring system, facilitate easy and fast access to learning input, and perfect the classroom setting. Teachers can help their students increase their capacity for autonomous learning by enhancing their ability to monitor, manage, and assess their own learning and by helping them comprehend the appropriate learning practices. [20]

In addition, educators need to shift their pedagogical stances and progressively introduce a student-cantered pedagogical approach. We need to leverage multimedia and other cutting-edge teaching approaches to tailor our lessons to each student's learning situation and personality traits in order to foster a culture of personalized instruction. As a result, educators should guide students through a process of self-evaluation to identify, address, and ultimately improve their unique learning styles, preferences, and challenges. [21]

Teachers should also show empathy and compassion for their students and make an effort to learn about their unique needs and learning styles. In short, the main objective of fostering students' autonomy learning is to prepare them for a lifetime of further education. The flipped classroom, which is the cornerstone of the independent learning model of College English, is a necessary adaptation to the teaching reform in the new era and paves the way for the introduction of wisdom education. Research into the new model is, therefore, in its infancy. Experts and academics need to collaborate on how to further enhance the model and increase students' capacity for autonomous learning. [22]

6. Conclusion

It has been demonstrated that there is substantial evidence from motivational studies that learning success and enhanced motivation are contingent on learners taking control of their learning, being able to make choices for their own learning, and recognizing that their learning successes or failures are attributable to their own efforts and strategies as opposed to external factors. These requirements are characteristic of learner autonomy and self-direction in applied linguistics. It is a vital method for fostering the achievement motivation of English college students. [23]Therefore, teachers should frequently discuss ideals with students and provide examples of successful English

learners so that students feel a sense of accomplishment from their studies. In addition to encouraging college students, teachers should generate numerous conditions to assist students in realizing their ideal and transforming it into a proper achievement motivation. In this study, the impact of motivation on English learning and five strategies for enhancing English learning are examined. They provide as direction for both students and instructors. Motivation is crucial for language learning, in a nutshell. As language instructors, we must comprehend this and work to motivate college students in order to be successful. As learners, students should pay attention to motivational aspects in order to learn English effectively.

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