The Correlation between Business English Freshmen's Learning Motivation and Self-efficacy

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Keywords: Business English, learning motivation, self-efficacy, correlation

Abstract: Researchers have conducted numerous studies on the phenomenon of learners' motivation in foreign language acquisition; however, there is a paucity of research examining the relationship between English learning motivation and self-efficacy among Business English freshmen. This study aims to address three key questions to explore the correlation between English learning motivation and self-efficacy among Business English majors: (1) What is the level of English learning motivation among first-year business English majors? (2) What is the overall status of self-efficacy in English learning among first-year business English majors? (3) What is the association between English learning motivation and self-efficacy among first-year business English majors? Subsequently, employing SPSS data analysis, this research yields several noteworthy findings: firstly, the level of English learning motivation among first-year business English majors is significantly high; secondly, their perceived self-efficacy in mastering the language falls within a moderate range; finally, the relationship between English learning motivation and self-efficacy demonstrates a positive correlation (R=.595*).

1. Introduction

The learning effectiveness is influenced by a multitude of factors. Apart from IQ, non-cognitive aspects such as learning motivation also play a pivotal role[1]. Motivation refers to the driving forces that inspire and sustain learners in engaging in learning activities, which can be intrinsic, such as curiosity and thirst for knowledge, or extrinsic, such as examination pressure and career aspirations. Learning motivation significantly impacts the efficacy of business English learners' educational endeavors. Learners with strong motivation tend to exert greater effort, actively seek diverse learning opportunities, surmount obstacles and challenges encountered during their studies, thereby attaining superior academic outcomes. Conversely, insufficiently motivated learners may lack the drive and enthusiasm necessary for effective learning; they are more susceptible to external distractions and temptations that ultimately lead to subpar achievements. However, despite possessing high levels of motivation towards learning English for business purposes, some students exhibit low self-efficacy in assessing their own abilities and struggle to bridge the gap between knowledge acquisition and practical application resulting in unsatisfactory academic performance. This deficiency in self-efficacy can impede their progress in language acquisition. To enhance the

learning effectiveness of business English learners comprehensively addressing both their motivational levels and self-efficacy is imperative while acknowledging the intricate interplay between these two constructs.

2. Theoretical Framework

Self-efficacy theory is a psychological framework positing that an individual's confidence in their abilities and sense of self-efficacy exert a substantial influence on their behavior and emotional responses[2]. Developed by American psychologist Albert Bandura, the theory centers around an individual's belief in their capacity to successfully accomplish tasks or overcome challenges[3]. According to self-efficacy theory, individuals who possess confidence in their abilities are more motivated to confront challenges head-on and diligently strive to surmount them. This stems from their conviction that they possess adequate skills to tackle obstacles, thereby fueling their motivation and bolstering their self-efficacy. Conversely, individuals lacking confidence in their abilities may experience anxiety, frustration, and tend to avoid challenges altogether. Such a mindset can impede performance and hinder personal growth as these individuals lack faith in successfully completing tasks or meeting challenges.

The application of self-efficacy theory spans across various domains. In the context of business English learning, learners must acquire a vast array of specialized vocabulary, terminology, as well as communication skills tailored for business settings. These endeavors often necessitate a high level of self-efficacy for learners to effectively navigate difficulties and conquer challenges encountered along the way. Drawing upon self-efficacy theory principles, confident learners exhibit heightened engagement with learning activities while actively striving towards overcoming obstacles encountered during the learning process itself. For instance, when faced with difficulties while studying Business English concepts, learners can employ strategies rooted in self-efficacy theory as means of encouragement whilst exploring diverse approaches aimed at enhancing overall learning outcomes.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Questions

(1) What is the level of English learning motivation among freshman students majoring in Business English?

(2) What is the overall status of self-efficacy in English learning among first-year Business English majors?

(3) What is the correlation between English learning motivation and self-efficacy among freshman students majoring in Business English?

3.2. Research Designs

3.2.1. Research Participants

The participants of this study consisted of first-year undergraduate students majoring in Business English at a college in Guangdong Province. In order to ensure the representativeness of the sample, we randomly selected eight classes from the first semester of 2022-2023 for conducting a questionnaire survey. The survey was administered on a voluntary basis, ensuring anonymity, and completed within 10 minutes during class time. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed, and after excluding invalid responses, we obtained 168 valid questionnaires. Among these respondents,

there were 20 male students and 148 female students with an average age of 18 years.

3.3. Instrumentation

1) The Business English Learning Motivation Scale

Teresa M. Amabile and her colleagues developed the Work Preference Inventory (WPI), which includes two versions of the Adult Work Motivation Scale and the Student Motivation for Learning Scale, both demonstrating desirable reliabilities and validities[4]. Robinson conducted exploratory and validation factor analyses on these scales, resulting in a simplified version called WPI-10 with only 10 items[5]. The WPI-10 scale exhibits comparable reliability and validity to the original WPI- 30 while reducing participant burden. This study was based on the Chinese adaptation of the WPI- 10 scale for business English majors, comprising two dimensions: internal factors and external factors , with 10 questions rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1" to "5", representing 'Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Uncertain, Agree, Strongly Agree' respectively. A higher total score indicates stronger individual motivation. The questionnaire demonstrates good reliability and validity, with an internal consistency coefficient of 0.872 for the overall scale in this study, as well as coefficients of 0.839 for external factors and 0.787 for internal factors.

2) Business English Learning Self-efficacy Scale

The scale was developed based on the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) originally devised by Schwarzer and colleagues to adapt to Chinese business English majors[6]. It comprises 10 items, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "1" (Strongly Disagree) to "5" (Strongly Agree). The higher scores indicate greater individual self-efficacy. The questionnaire demonstrates good reliability and validity, with an internal consistency coefficient of the overall scale at 0.872.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Levels of Students' English Learning Motivation

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Motivation in Business English Learning

Categories	Items of motivation for Business English learning	Mean	SD
Internal Factors	1. I am strongly motivated by the recognition I can earn from Business English learning.	3.83	1.053
	2. I want other people to find out how good I really can be at Business English learning.	3.68	1.101
	3. To me, success means doing better than other people in Business English learning.	3.03	1.402
	4. I am keenly aware of the promotion goals I have for myself in Business English learning.	3.23	.989
	5. I am keenly aware of the income goals I have for myself in Business English learning.	3.08	1.011
External Factors	6. I enjoy tackling problems that are completely new to me in Business English learning.	3.11	.909
	7. I enjoy trying to solve complex problems in Business English learning.	3.26	1.094
	8. In Business English learning, the more difficult the problem, the more I enjoy trying to solve it.	3.39	1.238
	9. In Business English learning, what matters most to me is enjoying what I do.	4.12	.726
	10. In Business English learning, it is important for me to be able to do what I most enjoy.	3.94	.937
Overall motivation		3.467	1.046

According to the criteria of the five-point Likert scale, a value equal to or exceeding 3.00 indicates that students possess learning motivation. From Table 1, it is evident that the mean motivation score for freshmen business English majors in their English learning process is approximately 3.467, suggesting a high level of motivation among these students. The mean internal factor score is 3.37 with a standard deviation (SD) of 1.1112, while the mean external factor score is 3.564 with a standard deviation of 0.9808. Consequently, it can be observed that the mean external factor score surpasses the mean internal factor score; however, overall both values are comparable in magnitude and indicate that students recognize and value not only internal but also external factors' influence. High learning motivation can be elucidated from the following four perspectives: 1) Freshmen exhibit fervor towards the myriad possibilities in college studies and life, driven by their curiosity and exposure to a new environment. 2) The anticipation of attaining commendable academic outcomes coupled with well-defined objectives for future career prospects and personal growth endows freshmen with elevated learning motivation. 3) Freshmen's unwavering belief in their abilities and untapped potential serves as a self-affirmation mechanism that sustains their drive to engage in scholarly pursuits. 4) The necessity for freshmen to adapt to novel pedagogical approaches and challenging academic tasks not only shapes their learning styles but also significantly influences their motivational levels.

Specifically, item 9 had the highest mean of 4.12 (SD=0.726) and the lowest standard deviation of 0.726, indicating that interest is the primary consideration for a majority of new business English students in their language learning journey. This finding aligns with contemporary college students' values, as they prioritize self-realization and derive enjoyment from the learning process itself. In business English education, interest not only serves as an important factor but also influences learners' overall learning outcomes. When learners are genuinely interested in Business English, they actively engage in the learning process by paying closer attention to and reflecting upon the content being taught, thereby facilitating easier acquisition of knowledge and skills. Cultivating students' interest in Business English thus becomes one of the crucial tasks for educators within this domain. Only when students possess genuine interest will they actively participate in their own learning endeavors while dedicating more attention and cognitive effort towards comprehending and mastering both theoretical concepts and practical skills associated with Business English education.

Additionally, item 10 also exhibited a relatively high mean value of 3.94 which further emphasizes that effective teaching should not only focus on fostering student interest but also consider instructional difficulty levels that match individual student abilities appropriately. If teaching difficulty surpasses students' capabilities excessively, it may lead to frustration resulting in diminished motivation; conversely, if teaching difficulty remains too low relative to student proficiency levels, it can result in disinterest due to lack of challenge or stimulation during the educational experience itself.

Furthermore, item 3 exhibited the lowest mean rank of 3.03 and the highest standard deviation of 1.402. When combined with the highest mean rank (3.83) in the intrinsic factor of the first item, it indicates that students' perception of success extends beyond academic performance alone; they strive for superior performance in business English learning and seek recognition from their peers, reflecting a competitive mindset among students. Moreover, the substantial standard deviation of 1.402 suggests significant variations in defining success among different students. While some may perceive success as achieving high grades in business English learning, others may view it as being proficient in using English for business communication purposes. Therefore, teachers should pay attention to individual characteristics and needs when designing instruction and assessment criteria tailored to each student's specific circumstances so that every student can achieve personal success in business English learning.

4.2. Levels of Students' English Learning Self-efficacy

As presented in Table 2, the overall mean of Business English majors' self-efficacy in learning English is approximately 2.874, indicating a moderate level according to Likert's five-point scale.

The data in Table 2 were analyzed as follows: item 19 had the highest mean value of 3.36. This finding suggests that the majority of learners believe in their ability to independently overcome difficulties encountered in Business English learning. Rather than easily giving up or seeking external assistance, they actively seek solutions when faced with challenges. Such a sense of self-efficacy is crucial for learners' academic progress and personal development.

However, there were also some self-efficacy items exhibiting low mean values. For instance, the mean value of item 1 is 2.56, indicating a lack of confidence and perseverance among learners when it comes to overcoming challenges in Business English learning. They may perceive difficulties as insurmountable or believe they lack problem-solving skills, which could impede their progress. Additionally, the mean value of item 12 is also relatively low at 2.72. This suggests that learners might feel helpless and frustrated when faced with opposition or obstacles and struggle to identify effective strategies for achieving their goals. Such diminished self-efficacy may restrict learners' ability to adapt and cope with challenges effectively. In terms of standard deviation, item 12 exhibits the highest score of 1.271 compared to other items, implying greater variability in subjects' self-efficacy levels when confronted with opposition or obstruction during their learning journey. This variation could be attributed to diverse individual experiences, cognitive processes, and coping mechanisms employed while dealing with such situations.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Self-efficacy in Business English Learning

Items of self-efficacy for Business English learning	Mean	SD
11. I can always manage to solve difficult problems in Business English learning if I try hard enough.	2.56	1.237
12. If someone opposes me in Business English learning, I can find the means to get what I want.	2.72	1.271
13. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals in Business English learning.	2.77	.821
14. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events in Business English learning.	3.09	1.088
15. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations in Business English learning.	2.84	1.228
16. I can solve most Business English learning problems if I invest the necessary effort.	2.64	.911
17. I can remain calm when facing difficulties in Business English learning because I can rely on my coping abilities.	3.20	.897
18. When I am confronted with a problem in Business English learning, I can find several solutions.	2.68	1.144
19. If I am in trouble in Business English learning, I can usually think of a solution.	3.36	1.151
20. I can usually handle whatever comes my way in Business English learning.	2.88	1.069
Overall Self-efficacy	2.874	1.0817

4.3. Correlation between Motivation and Self-efficacy in English Learning

Table 3: Correlation Analysis between Overall Motivation and Overall Self-efficacy

	Overall Motivation
Overall Self-efficacy	.595*

The relationship between overall motivation and overall self-efficacy of English majors is presented in Table 3. According to Pearson's coefficient, there exists a positive correlation ($r = 0.595$, $p < 0.01$) between the learning motivation of first-year business English majors and their self-efficacy in the process of English language acquisition. Specifically, higher levels of learning

motivation are associated with lower levels of self-efficacy, and vice versa. Relevant findings from Kim's (2020) research lend support to this conclusion[7].

According to self-efficacy theory, individuals with higher competence tend to set more ambitious goals and have a stronger commitment towards achieving them. This finding has been supported by various scholars. Huo and Rui (2020) suggest that students with high levels of self-efficacy possess a heightened sense of capability in accomplishing tasks, which drives them to pursue more challenging objectives and construct a superior idealized version of themselves mentally. Consequently, when confronted with demanding assignments, these students exhibit remarkable perseverance and resilience while actively seeking solutions to attain their desired outcomes. Another plausible explanation is that individuals with robust self-efficacy have a clearer understanding of their abilities, enabling them to set realistic learning tasks for themselves and harbor greater confidence in accomplishing them[8]. As a result, they develop elevated expectations for the future and proactively shape an idealized image of their future selves. Chen (2019) further elucidates that individuals with enhanced self-efficacy are significantly motivated to foster optimistic prospects for the future; thus they actively construct images portraying an idealized version of themselves in forthcoming scenarios[9].

5. Conclusions

The findings of this study demonstrate that first-year Business English students are highly motivated to learn the language, but their self-efficacy is only moderately developed. There is a positive correlation between motivation and self-efficacy, indicating problem-solving ability and confidence in facing challenges. However, students need to focus on improving specific aspects of their learning such as handling complex problems and opposition. Instructors should monitor motivation levels and use effective teaching strategies to stimulate interest while boosting self-efficacy. The study has limitations due to a small sample size; further research across different regions of China is needed for generalizability.

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