

# Study on Stimulating Students' Interest in College English Learning by Weiner's Attribution Theory

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**Abstract.** At present, most students from non-English majors hold a passive attitude towards English learning, which affects the effect of English learning. Learning motivation is an important factor of learning positivity, and attribution theory plays an important role in promoting English learning motivation. Therefore, college English teachers should guide students to learn the correct attribution, so as to stimulate students' learning motivation.

**Keywords:** college English, attribution theory, learning motivation.

## 1. Introduction

With the continuous development of The Times, English has become one of the indispensable communication tools, most of the students from non-English majors have realized the importance of English learning and its influence on the development of the employment in the future, but they often have to give up the idea of studying English hard due to the lack of interest, bitterness in learning English, which directly affects the effect of English learning. These students are characterized by a lack of motivation and passion, that is, a lack of motivation to learn English. Therefore, English teachers in college should focus on how to guide students to study actively and how to stimulate their motivation of college English learning.

## 2. The Introduction and Interaction of Attribution Theory and Learning Motivation

### 2.1 Weiner's Attribution Theory

American psychologist Bernard Weiner presented an attribution model centered on the cognitive components of successful and failed behaviors. According to his opinion, an individual's explanation of success or failure is mainly attributed to four factors: personal ability, effort level, difficulty of task, and luck. And these four factors can be analyzed from three dimensions such as the cause source, stability and controllability. According to the source of behavior cause, it can be divided into internal cause and external cause. Personal ability and effort level are internal, while difficulty of task and luck are external. According to the stability of behavior cause, it can be divided into stable cause and unstable cause. Reasons for stability include personal ability and difficulty of tasks, while reasons for instability include effort level and luck. According to the controllability of behavior cause, it can be divided into controllable cause and uncontrollable cause. The level of effort is controllable, while the other three factors are uncontrollable.

### 2.2 Learning Motivation

Learning motivation is the internal cause that can promote students' learning activities, and it is the strong impetus that can motivate students working towards a certain goal. Certain learning motivation can fully mobilize students' learning initiative and enthusiasm, influence students' learning effect. The activation of learning motivation refers to use certain incentives to transfer the formed learning needs from the latent state into the active state, so as to become the fresh power to promote the students' learning motivation. Usually, the stronger learning motivation is, the higher learning enthusiasm is, the better learning behavior is, the better learning effect will be. On the contrary, the weaker learning motivation is, the lower learning enthusiasm is, the worse learning

behavior is, the poorer learning effect will be. It can be seen that the learning motivation and the learning result interact as both cause and effect. It is very important for college English students to motivate themselves. Students are faced with a lot of new words, phrases and complex sentences every day, students must repeat and practice them for using them skillfully, students are fighting against forgetting every day. It is difficult to achieve success if there is no clear learning motivation and learning goal.

### **2.3 The Influence of Attribution Theory on Learning Motivation**

Weiner believes that people tend to attribute their success and failure to one or more of the above four factors, and such attribution will bring corresponding psychological changes, which are manifested in the change of expectation and emotion for the next achievement, and thus will play a role in strengthening or weakening the learning motivation. From the perspective of cause source dimension, if success is attributed to internal factors such as personal ability and effort level, sense of pride will be generated and learning motivation will be enhanced. If success is attributed to external factors, fluke mind will be generated. If attributing failure to internal factors, feelings of shame will be generated; If attributing failure to external factors, angry feelings will be generated. In terms of the stability dimension, if the success is attributed to the stability factor, pride will be generated and motivation will be improved. If the success is attributed to unstable factor, fluke psychology can be generated. Attributing failure to stable factors will create a sense of despair; If attributing failure to unstable factor, the angry mood will be generated. In terms of the control dimension, if you attribute success to controllable factors, you will actively strive for success. If attributing to uncontrollable factors, it will not generate much momentum on you. If attributing the failure to controllable factors, you will continue to work hard; If you attribute it to uncontrollable factors, you will be in despair.

### **2.4 Attribution Analysis of College Students' Motivation in English Learning**

After learning Weiner's attribution theory, the author conducted attribution questionnaires for students of two classes in the grade of 2018. The first class is composed of 70 students majoring in electronic engineering and mechanical engineering, and the second class is composed of 70 students majoring in accounting and marketing management. The students had just taken a unit test, and the passing rate was not ideal. Thirty-five students in class one passed the exam with a pass rate of 50 percent. In class two, 45 students passed with a pass rate of 64.2%. To this end, the author designed an attribution questionnaire, which was divided into factors such as their own ability, effort level, difficulty of task, luck, etc., and required students to conduct self-analysis according to their performance in the unit test. The results of the questionnaire analysis showed that 20 percent of the students who passed the test said they passed because of a certain amount of effort, while 85 percent of the students who passed the test said they passed because of good luck and lower degree of difficulty of the paper, etc. 23 percent of those who failed in the test attributed their poor academic performance to poor English, lots of unfamiliar words and poor effort level. However, most of these students are willing to accept the teacher's help, seek help from the teacher, willing to consult teachers and classmates, and willing to continue to work hard for getting good grades next time. Another 74 percent of those who failed in the test said the main reasons for not doing well were that the questions were too difficult, the teacher didn't teach them well and the course didn't interest them. These students are often unwilling to seek the help from teachers, unwilling to make efforts, lack of motivation to learn. From the results of questionnaire survey on students, both successful and failed students tend to attribute the test results to external, unstable and uncontrollable factors, rather than internal, stable and controllable factors. According to Webster's attribution theory, we know that this kind of attribution style is inappropriate and cannot strengthen the learning motivation. Therefore, college English teachers should guide students to make correct attribution.

### **3. The Measures of Stimulating Students' Learning Motivation by using Attribution Theory**

#### **3.1 Help Students Set Correct Learning Goals**

Learning objectives refer to the objective standards that learning is expected to achieve. When students are ready to learn, they often have some kind of expectation, which expect them to achieve their goals. For the purpose of study of college English, the purpose of some students are to pass the related exam for gaining the certificates, the purpose of some students are to communicate well, the purpose of some students are to study abroad, the purpose of some students are to have certain advantages in the future job hunting. So teachers should help students set up two kinds of goals, namely long-term goals and short-term goals. Setting long-term goals can stimulate students' learning motivation and make efforts towards this goal. With the economic globalization and integration, English is widely used in international trade, business negotiations, international conferences and so on. Therefore, college students must improve their English communication level to adapt to the trend of social progress. At the same time, it is necessary to set short-term goals that can be achieved in the near future so that students can achieve them through certain unremitting efforts, so as to obtain self-satisfaction and enhance self-confidence. At the beginning of the semester, students can be divided into several grades such as excellent grade, good grade and normal grade. Higher requirements should be set for students who have better basic knowledge, such as giving a certain topic for discussion, so that they can make efforts and enjoy the learning process of college English. The standard of requirements can be lower for students with poor English foundation, such as giving certain word tasks, when they basically complete the teacher's requirements, the teacher should timely affirm the results for building their confidence. As long as the goals set are appropriate and the corresponding measures taken are effective. Even the students with poor academic performance can have the desire to learn, enhance their confidence and form a positive learning motivation

#### **3.2 Guide Students to Make Correct Attributions**

According to Weiner's attribution theory, teachers should conduct correct attribution training for students, so as to make students reconstruct the correct attribution pattern. Some students attribute their success entirely to their own ability and think that they can succeed without any effort. Teachers should give appraise to their ability of such students, but at the same time teachers should let them realize that success they achieved is occasional if they don't work hard. Some students attribute their success to the low difficulty of the task and good luck. Teachers should guide them to make more efforts to make them understand that effort level plays a crucial role in succeeding. Some students attribute their failure to poor English foundation caused in middle school, so they are not willing to make any efforts, and lose their interest and confidence in English learning over time. For such students, teachers should help them achieve some success, so as to gain a sense of achievement and regain confidence. Some students attribute their failure to external factors such as difficult questions and bad luck. Teachers should give guidance and point out clearly that the result of their failure should attribute to poor degree of effort level. After repeated training, students can get rid of the negative attribution instead stimulating the learning motivation.

#### **3.3 Use Positive Feedback**

College English teachers must clearly realize that teachers' feedback to students will have a great impact on their emotions. Most students perceive the success or failure of learning through teachers' behavior and attitude, and take the feedback as the basis for attributing success or failure. Of course, there is positive feedback as well as negative feedback, which will affect students' learning motivation at any time. When students feel that their efforts in English learning are fruitful and valuable, they will take the initiative to make efforts, strengthen their learning motivation and achieve success. On the contrary, students will lose confidence and think that they are not proper for learning English, thus break their enthusiasm if only focusing on the effort, ignoring their success,

and giving no feedback on their success. Therefore, teachers should be good at discovering the shining points of each student, and timely praise students for their progress, so as to stimulate their interest in English and help them experience the fun of English learning.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In a word, learning motivation is an important factor that constitutes learning initiative, and attribution theory plays an outstanding role in promoting motivation in English learning. The application of attribution theory can not only help learners get rid of the feelings of disappointment and helplessness but also make students keep a positive and optimistic attitude towards learning, so as to make continuous progress and improve the quality of English learning.

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