A Study on Integrative and Instrumental Motivations and Learning Strategies of PhD Dissertation

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Abstract: The research topic of the author's PhD dissertation is "The Impact of Motivation Cultivation on English Autonomous Learning among University Students in Hunan, China—A Mediating Role of Learning Strategy." Within this topic, three key variables are identified: the dependent variable (DV), the independent variable (IV), and the mediating variable (MV). Specifically, the DV refers to English autonomous learning, the IV refers to motivation, and the MV refers to learning strategy. The research establishes that the MV (learning strategy) is an integral component of information processing theory (IPT). Consequently, the dissertation incorporates integrative and instrumental motivation theories alongside IPT as its foundational theoretical framework. This paper aims to explore the theoretical framework of the PhD dissertation in detail, focusing on the interplay of these three theories.

Keywords: English autonomous learning; Motivation; Learning strategy; Integrative motivation theory; Instrumental motivation theory; Information processing theory

1. Introduction

The research topic of the author's PhD dissertation is "The Impact of Motivation Cultivation on English Autonomous Learning among University Students in Hunan, China——A Mediating Role of Learning Strategy." Regarding the variables in this research, there are three in total: one dependent variable (DV), one Independent variable (IV), and one mediating variable (MV). After thorough analysis, the DV refers to "English autonomous learning," the IV is "motivation," and the MV is "learning strategy." A detailed examination reveals that the MV, "learning strategy," is closely related to information processing theory (IPT). Consequently, this PhD dissertation integrates theories of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation, as well as IPT, to guide the research direction. The following sections of this paper will elaborate on the theoretical framework,

exploring the three aforementioned theories in detail.

2. Integrative motivation and instrumental motivation theories

This dissertation will adopt the theories of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Agustin *et al.* [1] revealed that while some people naturally grasp language more easily than others due to their aptitude, having a strong desire to learn can push anyone to achieve great things regardless of their starting point. This idea was echoed by Barrnett [2], who emphasized that the most significant factor in becoming fluent in English is not just intelligence or access to resources but rather the learner's drive and enthusiasm. When students are motivated, they dive into learning with passion and curiosity, making even the toughest challenges feel manageable.

Moreover, while intellectual capabilities, educational tools, and family support play important roles in learning, they are not always enough to guarantee success. Motivation acts as a catalyst that brings all these elements together. Consider two students: one has exceptional language skills and access to top-notch facilities but lacks interest, while the other struggles with natural ability yet possesses immense motivation. More often than not, it is the motivated student who thrives because their determination helps them overcome obstacles. Therefore, fostering a love for learning and intrinsic motivation among students could lead to better outcomes in education, ultimately empowering them to realize their full potential. It is clear that nurturing motivation should be at the forefront of educational strategies, as it truly holds the key to unlocking achievement in any field of study. Two primary types of motivation influence learners: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation [1]. For example, when someone learns a new language to connect with friends, explore different cultures, or feel included within a group, integrative motivation is at play. This type of motivation taps into our emotions and social needs, making the learning experience not just about gaining knowledge but also about building relationships and understanding the world around us. On the other hand, instrumental motivation is more focused on practical benefits and personal goals. When learners study hard to get good grades, land a job, or earn a promotion, they are driven by instrumental motivation. This form of motivation emphasizes tangible rewards—things that can directly impact one's future success. Understanding these motivations helps us recognize why we pursue certain paths and how our goals can shape our educational journeys. Whether through forming connections or achieving specific objectives, motivation remains a powerful force that guides us toward growth and fulfillment. As noted by Amoah and Yeboah [3], motivation is not merely about wanting something; it involves deep feelings and reactions within us that drive us forward. For instance, consider the excitement of preparing for a significant event, such as a big game or an important exam. That surge of energy represents motivation in action—an inner engine fueling the will to act and overcome challenges. Without this inner spark, many of us might struggle to muster the energy to tackle daily tasks, complete homework, or engage in practice sessions.

On another level, understanding what motivates us can lead to personal growth and improvement. Our motives are often tied to our emotions and experiences. For instance, if we set a goal based on things we love— like learning a new instrument or helping others—we tap into a deeper source of energy that makes reaching those goals much more rewarding. The journey becomes less about just completing tasks and more about discovering who we truly are and what brings us joy. Recognizing how motivation influences our behavior helps us make better choices every day. When we identify what drives us, we not only boost our chances of success but also enrich our lives with purpose and meaning. Anggarista and Wahyudin [4] stated that motivation does not only influence what we do but also shapes how we set our goals and stick to them. For example, if one's

goal is to converse with friends who speak another language, that desire propels them to practice consistently. Even on days when studying feels burdensome, their motivation reminds them of the end goal: connecting with others and experiencing their culture through language. This persistence is key because every learner will face challenges along the way. Overall, motivation acts as both a guide and a shield in the journey of learning a second language, helping us overcome difficulties while enriching our experiences. Learning English can be a tough journey for many students. They often feel overwhelmed when trying to speak, write, or even understand the language. This struggle is understandable; after all, English has its unique quirks and complexities that can confuse anyone. Even when students put in countless hours of studying with the hope of scoring well on tests, they sometimes find themselves disappointed by low grades. It is frustrating to work hard yet not see the results they desire. However, it is important to remember that effort alone may not be enough. Just like athletes need a game plan to win, students also require effective learning strategies to truly excel in English.

The key lies in finding personalized methods that resonate with each student. Not every technique will work for everyone; some might benefit from visual aids while others learn better through conversation or writing exercises. For instance, engaging with fun resources—like games, songs, or interactive apps—can make learning more enjoyable and less stressful. By experimenting with different approaches, students can discover what helps them grasp new vocabulary or improve their grammar skills. In doing so, they not only enhance their understanding of the language but also build confidence in their abilities. With the right strategy tailored to their own learning style, students can turn their challenges into triumphs, making strides toward mastering English one step at a time. Azar and Tanggaraju [5] remind us that students who recognize their own learning strategies can truly transform this journey into something enjoyable and fulfilling. When learners identify how they best understand new information—whether through visual aids, hands-on activities, or even discussions with friends—they become empowered to navigate challenges more easily. It is not just about enduring lessons; it is about making them enjoyable. Imagine tackling complex math problems or reading challenging texts with confidence, simply because one knows what works for them. This sense of ownership transforms education from a tedious obligation into an exciting quest for knowledge.

Moreover, embracing personalized learning strategies leads to greater self-confidence and effectiveness in adapting to different situations. When individuals discover what learning methods work best for them, they also unlock tools to navigate future challenges with ease. This means students are better prepared for exams, group projects, or even unexpected questions in class. With each step taken using their unique approach, they build not only skills but also resilience. The joy comes not just from understanding facts, but from realizing that they have the ability to overcome hurdles on their educational path. In essence, knowing one's learning strategy creates a roadmap filled with opportunities and successes, paving the way for a brighter academic future. According to Bureau *et al.* [6], these strategies help everyone involved reach their learning goals more effectively. When teachers incorporate specific methods into their lessons, they guide students toward understanding new concepts better. At the same time, students have the opportunity to take charge of their own learning by choosing different approaches that work for them. For example, a student might decide to create flashcards for vocabulary words or form study groups with classmates to discuss important topics. This active participation not only makes learning more enjoyable but also helps students feel more confident in what they are studying.

In language learning, having good strategies is especially crucial because it allows learners to engage directly with the material. Language is all about communication, so using various techniques can build a person's ability to express themselves clearly. Strategies such as practicing speaking with friends, listening to music in another language, or reading books can deepen one's understanding and fluency. These activities

encourage self-directed involvement, which means that students are taking responsibility for their progress instead of waiting for someone else to teach them everything [7]. By doing this, they develop communicative competence—an essential skill that goes beyond just knowing grammar rules; it involves being able to understand and connect with others through language. Overall, embracing learning strategies empowers students and prepares them for real-world interactions where clear communication matters most.

3. Learning strategy as a part of information processing theory

Information processing theory provides a framework for understanding how information is processed by the human mind, and learning strategies are practical applications of this theoretical framework [8]. In essence, learning strategies are specific techniques that learners use to facilitate the processes described by IPT: encoding, storage, and retrieval of information.

IPT compares human cognition to the operations of a computer, focusing on how information is: (1) Encoding: The process of transforming sensory input into a form that can be processed by the brain. (2) Storage: The process of retaining encoded information over time in short-term or long-term memory. (3) Retrieval: The process of accessing stored information when it is needed.

Learning strategies are the tools and techniques that individuals use to optimize the stages of information processing. They enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of encoding, storage, and retrieval. Here's how learning strategies fit into each stage of IPT: (1) Encoding and cognitive strategies: (i) Rehearsal: Repetition of information to keep it active in short-term memory and facilitate its transfer to long-term memory. (ii) Elaboration: Making connections between new information and existing knowledge to create a deeper understanding and stronger memory traces. (iii) Organization: Structuring information into categories, hierarchies, or other logical arrangements to facilitate encoding and later retrieval. (2) Storage and metacognitive strategies: (i) Planning: Setting goals and choosing appropriate strategies before engaging in learning tasks to ensure effective encoding and storage. (ii) Monitoring: Continuously checking one's understanding and progress during learning activities to make adjustments as needed. (iii) Evaluating: Reflecting on the learning process and outcomes to assess the effectiveness of strategies and make improvements for future learning. (3) Retrieval and resource management strategies: (i) Time management: Allocating appropriate time for studying and reviewing to ensure information is adequately encoded and retained. (ii) Environmental structuring: Creating a conducive learning environment that minimizes distractions and supports focused study sessions. (iii) Seeking help: Utilizing external resources, such as peers, tutors, or digital tools, to aid in understanding and remembering information.

The following are examples of learning strategies within IPT: (1) Elaboration strategies: (i) Self-explanation: Explaining the material to oneself in one's own words to deepen understanding and strengthen memory connections. (ii) Question generation: Creating questions about the material to actively engage with the content and anticipate possible exam questions. (2) Organizational strategies: (i) Mind mapping: Creating visual diagrams that represent relationships between concepts to aid in understanding and memory. (ii) Outlining: Writing structured summaries of information to highlight main points and supporting details. (3) Metacognitive strategies: (i) Goal setting: Defining specific, measurable, and achievable learning objectives before starting a study session. (ii) Self-monitoring: Regularly checking one's comprehension and progress, such as through practice tests or quizzes. (4) Resource management strategies: (i) Effective note-taking: Using methods like the Cornell Note-Taking System to organize and review notes systematically. (ii) Study schedules: Planning study

sessions and breaks to maximize focus and retention [9].

Practical applications in education are as follows: (1) Curriculum design: Incorporating activities that promote the use of cognitive, metacognitive, and resource management strategies into lesson plans. Designing assessments that require students to use and demonstrate their learning strategies. (2) Instructional techniques: Teaching students how to use different learning strategies effectively. Providing opportunities for students to practice and refine their strategies through guided practice and feedback [10]. (3) Personalized learning: Tailoring instruction to individual students' preferred learning strategies and cognitive strengths. Using adaptive learning technologies that provide personalized feedback and support. (4) Teacher training: Equipping educators with knowledge and skills to teach and reinforce effective learning strategies. Encouraging teachers to model and scaffold the use of these strategies in their instruction.

By integrating learning strategies within the framework of IPT, educators can enhance students' ability to process, understand, and retain information, leading to improved academic outcomes and lifelong learning skills [11].

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can summarize that there are mainly two kinds of motivation that influence learners: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation [12]. Specifically, when someone learns a new language to make friends, experience different cultures, or feel integrated into a group, integrative motivation is at play. This type of motivation blends into our feelings and needs of incorporating into social surroundings, thus making the learning experience not only about acquiring knowledge but also about fostering meaningful relationships and gaining a deeper understanding of the world around us.

On the other hand, instrumental motivation is focused on practical benefits and personal goals. When learners strive to achieve high grades, secure a job offer, or earn a promotion, they are driven by instrumental motivation. This form of motivation stresses tangible rewards—things that can directly influence one's future success and achievements. Understanding these two types of motivation helps us uncover both the surface-level and deeper reasons behind our pursuits, while also revealing how our goals shape our educational journeys.

Whether through building strong connections or achieving specific objectives, motivation remains a powerful force that drives growth and fulfillment. Aligned with the findings of this PhD dissertation, we can logically conclude that the cultivation of motivation has a profoundly positive and optimistic impact on English autonomous learning among university students in Hunan, China.

Through incorporating learning strategies within the framework of IPT, teachers can better promote students' ability to process, understand, and retain information well, thus leading to improved academic accomplishments and boosted lifelong learning skills. Therefore, as this dissertation highlights, in the context of cultivating motivation's impact on English autonomous learning among university students in Hunan, China, learning strategies consistently play a pivotal mediating role.

Impact of Integrative Motivation and Instrumental Motivation on English Autonomous Learning among University Students in Hunan, China——A Mediating Role of Learning Strategy" (SYXY202441)

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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