

The impact of learning experience on motivation: A case study of Chinese ethnic minority EFL learners

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ABSTRACT

Language motivation research has long been a research focus in the field of second language acquisition. In the past two decades, a large number of motivation studies have been conducted in different social and cultural contexts. Researchers contributed to the explorations of factors that affect learners' foreign language motivation as well as the relationship between motivation and other aspects of foreign language learning. However, research on Chinese ethnic minority learners' motivation to learn English is in paucity. Many of the ethnic minority students are proficient in their mother tongue (minority language) and Mandarin (national language), while they are also learning English as a foreign language. The social and cultural contexts to which they are exposed make their English learning complicated. To address the gap, the present study adopted a qualitative research approach in the form of a case study to explore the impact of learning experience on English learning motivation among three Chinese ethnic minority pre-university students. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with three participants. The findings from the qualitative data revealed that the English learning motivation of the participants was typically examination-directed and greatly influenced by teachers' teaching style, peers' attitudes toward English, and the overall learning atmosphere in the class. The study provides implications for educational policy-making and English instruction in China's ethnic minority regions.

Keywords: Chinese ethnic minorities; motivation; learning experience; learning impact

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INTRODUCTION

In the context of China, it is believed that good English proficiency opens doors to greater opportunities, making the overall Chinese people aware of the critical importance of learning English. As a compulsory subject, English is offered to all Chinese students at different levels of schools ranging from primary schools to universities. It is estimated that about 400 million Chinese people are learning English, a number of which is larger than the total population of the United States (Li, 2020).

Ethnic minority English learners are a special group of English learners in China. On the one hand, many of them are learning English as a third language, with ethnic minority languages as their mother tongue and Chinese as their second language.

On the other hand, students in ethnic minority-dominated schools start learning English in junior high or even senior high school, as opposed to Han-dominated schools, where the majority of students are of the Han ethnicity, the textbooks are written in Chinese, and the teaching language is Chinese. They have to work hard on Chinese in order to be both proficient in minority languages and national lingua franca. Though they find it easy to be a person with good proficiency in two daily used languages, they find it difficult to learn English. It has been well noted in TESOL and related fields that ethnic minority students often experience difficulties and underperform in mainstream English classrooms due to their lack of linguistic capital and proficiency in the instructional language and their limited access to

quality English learning resources (Adamson & Xia, 2011; Yang, 2017; Zhang, 2018). Difficulties in English learning make many ethnic minority students anxious, less confident, inactive and even less motivated in English learning.

Motivation has been recognized as one of the most important factors in learning a foreign language, for example in relation to why an individual decides to learn a foreign language, how long he/she is willing to persist in the learning, and how hard he/she is going to pursue it. According to Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), such questions are concerns in motivation theory and research. Numerous studies have found that learners with high motivation perform better than those who are less motivated in learning English as a foreign language. The intensity of learners' motivation, which is crucial in the process of foreign learning, is attributed to various factors. This study attempts to explore the impact of learning experience on Chinese ethnic minority English learners' motivation to learn English.

L2 learning motivation has long been a research focus in the second language acquisition field since the 1950s. L2 motivation research finds its root in the work of Gardner and his colleagues in Canada in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Csizér, 2019). In the 1990s, the Social Educational Model put forward by Gardner made an influential contribution to L2 motivation research. Drawing on his own empirical research and a number of theories, Dörnyei in 2005 introduced L2 Motivational Self System (henceforth L2MSS) with an aim to explain individual differences in the motivation of learning a second language. L2MSS has currently been a dominant theoretical framework in the field of L2 motivation research due to its versatility and capability to include various perspectives from different theoretical orientations (Boo et al., 2015).

L2MSS consists of three core components: the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience. According to Dörnyei (2005), the intended effort learners are willing to put into L2 learning is affected by the three constructs of L2MSS. The ideal L2 self which concerns the state a L2 learner would ideally like to reach represents the learner's own hopes and wishes. The ought-to L2 self refers to the state that an L2 learner has to reach so as to meet others' expectations and avoid negative outcomes. Thus, the ought-to L2 self represents the hopes and expectations imposed by significant others. The L2 learning experience refers to an L2 learner's experience related to the immediate learning environment, such as the impact of the teachers, the curriculum, and the peers.

In recent years, researchers have put increasing focus on L2 learning motivation and taken it as an important predictor of L2 learning behavior and learning outcomes in successful language learning (Ushioda, 2020; Al-Hoorie & Szabó, 2022). A great number of studies have been conducted with the

framework of L2MSS. Researchers have confirmed the validation of L2MSS in different social and cultural contexts (e.g., Doiz & Lasgabaster 2018; Fryer & Roger, 2018; Kong et al., 2018). In recent years, L2 motivation research in China began to shift from using Gardner's social-educational model to following Dörnyei's L2MSS as the theoretical framework. Studies carried out mainly have four focuses. Firstly, some studies made further validation of the L2MSS in Chinese contexts (e.g., Magid & Papi, 2009; Liu, 2015; You & Dörnyei, 2016). The results of those studies are in agreement that the model of L2MSS can be used as a theoretical framework in motivation research among Chinese learners.

Secondly, studies investigated the influencing factors of L2 English learners' L2MSS. In their research, Zhan and Hong (2015) reported that family educational background increased the level of the ideal L2 self. However, it did not have a significant impact on learners' ought-to L2 self and the L2 learning experience. Zheng et al. (2018) used a structural equation model to explore the relationship between learners' English learning motivation and their online self-regulation. The result showed that a positive future image of English learning and internal interest in English culture tended to increase the capacity of self-regulation in online learning.

Thirdly, some studies explored the relationship between L2MSS and other aspects related to English learning, such as the relationship among components of L2MSS, the relationship between L2 motivation and learners' intended learning efforts, a correlation between L2 learners' motivation intensity and L2 proficiency (e.g., Chen, 2019; Huo & Rui, 2020; Jiao et al., 2022; Yu & Jiang, 2021). Fourthly, researchers adopted the L2MSS theory to study the learning motivation of Chinese as a second language among international students or Chinese ethnic minority groups in the Chinese context (e.g., Liu, 2020; Li & Zhang, 2021).

Research in English learning motivation in the Chinese context has aroused emerging interest (Wang et al., 2021). However, the existing literature shows that previous studies mainly focused on the learning motivation of university students whose first language is Chinese and who learn English as an L2 language. L2 motivation research involving Chinese ethnic minority students as research subjects is in scarcity. China is a multi-ethnic country where many ethnic groups have their own mother tongues and specific ethnic cultures which exhibit obvious differences from those of the Han Majority. The education policy and education resources in ethnic minority regions result in a different foreign language learning experience among ethnic minority English learners. However, little has been known about the influence of Chinese ethnic minority learners' English learning experience on their learning motivation. To fill this gap, the present study aims to

investigate the impact of the L2 learning experience on Chinese ethnic minority learners of English using the framework of L2MSS. This study is of significance theoretically and pedagogically. The findings from the previous empirical studies have revealed that “L2 learning experience was a strong predictor of various criterion measures such as intended learning effort or L2 learning achievement” (Dörnyei, 2019, p. 22). Besides, the exploration of the support that English learners receive from their parents and peers is also helpful in investigating their motivation to learn English (Wallace & Leong, 2020). Overall, this study provides insight for educators for promoting a strong and sustainable motivation to learn English among ethnic minority students in China.

The present study aims to achieve the following objectives: (1) to investigate the influence of learning experience on Chinese ethnic minority learners’ EFL motivation and (2) to determine the power of learning experience on Chinese ethnic minority learners’ EFL motivation. Based on the research objectives, the following questions are addressed: (1) how does the learning experience influence Chinese ethnic minority learners’ English learning motivation? and (2) Which aspect of the learning experience exerts the most powerful influence on Chinese ethnic minority learners’ EFL motivation?

METHOD

Research Design

In order to obtain a better understanding of the impact

of learning experience on Chinese ethnic minority students’ English learning motivation, the present study attempts to use a qualitative case research design to make a thorough and deep investigation of each case. The study was conducted in a natural setting where the participants live. The data were collected using various data sources such as interviews, observations and documents to make a deep exploration and provide a holistic view of the issue. Most studies on L2MSS employed quantitative research design using the questionnaire designed by Dörnyei and his colleagues or the adapted version as the main instrument. The participants in the study answered the questionnaire by making responses to each of the questionnaire items in the Likert scale.

Participants

The participants were purposefully selected from ethnic minority undergraduate freshmen. The researcher asked three English teachers to send a recruitment notice through teachers’ WeChat for voluntary participants. Five students contacted the researcher to express their interest in this study. Finally, three participants with different English learning experiences from three different English classes were recruited. All three participants were proficient in their mother tongue (ethnic minority language) and Mandarin (China’s national language), meanwhile they were learning English as a foreign language. Please note that in this report the participants are referred to using pseudonyms. Table 1 shows the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1

Demographic Information of the Three Participants

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Years of English Learning	Self-reported English Level
Nancy	female	Uygur	19	4	elementary
Alice	female	Kazak	19	13	intermediate
Jack	male	Uygur	21	3	beginner

Instrument

A semi-structured interview was used as the main data source, including exchanges between the researcher and the participants conducted via WeChat. The interview protocol was made up of two parts. The first part comprised six questions about the participants’ demographic information. The second part was about the participants’ English learning experience. It consisted of five main questions under which there were some sub-questions based on the participants’ responses to the main questions. The interview questions were validated by two experienced researchers in the field of applied linguistics. The researcher made some amendments to the interview questions based on the feedback from the validators until a consensus was reached.

Data Collection

The interview was conducted with each participant

face to face at the university where they are studying. The researcher made an appointment in advance with the participants to confirm the time and place of the interview. The interview with Nancy was conducted in a vacant classroom. The interview with Alice and Jack was carried out in a staff office. Nobody else was at the site except the researcher and the participants during the interview.

The interview was conducted as a conversation. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher told the participant about the purpose and importance of the interview to let the participant feel at ease. The participants were encouraged to tell their real stories about their own English learning experience as detailed as possible. The interview was conducted in Chinese because the participants were not able to communicate in English. During the interview, when the participants did not understand the questions better, the researcher would explain to them. For

example, when the question “Which of the above-mentioned factors influence your English learning motivation most” was asked, one of the participants was puzzled about the word “motivation.” The researcher offered him an explanation of the word with examples. When what the participants answered was not very relevant to what was asked, the researcher would keep listening to them rather than interrupting them. When they stopped talking, the researcher would address the questions, in other words, to let the participants elicit answers closer to the interview questions. The researcher gave responses to the participants during their talk with nods or verbal reactions. All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim manually.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with the qualitative research paradigm. The analysis of the data began with the coding of the interview transcripts. The researcher first read and re-read the interview transcripts very carefully. Some keywords, phrases, or sentences were underlined during the reading process. Then the researcher put codes for each meaning segment which are either a complete sentence, part of a sentence, a word, a phrase, or sentence groups. After completing the first coding of Nancy’s interview transcripts, the researcher examined the codes and checked if some segments were not coded.

In the second coding of Nancy’s interview transcripts, the previous codes were categorized based on their similarity in meaning. For example, codes “devote in English for *Gao Kao* (College Entrance Examination in China),” and “work hard for a good grade in *Gao Kao*” were put together with a new code “work hard on English for *Gao Kao*”. Thus, the theme “learn English for *Gao Kao*” was established. All the codes were scrutinized and categorized in this way. There were eight themes identified with Nancy’s interview transcripts in this round of coding. In the third round of coding, the eight themes were recategorized into five based on their shared meaning. For example, the themes “work hard on English for *Gao Kao*,” “devote in English for CET” and “learn English for postgraduate entrance exam” were unified and coded with the new theme of “learn English for the exam.” The coding of the other two participants’ interview transcripts was conducted in the same way as it was done with Nancy’s.

The codes and themes that emerged from the transcripts were peer-reviewed. The researcher told the validators about the coding process. The validators read the transcripts and examined the codes and the themes. They expressed their opinions and gave feedback. The researcher of the present study had discussions with the validators on some codes for which they had different opinions before the consensus was reached, for example “can’t understand the teacher” was replaced with “can’t follow the teacher’s instruction”.

FINDINGS

The Story of Nancy

Nancy was of Uygur ethnicity, coming from a village in Yi Ning City of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous region. Nancy had a sister and a brother who were studying at a primary school and secondary school respectively. She was the eldest child in her family. Her parents only had little education, so they were proud of Nancy being the first person in the family to become a university student. Nancy liked English when she was a child, even though she did not learn English at that time.

I like English. I was interested in English when I was a little child...At junior middle school, I heard students in another class reading English which sounds very nice. I was wondering that I would be very happy if I could speak fluent English. I think English is really a beautiful language.

Learning English was important for Nancy. She was learning English mainly for exams and future employment. In her interview, Nancy said, “Having a good mastery of English can facilitate my academic development, for example, to pass CET 4/6 (College English Test Band 4/6) and to increase grades in the postgraduate entrance exam. English also played important roles in future employment”.

Nancy started learning English late as most ethnic minority students did in Xinjiang. Bilingual Education Policy was carried out in ethnic minority students-dominated schools in Xinjiang. The aim of the policy was to cultivate students with good proficiency in both minority language and Chinese. At primary schools, no foreign language was offered, and students focused on Chinese learning in addition to minority language learning and other subjects. Nancy had never learned English at primary school. Nancy began learning English in grade two of junior high school. She liked English, even though only a few English lessons were offered during her junior high school years. “I have learned nothing except for the alphabet,” said Nancy.

Nancy’s motivation in learning English varied at senior high. English subject was offered at her senior high school for the academic years. In grade one, there were two English classes per week. Most of her classmates spent little time and energy in English since English was not included in *Gao Kao*. But Nancy tried to learn English well in the first semester of grade one. “I worked hard on English in the first semester. I read and recited English texts every day, and I also tried to remember every word I have learned,” said Nancy. However, her effort to learn English changed in the second semester of grade one.

*I liked learning English in semester one of grade one and I also wanted to learn it well. When we were informed that we can choose our minority language to replace English in *Gao Kao*, we did not want to work on English. Sometimes I want to learn English, but there are too many subjects to learn. I have to work very hard on those subjects in order to be selected in one of the best classes where all students*

are best in our grade. I really did not have time and energy to put in English. I devoted myself to the subjects which would be tested for the selection of the best class.

Nancy started working on English in grade two. With her great effort and excellent grades, she was selected for one of the best classes in grade two. At the beginning of grade two, the policy changed again. English was then a compulsory subject in Gao Kao. Nancy could not follow the English teacher's instruction since her teaching did not fit Nancy and other students who had learned little English before. Nancy wanted to spend more time improving her English. To her disappointment, no matter how hard she studied, she still had great difficulty following the teacher's instructions. She found many of her classmates with similar English proficiency as hers did not concentrate on English class and even gave up learning English.

It was too noisy in English class. Only a few students who have learned English in junior high school listened attentively to the teacher. I tried my best to focus on the class, but I found I often lost. Sometimes I also wanted to give up English, but I did not want to do it too early. I know English is important for me in the future.

In the second semester of grade two, a new English teacher came to teach Nancy's class. She was an ethnic minority teacher, and Nancy liked her very much. Nancy enjoyed learning English with the teacher, and she would like to work harder on English.

The teacher is also from Uygur. She graduated from a key university. She taught us based on our average English level. In that semester, we learned English textbooks for junior high school because many of us did not get enough English education at junior high school. I could comprehend the teacher's instruction and I also felt a little bit progress in my English. I had a strong motivation to learn English well and really worked very hard on English in that month.

Nancy gave up learning English in grade three. Though her interest in English increased and her English had also improved with one-year hard work in grade two, Nancy decided to give up learning English. Because they were officially informed that they could choose one subject from English and a minority language for Gao Kao.

Minority language is my mother tongue. I am confident that I can get a good grade if I choose minority language. But if I choose English, I am sure I will lose. How can I compete with students who have learned English for many years?

After being a university student, Nancy became more aware of the importance of learning English. English was compulsory for all students in the university in China. It was natural that Nancy had difficulty in learning English since she had not gotten enough English education compared to her

classmates who had learned English at least from primary school. With the teacher's encouragement and classmates' help, Nancy made a study plan and spent plenty of time learning English every day.

The learning atmosphere in my class is very good. Most students are working very hard. I study English together with my roommates. We dictate English words for each other. They help me a lot in English grammar.

Nancy's motivation to learn English was greatly influenced by the Gao Kao policy and the English learning atmosphere.

If we were told that English is a compulsory subject in Gao Kao and the policy were not changed, I think many students at senior high school would work very hard on English. Since English is not compulsory for all, many of us did not take it seriously. So English learning atmosphere is really bad at my secondary school. The school also seemed to attach less importance to English education.

The Story of Alice

Alice was a Uygur girl. Both of her parents were peasants. She had a young brother and a young sister who were studying in grade one and grade three of junior high school respectively. Alice started learning English in grade one of senior high school. She liked learning English and used to be the English class representative in her class. For her, English was useful for entertainment, communication and cultural exchange. She emphasized the importance of learning English for university students.

If you want to pass CET 4, you must work hard on English. It is better to pass CET 6 which will increase your employment chances. I will be a math teacher after graduation. At least I have to pass CET 4. Otherwise, my future students will look down upon me.

Alice devoted herself to English learning for her whole senior high school years. She had English class every day in the three school years. Her interest in English increased in grade one with a good teacher teaching her English. So, she had a strong motivation to learn English well. Alice told me with admiration:

She is the group leader of English teachers. She speaks fluent English. She works as a part-time interpreter for local government. She is really excellent. We admire her so much. I also want to reach her English proficiency.

The good atmosphere further strengthened Alice's motivation to learn English. In grade two Alice decided to choose English in Gao Kao. She had an English class in class one where students with good English proficiency from different classes were selected to have English together. Alice was proud of having English lessons in class one since all the students spared no effort in learning English. She also worked much harder on English than before. She thought that she was the most diligent student in her class.

We competed in learning English. At that time, I thought that I preferred to be the last one in class one than to be the first one in my own class (class three). I spent more time and energy on English than on other subjects. Good atmosphere in class one positively influenced me through the year.

A considerate English teacher and a good atmosphere in the university made Alice keep going in her English learning. Her English was not good, and she even had difficulty learning English at the university. Though she was anxious about her English, she had never given it up. The English teacher often talked with Alice about her English learning and gave her advice. With the teacher's encouragement and help, Alice was more confident in English and worked much harder.

University English is really very difficult for me. Now I can follow the teacher's instruction, but I am still very poor in grammar and writing. Sometimes I felt upset with my English. My English teacher has never ignored me; she often gives me power. My classmates, especially my roommates help me a lot in learning English. So many people are helpful in my English, I will not give up English, and I must work much harder.

For Alice, the learning atmosphere was a key factor that affected her motivation to learn English. As she put it, "If most students in your class are working very hard, you will naturally work hard ... I will lag behind if I do not make an effort to learn."

The Story of Jack

Jack was a Kazak boy who came from the village of Urumqi, the capital city of Xinjiang. Unlike Nancy and Alice, Jack started learning English in grade three of primary school. He studied at the Han majority-dominated primary school where English was offered from grade three. However, Jack did not like English at primary school.

Jack did not make any effort in learning English in junior high school. Few students paid attention to English since it was not a compulsory subject in Gao Kao. There were only one or two English lessons per week. Sometimes the students watched a movie in English class. English class was even replaced by math or other subjects which were taken as more important than English.

I almost did not learn English during my whole junior high school years. We thought that it was not worth spending time and energy on English since we would not choose English in Gao Kao.

Jack's motivation at senior high school varied from time to time. Jack had English class every day at senior high school. His English teacher was a humorous young man who was very nice and responsible. Jack liked the English class and was gradually interested in learning English. He was aware of the importance to learn English. To him, learning English can provide him with a lot of

benefits.

If I have a good mastery of English, I can be an interpreter, and I can travel abroad without other's help. For university students, only by learning English well can we pass CET 4/6, without which we will be not competitive in the future job market. I think more and more undergraduates will take postgraduate entrance exam to pursue their studies as postgraduates. English plays a critical role in those import exams.

Being aware of the importance of English, Jack was more motivated to learn English. He worked very hard by reading English, memorizing English words, and doing English exercises. Since he did not learn English well in junior high school, Jack had difficulty in English in grade one of senior high school. In order to improve his English, Jack's parents paid for an English tutor to teach him on the weekends. One year later, his hard work paid off, and he made great progress in English. His English was better than many of his classmates.

Jack's English learning motivation was affected by the Gao Kao policy. In grade two, Jack worked much harder on English than before since he expected a better grade on an English exam. In the second semester of grade three, the Gao Kao policy changed. English was not compulsory, and students could choose one from English and a minority language in Gao Kao. Most of Jack's classmates chose minority language which they were more confident for a good grade. However, Jack did not change his mind, and he still chose English.

We were told to choose one subject from English and minority language in Gao Kao in the second semester. I was very anxious about it. I have no idea about which one to choose. After careful consideration I decided on English.

The learning atmosphere in grade three decreased Jack's effort in English. With a strong determination to get a good grade on the English exam in Gao Kao, Jack devoted himself to learning English at the beginning of grade three. Most of his classmates did not learn English since they chose a minority language in Gao Kao, so did Jack's close friends. "Why didn't I learn a minority language with my friends together," Jack thought. Jack once again chose a minority language in Gao Kao. Immediately he spent less time learning English. However, he found it not easy to get a higher grade in minority language. Finally, he stopped learning English.

You know I studied at the Han majority dominated primary school for six years. I just can speak minority language with people around me. I am not good at reading and writing in minority language. I'm afraid of getting a bad result in minority language exam. I hope I can insist on English and I also expect that English will make a big contribution to my total score of Gao Kao.

Jack was less motivated to learn English since

he studied at the university. After three years of hard work in senior high school, Jack was tired of studying at the university. He just did what the English teacher asked him to do. He seldom spent time learning English after class. He thought no one pushed him in studying and he had more time to play basketball which was his favorite sport.

I still like English. But English class is not fun. We just learn texts, new words, and grammar. I think we should have more interesting activities in the class. It seems that we are still learning English for exams.

He worked hard whenever he thought that he had to pass CET. However, his effort in English did not last long. He just insisted on working hard for some days and then stopped. He felt university English was hard to learn. He had a lot to do to improve his English. But he did not know how to learn. So, gradually his interest in English decreased when he studied at the university.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the impact of learning experience on English learning motivation in the trajectory of Chinese minority students' English learning. Despite their different English learning experiences, the English learning motivation of the participants in the study is influenced by similar factors. All the participants' motivation to learn English is affected by teachers, the learning atmosphere of the class, and peers' attitudes towards English learning. This result indicates that the L2 learning experience is one of the important sources of L2 learning motivation. The result is consistent with the previous studies which revealed that L2 learning experience was the most powerful predictor of motivated behavior (e.g., Taguchi et al., 2009; Papi & Teimouri, 2012; Islam et al., 2013; You & Dörnyei, 2016).

The participants' motivation and effort to learn English vary in their trajectory of English learning. They acknowledged the importance of English in their academic and future employment and desired to have a good mastery of English. When they were informed that English was compulsory for all students in Gao Kao, they worked harder on English. When they chose a minority language in Gao Kao, they paid less attention to English. In this sense, the English learning motivation of Chinese ethnic minority learners is greatly influenced by examinations. This is in line with a large-scale motivation survey in China conducted by You and Dörnyei (2016). In the survey, they found that the desire to be successful in academic development is a powerful factor for all levels of Chinese English learners. Many Chinese students study hard for a better tertiary education which increases their chances to obtain a high social status and high-paying job. Success in exams plays a critical role for Chinese ethnic minority students to strive for personal development and family welfare. This is why the

English learning motivation of Chinese ethnic minority students is examination-oriented.

In addition, learning with teachers who are proficient in English and competent in teaching promoted their motivation to learn English. Nancy and Alice are two typical examples of this. They admired their English teachers' excellent English ability and would like to work hard to be a person like their teachers. When many of their classmates did not focus on English, and even the schools took English as a less important subject, they were not motivated to learn English, or they even wanted to give up English. Alice was seriously affected by the learning atmosphere before she gave up learning English in senior high school.

English learning motivation of Nancy and Alice is positively influenced by teachers, peers, and the learning atmosphere in the university. Though they had great difficulty learning English in the university, they had strong motivation and devoted themselves to learning English with teachers' encouragement and classmates' help. To them, a good learning atmosphere played a critical role in promoting their motivation and efforts to learn English. Unlike Nancy and Alice, Jack's motivation to learn English decreased because English class at the university was not as fun as he expected before. In addition, he could not see obvious progress in English and did not know how to improve it. Therefore, his interest in English gradually faded.

CONCLUSION

With a qualitative research paradigm, this study investigated the influence of learning experience on English learning motivation among Chinese ethnic minority students. The findings confirm that L2 learning motivation is affected by students' learning experiences. It is noticeable that Chinese ethnic minority students' motivation to learn English is oriented toward examination and is greatly affected by teachers and the learning atmosphere. Institutions should create more enjoyable learning experiences to promote ethnic minority students' motivation to learn English. For example, English teachers should pay more attention to ethnic minority students who have difficulty in English and give encouragement and academic help to those students. Peers who are good at English can set a good example for them to follow and offer them help in English learning.

Because of time constraints, the researcher of the present study did not conduct class observation, which might provide more insights into the participants' English learning motivation. It is advisable for future researchers to conduct class observation to further investigate how immediate learning environment and experience affect learners' motivation to learn English. Besides, it is better to carry out a longitudinal study to explore the changes in participants' motivation and the factors leading to the changes.

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