

Blended University English Learning Motivation Based on the Framework of Self-determination Theory

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Abstract: Presently, there is a flourishing demand for transnational communicative talents from all walks of life, which poses higher expectations for university English teaching. Following the innovation of university English education and the high-speed growth of technology, the conventional university English class has been transitioned from a solitary face-to-face, teacher-oriented treatment to a blended pattern (Muhammadin & Herda, 2024). Along with this shift, it is imperative to find out whether and how students' motivation to learn English gets elevated. Hence, to addressing this issue, this paper presents the basic theoretical framework of self-determinism and analyses whether and how the basic psychological needs of learners are better met to elevate their learning motivation in blended university English instruction. Despite its limitations, this study provides a referential basis for the researchers who are interested in this theory while at the same time providing a practical guide to the practice of blended university English language teaching and learning.

Keywords: Motivation; Self-Determination Theory; Blended Learning

Introduction

Motivation, as an important non-intellectual factor, is of undeniable importance in education as it influences learning outcomes and the level of commitment to learning (Bower, 1979). Most existing research on motivation has used a dichotomous approach to classify motivation as internal or external. It was not until the 1980s that the American psychologists Deci and Ryan developed their self-determination theory (SDT). They broke away from the limitations of the previous view and saw human motivation as a continuum from unmotivated, externally motivated to internally motivated (Deci & Ryan, 1980). They also suggest that there are three basic psychological needs for every individual, the need to be competent, the need to belong, and the need for autonomy. When these needs are met, the individual will fully engage in learning activities and self-regulate, internalizing external motivation into more enduring intrinsic motivation (Muñoz & Ramirez, 2015). This theoretical finding has shed considerable light on the enhancement of student motivation in traditional university English language teaching, and there has been a great deal of empirical and theoretical research by scholars on how it can be applied to boost educational effectiveness in university English classes (Wang & Wang, 2024). It is worth noting, however, that contemporary education has progressively embraced blended learning settings, which involve a combination of offline and online delivery methods in which instruction and assessment are provided to students in a physical environment, such as a classroom or a workplace, in tandem with online environments (online quizzes, online instructor-led lectures, or online assessments) (Marcellis et al., 2023). At present, there are relatively few studies concerned with employing self-determinism to raise university students' motivation to learn English within such blended learning environments (Wang & Wang, 2024). Therefore, aiming at bridging this gap, this paper analyses the effects of these three psychological needs on English learning motivation individually on the basis of the SDT theory as the basic framework and elaborates on whether and how the exploitation of the SDT theory in blended teaching of university English stimulate students' motivation and promote the quality of instruction so as to bring new inspirations to practitioners.

1. Three Psychological Needs

1.1. Competence

Competence in SDT is analogous to Bandura's notion of self-efficacy, a subjective determination of a given one's ability to undertake a learning task. When learners have a high level of competence, their engagement in and motivation for learning is higher (Deci & Ryan, 1980). And the most crucial aspect of competent satisfaction is the tasks given to students are moderately difficult and in the best areas chal-

lenging. When tasks are in the realm of optimal challenge, competence needs are well met and intrinsic motivation is increased. Accordingly, In blended teaching, the way in which instruction is delivered both offline and online can be better adapted to the ability level of the student to allow them to be challenged to the maximum extent possible. For instance, online intelligent tutoring systems enable support to be tailored to students' proficiency levels. Instructors would even be able to visualize students' real-time proficiency growth throughout the English language learning process through graphs automatically generated by the online system including spiderweb graphs or line graphs, and deliver guidance that is best suited to the student's ability (Kabudi, 2021). Furthermore, according to cognitive appraisal theory, informational reward can increase an individual's intrinsic motivation by making them feel competent in the activity they are performing, or by knowing how to be more competent in that activity. In educational activities, positive feedback and formative assessment are common forms of informational rewards, which increase students' self-esteem, their sense of competence, and their internal motivation to learn ((Muñoz & Ramirez, 2015). University students are in the key stage of self-identification, they are eager to be recognized and respected by outsiders, especially the teachers (Tran & Ma, 2021). It is thus of paramount value to provide them with positive and formative responses in teaching so that they are aware of their competence and progress, which is a powerful approach to raise their learning motivation. And the periodic testing, instant and timely feedback, and growth records in blended teaching all make it easier for learners to track their learning gains and advances, boosting their self-confidence and intrinsic motivation.

1.2. Relatedness

According to SDT, the satisfaction of the need for relatedness could also lead externally motivated or demotivated learners to a more intrinsic motivation. When individuals are in an environment where they feel secure, warm, and belong, exploratory behaviors governed by intrinsic motivation will increase (Comanaru & Noels, 2009). It is wise to utilize the role of relatedness adequately to strengthen students' motivation to learn English. And blended teaching is precisely a perfect stimulus for university students to build rapport with their teachers and instructors. On the one hand, teachers could create a form to summarize and record students' basic profiles and personal traits, and use different caring techniques for different types of students to meet their needs for being related. Or hold regular question-and-answer hours, and leave the instructor's contact channels accessible so that students have the channel to connect directly with teachers. On the other hand, it is useful to use online tools such as videoconferencing or virtual reality platforms to organize social activities to build rapport among students and satisfying their sense of relatedness.

1.3. Autonomy

In SDT, autonomy is the heart of the three basic psychological needs. It refers to the individual's perception that the actions carried out are of their own volition and are self-directed. When learners develop a high degree of autonomy over their learning tasks, they will tend to regulate their own behavior, make fuller use of their talents (Black & Deci, 2000). In the past, many instructors have always taught according to the official syllabus issued by the educational department, treating students as passive learners, resulting in students' learning interest declining year by year and a utilitarian attitude towards learning. Whereas in blended teaching, this phenomenon can be modified. Teachers provide open learning resources, such as e-books, podcasts, online courses, etc., to empower students to autonomously choose learning materials according to their interests and learning goals. Besides, students are provided with a wider range of self-directed learning tools, such as grammar and vocabulary practice software, pronunciation correction tools, language learning apps, etc., enables students to self-evaluate and upgrade their language skills. Teaching that honors students' independence and autonomy by giving them the scope to choose their learning materials and learning strategies, enables learners to be accountable for their conduct and to internalize their learning motivation, thus heightening the effectiveness of education (Mohamed & Al-Jadaan, 2024).

Conclusion

In a word, in blended university English teaching, students' psychological needs are all catered for better, and their learning motivation are aroused in a greater way. The new mode can be better tailored to the proficiency level of university students and supply positive and formative feedback to satisfy their competence demands; offer abundant pathways of linkage to foster student-to-student, and student-to-teacher

connections; and enable students to make their own choices among the open learning resources and self-directed learning tools. This finding has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it expands and perfects the English teaching in universities, and offers additional references and grounds for researchers who are keen on this theory to explore university students' motivation in blended English language teaching based on the SDT theory. Practically speaking, it is a useful approach to promote motivation in the practice of university blended English teaching. However, the mechanics of motivation are immensely complicated. The universality of the basic psychological needs is still in doubt. And perhaps there are also cultural and individual differences in terms of the concept of self and personal psychological needs (Muhammadin & Herda, 2024). Hence, hereafter, a more targeted and represented research design could be taken into account, depending on the characteristics of the research participants. And English educators shall continue to explore and check how SDT theory functions more effectively in motivating learners in the context of blended education in university English, in light of their practical teaching experiences.

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