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The Relationship Between Second L2 Acquisition Anxiety and Learning Motivation

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Abstract. The interaction between second language (L2) acquisition anxiety and motivation has received widespread attention, but existing research still lacks systematic synthesis and review. Through the consultation of relevant domestic and international literature, within the framework of theoretical foundations, empirical studies, existing limitations and future directions, this paper systematically reviews research on the links between anxiety and motivation in second language learning, in order to clarify the relationship between these two variables and its internal mechanism. The study found that anxiety was negatively related to motivation in general. However, this relationship is complex, as different types of motivation can affect anxiety levels to varying degrees. At the same time, motivation plays important mediating and moderating roles in the process in which anxiety affects learning behavior and learning outcomes. Based on these findings, this paper suggests that pedagogical practice should focus on cultivating learners' Ideal L2 Self, creating a supportive classroom environment, and helping students reshape anxiety as a challenge, thereby relieving anxiety and fostering the development of motivation.

Keywords: Second Language Acquisition, L2 acquisition anxiety, learning motivation, ideal L2 self

1. Introduction

With the progress of globalization and intercultural exchange, second language learning is an important means of supporting individual growth, educational development and international exchange. In second language acquisition studies, the influence of cognitive factors on learning outcomes was mainly emphasized, while interest in affective factors was relatively limited. However, with the development of research, interest in individual differences among learners is increasing. Among them, second language learning motivation and L2 acquisition anxiety are positioned as important concepts in understanding the psychological process underlying second language learning. In recent studies, it is shown that affective factors do not act independently but have dynamic effects on each other. Therefore, it is important to clarify the interaction between motivation and anxiety.

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Although research accumulation in this field has been steadily increasing, many of the existing studies have focused on particular aspects of the relationship between motivation and anxiety, and the study of comprehensive integration of theoretical and empirical knowledge is still lacking. Based on these backgrounds, this paper reviews the previous research on the relationship between L2 acquisition anxiety and second language learning motivation. The purpose of this research is to integrate the results of the existing research, to organize the main research trends, to examine the issues of the present research and to review the direction of future research.

2. Review of related theories

Anxiety related to foreign language learning is first defined as a form of personal perception and emotional experience unique to the learning process, primarily manifesting as fear of communication, anxiety about exams, and a sense of negative judgment. It is an important emotional factor that hinders second language acquisition [1]. In 1986, Horwitz and his colleagues developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), a tool specifically designed to measure learners' anxiety in foreign language classes. The foreign L2 acquisition anxiety scale measures insecurity related to foreign language acquisition along three dimensions: fear of communication, anxiety about exams, and fear of negative evaluations. This scale is recognized for its high level of reliability and validity and is the most commonly used standard in second language proficiency assessment.

Motivation to learn a second language primarily influences the learner's engagement, time devoted to learning, energy investment, and success in language acquisition [2]. Gardner decomposed this motivation into four components: motivation strength, the desire to learn a language, attitudes toward language learning, and integration [3]. Dörnyei simplified this model into three dimensions: behavioral orientation, effort and perseverance, as well as the reinforcement of emotional prerequisites and their increased applicability [2].

3. Summary of empirical research

3.1. Negatively correlated with motivation

It is widely accepted within the field of Second Language Acquisition that anxiety is negatively correlated with motivation. However, this relationship can be affected by the type of motivation.

First, in terms of overall correlation, many studies have confirmed the existence of a significant negative relationship between anxiety and motivation. For example, anxiety has been reported to show a negative correlation with intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation as well as overall motivation for English learning [4]. In addition, there was a significant negative correlation between the anxiety of English use and most learning motivations (such as acquisition of knowledge, stimulation and excitement) [5].

3.2. The influence of different motivations on anxiety and its causes

Recently, scholars have examined how various motivations affect second L2 acquisition anxiety through multiple theoretical lenses, and the collective findings of these studies are largely consistent.

Research based on self-determination theory (SDT) shows that learners with high autonomous motivation usually voluntarily participate in learning because of their intrinsic interest or recognition of the value of activities, which enhances learners' sense of autonomy and psychological

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adaptability, thus reducing the level of anxiety. While control motivation is mainly driven by external rewards and punishments or internal pressure. Learners tend to learn in order to avoid shame, guilt, failure, or other people's negative evaluation. Negative emotions, particularly anxiety, are frequently triggered by such persistent external pressures [6].

Meanwhile, research based on the second language motivational self system (l2mss) also found that promotive orientation and ideal L2 self emphasize the possibility of future development and personal growth. The clearer the learner's L2 image of his future ideal, the more motivated and confident he will be in L2 learning. This positive self-expectation helps to curb foreign language anxiety and relieve anxiety. A preventive orientation based on responsibility and external expectations, together with the ought-to L2 self, typically leads to intense anxiety experiences. Learners prefer to pay more attention to avoiding failure or negative evaluation, resulting in fear of failure [7].

In addition, the 2 × 2 model based on l2mss theory further shows that the promoting orientation can help reduce anxiety, while the preventive orientation may strengthen anxiety experience [8].

3.3. The mechanisms underlying the mediating and moderating effects of motivation on anxiety

Contemporary studies in L2 acquisition have moved beyond a sole emphasis on the detrimental impacts of anxiety. Instead, they now investigate the mediating and moderating functions of motivation, viewing it as a crucial psychological mechanism that influences learning outcomes in the presence of anxiety. Based on the existing literature, motivation plays a dual role of "mediation" and "regulation" in this path. First, from the perspective of mediation, the intrinsic reason why communication anxiety can significantly reduce students' language learning motivation is that anxiety consumes learners' motivation resources. Anxiety interferes with the capacity of learners' working memory, makes students form fixed ability beliefs, makes them fall into doubt about their own ability, and directly destroys the internal driving force of learners. Wang et al. found that among junior high school students, communication anxiety induces learners' avoidance behavior, resulting in a marked decrease in motivation for language learning as well as a drop in L2 willingness to communicate (WTC) [9].

Secondly, from the perspective of regulation, anxiety is not completely destructive, and its effect largely depends on the level of learners' motivation. Highly motivated learners are often able to reconstruct anxiety into challenges, thus maintaining learning engagement. Learners with low motivation are easily troubled by anxiety, leading to the withdrawal of learning behavior. Some studies have shown that in the long-term oral learning of a second language, students with a strong ideal L2 self can reframe anxiety as a challenge, so as to maintain learning engagement. Sufficient motivational reserves enable learners to withstand the detrimental impact of anxiety, thereby initiating a virtuous cycle. Learners with weak motivation who lack a clear ideal self mostly think that anxiety is a threat. Motivation resources are insufficient to resist the negative effects of anxiety, and then they fall into a negative cycle. Finally, it is difficult to make progress in language learning because of anxiety [10]. Other studies further point out that intrinsic motivation (ELMQ4) and extrinsic motivation (ELMQ1) are more powerful positive indicators for predicting academic achievement [4]. Both of these motivations have behavior-driven functions. Intrinsic motivation makes learners spontaneously increase learning time through interest, while extrinsic motivation forces learners to study intensively through goal orientation.

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4. Enlightenment and suggestions

Generally speaking, studies at home and abroad have provided a lot of theoretical and empirical evidence for second language teaching and learning. Anxiety will suppress learning motivation, and the main influence is whether motivation can really work.

In addition, learners' own anxiety will also weaken their motivation. This psychological mechanism of internal motivation decline triggered by anxiety can be attributed to self-negative evaluation. Teachers should base on this motivation formation mechanism and take appropriate measures to enhance learners' sense of achievement, adjust their motivational methods, and reduce the negative impact of anxiety on motivation. The teacher can also take the students to set the kind of challenge, but can achieve the goal, and then split it into a small step by step, to help students maintain their learning momentum, accompanied by them to make visible, measurable results. In this way, students are more likely to have positive emotional experience when facing anxiety. According to the existing research results, there is a close two-way interaction between anxiety and learning motivation. On the one hand, anxiety weakens the enthusiasm of learners. On the other hand, various types of motivation also affect the degree of anxiety of learners.

Therefore, teachers should pay special attention to cultivating students' positive motivation. It can help students to figure out what kind of second language user they want to be. This image should be clear and positive and then guide them to the direction of future development and personal growth. In this way, their motivation will gradually change from fearing failure and avoiding failure to the motivation of wanting to make progress and wanting to improve [7, 11].

In addition, teachers can adopt more learner-centered teaching methods in teaching practice. In this way, the learner 's self-consciousness can be gradually enhanced, and their self-consciousness of their own value can also be improved. At the same time, teachers should also consciously reduce the over-control teaching strategies formed by over-reliance on external evaluation or rewards and punishments [6]. Moreover, creating a favorable and inclusive classroom environment, providing positive feedback, and offering abundant language practice opportunities are crucial for helping learners enhance their self-confidence, alleviate anxiety caused by negative evaluations or learning difficulties, and thus develop positive emotional experiences when facing anxiety. At the same time, from previous studies, motivation plays a mediating and moderating role in the development of anxiety, which in turn affects learners ' academic performance, these results can also provide useful guidance for language teaching. Teachers should not only eliminate anxiety as the traditional goal, but also reconstruct students' cognitive approach to anxiety, helping them transform anxiety from a threat into a task, thereby avoiding excessive consumption of working memory resources [9]. Meanwhile, teachers should accept the mistakes made by students in the classroom, reduce the pressure related to social evaluation, and maintain students' intrinsic motivation [9].

Finally, teachers should also help students develop an ideal self-image as a second language user and ensure that they have sufficient motivation to counteract the possible negative effects of anxiety [10]. Teachers also need to consider the synergistic effect between intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. On the one hand, internal motivation is used to stimulate students ' interest in learning. On the other hand, external motivation is used to organize high-intensity training, so as to increase their contact with the target language and promote the improvement of learning effect.

5. Conclusion

Grounded in the correlation between L2 acquisition anxiety and learner motivation, this paper systematically reviews the relevant theoretical and empirical research. Current literature consistently

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indicates an inverse relationship between L2 acquisition anxiety and learner motivation. This relationship is affected by motivation types, learning situations and individual differences. Among them, ideal second language self, promotive orientation and autonomous motivation usually help to reduce the level of anxiety, while should second language self, preventive orientation and control motivation are more likely to induce anxiety experience.

Furthermore, motivation serves as a critical determinant of anxiety. It also functions as a vital moderator and mediator that influences how anxiety impacts both learning behaviors and academic outcomes. From a theoretical perspective, the L2 motivational self-system, self-determination theory and social education model provide an important basis for explaining the interaction between anxiety and motivation. From the perspective of practice, findings indicate that fostering a strong ideal L2 self, enhancing learner autonomy, creating a supportive classroom environment, and improving learners' self-efficacy can help alleviate anxiety and promote the development of learning motivation. Although research in this area has expanded significantly in recent years, there are still some problems, such as the limited coverage of research objects, the single research situation, the lack of longitudinal tracking research, and the lack of attention to the dynamic interaction mechanism between the two.

Future research can further combine different age groups, different language learning environments and emerging research methods to investigate the dynamic interplay and mechanism between anxiety levels and motivation factors. Such effort would provide a more comprehensive theoretical framework and practical implications within the domain of L2 acquisition and language teaching practice.

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