

Consider to What Extent Chinese Students' Motivation to Learn English Differs Across Levels of Schooling

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Abstract

A substantial literature has regarded motivation as determinants that affect the quality of individuals' English learning and learners' motivation is dynamic, changing with time. This study focuses on how Chinese students' motivation to learn English differs at different levels of study, namely primary schools, secondary schools and universities. It aims to explore the differences in Chinese students' integrative-instrumental motivation and intrinsic-extrinsic motivation to learn English across different schooling stages as well as the potential motivational factors explaining these differences. To investigate these issues, a research synthesis approach was used and 9 articles were analyzed to answer the synthesis questions. The results of the analysis show that Chinese primary school students share unbiased integrative and instrumental motivation to learn English. Secondary pupils and university students exhibit a higher level of instrumental motivation than integrative motivation due to different reasons. Additionally, Chinese primary school students are more intrinsically motivated in that they are interested in and curious about the new language. However, extrinsic motivation becomes prominent among secondary school students and university students since they are motivated by different external factors, like teachers, parents and exams. Based on these findings, some pedagogical suggestions and directions for future research are also discussed.

Keywords: English learning motivation, Chinese students, schooling levels

1. Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to this study, consisting of five parts that provide respectively, an overview of the background to the problems investigated, the research questions addressed, the research design utilised, the structure of the writeup presented here and the significance of the study as a whole.

1.1 Background of the Problem

Motivation is widely accepted by researchers as one of the most influential factors playing into students' achievements with respect to L2 learning (Ye, 2021). As Dörnyei (1998) describes, without adequate L2 learning motivation, even individuals with remarkable language aptitude may fail to achieve their long-term learning goals. By contrast, with a high level of motivation, learners are much more likely to achieve such learning outcomes. Researchers have therefore invested considerable effort exploring motivation within second language acquisition, with research on L2 learning motivation having come to occupy a position of increasing importance.

According to You and Dörnyei (2016), relevant research studies on this topic in China began in the 1980s in response to the publication of Gardner and Lambert's research findings on motivation in 1972. Subsequently, researchers' interest in L2 learning motivation underwent a period of substantial proliferation (Dörnyei & et al., 2015). Much of the research concerning motivation is conducted in the context of higher education in China (You & Dörnyei, 2016). However, L2 learning motivation is a dynamic process, changing over time (Dörnyei &

et al., 2015) and relating to a range of different learning situations and levels of schooling (Yu & Geng, 2020). For instance, elementary students are motivated to learn English mainly by the interests that they have (Butler, 2015), while senior high school students face significant levels of pressure as a result of having to undertake college entrance examinations and so the motivation they experience tends to be more exam-oriented (Xu & Case, 2015).

Although in recent years, researchers have paid increasing attention to differences in motivation experienced by students in China, the tendency has been to compare these differences within one or two particular stages of schooling (e.g. Li, 2014; Ye, 2021; Zhang & Kim, 2013). As Xu and Case (2015) state, there is a scarcity of research exploring Chinese students' motivational differences and changes in English learning across different levels of study. There is therefore a research gap regarding how Chinese students' motivation to learn English differs between primary school and university. In the present study, the method of research synthesis is chosen as a means of bringing together previous studies relating to students' motivation across different stages of schooling. It is to be hoped that producing such a comparison will result in a useful account of how Chinese students' motivation differs with respect to English language learning across different stages of education, thereby addressing this gap in the existing research.

1.2 Research Questions

As noted above, this study presents an analysis of the existing literature to investigate how Chinese students' motivation to learn English differs between primary school, secondary school and university, and to explore the factors that can explain any reported differences. Given this aim, the following research questions are proposed to guide the research:

- 1) How does Chinese students' motivation to learn English differ across levels of schooling?
- 2) How can these differences be explained?

These two research questions are proposed to cover Chinese students' differences in English learning motivation with respect to the three levels of schooling in primary school, secondary school and university, as well as to gain a comprehensive understanding of these differences.

1.3 Research Design

The methodological approach taken in this study is a research synthesis. More specifically, it is a qualitative synthesis of qualitative and quantitative research that focuses not only on qualitative studies but also on those using quantitative and mixed-method approaches. In this study, students' motivational differences are analyzed in terms of two categories of motivation proposed in the literature, these being integrative-instrumental motivation and intrinsic-extrinsic motivation, as a means of framing the findings within existing research frameworks. With respect to the literature accessed, the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), supported by the U.S Department of Education, is chosen as the search database on the basis that it features a high level of relevant studies in the area of interest.

1.4 Structure of the Present Study

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to the topic, offering background information to this study, outlining the research questions, illustrating the aims and objectives of the study, introducing the structure of this dissertation and stating the significance of this research. The second chapter reviews the relevant literature, defining technical terms, explaining relevant theories and providing an overview of motivational studies relating to differences in ages across different contexts of learning. It also provides contextual information on the Chinese educational system. In this way, justification is provided as to why the specific research questions proposed are addressed. The third chapter provides details of the research methodology. This study is literature-based, and so this chapter introduces the relevant research paradigm, explains the concept of research synthesis, states the reasons for selecting this method, provides details of the database searched and the literature identified for analysis, illustrates the approach taken to data analysis and finally discusses certain ethical considerations and the trustworthiness of the study. The fourth chapter states the findings in relation to the two research questions stated. The final chapter concludes, providing a summary of the study, reflecting on its limitations, stating certain pedagogical suggestions for English teachers in China and providing recommendations for future research in this area.

1.5 Significance of the Present Study

The results of this study have the potential to be useful in terms of their contribution to the present literature regarding differences in the motivation experienced by Chinese learners of English. In this respect, researchers, academics and teachers all stand to benefit from gaining a more comprehensive understanding of how Chinese students' motivation differs or changes between primary school and university. Understanding the relevant factors will allow such individuals to take measures to improve students' motivation in a more informed way.

This is especially true for English teachers across different levels of schooling, for whom there is a clear benefit associated with improving students' integrative and intrinsic motivation to learn English by stimulating such students' interests in this subject. Given this, several pedagogical suggestions are offered here to facilitate the process of improving students' motivation in the classroom.

2. Literature Review and Context

The chapter reviews the existing literature on motivation relating to second language learning, providing an overview of L2 motivation, factors affecting students' L2 motivation, previous studies on the differences in students' motivation to learn English, Chinese English education in a more general sense and the Chinese National College Entrance Examination.

2.1 Overview of L2 Motivation

Motivation is regarded as one of the most significant factors playing into the success of an individual seeking to learn a second language (Dörnyei, 1998; Guerrero, 2015) on the grounds that it offers the primary impetus to sustain his or her efforts throughout the learning process (Dörnyei, 1998). Gardner and Lambert (1972) state that, although individual success in the second language learning depends to a significant extent on language aptitude, motivational factors may override this. In other words, a high level of motivation at least has the potential to compensate for deficiencies in one's language aptitude. Because of the importance of L2 motivation, it has become the target of a high level of research, evolving as a rich and largely independent research field (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013; Dörnyei, 1998). The subsequent section therefore introduces relevant terms and studies of L2 motivation, including the definition of L2 motivation and different types of motivation.

2.1.1 Defining L2 Motivation

According to Dörnyei (1998), although the concept of motivation is frequently mentioned in both educational and research contexts, there is little agreement in the literature with respect to the exact meaning of the term. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2013) note that perhaps the only thing about the definition of motivation that a majority of researchers would agree on is that this concept pertains to the *direction* and *magnitude* of human behaviour. Motivation is regarded as relating to the following three matters: 'why people decide to do something'; 'how long they are willing to sustain the activity'; and how hard they are going to pursue it' (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013: p.4). Additionally, Gardner (1985) defines motivation in second language acquisition as the combination of effort exerted and the desire to achieve individuals' goals of learning L2 as well as positive attitudes towards the process of language learning. This means that L2 motivation may include considerations relating to the extent to which the language learner tries to learn the language out of their personal desires and the satisfaction they experience in the process. According to Lamb (2016), L2 motivation is a process external to the individual that cannot be directly observed but rather only inferred from different attributes such as learners' personal or academic goals, their desire to achieve set goals, their attitudes towards the L2 community and cultures, their interests in the language, their enjoyment of the learning process, etc. These factors are important predictors of learners' motivation and some of them are discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to the reasons for differences in Chinese students' motivation to learn English.

2.1.2 Types of Motivation

With the rapid proliferation of research into L2 motivation in recent decades, a considerable diversity of perspectives and issues have emerged regarding the identification of different types of motivation with respect to language learning (Chung, 2013). Two major categories of motivation – integrative-instrumental motivation and intrinsic-extrinsic motivation – are introduced to enable this study to focus on these four types of motivation in exploring differences in the motivation that Chinese students experience.

2.1.2.1 Integrative and Instrumental Motivation

In their social-psychological account, Gardner and Lambert (1972) propose the concepts of integrative orientation and instrumental orientation, thereby laying the foundation for subsequent research into L2 motivation. According to Gardner (1985), an orientation can be defined as a set of reasons for performing an activity, offering a frame of reference within which individuals interpret their language learning experience and direct their learning efforts. The orientation is closely related to motivation in that, when talking about individuals' motivation to do something, it is often understood as their reasons for doing something (Zhao, 2011). Hence, researchers also categorise different varieties of motivation in terms of whether they are integrative or instrumental.

Integrative motivation concerns the positive disposition of individuals to learn a second language, their desire to interact with people in the target community and even their desire to become a member of that community (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013). In other words, integrative-oriented learners work hard to integrate themselves within the L2 group and to communicate with people within the L2 community. For example, individuals can

empathize with members of and the culture associated with the L2 through visiting countries and reading literature of the target language (Kashefian-Naeini et al., 2018). Such efforts reflect their willingness to master the L2 and to come to know more about the target community and culture (Chung, 2013). Such motivation seems to exert a positive influence on personal development and cultural richness. As Chen et al. (2005) point out, this motivation has the potential to result in positive development since language skills are perceived as integral to participating in the certain social group whose members use the target language.

In terms of instrumental motivation, people experiencing this kind of motivation learn the L2 with a view to realising certain practical outcomes, such as passing exams, gaining promotional opportunities and earning higher salaries (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013). Such motivation is often characterized by people's desire to gain social recognition and economic advantages (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Furthermore, Zhao (2011) notes that instrumental motivation can motivate language learners effectively, especially with respect to the return on their investment. In other words, pragmatic and utilitarian benefits, including academic and employment-related ones, have the potential to motivate L2 learners to learn the target language in an effective manner.

It is not the case that the motivation to engage in L2 learning must be regarded as discretely integrative or instrumental; both types play significant roles in language learning (Cook, 2016). In relation to this, Gardner and MacIntyre (1991) present the results of a study to investigate the effects of integrative and instrumental motivation on the learning of French and English vocabulary, and these results indicate that both integrative motivation and instrumental motivation facilitate vocabulary learning. Furthermore, Kreishan and Al-Dhaimat (2013) demonstrate that, although being integratively or instrumentally motivated may be sufficient to ensure success within L2 learning, it is preferable if both varieties of motivation are present. In other words, one certain language learner may exhibit one type of the mentioned motivation, or both of them, but the language learner experiencing both types of motivation seem to be in a stronger position to learn the language more effectively. It therefore appears that both integrative and instrumental motivation are essential for L2 learning.

2.1.2.2 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

In their account of motivation, Deci and Ryan (1985) introduce self-determination theory and propose the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000) define intrinsic motivation as being the force underpinning one's efforts to do something because it is inherently enjoyable and interesting. The rewards resulting from acting on intrinsic motivation are usually positive feelings such as pleasure, satisfaction and enjoyment, and learners tend to experience positive motivation from the pursuit of such internal rewards, meaning that this alone is often enough to sustain their learning efforts (Benson, 1997).

Intrinsic motivation can be classified into three subtypes, each being increasingly self-determined (Vandergrift, 2005). The first category is intrinsic motivation, which relates to knowledge and the drive to perform an activity out of a desire to experience the feeling of exploring new ideas and developing knowledge (Vandergrift, 2005). For example, learners may enjoy the feeling of learning about English-speakers' habits and lives. The second category is intrinsic motivation, which is associated with accomplishment and refers to finishing a task or achieving a goal (Vandergrift, 2005). Examples include the feeling experienced when learners finish a challenging English-learning-related task. The final category is intrinsic motivation, which is linked with stimulation and is the most self-determined of the three sub-types. It is strongly associated with the sensation experienced in the context of performing a task (Vandergrift, 2005), such as the satisfaction associated with hearing and understanding English. In general, intrinsically motivated individuals are viewed as appreciating the process of learning L2 because they are stimulated by the new knowledge gained, they enjoy the challenge of engaging in learning tasks or they gain satisfaction from their increasing mastery of the language (Lamb, 2016). Kreishan and Al-Dhaimat (2013) note that intrinsic motivation is more likely to result in successful L2 learning.

With respect to extrinsic motivation, this refers to the drive to perform some action for the reason that it will result in a separable outcome (Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001). Extrinsically motivated learners learn L2 because they hope to gain certain practical benefits distinct from the process of learning (Lamb, 2016). For example, they may seek to gain access to certain external rewards and incentives, such as their parents' approval, the chance to travel abroad, etc. However, such learners learning L2 in pursuit of such external rewards are characterised as comparatively passive and it is claimed that their motivation may fail to sustain itself autonomously (Zhao, 2011). If the external reinforcement is not available, they may have no reason to learn the language and the learning process may therefore become stagnant.

Extrinsic motivation can also be divided into three subtypes: internal regulation, introjected regulation and identified regulation, each one increasingly self-determined (Vandergrift, 2005). According to Deci and Ryan (2002), people exercising external regulation in L2 learning study the language to satisfy certain external demands or to access rewards within the social environment, such as passing an exam or gaining certain opportunities relating to employment, as noted above. Introjected regulation, meanwhile, relates to more internalised reasons for engaging in L2 learning (Vandergrift, 2005). Learners engaging in this kind of regulation

tend to do so because they tend to feel guilty if they do not engage in such learning (Takahashi & Im, 2020). For instance, L2 learners with introjected regulation may learn the language to demonstrate that they are good citizens. The final variety of regulation, identified regulation, refers to personal priorities, choices or value relating to L2 learning outcome (Vandergrift, 2005). It is the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation and shares certain characteristics with intrinsic motivation (Takahashi & Im, 2020). An example of individuals engaging in identified regulation is those striving to become individuals with the ability to speak multiple languages. Vandergrift (2005) also states that these sub-types of extrinsic motivation are characterised by external coercion. Once these external factors are removed, such L2 learners may abandon their learning. Hence, there are grounds for viewing intrinsically driven motivation as being more beneficial in some sense than extrinsically controlled motivation for the reason that the former can enhance learners' positive feelings and involvement in learning (Kashefian-Naeeni et al., 2018; Noels, 2005).

Overall, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation provide another means of conceptualising and categorising L2 motivation. This former model is not used to replace the later one, but rather to complement it (Oxford, 1996). Furthermore, there are clear parallels between (i) intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation and (ii) integrative motivation and instrumental motivation in that integrative motivation pertains to a personal interest in the L2 group and instrumental motivation outcomes are driven by the external factors (Kreishan & Al-Dhaimat, 2013). It therefore seems reasonable to focus on these four types of motivation in one study. For example, Noels (2005) reports the results of a study investigating university students' integrative and instrumental motivation as well as their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to learn German. The findings indicate that these four types of motivation co-exist in the L2 learning and play different roles in students' German learning. Hence, the present study also considers all four types of motivation in relation to the research questions.

2.2 Factors Affecting Students' L2 Motivation

In the process of learning a foreign language, there are many factors affecting learners' motivation (Zhao, 2011). Williams and Burden (1997) provide a comprehensive framework of L2 motivation that categorises motivational factors in terms of whether they are internal or external. Internal factors are closely linked with learner-related matters, such as their intrinsic interests in activities, their attitudes towards language learning, etc. External factors, meanwhile, are associated with external contexts, such as the influence of parents, teachers, the learning environment, etc. Researchers have also come to consider an expansive range of motivational factors in recent years (e.g. Butler, 2015; Seda & Zahitjan, 2016; Shilova et al., 2019), with three external factors – including the influence of teachers, parents and assessment – being introduced on the grounds that students at school are less likely to be motivated by integrative reasons relating to internal factors. As Li et al. (2018) explain, students at school have limited direct contact with native speakers and their consciousness of the self is vaguer than that of adult learners.

2.2.1 Teachers

There is a close connection between teachers and individuals' motivation to learn a foreign language (Ghenghesh, 2010). However, teachers play a complex role in shaping students' L2 motivation in that several different factors are involved, including teachers' personalities, teaching styles and classroom management skills (Li et al., 2018). Dörnyei (1998) reports the results of an investigation into the relationship between learners' demotivation and attitudes towards L2 learning and finds that teachers have the significant potential to demotivate students with respect to their L2 learning, with teachers' personalities, levels of competence and commitment and teaching methods all being reported as affecting students' motivation to learn a foreign language.

In particular, engaging teaching methods appear essential to affecting students' motivation. Shilova et al. (2019) report an investigation into the levels of intrinsic motivation experienced by primary school students as well as factors playing into this. It is reported that when the teachers in this study convey content in a direct manner, the students demonstrate low levels of motivation. However, when the teachers play games or make use of music in the classroom, it is reported that the students take an active interest in the activities and demonstrate increased ability to memorise new words. This demonstrates that a lesson plan making use of such innovations may have a positive influence on primary school students' motivation, as well as the close link between learners' interest and desire to learn a foreign language and their teachers. Furthermore, Ghenghesh (2010) states that teachers without considering students' needs may result in students' low level of motivation. He suggests that teachers should possess certain qualities conducive to students' learning motivation and should strive to make lessons interesting, explain concepts clearly, behave in a friendly manner and encourage students to study. Seda and Zahitjan (2016) also claim that almost 90% of participants in their study emerged as more motivated when teachers formulated realistic learning aims and provided clear information relating to why they needed to engage in the given activity.

2.2.2 Parents

Parents also play an essential role in mediating learners' motivation (Seda & Zahitjan, 2016; Shilova et al., 2019), providing both material and moral support. Material support includes the provision of necessary amenities, such as textbooks, laptops, notebooks, etc. Moral support is often by discussing children's homework with them as well as offering learning-related advice and immediate encouragement. Evidence has shown that parental involvement can help predict students' attitudes and motivation towards L2 learning (Li et al., 2018), exerting a positive influence on students' motivation (Shilova & et al., 2019).

It is noteworthy that considerable numbers of studies on L2 motivation in East Asian countries, such as China, Japan and Korea, frame parental involvement as a ubiquitous phenomenon (Li et al., 2018). One possible explanation is that parents in East Asia tend to hold high academic expectations of their children (Bong et al., 2014). Compared with parents in European countries or North America, Asian parents tend to invest increased time, money and energy on their children's learning, with this being accompanied by the higher expectations mentioned above (Okagaki & Frensch, 1998). For example, Gao (2012) reports the results of an investigation into parental involvement in secondary school pupils' vocabulary learning in the Chinese Mainland. His findings indicate that parents regulate and control adolescents' learning processes through mediating motivational discourses, beliefs and knowledge. Butler (2015) also examines how parents' socio-economic class and involvement affect children's motivation to learn English in the Chinese context. His findings indicate that if parents, especially those of higher socioeconomic classes, give their children increased opportunities to use English outside of school, then this can help them to develop self-determined motivation. In response, children of East Asian cultures regard studying hard as a form of obligation and means by which to meet their parents' expectations (Park & Kim, 2006). Overall, although parent-centered motivation tends to impose a level of control, it still plays an important role in children's motivation to learn a foreign language.

2.2.3 Assessment

Another relevant factor to consider is assessment, especially proficiency tests and high-staked standardised language tests. There is an increasing number of studies exploring the relationship between exams and pupils' learning motivation (Haggerty & Fox, 2015; Harlen & Deakin, 2003). For example, the findings reported in Harlen and Deakin (2003) indicate that tests are likely to exert a negative influence on lower achieving students since they tend to experience demotivation stemming from the constant evidence of their weaker learning abilities. Lower achievers in such studies are doubly disadvantaged in that being labelled as a failure has consequences not just in terms of their perceptions of their ability to learn, but also for their self-esteem, hence reducing the chance of future success (Harlen & Deakin, 2003). Haggerty and Fox (2015) explore the relationship between language testing experience and English learning motivation among students aged between 12 and 15 in the South Korean context, where exam-driven learning is emphasised. The results suggest that students' L2 motivation is closely linked with the amount of time they are willing to spend on this, and large-scale high-stakes English tests are highlighted as playing a significant role in mediating pupils' L2 motivation. Hence, different tests seem to have different kinds of influences on learners' motivation.

In summary, multiple external factors have the potential to affect individuals' motivation to learn a foreign language, with each factor mediating L2 motivation in different ways. The influence of teachers, parents and assessment are all prominent factors shaping students' motivation to learn English.

2.3 Previous Studies on Differences in Students' L2 Motivation

Notwithstanding that L2 motivation has formed the subject of a considerable level of research, numerous studies have focused on linguistic outcomes of learning in term of English proficiency (Yihong et al., 2007). More specifically, these studies are associated with what kind of motivation types lead to higher proficiency performances and how motivation may affect learning achievements (ibid). However, Dörnyei (2005) demonstrates that motivation changes over time, indicating that the nature of L2 motivation is dynamic. Thus, in recent years, an increasing number of researchers (e.g. Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013; Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Xu & Case, 2015) have paid attention to the temporal variation and dynamic character of L2 learning (Yu & Geng, 2020). Considerable empirical studies have also been conducted in relation to differences in L2 learning motivation at different school levels and across different learning contexts (Zhang & Kim, 2013).

2.3.1 Research on Differences Relating to L2 Learning Motivation Across Schooling Levels in Other Countries

Two studies conducted in Libya and Korea are relevant to the topic of differences in learners' motivation to learn English across ages. The first one is conducted by Ghenghesh (2010) in the Tripoli area within Libya. This study investigates the motivation of a heterogeneous group of students studying English as a foreign language at school through questionnaires and interviews. It investigates the temporal dimension of L2 motivation to establish whether the participants' motivation changed when they start senior high school and whether there are different factors that can explain such changes. Quantitative comparisons are made and indicate that the students show a decreasing tendency for L2 motivation as their age increases, which is mirrored in the qualitative data.

Furthermore, the students are reported as attributing the demotivation they experienced as relating to their teachers and the features of the lesson content. The students are also reported as stating that teachers should take measures to stimulate their initial motivation to learn English and to help them to maintain it (Ghenghesh, 2010).

The other study to consider is that by Kim (2012), who reports on an investigation into English language learners' motivational changes between Grades 3 and 12 in 14 different schools in Korea. The findings show that Korean students' motivation to learn English undergoes dynamic changes of a curvilinear nature. More specifically, the intensity of the motivation experienced by such students experiences a decreased tendency between Grades 3 and 9 and then an increased tendency between Grades 10 and 12. Students in junior high school demonstrate the lowest level of English learning, which is explained in terms of the reshuffling of the student population when they graduate from junior high school (Grade 9) and attend senior high school (Grade 10) (Kim, 2012). After finishing Grade 9, students are required to choose either vocational or academic educational tracks, and only those with a high overall GAP can enroll in the latter. In Kim's (2012) research, all participating high schools offer only academic tracks in which most of the student population seek to enter university post-graduation and demonstrate strong levels of exam-oriented motivation to learn English.

2.3.2 Research on Differences Relating to L2 Learning Motivation Across Different Schooling Levels in China

Research on differences in L2 motivation has also come to focus to an increasing extent on the Chinese context. For example, Xu and Case (2015) report the results of a survey of 1,213 school-age students between Grades 1 and 11 in Mainland China to identify differences in their motivation to engage in English language learning across different levels of schooling. The findings demonstrate that such students' overall motivation to engage in such learning shifts with each level of schooling. Integrative motivation is associated with a constant drop with age, while instrumental motivation shows a rising tendency. More specifically, primary school students start with unbiased motivation in English learning. As students enter junior high schools, such students learn English in a manner characterised by strong integrative motivation and are stimulated by the communicative and social dimensions of English use. Xu and Case (2015) also state that milieu, cultural interest, direct contact with English speakers and linguistic self-confidence all peak during this period. Senior high school students engage in English learning characterised by the presence of strong instrumental motivation and very little integrative motivation as a result of the pressure of the National College Entrance Examination.

Another relevant study is the retrospective investigation conducted by (Yu & Geng, 2020) featuring 20 Chinese Ph.D. students. This study identifies 12 different motivational factors categorised as controlled and autonomous with respect to English learning. It is found that controlled motivation demonstrates fluctuation across all schooling stages, starting from the lowest point in primary school before increasing dramatically to a peak in secondary school and finally decreasing at the postgraduate level. Autonomous motivation, by contrast, does not demonstrate significant fluctuation. More specifically, primary school students' motivation to learn English is largely autonomous as a result of the fact that English is new to them. Meanwhile, secondary schools pupils' motivation is primarily of a controlled nature due to the pressure stemming from high-stakes public examinations, such as the National College Entrance Exam. For students in higher education, motivation to learn English is typically characterised by both controlled and autonomous motivation, with such learning in university relating primarily to future academic and employment-related opportunities.

Overall, such studies demonstrate the existence of considerable differences in students' motivation to learn English across different levels of study. In this respect, they constitute important points of reference for the present study.

2.4 *English Education and the National College Entrance Examination in China*

The roles of English education and the National College Entrance Examination are essential factors with respect to Chinese students' dynamic L2 motivation across different stages of schooling. This is typically attributed to the fact that the Chinese educational system is decidedly exam-oriented and English plays a significant role in different exams, especially the National College Entrance Exam (Dörnyei et al., 2009).

2.4.1 English Education in China

Factors such as national modernisation, government policy and social development are adduced as relevant for the current importance associated with English learning and teaching in China (Bolton & Graddol, 2012; Hu, 2005). Since the 1980s, there has been a clear recognition of English as a necessary resource to promote international exchange, acquire scientific knowledge, facilitate educational development and foster economic progress (Hu, 2002). Two important policies have been introduced by the Chinese government to popularise English in China. Firstly, policymakers within the Ministry of Education decided to include English as the first compulsory subject in secondary school and higher education since the 1970s (Qi, 2016), with this subject also featuring in the National College Entrance Exam (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). Furthermore, as a result of its increasing importance in economic, technological, commercial and cultural exchange, the Ministry of Education

also issued a directive on English language teaching within primary schools, requiring Chinese primary schools to provide English classes for students in Grade 3 or above (Hu, 2005). After that, Chinese students receive at least 11 to 13 years of formal English education before they graduate from university, including at least three years in primary school, six years in secondary school and at least two years in university (Zheng, 2015).

There are different requirements for students across different levels of schooling with respect to the frequency and length of their lessons. For example, primary school students have three weekly lessons, each lesson lasting for 40 minutes; secondary school students have no less than four 45-minute lessons each week (Ministry of Education, 2001). In the case of students in universities, they are divided into groups of non-English majors and English majors, with students of the former type having four lessons each week, each one lasting 50 minutes in the first two years of university study, and students of the latter having an average of 14 lessons each week (Ministry of Education, 2008). It is therefore clear that English education has been accorded significant importance in China, albeit with differences in the aim of English learning across different stages of schooling. For instance, in the case of primary school students, the aim is to stimulate their interest in learning English and to encourage them to use it for communication (Ministry of Education, 2001). However, for secondary school and college students, English learning is primarily exam-driven (Silver et al., 2002).

Although a relatively comprehensive system of teaching English has arisen within China in recent decades, the overall Chinese style of teaching English is considered old-fashioned and excessively input-based and teacher-oriented, especially that offered in secondary schools and universities (Silver et al., 2002; Lin, 2014). Evidence from previous studies (e.g. Liu 2006; Jiang, 2009; Zhang, 2010) indicates that traditional teaching methods such as the Grammar-Translation Method – characterised by detailed analysis of grammar, extensive use of translation, rote learning of vocabulary and a strong emphasis on writing (Richards & Rodgers, 1986) – tend to result in passiveness among students, who tend to demonstrate little interest in the content taught. For example, teachers are the center of attention within classes, conveying knowledge points, issuing instructions and correcting errors without too much interaction with students. Chinese students are therefore typically regarded as receivers of knowledge rather than active classroom participants. This is regarded as one of the major sources of their declining interests in English learning (Lin, 2014), as well as their unwillingness to communicate in and to engage in future learning of English.

2.4.2 English Learning and the National College Entrance Examination in China

To understand Chinese students' motivation to learn English, it is necessary to understand the nature and importance of both the Chinese National College Entrance Exam and the way that English features in this exam. As Xu and Case (2015) explain, students' motivation to learn English relates closely to the pressure stemming from this significant exam.

The National College Entrance Exam was first hosted in 1952 under the control of the National Examination Authority within the Ministry of Education (Davey et al., 2007). English has featured as a required subject within this exam since the 1980s and accounts for 150 points in "3+X" system (Peng et al., 2014). As Davey et al. (2007) explain, "3" refers to the three compulsory subjects of English, Chinese and Mathematics while "X" stands for a combined subject exam. For art students, "X" represents History, Politics and Geography, and, for science students, Biology, Chemistry and Physics (Peng et al., 2014). Although there are different versions of the National College Entrance Exam in China, the role and importance of the test have not been changed (Xu & Case, 2015).

As a high-stakes exam, it is primarily used to govern the admittance of students into college (Zhang, 2016) and is almost the sole determinant in this regard (Graff Zivin et al., 2020). Each year, around nine million students participate in this exam to compete for admission to around 2,300 Chinese colleges and universities. The overall admission rate of academically-oriented universities is about 30% and the admission rate for elite or key universities hovers around 12% (Graff Zivin et al., 2020). As Davey et al. (2007) state, the competition around the National College Entrance Exam in China is fierce, particularly for entry into key universities, with a higher score meaning that it is more likely that a given student will be able to attend a prestigious university. Such opportunities seem to be highly correlated with students' future life opportunities and personal development. Hence, teachers and parents tend to exert significant pressure on students to succeed in school and to push them to prepare for the exam at an early age (Davey et al., 2007). Such pressure is reported as having the strong potential to affect learners' motivation (Xu & Case, 2015).

3. Methodology

This chapter provides details of the methods used in the present study, doing so over five sections relating to: the research paradigm; choice of methodology; literature and database searching; approach to data analysis; and ethical considerations and trustworthiness of the present study.

3.1 Research Paradigm

Willis et al. (2007) define the term “paradigm” as a comprehensive belief system, framework or world view that can guide research and practice within a particular field. Cohen et al. (2018) also note that a paradigm does not simply refer to the methodology of the research conducted; rather, it can also be regarded as a way of viewing the world and perceiving different assumptions about how the world is and how individuals can understand or know about it. Different paradigms have been set out in educational research in recent times, with examples including positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism, etc. Given such diversity, there is a clear need to select an appropriate paradigm to contextualize the present research in a manner informed by its specific nature and aims (Cohen et al., 2018).

The present study is situated within the interpretive paradigm. According to Cohen et al. (2018), this paradigm is utilised to investigate the interpretations of a situation arrived at by the participants themselves and to understand their attitudes, behaviours and interactions. More specifically, when interpretivism is applied within educational research, this enables researchers to establish a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of teachers and students as well the culture of schools, classrooms and communities in which they operate (Taylor & Medina, 2011). Interpretivists commence their research using open-ended research questions, utilising different methods to generate qualitative data from which they can derive meanings (Phothongsunan, 2010). Examples of data collection may include interviews, observations, field notes, documents etc. In addition to qualitative data, Rehman and Alharthi (2016) note that numerical data can also feature within interpretive research, but not to the extent that they are accorded the same weight. The present study is conducted to synthesise previous studies to explore how Chinese students’ motivation to learn English differs across levels of schooling. It is on this basis that interpretivism is selected as the paradigm for use.

3.2 Choice of the Methodology

As noted above, this study synthesises previous studies to provide answers to the research questions stated. A research synthesis approach is used. According to Cooper et al. (2009), conducting a research synthesis involves the conjunction of particular set of literature review features, with its primary focus and aim being to integrate previous empirical research to formulate generalisations. Research synthesists usually take previous extant reviews as the foundation for their work since such reviews, including their bibliographic references, are useful for obtaining information and developing a broad overview of research syntheses within a specific field (Cohen & et al., 2018). Furthermore, research syntheses usually have close regard to relevant extant theories, critically analyse the research under examination and seek to identify central issues for future research (Cooper & et al., 2009). It is on this basis that there is a need for consideration to be given to theories relevant to the research question to synthesise the selected studies and to formulate the implications of such studies together with potential directions for future studies. Overall, such work involves synthesising results across different studies that share the same theme or similar themes based on relevant theories to reach a high-level understanding of the problems under investigation (Gurevitch & et al., 2018).

The choice of research synthesis as the method for the present study is motivated on the basis of the following reasons. Firstly, as Weed (2005) suggests, the essence of a research synthesis is to bring together the results, findings and conclusions of previous research for discussion. The broad topic selected for the present study, L2 motivation, is characterised by a certain level of controversy, with a considerable range of different definitions and features of this topic being provided in the literature. Furthermore, although there is an increasing number of empirical studies on motivational differences conducted in the Chinese context, they investigate students’ differences within specific schooling levels (e.g. Kyriacou & Zhu, 2008; Li, 2014; Ye, 2021). It therefore seems appropriate to isolate an approach that brings together these studies associated with similar themes and to synthesise them. It can provide researchers and teachers with a means of informing themselves as to how Chinese students’ motivation to learn English differs across levels of school. As Suri and Clarke (2009) illustrate, research synthesis plays a significant role in both disseminating research knowledge and shaping future research.

There are further reasons for adopting such an approach to the study, these being more pragmatic in their nature. Firstly, only limited time was available for this study, meaning that its scope was also similarly restricted, and it is time-consuming to conduct quantitative investigations of students’ motivational differences across stages of education such as primary schools and universities. Additionally, due to the ongoing influence of COVID-19, it was regarded as safer to use a desk-based method to conduct a study such as the present one on the grounds that social distancing could be observed. Having regard to all these considerations, a small-scale approach grounded in research synthesis was considered a reasonable and effective one to take.

This research synthesis focuses not only on qualitative studies, but also on certain quantitative ones. In other words, it is a qualitative synthesis of qualitative and quantitative research featuring the combination of methodologically diverse studies on a similar topic (Suri & Clarke, 2009). Such approaches are often adopted because ‘the reduction of qualitative findings to a statistical measure of probability’ (Weed, 2005, pp. 4) is likely to result in the loss of richness within the research data. Heyvaert et al. (2013) also note that including both

quantitative and qualitative studies has the potential to offer more complete and concrete answers to the research questions posed. Additionally, a majority of the previous L2 motivation studies in China have obtained data using questionnaires (e.g. Li, 2014; Xu & Case, 2015) or mixed-methods of questionnaires and interviews (e.g. Butler, 2015; Yu & Geng, 2020; Zhang & Kim, 2013). If the present research were to focus solely on qualitative or quantitative studies, there is the potential for considerable resources for synthesis to be lost. It therefore seems more appropriate and efficient to synthesise the qualitative findings of previous studies conducted in a qualitative, quantitative or mixed-method manner to address the research questions posed.

3.3 Literature and Database Search

To enable appropriate sources to be found for synthesis within the limited time available, one database, the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), supported by the U.S. Department of Education, was chosen. This database is provided to support educational research in an efficient and user-friendly way (ERIC, 2018). This database was chosen on the basis that it featured a high level of initial educational research and it was easy to navigate and search through. Key item searches were carried out in the period between the 5th of October to the 3rd of November. At first, it included various combinations of the following key words and phrases: “motivation,” “English as a foreign language or a second language,” and “China.” To ensure that all relevant studies were identified from within the database, synonyms and other research terms were also used, such as “L2 motivation,” “Chinese students,” “primary school,” “secondary school,” “universities,” and “colleges”. The initial search produced 85 articles.

It was essential to narrow down the number of searching articles to ensure that the chosen study shared a close link with the research questions. Therefore, two steps were undertaken to select needed studies. Firstly, the results were examined in a first pass to check whether the title of each result showed relevance to the present study at first blush. These cases judged as relevant were added to a folder named “1st search.” The next step was to read the abstracts of these relevant studies to select the articles that would actually be useful, the results of which were added to another folder named “2nd search.”

When reading the abstracts, several inclusion and exclusion criteria were also listed. For example, studies concentrating on general motivation or motivation towards languages other than English were excluded. Furthermore, the studies were also required to focus on Chinese students learning English as a foreign language or a second language. Because of this requirement, only studies conducted in the Chinese context were included. Another criterion for selection used related to the requirement that these studies focused on Chinese students across different schooling levels, including those from primary schools, secondary schools and universities. As a result, studies focusing on adults learning English outside the school context were eschewed. Additionally, to ensure that studies of an appropriate quality were included, a decision was made to only include studies from peer-reviewed journals. The final criterion related to the matter of timescale, which was set between 2005 and 2021. This period was selected on the grounds that there have been no significant reforms in English education in China during the past two decades. Implementing these four criteria resulted in nine studies being identified for consideration. Three of them were about Chinese students’ motivational differences or changes in motivation across different stages of study and the remaining six focused on students’ motivation to learn English at particular stages of schooling.

3.4 Approach to Data Analysis

There were three steps involved in synthesising the chosen studies. Firstly, nine studies were read thoroughly and a summary of each study was produced on the research context, the research methods, the participants and the key points of the study (see Appendix 1). Secondly, these studies were read again in detail and notes were taken regarding the research question for which their findings would be relevant. Six were relevant to the first question and seven to the second. To address the first research question, the commentary on motivation given in the six studies was recategorised such that it was divided into intrinsic-extrinsic and integrative-instrumental. Following this, notes were made on the primary school, secondary school and university students’ differences with respect to these two motivational categories. Regarding the second research question, all potential factors that might affect students’ motivation at particular stages of school were listed separately. Notes were also taken regarding how these potential factors affect the two categories of Chinese students’ motivation to learn English. The final step was to synthesis all these notes relating to research questions and to combine them such they could be presented as one text.

3.5 Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness of the Present Study

According to Cavan (1997), ethical considerations in the research refer to a matter of sensitive issues principled the rights of participants and Cohen et al. (2018) emphasize their importance in conducting a study. Unlike researchers conducting human-based studies, research synthesists do not collect personal data from people. They use documents as data and are seldom asked to apply ethical approval before starting to research. However,

ethical decision-making and trustworthiness should also be displayed in research syntheses at different stages, like the stage of searching for relevant studies and distilling evidence from selected documents (Zawacki-Richter & et al., 2020).

When choosing needed studies, I listed some detailed inclusion and exclusion criteria, only including published research that has undergone the peer-review process of the academic community. La Paro and Pianta (2000) illustrate that only including peer-reviewed research is of high quality to synthesize and can minimize the potential impact of multiple publications. After reading the synthesized studies in a detailed way, I also distill the information relevant to my research questions by constant reflection. As Major and Savin-Baden (2010) state, it is necessary for researchers to ethically consider the relevance of evidence presented in primary reports with respect to the synthesizing purpose. Furthermore, the steps of selecting relevant studies and analyzing data are listed in a detailed way above, which seems to guarantee the trustworthiness of this study. As Rehman and Alharthi (2016) claim, if researchers are honest in their efforts for approximation to truth and describe the method as well as steps of the study in a clear way, the study is likely to meet the criteria of trustworthiness to some degree. Overall, based on what has been mentioned, this study seems to be conducted in an ethical and trustworthy way.

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter is divided into two sections, all of which present the results of the synthesis. The first section focuses on how Chinese students' English learning motivation differs across levels of schooling and the second one on the reasons highlighted for these differences.

4.1 How Does Chinese Students' Motivation to Learn English Differ Across Levels of Schooling?

Six of the nine studies included for synthesis were identified to answer the first research question. They involved studies using different research methods to identify Chinese students' motivation to learn English across particular levels of schooling (Butler, 2015; Ye, 2021; Zhao, 2011)¹ and their differences in motivation across ages (Xu & Case, 2015; Yu & Geng, 2020; Zhang & Kim, 2013). These studies were synthesized based on the different types of L2 motivation discussed in Chapter 2. The main themes emerging from the synthesis related to differences in students' integrative and instrumental motivation as well as their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to learn English across different schooling levels, namely in primary schools, secondary schools and universities.

With respect to social psychology, L2 motivation can be divided into integrative and instrumental varieties. These two types of motivation play different roles across different stages of schooling. For example, Xu and Case (2015) indicate that primary school students demonstrate unbiased integrative and instrumental motivation for learning English. However, in the case of students in secondary schools, they demonstrate a higher level of instrumental motivation to learn English than is the case for integrative motivation (Zhang & Kim, 2013). This trend seems to continue among university students, since, in (Zhao, 2011), the general mean of instrumental motivation of his non-English major university participants is much higher than that of integrative motivation. This reflects that university students' English learning motivation is also more instrumental rather than integrative. From what has been discussed, it may be inferred the purpose of most Chinese students' English acquisition changes and tends to be functional and pragmatic after primary school. This trend is the same as Korean secondary pupils who learn English mainly to be admitted by universities (Kim, 2012). Overall, the degree of integrative and instrumental motivation for Chinese students to learn English vary between the context of primary school and university and instrumental motivation becomes dominant with ages.

In addition to the categories of integrative and instrumental motivation, according to Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory, motivation can also be classified into intrinsic and extrinsic varieties. Evidence shows that, although Chinese students have both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to learn English across different levels of study, they exhibit dynamic variation with respect to these two types of motivation among primary school, secondary school and university (Yu & Geng, 2020). In Butler's (2015) study, the fourth-grade and sixth-grade students surveyed present with higher intrinsic motivation than extrinsic motivation. This accords with Yu and Geng's (2020) view that Chinese primary school students' motivation to learn English is mainly characterised as internal, satisfying their inner needs and enhancing growth. With respect to junior and senior high schools, Yu and Geng (2020) present data suggesting that students' motivation largely stems from external factors such as the pressure of passing exams. This suggests that secondary students are motivated to a greater extent by extrinsic factors rather than intrinsic ones with respect to learning English in the Chinese context. Further credence is lent to this conclusion by Ye's (2021) findings that extrinsic motivation becomes the prime motivation type for students to learn English in secondary schools and that they start to learn English for some utilitarian purposes, such as being admitted by universities and studying abroad. With respect to university students, Zhao (2011) presents finds that students' extrinsic motivation in his study is a little higher than is the case for their intrinsic motivation, albeit only to a minor extent.

It can be concluded that Chinese primary school students are more intrinsically motivated, while secondary school students and university students are more extrinsically motivated. However, university students tend to show more increasing intrinsic motivation than secondary pupils do. This conclusion seems consistent with Yu and Geng's (2020) findings that, in primary school, students' motivation is largely autonomous in nature and that the source of this autonomous motivation is internal. Nevertheless, with respect to secondary schools, their motivation is primarily controlled and the source of this controlled motivation is external in nature. Once such students have gained entry to universities, their motivation is characterised as both autonomous and controlled (Yu & Geng, 2020). In other words, it seems that intrinsic motivation is dominant among Chinese primary school students with respect to the task of learning English, with extrinsic motivation becoming notable when students commence study in secondary school and university.

(Zhao, 2011) notes that integrative-instrumental motivation co-exists with intrinsic-extrinsic motivation in Chinese students' efforts to learn English, albeit it appears that students across different educational levels exhibit different types of motivation in different ways. In the case of primary school students, they show similar levels of integrative and instrumental motivation but higher intrinsic motivation than extrinsic motivation. For secondary school and university students, their instrumental and extrinsic motivation tends to be more prominent. However, the gap between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as well as the one between integrative and instrumental motivation seems to be narrowed among university students. Learners' motivation to learn English at different levels of study may be affected by different factors (Li & et al., 2018) and the next part will focus on some potential factors to explain these differences.

4.2 What Motivational Factors Can Explain These Differences?

To establish the reasons identified for Chinese students' motivational differences in learning English across different stages of schooling, seven studies were considered. Various factors may affect Chinese students' English learning motivation from primary schools to universities, but major factors vary at different schooling levels and even the same factor may play different roles in primary school, secondary school and university. Hence, key factors that affect learners' motivation at these three schooling levels will be analyzed separately to answer this research question.

4.2.1 Potential Factors Explaining Primary School Students' Motivation to Learn English

Chinese primary school students demonstrate a higher level of intrinsic motivation than extrinsic motivation. Zhang and Kim (2013) explain that students at this stage of schooling demonstrate significant internal interests in this language and that this is to be considered as one of the most important motivational incentives. A majority of primary school interviewees in their study state that they consider English to be an interesting school subject and that learning it is an interesting activity. Yu and Geng (2020) also claim that primary school students' motivation to learn English is characterised by internal interest. Hence, it seems that internal interests play significant roles in primary school children's motivation to learn English.

With respect to the reasons underpinning such internal interests, different scholars come to different conclusions. Firstly, Yu & Geng (2020) mention that English is a new language to primary school students, meaning that it offers a fresh experience. Such a claim is in line with Butler's (2015) finding that primary school students' initial interests in English are the locus of curiosity. Fourth-grade students in his study articulate their interests in English as stemming from the differences between Chinese and English and that they are curious to know how English speakers express themselves using only 26 letters. As one of the fourth-grade interview participants is reported as commenting:

"I liked English when I was in the third grade because I was curious about why we Chinese write characters like little squares, but they English writers [sic] write in those strange symbols and signs" (Butler, 2015:184).

This kind of curiosity continues among six-graders (Butler, 2015). For example, one of the six-grade participants is reported as stating:

"English and Chinese differ in many ways such as word meanings. One English word can correspond to two different meanings, but one Chinese character has only one meaning" (Butler, 2015:184).

Although the fourth-grader and the six-grader are curious about different aspects of Chinese and English, they both show great interests in the differences. This may be regarded as an important factor sustaining their internal motivation to learn English.

Secondly, students in primary schools consider that English is interesting because English class presents an opportunity to engage in many fun activities (Zhang & Kim, 2013). As three primary school students in Zhang and Kim's (2013) study mention, the main teaching method that their English teacher preferred to use was word-focused and game-based. Using a variety of games, stories, jokes etc., seems to appeal to students, encourage them to learn English and improve their internal motivation. It is also in line with Shilova et al. (2019)

that innovative teaching methods exert positive influences on children's learning motivation. Another factor explaining primary school students' interests in learning English lies in their interest in and desire to understand English-related culture (Butler, 2015). For example, in the case of both fourth graders and sixth graders in Butler's (2015) study, being able to understand English-language cartoons and programs on television is a major source of their interests in English, and is said to be regarded as a source of knowledge about the outside world, broadening their horizons.

In addition to internal interests, there are also some other external factors that may affect primary school students' motivation to learn English. Firstly, parents are regarded as an important factor in several studies (Butler, 2015; Zhang & Kim, 2013). It is reported in Butler (2015) that most of the parents told their children about the importance of learning English when they start English class and take an active involvement in their children's English learning. For example, parents might offer significant help with vocabulary learning. One of the interviewees in Butler (2015) commented on this as follows:

"My dad is very good at English. He models the pronunciation of new words for me. Also, when my mom and dad find that a lesson is about to end, they help me with the dictations" (Butler, 2015:180).

Such support appears to help students improve their performance in English learning and their levels of self-confidence. Zhang and Kim (2013) also state that when parents can provide timely advice and help with English learning, this is likely to have a positive influence on the formation of intrinsic and integrative motivation. These findings accords with Shilova et al.'s (2019) view that parental involvement has a positive influence on children's motivation.

Additionally, Butler (2015) notes that, in his study, most of the parents compare their children's achievements with those of others, such as the children of their neighbours, friends and relatives. For example, one of the interviewees is reported as describing their parents' comparison as follows:

"My mother compares me with a wide range of people! Not to mention my little sister, Feng Xi. And a child of his colleges. She got admitted to the Foreign Language School." (Butler, 2015:182).

It is common among Chinese parents to compare their children's performances with those of others (Zhang & Kim, 2013). The primary school interviewees in Butler (2015) claim that their parents' constant comparison of them with others is also a positive source of motivation to learn English, indicating that being compared with somebody else can encourage primary school students to learn English in China. One possible explanation for this situation may be that there are no English exams for such students and that English learning is relatively easy at this level of schooling (Zhang & Kim, 2013), meaning that parents' comparison does not result in a significant level of stress. As Xu and Case (2015) add, the National College Entrance Examination is still many years away at this point and thoughts of how English will affect their opportunities to find fulfilling employment are still distant. In other words, although such students are being compared with others at this stage, they do not experience significant pressure to learn English and therefore do not experience much stress during the learning process.

In general, in primary school, Chinese students' motivation is largely intrinsic rather than extrinsic, with such students demonstrating significant interest in this new language and an internal willingness to learn it. Although they are informed of the importance of learning English and compared with others by their parents, given that concerns relating to further education and employment are still some distance away, they do not (yet) experience significant stress. Primary school students' internal interests in English constitute a prominent source of incentive to study by itself, motivating them to engage with English at this level of education.

4.2.2 Potential Factors Explaining Secondary School Students' Motivation to Learn English

In the case of secondary school students, they exhibit higher instrumental and extrinsic motivation than integrative and intrinsic motivation regarding learning English. This is said to be the case because such students are more alive to the importance of their future educational and professional careers than is the case with primary school students, meaning that their internal interests in English gradually diminish (Butler, 2015; Yu & Geng, 2020; Zhang & Kim, 2013). This position accords with Ye (2021) that when entering secondary school, students become more aware of the relative importance of English to their future studies, leading them to learn English for more utilitarian purposes.

Secondary school students come to learn English with greater utilitarian purposes in that they face the considerable pressure associated with passing exams (Yu & Geng, 2020). As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Chinese educational system is exam-driven and English plays essential roles in different exams (Dörnyei et al., 2009). For example, junior high school students need to participate in high school entrance examinations and senior high school students in college entrance examinations (Zhang & Kim, 2013). When junior high school students finish their school classes, they can choose either a vocational or a college-bound senior high school. However, most of senior high school students face the pressure of doing well in the National College Entrance

Examination since it is the only criterion used to manage admissions to university and has a significant influence on their future career options (Zhang, 2016). Additionally, English accounts for 150 credits in this rigorous exam. Hence, it is necessary for senior high school students to study English hard to enable them to perform well in this exam. As the interviewees in Yu and Geng (2020) stated:

“The main reason for the change in my goals was the examination system in China. Because if I wanted to be enrolled in a good university in China, I had to study English well and this learning was under great pressure so there was no interest in English learning” (Yu & Geng, 2020:244).

Another student comments like this:

“When I came to middle school and high school, the reason for my learning English was that English as a subject was a requirement for my High School Entrance Examination and National College Entrance Examination, and at that time, there was no interest in English. I came from Shangdong Province where there is great NECC pressure, so I had no mood in doing other things and my focus was on the study” (Yu & Geng, 2020:244).

It seems that the exam-oriented educational system exerts a significant degree of pressure on Chinese secondary school students' motivation to learn English. Such pressure means that little room is left for students to enjoy what was previously a source of pleasure in the study.

Furthermore, the expectations of parents and the comparisons they draw between children's performances on different exams have the potential to serve as a significant burden on students (Zhang & Kim, 2013). This claim is consistent with Butler (2015) that eighth-graders experience such pressure as a result of their parents' admonishments to perform better and their comparing them with top students in their classes. Unlike primary school students regarding parental comparison as a positive motivational factor in learning English, students in secondary schools tend to experience stress and anxiety as a result of their parents' high expectations and frequent comparisons, which may ultimately serve to demotivate them (Zhang & Kim, 2013).

As for such students' decreasing interest in English learning, there are several external factors that may explain this. Firstly, teachers' teaching models tend to become exam-oriented in secondary school due to the exam-driven nature of the Chinese educational system (Zhang & Kim, 2013). The existence of this system forces English teaching to be conducted with a single-minded focus on test scores (Long, et al., 2013). Furthermore, Chinese English teachers in secondary schools, especially those in senior high schools, prefer to use exam-focused teaching methods such as the grammar-translation teaching method to teach English. As a result, English classes tend to be both grammar-focused and teacher-oriented. Although this kind of educational model is closely linked to preparation for the National College Entrance Examination (Yu & Geng, 2020), it tends to fail to arouse students' interests in English. It is in line with Liu (2006) and Zhang (2010) that these traditional methods make students passive learners and decrease their interests. Two senior high school students in Zhang and Kim (2013) complained about this in the following way:

“In terms of grammar learning, my English teacher asks us to do a lot of English grammar drills. In fact, I know it is helpful for us to get a high score on the college entrance examination, but it is too much and boring” (Zhang & Kim, 2013:623).

“There is almost no opportunity to speak English in the English classes. High school teachers focus on more exam-oriented education. Their goal is to teach us how to get high scores on the college entrance examination” (Zhang & Kim, 2013:623).

In the exam-centered teaching and learning atmosphere, teachers in secondary schools no longer apply interesting and creative teaching methods in the classroom in the manner of those in primary schools. Furthermore, students are required to spend more time on grammar practice, meaning that any pleasure derived from learning English is always secondary to the results they achieve.

Another relevant factor is that English at this level is not as easy as that in primary schools, becoming increasingly challenging across higher levels of study (Ye, 2021). Almost half of the eight-grade interviewees in Butler (2015) indicated agreement with this point, stating that, as the content of English classes became increasingly difficult, they became less fond of their English classes. Additionally, parents of secondary school students, especially those of senior high school students, become less and less involved in their children's English learning because of the increasing difficulty of English classes and their limited knowledge (Zhang & Kim, 2013). This tends to exert a negative influence on students' interest in learning English since they are forced to deal with any problems that arise by themselves, without any parental advice, which may decrease their self-confidence. Overall, the exam-oriented teaching methods and the increasing difficulty of the content of English seem to exert a negative influence on secondary school students' interests in English, decreasing their internal and integrative motivation to learn it.

In general, Chinese secondary school students are more instrumentally and extrinsically motivated to learn English in that they face huge pressure of doing well in different exams, especially in the National College Entrance Exam. Additionally, because of the exam-oriented teaching styles and increasingly challenging content, their interests in learning English decrease. In that case, their instrumental and extrinsic motivation domain English learning when compared with primary school students.

4.2.3 Potential Factors to Explaining University Students' Motivation to Learn English

From the results of the synthesis outlined above, university students appear to exhibit the same motivational tendencies as secondary school students: their instrumental and extrinsic motivation is also more prominent than integrative and intrinsic motivation, whereas the gap is not as big as that of secondary school students. Factors affecting university students' motivation are also not the same as those affecting their secondary school counterparts.

According to Li (2014), instrumental and extrinsic motivation play dominant roles in Chinese university students' learning of English in that they associate English learning with personal goals of becoming successful in academic or professional realms. As Zhao (2011) notes, university students' initial motivation to learn English tends to be more instrumental rather than integrative, since English is mainly considered as a pragmatic and supportive tool for potential gains. This position is also taken by Yu & Geng (2020), who state that Chinese undergraduates relate English learning closely with future personal opportunities, including academic development and securing prestigious and lucrative employment. As one of the interviewees in their study reported, when he was in secondary school, he only cared about scores and his motivation to learn English was strictly exam-oriented. However, after entering university, he commented that he became aware of the importance of learning English and came to regard it as an instrument of more use within his future life. It is unsurprising that such participants would consider English as being of such importance given that many jobs in China are now awarded on the basis of the candidate's competency in English (Zhao, 2011). Yu & Geng (2020) also explain that acquiring English confers certain advantages, providing individuals with greater opportunities. For example, students with strong English abilities are better positioned to work within international companies and to acquire higher salaries.

Although most university students appear to believe that English learning is of greater relevance for their future development, they still face the pressure stemming from passing English exams. As Zheng, 2015) note, English is still a compulsory subject in the first two years of university in China. University students also have to undertake constant English examinations each semester and participate in proficiency tests such as CET-4 and CET-6 (Zhao, 2011). However, unlike in secondary school, Chinese universities and colleges have less control over and are more flexible with their students (Yu & Geng, 2020). Teachers meet their students only once or twice a week and leave them to study independently. In other words, students are forced to take full responsibility for their studies rather than relying on their teachers or parents to motivate them (Yu & Geng, 2020). It seems that they face less pressure to pass exams as when they are in secondary schools. Hence, although the need to pass exams may motivate university students to learn English to some extent, it appears not to be the main source of their motivation to learn English in this context.

For university students, the gap between integrative and instrumental motivation and the gap between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are narrowed since they can sustain integrative and intrinsic motivation to learn English to some degree, although these two types of motivation are not as prominent as the extrinsic or instrumental varieties (Zhao, 2011). Without the pressure of passing the National College Entrance Examination, university students seem to have more time to learn about western culture through watching films in English and reading classical English novels. Such activities have the potential to restimulate their interest in English (Yu & Geng, 2020) since their success in English learning can enrich their life through these relaxing activities. However, university students, especially non-English major students in China have limited opportunities to make contact with the target community (Zhao, 2011) since they have their majors in university. As previously discussed, English is only studied in foreign language classes once or twice a week for them. Therefore, although they are motivated by interests to some extent, they experience relatively few opportunities to engage with the English-speaking community, making it hard for them to pick up English in a manner informed by intrinsic or integrative motivation.

Overall, given the results of the studies in this research synthesis on Chinese students' motivational differences in English learning, it can be concluded that primary school students exhibit higher levels of intrinsic motivation, while secondary school and university students are more instrumentally and extrinsically motivated. As Yu & Geng, (2020) state, students' motivation differs according to their needs relating to using the language in the real world, meaning that their motivation may shift to satisfy differing needs across different levels of schooling. Primary school students' motivation to learn English can be primarily attributed to their internal interests, while, in the case of secondary and university students, they gradually lose their interests in English due to various

external factors such as the pressure of passing exams, the parental influence, etc. It is not surprising that extrinsic and instrumental motivation feature prominently in students' English education after primary school since it is a common view of Chinese people that English competency is required for succeeding in academic development, securing prestigious employment and achieving promotion (Li, 2014). However, many Chinese students strive to do well in English on the basis of instrumental and extrinsic motivation, with such experiences being characterised by little interest or self-confidence (Kyriacou & Zhu, 2008). Hence, it is essential for English teachers to take effective measures to foster students' interests in English and to help them build self-confidence as well as self-efficacy to promote their intrinsic and integrative motivation to learn English (Zhao, 2011).

5. Conclusion

This chapter is separated into four parts, providing a summary of the study conducted and stating its limitations, certain pedagogical suggestions for English teachers and recommendations for future research.

5.1 *Summary of the Present Study*

This study investigated how Chinese students' motivation to learn English differs across levels of schooling, namely primary schools, secondary schools and universities. This study also explored the factors adduced as explaining these differences through a research synthesis of previous studies. To select studies to synthesise, the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) was chosen and key words were used to identify potential relevant articles, from which set a list of nine specific studies was isolated. Furthermore, motivation in these studies was recategorised into integrative and instrumental as well as intrinsic and extrinsic varieties. The research questions can thus now be addressed by referring to these four types of motivation.

The findings show that Chinese primary school students share unbiased integrative and instrumental motivation. Secondary school students, especially those in senior high schools, exhibit a higher level of instrumental motivation than integrative motivation, and the reason for this seems to be that they face great pressure as a result of the need to pass the National College Entrance Exam. Despite the fact university students appear to be more instrumentally motivated, they have different reasons to learn English as compared with secondary pupils. University learners link English learning closely with future personal opportunities, including securing employment and promotional opportunities. With respect to intrinsic-extrinsic motivation, students in primary schools appear more intrinsically motivated rather than extrinsically motivated in that they tend to demonstrate greater interests in English as a new language and express that they seek to learn it to fulfill certain internal interests. However, the motivation experienced by pupils in secondary schools to learn English is largely extrinsic in that they appear to be driven to do so primarily by external factors such as the influence of their parents and teachers, leading to a gradual loss in their internal interests in learning English. University students are also more extrinsically motivated to learn English. However, they appear to develop more intrinsic motivation to learn English than their counterparts in secondary school.

5.2 *Limitations of the Present Study*

This study is a small-scale research synthesis reporting on the findings of nine previous studies and so it is necessary to recognise its limitations. Firstly, although different key words, synonyms and other research items were utilised in an effort to identify relevant studies, only one database was searched as a result of time constraints, meaning that certain other relevant studies were most likely not considered. As a result, the conclusions drawn may not be as widely generalisable as would be ideal. Additionally, some of the published studies yielded by the searches conducted did not include original data. What was therefore synthesised was an interpretation of the raw data, which seemed to increase the distance between the researcher and the original participants and this potentially gave rise to a certain level of misunderstanding or misinterpretation. A further limitation is that this study focused on differences in integrative-instrumental motivation and intrinsic-extrinsic motivation without comparing students' overall motivation longitudinally. Conducting such a comparison might have enabled the research questions to be addressed more comprehensively. Another source of weakness in this study is that one of the studies analysed was published in 2008, meaning that it is now older than would have been ideal in that its data and findings might now be out of date and thus failed to offer insight useful to addressing the research questions.

5.3 *Potential Pedagogical Suggestions*

Despite the limitations mentioned above, the findings reported here have certain practical pedagogical suggestions for English teachers in China. As Zhao (2011) states, only with intrinsic and integrative motivation to learn English do students set aside more effort and time to engage in the learning process. There is a clear need for teachers, especially those who teach English in secondary schools and universities, to foster a certain level of intrinsic and integrative motivation in their students. To facilitate intrinsic and integrative motivation, English teachers should ensure that they have a sense of what students are interested in and how to increase their interest in learning English. It is therefore important to identify major sources of students' interests across

educational levels and to take measures to stimulate students' interests in a way that is informed by awareness of these sources. For example, younger students are interested in English cartoons and tend to be curious about comparisons between Chinese and English. Hence, it may be productive to use popular cartoon series as material for classroom instructions and to compare the differences between these two languages in the classroom. Regarding older students, as Chinese English classrooms are usually exam-driven and teacher-oriented, they tend to be more eager to use English to maintain their intrinsic motivation. Therefore, it seems important that teachers give students more opportunities to speak English rather than focusing solely on grammar practice. As Zhao (2011) suggests, teachers should encourage students to interact with their peers in English during class to improve their communication skills.

Besides increasing students' interests in English learning, it also seems essential that English teachers promote students' self-confidence and help them develop a sense of self-efficacy. A low level of self-confidence and self-efficacy results in learners being underpowered with respect to sustaining their efforts in English learning (Zhao, 2011). Promoting students' self-confidence and self-efficacy can be achieved by encouraging them to compare their current performances with past performances rather than with other, perhaps stronger students in their class, praising them when they make progress class and providing challenging but achievable tasks to enable them to experience a sense of success and achievement. Furthermore, positive feedback also plays a significant role in improving students' self-confidence and self-efficacy, with Zhao (2011) underscoring the effect of positive feedback and stating that it can motivate students to succeed.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

This study has considered certain questions whose answers may be reconsidered within future research. There is a need for more longitudinal studies exploring Chinese students' overall level of motivation to learn English across schooling levels to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this research topic. Furthermore, university students in this study are non-English majors, and so future work may also consider Chinese English-major students as participants to gain greater insight into the motivational differences they experience. Finally, this study has shown that most Chinese students are less integratively and intrinsically motivated; however, these two types of motivation nevertheless have significant roles in the learning of English. Further studies considering how to improve students' integrative and intrinsic motivation seem necessary as a means of improving such students' performances in English.

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¹ Studies included in the research synthesis are highlighted in bold.

Appendix A

Concise Summary of Articles Included in the Research Synthesis

Butler, Y. G., (2015). Parental factors in children's motivation for learning English: a case in China. *Research Papers in Education*, 30(2), pp. 164-191.

Context: Mainland China, 198 fourth-grade students, 191 sixth-grade students, 183 eighth-grade students
Type of research: quantitative and qualitative study (questionnaires and interviews)
Key points in the article: parents' socio-economic status, behaviors and beliefs about their children's English education influenced children's motivation to learn English; parents' influences on children's motivation vary depending on their SES backgrounds and their children's grade level; higher SES parents are able to provide their children with more opportunities to use English outside of school.

Ye, X., (2021). EFL Learning motivation differences of Chinese junior secondary school students: A mixed-methods study. *Education 3-13*, 49(2), pp. 203-216.

Context: Mainland China, 773 junior high school students

Type of research: quantitative and qualitative study (questionnaires and interviews)

Key points in the article: there are notable differences and similarities in motivation among Chinese junior secondary school students' motivation to learn English; different students show different levels of intrinsic motivation but the same level of extrinsic motivation; it is crucial for English teachers to adopt various strategies to foster students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Zhao, L., (2011). Investigation into motivation types and influences on motivation: The case of Chinese non-English majors. *English Language Teaching*, 5(3), pp. 100-122.

Context: Mainland China, 124 non-English major students of year 1 and year 2

Type of research: quantitative (questionnaires)

Key points in the article: Chinese non-English major students' initial motivation to learn English is with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as well as integrative and instrumental motivation, but extrinsic and instrumental motivation are more prominent and stronger than intrinsic and integrative motivation; both internal and external factors are considered having great influence on students' motivation; English teachers should help students to build up positive perceptions of themselves and improve their intrinsic motivation.

Xu, W. & Case, R. E., (2015). Age-related differences in motivation in learning English among Mainland Chinese students. *International journal of applied linguistics*, 25(1), pp. 67-82.

Context: Mainland China, 1212 school-age students from grade 1 to 11

Type of research: quantitative (questionnaires)

Key points in the article: differences in students' motivation to learn English separate at different schooling levels, including elementary schools and secondary schools; Chinese students are more instrumentally than integratively motivated toward English learning; Chinese high school students face huge pressure of passing the college entrance examination.

Yu, J. & Geng, J., (2020). Continuity and Change in Chinese English Learners' Motivations Across Different Contexts and Schooling Levels. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*. 29(3), pp. 237-248.

Context: Mainland China and New Zealand, 20 Chinese PhD students

Type of research: quantitative and qualitative study (questionnaires and interviews)

Key points in the article: both Chinese students who learn English as a foreign language and a second language show changes in their motivation to learn English; in the EFL learning contexts, students' motivation is dominated by passing examination, while in the ESL learning context, students' motivation is characterized by communication; the development of language; learners' motivation is a dynamic process and contingent on levels of study or learning contexts.

Zhang, Q. & Kim, T., (2013). Cross-grade analysis of Chinese students' English learning motivation: a mixed-methods study. *Asia Pacific education review*, 14(4), pp. 615-627.

Context: Mainland China, 3777 elementary and secondary school students

Type of research: quantitative and qualitative study (questionnaires and interviews)

Key points in the article: Chinese junior high school students have the highest learning motivation, followed by those in primary schools and those in high schools; parents have great influence on students' motivation; the influence of the college entrance examination have a negative influence on high school students' motivation to learn English;

Kyriacou, C. & Zhu, D., (2008). Shanghai pupils' motivation towards learning English and the perceived influence of important others. *Educational studies*, 34(2), pp. 97-104.

Context: Mainland China, 700 pupils in the second year of their senior high school in Shanghai

Type of research: quantitative and qualitative study (questionnaires and interviews)

Key points in the article: senior high school pupils' English learning motivation is dominated by life and career-based reasons rather than intrinsic and integrative reasons; parents, teachers and peers have influences on students' motivation and teachers are viewed as the most influential factor;

Long, C., Ming, Z., & Chen, L., (2013). The study of student motivation on English learning in junior middle school- A case study of No.5 middle school in Gejiu. *English language teaching*, 6(9), pp. 136-145.

Context: Mainland China, 45 junior middle school students from No. 5 Middle School of Gejiu

Type of research: quantitative study (questionnaire)

Key points in the article: the junior high school students' motivation to learn English is not very high and are largely instrumental motivation; it is necessary to arouse students' English learning motivation and improve the efficiency of English learning; teacher should pay more attention to communicative learn which can stimulate students to learn effectively.

Li, Q., (2014). Differences in the motivation of Chinese learners of English in a foreign and second language context. *System (Linköping)*, 42, pp. 451-461.

Context: Mainland China and New Zealand, 132 Chinese learners of English in Chinese universities (in the first or second year of university), 122 Chinese learners taking general or academic English courses at English language schools in New Zealand.

Type of research: quantitative study (questionnaire)

Key points in the article: there are notable differences in the English learning motivation between Chinese EFL learners and ESL learners; the EFL learners have a high level of prevention of instrumentality, while the ESL learners hope to develop stronger idealized self-images as competent users of English; English learning experience and promotional instrumentality are two significant factors in determining Chinese students motivated learning behavior.

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