



The Relationship of Motivation for Learning and Perceptual Learning Style Preferences with Academic Achievement of Chineses Grade 8 Students in English Language Class

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Abstract

This study's objective was to determine if there is a significant relationship of motivation for learning and perceptual learning style preferences in English language class with academic achievement of Grade 8 students at a Junior Middle School, Xuanwei, Yunnan, China. A sample of 231 Grade 8 students at a Junior Middle School during the academic year of 2021 attended. In order to measure students' motivation levels and perceptual learning style preferences, two questionnaires were used. In order to determine the students' academic achievement in English learning, the final test score of English class from August of this academic year 2021 was taken as the instrument. After the data was collected, the research objectives and hypothesis were examined by means, standard deviations, frequency, percentage and multiple correlation coefficient. The findings showed that Grade 8 students had slightly high motivation for learning, and their most preferred perceptual learning style was auditory, followed by mixed, kinesthetic, group, tactile, individual and visual learning style. They had a good level of English achievement. There was a positive and significant relationship between the motivation for learning and perceptual learning style preferences with academic achievement in English language class of Grade 8 students at the Junior Middle school.

Keywords : Motivtion for Learning; Perceptual Learning style preferences; Academic Achievement; English Language Class; Grade 8 Students

JEL Classification Code : C12, I20

1. Introduction

Over the past 20 years, China has implemented the reform and opening-up policy, and its diplomatic scale has been continuously expanded, the demand for intercultural communication talents is growing rapidly (Xu, 2016). As an international language, the demand for English talents has also increased undoubtedly. According to the Compulsory English Curriculum Standard of China (2017), students' emotional attitude is very important. Emotional attitudes include factors such as interest, motivation and self-confidence that affect the learning process.

Teachers should stimulate students' motivation in English teaching, help students to develop in a positive and successful direction. As a result, to study the motivation of junior high school students is necessary and important. Besides motivation, individual differences of students also affect their learning ability.

Among the individual differences that affect students' learning ability, learning style difference is one of the important reasons. According to Reid' s description in learning styles in the ESL/EFL classroom, while perceptual learning style is the primary and vital part of the formation of learning style (Reid, 1995). Therefore, the study of

learning style is an important part of individual difference research.

1.2. Research Objectives

The following research objectives are addressed.

1. To identify the level of motivation for learning in English language class of Grade 8 students at a Junior Middle school, Xuanwei, Yunnan, China
2. To identify the level of perceptual learning style preferences in English language class of Grade 8 students at a Junior Middle school, Xuanwei, Yunnan, China.
3. To identify the level of academic achievement in English language class of Grade 8 students at a Junior Middle school, Xuanwei, Yunnan, China
4. To identify if there is a significant relationship of motivation for learning and perceptual learning style preferences with academic achievement in English language class of Grade 8 students at a Junior Middle school, Xuanwei, Yunnan, China.

1.3. Research Hypotheses

One hypothesis was tested in this study.

There is a significant relationship of motivation for learning and perceptual learning style with academic achievement in English language class of Grade 8 students at a Junior Middle school, Xuanwei, Yunnan, China.

1.4. Theoretical Framework

1.4.1. Motivation for Learning

Motivation for learning is an internal motive to drive student to learn, as a non-intellectual factor, promotes learning indirectly. Motivation for foreign language learning is the synthesis of the desire to learn a language and the effort to it and a good attitude towards learning a language " He pointed out that motivation for foreign language learning consists of four parts, namely, learning goal, effort, desire to achieve learning goals and learning attitude. In this model, motivation for learning is defined as the combination of an individual's motivational intensity, desire to learn, and attitudes toward learning English.

1.4.2. Perceptual Learning Style Preference

Learning style preference theory was proposed by the Dunns and Price. They divided the learning style preference into four categories: visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile (Dunn & Price, 1975). In the mid-1980s, two other learning style preferences: group and individual was added by Reid and he produced the perceptual learning style preferences questionnaire to more accurately measure the learning types of students according to these six types of learning style preference

1.5. Conceptual Framework

A sample population of Grade 8 students from a junior middle school in Xuanwei, Yunnan, China was chosen for this study. This study's objective was to investigate the relationship of motivation for learning and perceptual learning style with academic achievement in English language class of Grade 8 students at a Junior Middle school, Xuanwei, Yunnan, China. The process of data collection was completed after the students filled out the questionnaire. Below is the conceptual framework of this study.

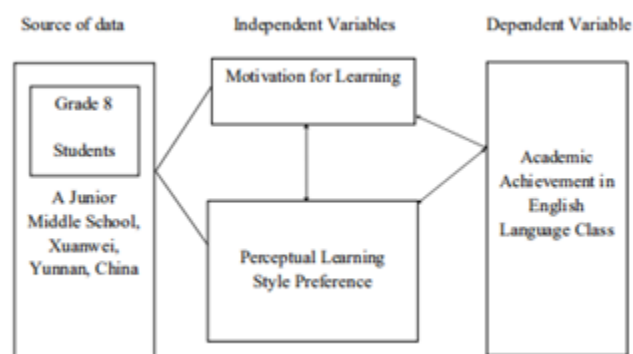


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of this study

2. Literature Review

Chalak and Kassaian (2010) administered a study on the area of motivation and attitude for learning English as foreign language with 108 Iranian undergraduate students who specialize in English translation. According to the findings in this study, 108 Iranian students learn English as a foreign language for both instrumental and integrative purposes, and with high positive attitudes toward the target language community.

Shell and Lynch (2016) investigated students' motivation for learning English as a foreign language and their preferred instructional strategies with 123 students in Grade 9-12 from Pan-Asia International school. Shell found that motivation and instructional strategies are both important elements in Learning English as a Foreign language.

Huang and Lynch (2017) studied the relationship for learning Chinese and perception of parental encouragement for learning Chinese with academic achievement. 61 Grade 3 students, 66 Grade 4 students, and 48 Grade 5 students participated in this study. Huang found that the motivation of Grade 3 and Grade 5 students for learning Chinese was slightly high, while Grade 4 students' motivation for learning Chinese was moderately high.

San and Ye (2013) conducted a comparative study of learning styles in Myanmar. 70 student had participated in the Reid' s perceptual learning style preference questionnaire. The results showed that there are 27% students preferred the tactile learning style, 23% preferred the auditory learning style, 23% preferred the kinesthetic learning style, 17% preferred the individual learning style, and 10% preferred the group learning style.

A study in China by Dong and Yao (2016) investigated the relationship between the college student's



learning style preferences and the classroom participation with 272 students. They just adopt four subscales (visual, auditory, kinesthetic and tactile) from Reid's perceptual learning style preference questionnaire. The result showed that there are a half of the college students preferred the visual learning style, and then in turn the kinesthetic and tactile, auditory.

3. Methodology/Procedure

3.1. Population and Sample

This study examined a population of the students who are studying English as a foreign language of Grade 8 students at a Junior Middle School, Xuanwei, Yunnan, China during the academic year of 2021. The Grade 8 has 4 classes, consisting of 231 people. And all the 231 students were used as the sample

3.2. Research Instrument

Firstly, the Motivation for Learning English as a Foreign Language Questionnaire (MLEFLQ) from Siphora and Lynch (2016) was used. It is an adaptation of Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). Secondly, Reid's Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) which developed in 1984 was used. Thirdly, a sample of 231 Grade 8 students from a Junior Middle School in Xuanwei, Yunnan, China during the academic year of 2021 was attended.

3.3. Validity and Reliability

Many researchers have used AMTB extensively in many different countries in order to assess the affective elements of second language acquisition. Gardner (1985) developed the origin concepts and items of the instrument and then extended it further with Lambert in 1972, but the full items with internal consistency reliability was developed by Gardner and Smythe (1975), presented in 1981. PLSPQ (Perceptual Learning Styles Preferences Questionnaire) was written and designed by Reid in 1984, and is extensively used to identify students' Perceptual Learning Style Preferences. Based on their reliability analysis of the PLSPQ, Tian and Lynch (2016) concluded that the Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the PLSPQ ranges between .62 and .81. Of the English language class's final test score, the test paper was issued by the Educational

Bureau of Xuanwei city, all the Grade 8 students of this city were tested by the same paper.

4. Findings.

4.1. Findings for Research Objective 1.

Based on the statistical analysis of data, the Grade 8 students at a Junior Middle School, Xuanwei, Yunnan, China had a slightly high degree of motivation for learning, due to the overall mean scores of this questionnaire was $M = 4.33$, which is interpreted as slightly high. Likewise, the mean score of motivation for learning was $M = 4.21$, desire to learn English was $M = 4.29$ and attitudes toward learning English was $M = 4.50$, all the mean scores of these 3 subscales were slightly high.

Table 1: Subscales, Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD) and

Subscales of Motivation for Learning	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
Motivational intensity	4.21	1.34	Slightly high
Desire to learn English	4.29	1.49	Slightly high
Attitudes toward learning English	4.50	1.36	Slightly high
Total	4.33	1.40	Slightly high

4.2. Findings for Research Objective 2

According to Table 2, the most preferred perceptual learning style of Grade 8 students at a Junior Middle School, Xuanwei, Yunnan, China was Auditory (32%), followed by Mix (20.3%), Kinesthetic (17.3%), Group (16.9%), Tactile (6.9%), individual (3.9%) and Visual (2.6%).

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of the Preferred Perceptual Learning Style of Grade 8 Students

Learning Styles	Frequency	Percentage
Visual	6	2.6
Auditory	74	32.0
Kinesthetic	40	17.3
Tactile	16	6.9
Learning Styles	Frequency	Percentage
Group	39	16.9
Individual	9	3.9
Mixed	47	20.3
Total	231	100.0

4.3. Findings for Research Objective 3



The mean scores of 86.67 in academic achievement indicates that the Grade 8 students at a Junior Middle School, Xuanwei, Yunnan, China had a good academic achievement in English.

Table 3: Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) of the Academic Achievement of Grade 8 Students

	N	M	SD	Interpretation
Achievement Level	231	86.67	24.79	Good

4.4. Findings for Research Objective 4

The relationship of motivation for learning and perceptual learning style preferences with academic achievement in English Language class of Grade 8 students at a Junior Middle school, Xuanwei, Yunnan, China was significantly and moderately correlated ($R = .44$, $p < .01$) at .05 level. Additionally, it was also shows that the independent variables (motivation for learning and perceptual learning style preferences) explained 29% of the variance in the dependent variable ($R^2 = .29$, $F(2, 228) = 47.99$, $p < .01$). Other factors account for 71% of the variance in academic achievement in English language class.

Table 4: Analysis of Multiple Correlation Coefficient Between Grade 8 Student's Motivation for Learning and Perceptual Learning Style Preferences with their Academic Achievement

Variables	R	R ²	df	F	p
Grade 8 students' motivation for learning and perceptual learning style preferences with their academic achievement	.54	.29	2, 228	47.99	.000

5. Discussion

5.1. Motivation for Learning

The result suggested that they had a slightly high degree of motivation for learning which in line with the survey result of Tian and Lynch's research (2016). In the research of motivation for learning Chinese as a foreign language of Grades 5 - 8 students at an international school,

they found that Grade 5 - 8 students' overall level of motivation for learning Chinese were moderate and very close to high. In the dimension of attitudes towards English, many students agree with that the English is a very important part of school program, but they didn't suppose English learning as a interesting thing. The researcher assumes that it because English language as a compulsory curriculum was highly valued in China's formal education, if the junior high school want to pass the entrance examination then enter the high school stage of study, they need to get a good score of English language subject. Students also well ware of the importance of English, but due to the teaching content was inclined to grammar which required a lot rote learning, so they could not find enough pleasure in English Learning. This finding was aligned with the research of Luo (2015) that nearly 70 percent of students think that pass the entrance examination then enter the high school stage of study is the main reason for their English study

5.2. Relationship of students' motivation for learning and their academic achievement in English language class

The findings of this study indicated that the relationship between Grade 8 students' motivation for learning and their academic achievement in English language class was strong, positive and significant. The result of this finding was aligned with many previous studies that motivation had a significant relationship with academic achievement (Zhu, 2014; Cai & Lynch, 2015; Hou & Lynch, 2015; Huang & Lynch, 2017). According to Bandura (1982), learners with high motivation were more capable to gain better learning achievement. From the survey result of questionnaire, the researcher found that the academic achievement of Grade 8 student was seriously differentiated, also, their motivation for learning English was differentiated. The students who had a stronger motivation for learning English, the better academic achievement they will achieve in the English final test, the better English academic achievement will encourage them have a stronger motivation and vice versa. Thus it can be seen that student's motivation for learning are interrelated with their academic achievement

5.3. Perceptual Learning Style Preference

The results of this study demonstrated that the most preferred perceptual learning style of Grade 8 students was

auditory followed by mixed, kinesthetic, group and tactile, individual and visual. The reason was that the instruction model in the target school was teacher-centered, most of the time, the students need to listen what the teacher had taught and write it down, so the researcher assumes that this is the major cause of auditory style preference. This research findings was in line with Chen (2015) that auditory learning style was a major learning style of junior middle school students, and the formation of this type of learning style preference was influenced by the teaching method of teacher to a large extent. The results of this study also consistent with Zhan (2016) that auditory type is the preferred perceptual learning style of students, while individual type is the perceptual learning style that students are less inclined to use. Zhan also reasoned it by the teacher-centered English classroom teaching mode that students are accustomed to obtaining new knowledge by listening to teacher explanations, listening to group discussions, listening to recordings and other ways.

5.4. Relationship of students' perceptual learning style preferences and their academic achievement in English language class

The finding of this study showed that there had a positive and significant relationship between students' perceptual learning style preferences and their academic achievement in English language class. Reid (1984) proposes that the primary perceptual learning style refers to what kind of perception learners use to learn best, so it is not difficult to understand that everyone has a major tendency towards perceptual learning styles. In the process of learning need to use a variety of different skills, individuals by using one or two perceptual learning style is difficult to master many different skills, to better learning a foreign language, students have to develop visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, group or individual and a variety of perceptual learning style. From the research results of Zhang (2017), she found that junior high school students' perceptual learning style preferences was correlated with their academic achievement, in which tactile, kinesthetic and individual learning styles are positively correlated to learning achievements while visual, auditory and group learning styles are negatively correlated to English learning achievements. In a study of the correlation between perceptual learning style and English reading scores in Chinese senior high school, Zhan (2016) found that there are

three perceptual learning styles of auditory, individual and group were associated with total English reading scores.

5.5. Relationship of students' motivation for learning and their perceptual learning style preferences in English language class

The finding of this study suggested that students' motivation for learning was correlated with their perceptual learning style preferences in English language class which aligned with previous studies. In the correlation study of perceptual learning style and motivated second language behavior for junior high school students, Ren (2020) found that there is a positive and significant relationship existing in junior high school students' perceptual learning styles of visual, auditory, kinesthetic, individual learning style and motivated second language behavior. Lian (2014) found that there was a significant relationship between learning motivation and perceptual learning style. In classes consistent with their preferred perceptual learning style, students have strong learning motivation, but vice versa. In the current study, the researcher also found that the student who preferred auditory learning style will have a strong motivation for learning in the teacher-centered English language class.

6. Recommendations

6.1. For Students

The findings of the current research would lead them to know that as a non- intellectual but very crucial factor, motivation indirectly promotes learning. Students should explore their interest in English and stimulate their learning motivation. And by detecting their own learning style, students can adopt the corresponding learning strategies to effectively complete the learning tasks.

6.2. For Teachers

In order to help students cultivate their interest in English Learning and fully utilize their perceptual learning style preferences, the teachers should consider doing the following: Praise and encourage more to improve students' learning enthusiasm; help students find the fun of English, such as share the history or story of English-speaking countries; choose the appropriate teaching methods to present the English reading teaching content; design different teaching activities according to the characteristics of students' perceptual learning style; divide students in the



same class into homogeneous groups by their preferred perceptual learning styles

6.3. For School Leaders

According to the finding result of this study, the overall motivation of students is slightly high, but for many of them, they just learn English for pass exam rather than really enjoy it. The school leaders should carry out some English-related activities, such as the historical knowledge contest about English-speaking countries, play English movies, organize an English speech contest or an English song singing activity, so that help students to find the fun of learning English. For the learning styles, the school leaders can stream students and educate them according to their perceptual learning style preferences.

6.4. For Researchers

The following recommendations are offered for those who are interested to study the motivation for learning and student perceptual learning style preference in learning English as a foreign language: to ensure the objective of the study results, the English test scores should be collected several more times; the sample range can be larger to make it more representative; the variable of gender can be added to make studies more targeted ; add more subscales from AMTB to research students' motivation for learning; use diverse questionnaires to test students' perceptual learning style preferences

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