

Understanding Learners' participative motivation in *Reading Challenge*

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Abstract: The study is based on related motivation theory to explore the learners' participative motivation in an English reading contest. Total 30 winners in high school are subjects in this study. After analyzing interview content, we divided learners' participative motivation in contest into: participative intrinsic motivation, participative extrinsic motivation, and participative interpersonal motivation. This study also presents the future work for further research.

Keywords: learning motivation, participative motivation, English reading challenge

Introduction

There are many English online learning communities that provide rich materials and content, and thus users can utilize many features, such as the convenience of the Internet and personalized learning. This is a unique departure from traditional ways of learning English in the classroom. Furthermore, the culture of online learning communities has gradually grown and changed as more and more people join websites and learn from each other. Members of these communities can share and exchange their experiences during the learning process in interactive ways.

When students learn English, Wible et al. [1] argue that a strong emphasis on reading can significantly improve a student's English comprehension, particularly when these students read high quality English reading materials recommended by teachers and experts. In order to advance the use of excellent English books and to enhance English comprehension for high school students, IWiLL, an English online learning community, has held annual English *Reading Challenge* contests since 2000. On average, these contests draw thousands of students, many of whom are also IWiLL members. However, the motivations of students who participate in these annual contests are unclear. Are students volunteering to join such a national large-scale competition, or are they forced by their classroom teachers? What is their primary motivation for taking part in these events?

The purpose of this paper is based on related motivation theory to discover the learners' participative motivation in *Reading Challenge* contest on an online learning community. After analyzing the collected data, we will find out the factors for learners to participate in the contest. Then, these factors will be induced as the participative motivation for Reading Challenge contest based on related motivation theory.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Motivation

Motivation has been a term widely used in educational and psychological study fields for decades. Motivation is an internal status and process making an individual physically take action and maintain the action toward a goal [2]. Motivation is the internal drive to learn again. With this drive, individuals could continually learn until achieving their learning purposes. It means that any learning behavior must be driven by the learning motivation [3]. It shows that motivation is an internal psychological status and also an internal factor to facilitate an individual to be engaged in certain activity.

We will discuss the following several important related theories about the development of the motivation theory for past several decades.

(1) Need hierarchy theory

Maslow's need hierarchy theory [4] puts human need in hierarchical levels. He thought motivation is related to human multi-level needs. The needs could be arranged and described by the hierarchical method from low-ordered physiological needs to high-ordered mental needs - pursuing self-actualization. In general, higher-ordered needs will not be produced when lower-ordered needs are not satisfied yet.

(2) ERG theory

Alderfer's ERG (Existence - Relatedness - Growth) theory [5] deemed that individuals could pursue more than one kind of needs at the same time without priority. In other words, all kinds of needs could exist and stimulate motivation at the same time. This theory is generally similar with Maslow's hierarchy need theory. Alderfer classified humanity's needs into three levels from bottom to up.

(a) Existence needs

It is equal to Maslow theory's physiological needs and safety needs.

(b) Relatedness needs

It is equal to Maslow theory's social needs and esteem needs.

(c) Growth needs

It is equal to self - actualization needs in Maslow theory.

But Alderfer thought that a person may be affected by more than one need to affect. Moreover, when the satisfaction of higher-ordered needs is suppressed, willingness to seek for the satisfaction of lower-ordered needs would be increased. Accordingly, the extent of need for relationship and growth would be strengthened following higher satisfaction level [5].

(3) Learned needs theory

McClelland et al. [6] thought needs are deeply affected by culture and society, including three needs, namely, need for achievement, need for affiliation, and need for power. Everyone usually would have more or less three kinds of needs mentioned above. However, individual has different focus. The theory content is as follows:

(a) Need for achievement

This indicates a person is not only willing to do but also dedicating themselves to achieve with internal drive for an very important or valuable job in their minds.

(b) Need for power

It is an internal drive of individual's hope to have an influence on others and do their best for their work.

(c) Need for affiliation

It is an internal drive of individual's expectation to maintain good relationship and gain friendship with others.

Because of the theory above, needs are triggered by motivation so that different needs are created under different environments. And different needs would lead to different motivation. When individuals have needs, motivation is developed. Either the motivation is resulted from the internal psychological satisfaction or the external incentives cause, personal drive is created to have motivational behavior.

1.2 The participative motivation of online learning community

Most studies of participative motivations of online communities are based on the shared knowledge of online communities. This paper first focuses on the motivations of knowledge community sharing. Then it summarizes the participative motivations of individuals within online learning communities.

Research on the motivations of knowledge sharing communities is mainly divided into four different perspectives or viewpoints: psychological, sociological, economic, and technological [7][8]. From psychological viewpoint, Deci [9] emphasizes that motivation of knowledge sharing behavior could be divided into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation includes goal achievement, expectation of completing tasks, and desires to make a decision. Extrinsic motivation involves the receipt of rewards. Writing from the perspective of psychology, Kollock's [10] views on intrinsically motivated learners are similar, adding that intrinsic motivations are rooted in: (a) expectations that the community's members would provide feedback to others after being helped; (b) enhancement of their own reputation and status; (c) discovery of their personal value for the community; (d) realization of their sense of belonging within their community.

From the viewpoint of economics, Walster et al. [11] argued that motivations behind sharing are best viewed as a kind of reciprocal expectation. If the sharing resource is equal to the reward, sharing behavior will be created accordingly. From the viewpoint of sociology, Constant et al. [12] proposed that knowledge sharing is affected by self-interest and environmental factors of society and organization.

Lastly, Kwok and Gao [8] provide yet another alternative to understanding motivation, by combining these three perspectives (psychological, sociological, economic) and then dividing the concept of motivation into three, rather than two, types: intrinsic, extrinsic, and interpersonal. Their definition of these concepts is as follows:

- (1) Intrinsic motivation includes altruism and reputation, with altruism simply defined as the ability for an individual to benefit others without accepting something in return. The quality of the reputation and qualification are assessed by other members in the community.
- (2) Extrinsic motivation is still rooted in reward, or personal desires. Rewards are the feedback from a community after an individual contributes to that community. Personal needs mean the need for a person to be useful or beneficial. For example, when an individual makes contributions to a group, the resulting respect for the individual will further enhance that individual's position and level within the community.
- (3) Interpersonal motivation contains liking and affiliation which both play important roles in the knowledge community. The value obtained by joining and participating in the community is derived from true enjoyment and the desire to discuss as well as interact with community members.

From Kwok's and Gao's theories [8], we know that individual motivation is divided into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation includes altruism and reputation. Extrinsic motivation contains reward and individual need. And individual motivation could affect interpersonal motivation to affiliate with each other and establish friendly relationship between members.

The development of online learning communities leads traditional learning techniques to face a series of evolutions in the previous sections of literature reviews. In terms of learning style, personal learning transforms into collaborative learning. Learning structures change from closed to open. During the process of learning, it was knowledge delivery but now it is knowledge construction. When technology is integrated into education, the original interaction mode transforms from one-way human-system interaction into two-way instructor-learner, as well as peer-to-peer interaction [13]. Additionally, learning motivation is also gradually changing for integration with element of technology.

In our research, we established an online learning community, where community members could participate in *Reading Challenge* contests the community holds annually. The primary research purpose of this study is to explore the motivations of the contest participants for participating. Furthermore, this study intends to identify the motivations of these learners using the framework proposed by Kwok and Gao [8].

2. Reading Challenge contest

Intelligent Web-based Interactive Language Learning (IWILL, <http://www.iwillnow.org>) is a Taiwanese large online learning community for learners who wish to learn a foreign language. IWILL regularly holds a nationwide English reading contest – *Reading Challenge* (see Figure 1). It has been held since 2000, and thousands of high school students have participated in this contest. The details of the contest are described as follows:

(1) Purpose

The purpose of the contest is to test the English reading comprehension of students from the online learning community.

(2) Goals

The goal is to introduce excellent English books in order to cultivate students' interest in reading.



Figure 1. The procedure of *Reading Challenge* contest

(3) Activity Period

Every year, this contest starts from the beginning of summer break to the end.

(4) Participants

People who would participate in the *Reading Challenge* contest must first join the IWILL online learning community as an online member.

(5) Rules

- a. Participants should select any novels from the *Reading Challenge* lists, including six books for beginners, three for basic level, intermediate level, and advanced level, respectively.
- b. Participants must add in the books they choose to personal bookcases before starting the challenge activity.

- c. After reading every novel, participants start to answer 20 questions at most in a comprehension test. The test time is 15 minutes. (The Beginner reading has 20 questions at most and the examination time is 10 minutes.)
- d. In order to pass the comprehensive test, participants must score 80 points or higher. Furthermore, participants may retake the test as many times as necessary in order to pass.
- e. While participating in the contest, participants will have access to discussion boards through which they can interact with other participants. The numbers of articles and discussion posts made by participants on the website during the contest will affect each participant's final score.

The contest style of IWiLL has changed since the 13th *Reading Challenge* in 2009. From the online learning environment perspective, members own their individual learning blog, My Cube, allowing the rest of the internet to know what they think and what they learn. Additionally, participants join the Reading Club they like for more discussion and interaction. It also allows users to add friends in their lists for knowledge and ideas sharing. Furthermore, participants in the Reading Club can read other members' comments on books to understand more about them. They can also run My Cube to establish personal sharing spaces and present their ideas on the reading. Lastly, members can share their own learning experiences and further encourage others to earn rewards and prizes.

3. Method

This research takes the related motivation theory as the foundation to explore the learners' participative motivations in these contests. Because the previous literature found few studies of this type, the concept is still in its preliminary stages as an exploratory study. Methodologically, this research is primarily based on qualitative methods with support of descriptive statistics. Regarding the data collection, researchers acquire data by using web-based open-ended questionnaires, in-depth interviews, observations, and learners' log files.

3.1 Subjects

The research in this study was conducted from July 1, 2010 to August 31, 2010, for a total of eight weeks. Each participant's record of his online learning portfolio during the contest was stored in a personal profile in IWiLL for data analysis.

After the contest was completed and all 30 students were publicly awarded by the sponsor, the researchers started the interview process. The average interview time of each subject was 10 to 20 minutes. Overall, the interview process took one month to complete.

3.2 Instruments

The questionnaire was developed by consulting both the existing literature, as well as the professional opinions of five high school teachers within the IWiLL online learning community. The questionnaire recorded basic personal information as well as answers to four open-ended questions.

Furthermore, we asked five senior teachers in high school who know the IWiLL *Reading Challenge* well to assist in the questionnaire design process. This study contends that the content in this questionnaire could meet expert validity to ensure stability and accuracy of the research conclusion.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 The demographic analysis of subjects

The subjects in this research are 30 high school students from all over the country who were rewarded by IWiLL. In this *Reading Challenge* contest, there were 27 females (90%) and 3 males (10%). The majority of participants were also high school students in northern Taiwan (25, 83%). The secondary highest numbers were from southern Taiwan (4, 14%) and then central Taiwan (1, 3%). Regarding their age and grade levels, there was a mix of high school freshmen (9, 30%), sophomores (15, 50%), and seniors (6, 20%). Furthermore, 25 students (83%) expressed that they had entered similar competitions before, and 16 students (53%) had received rewards in the past. This shows that the majority of subjects had some past experience with these contests, and that half of the surveyed students had previously won the contest. In terms of registration, 24 of the 30 students were encouraged by teachers to sign up (83%), while six students signed up by themselves (20%). This implies that most of the students who signed up for this contest did so because of their teacher's announcement and encouragement. Lastly, the average time the participants had been using IWiLL was 20.3 months, which suggests that they had some time to experience and use many of the functions that IWiLL provides.

Figure 2 shows the comparison of the average number of posted articles and responses in the discussion board. The average amount of activity by the 30 subjects is obviously higher than that of the other participants at different stages. The average number of posting articles and responses by both the subject group and all participants tends to rise after week 5. As the contest drew to a close, it appears that the members' interactions were more enthusiastic in the discussion board, and that members had a higher frequency of log-ins.

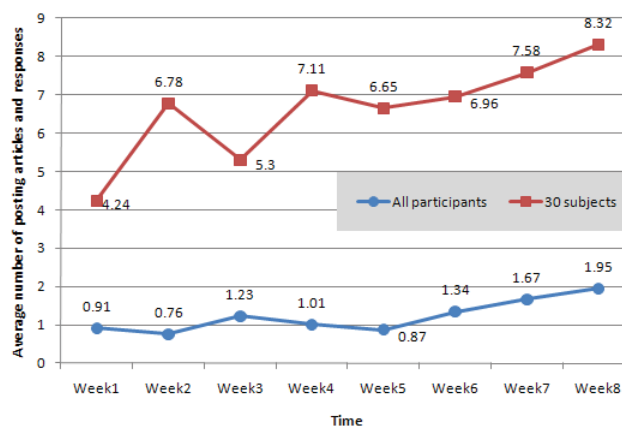


Figure 2. Comparison of the average number of posting articles and responses

4.2 The motivation for participating Reading Challenge Contest in IWiLL

- Learning English through reading novels is interesting
Many subjects indicated that the important reason why they joined the IWiLL online learning community was because they agreed with IWiLL's vision: to introduce excellent English books and to promote strong reading habits in order to inspire students' interest in English reading. (*FHSH01, TFG09, WULING06, AHS01, TFG02, WULING04*)
- Enjoy the fun of wide reading English
Respondents replied that the fun of learning English could be enhanced by extensive

and considerable reading. Subjects thought that reading diverse material could foster broader global views. (TFG05, CYGSH02, CLHS03, WULING04)

- Learn how to contribute knowledge to the community
When more and more members in the community are willing to share knowledge and to exchange learning experiences, this creates a growing pool of accumulated knowledge that can benefit everyone. (WULING02, CYGSH03, TFG10)
- Apply for university admission or study abroad
All subjects are senior high school students. The next phase of their studies is to enter university for further education or study abroad. Foreign language proficiency examinations are one of most important criteria when applying for university admission, and test scores directly affect the chances of acceptance. The online learning community provides an interactive learning environment to prepare students for these advanced tests. (TFG11, TFG07, WULING04)
- Awards and scholarships
After the contest is finished, students with excellent grades are awarded in public by different ranking level. Some subjects indicated that this is also one of the incentives for signing up for the contest. (TFG04, WULING05)
- Enhance learning interaction with peers
Most subjects indicated that they no longer felt lonely when learning through online learning communities. Learners could get together with a group of peers who have the same learning goals and desire to share their knowledge and learning experiences. (TFG01, TSVS01, TRGSH01, TFG03, WULING01)

Through in-depth interviews, we find their reasons and motivations to participate in the contest. After analyzing the content of these interviews, the learners' participative motivations in the *Reading Challenge* contest are induced as follows:

1. Participative intrinsic motivations

- (1) Learning English through reading novels is interesting
- (2) Enjoy the fun of wide reading English

2. Participative extrinsic motivations

- (1) Apply for university admission or study abroad
- (2) Awards and scholarships

3. Participative interpersonal motivation

- (1) Enhanced learning interaction with peers
- (2) Learned how to contribute knowledge to the community

5. Conclusion

This exploratory study is mainly based on qualitative research with the support of descriptive statistics to help understand learners' participative motivation in *Reading Challenge* contests within an online learning community. After analyzing interview content, we divided learners' participative motivation into: participative intrinsic motivation, participative extrinsic motivation, and participative interpersonal motivation. In the future, this study will develop Participative Motivation Scales of English reading contests for quantitative research, and help discover the casual relationships between additional variables with which we are concerned.

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