# The Study of Student Motivation on English Learning in Junior Middle School -- A Case Study of No.5 Middle School in Gejiu

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# Abstract

Motivation plays an important role in foreign language learning. Learning motivation is to promote and guide and maintain learning activities which have been conducted an internal strength or internal mechanism. Learning motivation once formed, the student will use an active learning attitude to learn, and express a keen interest in learning, and can focus attention in class to master knowledge. Through the study of the theory of modern education, this paper discusses the definition of motivation, types of motivation; the role of motivation in English learning are analyzed. The subjects in the thesis are Gejiu middle school students, and the author designed a questionnaire on English motivation. The purpose of the study was to find out the unfavorable factors. According to the results and the related theory, the author presents some suggestions to arouse the students' English motivation and improve the efficiency of English learning and teaching in Junior Middle School. Among the suggestions, the implications by the study include that students need motivation to help them learning English, they should establish the right goal to enhance them learning English well. Meanwhile, as an organizer in teaching, teacher should pay more attention to communicative learning that can stimulate students to learn effectively.

Key words: learning motivation, junior middle school student, English learning

# 1. Introduction

# 1.1 Background

In recent years in China, learning English has been prevalent and it has become more popular and urgent as China has joined World Trade Organization (WTO), and China has held the 2010 Shanghai World Expo successfully. As a global language, English is becoming more and more important in international cooperation and communication so English learning is getting more and more popular in China. Therefore, motivation plays an important role in foreign learning. Learning motivation is to promote, guide and maintain learning activities which have been conducted an internal strength or internal mechanism. Learning motivation once formed, the student will use an initiative study attitude to learn, and express a keen interest in learning, and can focus attention, especially in the process of learning. Learning motivation that there is a dialectical relationship, which learning can produce motivation, and motivation can promote learning. Thus, learning motivation plays an essential role in learning English. In the course of learning foreign languages, students with strong motivation can always make good achievements while students without intrinsic motivation are often losers of language learning.

In addition, the English learners have become younger and younger. English has been a compulsory subject in middle school for a long time. As for the junior students, students need motivations in learning a foreign language. Moreover, teachers should know the psychological theory and the process of English learning in order to encourage and enhance students' English learning.

Learners' motivation plays a crucial part in learning English. Indeed, the role of learners' motivation in learning has been examined by many researchers who are interested in this subject area. Gardner (1985) seems to support this idea and point out that motivation in language learning is of particular importance. He indicates that the

motivation of foreign language learning contains four aspects: a goal, effortful behavior, a desire to attain the goal and attitude. Students who have strong learning motivation take a correct and positive attitude towards study and make great efforts to master English with clear goal and desire and consequently gain better grade. It is true that motivation is such a basic factor in language learning that no teacher could avoid being concerned with students' motivation. Therefore, teachers and students also pay more attention to motivation, which can drive students to learn English actively.

# 1.2 Problem Statement and Research Questions

Learners' motivation of learning a language is considered as a crucial factor influencing the achievement and proficiency of learning. If a student is given motivation, student can learn a language better and can last the learning enthusiasm longer. Without motivation nobody can achieve the long-term goal of learning a language. High achievement-motivation is one of factors that cause successful learning may cause high motivation as well. Foreign language teachers want to stimulate students' learning motivation very much. How do we promote students' motivation in learning English? So we should have a general understanding of learning motivation in order to understand students to learn behaviors comprehensively.

# 1.3 Factors of the Junior Students and the Teachers

For students, firstly of all, the junior students are not perfect mentally. The world view, the outlook on life and values are relatively immature. Second, the junior students have strong self-esteem, and sometimes they have a little reverse psychology to the family and school education so that motivation education has enormous obstacles. Third, the different students have the different experience and personalities so that the methods of motivation education should be different. Then the motivation education for the junior students is doomed to need a great work. In the methods of research, there is a large number of explorative works to be completed.

For teachers, the primary reason is that teachers do not pay sufficient attention to ideology. Some teachers suppose that it is a waste of time to cultivate motivation for students. Another reason can be that teachers have some misunderstandings. They think that the primary school when everyone has been so motivated to learned for life should be the phase for students to cultivate motivation, while sometimes the junior students have been fixed and then it is in vain to cultivate motivation for them.

The junior students have the initial psychological basis to carry out their ideals to the end and obtain the corresponding ability to reserve. It is the key and transitional period from the unconscious motivation to self-motivation. If the students can grasp this period well, they will be excellent and successful. Instead, they will go into the opposite way. The instability of the junior students' learning is the reflection of the amount of motivation. That is why we must seize the opportunity to guide students in forming a clear and sustained motivation. Motivation is the internal cause and the external cause functions owing to the internal cause, so the teachers' guidance should be natural, but strongly imposed on students.

# 2. Literature Review

# 2.1 Studies on Learning Motivation Abroad and Home

Motivation has been considered as one of important factors influencing the success of second language learning. About its definition different scholars hold different ideas, form different perspectives. Gardner (1985) defines motivation as the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language. This definition includes three components: (1) effort expanded to reach the goal; (2) desire to achieve the goal; (3) favorable attitude towards learning language. "Motivation is a force that energizes, sustains, and directs behavior toward a goal" (Paul Eggen&Kauchak Don, 2005:349).

Some researchers emphasize that goal is a part of motivation. Wen Qiufang (1996) thinks of motivation simply as reasons and goals of learning English. He Zhaoxiong and Mei Deming (1999) define motivation as the learner's overall goal or orientation. Johnstone (1999) considers that motivation is a drive directed towards a goal. Pintrich and Schunk (2002:4) think of motivation as "the process whereby goal directed activity is instigated and sustained", in which motivation is to start and keep the activity towards the goal. Williams and Burden(1997)interpreted motivation as a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, which leads to a conscious decision to act, and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to attain a previously set goal. Some of them are learners' internal factors, such as interest, curiosity, or a wish to succeed. Others are external, such as the influence of the learning contexts, the learning situation and the influence of other people. This internal-external distinction has played a significant role in many theories of motivation. Gardner (1972) defines integrative reasons as those that indicate an interest in learning the language in order to meet and communicate with members of the second language community. Instrumental reasons refer to those

reasons, which stress the pragmatic aspects of learning the second language, without any particular interest in communicating with the second language community (Gardner Macintyre, 1992). As Crookes and Schmidt (1991; 1996) defined, motivation is the learner's orientation with regard to the goal of learning a second language. Students develop a motivation to learn; they initiate learning activities, stay involved in a learning task and exhibit a commitment to learning.

In the last two decades, guite a few Chinese scholars have also studied motivation and carried out some researches among Chinese students. The researches contribute to motivation studies. They finds that learning motivation is closely related to learning confidence, and that motivation and confidence are related to learning strategies. They also investigated learning motivation among French majors, aiming to make clear the relationship between motivation and other factors. Wen Qiufang (2001) reports a study on developmental patterns of modifiable learner variables and their relations based on the questionnaire data. The research results indicate that the relations among the variables such motivation, beliefs and strategies are fairly stable. Hao Mei and Hao Ruoping (2001) all research the relationship between English achievement and achievement motivation as well as anxiety state. Wu Heping (2001) and Wen Qiufang (2001) study the internal structure of EFL motivation, and concluded the relationship between motivation and causal attribution, interest in English self-efficacy, the learning purpose, goal orientations and efforts. The research on motivation is essential to teachers. If teachers do not understand students' foreign language learning motivation, then it is very difficult for them to complete foreign language teaching tasks outstandingly. How do we arouse and keep middle school students' learning motivation? Some teachers think that to give students proper reward; some teachers think that the entrance examination plays an important role in students' learning motivation and it is important to give students proper reward.

## 2.2 Main Types of Motivation

Gardner and Lambert (1959) made the well-known distinction between integrative orientations and instrumental orientations in motivation. Instrumental motivation is generally characterized by the desire to obtain something practical or concrete from the study of a second language (Hudson, 2000). Integrative motivation is characterized by the learner's positive attitudes towards the target language group and comes into play when one desires to become a part of a community that uses the target language in social situations.

The intrinsic/extrinsic distinction has been influential in studies of motivation, and these concepts have been used in various attempts to explain differences in motivation among different learners. An intrinsically motivated student learns because he or she wants to learn. "Intrinsic motivation is the motivation to be involved in an activity for its own sake" (Paul Eggen&Kauchak Don, 2005:398). VanLier (1996) defines intrinsic motivation in terms of drive theories: certain basic psychological needs which are innate in the human being. It is important to note that it is intrinsic motivation that is engendered by the learning process itself. Those views are encouraging to language teachers, owing to the fact that some students bring no intrinsic motivation to the classroom. As the language "teachers, our task is to maximize the stimulation of students" intrinsic motivation, while extrinsic motivation can be used to marshal the productive forces of intrinsic motivation. "Extrinsic motivation is a standing invitation to students to adopt a surface approach." (Biggs, 2002:61). The students focus on their performance and the value or the importance that they attach to the outcome. "Extrinsic motivation is characterized as the motivation to engage in an activity as a means to an end."(Paul Eggen&Kauchak Don, 2005:349). An extrinsically motivated student performs in order to receive a reward, such as graduating or passing a test or avoiding a penalty like a failing grade. Extrinsic motivation is stimulated not by the process itself but by what can be got from doing the action. At the same time, the junior middle school students' learning motivation are influenced by the intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, but extrinsic motivation affect mainly. The dominated intrinsic motivation including curiosity, thirst for knowledge, interest and competition etc; the dominated extrinsic motivation including current incentives, strengthening attract, desperate for peer recognition and admiration. (An Min, 2010)

# 2.3 Theories of Learning Motivation

There are several theories of learning motivation. Different scholars clarify motivation into different categories. Bandura (1986) defined self-efficacy as individuals' confidence in their abilities to organize mad execute a given course of action to solve a problem or accomplish a task. Attribution theory suggests that the elements, to which a person attributes his successes and failures, influence his expectations for future success and hence affect motivations. Atkinson(1964) developed motivation theories which were based on the following formula: Motivation (M) =Perceived probability of Success (Ps) x Incentive value of success (Is) Locke & Latham(1990) put forward the Goal-setting theory, holding that the individual's behavior is decided by its goal, the individual will have a choice to settle goal, and effort for it before taking action.

The teachers' encouragement is also an important factor to influence goal-setting and goal-commitment. If a student lacks self-confidence, the teacher's encouragement will help the student realize his own ability or advantage, which will motivate the student to set a goal. Therefore, each individual should set goals that can challenge difficulties; however, they should not beyond their capabilities. Teachers should give rewards to students to increase students' self-efficacy for obtaining the goal, and help students set clear, reasonable goals because goals serve to motivate behavior. Students are more likely to work towards clear, specific, moderately difficult goals, because they perceive them as challenging but attainable. So teachers should master some important implications from the above goal-based theories, and establish proper goals for students and encourage them to focus on learning improving.

Learning motivation has three basic functions (Wu xinchun, 1999): (1) Stimulating function. Once learners have certain learning motivation, in a certain condition, this incentive will stimulate learners to learn activities. (2) Pointing to the function. Learning motivation can make learners for certain learning objectives and learning. (3) Maintaining and regulating function. When learning activities, keep this active learning motivation will for certain learning goals. And adjust the learning of the intensity and duration. Each individual realize learning goals, and motivate to pursue the current learning activities, and to achieve our learning goals. Learning motivation can drive the organism to maintain or strengthen learning activities, or conversion activity direction in order to achieve the ultimate goal. (Yao xiaoting&Mao lingling, 2010: Huang Qian, 2012). Therefore, motivation can help students to improve themselves, the study with questionnaire, which is necessary to research the student's English learning motivation.

## 3. Research Design

## 3.1 Objectives and Research Questions

The study was conducted to measure some social and psychological variables affecting students' English learning. The variables discussed in this paper are students' interest in English, attitudes to English-speaking people, integrative, instrumental, motivational intensity, students' goals, parental encouragement and different attributions. To measure these variables, I modified some questions to constitute my questionnaire (see the appendix). I translated these questions into Chinese because I did not want students to have comprehension difficulties in the way of the measurement procedure 45students from No.5 Middle School of Gejiu was encouraged to answer the questions as honestly as possible in order to promote the validity of the responses. I want to find out that is motivation related to students' grades. Namely, I want to find out the answers to the following questions:

- 1. Whether or not students' interest in English affects their learning motivation and achievements?
- 2. What are the main factors affecting students learning English?

#### 3.2 Subjects

The subjects in this study were 45 junior middle school students from NO.5 Middle School of Gejiu. Most of them came from the countryside and boys were more than girls. There are 21girls and 24 boys. Their ages ranged from 13 to15 and most of them were 14. They started learning English in primary school. They are in Grade Eight. I divided the students into two groups according to the marks of the Gejiu Final Examination last term: Group One is the middle level students (22), Group Two is the other students (23). In addition, all of them were my students which may make them respond the questionnaire cautiously and responsibly. Considering the above aspects, on the whole, the subjects may represent the average middle school students in this school.

## 3.3 Instruments

This research adopts a questionnaire. Questionnaire for students is used to express and verify the research questions. One of the purposes of the study is to identify student motivation. In this circumstance, questionnaire is the most appropriate way to get data. In addition, in questionnaire students need not sign their names and shy students can also show their ideas without any embarrassment, which is possible to get the true data.

#### 3.4 Data Collection

The questionnaire was taken during regular class time by the author. Before the students answered the questions, some necessary instructions had been given on what the aim of the questionnaire was and how to answer the questionnaire and so forth by the author so that all the students can accomplish the questions with the right attitude and right ways. They were required to answer the questions honestly and accurately by themselves. The author explained that they need not write down their names on the questionnaire and all their information would

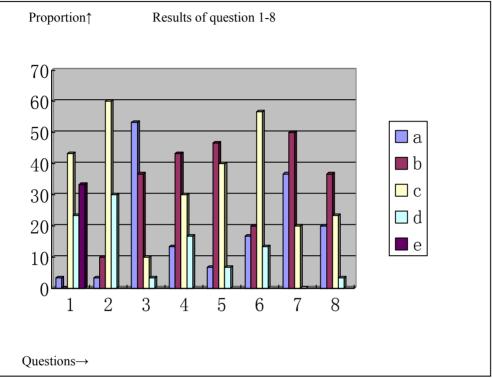
## be kept as secret.

After the data were collected, they were carefully examined once more to guarantee that all of them are valid for study. Because of the authors' knowledge limitation in statistics, all the data was analyzed by EXCEL.

# 4. Data Collection and Analysis

# 4.1 Results and Analysis

The author collected and analyzed those 45 valid questionnaire accomplished by 45 students in Gejiu NO.5 Junior Middle School. For the questionnaire, from the question 1 to 8, 8 questions which are showed on the following table.





It is obvious in the chart as the second question that illustrate 60% participants spent half an hour to learn English in their daily life; but only 3.3% of them spend more than one hour to learn English. When it comes to students' motivation, 46.7% students are sometimes internal motivation learning in their daily life. And 40% students can learn by themselves spontaneously. The sixth question shows that 56.7% students are no feeling about learning English. According to the eighth question, 36.7% shows that goal-setting is the main factor of students' motivation in learning English. 23.3% students can strive for the learning goal. From the seventh question, 50% students expect to communicate with other in English. Most students consider that they expect to get high grade in learning English, which contains 36.7%. And, the first question and the fourth question show that the most students are the middle level in the class, which 43.3% are confidence about learning English well. Some students think that they have some confidences to learn English well. The third questions shows that 53.3% students believe the importance of learning English, 36.7% students think that learning English is more important. The sixth question indicates that 56.7% students are unconsciousness about learning English.

Table 1. Results of the ninth question

Item a	Item b	Item c	Item d	Item e	Item f	Item g	Item h	Item i
66.7%	40%	23.3%	36.7%	16.7%	16.7%	23.3%	3%	0

For the ninth question, 66.7% shows that most students' learning motivation is the main source of take good

result in the examination. The other main sources of learning motivation are 40% students get/avoid parents and teacher of praise/punishment, 23.3% students consider that English is interesting, 36.7% students want to go abroad or to find good job in the future, and 20% students have their own opinions.

Table 2. Results of the tenth question

Item a	Item b	Item c	Item d	Item e	
46.7%	16.7%	40%	13.3%	0	

The tenth question, students achievement, 46.7% indicates that the teacher should teach well, they create a relaxed and happy atmosphere so student can learn English well. And 40% are parents and teachers paying more attention on students' learning English.

Table 3. Results of the eleventh question

Item a	Item b	Item c	Item d	Item e
66.7%	40%	23.3%	36.7%	0

The eleventh question, 66.7% tells us that learning is not good, because the English class is boring, and 40% for students' laziness, and 36.7% for lacking of English environment.

For the twelfth question, students give teachers lots of advice; the most important is effective classroom atmosphere. And students interest in English songs that they learn from the song lyrics. The teacher can have a flexible and effective method to help students learning English. The teachers can tell stories about English or foreign fairy tale. And the teacher also can give students more time for active discussion and practice English.

# 4.2 Discussions of the Results

According to the survey, most students have a relatively clear study motivation. Students can realize the importance of learning English. Students think that learning motivation is the main sources to get good grades in the examination; some students get/avoid parents and teacher of praise/punishment; to go abroad or to find good job in the future; the role of learning is to improve their own quality. Those can answer the second question. And those also are the students' interest in English affects their learning motivation and achievements. The Junior Middle school students' English learning motivation level is not high, on the whole are largely instrumental motivation. It is a long-term "exam-oriented education system" that forces the English teaching should keep an eye on the test scores, yet "high score low-intelligence phenomenon universal existence". To cope with the examination, teachers teach students problem solving skills, students practice problem solving skills, students focus almost entirely on how to deal with the test. Therefore, we should pay attention to training and induction the students' intrinsic motivation of English learning for middle school students. And to improve middle school students' English learning initiative and self-consciousness. Students' interest plays an important part in English learning. Their interest in English affects their English learning and achievements. If students show great interest in English, they will hold positive attitudes towards English-speaking people and towards learning English. Therefore, teachers should take any possible measures to arouse student's curiosity and develop their interest in English learning.

According to the analysis, we can see that motivation is very essential in students' learning English in junior middle school. The methods to excite students' English learning motivation are necessary.

# 5. Some Suggestions to Students and Teachers

# 5.1 Suggestions to the Students

For students, the students who use a variety of ways and activities can promote learning English. The students should believe that they need motivation to help them learning English. Setting up the right self-concept and clear and concrete study goal play an important role. The learning goal is clear that the goal can encourage people to struggle for it, unremitting, insist on reaching the purpose.

(1) Students set right goal in English learning. Zhan Lu (2012) put forward that the clear goal of study and the

stage for students help them to realize goal one by one. The goal is students' striving direction, and the standard appraised and sign improved in study. To make students fully realize the value of English learning. Establishing the goal of learning English, and develop strong interest in learning English.

(2) Students establish self-confidence. The students cultivate self-confidence and focuses on training themselves to ask questions, find problems, the ability to solve the problem. And the students can think seriously and actively answer questions, guide the students' divergent thinking and innovative consciousness.

(3) Students take part in activity groups. In English classroom, the students should pay attention to join group activities. And the students launch the activity; they can have more opportunity to learn English.

(4) Students developing strong interest in learning English. Interest is one of the important conditions of learning English. Only the students who are determined to learn English well can generate strong interest in learning, so they will be happy and efficient to learn English and obtain good effect of learning English.

(5) Students master study method and form good learning habits. The correct learning methods and skills in English learning is an important guarantee of the best effect. In addition, a good habit can help students effectively learning. Students in learning English should pay attention to develop spoken English, autonomous learning English and good writing habits.

# 5.2 Suggestions to the Teachers

For teacher, as an organizer or leader in teaching, teachers have responsibilities to increase their students' inclination to perform willingly and actively in English learning. As the old saying goes: "In ancient times those who wanted to learn would seek out a teacher, one who could propagate the doctrine, impart professional knowledge, and resolve doubts." Meanwhile, teacher should establish good teacher-student relationship with students. Teacher's role can be from focus knowledge to changes in the development of students. (Wu Baoming, 2009)

At the same time, it is proved that teacher could expound every creation purpose, meaning of knowledge among classroom instruction to test, make students realize the obvious value of knowledge and the knowledge can attract students to yield the prospective future and try their best to achieve it. So the English teacher should try to improve the charm of English, improve the temptation of learning English as well, and help students to fully realize the importance of English.

(1) Teacher should use various and interesting activities in whole class, in small groups or in pair, which can attract students' attention.

(2) Apply new and effective techniques--multi-media, e-learning, not only in print but also audio and visual that arouses students' curiosity and interest and also promote their intrinsic motivation. Adopting cooperative activities that can keep students feel safe and can stimulate their emotion.

(3) Teacher should create a harmonious and co-operative classroom atmosphere to lighten students' anxiety. Creating a student-centered environment is important, but not enough. A good class climate is vital to the success of the student-centered method.

(4) Effective teaching and classroom management are relative (Huang Qian, 2012). Teachers can not only perfect in English but also good at managing the students. It is well know "Interest is the best teacher". In the classroom teachers must be good at arousing students' learning motivation and interests, enhancing their consciousness of participation in classroom activities, especially, stimulating students' interest in learning English and making them "happy" in a pleasant situation. From "want me to learn" into "I want to learn" to "I love to learn". (Zhao Chaojian, 2012) The cultivation of middle school students' learning motivation requires teachers to excite students' learning interest in the course of adopting the valid organization teaching methods.

(5) Make efforts to provide more communicative opportunities. The teacher must give students high expectation and use rewards appropriately that the outward power can stimulate students' English learning on the basis of extrinsic motivation theory. Meanwhile, teacher provides opportunities for students to experience the success. The combination of listening, speaking, reading and writing may be the most effective skill activity, the more ways we can give our students to use English, the more likely we are to keep all our students motivated and successful.

# 6. Conclusion

There are some limitations of the present study. Based on questionnaire in this research is possible not to cover all aspects of motivation variables. In other words, the questionnaire is not comprehensive enough. The larger the sample size is, the more reliable the research will be. Although 45 junior middle school students are selected,

the number is only a small size analyzed with the whole number.

The above study and discussion show that many students have a strong instrumental motivation in their English learning. Most of them prefer short-term goals to long-term goals. On the other hand, students generally have higher desire and commitment to learning English despite a lot of difficulties facing them. In order to enhance the motivational behaviors of these students, the author provides some suggestions, for example, developing students' interests in learning English, training learning strategies and promoting students' self-efficacy. It is expected that the findings obtained in the study can be helpful for English teachers to have a better understanding of their students, and the suggestions offered in the paper can be a contribution to the improvement of English teaching.

In conclusion, all the teachers and students must spare no effort to work hard in the process of teaching and learning. The most important thing is that spur students' motivation to heighten the teaching effect in English teaching and learning so as to the students' English practical ability.

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## Appendix

下面是本人在 2013 年 2 月至 3 月于个旧市第五中学实习时对八年级 45 名学生的关于激发英语学习动机 的问卷调查:

亲爱的同学:

你好!这是一份关于初中生英语学习动机的调查问卷。调查的目的是为了进一步了解初中生英语学习现状,培养英语学习兴趣,提高学习效率。希望你认真阅读此问卷,按照你的真实情况选择。问卷仅作调查研究使用,答案没有对错之分;问卷填写采用不记名方式;对你填写的内容我们将采取严格的保密措施,希望你能真实填写。谢谢你的配合,祝你身体健康、学习进步!

最后,感谢你的支持和配合!

年级\_\_\_\_\_ 性别\_\_\_\_

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选择题(每题只选出最符合自己情况的一个答案)
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1、你自己的英语成绩在班上属于 ()

a. 好 b. 上 c. 中 d. 中下 e. 差

2、除了上英语课,你每天自觉花在英语学习上的时间是 ()

a. 超过一个小时 b. 约1小时 c. 半个小时 d. 几乎不花时间

3、 你认为英语重要性())

a.很重要 b. 较重要 c. 不重要 d. 没用

- 4、你对学好英语的信心 ()
- a. 充满信心 b. 一般 c. 有些信心 d. 没有信心
- 5、你平常是否会主动学习英语? ( )
- a. 经常 b. 有时 c.很少 d.从不
- 6、你学习英语时有什么感觉? ()
- a. 很快乐 b. 比较快乐 c. 没感觉 d.痛苦
- 7、你对自己英语水平的期待 ()
- a.考试得高分 b.能用英语流利的交流 c.差不多就可以 d. 无所谓
- 8、你会给自己的英语学习确定目标,然后朝着目标努力吗?()
- a. 每次都会 b. 有时 c.很少 d.从不
- 9、你的学习动机来源主要是(可多选)()

a. 在考试中取得好成绩 b. 获得/避免家长和老师的表扬/惩罚 c. 英语很有趣 d. 为将来出国或找好 工作 e 老师经常鼓励我 f 我想看英文电影, 小说上网等 g 大家都在学习英语 h 我喜欢英语老师 i 其它

再次感谢你的大力合作!祝你学习进步!

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