

Relationship between English learning motivation and English proficiency: A Study of Chinese ethnic minority learners

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Abstract: Language learning motivation plays a critical role in a successful language learning process. Research into foreign/second language learning motivation has been a focal point in the field of foreign/second language acquisition for long. Over the past twenty years, there has been a substantial body of research dedicated to motivation, conducted across various social and cultural contexts. These studies have played a crucial role in exploring the factors that impact learners' motivation to acquire a foreign language, as well as in examining the intricate relationship between motivation and other facets of foreign language learning. Foreign language proficiency is seen as the ultimate aim of foreign language learning. Some studies have delved into the relationship between foreign language learning motivation and foreign language proficiency, and no agreement has been reached yet. Nonetheless, there exists a notable

dearth of research concerning the relationship between English learning motivation and English language proficiency of Chinese ethnic minority learners who have minority language as native language, Mandarin as national language, and learn English as a foreign language. To address this gap, a quantitative study was undertaken to identify if there is relationship between English learning motivation and English proficiency among ethnic minority learners in rural China. Pearson correlation coefficients were performed on the data which were collected from English learner questionnaire and English proficiency test. The findings revealed that there is no relationship between the participants' English learning motivation and English proficiency. The findings can be treated as evidence that high level of English learning motivation may not always contribute to good English proficiency. Researchers should concern more about motivation in relation to English proficiency. The results of this study provide implications for both policymakers and English educators in ethnic minority regions of China.

Keywords: English proficiency; ethnic minority learners; motivation, rural China

INTRODUCTION

English, as a global lingua franca, holds immense importance in the contemporary world. It serves as a means of communication in various domains, such as academia, business, technology, and entertainment. Consequently, individuals whose native language is not English around the world engage in EFL/ESL learning for diverse purposes, ranging from academic pursuits to enhancing career prospects and fostering cross-cultural communication.

The importance of English proficiency in the context of English as foreign language learning cannot be overstated. A good English proficiency is seen as a manifestation of a successful English learning. It opens doors to numerous opportunities, both on a personal and professional level. It enhances individuals' access to global knowledge, academic institutions, and international job markets. English proficiency not only facilitates effective communication but also fosters cross-cultural understanding, enabling individuals to engage in meaningful exchanges with people from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, in an increasingly interconnected world, English proficiency is often a prerequisite for participation in global industries, research collaborations, and diplomatic relations. Therefore, English proficiency is not merely a goal in English language learning; it is a gateway to broader horizons and a key to success in today's interconnected and globalized society. However, compared with EFL learners in other parts of Asian, Chinese EFL learners' English proficiency ranks towards the bottom (King, 2015).

China is a multi-ethnic nation with 56 different ethnic groups. Apart from Han nationality, who makes up around 91.59% of mainland China's total population, the other 55 nationalities are recognized as ethnic minorities due to their less population which takes up 8.41% in total population of 133.39 million (The State Council, 2020). It is reported by experts that more than 80 languages are spoken by 55 ethnic minorities (Zhou, 2003). Many ethnic minority people, especially those living in Xin Jiang, Tibet, and Mongolia Autonomous

Regions have minority language as mother language, Mandarin as national language, and learn English as a foreign language. According to a national survey conducted by the Chinese Ministry of Education, the average English proficiency level of minority students is significantly lower than that of majority students (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019).

Foreign language acquisition concerns about achieving a sufficient level of language proficiency in teaching and learning process (Moskovsky et. al., 2016). Many researchers have identified motivation and learner autonomy as effective factors that influence the outcomes of the foreign language acquisition (Teng & Xu, 2015). Dörnyei (2005) put forward L2 language Motivational Self System theory which comprises three components: the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the L2 experience. According to Dörnyei (2009), learners' intended learning efforts predict their language proficiency levels. However, the impact of the three components on L2 achievement has not been clearly established by Dörnyei and other researchers advocating L2MSS theory (Moskovsky et. al., 2016). Whether or not language learning motivation has impact on foreign language learning proficiency has not yet reached to consensus. Therefore, the current study was designed to further identify if there exists a relationship between foreign language learning motivation and foreign language learning proficiency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivation has been one of the most important concepts used by psychologists and educators to explain different levels of learning performance. It is considered as an influential factor in foreign language learning process. The concept of motivation tries to explain why people put different amounts of effort into learning tasks. Because of this, it is expected to be strongly linked to different levels of performance. Researchers has put forward different types of motivation as instrumental and integrative motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972), intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Due to its important role in EFL/ESL, language learning motivation has been a research focus in EFL/ESL field for long. Since 1950s, L2 motivation research has undergone different periods of historical development during which different theories have emerged. In 2005 Dörnyei put forward his influential L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) theory. L2MSS has currently been a dominant theoretical framework in the field of L2 motivation research due to its versatility and capability to include various perspectives from different theoretical orientations (Boo, Dörnyei, & Ryan, 2015). L2MSS was formed with theories of self and identity in mainstream psychology as its theoretical basis (Csizér, 2019). Two theories were adopted by Dörnyei (2007) in the development of L2MSS. One is the theory of possible selves proposed by Markus and Nurius (1986), and the other is the theory of self-discrepancy put forward by Higgin (1987). L2MSS is based on the assumption that learners' perception of a gap between their current condition and their future self-guide may motivate them to take actions to close the gap (Al-Hoorie, 2018).

L2MSS is made up of three components: ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, and L2 learning experience. These three dimensions are supposed to work together to regulate learners' leaning

behaviour. The ideal L2 self which concerns the state a L2 learner would ideally like to reach represents the learner's own hopes and wishes. The ought-to L2 self refers to the state that a L2 learner has to reach so as to meet others' expectations and avoid negative outcomes. Thus, the ought-to L2 self represents the hopes and expectations imposed by significant others. The L2 learning experience refers to a L2 learner's experience related to the immediate learning environment, such as the impact from the teachers, the curriculum, and the peers. In recent years, researchers have put increasing focus on L2 learning motivation and taken it as an important predictor of L2 learning behavior and learning outcomes in successful language learning (Al-Hoorie & Szabó, 2022).

A great number of studies have been conducted with the framework of L2MSS. Researchers have confirmed the validation of L2MSS in different social and cultural contexts. In order to validate L2MSS in a Pakistani context, Íslam et al. (2013) carried out a survey which involved 975 Pakistani undergraduate students as participants. They concluded that the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self and L2 learning experience represent the main components of L2MSS. The findings in their study also revealed that promotional instrumentality had higher correlation with ideal L2 self, whereas preventional instrumentality worked as the strong predictor of the ought-to L2 self. The results of Al-Hoorie's (2018) meta-analysis of L2MSS confirmed that the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience have a significant effect on learners' intended effort in L2 learning.

Taylan (2017) conducted a survey involving 250 Turkish university students to validate L2MSS in Turkish context. It was reported that the three components of L2MSS proved to be linked to Turkish students' intended English learning efforts. Meanwhile, the results also showed that Turkish participants' attitudes toward English learning on their intended efforts was higher than the ideal L2 self on it. You and Dörnyei (2016) carried out a large-scale survey of Chinese EFL learner's motivational disposition by following the L2MSS theory. This investigation indicated that model of L2 motivation self system can be applied in Chinese context.

Empirical studies have been conducted to explore various aspects related to English as a foreign or second language learning through the lens of L2MSS theory. Using structure equation model, Huo and Rui (2020) investigated the interaction among the self efficacy, L2 motivational self system and English proficiency of Chinese university students. It was found that the ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience played a mediating role in the effect of self-efficacy on English proficiency.

Moskovsky et al. (2016) explored the relationship between L2MSS and L2 proficiency of Saudi university students majoring in English. Their study reported that the three components of L2MSS can well predict the learners' intended learning efforts. However, it was also found in this study that the components of L2MSS were not consistently correlated with L2 achievement.

In a questionnaire-based study with 294 undergraduate students in China, Chen (2019) came to the conclusion that the three L2MSS components, especially the ideal L2 self, were the most direct and substantial positive indicators of students' behaviour in the classroom. Lamb et al. (2019) conducted a study in an Indonesian context and found that English learning experience was the most significant predictor of both motivated learning behaviour and L2 proficiency.

In an educational context in Southeast Asia, Laohawiriyanon (2019) carried out a study using a mixed-method approach to investigate the relationship between three components of the L2MSS framework and the language proficiency of Cambodian students' English learning as a foreign language. According to the research, there was a significant relationship between successful students' ideal L2 selves and their language competency.

Irgatolu (2021) studied the level of three components of L2MSS framework in Turkey context. The construct of surface learning strategies was used in this study to understand the deep learning motivation with L2MSS. In this study, the language proficiency levels, which were indicated by grades, of male and female EFL high school students was evaluated by using the surface learning strategies. Female students were found to have stronger future self-guides than their male peers. Consistent with other research, it was found that high-achieving students had a stronger ideal L2 self than low-achieving students.

Using the L2MSS, Liu and Thompson (2018) investigated the motivational profiles and L2 proficiency of Chinese EFL learners as well as the relationships between the context, gender, major, English proficiency, and English learning motivation. According to the findings, the L2MSS is able to accurately portray the motivational profiles of Chinese L2 learners, and the anti-ought-to L2 self plays a significant role. The results also showed that the ought-to L2 self negatively impacted language learners' English proficiency, while the ideal and anti-ought-to L2 selves made positive contribution to English proficiency.

As the literature review elucidates, L2MSS has been validated and applied across diverse cultural settings, including Pakistan, Turkey, China, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Turkey, each offering unique insights into intricate dynamics between motivational factors and English learning. The studies examined within the literature review underscore that while language learning motivation has a profound influence on learners' intended efforts and behaviours in English learning, the relationship between motivation and actual language proficiency is multifaceted and context-dependent.

Through the lens of L2MSS and drawing upon a multitude of studies conducted in various cultural and educational contexts, this research embarks on an exploration of relationship between English learning motivation and English proficiency among ethnic minority EFL learners in rural China. As understudied population, Chinese ethnic minority English learners in the present study have minority language as mother tongue, learn Mandarin as national language and English as foreign language. Their unique language and cultural backgrounds as well as English learning context make their English learning different from those whose native language is national language and learn English as a foreign language. This study seeks to provide valuable insights for educators, and policymakers in enhancing language learning experiences and outcomes for those learners. Moreover, it aspires to contribute to the broader understanding of the intricate interconnections between motivation and language proficiency, further enriching the theoretical and practical foundations of foreign language acquisition.

METHOD

Research Participants

The participants in this study are 38 purposefully selected ethnic minority university freshmen from rural China. They are studying in a one-year pre-university program which is provided for ethnic minority students as a preferential policy by the government. They do not have specific majors during the one-year program, and all of them are learning the same subjects. English is compulsory and key subjects for students in this program. 32 of them are Uyghur and the other 6 are Kazak. Their age ranges from 19 years old to 21 years old, and their average age is 19.24. All of them have minority language as their mother tongue, and the majority of them are proficient in both their mother tongue (Uyghur language or Kazak language) and China's national language (Mandarin), meanwhile they are learning English as a foreign language. The majority of them (63.2%) started learning English from senior high school, and only 5 participants (13.2%) have learned English since primary school. Even 5 participants (13.2%) began learning English at the university. They were asked to report their current English level according to a self-rating scale. 47.4% of the participants taken themselves as English beginners, which accounted almost half of the participants. None of them rated them thought they had reached to Upper intermediate level and over. Their detailed demographic information is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Participants

		Frequency (Total N=38)	Percent
Ethnicity	Uyghur	32	84.2%
	Kazak	6	15.8%
	others	0	0%
Gender	Male	14	36.8%
	Female	24	63.2%
Age	19	28	73.7%
	20	9	23.7%
	21	1	2.6%
Mother tongue	Uyghur language	32	84.2%
	Kazak language	6	15.8%
	others	0	0%
Time to start learning English	Primary school	5	13.2%
	Junior high school	4	10.5%
	Senior high school	24	63.2%
	University	5	13.2%
Self-reported English level	Beginner level	18	47.4%
	Post-beginner level	11	28.9%
	lower-intermediate level	7	18.4%
	intermediate level	2	5.3%
	Upper intermediate level and over	0	0%

Research Instruments

Two instruments were used to collect data in this study: English proficiency test and English Learner Questionnaire. The English language proficiency test was utilized to collect data to determine the participants' English proficiency. The test paper is the National Matriculation English Test (III) which is designed for Tibet Autonomous Region, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Yunnan Province, Guizhou Province, and Sichuan Province. There are four parts in the test: listening comprehension (30 scores), reading comprehension (40 scores), language knowledge application (45 scores), and writing (35 scores).

The choice of this English test paper is due to three reasons. Firstly, the test paper is designed for China national college entrance admission. The reliability and validity of the test content can be guaranteed. Secondly, as a college admission English test, it can identify the gap between the participants' prior English competence and admission level required by universities. Thirdly, all the participants are not familiar with the test paper, because they are from Xin Jiang Uygur Autonomous Region where National Matriculation English Test is totally different from the test paper chosen. Thus, the test paper ensures the authenticity of the English language proficiency test.

The English Learner Questionnaire developed by Dörnyei (2010) was adopted as a research instrument to explore participants' English learning motivation. The English Learner Questionnaire has been proven to be a reliable and effective instrument to explore foreign language learners' motivational aspects in Chinese context. The questionnaire, consisting of with 67 items in 7 variables (See Table 2), is made up of two sections. Items from 1 to 45 in section one are statements which to be asked by the participants to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statements. The participants mark one of the 6 responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree on a six-point Likert scale. Section 2 includes items 46 to 67 which are questions. The participants are required to answer these questions by marking one of the 6 responses ranging from very much to not at all on a six-point rating scale.

Table 2: *Information about the Motivational Variables in the Questionnaire*

Variables	Number of Items
Attitudes toward learning English	4
Attitudes toward L2 community and culture	4
Fear of assimilation	5
Ought-to L2 Self	7
Ideal L2 Self	5
Instrumentality -prevention	5
Instrumentality-promotion	8
Family influence	5
Ethnocentrism	5
English anxiety	4
Travel orientation	3
Criterion measures	6
Integrativeness	3
Cultural interest	3

To ensure the reliability and validity of the instruments, a pilot study with a small sample was conducted on the instruments before carrying out the main study. The instruments worked well with the participants in the pilot study.

Procedure

Approval from the dean of the faculty where the participants are studying was obtained before collecting the data. With the dean's approval, the researcher informed the English teachers of the purpose and significance of the study. With the help of the English teachers, participants were selected. They expressed their willingness to participate in this study and signed the consent form. The data was collected in a classroom of a teaching building. The English proficiency test was carried out first with two teachers invigilating the test. The English Learner Questionnaire was responded some days later after conducting English proficiency test.

Data Collection

The data was collected with two instruments on different days. The English proficiency test was conducted first in the formal way as it is normally done in the university. 38 participants took the test under the invigilation of two English teachers. The participants were required to hand in their test paper and answer sheets within two hours. During the test, the invigilators checked and ensured all the participants were writing the answers in a correct way on the answer sheet. When the time was out, all the test paper and answer sheets were collected and checked to ensure all the participants handed in their test paper as well as the answer sheets.

The administration and collection of questionnaires was undertaken in the way of answering the paper questionnaires. It is a common way to conduct a survey by filling out questionnaires online for it is free of time and space restriction. However, the researcher preferred conducting data collection with paper questionnaires in the classroom. Two advantages could be obtained from that practice. Firstly, as the researcher was in the classroom, the respondents were supposed to be more serious about making responses to the question items. Secondly, all the questionnaires handed out were returned. The participants were required to answer the questionnaire individually and provide truthful responses to the questionnaire items. At last, all the questionnaires were returned within 18 minutes.

FINDINGS

The analysis of the data from English proficiency test started with marking the test paper. To ensure the accuracy and efficiency, three English teachers worked together to mark the test papers and then calculate the total score of each test paper. The total score for each test paper were imported into Excel spreadsheet. When there was no problem identified in the dataset, the data was coded and entered into the statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 27) to do descriptive statistics.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of English Proficiency (N=38)

	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mean	Std. Deviation
Listening	6.00	21.00	13.50	13.76	3.51
Reading Comprehension	6.00	28.00	16.00	16.66	5.98
Language Knowledge Application	4.50	31.50	12.00	13.63	7.20
Writing	0.00	26.00	8.5	10.05	8.67
Total Score	24.00	101.00	52.25	54.29	18.73

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the participants' overall English proficiency and their competence in listening, reading, writing and basic English knowledge. As is seen from Table 3, the mean score of the participants' overall English proficiency is 54.29, with the highest score being 101.00, and the lowest score being 24.00. As for the participants' sub-skills in the English proficiency test, the highest mean score is on reading comprehension (M=16.66), with the highest score being 28.00 and the lowest being 6.00. It is followed by listening (M=13.76), language knowledge application (M=13.63) and writing (M=10.05). The mean score on writing is the lowest of the participant's four sub-skills. The mean scores on the overall English proficiency test and the subsections indicate that their English proficiency did not reach to the passing level (90 on the English test with the total score of 150). Therefore, there is a big gap between the participants actual English proficiency and the English proficiency required by university admission. Besides, the low mean score on the participants' English proficiency test reveals that they have a very weak foundation for English language.

Before conducting Pearson correlation analysis, the normality of variables needs to be ensured. Skewness and Kurtosis statistics are used to show whether the data is normally distributed. The skewness and kurtosis values between ± 1 suggest normally distributed data. In L2 data, however, it is acceptable to use skewness and kurtosis values between ± 2 as an indicator that the data are generally normally distributed (Roever & Phakiti, 2017).

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of English Proficiency Test Total Score

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
English Proficiency	54.2237	18.68975	.661	.107

As is seen from the Table 4, the Skewness and Kurtosis are .661 and .107 respectively, which are within the range of +1 and -1, indicating that the data of English proficiency is normally distributed. Therefore, the data of English proficiency can be used for Pearson correlation analysis.

Statistical analysis for English Learner Questionnaire began after the data from the questionnaires been collated. Reliability analysis was firstly measured by Cronbach Alpha coefficient. Descriptive statistical analysis was then conducted in order to summarize participants' responses to all the items. The descriptive statistical analysis involved mean, median, standard deviation, minimum and maximum values. Finally, in order to identify if there is relationship between participants' English proficiency and their language learning motivation, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. Pearson correlation analysis was performed between English proficiency and each of the 14 variables of English language

learning motivation.

Reliability of the questionnaire was firstly conducted on the overall reliability and reliability of each of the variables. To test the reliability of the English learner questionnaire, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients was measured with SPSS (version 27). There are total of 67 items that can be used to test the overall Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis of the questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha for the 67 items is 0.951 as it was given in the below Table 5. This value displayed a high internal reliability, which indicates an excellent level of internal consistency among those 67 items. 0.70 should be the threshold of Cronbach Alpha coefficients, and the Alpha value reaches to 0.70 or above is generally taken as an acceptable reliability coefficient (Dörnyei, 2010). Therefore, the overall reliability of the English learner questionnaire used in this study is acceptable with its high Cronbach Alpha coefficient.

Table 5: The Overall Reliability of the Questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
.951	67

Reliability analysis was also computed on each of the variables in the questionnaire. Table 6 summarizes the Cronbach Alpha coefficients for each of the 14 variables. As it is presented in the Table, the value of the Cronbach Alpha for all the variables exceeds 0.70 except the variable of *Ethnocentrism* the Alpha for which is 0.584. The Alpha of nine variables is even above 0.80. The Alpha of *Ideal L2 Self* is the highest one among the 14 variables which reaches to 0.931.

Table 6: Reliability for Each Variable

Variables	Number of Items	Alpha
Criterion measures	6	0.83
Ideal L2 Self	5	0.931
Ought toL2 self	7	0.792
Family influence	5	0.81
Instrumentality promotion	8	0.897
Instrumentality prevention	5	0.798
Attitudes Toward Learning English	4	0.875
Travel Orientation	3	0.72
Fear of Assimilation	5	0.865
Ethnocentrism	5	0.584
English Anxiety	4	0.885
Integrativeness	3	0.722
Cultural Interest	3	0.845
Attitudes Toward L2 Community	4	0.886

Table 7 presents the descriptive statistics of the 14 variables of English learning motivation. All the variables were positively supported by the participants except for *Fear of Assimilation*. The mean score of *Fear of Assimilation* ranks the lowest ($M=2.27$). The mean scores of other 13 variables range from 3.62 to 4.87. As it is seen from the table, the mean scores of 13 variables exceed to 3.6. The mean scores of 10 variables are above 4.0. The *Integrativeness* ranks the highest ($M=4.87$), followed by the *Instrumentality promotion* and *Criterion measures* ($M=4.80, 4.72$ respectively). Therefore, it can be concluded that Chinese ethnic minority students in general have a positive disposition towards learning English as a foreign language. According to Table 7, since the majority of the Skewness and Kurtosis values ranged between +1 and -1, the normal distribution of each motivational variable is acceptable.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics of 14 Motivational Variables ($N=38$)

	Mean	S. D	Skewness	Kurtosis
Criterion measures	4.7281	.66489	.169	-.515
Ideal L2 Self	4.7316	.94414	-1.025	1.786
Ought toL2 self	3.6203	.84501	.278	.259
Family influence	3.6789	.93293	-.237	.819
Instrumentality promotion	4.8026	.56550	-.060	-.747
Instrumentality prevention	4.1947	.77038	.201	-.139
Attitudes Toward Learning English	4.5987	.86902	-.327	-.364
Travel Orientation	4.2632	.85655	.045	-.592
Fear of Assimilation	2.2684	1.04315	.629	-.336
Ethnocentrism	3.7000	.80101	-.226	-.425
English Anxiety	4.4408	.85510	.200	-.608
Integrativeness	4.8772	.69065	-.727	1.543
Cultural Interest	4.5439	.87824	-.044	-1.163
Attitudes toward Language Community	4.1776	1.03635	-.816	.993

Table 8 presents the results of the correlation analysis of participants' English learning motivation and English proficiency, the correlation coefficients reveal that except for English anxiety, each of the other variables of participants' English learning motivation was not significantly correlated with their English proficiency. English anxiety had a weakly negative correlation between English proficiency ($r=-.338, p<0.5$). It is understandable that more anxiety in English learning might not lead to a good English proficiency. The participants in this study have a favorable motivation to learn English as shown in Table 7. However, it is out of expectation that their English learning motivation was not significantly correlated to their English proficiency since the significance values of Pearson correlation coefficients are higher than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no relationship between English learning motivation and English proficiency among ethnic minority English learners in rural China.

Table 8: *The Correlation between Each variable of Participants' Motivation and Their English Proficiency (N=38)*

		English Proficiency Score
1. Criterion measures	Pearson Correlation	-.005
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.977
2. Ideal_L2_Self	Pearson Correlation	.086
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.606
3. Ought_toL2_self	Pearson Correlation	-.189
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.257
4. Family influence	Pearson Correlation	-.238
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.150
5. Instrumentality promotion	Pearson Correlation	-.172
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.303
6. Instrumentality prevention	Pearson Correlation	-.167
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.317
7. Attitudes Toward Learning English	Pearson Correlation	-.027
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.874
8. Travel Orientation	Pearson Correlation	.192
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.248
9. Fear of Assimilation	Pearson Correlation	-.157
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.345
10. Ethnocentrism	Pearson Correlation	-.152
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.361
11. English Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	-.338*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.038
12. Integrativeness	Pearson Correlation	.037
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.827
13. Cultural Interest	Pearson Correlation	.040
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.813
14. Attitudes Toward L2 Community	Pearson Correlation	.265
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.108

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The aim of this study is to identify if there is relationship between English learning motivation and English proficiency among ethnic minority learners in rural China. To achieve this aim, Pearson correlation coefficients were conducted on the data which is gathered from English Learner Questionnaire and English proficiency test. The results show that there is no relationship between English learning motivation and learners' English proficiency. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Ridha Ilma (2018) in which each variable of students' motivation was not correlated significantly with their English proficiency. The finding of this study is also consistent with Moskovsky et al. (2016) who explored the relationship between L2MSS and L2 proficiency of Saudi university students majoring in English. In their study the components of L2MSS were not consistently correlated with L2 achievement which is represented by L2 proficiency. While the finding of the present research is consistent with some previous studies, it is contradictory with other studies like Laohawiriyanon (2019), Liu and Thompson (2018) and Irgatolu (2021) in which English learning motivation has a positive correlation with English proficiency.

The finding of this study is out of the common expectation that higher level of ideal L2 self, positive L2 learning experience together with higher level of intended effort lead to a better English proficiency. English proficiency is a result of various factors and should not be solely explained by English learning motivation. From a theoretical point of view, the relationship between motivation and achievement is not straightforward. “Motivation – by definition – is the antecedent of *action* rather than achievement” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 200-201). While it is a truth that learners who are motivated will exhibit greater dedication and perseverance in their tasks, resulting in potential improvements in their accomplishments, it should be noted that this association is not direct. This is due to the fact that achievement is influenced by numerous additional factors (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) further pointed out that such factors as learners’ learning ability, opportunities to learn, and the quality of instruction provided in the learning tasks all have impact on foreign language learning.

English learning motivation is one of the factors that affect Chinese ethnic minority learners’ English learning, however, other factors also contribute to the learners’ English proficiency. Education policy is one of the factors that influence their English learning. Participants of the present study are ethnic minority English learners from rural area of Xin Jiang of China. They have their own minority language as mother tongue in their daily life, and then they began to learn the national language (Mandarin) in primary school or even in junior high school. In order not to put much burden on students’ language learning, the policy of Shuang Yu Jiao Yu (Bilingual Education of Mandarin and Minority Language) have been implemented for decades in Xin Jiang. The aim of the policy is to cultivate ethnic minority students to be proficient in both minority language and national language.

Limited English exposure is another important factor that resulted in English proficiency of the participants in this study. Most ethnic minority students in rural areas of Xin Jiang studied in ethnic primary schools where no foreign language was offered. They usually started learning English from junior high school. However, the total hours of English lessons are far from enough. Therefore, the limited opportunities to learn English and lack of English exposure can hinder their ability to engage actively in English learning and utilize their motivation effectively, even if their motivation to learn English is high.

Besides, English is not compulsory in entrance examination for ethnic minority students in Xin Jiang, which resulted in less attention paid in English learning. Less time and effort in English learning led to low current English proficiency. Though most ethnic minority students in the university have a high level of English learning motivation and are spending or intend to spend their effort in learning English, their average English proficiency is still at a rather lower level, because their prior English proficiency is there.

CONCLUSION

With a quantitative research paradigm, this study identified the relationship between English as foreign language learning motivation and English proficiency among ethnic minority learners in rural China. Participants’ English learning motivation was explored with English Learner Questionnaire which was designed under L2MSS theory. English proficiency was

represented by the participants' score in National Matriculation English Test. Pearson correlation coefficients were conducted on the participants' English learning motivation and their English learning proficiency. The findings revealed that there is no relationship between the two variables. Despite having high motivation to learn English as a foreign language, ethnic minority learners in rural China have relatively lower English proficiency. Their English proficiency was not solely influenced by English learning motivation. It was also affected by other factors like education policy and English exposure.

By exploring the relationship between English learning motivation and English proficiency through the lens of L2MSS, this study extends the L2MSS theory to an understudied population of Chinese ethnic minority English learners. On the one hand, it further extends the application of L2MSS theory in the unique linguistic and cultural context of English learning. On the other hand, this study provides a better understanding of relationship between learning motivation and English proficiency among English learners in rural China. It offers both theoretical and pedagogical implications. Theoretically, it further confirmed the validation of using L2MSS theory in investigating Chinese ethnic minority learners' English learning motivation. Pedagogically, it sheds lights on English education for ethnic minority learners in rural China. For policymakers, policies should be proposed to put more emphasis on English education in ethnic minority-dominated schools. For English educators, they should help to strengthen ethnic minority learners' sustainable English learning motivation by using motivational teaching strategies. Meanwhile, targeted English teaching materials and teaching approaches are advised to be used to improve the learners' English proficiency.

This study is not free from limitations. As quantitative research, this study only made use of data from a questionnaire and an English proficiency test. It is suggested to use a mixed-methods approach in which interviews should be included to obtain more sufficient information about the participants' English learning motivation and their English proficiency. Besides, due to the time constraints, this study is a synchronic study. It is better for further researchers to do a longitudinal study to investigate how learners' English proficiency changes with their English learning motivation over time.

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