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## Motivation for English as a Foreign Language learning in China and Russia

**Abstract.** The significance of motivation is indisputable for learning concerning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) studies. This article is contributed to a comparative study of motivation of bachelor students for EFL in China and Russia based on the research findings of one author's master dissertation. A survey based on 5-point Likert scale was conducted to acquire both teachers' and students' perception of types, rank order and degree of motivation. The results show differences and similarities at the same time in perception between teachers, teachers and students in each country. It is interesting to notice that the difference in the ranking of motivation between Chinese teachers' and their students' is even bigger than between Russian teachers' and Chinese students'. The big variance in perception between Chinese respondents suggests cross-cultural difference is not necessarily bigger than in one culture, which at the same time implies that Chinese students may suit well to study EFL in Russia, while Russian students may feel relatively more difficult to study in China. It is also assumed that Russian teachers understand their students better than Chinese teachers, hence have a closer relationship in general. At the end of the article some recommendations are accordingly made.

**Keywords:** comparative study; China and Russia; university; English as a Foreign Language; perception of Motivation; rank order of Motivation; degree of Motivation

### Introduction

Motivation plays a vital role in second language learning because it helps learners maintain effort, it increases success in English learning, and it promotes the autonomy of language learners [4]. This article is written based on research findings of one author's master dissertation named as "Classroom management and motivation in EFL classes in China and Russia".

Antoine de Saint-Exupery once said "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the people to gather wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead teach them to yearn for the endless immensity

of the sea” [3]. It indicates the difference between motivating and simply task assigning. As widely accepted, motivation includes two types: the intrinsic and the extrinsic. They distinguish from each other in levels and orientation of motivation according to Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci [10].

The phenomenon of intrinsic motivation (IM) was first acknowledged within experimental studies of animal behavior, where it was discovered that many organisms engage in exploratory, playful, and curiosity-driven behaviors even with no apparent reinforcement or reward except the activity itself. This intrinsic motivation might be either innate or learnt [13]. Therefore, the intrinsic motivation got defined and widely accepted as the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions, derived from participation rather than for some separable consequence [10]. Later, a tripartite taxonomy of IM has been postulated by Vallerand R.J., Pelletier L.G., Blais M.R., etc. during approximately 1992 to 1995. These three types of IM, which claimed by these scholars are based on independent researches, have been identified as IM to Know, IM to Accomplish Things, and IM to Experience Stimulation [9].

These types of IM are fully described below.

- Intrinsic motivation to know

The first type of IM relates to several constructs such as exploration, curiosity, learning goals, intrinsic intellectuality, and finally IM to learn with the reference to scholars like Vallerand [11]. Scholars like Pelletier replaced the intrinsic intellectuality into the epistemic need to know and understand to widen this construct insofar IM to know can be defined as performing an activity for the pleasure and the satisfaction while learning, exploring, or trying to understand something new [9]. For instance, students are intrinsically motivated to know when they read a foreign literature in the target language for the sheer delight that they experience from knowing something new.

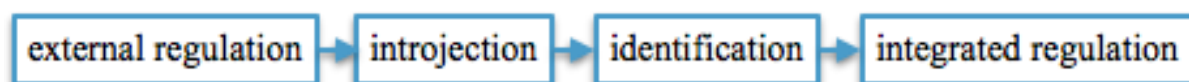
- Intrinsic motivation towards accomplishments.

The second type of IM has been studied in developmental psychology, as well as in educational research, under such terms as mastery motivation, efficacy motivation, and task-orientation [9]. In addition, other authors have assumed that individuals interact with the environment in order to feel competent and to create unique accomplishments [10]. To some extent individuals focus on the process of achieving rather than on the outcome [11]. Thus, IM towards accomplishments can be defined as engaging in an activity for the pleasure and satisfaction experienced when one attempts to accomplish or create something [9]. For instance, students, who set goals to improve and challenge themselves, are showing IM towards accomplishments.

- Intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation.

The third type of IM occurs when someone engages in an activity in order to experience stimulating sensations (e.g., sensory pleasure, aesthetic and holistic experiences, as well as fun and excitement) derived from one's engagement in the activity [11]. For example, students might read a book for the willingness of experiencing the same thrilling feeling as the book characters had and they go to class for experiencing the joy of an expected interesting talk with teacher and classmates. This is different from IM to Know in the newness of experience. Therefore, it to some extent explains why possible to keep different level of learners studying in one group.

Extrinsic motivation (EM) is a construct, which pertains whenever an activity is done not for its own sake but for attaining some separable outcome [10]. Ryan and Deci continued to explain by referring to the joint effort with Connell W.S. and Grolnick J.P. that there are four different types of extrinsic motivation [see figure 1], which can be ordered along a self-determination continuum from low to high level:



*Figure 1. Types of extrinsic motivation*

The external regulation is the only kind of motivation recognized by operant theorists, such as Skinner B.F and is this type of extrinsic motivation that was typically contrasted with intrinsic motivation in early lab studies and discussions and was often not thoroughly treated as the nowadays known EM [10]. In addition, because of external regulation, individuals typically perceive they are under controlled or alienated and their behaviors are performed to satisfy an external demand or obtain an externally imposed reward contingency, in another word according to DeCharms Richard, they do out of an external perceived locus of causality [10]. This type of motivation might help labor work to increase productivity in terms of quantity but barely creativity according to a recent experiment post in 2008 by economic Dan Ariely and his three colleagues [1].

Introjection, right next to external regulation, turns to the beginning of internal regulation which is still quite controlling because people perform such actions with the feeling of pressure in order to avoid guilt or anxiety or to attain ego-enhancements or pride. For instance, a student who studies hard before exams might say that is because all good students do. The defense or worry about their self-esteem provide more reasons why peer relationship and teachers' encouragement are important.

Identification is very close to the most autonomous (self-determined) form of extrinsic motivation – the integrated regulation which is infinitely close to the intrinsic motivation.

## Method

### Research question

What is the difference in the types of motivation of Chinese and Russian students for EFL according to both teachers' and students' perception?

What is the difference in the order and degree of motivation according to students themselves in China and Russia?

### Sample and context

The study was conducted at two universities: China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU) in Beijing, China, and Northern Arctic Federal University (NArFU) in Arkhangelsk, Russia, in collaboration with the English Language Teaching Departments of both universities.

The sample included first-year linguistic students in four study groups at both universities and all the teachers involved in conducting English language classes to these students. Due to the fact that the linguistic group size is different in China and Russia as well as there are differences in the numbers of participating teachers, it causes unequal numbers of students and teachers in China and Russia, namely: 84 students (4 groups) and 10 teachers at CFAU; and 32 students (4 groups) and 3 teachers at NArFU. This was not viewed as a limitation as the research idea was to compare the perception of motivations not only cross-culturally but also between teachers and students in both countries. For this reason, the number of sample groups was limited to even as four from both universities.

### Procedure and data processing

The study employed a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire designed by the authors, which contains two questions based on types of motivation. Design of the questionnaire was referred to the

studies of Min [5], You & Zolta [14], Galkina [2] and Parshin [8]. The questions were provided in English at both university as the following shows:

Q1. Please choose and rank your motivation for English study by descending order:

1. academic interest, like linguistics, literature, diverse opinions or voices, etc.
2. entertainment, like films, game chatting, music, traveling, etc.
3. international relationship (including marriage)
4. career
5. obligatory study
6. better grades
7. others ( )

Q2. How is your motivation for English study?

- A. very high
- B. high
- C. so-so
- D. low
- E. very low

The questionnaire to teachers was only one question about their perception of their students' motivations.

Since the research sample is quantity-limited, the data does not follow a normal distribution. Besides, simply calculating mean value of collected data does not properly present the order of motivation, therefore a formula was introduced, which concerns the response rate and the weight of each motivation item according to the position in the rank. For example, regarding to the first motivation – “Academic interest”, the function is  $(0.5*6+0.1*5+0.3*3)/6*0.9$  which equals to 0.66. Specifically, 0.5 means 5 teachers out of 10 put the motivation in the first place as the most important, hence it has the highest weight. The highest weight is 6, because it turned out there are totally 6 chosen types of motivation in the answers. Logically 0.1 means 1 teacher put it in the second place with the corresponding weight, 5 and 0.3 means 3 teachers put it in the fourth with the weight, 3. Besides, 0.9 is the response rate of this item, which means 9 out of 10 teachers chose the motivation as one of the students' motivations, that is, it reflects the importance of this motivation to some extent, therefore it was multiplied.

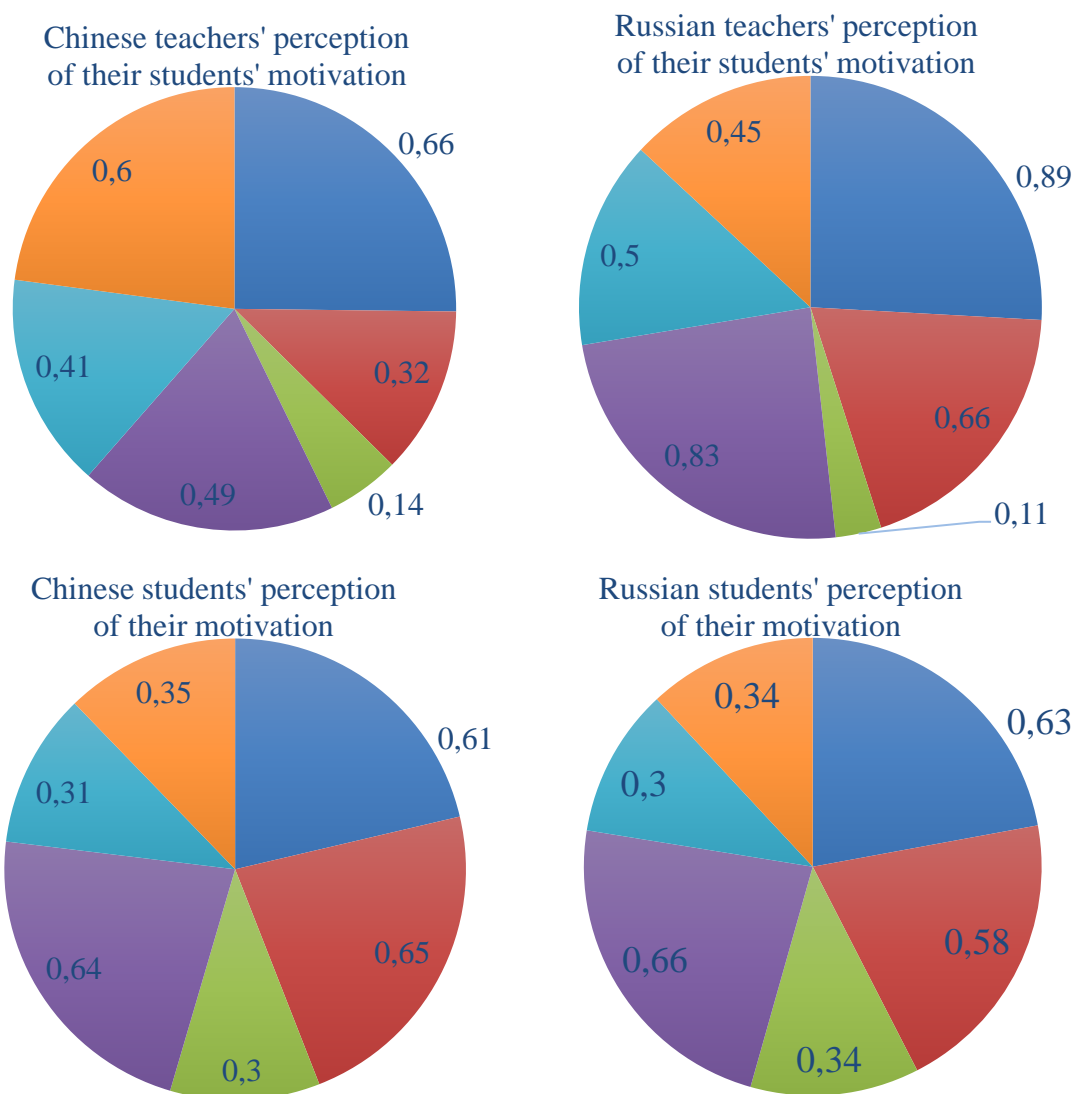
### Findings and discussion

The following charts [see figure 2] illustrate Chinese and Russian respondents' perception of motivation and the order of the each motivation with the reference to the answers to Q1 in the survey.

As the charts show it is apparent to know which motivation is how important in whose eyes according to the size of each color and the data labels. It makes easy to compare between respondents. For instance, viewing the cross-cultural comparison between teachers, Chinese teachers ranked motivations as:

“Academic interest”, “Better grades”, “Career”, “Obligatory study”, “Entertainment” and “International relationship”. Russian teachers meanwhile ranked as: “Academic interest”, “Career”, “Entertainment”, “Obligatory study”, “Better grades” and “International relationship”. It is easy to

know that three motivations were ranked the same by teachers. However, students shared the exactly first three motivations, even though they ranked it slightly differently. Russian students perceived that their motivation order is “Career, Academic interests and Entertainment”, while Chinese students ranked as “Entertainment, Career, Academic interests”. One motivation – “Better grades” was ranked similarly.



Academic interest, like linguistics, literature, diverse opinions or voices, etc.

Entertainment, like films, game chatting, music, traveling etc.

International relationship (including marriage)

Career

Obligatory study

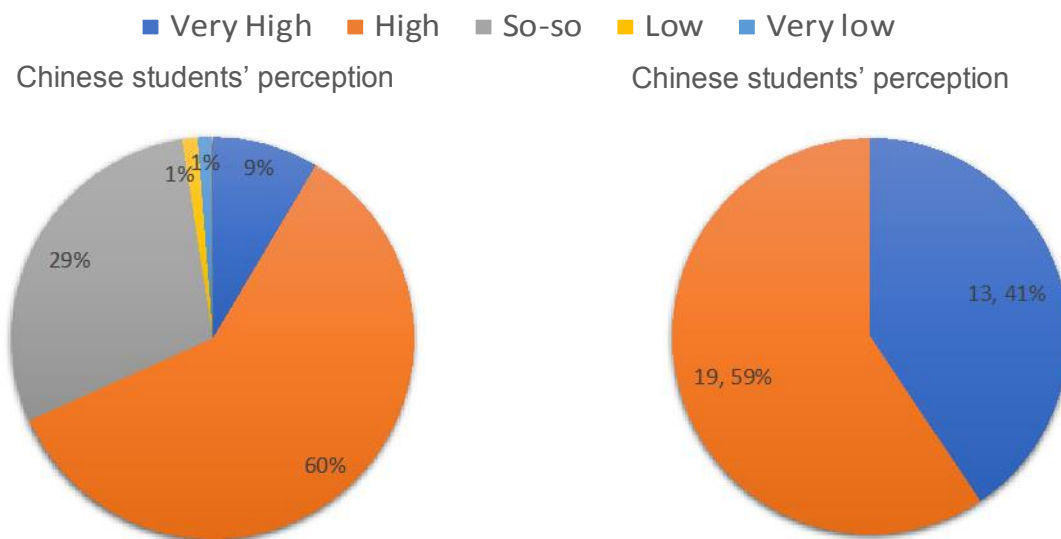
Better grades

**Figure 2.** Whole view of Chinese and Russian respondents' perception of motivation

Viewing Russian respondents, the three most important motivations are the same and have the same rank order, which namely are “Academic interest”, “Career” and “Entertainment”. However, between Chinese respondents there is only one similarly ranked motivation, which is “International relationship”.

Logically the perception between Russian respondents then as shown shares much more similarities than between Chinese respondents. The big difference in perception between Chinese respondents, which is even bigger than between Russian teachers and Chinese students, suggests cross-cultural difference is not necessarily bigger than within one culture. This suggestion is not firstly discovered, and it is in fact coherent to the findings of Jinkyung Na in 2010 who stated “differences in social orientation and in cognition that exist between cultures and social classes do not necessarily have counterparts in individual differences within those groups” [6]. Furthermore, the significant variance also indicates that Russian teachers may understand their students better than Chinese teachers, hence have a closer relationship in general.

Concerning the second question to students about their motivation degree, the result is illustrated below by two pie charts [see figure 3]. It can be easily acknowledged that 41 % of Russian students were very highly motivated and 59 % of them were highly motivated, in contrast to the result of Chinese students in the chart on the left. It shows 9 %, 60 %, 29 %, 1 % and 1 % with the range of motivation from the very high to the very low. We assume the distinct results may surprise teachers, especially Russian teachers. As well known, English level of Russian students are usually lower than students of other European countries. The distinction between the specially high motivation of Russian students and general low language performance may suggest that they really had very high motivation in the first year of bachelor study, but later may get changed during the future study.



*Figure 3. Students' motivation degree for EFL*

### Conclusion and implications

The research clarifies the theoretical understanding of motivation according to Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci. It also presents findings through illustrations of empirical results and correspondent analytical discussions. Based on these, the following general conclusions and implications can be made.

The statistics show that the perception between Russian respondents shares much more similarities than between their Chinese counterparts. The big difference in perception between Chinese respondents suggests cross-cultural difference is not necessarily bigger than in one culture, which at

the same time implies that Chinese students may suit well to study EFL in Russia, while Russian students may feel relatively more difficult to study in China. It is also assumed that Russian teachers understand their students better than Chinese teachers, hence a closer relationship in general.

The findings of this research concerning differences between teachers' and students' perception in China and Russia can help teachers and students understand each other's expectation better, which then can stimulate teachers to implement new or modify the existing EFL strategies. The following suggestions might be useful for Chinese and Russian teachers. Firstly, Chinese teachers who strive to raise students' motivation towards academic interest are recommended to use games [7] or new technologies to integrate entertaining elements into learning. Secondly, Russian teachers are recommended to use updated classroom management strategies, like less drilling exercises, more student-friendly ways of mistakes correction, to keep students being motivated in the whole 4-year study.

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## **Мотивация к изучению английского языка как иностранного в Китае и России**

**Аннотация.** Значение мотивации к изучению английского языка как иностранного (EFL) неоспоримо. Данная статья посвящена сравнительному изучению мотивации бакалавров к EFL в Китае и России с использованием результатов исследования в рамках магистерской диссертации одного из авторов. Было проведено анкетирование. Были оценены следующие результаты по 5-балльной шкале Ликерта: типы, ранги и степени мотивации у преподавателей и студентов. Результаты показывают различия и сходства мотивации между преподавателями, преподавателями и студентами в каждой стране. Разница в рейтинге мотивации между китайскими преподавателями и их студентами даже больше, чем между русскими преподавателями и китайскими студентами. Большой разброс в показателях между китайскими респондентами предполагает, что межкультурное различие может быть больше даже в одной культуре. В то же время это означает, что китайские студенты легче адаптируются к изучению EFL в России, а российские студенты сложнее адаптируются в Китае. Также выяснилось, что российские преподаватели лучше понимают своих студентов, чем китайские преподаватели, они имеют со студентами более тесный контакт. В конце статьи, соответственно, сделаны некоторые рекомендации.

**Ключевые слова:** сравнительное исследование; Китай и Россия; университет; английский как иностранный; оценка мотивации; ранжирование мотивации; степень мотивации