Exploring Differences in Motivation between Students Who Excelled and Underperformed in Learning the English Language

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to shed light on the concept of motivation among students and its corresponding effects on their academic performances. It reports a study that aims to investigate the motivation levels of excellent and underperforming students among Junior Middle 3 (Form 3) students in a Chinese Independent Secondary School and offers suggestions to improve waning motivation. A mixed methods approach was chosen with the questionnaire and interview as research instruments. Overall excellent students exhibited higher motivation level than the underperformers.

KEYWORDS: **academic performance, ESL, excellent students, motivation, underperformers**

Introduction

Motivation, in its Latin root verb *movere,* means to move (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). It concerns the force behind a decision, the reason for an action in attainment of a goal (Dörnyei, 1998; Harmer, 2001; Ushioda, 2008). By common sense it can be said that high achievers are more driven than those who are not, even with the same level of intelligence. This resonates in the field of language learning where good language learners are motivated (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Dörnyei, 1998; Brown, 2000; Harmer, 2001; Chitravelu et al., 2005; Ushioda, 2008).

As motivation is a concept which is generally considered to be influential yet complex to define, more empirical research is still needed to grasp its antecedents of action (Dörnyei, 2001). Despite the amount of literature, studies on motivation among language learners are still insufficient (Ushioda, 2008). Teachers sharing on classroom experiences on this matter would significantly benefit theorists and practitioners in the field (Ushioda, 2008). It is in this line of thinking that the research was shaped. This study examines the motivation causes of students who are excelling and failing in the English subject at school. It also offers suggestions in improving motivation levels among weak students. In the pedagogical context, the research hopes to sensitize and assist educators in planning, organizing, and delivering classroom lessons in ways that would motivate students to learn.

The research was conducted in a Chinese Independent Secondary School in Malaysia where students learned English as a second language. Two Form 3 classes of students with mixed ages of 15 and 16 years were selected. The two classes selected were the first class and last class according to the ranking of grades. Students were requested to fill in a 44-question survey form in English with verbal mandarin translation given by the researcher in class. A brief dialogue was then held with the English teacher on students' motivation levels for both clusters of students and on suggestions to improve waning motivation levels.

The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

i.   What are the motivation levels of underperforming students learning English language?
ii. What are the motivation levels of students who excel in learning English language?
iii. How can the underperformers' motivation levels be improved?

Students with 80 marks and above in their English language subject during the midterm examination are classified as 'excellent' students or 'students who excel' while 'underperformers' and 'failing' students have less than 50 marks.

Literature review

Motivation in second language learning
Corder (1967) famously wrote, "Let us say that, given motivation, it is inevitable that a human being will learn a second language if he is exposed to the language data" (p. 164). This reflects the perception that motivation has been the success factor in overcoming the difficulties, the self-discipline and persistence in an individual's endeavours towards the mastery of a new language. Seemingly common sensical, the observation of this human behavioural trait has had language acquisition experts fascinated and in turn generated an enormous amount of research.

Traditionally, motivation research in the field of second language (L2) acquisition is its own entity with distinct characteristics from motivation in mainstream psychology. This is as

language learning entails a different motivation process than in other areas (Dörnyei, 2001). Most research on motivation between the 1960s and 1990s looked into the relationship of students' attitudes towards the target language and the effect it has on their desire to learn the language. The most notable social psychological approach spearheaded by Gardner and Lambert (1972) assumed that learners' communicative needs and their attitudes towards the target language culture and people would affect their motivation and subsequently their achievements in learning the language (Brown, 2000; Dörnyei, 2001; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Ushioda, 2008). Language learning motivation was found to be empirically different from other forms of learning motivation hence the occurrence of instrumental and integrative orientations. The instrumental orientation was academic or career-related in acquiring a language while the latter reflected a socially or culturally oriented interest in the target language (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, 1991). Numerous empirical studies suggest that the two orientations are not necessarily mutually exclusive and in most situations entail a mixture of both (Brown, 2000).

Another distinction that was made in the concept of motivation was extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is caused by instrumental or outside factors, such as to be rich, famous or to pass an exam (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Harmer, 2001). Intrinsic motivation on the other hand is the engagement of activities that are personally pleasing, for example a person might be interested in the learning process (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Harmer, 2001). The modern cognitive tradition that beheld the relation of beliefs, values, and goals to action has a more elaborated explanation to the above classification. This includes the Goal Theories and Self-determination Theory for extrinsic motivation while Interest Theories, Flow Theory and Individual Difference theories of Intrinsic Motivation shed a different intellectual perspective on the other side of motivation. Despite the numerous schools of thoughts, a great number of researchers have come to view the superiority of intrinsic motivation in culminating success in learning (Maslow, 1970; Ellis, 1986; Ramage, 1990; Deci & Flaste, 1996; Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Bruner, 1996; Dörnyei, 1998; Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Brown, 2000; Harmer, 2001).

The model chosen for discussion in this paper is the expectancy-value model of motivation which is discussed further in the next section.

Expectancy-value model of motivation
The expectancy component is students' perception on their ability to perform a task and their responsibility in seeing it to completion with the execution of cognitive strategies (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Pintrich, 1999). As illustrated in Figure 1, the model consists of three components of: (a) an expectancy component, (b) a value component and (c) an affective component (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Pintrich, 1999).

Previous research suggested the correlation between self-efficacy, engagement of cognitive strategies and persistence in difficult tasks with achievement in second language learning (e.g., Fincham & Cain, 1986; Paris & Oka, 1986; Schunk, 1985 as cited in Pintrich & De Groot, 1990).

The value component involves students' perception on the priority of tasks, interest of the task and the reasons for doing it (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Pintrich, 1999). Previous research showed the influence of intrinsic value in increasing productivity in students' language learning (e.g., Ames & Archer, 1988; Dweck & Elliott, 1983; Eccles, 1983; Meece, Blumenfeld, & Hoyle, 1988; NoNolen, 1988; Paris & Oka, 1986 as cited in Pintrich & De Groot, 1990).

The affective component is "students' affective or emotional reactions to the task" (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; p. 34). In a classroom situation, test anxiety and self-regulation are considered

relevant to the research component of motivation (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Researches on positive test anxiety and self-regulation have been linked to students' increased productivity in execution of tasks and improved academic performance in second language learning (e.g., Benjamin, McKeachie, Lin, & Holinger, 1981; Culler & Holahan, 1980; Tobias, 1985 as cited in Pintrich & De Groot, 1990).
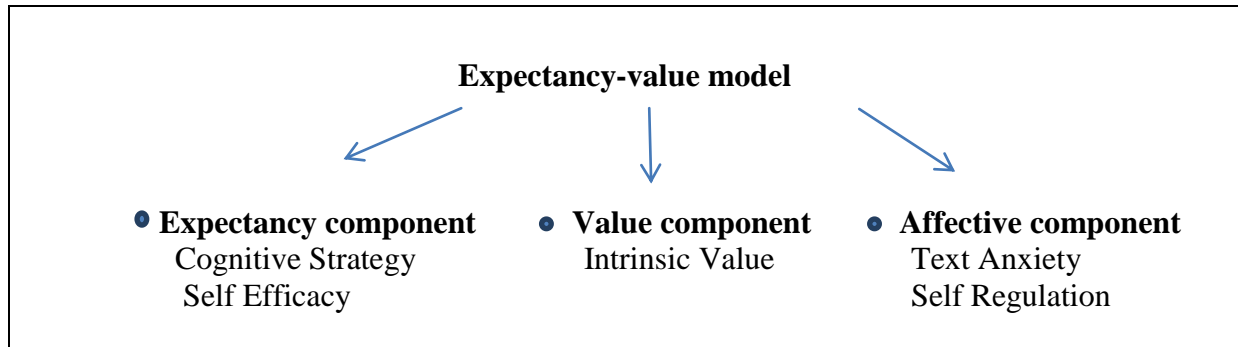

Expectancy-value model

- **Expectancy component**
  Cognitive Strategy
  Self Efficacy

- **Value component**
  Intrinsic Value

- **Affective component**
  Text Anxiety
  Self Regulation

Figure 1: Illustration of the expectancy-value model of motivation (Source: Eccles & Wigfied, 2002; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Pintrich, 1999)

Criticisms against motivation

According to Wlodkowski (1986) "With a hypothetical construct as broad and complex as motivation, there is always room for controversy and argumentation" (p. 12). Motivation as a human behavior with a multitude of potential determinants has yet been thoroughly explained by psychologists. The challenge remains in identifying the principal motives among various conflicting theories (Dörnyei, 2001).

This sentiment has been echoed across the field with researchers calling for the implementation of a new "agenda" in a number of alternative models with the behaviorist, cognitivist and constructivist attempting to agree on possible variables that could influence learners' motivation within the second language learning context (Crandall et al. 1965, Rotter 1966; Ausubel, 1968; Connell,1985; Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Skinner 1995, Skinner et al., 1998; Bandura, 1997, 2001; Brown, 2000; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

There are also growing concerns with the concept of integrativeness/integrative motivation, which has been at the centre of L2 motivation research for almost five decades with several scholars questioning the validity and relevance of the notion of integrativeness (Vallerand, 1997; Noels, Clément, Pelletier, 1999; Lamb, 2004; Dörnyei, 2001; Ushioda, 2006).

Taking into account the lack of Gardner's socio-educational model of language learning in classroom context of learner motivation (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991), Zoltan Dörnyei (1994) developed an educational framework of motivation that is classroom specific in addition to having the subsystems of Gardner's earlier model and the characteristics of learner in the acquisition process. In 1998, the time dimension was included in Dörnyei's three-phased process-oriented model of motivation (Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998; Dörnyei, 2000, 2001). In 2009, with a growing disenchantment with the concept of integrativeness/integrative motivation, he proposed a theory of L2 motivational self-system which would be an interface between personality psychology (self-theory) and motivational psychology (Dörnyei, 2009).

The role of learners in generating motivation

In a classroom, students' motivation levels are as diverse as their personalities; some have clear strong goals while others have weak, obscure ones. Nonetheless a student's initial motivation (or lack of it) would not remain the same throughout (Harmer, 2001).

Naiman et al. (1978 as cited in Ur, 2008) has highlighted the seven traits of a successful language learner: positive task orientation (willing to tackle challenges and is confident), ego-involvement (the promoting of one's positive self-image), need for achievement, high aspirations, goal orientation, perseverance and tolerance of ambiguity (p.275).

Learners would consciously get themselves to practice the language as often as they can, making effort in experimenting with new learning methods for learning. They are risk takers and they learn from mistakes that they make. They achieve success and develop competence, and this in turn motivates them to learn more (as illustrated in figure 2). As for the source of motivation, students can be motivated by a wide range of reasons – interaction, furthering of education, securing a better paid job, reading of books, magazines in English and many others (Chitravelu et al., 2005).
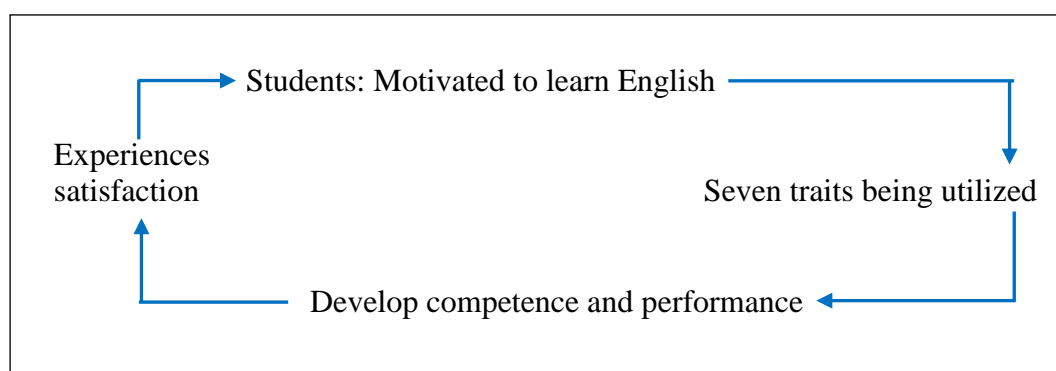

Figure 2: Motivation and success in language learning (cyclical view)
(Adapted from Chitravelu et al., 2005)

The role of teachers in generating motivation

In a classroom where learning takes place under the dual relationship of learners and teachers, it takes as much the willingness of learners to learn as much as the effort of teacher in setting the right learning conditions. Pedagogical common sense would proclaim that most students' motivation can be worked on and increased. Although too often teachers would resort to reward and punishments, there are other potentially effective methods to improve the quality of teaching. Rost's (2006) own account of her teaching practices showed the relationship of individual motivation on the quality and level of support received in the learning environment.

Chitravelu et al. (2005) and Lightbown and Spada (2006) suggested teachers could maximize motivation among students by:
> 1) using or supplementing materials that appeal to the learners
> 2) setting realistically challenging yet attainable goals
> 3) making students aware of teaching-learning objectives
> 4) giving feedback consistently on students' progress as well as performance

Harmer (2001) advocated the "emotional atmosphere" the teachers created in the classroom, a learning environment where it is comfortable and non-threatening for students to make mistakes. Teachers should also be mindful when responding to students as to not discourage them. The

optimal atmosphere would be supportive, cooperative, positive and conducive for learning to take place (McCombs, 1994). Ushioda (1996) preferred teachers to "lead" learners in a reflective manner to analyse and solve issues they might encounter in learning. The prompting or scaffolding provided by the teachers could enable learners to exert more control in their learning (Ushioda, 2008).

The following diagram summarises motivational strategies in Dörnyei's (2001) process-oriented model of motivational teaching practice.

Creating the basic motivational conditions
- A learning environment where it is comfortable and non-threatening for students to make mistakes (Harmer, 2001)

Encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation
- Giving consistent feedback on students' progress as well as performance (Chitravelu et al., 2005; Lightbown & Spada, 2006)
- Teachers to "lead" learners in a reflective manner to analyse and solve issues that might encounter in learning (Ushioda, 1996)

Generating initial motivation
- Making students aware of teaching-learning objectives
- Using or supplementing materials that appeal to the learners (Chitravelu et al., 2005; Lightbown & Spada, 2006)

Maintaining and protecting motivation
- Setting realistically challenging yet attainable goals (Chitravelu et al., 2005; Lightbown & Spada, 2006)
- The optimal atmosphere would be supportive, cooperative, positive and conducive for learning to take place (McCombs, 1994)
- The prompting or scaffolding provided by the teachers could enable learners to exert more control in their learning (Ushioda, 2008)
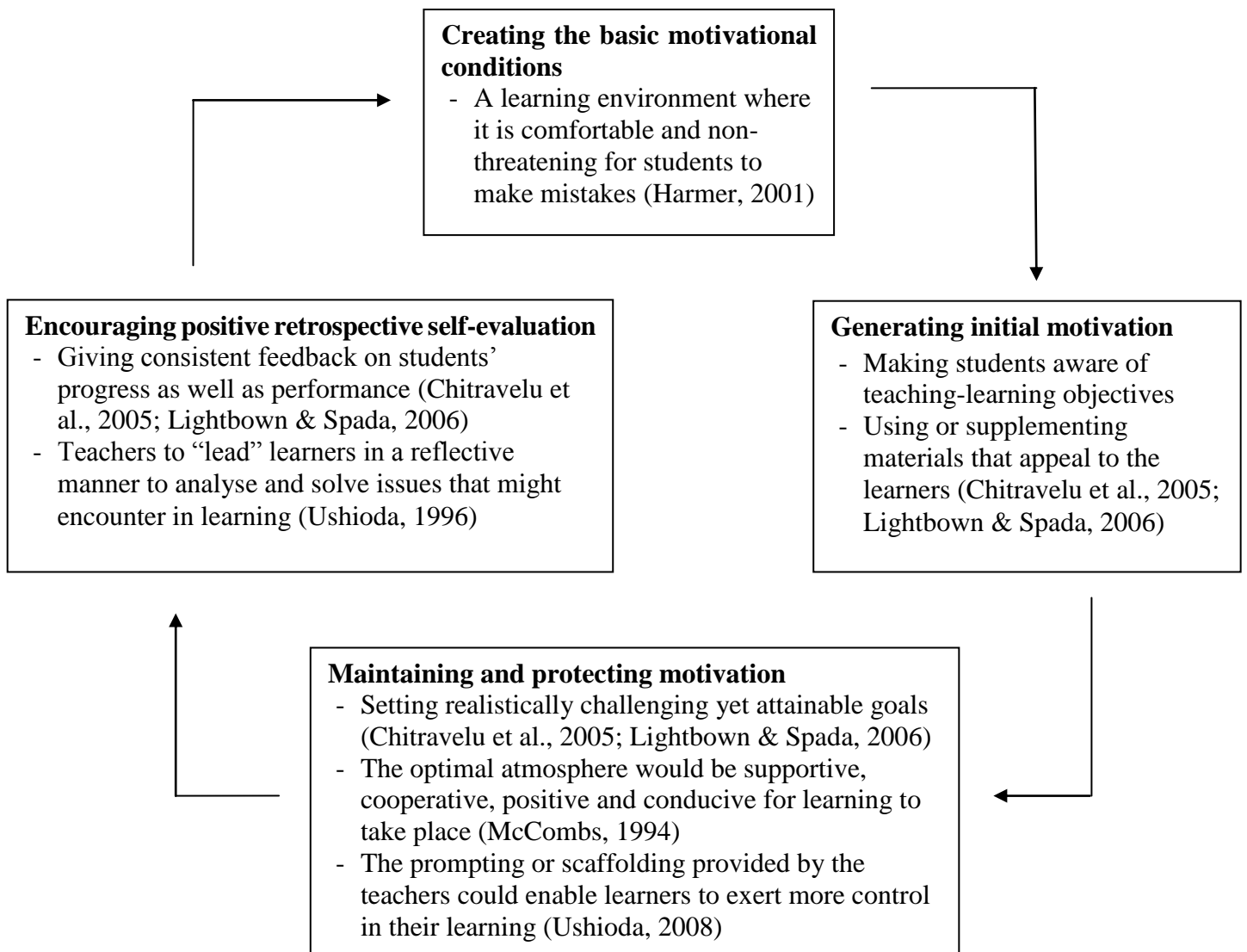
Figure 3: A summary of motivational teaching strategies (Adapted from Dörnyei, 2001)

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is from the expectancy-value model of motivation. The questionnaire design was shaped according to the three components of expectancy, value and affective factors. The items tested include expectancy factors of cognitive strategy and self-

efficacy; value component of intrinsic motivation and affective factors of test anxiety and self-regulation.

According to expectancies, motivation levels are in parallel with users' belief (value), the use of motivational strategies (expectancy) and emotional control (affective) in learning tasks' execution. Hence the higher the scores, the more motivated a participant is and the more skilled he/she is in second language learning (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990).

The mode of measuring was self-reports from the students in completing the questionnaire. Their responses would be a reflection of their motivation levels in second language learning. The results would also be verified with an interview with the English subject teacher from both classes.

Methodology

A mixed methods approach was chosen as it involved both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The instrument of questionnaire was given out to students in the quantitative approach while the English Language teacher being interviewed formed the qualitative aspect of the research. This method enables the researcher to focus on measuring the concept numerically for multiple participants and to integrate data of two different perspectives: teacher and students (Creswell, 2003).

A 44-question survey developed by Pintrich and De Groot (1990) was chosen as the tool for psychometric research in the comparison of motivation levels between excellent and underperforming students. The questionnaire was chosen due to its extensive yet specific evaluative items that were classroom specific. The items examined were relevant to the context of learning a second language and were tailored to show the relationship between academic performance and motivation levels (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). The instrument has also been found valid in providing empirical evidence for the importance of motivational components in influencing classroom academic performance (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990).

The questionnaire (see Appendix A) required respondents to rate the items based on their behaviours in class with 1 being 'not at all true of me' and 7 'very true of me'. The participants consisted of twenty six students from the first class and eleven from the last class. Students were asked to list their English Language marks from the mid-term examination on the survey forms to allow for filtering of excellent and underperforming students on this particular subject. Filtering was done as assumption could not be made on the basis of academic excellence attributing to the success of English language learning and likewise (Little, 1985; Williams & Burden, 1999). After screening through the marks on the questionnaire and validating them from the teacher's mark sheet, it was found that 11 students were failing in the last class and none had 80 marks and above. In the first class, there were 26 students who scored 80 and above with zero failures. All students received 4 periods (140 minutes) of classroom instruction every week from the same teacher. The materials used were the course books from Cambridge in Mind series at intermediate level.

Students were handed the questionnaire before the start of their English lesson and were given the instructions to fill in their marks on the paper but not their names. After that an explanation in Mandarin was given to students of both classes on all of the items by the researcher. A verbal translation was given instead of written ones due to the presence of some Thai students in the class who were not fluent in reading Chinese language but could understand spoken Mandarin.

Students were told to inquire on words, phrases or expressions that they were not familiar with. Students were given 20 minutes to complete the survey. The survey was done under the supervision of their English teacher and the researcher.

A short dialogue was also conducted with the subject teacher on the motivation levels of both clusters of students and recommendations for improvement (Please refer to appendixes E, F). As such responses from both parties will be discussed in the following section.

Findings

The table below displays the findings from the survey. Questions and their groupings can be referred to in Appendix D.

Table 1
Average rating of motivational components for excellent and failing students

Motivational Components	Question number	Average Rating (Motivation Level)	
		Excellent students	**Failing students**
Expectancy: Cognitive	23	5	5
	24	5	4
	26	3	5
	28	4	4
	29	6	5
	30	6	6
	31	4	3
	34	5	4
	36	5	3
	39	5	4
	40	4	4
	41	5	3
	42	4	3
	43	5	4
	44	5	3
		71/15 = 5	60/15 = 4
Expectancy: Self-Efficacy	2	5	3
	6	6	5
	8	5	5
	9	5	3
	11	6	5
	13	5	3
	16	4	3
	18	4	3
	19	6	4
		46/9 = 5	34/9 = 4
Value: Intrinsic	1	5	4
	4	6	6
	5	6	5
	7	6	4
	10	3	6
	14	6	3
	15	6	5
	17	6	4
	21	6	5
		50/9 = 6	42/9 = 5
Affective: Test Anxiety	3	4	4
	12	4	1
	20	5	3

	22	4	4
		17/4 = 4	12/4 = 3
Affective: Self-Regulation	25	4	5
	27	3	3
	32	3	5
	33	5	3
	35	4	2
	38	4	4
		23/6 = 4	22/6 = 4

Indicators:
1 – not at all true of me;   2 – moderately not true of me;   3 – slightly not true of me;
4 – neutral;   5 – slightly true of me;   6 – moderately true of me;
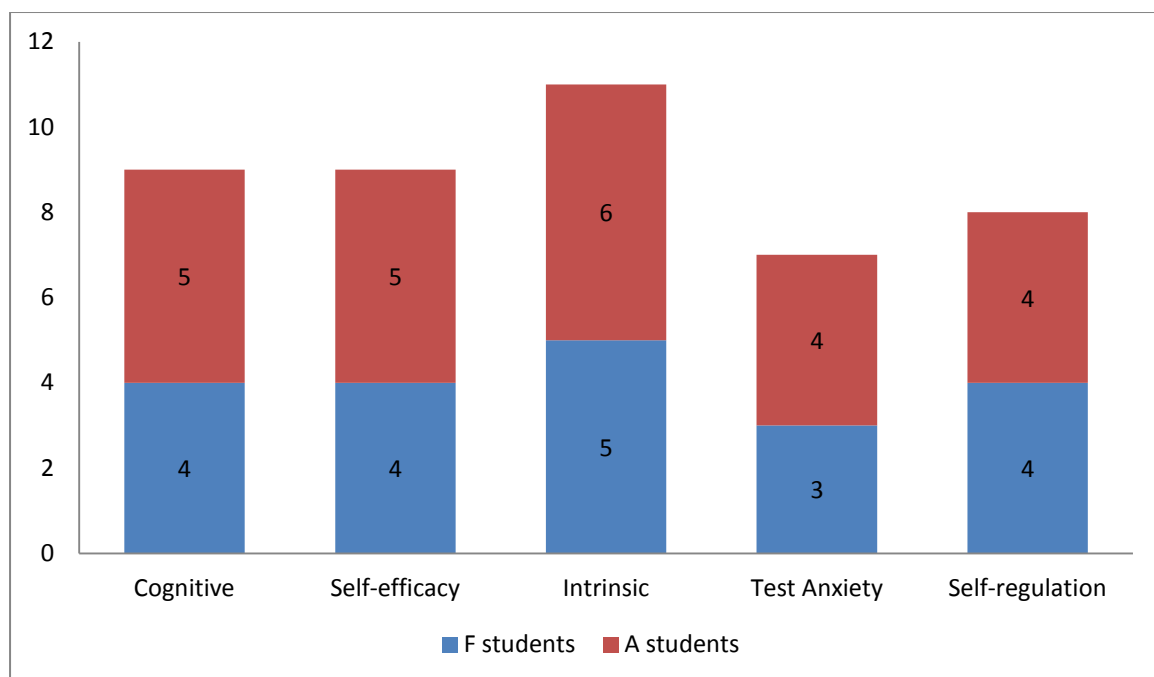7 – very true of me

Figure 4: Motivation levels of excellent and underperforming students

The questions were divided and grouped into five clusters of different motivational components of cognitive, self-efficacy, intrinsic, test anxiety and self-regulation (refer to Appendix D). The scores for each of the category were tallied and averaged for the two different categories of excellent and failing students, as could be seen in Table 1. For easier comparison, the averages were illustrated in a graph (Figure 4).

The results showed the motivational differences between excellent and failing students in a classroom setting. Excellent students were seen to have higher motivational averages than students who were failing with each of the motivational components exhibited higher scores than students who were failing. As can be seen from figure 4, the A class students have the upper hand in areas such as cognitive, self-efficacy, intrinsic and test anxiety. Students from both clusters were tied in self-regulation.

Discussion

From the findings, the academic performance of second language learning seemed to correspond with the motivational components in the classroom. Students who were better language learners

would demonstrate higher level of motivation, as could be seen from figure 4. From table 1, excellent students were seen to be much more confident of their learning abilities, more likely to make use of cognitive strategies, more attentive and interested in the tasks they did and more persistent at challenging academic tasks. The findings suggested that multiple motivational components or motivation levels had a role to play in students' language learning achievements. The results were consistent with the results from previous research (e.g., Pintrich & De Groot, 1990).

The motivational component of expectancy played a facilitative role in students' learning as pointed out by Eccles and Wigfield (2002). This implied that students who were motivated would use more cognitive strategies like organization, memorization and revision in learning their classroom material. They would also be more assured of their competence. For example, they were certain that they would understand the "ideas taught in class" (question 2), that they would be able to do well in class (questions 2, 8, 11, 13) and that they had advantage over their peers (questions 9, 16, 19). This was also reiterated by the English teacher who mentioned that the students were driven and "keen" learners. This was opposed to weak learners who needed "persuasion" or even "force (disciplinary action)" to get them to complete the learning tasks. Due to a lower motivation level, they would use less of the cognitive strategies in learning and would give up comparatively easier than motivated students. They were less confident in succeeding in their learning. Quoting from their English teacher they were of the opinion that learning English would be "hard" as they could hardly "understand" a word of the language and they were "afraid of making mistakes". The findings supported the research of Corno and Mandinach (1983) and Weinstein and Mayer (1986) as cited in Pintrich and De Groot (1990) that students who were motivated and who used the cognitive and self-efficacy strategies would perform better than students who did not.

Intrinsic value was another key motivational component for superior performance in second language learning. Students who enjoyed learning the language instead of learning for pragmatic gains would exert more effort into their school work. The excellent students were found to have a high score of 6 (moderately true of me) in the criteria demonstrating high level of enthusiasm and conviction in their learning of English. There was a dip in responses to question number 10 for this group of students who responded that they would not intentionally seek difficult topics to learn. This could be due to students not wanting to over complicate matters and in the process dampened their spirits in learning. However their teacher acknowledged that students were "willing to learn something new" and that the lesson flowed in the class "effortlessly". In a similar fashion, the data suggested that underperformers were less intrinsically motivated to learn. A sentiment shared by their teacher who said the students "did not see the point of learning English" and he needed extra effort just to keep students awake at times during lessons. As they did not see the value in learning a new language, fewer attempts were made to learn it. It was interesting to note that in the compilation of questionnaire responses, this cluster of students responded positively to question number 10 than the previous group and gave a low score of 3 to question 14 that asked about test paper revision in order to learn from mistakes made. It was possible that students would choose a slightly difficult paper to learn yet unwilling to exert more of their energy in learning. They did not read up on the errors made in a previous test due to not foreseeing the items tested resurfacing in future evaluations. The overall perception confirmed the prevailing finding of intrinsic motivation in culminating success in learning (e.g., Maslow, 1970; Ellis, 1986; Ramage, 1990; Deci & Flaste, 1996; Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Bruner, 1996; Dörnyei, 1998; Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Brown, 2000; Harmer, 2001).

For the affective components of test anxiety and self-regulation, excellent students scored higher for test anxiety while the two groups shared the same score for self-regulation. Test anxiety here referred to "nervousness" (question 3); "uneasy, upset feeling" (question 12); "worry" (question 20) and negative thoughts (question 22). This interpretation was in line with the expectancy model of test anxiety (e.g., Benjamin, McKeachie, & Lin, 1987; Tobias, 1985 as cited in Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). It contended that test anxiety during exams would interfere with optimal performance in examination conditions; students could be motivated yet due to stress not have the desired grades. Despite the mental strain excellent students felt during English Language examination, it did not hinder their performances. This showed that test anxiety did not inhibit the preparation work students had put into their study of the English language. One plausible reason for the tie in self-regulatory items was due to the fact that one of the items was expressed in a negative connotation. Both groups were in unison in their response to question 27 - on their persistence in a task, they answered that "it's slightly not true of me." The weaker students also checked 5 (slightly true of me) for items 25 and 32 which were on recalling strategies used when studying and a 2 (moderately not true of me) in question 35 on study organization. This anomaly could be explained by the fact that weak students would use rote learning in acquiring a second language and they would not plan their studies. From the response in question 33, it could be seen that the underperforming students were less committed in seeing their work to completion. On the other hand, excellent students would plan their studies, commit to it and do so in a more creative manner. This was spoken also by their teacher who thought that excellent students would like topics to be "more interesting and fun to learn". Although the responses on test anxiety correlated with previous researches, the tie in self-regulation for both groups did not.

From the survey results and the interview data, it could be concluded that imparting intrinsic values in students would improve motivation levels (Brophy, 1983; Corno & Rohrkemper, 1985 as cited in Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). With a higher sense of intrinsic motivation, students could be more engaged in their learning of a second language. Teachers could raise students' awareness on self-regulating strategies such as having achievable learning goals, planning, monitoring students' understanding and encouraging persistence to students". Not only would this increase motivation as students realized the "steps" of learning a second language, it would also improve their performance (Corno, 1986; Zimmerman & Pons, 1986, 1988 as cited in Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). While the teacher could impart to students the different cognitive strategies of learning, students would do much more when they have enhanced self-efficacy (Borkowski, Weyhing, & Carr, 1988; Garner & Alexander, 1989; Schunk, 1985 as cited in Pintrich & De Groot, 1990). Students who believe they could learn a second language and succeed in tasks given would be more determined to implement cognitive strategies.

Conclusion

From the discussion above and the average rating from all the motivational components for failing students, the answer to the first research question (*What are the motivation levels of underperforming students learning English language?*) is the students are at a neutral level. The students were found to be less keen in practicing the three components of cognitive strategy, self-efficacy and intrinsic in their learning. They were also less concerned in taking their English Language examination. Their teacher commented likewise that the students needed constant push to learn.

As for question two (*What are the motivation levels of students who excel in learning English language?*), by comparing the average overall rating, students are of slightly motivated level. Compared to underperforming students, they were more willing to utilize the components in the

expectancy-value model of motivation and were more anxious in sitting for English Language examination. Their teacher mentioned that they were keen in learning and were frequently striving to do better.

On question three (*How can the underperformers' motivation levels be improved?*), teachers could cultivate interest in students, consciously impart self-efficacy, self-regulating and cognitive strategies in raising the motivation levels in underperforming students. Students would need to have interest, strategy and persistence to succeed in learning a second language.

There are several limitations to these findings. Firstly, all the responses were measured with a self-report instrument. Although there was verification from the English subject teacher, there still lies the validity threat of students' truthfulness in answering all the questions. As the study confines itself to 26 and 11 participants, the unequal sample size reduces the generalizability of findings. As motivation does not exist in the pure form, the use of one questionnaire confines the measurement of motivation levels in different students (Dörnyei, 2001). More research using other methods of investigation could be done to understand further the motivation levels in different learners.

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Appendix A   Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire

Please rate the following items based on your behaviour in this class. Your rating should be on a 7- point scale where 1= **not at all true of me** to 7=**very true of me**.

1. I prefer class work that is challenging so I can learn new things
2. Compared with other students in this class I expect to do well
3. I am so nervous during a test that I cannot remember facts I have learned
4. It is important for me to learn what is being taught in this class
5. I like what I am learning in this class
6. I'm certain I can understand the ideas taught in this course
7. I think I will be able to use what I learn in this class in other classes
8. I expect to do very well in this class
9. Compared with others in this class, I think I'm a good student
10. I often choose paper topics I will learn something from even if they require more work
11. I am sure I can do an excellent job on the problems and tasks assigned for this class
12. I have an uneasy, upset feeling when I take a test
13. I think I will receive a good grade in this class
14. Even when I do poorly on a test I try to learn from my mistakes
15. I think that what I am learning in this class is useful for me to know
16. My study skills are excellent compared with others in this class
17. I think that what we are learning in this class is interesting
18. Compared with other students in this class I think I know a great deal about the subject
19. I know that I will be able to learn the material for this class
20. I worry a great deal about tests
21. Understanding this subject is important to me
22. When I take a test I think about how poorly I am doing
23. When I study for a test, I try to put together the information from class and from the book
24. When I do homework, I try to remember what the teacher said in class so I can answer the questions correctly
25. I ask myself questions to make sure I know the material I have been studying
26. It is hard for me to decide what the main ideas are in what I read
27. When work is hard I either give up or study only the easy parts
28. When I study I put important ideas into my own words
29. I always try to understand what the teacher is saying even if it doesn't make sense.
30. When I study for a test I try to remember as many facts as I can
31. When studying, I copy my notes over to help me remember material
32. I work on practice exercises and answer end of chapter questions even when I don't have to
33. Even when study materials are dull and uninteresting, I keep working until I finish
34. When I study for a test I practice saying the important facts over and over to myself
35. Before I begin studying I think about the things I will need to do to learn
36. I use what I have learned from old homework assignments and the textbook to do new assignments
37. I often find that I have been reading for class but don't know what it is all about.
38. I find that when the teacher is talking I think of other things and don't really listen to what is being said
39. When I am studying a topic, I try to make everything fit together
40. When I'm reading I stop once in a while and go over what I have read
41. When I read materials for this class, I say the words over and over to myself to help me remember
42. I outline the chapters in my book to help me study
43. I work hard to get a good grade even when I don't like a class
44. When reading I try to connect the things I am reading about with what I already know.

Source: Pintrich, R. R., & DeGroot, E. V. (1990)

Appendix B — Excellent students' responses to the questionnaire (26 students)

Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	Average
Grade	88%	89%	95%	80%	89%	80%	81%	82%	85%	86%	94%	84%	88%	95%	84%	87%	84%	91%	84%	89%	88%	83%	84%	80%	80%	84%	
Question 1	4	5	5	6	6	5	6	6	6	7	5	6	7	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	7	7	6	7	7	7	5
Question 2	4	4	5	3	2	5	5	7	2	7	6	5	5	2	3	1	3	5	7	7	7	6	5	7	6	6	5
Question 3	2	5	7	3	6	7	2	2	7	1	2	2	7	1	7	5	4	5	1	4	4	2	1	1	1	7	4
Question 4	7	5	7	7	7	7	4	7	7	3	7	6	7	7	6	7	5	7	4	6	7	7	7	7	6	7	6
Question 5	6	4	7	7	5	6	4	7	3	7	7	6	7	7	7	6	6	7	5	3	7	6	7	7	7	7	6
Question 6	6	7	7	6	3	6	6	7	7	7	7	6	5	7	6	5	6	6	7	6	6	6	7	3	7	7	6
Question 7	7	4	6	5	4	5	6	5	5	7	6	6	5	5	6	5	6	6	7	7	7	5	6	5	7	5	6
Question 8	4	5	1	5	5	6	5	7	4	7	6	5	1	1	6	4	3	6	6	5	5	7	6	5	7	2	5
Question 9	5	5	7	6	2	5	5	6	3	7	6	4	4	5	5	1	3	6	5	7	3	6	2	7	5	5	5
Question 10	1	1	1	2	1	5	4	1	1	6	6	5	7	2	1	6	4	5	2	1	3	6	4	5	2	2	3
Question 11	5	5	6	6	4	6	5	7	6	7	6	6	6	5	7	5	3	6	5	6	6	7	4	5	5	6	6
Question 12	4	1	1	1	6	4	2	7	2	1	1	4	6	3	4	7	5	2	7	6	4	2	2	3	1	6	4
Question 13	5	3	1	5	5	5	5	5	4	7	6	5	5	2	5	5	4	6	7	5	5	6	6	1	5	4	5
Question 14	7	6	7	5	7	7	5	6	3	5	7	5	7	7	4	7	5	7	6	4	7	6	7	7	6	6	6
Question 15	7	5	6	6	1	5	5	7	7	7	7	7	6	7	6	5	7	5	7	7	6	7	7	5	7	7	6
Question 16	3	3	1	1	3	5	5	4	5	7	6	2	3	1	3	4	3	6	6	5	4	6	3	7	4	5	4
Question 17	5	6	7	7	6	4	4	7	2	7	7	3	6	5	7	5	7	7	7	3	7	7	7	4	7	7	6
Question 18	2	3	3	4	1	4	5	6	4	7	5	4	3	2	4	4	3	6	7	4	4	7	5	4	4	5	4
Question 19	3	6	7	7	4	4	5	7	4	7	7	5	7	7	7	4	5	6	7	6	6	7	7	7	4	7	6
Question 20	2	5	7	4	7	5	2	7	7	1	2	3	7	4	7	7	6	2	3	4	5	3	1	7	2	7	5
Question 21	6	6	7	7	3	6	4	7	7	7	7	6	6	7	6	6	6	7	7	3	7	7	5	7	7	4	6
Question 22	4	5	7	3	1	4	2	1	4	1	2	3	6	5	6	3	5	4	1	7	4	2	6	7	2	5	4
Question 23	3	5	5	7	6	6	4	7	2	1	7	5	7	6	6	5	6	7	5	2	6	6	7	4	7	7	5
Question 24	4	5	6	6	7	5	4	7	2	2	7	5	7	4	7	5	6	7	4	2	7	7	4	5	7	7	5
Question 25	2	1	4	5	4	4	3	2	1	1	6	3	6	3	4	4	5	3	1	2	5	7	7	6	5	7	4
Question 26	5	2	2	7	2	3	2	1	4	1	1	2	6	2	3	7	1	2	1	4	2	1	5	6	3	7	3
Question 27	3	2	1	1	1	4	1	2	2	1	1	2	4	1	5	4	1	3	5	6	1	1	1	6	3	3	3
Question 28	2	5	1	5	4	3	3	1	5	7	7	6	6	4	6	4	2	6	1	4	5	6	7	3	3	7	4
Question 29	7	5	7	7	3	5	5	7	5	7	7	6	7	6	7	7	7	5	7	5	4	7	7	5	7	4	6
Question 30	7	5	7	7	5	7	5	7	7	7	7	5	6	6	6	5	7	6	7	7	7	7	6	6	5	7	6
Question 31	2	5	4	7	3	3	4	1	7	1	7	2	7	5	1	2	6	2	1	3	5	6	1	1	4	6	4
Question 32	1	1	1	1	4	5	2	4	1	7	6	3	5	2	1	4	3	2	1	2	3	7	6	5	3	4	3
Question 33	5	5	6	7	6	5	3	5	7	7	7	5	5	6	5	7	5	4	5	3	7	7	7	7	1	5	5
Question 34	3	7	7	1	4	5	6	5	7	4	7	3	7	7	7	5	6	4	2	2	5	6	7	6	5	7	5
Question 35	3	5	1	3	4	4	3	7	1	1	6	2	6	4	6	4	3	2	3	3	6	7	6	4	4	6	4
Question 36	4	4	2	6	5	3	4	6	4	1	7	5	6	4	5	5	4	5	4	3	6	6	4	3	6	7	5
Question 37	1	3	1	1	3	3	2	1	5	1	1	1	6	1	4	3	1	3	1	4	2	1	1	7	1	5	2
Question 38	2	2	5	1	2	7	4	6	7	7	1	1	7	1	6	2	2	2	3	6	1	1	4	7	1	5	4
Question 39	4	3	6	3	7	4	3	5	3	4	5	6	5	3	7	4	3	2	3	5	7	6	3	5	5	7	5
Question 40	3	6	6	3	5	5	3	1	2	1	6	2	6	6	5	4	5	2	1	1	6	6	5	7	3	7	4
Question 41	1	6	3	7	7	5	5	3	7	1	6	2	6	4	7	3	5	2	7	3	5	6	7	4	3	7	5
Question 42	3	7	1	2	5	5	2	5	4	1	7	3	7	4	6	2	3	5	1	5	5	6	4	7	4	7	4
Question 43	7	4	7	7	4	5	6	7	7	1	7	6	5	6	3	3	4	6	4	4	7	7	7	4	6	7	5
Question 44	5	4	7	7	7	5	3	7	5	1	7	6	7	5	6	5	5	5	7	3	6	7	7	2	7	6	5

Appendix C   Failing students' responses to the questionnaire (11 students)

Respondent	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Average
Grade	40%	49%	36%	48%	48%	35%	46%	36%	48%	47%	32%	
Question 1	4	4	4	4	4	7	4	4	4	5	1	4
Question 2	4	1	4	1	1	1	4	7	1	5	4	3
Question 3	7	4	1	7	7	4	1	1	4	5	1	4
Question 4	7	5	4	7	7	7	7	4	7	7	4	6
Question 5	4	4	4	7	5	5	7	4	5	7	4	5
Question 6	4	2	5	4	3	6	7	4	6	4	7	5
Question 7	4	3	3	7	5	3	7	4	5	4	4	4
Question 8	1	1	6	3	7	7	4	4	4	7	7	5
Question 9	1	1	1	3	2	3	7	7	3	6	4	3
Question 10	3	1	7	7	7	7	4	7	4	7	7	6
Question 11	4	2	5	7	2	2	7	7	6	6	4	5
Question 12	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
Question 13	1	1	4	1	1	1	7	7	2	4	1	3
Question 14	3	1	5	1	3	7	4	1	4	1	4	3
Question 15	3	1	5	7	7	7	7	7	4	3	7	5
Question 16	4	1	6	2	1	1	7	1	7	4	4	3
Question 17	4	2	3	2	4	2	7	4	5	4	7	4
Question 18	1	1	4	1	1	3	4	4	4	4	5	3
Question 19	4	1	6	4	1	4	4	7	5	3	4	4
Question 20	4	1	1	5	7	1	1	4	1	3	1	3
Question 21	4	1	3	3	7	1	7	7	6	6	7	5
Question 22	7	4	5	7	7	1	1	1	1	7	1	4
Question 23	7	2	2	7	6	5	4	1	4	7	7	5
Question 24	4	2	5	6	4	6	4	4	4	4	4	4
Question 25	7	2	6	6	6	2	4	7	1	4	7	5
Question 26	4	7	2	7	7	7	1	4	1	7	5	5
Question 27	7	4	4	4	2	1	1	4	1	4	1	3
Question 28	4	2	5	3	7	2	4	7	7	5	1	4
Question 29	4	1	6	7	7	7	4	4	4	7	7	5
Question 30	7	1	7	6	7	3	7	7	7	7	7	6
Question 31	4	1	7	1	1	1	1	1	7	3	7	3
Question 32	4	3	3	4	6	7	4	4	7	4	7	5
Question 33	2	1	1	4	1	4	4	4	4	3	1	3
Question 34	6	2	6	4	6	1	1	7	1	3	7	4
Question 35	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	4	2
Question 36	3	1	5	3	1	3	4	4	4	5	4	3
Question 37	4	7	2	4	5	1	1	7	1	5	7	4
Question 38	4	7	5	5	4	3	4	1	4	4	5	4
Question 39	4	1	6	5	6	3	4	4	4	4	4	4
Question 40	5	1	1	1	3	7	4	4	4	3	7	4
Question 41	3	1	3	4	6	4	1	7	1	4	4	3
Question 42	3	1	5	1	2	1	7	4	1	3	7	3
Question 43	4	2	7	2	6	4	7	7	4	4	1	4
Question 44	3	1	6	4	2	1	4	4	1	4	7	3

Appendix D   Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire in Different Components

The following scales and items represent the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) that was used in this study to measure students' motivational beliefs. The numbers next to the items reflect the item's actual position on the questionnaire.

A. Self-Efficacy
2. Compared with other students in this class I expect to do well.
6. I'm certain I can understand the ideas taught in this course.
8. I expect to do very well in this class.
9. Compared with others in this class, I think I'm a good student.
11. I am sure I can do an excellent job on the problems and tasks assigned for this class.
13. I think I will receive a good grade in this class.
16. My study skills are excellent compared with others in this class.
18. Compared with other students in this class I think I know a great deal about the subject.
19. I know that I will be able to learn the material for this class.

B. Intrinsic Value
1. I prefer class work that is challenging so I can learn new things.
4. It is important for me to learn what is being taught in this class.
5. I like what I am learning in this class.
7. I think I will be able to use what I learn in this class in other classes.
10. I often choose paper topics I will learn something from even if they require more work.
14. Even when I do poorly on a test I try to learn from my mistakes.
15. I think that what I am learning in this class is useful for me to know.
17. I think that what we are learning in this class is interesting.
21. Understanding this subject is important to me.

C. Test Anxiety
3. I am so nervous during a test that I cannot remember facts I have learned.
12. I have an uneasy, upset feeling when I take a test.
20. I worry a great deal about tests.
22. When I take a test I think about how poorly I am doing.

D. Cognitive Strategy Use
23. When I study for a test, I try to put together the information from class and from the book.
24. When I do homework, I try to remember what the teacher said in class so I can answer the questions correctly.
26. It is hard for me to decide what the main ideas are in what I read.
28. When I study I put important ideas into my own words.
29. I always try to understand what the teacher is saying even if it doesn't make sense.
30. When I study for a test I try to remember as many facts as I can.
31. When studying, I copy my notes over to help me remember material.
34. When I study for a test I practice saying the important facts over and over to myself.
36. I use what I have learned from old homework assignments and the textbook to do new assignments.
39. When I am studying a topic, I try to make everything fit together.
40. When I'm reading I stop once in a while and go over what I have read.
41. When I read materials for this class, I say the words over and over to myself to help me remember.
42. I outline the chapters in my book to help me study.
43. I work hard to get a good grade even when I don't like a class.
44. When reading I try to connect the things I am reading about with what I already know.

E. Self-Regulation
25. I ask myself questions to make sure I know the material I have been studying.
27. When work is hard I either give up or study only the easy parts.
32. I work on practice exercises and answer end of chapter questions even when I don't have to.
33. Even when study materials are dull and uninteresting, I keep working until I finish.
35. Before I begin studying I think about the things I will need to do to learn.
38. I find that when the teacher is talking I think of other things and don't really listen to what is being said.

Source: Pintrich & DeGroot (1990)

Appendix E   Interview Questions

1. How do you find the students' motivational level for both classes?
2. Have you tried (any methods) to change it?
3. What would you do/ or suggest to improve unmotivated students' motivation level in class?

Appendix F Interview Responses

1. How do you find the students' motivational level for both classes?

Well, let me split them into two separate parts to answer your question.
For the good ones: Since they are in A class, most of them would be able to understand the teaching effortlessly and always push themselves to work harder as to keep up with others. They are always keen to learn something new for them and find things that they have already known rather boring.

The weak learners: The students think that it is hard for them to learn the language simply because they couldn't understand, some of them don't speak a word of English which personally I find unacceptable and not happy. Most of the time I think they just don't see the point of learning up the language since they plan to be in a Chinese society, which I think is miseducated.

2. Have you tried (any methods) to change it?

(Excellent students): I don't really have to try something to motivate them except to make the topics more interesting and fun to learn, on top of the usual grammar & vocabulary stuffs.

(Failing students): I have always shown them the importance to conquer their fear of opening their mouths and speak/talk, just because they are afraid of making mistakes. As long as they always try to say something, rather than lift up their shoulders and say nothing, then I'm okay. I have to persuade, okay, maybe force them to do some work just to show them that they are capable of doing the tasks given. I have to use other interesting approaches (relating the topics to things they are familiar with) to teach the topic or subject, just to "wake them up" sometimes.

3. What would you do or suggest to improve unmotivated students' motivation level in class?

(Excellent students): For these students, I would suggest something more challenging like split them into groups and let them compete among themselves, which indirectly will force them to push themselves to have better achievements. They are smart students, so things they already know would bore them easily. Nevertheless, there are some who need me to sit and talk to them personally, find out the problems. Normally I would tell them some stories and perhaps the moral behind them, just to capture their attention and make them understand the importance of learning a language/subject, for their future.

(Failing students): I think make them aware of what difficulties they would face in the future when they step into the society, and when they would regret for not paying attention and learn up the language when they were supposed to. Tell them by learning up the language would give them a better opportunity for a better future/life.