

## Chinese students' motivation for learning German and French in an intensive non-degree programme

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Received: 15 December 2020 / Accepted: 5 April 2021

**Abstract.** This paper reports on a mixed method study that examined the motivation of 121 students in a 1-year intensive language course in German or French at a Chinese university. Drawing on Dörnyei's (2009) theory of the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), a survey was conducted to explore their motivation to learn German or French. Regression analyses revealed that learning experience and promotion-focused instrumentality were the predictors for the German learners' intended learning effort, while ideal L2 self was the predictor for the French learners' motivation. Furthermore, ought-to self, culture/community interest and prevention-focused instrumentality were excluded in both regression models. In addition, 17 participants' qualitative data in the interviews suggested that most of them had lower expectations for the value of German or French than for the value of English in improving one's employability. Instead, they were much more oriented to learn and appreciate the cultural values of these languages. The results provided insight into the complexity of motivation to learn Languages Other than English (LOTEs) in the university context in China, and suggested future direction for research on LOTE learning motivation.

**Keywords:** Motivation, German learning, French learning, China, L2MSS

### [ch]中国大学生德语和法语学习动机研究：以非学位强化课程为例

**摘要：**本研究以Dörnyei (2009)的二语动机自我系统理论(L2MSS)为框架，采用混合研究法，调查了121名参加一年制德语或法语强化语言课程的中国大学生，探究他们学习德语或法语的动机。回归分析显示，德语学习动机的预测变量是学习体验和提升型工具动机，而理想二语自我则为法语学习的主要动机因素。应该二语自我、文化兴趣和预防型工具动机均未进入回归模型。17名参与者的访谈数据表明，大多数学生认为德语或法语在提升就业机会方面的作用不及英语；他们学习小语种，更是因为看重其文化价值。研究结果揭示了中国大学生学习小语种动机的复杂性，并提出了未来小语种学习动机的研究方向。

**关键词：**动机、德语学习、法语学习、中国、二语动机自我系统

**How to cite:** Chen, Yu 陈宇, Zhao, Dan 赵丹, Shen, Qi 沈骑 (2021) Chinese Students' motivation to learn German and French in an intensive non-degree programme. *Círculo de Lingüística Aplicada a la Comunicación* 86, 81-92, <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/clac.75497>.

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## 1. Introduction

L2 learning motivation has always attracted significant attention in language learning and acquisition research (Riemer, 2016). However, the majority (73%) of recent studies have focussed on English as a foreign/second language (EFL/ESL), and almost all in Asian settings aimed at English learning (Boo et al., 2015: 151). The dominance of English as a preferred L2 has resulted in a severe imbalance of research into student motivations to learn a second language other than English. The discrepancy between investigations of L2 motivations for English and other languages may also partly explain the leading role English has taken as a global lingua franca, since the proper motivations to encourage the learning of languages other than English (LOTEs) in Mainland China are vastly under-explored. The insufficient data available at present emphasises the pressing need for empirical research on LOTE motivation.

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In mainland China, the teaching and learning of LOTEs have been accorded increasing importance due to the Chinese government's commitment to implementing the "Belt and Road Initiative" since 2013 (Gao & Zheng, 2019). The Belt and Road Initiative, which features cooperation in various domains, involves 64 non-anglophone nations. In this context, the importance of an LOTE-speaking workforce is increasingly appreciated by the authorities. In response to this demand, a series of policies were issued by the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) to strengthen LOTE education in China's secondary and tertiary institutions (Gao & Zheng, 2019), leading to a substantial growth of LOTE-oriented courses and majors (Han et al., 2019). From 2016 to 2019 the total number of LOTE degree programmes approved by the MOE increased substantially, rising by 71 to reach 161 in total (Shen, 2019). In the meantime, a project is being conducted at selected universities to pilot compulsory LOTE learning by non-philological major students.

In view of the rising number of LOTE learners in China and the absence of relevant studies in this particular context, we believe that the LOTE motivation of Chinese university students deserves further research. Drawing on the L2 motivational self system (L2MSS; Dörnyei, 2009), we conducted a mixed method study on Chinese university students' motivation for learning German or French by addressing the following question:

What are the motivation characteristics among Chinese undergraduate students of a non-foreign language major learning LOTEs?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS)

Motivation research has always been one of the key topics of foreign language learning/teaching research. Intrinsic and extrinsic factors exert substantial influences on learners' L2-motivation. Such studies, using different approaches and paradigms, are mostly empirically driven, with theories and analytical frameworks borrowed from psychology and language acquisition. Language learners have long been theorised to be motivated to study languages for instrumental (e.g. to secure good jobs and lucrative salary) and integrative (e.g. to integrate into a new culture) reasons (Gardner, 2006). Gardner's influential dichotomy of instrumental and integrative orientations was derived from motivational research in bilingual contexts (e.g. Francophone Canada), where learners' integrative motivation was accorded higher attention by academia. In the face of globalisation however, an increasing number of studies have found that many language learners do not learn English in order to integrate into communities of native-speakers of English. In fact, instrumental orientation becomes the predominant motivator. Admittedly, a passion for the nation and culture related to the target language is an important driver in language learning, but it should not be considered the only decisive factor.

Against this backdrop, Dörnyei proposed a L2MSS to explore language learning motivation. L2MSS is based on the possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) from motivational psychology. It shifts the focus of motivation research from externally defined target language speakers' communities to language learners' visions of self. The L2MSS model contains three components, namely ideal L2 self, ought-to self, and language learning experiences (Dörnyei, 2009). According to the L2MSS, everyone has an aspiration for the ideal state of their future. If L2 is a part of it, this is called the individual's ideal L2 self. Ought-to L2 self suggests that someone learns a foreign language in order to meet the expectations of others or avoid negative consequences. In such an identification process, L2 motivation and intended learning effort are stimulated once the learner discovers any discrepancy between the real self and the aspired ideal self. The ideal L2 self, L2-specific expectations of the learner's future image, measures one's desire to be assimilated into the L2 community. Conversely, the ought-to L2 self assesses the learner's attitude towards others' expectations of their language learning, i.e. whether it fulfils expectations and obligations from others or society (e.g. Dörnyei, 2009; Taguchi et al., 2009). L2 learning experience is associated with past and present learning experience (such as teacher, curriculum, materials, peers etc.).

The theorisation of the L2MSS has been empirically validated across various contexts such as EFL/ESL learning in Sweden (Sylvén & Thompson, 2015), Turkey (Thompson & Erdil-Moody, 2016), the United States (Thompson, 2017), Iran (Papi & Teimouri, 2012), Korea (Kim, 2012), Pakistan (Islam et al., 2013) and China (You & Dörnyei, 2016). Most research has shown the ideal L2 self as a strong predictor for motivated learning behaviour (e.g. Yashima et al., 2017). Research has also identified that learning experience contributes to intended learning efforts (e.g. Papi, 2010), with explanatory power varying in different studies (e.g. Csizér & Lukas, 2010; Huang, 2019). For ought-to self, however, previous studies have reported inconsistent findings on whether it contributes to motivational behaviour. In some studies, the construct of ought-to self yielded limited explanatory power in relation to variance in criterion measures (e.g. Papi, 2010), while some findings failed to demonstrate it reaching "acceptable" reliability (Lamb, 2012). In other studies, the ought-to self was even shown to have an inverse correlation with learners' L2 proficiency (e.g. Liu & Thompson 2018).

### 2.2. LOTE Learning Motivation

Although the L2MSS is gradually becoming the mainstream framework for research on second language learning motivation, it is still mostly aimed at English learning in the globalised environment. Whether it can be directly

transplanted into LOTE learning is controversial (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017). Compared with studies on English learning motivation which are in the ascendant, empirical research on LOTE motivation has only emerged in the last 10 years (Boo et al. 2015: 151).

Ideal self has frequently been regarded as a strong motivator in many studies concerning language learning motivation (e.g. Busse, 2013; Schmidt, 2016; Csizér & Lukács, 2010), along with other common significant factors including culture interest (Schmidt, 2016) and instrumental orientation (e.g. Maleki, 2016; Riemer, 2016). Findings about the ought-to self, however, are rather different. Huang et al. (2015) suggests that in Confucian-influenced societies, social role obligations may substantially affect learners' behaviour, whereas Thompson's (2017) research showed that LOTE learners of an American university rated significantly high in ideal self, but very low in ought-to self, and students learning LOTEs other than Spanish even reported a strong anti-ought-to self. Studies concerning the LOTE learning experience are limited in number, and previous research has shown it to be insignificant for Hungarian learners of German (Csizér & Lukács, 2010), but has found it to play a crucial role in motivating learning behaviour in Taiwan, China (Huang 2019).

As far as foreign language education in China is concerned, the learning and teaching of English as a foreign language has primarily been the focus for the past three decades (Gao & Zheng, 2019). Recent years have witnessed a gradual growth in empirical research on LOTE learning, using a wide variety of methods. Studies of LOTE learning in the Chinese context combine personal foreign language learning with cultural, educational and social factors to explore the complexity of multilingual learning motivation. Evidence suggests that intercultural orientations and instrumental value (e.g. employment opportunities) are two strong motivators for Chinese LOTE learners (e.g. Lv et al., 2017; Gao & Lv, 2018; Wang & Zheng, 2019; Zheng et al., 2019). However, a study conducted by Chen et al. (2020) reveals that Master's students attending one-year French or Spanish courses questioned the usefulness of their LOTE in their imagined identity, especially its benefit for their future professional career. Hence, they tended to regard LOTE learning as part of their leisure and consumption behaviour, rather than as an investment (Chen et al., 2020). A longitudinal study of Chinese learners of Spanish suggests that it was translingual and transcultural orientation rather than instrumental orientation that played a significant role in sustaining learners' motivation in learning L3 (Zheng et al., 2020). The dominance of English exerts a negative influence on the motivation for learning an L3 (Wang & Zheng, 2019). Even for learners with a significant multilingual posture, English occupies a predominant position in their ideal L2 self (Lu et al., 2019). Ought-to self becomes a significant predictor for L3 learning only among learners possessing exceptionally strong L3 motivation (Lu et al., 2019).

Despite the recent promotion of multilingual education prescribed by the Chinese government, particularly the teaching and learning of French and German, there is still insufficient research on LOTE learners' motivation in the Chinese higher education context. In the present study, students from a government-appointed piloting university for LOTE education were selected as research participants, voluntarily taking part in a one-year intensive LOTE course in addition to their compulsory English language module. An investigation into the motivational patterns of these students not only verifies the applicability of the L2MSS theory to Chinese learners of German and French, but also provides an in-depth understanding of individual learners' perceptions of multilingualism and multilingual development, thereby enriching the research on language learning motivation.

### 3. The Study

#### 3.1. Participants and Sampling

The present study was conducted in a top-tier comprehensive university in eastern China. The intensive LOTE programme consists of two one-year courses at this university: an intensive German course and an intensive French course, with enrollees in the former divided into four parallel groups and those in the latter in a single group. According to the admission criteria of the LOTE programme, only non-senior students with an average GPA of 3.5 or higher (5 in total) are eligible to apply and gain admittance. German major students are not allowed to apply for the intensive German course. Due to the absence of a French major degree in the university, no restrictions are imposed on applicants for the intensive French course. Each language course carries 36 credits, requiring enrollees to commit to 612 hours (18 hours per week) during the academic year. Enrollees have to pay an additional tuition fee for the LOTE programme, and they are granted a one-year extension in addition to the stipulated duration of their academic studies at the university.

At the time of this study, the numbers of registered students in the German intensive course and the French intensive course were 117 and 25 respectively. 98 from the German group (84% of the students on the course) and 23 from the French group (92%) participated in the questionnaire survey. Among all the informants, 47.9% were in their fourth year, 33.1% in their third and 19% in their second. Male and female students accounted for 46.3% and 53.7% respectively of all the students surveyed. Their disciplinary backgrounds included science, engineering, medicine, arts and the humanities, economics and management and so on, among which a majority of the informants were from engineering-related disciplines, accounting for 66% of the sample. Few participants had any prior knowledge of Ger-

man or French. Few significant discrepancies were identified between the German and the French group regarding the aforementioned demographics.

### 3.2. Data Collection Procedure

The survey was carried out in two stages. The first was a questionnaire distribution administered three months after the initiation of the LOTEs courses. The three-month gap was set to allow participants to have enough experience with their LOTE learning to respond to survey questions. The questionnaire, with reference to Taguchi et al.'s (2009) Chinese version, was developed and double-checked collaboratively by researchers in terms of its feasibility. Tailored to investigate learners' LOTE motivational patterns, it was developed in Putonghua, the participants' mother tongue, and was piloted with six students from the previous year's LOTEs programme who were then excluded from the formal study (4 of them had been learning German and 2 learning French). Based on their suggestions for improvement, the questionnaire underwent four rounds of modification before it was ready for main distribution.

The researcher approached all the instructors of LOTEs courses at the end of November 2019 to explain the research and to seek assistance. With the help of the LOTEs programme instructors, the questionnaires were distributed during breaks between sessions and were returned at the scene. The questionnaire data obtained were coded and analysed using SPSS 26.0 for Windows. By comparing the statistics between the German and French groups, we attempted to identify factors influencing the motivational behaviour of these LOTE learners.

The second stage was semi-structured interviews conducted in January 2020. A total of 17 students participated in the following-up interview to probe further into their LOTE motivation, with 12 informants from the intensive German course and 5 from the intensive French course. The selection of interview participants was primarily based on the following criteria: 1) whether they were willing to participate in the follow-up interview, and 2) whether they were representative of the students sampled in the questionnaire phase in terms of gender, year of study and major subject area. The interviews lasted from 20 to 40 minutes and were conducted in Putonghua.

### 3.3. Instrument

The questionnaires prepared and used in stage 1, for both the German and French groups, were exactly the same in content except for the references to French and German, both consisting of two parts. Part I contained 38 items and employed 5-point Likert scales, with 1 being "strongly disagree" and 5 "strongly agree". The items were adopted from established motivation questionnaires (Taguchi et al., 2009) with attested validity and reliability. Part II contained five questions to collect students' background information such as gender, year of study, major, whether they had received any tutoring in the target language, and whether they had visited the countries related to the target language (mainly France and Germany in this study).

Apart from major L2MSS predictors such as ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self and learning experience, we also included both forms of instrumentality, promotion and prevention, in the questionnaire, as previous research has shown instrumentality to be an influential factor in language learning motivation (e.g. Chen et al., 2005). In addition, culture/community interest was included as an important variable for the same reason mentioned (e.g. Huang et al., 2015; Huang, 2019). As such, intended learning effort was included as a criterion measure. Predictor scales and criterion measures in the questionnaire are described below with example items.

- 1) Ideal L2 Self (5 items): the extent to which learners master the language being studied in their future self-vision. Example: 'I wish I could have a good command of X language.'
- 2) Instrumentality-Promotion (7 items): the regulation of pragmatic benefits associated with learning the language. Example: 'Being proficient in X language will help me get a good job and/or make more money.'
- 3) Culture/Community Interest (5 items): the learner's interest in learning about the culture related to the target language community. Example: 'I study X language in order to have a better understanding of the culture and art of the target language-speaking countries'
- 4) Ought-to L2 Self (5 items): learners' sense of duty and obligation towards learning the language. Example: 'My parents believe that I should learn X language.'
- 5) Instrumentality-Prevention (5 items): regulation of fears for negative consequences associated with language learning failure. Example: 'I have to study X language hard, because I may lose face if I get a low mark in the final exam.'
- 6) Learning Experience (4 items): the extent to which learners enjoy their learning experience. Example: 'I enjoy having language classes.'
- 7) Intended Learning Effort (7 items): students' self-assessment of the effort made and willingness in learning the language. Example: 'I think I'm sparing no effort in learning the language.'

Questionnaire data were coded and analysed using SPSS 26.0 for Windows. The statistics for the reliability analysis are shown in Table 1 below.



**Table 1.** Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients

	# of items	German n=98	French n=23	Total n=121
Ideal L2 Self	5	.669	.690	.671
Instrumentality-Promotion	7	.664	.782	.693
Culture/Community Interest	5	.659	.802	.704
Ought-to L2 Self	5	.611	.802	.660
Instrumentality-Prevention	5	.616	.645	.622
Learning Experience	4	.788	.903	.825
Intended Learning Effort	7	.826	.874	.836
Whole	38	.855	.929	.878

According to Table 1 above, the average Cronbach's alpha values for the subscales under both German and French groups, and for the entire sample, are higher than the acceptable value of 0.60. Learning experience was the most reliable variable, with alpha values all above 0.75 for both language groups and entire sample. On the other hand, the values of instrumentality-prevention for both groups and the entire sample were constantly lower than the other variables, with the exception of the German group, which was valued at 0.616, slightly higher than the value for ought-to L2 self within the same language group. The criterion variable, intended learning effort, had all alphas above 0.80.

Although quantitative analysis may discover general trends, it cannot capture the contextualised and situated nature of foreign language learning motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Thus, qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews to complement the results of the questionnaires. Participants were encouraged to express their viewpoints and perceptions about the following points: 1) reasons to learn the LOTE, their expected proficiency level in the LOTE, their opinion on the function of the LOTE in further academic study and in future employment; 2) whether to learn the LOTE willingly and whether they are under pressure to learn; 3) to what extent they are satisfied with the programme, instructor and the teaching and learning atmosphere; and 4) their personal assessment of the effort made in relation to LOTE learning, and their plans for further LOTE study. The demographic information of the 17 students interviewed is shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2.** Interviewees

ID	Gender	Language	Major	Year of admission
P1	M	German	Animation	2017
P2	F	German	Digital Media and Communications	2017
P3	F	German	Philosophy	2017
P4	M	German	Material Science and Engineering	2018
P5	F	German	E-information	2018
P6	F	German	Civil Engineering	2018
P7	F	German	Political Science and Public Administration	2016
P8	M	German	Civil Engineering	2016
P9	M	German	Physics	2017
P10	F	German	Surveying and Mapping Engineering	2018
P11	F	German	Traffic and Transportation Engineering	2018
P12	F	German	Accountancy	2016
P13	M	French	Civil Engineering	2018
P14	M	French	Biotechnology	2017
P15	F	French	Computer Science	2016
P16	F	French	German	2016
P17	F	French	Cultural Industries Management	2016

The content of the interview was audio-recorded and transcribed into Chinese with extracts translated into English. The translation was double-checked by all three authors and an experienced translator. Transcripts were qualitatively analysed over three rounds. In the first round we attempted to identify the themes emerging from each transcript based on the six predictor scales proposed in the L2MSS framework. Then, a second reading of the transcripts helped us to refine the identified themes to establish an in-depth understanding. Finally, we established interconnections among the themes across all the transcripts.

## 4. Results

This section reports on the findings of the current study in two parts. First, the quantitative results from the questionnaire survey are presented in the questionnaire analysis, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and regression models. Second, the qualitative results from the semi-structured interview were shown with representative extracts exhibited as supporting evidence.

### 4.1. Questionnaire results analysis

The distribution of each variable can be described using mean scores and standard deviations. A t-test reveals the discrepancies between the German and the French group. Mean scores and standard deviations of the subscales for the two language groups and the entire sample are presented in Table 3 below.

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics

	German M	n=98 SD	French M	n=23 SD	T	Whole M	n=121 SD
Ideal L2 self	3.5306	.60928	3.5565	.76979	-.174	3.5355	.63938
Instrumentality-Promotion	3.9621	.52920	3.8944	.73378	.510	3.9492	.57079
Culture/community interest	3.5878	.67949	3.9304	.84769	-2.073*	3.6529	.72331
Ought-to L2 self	2.7816	.71224	2.4087	.80787	2.202*	2.7107	.74250
Instrumentality-Prevention	3.3592	.71043	3.2783	.83282	.475	3.3438	.73222
Learning experience	4.2577	.52077	4.3152	.84348	-.418	4.2686	.59175
Intended learning effort	3.5816	.62867	3.6211	.76884	-.259	3.5891	.65428

\*Sig. (2-tailed)<0.05

It is clearly shown in the above table that learning experience had a mean score higher than 4 across the entire sample, indicating that the informants were satisfied with the curriculum design, their LOTE instructors and the learning atmosphere. This was followed by instrumentality-promotion, culture interest and ideal L2 self. The means of instrumentality-prevention and ought-to L2 self, on the other hand, ranked the lowest among the 7 variables. The t-test results revealed that the French group was significantly more interested in French culture than their German counterparts' interest in German culture, whereas students from German group were more likely to be influenced by external factors such as pressure from parents and peers. With regard to other variables, there were no significant discrepancies across the groups.

Correlation analysis can be effective in revealing the linear relationships between motivational variables and criterion measures. The results of a correlation analysis are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Correlations between predictors and criterion measure

Intended learning effort	German	French	Total
Ideal L2 self	.373**	.811**	.487**
Instrumentality-Promotion	.446**	.641**	.497**
Culture/community interest	.130	.587**	.248**
Ought-to L2 self	.131	.014	.096
Instrumentality-Prevention	.008	.093	.027
Learning experience	.475**	.676**	.533**

\*\* . at 0.01 level (2-tailed) correlation is significant

As shown in the above table, irrespective of language types, intended learning effort was found to be positively correlated with ideal L2 self, instrumentality-promotion and learning experience, with the correlation coefficients reaching the .01 significance level. However, the correlations between intended learning effort and ought-to L2 self and instrumentality-prevention were statistically non-significant. A distinct divergence was seen between the two language groups. It is noticeable that among all the variables with significant correlations, the Pearson's correlation coefficients of the French group were higher than those of the German group. The strongest linear relationship was found in the ideal L2 self scores of the French group, with a correlation coefficient reaching .811. Strong correlations with the criterion measure (greater than .6) were also found for instrumentality-promotion and learning experience, followed by culture/community interest (.587). In the German group, learning experience and instrumentality-promotion were found to produce the highest coefficients (.475 and .446 respectively), both of which were moderately correlated with the criterion measure. A comparatively weak correlation was found for ideal L2 self, while no correlation was identified for culture/community interest in the German group. This pattern is in sharp contrast with the comparable figures for the French equivalence.

In order to explore the predictive power of the chosen motivational variables, stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted. The final regression models and the entered variables are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Regression models

	German			French		
	Beta	S.E.	Std.β	Beta	S.E.	Std.β
Ideal L2 self	–	–	–	.810	.127	.811**
Instrumentality-Promotion	.461	.105	.382**	–	–	–
Culture/community interest	–	–	–	–	–	–
Ought-to L2 self	–	–	–	–	–	–
Instrumentality-Prevention	–	–	–	–	–	–
Learning experience	.405	.103	.341**	–	–	–
Adjusted $R^2$	.320			.642		

\*\* $p < 0.01$

According to Table 5, the adjusted  $R^2$  values indicated that 32% and 64.2% of the variance were accounted for by the dependent variables in the German and French groups respectively. Within the German group, significant contributors to intended learning effort included instrumentality-promotion and learning experience, which accounted for 38.2% and 34.1% of the variance in the German sample. Ideal L2 self was the only robust motivator in the French group, although its intensity was exceptionally high (Std.β=.811,  $p < 0.01$ ). Of the three main components in Dörnyei's L2 motivational self system, only ought-to L2 self was excluded by both the German and French models, indicating that German and French learners in this survey felt less pressure to meet the expectations and requirements of the outside world. Instrumentality-prevention, which also points to external influences, was absent in the final models of the two language groups. Students' interest in the target language, culture and community was not a significant motivator either, regardless of language types. German learners were clearly influenced by the self-perceived utilitarian value of the target language and their learning experience, while the language-related ideal value upheld by French learners served as a powerful catalyst for their learning behaviour regulation and sustainable motivation.

## 4.2. Interview Analysis

On the one hand, the analysis of the questionnaire data suggested marked discrepancies from previous results concerning LOTE motivation among similar populations and in a similar context. Contrary to what Huang et al. (2015) and Huang (2019) discovered, the current study reveals that ought-to L2 self was excluded as a significant predictor for the German group, and culture interest failed to play a significant role in predicting French learners' motivation. In neither group was learning experience identified as the strongest predictor. On the other hand, the statistical analysis did show differences among the two groups in terms of their motivational constructs, suggesting a need to contextualise our quantitative data to gain an in-depth understanding of the motivational characters of the LOTE learners. These findings are elaborated in the following interview analysis.

### *Ideal L2 self and culture/community interest*

The interviewees generally expressed an intention to use LOTE for communicative purposes without any specific plans to immigrate to the country where the target language is nationally spoken, suggesting a low integrative moti-

vation. Although some were explicit about their expectation for further study in the target nation and a majority were open to the possibility of overseas study in future, few had made concrete plans about whether to continue their stay in the country of the target language for occupational purposes.

Interestingly, three interviewees from the French class made it clear that they wished to be able to use French as a working language in their workplace in the future. A narrative from P16 exemplifies this:

I will probably embark on European language research in future, so sooner or later I'll have to learn (French).  
(P16)

As shown by the interview data, some students from the French group explicitly related their LOTE study to their imagined self-vision. With ambitious goals in mind, they were willing to invest time and energy in French learning. This explained why ideal L2 self was the only variable entering the final model in the regression analysis, accounting for 64% of the variance, whereas no such trend was identified for the German group.

Interviewees from the French group demonstrated an interest in French culture, involving French philosophy, literature, music, luxury superbrands etc., whereas those from the German group were more inclined to associate German learning with self-advancement. Several German learners even expressed their regret at failing to secure a place in the French group due to the fierce competition and their insufficient GPA. Consequently, some had to choose German as an alternative. Hence, it is understandable that the French group scored significantly higher than the German group in quantitative analysis in terms of cultural interest.

### *Instrumentality-Promotion*

There was a consensus among the students that LOTEs would provide them with more options in terms of their future employment and overseas study. Nonetheless, compared with English, a majority of the interviewees agreed that the pragmatic value of LOTEs were relatively limited in a multilingual working environment. Those from the German group in particular stressed that “English is a must-have skill while German is optional”, as the former is the working language in most enterprises characterised by multilingualism. Likewise, when asked about “which programme to choose in terms of medium of instruction while studying in LOTE countries”, students tended to choose programmes using English as the medium of instruction (EMI) for short-term academic exchange, although they preferred LOTE-oriented programmes to EMI when it came to long-term study. Interview data from P4 shows this motivational construct:

Of course I will choose EMI, but more options are available if I understand German. For example, I can also choose courses that are only taught in German. (With this language skill) [m]y opportunities for employment are also broadened, and German is also crucially important for assimilation into the local community. If I choose to work in China, the chance of using German is slim, but there is no downside of possessing this additional language skill anyway. (P4)

It is clear from the account above that “Englishisation” is not only prevalent in transnational companies, but is also actively promoted as an approach to the internationalisation of education in LOTE nations. Despite this, and irrespective of their future plans, the interviewees generally acknowledged the value of LOTEs, which were not necessarily for the opportunities they offered in overseas study or employment, but more for the enhancement of their knowledge, outlook and comprehensive literacy. Most of them argued that languages are not only a tool for communication, but also carriers of intangible culture heritage. By learning a language, one equips oneself with an intercultural perspective, and an in-depth understanding of the culture and people of the target countries.

A special instrumental orientation shared by several German learners is worth-noticing. They were learning German merely because of the university's prestigious reputation in learning and teaching the language, and for the links it had established with Germany. Although they were unclear about the practical utility of German, they were aware of the benefit of LOTEs in terms of personal advancement. This opinion was widely observed among participants who had neither a clear prospect for their future profession nor any specific plans for overseas education, which also verifies the results that instrumentality-promotion is the most robust motivational predictor in the German group.

### *Ought-to L2 self*

The mean score for ought-to L2 self was below 3, the lowest among all the variables. It was not correlated with any dependent variable and was excluded from the regression model. This is an indication that the students did not choose to attend the intensive LOTE programmes to meet external expectations (from family members, teachers or friends) or to follow others' lead. All the students interviewed appeared to have been self-motivated to sign up for the intensive programmes. They had all discussed with their parents regarding the one-year extension of their study duration. Interview data from participant P7 demonstrates this:



I made up my mind myself, and they (parents) would support me in either case. They always respect my decision without any interference. I think most of the parents are really open-minded. (P7)

The above narrative suggests that parents generally leave the decisions up to their children, and are supportive when it comes to satisfying their child's appetite for knowledge and skills. Students decide for themselves what to study, and are well aware of their right to do so. Thus, it can be concluded that parental expectation was not a motivator for these students. Even those who agreed with the questionnaire statement "my parents believe that I should learn German" reported their free will in attending the programme, without any coercion from external forces. Likewise, their parents' attitudes towards them joining the programme were found generally to be in line with those held by the students themselves.

Resulting from historical and academic ties with Germany, the university in which the present study was conducted boasts a high standard in teaching and learning this language. In such a milieu, both students and parents would be eager to take advantage of this to facilitate German learning. This may be the reason why a higher mean score for ought-to L2 self was observed in the German group than in the French group.

### *Instrumentality-Prevention*

We investigated the students' attitudes towards their final marks in the LOTE courses in order to check their alignment with the corresponding quantitative data. A number of interviewees expressed their opinions on the LOTE programmes' final marks:

(I think) the credit is important. I got two Bs, which led to a deduction of my GPA by 0.1, and that really hurts. However, I am not regretful as I have learnt a lot. I think the process of learning and what you have learnt during LOTE study matters more than the results you get. (P17)

Due to the considerable academic credit attached to the intensive LOTE programmes, the final result awarded for the programme usually influences a student's GPA significantly. Therefore, learners seeking postgraduate recommendations or overseas study opportunities were relatively sensitive to this. However, the interviewees were generally observed not to be overly anxious about their course credit. Drawing on the qualitative data, we can see that notwithstanding the status of the final marks, the students apparently attached more weight to their learning experience and actual knowledge gains, so long as the credits earned was within an acceptable range. Likewise, the parents of the students would be satisfied once they had devoted enough effort to their LOTE study, regardless of the academic results. This data further explains why the mean score for preventive instrumentality (3.34) ranked the second lowest among the six motivational predictors and was excluded from the regression model.

### *Learning experience*

In terms of learning experience, the mean score was over 4.2, the highest among all the independent variables. In the interview session, all the interviewees from the French group were satisfied with the intensive French course and its instructors. However, interviewees from the German group, as well as expressing their satisfaction, voiced their concerns about the challenging nature of the course:

(I) enjoy it a lot! The process of learning is especially fun but challenging indeed. If only there weren't so many tests and assessments, I would enjoy it more! (P11)

The inherent difficulty of German learning, as well as the regular tests in the learning process, exerted negative influences on the learning experience for the German group. Some felt under pressure due to the multiple exams across the one-year duration of the course. This explained why learning experience is one of the motivational predictors for the German group in the regression model.

### *Intended learning effort*

Interview data regarding intended learning effort extracted from both groups is generally in line with that gathered in the questionnaire survey. In general, students were willing to invest time and energy in LOTE learning, probably due to the considerable teaching hours and credits attached to the intensive LOTE programmes, as subject P2 reported:

(I) will spend more time on German and improve my learning method when necessary. (P2)

Most interviewees who were unsatisfied with their achievements had reflected on their LOTE learning and were about to improve their methodology. Nevertheless, several from the German group reported insufficient time and energy for their language learning because of the burdens from other courses.

## 5. Discussion

Employing Dörnyei's (2005; 2009) L2MSS as an analytical framework, we have identified that the motivation for students to learn LOTE in a Chinese university context is contingent upon a number of factors. While our French group was motivated by ideal-L2 self, their German counterparts were influenced by instrumentality-promotion and learning experience.

First, the results of the present study lend support to Dörnyei's L2MSS model. In three major L2MSS components, the ought-to L2 self was rated the weakest motivational predictor regardless of language types, and it neither correlated with nor was a significant indicator of the criterion measure. This finding was a direct contradiction to a previous study conducted in China (Huang et al., 2015), in which the significance of ought-to L2 self or identification with social role obligations was prominent, and was even named a "Chinese imperative" (Chen et al., 2005). The participants in the present study were generally found to have a strong self-will and self-determination in attending the intensive LOTE programmes for second foreign language learning, rather than to satisfy societal, educational or familial expectations. Since participation in the intensive LOTE programmes leads to an extension of one year in their undergraduate study, students typically discussed with their parents whether to join the programme, and were generally granted permission by and support from their parents. Most of the interviewees reported an intergenerational relationship involving equality and mutual trust between themselves and their parents. The latter rarely interfered in their children's academic studies, and believed them to be responsible for their own decisions. In such a supportive family atmosphere the students were able to treat their academic achievements with a relatively relaxed attitude, and more importance was attached to the learning process than to the final scores. Therefore the instrumentality-prevention variables, which were closely related to ought-to L2 self, were excluded from our regression models. In addition, the explanatory power of the ought-to L2 self was insufficient in the entire model, which is consistent with the findings from some large-scale motivation surveys of (Mainland) Chinese English learners (You & Dörnyei, 2016; Liu, 2015).

Second, the participants were found to have chosen their target language groups based on the perceived usefulness of a particular language for their disciplinary learning and future development. For instance, students majoring in philosophy were more likely to choose German because they believed that this language would facilitate their reading of famous philosophical literature in the original German, while those majoring in cultural industry management tended to study French because the relevant literature was mostly in that language. In addition, the participants regarded LOTE qualifications more as an additional qualification, an icing on the cake, in terms of their future career path. In other words, they were well aware of the dominance of English in their future career advancement, but they also sought more opportunities and possibilities that might be brought by learning LOTE. Therefore, LOTE learners generally choose EMI programmes for short-term academic exchange projects, while preferring LOTE-based programmes to EMI for long-term stays abroad in order to become better integrated into the local community.

In addition, the instrumental view of LOTE taken by these students concentrated more on the cultural value of the languages, and the students generally believed that they would gain a more in-depth understanding of the culture and community by learning the target language; Schmidt (2016) called this a "humanistisches Bildungsmotiv" (humanistic educational motive). In addition, LOTE learning was also seen as a challenge, serving as an approach to building up personal confidence, demonstrating capability, and seeking emotional fulfillment. Therefore, to a certain extent the learning of LOTE is not only an effort to develop personal comprehensive literacy, but also consumption in terms of fulfilling one's purpose of socialisation and achievement (Chen et al., 2020).

Finally, interesting differences emerged between the two languages in the final regression models. The only predictor of learning motivation for the French group was ideal L2 self, but it was a very powerful one. In other words, a clear blueprint for the use of L2 in imagined future self effectively prompted these learners' autonomy in their ongoing foreign language learning. There were two factors in the German group. The justifying power of instrumentality-promotion for the dependent variable was found to be slightly higher than that of learning experience, but significantly lower than that of ideal self in the French group. The main driving force of the learning behaviours of the German learners was more strongly derived from the self-perceived instrumental value of the target language and their present learning enjoyment. In general, this result was found to be consistent with those identified in previous large-scale surveys: ideal self was the most powerful predictor in surveys conducted by Busse (2013) and Csizér & Lukács (2010), while learning experience or learning attitude explained the most variance in intended effort in You & Dörnyei (2016) and Huang (2019). There were a number of possible reasons for the obvious difference between the two LOTE groups in this study. For example, the GPAs of the intensive French class students were significantly higher than those of their peers in the German class. The latter might therefore face a greater challenge in fulfilling the course requirements. This was supported by some responses from the German group, who reported a negative learning experience due to the considerable difficulty of the intensive German course. In addition, the university in which the students studied had strong German instruction and Sino-German academic exchange traditions, which might lead to an instrumental inclination among the students.

## 6. Conclusion

The present study explores the motivational patterns of LOTE learners at a major Chinese university. Drawing on Dörnyei's L2MSS (L2 Motivational Self System), we attempted to sketch their motivations from the perspective

of the learners' vision of self, rather than their externally targeted language communities. Based on questionnaire and interview results, the study revealed diverse and complex motivational constructs among these LOTE learners in a Chinese university context. To begin with, English was overwhelmingly viewed as a necessary skill for work, whereas LOTEs were generally regarded as optional, a valuable but non-essential addition to English in the job market. Participants commonly saw LOTE learning as an investment of effort to develop their personal comprehensive literacy, a cultivation of interest, a way to broaden horizons and a means to seek emotional fulfilment and satisfaction. In addition, it was revealed that language learners' motivations were neither externally imposed nor associated with any salient obligation beliefs. Participants generally valued their actual language gains and the process of learning more than their academic outcomes. Besides, possible discrepancies in motivational constructs were identified between the two groups. While ideal L2 self explained most of the variance in the French group, instrumentality-promotion and learning experience were the two most robust motivational predictors for the German group.

Some limitations of the current study should be noted however. Although the sampling covered most of the members in the two LOTEs groups, the group sizes were insufficient in number, particularly in the French group. Despite this, the results of the current study demonstrate that L2MSS is applicable in sketching the motivational constructs of LOTE learners in the university context. Besides, it further confirms the complexity of LOTE learners' motivation and its impact on motivated behaviour (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005). In order to better understand the motivational patterns of LOTE learners, more research is needed in diversified local contexts and at academic institutions of different levels. Future research may also shed light on the relationship between English and LOTE motivation, and how the motivational characteristics of LOTE learners change with shifts in their social identities over time.

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