



# Motivation and International Posture among College Students in China

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**Abstract**— *This study investigates the relationship between motivation and International Posture among Chinese college students learning English. Examining the Ideal Self, Ought-to Self, Learning Experience, and four aspects of International Posture, the research reveals distinct patterns. Students display stronger motivation when aligned with their ideal language self but are less motivated by external pressures and classroom experience. While showing moderate interest in international activities, they express less enthusiasm for inter-group interactions. Notably, a significant and positive correlation exists between motivation and international posture. These findings emphasize the need to cultivate intrinsic motivation and enhance international engagement within language education, empowering students for effective global communication.*



**Keywords**—*Motivation, International Posture, College students in Chinese universities*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Motivation's profound impact on language learning outcomes has long been recognized in the field of second language acquisition. Learners who are motivated exhibit increased participation, actively engage in learning, and achieve higher levels of proficiency. As the world becomes increasingly globalized, the concept of international posture has emerged as a pivotal factor, reflecting learners' attitudes toward international affairs and intercultural interaction. This notion holds immense importance in designing effective language learning programs and promoting intercultural communication.

Motivation, a pivotal factor in language learning success, remains a subject of ongoing scholarly exploration. Diverse definitions of motivation have emerged, encompassing both internal drivers and external pressures. The history of second language motivation research reveals distinct eras, from the social-psychological perspective, dominating the first phase (Gardner & Lambert, 1959-1990) to the cognitive-situated period in the 1990s (Boo et al., 2015), culminating in the contemporary socio-dynamic framework of the 21st

century (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). Within this context, the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) model emerged, recognizing the interplay of the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience as crucial components shaping learners' motivation (Dörnyei, 2009).

The Ideal L2 Self embodies intrinsic aspirations, while the Ought-to L2 Self reflects external expectations. These dimensions interact with the L2 Learning Experience, influenced by classroom dynamics, to impact motivation (Martinović & Burić, 2021). Research has shown that the L2MSS model offers a nuanced comprehension of motivation's complex dynamics, transcending the limitations of integrativeness and acknowledging the broader international context of language use (Dörnyei, 2005). Understanding these motivational elements deepen our insight into language learners' behaviors and offers a comprehensive framework for fostering effective language education (Wen, 2022).

Additionally, studies have spotlighted the role of International Posture in shaping learners' attitudes and their inclination to engage with diverse cultures (Yashima, 2002). As a comprehensive framework, the concept of

International Posture elucidates learners' attitudes and orientations toward the global community, profoundly influencing their motivation and communicative behaviors in language acquisition (Peng et al., 2015).

In an era where English serves as a lingua franca for cross-border communication, comprehending learners' international posture has gained heightened significance for effective language education and fostering intercultural competence (Véliz-Campos et al., 2020). Acknowledging the weight of international posture enables educators to tailor instructional strategies to cater to the multifaceted needs and aspirations of language learners within the dynamic context of an interconnected world (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2020).

The considerable impact of international posture on learners' willingness to communicate in a second language and their overall language proficiency has been underscored by research (Botes et al., 2020). This construct nurtures affirmative attitudes towards global encounters and intercultural communication, motivating learners to actively participate in language learning and international interactions (Ulu et al., 2015). By acknowledging and nurturing learners' motivations to engage with the global community, language educators can cultivate a supportive and culturally inclusive learning environment (Yashima, 2009).

While extensive research has explored these constructs, particularly within varied contexts, the examination of motivation and international posture among college students in China, especially against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact, remains an underdeveloped area.

This study aims to bridge this gap by investigating the levels of motivation and international posture among college students in China enrolled in College English courses. Through this exploration, the study endeavors to shed light on students' language learning attitudes and their readiness for intercultural experiences. Furthermore, this research seeks to contribute context-specific insights to the second-language acquisition literature, focusing on the unique Chinese college student population.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The research design employed a cross-sectional approach. Data collection involved administering the self-report questionnaire to the participants. Descriptive and correlation analyses were conducted to explore the nature and relationships between motivation and international posture.

### 2.1 Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 565 college students from various majors and year levels. Using a purposive sampling method, they were recruited from two comprehensive universities in China. The sample size was determined to ensure adequate representation and generalizability of findings across different disciplines and academic levels.

### 2.2 Instruments

This study investigated the motivation and international posture of college students in China. To assess the participants' motivation and international posture, a self-report questionnaire was used. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: gathering the profile of the respondents, assessing student motivation, and evaluating student international posture. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement on a Likert scale. The student motivation part contained 25 items, focusing on the ideal self, ought to self, and learning experience. Students' international posture was measured using 20 items, covering inter-group approach-avoidance tendency, interest in international vocation or activities, interest in international news, and having things to communicate to the world.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Students' Motivation

Based on the result, this section conducts an analysis of students' motivation concerning their English language learning journey. The investigation centers on three fundamental dimensions: Ideal Self, Ought-to Self, and Learning Experience. A succinct overview of these dimensions, accompanied by their corresponding composite mean scores and Verbal Interpretation (VI) classifications, is presented in Table 1. The VI scale facilitates a nuanced comprehension of the degree to which students concur or dissent with the statements within each dimension.

The Grand Composite Mean of 2.32 indicates an overall average motivation level across all key areas, suggesting a tendency toward disagreement. The VI also reflects a level of disagreement in all key areas, indicating a general lack of strong motivation among students.

The results reveal that students' ideal self-motivation for learning English, with a composite mean of 2.45, is relatively stronger compared to other areas. This suggests that students have a greater desire to use English fluently, engage in conversations with foreigners, and envision themselves living abroad. Studies have shown that the ideal L2 self plays a significant role in motivating learners,

as it aligns with their personal goals and aspirations for language proficiency (Martinović & Burić, 2021).

*Table 1: Summary Table on Students' Motivation in Terms of Different L2MSS Components*

Key Result Areas	Composite Mean	VI	Rank
Ideal Self	2.45	Disagree	1
Ought-to Self	2.31	Disagree	2
Learning Experience	2.20	Disagree	3
Grand Composite Mean	2.32	Disagree	

Legend: 3.50-4.00=Strongly Agree; 2.50-3.49=Agree; 1.50-2.49=Disagree; 1.00-1.49=Strongly Disagree

On the other hand, students' ought-to self motivation, with a composite mean of 2.31, exhibits a slightly lower level of disagreement. Ought-to self motivation is driven by external expectations, such as societal or parental pressure to learn English. While it ranks second among the key areas, it still indicates a moderate level of motivation. The college admission exam, which includes English as a major topic, adds pressure on college students to perform well in the subject, which may diminish their motivation and naturally lowers their ought-to self motivation (Zhou, 2022). Students may find greater motivation and engagement in learning English when it aligns with their aspirations and goals rather than fulfilling external obligations.

In terms of the learning experience, students express relatively lower motivation, with a composite mean of 2.20. This includes factors related to the classroom atmosphere, enjoyment of learning English, anticipation, excitement, and the perceived impact of difficulty levels. It ranks third among the key areas, indicating lower motivation compared to the other two aspects. Creating a nurturing and liberating educational setting that empowers students to actively control their learning process can enhance the learning experience and improve motivation (Wen, 2022).

Overall, the findings suggest that students' motivation towards learning English is relatively stronger when aligned with their ideal self and weaker when influenced by external expectations or their learning experience. Addressing the learning experience and enhancing positive aspects of English classes may potentially improve students' motivation and engagement in the language learning process

### 3.2 Students' International Posture

In terms of the international posture, it delves into students' international posture, unveiling distinct inclinations within various domains. While students expressed a notable interest in international news, other dimensions such as Inter-group Approach Avoidance Tendency signaled a more reserved stance. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of students' global outlook.

*Table 2 Summary Table on International Posture of Students*

Key Result Areas	Composite Mean	VI	Rank
Inter-group Approach Avoidance Tendency	2.16	Disagree	4
Interest in International Vocation or Activities	2.43	Disagree	2
Interest in International News	2.48	Disagree	1
Having Things to Communicate to the World	2.35	Disagree	3
Grand Composite Mean	2.36	Disagree	

Legend: 3.50-4.00=Strongly Agree; 2.50-3.49=Agree; 1.50-2.49=Disagree; 1.00-1.49=Strongly Disagree

Table 2 presents a summary of students' international posture across various result areas. The Grand Composite Mean of 2.36 indicates an overall average level of international posture among students, suggesting a tendency toward disagreement. This means that students may not strongly express positive attitudes or inclinations towards different aspects of international engagement.

In the first result area, Inter-group Approach Avoidance Tendency, with a composite mean of 2.16, students tend to disagree. This indicates that they may not strongly desire to make friends with international students in their local country or actively engage in conversations with foreigners. It ranks fourth among the result areas, suggesting a relatively lower level of international posture in this aspect. Improving this aspect is essential for language learning, as a sense of belonging to a community can increase exposure to the target language (Teng & Buiwih, 2020).

The third result area, Interest in International News, with a composite mean of 2.48, also indicates a tendency towards disagreement. Students may not actively engage in reading or discussing news about foreign countries. It ranks first among the result categories, showing a comparatively higher interest in international news. Fostering learners' global awareness and motivating them to use this advantage when learning a language can improve their motivation for studying global concerns, going abroad, and engaging in social interactions in a globalized society (Véliz-Campos et al., 2020).

Regarding interest in international vocation or activities, the weighted mean of 2.43 indicates a moderate level of disagreement. This suggests that, on average, students do not strongly express an interest in engaging in international vocations or activities. Possible reasons for this response could include a lack of awareness about international opportunities, a focus on other career paths, or a preference for staying within their local community or country for professional pursuits.

Similarly, for the item about having things to communicate to the world, the weighted mean of 2.35 also indicates a moderate level of disagreement. Students may not strongly feel the need or desire to share specific messages or thoughts with the world. Factors such as a focus on personal rather than global communication, a lack of platform or opportunity to share ideas internationally, or a perception that their thoughts may not have a wide-reaching impact could influence this response.

Studies have shown that short-term study abroad experiences can enhance students' language learning and international posture by improving their L2 willingness to communicate and reducing anxiety (Véliz-Campos et al., 2020). Engaging in such experiences may be an option to enhance students' international posture and foster a more positive attitude towards international engagement.

### 3.3 Relationship Between Students' Motivation toward Learning English and Level of International Posture among Students

The correlation analysis unearths insight into the connection between motivation and international posture. The findings collectively suggest a bidirectional relationship between motivation for English language learning and the inclination toward international engagement. Learners who possess robust ideal self-motivation and those who feel external pressure to excel in English are more likely to embrace intercultural interactions and engage with global contexts. Additionally, the interplay between the learning experience and international posture highlights the potential for educational institutions to enhance language learning

motivation by cultivating a conducive and engaging classroom environment.

Table 3 presents the results of the correlation analysis, examining the relationship between students' motivation towards learning English and their level of international posture. The rho-values indicate the strength of the correlations, while the p-values determine the statistical significance of these relationships.

*Table 3: Relationship Between Students' Motivation toward Learning English and Level of International Posture among Students*

Variables	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation
<b>Ideal Self</b>			
Inter-group Approach Avoidance Tendency	0.493**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interest in International Vocation or Activities	0.493**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interest in International News	0.587**	0.000	Highly Significant
Having Things to Communicate to the World	0.551**	0.000	Highly Significant
<b>Ought-to Self</b>			
Inter-group Approach Avoidance Tendency	0.436**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interest in International Vocation or Activities	0.439**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interest in International News	0.486**	0.000	Highly Significant
Having Things to Communicate to the World	0.444**	0.000	Highly Significant
<b>Learning Experience</b>			
Inter-group Approach Avoidance Tendency	0.495**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interest in International Vocation or Activities	0.359**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interest in International News	0.540**	0.000	Highly Significant

Having Things to Communicate to the World	0.530**	0.000	Highly Significant
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\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

The rho-values range from 0.359 to 0.587, suggesting a weak to moderate direct relationship between students' motivation towards learning English and their level of international posture. These correlations indicate that as students' motivation towards learning English increases, their level of international posture tends to increase.

Moreover, all the obtained p-values are less than 0.01, indicating that there is a statistically significant relationship between students' motivation toward learning English and their level of international posture. This suggests that the observed relationships are not due to chance and are indeed meaningful.

The findings reveal a significant and positive relationship between students' motivation towards learning English and their level of international posture. These results align with previous research by Balouchi and Samad (2021) and Botes et al. (2020), highlighting the importance of international posture in explaining students' motivation and proficiency in learning English. The results imply that students' motivation towards learning English positively influences their engagement in international activities and their willingness to communicate with the world. In turn, their level of international posture plays a vital role in shaping their motivation to learn English and their overall language proficiency.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study explored the motivation and international posture of 565 college students in China regarding English learning. The findings revealed a strong association between ideal self-motivation and students' motivation to learn English. However, students expressed comparatively lower motivation in their learning experiences within the English classroom. Despite moderate interest in international vocation or activities, there was a lack of pronounced inclination towards interacting with international students. Nevertheless, a significant and positive relationship between motivation and international posture was evident. These results emphasize the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation and cultivating students' global engagement. Language educators and policymakers can utilize these insights to create a supportive and immersive learning environment that enhances students' language proficiency and intercultural

communication skills, thus preparing them to be active participants in a globalized world.

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