

A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
LEARNING MOTIVATION AMONG
ETHNIC MINORITY LEARNERS
IN RURAL CHINA

SULTAN IDRIS EDUCATION UNIVERSITY

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A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING MOTIVATION
AMONG ETHNIC MINORITY LEARNERS
IN RURAL CHINA

YE XINCAI

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to investigate English learning motivation among ethnic minority English learners in rural China. Based on Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System theory, participants' English learning motivation was investigated and factors which affect their motivation to learn English were explored. Besides, the relationship between the participants' English proficiency and learning motivation was also investigated. The study adopted a mixed methods case study research approach. 38 students of Uyghur and Kazak ethnic groups in Ningxia University were selected as the participants and 6 of them were recruited as cases. Research data was collected on English proficiency test, questionnaire and interview. Quantitative data was analysed by conducting descriptive analysis and Pearson correlation analysis, while the qualitative data was analysed by using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that ethnic minority English learners in rural China had a favourable disposition towards learning English, and they intend to put effort in English learning. Besides, the findings also indicated that there was no relationship between the participants' English learning motivation and their English proficiency. Their motivation was affected by various factors including attitudes towards English, ideal L2 self, instrumentality promotion and prevention, English proficiency, institution related factors and influence of significance others. The findings of this study shed light on both pedagogical and theoretical aspects. In terms of English teaching, the findings provided implications for promoting English learning motivation of Chinese ethnic minority learners. Theoretically, this study expanded the scope of using L2 Motivational Self System theory to investigate Chinese ethnic minority EFL learners' English learning motivation in the Chinese context.





KAJIAN KES MOTIVASI PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA INGGERIS DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR ETNIK MINORITI DI LUAR BANDAR CHINA

ABSTRAK

Matlamat kajian adalah untuk menyiasat motivasi pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris dalam kalangan pelajar bahasa Inggeris etnik minoriti di luar bandar China. Berdasarkan teori Sistem Kendiri Motivasi L2 Dörnyei, motivasi pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris peserta telah disiasat dan faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi motivasi mereka untuk belajar bahasa Inggeris telah diterokai. Selain itu, hubungan antara penguasaan bahasa Inggeris peserta dan motivasi pembelajaran turut disiasat. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan kajian kajian kes kaedah campuran. 38 pelajar kumpulan etnik Uyghur dan Kazak di Universiti Ningxia telah dipilih sebagai peserta dan 6 daripadanya telah diambil sebagai kes. Data kajian dikumpul melalui ujian penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris, soal selidik dan temu bual. Data kuantitatif dianalisis dengan menjalankan analisis deskriptif dan analisis korelasi Pearson, manakala data kualitatif dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Penemuan mendedahkan bahawa pelajar bahasa Inggeris etnik minoriti di luar bandar China mempunyai kecenderungan yang menggalakkan terhadap pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris, dan mereka berhasrat untuk berusaha dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris. Selain itu, dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa tiada hubungan antara motivasi pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris peserta dengan penguasaan bahasa Inggeris mereka. Motivasi mereka dipengaruhi oleh pelbagai faktor termasuk sikap terhadap bahasa Inggeris, kendiri L2 yang ideal, promosi dan pencegahan instrumentaliti, penguasaan bahasa Inggeris, faktor berkaitan institusi dan pengaruh kepentingan orang lain. Dapatan kajian ini memberi pencerahan kepada kedua-dua aspek pedagogi dan teori. Dari segi pengajaran bahasa Inggeris, dapatan ini memberikan implikasi untuk menggalakkan motivasi pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris pelajar etnik minoriti Cina. Secara teorinya, kajian ini meluaskan skop penggunaan teori Sistem Kendiri Motivasi L2 untuk menyiasat motivasi pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris pelajar EFL etnik minoriti Cina dalam konteks Cina.



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CET	College English Test
EFL	English as Foreign Language Learning
L2MSS	L2 Motivational Self System
L2WTC	L2 Willingness to Communicate
MOE	Ministry of Education
PRC	People's Republic of China
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
SPSS	Statistical Packages for The Social Science
TEM	Test for English Majors
USSR	Union of Soviet Social Republics



LIST OF APPENDICES

- A English Proficiency Test
- B English Learner Questionnaire
- C Interview Protocol
- D Sample of Interview Transcripts
- E Consent Forms



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



1.1 Introduction

Globalization of English has impacted English education in many countries of the world. The mania for English is especially stronger in Asian countries. Language planners in Asian nations see English as a global resource vital to the success of their countries' economies and societies, and their citizens view it in the same light (Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). China, where English language education has been given significant emphasis over the past several decades, is not an exception. As a compulsory course, English has been incorporated into the school curriculum starting from primary schools to tertiary institutions. It has equal status as Chinese and Mathematics which





contribute to a large proportion in Gao Kao, the National College Entrance Examination of China. It also plays a decisive role in other important examinations like the national entrance examination for postgraduate students.

In China, the government's strategic plan for national economic development places a premium on improving English instruction as a key component of education reform (Gao, 2012; Qiang et al., 2011). English has been regarded as a requirement for the nation's economic growth and social development (MOE, 2001a). In the past decades, China has shown great emphasis to English language teaching-learning through curriculum, teachers' education and anglophone settings (Zhang, 2020).



It is commonly acknowledged in China that having a good knowledge of English makes a person in an advantageous position in education and employment. Therefore, the number of English learners keeps on increasing, with learners ranging from kindergarten kids to school students, from working staff to retired people. In 2002, a trilingual education strategy was introduced in ethnic minority regions, in response to the central government's acknowledgement of importance of English in China's modernization and the requirement for ethnic minority students to learn Mandarin as the national language (Han et al., 2019). This means that, in addition to minority language as their mother tongue, ethnic minority students need to learn Mandarin as national language and English as a foreign language at school. The Chinese government points out that during the process of vigorously





promoting bilingual (minority language and Mandarin) Education in primary and secondary schools in ethnic minority areas, the relationship between teaching in the medium of minority languages and Chinese should be correctly handled. It was planned that ethnic minority primary and secondary schools should gradually form a curriculum system of English also for minority language medium teaching and Chinese medium teaching. With that policy framework, it was also emphasized that schools in areas where conditions permit should provide a foreign language course for students (The State Council, 2002). That framework resulted in the development of foreign language teaching, which has become a new feature of the basic education for ethnic minorities in China in the new era. In that case, English is taken as the main language and more and more schools in ethnic minority areas have been required to provide English as a foreign language education for students from Grade 3 as it has been carried out in most provinces in the country.

China is a multiethnic and unitary state with fifty-six ethnic groups. The Han ethnic group is by far the largest, constituting approximately 91.59% of the population. Alongside the Han majority, there are other 55 ethnic minorities scattered in five autonomous regions and other provinces of China. The majority of ethnic minority groups reside in primarily resource-rich but economically underdeveloped autonomous ethnic regions, many of which are situated near the country's borders (UNESCO, 2004). Due to the various factors, the need for English as a foreign language education, the curriculum system, and the pace of English education growth



differ greatly between minority-dominated regions and the Han majorities. This has resulted in the development of English language education for ethnic minority students being incompatible to the fast advancement of English education for the Han majority students.

Consequently, the English proficiency of students from ethnic minority areas is commonly disappointing. As a result of the cultural and linguistic barrier among their mother tongue, Mandarin and English, ethnic minority students often struggle to follow the English curriculum and get into or stay in college, which may undermine their chances of moving up in society (Feng, 2005; Han et al., 2016). Though ethnic minority students are entitled to a preferential policy of being admitted by universities with a significantly lower score in English than the Han majority students in Gao Kao, they usually study in the same English class with their Han majority classmates to meet the same English academic requirement and fulfill the same learning tasks. To compete with Han majority counterparts who have received school English education for at least 12 years makes English learning among minority students whose access to English learning has been socially and historically constrained more challenging. It has long been recognized in TESOL and related fields that students from ethnic minority groups face challenges and underperform in regular English classes due to their limited English knowledge and skills in the language used for instruction. Additionally, they often have limited opportunities to access high quality resources for learning English (Yang, 2017; Zhang, 2018). Difficulties in English learning make the

majority of minority college students anxious, less confident, inactive, and even less motivated in and after English class. The disappointed English academic achievements further exert a negative effect on their academic development and future employment.

Within this context, it is argued here that, there are unexplored motivational factors that need to be investigated for learning of English as a foreign language, especially among ethnic minority students of China. The existing studies on motivations for English learning have mainly focused on the sources of motivations (Sude et al., 2020). The integrativeness and instrumentality of motivational factors are still to be explored. Further, due to the examination-orientated English learning in China, deep analysis and investigation are needed to understand the role of various motivational factors in English learning for ethnic minority students of China.

According to Beckett and MacPherson (2005), the growing demand for English-language education is contributing to an ever-widening income disparity between the Han majority and minority groups. Foreign language ability is an indispensable part in ethnic minority students' knowledge system, and it is also the manifestation of students' comprehensive strengths. The success of foreign language education lies in whether students have the language proficiency required by society, which is also one of the test criteria for the success of higher education. For the sake of enhancing minority students' academic and employment competitiveness, it is

needed to speed up the cultivation of a talented working force for sustainable social and economic development in ethnic minority areas and the whole Chinese nation. There is a crucial need to explore some aspects of ethnic minority students' English learning and find out the possible ways to facilitate their English learning. Further, enriching research on English learning among ethnic minority learners, shedding light for policy-makers and language instructors on how to support ethnic minority students in mainstream English classrooms in China.

1.2 Context of the Research

This section has discussed the background and context in which the current study is conducted. It is organized into various subsections describing the historical development of English language education in China, the current status of the English education system in China, and English education in Ethnic minority groups.

1.2.1 A Brief Historical Development of English Language Education in China

In the nineteenth century, when western countries like Britain and America were attempting to get access to Chinese markets and Christian missionaries were trying to gain access to Chinese souls, English education made its way into China (Adamson,



2004). Western missionaries and reformers of the Qing dynasty in China took the initiative in teaching English, with the first group of people spreading Western civilization and the second group encouraging the study of English as a means of self-strengthening the nation (Yang, 2000).

In a study, the development of English language learning in China is reported before the seventeenth century in form of 'Pidgin English'. Pidgin is a word that represents 'business' and it was a trade jargon between local and British merchants. (Li, 2017). Scholars recognized that it was necessary to learn foreign languages to gain access to western ideas and to meet their supremacy. Hence, English was then used to gain access to western science and technology (Adamson, 2004). In 1861, Jinshi Tongwen Guan was established by the Chinese government as the first Chinese-run foreign languages school in Beijing to train translators as its main aim. At Jinshi Tongwen Guan, English was the first language taught, followed by Russian, French, German, and Japanese. Shanghai and Guangzhou each opened equivalent institutions in 1963 and 1964.

The founding of Jinshi Tongwen Guan became a new starting point for modern foreign language education in China and marked the start of English education in government schools (Li & Xu, 2006). In 1902, China rejected the traditional system of schooling and abolished the traditional examination and adopted a modern education system, then included English in the mainstream school subjects





in senior secondary schools (Adamson, 2004). In an effort to equip Chinese students with western technologies, the English language was included in the secondary curriculum beginning in 1903. The Chinese reformers also instituted a new kind of education (Xin Shi Jiao Yu) that made the study of English, along with mathematics and Chinese, compulsory for all students (Bolton, 2002). It was with the belief that this will help in maintaining the traditional moral and social structure of Chinese (Gu, 2009).

In 1912, the Republic was founded after the overthrow of the Qing dynasty. In the early days of the Republic, studying abroad to learn from the industrialized world grew in popularity. Though English as a school subject was in controversy, especially after the May Fourth Movement (Intellectual Revolution) of 1919, interest in learning English increased with the expansion of foreign mass media and entertainment. In addition, international events also played a role in making China closer to English-speaking nations. China's modernization program launched in the republican period from 1919 to 1949 promoted the role of English and increased opportunities to learn English (Adamson, 2004).

A new era began with the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, which sparked extensive political, social, economic, and educational renovation in China. In the early 1950s, the Union of Soviet Social Republics (USSR) provided significant help to China in the building of the new country and system. Because of



the close link with the USSR, Russian became the primary foreign language taught in schools and many English teachers were trained to teach Russian. As a result, English was rarely found in the school curriculum as English was labelled as an “American cultural aggression” in the national campaign to resist America. However, Chinese foreign language teaching was affected by the diplomatic strategy in a certain way.

In the late 1950s, the broke down of the relationship between China and USSR changed the official slogan from Learn from the Soviet Union to Learn from all the Advanced Experiences of the World (Dzau, 1990). It was a remarkable development in the education system of China. The need for developing industry and expanding diplomatic relationships with more powerful nations made the value of English reconsidered. Consequently, the status of Russian as a school subject declined gradually while the status of English was boosted (Hu & Adamson, 2012).

Since 1962, English was a subject taught in secondary schools all around the nation and introduced in Grade 4 and Grade 5 curriculum in some primary schools. As English became a required subject for college entrance exams in China, it became a primary foreign language taught in schools. Unfortunately, the brief renaissance of English instruction in the early 1960s was put to an end by the Cultural Revolution of 1966, the goal of which was to eradicate feudal customs, culture, and ideas (Adamson, 2004) and rid Chinese society of what was thought to be the harmful impact of foreign culture (Teng, 2017).

Foreign language education in China suffered greatly during the ten years of the Cultural Revolution (Li & Xu, 2016). English as a major foreign language teaching during the period reached its bottom. Due to the belief that learning foreign languages from capitalist countries was to worship foreign countries and follow the capitalist route, English as well as other foreign languages were removed from the curriculum of all secondary schools and tertiary institutions; foreign newspapers, radios, and movies were banned; imported foreign books were forbidden.

There have been major shifts and adjustments in China's political, social, cultural, and educational structures since 1978. Under the new leadership, the policy of reform and opening up was put into practice to speed up the country's modernization process. The government officially stated that "all the rich knowledge, advanced technologies, and ways of management can be utilized for socialist construction". Under these social circumstances, the value of learning foreign languages was once again seen in China. English was considered as a tool in facilitating the modernization process as it would function as a bridge between China and the world in political, economic, and social exchange (Adamson & Morris, 1997). Moving ahead with this philosophy, it is in the year of 1978 that the first unified primary and secondary curriculum and a trial English syllabus were put forward by China's Ministry of Education (2001). Since then, English keeps the equal status of the three core subjects (Chinese, Mathematics, English) in the secondary school curriculum and remains in the national college entrance examination and a mandatory

subject for college students.

The policy of Reform and Opening up accelerated China's modernization process and helped to boost the role and status of English in a big way. Turning to the 21st century, the status of English keeps rising with the dramatic development in the economy and increasingly frequent international communication. In January of 2001, the Ministry of Education issued a directive which required that English as a school subject should be offered to students from Grade 3 of primary schools located in cities and counties from the autumn of 2001, and the rest of the primary schools start to do so in the following year (MOE, 2001a). A transition from liberation to globalization during the 21st century saw the development of English education in China (Bolton, 2002).

There is no doubt that English education plays an important role in social advancement and economic development. Thus, there is a greater need for people with good English proficiency. Besides, learning English also increases the chances of individual improvement. As stated by Hu (2002) that English proficiency functions as a stepping-stone to university admission, graduation, studying abroad, job hunting, and promotion. In order to improve students' English proficiency, the Ministry of Education has been reforming the English education system and making adjustments for the English teaching syllabus at schools of primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.

A review of the research works on the historical development of English education shows that scholars have given importance to methodologies while investigating the outcomes of English learning in different contexts. The latest trends in the research are toward identifying psychosocial determinants of learning and relating it with proficiency for ESL. It is argued here that the language ideology for internalization is a complex concept. For policymakers, it is defined with value attached to that language, while for the learner, it is a top-down acceptance or resistance to learning of language by attaching a different value. Hence, the motivational aspects need to be explored in detail. This research work has taken into consideration of the historical development of English education in China to get insights into the changes in the policy of English education in China and its implications.

1.2.2 Current English Education System in China

Currently, the English education system in China is mainly made up of formal school English education and English training provided by social training institutions. English teaching and learning in the present study refer to formal school education. So, the following literature focuses on English education in different levels of schools: primary, secondary and tertiary schools.

1.2.2.1 English Education in Primary Schools

In the 1980s and 1990s, English as a school subject was only offered in primary schools which are located in fewer socioeconomically developed areas. At the end of 1990s, the Chinese government began to vigorously promote mass education and deepen educational reform with the aim of achieving quality education and lifelong learning. With the national English curriculum issued by MOE in 2001 and 2011, English education has been gradually expanded into primary schools all over the country. Most primary schools offer English classes for students from grade 3 as required by MOE and some schools may start English teaching from grade 1.

However, English education is not available in some primary schools in remote rural regions mainly due to the shortage of English teachers. Students there begin their English studies when reaching junior secondary school.

1.2.2.2 English Education in Secondary Schools

Secondary schools in China consist of junior secondary schools and senior secondary schools. English is a mandatory subject and much valued in secondary schools. According to Wang (2007), over 66 million junior secondary students and over a 16 million senior secondary students study English in China. The importance attached to English can be reflected in the time allocated to English teaching. Time for English

class takes up 16% of all the subjects in junior secondary schools and 30% of the time is given to Chinese and foreign languages. Students in junior secondary school have to take an entrance examination in which English is compulsory and reach the minimum total score before proceeding to study in senior secondary schools. However, specific requirements for English grades in the entrance examination may be required by some senior secondary schools.

Though the objectives of English teaching are clearly set out in the curriculum for secondary school by MOE, most Chinese students learn English in secondary school for achieving high grades in countless examinations, among which the National College Entrance Examination (Gao Kao) is the most important one. It is acknowledged in China that the main aim of studying in secondary school is to succeed in the national college entrance examination so as to be admitted into the university. This is an important insight to understand the motivation for English learning.

1.2.2.3 English Education in Tertiary Institutions

All Chinese university and college students are required to take an English course, regardless of what major they are in. There are mainly two types of English programs offered at universities. One is a four-year program for English majors with advanced



English, literature, culture of major English countries, writing, translation and linguistics as the core courses. For those non-English majors, they usually learn English in the first two years of a four or five-year study. English offered to non-English majors are called College English or Public English. The College English course is usually provided twice a week with a 90 minutes class for each at most universities. It is the longest compulsory course having the most credits for non-English majors in the universities of China. In College English class students' English ability of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating is further developed.

The purpose of college English instruction, according to the College English Teaching Guide (2015), is to develop students' proficiency in using English in a variety of contexts and to improve their capacity for cross-cultural communication (Cai, 2017). To what extent these goals are achieved since the implementation of the latest English education policy in China, is a matter of study, especially with the reference to ethnic minority groups.

The major objective of offering English courses at colleges and universities in China should be to cultivate college graduates to have both professional knowledge and strong English communication ability, so as to meet the country's needs for international communication in the fields of politics, economy and culture. However, the fact is that more time and energy is devoted to the preparation of English tests by



most college students, which is a nationwide phenomenon. Two tests are adored by students. One is a Test for English Majors (TEM) and the other is a College English Test (CET). Those two English proficiency tests are not only academic requirements for students but also bring students to an advantageous position for job hunting and further study as a postgraduate student. Students with low English proficiency, especially those who fail to pass the TEM or CET often loses many chances. Hence, learning the English language in China is primarily driven by the motivation to take admissions and jobs, instead of internalizing it as a way for international communications.

1.2.3 English Education in Ethnic Minority Areas in China

China is a multi-ethnic nation with 56 different ethnic groups. Apart from Han nationality, who make up around 91.59% of mainland China's total population, the other 55 nationalities are recognized as ethnic minorities due to their less population which takes up 8.41% in total population of 133.39 million (The State Council, 2012). Scattered in the Autonomous Regions like Inner Guangxi, Mongolia, Tibet, Xin Jiang and other provinces, the habitats of minority groups are said to cover more than half of the country's total area. It is reported by experts that more than 80 languages are spoken by 55 ethnic minorities (Zhou, 2003). Many ethnic minority people, especially those living in Xin Jiang, Tibet, and Mongolia Autonomous Regions are bilinguals or

even trilingual. They speak minority language as their mother tongue, Mandarin as national language, and learn English as a foreign language, and the majority of them are proficient in minority language and Mandarin.

After Reform and Opening up, bilingual education (Shuang Yu Jiao Yu) for ethnic minority groups in China has been restored and developed gradually (Li, 2009). Since then, till the beginning of the 21st century, the policy of bilingual language provision for ethnic minorities in China placed a high emphasis on Min-Han Jian Tong (proficient in both minority language and Mandarin), which aimed at cultivating ethnic minority students with a good mastery of minority language and Mandarin.

With China opening the door to the world and under the influence of economic globalization, the turn of the century witnessed a dramatic social development and a rapid incorporation of China's economy into international markets, further increasing the nation's awareness of the importance and status of English which was once considered as a tool for learning advanced science and technology from the powerful nations and a link in international exchange.

The ever-increasing demand for people with English proficiency from the Chinese society and unprecedented mania for English learning among Chinese citizens became a social phenomenon along with three directive documents issued by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2001. The objective of the documents is to strengthen English education across China. The first document required that English

should be included as a required school subject for students from Grade 3 in primary schools by the autumn of 2002 (MOE, 2001a). The second document set up specific standards for English curriculum in secondary schools (MOE, 2001b). The third document which was intended for tertiary institutions stipulates that 5% to 10% of courses for the undergraduate program should be in English medium instruction within three years.

Under the influence of domestic and international context, together with the developmental need in ethnic minority regions, English as a foreign language provision for minority students was gradually conducted in some schools located at ethnic minority areas. In 2002, the directive on minority language education issued by the State Council pointed out that in the course of promoting bilingual education in primary and secondary schools in ethnic minority regions, the relationship between teaching in ethnic minority languages and Mandarin should be correctly managed, the curriculum system of minority language medium teaching and Mandarin medium teaching should be gradually formed in primary and secondary schools for ethnic minorities, and English should be provided in schools where favourable local conditions exist (The State Council, 2002). The official directive of 2002 marked the beginning of trilingual education (Sanyu Jiaoyu) in China's ethnic minority regions. However, as stated in the directive that not all schools in ethnic minority regions are required to offer English provision for students, only regions with favourable conditions should provide students with English classes. With no explanation of what

the favourable conditions are, it implicitly gives freedom for ethnic minority regions to decide if English as a foreign language should be offered in primary and secondary schools.

In his investigation, Feng (2012) reported that tertiary institutions located in large cities have responded well to the policy intended for universities, while local laws and practices regarding English instruction in primary and secondary schools serving ethnic minorities vary widely. The divergence is mainly attributed to two factors. One is the Law of People's Republic of China on Ethnic Minority Autonomous Regions (2001). The law grants ethnic minority autonomous areas considerable independence in various ways. With regard to education, to attend to the needs of ethnic minority groups, the government of autonomous areas has the right to decide on their own education plans, curriculum contents, and the instruction medium in accordance with the state policy on education and the provisions of law (The State Council, 2002). The other is the directive issued by State Council in 2002 which does not require explicitly all schools in ethnic minority areas to offer English provision. Consequently, institutions in minority-dominated regions, prefectures, and counties have implemented their own strategies, or lack thereof (Feng, 2012). Consequently, differences in the conduction of English education have been seen among ethnic minority regions.

With regard to English provision policy making, some autonomous regions and prefectures have made concrete plans while some have toned down the lofty directives, and others have taken a laissez-faire approach or even disregarded the documents that the State Council has put out due to the regions' unfavourable situations, such as remoteness and a lack of resources (Feng, 2012). For example, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region was reported to make strategic plans for ensuring the implementation of English provision for all schools located in urban cities and remote rural areas (Admson & Feng, 2009). Xin Jiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, however, seems to be excluded from the state documents of English provision policy (Feng, 2012). There is no wonder, it was found in a survey conducted by Olan (2007) that even at the most prestigious university in Xin Jiang, 62% of the minority students had had no English learning experience at all.

1.2.4 English Education in Xin Jiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

Xin Jiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, one of the five autonomous regions in China, is situated in the northwest of the People's Republic of China. Accounting for one sixth of China's entire territory, Xin Jiang borders with countries, with Russia and Mongolia in the north; Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan in the west; and Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India in the southwest. Ethnic groups of Han, Uyghur, Kazakhs, Mongols, Tajiks, Hui, Kyrgyz and some others inhabit together in Xin Jiang

where multi-ethnic groups, multi-cultures and multi-languages coexist. Ethnic minority groups altogether take up about 63% of the total population of above 22 million, with the Han ethnic group occupying about 37%. Within the ethnic minority groups, the Uyghur forms the largest minority group, which is followed by the Kazakh. Linguistically, with exception of the Han, Hui, and Man ethnic groups who speak Mandarin as mother tongue, the remaining minority groups have their own minority language as mother tongue and learn Mandarin as national language.

Since the end of 1970s, language policies in Xin Jiang have placed increasing emphasis on bilingual education, aiming at cultivating ethnic minority groups with a mastery of minority language and Mandarin to adapt to social development and regional construction. Bilingual education refers to an instructional model of Xin Jiang Uygur Autonomous Region in which a minority language and Mandarin are employed as the instructional languages in minority schools. The diversity of the bilingual education model in Xin Jiang Uygur Autonomous Region is decided by the economy, educational foundation, and language environmental differences. The directive document issued in 1985 stated that within five years, all secondary school graduates were to have a good mastery of standard Mandarin, and all instructors and administrators were to utilize Mandarin in formal contexts like classrooms and meetings (Adamson & Feng, 2009).



In 2004, a new document intended for vigorously promoting bilingual education was issued by the government of Xin Jiang. The objectives of developing bilingual education and measures to promote it are clearly put forward in the document. One of the most important decisions is that all the subjects in primary and secondary schools should be taught in Mandarin with minority language as a school subject (Xin Jiang Uyghur Autonomous Region People's Government, 2004). In the following year (2005) the first directive of promoting bilingual education in kindergarten was issued to further improve the bilingual education system in Xin Jiang.

In the policy document of Xin Jiang Uyghur Autonomous Region People's Government (2011), the Xin Jiang government promulgated an outline of education reform and development plan which states that by 2012 the education model in which Chinese Mandarin should be the main teaching language and minority language as the second would be basically popularized. Further, by 2015, bilingual education in primary and secondary schools would be basically universal, and bilingual students in primary and secondary schools would take up about 75% of the total number of primary and secondary school students. By 2020, senior secondary school graduates would be competent in Chinese, and bilingual students in primary and secondary schools would account for more than 90% of the total number of primary and secondary school students.



The contact and communication among the ethnic groups in Xin Jiang has formed the unique bilingual or multilingual phenomenon in Xin Jiang. As a major feature of education model in Xin Jiang, the success or failure of bilingual education not only plays an important role in the development of ethnic education in the region, but also plays a significant part in the region's economic construction, the maintenance of the unity of all ethnic groups and the promotion of lasting peace and stability in Xin Jiang (Li, 2017).

There is no denying of the importance in the emphasis on achieving proficiency in Mandarin. Admittedly, foreign language education is also of significance in social and economic development of Xin Jiang. In Xin Jiang, foreign language is an important tool for the promotion of economic and cultural exchanges and the steady development of border areas. Foreign language education not only plays a decisive role in the cultivation of ethnic minority talents competent in a foreign language, but also directly or indirectly affects national security and Xin Jiang's opening up to the world (Cai & Zhao, 2016).

However, foreign language education for minority school students in Xin Jiang seems to be neglected mainly due to a lack of foreign language education policy. The directive (MOE, 2001) stipulates that all primary schools across China should include English as a required subject for students from grade 3 by 2002. The directive issued by State Council in 2002 puts forward that ethnic minority areas with



favourable conditions should offer foreign language provision in minority dominated primary and secondary schools. In July of the same year, it was stated in The Fifth National Conference on Education for Ethnic Minorities that in the process of vigorously strengthening Chinese education and actively promoting Mandarin speaking, foreign language education should be provided in minority dominated primary and secondary schools where conditions permit so as to meet the needs for modernization (Wen, 2012). Under the national policy, along with the needs for English in the development of economy and education as well as demands for English from other walks of life, English was provided for primary and secondary students in some ethnic dominated schools which are located in relatively developed large or medium-sized cities like Urumqi (Wen, 2012).



According to the Bilingual Curriculum Plan in Compulsory Education Phase (2011), at present two bilingual education modes are adopted in Xin Jiang and each minority school can choose one of them in accordance with its actual condition. There is little difference between the two education modes in the curriculum setting, they only differ in the number of subjects instructed in the medium of Mandarin. Besides, no English provision is offered in primary curriculum if mode 1 is adopted. Primary schools adopting mode 2 and secondary schools adopting either of the two modes include English as a school subject in the curriculum with 2 class periods and 3 class periods respectively (usually 45 minutes for each period in primary and secondary schools). The time allocation for English class is far less than Chinese which takes up



most of the class time. Also, the English learning time in the schools for ethnic minority students are far from enough compared with that in the majority Han dominated schools where English class is usually provided every day for one class period during the school days. In their research, Sunuodula and Cao (2015) reported that though foreign language education is listed in the curriculum of both education modes, schools can choose to postpone the course, which is a practice in most schools. As for English education in remote rural ethnic minority areas, the picture is much gloomier. Due to the lack of specific policy guidance and the unique nature of language learning for ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, the current foreign language education in primary and secondary schools is somewhat disorganized and inconsistent. (Wen, 2012).

To a certain degree, the education modes and curriculum plan set in Xin Jiang decide the status of English education, which directly affects the quality of English education in ethnic minority regions. The preferential policy for College Entrance Examination granted by country to ethnic minority students also has effect on students' English learning. The rate of educational development in ethnic minority regions varies from one ethnic group to another due to the factors of history, geography and deferent levels of socioeconomic advancement. To ensure that ethnic minority students have fair access and more opportunities to receive education in tertiary institutions, preferential policies with regard to education are granted to ethnic minority students by lowering the threshold for tertiary institutions.

Preferential policies for university admission differ from one region or province to another. The common practice in most regions is to add some marks in original total marks of national college entrance examination. However, the preferential policy for ethnic minority students in senior secondary school adopting either one of the bilingual education modes in Xin Jiang is significantly different from that of ethnic minority students in other autonomous regions or provinces. On the one hand, the minimum score for university admission for ethnic minority students in Xin Jiang is much lower than that for Han and most of other ethnic minority students in the country. Han et al. (2016) found that the minimum score of national college entrance examination for Han majority students to be enrolled into Zhejiang University was 631, the minimum score for ethnic minority students from Xin Jiang was only 380.

On the other hand, for ethnic minority senior secondary graduates from minority dominated schools, English test results in National College Entrance Examination merely serve as a reference with regard to university admission. Although as a required subject, English course with limited class teaching time allocation is listed in senior school curriculum, the value of the subject is underscored, thus English has not been attached enough importance, as few students would devote much time and energy to a course which does little for their college entrance examination in an examination-oriented context.



There is little pressure in learning English for ethnic minority primary and secondary students in Xin Jiang, since the majority of them are similar in English proficiency. When they are enrolled into tertiary institutions, the circumstance starts to change with regard to English learning. According to Li (2017), preferential policies for minority students in the College Entrance Examination typically end at the point of entry to the university, and the minority students often fall back to a disadvantaged position once they arrive on campus.

In most universities ethnic minority students study with Han majority peers in the same English class with the same teaching materials under the same instruction.

According to Wu (2002), the failure rate of English exams taken by ethnic minority students is eight times higher than that of those from majority groups. Many of them have to retake their English exams even for lots of times in order to meet the minimum requirement for graduation, which exerts negative influence in their self-esteem, confidence and overall school performance. In comparison with Han majority peer who have received formal school English education for at least 9 years before entering universities, learning English as L3 is really a big challenge for most ethnic minority students from bilingual schools in Xin Jiang.





1.3 Need for the Study

Since 2002, English education has been gradually included in the school curriculum in ethnic minority areas though with regional differences due to the varying degree of socio-economic advancement and educational development. In recent years, English education in ethnic minority areas is getting more and more attention from the Chinese government, schools and parents. English is considered as a key factor for economic growth, modernization and globalization. The motivation for learning English among ethnic groups determines its priority over other languages. At the national level, English is not just a medium to meet the pace of modernization and globalization in China, but also a tool to train people with desired professional competence. Researchers have been trying to study the motivational factors that are instrumental in English learning, but still, sufficient explorations are lacking on those aspects, especially with reference to ethnic groups of China.

There are two two-fold benefits of English learning. On the one hand, English plays an increasing role in the development of ethnic minority regions with economic globalization. On the other hand, ethnic minority students who are having good proficiency in three languages (minority language, Mandarin and English) are competitive both in academic and employment development. As a mainstream communication tool in the international community, a good command of English has been an essential quality for college students, which will promote their personal



enhancement and increase their employment chances.

Within these contexts, the present study aims at investigating English learning motivation among ethnic minority students in rural China. Based on the Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) L2 Motivational Self System theory, the researcher explored the motivation characteristics of ethnic minority English learners in rural China and find out the factors affecting their English learning motivation.

1.3.1 Need for Social Development and Students' Improvement

China's rapid economic expansion and profound social reform since the reform and opening up policy's implementation have led to impressive socioeconomic gains. Interactions with other countries are becoming unprecedentedly frequent in order to keep economic and social progress constant and sustainable. As a commonly used language in international communication, the importance of having a good command of English is being understood more deeply. In this social context, educators began to think more reasonably about the aim and ways of effective English education.

Both policy makers and educators as well as the students from ethnic minority areas have a deeper awareness of the status of English as a school subject in education and the role it plays in social and personal development. It is argued that, as far as



language is concerned, only mastering Mandarin in addition to minority tongue is not conducive to cultivating a compound talent for social and economic development in ethnic minority areas. Without certain English proficiency, it is hard to go abroad to experience foreign cultures, let alone learn directly advanced science, technology, and cultural knowledge from other nations, which are mandatory for personal and socio-economic development. Further, English language learning motivation as one of the key factors affecting foreign language learning outcomes should be attached more importance for developing and implementing the educational policy. Therefore, it is necessary to delve into English learning motivation among Chinese ethnic minority English learners to understand the drivers, expectations, and outcomes from a holistic perspective.



China is a multi-ethnic country with 55 officially recognized ethnic minority groups, which account for approximately 8.5% of the population. Ethnic minority groups are mainly distributed in socioeconomically underdeveloped western China, concentrating in Xin Jiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Tibetan Autonomous Region, Ning Xia Hui Autonomous Region, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and scattered in all provinces across China. Restricted by social, economic and cultural factors, there is a great gap in English education between the eastern areas and the western minority regions. The economy and English education in minority areas influence and restrict each other. On the one hand, the lag of economic development leads to the shortage of English education resources and the



low level of English education in minority areas. On the other hand, the backwardness in English education hinders the communication between ethnic minority areas and the outside world, thus losing the opportunity to introduce foreign capital to develop the local economy. Under the impact of the economic globalization, the economy of ethnic minority areas is liable to miss the development opportunity.

China is an urban-rural dual-structured society where students in urban areas enjoy rich English learning resources while those living in remote rural regions have limited access to profitable resources. Ethnic minority college students are mainly from remote rural areas, they are reported to have a rather disappointed English academic performance and experience more difficulties in college English learning (Adamson & Xia, 2011; Yang, 2017; Zhang, 2018). As the reserve force of social development in minority areas, ethnic minority college students should be equipped with a solid foundation in English to make them develop in an all-round way. Given the stepping stone role English plays in social mobility and employment opportunities, ethnic minority college students have to deal with various obstacles in their way of English learning to be competitive in future development. From both the social development and personal improvement perspective, there is a need to deeply explore the motivational factors for English learning among ethnic minority college students.

1.3.2 Need to Explore Ethnic Minority English Learners

With the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Chinese government has implemented a multilingual policy for education. It consists of three main objectives. The first objective was to develop the ethnic minority students' native languages. The second was to strengthen their proficiency in Mandarin and a foreign language (mainly English). The third objective was to cultivate trilingual competence in minority language, Mandarin and a foreign language among ethnic minority students. According to Adamson and Feng (2009), to improve literacy, ensure internal stability, and permit knowledge transfer in order to strengthen the nation, China's government has begun language programs to foster trilingualism in places with large ethnic minority populations.

The uses of languages in ethnic groups are diverse and very complex which is influenced by differences in community distributions and socioeconomic development. Hence, understanding the motivational factors for English learners of ethnic groups is challenging but insightful in opening new dimensions of study and research. The impacts of multilingual policy on English learning may be considered in the future scope of the research due to its significant importance for the policy makers.

The present study involves a group of ethnic minority college students from remote rural areas in Xin Jiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The Xin Jiang Uyghur



Autonomous Region occupies around 16% of China's total land area and is situated in the country's northwest. It shares borders with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Mongolia, India, and Afghanistan. The Xin Jiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is a home to a large number of recognized ethnic minority groups whose population accounted for about 63 percent of Xinxiang's total population of 22.9 million by the end of 2014 (The Government of Xin Jiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China, 2019). Unlike most ethnic minorities in China, the majority of ethnic groups in Xin Jiang are bilinguals who have minority language as their mother tongue and learn Mandarin as national language.



Students of Uygur and Kazak ethnic groups from remote rural areas are the subjects in the present research. They are representatives of college ethnic minority students who are undergoing a hard time when learning English in tertiary institutions in China. The population of these two ethnic minority groups altogether accounts for the most of the total ethnic minority population in Xin Jiang. They are all bilinguals, speaking their mother tongue respectively and learned Mandarin as national language usually from primary education. They started to learn English as a foreign language in secondary school. Their daily communication with their parents is in their minority language since most of their parents can only speak their minority language. At school, subjects of Chinese and English are taught in Chinese and they receive minority language medium instruction in the rest of the subjects.



Despite the fact that English is a compulsory subject in junior and senior high schools in Xin Jiang, the real picture of English education in rural regions is still gloomy. Firstly, the practice that English is exclusive in the total score of senior high school entrance examination and national college entrance examination reduces students' attention to English learning. School education in China is highly exam-oriented. Any school subject with no relation to examination is hardly paid enough attention. Secondly, lack of qualified English teachers, inadequate learning materials and limited access to modern English learning resources make the situation of English learning even much worse. Further, the total hours of English class teaching in Xin Jiang are fewer than those in other provinces of China. When those students start their university life, they universally find English is the most challenging subject for them. Because of their underperformance in English, they suffered a lot both psychologically and academically.

Hence, it is important to explore the motivational factors for English learning among ethnic minority students.

1.3.3 Need to Enrich the Research on English Learning among Ethnic Minorities

In China, the research on English as a foreign language education for ethnic minority learners is a new concern and the related research is very scant. The few research in



this field is a manifestation of less attention paid to this research field (Shao et al., 2019). The related research on the issue mainly focuses on: 1) the investigation into the problems and strategic solutions to English education for ethnic minority learners; 2) English teachers' development; 3) issues concerning English education planning in ethnic minority areas; 4) exploration of learning styles of ethnic minority English learners.

Many researchers point out the problems in teaching and learning English in ethnic minority areas, but much fewer researchers have ever conducted a deep and comprehensive exploration of the contributing factors of the problem. A deep investigation of English learning among ethnic minority students is much needed. It will offer a clear picture of English learning among those students in remote ethnic minority areas and will provide the first-hand data for teachers, school administrators, textbook editors, and various individuals and organizations related to English education in ethnic minority areas, hence promoting a rapid and steady development of English education in rural ethnic minority regions. Within these contexts, the motivational profiles of students from ethnic minority groups are used to conduct the research. It will help in identifying the key factors that are impacting at the individual level as well as at policy framework level for English language learning in China. Hence, this research will enrich the existing knowledge on this area as well as on related areas by opening new scopes for the research works.





1.4 Statement of the Problem

In today's globalized world, English is playing an increasingly important role in a nation's socio-economic growth and an individual's development. English language proficiency is increasingly viewed as a key determinant of academic success, employment opportunities, and social mobility (Hu, 2005). As a result, many countries have placed a strong emphasis on English education, with the aim of equipping their citizens with the necessary language skills to compete in the global economy.

However, English education is not distributed evenly across populations. In many countries, minority students face significant challenges in learning English due to lack of resources, exposure to English language environment and linguistic distances from the target language, which can lead to a language proficiency gap between minority and majority students. This gap can have significant consequences for minority students, limiting their academic and career opportunities and perpetuating social and economic inequality (Cummins, 2000; Hu, 2005).

In China, English language learning has become increasingly important for minority students, as it is viewed as a key determinant of academic success and employment opportunities. However, despite the government's efforts to promote bilingual education and support for minority language learning, minority students still





face significant challenges in learning English. According to a national survey conducted by the Chinese Ministry of Education, the average English proficiency level of minority students is significantly lower than that of majority students (MOE, 2019).

The challenges faced by minority students in learning English in China are complex and multifaceted. Minority students often have limited exposure to English language input, which can hinder their language development (Huang & Van Duzer, 2015). In addition, many minority students face socio-cultural and linguistic barriers that can impact their motivation and ability to learn English (Liu & Zhang, 2017). For instance, minority students may struggle with the cultural and linguistic differences between their mother tongue and English, which can make it difficult for them to acquire English language skills (Hu, 2005).

Motivation is a crucial factor in foreign language learning, and it plays an essential role in determining learners' success in the process of foreign language learning. Therefore, understanding the motivation in learning English is critical to facilitate English teaching and promote English learning among ethnic minority English learners. Despite the challenges faced by minority students in learning English in China, there is a lack of research on English learning motivation among this population.



Research on English education among Chinese ethnic minority students has only begun in the last two decades. Shao et al. (2019) stated that most research on English education of ethnic minorities in China mainly focused on issues relating to teaching and countermeasures, followed by research on teachers' development, then study on bilingual or trilingual education comes the third. The output of research articles in this field is fewer. Until now only 13 research articles investigated a designated ethnic minority group, and all the rest articles studied the ethnic minority in its entirety (Shao et al., 2019). In the limited research articles, a comprehensive exploration of English learning motivation among ethnic minority learners is scant. And up to date, it can hardly find research on English learning motivation among those ethnic minority students who speak minority language as mother language, learn Chinese as national language and English as a foreign language. There are some differences in education among different ethnic groups for their linguistic and cultural uniqueness and social differences of the areas where they living. As one of the English learning groups in China, it is important and necessary to explore English learning motivation among ethnic minority learners.

The present study seeks to address this research gap by investigating the English learning motivation among ethnic minority students in rural China, with the aim of enriching our understanding of English learning motivation among ethnic minority learners in Chinese context, and informing the development of effective language learning strategies and policies that cater to the unique needs and challenges



faced by this population.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The main aim of the study is to have a comprehensive view of English learning motivation of Chinese ethnic minority learners who speak minority language as their mother tongue, learn Mandarin as national language and English as a foreign language. The study is significant theoretically and practically in the following ways.

Firstly, through a mixed-method case study, the present research systematically explored English learning motivation among ethnic minority students from Xin Jiang. Through a thorough and comprehensive analysis of the English learning motivation and influence factors within the framework of L2 Motivational Self System, the research provided valuable information for English teachers to better understand ethnic minority students' English learning so as to take their actual situation into account and carry out targeted English teaching. Teaching English with a better understanding of learners' learning motivation and their identity as ethnic minority will be conducive to improving learners' motivation, building confidence, overcoming students' difficulties and enhancing efficiency in English learning. On the college administrative level, a better knowledge of status quo of ethnic minority English learners from rural regions provided basis for English curriculum offering and





assessment standards for those students.

Secondly, the phenomenon that most bilingual ethnic minority students are unmotivated in learning English is a manifestation of the fact that those students are not able to adapt to learning environment and teaching mode in universities. The factors behind this phenomenon actually reflect the problems of English education at primary and secondary stages. So the results from the study offered useful insights for educational policy makers and English educators in Xin Jiang in the issue of English education for ethnic minority learners. The lack of education policy will lead to the unreasonable allocation of teaching resources, while the unreasonable teaching resources and the unclear education policy will make students English learning a mere formality, thus the learning effect is greatly reduced (Wen, 2012). An investigation of English learning motivation among ethnic minority students will provide a direction for the improvement of basic English education in rural ethnic minority areas and promote the development of ethnic minority education. Ethnic minority talents with a solid foundation of English language required by society are indispensable to the development and prosperity of ethnic minority regions. A reasonable education policy will pave the way for both school teaching and students learning.

Thirdly, motivation in learning English is a result of interaction between individual and social factors. By exploring learners' motivation in English learning and analysing the influence factors, it is the researcher's hope that the issue of ethnic



minority students' English learning motivation would be attached into more importance by individual learners, teachers, parents and people concerned.

Fourthly, the present research shed light on the research on foreign language acquisition among ethnic minority students in China. The current foreign language research in China often draws mechanically on second language acquisition theories and research conclusions abroad, regardless of the differences between foreign language teaching and second language teaching. The research on China's foreign language education should take the actual situation of foreign language teaching and learning in China into consideration. Chinese foreign language learners' characteristics should be taken as a basis to explore their foreign language learning process, psychological process, educational process and learning rules, so as to find out the most effective method of teaching foreign language and improve the efficiency of Chinese students' foreign language learning (Yang, 2007). For ethnic minority students in China, learning English is to learn a foreign language, the learning process of which is different from both their mother tongue and Chinese. Therefore, research on English learning motivation among Chinese ethnic minority students enriched the theory of foreign language acquisition, especially the theory of foreign language motivation.

1.6 Purpose of the Study

The study aims at investigating the English learning motivation among ethnic minority learners in rural China. In addition, the factors which are affecting their English learning motivation are to be explored.

1.7 Research Objectives

Specifically, the study has the following objectives:

- i. To investigate characteristics of ethnic minority learners' English learning motivation.
- ii. To identify the relationship between the learners' English proficiency and their English learning motivation.
- iii. To explore the factors which affect the ethnic minority learners' motivation to learn English.
- iv. To determine the degree of influence of the learners' learning motivation on their English learning trajectory.



1.8 Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, the study addressed the following research questions:

- i. What are the characteristics of English learning motivation among Ethnic minority learners in rural China?
- ii. Is there a relationship between learners' English proficiency and English learning motivation among ethnic minority learners in rural China?
- iii. What are the factors that affect English learning motivation among ethnic minority learners in rural China?
- iv. To what extent does the ethnic minority learners' English learning motivation affect their English learning trajectory?



1.9 Theoretical Framework

English has become the global language and plays a crucial role in facilitating people's communication and integration into international society. Learning and using the English language has become a necessity for many individuals, particularly the younger generation. Within this perspective, it is important for academia, policymakers as well teachers to understand the motivational factor behind learning



English as a second language. Motivational research in English language learning has long been a research focus in the field of the second language acquisition. However, it is until recently that the theoretical bases of L2 motivation have been developed with the L2MSS model which makes L2 motivation research different from mainstream motivation research (Woodrow, 2017).

With the work of Gardner and Lambert (1972) on attitudinal and motivational factors on language learning success, the research on motivational aspects of L2 learning is dominated by two interrelated concepts of motivation; instrumental and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation refers to the learner's motivation by which the L2 learning is driven by the desire to fulfil a particular objective, like in boosting one's employability, education, or career prospects., etc. Integrative motivation on the other hand refers to the learner's genuine interest in the L2 community. Therefore, the learner desires to acquire the L2 in order to communicate with those who speak it and to comprehend their culture. Many authorities and teachers in the Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) field asserted that integrative motivation is essential for successful L2 or foreign language acquisition on the basis of the strength of these ideas.

Starting from Gardner's socio-educational model, the past decades have witnessed diversified research in theorizing the research on L2 motivation. In this context the work of Deci and Ryan's Self Determination theory, Williams and

Burden's social constructivist model, and Dörnyei and Ottó's process model are significant. The most recent L2 motivation research approach is Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS). Due to its comprehensive framework, L2MSS is considered as the central theory in this research to explain the motivators in the ethnic minority group of China for English language learning as a foreign language learning with a clear description of the context.

A theoretical framework helps in developing a plan for study and investigation through critical analysis and construct extraction from previously compiled knowledge. It elaborates the scenario with well-supported rationales to plan and organize the research work and identify the issues with research problems from broader perspectives. In this context, various theories of language learning and second language acquisition are reviewed to explain the phenomena of motivation for L2 learning, identify the objectives and define the research questions of this research.

The second language is a language that is present in the environment where it is taught. It is different from the first language, which is already internalized in the learner with context and habits. There are two distinct categories of language instruction procedures. One relates to languages that were partially acquired prior to formal education, while the other group deals with languages that must be learned from scratch or nearly from scratch. It has been argued that motivation plays a great role in second language learning.

There are various motivation factors for learning the English language as a second language. However, the objects of English language learning are moderated by the contexts in which second language acquisition takes place. There are various theories explaining the moderating effects of the context of English language learning with motivators. These theories are broadly categorized into three categories to develop the theoretical framework for this study. These are Language learning theories, motivation theories of language learning, and Critical Language learning theories. All these are used in this research to create the foundation by understanding the constructs, and research models to describe the phenomena of motivation for English language learning as L2. After that the main theory, L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), is taken as the central theory for this study along with the constructs of critical language learning theories to study the interplay between motivators and context for L2 learning. A schematic representation of the theoretical framework for this research is shown below in Figure 1.1.

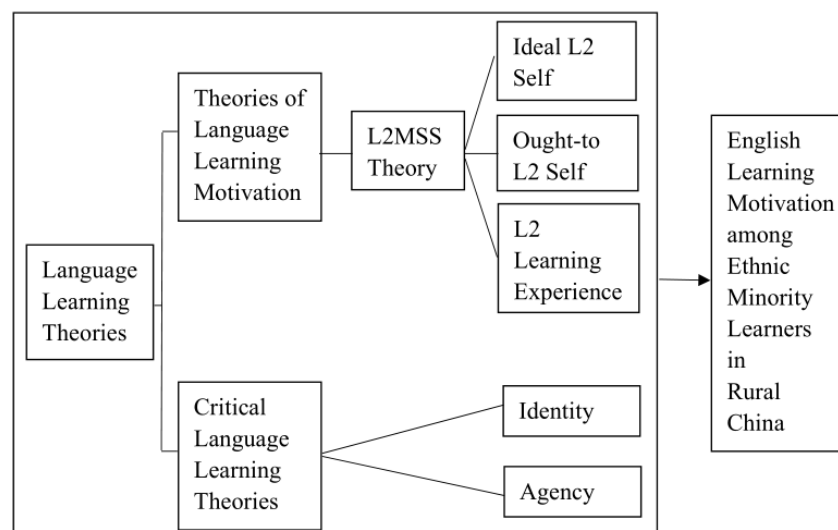


Figure 1.1. Schematic Representation of the Theoretical Framework

Dörnyei (2005) proposed the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) in an effort to address numerous concerns raised by Gardner's theory. He did so by drawing on theoretical paradigms from motivational psychology, L2 motivation research, and his own empirical research. The L2MSS, developed by Dörnyei (2005), offers a powerful explanation of second language motivation by integrating theories such as possible selves, self-discrepancy, and socio-educational models. Dörnyei (2005) sees L2MSS as a natural progression of Gardner's socio-educational model. It is more powerful to explain L2 learning motivation in different learning environments. Besides, L2MSS is taken as a convergence of self-theories and motivation theories. To increase its comprehensiveness. Compared to other models in L2 learning motivation studies, the L2MSS model expands the applicability of L2 motivation theory to diverse language learning contexts in an increasingly globalized world (Dörnyei, 2009).

In this framework, the L2 learning motivation is conceptualized through three dimensions: the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience. The ideal L2 self represents the learner's desired image of themselves as proficient language users, while the ought-to L2 self reflects the expectations of others and the attributes learners believe they should possess. The L2 learning experience encompasses the immediate learning environment, including teachers, curriculum, peers, and classroom success or failure. By considering these dimensions, the L2MSS highlights the psychological desire to reduce the discrepancy between

learners' current and future selves, thus enhancing their motivation to learn the target language.

The identity and agency paradigms of critical language learning emphasize the socio-cultural and political aspects of language learning. In identity research, the models of Norton's work (e.g., 1995, 2000, 2001) which was conducted in the North American context are influential. The issue of the power relationship between the language learner and target language speakers in the social context is addressed by this influential research work. It has helped in understanding the contexts of interactions as a mediating motivational factor for L2 learning.

The concept of agency in L2 learning can be approached from two perspectives: the psychological view and the sociocultural view. From a psychological standpoint, agency is seen as an individual attribute that is influenced by social structures and embedded within social contexts. In contrast, the sociocultural view regards agency as a relational process that is co-constructed and renegotiated in interaction with others and society. These theoretical frameworks, including sociocultural theory, poststructuralism, critical and feminist theorizations, narrative approaches, phenomenology, and hermeneutics, have paved the way for the exploration of agency in applied linguistics and educational research, much like how identity has entered the field through similar pathways (Duff, 2012).

It is argued that an individual can possess multiple identities in relation to various environments, which is in contrast with conceptualizations of agency in L2 learning. Agency takes various forms, including relational agency, identity agency, and pedagogical agency. Identity theory suggests that individuals might have various and transportable identities. (Dörnyei, 2009; Block, 2007; Duff, 2012). Empirical studies also showed the complex interplay between these identities and various circumstances of student-teacher development (Barcelos, 2016; Kalaja, 2016; Kayi-Aydar, 2015). Hence, identity and agency paradigms are assumed to play significant roles in the competence of learning English as a foreign language for ethnic minority groups in China.

In summary, the theoretical frameworks of identity and agency shed light on the multifaceted nature of language learning motivation and the construction of identities in L2 learning contexts. The recognition of multiple identities and the dynamic nature of agency contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in English language learning among ethnic minority learners in rural China.

1.10 Definition of Terms

Ethnic minorities – China is a country consisting of 56 officially identified ethnic groups. Except for the Han majority, the other 55 groups are called ethnic minorities,

Shaoshu Minzu in Chinese. People of ethnic groups consist of monolingual and bilingual ethnic minorities. For the purpose of this study, ethnic minorities refer to people who belong to ethnic groups and are proficient in both minority language (mother tongue) and Mandarin (national language).

Bilingual – Definitions of bilingual are various. In this study, the researcher prefers the definition given by Grosjean. Grosjean (2000) defines bilinguals as “those who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their everyday lives” (p. 4). This definition put an emphasis on everyday use of two languages. In this study, bilingual refers to a person who are proficient in a minimal degree in two or more languages (minority language and Mandarin) in their daily life.

Bilingual ethnic minorities – There are 55 ethnic minority groups in China. A few of them are monolinguals speaking Mandarin, like ethnic groups of Hui and Man, while most of the ethnic minorities are bilinguals whose mother tongue are their minority language and speak Mandarin as national language.

Multilingual – A person who is multilingual is able to use three or more languages, either independently or in variable degrees of code-mixing, with their proficiency in each language fluctuating depending on things including register, occupation, and education. (Kemp, 2009)

L1 – First language or mother tongue. It can be the language of the country where people live in, or the minority language which people acquire in their early childhood because their family speaks that language (Richards et al., 1992).

L2 – Second language, the language a learner is learning in addition to his first language. L2 for the ethnic minority students in China is Mandarin.

Motivation – Motivation refers to the direction and intensity of human behaviour, i.e., the decision to take a specific action, the persistence with it, and the amount of effort spent (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

English learning trajectory – In this study, English leaning trajectory refers to the participants' English learning journey from past to present. The participants' English learning trajectory is traced by the information they provide in the interview.

1.11 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter provided an overview of the contextual background, rationale, purpose, objectives, research questions and theoretical framework of the study. Firstly, the historical development of English education and current English education system in China were briefly reviewed. China is a unitary state with 56 ethnic groups. English

education differs between minority and Han-majority regions due to geographical, socio-linguistic and cultural diversity, leading to incompatible advancements in English language education for ethnic minority students.

Secondly, the need for the study, the problem statement and the research aim were explained. Ethnic minority learners normally find it very challenging to learn English. They were taken as a group of learners who have lower English proficiency and are less motivated to learn English. Motivation plays an important role in the success of foreign language learning. Hence, the aim of this study is to investigate the English learning motivation of ethnic minority learners in rural China through the lens of Dörnyei's L2 Motivational System theory and with reference to the theories of identity and agency. The research has the potential to contribute not only to the validation of Dörnyei's L2 Motivational system but also to enhance our understanding of different aspects of foreign language learning motivation in the relatively unexplored ethnic minority learners' group in the context of rural China.

Thirdly, based on the research aim, four research objectives were put forward according to which the four research questions were addressed in this study. After that, the theoretical framework was put forward and elaborated. Dörnyei's L2 Motivational System theory was the major theory which guided this study. In addition, the theories of identity and agency were also used to help to better understand the issue under discussion.



Lastly, definitions of some important terms were provided at the end of the chapter.

