English language motivation, cultural identity and sensitivity among Chinese EFL undergraduates

Wang, Xiaohui ✉

Graduate School, Lyceum of the Philippines University – Batangas, Philippines

Abstract

As China's economic globalization and international cooperation continue to deepen, mastering English has become a key skill to achieve personal and national development. However, despite significant progress in English learning in China, many Chinese EFL undergraduates still face challenges in terms of English language motivation, cultural identity and intercultural sensitivity. Understanding these issues is essential to enhance their English learning experiences and outcomes. The study aimed to explore the relationships between English language motivation, cultural identity and intercultural sensitivity and provide insights into improving English language education for Chinese EFL undergraduates. The research adopted a descriptive method involving a total of 400 English majors and non-English majors at all levels as participants who filled out a designed questionnaire. The findings revealed that the respondents agree with English language motivation with "going abroad" being the strongest motivational factor. Regarding cultural identity, respondents generally agree with most indicators with "values" and "cultural behavior" being the most influential, indicating a relatively strong English cultural identity. Furthermore, students strongly agree on intercultural sensitivity with "respect for cultural difference" being the highest. In addition, there was a highly significant correlation among these three variables. However, Chinese EFL learners still face unique challenges, including low individual development motivation, weak language identity, and limited intercultural sensitivity, particularly in open-mindedness. Therefore, an English language enhancement program was proposed to help Chinese EFL undergraduates improve and adjust their English language motivation as well as cultivate and strengthen their cultural identity and intercultural sensitivity.

Keywords: English language motivation, cultural identity, sensitivity, Chinese EFL undergraduates

English language motivation, cultural identity and sensitivity among Chinese EFL undergraduates

1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, English language ability has become a key skill for non-native speakers, especially in non-English speaking countries like China. Driven by economic, educational, and social needs, the demand for English proficiency has grown significantly (Xu & Knijnik, 2024). English learners in China must not only strive to achieve language competence but also navigate the complex interplay of cultural identity and intercultural sensitivity in their academic and personal lives. Research shows that Chinese EFL learners' motivation is also influenced by cultural and identity factors (Xu & Gao, 2014). The process of learning English is not just about learning a new language but also requires engagement with different cultural norms and values, which may affect a student's cultural identity (Wang, 2024). The interaction between language learning and cultural identity is both rich and challenging as students negotiate their sense of self within a broader global context.

With the wide spread of English, almost every corner of the world can feel the Western cultural atmosphere it carries. Western culture, especially English-speaking countries' culture, is eroding the traditional culture of many developing countries, and China is no exception. Since the 1980s, English learning in China has been on the rise. English not only broadens students' horizons and enhances their comprehensive quality, but also activates their thinking mode. Under this context, based on previous studies, this research will investigate the relationship between English language motivation, cultural identity and intercultural sensitivity among Chinese EFL undergraduates, and explore the factors that affect English learner's language motivation, cultural identity and intercultural sensitivity.

Motivation is often related to enthusiasm, commitment and persistence to achieve goals, consisting of a closely related set of perceptions, beliefs, interests, values, and actions (Cook & Artino, 2016). English language motivation refers to the internal and external factors that influence an individual's desire and effort to learn and use the English language (Ai et al., 2021). In the context of learning English as a foreign language, motivation is classified into four types that are intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, integrative motivation, and instrumental motivation (Alizadeh, 2016). Intrinsic motivation refers to the internal desire to learn English for personal satisfaction, interest, or enjoyment, while extrinsic motivation refers to external factors that drive one to learn English, such as the need for academic success, career advancement, or social recognition (Alizadeh, 2016). It proposes that "integrative motivation refers to language learning for personal growth and cultural enrichment; that is, the learner likes to learn a language to enter successfully into the target language society". Instrumental motivation arises out of a need to learn the L2 for functional or external reasons, involving the attainment of aims, functional aims for learning like passing exams and financial rewards (Alizadeh, 2016).

Recent research sheds light on English language motivation in the Chinese context. Tai and Zhao (2024) found that due to social and family pressures, English learners in China show strong instrumental motivation to excel academically and gain better career prospects. Similarly, a study by Wang and Liu (2024) highlighted that China's highly competitive academic environment significantly increased students' motivation to learn English for educational advancement. In addition, the role of technology and social media in shaping Chinese students' motivation for learning English has been increasingly recognized.

Cultural identity refers to a sense of belonging to a particular cultural or ethnic group, including values, traditions, beliefs and norms that individuals internalize and express as part of their cultural heritage. Cultural identity emerges from external factors such as socioeconomic status, ethnic background, educational background, and immigration, which have contributed to forming a cultural identity or cultural contact between countries.

English cultural identity is an individual's general attitude towards the cultural field of English-speaking countries, including the identification of language, values, daily cultural behavior, religion and politics of English-speaking countries. English language learning includes not only the change of language but also the change of language skills in the process of learning, such as the change of cultural identity, values, life style and thinking mode. In the field of language learning, cultural identity plays a crucial role in shaping learners' attitudes, motivations, and experiences (Xiao, 2024). When learners are exposed to a new language, they often encounter different cultural norms and values, which can lead to changes in their cultural identity. The integration of language and culture in the learning process is essential for developing a deep understanding and appreciation of the target language (Hossain, 2024). Foreign language learning will inevitably affect the individual learner's attitude towards the target language culture at a deeper level, which in turn affects the learner's foreign language learning effects (Mohammed, 2020).

With the development of the international social situation and the increasing investigation of Chinese and Western cultures in Chinese English exams, English learning is no longer just about English language knowledge, but more about language and culture. Recent research trends have highlighted the complex interplay between cultural identity and language learning (Norton, 2013). Scholars have focused on how globalization and increasing intercultural interaction affect learners' cultural identities. In addition, there is growing interest in how digital media and online communities can facilitate cultural exchange and influence identity formation. Research on the cultural identity of Chinese English learners has shown that these learners face complexity and challenges in balancing their native cultural identity with the cultural elements embedded in the English language (Peng, 2023). While many Chinese students value the practical benefits of being proficient in English, they often feel tension between accepting English and maintaining their Chinese cultural identity.

Intercultural sensitivity refers to an individual's ability to recognize, understand and respond appropriately to cultural differences and similarities (Choe, 2022). This concept is crucial in the context of globalization, where intercultural interaction has become commonplace. Intercultural sensitivity is considered a key component of intercultural competence, including the attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary for effective communication across cultures (Arasaratnam, 2016). The relevant research results of humanistic psychology show that the real influence of students' learning effect is not only their talent, learning environment and teacher level, but also their emotional attitude factors (Zhang, 2022a). The level of intercultural sensitivity of learners will affect the association of cultural knowledge, language motivation and cognitive adjustment process consequently promoting or inhibiting students' English proficiency. There is ongoing work to develop and refine tools for measuring intercultural sensitivity. New scales and methods are constantly emerging that aim to capture the nuances of intercultural interactions more effectively, such as the Intercultural Competence Questionnaire (ICQ) to measure an individual's intercultural competence (Matveev & Yamazaki, 2014). Bennett and Hammer (2017) created The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) to explain the stages people may go through as they become culturally sensitive.

For college students of English as a foreign language in China, intercultural sensitivity is the key factor that affects their ability to carry out meaningful intercultural communication. Research shows that Chinese students often face challenges in intercultural environments due to differences in cultural norms, communication styles, and educational backgrounds (Wang, 2023). With the increasing impact of globalization and digitalization on education, there is a gap in understanding how these factors influence English language motivation, cultural identity, and intercultural sensitivity among Chinese EFL undergraduates. While there is ample research on language motivation, cultural identity and intercultural sensitivity, studies that integrate all of those aspects in the context of Chinese EFL undergraduates are limited. Understanding how these three aspects interact and influence one another holistically remains underexplored.

This study contributes to enhancing language motivation, developing cultural identity, and identifying effective methods for enhancing students' abilities to understand and respect cultural differences. The proposed language program contributes to providing a holistic approach to English language learning, addressing the

motivational, and cultural aspects. For policymakers and curriculum developers, the insights from this study can inform the design of language courses to better meet students' motivational, cultural, and intercultural needs. For teachers, the findings can guide the implementation of teaching practices, increase student engagement, and foster a positive learning environment. For students, a deeper understanding of their motivations and cultural identity can lead to a more effective and enjoyable language learning experience.

Objectives of the Study - This study aimed to determine the correlation between English language motivation, cultural identity, and intercultural sensitivity among Chinese EFL undergraduates and propose a language program to promote the enhancement of English language motivation, cultural identity and intercultural sensitivity of Chinese EFL undergraduates. Specifically, this study sought to describe the demographic profile of the respondents as to sex, grade and major; assess the English language motivation of Chinese EFL undergraduates in terms of intrinsic interest, English achievement, learning situation, going abroad, social responsibility, individual development, and information media; identify the cultural identity of Chinese EFL undergraduates in terms of language, values, religious belief and politics, and cultural behavior; determine the intercultural sensitivity of Chinese EFL undergraduates in terms of open-mindedness, empathy, interaction confidence, and respect for cultural differences; test the differences in responses on English language motivation, cultural identity and intercultural sensitivity among Chinese EFL undergraduates when grouped according to sex, grade and major; test the relationships among the key variables; propose an English language enhancement program for Chinese EFL students.

2. Methods

Research Design - The researcher used a descriptive method to conduct the study in determining the significant relationships among English language motivation, cultural identity, and intercultural sensitivity. Descriptive research provides observation-based information and describes things as the way they are by using questionnaires, surveys, rubrics, interviews or rankings (Deckert et al., 2023). In this study, descriptive method was used in examining the relationship among English language motivation, cultural identity and intercultural sensitivity. In survey research, respondents answered through questionnaires and the research results were discussed and analyzed using the relevant theories and studies.

Participants of the Study - Respondents of the study are students from Yantai Nanshan University and Jining University in China. The respondents were classified into English majors and non-English majors. Selecting respondents from all four academic years and classifying them into English majors and non-English majors allowed the study to provide a comprehensive, comparative, and nuanced understanding of Chinese EFL undergraduates' English language motivation, cultural identity, and intercultural sensitivity. This choice of methodology ensured that the study captured the full breadth of the student experience, providing valuable insights for academic research and practical educational improvement. The number of students in Yantai Nanshan University and Jining University are 24158 and 20000 respectively, and 44158 in total. The sample size was 400 which the researcher calculated using the Raosoft online sample size calculator with a 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level. Therefore, a total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to the target respondents.

Data Gathering Instrument - The main instrument for data collection is the validated and modified questionnaire. The questionnaire includes four parts: Personal Data Information, English Language Motivation Questionnaire, Cultural Identity Questionnaire and Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire, with a total of 79 items in a 4-point Likert scale. The first part of the questionnaire includes the respondents' profile: sex, grade and major. The second part is the English Language Motivation Questionnaire adapted from the English Learning Motivation Questionnaire edited by Wu (2018a). The English Language Motivation Questionnaire has seven subdomains: intrinsic interest, English achievement, learning situation, going abroad, social responsibility, individual development, and information media, consisting of 35 statements. In this part, the participants' responses were described on a four-point Likert scale. The third part is the Cultural Identity Questionnaire

adapted from the English Cultural Identity Scale by Wu (2018b). It has four subdomains: language, values, religious belief and politics, and cultural behavior, consisting of 20 statements. In this part, the participants' responses were described on a four-point Likert scale. The fourth part is the Intercultural Sensitivity Questionnaire adapted from the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS) by Huang (2017). It has four subdomains: open-mindedness, empathy, interaction confidence, and respect for cultural differences, consisting of 24 statements. In this part, a measure scale ranging from 1 to 4 was scaled.

The Reliability Test Results for Three Variables

Indicators	Cronbach Alpha	Remarks
Intrinsic Interest	0.854	Good
English Achievement	0.890	Good
Learning Situation	0.872	Good
Going Abroad	0.939	Excellent
Social Responsibility	0.921	Excellent
Individual Development	0.878	Good
Information Media	0.935	Excellent
Language	0.913	Excellent
Values	0.911	Excellent
Religious Belief and Politics	0.949	Excellent
Cultural Behavior	0.885	Good
Open-mindedness	0.862	Good
Empathy	0.937	Excellent
Interaction Confidence	0.938	Excellent
Respect for Cultural Differences	0.926	Excellent

George and Mallery (2003) provide the following rules of thumb: "_>.9 = Excellent, _>.8 = Good, _>.7 = Acceptable, _>.6 = Questionable, _>.5 = Poor, and _<.5 = Unacceptable

The reliability test results of Chinese EFL undergraduates' English language motivation, cultural identity and intercultural sensitivity are given. Cronbach's Alpha values of each index ranged from 0.854 to 0.949, and the reliability was good to excellent. Specifically, "Going abroad" (0.939), "Social responsibility" (0.921), "Empathy" (0.937) and other indicators have excellent reliability, with alpha values above 0.9. Only a few indicators, such as "Intrinsic interest" (0.854), "English achievement" (0.890) and "Open-mindedness" (0.862), scored slightly lower on reliability, but still good. Overall, a high Cronbach's Alpha value suggests that the metrics used in the study are consistently reliable measurements.

Data Gathering Procedure - The questionnaires before the actual data gathering were content validated by experts in the field and a pilot study with 30 respondents was conducted to test the reliability of the questionnaires. Cronbach's Alpha was employed to check the reliability of the 79 items in the three questionnaires to examine the level of internal consistency and stability of the grouped items in the instrument. After the pilot study, the complete data collection began. All the questionnaires were distributed through the online questionnaire star platform. The administration of the questionnaires was carried out in the student's regular class. Before issuing the questionnaire, the researcher first introduced the purpose and procedure of the survey. Participants were told that all information would be kept confidential. The collected questionnaires were derived by the questionnaire star platform. The researcher then downloaded the questionnaire data in the form of Excel and carefully checked and selected data to ensure the data were accurate. The final data analysis was interpreted and the results were used as the basis for the design of a proposed language program.

Ethical Considerations - Before the conduct of the study, the researcher applied for the Research Ethics Review at the Lyceum of the Philippines University, Batangas, and had the approval by the LPU-B-Research Ethics Committee. Then the researcher asked the permission of the deans and teachers in both two universities, Yantai Nanshan University and Jining University. Then the participants were allowed to answer the questionnaires voluntarily and the research purpose was clearly explained to them before they were engaged in this survey. During the survey, all the personal information, and the answers of the respondents were kept

confidential. Finally, the reference authors and their works used in this study were appropriately cited and listed in the references.

Data Analysis - After data collection, the researcher processed the data to check on its validity. Then, computer methods such as frequency distribution, mean and multiple regression were used to describe and conclude the characteristics of each variable and the correlation between the three variables by the tool of Statistic Package for the Social Science (SPSS) 27. In the process of data analysis, frequency distribution and percentage distribution were used to display demographic information of the respondents as to sex, grade and major. Then, according to the weighted mean, verbal interpretations and rankings, the researcher interpreted each indicator of the three variables, including English language motivation, cultural identity and intercultural sensitivity among Chinese EFL undergraduates. In addition, testing was conducted to examine the three variables when grouped by their profile, as well as the correlations between English language motivation and cultural identity, English language motivation and intercultural sensitivity, as well as cultural identity and intercultural sensitivity. Finally, based on the analysis of the three variables, the researcher analyzed the factors and influences of each variable and tried to propose an enhancement plan to improve Chinese EFL undergraduates' English learning proficiency.

3. Results and discussion

Table 1

English Language Motivation

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Intrinsic Interest	3.20	Agree	2
2. English Achievement	3.19	Agree	4
3. Learning Situation	3.18	Agree	6
4. Going Abroad	3.22	Agree	1
5. Social Responsibility	3.19	Agree	4
6. Individual Development	3.15	Agree	7
7. Information Media	3.19	Agree	4
Composite Mean	3.18	Agree	

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

Table 1 shows the rank of different motivations for English language motivation among Chinese EFL undergraduates. The composite mean score of 3.19 indicates that the respondents generally agree with these motivations. Among these indicators, "going abroad" is the highest-ranking motivation with a weighted mean score of 3.22, showing that Chinese EFL students regard English as a useful tool to obtain opportunities in English-speaking countries, for example getting better and higher education, obtaining a good job overseas or cultural experiences. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021) discussed the L2 Motivational Self System which includes the concept of the Ideal L2 Self, where language learner's visions of themselves using the language in future scenarios (e.g., studying or working abroad) drive their current learning efforts. Nong (2023) identifies various motivational factors among Chinese EFL undergraduates which concludes that the instrumental motivations, including the desire to work or study abroad, are highly prevalent.

The finding that the respondents regard English as essential for accessing chances in English-speaking countries is in line with the indicator that going abroad is a primary motivation. Xu and Yang (2016) examines the English language motivation of Chinese EFL learners, indicating that the pragmatic needs, such as obtaining better education and good job abroad, are significant drivers, which corroborates the high ranking of "going abroad" as a motivation. In the context of English language motivation, intrinsic interest refers to the intrinsic curiosity, enjoyment, or personal satisfaction that an individual experiences when exposed to English. This is a motivation that comes from within the learner and is driven by the intrinsic value, interest or pleasure they find in learning and using English. In this study, intrinsic interest ranks second with the weighted score of 3.20, indicating that the respondents are motivated by a genuine interest in learning English. This motivation

originates from an intrinsic curiosity and enjoyment about the language and its cultural aspects. Lai (2013) investigates 267 Chinese EFL students and explores EFL learner's orientations for studying English, highlighting that intrinsic motivation, such as interest in the language and enjoyment of learning, is a significant driver for many students.

English achievement (3.19), social responsibility (3.19) and information Media (3.19) got the same weighted mean which also indicate that the respondents generally agree with these motivational factors that inspire them to learn English. These are closely tied, reflecting a balanced mix of academic goals, social values and practical needs. However, learning situation (3.18) shows that while the learning environment is important, it is secondary to more intrinsic and instrumental motivations. This analysis is consistent with the broader literature on motivation in language learning, which shows that contextual factors, such as the learning situation, while important, often take a back seat to more personal and goal-oriented motivations. This results aligns with the study done by He et al. (2022), they find that while the learning situation, such as exam pressures and instructional elements, impacts English learning motivation, it is less influential compared to intrinsic motivations and future-oriented goals such as studying or working abroad.

Individual development (3.15) ranks lowest, suggesting that personal growth, though acknowledged, is less of a driving force compared to other subdomains of English language motivation. The lower ranking of individual development could be explained by Deci et al. (2012) who highlights that motivations related to personal growth can vary in strength depending on the sociocultural context and individual goals. The above research shows that personal development is listed as a lower motivator among English learners in China, which can be attributed to culture and education focusing more on tangible external results, such as employment prospects, academic success, and social recognition, rather than personal growth and self-realization. Halimi et al. (2020) also discussed cultural and educational factors may influence motivational priorities among Chinese EFL learners.

Table 2

Cultural Identity

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Language	3.15		Agree
2. Values	3.21		Agree
3. Religious Belief and Politics	3.16		Agree
4. Cultural Behavior	3.21		Agree
Composite Mean	3.18		Agree

Table 2 presents the various indicators of cultural identity among Chinese EFL undergraduates, reflecting their attitudes towards English culture. The composite mean score of 3.18 indicates the complicated interplay between global cultural influence, revealing a significant impact of English culture on the respondents' preferences and behaviors.

The results of the indicators of Chinese EFL students' cultural identity show that values and cultural behaviors are the main factors affecting Chinese EFL undergraduates' cultural identity with weighted mean scores of 3.21 respectively. These high rankings of these indicators show that they are the most immediate and visible aspects of cultural identity. Values are an important part of cultural identity, making up societal guidelines and defining priorities within a specific culture (Lutz, 2017). Values guide individual and social behavior, while cultural behavior is often practiced, making its influence more apparent. This finding aligns with the study by Chen (2010) who explores the components of intercultural communicative competence, highlighting the significance of integrating and understanding cultural values and behaviors; It emphasizes that values and behaviors are central to the formation and expression of cultural identity, especially in cross-cultural contexts. It also holds the same view of the emphasis on the impact of cultural globalization and the influx of American cultural elements on Chinese youth, suggesting that Western cultural behaviors, such as celebrating festivals and adopting consumption habits, have significantly influenced the cultural identity of Chinese youth.

Religious beliefs and politics with a weighted score of 3.16, while important, have less impact, and language with a weighted score of 3.15, while fundamental, is considered secondary in shaping the cultural identity of Chinese EFL undergraduates. Although these factors are important, they may not be directly related to students' daily experiences as compared to values and behaviors. Their modest influence reflects a more nuanced engagement with these aspects. This finding aligns with the study of Yang (2011) who explores the complicated role of religion in Chinese society under Communist Party rule and finds that while religion is an important aspect of cultural identity for some people, its influence is often less pronounced than other cultural factors due to the secular nature of the state and society.

Language, while fundamental to cultural identity, may be seen as a tool of communication rather than central to identity formation. Its low ranking suggests that while it is important, it is not a major driver of cultural identity for the respondents. Norton (2013) discussed that language is the medium through which individuals engage and express their identities, but the social interactions and cultural contexts that language promotes play a more critical role in identity formation. Duff (2013) also explored the role of identity and agency in second language acquisition and the researcher notes that while language learning is an important aspect of individual academic development, it is often the broader cultural and social experiences that more profoundly shape an individual's identity.

The result of the respondents' cultural identity aligns with the study done by Wu (2018b) who also studied the values, religion and politics, language, and cultural behavior of adult English learners in China. In Wu's study, the composite mean of cultural identity is 3.0697, which shows that adult students' identification level of English-speaking countries' culture is at the medium level, that is, they neither blindly worship the target language's culture nor overreact. However, the rank of the four indicators of cultural identity in these two studies has nuanced differences. In Wu's study, values, politics and religion, language, and cultural behavior were ranked from highest to lowest.

Table 3

Quality of Teaching in Chinese Universities

Indicators	Weighted Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
1. Open-mindedness	3.19	Agree	4
2. Empathy	3.24	Agree	2.5
3. Interaction Confidence	3.24	Agree	2.5
4. Respect for Cultural Differences	3.35	Agree	1
Composite Mean	3.26	Agree	

Table 3 shows the summary of various indicators of sensitivity among Chinese EFL undergraduates in terms of open-mindedness, empathy, interaction confidence, and respect for cultural differences with a composite mean of 3.26. The findings reflect that the respondents have high intercultural sensitivity.

Among these indicators, respect for cultural differences is the highest ranking indicator (3.35), which shows that Chinese EFL undergraduates attach great importance to recognizing and valuing cultural diversity. This indicates a high level of cultural awareness and sensitivity to different cultural practices and values. This finding aligns with traditional Chinese values, especially Confucian values, which emphasize respect for others and harmony in social interactions. Another reason may be that the increased exposure to different cultures through media, education, and travel might have enhanced students' appreciation for cultural diversity.

Both empathy and interaction confidence (3.24 respectively) are highly valued, indicating that students not only strive to understand and share the feelings of others but also feel reasonably confident in their intercultural interactions. Modern educational practices in China increasingly emphasize the development of soft skills, including empathy and confidence in communication. Moreover, many Chinese universities offer programs and activities that promote personal development and intercultural competence, helping students build empathy and confidence.

While the indicator open-mindedness ranks the lowest (3.19), it is still within the range of "Agree". This suggests that while students are generally open to new ideas and perspectives, there is room for improvement in fostering a more open-minded approach. The reason for the lowest rank on the indicator of open-mindedness may relate to the Chinese education system. Traditional Chinese education has been criticized for being more exam-oriented, which might limit opportunities for developing open-mindedness compared to systems that emphasize critical thinking and diverse viewpoints.

These findings align with the study of Chen and Hu (2023), who found that university students in China exhibited high levels of intercultural sensitivity, particularly with respect for cultural differences and empathy, similar to the findings in the current study. Liu (2022) study investigates the influence of learner variables on the intercultural sensitivity and effectiveness of 439 Chinese bilingual undergraduates. The study by Liu highlights the importance of empathy and confidence in intercultural communication, aligning with the current study's findings that these indicators are highly valued among Chinese EFL learners.

The analysis of intercultural sensitivity indicators among Chinese EFL undergraduates reveals that respect for cultural differences, empathy, and interaction confidence are highly valued. These findings align with traditional Chinese values of respect and harmony and are supported by relevant literature on intercultural sensitivity. Enhancing these aspects can further develop intercultural competence among students, promoting more effective and respectful intercultural interactions. The relatively lower ranking of open-mindedness suggests an area for potential growth, highlighting the need for educational reforms that foster critical thinking and openness to diverse perspectives.

Table 4 displays the association between English language motivation and cultural identity. The computed r-values indicate a strong direct correlation and the resulting p-values were less than the alpha level. This indicates that in this study, cultural identity and English language motivation have an overall influence on each other, that is, the higher the cultural identity, the stronger the English language motivation, and vice versa. The study shows that students who are highly motivated to learn English are more likely to accept and adapt to new cultural norms and values, resulting in a more fluid and evolving sense of cultural identity. Students who felt a strong attachment to American culture and actively sought to learn more about it were more likely to have higher English learning motivation and proficiency (Peng & Patterson, 2022).

The r values of intrinsic interest and language, values, religious belief and political and cultural behavior were.883,.881,.899 and.902, respectively, indicating high significance. This indicates that the higher the intrinsic interest in English learning, the higher the students' recognition of language identity, values, religious beliefs and political and cultural behaviors. This aligns with the study of Wang (2017) who also found that there is a high correlation between intrinsic interest motivation and cultural identity. This may be because intrinsic interest motivation motivates students to engage and understand different cultures more actively, thereby enhancing their cultural identity.

The r values of English achievement motivation and the four indicators of cultural identity were.881,.882,.907 and.902, respectively, indicating high significance. This suggests that the higher the English learning achievement motivation, the higher the students' recognition of these cultural identities. The study by Wang et al., (2020) reviewed how sociocultural factors affect students' achievement motivation in different cultural contexts; It highlights that cultural values and social norms have a significant impact on student's attitudes to learning and achievement. They also discussed how cultural identity forms students' achievement motivation, including in the context of learning English.

Table 4

Relationship Between English Language Motivation and Cultural Identity

Intrinsic Interest	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Language	.883**	0.000	Highly Significant
Values	.881**	0.000	Highly Significant
Religious Belief and Politics	.899**	0.000	Highly Significant
Cultural Behavior	.902**	0.000	Highly Significant
English Achievement			
Language	.881**	0.000	Highly Significant
Values	.882**	0.000	Highly Significant
Religious Belief and Politics	.907**	0.000	Highly Significant
Cultural Behavior	.902**	0.000	Highly Significant
Learning Situation			
Language	.901**	0.000	Highly Significant
Values	.884**	0.000	Highly Significant
Religious Belief and Politics	.914**	0.000	Highly Significant
Cultural Behavior	.912**	0.000	Highly Significant
Going Abroad			
Language	.903**	0.000	Highly Significant
Values	.883**	0.000	Highly Significant
Religious Belief and Politics	.904**	0.000	Highly Significant
Cultural Behavior	.903**	0.000	Highly Significant
Social Responsibility			
Language	.892**	0.000	Highly Significant
Values	.899**	0.000	Highly Significant
Religious Belief and Politics	.908**	0.000	Highly Significant
Cultural Behavior	.915**	0.000	Highly Significant
Individual Development			
Language	.904**	0.000	Highly Significant
Values	.898**	0.000	Highly Significant
Religious Belief and Politics	.921**	0.000	Highly Significant
Cultural Behavior	.903**	0.000	Highly Significant
Information Media			
Language	.902**	0.000	Highly Significant
Values	.892**	0.000	Highly Significant
Religious Belief and Politics	.911**	0.000	Highly Significant
Cultural Behavior	.902**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

The r values of the learning environment and cultural identity were .901, .884, .914, and .912, respectively, indicating high significance. This indicates that a good learning environment can significantly improve students' cultural recognition in these aspects. A good learning environment may provide more cultural exchange opportunities and resources to help students better understand and identify with different cultures. Gardner's (2010) social education model holds that learners' cultural identity and attitude toward the target language culture are closely related to learning motivation. When the learning environment supports cultural exploration and integration, students are more likely to develop a strong and positive motivation for language learning. The r values of going abroad and cultural identity were .903,.883,.904 and.903, respectively, indicating high significance. Furthermore, the highest correlation is between motivation to go abroad and language (r =.903), which shows that students who plan to go abroad are more likely to show a strong cultural identity in language. Jackson (2011) explored the relationship between language ability and intercultural sensitivity and found that language ability significantly affects intercultural identity, supporting the strong relationship between motivation to go abroad and cultural identity.

The correlation between social responsibility motivation and cultural behavior is the highest (r =.915), indicating that students with a strong sense of social responsibility are more likely to show significant cultural identity in cultural behavior, which aligns with the study of Wang (2017). Moreover, Xie (2022) also found that there is a high significance between individual development and cultural identity, which is also in line with the results of this study. English cultural identity and personal development motivation are mutually promoting relations. Individual development motivation is related to personal accomplishment and social status, as well as

students' future development prospects. English learning is closely related to their future jobs. They can enhance their professionalism and constantly improve themselves by understanding English-speaking countries' cultures. Correspondingly, in order to maintain and improve their professionalism, they will continue to learn more about English culture.

The r values of information media motivation and the four indicators of cultural identity were .902, .892, .911 and .902, respectively, indicating high significance. The results generally align with the study of Wang (2017) that language identity has a significant positive impact on information media motivation. However, Wang found that value identity and cultural behavior identity have no significant impact on information media motivation which is different from the results of this study.

Table 5

Relationship Between Professional Team Development and Quality of Teaching in Chinese Universities

Intrinsic Interest	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Open-mindedness	.875**	0.000	Highly Significant
Empathy	.864**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interaction Confidence	.886**	0.000	Highly Significant
Respect for Cultural Differences	.844**	0.000	Highly Significant
English Achievement			
Open-mindedness	.883**	0.000	Highly Significant
Empathy	.876**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interaction Confidence	.891**	0.000	Highly Significant
Respect for Cultural Differences	.856**	0.000	Highly Significant
Learning Situation			
Open-mindedness	.876**	0.000	Highly Significant
Empathy	.870**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interaction Confidence	.893**	0.000	Highly Significant
Respect for Cultural Differences	.843**	0.000	Highly Significant
Going Abroad			
Open-mindedness	.877**	0.000	Highly Significant
Empathy	.869**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interaction Confidence	.883**	0.000	Highly Significant
Respect for Cultural Differences	.881**	0.000	Highly Significant
Social Responsibility			
Open-mindedness	.874**	0.000	Highly Significant
Empathy	.882**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interaction Confidence	.900**	0.000	Highly Significant
Respect for Cultural Differences	.863**	0.000	Highly Significant
Individual Development			
Open-mindedness	.894**	0.000	Highly Significant
Empathy	.868**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interaction Confidence	.893**	0.000	Highly Significant
Respect for Cultural Differences	.860**	0.000	Highly Significant
Information Media			
Open-mindedness	.874**	0.000	Highly Significant
Empathy	.877**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interaction Confidence	.887**	0.000	Highly Significant
Respect for Cultural Differences	.860**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.05

Table 5 shows the association between English language motivation and sensitivity. The computed r-values indicate a strong direct correlation and the resulting p-values were less than the alpha level. This means that there was significant relationship exists and implies that the more motivated in the English language, the more that they are sensitive during intercultural communication. Huynh et al., (2018) discussed in his study that there is a positive correlation between intercultural sensitivity and language learning motivation. Specifically, students exhibited high levels of both intercultural sensitivity and language learning motivation. These results also are in line with the study by Akhtar et al. (2019) who investigated the motivation and intercultural sensitivity of Taiwanese college students in learning English. They found that students with higher overall motivation show greater intercultural sensitivity.

Intrinsic interest motivation has the highest correlation with interaction confidence in intercultural sensitivity (r =.886), indicating that students with intrinsic interest drive are more likely to show high confidence in intercultural interactions. Tamam (2010) explores how intrinsic motivation enhances intercultural sensitivity, which is closely related to confidence in intercultural communication settings. Moreover, this study explores in depth how individual involvement in different cultural interests can improve communication skills in cross-cultural contexts (Tamam, 2010), which is in line with the findings of this study. Furthermore, English achievement motivation, learning environment motivation, social responsibility motivation, and information media motivation also have a high correlation with interaction confidence in intercultural sensitivity.

Several studies have explored this connection, suggesting that English language motivation can significantly affect learners' confidence in cross-cultural communication settings. Çiloğlan and Bardakçı (2019) found that intercultural sensitivity and English language competence are interrelated, therefore students who actively study English tend to develop stronger intercultural skills, which are essential for communicating effectively in different settings. Liu and Zhang (2023) explore the relationship between cultural sensitivity and the academic performance of Chinese students and find that intercultural sensitivity is highly correlated with academic performance, which supports the relationship between English achievement and intercultural sensitivity.

Research shows that positive emotions, such as enjoyment, generated in a supportive learning environment are critical to encouraging students' willingness to communicate in a second language. In intercultural settings, this willingness is often associated with higher confidence (Khajavy et al., 2018), which can approve the correlation between learning situation motivation and interaction confidence. Hong (2013) discussed the relationship between intercultural sensitivity and information media motivation, specifically, the use of social networking sites; they highlighted that the use of these platforms influenced the students' competence in intercultural communication. Furthermore, individual development motivation has the highest correlation with openness (r =.894), indicating that students who pursue personal development are more inclined to show an open attitude in cross-cultural communication. The correlation between motivation to go abroad and respect for cultural differences was the highest (r =.881), indicating that students who plan to go abroad are more inclined to show high respect for cultural differences in intercultural communication. Raczkoski and Robinson (2018) point out that students' intrinsic values and expectations are the strongest predictors of their intention to study abroad and they also found that intrinsic motivation, such as the expectation of cultural experience, significantly enhances students' openness and respect for cultural differences in cross-cultural communication.

Table 6 presents the association between cultural identity and intercultural sensitivity. The computed r-values indicate a strong direct correlation and the resulting p-values were less than the alpha level. This means that there was a significant relationship exists and implies that the better the cultural identity, the more that they are culturally sensitive. Language identity and all variables of intercultural sensitivity showed a highly significant positive correlation, indicating a strong relationship between language identity and intercultural sensitivity. This means that the higher the level of language recognition, the more open, empathetic, communicative confidence and respect for cultural differences students can show in cross-cultural communication. Zhang (2016) explored language attitudes and identity in the multilingual context of China and found that language identity has a significant impact on intercultural communication ability, showing that positive language identity can enhance individuals' intercultural sensitivity and willingness to communicate.

Table 6

Relationship Between Cultural Identity and Intercultural Sensitivity

Language	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Open-mindedness	.873**	0.000	Highly Significant
Empathy	.870**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interaction Confidence	.873**	0.000	Highly Significant
Respect for Cultural Differences	.856**	0.000	Highly Significant

Values			
Open-mindedness	.874**	0.000	Highly Significant
Empathy	.879**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interaction Confidence	.888**	0.000	Highly Significant
Respect for Cultural Differences	.847**	0.000	Highly Significant
Religious Belief and politics			
Open-mindedness	.890**	0.000	Highly Significant
Empathy	.876**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interaction Confidence	.887**	0.000	Highly Significant
Respect for Cultural Differences	.853**	0.000	Highly Significant
Cultural Behavior			
Open-mindedness	.883**	0.000	Highly Significant
Empathy	.876**	0.000	Highly Significant
Interaction Confidence	.901**	0.000	Highly Significant
Respect for Cultural Differences	.867**	0.000	Highly Significant

Legend: Significant at p-value < 0.01

There is also a highly significant positive correlation between values and intercultural sensitivity, especially in terms of empathy and communicative confidence. This indicates that values identity has an important impact on students' intercultural communication ability. Moradi and Ghabanchi (2019) explored the intercultural sensitivity of business English undergraduates in China and found that value identification (such as openness to multiculturalism) has a significant impact on intercultural sensitivity, which is in line with the findings of this study. Chen (2010) also supports a significant positive correlation between value identification (e.g. openness) and intercultural sensitivity.

Religious belief and political identity have significant effects on intercultural sensitivity, especially on openness and communicative confidence. This suggests that religious and political backgrounds play a key role in shaping students' intercultural communication skills. Littler (2020) discusses how religion can be an important factor in intercultural communication. Research has shown that religious identity affects not only an individual's cultural identity but also their communication style and sensitivity to people from different cultural backgrounds.

The correlation between cultural behavior and intercultural sensitivity was highest, especially in the area of interaction confidence. This indicates that cultural behavior has the strongest predictive effect on students' intercultural communication ability and intercultural sensitivity. As individuals become more aware of cultural differences, their sensitivity, and understanding of those differences also increase. In other words, the increased identification with cultural behavior can enhance intercultural sensitivity, as it involves a shift from ethnocentrism to racial relativism, in which cultural differences are acknowledged and valued. Bennett and Hammer (2017) support the analysis of the positive correlation between cultural behavior identification and intercultural sensitivity; as individuals become more sensitive to cultural nuances (a process that involves identifying and understanding different cultural behaviors), they enter a higher stage of intercultural sensitivity.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

Respondents of English and non-English major students were female-dominated groups. Students of freshmen and juniors make up the majority. Chinese EFL undergraduates generally agree that going abroad, intrinsic interest, English achievement, learning situation, social responsibility, individual development, and information media motivate them to learn English. Chinese EFL undergraduates strongly agree in terms of the values and cultural behavior of the English-speaking countries.. Chinese EFL undergraduates strongly agree with respecting cultural differences, interaction confidence, and empathy with dealing with intercultural conversations. There were no significant differences in English language motivation, cultural identity, and cultural sensitivity among the respondents when grouped according to the profile. There was a significant correlation among EFL undergraduates' English language motivation, cultural identity, and sensitivity in China. An English language enhancement program was proposed to help Chinese EFL undergraduates improve their English language

motivation, respect different cultures, and enhance cultural sensitivity.

School administrators may provide career development support, build a learning support system, and promote the internationalization process to facilitate teachers to carry out educational activities for students to achieve better English proficiency. English teachers may make reasonable use of and combine students' intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation to stimulate students' desire to learn English. At the same time, teachers may guide students' cultural identity to avoid extreme phenomena. In addition, teachers may cultivate students' confidence in intercultural communication. English supervisors and teachers may evaluate the proposed program for implementation. Future researchers may balance the number of freshman to sophomore participants to ensure the diversity and representation of research findings. Moreover, future studies may further verify the difference in English language motivation, cultural identity and sensitivity when grouped by sex, grade, and major.

5. References

Ai, J., Pan, Y., & Zhong, W. (2021). The Role of Motivation in Second Language Acquisition: A review. In 2021 3rd International Conference on Literature, Art and Human Development (ICLAHD 2021) (pp. 623-627). Atlantis Press.

Alizadeh, M. (2016). The Impact of Motivation on English Language Learning. *International Journal of Research in English Education*, 1(1), 11-15.

Akhtar, N., Pratt, C. B., & Hu, Y. (2019). Sustainability of the Belt and Road Initiative: An Integrated, Conceptual Framework for Instructional Communication in China's Universities. *Sustainability*, 11(23), 6789.

Arasaratnam, L. A. (2016). Intercultural Competence. In J. Nussbaum (Ed.), *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. Oxford University Press.

Bennett, M. J., & Hammer, M. (2017). Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. *The International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication*, 1(10).

Chen, G. M. (2010). *A Study of Intercultural Communication Competence*. China Review Academic Publishers.

Choe, M. (2022). Second Culture Acquisition and Language Development: Cultural Sensitivity as An Individual Difference Factor. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 30(4), 145-167.

Chen, H., & Hu, B. (2023). On the Intercultural Sensitivity of University Students in Multicultural Regions: A Case Study in Macao. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1090775.

Çiloğlan, F., & Bardakçı, M. (2019). The Relationship Between Intercultural Sensitivity and English Language Achievement. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 15(3),* 1204-1214.

Cook, D. A., & Artino Jr, A. R. (2016). Motivation to Learn: An Overview of Contemporary Theories. *Medical Education, 50(10)*, 997-1014.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2017). Self-Determination *Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness*. Guilford Press.

Deckert, J., & Wilson, M. (2023). Descriptive Research Methods. In T. Welsh, J. P. Ambegaonkar, & L. Mainwaring (Eds.), *Research Methods in the Dance Sciences*. University Press of Florida

Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2021). *Teaching and Researching Motivation. Routledge.*

Duff, P. A. (2013). *Identity, Agency, and Second Language Acquisition. In The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition*. Routledge.

Gardner, R. C. (2010). Motivation and Second Language Acquisition. *The Socio-Educational Model* (Vol. 10).

Jackson, J. (2019). *Introducing Language and Intercultural Communication*. Routledge.

Halimi, F., Daniel, C. E., & Al Shammari, I. A. (2020). Motivation and Socio-Cultural Milieu of Second Language Learners: Considerations Involved in English Teaching. *English Language Teaching*, 13(5), 149-163.

He, X., Zhou, D., & Wu, C. (2022). Exploring the Motivational States of English Learning Among Chinese EFL Learners at Tertiary-Level: A Perspective of Directed Motivational Currents. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 1041258.

Hossain, K. I. (2024). Reviewing the Role of Culture in English Language Learning: Challenges and Opportunities for Educators. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 9, 100781.

Huang, W. H. (2017). Preliminary Construction of the Chinese Intercultural Sensitivity Scale. *China Foreign Affairs University, (02),* 92-98.

Huynh, Q. L., Benet-Martínez, V., & Nguyen, A. M. D. (2018). Measuring Variations in Bicultural Identity Across US Ethnic and Generational Groups: Development and Validation of the Bicultural Identity Integration Scale—Version 2 (BIIS-2). *Psychological Assessment*, 30(12), 1581.

Khajavy, G. H., MacIntyre, P. D., & Barabadi, E. (2018). Role of the Emotions and Classroom Environment in Willingness to Communicate: Applying Doubly Latent Multilevel Analysis in Second Language Acquisition Research. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 40(3),* 605-624.

Lai, H. Y. T. (2013). The Motivation of Learners of English as a Foreign Language Revisited. *International Education Studies*, 6(10), 90-101.

Liu, M. (2022). Effects of Learner Variables on Chinese Bilingual Undergraduates' Intercultural Sensitivity and Effectiveness. *Education Sciences*, 12(12), 873.

Littler, M. (2020). Religion and Intercultural Communication. In J. Jackson (Ed.), The Cambridge Handbook of Intercultural Communication (pp. 446-459). *Cambridge University Press.*

Lutz, S. A. (2017). Cultural Sensitivity: Importance, Competencies, and Public Relations Implications. *Chancellor's Honors Program Projects.*

Matveev, A. V., & Yamazaki Merz, M. (2014). Intercultural competence assessment: What are its key dimensions across assessment tools?.

Mohammed, A. (2020). The Impact of Culture on English Language Learning. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, 8(1), 21-27.

Moradi, E., & Ghabanchi, Z. (2019). Intercultural Sensitivity. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies, 6(3),* 134-146.

Nong, X. (2023). A Study of the Motivation of the Chinese College English Learners. In *2022 4th International Conference on Literature, Art and Human Development (ICLAHD 2022)* (pp.596-605). Atlantis Press.

Norton, B. (2013). Identity and Language Learning: Extending the Conversation. In Identity and Language Learning (2nd ed., pp. 1-16). *Multilingual Matters.*

Peng, Y. (2023). Understanding the Cultural Identity of EFL Learners from the Eco-linguistics Perspective: Evidence from Students in Arts College Before and After the COVID-19 Epidemic Period. *Frontiers in Psychology, 14*, 1249334.

Peng, A., & Patterson, M. M. (2022). Relations Among Cultural Identity, Motivation for Language Learning, and Perceived English Language Proficiency for International Students in the United States. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 35(1), 67-82.

Raczkoski, B. M., Robinson, J. S., Edwards, M. C., & Baker, M. A. (2018). Forecasting College Students' Motivations to Study Abroad: A Pilot Study. *Journal of Agricultural Education, 59(2),* 123-142.

Tai, K. W., & Zhao, Y. V. (2024). Success Factors for English as a Second Language University Students' Attainment in Academic English Language Proficiency: Exploring the Roles of Secondary School Medium-of-Instruction, Motivation and Language Learning Strategies. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 15(2), 611-641.

Tamam, E. (2010). Examining Chen and Starosta's Model of Intercultural Sensitivity in a Multiracial Collectivistic Country. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 39(3),* 173-183.

Wang, X., & Liu, H. (2024). Exploring the Moderating Roles of Emotions, Attitudes, Environment, and Teachers in the Impact of Motivation on Learning Behaviours in Students' English Learning. *Psychological Reports.*

Wang, W. (2023a). Effects of Intercultural Communication on Academic Achievement of Chinese Overseas Students in the UK. *Journal of Education and Educational Research*, 6(2), 15-19.

Wang, W. (2017). A Study of English Majors' Anglo-American Cultural Identity and Its Influence on English Learning Motivation: Take the English Majors of X University as an Example. (Master's thesis, Xi'an International Studies University).

Wang, M. T., Guo, J., & Degol, J. L. (2020). The Role of Sociocultural Factors in Student Achievement Motivation: A Cross-Cultural Review. *Adolescent Research Review*, 5(4), 435-450.

Wu, Y. (2018a). The Relationship Among English Learning Motivation Types, Motivation Intensity, and L2 Motivational Selves: A Case Study of Wuhan University Students Wuhan University (Master's thesis, Wuhan University).

Wu, L. (2018b). The Study on the Correlation Between British-American Cultural Identity and Adult's Language Learning Motivation (Master's thesis, Shanghai International Studies University).

Xiao, M. (2024). Chinese International Graduate Students at Canadian Universities: Language barriers, Cultural Identities and Perceived problems of Engagement. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 28(5)*, 491-508.

Xie, X. (2022). Transnational Higher Education Partnerships in China: Exploring the Impact of Chinese Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence on Their Motivation to Study Abroad. *Educational Research and Evaluation*, 27(3-4), 280-308.

Xu, H., & Gao, Y. (2014). The Development of English Learning Motivation and Learners' Identities: A Structural Equation Modeling Analysis of Longitudinal Data from Chinese Universities. *System, 47*, 102-115.

Xu, W., & Knijnik, J. (2024). Teaching the English Language in Chinese Higher Education: Preparing Critical Citizens for the Global Village. *Teaching in Higher Education, 29(1)*, 16-30.

Xu, S., & Yang, X. (2016). Empirical Study on Characteristics of Students' English Learning Motivation in Local Universities. In *2016 2nd International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2016)* (pp. 482-485). Atlantis Press.

Yang, F. (2011). Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule. *Oxford University Press.*

Zhang, J. (2016). Language Attitudes and Identities in Multilingual China: A Linguistic Ethnography. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 19(4),* 471–474.

Zhang, T. (2022a). A Study on the Correlation Between Intercultural Sensitivity and English Proficiency of Senior High School Students (Master's thesis, Jinlin International Studies University)