

**Motivation and English Attainment: A comparative study of Hong  
Kong students with different cultural backgrounds**

*Ruth Ming Har Wong*

*The Hong Kong Institute of Education*

*Published date: 2007*

*Journal: Asia Pacific Education Researcher, 17 (1), 45-60.*

# **Motivation and English Attainment: A comparative study of Hong Kong students with different cultural backgrounds**

---

## ***Abstract***

*The main objective of this study is to investigate the motivation patterns of the two groups of Hong Kong students with different cultural backgrounds and examine the relationship between their motivation to learn English and English attainment. This study adopted the motivation framework of Dorneyi (2001) to investigate to what extent each social specific motivation component affects respective group of students' motivation to learn English. Results found that peer is the most influential factor in affecting students' motivation to learn while parents play the least significant role. Attempts were also made to see how specific motivational components relate to English attainment. Results showed that both groups of students' English attainment are positively correlated to course-specific motivation while teacher-specific motivation holds contrastive correlations with the two groups of students. With the results of this study, lights can be shed on helping educators to understand the fundamental differences between the two groups of students in terms of motivation and learning needs.*

Since 1997, the number of Mainland Chinese children coming to Hong Kong to unite with their families has been increasing. Adaptation to the local education system and the challenges posed by the new English learning environment are the issues these children need to deal with. It is believed that the English proficiency of the locally born Hong Kong (LBHK) students is of higher level than that of newly arrived Hong Kong (NAHK) students because of several reasons: First of all, English is a compulsory subject throughout the nine-year Hong Kong compulsory education system. Although China has also adopted a nine-year compulsory schooling system, foreign languages such as English are optional courses in primary education. Also, English has been incorporated in other subjects taught in schools for many years in Hong Kong; but this is not the case in Mainland China. Finally, English and Chinese are both the official languages in Hong Kong and English has long been widely used in various business sectors, government, and international trade. It is known that it is difficult to get a good job without sufficient English proficiency in Hong Kong. However, it is still possible to get a good job without any proficiency of English in China although English is now becoming important in international trade and business sectors.

Because of the aforementioned differences, NAHK students are differ from the LBHK students in terms of their English proficiency, learning environment and exposure, which may affect their respective motivation to learn and English attainment. To better help NAHK students to adapt to the new learning environment and learn English, an understanding of the relationship between English learning motivation and English attainment will be necessary.

This study attempts to examine the motivation patterns of the two groups of students; and find out whether respective group of students' learning motivation has correlations with English attainment. To answer these questions, it is hypothesized peer plays the most important factor affecting students' motivation to learn English while parents play the least significant role; and both groups of students' motivation are positively correlated with English attainment. When comparing the differences between the motivation patterns, it is hypothesized that LBHK students have stronger motivation than NAHK students.

### **Purpose of Study**

The main objective of the current study is to examine and compare the relationship between motivation for learning English and English attainment of NAHK students and LBHK students. There are two sub-objectives:

- To find out in what ways NAHK students and LBHK students differ in terms of teacher-specific motivation, group-specific motivation, course-specific motivation and parent-specific motivation respectively;
- To ascertain how motivation relates to English attainment for both NAHK students and LBHK students.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

To explore the differences between the two groups of students' motivation and its relations with English attainment, a total of five hypotheses under three research questions were set for testing.

(1) What are the motivation patterns of the two groups of students?

H1: Peer influences students' learning motivation most.

H2: Parent influences students' learning motivation least.

(2) What are the differences between the motivation patterns of the two groups of students?

H3: LBHK students' motivation is significantly stronger than that of NAHK students'.

(3) What are the relations between students' learning motivation and English attainment?

H4: LBHK students' motivation has positive correlation with their English attainment.

H5: NAHK students' motivation has positive correlation with their English attainment.

## **Literature Review**

Achievement motivation theory suggests that people are moved to take action by a need to achieve or to be successful. Psycholinguistic researches have been focusing on students' motivation and its relation to attainment. Gardner's researches had laid the very foundations of motivation studies and his work have also shown greater efforts from learners are encouraged by motivation, thus greater success in language performance is

reported (1985, 1992, 1995). Meanwhile, this area of study was investigated with further details by a number of scholars (e.g. Chandrasegaran 1979, Okada et al. 1996, Oxford & Shearin 1994, Paitoonpong 1980 & Spolsky 1969). However, these studies were only investigated in general terms, not related to specific cultural context.

In the 80s and 90s, motivational studies continued to be conducted perpetually and had started to be culturally specific. Pierson, Fu and Lee (1980) found six factors significantly related to HK secondary school students' English proficiency. They are: 1) freedom of language choice; 2) desire to learn English; 3) lack of self-confidence in using English; 4) approbation for using English; 5) discomfort over Chinese speakers using English; and 6) English as a mark of education. Their work laid a foundation in investigating motivation with respect to specific cultural context.

Since then, research done on relations between motivation and English attainment in Hong Kong context started to flourish. Significant studies were done to look into the aspects of learning motivation and English attainment. Pierson, Fu and Lee (1980), Deci & Ryan (1985) Strong (1984) and Richards (1993) all found that there is a strong positive correlation between Hong Kong students' intrinsic motivation and high English attainment. Pennington and Yue (1993) later assessed the language attitudes of HK secondary students in the context of imminent changes of sovereignty in 1997. The findings showed that there is a strong motivation for students in HK to learn English. Lin & Detaramani (1998) found that most tertiary students are very much extrinsically motivated to learn English. The motivating force lies upon the immediate need of

learning and using the L2, not from their anticipated future goals. Tertiary students with high English attainment tend to be more intrinsically motivated than extrinsically motivated.

Littlewood (1996) further explained students' eagerness to communicate with English-speaking people may point to intrinsic motivation, however, students commented their eagerness to learn is due to the predominantly Cantonese-speaking environment. That is, students communicate with English-speaking people is also due to extrinsic reason. Liu & Littlewood (1996) concluded that students' overall strong motivation and positive attitudes toward English and interacting with English speaking people indicate a set of schemata favorable to learning. The latest work can be found in Chan et al's (2005) work, they found that HK students' academic achievement was not related to learning goals.

Most of the past studies mentioned above are related to one particular sort of motivation and its relations to a particular context. There has been no comprehensive study to investigate how social setting as a whole exert influence on different cultural groups of learners' English learning motivation and its relations to attainment, especially in the context of Hong Kong. This paper therefore intends to fill such gap.

## **Methodology**

### ***Participants***

In this study, two groups of students, with the total number of 50 NAHK students and LBHK students were compared on their motivation of English learning and English attainment.

The NAHK students groups comprised the total intake of 25 NAHK teenagers from China who arrived in HK to unite with their families in 2004 and were admitted to a local secondary school in the same year. They were all studying in Form 2 (ages 15—16) in 2004—2005 but in different classes. Length of having been studying in HK is the same. All are Cantonese speakers and from Guangdong Province, a regional province where Hong Kong is located in. When these NAHK students came to Hong Kong, they were provided with a one-year English remedial class to ensure their English proficiency reached the beginner level (Key Stage One) of English stated in the Hong Kong Secondary School Curriculum Guide.

The subjects drawn for LBHK students group are randomly chosen from the same form and the same classes where the NAHK students are allocated. To control variables, the numbers of samples of the two groups are the same. Both groups have 25 students, 10 males and 15 females.

## **Instrumentation**

### ***Questionnaire***



A questionnaire was employed to collect quantitative data of students' motivation of learning. The questionnaire administered in this study consists of 48 closed questions. Three statements were constructed for each sub-component under each motivational component of the proposed version of Dornyei's (2001) extended framework. Six-point Likert scale was adopted for respondents to indicate their responses ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". A pilot study confirmed that six-point scale was effective in lowering respondents' tendency to choose the central response. Chinese was the language used in the questionnaire as students are most comfortable with their first language.

### ***English Attainment Test***

The English examination is an internal standardized test taken by all students in the same form. All subjects took part in the exam. The examination paper consists of four papers: (1) listening, (2) writing, (3) reading and (4) speaking. Each paper carries equal weighting.

### ***Data Analysis***

To decide which motivational factor is more significantly influential in affecting students' motivation to learn English, mean scores and standard deviation were calculated. Inferential statistics, that is independent sample *t*-test in an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was also used to determine if there is any significant differences between different practices employed by the two groups of researchers. The groups are considered independent if a member of one group cannot possibly be in the other

group. The significance level was set at  $p < 0.05$ . Since multiple comparisons were to be made within the same dataset, the probability of observing a sizable difference one of the comparisons increases with the number of comparisons made. To control Type I error, the significance level after Bonferroni adjustments was set to  $p < 0.001$  ( $0.05/50$ ). This adjustment controls very tightly for false positives.

### **Reliability and internal consistency of questionnaire**

A reliability test on the 48-item questionnaire was run to test if there is an internal consistency of all the items set. Reliability coefficient (Cronbach alphas) for the motivational components was high, with an alpha value of 0.852, which means the internal consistency of the 48 items in the questionnaire was high.

### **Reliability of English test scale score**

To ensure the reliability of the English tests, the test-retest method was adopted to see if the first set of scores was correlated with the second set of scores. The correlations found were 0.83 (listening) and 0.74 (reading). The internal consistency by using Cronbach alphas were also calculated. They were 0.72 (listening) and 0.68 (reading) respectively.

The reliability of the speaking and writing cannot be reported in the same manner because they are not item-based. Writing and speaking were assessed by senior teachers according to detailed descriptive criteria. Sample writing scripts and oral assessment tapes were randomly double-marked. Analysis of the paired markers' given marks produced correlations of 0.84 for the writing paper and 0.78 for the speaking paper.

## **Theoretical Framework--Modification of Dornyei's Framework of L2 Motivation**

In this study, the learning situation level of Dornyei's extended framework on L2 motivation were adopted because the elements and factors in the framework are all relevant to the samples selected for the study.

Dornyei's model (Dornyei, 2001) consists of three levels of motivation, they are language level, learner level and learning situation level, of which components are listed in the following table. The level of learning situation of Dornyei's framework was adopted in this empirical study as this study mainly deals with the social aspect of motivational factors affecting English attainment rather than exploring the relationship of the two from a psychological point of view. This framework includes most of the important social factors considered by the past researches as having impact on language learning.

*Table 1 Learning Situation Level Components of Foreign Language Learning Motivation (Dornyei, 2001)*

Learning Situation Level	
<i>Course-specific</i>  <i>Motivation Components</i>	Interest (in the course)
	Relevance (of the course to one's needs)
	Expectancy (of success)
	Satisfaction (one has in the outcome)
<i>Teacher-Specific</i>	Affiliative motive (to please the teacher)

<i>Motivational components</i>	Authority type (autonomy-supporting)
	Direct Socialization of Motivation
	*Modeling
	*Task Presentation
	*Feedback
<i>Group-Specific</i>	Goal-orientations
<i>Motivational Components</i>	Norm & Reward System
	Group Cohesion
	Classroom Goal Structure (cooperative)

According to Dornyei, course-specific motivational components are related to syllabus, teaching materials, teaching methods and learning tasks. Teacher-specific motivational components refer to teachers' behaviour, personality and teaching style while group-specific motivational components relate to group's goal orientations, cohesiveness, norm, reward system and classroom goal structure.

To increase representativeness, one element has been added to Dornyei's framework. That is, *parent-specific motivational component*. Interestingly, Dornyei (2001) also noted parental influence plays a large part in students learning motivation although he does not include it as a component in his framework. According to the research to date (e.g. Douglas , 1967; Brophy, 1987, Wlodkosuki & Jaynes,1990 & Gottfield et al., 1994), parent is one of the primary impacts on students' learning motivation. As Wlodkoswki &

Janynes (1990) concluded effective families have a set of characteristics like family income, education, and ethnic background. Effective families also display a number of positive attitudes and behaviours toward their children which help succeed in school.

Due to the incomplete list of Dornyei's framework, the component of *parent-specific motivation* was added which can be broken down into further constituents to fit the context of Hong Kong:

- Education background
- Financial support
- Affective encouragement

In this paper, education background refers to parents' proficiency of English and abilities in offering guidance to their children. Financial support refers to technical support, provided by parents to facilitate their children's English learning, such as hiring tutor, buying reference books or computer. Affective encouragement refers to the supportive family climate, like verbal encouragement to their children.

Table 2 is the modified version of the learning situation level in Dornyei's framework of L2 learning.

*Table 2 Extension of Dornyei's Extended Framework (1994)*

<b>Learning Situation Level</b>
---------------------------------

<i>Course-specific Motivation Components</i>	Interest (in the course)
	Relevance (of the course to one's needs)
	Expectancy (of success)
	Satisfaction (one has in the outcome)
<i>Teacher-Specific Motivational components</i>	Affiliative motive (to please the teacher)
	Authority type (autonomy-supporting)
	Direct Socialization of Motivation
	*Modeling
	*Task Presentation
	*Feedback
<i>Group-Specific Motivational Components</i>	Goal-orientations
	Norm & Reward System
	Group Cohesion
	Classroom Goal Structure (cooperative)
<i>*Parent-Specific Motivation Component</i>	Education Background
	Financial Support
	Affective Encouragement

\* New motivation component added to Dornyei's (2001) extended framework.

## Results

*The Motivation Patterns of the Two Groups of Students*

*Hypothesis 1: Peer influences students' learning motivation most.*

Mean and standard deviation of each motivational component for both groups of students were computed in order to identify their motivation patterns. Table 5 shows some descriptive statistics of each motivational component measured in the present study.

*Table 3 Descriptive Statistics--Motivational Components*

	<b>LBHK</b>		<b>NAHK</b>	
	<b>students</b>	<b>students</b>	<b>students</b>	<b>students</b>
	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Group-specific Motivation</b>	4.79	0.34	4.56	0.42
<b>Teacher-specific Motivation</b>	4.59	0.37	4.40	0.37
<b>Course-specific Motivation</b>	4.36	0.46	3.78	0.56
<b>Parent-specific Motivation</b>	3.90	0.78	3.57	0.55
<b>Overall Motivation</b>	4.41	0.34	4.08	0.34

Table 3 shows that for LBHK students, the motivational component with the highest mean is group-specific motivation, with a mean of 4.79; teacher-specific motivation comes second; course-specific motivation comes third while parent-specific motivation comes last, with a mean of 3.9.

Interestingly, the statistical results of NAHK students' are similar. Group-specific motivation indicates a mean of 4.56; teacher-specific motivation shows a mean of 4.4; course-specific motivation has a mean of 3.78; while parents-specific motivation indicates the lowest mean of all, 3.57. If two groups of students' overall motivation are to be compared, LBHK students have a higher mean of 4.41 while NAHK students show a mean of 4.01. The results support hypothesis 1 at this point of study.

If we are to further look into details of the statistical results, results also continue to support hypothesis 1. All statements listed in Table 4 are derived from group-specific motivation, which draw a clear picture that Hong Kong students are influenced by their peers most during their process of learning English.

*Table 4 Means and SD for Statements LBHK Students Most Agreed with*

<b>Statement Number</b>	<b>Motivational Component</b>	<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
11	Group-Specific Motivation	Learning English with my friends together is better than learning it by myself.	5.56	0.71
35	Group-Specific Motivation	I know the reason for learning English.	5.40	0.65
33	Group-Specific Motivation	Most of my classmates obey what our English teacher instructs us to do.	5.40	0.82
36	Group-Specific	If my friends are good at English, I	5.16	0.80



	Motivation	want to be good at English too.		
16	Group-Specific	I enjoy learning English with my class.	5.16	1.25
	Motivation			
10	Course-Specific	I like what I am learning in English	5.08	0.81
	Motivation	classes.		
37	Teacher-Specific	If I can learn English well, my teacher	5.08	0.76
	Motivation	will praise me.		
47	Teacher-Specific	If I can master English well, my teacher	5.08	0.86
	Motivation	will have a better impression of me.		
13	Group-Specific	I understand why I must work hard on	5.04	0.84
	Motivation	my English.		
5	Teacher-Specific	I want to pass my English because I do	5.00	0.96
	Motivation	not want to disappoint my teacher.		
29	Teacher-Specific	I agree with my English teacher when	5.00	0.87
	Motivation	he/she points out my mistakes.		

*\*This table only listed statements with means of 5.00 or above.*

The statements which elicited the strongest agreement from the NAHK students are also mostly group-specific. They are: (33) “Most of my classmates obey what our English teacher instructs us to do,” (13) “I understand why I must work hard on my English,” (35) “I know the reason for learning English,” (29) “I agree with my English teacher when he/she points out my mistakes,” and (36) “If my friends are good at English, I want to be good at English too.” Four out of these five statements are under the category of group-

specific motivation, only (29) is from the category of teacher-specific motivation. Here, NAHK students echoed the results of LBHK students. NAHK students also expressed that peers influenced their English learning most. Table 5 shows the statements NAHK students most agreed with.

*Table 5 Means and Standard Deviation for Statements NAHK students Most Agreed with*

<b>Statement Number</b>	<b>Motivational Component</b>	<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
33	Group-Specific Motivation	Most of my classmates obey what our English teacher instructs us to do.	5.56	0.65
13	Group-Specific Motivation	I understand why I must work hard on my English.	5.16	0.75
35	Group-Specific Motivation	I know the reason for learning English.	5.12	0.72
29	Teacher-Specific Motivation	I agree with my English teacher when he/she points out my mistakes.	5.12	0.66
36	Group-Specific Motivation	If my friends are good at English, I want to be good at English too.	5.04	0.73

- This table only listed statements with means of 5.00 or above.

Table 4 and Table 5 provide sufficient evidence to support hypothesis 1 set in this study: peer influences students' learning motivation most.

***Hypothesis 2: Parents have least influence on students' motivation***

In order to examine which motivation component influences students' process learning of English least, a glance at Table 5 gives us an answer. Table 5 shows parents play the least significant role in affecting both groups of students' motivation to learn English. This supports hypothesis 2 set in this study: parents have least influence on students' motivation.

To further understand why parents play such minor role in motivating their children's motivation to learn English, Table 6 and 7 may help. According to Table 6 and 7, the statements which elicited the weakest agreement by both LBHK and NAHK students are the same. They are: (27) "I think my parents English is good enough to communicate with native English speakers," (39) "My parents can point out my mistakes in English works," and (14) "My parents can teach me English when I need them to." These three statements are all related to parent-specific motivation and pointed at their parents' English proficiency which can not be of help to their English work.

*Table 6 Means and Standard Deviation for Statements LBHK Students Most Disagreed with*

<b>Statement Number</b>	<b>Motivational Component</b>	<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
27	Parent-Specific Motivation	I think my parents English is good enough to communicate with native English speakers.	2.92	1.17
39	Parent-Specific Motivation	My parents can point out my mistakes in English works.	2.96	1.69
14	Parent-Specific Motivation	My parents can teach me English when I need them to.	3.20	1.68
6	Teacher-Specific Motivation	I am willing to do some English work even if I am not assigned to.	3.52	1.19
28	Course-Specific Motivation	I believe I am a competent English-user.	3.68	0.85
20	Group-Specific Motivation	Most of my classmates hand in their English homework on time.	3.68	1.11
18	Course-Specific Motivation	I am happy with my English test results.	3.84	1.46
23	Course-Specific Motivation	I think English is not difficult to learn.	3.92	1.29

- This table only listed statements with means of under 4.00.

*Table 7 Means and Standard Deviation for Statements NAHK students Most Disagreed with*

<b>Statement Number</b>	<b>Motivational Component</b>	<b>Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
27	Parent-Specific Motivation	I think my parents English is good enough to communicate with native English speakers.	1.64	1.22
39	Parent-Specific Motivation	My parents can point out my mistakes in English works.	1.76	1.27
14	Parent-Specific Motivation	My parents can teach me English when I need them to.	2.08	1.32
18	Course-Specific Motivation	I am happy with my English test results.	2.48	1.22
23	Course-Specific Motivation	I think English is not difficult to learn.	2.88	1.05
28	Course-Specific Motivation	I believe I am a competent English-user.	3.04	1.10
4	Course-Specific Motivation	So far I am happy with my progress of learning English.	3.20	1.38
42	Teacher-Specific Motivation	I understand my English teacher's instructions.	3.32	1.03
3	Course-Specific Motivation	I believe I can pass my English tests/exams.	3.64	1.50
22	Parent-Specific	My parents can afford English tutorial class	3.64	1.22

	Motivation	for me to improve my English.		
26	Teacher-Specific	Even it is outside class, I try to learn	3.80	1.29
	Motivation	English whenever I can.		
20	Group-Specific	Most of my classmates hand in their	3.80	1.04
	Motivation	English homework on time.		
32	Group-Specific	Reward system at school motivates me to	3.84	0.94
	Motivation	learn better English.		
1	Course-Specific	I think learning English at school is	3.96	0.98
	Motivation	interesting.		
6	Teacher-Specific	I am willing to do some English work even	3.96	1.98
	Motivation	if I am not assigned to.		
12	Group-Specific	My classmates are cooperative in English	3.96	1.17
	Motivation	lessons.		

- This table only listed statements with means of under 4.00.

### **Comparison of the Motivation Patterns of the Two Groups of Students**

#### ***Hypothesis 3: LBHK students' motivation is significantly stronger than that of NAHK students***

Although it is known that peer influences students' motivation most and parents affect the least, whether all motivational components elicited significantly different responses from the two groups of students still remained unknown. In order to compare the learning motivation between the two groups of students, independent samples *t*-tests were performed to test for a significant difference between the means of the two groups. The

means and standard deviations of each group of students' motivation are shown in the following tables.

- **Course-specific motivation**

Table 8 Summary Statistics of Students' Course-Specific Motivation

	Origin	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i> value	Significance
Course-Specific Motivation	LBHK Students	25	4.357	0.462	3.945	$p < 0.001$
	NAHK students	25	3.783	0.561		

If LBHK and NAHK students' course-specific motivation are to be compared, significance differences were found. The mean for LBHK students is 4.35 ( $SD = 0.46$ ) while the mean for the NAHK students is 3.78 ( $SD = 0.56$ ). This difference is significant ( $t = 3.94, p < 0.001$ ) and cannot be attributed to chance.

- **Group-specific motivation**

Table 9 Summary Statistics of Students' Group-Specific Motivation

	Origin	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i> value	Significance
Group-Specific Motivation	LBHK Students	25	4.787	0.339	2.106	$p < 0.04$ NS
	NAHK students	25	3.560	0.416		

Significant differences were not found between LBHK students and NAHK students in group-specific motivation. The mean for LBHK students is 4.79 ( $SD = 0.34$ ) while the mean for NAHK students is 3.56 ( $SD = 0.42$ ). This difference between the two groups is non-significant.

- **Teacher-specific motivation**

Table 10 Summary Statistics of Students' Teacher-Specific Motivation

	Origin	N	Mean	SD	t value	Significance
Teacher-Specific Motivation	LBHK Students	25	4.589	0.366	1.762	$p < 0.084$
	NAHK students	25	3.405	0.372		NS

Significant difference was also not found between LBHK students and NAHK students in teacher-specific motivation. The mean for LBHK students was 4.59 ( $SD = 0.37$ ) while the mean for the NAHK students is 3.40 ( $SD = 0.37$ ). This difference is not significant ( $t = 1.76, p > 0.05$ ), therefore the two groups are not really different on teacher-specific motivation measured. The null hypothesis is supported.

- **Parent-specific motivation**

Table 11 Summary Statistics of Students' Parent-Specific Motivation

	Origin	N	Mean	SD	t value	Significance
--	--------	---	------	----	---------	--------------



	Origin	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i> value	Significance
Parent-Specific Motivation	LBHK Students	25	3.900	0.783	1.752	$p < 0.086$
	NAHK students	25	3.560	0.569		NS

In comparing LBHK students and NAHK students' parent-specific motivation, there is no significant difference found. The mean for LBHK students is 3.90 ( $SD = 0.78$ ) while the mean for the NAHK students is 3.56 ( $SD = 0.57$ ). This difference is not significant ( $t = 1.75, p > 0.05$ ), therefore the two groups are not really different on teacher-specific motivation measured.

- **Overall motivation**

Table 12 Summary Statistics of Students' Overall Motivation

	Origin	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i> value	Significance
Overall Motivation	LBHK Students	25	4.408	0.337	3.403	$p < 0.001$
	NAHK students	25	4.080	0.344		

Although course-specific motivation is the only specific motivation found to have significant difference between the two groups of students, significant difference was also found in their overall motivation. The mean for LBHK students is 4.408 ( $SD = 0.337$ )

while the mean for the NAHK students is 4.080 ( $SD = 0.344$ ). The difference is significant,  $t = 3.403$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , and cannot be attributed to chance.

Having administered the independent samples  $t$ -test to measure whether the two groups are significantly different on each motivational component measure, Table 13 summaries the results of all independent samples  $t$ -tests.

*Table 13 Summary of Independent  $t$ -test Results*

<b>Motivational Component</b>	<b>Student group</b>	<b>Stronger Motivation</b>	<b>Statistically Significance</b>
Course -specific Motivation	LBHK Students	√	$p < 0.001$
	NAHK students		
Group - Specific Motivation	LBHK Students	√	NS
	NAHK students		
Teacher - Specific Motivation	LBHK Students	√	NS
	NAHK students		
Parent - Specific Motivation	LBHK Students	√	NS
	NAHK students		
Overall Motivation	LBHK Students	√	$p < 0.001$
	NAHK students		

This study found that course-specific is the motivation significantly different between the two groups; while others are proved to be statistically non-significant.

Besides, statistics also show that LBHK students have stronger motivation than NAHK students as HK students were found to possess a stronger mean on course-specific motivation (4.36 vs 3.78), group-specific motivation (4.79 vs 3.56), teacher-specific motivation (4.59 vs 3.40), and parent-specific motivation (3.90 vs 3.56). Generally speaking, LBHK students have stronger motivation than NAHK students (4.41 vs 4.08). This evidently supports hypothesis 3, assuming LBHK students' motivation is stronger than that of NAHK students'.

## **Relations between Students' Learning Motivation and English Attainment**

### ***Comparison of Students' English Scores***

Figure 1 and 2 show the English scores of both LBHK students and NAHK students.

Figure 1 shows that LBHK students' average English score is 58.3 ( $SD = 15.88$ ).

Distribution of LBHK students' English examination scores is normal. On the other hand, the average score of NAHK students is 49.6 ( $SD = 15.22$ ); distribution of English examination scores is rather skewed.

Figure 1 Hong Kong Students English Scores

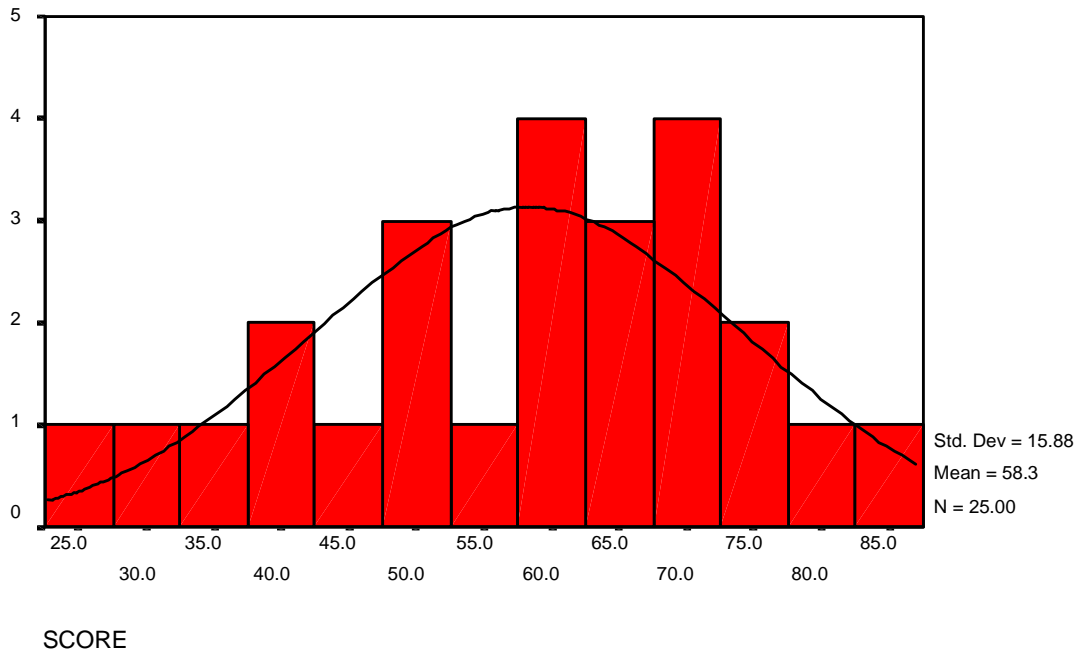
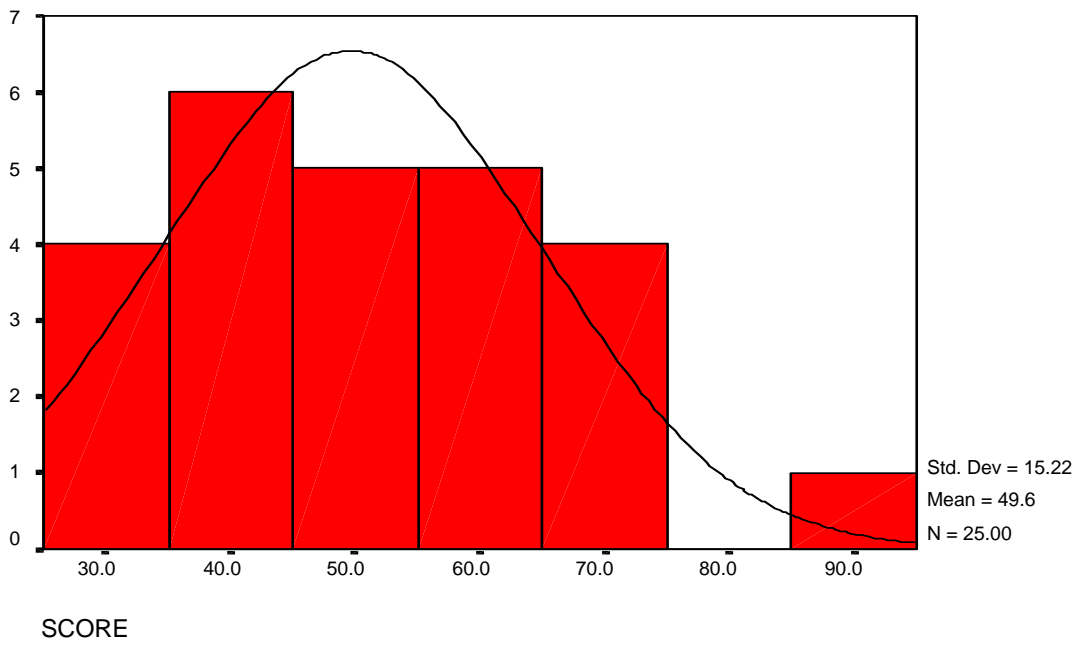


Figure 2 NAHK students English Scores



### *Correlation between Motivational Component and English Attainment*

***Hypothesis 4: LBHK students' motivation has positive correlation with their English attainment.***

In order to explore the degree and the direction of a relationship between motivation and English attainment, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was calculated. The overall motivation and each motivational component were compared with English attainment respectively (see table 14).

The correlation between overall motivation and English attainment of LBHK students is not significant,  $r = -0.238$ ,  $p < 0.252$ ; for group-specific motivation and English attainment, the correlation is non-significant,  $r = -0.342$ ,  $p < 0.94$ . The correlation between course-specific motivation and English attainment is non-also non-significant,  $r = 0.253$ ,  $p < 0.016$ . However, the correlation between teacher-specific motivation and English attainment is significant,  $r = -0.476$ ,  $p < 0.16$ .

From the overall motivation result, this study learn that the result does not support hypothesis 4 assuming LBHK students motivation has positive correlation with their English attainment. However, there is one interesting result found. That is, course specific motivation is the only motivational component that has positive correlations with English attainment in the group of LBHK students. Details will be discussed in the section of discussion.

Table 14 Summary of Correlation between LBHK students' Motivation and their English

*Attainment*

<b>Motivational Component</b>	<b>Correlation Coefficient (<i>r</i>)</b>	<b>Relationship</b>
Course-Specific Motivation	0.25	Direct/Positive
Group-Specific Motivation	-0.34	Inverse/Negative
Teacher-Specific Motivation	-0.48	Inverse/Negative
Parent-Specific Motivation	-0.19	Inverse/Negative
<b>Overall</b>	<b>-0.238</b>	Inverse/Negative

***Hypothesis 5: NAHK students' motivation has positive correlation with their English***

***attainment.***

After examining the correlation of LBHK student motivation and English attainment, this study will explore the correlation between NAHK students and English attainment. Table 15 summarizes the results.

Table 15 Summary of Correlation between NAHK students' Motivation and their English

*Attainment*

<b>Motivational Component</b>	<b>Correlation Coefficient (<i>r</i>)</b>	<b>Relationship</b>
Course-Specific Motivation	0.061	Direct/Positive
Group-Specific Motivation	0.184	Direct/Positive
Teacher-Specific Motivation	0.154	Direct/Positive
Parent-Specific Motivation	-0.322	Inverse/Negative

<b>Overall</b>	<b>0.007</b>	Direct/Positive
----------------	--------------	-----------------

The correlation between overall motivation and English attainment is non-significant,  $r = 0.007$ ,  $p < 0.974$ . It means the overall motivation result supports hypothesis 5 set in this study that NAHK students' motivation has positive correlation with English attainment.

However, there is also one interesting picture projected from the statistical results. That is most motivational components, except parent-specific motivation, have positive correlation with English attainment. Parent-specific motivation has the strongest negative relationship with English attainment. Its implications will be discussed in the section of discussions.

## **Discussion**

### ***Peers and English Attainment***

An increasing number of studies (e.g. Ehrman & Dornyei, 1998) in educational psychology have looked into the role of peers and its influence on students' process of learning. The power of norms and social identity govern and play a major role in students' learning behavior. In this study, peer also turns out to be the most influential factor in determining students' learning motivation (LBHK students  $M = 4.79$ , NAHK students  $M = 4.56$ ).

A probable explanation for this learning behavior can be attributed to the norm of the groups. Peers can affect students' motivation through social comparison, social

competence, peer learning, and peer-group influences. Students compare themselves with their peers on where they stand academically and socially. Besides, adolescents are more likely to engage in social comparison, especially with those who are similar to them in age, ability and interests.

Results has also indicated that to the power of peers in motivating learners to conform and social interactions with peers have a large influence on their behavior because the presence of others alters students' learning motivation. Yang (1988) portrayed a characteristic of Chinese achievement motivation. That is, the label of achievement is usually defined by other people rather than the individual. As Ehrman & Dornyei (1998) clearly stated, norms regulated students' own behavior to make task accomplishment possible and it also enhanced or decreased students' academic goal striving and learning achievement. If the pattern of perception towards learning English among the ethnic group is generally positive, the whole group will cultivate a positive attitude of learning English and result in positive academic achievement. The group of NAHK students is an example of this case as these results show that there is positive correlation between their group-specific motivation and English attainment.

However, the results of LBHK students' group-specific motivation do not show positive correlation with English attainment but inverse relationship. Statements of group-specific motivation which received lower agreement from LBHK students are: "Most of my classmates hand in their English homework on time" and "Most of my classmates obey what our English teacher instructs us to do". These two statements receive the means of



3.68 and 4.36 respectively. Statement that received the highest mean of 5.56 is “If my friends are good at English, I want to be good at English too”. The statements show a possible reason. That may mean the LBHK students do compare with their fellow students, just like the NAHK students, and want to do as well as their fellow students; however, many of their fellow students are not good models to learn from—they do not hand in their English homework on time nor obey their teachers. In other words, LBHK students are not positively affected by their fellow students in terms of English learning because there is a lack of good examples to follow in their process of learning English.

Another possible reason to explain the negative correlation between peers and English attainment is that, the LBHK students have been in the same class for a long time; they do not need to use learning English to obtain any new or further social recognition from their peers, so they are not as stimulated by group-specific motivation as the NAHK students are although LBHK students’ group-specific motivation is high in comparison with other motivation components. On the other hand, new social surroundings and environment urge NAHK students to acquire social recognition from their peers. For the sake of integration and acculturation, the NAHK students need to adapt to similar social behavior and pursue similar studying patterns from their peers.

### ***Parent and English Attainment***

Scholars like Wlodkosuki and Jaynes (1990), Gottfried et al. and Eccles et al. (cited in Dornyei, 2001) believe that parents, apart from peers, also play a major role in affecting students’ motivation to learn as parents’ support is the main reference point reinforcing

students' goals during their process of learning. As Brophy also (1987) stated, motivation to learn is a competence acquired "through general experience but stimulated most directly through modeling, communication of expectations, and direct instruction or socialization by significant others, especially parents and teachers." Children's home environment shapes the initial constellation of attitudes they develop learning. When parents nurture their children to learn by encouraging them to explore and ask questions, they will develop a sense of competence and self-efficacy and autonomy which help enhancing their motivation to learn.

It is commonly believed that parents play an important role in students' motivation to learn. As Wlodkoswki & Jaynes (1990) suggests, "Like effective school, effective families have a set of easy-to-identify characteristics. These cut across family income, education, and ethnic backgrounds...effective families display a number of positive attitudes and behaviours towards their children which help them to succeed in school and in life." A study by Douglas (1967) revealed that parents who make frequent visits to school and are interested in their children's education is positively correlated with their children's academic attainment.

However, the result of this present study shows that parents play the least role in affecting students' motivation and it holds inverse relationship with both groups of students' English attainment, which echo the results of Paitoonpang (1980): teachers, not parents, had significant influence on students' motivation.

To understand the parents' role in students' motivation, one needs to focus on their demographic characteristics (such as education level and family structure) and child-rearing practices (such as providing the right amount of encouragement and support). Very often, parents with higher education are more likely than the less educated parents to believe that their involvement in their child's education is important to their child's education.

Therefore, to understand why parents play the least significant role in motivating their children to learn English, a further look at the demographic characteristics of the subjects' parents will be necessary. First of all, most parents in this study are from working class, they can hardly find time to communicate with and help their children. Home environment thus does not cultivate students' motivation to learn. Besides, parents' educational level may not be sufficient to solve their children's English problems neither. When students lack academic support, they tend to give up which certainly devastates their learning motivation. Furthermore, family total income can barely support the expenditure of the whole family, it is therefore difficult for parents to buy extra reference books or hire tutors to resolve their children's academic problem. All the above reasons explain why parents have the least positive influence on students' learning motivation and hold inverse relationship with English attainment.

### ***Course and English Attainment***

This present study found that both LBHK students and NAHK students' course-specific motivation are positively correlated with their English attainment. Course-specific

motivation relates to syllabus, teaching materials, teaching methods and learning tasks. It is made up of elements of four elements: students' interest in the course, relevance of the course to one's needs, expectancy of success, and satisfaction one has in the outcome. That is, students of both groups find the curriculum and the learning tasks meaningful and are useful in enhancing their motivation to learn English.

What course-specific motivational components specifically motivate students' English learning can be traced to Dornyei's (2001) explanation. There are four important factors determining their intention to learn. They are: interest, relevance, expectancy and satisfaction. In this study, both groups of students were found to share the same beliefs. They believe interests sustains their curiosity and desire to learn. It is part of intrinsic motivation. Also, they also believe they will have better results if what they are learning in English class connect their values, goals and personal needs. Both groups of students also believe they will put more effort in dealing with the tasks if they have the self-confidence and self-efficacy. Finally, they will have better English attainment if a sense of satisfaction can be got from the course and it maintains their sense of pride and enjoyment during their process of learning English. All these four indicators show that both groups of students see the direct relationships between English attainment and course-specific motivation.

### ***Teachers and English Attainment***

It is shown that the NAHK students' teacher-specific motivation has positive correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.15$ ), and direct relationship with their English attainment while LBHK students have the opposite ( $r = -0.42, p < 0.05$ ).

Traditionally, students from China tend to consider their teachers the main source of learning, which results from the philosophical foundation for education in China laid by Confucius. Students are accustomed to speech dominated education by a teacher-centered, book-centered, grammar-translation method and an emphasis on rote memory. There is little student initiative and, if any at all, little student-student interaction.

For NAHK students, teachers play a key figure in their learning process as teachers provide students with mentoring, guidance and support. Factors like teachers' personality, professional knowledge, enthusiasm, commitment, and professional classroom management skills all directly have multiple influences on their learning motivation. As Dornyei (2001) indicates, "Through these channels, teacher communicate their beliefs, expectations and attitudes, thereby pressing their students to adopt similar beliefs, attitudes, expectations and associated behaviours." Teachers and students' mutual expectation accelerate student learning motivation. This results have pointed to the same direction as other studies (see Palardy, 1969; Dusek and O'Connell, 1973; Burstall, 1970, 1974; Anastasiow and Espinosa, 1966; Aspy and Roebuck, 1972; Hughes, 1973; Brohpy and Good, 1970; Rist, 1970, etc cited in Burstall, 1978) that student's positive relationship with teachers correlate with their language acquisition.

However, LBHK students have been influenced by tremendous educational reform in the past few decades. They are believed to be tired of traditional teacher-centered and grammar-translation approach. Learners' autonomy has also been emphasized by the government in the past few years. Due to the changes of society, government and ideology, students now are more independent in terms of what they want to learn and how to learn. Students are also more expressive to speak up and voice their opinion regarding teachers' teaching methodologies and syllabi. The role of teachers has been becoming passive and proactive. LBHK students do not rely on teachers as heavily as a decade ago. The above mentioned reasons are the probable explanations for LBHK students' negative correlation with their English attainment.

***LBHK students' motivation to learn English is stronger than that of NAHK students'***

The two groups of students showed significant difference in their motivation patterns. The means of LBHK students' motivation is higher than the NAHK students'. There are several possible explanations for NAHK students having weaker motivation than LBHK students.

First of all, one can attribute the situation to the unfamiliarity of NAHK students to the HK education environment because these students' home culture differs significantly from that of Hong Kong, such as ideology and living styles. NAHK students may find it difficult to succeed in the new school environment, thus may experience anxiety, frustration, anger and depression associated with cultural shock. Environmental changes

would lead to lowered perception of competence and heightened anxiety over one's performance.

Also, the exposure of English for students from China may be less than those students born in Hong Kong. For example, English is a compulsory subject at primary schools in HK while it is a compulsory subject only in secondary schools but in China. Lack of English exposure and learning opportunities may bring failure to their English attainment. Lowered English attainment leads to frustration and self-helplessness, which devastate students' learning motivation and initiative.

Home culture of the NAHK students is also different from that of HK. Being able to master good English proficiency is almost a must in getting a good job and career in Hong Kong. While in China, the situation is different. Mastering insufficient English proficiency does not necessary leads to poor jobs. Having realized the importance of English in HK, NAHK students' perceptions and attitudes towards English were totally changed.

Furthermore, one can also see that HK parents play a more important role in their children's process of learning English than the NAHK students'. A closer look at the family structure of the students' family may give us an answer. One of the possible reasons is that the income of the local students' families is higher than that of NAHK students' because both the mothers and fathers are working. However, for NAHK students' families, most of the mothers are housewives and only their fathers are

working. In some families, both the fathers and mothers, are unemployed and receiving subsidies from the government. Their financial status is therefore insufficient to provide financial support for their children. Besides, most HK parents, if they were educated in HK or had experienced compulsory schooling system, should be able to master at least some English, which means they may be able to help their children's academic problems in some situations although only at a very low level.

Because of the above mentioned reasons, the NAHK students may therefore tend to possess negative attitudes towards learning English, which would adversely affect their motivation and in turn their English attainment. (Pierson, 1987)

### **Limitations of study**

There were some limitations with respect to the analysis and data that may affect the accuracy of the results. The sample size for this study is particularly small ( $N=50$ ). A small sample size means it is harder to find significant relationships from the data, as statistical tests normally require a larger sample size to justify that the effect did not just happened by chance alone. Extra care is therefore taken when data and findings are being generalized in this study.

Secondly, the participants of this study were drawn from the same school in Hong Kong. This study could have drawn participants from at least one school in each Hong Kong district to increase the validity of the findings.



Thirdly, the English tests set for this study was only an internal school examination for end-of-term assessment purposes. The tests

Finally, the study would have benefited from additional qualitative information on attitudes and behavioral aspects obtained through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

### **Conclusions**

According to Dornyei (2001), there are three important components in learning motivation. They are course-specific motivation, group-specific motivation and teacher-specific motivation. In the present study, an additional component, parent-motivation, is added to broaden the horizon of this present research.

Using self-reported questionnaire, this study has investigated the learning motivation of LBHK and NAHK students. One has to also explore the relationship between motivation and English attainment for the two groups of students. A comparison between the two groups' motivation and English attainment was also conducted.

This results show that parent-specific motivation statements received lowest agreement among the four motivational components. This proved that parental guidance is not sufficient during students' process of learning English as a second language.

The results showed that parents' education and financial status are the foremost problems, which may indirectly devastate students' learning motivation. Therefore, this study believes if the government and the school can provide help for the difficult families in order to help parents to participate more in their children's education, students' learning motivation can be enhanced. English attainment can also be improved.

Meanwhile, group-specific motivation statements received the highest agreement in this study. This demonstrates the importance of peer in students' process of learning is essential. It is certain that peers surely regulate students' social behavior and orientation to make task accomplishment possible resulting in positive academic attainment. Social recognition and acknowledgement are the main keys for stimulating students' motivation to learn English and eagerness to gain better academic results.

Besides, it is evidently shown that both groups of students' course-specific motivations are positively correlated with their English attainment. Hence, this study can attribute both groups of students' English attainment to their sense of interest in the course, relevance to students' needs, expectancy of success, and satisfaction students have in the outcome.

NAHK students' teacher-specific motivation holds direct relationship with their English attainment because they tend to consider their teachers the main source of learning.

Nevertheless, negative relationship was found between LBHK students' teacher-specific motivation and English attainment. This study believed the possible reasons are LBHK

students now are more independent in terms of what they want to learn and how to learn. The Education Department emphasizes “Learning to Learn” as the main objective of the current education policy. Creative thinking is also advocated. Students are now having higher learners’ autonomy and they are encouraged to speak up and voice out their opinion about what to learn and how to learn. In other words, the role of teachers has also been becoming secondary and proactive.

The main objective of this study is to investigate the motivation patterns of the two groups of students and examine the relationship between motivation and English attainment. With the results of this study, lights can be shed on helping schools to understand the fundamental differences between the two groups of students in terms of motivation and learning needs.

The most prominent problem that the government should not neglect is the adaptation of the NAHK students. They need substantial English remedial classes to help them realizing the importance of English and catching up with the English standard in Hong Kong.

Finally, it is also hoped that the results can provide educators with an implication of whether different teaching methodologies should be adopted when teaching these two groups of students whose origins and cultures are rather different.

## References

Brophy, J. (1987). *On Motivating Students*. Occasional Paper No. 101. East Lansing, Michigan: Institute for Research on Teaching, Michigan State University.

Burstall, C. (1978). Factors affecting foreign-language learning: A consideration of some recent research findings in V. Kinsella (ed). *Language Teaching and Linguistics: Surveys*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chan, K. W, Lai, P. Y. Leung, M. T. and Moore, P. H. (2005). Students' goal orientations, study strategies and achievement: A closer look in Hong Kong Chinese cultural context. In *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*. 14(1) 1-26.

Chandrasegaran, A. L. (1979). *Problems of learning English in national schools in Johor, Malaysia: an investigation of attitudinal m-motivational variables, learning strategies and exposure to English*. National University of Singapore.

Deci, E. L. & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behaviour*. New York: Plenum Press.

Dornyei, Z. (2001). *Teaching and Researching Motivation*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Douglas, J. W. B. (1967). *The Home and the School: a study of ability and attainment in the primary school*. Panther Modern Society.

- Ehrman, M. E. & Dornyei, Z. (1998). *Interpersonal Dynamics in Second Language Education: The visible and invisible classroom*. SAGE publications.
- Gardner, R. C. & Tremblay, P. F. (1995). On motivation: Measurement and Conceptual Considerations. *Modern Language Journal*, 78, 524—27.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social Psychology and Language Learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. London: Ontario: Edward Arnold
- Gardner, R. C. (1992). Second language learning in adults: Correlates of proficiency. *Applied Language Learning*, 2, 1—28.
- Gottfried A. E., Fleming, J. S. and Gottfried, A. W. (1994). Role of parental motivational practices in children's academic intrinsic motivation and achievement, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 86, 104-113
- Lin, A. & Detaramani, C. (1998). By carrot and by rod: Extrinsic motivation and English attainment of tertiary students in Hong Kong. In Pennington, M. (Ed) (1998) *Language in Hong Kong at Century's End*. Hong Kong University Press.
- Littlewood, W. (1996). *How Do Secondary Students Perceive Their English Learning Experience?—Report on a "Young Post" Readers Survey*. Hong Kong: New Horizon in Education #37.
- Okada, M., Oxford, R. L. & Abo, S. (1996) Not all alike: Motivation and learning strategies among students of Japanese and Spanish: an Exploratory Study.

- Oxford, R. L. & Shearin, J. (1994) Language learning motivation: Expanding the theoretical framework. *Modern Language Journal*, 78, 12—28.
- Paitoonpong, F. (1980). *Motivational Variables in Foreign Language Achievement: a case in Thailand*. National University of Singapore.
- Pennington, M. C. & Yue, F. (1993) *Assessing pre-1997 Language Attitudes in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong : City Polytechnic of Hong Kong, Dept. of English.
- Pierson, H. D. (1987). Language attitudes and language proficiency: A review of selected research. In R. Lord & Cheng, H. N. L. (eds). *Language Education in Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.
- Pierson, H. D., Fu, G. S. & Lee, S. Y. (1980) An analysis of the relationship between language attitudes and English attainment of secondary school students in Hong Kong. *Language Learning*, 30, 289—316.
- Richards, S. (1993.) *Motivation in Second Language Learning: A Hong Kong Perspective. Research Report #32*. Hong Kong: Department of English, City Polytechnic of Hong Kong.
- Spolsky, B. (1969). Attitudinal aspects of second language learning. *Language Learning*, 19, 271—283.
- Strong, M. (1984). Integrative motivation: Cause or effect of successful second language learning. *Language Learning*, 37, 1—14.

Weiner, B. (1979). A theory of motivation for some classroom experiences. *Journal of Education Psychology*, 71, 3—25.

Wlodkoswki, R. J. & Jaynes, J. H. (1990). *Eager to Learn*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Yang, H. S. (ed). (1998) *Chinese People Psychology*. Taipei: Gwei Gwan Tu Shu (in Chinese)