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The Relationship Between Senior High School Students' English Learning Hope and English Learning Effort

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Abstract: The advent of the "positive psychology turn" in applied linguistics has brought increased attention to psychological constructs such as hope, which significantly impact students' academic performance, including their effort. However, the intricate relationships among these factors remain underexplored. To address this gap, the present study employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate how specific dimensions of students' hope influence their efforts. A sample of 711 Chinese senior high school students studying English as a foreign language participated by completing questionnaires assessing their levels of hope and effort. Findings from structural equation modeling indicate that pathways, a dimension of hope, directly and positively affect students' efforts in learning a foreign language. This research provides valuable insights for educators, highlighting the importance of fostering hope in English learning to enhance students' strategic approaches to language acquisition and support their academic progress.

Keywords: *Hope, effort, English as a foreign language, correlation.*

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Introduction

The increasing prominence of positive psychology (PP) over the past two decades marks a significant shift from a sole focus on general psychological issues, which emphasizes diverse emotional experiences among learners and fosters a sense of unity within the academic community. As a result, in addition to the traditional psychological variables, such as L2 self (Liu, 2024), motivation (X. Wang & Liu, 2024; Yu & Liu, 2024), more positive psychological factors in foreign language learning have gained considerable attention, such as flow (Liu & Song, 2021); buoyancy (Li et al., 2023; Y. Wang & Liu, 2022), resilience (Chu et al., 2024; Duan et al., 2024; Liu & Han, 2022; Liu, Zhong, et al., 2023), and grit (Liu, Li, & Yan, 2023). Among these factors, English learning hope (ELH) and English learning effort (ELE) have emerged as crucial constructs in language learning motivation. ELH refers to learners' expectations and beliefs in their ability to succeed in learning a foreign language and achieving their language learning objectives (Dewaele & Li, 2020).

Hope plays a vital role in language learning by helping learners overcome obstacles and persevere through challenges. According to Snyder's (2000) theory, hope comprises three main elements: goal-directed thinking, agency, and pathways. Goal-directed thinking involves setting clear and achievable goals, agency is the belief in one's ability to achieve these goals, and pathways refer to identifying and pursuing multiple routes to reach these goals. In language learning, hope helps learners set realistic goals, stay motivated, and overcome setbacks by providing alternative pathways to achieve their goals. Studies have shown that hope positively correlates with language learning outcomes, such as language proficiency, self-efficacy, and motivation (e.g., Pekrun et al., 2009), which in turn reinforces students' efforts in their learning. ELE is a crucial factor influencing language learning success (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019). Research indicates that learners who invest more effort are more likely to achieve superior language proficiency compared to their less effortful counterparts.

In summary, hope and effort are interconnected factors essential for language learning success. Learners with a strong sense of hope in their English learning are more likely to commit greater effort and achieve higher language proficiency. Therefore, it is imperative for language teachers to create a positive learning environment that enhances learners' hope and encourages sustained effort. This research aims to address the following questions:

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1. What are the dimensions of hope and effort?
2. What are the levels of students' hope and effort?
3. What are the correlations between students' hope and effort?

Literature Review

English Learning Hope

The existing literature on hope in second language education is notably limited. This discussion aims to address this gap by summarizing the general definitions of hope as provided by previous researchers. Early research by Miller and Powers (1988, pp. 6-10) characterized hope as a positive emotional experience, describing it as "a set of expectations and depictions of a good state or thing, a feeling of self-improvement or release from a difficult situation." They emphasized that these positive expectations do not need to be linked to a specific goal, presenting hope as an optimistic anticipation of the future based on relationships, the perceived ability to overcome challenges, and psychological and spiritual fulfillment. Hope encompasses a sense of life's purpose and meaning and a belief in limitless possibilities.

Although subsequent researchers have approached the definition of hope from various perspectives, Snyder et al. (1991) offered a widely accepted definition, describing hope as a cognitive state shaped by the belief in one's ability to achieve goals through determination and planning. This definition aligns with the concept of English Learning Hope (ELH) employed in this study.

Research examining the relationship between hope and other emotional factors in second language acquisition remains relatively sparse. Recent findings have identified a positive small-to-medium correlation between L2 grit and L2 hope (Guo, G. et al., 2024).

In conclusion, the majority of existing studies have predominantly focused on adolescent college students in international educational settings, with an emphasis on quantitative methodologies. To deepen the understanding of hope in second language learning, future research should incorporate a broader range of methodological approaches and investigate hope across diverse cultural contexts.

English learning Effort

Effort, according to Carbonaro (2005), quantifies the amount of time and energy that students invest in meeting formal academic requirements. This investment is widely recognized as a crucial factor for academic success (Liew et al., 2010; Trautwein et al., 2009). Effort involves the focused allocation of mental resources toward achieving specific goals (Cowan, 2005) and should be distinguished from engagement, which includes behaviors such as attending classes and completing homework (Johnson et al., 2001; Smerdon, 1999).

In foreign language education, ELE refers to the dedication and resources students invest in acquiring a foreign language, both in and out of the classroom. This definition, used by Gao et al. (2003) and adopted in this study, highlights the comprehensive nature of effort in language learning. Furthermore, ELE is closely linked to motivation, as Gardner (2001) explains that motivation involves the desire for success and its associated rewards, achievable only through sustained effort.

To sum up, most existing studies focus on students at various educational levels in international contexts, primarily using quantitative methods and questionnaires. This study adopts Gao et al.'s (2003) framework of effort, emphasizing motivational intensity. Future research should use diverse methods to explore students' effort levels across different cultural contexts, enhancing our understanding of ELEs.

Relationship Between ELH and ELE

Research has consistently shown that hope exerts a positive influence on learners' determination, motivation, and effort in academic settings (Idan & Margalit, 2014; Levi et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2024; Rand, 2009). In the context of education, hope has been identified as a critical factor contributing to students' sustained effort and academic achievement. Rand, in a quantitative study involving 345 undergraduate students, found that students who engaged in hopeful thinking and maintained an optimistic attitude were more likely to achieve higher academic performance. His findings underscored the significant impact of hope on goal-setting and perseverance in academic pursuits. Building on Rand's work, Idan and Margalit (2014) conducted a quantitative study with 856 high school students, which further revealed that hopeful thoughts not only motivate goal pursuit but also enhance students' self-belief and increase their willingness to exert effort. Their research confirmed that students who exhibited higher levels of hope were more likely to engage in sustained efforts to reach their academic goals, demonstrating the integral role hope plays in academic motivation. Similarly, Levi et al. (2014), through a quantitative study of 289 10th-grade students, discovered that students' academic performance was indirectly influenced by their optimistic thoughts and expectations about their grades. The study highlighted that hope, through fostering positive expectations about academic success, leads to increased effort and

persistence in schoolwork. Additionally, recent research by Liu et al. (2024) extended this understanding by exploring the relationship between hope and effort in foreign language acquisition. Their study found that specific dimensions of hope, such as pathways (the ability to identify routes to achieving goals), and foreign language enjoyment-private (FLE-Private, a dimension of enjoyment in learning a foreign language), directly and positively influenced students' effort in learning a foreign language. These findings indicate that hope, particularly in terms of students' ability to generate strategies for overcoming obstacles, plays a crucial role in sustaining effort in challenging learning environments. To sum up, across various educational contexts, hope has been consistently linked to enhanced motivation, effort, and academic achievement, providing a foundation for future research to explore how hope can be cultivated and leveraged to improve learning outcomes.

In summary, these studies establish a positive correlation between hope and effort in language learning, primarily focusing on high school and undergraduate students through quantitative methods. However, the relationship between language learning hope and effort in English learning has not been sufficiently examined within the Chinese context. Addressing this gap, the current study employs a mixed-methods design to investigate the correlation between language learning hope and the effort invested in English learning among senior high school students in China.

Methodology

Participants

The present study sampled 711 high school students from a city in northeastern China using convenience sampling (Rose et al., 2019). The sample comprised 342 males and 369 females, all of whom were English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners with Chinese as their first language. English is a mandatory subject in their educational curriculum.

The sampling strategy for the interviewees aimed for maximum variation concerning the interviewee's grade and gender to achieve commonality across diversity. Five students were selected to participate in the interviews, with an average interview length of 14 minutes. The interview records were transcribed into 13,455 Chinese characters. Details about the interviewees and their scores on each dimension of the questionnaire are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Basic Information of Interviewees

Student	Gender	Grade	Pathways	Agency	Effort
S1	male	3	3.50	4.00	2.00
S2	male	1	1.00	1.00	3.71
S3	female	3	2.50	3.75	2.57
S4	female	3	2.00	2.00	3.29
S5	female	2	2.25	3.00	3.14

Research Instruments

The present research utilized two previously validated scales and an interview protocol for data collection. The scale employed to measure hope was The Trait Hope Scale (TTHS) (Snyder et al., 1991). The scale measuring students' effort was adapted from the one developed by Gao et al. (2003). To ensure the psychometric soundness of the adapted scale, the adaptation process involved pilot testing with a small sample of students (two girls and three boys from all grades in Northeast China) to examine its clarity and cultural relevance. Feedback from the pilot test helped refine the wording of certain items to ensure they were appropriate for the target population. The scales were then subject to further validation procedures to assess their reliability and validity.

English Learning Hope

English Learning Hope Scale (ELHS) was adapted from Snyder et al.'s (1991) Trait Hope Scale (TTHS). The TTHS consists of 12 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) and includes three subscales: agency (active goal pursuit), pathways (developing strategies to achieve goals), and interference (obstacles to goal achievement). For this analysis, only four items from the agency and pathways subscales were included, excluding the interference items. To ensure the reliability of the ELHS, the internal consistency of the scales was reassessed using Cronbach's alpha. Reliability is considered a property of the data collected using an instrument rather than an inherent property of the instrument itself (Woodrow, 2014). The ELHS demonstrated high internal consistency reliability in this study, with Cronbach's alpha values calculated for the overall scale, as well as the pathways, and agency subscales (see details in Table 2).

Table 2. Dimensions, Reliability, Items, and Sample Items of ELHS

Dimension	Items	Sample Items
pathways ($\alpha=.824$)	22, 24, 25, 26	Item 22: I can think of many ways to get out of a jam.
Agency ($\alpha=.766$)	23, 27, 28, 29	Item 23: I energetically pursue my goals.

English Learning Effort Scale

The English Learning Effort Scale (ELES) was adapted from Gao et al.'s (2003) self-developed questionnaire. This 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) comprises three components: type of motivation, intensity of motivation, and change in self-identity. This study specifically focuses on the intensity of motivation component, which includes 11 items that use behavioral indicators such as "I actively read English newspapers and magazines in class" and "I rarely seek and create opportunities to converse in English." Negative items were reverse-scored, and participants' responses were summed to reflect their overall effort in learning English. The reliability of the ELES was assessed using SPSS 26.0, yielding a high-reliability coefficient ($\alpha = 0.855$).

Table 3. Dimensions, Reliability, Items, and Sample Items of ELES

Dimension	Items	Sample Item
effort ($\alpha=.855$)	30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40	Item 31: I try to find and create opportunities to speak in English.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data collection process consisted of two stages: a questionnaire phase and a semi-structured interview phase. The first phase, conducted between January and March 2023, involved distributing an online questionnaire through Wenjuanxing. Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, ensuring voluntary participation. They were assured that their responses would remain confidential, their academic performance would not be impacted, and no personal information would be disclosed.

In the second phase, conducted from June to July 2023, five students participated in semi-structured phone interviews, each lasting approximately 14 minutes. The interviews, conducted in Putonghua, were audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The primary aim of these interviews was to explore the students' experiences and emotions related to their English studies. After the interviews, the researchers transcribed the recordings, and the participants were given the opportunity to verify the accuracy of the transcriptions. Confidentiality of personal information was assured, and these steps helped to establish trustworthiness in the study.

The data analysis followed three phases. In the first phase, normality and item analysis of the three scales were performed using the full dataset. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on half of the data ($N = 377$), while the remaining half ($N = 334$) was used for confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). In the second phase, descriptive and Pearson correlation analyses were conducted using SPSS 26.0 to examine variables such as English learning boredom, perceived teacher support, and English learning empathy. Model fit was assessed based on the benchmarks established by Kline (2016) (e.g., $\chi^2/df \leq 8$, GFI ≥ 0.90 , CFI ≥ 0.90 , RMSEA ≤ 0.08).

In the third phase, a thematic analysis of the qualitative data was conducted, following the guidelines provided by Braun and Clarke (2006). The thematic analysis process was iterative and recursive, involving multiple reviews of the interview transcripts. Initially, codes were generated from the data to categorize extracts. These codes were then reviewed to identify themes representing broader patterns across the data. Themes were validated through discussions among the researchers, ensuring that they were grounded in the data and accurately reflected the participants' experiences. Triangulation with the quantitative data, member checks, and peer debriefing were employed to further validate the identified themes, ensuring both rigor and trustworthiness in the analysis.

Results

Results of Exploratory Factor Analysis

After extraction, only two items remained in the agency dimension. To ensure the scale's reliability and validity, items Q01, Q02, Q18, and Q10 were retained. As shown in Table 1, the cumulative percentage of total variance explained was 56.012%, which exceeds the 55% threshold recommended for exploratory factor analysis (EFA) by Plonsky and Gonulal (2015). This confirms the acceptability of the final result (see Table 4).

Table 4. Results of EFA of English Learning Hope Scale (Pattern matrix)

Items	Factor 1	Communality
Q22: I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are important to me.	0.666	0.443
Q24 There are lots of ways around any problem.	0.757	0.573
Q25 I can get the most important things for me in English learning through different ways.	0.823	0.677
Q26 Faced with the same English learning problem, I still believe that I can find some way to solve the problem even when others lose confidence.	0.775	0.600
Total Variance Explained Cumulative %	57.318	—
Cronbach α	0.841	—

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy for the ELES was 0.895, and Bartlett's test of sphericity yielded $\chi^2 = 1346.468$, $df = 55$, $p = 0.000$, indicating suitability for factor analysis. Principal axis factoring was applied to the 11 items, with a factor loading threshold of |0.4| (Hair et al., 2018). Items were excluded if their loadings were below |0.4|, if cross-loadings exceeded |0.4|, if the difference between cross-loadings was less than |0.2|, or if commonality was below 0.4. This process reduced the original 11 items to 6 (Q10, Q08, Q07, Q03, Q02 removed). Furthermore, only two items remained in the agency dimension post-extraction; Q06 and Q09 were retained based on their reliability and validity criteria. The cumulative percentage of total variance explained was 50.635%, surpassing the 50% benchmark recommended for EFA (Merenda, 1997), affirming the acceptability of the findings (see Table 5).

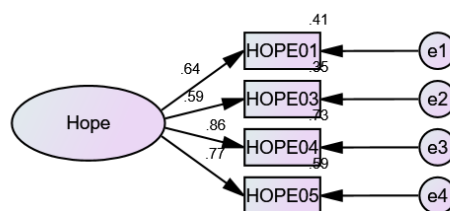
Table 5. Results of EFA of English Learning Effort Scale (Pattern matrix)

Items	Factor 1	Communalities
Q30 I actively read English newspapers and magazines after class	0.835	0.666
Q33 I usually spend more than 15 hours a week learning English after class.	0.668	0.838
Q34 I consciously accumulate English vocabulary.	0.613	0.594
Total Variance Explained Cumulative %	50.635	—
Cronbach α	0.745	—

Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

LLHS

According to Kline's (2016) criteria for model fit indices ($\chi^2/df \leq 8$; GFI ≥ 0.90 ; AGFI ≥ 0.90 ; CFI ≥ 0.90 ; RMSEA ≤ 0.08 ; RMR ≤ 0.10), the results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for the ELHS were satisfactory: $\chi^2/df = 1.873$, GFI = 0.995, AGFI = 0.974, CFI = 0.996, RMSEA = 0.050, and RMR = 0.019 (refer to Figure 2). After conducting the CFA, only one dimension, pathway, remained.



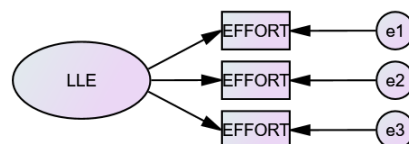
CMIN/DF = 1.873 $p = .154$
 GFI = .995 AGFI = .974 CFI = .996 NFI = .992 TLI = .989
 RMSEA = .050 RMR = .019

Figure 1. Graphical Representation of the model and factor loadings of ELHS

The reliability of the ELHS was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α) and composite reliability (CR). The Cronbach's alpha for the overall ELHS was calculated as .824. Additionally, the alpha coefficients and CR values were .84 and .81, respectively, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong reliability (Hair et al., 2018).

ELES

For the ELES, it has been demonstrated that the one-factorial structure of students' ELE is a saturated model. This is illustrated in Figure 3.



CMIN/DF = \CMINDF $p = \backslash p$
 GFI = 1.000 AGFI = \AGFI CFI = \CFI NFI = \NFI TLI = \TLI
 RMSEA = \RMSEA RMR = \RMR

LLE=Language Learning Effort

Figure 2. Graphical Representation of the Model and Factor Loadings of ELES

The reliability of the ELES was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α) and composite reliability. The Cronbach's alpha for the overall ELES was calculated as 0.745, surpassing the recommended threshold of 0.70, indicating strong reliability (Hair et al., 2018).

Levels of English Learning Hope

Based on Snyder et al.'s (2002) categorization of hope levels, a score range of 0.6-1.25 is typically considered moderate. In this study, the mean hope score was 3.27 ($SD = 0.84$, see Table 11), indicating that Chinese senior high school students reported a moderate to high level of hope, which exceeds the average range.

Table 6. Results of Descriptive Analysis of ELH

Variables	Min	Max	M	SD	Skew	Kurt
English Learning Hope	1.00	5.00	3.27	.84	-.340	.150

N=711

Levels of English Learning Effort

According to Yeung's (2011) framework, a score of 3 points indicates a moderate level of effort. As shown in Table 12, the mean effort level among Chinese senior high school students was 2.97 ($SD = 0.02$), suggesting that students generally exhibit a medium to low level of effort in their English learning activities.

Table 6. Results of Descriptive Analysis of ELE

Variables	Min	Max	M	SD	Skew	Kurt
English Learning Effort	1.00	5.00	2.97	.67	.020	.590

N=711

Correlation between Students' ELH and ELE

The correlation analysis between English Learning Hope (ELH) and English Learning Effort (ELE) revealed a significant positive relationship. Specifically, ELH was significantly correlated with ELE ($r = .34$, $p < .05$, $r^2 = .115$), indicating that ELH accounted for 11.5% of the variance in ELE. This coefficient reflects the strength of the relationship between these variables.

Qualitative Results

Levels of English learning hope

Upon analyzing the interview data, it was evident that students demonstrated elevated levels of English Learning Hope (ELH), driven by their awareness of personal weaknesses and proactive efforts to address them. This perspective is substantiated by the remarks of Student 2 and Student 4. Based on the above interviews, Student 3 indicated that he was good at English, and his strong performance in English gave him more confidence in achieving the goal in Gaokao. Therefore, he was motivated to make plans and overcome his weak points. In addition, both Student 4 and Student 5 emphasized their teachers' high expectations of them, which prompted them to overcome learning difficulties in English.

Extract 1

Interviewer: Do you usually set goals for learning English? What do you typically do in response to these goals?

The goal I set for myself was to get more than 95 points. Generally speaking, I still followed the teacher. Still, at the final stage of the final exam, I might spend time checking and improving on my weaker part of English, such as listening, which I felt was relatively ineffective at that time, and then I would go to do more listening practice. (Student 2, 2023/6/20)

Extract 2

For example, I was not very good at listening in my last final exam; I just got another listening-related practice book for summer vacation and listened to a few good essays every day or memorized and read a little bit more. (Student 4, 2023/6/20)

Extract 3

On the one hand, I have my own goals for Gaokao, and I want to go to a relatively good university. Therefore, I hope I can perform well in English so that the points on my English test can help me rank higher in the whole

examination. Also, I'm good at English, and I know how to learn it effectively, so when I encounter some difficulties, I can always make plans and conquer them. (Student 3, 2022/6/20)

Extract 4

Because my classmates are good at learning, due to the peer pressure, I must learn harder. Besides, my English teacher is one of my families, so she cares about my performance, so I cannot let her down. (Student 4, 2023/6/20)

Extract 5

Because of my English teacher's high expectations of me, I don't want to make her disappointed. (Student 5, 2023/6/20)

Levels of English learning effort

Further analysis of the interviews revealed that students generally exhibited a moderate level of effort in their English learning. Specifically, many reported focusing their most significant efforts on the reading and listening aspects. The following excerpts from the interviews support this observation.

Extract 6

Interviewer: How do you usually study English? Can you be more specific in terms of listening, reading, and writing?

I learn in a critical senior high school, and the teachers treat us strictly. In the morning, we will do the morning reading and then have the class. At noon and in the evening, we will do some reading exercises. (Student 3, 2023/6/20)

Extract 7

I don't spend too much time on English. I usually learn English by following the teacher's instructions. For example, he will talk about some topics first, and then he will teach some content from today's lecture, and then he may make us do some exercises after the lecture. In addition to the lessons, I usually watch some English-related movies and comics to practice my listening skills. (Student 4, 2023/6/20)

Extract 8

I usually follow the teacher's instructions. Also, I sometimes learn English through APPs on my cell phone, such as BaiCiZhan, Coco English, and so on, and then I will also read some English foreign magazines and then memorize some good words and sentences. (Student 5, 2023/6/20)

Correlation between students' ELH and ELE

The positive association between ELH and ELE was further supported by qualitative data from participant interviews. The following excerpts from the interviews substantiate this relationship:

Extract 9

I used to design a specific plan to improve my English. For example, I was not good at listening. So, I tried to plan some extra exercises for myself to enhance my learning. (Student 2, 2023/6/20)

Extract 10

I remember that my reading was not that good, so I will find ways to improve my reading. For example, in my spare time, I will do more reading exercises and I will memorize some unfamiliar expressions. (Student 4, 2023/6/20)

Discussion

Profiles of Students' ELH and ELE

Levels of English Learning Hope

Based on Snyder et al.'s (2002) categorization of hope levels, a score range of 0.6-1.25 is typically considered moderate. In this study, the mean hope score of 3.27 ($SD = 0.84$, see Table 11) indicates that Chinese senior high school students reported a moderate to high level of hope, exceeding the average range. This suggests a strong motivation and a willingness among students to explore various methods of English learning. These findings align closely with those of Gilman et al. (2006), who similarly identified moderate to high levels of hope among 256 of the 341 middle and high school students in their study. This consistency across different cultural and educational contexts strengthens the argument that hope plays a significant role in student motivation and engagement in language learning.

Furthermore, the theoretical implications of these findings suggest that hope, as conceptualized by Snyder's (1991) hope theory, may be more universally applicable across diverse student populations than previously thought. Snyder et al. (2002) emphasized the importance of agency (the belief in one's ability to initiate and sustain actions toward goals) and pathways (the perceived capability to find multiple strategies to achieve goals). In this study, students who reported higher levels of hope also demonstrated a greater inclination to plan their English learning strategically, addressing their weaknesses and seeking alternative methods when encountering difficulties. This mirrors Snyder's (2000) assertion that students with high levels of hope tend to set incremental goals based on their prior achievements, pushing themselves slightly beyond their past performance to ensure continuous growth.

The qualitative data from the interviews further supports this theoretical framework. Students expressed a positive outlook toward improving their English skills and viewed challenges as opportunities for feedback, rather than failures. This resilience is consistent with Snyder et al. (2002), who argued that hopeful students are more likely to view setbacks as learning experiences that fuel their determination to find alternative, achievable methods. In this regard, the findings challenge static views of student effort in language learning by emphasizing the dynamic, goal-oriented nature of hope, which propels students to adapt their strategies based on evolving circumstances.

Moreover, the relationship between hope and peer pressure, teacher expectations, and future goals revealed in this study adds to the existing body of research. While Snyder's hope theory focuses primarily on internal factors like agency and pathways, this study highlights the external factors that may influence English Learning Hope (ELH). Peer pressure and teacher expectations, for instance, could act as catalysts for students to set more ambitious learning goals and maintain high levels of effort. This suggests that future research could benefit from integrating these external motivational factors into existing hope theories, offering a more comprehensive understanding of what drives hope and effort in language learning.

In summary, this study not only corroborates the foundational principles of Snyder's hope theory but also extends it by showing the significant role of external influences such as peer pressure and teacher expectations. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of how hope functions in the context of language learning and underscore the need to consider both internal and external factors in future theoretical developments.

Levels of English Learning Efforts

According to Yeung's (2011) framework, a score of 3 points indicates a moderate level of effort. In this study, the mean effort level among Chinese senior high school students was 2.97 ($SD = 0.02$), suggesting a medium to low level of effort in English learning activities. This finding implies a moderate to low overall investment in effort, which aligns with previous research. For instance, Schweder and Raufelder's (2022) study of 754 German middle school students similarly reported moderate to low effort levels, with means of 2.65 ($SD = 0.62$) under teacher-directed instruction and 2.92 ($SD = 0.68$) during self-directed learning. The consistency of these findings across different educational contexts suggests that moderate effort levels may be common among students learning a second language in formal settings, where motivation and engagement can fluctuate depending on the learning environment and the nature of instructional support.

Additionally, the qualitative data from interviews further reinforces the quantitative findings. Several students indicated that they were primarily focused on improving their reading and listening skills, but their overall effort remained moderate. This reflects a more task-specific approach to English learning, where students prioritize certain language skills over others, potentially due to perceived difficulty or the emphasis placed by teachers. For example, both Student 4 and Student 5 highlighted that they tended to follow their teacher's instructions without exerting additional effort, suggesting a reliance on external guidance rather than internal motivation to engage more deeply with the language. This aligns with Gao et al.'s (2003) conclusion that students with moderate to low effort levels often exhibit a superficial understanding of the target language's values and communication styles. Without a deep cultural immersion, these students may not experience significant cultural conflicts between the target language and their native culture, which could contribute to their lower investment in learning the language beyond classroom expectations.

These findings suggest potential theoretical implications for understanding effort in language learning, particularly in relation to cultural engagement and self-awareness. Gao et al.'s (2003) research posits that students who invest lower levels of effort often fail to grasp the deeper cultural nuances of the target language. This lack of cultural depth, coupled with moderate effort levels, can lead to a more instrumental view of language learning, where students focus on practical skills like reading and listening for academic or career purposes rather than striving for full linguistic and cultural fluency. The absence of significant cultural clashes, as noted in both quantitative and qualitative data, could indicate that students may not be fully engaging with the target language culture, leading to less motivation to invest additional effort into learning. This contrasts with other studies, such as Dörnyei's (2005) L2 motivational self-system, which highlights the importance of envisioning oneself as part of the target language community in driving higher levels of effort and engagement.

Moreover, this study's findings challenge self-regulation theories, which suggest that students with moderate levels of effort may not be engaging in effective self-regulatory practices. The interviews revealed that students often relied on teacher-directed learning, with limited evidence of proactive strategies to enhance their English learning independently.

This is consistent with Schweder and Raufelder's (2022) findings, where students under teacher-directed instruction exhibited lower effort compared to self-directed learners. However, in this study, even during self-directed learning, the effort remained relatively moderate, highlighting the need to consider how autonomy and self-regulation are fostered within the classroom. Future research could explore the balance between teacher support and self-directed learning to better understand how students can be encouraged to take ownership of their language learning process.

In summary, this study's findings contribute to existing theories of effort in language learning by highlighting the complex interaction between external guidance, cultural engagement, and self-awareness. While previous research has emphasized the role of self-regulation and cultural immersion in fostering higher levels of effort, this study suggests that students in formal educational settings may often exhibit moderate effort levels due to a reliance on teacher instruction and a lack of deep cultural involvement with the target language. These results call for a deeper examination of how classroom environments and cultural integration can influence effort and motivation in second language acquisition.

Correlation Between Students' ELH and ELE

The analysis of the correlation between ELH and ELE indicated a significant positive association, which aligns with and extends previous research on the relationship between hope and effort in language learning. This study supports findings from MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) and Snyder (2000), both of whom demonstrated that hope—defined as the belief in one's ability to overcome challenges and succeed—directly influences a learner's persistence and engagement. Specifically, MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) emphasized that learners with high levels of hope are more likely to remain engaged and persevere when confronted with difficulties, as they view setbacks as temporary and solvable. Similarly, Snyder (2000) argued that hope functions as a motivational force, encouraging individuals to increase their effort when faced with obstacles, as they see these challenges as opportunities for growth rather than insurmountable barriers.

This study's qualitative findings further corroborate this theoretical relationship between hope and effort. Several students in the interviews demonstrated self-awareness about their English learning weaknesses and actively sought to improve their skills, especially in listening and reading. For example, Student 2 and Student 4 highlighted that having a specific plan helped them focus their efforts and improve their learning efficiency. These insights closely mirror the findings of Martin (2015), who showed that students who proactively identify solutions to their learning challenges are more likely to set meaningful goals, maintain a positive outlook on future outcomes, and invest sustained effort to achieve their goals. This proactive approach not only reinforces the positive link between ELH and ELE but also suggests that students with higher hope levels engage in more strategic and goal-oriented behaviors in their learning.

In contrast to studies that focus primarily on the role of external motivation in driving effort, this study's findings emphasize the internal, self-regulatory mechanisms driven by hope. The results challenge more traditional views of effort in language learning that center on external factors, such as teacher expectations or peer pressure. While these external influences were acknowledged by participants, the data suggests that internal motivation—specifically hope—played a more critical role in shaping students' effort. This echoes Snyder et al.'s (1991) Hope Theory, which posits that hope involves both agency thinking (the belief in one's capacity to initiate and sustain goal-directed actions) and pathways thinking (the ability to find alternative strategies to reach one's goals). In this study, students who reported higher levels of ELH appeared to embody both agency and pathways thinking, as they not only recognized their weaknesses but also developed plans and sought alternative methods to improve their skills.

The theoretical implications of these findings are significant. First, they contribute to hope theory by reinforcing the notion that hope is a key predictor of effort in language learning. However, this study also suggests that the relationship between ELH and ELE may be more nuanced than previously thought. For instance, while MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) focused on engagement and perseverance as outcomes of hope, this study highlights the importance of goal-setting and strategic planning as mediating factors between hope and effort. Students who exhibited higher levels of hope were not only more determined but also more methodical in their approach to language learning, suggesting that hope may foster not just effort but also more efficient and targeted effort.

Second, these findings extend existing research by considering how cultural and educational contexts influence the hope-effort relationship. For example, while Snyder (2000) and Martin (2015) conducted their research primarily in Western educational contexts, this study involving Chinese senior high school students indicates that hope's influence on effort is similarly strong in non-Western contexts. However, the specific ways in which students channel their effort (e.g., focusing on listening and reading) may vary based on cultural and educational priorities. In Confucian-influenced educational systems, where emphasis is often placed on rote learning and teacher-directed instruction, students may need to navigate different pathways to develop both hope and effort. The finding that students with high ELH still relied on external structures, such as teacher guidance, suggests that future research could explore how hope interacts with cultural learning practices to influence effort.

In summary, this study strengthens the connection between ELH and ELE by confirming the significant positive association observed in earlier research and extending these findings to a new educational context. Theoretical implications include the reinforcement of Snyder's Hope Theory and the suggestion that hope not only drives effort but also encourages more strategic and focused learning behaviors. Additionally, these findings challenge theories that

overemphasize external motivation in language learning, highlighting the critical role of internal motivation—specifically hope—in sustaining effort.

Conclusion

This study makes several unique contributions to the field of English language education, particularly within the Chinese educational context. First, the investigation into the relationship between hope and effort provides a nuanced understanding of how motivational constructs, such as hope, influence students' engagement in English learning. The results, showing moderate levels of hope (mean score of 3.27 out of 5) and moderate to low levels of effort (mean score of 2.97 out of 5), contribute to the growing body of research exploring how internal psychological factors impact learning behaviors. Specifically, the correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation between hope and effort ($r = .34, p < .05$), indicating that hope explains 11.5% of the variance in effort. This finding underscores the critical role hope plays in motivating students to invest effort in their English studies.

One of the study's most important contributions is its focus on the Chinese context, where Confucian learning values and teacher-directed instruction dominate educational practices. While previous research on hope and effort, such as Snyder (2000) and MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012), has largely been conducted in Western settings, this study extends those findings to Chinese senior high school students, providing cross-cultural validation of the hope-effort relationship. In China, where rote memorization and external motivation (e.g., teacher expectations) often shape student behavior, this study highlights that internal factors, like hope, also play a significant role in driving effort, even within a highly structured educational system.

Another distinctive contribution lies in the study's exploration of the practical implications of hope for English learning behaviors. The qualitative data suggested that students with higher levels of hope are more self-aware of their weaknesses and develop specific plans to improve their skills, particularly in listening and reading. These findings are particularly relevant in the Chinese context, where students often rely heavily on teacher guidance. By showing that hope can foster both self-regulation and strategic planning, this study offers valuable insights into how Chinese students can be encouraged to take more autonomous approaches to their English learning, despite the traditionally teacher-centered environment.

Moreover, this study contributes to educational policy and pedagogy by providing evidence that fostering hope in students could be a powerful intervention for enhancing their learning effort. Given that hope accounted for 11.5% of the variance in effort, educational programs aiming to build students' optimism and goal-setting capabilities could lead to higher levels of engagement in English learning. This is particularly critical in China, where the pressure to succeed in English is high, yet students often struggle with low motivation and engagement. The study's findings suggest that cultivating hope through targeted interventions could be an effective strategy to enhance student performance in English.

In summary, this study contributes uniquely to the field of English language education by extending the understanding of the hope-effort relationship to the Chinese educational context, revealing the importance of hope as a motivational driver of effort even in externally structured learning environments. It also provides practical insights for fostering self-regulation and autonomy in students and offers a potential avenue for educational interventions aimed at improving learning engagement in China.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the study proposes recommendations for educators and stakeholders in senior high schools, especially within the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in China. Firstly, recognizing the moderate levels of hope and effort among students underscores the importance of fostering self-directed learning initiatives and acknowledging and rewarding students' efforts. These strategies can potentially enhance their motivation and confidence in navigating English language learning challenges. Secondly, leveraging the observed correlation between hope and effort suggests that educators can bolster students' perseverance and engagement by cultivating a supportive classroom environment (Liu & Li, 2023). This can be achieved through providing constructive feedback, encouraging students to tackle challenging tasks, and promoting a growth-oriented mindset. Such approaches align with established educational psychology principles (Mercer et al., 2018; Ushioda, 2013) and can effectively cultivate students' sustained effort and positive learning outcomes in English language acquisition.

Limitations

While this study endeavored to elucidate the intricate relationship between students' hope and effort, it is crucial to acknowledge several limitations. Firstly, the dataset was constrained as it solely investigated the predictive role of one aspect of hope, specifically pathways. This limitation stems from the cultural context in which the data were collected, suggesting a need for broader cultural diversity in future studies to enhance the dataset's comprehensiveness. Secondly, to better understand the developmental changes in hope and effort among participants, future research is recommended to incorporate qualitative follow-up studies. Such studies could provide deeper insights into how these constructs evolve longitudinally and how contextual factors may shape their development over time.

Ethics Statements

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by Soochow University. The participants provided their informed consent to participate in this study.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Jiang: Concept and design, Data analysis, drafting manuscript. Liu: Concept and design, Data acquisition, supervision, critical revision.

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