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Final report

## **Research Topic:**

**The effectiveness of enhancing students' learning motivation in English through engaging them in language arts activities**

## **Abstract**

*The study seeks to find out the extent to which students are motivated in learning English through language arts activities and the factors affecting their learning motivation. Adopting action research with support of qualitative approach, the study firstly examined students' learning motivation towards language arts activities, thus explored the factors leading to the results through videotaped lesson observations and interviews. It was found that a majority of the students were motivated by language arts activities except for the writing task as compared to non language arts and there were three factors leading to the findings: varieties of activities, form of assessment and learning styles. The implication hence suggested ways to enhance learning motivation of students who were not motivated during language arts activities or specific tasks.*

## **1 Introduction**

It is irrefutable that learning motivation is a crucial element to foster students' learning. Self-determination Theory (SDT) proposed that language learners are driven to learn a foreign language due on two forces, external and internal (Deci & Ryan, 1991). If neither of the motivation is found in a learner's language attainment process, the learner will be stymied in the stage called "amotivation" which they lack intention in learning (Assor et al., 2005). English language has been an indispensable core subject in the Hong Kong education system for decades. Due to its significance in university admission, a multitude of Hong Kong secondary school students are

under tremendous pressure every year. It is irrefutable that the stressful learning environment as well as heavy focus on summative assessments (Davison, 2004) adversely affects Hong Kong students' willingness in English attainment journey (Wong, 2007). Hence, the English learning environment remains mostly the traditional chalk-to-talk methodology which results in students' lack of motivation in learning English.

Learning English through language arts units including short stories, films, lyrics, poems and songs are listed in the English Language Education Key Learning Area Curriculum Guide originated by the Hong Kong Education Bureau (CDC and HKEAA, 2007), yet, it is not a compulsory component but rather an elective that the school can choose to include in their teaching or not. In past researches, scholars have proved the importance of involving language arts teaching to enhance students' learning motivation. The cooperative learning strategies and student-centered activities underneath language arts units design help improve students' motivation as it adds value on individual accountability and positive independence (Richards and Rodgers, 2014).

In Hong Kong, the ESL learning context takes place where students are driven to learn English mainly because of external forces such as gaining high marks in examination and teachers, (Vibulphol, 2016). A lot of studies have covered the areas on how to motivate students in learning English as a second language or the effectiveness of language arts and students' motivation in learning English. However, how to conduct the language arts units and the approach of engaging students into classroom activities so as to enhance their learning motivation can hardly be found in those literary works. As a result, the main focus of this research is to conduct an action research and qualitative study to find out whether increasing the amount of language arts activities will enhance secondary school students' learning motivation in English subjects.

The overall aim of the study is to examine the relationship between language arts and students' motivation in learning English language. Through the action research, students were engaged in both language arts (LA) and non language arts (non- LA) activities to see students' change of motivation through a comparison of both units to fill in the research gap. The rationale and the underlying reasons contributing to the result will be discussed based on literature readings and focus group interviews with the students.

The following parts of the study include a literature review to answer the research questions, research methodology explaining how the research was conducted, an analysis of the research findings, discussion on the similarities and differences of this study and past literatures and lastly, implications on how teachers can implement language arts activities to effectively enhance student's learning motivation in English.

## **2 Literature review**

### 2.1 Language arts and learning motivation

Past research has shown that language arts can enhance students' motivation in learning English since it provides learners with a greater opportunity to be engaged in various classroom activities under an innovative learning environment (Wong, 2014). Lazar (1992) mentioned in his research that language arts offers opportunities for students to learn in an intriguing, thought- provoking and motivating ambience. As encapsulated in another scholar's research, language arts units alter traditional drilling driven learning atmosphere and replace it with an imaginative classroom where students are engaged into interactive activities and learn to think creatively to raise their interests in English learning (Lau, 2002). Language arts lessons integrate a multitude of activities which

allow students to learn in a riveting and interesting learning journey through a stressless learning environment (Asher, 1968). The element of drama and short stories allows teachers to design activities such as games and reader's theatre enables students to maintain their interests in language learning (Kuo, Hsu, Fang and Chen, 2013). In elaboration, as compared to regular lessons, LA provides more room for teachers to conduct classroom activities such as "role play" during an English class, the physical interaction has a positive impact on student's perception on the second language acquisition process (Macedonia, Muller, and Friederici, 2011). The ultimate goal of teaching English is to provide students with more pleasurable experience in learning (Murphy, 1993) and language arts units such as short stories, poems and songs with student-oriented topics are found to motivate ESL learners (King, 2010).

Yet, there are still negative voices claiming that it is difficult to involve language arts elements in English classrooms due to insufficient well-structured classroom processes and lack of consensus in assessment requirements (Savignon, 1991). Carless and Harfitt (2013) mentioned in their paper that some students are not motivated by language arts materials due to a lack of readiness to the module as they were used to traditional classrooms where examinations and drilling are stressed. In a former research, there are several unsuccessful attempts in using language arts units to enhance students' learning motivation although learner-centered curricula was incorporated (Carless, 2001).

The following paragraphs explained some of the factors affecting students' motivation towards language arts units.

## 2.2 Factors affecting students' learning motivation in Language arts

### *2.2.1 Varieties of activities*

Language arts motivated students to learn English because it contains more varieties of activities than non- LA units. Cheung (2001) suggested that the activities touch the lives of students and hence create an environment that enhances learning. The use of linguistic plays in language classrooms elevates students' learning interests (King, 2010) because of its spontaneous language input and output (Wong, 2014). Students are generally discovered to be more motivated when language learning engages more tasks like storytelling, role plays, dramas, etc. (Castro, 2010). CDC (2007) has also suggested that LA units include different kinds of tasks focusing on experiencing, inquiring and collaborating which motivate learners due on enjoyment and develop a sense of commitment in learning. Successful teachers who are able to motivate their students always involve students through challenging literacy activities with classroom interactions and discussions (Sweet & Guthrie, 1996).

On the contrary, some other studies have also proven that some students possessed a rather negative attitude towards language arts activities in Hong Kong. As a researcher stated, it may not have a huge impact on students' learning motivation since some students are not used to the change in classroom activities, they still prefer to work individually on exercises which they are guided to a clear and specific learning outcome (Evan, 1997).

### *2.2.2 Form of assessment*

According to the Curriculum Development Council (2007), teachers are expected to incorporate consistent formative assessment with clear learning objectives, clear performance criteria and

well- designed tasks so as to let students understand what and why they need to do. It also stresses the importance of feedback based assessment to promote further learning. In fact, a myriad of educators incorporate Performance based assessment (PBA) alongside with formative assessment so as to encourage students to maintain an interest in learning through deeper thinking and learning process without much pressure from grades or exam results (Spaling, 2000). Implementing PBA has proven to motivate students to develop an interest in learning since its focus on process learning and that students can keep improving based on feedback and comments provided by teachers (Tong, 2011). Formative PBA allows students to develop on creative writing tasks or create a play, thus motivate them to speak and understand the text which is an alternative for the restricted traditional teaching in Hong Kong (Morris & Adamson, 2010).

It is found that some students are reluctant to learn English through language arts materials because of their perspectives of the assessments in language arts (Carless & Harfitt, 2013). Although Brumfit (1985) pointed out the effectiveness of teaching literature in terms of helping learners' develop language competence and attain academic goals (the external learning motivation), students in Hong Kong still feel more comfortable with the traditional summative assessment (Jin & Cortazzi, 1998). Despite the fact that some students found LA lesson more student- centered and interesting as compared to the traditional teacher- centered learning, they still perceive that the later is more satisfying in terms of meeting academic expectations and being assessed summatively (Wong, 2014) Students tend to attribute one of their motivations for learning English with the role of the assessment, and thus, they lack confidence accomplishing language arts assessment (Evans, 1996).

However, why would some students favor the varieties of activities designed or the formative as well as performance based assessment in Language arts units while some are unmotivated by the

same element? The following sections will examine whether the results of this study agree with the past research and whether there is another factor contributing to the disparity.

### **3 Methodology**

#### 3.1 Research questions

The research was designed to explore the effectiveness of enhancing students' learning motivation by involving more language art activities in regular English lessons in local secondary schools. It aims to seek the answers to the following two research questions:

1. To what extent does engaging students in language arts activities during English lessons enhance students' learning motivation?
2. What are the factors affecting students' learning motivation in English lessons?

#### 3.2 Research methods

This is an action research study and a qualitative design was chosen to explore the extent to which students are motivated by language arts lessons and the factors affecting students' learning motivation in language arts activities. In elaboration, the action research was aiming at addressing the research questions through engaging students in both LA and non- LA lessons. Learning English through English Short Stories was chosen as the LA unit and Learning English through Social Issues was selected as the non- LA unit. Focus group interviews were conducted as the qualitative approach in order to find out factors affecting students' learning motivation in English.

The following will explain the reasons for adopting the two research approaches.



Action Research allows teachers to try out ideas in practice as a means of increasing knowledge about and /or improving curriculum, teaching and learning(Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982). By immersing students into real lessons, researchers will be able to observe students' perception towards language learning and seek answers in response to the research questions.

Moreover, action research promotes reflective teaching and thinking, reinforces the link between practice and student achievement, fosters an openness toward new ideas and learning new things, and gives teachers ownership of effective practices (Hensen, 1996). In this study, students will be immersed into language arts learning through action research to find out whether students are motivated by LA. Thus, evaluate the effectiveness through lesson observation and reflect on the reasons causing students' motivation level. Using Kemmis and McTaggart (1988)'s action research cycle, the action research for this study was carried out in different stages (detailed lesson plans and dates are displayed in section 3.3). The lesson plans and design for both LA and non-LA units were completed in early August. The first lesson was conducted in November. I, the researcher of this project, was the one who taught and observed lessons with extra support for my supporting teacher. Students were found to be severely unmotivated by the first reading lesson for the non- LA unit, so the lesson planning was modified to make the activities in LA and non- LA more balanced after further consultation with the supporting teachers.

Qualitative method helps to understand the phenomenon of interest through participants' perspectives (Merriam, 2009). Rather than quantifying data from surveys or questionnaires, qualitative research can collect views of interviewees (Creswell, 2005) and provoke descriptive and deep understanding of the subject matter (Merriam, 2009). By analyzing qualitative data, the research can address the underlying message drawn from the data gain from the interviews. Focus

group interview with 8 students was conducted for this research to find out the factors affecting students' learning motivation towards language arts activities. The interview which lasted for 1 hour and 22 minutes was carried out after the 12 lessons of the action research in December.

Examples of questions asked are listed as follow:

1. I have conducted different activities in the two units, e.g. drama theatre, role play in LA lessons, e.g. jigsaw reading and group presentations in “Save the Planet”, which one were you more actively participating in? Why?
2. Do you feel like you were forced to participate in the activities in both units? (e.g. group writing) Why? Which one do you find more stressful?
3. Comment on the different kinds of assessments in both units (e.g. LA: drama performance, non- LA: group presentation). Which one do you prefer, why?

### 3.3 The design of the research

The research took place in a local secondary school, targeting 21 S.2 students with low to intermediate English proficiency. A total of 12 lessons were designed (6 for non- LA lessons, 6 for LA lessons) based on two units: Saving the Planet (non- LA unit) and Charlie and the Chocolate Factories (LA units). The first four lessons focused on reading, listening, writing and speaking tasks. Students were requested to conduct group presentations during the fifth and sixth lesson for non- LA units and drama performance for the LA units. By comparing students' learning attitudes in both LA and non- LA lessons, students' change in English learning motivation could be examined. Table 1 below shows the detailed design of the lessons.

Table 1 Lesson planning for the action research

	Date	Saving the Planet	Date	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
<b>Lesson 1</b> <b>Reading</b>	4/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jigsaw reading: letter to the editor (10 mins)</li> <li>- Sequencing the reading parts (7 mins)</li> <li>- Answering reader- response questions (15 mins)</li> <li>- Give alternative title for the reading passage (8 mins)</li> </ul>	5/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jigsaw reading: scene 2 of the story (15 mins)</li> <li>- Reader’s theatre: take turns to read the lines with appropriate intonation and emotions (10 mins)</li> <li>- Charades: understanding the meaning of key vocabulary (15mins)</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 2</b> <b>Listening</b>	11/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pre- listening: familiarizing with listening content (7 mins)</li> <li>- While- listening: listen to the recordings and locate specific information (18 mins)</li> <li>- Post- listening: choose the most serious effect of climate change and explain with reasons (15 mins)</li> </ul>	12/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Listen and identify the four ways of speech (e.g. scream/whisper) (10 mins)</li> <li>- Identify the emotion of characters by listening to the lines (performed by classmates) (15 mins)</li> <li>- Identify the characters through listening to the lines (performed by classmates) (15 mins)</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 3</b> <b>Writing</b>	25/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Topic: Should we replace fossil- fuelled cars with electric cars?</li> <li>- Brainstorming ideas + jot down notes</li> </ul>	26/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Game: pass on the message (7 mins)</li> <li>- Ways to express emotion (use the same sentence) (5 mins)</li> </ul>

		<p>(7 mins)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Group discussion (practice on target structure) (20 mins)</li> <li>- Peer evaluation: invite groups to come out and discuss, other classmates provide comments (13 mins)</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mini- debate: which character has the worst behavior (students have to immerse in the role) (15 mins)</li> <li>- Get into the characters and perform the lines (13 mins)</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 4</b> <b>Speaking</b>	2/12	<p>Topic:( letter to the editor) How can we solve air pollution in Hong Kong?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pre- writing: collecting ideas (8 mins)</li> <li>- While- writing: scaffolding and group writing (one body paragraph) (17 mins)</li> <li>- Post- writing: peer presentation of written ideas (12 mins)</li> </ul>	3/12	<p>Topic: rewrite one of the scene in the story</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Present suggested scene to change brainstorming ideas (10 mins)</li> <li>- Group writing (20 mins)</li> <li>- Peer presentation (10 mins)</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson 5</b> <b>(non-LA: group presentation LA: drama performance)</b>	9/12	<p>Topic: What is the most serious pollution in Hong Kong and how can we solve it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Revision on group presentation skills (7 mins)</li> <li>- Group presentation + peer evaluation (23 mins)</li> <li>- Comments and evaluation (10 mins)</li> </ul>	10/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Drama performance guidelines and suggestions (5 mins)</li> <li>- Tableau mime theatre (10 mins)</li> <li>- Reader's theatre + teacher's comments (15 mins)</li> <li>- Student choose their own scene to perform and practice (10 mins)</li> </ul>

<b>Lesson 6 (non-LA: group presentation LA: drama performance)</b>	16/12	Topic: Ways to be green in Mu Kuang English School. - Revision on group presentation skills (7 mins) - Group presentation + peer evaluation (23 mins) - Comments and evaluation (10 mins)	17/12	- Groups drama performance (25 mins) - Peer comments + teacher's comments (10 mins) - Vote for the best performance (5 mins)

### 3.3.1 Data analysis

8 students with different learning attitudes were invited to the focus group interviews after finishing the action research. Eight open-ended questions were asked to find out the factors affecting their learning motivation in English and their preference in having LA English lessons. Research question one was answered mainly through the observation in the action search and Research question two was mainly answered through the interviews with support of evidence collected during the action research. First, the recorded interview was transcribed. Second, after re-reading and checking for the transcribed contents, the transcribed data were segmented into categories related to factors affecting students' motivation towards English language arts activities. Third, the emerging categories were revisited to draw relations to the conceptual framework of this study, i.e. the affective, behavioral and conative language attitude to show students' motivation towards language arts activities as well as the three factors affecting their learning motivations.

All the lessons conducted were recorded and reviewed as a reference for data analysis. Significant clips showing students' language attitudes were identified and jotted in the observation form. For instance, the number of times students took initiative to raise their hands and answered teacher's questions were counted to reflect their learning motivation in each lesson. Participants in the research were invited to review the drafted analysis so as to make sure there is no misunderstanding and to ensure the research's validity.

#### **4 Analysis of findings**

The following paragraphs aim to report the findings gained from the action research observation alongside with the observation notes and qualitative data as well as to answer the research questions. Following the framework proposed by Garner and Lambert (1972), the analysis displays the three aspects of language attitudes (affective, conative and cognitive) which reflects students' change of learning motivation during English lessons. In Garner's later study (1985), he explained further what the three language attitudes consist of: affective attitudes refers to people's feelings towards a language, conative attitude including a person's behavioral tendencies when learning a language whereas cognitive attitude means the person's personal belief towards language acquisition. As a result, the following students' action and reaction were counted to analyze the three levels of language attitudes. (i.e. Affective attitude: number of students showing reluctance to accomplish class activities, Conative attitude: number of times students put up hands and answered questions, number of students volunteered to participate in class activities and number of students dozed- off during the lesson)

#### 4.1 Students' learning motivation

The first research question concerning whether language arts activities will possess a significant impact on students' learning motivation in English, is examined through observations through action research and focus group interviews.

Generally, students were mildly motivated during Language Arts lessons. Their learning attitudes were more positive on affective, conative and cognitive levels during reading, listening, speaking and drama lessons. However, they were not motivated during LA writing activities.

##### ***4.1.1 Affective attitude (emotional reactions)***

During the interview, 5 out of 8 students who were invited to the interview agreed that they were more willing to learn during LA lessons except for the writing lesson. The activities set in LA lessons allow them to move around and share their ideas to the classmates whereas in non-LA lessons, the classroom interaction was limited, and they felt stressful and hard to concentrate because the teacher did most of the talking. Some students revealed that they were more relaxed and able to enjoy the learning process during LA lessons which drive them to learn English, as evidenced in the following quotes from the interview:

*LA lessons are more interesting and relaxing. I love to move around and ask my classmates for their opinions. The activities were more interesting, like we could act out and laugh at each other when someone was performing a silly scene. We just sat there and followed the teacher's instructions during non- LA lessons. It was boring. (Student 1)*

*I am more relaxed during LA lessons and I felt like I wanted to learn because I could work collaboratively with my classmates. I really like the LA lessons, the activities were more fun.*  
(Student 5)

*Figure 1 Number of students showing reluctance to accomplish class activities*

Total number of students: 21		
	Saving the Planet (non- LA)	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (LA)
Lesson 1	11	9
Lesson 2	3	0
Lesson 3	14	19
Lesson 4	5	0
Lesson 5	7	5
Lesson 6	4	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>35</b>

Figure 1 displayed the number of students showing reluctance when the teacher requires them to complete class activities. The numbers were counted when reviewing the recorded lessons. Overall, students' willingness to accomplish LA activities is higher than non- LA activities, except for lesson 3 which focused on writing tasks. As shown from the above figure, 90% of the students



were reluctant to complete the writing activity in the LA lessons. There were 4 more students who were unwilling to participate during class activities, as compared to non- LA lessons.

It was found in the interview that students disliked the creative writing activity during LA lessons the most. 2 of them were confused and did not know how to compose an alternative storyline and they felt extremely stressful even though it was a group writing activity that they could gain help from their classmates. 1 of the participants claimed that he preferred the LA writing because more instructions were given and he hated the creative writing task because he was clueless and it was boring:

*I just hate the writing activity in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. To be honest, no one in my group knew what to do and it was boring. It was so exhausting when I was asked to write new storylines. (Student 4)*

**4.1.2 Conative attitude (behavioral tendencies)**

*Figure 2 Number of times students put up hands and answered questions*

	Saving the Planet (non- LA)	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (LA)
Lesson 1	7	9
Lesson 2	6	11
Lesson 3	4	3

Lesson 4	7	13
Lesson 5	8	15
Lesson 6	4	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>59</b>

Figure 2 illustrated the number of students who proactively raised their hands and answered questions during class. In general, more students (a total of 36 students throughout the five lessons) answered the teacher's questions initiatively during LA lessons than during non- LA lessons (a total of 59 students throughout the five lessons), especially during lesson 2 (listening), lesson 4 (speaking). It reflected that students enjoyed LA lessons more and that they were more motivated during LA lessons.

*Figure 3 Number of students volunteered to participate in class activities (raised their hands)*

	Saving the Planet (non- LA)	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (LA)
Lesson 1	0	0
Lesson 2	0	5
Lesson 3	0	0
Lesson 4	2	7
Lesson 5	4	12

Lesson 6	6	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>38</b>

Students were generally more willing to participate in class activities in LA lessons than non- LA lessons as shown in figure 3. Over half of the class volunteered themselves in lesson 5 and 6 (drama) which reflects that they were motivated in LA lessons. Yet, students were less willing to participate in class activities during lesson 1 (reading) and lesson 3 (writing).

*Figure 4 Number of students dozed- off during the lesson*

	Saving the Planet (non- LA)	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (LA)
Lesson 1	3	2
Lesson 2	2	0
Lesson 3	0	3
Lesson 4	0	0
Lesson 5	1	0
Lesson 6	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>

Figure 4 presented the number of students fell asleep during class to reflect students' learning interest during the lessons. According to the data as shown, students were more motivated during LA lessons since there were fewer students who fell asleep as compared to LA lessons. However, there were 3 more students falling during lesson 3 (writing) in LA lessons.

#### ***4.1.2 Cognitive attitude (personal belief's structure)***

5 out of 8 participants believed that LA lessons will enhance their interests (intrinsic learning motivation) in learning English and that it could assist them to achieve a higher learning outcome (extrinsic learning motivation). Two of the students believed that they could understand the words better since the story was easy to comprehend. The other three claimed that language arts equipped them with more confidence when learning English because they knew what they were doing. Their comments are listed as below:

*The storyline in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory is easy to understand and I had more confidence in answering the teacher's questions. (Student 1)*

*I love Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. I felt like I was really learning English rather than forcing myself to remember a lot of academic words in Save the Planet. It helped me learn how to apply what I have learnt more spontaneously. (Student 5)*

*I just felt like I am more confident through all the drama play and I believe in myself more. (Student 3)*

*It (Charlie and the Chocolate Factory) made me believe that English was not that difficult after all. (Student 7)*

*The activities were more interesting and I knew what I was doing. We found that English was not so difficult after all. (Student 8)*

2 of the interviewees revealed that they were not interested in either LA or non- LA lessons because they felt like English was still difficult for them to learn. They only enjoyed the games but they did not agree that the other activities such as writing or drama would help them learn English in a more relaxing way.

*English is still English. Saving the planet and Charlie and the Chocolate Factory are still the same. I just have no confidence in it. Playing games is okay but I have no confidence when I was picked by the teacher to answer the question. (Student 2)*

*I still believe that English is hard to master. There are too many unfamiliar words in both units. Although the game was fun, I still possess the same feeling towards English. (Student 6)*

While most students enjoyed having LA lessons, one student expressed her negative feelings towards LA lessons, claiming that she did not believe English short stories will help her enjoy English learning more. Instead, she felt stressed when being asked to work with other classmates or participating during class activities.

*I don't like the lessons because I think my classmates were always laughing at me whenever I was performing or answering teacher's questions. There were too many words in the story and I*

*don't agree that the activities design help me to understand the lesson. (Student 4)*

#### 4.2 Factors affecting students' learning motivation

While most of the students were more interested in LA lessons, some of the students possessed neutral or even negative feelings towards the activities designed in the unit. Through the focus group interview with 8 students, 5 of them (student 1, 3, 5 and 7) agreed that LA lessons were motivating, 2 of them (student 2 and 6) felt that LA and non- LA lessons were the same, 1 of them (student 4) felt stressed when having LA lessons. By grouping and analysing the interview, three factors: **varieties of activities**, **classroom interactions** and **learning styles** were found to impact on students' learning motivation in English.

##### ***4.2.1 Varieties of activities***

The interview indicated that students were more motivated by LA lessons because they were engaged in different kinds of activities. Compared in non- LA lessons, they felt more relaxed since they were not merely requested to follow the teacher's instructions and sat idly while the teacher did most of the talking. 5 participants agreed that activities such as **“drama performance”** and **“mime theatre”** will drive them to learn because they could move around and act out.

*The teacher did not talk all the time during LA lessons. There were more activities in LA lessons.*

*(Student 1)*

*We can learn more through different activities. For example, I learnt more vocabulary through the fun game “Charades” and I understand the deep meaning through performing drama. I felt*

*like the activities and things we learnt in Save the Planet were fixed and not that interesting.*  
(Student 3)

*LA lessons are more interesting. It is easier for us to understand what the teacher was saying through games and activities in LA lessons.* (Student 7)

*Drama was the most interesting activity. I was more active in drama performance. I love to move around and work with my classmates, like ask them how to perform, etc. This activity is the most impressive for me.* (Student 5)

*The activities in Save the Planet were too academic, we were only asked to discuss based on the content in the text or given topics. However, we were given opportunities to share our ideas and move around and voice out during Charlie and the Chocolate Factory lessons.* (Student 8)

#### **4.2.2 Form of assessment**

The findings in the interview showed that students' learning motivation was affected by the form of assessment. Students felt less stressful during LA lessons because their performance was not graded mainly but they received comments from the teachers instead. Thus, they were encouraged by the formative assessment throughout the learning process since their performance was not judged by grades.

*I like Charlie and the Chocolate Factory more because the teacher will not give me a poor mark or grade. Normally, we will provide comments with one another and share ideas on how to*

*improve. (Student 3)*

*The teacher was more supportive. There were no absolute right or wrong answers in drama or games. However, we were given marks during group presentations or listening activities in Save the Planet, which was stressful. (Student 1)*

*I don't like LA but I have to admit that it is less stressful when teachers and classmates just give you comments instead of giving you a "D" grade. Grades are more terrifying (Student 4)*

#### **4.2.3 Learning styles**

Although students were generally more driven in LA lessons, there are a few students who shared different opinions. It was evident that different learning styles would affect students' learning motivation in English. Students who enjoyed collaborative learning tended to be more active and intrigued during LA lessons since most of the activities designed required group work and sharing ideas among one another. On the contrary, some of the students enjoyed independent learning and they found LA lessons troublesome and uninspiring that they prefer to work on their own.

##### *Students who enjoy group work:*

*I had a good time because we were able to share our ideas to our classmates. Sometimes it's funny to laugh at each other when we perform in a silly manner. (Student 5)*

*I don't like working alone, like listening to the recordings and finishing my own exercise. I am*



*more interested in knowing what my classmates were thinking. (Student 7)*

*It's just that you can get help from your groupmates. Even when we did not know how to do the creative writing task, we were sharing the stress as a team. (Student 8)*

*I love to rehearse the drama with my groupmates. The group activities impelled me to learn English because I can discuss what I think with my groupmates. (Student 1)*

*Students who enjoy individual learning:*

*I don't like the group activities in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory because my groupmates did nothing. I would rather work on my own in the first place. (Student 4)*

*I like to read and finish all the tasks by myself. I think I can learn faster that way. (Student 2)*

## **5 Discussions**

Overall, this study confirms both sides of the previous studies. Although a majority of students were motivated by language arts, some students were found to have no increase in motivation in learning English through language arts units. This study also provides new insights in terms of the factor causing the disparity in students' perception towards language arts activities: learning style of students.

## Varieties of activities

In particular, most of the students enjoyed the language arts lessons since there were more varieties of activities involved. The result suggested that students were more relaxed and more driven during language arts lessons as compared to non language arts lessons. It agrees with King 's (2010) previous research that language arts activities such as role playing and drama allows more classroom interactions which engage students in a more vibrant learning environment. Students who were more motivated by language arts activities also mentioned that they were given the opportunities to voice out and perform whereas during non- LA lessons, they were only allowed to discuss academic topics which they found boring and restricted.

It is undeniable that there are still a few students who possessed a rather apathetic attitude towards LA lessons, especially for the creative writing activity. As research shows, students may be unmotivated by language arts activities because they were not confident due to a lack of linguistic competence and that they felt lost without clear guidelines as well as clear learning objectives during LA lessons (Wong, 2014). The student who preferred non- LA lessons more in this study were also found to be unmotivated during LA activities since he reckoned that he did not receive sufficient expected learning outcomes from the teacher. Although the activities were fun, he did not understand the learning purpose of those activities and it required spontaneous language output which he felt uncomfortable with.

### Form of assessment

Although researchers suggested that Hong Kong students are more used to and comfortable with exam- oriented learning because their needs meet academic expectations (Evan, 1996), the result from this research does not entirely agree with it. The findings suggested that students felt more supported when teachers provided them with comments instead of grades or telling them what they have done wrong. Despite the fact a few students were not motivated by LA lessons because there is a lack of clear expected learning outcomes, the main reason for the lack of motivation is not on account of the assessment set. According to the interview, the student expressed his positive attitudes towards the performance based and formative assessment and admitted that summative assessment in regular English lessons were more terrifying (see 4.4.2- student 4). It has also been proved by other scholars that formative performance based assessment can motivate students to learn since its focus on helping students improve based on constant feedback. (Tong, 2011)

### Learning styles

Past researches have suggested that learning styles is a main factor affecting students' learning motivation towards a second language learning journey (Ehrman, Leaver & Oxford, 2003) as it affects student's sense of satisfaction towards learning. However, very few of the studies have drawn relation to different learning styles when discussing factors affecting students' learning motivation in language arts lessons. According to this research, both types of students, those who were motivated by language arts lessons and those who were apathetic to it were found. It then leads to a discussion on different students' learning styles. While some students enjoy collaborative learning such as drama performance, some prefer individual learning. Moreover, some students were more motivated in non LA lessons because they felt like the instructions and

requirements are clear. As compared to the writing activity in non LA lessons, the creative writing activity lacks specific requirements because they were allowed to be creative and students were intimidated by the sudden change of tasks. They were not used to the imaginative thinking skills as required but rather, they felt more motivated to write with clear focus on each paragraph. (i.e. different subheadings in formal writing)

## **6 Conclusion and Implication**

In general, the study revealed the possibility in including more language arts activities during English lessons in secondary schools as a majority of the participants showed a positive attitude towards LA lessons which reflected that they were motivated. However, there are some limitations in this study. The researcher was the sole observer for videoed lesson reviews and the one drafting all observation results, so there might be variables that have not been taken into account. To avoid biases, future research can invite other teachers or researchers to participate during the action research lesson observations and focus group interview.

For implementing language arts in future teaching, more guidelines and specific learning outcomes are suggested to be inserted into the assessment criteria. It is reflected from the findings that the assessment set in this study lacked academic purposes. Therefore, a clear assessment framework should be set so as to further motivate students' long term English learning progress. To elaborate, more guiding questions and criterias should be added in the writing tasks so as to facilitate students' writing interests. Most of them found that they lack linguistic input and requirements to follow that they did not know what to do during the creative writing tasks. Therefore, a clear

assessment framework should be set so as to further motivate students' long term English learning progress.

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## 8 Appendixes

### Appendix 1 Information sheets

#### INFORMATION SHEET

#### < The effectiveness of enhancing students' learning motivation in English through engaging them in language arts activities >

You are invited to participate in a project supervised by Dr. Mak Wing Wah Pauline and conducted by Lau Ping, who are staff and student of Department of English Language Education in The Education University of Hong Kong.

#### **The introduction of the research**

This research study is purposed to seek the relationship between language arts and students' motivation in learning language. Then, find out whether it would be an effective teaching method to engage students into more language arts activities so as to enhance their learning motivation in English. Literatures have approved the significant role of language arts in terms of enhancing students' interests in learning English. The research will be conducted by an observation of a classroom teaching by a self- designed English teaching plan through language arts activities based on Total Physical Response Theory (Asher, 1966) as explained in the literature review section. The ultimate goal of this research is to provide some insights for educators in Hong Kong to realize the importance of providing opportunities for secondary school students to be engaged in classroom activities in order to increase their interests in learning English, specifically language arts activities.

#### **The methodology of the research**

The research is expected to take place in a Hong Kong secondary school by using action research. The unit *Learning English through English stories* will be chosen for the experiment. A unit plan featured on classroom activities based on the English short stories will be designed. The research will be carried out in two stages. The first stage is to teach English in traditional method without involvement in physical response. The second stage is to teach the chosen participant with the designed unit plan. Thus, the second stage of teaching will be compared to the first stage through observation on students' learning attitude in both stages.

15 students will be selected for the interviews to further investigate the factors affecting their motivation in learning English through language arts activities. The questions will be based on two aspects of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

### **The potential risks of the research**

Your participation in the project is voluntary. You have every right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. All information related to you will remain confidential, and will be identifiable by codes known only to the researcher.

### **Describe how results will be potentially disseminated**

All the information obtained will ONLY be used for research purposes, names of participants will NOT be shown and mentioned.

If you would like to obtain more information about this study, please contact me by email at \_\_\_\_\_ or telephone number \_\_\_\_\_, or my supervisor Dr. GU, Mingyue Michelle by email at \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research study, please do not hesitate to contact the Human Research Ethics Committee by email at [hrec@eduhk.hk](mailto:hrec@eduhk.hk) or by mail to Research and Development Office, The Education University of Hong Kong.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

Lau Ping

Appendix 2 Consent form

**<Department of English Language Education>**

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**< The effectiveness of enhancing students' learning motivation in English through  
engaging them in language arts >**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby consent to participate in the captioned project supervised by Dr GU, Mingyue Michelle and conducted by Lau Ping, who are staff and student of Department of English Language Education in The Education University of Hong Kong.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, my right to privacy will be retained, i.e., my personal details will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the **attached** information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. My participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Signature:

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Name of Participant:

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Date:

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Appendix 3 Sample consent form signed by students

<Department of English Language Education>

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

< The effectiveness of enhancing students' learning motivation in English through engaging them in language arts >

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby consent to participate in the captioned project supervised by Dr GU, Mingyue Michelle and conducted by Lau Ping, who are staff and student of Department of English Language Education in The Education University of Hong Kong.

I understand that information obtained from this research may be used in future research and may be published. However, my right to privacy will be retained, i.e., my personal details will not be revealed.

The procedure as set out in the attached information sheet has been fully explained. I understand the benefits and risks involved. My participation in the project is voluntary.

I acknowledge that I have the right to question any part of the procedure and can withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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Appendix 4 Sample observation notes and modification on lesson plans

Chocolate Factory lesson

3/12/2019

- to know
- to know knowledge:
- to interaction
- to role play
- to drama

Lesson objectives:

- perform chosen scenes through mine role play.
- Decide which groupmate is responsible for playing which character.
- Act out a drama scene on stage with interaction and
- Memorize the script of the chosen action scene.

Procedures:

Mine Role Plays (20 minutes)

- T introduces mine role play to the students telling them they need to let their groupmates guess the scene.
- T introduces a few significant scenes in the chapter.
- Ss are divided into groups of 4/5/6.
- Ss need to guess the scene provided by the teacher.
- one of the groupmate comes out and act the scene without a word but just the action.
- The group that gets the most amount of correct answers wins.
- Interaction with groupmates.

Role Play (10 minutes)

- T introduces two scenes to the students and ask them to choose a scene to perform in the last lesson.
- Ss choose the characters they want to act.
- T invites one group to come up and perform.
- Ss with the same role to sit together and read the script.
- Interaction and acting.