Abstract

With the development of globalization, English has become a global language. More and more Chinese want to learn English which includes middle-aged and elderly people. However, in recent research, most are focusing on children, teenagers and college students. There is little research that focuses on middle-aged and elderly and there is also a lack of comparison of study of learning motivation, learning strategies and learning barriers of middle-aged and elderly. Thus, the research objective is to analyze the differences in learning motivation, learning strategies and learning barriers of middle-aged and elderly. In this study, there are four research questions:

1) What motivates the middle-aged and elderly Chinese to learn English?
2) What learning strategies do middle-aged and elderly Chinese use in learning English?
3) What are the barriers that obstruct the middle-aged and elderly Chinese in learning English?
4) What may be the differences of motivation and strategies between middle-aged and elderly Chinese in learning?

The data are collected by questionnaire and interview. 22 middle-aged and 18 elderly who are from Guiyang LaoNian DaXue (Senior Citizen University) in China and Nanjing Library are investigated. The data of the questionnaire were collected and analyzed by Graphpad Prism 5.0. (1) To do statistical description analysis of the results of the questionnaire. (2) To analyze the differences of middle-aged and elderly learning English by t-test. (3) To analyze the differences of middle-aged and elderly learning result by t-test. This research is also completed by the interviews.

The research findings show that firstly, most of learners who are learning English are from urban areas and have a good education. Most of them are female who are working in the government. Secondly, the motivation for the middle-age
people is extrinsic learning motivation. By the comparison, the elderly learning English motivation is more intrinsic. Thirdly, for the middle-age people and elderly, they use some of the following learning strategies to learn English. There is a significant difference between memory strategy and metacognitive strategy. However, there are no significant differences in terms of learning effectiveness. The fourth difficulty for the middle-age people is they have not enough time to learn English, and for the elderly, their short term memory is something of a challenge.

According to these research findings, three suggestions are made: (1) Transformation and optimization of learning environment (2) Enhance the motivation of learning English to middle-aged and elderly (3) Teaching and training of learning strategies which could help Chinese middle-aged and elderly learning English effectively.

Key words: middle-aged, elderly, English learning, strategies, barriers, motivation