

Motivations, Limitations and Expectations of German Language Placement Test: Case Study of German Major Student at Thammasat University

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Abstract

Language placement test is not new and also one of the critical requirements for further education or work application. Therefore, it is one of the motivational reasons to study foreign languages. The primary objective of this pilot study is to find ways to develop the ability of German-major students at Thammasat University to pass the German placement test- Goethe Zertifikat- during their fourth academic year successfully. The questionnaire was developed to assess the student's perception of their motivation, obstacle, and expectations towards German placement test. The results show that their motivation lies mainly in the self-level test and their determination to further education or even future career. Although the long-term goals of studying are clear, specific short-term goals should be considered as well, because it is also a key to encourage the students to learn and prepare themselves more for the placement test. Tasks and assignments of the preparation phase or tutorial session would be divided into small steps. Deadlines must be assigned and the students must monitor their own progress. The students could be therefore more flexible with their own learning or studying schedule. The lecturers could also follow up the learning progress, evaluate the performance and give feedback. However, the students are very satisfied with the support from the German Department, especially financial and organization support, starting from the preparation phase until the end of the exam and they also got to pay minimal exam fees.

Keywords: Expectation, German placement test, Goethe Zertifikat, Goal-setting, Language placement test, Limitations, Motivations

Introduction

Since 2007, German Department, Faculty of Liberal Arts, Thammasat University has received cooperation from the German language institution– Goethe Institut Thailand for German language placement test– so called *Goethe Zertifikat*, which is internationally recognized evidence of German language skills. This German

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language placement test is offered by Goethe Institut, which correspond to the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), range from level A1 for beginners to C2 equivalent to native speaker and can be taken in Germany, worldwide at Goethe-Instituts, Goethe-Centers and their cooperation partners. The tests are divided into four parts: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The important proposal of this cooperation from Goethe Institut Thailand is that the German major students at the Thammasat University can participate in this test at a special price. As of 2019, the standard fees for participation in the test are as followed: B1 Level costs 7,200 Baht, B2 9,500 Baht and C1 12,100 Baht. The students of the cooperate institutes are only required to pay only 750 Baht, 1,000 Baht and 1,300 Baht respectively (Goethe Institut Thailand, 2019). Moreover, there is also a financial support from the university, managed by the German Department.

It is undeniable that the students' main motivation learning German language is to study in German language speaking countries. Some may even want to further their future career through work application or applying for a scholarship during the academic year or after graduation. The German language certificate plays an important role in this process. The students would not be allowed to participate in any academic study course in Germany, without a sufficient command in German, if such a study course or lessons are taught entirely or partially in German language. To prove their competence of German language for academic studies in German speaking countries, a certificate for passing a recognized German language test need to be presented. For some work applications with German language qualification or applying for a scholarship in German language speaking countries such as Erasmus or other exchange programs, the proof of German language is required as well. In the past, the Goethe Zertifikat were not considered seriously, since universities in German language speaking countries only recognized other German language skill proofs for admission such as Telc, DSH or TestDAF. In 2016, the certificate *Telc* with C1 level was officially recognized as proof of language skills for admission to German universities by the members of the German Rectors' and Cultural Ministers' Conference. DSH is abbreviation of a *Deutsche Sprachprüfung für den Hochschulzugang*. This test stands for a standardized language examination that examines German language competencies as a foreigner taking up a study course with a German as a language of instruction. DSH Certificate is the top accepted certificate by the German higher education institutions, as a proof of German language proficiency for admission in studies. TestDaF is founded and centrally maintained by the TestDaF Institute in Hagen, Germany. There are 80 licensed TestDaF centers in other foreign countries worldwide. TestDaF Certificate is recognized by the most

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German higher education institutions, as a proof of German language skills for foreigner's applying for a study place in a higher education institution in Germany. In 2016, it was officially recognized as proof of language skills for admission to German universities by the members of the German Rectors' and Cultural Ministers' Conference. The Goethe Zertifikat became relevance in 2017 as many universities in German language speaking countries also accept it as (Goethe Insitut, 2017). Since then, the German Department has therefore seen the importance of this test and tried to make the examination as successful as possible, in order to increase students' opportunities in either future career or further abroad study.

Student Requirements for the Placement Test

There are some requirements for this placement test: 1) the students have to pass the pre- test, so that they are allowed to take the real placement test. From 2007-2014 Goethe Institut Thailand ran this pre-placement test themselves, but since 2015 the German Department has been given this order and run this process on its own (Knoop, 2019). 2) These 3 level tests will take place once an academic year. Both curriculums establish prerequisite admission criteria, that every student needs an A2 level or above (Thammasat University, 2013&2019). At this point, the German Department does not see any necessity of the placement test for the A1 or A2 level, but B1, B2 and C1. Due to the curriculums, the students would achieve their German language skill level within 4 academic years from B1 to B2 or C1, in addition of studying German regional and cultural studies, history, translation, linguistics and German for Tourism and Business. After careful consideration of these criteria, the German Department has set the test schedule at the end of every academic year so that these tests would suit the students' language skill.

Table 1

Schedule of the placement test- Goethe Zertifikat

Year	Semester	Level	Placement Test Schedule
1	1 st	B1.1	B1 Test (end of semester)
	2 nd	B1.2	
2	1 st	B1+	B2 Test (end of semester)
	2 nd	B2.1	
3	1 st	B2.2	C1 Test (end of semester)
	2 nd	B2+	
4	1 st	B2+	C1 Test (end of semester)
	2 nd	B2+ or C1	

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3) Students also have the opportunity to repeat the test in the next academic year, if they failed either wholly or partially, by selecting the test at the same level or taking the test at a higher level that suit their academic year of study. Since 2016, there has been a new regulation for test repetition. In every level, if the students failed the test wholly in all of the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, they are allowed to repeat the whole test in the next academic year. In B1 level, if they failed partially in any skill, they will only have to repeat the part that they failed. Both in B2 and C1, if they failed in speaking part, they will have to repeat that part only; however, if they failed in any of other three parts, they will have to repeat the test of these three skills altogether, even if they failed only one part (Goethe Institut Thailand, 2019).

Extra Tutoring

The German Department also supports the students' performance in the placement test by offering extra tutoring. The tutoring sessions take place during the semester, along with regular study and in the same semester, which the placement test occurs. For example, B1 test occurs at the end of the second semester in the first academic year. The tutoring starts at the beginning of that semester and allow first year students to attend the session. The tutoring session usually takes 90 minutes every week and is taught by foreign language assistant, sponsored by DAAD. DAAD is the German abbreviation of *Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst*, which stands for German Academic Exchange Service. The **DAAD** is a funding organization for the international exchange of students and researchers. It is useful to note that, these tutorials are not obligatory and often scheduled after lecture time (9.30-16.30), i.e. 16.30-18.00, due to difference of students' class schedule, which they have approximately 18-24 hours per week.

Previous Statistic of the Placement Test Result

Although the students motivated to accomplish the placement test, the results were still not impressive. The two tables below compare numbers of students, who all attended the pre-test, passed the pre-test and passed the placement test of academic year 2016 and 2017.

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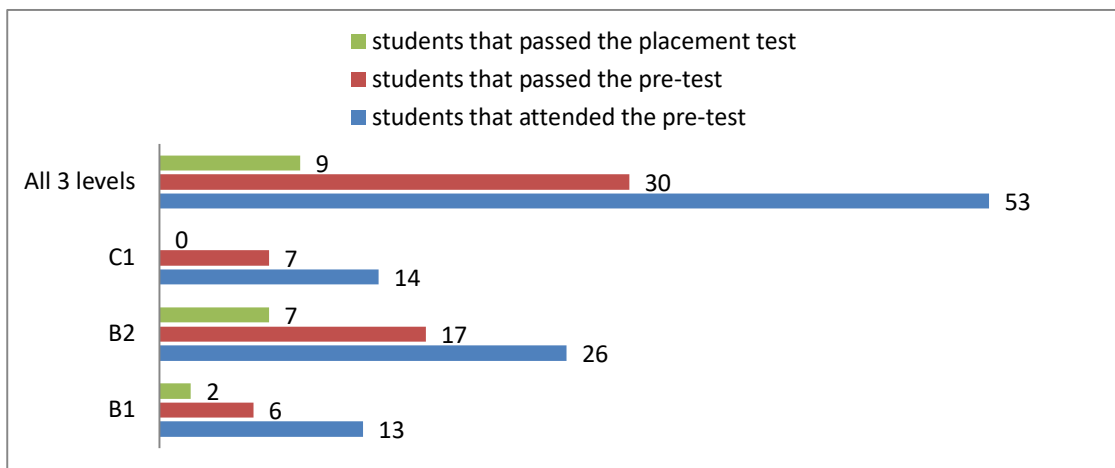


Figure 1. Shows the number of students that attended the pre-test, passed the pre-test and passed the placement test in academic year 2017.

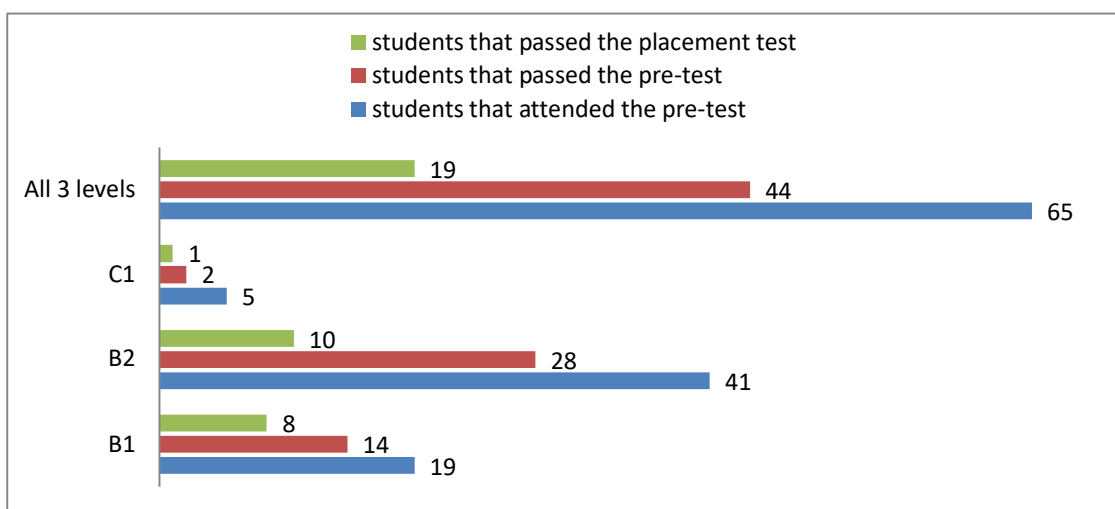


Figure 2. shows the number of students that attended the pre-test, passed the pre-test and passed the placement test in academic year 2016.

In 2016 there were 19 of 65 students (29.23 %), who accomplished the placement tests, and in 2017 there were 9 of 53students (16.98 %). That means in 2016, 44 from all 65 students were allowed to take the placement test, because they passed the pre-test, then the 19 of 44 (43.19%) students passed the test and the rest 25 of 44 students (56.81%) failed. In 2017, 30 from all 53 students were allowed to take the placement test, because they passed the pre-test, then the 9 of 30 (30%) students passed the test and the rest 21 of 30 students (70%) failed. Failing is indeed costly. As previously stated, if the students failed either just one or the whole four parts, it counts as a complete fail. The students need to pass all the four parts, in order to counted that they passed the placement test. The information of the failed parts have

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been collected and summarized, as following.

Table 2

Failed parts of students' placement test in academic year 2017

Level \ Skill	listening	speaking	reading	writing	Total
B1	3	1	2	0	6
B2	5	1	9	2	17
C1	6	0	7	6	19
Total	14	2	18	8	42
Percentage	33.33	4.76	42.86	19.05	

Table 3

Failed parts of students' placement test in academic year 2016

Level \ Skill	listening	speaking	reading	writing	Total
B1	5	0	2	0	7
B2	22	4	16	10	52
C1	1	0	0	0	1
Total	28	4	18	10	60
Percentage	46.67	6.66	30	16.67	

In 2016, 19 students failed the test and the number of total failed part is 60. The ratio would be 19:60 or average 3.16 failures per one student. In 2017, 21 students failed the test and the number of total failed part is 42. The ratio would be 21:42 or average 2 failures per one student. This shows that although the proportion of successful test in 2016 is more than 2017, in 2017 the students tend to fail less than in year 2016.

Failing in each skill is to be observed, in order to find out students' strength and weakness with the German language. In 2016, the ratio of failure are listening part (46.67%), then reading (30%) and writing (16.67%), respectively. Speaking (6.66%) was the strongest skill. Contrast with 2017, the ratio of failure are reading part (42.86%), listening (33.33%) and writing (19.05%) respectively. Interestingly, speaking (4.76%) remained the strongest skill as in 2016. This could be assumed that speaking and writing are the students' strength, while listening and reading are their weakness.

Purpose of the Study

1. To study motivations, limitations and expectations of undergraduate German

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major students towards the German placement test – Goethe Zertifikat during their study.

2. To find developmental ways, in order that the students could accomplish the German placement test- Goethe Zertifikat- during their fourth academic year successfully.

Theoretical framework

Motivation is one of the significant roles in the process of language learning. It is important to understand the student's motivation in order to find the best method in learning and teaching language. According to Dörnyei (2001, pp.6-7) motivation is a general way of referring to the *antecedents* of action, which means the causes and origins. Motivation explains *why* people decide to do something, *how hard* they are going to pursue it and *how long* they are willing to sustain the activity, due to two basic dimensions of human behavior- direction and intensity.

Dörnyei (2001, pp.10-11) has summarized the most ten well-known contemporary motivation theories in psychology: Expectancy value theories by Brophy (1999), Eccles and Wigfield (1995), Achievement motivation theory by Atkinson and Raynor (1974), Self-efficacy theory by Bandura (1997), Attribution theory by Weiner (1992), Self-worth theory by Covington (1998), Goal setting theory by Locke and Latham (1990), Goal orientation theory by Ames (1992), Self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan (1985) and Vallerand (1997), Social motivation theory by Weiner (1994) and Wentzel (1999) and Theory of planned behavior by Ajzen (1988) and Eagly and Chaiken (1993).

Goal setting theory by Locke and Latham (1990) is mainly about goal properties: specificity, difficulty and commitment. Dörnyei (2001) has summarized this theory as “Human action is caused by purpose, and for action to take place, *goals* that are both specific and difficult (within reason) lead to the highest performance provided the individual shows goal commitment.” Goals are fundamental to the study of motivation and focus on the purposes or reasons that the students perceive for achieving (Anderman & Midgley, 1998).

Dörnyei (2001) applied this theory to his model on language learning motivation in 1998. He showed examples of grade exams or grade certificates, where goals are standard by which students can evaluate their own performance and mark their progress. Dörnyei (2001, pp.12-28), having developed his model from Oxford and Shearin in 1994, explained that, goal-setting can have exceptional importance in stimulating second learning motivation, and it is therefore shocking that so little time and energy are spent in the second language classroom on goal-setting. By the way,

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according to Dörnyei's applied goal-setting theory, specific and short-term goals can help the learners to structure their second language learning process and would provide immediate extra incentives. From the compatibility of the goal-setting theory and the motivation for the placement test, this theory is applied to this case-study, in order to increase productivity of learning and achievement of the placement tests.

Research design and methodology

Population and Samples

This research studied motivations, limitations and expectations toward German language placement test of undergraduate German major students at Thammasat University. It consisted of 58 German major students in the academic year 2018, which derived from 1st year 18 students (31%), 2nd year 12 students (20.8%), 3rd year 14 students (24.1%) and 4th year 14 students (24.1%).

Instrumentation

The instruments used in this study were interview and anonymous questionnaire. Both interview and questionnaire were constructed by the researcher based on group interview in classroom and opinions of the lecturers from the German Department towards their experiences with the placement test from the students, during the curriculum conferences and quality assurance conferences.

The questionnaire was divided into 4 parts as followed:

1. Background information of the students
 - Students' academic year
 - Students' German language background (A1 and A2 level)
 - Self-evaluation of their German language skills
 - Reasons, why they choose to study German.
2. Opinions about the placement test– Goethe Zertifikat
 - Reasons of willing for the placement test
 - Opinions about the pre-test
 - Opinions about the test schedule
 - Motivation and obstacle for the placement test
3. Preparation and tutorial
 - Frequency of attendance in tutorial
 - Reasons of tutorial attendance or absence
4. Opinion about support from the German department
 - Financial support
 - Preparation

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- Organizational support
- Sufficient information

Data Collection

Motivations, limitations and expectations of German language placement test were accessed through the questionnaire in the first semester of the academic year 2018.

Findings and Result

The data analysis from the questionnaire, reported by German major student at Thammasat University in academic year 2018, was presented as following:

Background information of the students

The first part of questionnaire is mainly about background information of the German major students in academic year 2018, as describes below:

Table 4

Background information of the students

	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1. Students' academic year		
1.1 1 st Year	18	31
1.2 2 nd Year	12	20.8
1.3 3 rd Year	14	24.1
1.4 4 th Year	14	24.1
Total	58	100
2. Students' German language background(A1 and A2 level)		
2.1 Arts-German Program in High School	26	44.8
2.2 Exchange student in German speaking Countries	18	31
2.3 Courses GR171 and GR172	8	13.8
2.4 Language Institution with German proof	6	10.3
Total	58	100
3. Reasons, why they choose to study German.		
3.1 Future career/ Work application	39	67.3
3.2 Further Education/ Scholarship	9	15.5
3.3 Parents	4	6.9
3.4 others	6	10.3
Total	58	100

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4. Self-evaluation of students' German language skills		
4.1 Self-evaluation of strong German skill		
4.1.1 Reading	25	43.1
4.1.2 Listening	12	20.7
4.1.3 Writing	11	19
4.1.4 Speaking	10	17.2
Total	58	100
4.2 Self-evaluation of weak German skill		
4.2.1 Listening	19	32.8
4.2.2 Writing	18	31
4.2.3 Speaking	16	27.6
4.2.4 Reading	5	8.6
Total	58	100

This section on their reasons for studying German assumes that the most motivating reason is students' future career and work application (67.3%), and the second is further education or applying for scholarship (15.5%).

Students have evaluated their German skill and the results indicated that they perceived reading as their strongest skill (43.1%), while the other two skills, listening (32.8%) and writing (31%), are their weakness. But, when this result is compared to the failing results from the placement test of the last two academic years, it results in a reverse ratio: speaking was their strongest skill; the most failing part in 2016 was listening and in 2017 was reading.

Opinions about the placement test– Goethe Zertifikat

In the second part of questionnaire, the students have to give their opinions about placement test – Goethe Zertifikat, in multiple choice and open question. The result of their opinions is as following:

Table 5

Student's opinions about placement test– Goethe Zertifikat

5. Students' wanting for German placement test	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
5.1 Yes	54	93.1
5.2 No	4	6.9
Total	58	100

6. Reasons for wanting or not wanting for German placement test

6.1 Yes		
6.1.1 Self-level Test	38	65.52
6.1.2 Certificate for work application/further study	13	22.41
6.1.3 Inexpensive fee	3	5.17

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6.2 No		
6.2.1 Too much pressure	2	3.45
6.2.2 Failed in pre-test	2	3.45
Total	58	100
7. Students' pre-test experience		
7.1 have ever done pre-test before	35	60.34
7.1.1 pre-test was easier than the real test	18	31.03
7.1.2 pre-test was more difficult than the real test	17	29.31
7.2 never done pre-test before	23	39.66
Total	58	100
8. Students' opinions about the test schedule		
8.1 agree	47	81
8.2 disagree	11	19
Total	58	100

Almost of all the students (93.1%) would like to take the placement test and agree with the test schedule (81%). Incidentally, the main reason why the students want to take the placement test, is not certificate for work application or further study (22.41%) as they mentioned earlier as their reasons for studying German, but they would like to test their German skills (65.52%). On the contrary, their given reasons for not wanting or not be able to take the placement test, are too much stress and failing the pre-test.

In this part of questionnaire, there were some extra comments about their motivation and obstacle for the placement test. For their motivation, they believed that passing the test and finally receiving the certificate is an achievement that motivated them to be more active in learning. These future achievements had inspired them to take more effort and try their best during the preparation phase and for the placement test. On the contrary, they were obstructed by their weak skills, such as speaking or listening. There was also a comment about the test schedule, which the test occurred at the same day with the students' class and wish they could have the test during the semester break instead of during the semester. Moreover, they also experienced difficulties during the preparation phase as they did not have enough time for it or were too exhausted, due to their study during semester.

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Preparation and Tutoring

The third part is mainly about students' frequency of attendance in tutorial, in multiple choice and open question. Since the first tutorial (for B1 level) occurs in the second semester of the academic year and this survey was managed in the first semester, the first year students have not experienced the tutorial yet. Therefore, there are 40 students instead of 58 filling out this part of questionnaire.

Table 6

Students' frequency of attendance in tutorial

	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
9. Frequency of tutorial attendance		
9.1 up to 80%	14	35
9.2 60-80%	6	15
9.3 40-60%	6	15
9.4 less than 40%	14	35
Total	40	100
10. Reasons of tutorial attendance or absence		
10.1 Reasons of tutorial attendance		
10.1.1 Preparation for the placement test	12	30
10.1.2 Extra learning and practicing	11	27.5
10.1.3 others	3	7.5
10.2. Reasons of tutorial absence		
10.2.1 time limitation due to study	4	10
10.2.2 tutorial schedule	8	20
10.2.3 tired from study	2	5
Total	40	100

There are half of the students who regularly participate in the tutorial, because they would like to prepare themselves for the placement test and learn or practice more German.

However, they also gave reasons of absence, which are time limitation and exhaustion due to their study and tutorial schedule.

Opinion about support from the German department

The last part concerns about students' opinions about support from the German Department. As mentioned earlier, the first year students have not participated in any parts of the placement test yet, but they were completely informed about the placement test in the orientation date, shortly before the beginning of their very first semester. For this reason, it seems appropriate that this group of students could share their opinions in this part as well. The scale is from 1 to 5; by 5 is the full score.

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Table 7

Students' opinions about support from the German Department

	<i>Average Score</i>
11.1 Financial support	4.40
11.2 Preparation	3.90
11.3 Organizational support	3.97
11.4 Sufficient information	3.84
Average score	4.03

It should be noted that in this part of questionnaire, students have mentioned the need for extra self-learning medias. The students would like to have more preparation books for placement test, vocabulary and grammar books to be provided in German-Self-Learning- Center. They would like to have an opportunity to borrow other medias such as DVDs of German films in German-Self- Learning- Center as well. They believed that these could help them improve their skills through self-learning.

From the result, it can be safely assume that the students are satisfied with the support from the German Department, especially financial and organization support, starting from the preparation phase until the end of the exam and they also got to pay minimal exam fees.

Conclusion and discussion

Almost of all the students are willing to take the German language placement test– Goethe Zertifikat, due to self-level test of their German skill and future career or further study. The reason about self-level test of their German skill is very interesting for further research. It is useful to inquire the reasons why the students still wish to have extra level test, while they are evaluated in every subject, they enrolled and get grades as an assessment score in every semester.

There is also discrepancy with students' strong and weak skills. Students have evaluated that reading is their strongest skill, while listening and writing are their weakness. Yet, the results from the placement tests of from 2016 and 2017 academic years show that speaking was the students' strongest skill and their weakness were listening and reading. At this point, it would be necessary to find and evaluate the students' true strength and weakness in their German language skills. The differences between individuals with different skills must be taken into consideration as well.

Although the tutoring sessions are seen as a necessity in order to help students accomplish the test or even just develop their skill, only half of the students attended it regularly. These tutoring sessions are not obligatory and often scheduled after

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lecture time (9.30-16.30), i.e. 16.30-18.00. These sessions add more workload to the regular class schedule, which they already have approximately 18-24 hours per week. Their given reasons of absence are time limitation and exhaustion from their study. These actually suit with comments some students mentioned, that they wish that placement test would take place not in the end of the semester but during the semester break. Usually, the tutoring sessions were conducted during the semester and take 90 minutes every week and the students take the pre-test and the placement test at the end of the semester. It is clear that the tutoring and placement test schedule need to be discussed or rearranged. The students' behavior could be seen as a factor contributing to the scheduling conflict. The students are the one who agreed on their tutoring and placement test schedule. The German Department would negotiate the schedule with Goethe Institut afterward. For the record, there was never any offer or wish for the test schedule to be conducted during the semester break or vacation time.

Even though, the students are satisfied with the support from the German Department, especially financial and organization support, which they have been receiving convenience and need to pay minimal test fees. However, medias for self-learning are required in German-Self-Learning- Center, such as preparation books for placement test, vocabulary and grammar books und movie-DVDs. They believed that these could help them improve their skills through self-learning. Normally these medias are available at the German-Self- Learning- Center, but since there is no lending and returning system, the students are not allowed to lend any book or DVD back home. The German Department provides a solution to this obstacle by letting the students making a copy or watching the movies on the provided computers at the German -Self -Learning Center. At this point, the best practice for students' development would be more books for placement test, vocabulary, grammar books or others, by giving the students the opportunity to recommend books that they are interested in. The lending and returning system should be reconsidered as well.

According to Dörnyei (2011)'s applied goal-setting theory, specific and short-term goals can help the learners to structure their second language learning process. That means short-term goal is as important as the long-time goal, which in this case is accomplishing the placement test. The key of short-term goals here would be that the tasks and assignments of the preparation phase or tutorial are broken down into small steps. Deadlines of these tasks must be assigned and the students must monitor their own progress as well. The lecturers can support the students by planning the preparation tasks, giving assignments, giving feedbacks or advising. It is therefore assumed that these short-term goals would encourage the students to learn and prepare themselves for the placement test. As they mentioned that they were tired from their

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studying schedule and sometimes were too exhausted to attend the tutorial, these short-term goals could be adapted into self-learning assignment, in order that the students could be more flexible with their own learning or studying schedule. The lecturers could also follow up the learning progress and evaluate the performance. However, the most important factor is to help the students established their clear goals of studying, because goals are foundation of motivation. The students should focus on the purposes or reasons why they choose to study German and for what purpose. The lecturers should be aware that the students' intrinsic enjoyment and innate curiosity are key sources of motivation as well.

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