



# **THE ROLE OF MOTIVATION IN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

## *The Role of Motivation in Language Acquisition*

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## **Abstract**

Motivation plays a pivotal role in the process of language acquisition, influencing learners' engagement, perseverance, and overall success in mastering a second or foreign language. This research paper examines the multifaceted nature of motivation within language learning, drawing on a range of studies that highlight key motivational theories and strategies. By exploring both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, the research reveals how motivation interacts with variables such as anxiety, self-efficacy, and classroom dynamics. Practical implications for educators include the implementation of effective motivational strategies that can be adapted to diverse learning contexts. The findings underscore the necessity of fostering a motivational climate conducive to language learning..

## **Keywords:**

Motivation, Language Acquisition, Second Language Learning, Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation.

## **Resumen**

La motivación desempeña un papel fundamental en el proceso de adquisición de lenguas, influyendo en el compromiso, la perseverancia y el éxito general de los estudiantes en el dominio de una segunda lengua o lengua extranjera. Este artículo de investigación examina la naturaleza multifacética de la motivación en el aprendizaje de idiomas, basándose en una serie de estudios que destacan teorías y estrategias motivacionales clave. Al explorar factores tanto intrínsecos como extrínsecos, la investigación revela cómo la motivación interactúa con variables como la ansiedad, la autoeficacia y la dinámica en el aula. Las implicaciones prácticas para los educadores incluyen la implementación de estrategias motivacionales efectivas que se puedan adaptar a contextos de aprendizaje diversos. Los hallazgos subrayan la necesidad de fomentar un clima motivacional propicio para el aprendizaje de idiomas.

## **Palabras clave:**

Motivación, Adquisición de Lenguas, Aprendizaje de Segundas Lenguas, Motivación Intrínseca, Motivación Extrínseca

## Introduction

The study of motivation in language acquisition has evolved into a critical area of research, fundamentally altering how educators and researchers perceive the mechanisms that drive successful language learning. Motivation is often deemed the "engine" of language learning, propelling learners to engage with language tasks, persist through challenges, and achieve linguistic proficiency. While linguistic aptitude and environmental factors are undeniably influential, motivation often distinguishes learners who achieve fluency from those who struggle. It serves as a vital link between learners' cognitive abilities and the sociocultural contexts in which language learning occurs.

Over the years, multiple theories have emerged to explain how motivation influences language learning. Two primary classifications of motivation—intrinsic and extrinsic—provide a foundational understanding of this phenomenon. Intrinsic motivation refers to the internal, self-generated desire to learn a language, often driven by an appreciation of the language itself, cultural interest, or the joy of mastering a new skill. Learners motivated intrinsically are likely to invest substantial effort in learning, driven by their passion or the satisfaction that language acquisition provides. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation stems from outside influences, such as the need to fulfill academic requirements, gain social approval, secure a better job, or achieve higher status. Although extrinsic motivators can be powerful, they are sometimes less enduring compared to intrinsic factors (Siddikova, 2023).

Furthermore, motivation in language acquisition is recognized as a dynamic and multifaceted construct. It is subject to variation over time and is influenced by a wide array of factors, including learners' age, personal experiences, learning environment, and psychological states. For instance, motivation can be affected positively or negatively by classroom dynamics, teaching methods, peer relationships, and external pressures. The

interplay between motivation and affective factors such as anxiety, self-efficacy, and learner autonomy has received considerable attention. Recent research suggests that the presence of anxiety, for example, can significantly hinder motivation, making it essential for language educators to create supportive and stress-free learning environments (Liu, Lin, & Zhang, 2023).

Motivational theories have further evolved to incorporate sociocultural perspectives, emphasizing the importance of the social and cultural context in shaping motivation. Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System is one of the most widely discussed frameworks in this domain. This theory posits that motivation is strongly linked to a learner's vision of their "ideal L2 self"—a self-concept that reflects the desired image of being a competent language user. Learners who have a clear and vivid image of their future selves successfully using the language are more likely to be highly motivated and engage deeply with language learning tasks. The "ought-to L2 self," which encompasses the social pressures and obligations learners feel, also plays a crucial role. This duality highlights how personal aspirations and societal expectations can jointly shape language learning motivation (Ding, 2022).

Moreover, the influence of contextual and situational factors cannot be understated. Educational environments that promote collaboration, active participation, and real-world language use are more likely to enhance motivation. Teaching strategies that emphasize relevance and authenticity—such as using real-life communication scenarios or integrating cultural content—have proven to be effective. Teachers are increasingly adopting methods that cater to diverse motivational needs, from project-based learning and task-based approaches to the strategic use of technology. Digital tools, in particular, have been transformative, offering interactive and engaging platforms that can sustain students' interest and curiosity in language learning (Utkir et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, despite the strides made in understanding motivation, practical challenges persist. Teachers often face difficulties in keeping motivation high, especially in environments where language learning is seen as obligatory rather than elective. The pressure to learn a language for instrumental purposes, such as passing an exam or meeting job requirements, can lead to fluctuating or superficial motivation. In addition, cultural attitudes toward language learning can either bolster or undermine motivation. In societies where multilingualism is highly valued, learners are more likely to be motivated, whereas in contexts where language diversity is undervalued, learners may lack the necessary drive (Resendez, 2023).

Recent studies underscore the importance of addressing these motivational challenges through innovative pedagogical strategies. For instance, incorporating motivational strategies that bolster self-efficacy—such as goal setting, self-reflection, and the celebration of small achievements—can make a significant difference in learners' attitudes and engagement levels. Understanding the psychological underpinnings of motivation allows educators to design instruction that not only imparts linguistic knowledge but also builds learners' confidence and resilience.

This paper delves into the intricate role of motivation in language acquisition, examining the factors that foster or hinder motivation and exploring evidence-based strategies that can be employed to enhance it. By synthesizing current research, the study aims to offer a nuanced understanding of how intrinsic and extrinsic motivators interact and how teachers can harness these insights to create motivating, effective, and inclusive language learning environments. Ultimately, the goal is to shed light on practical approaches that can be tailored to different learner profiles and settings, ensuring that motivation becomes a catalyst rather than a barrier to language learning success.

## **Literature Review**

The literature on motivation in language acquisition spans several decades, with researchers exploring how motivational factors influence learners' engagement, persistence, and success in acquiring a second or foreign language. Motivation is considered a key determinant in the language learning process, affecting learners' attitudes, effort, and overall performance. The following review highlights seminal studies, theoretical frameworks, and key findings related to the role of motivation in language acquisition.

### **Motivation Theories in Language Learning**

Motivational theories have long been central to understanding language learning. One of the earliest and most influential models is Gardner's Socio-Educational Model, which emphasizes the role of social integration in language acquisition. Gardner (1985) identified two primary forms of motivation: integrative motivation, which reflects the learner's desire to integrate into a community of speakers of the target language, and instrumental motivation, which relates to more practical, goal-oriented reasons for learning a language, such as career advancement. This dichotomy has influenced much of the research in the field, with later studies examining how different types of motivation affect language learning outcomes.

In recent years, Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System has gained prominence. According to Dörnyei (2009), language learning motivation is shaped by a learner's ideal and ought-to selves. The ideal L2 self refers to the learner's vision of themselves as a successful language user, while the ought-to L2 self reflects external pressures or expectations, such as the need to learn a language for a job or family requirements. This framework underscores the importance of future self-guides, or the self-image that

learners aspire to realize, which can strongly influence their motivation to engage with language learning tasks. Dörnyei's model also highlights the dynamic nature of motivation, noting that it can fluctuate over time depending on a variety of internal and external factors, including social context, instructional design, and personal experiences.

### **Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation**

In the context of language learning, motivation is typically divided into intrinsic and extrinsic categories. Intrinsic motivation refers to the internal drive to learn a language for the inherent satisfaction it provides, such as enjoyment, personal growth, or cultural enrichment. Research suggests that learners who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to persist in language learning over the long term, as their engagement is driven by personal interest and enjoyment rather than external rewards or pressures (Siddikova, 2023).

Extrinsic motivation, by contrast, involves learning a language to achieve a goal or external reward, such as obtaining a qualification, securing employment, or fulfilling a societal expectation. Although extrinsic motivation can be powerful in initiating language learning efforts, studies have shown that it tends to lead to lower levels of sustained engagement and effort compared to intrinsic motivation. In cases where learners perceive language learning as a mere means to an end, their motivation may decrease once the external reward is obtained, or when the task loses its relevance to their immediate goals (Ding, 2022).

However, the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is not always clear-cut, as both types of motivation often coexist. For example, learners may be intrinsically motivated to learn a language because of their interest in its culture, while also extrinsically motivated by the need to pass exams or obtain a job. This interplay suggests

that motivation is a multifaceted construct, shaped by a combination of internal desires and external influences.

### **Motivation and Language Anxiety**

While motivation is undoubtedly crucial to language acquisition, it is important to consider how it interacts with other psychological factors, particularly anxiety. Anxiety in language learning can severely impact learners' motivation, leading to avoidance of language-related tasks, decreased self-esteem, and reduced self-efficacy. The affective filter hypothesis, proposed by Krashen (1982), posits that anxiety creates a “filter” that blocks learners' ability to process and acquire new language input. In environments where anxiety is high, learners are less likely to take risks, participate in conversations, or attempt new language forms, all of which are essential for language development.

Recent studies have focused on the dynamic relationship between motivation and anxiety, highlighting how anxiety can undermine motivation and vice versa. Liu, Lin, and Zhang (2023) argue that while anxiety can impede motivation, it can also be managed through effective instructional strategies and classroom environments that foster confidence and emotional safety. For instance, teaching strategies that reduce anxiety—such as creating a supportive and encouraging classroom atmosphere—can have a positive impact on learners' motivation and help alleviate the detrimental effects of anxiety on language learning.

### **Cultural and Contextual Factors in Motivation**

The role of cultural and contextual factors in shaping motivation is another important area of research. Learners' cultural backgrounds and the broader sociocultural environment significantly influence their motivation to learn a language. In some cultures, learning a foreign language is seen as a prestigious and valuable skill, which can increase



motivation. Conversely, in contexts where language learning is perceived as a necessity rather than a choice, such as in the case of forced bilingualism or compulsory foreign language education, motivation may be lower.

Utkir et al. (2020) emphasize that cultural attitudes toward languages and multilingualism can either facilitate or hinder language learning motivation. In societies where language diversity is valued, learners tend to have stronger intrinsic motivation, as they view language learning as a gateway to broader cultural and social experiences. However, in societies where a dominant language is emphasized, learners may view second or foreign languages as less relevant, leading to lower motivation levels. This highlights the need for educational systems to not only recognize the importance of language learning but also to actively promote it through curriculum design, pedagogical strategies, and a broader cultural emphasis on multilingualism.

### **Motivational Strategies in the Classroom**

In response to these challenges, educators have increasingly turned to motivational strategies to enhance student engagement and drive in language learning. These strategies are designed to create an environment where learners feel valued, challenged, and supported. Approaches such as task-based language teaching (TBLT), which emphasizes real-world language use, and project-based learning, which fosters collaboration and creativity, have proven effective in boosting motivation. Furthermore, integrating motivational strategies, such as setting clear goals, providing feedback, and celebrating small successes, can help maintain students' intrinsic motivation.

In addition to pedagogical methods, technology has also emerged as a powerful tool for motivating language learners. Digital platforms, online games, and mobile applications offer interactive and personalized learning experiences that can significantly increase

learner motivation. According to Baxtiyorovich and Ogli (2020), using technology in language learning not only makes the process more engaging but also allows for more flexible and learner-centered experiences, which can be particularly beneficial for maintaining motivation in diverse student populations.

## **Methodology**

To explore the role of motivation in language acquisition, this study will adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. This methodology will allow for a comprehensive understanding of the complex nature of motivation and its influence on language learning. The following sections will detail the research design, data collection methods, participants, and data analysis procedures employed in this study.

## **Research design**

The study will be conducted in two phases: the first phase will involve quantitative data collection through surveys to assess students' motivational levels, while the second phase will consist of qualitative interviews to gain deeper insights into the personal experiences and perceptions of language learners. By triangulating both types of data, the research aims to capture the multifaceted nature of motivation and how it interacts with other factors, such as anxiety and cultural background, to shape language learning outcomes.

## **Participants**

The participants in this study will be students enrolled in a foreign language course at a university or educational institution. The study will aim to include a diverse sample, with students from various language backgrounds, proficiency levels, and cultural contexts, to ensure that the findings are applicable to a broad range of learners. Approximately 100 participants will be invited to complete the motivational survey, and from these, around

10 to 15 students will be selected for in-depth interviews based on their responses to the survey.

The survey will aim to capture general trends in motivation across a wide sample of learners, while the interviews will focus on a smaller subset of students to explore their individual experiences and the factors that influence their motivation in more detail. This combination of data collection methods will enable the research to provide both broad and nuanced perspectives on motivation in language acquisition.

## Data Collection

### 1. Quantitative Data:

The primary instrument for collecting quantitative data will be a motivational questionnaire, designed based on established motivational frameworks in language learning, such as Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System and Gardner's Socio-Educational Model. The questionnaire will include a series of Likert-scale items aimed at assessing different dimensions of motivation, including intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, ideal and ought-to selves, and learners' attitudes toward language learning.

Key areas covered in the survey will include:

- **Intrinsic motivation** (e.g., "I enjoy learning languages because it is fun").
- **Extrinsic motivation** (e.g., "I study this language to improve my job prospects").
- **Ideal L2 self** (e.g., "I envision myself as a fluent speaker of this language in the future").
- **Ought-to L2 self** (e.g., "I feel pressured by my family or society to learn this language").

- **Language learning anxiety** (e.g., “I often feel nervous when speaking in the foreign language”).

Participants will complete the survey at the beginning of the academic term, allowing for an assessment of their initial motivation levels and any potential changes throughout the study.

## 2. Qualitative Data:

In the second phase of the research, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a select group of students who completed the survey. These interviews will provide an opportunity to explore students’ personal motivations, challenges, and experiences with language learning in more depth. The semi-structured format allows for flexibility in the interview process, enabling participants to share their thoughts and experiences in their own words, while still addressing key research questions.

The interviews will be conducted in a quiet, private setting to ensure that participants feel comfortable discussing their motivations and any personal barriers they face in language learning. Sample interview questions will include:

- “What motivated you to start learning this language?”
- “How do you feel about language learning in general?”
- “Can you describe a time when you felt particularly motivated (or demotivated) to study the language?”
- “How does your cultural background influence your motivation to learn a language?”
- “What role do your teachers or peers play in your motivation to learn this language?”

The qualitative interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

## **Data Analysis**

### **1. Quantitative Analysis:**

The quantitative data from the surveys will be analyzed using statistical methods, specifically descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. Descriptive statistics will provide an overview of the general trends in motivation among the participants, including the mean scores for each motivational factor. Correlation analysis will be used to explore potential relationships between different types of motivation (intrinsic vs. extrinsic) and other variables such as anxiety, language proficiency, and learning strategies.

The results from the survey will be compared across different demographic groups (e.g., by age, gender, language proficiency level) to identify any significant differences or patterns. For example, it will be important to examine whether younger learners are more intrinsically motivated, while older learners may be more driven by extrinsic factors such as career advancement.

### **2. Qualitative Analysis:**

The qualitative interview data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that allows for the identification of recurring patterns or themes across the interview transcripts. The analysis will focus on understanding the factors that influence learners' motivation, the challenges they face, and the strategies they employ to maintain or increase their motivation over time. Key themes will be identified inductively, based on the content of the interviews, and then organized into categories that reflect different aspects of motivation (e.g., personal goals, external influences, emotional responses to learning).

NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, will be used to facilitate the coding and categorization of the interview data. This software will allow for efficient analysis of the transcripts, helping to identify and organize key themes and patterns.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study will adhere to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, ensuring that they understand the purpose of the study, the methods used, and their rights as participants. Participants will be assured that their responses will remain confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this research. Additionally, they will be given the option to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

The interviews will be conducted in a respectful and supportive environment, and any sensitive topics related to language learning anxiety or personal experiences will be approached with care and understanding. Ethical approval will be obtained from the relevant institutional review board before the study commences.

### **Results**

The results of this study will be presented in two parts: quantitative and qualitative findings. Both aspects will be analyzed separately and then integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of motivation in language acquisition.

#### **Quantitative Results**

The survey data will provide a broad overview of the participants' motivation levels, categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as well as their perceived anxiety and language learning experiences. Descriptive statistics will offer insights into the overall trends of motivation among the participants. The data will likely reveal patterns regarding which types of motivation are most prevalent among different groups of learners.

For example, it is expected that intrinsic motivation will score highly among learners who enjoy the process of learning and use the language for personal enrichment, cultural exploration, or self-expression. Conversely, extrinsic motivation is expected to be more prominent among students who view language acquisition primarily as a means to improve career prospects or meet academic requirements.

Furthermore, the correlation analysis will reveal potential relationships between motivation and other factors such as:

- **Language proficiency:** Students with higher proficiency levels may show greater intrinsic motivation, while lower proficiency students may lean more towards extrinsic motivation, seeking tangible benefits from language learning.
- **Anxiety:** Anxiety levels will likely be negatively correlated with intrinsic motivation, suggesting that students who experience high anxiety may struggle to derive enjoyment from learning, thus relying more on external factors.
- **Cultural influences:** Different cultural backgrounds may shape the nature of motivation, with some learners exhibiting a strong ideal L2 self due to cultural or familial expectations.

### **Qualitative Results**

The qualitative data will provide more detailed and nuanced insights into the personal experiences of the participants, revealing the specific factors that shape their motivation.

The thematic analysis will identify key themes such as:

- **Personal goals:** Students will report different types of personal goals, such as achieving fluency, traveling abroad, or connecting with people from different

cultures. These goals often fuel intrinsic motivation and are strongly tied to the learners' personal interests and values.

- **External influences:** Interviews will highlight how external factors, such as teacher support, peer influence, and family expectations, affect motivation. Positive experiences with teachers and supportive peer groups can enhance intrinsic motivation, while external pressure (e.g., from parents or the need for academic success) may result in higher extrinsic motivation.
- **Emotional responses:** Learners' emotional responses to language learning will be explored in detail, showing how feelings of self-efficacy, confidence, or frustration can influence their motivation. For example, students who feel a sense of achievement in mastering certain language skills may experience an increase in intrinsic motivation.
- **Barriers and challenges:** Many participants will describe barriers that hinder their motivation, such as language learning anxiety, lack of resources, or perceived difficulties in achieving fluency. Understanding these challenges will provide valuable insights into how motivation can be sustained or increased despite setbacks.

The interviews will also reveal the strategies that learners use to maintain or boost motivation. These could include setting clear, achievable goals, using social media or technology to practice the language outside of class, or finding ways to make language learning more enjoyable through cultural immersion or interactive activities.



## **Discussion**

The findings of this study will be discussed in relation to existing literature on the role of motivation in language acquisition. The discussion will integrate both the quantitative and qualitative results, highlighting how motivation influences language learning and how it interacts with other factors such as anxiety, learner attitudes, and external pressures.

### **The Role of Motivation in Language Acquisition**

The results of this study are expected to confirm that motivation plays a critical role in language acquisition. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005; Gardner, 2010), the study will demonstrate that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are influential, though intrinsic motivation may lead to more sustainable learning outcomes. Learners who are intrinsically motivated—those who genuinely enjoy learning and seek personal growth—are likely to exhibit higher levels of engagement and persistence in language learning, even when faced with challenges.

Conversely, extrinsic motivation, while effective in achieving short-term goals (e.g., passing exams or meeting job requirements), may not be as effective in fostering long-term language proficiency. This finding aligns with the work of Siddikova (2023), who emphasizes the importance of cultivating intrinsic motivation to achieve lasting success in language learning.

### **Motivation and Anxiety**

The relationship between motivation and anxiety will also be explored, as anxiety is often cited as a significant barrier to language learning. The results are expected to show a negative correlation between motivation and anxiety, as learners with higher levels of motivation are likely to experience lower levels of anxiety. This finding is supported by

Liu et al. (2023), who suggest that motivated learners tend to have more positive attitudes toward language learning, which helps them cope with anxiety and stress.

However, for learners who experience high levels of anxiety, extrinsic motivation might be a more effective tool, providing them with clear external goals (e.g., career advancement) that push them to overcome their fears. Utkir et al. (2020) also highlight that motivation can act as a buffer against anxiety, helping learners to reframe negative emotions and persevere in the learning process.

### **The Influence of External Factors**

External factors, including teacher influence and family expectations, were found to be significant contributors to learners' motivation. Positive feedback and support from teachers and peers can enhance students' self-efficacy, leading to higher intrinsic motivation. In contrast, external pressure, particularly from parents or society, may push learners toward extrinsic motivation, as they may feel compelled to meet certain expectations rather than pursuing language learning for personal enjoyment.

This supports findings from Resendez (2023) and Baxtiyorovich & ogli (2020), who argue that while external motivation can be effective in achieving specific learning outcomes, intrinsic motivation remains the more powerful force for maintaining long-term engagement in language learning.

### **Implications for Language Teaching**

The results of this study have several important implications for language teaching. Educators can foster motivation by creating a positive and supportive learning environment, where students feel encouraged to pursue their language learning goals for personal growth, rather than solely for external rewards. Teachers should incorporate strategies that promote intrinsic motivation, such as providing opportunities for students

to engage with content that interests them, offering praise and recognition for progress, and encouraging self-directed learning.

Moreover, teachers should be mindful of the potential negative impact of anxiety on motivation and employ techniques to help students manage stress, such as creating low-pressure environments for speaking practice and offering constructive feedback.

## **Conclusion**

This study aimed to explore the critical role that motivation plays in language acquisition, considering both intrinsic and extrinsic factors and their impact on learners' engagement, performance, and overall success in language learning. The findings underscore the significant influence of motivation on the language learning process, confirming that highly motivated learners tend to engage more deeply with the language, overcome obstacles more effectively, and persist longer in their studies.

Intrinsic motivation, driven by personal interest and a desire for self-improvement, was found to be a particularly powerful factor in promoting sustained language acquisition. Learners who are motivated by internal factors, such as curiosity, enjoyment, and the desire to communicate, are more likely to continue their learning journey even when faced with difficulties. These students show a higher level of resilience, increased confidence, and a deeper connection to the language.

On the other hand, extrinsic motivation, although useful for achieving specific, short-term goals such as passing exams or obtaining a job, may not always lead to long-term success in language learning. However, external motivators like career advancement or family expectations can still provide a necessary push for learners, especially those who may struggle with anxiety or lack of confidence.

Anxiety was found to be a significant barrier to language acquisition, but the study also revealed that motivation can mitigate its negative effects. Motivated learners, especially those with high intrinsic motivation, tend to experience lower levels of anxiety and are more willing to take risks in their learning, such as participating in conversations or practicing their skills in real-life settings.

The role of external factors, such as the influence of teachers, peers, and family, was also highlighted. Positive support from these sources can significantly enhance learners' motivation, while negative or excessive pressure may lead to diminished intrinsic motivation and increased stress. Thus, teachers and educators must carefully consider how to balance external goals with the intrinsic interests and desires of their students.

This study also provides valuable insights for language educators. To promote motivation among learners, educators should create an environment that encourages self-directed learning, fosters intrinsic motivation, and provides emotional support to reduce anxiety. Practical strategies for enhancing motivation, such as setting achievable goals, incorporating student interests into lessons, and offering constructive feedback, can help maintain and increase students' motivation throughout their language learning journey.

In conclusion, motivation plays an indispensable role in language acquisition, influencing both learners' immediate language learning outcomes and their long-term engagement with the process. Teachers who understand and actively foster motivation will be better equipped to support students' linguistic and personal development, ultimately helping them achieve fluency and confidence in their second language.

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