

# The Influence of Foreign Language Learning Motivation on Foreign Language Learning

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## Abstract:

Foreign language learning is a complex and delicate psychological and cognitive process in which motivation plays an important role as the inner driving force to promote learners' persistence and in-depth learning. Many Chinese and foreign researchers have conducted extensive research on the influence of learning motivation on foreign Language learning, especially in the field of Second Language (L2) learning. This paper reviews and synthesizes the relevant literature in recent years, comprehensively analyzes the key factors affecting foreign language learning motivation, and probes into the formation mechanism, maintenance motivation, and its specific impact on learning results. Through analysis, this paper reveals the difference between learners' intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation under the influence of different social backgrounds and cultural factors and evaluates the motivation maintenance strategies in independent learning and foreign language teaching. This paper finds a significant positive correlation between foreign language learning motivation maintenance strategies and foreign language achievement. Learning interest, students' attribution tendency, teachers' quality and teaching methods, and learning tasks are indispensable in stimulating and maintaining learning motivation. The study also found a complex interaction between social needs, cultural identity, and motivation to learn foreign languages, which has important implications for foreign language education policymaking. The results show that to effectively improve the effectiveness of foreign language learning, educators should pay more attention to learners' interests, needs, and social environment and provide personalized strategies for stimulating and maintaining learning motivation in combination with modern technological means.

**Keywords:** Motivation in foreign language learning; second language acquisition; motivation; self-regulation strategies; educational strategies.

## 1. Introduction

With the deepening of international communication and the advancement of global education, foreign language ability has gradually become one of the important indicators for measuring comprehensive ability. Behind this, the role of foreign language learning motivation has increasingly become the focus of research in the field of second language learning. Early studies on learning motivation were mostly concentrated in psychology, and language learning motivation as an independent research object was not widely concerned until Gardner and Lambert's research work in the 1960s [1]. Since then, several research clusters have explored the complex correlation mechanism between learning motivation and foreign language learning. These theories hold that learning motivation results from internal and external factors, covering many aspects such as individual learner differences, cultural background, and teaching methods. However, in

the tide of information technology, the stimulation and maintenance of learning motivation meet new challenges and opportunities. For example, the abundance of foreign language learning resources in the network environment puts higher requirements for learners' self-management ability, and the interactivity of multimedia-assisted teaching provides a new way to improve learning motivation. These changes require researchers to continuously explore the latest trends in foreign language learning motivation based on existing research, combined with contemporary technology and educational concepts, to effectively respond to the rapidly changing educational environment. In this regard, this study should be timely, aiming to systematically review the research progress of foreign language learning motivation, conduct an in-depth analysis of its formation mechanism, influencing factors, and maintenance strategies, and summarize a set of theoretical frameworks and implementation methods that meet the needs

of current learning and educational practice. Research shows that compared with external motivation, learners' inner desire for knowledge and a sense of identity is the core force to maintain learning motivation, even though foreign language learning resources and methods are constantly evolving. Internal motivation has a more significant impact on language learners' long-term learning results. At the same time, the role of extrinsic motivation in promoting learners at the beginning of learning cannot be ignored, especially in shaping and maintaining learning interest in realizing early learning motivation [2]. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations interact and influence each other in the learning process, promoting or inhibiting the learning process together. Language learning is not only a cognitive process but also a complex process influenced by social culture and individual characteristics. The research on the influence of motivation on foreign language learning should also focus on the in-depth discussion of the changeable social and cultural background and the psychological needs of individuals to provide more accurate and efficient motivation stimulation and maintenance strategies for foreign language learning and teaching.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Foreign Language Learning Motivation

With the cross-development of psychology and pedagogy, the evolution of the theory of motivation in foreign language learning is deepening. The role of motivation in the process of language learning is widely regarded as the key factor affecting the improvement of learners' language levels.

Beginning in the 1950s and 1960s, Gardner and Lambert conducted in-depth research on learning motivation. They classified learning motivation into two categories: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation [3]. Integrative motivated learners have a genuine interest in the target language and want to better communicate with people in the target language country, participate in or integrate into the social life of that country, or even become members of that country. Their purpose of learning a foreign language is more out of their love for the culture of the target language and their desire to integrate into the society of the target language. On the other hand, Instrumentally motivated learners work hard to achieve a specific goal, such as passing an English test to get a better job opportunity.

In the 1990s, Hungarian scholar Dörnyei broke Gardner's dichotomy of learning motivation and proposed the three-layer theory of foreign language learning motivation [4]. This theory defines and measures the motivation of foreign language learning in three aspects: language,

learner, and learning environment [4]. This theory emphasizes that many factors influence the formation of motivation and is the comprehensive result of many factors. At the linguistic level, the learner's learning purpose is considered, similar to the integrated and instrumental learning motivation proposed by Gardner. It includes various motivational factors related to a second language, such as culture, customs, and practicability, which directly affect the setting and selection of learning objectives. The learner level represents the personality characteristics foreign language learners devote to the learning task. Among them, the sense of achievement and self-confidence are the key factors that affect the learning effect. The sense of achievement comes from learners' desire to gain respect, praise, and praise from others. At the same time, self-confidence is composed of language anxiety, self-evaluation, outcome attribution, and self-efficacy. The learning environment level covers three important motivational components: those related to the curriculum, those related to the teacher, and those related to the learning community. All these will affect students' learning motivation and engagement [1].

The L2 Motivational Self System theory, proposed by Dörnyei and Ushioda in 2011, emphasized the driving effects of the ideal and intrinsic self on learning motivation. This theory summarizes the core elements of modern foreign language learning motivation based on the assumption of the language level that foreign language learners hope to achieve in the future (ideal self) and the social and cultural expectation that learners have the responsibility and obligation to learn a foreign language (due self) [5]. The ideal L2 self represents the learner's hopes and aspirations for their future as a successful foreign language user. This is a key driving force in the motivational self-system influencing learners' efforts to achieve language learning goals. When learners can imagine themselves as fluent speakers of a foreign language, the ideal L2 self will become an important driving force for continuous learning. The L2 self should relate to expectations that the learner feels responsible for meeting, which may be derived from social or personal obligations, responsibilities, or generally recognized success stories. The L2 self reflects an individual's perception of external pressure to learn a foreign language and its possible impact.

### 2.2 Foreign Language Learning Motivation and Foreign Language Learning

In foreign language learning, the type of motivation has a decisive influence on the learning effect. Specifically, motivation types are usually divided into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation refers to the learner's learning out of personal interest, satisfying the

desire for knowledge and other internal drives. In contrast, extrinsic motivation comes from the response to external rewards or expectations of others. Since intrinsic motivation is closely related to the learning activity, it is a powerful driving factor for improving long-term learning achievement and language-use ability. Studies have shown that those learners with high intrinsic motivation show higher enthusiasm and persistence in all stages of foreign language learning, and are more likely to achieve fluency and accurate language output.

On the contrary, learners who rely on extrinsic motivation may show high learning outcomes in the early stage or under certain conditions. Still, their persistence and depth of learning are limited, which may eventually affect the overall development of language ability. A high level of motivation is conducive to success in learning, which improves motivation [6].

In the further exploration of motivation research, scholars try to reveal a more detailed relationship between motivation intensity and learning effect. The study found that motivation intensity is positively correlated with learning outcomes and has a complex interaction with the effort invested in the learning process and the learning strategies adopted. Therefore, increasing motivation intensity is a means to improve learning outcomes and the key to forming effective learning habits and skills.

### **2.3 Influencing Factors of Foreign Language Learning Motivation**

In foreign language learning, the level of motivation intensity is also one of the core factors that affect the improvement of learners' language proficiency. The intensity of motivation in language learning directly affects the time and energy learners devote to learning and indirectly affects the choice of learning strategies and persistence in the learning process. At present, the main factors affecting the intensity of English learning motivation are as follows: Learning interest plays a crucial role in English learning motivation. It directly and significantly affects the learner's motivation, even more than all other motivation variables. Learners with a strong interest in English will naturally have a positive attitude and be eager to learn more about English-speaking countries' culture, history, and geography [7].

Students' attribution tendency also has an impact on English learning motivation. According to attribution theory, students' perceptions of past successes and failures and their causes profoundly impact their future learning outcomes. Different attribution cognition will lead to different expectations and predictions of students' English learning success, thus affecting their learning motivation [7].

Teachers' quality and teaching methods also have an im-

portant impact on English learning. Modern learners have bright personalities and active thoughts and can hardly accept the traditional „cramming“ teaching mode. Therefore, teachers need to build novel, vivid, and interesting classroom teaching modes, break the dull atmosphere in the classroom, promote interaction, and enable learners to better absorb knowledge and participate in learning more actively to achieve teaching goals [7].

Learning tasks set standards that learners need to meet. Goal setting theory states that learners are more motivated to learn if they believe achieving a goal is possible (i.e., they expect success) and if the goal is important to them (i.e., the learning task has meaning or value). Moreover, the feasibility of the learning task is also a key factor affecting the learning effect [7].

Sociocultural factors also have an increasing influence on the motivation to learn a foreign language, which has attracted extensive attention from researchers in the field of language learning. Students' language learning motivation is often closely related to their social and cultural background's demand for and recognition of foreign language ability [8].

### **3. Formation and Maintenance of Foreign Language Learning Motivation**

Foreign language learning motivation is not only an internal trait, but also influenced by external environment, such as classroom environment, teacher role, peer relationship, etc., and develops and changes accordingly [9]. How to effectively stimulate and maintain the learning motivation of foreign language learners is a systematic project.

#### **3.1 Stimulating the Intrinsic Learning Motivation of Foreign Language Learners**

Stimulating learners' intrinsic motivation is an effective way to learn a foreign language well. Teachers should put learners' interest in learning English first. Teachers should prioritize cultivating learners' interest in learning English and making the learning process fun through innovative teaching methods, such as the introduction of real language materials. At the same time, we should give full play to the main role of learners, guide them to find fun in what they learn, and discover the meaning of learning itself. In the teaching process, give learners more choices and encourage them to become independent. Enthusiasm is the key to stimulating learning interest and curiosity so that learners can experience a sense of achievement after mastering knowledge and skills [10].

In addition, to better stimulate learners' intrinsic motivation, teachers should also try to provide real language materials. Van Lier's research emphasized the importance of authenticity in language teaching, and he believed that

language teaching materials, teaching environment, and teaching process should be as close to real life as possible [11]. Therefore, teachers can make use of various resources, such as movies, TV programs, news reports, etc., as language learning materials, so that learners' language learning can be closer to real life.

### **3.2 Stimulating Learners' External Motivation for Foreign Language Learning**

#### **3.2.1 Keeping pace with the times and introducing new teaching methods such as "micro-lessons" and "flipped classrooms"**

English teaching in Chinese colleges and universities is still limited to the mode of „conventional classroom + audio-visual classroom“. Although it can achieve certain teaching effects to a certain extent, it has limited effect on stimulating the learning motivation of foreign language learners. Therefore, it is imperative to innovate teaching methods. Professors can try to record short videos of „micro-lessons“ and combine the concept of „flipped classrooms“ to teach. Students can preview and study independently before class and have questions and in-depth discussions in class. This can improve students' interest in and initiative in learning and promote communication and interaction between teachers and students [12].

#### **3.2.2 Creating a variety of English practice situations**

When students have mastered skills, they are eager to find a place to use them, test their skill level, and avoid mislearning. Therefore, schools should create a variety of English practice situations so that students can practice simultaneously and clearly perceive that there are rivals stronger than themselves to constantly stimulate new English learning motivation. For example, in response to the trade war between China and the United States, students can communicate with foreign friends about major strategic ideas proposed by China, such as world economic integration and the community of human destiny. With the increase in practice times, students will gradually become familiar with some rare words in economics and world politics and continue improving their English. Such practice situations can broaden students' international vision, enhance their cross-cultural communication ability, and make them feel their growth and progress in communication [12].

#### **3.2.3 Developing reasonable learning tasks by individual differences**

According to the Yerkes-Dodson law, work efficiency will also increase with improving motivation levels within a certain range [11]. However, productivity may decline when the level of motivation exceeds a certain point rather

than increasing. This particular point is often referred to as the „optimal motivation level“, and it varies with the nature and difficulty of the task. Therefore, whether teaching institutions teach students according to their aptitude, make teaching plans suitable for students, and the teaching design and control of the teaching process greatly impact the learning effect. For example, when learning easy knowledge points, the professor should try to make the students focus their attention and make the students nervous; In difficult subjects, we should create a relaxed and free classroom atmosphere; When students encounter difficulties, they should be guided calmly and slowly, to avoid anxiety caused by excessive tension and affect the learning effect.

#### **3.2.4 Emphasizing on evaluation system and the role of reward and punishment**

When external learning motivation takes effect, people's learning activities mainly depend on the sense of responsibility, obligation, or the desire to get rewards and avoid punishment. Cause evaluation system becomes the criterion and rule of achievement motivation. In addition, although praise and rewards have a specific effect on learning, too much or inappropriate use can also have a negative effect. Bloffe identifies five elements of effective praise: appropriate timing, specific and explicit content, sincerity, a balance of public and private, and a combination of motivation and reward [13].

#### **3.2.5 Integrating social culture and needs into the teaching content**

Van Lier believes that learning communication cannot be separated from society, and students should learn from individual and social perspectives [14]. Teachers need to understand the social nature of teaching and integrate historical and sociocultural views and social needs into teaching. In daily teaching, social practice can be organized to enhance students' confidence in foreign language learning, cultivate cross-cultural awareness, make them interested in English and its social culture, and enhance their learning motivation.

## **4. Conclusion**

This paper explores the relationship between foreign language learning motivation and foreign language learning outcomes. It clarifies the different roles of intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation in the process of language learning. Learners' intrinsic motivation is driven by personal interest, attribution tendency, and other factors that play an important role in the long-term maintenance of foreign language learning. School education, social environment, cultural recognition, and other external fac-

tors affect learners' external motivation in various forms, which cannot be ignored, especially in achieving early learning breakthroughs and maintaining learning interest. The mutual influence of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation may also be the lever fulcrum of foreign language learning motivation regulation. Learners can maintain the best level of foreign language learning motivation by self-adjusting learning strategies to achieve better results in foreign language learning. Based on these findings, educators can design specific teaching activities and curriculum content and implement differentiated teaching to meet the needs and preferences of different learners. In teaching practice, pay attention to the profound influence of social and cultural background on learning motivation and build a positive learning atmosphere on this basis. Future research on foreign language learning motivation needs to explore a more comprehensive motivational strategy framework to better meet the needs of different learners and improve the overall efficiency of foreign language learning.

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