

THE ROLE OF MOTIVATION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract

Motivation is widely recognized as one of the most influential factors in successful language learning. It determines learners' willingness to begin, continue, and achieve their language-learning goals. This paper discusses the importance of motivation in foreign language acquisition, focusing on two major types of motivation: integrative and instrumental. It also reviews previous research conducted by Gardner and Lambert, as well as recent studies on learner engagement. The paper concludes that both types of motivation play significant roles in improving learners' academic achievement and long-term commitment to language learning.

Introduction

In today's globalized world, learning foreign languages has become both common and essential. Language proficiency provides opportunities for education, employment, international communication, and cultural exchange. However, language learning is a complex and long-term process influenced by cognitive, social, emotional, and psychological factors. Among these, motivation is considered one of the most significant predictors of success. Motivation encourages learners to remain persistent despite difficulties. It increases learners' enthusiasm, confidence, and willingness to practice the target language. Highly motivated students are more likely to participate actively in classroom activities, complete learning tasks, and continue improving their language skills over time.

The Concept of Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation can be defined as the internal drive or external influence that initiates, directs, and sustains goal-oriented behavior. In language learning, motivation functions as a psychological force that encourages learners to invest time and effort in mastering a foreign language. Positive learning experiences strengthen learners' motivation. When students achieve success or receive encouragement, they become more confident and develop a stronger desire to continue learning. This positive cycle increases long-term engagement and contributes to successful language acquisition. Researchers generally distinguish two major types of motivation in language learning: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation.

Integrative Motivation

Integrative motivation refers to the desire to learn a language in order to communicate with native speakers and become familiar with their culture, traditions, literature, history, and way of life. Learners with integrative motivation are genuinely interested in becoming part of the target language community and developing meaningful intercultural relationships. Many language learners are motivated by their curiosity about different cultures. They enjoy exploring the customs, values, literature, art, and social traditions of countries where the target language is spoken. Such learners often demonstrate greater persistence and positive attitudes toward language learning.

Instrumental Motivation

Instrumental motivation refers to learning a language for practical purposes. People often study foreign languages to obtain better employment opportunities, receive higher salaries, pass international examinations, earn language certificates, pursue higher education abroad, or expand their business activities. In modern society, instrumental motivation has become one of the strongest reasons for learning English and other foreign languages. Many students recognize that language proficiency provides significant academic and professional advantages.

Previous Research on Language Learning Motivation

The study of motivation in second language acquisition was pioneered by Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert in the 1970s. They introduced the concepts of integrative and instrumental motivation, which have become fundamental theories in language education. Their research demonstrated that learners' motivation significantly influences language achievement and overall learning success. More recent studies have continued to emphasize the importance of motivation and learner engagement. Research on technology-mediated mobile-assisted language learning (t-MALL) has shown that digital learning environments can effectively maintain learner engagement. Using grounded theory and a three-stage coding process, researchers found that learner-centered and self-regulated approaches, combined with appropriate scaffolding, increased students' participation, willingness to communicate, and autonomous learning. These findings indicate that supportive learning environments strengthen learners' motivation and improve language acquisition. Another study conducted among 40 second-year students at Government MAO College investigated both instrumental and integrative motivation in learning English as a second language. The results revealed that the participants demonstrated significantly stronger instrumental motivation than integrative motivation, suggesting that practical goals such as employment and academic achievement were the primary driving forces behind their language learning. Overall, previous research consistently confirms that motivation remains one of the strongest predictors of successful foreign language learning.

Conclusion

Motivation plays a fundamental role in language learning throughout people's lives. Whether learners are motivated by practical goals or by a desire to understand another culture, motivation encourages them to overcome challenges and continue improving their language skills. Both integrative and instrumental motivation contribute to successful language acquisition, although their relative importance may differ depending on learners' individual goals and social contexts. Therefore, teachers should create supportive, engaging, and motivating learning environments that encourage students to develop both intrinsic interest and practical reasons for learning foreign languages. Strengthening learners' motivation ultimately leads to higher achievement, greater learner autonomy, and lifelong language learning.