PAPER

MOTIVATION AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

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Abstract

This theme explores how motivation influences the selection and use of language learning strategies. It examines the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and their impact on learners' ability to adopt cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. The theme also highlights how strategic learning can, in turn, enhance motivation, creating a cycle of continuous language improvement. Understanding this relationship can help educators and learners optimize language acquisition by fostering motivation and implementing effective learning techniques.

Key words: motivation, language learning strategies, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, social strategies.

Introduction

Motivation has long been identified as a critical factor in second language acquisition [5]. It influences not only the intensity of effort learners are willing to invest but also their persistence and willingness to engage in complex language tasks. Language learning strategies (LLSs) - defined as conscious, goal-oriented behaviors used by learners to enhance their language competence are deeply affected by learners' motivational orientations.

Intrinsic motivation, which stems from personal interest and internal satisfaction, often leads to greater autonomy and sustained effort [4]. In contrast, extrinsic motivation driven by external rewards or pressures - can be effective in the short term but may not always foster long-term language development unless internalized. Understanding how these motivational types influence strategy selection and use is vital for optimizing language instruction and learner success.

Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods design combining quantitative and qualitative data collection. Participants were 60 intermediate EFL students (aged 14–16) from two secondary schools. The research included:

Motivation Questionnaire adapted from the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) to assess levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation [9].

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) to gather data on the frequency and types of learning strategies used [10].

Classroom Observations to support self-reported data and capture natural learning behaviors.

Semi-structured Interviews with a sample of 10 students to explore personal experiences related to motivation and strategy use.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and thematic coding of qualitative responses.

Results

Findings indicate a strong correlation between intrinsic motivation and the frequent use of metacognitive and cognitive strategies, such as goal setting, planning, monitoring, summarizing, and analyzing language input [2]. These learners were more autonomous and demonstrated higher levels of self-regulation in their learning. Extrinsically motivated learners

showed a preference for social and affective strategies, including asking for help, participating in group work, and using positive self-talk [7]. However, they were less likely to plan or evaluate their learning independently.

Notably, learners who regularly used a variety of strategies across all four categories (cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social) also reported higher motivation scores. Interview responses further indicated that success in applying strategies led to a sense of accomplishment, which, in turn, reinforced motivation – a pattern consistent with the findings of Zimmerman on self-regulated learning [10].

Discussion

These findings align with existing research indicating that motivation and strategy use are mutually reinforcing [6]. Intrinsically motivated students are more likely to engage in deep processing and strategic behavior, while extrinsically motivated students may benefit from structured guidance and social reinforcement to sustain their efforts [4]. Strategic learning promotes self-efficacy and autonomy, key components of motivation in language learning [1]. Thus, language educators should aim to foster both types of motivation while teaching strategy use explicitly. Providing learners with tools to reflect on their learning, set goals, and monitor progress can strengthen their belief in their capabilities and enhance learning outcomes.

A cyclical model emerges: motivated learners use strategies more effectively, and successful strategy use increases their motivation. This model supports the need for integrated pedagogy that treats motivation and strategy instruction as complementary rather than separate components.

Conclusion

This study reinforces the importance of motivation in shaping language learning strategy use and demonstrates that strategic learning behavior can, in turn, enhance motivation. Educators should consider this interdependence when designing instruction, aiming to cultivate intrinsic motivation and equip learners with a wide range of effective strategies. Doing so can create a positive feedback loop that sustains language acquisition and learner autonomy over time.

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