

Innovations

Motivations of Graduate Students Enrolled in Foreign Language Courses

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Abstract: *Motivation is the driving force behind learning foreign languages. As a result of the pandemic, schooling shifted to online learning, so is students' motivation the same? This article investigated the motivation levels and solutions for ensuring learners' motivation among 13 graduate students from the University of the Cordilleras in Baguio City. Quantitative data were analyzed using weighted mean, while qualitative data were evaluated thematically and narratively. Graduate students were shown to be highly motivated to learn foreign languages for career and economic advancement, global citizenship, communication, affiliation with foreigners, self-satisfaction, self-efficacy, and cultural integration. Furthermore, the following suggestions for assuring learning motivation are technology assistance for teachers, online interactive activities, games, and tools, timely feedback, appropriate pacing, revisiting course content and focusing on essentials, inviting native speakers, and personalized consultations. Only thirteen graduate students from the University of the Cordilleras in Baguio City were the subject of this investigation. It did not indicate findings that applied to all foreign language courses and doctorate students in the Philippines, so research with a bigger sample size is required.*

Keywords: *Motivation, Learning Motivation, Language learning motivation, online learning, foreign language, foreign language learning*

Introduction

Motivation plays a crucial role in learning by affecting persistence, engagement, work quality, and achievement (Panagiotidis et al., 2023; Zhou, 2022; Zhang, 2021). In foreign language acquisition, it drives active participation and is key to success (Wang, 2010).

The COVID-19 pandemic forced unexpected school closures in 2020, impacting 1.6 billion students and shifting education online (Hall et al., 2020; Lorente et al., 2020; Spitzer & Musslick, 2021; Van der Velde et al., 2021; Tao & Gao, 2022). Despite this shift, motivation remained crucial for effective learning

outcomes (Zhou, 2022; Castillo-Merino & Serradell-López, 2014). While online learning's impact on motivation varies, it can enhance motivation and reduce anxiety, leading to positive results (Akbari et al., 2016; Razmjou, 2021).

Studies show that some students felt less motivated and performed poorly in online learning, while others maintained their motivation (Tichavsky et al., 2015; Zhou, 2022). In online language learning, challenges include low engagement in communicative tasks (Jansem, 2021) and varying motivational responses, from incentive-driven learners (Jiang et al., 2021) to those who developed self-motivation (Agum et al., 2021). Since motivation varies by context (Alizadeh, 2016), sustaining it is more important than simply triggering it. Understanding how motivation evolves in new and uncertain environments is essential (Chiu et al., 2021).

This study builds on Unson and Lambenicio (2022) by exploring the motivation levels and sustaining strategies of 13 graduate foreign language students at the University of the Cordilleras. Its findings aim to help educators maintain motivation and improve learning outcomes in graduate language courses.

The following questions were the focus of this study:

- (1) What are the motivation levels of graduate students?
 - a) Career and economic enhancement
 - b) Global citizenship
 - c) Communication and affiliation with foreigners
 - d) Self-satisfaction
 - e) Self-efficacy
 - f) Integration with other cultures?
- (2) How can graduate students be motivated to learn foreign language courses?

1. Related Literature

Motivation is the internal and external force driving cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement (Panagiotidis et al., 2023). It combines effort, goal-oriented desire, and positive attitudes toward language learning (Wang, 2010; Chilingaryan & Gorbatenko, 2015; Ortega-Auquilla et al., 2022).

2.1 Types of Motivation

According to Ai et al. (2021), there are four types of motivation: intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative, and instrumental.

Motivation in language learning can be categorized into four types. Intrinsic motivation arises from personal interest and internal drive, without reliance on rewards or pressure, and is key to frequent use of learning strategies (Psychology Today, 2024; Marszalek et al., 2022). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is driven by external factors such as rewards or deadlines; while it can

be effective in the short term, it may diminish over time. Language learning often stems from quality instruction and teaching methods (Psychology Today, 2024; Ortega-Auquilla et al., 2022). Integrative motivation involves a desire to connect with and be part of the target language community, reflecting positive attitudes toward its speakers (Ortega-Auquilla, 2022; Wang, 2010). Instrumental motivation is goal-oriented, driven by practical benefits like career advancement or higher income (Lockhart, 2024; Wang, 2010). Each type plays a distinct role in shaping learners' engagement and success.

2.2 Theories

The following theories were used to interpret the results: Gardner's motivation theory, self-determination theory, and behaviorism.

2.2.1 Gardner's Motivation Theory

Gardner's motivation theory highlights three key aspects in second language learning: eagerness to learn, goal-driven willingness, and enjoyment. He also defines two orientations—**instrumental** (learning for external rewards) and **integrative** (learning to connect with native speakers and culture) (Ai et al., 2021).

2.2.2 Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) highlights the balance between internal motivation, like independence and self-growth, and external rewards such as money or recognition (Lopez-Garrido, 2023).

2.2.3 Behaviorism

Behaviorism posits that behaviors are learned through conditioning, which occurs through environmental interaction. There are two types: classical conditioning, where a neutral stimulus becomes associated with a natural one, triggering the same response (Cherry, 2022), and operant conditioning, which links behavior to its consequences, using reinforcement to encourage repetition and punishment to reduce behaviors (Cherry, 2022).

2. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study used both quantitative and qualitative designs. Quantitative design addressed the first problem, involving numerical data analyzed statistically (McLeod, 2023), while qualitative design focused on the second problem, using interviews to explore subjective experiences through non-numerical data (McLeod, 2023).

3.2 Data Gathering

Data was collected using two instruments. The first was a 40-item questionnaire adapted from Khan and Takkac (2021), where graduate students indicated their agreement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Topics included career advancement, global citizenship, communication with foreigners, self-satisfaction, self-efficacy, and cultural assimilation. The questionnaire's validity was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.97. It was distributed via Google Forms. The second instrument was an interview guide, validated by a research consultant. Structured interviews were conducted on Facebook Messenger.

3.3 Selection of Respondents

This study involved 13 of the 15 graduate students from the University of the Cordilleras, Baguio City, and the previous work of Unson and Lambenicio (2022). The participants were targeted to continue the previous work.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data from the questionnaire was analyzed by calculating the weighted mean for each of the 40 items and the overall mean to determine the responses. Scores between 3.26 and 4.00 indicated high motivation, meaning students were enthusiastic and determined. Scores from 2.51 to 3.25 indicated motivation, showing significant interest and enthusiasm. Scores from 1.76 to 2.50 indicated low interest, while scores from 1.00 to 1.75 indicated high demotivation, showing no enthusiasm for or drive. Graduate students were also interviewed for recommendations on maintaining motivation, and their responses were analyzed thematically and narratively.

3. Results

3.1 Motivation Factors

Table 1 shows the graduate students' mean responses for all questionnaire items. The results revealed strong motivation for learning foreign languages, with weighted averages of 3.28 for career and economic enhancement, 3.99 for global citizenship, 3.84 for communication with foreigners, 3.38 for self-satisfaction, 3.88 for self-efficacy, and 3.67 for cultural integration. Overall, the students had a weighted average of 3.67, indicating they were highly motivated to learn foreign languages.

4.2 Ensuring Motivation in Learning Foreign Languages

The following are the recommendations that the participants have cited to ensure motivation in learning foreign languages:

4.2.1 Integrating Technology Support for Teachers

According to Student A, “teachers should be technologically supported. In particular, Internet connections, usage of applications and the Canvas LMS, and other technical concerns should be carefully considered.” Student M added that “schools should empower teachers to maximize all the features of Canvas and Zoom Meeting and to be oriented with different teaching styles, activity types, relevant software, and gadgets they could use in their online classes. The school should also provide reliable Internet connections in faculty rooms so that teachers have an alternative place to work if their home Internet connections are faulty.” Before teachers can use technology to promote effective learning, they should be well-equipped to handle it. They should be empowered to be motivated and spread it to their students.

Table 1: Motivation Factors

I learn foreign languages...	Weighted Mean	Descriptive Equivalent
Career and Economic Enhancement		
...to improve my chances of getting a good job.	3.13	Motivated
...to get a high-paying job.	2.93	Motivated
...because foreign language proficiency will have financial benefits for me.	3.13	Motivated
...for training in my future job.	3.20	Motivated
...to have better job opportunities after graduation.	3.33	Highly Motivated
...because these give me more opportunities after graduation.	3.60	Highly Motivated
...because these give me an edge over other applicants for a job.	3.40	Highly Motivated
...because learning them is another way of enriching me for my future career.	3.53	Highly Motivated
Average	3.28	Highly Motivated
Global Citizenship		
...because these allow me to understand other cultures.	4.00	Highly Motivated
...because learning them is one way of learning other cultures.	4.00	Highly Motivated
...because these broaden my view of other cultures.	4.00	Highly Motivated
...because I can appreciate more foreign people if I know their languages.	4.00	Highly Motivated
...because these will allow me to understand other cultures.	4.00	Highly Motivated

...because these are important for me to understand other cultures.	4.00	Highly Motivated
...because these give me the self-confidence to understand other cultures.	4.00	Highly Motivated
...to be more educated about other cultures.	3.93	Highly Motivated
Average	3.99	Highly Motivated
Communication and Affiliation with Foreigners		
...to communicate with foreigners in their native languages.	3.87	Highly Motivated
...to speak to foreigners using their native languages.	3.80	Highly Motivated
...because these make it easier for me to relate with foreigners.	4.00	Highly Motivated
...because I am fascinated when I hear a foreigner speaking.	3.67	Highly Motivated
...to go to countries where these languages are spoken.	3.67	Highly Motivated
...because these are useful when I travel abroad.	4.00	Highly Motivated
Average	3.84	Highly Motivated
Self-Satisfaction		
...because I enjoy learning them when my friends give me some books on foreign languages.	3.40	Highly Motivated
...because I enjoy browsing websites that deal with foreign languages on the Internet.	3.53	Highly Motivated
...because I enjoy learning them upon the influence of friends who have enjoyed studying them, too.	3.27	Highly Motivated
...because I enjoy watching movies on TV, DVDs, or streaming sites, especially if they are in foreign languages.	4.00	Highly Motivated
...because my classmates are having a good time learning with me.	3.20	Motivated
...because I enjoy learning them in order to pass entrance examinations.	2.87	Motivated
Average	3.38	Highly Motivated
Self-Efficacy		
...because I can relate well to my foreign language classes.	3.87	Highly Motivated

...because I enjoy learning them as I feel good at them.	4.00	Highly Motivated
...because I feel comfortable speaking in my foreign language classes.	3.47	Highly Motivated
...because I enjoy learning them even if they are difficult.	3.93	Highly Motivated
...because I am delighted when teachers notice how I progress in my foreign language classes.	4.00	Highly Motivated
...because I believe I can learn them.	4.00	Highly Motivated
Average	3.88	Highly Motivated
Integration with Other Cultures		
...to be able to live in foreign lands	3.07	Motivated
...to be able to interact with foreigners as well.	4.00	Highly Motivated
...because I am also interested in foreign cultures.	3.87	Highly Motivated
...because learning them would prepare me to live in other countries.	3.60	Highly Motivated
...to live with another culture.	3.67	Highly Motivated
...to be able to socialize with foreigners.	3.80	Highly Motivated
Average	3.67	Highly Motivated
Overall Average	3.67	Highly Motivated

4.2.2 Curating Online Interactive Activities, Games, and Tools

According to Student J, “teachers should master digital tools that will help them deliver classes online and engage with their students well.” Student A suggested using online interactive games and tools to engage students in language learning: “Teachers may use online interactive games and tools to motivate the students to engage in language learning.” Student F emphasized that teachers should design interactive activities using relevant platforms, making the most of technology for effective learning.

4.2.3 Providing Timely Feedback

Students A and G suggested that teachers provide timely feedback on assignments, recitations, tasks, and exams. As language learning is a skill developed through practice, regular feedback helps reinforce knowledge and improve long-term retention.

4.2.4 Maintaining the Right Pacing

Pacing is crucial in teaching. Student F noted that teachers should slow down to help students keep up: “Teachers’ pacing in terms of delivering topics should be slower for students to be able to catch up always.” By adjusting their pacing, teachers can support language acquisition and improve students’ linguistic competence, helping them become more effective speakers.

4.2.5 Revisitation of Course Content and Focusing on Essentials

Student G suggested that teachers and schools focus on essential course content, as many topics overwhelm students. Student H agreed, noting that fewer topics would make the class more accessible. Student K emphasized that too many topics create confusion, and Student N recommended laddering topics from basic to advanced for continuity. Student E advocated for more oral practice in foreign language classes, while Student K suggested, “The more that topics had been coming in, the more confusing things got,” focusing on applying knowledge rather than language components like verb conjugations. Students H and L also stressed the need for better learning materials and videos. To focus on the essentials, institutions must consider students’ feedback to develop a suitable syllabus for their linguistic competence.

Student H mentioned that three months of study is insufficient for learning a foreign language, and Students M and N recommended extending courses to three trimesters. Focusing on one language for three trimesters, like Bahasa 1, 2, and 3, would allow for more profound mastery and better long-term retention of skills.

4.2.6 Invitation of Native Speakers

Student N suggested inviting native speakers to share their expertise in foreign language courses: “native speakers should be invited to share their expertise”. With online setups, they do not need to travel; they need a reliable internet connection. Since language development is social, interacting with native speakers allows students to put their skills to the test, offering invaluable learning experiences beyond classroom interaction.

4.2.7 Encouraging Individual Consultations

Relating with students personally is crucial in motivating students to learn. Thus, Student O said: “As teachers create good strategies to help them work with all of their students, it is also essential to meet individually. Teachers should interact with their students one-by-one so that they can ask questions if they do have.” Again, teachers are the source of formal instruction, yielding learning to scaffolding for students’ speaking skills. Thus, a teacher should check on his/her students to ensure they correctly say and use words and construct sentences well. Of course, given our present circumstances, this can only be done online. Nevertheless, it should be done.

4. Discussions

5.1 Motivation Factors

Traveling abroad and enhancing language skills are key drivers of language acquisition (Klimova, 2021; Ortega-Auquilla et al., 2022), and students' interest and social skills further motivate them to learn. Multilingualism, while not essential for global citizenship, broadens one's worldview (Devlin, 2023) and promotes cultural understanding, reducing ethnocentrism (Marszalek et al., 2022). Language is vital for career advancement, academic success, and global communication, with bilingualism offering employment advantages, especially with increasing international migration (Marszalek et al., 2022). For students, learning a language is essential for working with international clients and requires practical, real-world applications in language courses. Creating scenarios for real-life situations, like traveling or interacting with foreigners, can enhance learning. Self-efficacy, seen when students tackle challenging tasks and attribute success to their efforts, is crucial in language learning and increases satisfaction (Ueki & Takeuchi, 2013; Graham, 2022; Sun & Mu, 2023).

5.2 Ensuring Motivation in Learning Foreign Languages

5.2.1 Integrating Technology Support for Teachers

The teacher's role is crucial in motivating students to learn a foreign language. Teachers must use effective teaching methods to capture and maintain student attention (Zhou, 2022). However, the pandemic forced teachers to adapt to online learning, dealing with changing materials and low student engagement (Klimova, 2021). Poor teaching methods and a lack of enthusiasm can contribute to demotivation (Vakilifard et al., 2020). Teachers must use relevant teaching materials and technology to keep students engaged. Teacher motivation is key, as motivated teachers naturally inspire students (Ortega-Auquilla et al., 2022). Teachers also need technological skills to enhance online learning, and access to quality resources can improve teaching and student motivation (Jansem, 2021).

5.2.2 Curating Online Interactive Activities, Games, and Tools

Teachers should inspire students by engaging them in enjoyable activities (Zboun & Farrah, 2021). Different learning strategies can enhance student engagement in language lessons (Ortega-Auquilla et al., 2022). With innovation, ease of use, and motivational appeal, web-based technologies can boost cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement (Lyashenko & Malinina, 2015). These technologies and gamified lessons foster positive language learning experiences (Dehghanzadeh et al., 2021). Teachers must plan activities at all stages of Game-Based Learning, as digital games are not meant to replace the teacher.

5.2.3 Providing Timely Feedback

Timely feedback can enhance student motivation (Zhou, 2022), and corrective feedback from instructors and peers is valuable (Jeon, 2021). Web 2.0 tools foster social networks that encourage feedback and reciprocity. Games provide interactive environments with fast visual feedback, motivating users (Panagiotidis et al., 2023). Grading activities also boost motivation (Gördeslioğlu & Yüzer, 2019), and students are more motivated when they are satisfied with their successes (Zhou, 2022).

5.2.4 Maintaining the Right Pacing

Pacing refers to the rate at which lessons are delivered. If it is too fast, students may become confused and demotivated, leading to frustration or even cheating, which is easier online (Noorbehbahani et al., 2022; Unson & Lambenicio, 2022). Demotivation is often seen as a teacher's responsibility (Ebadi & Gheisari, 2016), so teachers must ensure classes are paced for optimal learning (Simmons, 2020).

5.2.5 Revisitation of Course Content and Focusing on Essentials

One of teachers' most prominent challenges is developing course content that inspires students to gain long-term knowledge and experiences (Medina et al., 2023). High-quality courses boost student motivation (Sogunro, 2015; Zhou, 2022), so teachers should focus on the motivational impact of materials and tasks (Chiu et al., 2021). A compelling course orientation and content that meets students' needs are essential (Zhou, 2022). Demotivation can result from overemphasizing specific topics (Vakilifard et al., 2020). Online education should also consider structure and motivation (Bulfin et al., 2014; Zhou, 2022).

Course design involves aligning with academic standards, creating a logical structure, and considering students' prior knowledge (Medina et al., 2023). Engaging students requires promoting active learning, autonomy, and inclusive design, including strategies like gamification, micro-learning, or flipped classrooms. The course must be reviewed for quality and relevance to ensure effectiveness (Medina et al., 2023).

Student feedback is crucial for improving course delivery (Medina et al., 2023), as creating a classroom environment where students can express their ideas fosters motivation. Teachers should use this input to adapt their teaching methods. Finally, ongoing assessment ensures effective learning and can be adjusted based on student experiences (Medina et al., 2023).

5.2.6 Invitation of Native Speakers

Gördeslioğlu and Yüzer (2019) found that most learners prefer the freedom to complete speaking exercises at their convenience. The lack of a foreign language-speaking community outside the classroom makes learning more challenging (Khan & Takkac, 2021). Tudini (2015) highlighted that interacting with native speakers boosts motivation for online language learning. Most learners

favor engaging with native speakers over other options (Chakowa, 2019), as it helps them feel more authentic in their speech. While interacting with native speakers can be intimidating, it provides a valuable opportunity for students to overcome their fear of speaking the language (Chakowa, 2019).

5.2.7 Encouraging Individual Consultations

Research on online education shows that fostering social connections between teachers and students is crucial (Jansem, 2021). Enhancing instructor-student interaction encourages students to take control of their learning (Kuama & Intharaksa, 2016) and motivates them to ask questions confidently (Ortega-Auquilla et al., 2022). However, interactivity remains a challenge in online learning (Jansem, 2021). Social media, like Facebook, can address this by boosting student engagement, offering flexibility, and appealing to learners (Akbari et al., 2016).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Graduate students were highly motivated to learn foreign languages for career advancement, global citizenship, communication with foreigners, self-satisfaction, self-efficacy, and cultural immersion. They suggested technology support for teachers, online interactive activities, games, timely feedback, proper pacing, revisiting course content, inviting native speakers, and individual consultations to maintain motivation. Based on 13 graduate students from the University of the Cordilleras, the study cannot be generalized to all graduate students or foreign language courses in the Philippines. Further research with a larger sample is needed. Foreign language educators should consider the participants' feedback to improve language education.

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