

THE ROLE OF MOTIVATION IN LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

Motivation is a driving force in foreign language acquisition, especially for primary school students who are at a formative stage of their education. This article explores how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation impact language learning in young children and examines the environmental, social, and psychological factors that contribute to fostering motivation. Practical examples from real-world classroom experiences and methods of enhancing student engagement are also included. Understanding these dynamics helps teachers and parents to create supportive environments that sustain students' interest and success in language learning.

Key Words: motivation, foreign language learning, primary students, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, learning environment, teaching strategies, parental involvement.

Introduction

Foreign language learning at the primary school level is crucial for children's cognitive development and global understanding. However, success largely depends on how motivated students are to engage in the learning process. At a young age, children are easily influenced by their surroundings, and their motivation to learn is often shaped by their teachers, parents, and learning environment. Motivation is typically divided into two categories: intrinsic (internal) and extrinsic (external). In this article, we explore how both types of motivation affect primary school students in the context of foreign language learning, providing practical strategies and real-life examples to illustrate how motivation can be effectively nurtured.

Main Body

1. Types of Motivation in Primary Language Learning

Intrinsic Motivation: This type of motivation comes from within the learner. For example, a child may be intrinsically motivated to learn French because they find the language exciting or because they enjoy watching French cartoons. Intrinsically

motivated students often engage more deeply with the language because they find the learning process itself rewarding. Example: In a classroom where students were learning Spanish, the teacher introduced a game where students had to match Spanish words to pictures of animals. Many students enjoyed this activity because it was fun and visually stimulating. Without any promise of external rewards, students stayed engaged simply because they liked the game, showing strong intrinsic motivation.

Extrinsic Motivation: This is driven by external rewards or pressures. For primary school students, extrinsic motivators could include receiving stickers, praise, or even the promise of a fun activity after completing their language exercises. While extrinsic motivation can be effective in the short term, it may not foster a lasting interest in the language unless it evolves into intrinsic motivation. Example: In another classroom, students were told that if they completed their French vocabulary test with good results, they would be allowed extra playtime during recess. While some students worked harder to achieve this, their motivation was largely based on the reward rather than the learning itself.

Factors Influencing Motivation in Young Learners

Several factors affect how motivated a child might be when learning a foreign language:

Role of Teachers: Teachers play a crucial role in inspiring both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. A teacher who is enthusiastic about the subject can create a positive and engaging learning environment. Teachers who incorporate interactive activities such as storytelling, songs, and games can make the language come alive for students, thus increasing their motivation. A teacher using puppets to teach basic phrases in English created an engaging and playful environment. The students loved interacting with the puppets, and this approach not only made the lesson fun but also made the language feel more relevant to their daily lives.

Parental Involvement: Parental encouragement can significantly influence a child's motivation to learn a new language. Children whose parents take an active interest in their language studies—by practicing with them at home or exposing them to language-learning media—tend to be more motivated. For instance: A student learning Chinese at school was more motivated because their parents encouraged them by watching Chinese cartoons at home and practicing new words during dinner. The child felt supported and enthusiastic, and this home involvement reinforced the learning that took place in the classroom.

Cultural Exposure: When students are exposed to the culture behind the language they are learning, they often find the process more meaningful. Integrating cultural elements, such as songs, festivals, or stories from the countries where the language is spoken, can spark curiosity and make the language more appealing.

Example: During a French lesson, the teacher organized a mini "French Day" where students learned about French food, music, and traditions. The students were excited to learn not only the language but also about the culture behind it. This experience made them feel more connected to what they were learning and increased their motivation to speak French.

3. Challenges in Sustaining Motivation

While it is possible to foster motivation, maintaining it can be challenging due to several factors:

Attention Span: Primary school students often have short attention spans, and keeping them focused on language learning can be difficult. Lessons must be varied and interactive to keep them engaged. A teacher noticed that students were losing focus halfway through a long grammar lesson. To re-engage them, the teacher introduced a game where students had to act out different animals and say the names in the foreign language, which successfully drew their attention back to the lesson.

Boredom and Frustration: If the learning process becomes repetitive or too challenging, students may become bored or frustrated. It's important for teachers to balance the difficulty of tasks and to ensure that learning remains enjoyable. Example: In one classroom, students became frustrated when asked to memorize a long list of vocabulary words. The teacher noticed this and switched to a new activity: creating short sentences with the words, which made the task more creative and less monotonous.

4. Strategies for Enhancing Motivation

Several strategies can be used to enhance and maintain motivation in young learners:

Gamification: Turning learning into a game is one of the most effective ways to motivate children. Language-learning apps, quizzes, and competitions can all be used to make the learning process more engaging. In a Spanish class, the teacher used a language-learning app that incorporated games to help students practice vocabulary. The app awarded points for correct answers, and students were excited to compete against each other to earn the highest score, keeping them motivated throughout the lesson.

Positive Reinforcement: Encouragement and recognition go a long way in maintaining a child's motivation. Regular praise for effort, rather than just results, can keep students focused on learning rather than on perfection. For example: A teacher implemented a "Star Chart" where students earned stars for effort and participation during language lessons. Even if a student made mistakes, their efforts were still recognized, which boosted their confidence and motivation.

Conclusion

Motivation is a crucial element in the foreign language learning process, especially for primary school students. By fostering both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation through supportive teachers, parental involvement, and engaging activities, educators can create an environment where students are excited to learn. While maintaining motivation may pose challenges, strategies such as gamification, cultural exposure, and positive reinforcement can keep young learners engaged and eager to continue their language journey. When properly motivated, primary school students are not only more likely to succeed in learning a foreign language, but they are also more likely to develop a long-term love for the language and culture.

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