

Strategies for Enhancing Learning Motivation in Chinese as a Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract: Learning motivation plays a unique and critical role in the learning process. Teachers should do their best to play it by ear to improve students' motivation to learn. First of all, during the preparing part, teachers should investigate what students' learning needs are, and the arrangement of teaching content, example sentences, and exercises. What's more, in the teaching part, teachers can adopt group competition in form, heuristic methods in questioning methods to stimulate students' learning motivation, and give timely and targeted feedback to students. Re-explain the key grammar or vocabulary of students' problems is necessary. After-class, teaching reflection is essential to record the mistakes of students, make bias analysis for students' repeated problems, and explain these weak points from the root cause of problems in the review class.

Keywords: Learning motivation, Group competition, Heuristic methods, Teaching reflection, Feedback.

1. Introduction

Learners of a second language are influenced by various factors, including motivation, strategies, attitudes, attribution styles, and intelligence. Among these, motivation is the core driver of learning. From the 1980s to 1990s, research shifted from language itself to the learning process, emphasizing learners' agency. Linguists recognize that while environmental, genetic, and educational factors matter, subjective initiative—learners' intrinsic drive—plays a decisive role. Thus, studying motivation in second language acquisition (SLA) is essential for improving learning efficiency.

2. Current Research Status Academic Research on Learning Motivation

Current Research Status Academic research on learning motivation mainly focuses on three aspects: the classification of learning motivation, the application of learning motivation in different subject teaching, and the maintenance and cultivation of learners' motivation. Firstly, regarding the classification of learning motivation, based on different criteria, motivation can be divided into various types. Lü Bisong (1992), for example, categorized second language acquisition motivation into: instructional purposes, academic research purposes, career purposes, instrumental career purposes, and other purposes^[1] Li Bin (2004) pointed out three types of motivation classification: the first is based on the internal and external dimensions of motivation, dividing it into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation; the second is based on students' academic behaviors, dividing it into cognitive drive, self-improvement drive, and affiliative drive — where cognitive drive belongs to intrinsic motivation, while self-improvement and affiliative drives belong to extrinsic motivation; the third is based on the components of motivational concepts, dividing them into intrinsic causes, extrinsic incentives, and self-regulation^[2]. Yuan Yichuan (2008) and others, through questionnaire surveys and descriptive statistics, identified seven key motivational factors: instructional factors, cooperative/competitive learning motivation, parental support, integrative motivation,

attitudes toward foreign languages/cultures, learning aspiration, and social responsibility^[3]. Guo Yaping (2009) and Fan Yajie (2015) proposed that international students' motivations for learning Chinese can be classified into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, short-term and long-term motivation, as well as integrative and instrumental motivation^[4].

Secondly, in terms of research on learning motivation in specific disciplines — especially in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL) — researchers such as Tian Mao (2008), Yang Zongxiong (2012), Hu Xue, and Li Jinlong (2012) have pointed out that, in practical teaching, learning motivation is directly related to learning outcomes, and there is a positive correlation between motivation and academic achievement. Tian Mao (2008) noted that a second language learner's motivation greatly influences their learning and mastery of the language. Learners with strong motivation tend to use more strategies to learn the language, and good results in turn further motivate them to study. Qu Ximeng (2010), through a survey of international students participating in various Chinese knowledge and speech contests, found that 77% of the students learned Chinese due to personal interest, 19% for job-related purposes, and less than 4% for other reasons. This result highlights the important role of intrinsic motivation in Chinese language learning^[5]. Therefore, in teaching practice, stimulating and cultivating students' learning motivation is a key task for educational theorists and practitioners.

Lastly, regarding research on maintaining and cultivating learners' motivation: Zhang Ying et al. (2008) suggested the following methods to stimulate learning motivation: 1) use diverse approaches to cultivate students' interest in learning; 2) provide positive feedback to build students' confidence; 3) prepare thoroughly to meet learners' sense of achievement; 4) organize group activities to enhance students' sense of competition; 5) conduct extracurricular activities to boost competitive awareness^[6]. Zhao Xiuxia et al. (2010) also proposed several strategies: first, create a conducive environment to simulate first language acquisition conditions; second, shift the teacher's role to stimulate learner interest; third, create opportunities for success to fulfill learners' achievement needs and enhance confidence; fourth, satisfy

learners' curiosity and strengthen Chinese cultural education; fifth, establish a sound evaluation system; sixth, emphasize extracurricular cultural activities to enhance learning ability and outcomes^[7]. Wang Yongliang et al. (2015) put forward the following strategies: 1) protect students' self-esteem and enhance their confidence; 2) promote autonomous learning; 3) emphasize formative assessment over summative assessment^[8]. Fan Yajie (2015) also pointed out the importance of strengthening cultural education, reforming teaching methods, and organizing extracurricular activities to stimulate learners' motivation^[9].

As teachers of Chinese as a foreign language, how to effectively stimulate learning motivation is particularly important in practical teaching. Therefore, based on existing research and reflections from practical experience, this paper aims to summarize effective theories from successful practices, and use these theories to guide future teaching.

3. Cultivating and Stimulating Learning Motivation

(1) Before Class: Simplify Textbook Content and Add Relevant Materials

Once the teaching objectives and difficulty level are determined, teachers should take the initiative to adapt textbook content—such as texts, vocabulary, grammar, sentence patterns, and topics—based on the students' actual situations. This involves selecting, deleting, or modifying content to match students' learning levels and abilities. The refined and integrated content should be reflected in the semester's teaching plan and accompanied by clear learning requirements for students.

The author conducted a survey of 200 Russian international students at University A and found that their motivations for learning Chinese varied: 58% aimed to engage in China-related trade, 26% wanted to become Chinese language teachers, 12% planned to live in China, and 4% were motivated by tourism. These findings show that students' motivations for learning Chinese are diverse, but most are career-related. Therefore, tailoring teaching content to meet the needs of the majority is more likely to stimulate student interest.

For example, at University A, teaching examples, dialogue practices, and writing exercises can center around the common themes of "work" and "life." Teaching materials that are simplified, practical, and relevant to daily life are more effective at arousing enthusiasm. In the *Developing Chinese Intermediate Speaking II* textbook by Beijing Language and Culture University Press, one lesson covers the topic of "boomerang kids" (young adults relying on their parents). The original discussion task is to debate the pros and cons of this phenomenon, which requires high-level language expression and organization skills. Based on the class's level, the topic can be adapted to questions like "Would you want to be a boomerang kid? Why or why not?" or "Do you know any boomerang kids? What are your thoughts?" These adaptations clearly sparked more interest among students.

(2) During Class

1) Promote Learning Through Competition

Classroom competition can be organized by group, which not only enhances communication among students but also boosts motivation to learn Chinese. Teachers should use heuristic questioning techniques, posing questions that are challenging, inspiring, and engaging. Group division should

follow the principle of "heterogeneity within groups and homogeneity between groups"—each group should have students of varying proficiency levels, while overall group abilities remain balanced. Stronger students can serve as group leaders to help those who are struggling, creating a dynamic of "intra-group cooperation and inter-group competition." Group activities can take various forms, such as:

a) Flashcard Phonics Game

The teacher prepares cards with initials, finals, and tones written in different colors—red for tones, blue for initials, and green for finals. Each group gets a tone card and several initial/final cards. The teacher reads 20 pinyin combinations, and groups must quickly raise the correct cards to represent the pronunciation components. The teacher checks for accuracy.

b) Charades Game: Guess the Verb

Students act out six learned verbs: "eat," "drink," "sit," "come in," "study," and "ask." Each group sends two students to the front: one acts, one guesses. The final two words are used for a buzzer round. All words are presented in Chinese characters without pinyin, increasing the difficulty.

c) Sentence Arrangement

This grammar and vocabulary review activity presents twelve jumbled sentences. Groups must rearrange them into correct sentences as quickly as possible. No pinyin is provided. Sentences involve key grammar points from five lessons, such as adjective-predicate structures, the placement of "在+location" as an adverbial phrase, and the positioning of adverbs "也" and "都," making it a moderately challenging task.

d) Dialogue Completion

Students are given four incomplete dialogues with blanks, based on different situations: greetings, introductions/nationality, expressing preferences, and asking for locations. Each group must complete all dialogues within ten minutes.

2) Provide Timely Feedback

Whether encouraging or constructive, teacher feedback helps students attribute success or failure and serves as a mirror for them to assess their progress. When evaluating students' academic performance, teachers should consider individual differences so that each student experiences success. This is especially crucial for students who lack confidence or rely heavily on support—positive reinforcement can significantly enhance their learning.

Feedback should go beyond right or wrong—it should be specific to students' responses, helping them understand both strengths and areas for improvement, and making them feel seen and supported. After completing a teaching activity, teachers should also evaluate the overall performance of the class, highlighting frequent errors in grammar or pronunciation, recording these in teaching reflections, and revisiting them during review sessions.

Feedback must be timely and cover in-class answers, homework, and test results. Praise and criticism should be used carefully to guide students toward appropriate responses, helping them gauge how far they are from achieving learning goals.

(3) After Class: Teaching Reflection

Each textbook level sets basic requirements for vocabulary, grammar, and other skills. Students need to meet these standards to progress smoothly. However, in short-term programs, proficiency levels often vary greatly within the

same class. Some students may find the materials too advanced. ^[10] Therefore, teachers should reflect after class and record common student mistakes, encouraging timely review. Group competitions can be used to motivate students to consolidate learning.

Although many international students are adults, extrinsic motivation still works. For example, students could earn a star for correct dictation of vocabulary; ten stars could earn a homework pass. Teachers should also document common errors for each class. After completing a unit, teachers should analyze these mistakes, identify causes, and provide targeted reviews to ensure content is absorbed. This prevents knowledge gaps from accumulating and discouraging students from learning further.

4. Conclusion

As Chinese culture gains popularity worldwide, Chinese—its key cultural vehicle—is increasingly embraced by foreigners, and the “Chinese language boom” is gradually spreading globally. More and more international students are coming to China to study Chinese for various reasons. Among the many factors influencing their learning, motivation plays a crucial role—it can even determine the overall success of their language acquisition.

Therefore, teachers of Chinese as a foreign language should begin by investigating students’ learning needs before class, and aligning lesson content accordingly. During class, group competitions and timely feedback can enhance motivation and help students recognize their progress, thereby further encouraging learning through improved outcomes. After class, teachers should reflect on student errors, revisit key points, and provide targeted reinforcement to support sustained learning motivation.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the financial support from State Grid Corporation of China- Deepening research and application of PV Cloud (SGZJ0000KXJS1800281).

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