

ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS INFLUENCING FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING MOTIVATION IN CHINESE STUDENTS ABOVE MATRICULATION LEVEL

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Abstract

Introduction. As friendship between Russia and China becomes stronger, more and more Chinese students come to Russia to study. Given a high demand for ‘foreign language + professional’ multidisciplinary international talents from all over the world, it is highly useful to obtain information about the factors influencing foreign language learning motivation among Chinese students above matriculation level. This paper examines the factors influencing such motivation in Chinese students above matriculation level from the perspective of educational psychology.

Materials and Methods. In order to gather empirical data, we designed, distributed, and collected a questionnaire containing 10 dimensions and 30 question items based on core variables. The valid questionnaire data were imported into SPSS 16.0 statistical software. We strictly followed the principal component analysis (PCA) steps and used SPSS for factor extraction, rotation, and interpretation, revealing the main influencing factors behind the observed variables.

Results. We found it appropriate to single out six factors influencing foreign language learning motivation among Chinese students above matriculation level. They were renamed as confidence expectation, intrinsic interest, task value, educational assistance, goal-driven, and emotional attribution factors.

The study concluded that six dimensions significantly affect foreign language learning motivation among Chinese students above matriculation level.

Conclusion. Overall, six factors are more generalizable than ten factors, and the total variance explained is 67.718 %, so it is more appropriate to extract six factors. The study employed quantitative research methods to enrich the knowledge about the factors influencing Chinese students’ foreign language learning motivation, expand the scope of the research group, and provide new ideas for a more in-depth discussion of Chinese students’ foreign language learning motivation.

Keywords: foreign language learning motivation, confidence expectation, intrinsic interest, task value, educational assistance, goal-driven factor, emotion attribution

АНАЛИЗ ФАКТОРОВ, ВЛИЯЮЩИХ НА МОТИВАЦИЮ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ИНОСТРАННОГО ЯЗЫКА КИТАЙСКИМИ СТУДЕНТАМИ НА ЭТАПЕ ВЫСШЕГО ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ

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Аннотация

Введение. С развитием дружбы между Россией и Китаем всё больше китайских студентов приезжают учиться в Россию. На фоне спроса на многопрофильные международные программы формата «иностранный язык + профессия» по всему миру большую ценность представляет изучение факторов, влияющих на мотивацию изучения иностранного языка китайскими студентами на этапе высшего образования. Цель исследования: изучить с точки зрения психологии образования факторы, влияющие на мотивацию китайских студентов изучать иностранный язык.

Материалы и методы. Для получения эмпирических данных в рамках исследования была разработана анкета, содержащая 10 измерений и состоящая из 30 вопросов, основанных на основных переменных. Полученные валидные данные анкеты были импортированы в статистическое

программное обеспечение SPSS 16.0. На их основе были проанализированы главные компоненты (РСА); извлечение, вращение и интерпретация факторов были проведены с помощью SPSS для выявления основных факторов влияния на наблюдаемые переменные.

Результаты исследования. Было определено, что целесообразно выделить шесть факторов, влияющих на мотивацию изучения иностранного языка китайскими студентами: фактор уверенности в себе, фактор внутреннего интереса, фактор ценности задачи, фактор синергии помощи, фактор целеустремленности и фактор эмоциональной атрибуции.

В заключение настоящее исследование демонстрирует, что эти шесть ключевых аспектов оказывают существенное влияние на мотивацию к изучению иностранных языков среди китайских студентов, обучающихся на уровне высшего образования.

Заключение. Выявлено шесть измерений, влияющих на мотивацию китайских студентов, изучающих иностранные языки в высшем учебном заведении. Вывод исследования: общая объяснённая дисперсия составляет 67,718 %, поэтому целесообразно выделять шесть факторов вместо десяти. В исследовании были использованы количественные методы для обогащения факторов влияния на мотивацию изучения иностранного языка китайскими студентами, расширения круга исследователей и предоставления новых идей для более глубокого обсуждения мотивации изучения иностранного языка китайскими студентами.

Ключевые слова: мотивация к изучению иностранного языка, уверенность в себе, внутренняя заинтересованность, ценность задачи, помощь в обучении, целеустремленность, эмоциональная атрибуция

Introduction

As Russian-Chinese friendship progresses, more and more Chinese students come to study in Russia, where they can choose to matriculate either to learn Russian or to teach English, which reflects Russia's high level of internationalization. Accordingly, we explore the factors that influence Chinese students' motivation to learn foreign languages and improve it. Motivation refers to a cognitive or emotional arousal, a state that triggers the subject to engage in sustained mental and physical efforts to achieve a set goal (Williams, Burden 1997, 123). Motivation is the result of a joint action of the subject of behavior (human) and the external object (environment). Human motivation includes extrinsic and intrinsic triggers (Vallerand 1997). Extrinsic triggers refer to the influence of the external social environment that does not originate from oneself (Ryan, Deci 2000, 62) while intrinsic ones relate to an individual's own needs, desires, personal cognition, and emotion (Ryan, Deci 2000, 55). Learning motivation can be defined as a psychological, non-intellectual factor that plays a certain role in the development of people's learning spirit (Mukhina, Kovalchuk 2023, 29).

Learning motivation is the driving force behind the learning process (Harlen, Crick 2003, 18).

A literature review found that student motivation for learning foreign languages was influenced by personal emotions (Dang 2023), social situations (Xu 2008), personal development (Gao et al. 2003), and cultural interest (Zhang, Du 2021). There is currently a lack of a systematic research analysis of foreign language learning motivation among Chinese students above matriculation level from the perspective of learning motivation theory. A review of the existing literature and a systematic analysis of related motivation theories enabled us to analyze the results based on self-determination theory (SDT), goal orientation, expectancy-value, achievement motivation theories, and core approaches such as self-efficacy, attribution, and self-regulated learning theories. The factors influencing foreign language learning motivation among Chinese students above matriculation level are revealed from multiple dimensions. SDT is a motivational theory of human behavior (Zhang et al. 2011) that identifies intrinsic and extrinsic motivation encouraging people to engage in activities. Intrinsic motivation refers to a motivation to engage in activities driven by one's own interests and

the enjoyment of the activity itself. Extrinsic motivation refers to a motivation to engage in activities in order to obtain additional results that can be brought about by activities (Zhang 2019). This directly inspired us to include two dimensions, ‘intrinsic motivation’ and ‘extrinsic motivation’, in measuring learners’ interest in foreign language learning itself and learning outcomes. Goal-orientation theory focuses on purposeful and goal-directed behavior, assuming that individual behavior builds around the pursuit of goals (Jiang, Guo 2003). We therefore included ‘goal orientation’ to capture the learning goals set and pursued by foreign language learners. Expectation is a cognitive process that is highly valued in cognitive motivation theory (Zhang 1996). Expectancy-value theory combines the individual’s expectation of possible success (expectation) and the value judgment of successful results (value), providing a theoretical basis for designing the dimensions of ‘achievement expectation’ and ‘task value’. The former focuses on learners’ confidence in achieving their learning goals, while the latter measures their perception of the meaning of the learning task itself. Achievement motivation theory (achievement goal) refers to the purpose of an individual’s achievement behavior, reflecting one’s pursuit of achievement (Liu, Zhuang 2004). The latter is a tendency to pursue success and avoid failure, which relates to the ‘achievement expectation’ and ‘extrinsic motivation’ dimensions. External rewards are also part of the driving force of achievement motivation. Perceived self-efficacy or sense of self-efficacy is a concept proposed by A. Bandura (Bandura 1977), which refers to people’s confidence or belief in their ability to achieve behavioral goals in a specific field (e. g. learning a foreign language) (Zhang et al. 1999). This directly corresponds to the ‘self-efficacy’ dimension in the questionnaire, which serves to assess learners’ confidence in learning a foreign language. Attribution theory believes that correct attribution plays an important role in fostering learning motivation and good learning attitudes among students (Fan 2025, 848). This makes the theoretical cornerstone of the ‘at-

tribution style’ dimension, helping us understand how learners adjust their subsequent behaviors based on the results of learning a foreign language. Finally, self-regulated learning theory emphasizes the active role of learners in setting goals, choosing strategies, monitoring progress, and evaluating effectiveness, with self-regulated learning as a key element of academic success (Schunk, Greene 2018). Second-language self-regulation strategies are closely related to learners’ motivation and have a positive effect on improving learning outcomes (Bai, Wang 2023; Teng et al. 2024); therefore, the ‘learning strategies’ dimension is included to reflect students’ ability to manage their own foreign language learning process. In addition, both social support and positive emotions can positively predict student learning engagement (Bao et al. 2022, 508), with social support mainly referring to the tools, information, emotion, and evaluation help provided by others (ten Brummelhuis, Bakker 2012). Emotional factors are also among the important contributors to foreign language learning (Qi, Li 2004), hence the dimensions of ‘social support’ and ‘emotional experience’.

Based on the integration and refinement of the seven theories listed above, we identified and hypothesized ten core factors: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, goal orientation, task value, achievement expectation, self-efficacy, attribution style, learning strategies, social support, and emotional experience. This study attempts to systematically explore the multiple factors influencing foreign language learning motivation among Chinese students above matriculation level from the perspective of educational psychology with the help of SPSS software.

Methodology

In this paper, data were collected through questionnaires and subjected to principal component factor analysis using SPSS statistical software.

The main body of the questionnaire consisted of two parts: the first part contained information about the respondents, while the second covered intrinsic motivation, extrinsic

motivation, goal orientation, task value, achievement expectation, self-efficacy, attribution style, learning strategies, social support, and emotional experience. It used 30 items on 10 dimensions and 30 factors influencing motivation to learn a foreign language, and a five-point Likert scale ranging from ‘completely disagree’ to ‘completely agree’.

The study adopted the snowball sampling method to survey 331 Chinese students from Moscow + Kazan, Russia, and Hubei + Henan + Xinjiang + Guangxi, China, including matriculation and undergraduate students (freshmen to seniors) and postgraduate students (masters and PhDs). A total of 331 questionnaires were collected, out of which 39 were excluded as invalid and 292 accepted as valid, with a validity rate of 88.2 %. The proportion of male and female respondents was 29.3 % and 70.7 % respectively. Matriculation students accounted for 1.8 %; freshmen to seniors numbered 8.5 %, 30.2 %, 26 %, and 10 % respectively, while postgraduates (masters and PhDs) totaled 24.1 %.

Results

Analysis of the reliability and validity of the scale

The study utilized Statistical Package for Social Sciences SPSS 16.0 to test the reliability and validity of the questionnaire data. Reliability

refers to the consistency and reliability of measurement results, and its measurement parameter is usually Cronbach’s alpha value. The internal consistency reliability analysis shows that the reliability coefficient of the total scale $\text{Alpha} = 0.940 > 0.9$, suggesting that the results of the questionnaire have good stability and consistency. The 30 items concerning the factors influencing foreign language learning motivation were used as raw data and input into the SPSS 16.0 software for exploratory factor analysis. Through the KMO and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity, the analysis found that $\text{KMO} = 0.934 > 0.8$, $P = 0.000 < 0.05$, indicating that the difference between the data is significant and suitable for principal component factor analysis. The questionnaire therefore has a good structural validity.

Exploratory factor analysis

The study used the SPSS 16.0 software to conduct an exploratory factor analysis of the collected data, aiming to identify the main factors influencing the motivation of Chinese students above matriculation level to learn foreign languages and to exclude the question items with weak correlations. Factor loadings were rotated using maximum variance rotation (Varimax), and natural categorization yielded six principal component factors, which cumulatively explained 67.718 % of the total variance (Table 1): the cumulative percentage of expla-

Table 1

Eigenvalues and Variance Percentages of Factors

Factor	Eigenvalue	Variance Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1	12.037	19.954	19.954
2	2.469	15.370	35.323
3	1.933	10.288	45.611
4	1.515	8.890	54.501
5	1.326	8.133	62.634
6	1.035	5.084	67.718

nation for orthogonal rotation (Varimax) was exactly the same. Based on the criterion of a large 0.5 loading of the observed variables, 29 valid questionnaire questions were finalized. Based on the results of the rotated component matrix, the six factors were named as confidence expectation, intrinsic interest, task value, educational assistance, goal-driven, and emotion attribution factors, with Q16, Q15, Q17, Q18, Q14, Q13, Q19, and Q22 of the questionnaire included in the first factor; Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q30 of the questionnaire, as well as Q9, Q7, and Q28 in the second; Q10, Q11, Q12, and Q25 in the third; Q24, Q26, and Q27 in the fourth; Q4, Q6, Q5, and Q8 in the fifth; and Q21, Q29, and Q20 of the questionnaire included in the sixth factor. When the number of specified factors is 6, it contains 29 question items. Overall, six factors are more generalizable than ten, and the total variance explained is 67.718 %. Therefore, we believe that it is more appropriate to select six factors. The loadings of each question on the factors and the names of the factors are shown in Table 2. The data in the table are the results of orthogonal rotation.

Factor naming and interpretation: the six factors are named according to the rotated factor loading array: the naming of the factors is based on the majority of the variables that have higher loading coefficients within the dimensions, and a few variables are allowed to run under other dimensions, as can be seen from Table 2.

Factor 1: Confidence expectation

The first common factor contains an example of a problem: Q16. I believe I can overcome the difficult task of learning a foreign language. Q15. I am confident in my progress in learning foreign languages. Q17. I feel that I have the ability to learn a foreign language well. Q18. In the process of learning a foreign language, I was able to effectively solve the problems I encountered. Q14. I think I can do well in the foreign language exam if I work hard. Q13. I believe that I am proficient in a foreign language. Q19. When I get good grades in my foreign language studies, I think it is the result of my own efforts. Q22.

I will take the initiative to find a foreign language learning method that suits me.

Naming argument: the first common factor has higher loadings on eight variables such as Q16, Q15, Q17, Q18, Q14, Q13, Q19, Q22, etc., which come from the two first-level indexes of achievement expectation and self-efficacy. This common factor mainly reflects the students' personal confidence in their ability to learn a foreign language well and their expectation to learn a foreign language well. Question items Q16, Q15, Q17, Q18, Q14, Q13, Q19, and Q22 can be thus named the 'confidence expectation factor'.

Factor 2: Intrinsic interest

The second common factor contains an example of a problem: Q2. I think learning a foreign language itself is an interesting thing. Q1. I study foreign languages because I am interested in the culture and language of different countries. Q3. When I learn a foreign language, I feel satisfied and happy in my heart. Q9. I want to show my language talent by learning a foreign language. Q7. My goal in learning a foreign language is to master the language and improve my abilities. Q28. I often feel excited and happy when learning a foreign language. Q30. I think learning a foreign language has made me feel the joy of growing up.

Naming argument: the second factor loads relatively heavily on seven indicators such as Q1, Q2, Q3, Q7, Q9, Q28, and Q30, which come from the first-level indicator of intrinsic motivation, and this factor mainly reflects the intrinsic interest in learning a foreign language. The factor consisting of question items Q1, Q2, Q3, Q7, Q9, Q28, and Q30 can therefore be called the 'intrinsic interest factor'.

Factor 3: Task value

The third common factor contains an example of a problem: Q11. I think learning a foreign language helps broaden my knowledge horizons. Q12. I believe that learning a foreign language can improve my overall quality. Q10. I think learning a foreign language is very important for my future development. Q25. My family is very supportive of my learning a foreign language.

Table 2

Factor Structure and Loadings

Load question	Factor	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6
		Confidence Expectation	Intrinsic Interest	Task Value	Educational Assistance	Goal- Driven	Emotion Attribution
Q16		.838					
Q15		.838					
Q17		.824					
Q18		.738					
Q14		.733					
Q13		.707					
Q19		.633					
Q22		.553					
Q1			.804				
Q2			.803				
Q3			.779				
Q30			.542				
Q9			.605				
Q7			.588				
Q28			.574				
Q10				.761			
Q11				.717			
Q12				.617			
Q25				.500			
Q24					.681		
Q26					.635		
Q27					.607		
Q4.						.821	
Q6						.784	
Q5						.696	
Q8						.655	
Q21							.678
Q29							.667
Q20							.573

Naming argument: the third factor loads more on the four indicators Q10, Q11, Q12, and Q25, which are four variables from the expected value theory, a first-level indicator, and this factor mainly reflects the sense of the value of foreign language learning. The factor consisting of question items Q10, Q11, Q12, and Q25 can be therefore named the ‘task value factor’.

Factor 4: Educational assistance

The fourth common factor contains an example of a question: Q26. My teacher will patiently answer my questions in foreign language learning. Q27. My friends will study foreign languages with me and encourage each other. Q24. I will regularly review the foreign language knowledge I have learned.

Naming argument: the fourth factor loads more on three indicators, Q24, Q26, and Q27, which come from the two first-level indicators of learning strategies and social support. This factor mainly reflects the individual’s self-support and social support in foreign language learning, their own help for themselves, and the help of their surroundings, so we can name the factor consisting of Q24, Q26, and Q27 as the ‘educational assistance factor’.

Factor 5: Goal-driven factor

The fifth common factor contains an example of a problem: Q4. I am studying a foreign language to get good grades so that I can graduate smoothly. Q8. When I study a foreign language, I pay more attention to how to get good grades in exams. Q6. I study a foreign language to get a good job or get a scholarship. Q5. I studied foreign languages because my parents and teachers expected me to study this course well.

Naming argument: the fifth factor loads more on four indicators — Q4, Q5, Q6, and Q8 — from the two first-level indicators of extrinsic motivation and goal orientation. This factor mainly reflects that the individual’s purpose in foreign language learning is mainly about external results, obtaining praise from parents, scholarships, getting good grades, etc. The factor consisting of Q4, Q5, Q6, and Q8 can thus be named the ‘goal-driven factor’.

Factor 6: Emotional attribution

The sixth common factor contains an example of a problem: Q21. I think the quality of foreign language learning performance has a lot to do with luck. Q29. I get frustrated when I encounter setbacks in my foreign language studies. Q20. When I have difficulties in learning a foreign language, I think I am not working hard enough.

Naming argument: the sixth factor loaded more on Q21, Q20, and Q29, which are three indicators from the two first-level indicators of attributional style and emotional experience. This factor mainly reflects that the individual’s purpose in learning a foreign language is mainly about external results, getting praise from parents, scholarships, getting good grades, etc., so the factor consisting of question items Q21, Q20, and Q29 can be called the ‘emotional attribution factor’.

Conclusion

1. Overall, six factors are more generalizable than ten factors and explain 67.718 % of the total variance. Therefore, we think it is more appropriate to select six factors. This study empirically analyzes the factors influencing foreign language learning motivation among Chinese students above matriculation level, revealing the complexity of its composition. It shows that students’ foreign language learning motivation is not driven by a single factor but is the result of a dynamic interaction and joint action of multiple dimensional factors. Our study consequently emphasizes the need to adopt diversified and individualized motivational strategies to effectively stimulate and maintain students’ foreign language learning motivation.

2. Data analysis found that about 50 % of students agreed that the fact that ‘they are interested in the culture and language of different countries’ is one of the important reasons why they choose to learn Russian (English), which directly confirms that the characteristics of the language of the target country, especially its culture, have a great influence on the choice of foreign language. In the principal component analysis, the load score of intrinsic motivation

(0.804) of ‘interest in the culture and language of the target country’ was significantly higher than that of ‘broadening knowledge horizons’ (0.761) and ‘improving comprehensive quality’ (0.717), which belonged to ‘task value motivation’. This indicates that the language characteristics of the target country affect the foreign language choice; interest in specific countries (such as Russia) is a crucial source of intrinsic motivation, and learners’ language choices are deeply affected by the cultural attraction and personal interests of the target country. It is particularly noteworthy that Russian-Chinese relations are currently undergoing a new stage of accelerated development. The results of this study are not only of far-reaching significance for enriching people-to-people exchanges between Russia and China but also provide a useful reference for predicting and meeting the demand for talents in future Russian-Chinese exchanges.

3. Limitations. Firstly, the original data in this study were collected through questionnaires, and the research subjects were Chinese students in Russia and mainland Chinese students. The scope of the subjects was limited and did not involve Chinese students from other countries. Secondly, the foreign languages are mainly Russian and English, and the follow-up study can expand the survey scope and the sample size.

4. Future perspectives. The research model used in this study only explored the effects

of six variables, namely confidence expectation, intrinsic interest, task value, educational assistance, goal-driven factor, and emotion attribution, on the motivation of foreign language learning among Chinese students above matriculation level, and excluded other potential variables. Principal component analysis (PCA) initially revealed six dimensions, and their structural stability still needs to be validated by confirmatory analysis. The research model only introduces independent variables and has not yet involved relevant mediating and moderating variables. Accordingly, more variables affecting the motivation of foreign language learning can be found via qualitative research in the future, making the research results more objective and comprehensive. As a bridge between the individual and the world, delving into language learning motivations is the cornerstone of fostering mutual understanding among civilizations and the international flow of talent. In the future, the specific impact of certain national conditions (such as economic cooperation, scientific and technological development, educational exchanges, etc.) on Chinese students’ choice of foreign languages can be further refined, and the ways to effectively stimulate and maintain learners’ interest in foreign language learning can be explored to better serve the development of Russia–China relations.

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Поступила в редакцию: 4 июня 2025.

Прошла рецензирование: 20 августа 2025.

Принята к печати: 1 декабря 2025.