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# Some Extrinsic Motivational Factors for Learning Critical Foreign Languages

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**Abstract.** In this article we discuss some extrinsic factors that impact students' motivation to learn foreign languages. These factors, attitude, goals and efforts were studied and analyzed by many researchers. Taha [8], Huang [6], Csizer and Dornyei [2], noted that attitudes toward the language community, native speakers and the language itself are important factors in the learning process. These factors enable creation of a positive attitude and tolerance and understanding of cultural, religious, and societal differences.

Hidi and Harackiewicz [5] and Schunk [5] discussed the influence of mastery and performance goals on academic motivation. They emphasized that only attractive and realistic goals can motivate people to act.

Csizer and Dornyei [2], Schunk [5] considered effort as one of criterion measures to examine motivational factors that determine direction and magnitude of motivated human behavior.

## 1. Introduction

Many scholars used various approaches to study goals as extrinsic motivational factors which allowed them to single out different types of goals: mastery goals, performance goals, realistic and attractive goals. Another extrinsic factor, attitude, is also considered as an important factor in the learning process, though, the difference between attitude and motivation has not been determined yet. It's crucial to underline that all motivational factors are intertwined and all together enable to establish successful communication in the target language environment.

## 2. Theoretical framework

This article is a part of a larger study on intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors that influence students' interest in learning foreign languages. It is based on previous research conducted by American as well as European scientists who made important contribution to this field. Various scientists examined different influential aspects of second language learning. The literature has shown that

Extrinsic motivational factors such as goals, attitude, and effort help to strengthen learners' involvement in the learning process and deepen their knowledge in the chosen field of study.

- Goals: Hidi and Harackiewicz [5] and Schunk (1991) discussed the influence of mastery and performance goals on academic motivation. They emphasized that only attractive and realistic goals can motivate people to act.



- Attitude: Taha [8], Huang [6], Csizer and Dornyei [2] noted that attitudes toward the language community, native speakers and the language itself are important factors in the learning process. These factors enable creation of a positive attitude and tolerance and understanding of cultural, religious, and societal differences.
- Efforts: Csizer and Dornyei (2005) Schunk [7] considered effort as one of criterion measures to examine motivational factors that determine direction and magnitude of motivated human behavior.

### 3. Population sample

The study population included students (573) taking critical and commonly taught languages at five public educational institutions, North Dakota State University (NDSU), University of North Dakota (UND), Minnesota State University of Moorhead (MSUM), Winona State University (WSU), St. Cloud State University (SCSU) and three private liberal arts colleges, Concordia College, St. Olaf College and Macalester College (Table 1). The participating educational institutions are located in two states: North Dakota and Minnesota. Study participants were students currently enrolled in the first four semesters of second language courses indicated above.

### 4. Definition terms

*Critical languages*: For the purpose of this study, the term ‘critical languages’ means that the United States does not have strong relationship with the countries in which these languages are spoken. This means that there is a shortage of professionals who speak these languages and understand the culture of the countries where these languages are spoken, which is important to create mutually fruitful relationships with these countries in the future.

*Commonly taught languages*: For the purpose of this study, the term commonly taught languages means Spanish, French and German.

*Target country*: For the purpose of this study, the term ‘target country’ means the country where the studies language is spoken.

*Target language*: For the purpose of this study, the term ‘target language’ means the studied language.

### 5. Methodology and instrumentation

The instrument of this study was developed based on the literature review and personal experience. It represents a questionnaire using a 6- point Likert scale from 1, *strongly disagree*, to 6, *strongly agree*.

SPSS and Microsoft Excel software were used to analyze the data. The descriptive statistics, including the means, standard deviations and sample, Independent sample t-test, and one-way ANOVA and Tukey honestly significant test were applied in this research.

### 6. Goals and efforts components of motivation theory

Hidi and Harackiewicz [5] considered the importance of goal setting for the purpose of academic motivation. They distinguished two types of goals that “represent contrasting patterns of motivational processes” [5]: mastery goals and performance goals. Mastery goals orient people to better understand the importance of their work and new skills that in turn augment their competency level, while performance goals enable people to positively evaluate their ability and reduce negative influence, which helps them to successfully compete and outperform others considering their abilities rather than efforts. Hidi and Harackiewicz [5] reviewed various studies and pointed out that some learners may have both mastery and performance goals while others may have neither. Hidi and Harackiewicz [5] emphasized the interconnectedness of mastery and performance goals concluding that one’s mastery goal directly affects performance goals.

Schunk [7] used expectancy value theories to argue the importance of goal setting for students’ academic motivation. According to expectancy-value theories, a behavior is a combination of people’s expectations of specific outcomes and the value level of these outcomes. Expectancy-value theories are grounded on the assumptions that only realistic and attractive goals motivate people to action.

These assumptions can equally be applied to critical language learning because some critical language learners are motivated by the uniqueness of the language and its culture while others are motivated by the possibility to apply the knowledge of the critical language in real life either for communication with family members and friends or with colleagues in social and business settings.

Based on self-efficacy theory, Schunk [7] pointed out the relationships between goals, efforts, and feedback. Schunk [7] argued that goals setting, efforts directed to positive outcomes and situational factors such as rewards and instructor's feedback affect students' performance and motivation. These factors indicate to students their progress in the learning process. "Motivation is enhanced when students perceive they are making progress in learning. In turn, as students work on tasks and become more skillful, they maintain a sense of self-efficacy for performing well" [7]. He emphasized that people with high sense of efficacy make greater efforts, "work harder and persist longer when they encounter difficulties than those who doubt their capabilities" [7].

In their study Csizer and Dornyei [2] explored motivational factors using two criterion measures, (a) the student's language choice and (b) the amount of efforts that students are willing to devote to their language learning. They singled out these two criterion measures as main concepts of motivational research because they are associated with direction and magnitude of motivated human behavior. Csizer and Kormos [3] emphasized that the level of energy and effort the learners are prepared to put into second language learning can be influenced by intercultural contacts.

Deci et al. [4] indicated that performance feedback supports learners' competence and facilitates their motivation. They specified that positive feedback fosters perceived competence, while negative feedback decreases perceived competence lessening learners' desire to move forward in the learning process and diminishing intrinsic motivation in general.

## **7. Attitude as a component of motivation theory**

Taha [8] conducted the study consisting of 34 international graduate students and 108 American undergraduate students enrolled in seven Spanish and French classes at a historically Black University. The participants completed the questionnaire that included three sections: (a) background information; (b) multiple choice questions about learning Arabic; (c) agreement/disagreement statements on integrative and instrumental motivation for learning Arabic based on a 5-point Likert scale [8].

After conducting studies, Taha [8] argued that besides motivation, another variable, attitude, is important in the learning process, and particularly in the foreign language learning. He noted that the difference between motivation and attitude has not been clearly explained yet. In second language teaching, motivation is usually associated with both learners' efforts and willingness to reach the goal of mastering second language skills and attitude [8].

Taha [8] analyzed intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for foreign language learning, Arabic in particular, and demonstrated that the attitude and motivation of students taking Arabic, is mainly for utilitarian purposes: over 60% of the study participant wanted to use the language for traveling, approximately 30% of the participants considered using Arabic for future careers. At the same time, over 80% considered it as a cultural and linguistic asset [8]. The study also showed that most American students believe that Arabic language programs should not be expanded, while most of international students thought that Arabic language programs should be strengthened.

Csizer and Dornyei [2] noted that motivation relates to learning outcomes, but indirectly. "In other words, motivation is a concept that explains why people behave as they do rather than how successful their behavior will be" [2]. In addition to motivation, other factors such as the learners' ability, learning opportunities, the quality of instruction among others, also contribute to the motivation-outcome relationship.

Csizer and Dornyei [2] emphasized the attitude toward the target language community as the main factor associated in their study "with attitudes toward meeting L2 speakers and traveling to their country, that is, attitude toward having direct contact with them" [2]. The study showed that integrativeness followed by instrumentality is "the key component in the generalized motivational disposition of language learners" (p. 28). Csizer and Dornyei [2] argued that, in an environment where

there is a lack of opportunity to directly communicate with native speakers, the relationship between self-confidence and attitude toward the target language speakers is determined by cultural interest.

Anderson and Suleiman [1] examined students' motivation to learn Arabic in the United Kingdom. They emphasized that students' motivation is connected with the personal, religious or political orientation of learners. Discussions of integrative and instrumental motivations led to consideration of other issues: such as should spoken dialects of Arabic or formal Arabic be taught; should students focus more on culture, literature, and religious texts or the language itself.

Anderson and Suleiman [1] also discussed the perspectives of Japanese, Chinese, and Arabic teachers and addressed the question of why these languages are considered difficult to teach and to learn. The scope and level of perception of each language rank from unusual vocabulary to the range of difficulties caused by diglossia. Finally, what makes a language difficult is not only inherent in the language itself but also in its unusual difference from one's native language. This difference can be either structural or cultural. [8]

Anderson and Suleiman [1] pointed out the increasing interest for Arabic among high school students and the implications of this interest for language departments at universities. Military school instructors "added a military perspective to these issues, describing their own purposes for teaching Arabic and the methodologies and assessment framework that they used" [1]

Anderson and Suleiman [1] discussed Manchester University students' survey on reasons for studying Arabic and four sets of students' orientations. For the first type of orientation, individual, the study revealed five of the most popular reasons for learning Arabic: social/personal; religious; understanding of Arab culture; career; and academic purposes [1]. It was stressed, however, that the results can be different depending on the participants' background. The second type of orientation is institutional. The issue discussed was to apply an intrinsic motivation approach and teach classical Arabic texts or an extrinsic motivation approach and offer an intensive training in the spoken language as the Foreign Office or Ministry of Defense do. The third type is the orientation toward Arabic language linguists. This orientation concerns other people's attitude towards students studying Arabic. Some of the issues of learning Arabic in Arabic speaking countries were discussed. The fourth is the orientation of students towards Arabs. It concerns methodologies and approaches to teach Arabic used in schools in various countries.

Anderson and Suleiman [1] highlighted the dual nature of language as a bearer of both public culture and private information. As a bearer of public culture, language was potentially integrative; as a bearer of private or secret information, it was a tool that could be instrumentalised. [1]

Huang [6] noted that second language learning is considered a social behavior and interaction with target culture and language representatives is a natural part of the language learning. For critical language learners, it is important to develop a positive attitude toward the target language culture that includes a positive attitude toward the language itself, native speakers or people speaking the target language, and a positive attitude toward and acceptance or at least tolerance and understanding of cultural, religious and societal differences. Developing and fostering a positive attitude toward a critical language culture is a long process, because critical language learners cognize it gradually starting with the alphabet. Genuine interest, clear and attainable goals, personal efforts and encouraging feedback play an important role in this process, and, in turn, when a positive attitude is established learners will be ready to put more effort and work toward reaching more complicated goals with a higher level of competence.

## 8. Significance of the study

To study the influence of extrinsic motivational factors on the foreign language learning we chose critical foreign languages. In the US, critical foreign languages are determined as languages that are not often taught offered in American universities and there is a lack of specialists with the knowledge of these languages. The Department of States determined 13 critical languages: Arabic, Azerbaijani, Bengali, Chinese, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Persian, Punjabi, Russian, Turkish, and Urdu.

## 9. Conclusion

For critical language learning attitude, efforts, goals and feedback are important motivational factors. Critical language learners have to overcome many barriers to achieve substantial progress. These barriers can be a non-Latin alphabet, a different, sometimes radically different, culture, a lack of communication with native speakers and so forth. In such situations, critical language learners have to be very enthusiastic and put a lot of personal effort to succeed in the learning process and achieve established goals. In the learning process, intrinsic motivation can change into extrinsic motivation and intrinsically motivated critical language learners can see the opportunities to apply their new knowledge and skills in practical way: traveling to countries where a target language is spoken, finding a job requiring knowledge of the critical language, further education in the field of the critical language and so forth. The established goals enable learners to realize the importance of their work, rationally evaluate the progress and maintain a high level of competence. In critical language learning, instructors are often the only authorities who can indicate the progress and evaluate the level of learners' competence. Thus, their opinion and feedback are very important for critical language learners and represent a strong motivational factor.

## 10. References

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