



## The Significance of Motivation in Education and Second Language Acquisition(SLA) Among L2 Learners

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### Abstract:

Motivation plays an essential role in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), especially because it influences pupil participation and long-term performance while learning a second language (L2). Various theoretical models emphasize the importance of motivation in affecting a learner's perseverance, attitude, and overall path toward language mastery. This article addresses the core ideas of motivation in SLA, emphasizing how they impact learner outcomes and success. It provides vital insights into how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, Gardner's Socio-Educational Model, and Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System drive L2 learning. The article also investigates the effects of contextual elements and individual learner characteristics, highlighting the significance of promoting motivation in order to enhance language learning efficacy. Understanding these motivating characteristics can help educators and program designers establish helpful settings. The article also examines contextual factors and individual learner differences, emphasizing the importance of fostering motivation within language learning programs. By understanding these motivational dynamics, educators and program designers can create supportive environments that encourage persistence, engagement, and a positive approach to language learning,



ultimately enhancing learners' proficiency and success in their target language acquisition journey.

**Key Words:** Motivation, Second Language Acquisition, Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation

#### المستخلص:

تستعرض هذه المقالة دور التحفيز في اكتساب اللغة الثانية (SLA)، مع التركيز على كيفية تأثيره على تفاعل المتعلم ونجاحه على المدى الطويل. يتم مناقشة النماذج النظرية مثل نموذج جاردنر الاجتماعي التربوي ونظام التحفيز في اللغة الثانية لدورني لتوضيح كيفية تشكيلها لإصرار المتعلمين ومواقفهم ونتائجهم في اكتساب اللغة الثانية (L2). كما تميز المقالة بين التحفيز الداخلي والخارجي، وتستعرض كيف تؤثر العوامل السياقية والاختلافات الفردية على التحفيز في تعلم اللغة. وتؤكد المقالة على أهمية تعزيز التحفيز لتحسين فعالية برامج تعلم اللغة الثانية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التحفيز، اكتساب اللغة الثانية، التحفيز الداخلي، التحفيز الخارجي

**Introduction:**

Second language acquisition (SLA) is a complicated process that involves several interacting factors, including cognitive abilities, environmental influences, and individual learner characteristics. Among these, motivation stands out as a key determinant of success in language learning. It is widely agreed that without sufficient motivation, learners are unlikely to achieve high proficiency, regardless of their intellectual abilities or the quality of instruction they receive. Thus, understanding the dynamics of motivation is essential for both learners and educators.

Motivation not only affects the decisions learners make—such as whether to begin learning a new language—but also influences the passion of their efforts and their willingness to continue when faced with challenges. Language learning is inherently hard, and learners are likely to encounter difficulties, whether they stem from grammatical complexities, pronunciation issues, or communicative misunderstandings. Therefore, motivation acts as the driving force that sustains learners through these difficulties and keeps them on the path to proficiency.

**Second Language Acquisition (SLA):**

Recent years have witnessed a surge in interest surrounding Second Language Acquisition (SLA), driven by its complexity and multifaceted nature. Research has increasingly integrated insights from various disciplines, including psychology, neuroscience, and linguistics, highlighting the diverse factors influencing SLA, such as age, cognitive strategies, and vocabulary learning techniques ([Howard, 2024; Wong et](#)



[al., 2024](#)). The Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST) has emerged as a significant framework, emphasizing the unpredictable and non-linear patterns of language development, necessitating longitudinal studies for a comprehensive understanding ([Behdarvandirad, 2024](#)). Additionally, age has been identified as a critical factor, with younger learners often perceived as having an advantage, although it is not the sole determinant of success in SLA ([Hasanah, 2023](#)). Furthermore, effective Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) are essential for enhancing language proficiency, suggesting that tailored teaching approaches can significantly impact learners' outcomes ([Ng & Wen, 2023](#)). This interdisciplinary approach underscores the evolving landscape of SLA research, indicating a promising direction for future studies.

### **Theories of Second Language Acquisition**

Recent scholarship has built upon foundational theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), introducing a variety of models that elucidate the processes through which individuals acquire a second language ([Lydia White, 2020](#)). Among the most significant theories are:

#### **1- Krashen's Input Hypothesis**

Stephen Krashen asserts that comprehensible input—language input that is marginally above the learner's existing proficiency level—is essential for SLA. This hypothesis underscores the necessity of exposure to meaningful language within contextual frameworks, contending that learners achieve optimal language acquisition when they comprehend the input they receive ([Sanako, 2024](#)).

## 2- Interaction Hypothesis

Michael Long's Interaction Hypothesis posits that meaningful interactions between learners and proficient speakers are critical for language development. This theory emphasizes the importance of collaborative problem-solving and the negotiation of meaning as fundamental elements of effective language learning ([Sanako, 2024](#)).

## 3- Sociocultural Theory (SCT)

SCT, which has its roots in Lev Vygotsky's work, places a strong emphasis on the part that social interaction and cultural context play in language acquisition. It places language learning into cultural frameworks by arguing that learning happens through group activities and practical language applications ([Sanako, 2024](#)).

## 4- The Affective Filter Theory

This theory, which was also created by Krashen, contends that incentive and anxiety are two emotional elements that have a big influence on language learning. Language input can be processed more effectively in a happy learning setting because it lowers the affective filter ([Sanako, 2024](#)).

## The Concept of Motivation in Educational Psychology

In **learning psychology**, motivation refers to the process of initiating, directing, and sustaining purposeful behaviors. It is a critical factor in various aspects, including education, employment, and personal growth. Motivation is generally classified into two types: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation arises from the inherent satisfaction of engaging in

an activity, while extrinsic motivation is driven by external influences such as rewards, recognition, or the pursuit of specific goals ([Iqbal et al., 2023](#)).

**Social cognitive theory** provides a more comprehensive analysis of how **self-efficacy** and **goal setting**, both of which are particularly significant in educational contexts, contribute to shaping motivation. Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020) highlight that students with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to persist, exert substantial effort, and attain academic excellence ([Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020](#)).

### Theories of motivation

Theories of motivation in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) encompass various frameworks that explain how motivation influences language learning. These theories can be categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, cognitive theories, and interdisciplinary approaches. Understanding these theories is crucial for enhancing SLA outcomes.

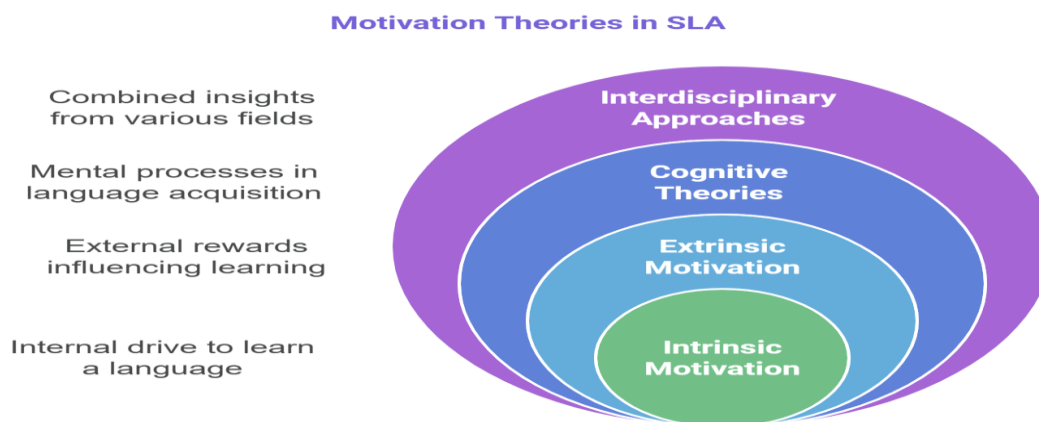


Figure 1: Motivation Theories in SLA

## Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

- **Intrinsic Motivation:** This includes factors such as the desire for knowledge, achievement, and stimulation, which drive learners to engage in language learning for personal satisfaction ([He & Li, 2023](#)).
- **Extrinsic Motivation:** This involves external factors like rewards, recognition, and social pressures, which can significantly influence learners' engagement and persistence in SLA ([He & Li, 2023](#)).

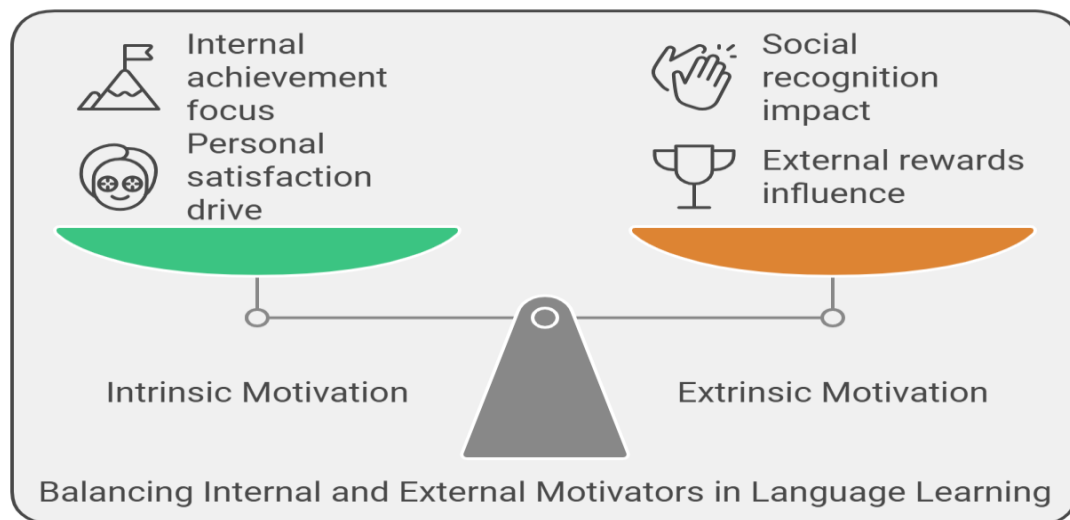


Figure 2: Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

## Cognitive Theories of Motivation

- **Self-Determination Theory (SDT):** Emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering motivation ([Znanetska, 2022](#)).
- **Goal Theories:** Focus on the role of specific goals in motivating learners, impacting their learning strategies and outcomes ([Znanetska, 2022](#)).



- **Attribution Theory:** Examines how learners' beliefs about their abilities and the reasons for their successes or failures affect their motivation ([Znanetska, 2022](#)).

### Interdisciplinary Approaches

- The integration of psychological concepts, such as Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System, highlights the influence of self-perception and identity on motivation in SLA ([Behdarvandirad, 2024](#)). This approach enriches the understanding of learner motivation by incorporating insights from psychology into language learning contexts.

While motivation is a critical factor in SLA, some researchers argue that its impact can vary significantly based on individual learner characteristics and contextual factors, suggesting a need for more nuanced studies that consider these variables.

### Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System

Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (**L2MSS**) emphasizes the significance of self-concept and personal goals in language learning motivation. This model comprises three components: the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience. Each element plays a distinct role in shaping learners' motivation and outcomes.

#### Ideal L2 Self

- Represents the learner's vision of themselves as proficient in the target language.





- Acts as a motivational driver, encouraging learners to engage in language learning activities to achieve this ideal.
- Studies show that a strong Ideal L2 Self correlates with increased effort and achievement in language tasks ([Howard, 2024; Wong et al., 2024](#)).

### **Ought-to L2 Self**

- Reflects external expectations from society, family, or career demands.
- While it is an external motivator, it can significantly influence learners' commitment to language learning.
- Research indicates that the Ought-to L2 Self often has a stronger impact on effort and achievement than the Ideal L2 Self ([Wong et al., 2024](#)).

### **L2 Learning Experience**

- Encompasses the immediate learning environment, including instructional quality and peer dynamics.
- Positive learning experiences enhance motivation and engagement in the language learning process.

Conversely, while the L2MSS framework highlights the importance of self-concept in motivation, it is essential to consider that external factors, such as classroom dynamics and teaching methods, can also play a critical role in shaping learners' motivation and success in language acquisition ([J. Li & Tai, 2024](#)).

## **Gardner's Socio-Educational Model**

Gardner's Socio-Educational Model remains a cornerstone in understanding motivation in second language acquisition (SLA). It distinguishes between integrative and instrumental motivation, highlighting how these types of influence learners' engagement and success. Integrative motivation fosters a desire to connect with the culture and community of the target language, while instrumental motivation focuses on practical benefits, such as career advancement. This model emphasizes that integrative motivation often leads to deeper, more sustained engagement in language learning.

### **Integrative Motivation**

- Cultural Connection: Learners motivated by integrative factors often seek to understand and engage with the culture of the language, enhancing their learning experience.
- Long-term Engagement: Research indicates that integrative motivation correlates with continued language study, even amidst challenges ([Y. Li, 2023](#)).

### **Instrumental Motivation**

- Practical Benefits: Instrumental motivation is linked to tangible outcomes, such as improved job prospects or academic success, driving learners to acquire language skills for specific goals ([Netta, 2023](#)).
- Behavioral Impact: Studies show that instrumental motivation can lead to different learning behaviors, influencing effort and emotional states in learners ([Znanetska, 2022](#)).

While Gardner's model provides a robust framework, it is essential to recognize that motivation is multifaceted and can vary significantly among learners, necessitating tailored teaching approaches to foster both types of motivation effectively ([Nat, 2022](#)).

## Types of Motivation

The two basic types of motivation—**intrinsic** and **extrinsic**—are crucial for understanding motivation in the context of **Second Language Acquisition (SLA)**. Both types of motivation have a significant impact on a learner's engagement with and proficiency in acquiring a second language, such as English.

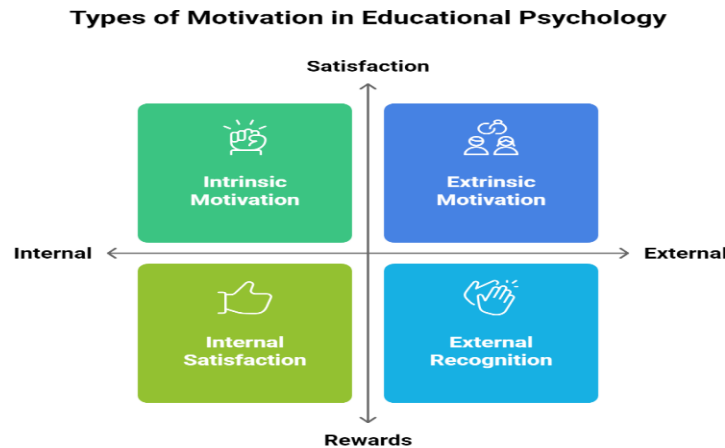


Figure 3 :Types of Motivation

## Intrinsic Motivation

**Intrinsic motivation** indicates a state in which a learner involves active participation in an activity for its inherent rewards. In educational settings, this form of motivation fosters deeper and continued interaction. In ESL learning, intrinsic motivation is demonstrated by learners who



seek to learn English due to their enthusiasm for language acquisition or the motivation to interact with English-speaking communities. Furthermore, intrinsic motivation has a significant correlation with ongoing learning perseverance and enhanced cognitive involvement ([Zhou & Zhang, 2024](#)).

Research by Schunk & DiBenedetto (2020) further highlights how intrinsic motivation is nurtured in educational settings that emphasize autonomy. When learners are allowed to set their own goals and take ownership of their learning, intrinsic motivation flourishes, leading to long-term success ([Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020](#)). Vallerand & Verner-Filion (2020) also note that **passion** plays a critical role in maintaining intrinsic motivation, particularly in contexts where students can explore their interests deeply ([Vallerand et al., 2020](#)).

Further evidence of the role of autonomy in fostering intrinsic motivation within educational settings is provided by research of Schunk and DiBenedetto (2020). Long-term success results from allowing students to take charge of their education and create their own goals as this fosters intrinsic motivation ([Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020](#)). Additionally, ([Vallerand et al., 2020](#)).point out that passion is essential for preserving intrinsic motivation, especially in settings where students can delve deeply into their interests.

### **Extrinsic Motivation**

**Extrinsic motivation** is driven by external incentives such as evaluations, praise, or the potential for professional advancement. In the



context of **ESL (English as a Second Language)**, extrinsic motivation can inspire learners to study English with the aim of passing an exam, securing better career, or fulfill certain academic criteria. Whereas extrinsic incentives can be effective for achieving short-term goals, they may not necessarily foster long-term commitment to language learning. According to ([Kotera et al., 2023](#)), a balanced approach that integrates both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation may contribute to sustaining long-term commitment and achievement.

Furthermore, ([Iqbal et al., 2023](#)) emphasized that in higher education, extrinsic motivators such as career goals and institutional support are influential. However, a quality educational environment that supports learners' needs is essential for sustained engagement

Moreover, ([Iqbal et al., 2023](#)) highlighted that in higher education, extrinsic motivators, including career aspirations and institutional support, play a significant role. However, for sustained engagement, it is crucial to provide a high-quality educational environment that adequately addresses the needs of learners ([Iqbal et al., 2023](#)).

### **Integrative and Instrumental Orientations in Second Language Acquisition (SLA)**

Within the framework of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), two critical motivational constructs—**integrative orientation** and **instrumental orientation**—are key to understanding how learners interact with a second language.



**Integrative orientation** reflects a desire to learn a language to connect with its associated culture or social environment. Learners who adopt this approach are typically intrinsically motivated, driven by a genuine interest in engaging with the people, traditions, and communities of the target language. For example, in the context of ESL, learners might aim to achieve fluency in English to build deeper connections with English-speaking communities. Integrative motivation is often linked to higher levels of language competence and sustained learning outcomes ( [Gardner, 2021](#)).

In contrast, **instrumental orientation** is motivated by pragmatic, goal-oriented factors including enhancing career opportunities, academic success, or financial benefits. Individuals with this type of motivation are often influenced by external factors, aiming to develop language proficiency to attain specific objectives, such as gaining employment or performing well on examinations. In situations where proficiency in a second language, such as English, is perceived as essential for professional advancement, instrumental motivation can be particularly effective([He, Y., & Weng, 2022](#)).

### **The Role of Motivation in Influencing SLA Among L2 Learners**

Motivation is one of the most important predictors of success in **Second Language Acquisition (SLA)**. Learners who are both integrative and instrumentally motivated tend to exhibit stronger perseverance and better language outcomes. **Gardner's socio-educational model** underscores the importance of motivation, especially integrative motivation, as a key factor in L2 learning success ( [Gardner, 2021](#)).

For ESL learners, motivation influences their willingness to engage in language tasks, seek opportunities to practice English, and overcome challenges such as cultural and linguistic barriers. Studies by Reeve & Cheon (2021) have shown that autonomy-supportive teaching practices can significantly enhance both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, thereby increasing learner engagement and improving long-term retention of the language(Reeve & Cheon, 2021).

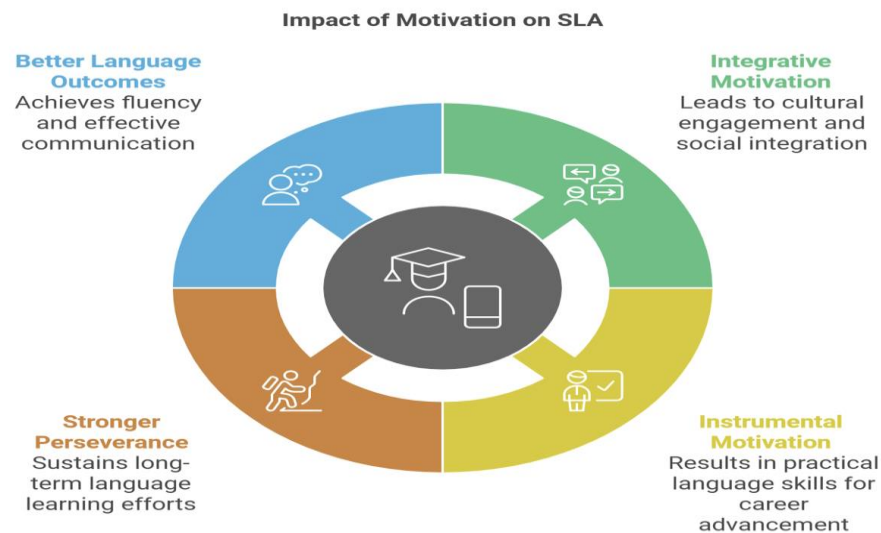


Figure 4: Impact of Motivation on SLA

## Conclusion

Motivation is a critical factor that drives success in ESL learning. Whether intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative, or instrumental, motivation shapes learners' engagement with language acquisition, influences their willingness to persist, and affects their overall proficiency. Understanding the balance between these types and orientations of motivation allows educators to design learning environments that support both short-term and long-term goals. Teachers play a key role



in cultivating motivation through autonomy-supportive teaching strategies, culturally relevant lessons, and meaningful feedback. By tapping into the right combination of motivational factors, educators can help learners build a sustained passion for English, leading to lifelong language learning success.

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