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# Impacts of the Motivations of English Learning on the Psychological Needs under Self-determination Theory

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***Abstract:*** *Autonomous motivation plays a big role in language learning, which makes it a popular and vital direction to explore the measures of taking advantage of intrinsic motivation to achieve better teaching effects in educational research. This paper revolves around the relationship between motivation and self-determination theory regarding psychological needs. By exploiting the related empirical studies into learners studying English as a foreign language, this analytical paper analyses and compares the results of these empirical studies, which reveals that intrinsic motivation performs better than extrinsic motivation on these psychological levels. This paper concludes that intrinsic motivation can generally facilitate stronger autonomous learning, form higher competence, and improve greater relatedness. Therefore, educators should figure out ways to strategically tailor pedagogy to enhance intrinsic motivation and facilitate autonomous learning.*

***Keywords:*** *Motivation, Language Learning, Autonomous Learning, Self-determination Theory, Psychological Needs*

## 1. Introduction and Background

Motivation has been regarded as one of the critical factors affecting the learning outcomes of foreign language learning. [1] According to Dörnyei (2003), the dominant theories of motivation have developed through three main periods for the past five decades. [2] The earliest one is the socio-psychological period when Gardner and Wallace claim that the motivation to learn a foreign or second language (L2) is to enhance or hinder communication with other communities in multicultural settings. It was followed by the cognitive-situated period when self-determination theory (SDT) was introduced by Deci and Ryan. [3] The latest one is the process-oriented period initiated by Dörnyei and Ottó when they first argue that motivation is dynamically evolving rather than static for language learning. [4] While a variety of motivational theoretical approaches have been suggested and no agreement has been reached regarding the exact meaning of motivation, this paper will focus on SDT as an elaboration of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Even though extrinsic motivation is no longer considered a counterpart of intrinsic motivation, a considerable number of studies have illustrated that intrinsic motivation generates more positive learning outcomes than extrinsic motivation. [5] This paper will use the related empirical studies into learners studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to demonstrate how intrinsic motivation performs better than extrinsic motivation on these psychological levels. The main sections included in this paper are 1) to give a brief overview of the recent history of motivation for EFL. 2) to explain the main theories that this paper will focus on. 3) to outline a particular motivation type for the EFL community. 4) review the findings of the latest research, which mainly concentrates on the influences that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have on the learning outcomes of EFL from the fundamental psychological needs suggested by SDT. [6]

## 2. Theories and Definitions

Deci and Ryan (1985) define SDT as being able to regulate the behaviours through which a person can become oneself as integrative. According to Deci, self-determining means' engaging in an activity with a full sense of wanting, choosing, and personal endorsement'. In light of the SDT interpreted by Deci and Ryan, three underlying types of broad categories are suggested: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Vallerand (1997) presents intrinsic motivation as dealing with a motivational behaviour performed for its own sake in order to generate pleasure and satisfaction intrinsic

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to this activity. [7] Regarding extrinsic motivation, Deci presents that it involves behaviours that come with instrumental outcomes such as status, approval, money, and many other things that people chase not because of personal interests but needs. The last type - amotivation refers to the absence of motivation due to the lack of any kind of incentives (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

## 3. Types of Intrinsic Motivation and Extrinsic Motivation

In the Hierarchical Model of Motivation, Vallerand (1997) categorizes the intrinsic motivation into three different types: a) to know, e.g., to obtain new knowledge through which people can experience pleasure and satisfaction; b) to accomplish things: e.g., to experience the pleasure of surpassing oneself; c) to experience simulation: e.g., to read on a bunch of exciting stuff to achieve high excitement. Extrinsic motivation is different from intrinsic motivation in several essential ways. It is represented by four types of regulatory styles: a) external regulation, engaging in a behaviour controlled by certain external contingencies and weak in maintenance and easy to transfer as long as the contingencies are removed; [8] b) introjection: engaging in a behaviour of individuals' involvement into external regulations and the contingent consequences are controlled by individuals themselves; c) identification: engaging in a behaviour that brings the value which is fully realized and accepted by individuals and is more likely to become a part of their identity; d) integration: engaging in a behaviour of simultaneously identifying the importance of personal behaviours and building an integration between these identification and various aspects of the self.

From the psychological-needs perspective, three innate psychological needs are subsumed under SDT: autonomy (or self-determination), competence, and relatedness (Deci, 1992). According to Deci, people are motivated by these innate needs to be competent, self-determining, and related to significant others to enhance their capabilities in specific areas.

## 4. Research findings

### *4.1. Impacts of Intrinsic Motivation on Autonomous Learning*

One of the three basic psychological needs mentioned above – autonomy is regarded as being highly related to intrinsically motivated behaviours (Deci, 1992). According to Deci and Ryan (1985), the need for autonomy refers to the desire to be self-initiating and self-regulating of people's actions. The definition of intrinsic motivation given by Vallerand (1997) indicates that intrinsic motivation represents the kind of motivational behaviours performed for their own sake to experience pleasure and satisfaction. By providing choice and acknowledging people’s inner experience, people’s intrinsic motivation was enhanced along with their confidence in performance (Deci, 2000). In other words, people are more autonomous when motivated intrinsically to engage in an activity. This essay will review three empirical studies to establish the argument stated here.

The first one is the research study done by Zainuddin and Perera (2019), in which intrinsic motivation is turned out to satisfy the need for autonomy in a flipped classroom that has worked to facilitate intrinsic motivation along with this study. [9] Zainuddin and Perera aim to identify the differences between a flipped classroom and a non-flipped one in students' EFL learning from the SDT perspective. Sixty-one undergraduate students participated in this study, with thirty-one students coming from a flipped class and thirty from a non-flipped one. In contrast, the data collected via the survey questionnaires demonstrates that there is a significant difference between the flipped and non-flipped groups regarding autonomous learning. Zainuddin and Perera then claim that the flipped environment has some positive impacts on students' intrinsic motivation, in which students' learning autonomy is enhanced.

It is commendable that Zainuddin and Perera employed a mixed-method research approach in their research, trying to reach a logical result through cross-verification and validation by both quantitative and qualitative analysis. For instance, in addition to the pre-test, post-test, and various questionnaires, they adopt a focus-group interview approach among ten participants from the flipped group, attempting to investigate students' perceptions about their autonomy. However, Zainuddin and Perera does not define that the four subtypes underlying extrinsic motivation respectively reflect some level of self-determination. [10] Noles (2001) argues that integrated regulation is the most self-determined, while external regulation is considered the least self-determined one among all the four types. Deci and Ryan (2000) also state that students' autonomy is significantly impacted by their extrinsic motivation. Thus, it is almost certain that the most self-determined type of extrinsic motivation - integrated regulation can

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meet the psychological need for personal autonomy, at least to some extent. As evidence, the second empirical study conducted by Yu (2020) on examining the autonomous motivation of EFL learners at the tertiary level regarding the regulatory styles (including the intrinsic knowledge and accomplishment) shows that the integrated regulation factor obtains the highest score among all six styles tested in the study.[11] This indicates the strong influence of integrated regulation as a subtype of extrinsic motivation in an EFL context. Despite the result illustrated in Yu's study, it is also necessary to highlight that the report demonstrates that intrinsic knowledge performs as the second important factor ($M$=5.46), slightly lower the score ($M$=5.83) gained by integrated regulation.

In Zainuddin and Perera's study, though there are no such external rewards such as incentives, rewards, or punishments applied in this case study, its research design indicated the following five items under the umbrella of extrinsic motivation: to review it as a mandatory course requirement; to show the capabilities to their instructor, family, and friends; to get better career and job prospects; to achieve better grades; to avoid being reproached by their instructor. In line with the interpretation of the identified four types of extrinsic motivation given by Deci and Ryan, none of the five items can be categorized into integrated regulation. In conclusion, this empirical study will make itself more convincing if the different levels of extrinsic motivation represented by the subtypes are also considered.

The third empirical study supports the claim listed as the subheading by presenting students' intrinsic motivation is enhanced due to the increase of autonomy by comparing this factor with another five ones attested: integrated regulation, identified regulation, introjected regulation, external regulation, and amotivation in a cooperative learning (CL) class. [12] Compared to Zainuddin and Perera's study, Ning and Hornby (2014) excel in including the most self-determining type - integrated regulation as a measured factor. At first glance, Ning and Hornby's work seems convincing. However, looking it into more in-depth, the assessment method employed in this case may reduce the impact of external pressure, such as fulfilling course requirements or gaining a reward. To be more specific, 70% of the final score is allocated to the final exam at the end of the semester. In comparison, only 30% is calculated through class teamwork performance with rewards as incentives. This assessment may result in a low contribution that rewards have as external factors.

In sum, the focus of interest in Zainuddin and Perera's study is to what extent students' autonomy is influenced by their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from the SDT perspective underlying the innate psychological need - autonomy. Zainuddin and Perera's paper indicates that the group with higher intrinsic motivation conducted more autonomous learning behaviours. What remains unclear is how intrinsic motivation surpasses extrinsic motivation concerning the four specific subtypes, particularly the most self-determined type – integrated regulation (Noles, 2001). Meanwhile, Yu's study is used to exemplify that a further detailed study of the subtypes of extrinsic motivation should be taken into consideration while comparing the influences intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation have on the need for autonomy in the EFL context. Finally, Ning and Hornby's paper is illustrated as a further exhibition that intrinsic motivation usually contributes more to studying EFL.

### *4.2. Impacts of Intrinsic Motivation on Competence*

Another psychological need under SDT – competence- is also tested in Zainuddin and Perera's research paper. In over three months, Zainuddin and Perera conducted three experimental post-tests to examine the competence of both the flipped group and the non-flipped one in terms of the learning of EFL. In their study, both the experimental and control groups are tested on their comprehensive English proficiency regarding vocabulary and writing, listening comprehension, and oral presentation. Besides, Ning and Hornby's research validates the effect that CL has on various motivational types. This paper will also be reviewed in this section to support the priority intrinsic motivation has on meeting the need to be competent for language learning for EFL.

In an attempt to testify if students being taught with two different teaching models, namely the flipped classroom and non-flipped one, under the same instructor vary concerning the study of EFL, Zainuddin and Perera designed a systematic assessment method under certain circumstances. According to the post-tests, there was no significant difference in students' competence in these areas found in post-test 1. Nevertheless, a significant difference was indicated in the second post-test, and an even greater one was found in the third. Via comparing the different testing scores in three stages of post-tests, Zainuddin and Perera claim that students from the flipped class are more competent with tasks and activities as they were motivated to develop self-directed learning compared with the conventional classroom. As noted earlier, as a part of Ning and Hornby's research outcome, it is found that students demonstrate higher communicational competence in CL group work. The ability to speak effectively to complete tasks brings

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them feelings of achievement and a high level of satisfaction obtained by learning EFL.

Zainuddin and Perera convincingly present that students from a flipped classroom functioning as facilitating students' intrinsic motivation demonstrate higher competence regarding the learning of EFL. However, in this single case study without including a large sample size, there is not too much indication whether this kind of situation is common or rare. Despite this, the authors provide much direct evidence of what is studied. Notably, in the three post-test stages, the first test did not show any difference in students' competence, but the subsequent two did. It indicates the researchers demonstrate the attitudes of rigorous and preciseness in their study, which, to some extent, makes their work more reliable. Regarding Ning and Hornby's paper, attention has to be paid to that as all the data collected from this study is based on a self-report instrument rather than the actual testing result on students' competence of their English proficiency; the finding derived from this study is weakened to some extent.

First, the empirical study conducted by Zainuddin and Perera well illustrates that students with higher intrinsic motivation tend to demonstrate higher competence in their study. This finding is coherent with what this paper assumes about the preferred role intrinsic motivation plays for EFL in light of the competence under SDT. This study would be more useful if a broader range of participants were explored. Second, Ning and Hornby's paper consolidates the view from another perspective that the preferable role intrinsic motivation has over extrinsic motivation.

### *4.3. Impacts of Intrinsic Motivation on Relatedness*

Regarding relatedness, Deci interprets people are inherent in connecting with others who are significant to them (1992). A large number of empirical studies have proved that interactive learning through peer interaction or student-instructor interaction contributes to language learning. [13] Hence, the question is, under what condition will people's intention to connect with others be strengthened? Zainuddin and Perera report such a case in which an environment was created to encourage participants to socialize more with others from their community. Meanwhile, the research mentioned above conducted by Ning and Hornby is utilized again as it exemplifies the same finding shared by Zainuddin and Perera.

In Zainuddin and Perera's paper, they expect to examine the level of peer interaction and engagement in class activities in both the flipped classroom, from which students demonstrate more intrinsically motivated behaviours and non-flipped, from which fewer intrinsically motivated behaviours are found. Different class activities are designed separately for the flipped and non-flipped classrooms with the same amount of teaching time. In contrast, it is found that most students in the flipped classroom can interact with their peers inside and outside the classroom, while the non-flipped group fails to indicate likewise. Zainuddin and Perera then state that most intrinsically motivated students in the flipped class demonstrate better peer interaction among themselves. In another empirical study used as supporting evidence, Ning and Hornby claim that students' team enthusiasm is facilitated in the CL. Thus, they are motivated to interact more with their peers and achieve better learning outcomes.

However, Zainuddin and Perera's report needs to indicate how peer interaction is assessed when the actual length of interactive activity designed for the flipped classroom and non-flipped one is different. In the course design, 60 minutes of conversational activity and interactive feedback session out of 100 minutes is designed for the flipped classroom, while only 35 minutes of conversational activity is implemented for students from the non-flipped group. This same issue is also indicated in Ning and Hornby's study. Further explanation about the measurement of distinguishing the time spent and level of intention on interaction should be displayed in their course design.

On this basis, the above two empirical studies conclude that students are more likely to socialize with others during English study when intrinsically motivated. What both Zainuddin and Perera's paper and Ning and Hornby's paper fail to do remarkably is to clarify the intention and activity itself while defining the willingness to participate in peer interaction.

## 5. Conclusion

From the review of the current literature, it can be seen that intrinsic motivation demonstrates more value than extrinsic motivation for EFL learners. This is embodied in three aspects: 1) Intrinsic motivation can satisfy the learners' basic psychological needs to be autonomous about their behaviours. 2) EFL learners are proven to be more competent when studying in an environment where intrinsically motivated behaviours are activated. 3) Students tend to relate themselves with others they view important

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through interactions and communication that are usually activated by intrinsically motivated actions and proved to show some positive influences on the learning process of EFL. As motivation is such a complexity, it is hard to define an all-round study that considers everything. Based on the literature included here, this paper provides an alternative view to understand the impacts that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have on the studies in the motivation study of EFL learning area.

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