



# The Influences of Intrinsic Motivation on Adult Beginners of Learning English

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**Abstract.** In recent years, learning English as a second language has become a necessary learning need in life, social and business circles. In the face of this situation, many adults are beginning to learn English for their personal interests, working needs and so on. However, adult beginners have difficulties in facilitating English learning due to the special group of the adult population in terms of their identity and limitations for personal reasons. This review paper will take the characteristics of adult beginners as its premise. This paper aims to analyze the influence of intrinsic motivation learning on adult beginners' English learning, especially their intrinsic factors of learning motivation. Regarding to how the topic will be reviewed, this study will take a retrospective approach due to time constraints. The review will be based on journals published and studies done by scholars. This paper will summarise and condense the journals published by scholars and the research done by researchers, taking into account the current state of development with analysis and recommendations. The ultimate goal is to promote adult English education. This research provides a basis for adults to remain positive motivation at the early stages of English language learning, and for teachers to improve teaching strategies, thereby achieving a better outcome.

**Keywords:** Adult Beginner · English Learning · Intrinsic Motivation

## 1 Introduction

Recently, English language learning has been popular among learners of higher age groups other than full-time students. For the worldwide circulation of English, Spolsky explains that the association of English with modern technology, economic progress, and internationalization has encouraged English learners all over the world [1]. Adult education is one of the continuing educations for people above high school or college age, such as adults starting a degree program, learning professional skills to advance a career, or simply taking courses of interest. Adult education as a form of education provides adults with opportunity to relearn.

After looking up the research before, many previous studies focus on primary and secondary education and less research on adult education. This paper wishes to study the influence of intrinsic motivation on adult English learners by analyzing the intrinsic factors of motivation and summarizing the importance of intrinsic motivation. The ultimate

goal of the research is to promote the learning and teaching of English to adults. This study lays a foundation for learners to maintain motivation at the beginning of English learning, and for teachers to improve their teaching strategies.

## 2 The Intrinsic Motivation of Learning English

Motivation is a concept in psychology, which was first applied by American psychologist Woodworth in 1918. Motivation is mainly manifested as a subjective desire or intention to pursue a certain goal, which is the conscious consciousness of people in pursuit of a certain intended purpose [2]. Therefore, motivation is generated by learners' personal needs. About learning a language, Gardner, a Canadian psychologist, points out that the motivation to learn a foreign language refers to the desire of learning a certain language with effort and good learning attitude maintained for this purpose. Motivation, as a non-intellectual factor, promotes language learning indirectly [3]. In second language acquisition, motivation is considered to be one of the most dynamic factors among individual learners [4].

According to the source of motivation, learning motivation is mainly divided into intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Among them, intrinsic motivation refers to the motivation that arises spontaneously from the needs of the individual such as intrinsic interest, perceived value, or individual affective state. Intrinsic motivation refers to the participation in learning activities is based on the learner's interest or pleasure. Extrinsic motivation refers to a learner's motivation due to external factors, such as other people around him or her, the learning environment, or other noises. Specifically, the intrinsic factors of motivation are the main drivers of learning behavior [5].

A graduate student from Shanghai International Studies University presents her paper on the motivation and experience of learning English as an example of migrant workers in Shanghai [6]. This student conducted a questionnaire among 70 adults between the ages of 20 and 40 [6]. Their motivations for participating in English training include interests in foreign culture, improving their own cultural skills, self-seeking for career advancement and the value of English social interaction [6]. Results find that there are three types of intrinsic motivation for learning. The first is interest in the activity itself. Learners are driven by interest to explore new areas and gain satisfaction, which inspires further learning. The second is perceived value of activity. The value here about the personal relevance to the learner, in the expectation of value, and even more in the inner value of the activity. The third is the various emotional states. In the process of learning, people experience emotional fluctuations such as confidence, anxiety, fear, etc. Different mental states affect learners from within.

## 3 The Significance of Intrinsic Motivation

### 3.1 Long-Term and Lasting Stimulation

The influence of intrinsic motivation is positive and lasting. Participating in learning activities is based on the learner's own interests or pleasures. It does not require external incentives. The concept of lifelong learning has been proposed and developed to this

day. It encourages adults to learn and act actively throughout their life cycles [7]. For personal interests, the intrinsic motivation can be the lasting incentive to learn and help people achieve long-term success.

### 3.2 The Improvement of Efficiency

Cultivating intrinsic motivation can improve adults' learning efficiency. It is relevant to adult learners' characteristics. On the one hand, the difference between adult learners and full-time students is that adults focus more on their work, at family, or other thing else with lots of energy. These aspects take up most of these adults' time. Therefore, from their perspectives, their time to learn English is limited. On the other hand, adults are more difficult to concentrate than full-time students. Adult beginners may not have been to school or have been out of school for a while, so they are unfamiliar with the matter of learning and do not know how to concentrate on learning. In this case, if adults stimulate their inner strength to learn, they can eliminate distractions and learn with high quality and efficiency.

### 3.3 The Learning Effect of Output

The intrinsic motivation can better translate knowledge into effective output. According to materialistic dialectics, the intrinsic factors of motivation are the basis of change, and extrinsic factors are the conditions of change. Extrinsic factors of motivation act through intrinsic factors. If learners focus on the essentials, they can acquire knowledge more effectively, and turn inputs into outputs. Successful output will increase adult beginners' learning interest and confidence. Taking oral language learning as an example, Thurman speculated that there are three aspects to oral language production: accuracy, complexity, and fluency [8]. Oral language as an output item is accumulated by learners through the continuous input of basic English of vocabulary accumulation, grammar changes and listening practice.

### 3.4 Creativity

The intrinsic motivation plays an important role in the cultivation of individuals in learning and in stimulating creativity at work. Williams, a American psychologist, believes that creative behaviour is not just divergent cognition, but also includes curiosity, adventure, challenge and imagination [9]. Certainly, these factors are all related to intrinsic motivation. Learners will take the initiative to ask questions and complete tasks. People actively search for what they have learned in that current situation to deal with what may happen. Also, Amabrie's research on creativity shows that if learners are dominated by intrinsic motivation, even if there are interferences from extrinsic factors, they will still keep an open mind, challenge risks, and solve problems creatively [10]. It is in this way that the novelty and uniqueness of creativity can be better reflected. Otherwise, study or work will be difficult to succeed.

## 4 The Influences of Intrinsic Motivation

Admittedly, motivation is necessary to start and carry out long-term learning [11]. Strong learning motivation is the precondition of a learner's action. More precisely, the intrinsic factors of motivation are the main drivers of learning. In English learning, intrinsic motivation is considered to be the key factor affecting learners' English learning.

### 4.1 Interests in Activity

Everyone knows that interest is the learner's best teacher that can motivate learners. Strong interest will enable individuals to form a positive learning attitude. As a non-native language, interest is very important for adult beginners to learn English. "Interest is the starting point of learning enthusiasm and initiative, which can motivate learners to have a desire to know the world, acquire knowledge, and explore the internal rules of things with a pleasant mood" [12]. For learners, once they are interested in English, they will bring their subjective initiative into full play in the process of learning. The source of adults' interest in English may be English TV series or movies, English music, some Western cultural elements, or a longing for Western tourist cities. These interests can motivate learners to learn English and cultural knowledge from within.

### 4.2 Value of Activity

Another influence of internal factors of motivation on second language acquisition is the received value of the activity. The value here includes personal relevance of value, the anticipated value of outcomes, and intrinsic value attributed to the activity [13].

#### 4.2.1 Personal Relevance of Value

Regarding personal relevance of value, it can be seen as an enhancement of personal value. With the development of globalization, the world is becoming more and more connected, and English is very important as an international common language. On the one hand, English is appearing more and more in job resume writing, and a series of English-related certificates are also being pursued. These are the pursuit of self-improvement. On the other hand, the improvement is reflected in the work. Increased workability is a very real factor for adults, as everyone wants a higher-paying position and more job opportunities. Adults are more motivated to learn when driven by reality.

#### 4.2.2 Anticipated Value of Outcomes

In terms of expected value, expectations and values are determined by people's beliefs, goals and self-understanding of accepting tasks; expected value can directly affect people's choice, persistence and performance of tasks [14]. The concept of expected value consists of three components, which are ability belief, success expectation and task value [15].

#### **4.2.2.1 Ability Belief**

There is a positive relationship between English learning ability beliefs and learning engagement [16]. The higher the ability beliefs, the more positive learning behaviors [16]. Therefore, improving adults' ability beliefs can enhance their motivations to learn.

#### **4.2.2.2 Success Expectation**

Success expectation is people's expectations for the achievement of goals. Adult learners will learn to establish reasonable expectations of success at the beginning in order to ensure conscious learning engagement.

#### **4.2.2.3 Task Value**

Task value can be understood as the practicality of completing the learning tasks for the learner, the learner's interest in the learning tasks, and the impact of various efforts during the learning process on task completion [16]. Here, various effects refer to money, time, space, energy, and other effects. Therefore, beginners should have a clear understanding of the value of English learning. This will promote the correct learning input of adult beginners and reduce the negative learning input possible.

### **4.3 The Affective States**

From the perspective of English learning, Alpert points out that emotional factors can affect learners' learning attitudes, which may promote students' learning, stimulate initiative, and cause negative emotions [17]. Arnold and Brown believe that the emotion in language learning is related to learners themselves, including their anxiety, depression, confidence, motivation and personality [18].

#### **4.3.1 The State of Being Confident**

Confidence is a positive attitude in self-evaluation and self-affirmation. This self-affirmation may be influenced by personal character, but to a greater extent, it is due to a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. When adult learners start learning English, they want affirmation and encouragement. With every little knowledge they learn to apply, these adults beginners will become more confident and motivated to start learning more. They will gain confidence that translates from a sense of achievement and satisfaction with lasting enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation to learn English.

#### **4.3.2 The State of Being Anxious**

Anxiety is a negative emotion such as doubt, panic and nervousness. From the perspective of second language acquisition, MaIntyre defines anxiety as the fear or anxiety generated when using a second language, which is a type of situational anxiety [19]. In terms of adult beginners, their self-esteem and self-confidence will be frustrated when they cannot get used to learning English as a non-native language, or when they cannot achieve their goals. Anxiety can be a short-term psychological state or a lasting psychological state [20]. As a short-term psychological state, anxiety can exist, because appropriate anxiety will facilitate learning. Having a certain level of anxiety implies that the learner is serious

about learning. Then, with the help of the teacher and the learners' own efforts, he or she will adjust anxiety and promote learning. As a lasting psychological state, the existence of anxiety is harmful, because it creates an indescribable sense of panic. Excessive anxiety will consume beginners' energy and focus, and destroy their self-esteem and confidence. This will eventually lead to the loss of learning motivation.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper reviews the influence of the intrinsic motivation that adult beginners may have for learning English by analyzing the intrinsic factors of motivation and their importance. The motivation theory is reviewed because motivation is considered to be the most dynamic element in language learning. More specifically, intrinsic motivation is a driver of second language acquisition. Also, this paper summarises the importance of four intrinsic motivations. These are that intrinsic motivation can have a positive and lasting influence, increase learning efficiency, enhance learning output and stimulate creativity for learners. After review and reflection, it is interesting to find that intrinsic motivation includes the interests, personal and expected values, and the learner's emotional state of confidence, and anxiety. These all have a positive or negative impact on language learning, which can inform the use of language learning strategies by learners and the improvement of teaching strategies by teachers.

In addition, this paper primarily aims at investigating the key influence of intrinsic motivation. It also mentions the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation before. But at the same time, people should recognize that learners' motivations should not be seen as just one of the two sides, but rather as both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects. In the process of language learning and teaching, learners and teachers still need to pay attention to other factors that affect adult learners' English learning.

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