



Learning Motivation and Contextual Beliefs of Students in Inner Mongolia, China and Their Effects on Second Language Learning Achievement

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Abstract. This study examined the relationships among Inner Mongolian high school students' motivation, beliefs about the learning environment, and academic achievement. Inner Mongolia, China, has a unique educational and cultural environment that influences students' motivation and academic achievement. The study examined intrinsic (self-monitoring, learning strategies, and self-planning) and extrinsic (social factors, goals, and motivation) motivational factors, as well as students' perceptions of instructional methods (teaching style, feedback and support, and course design). With a sample of 111 students, data were collected through a structured questionnaire and the results collected were analyzed using quantitative methods, revealing important patterns in the motivation of Inner Mongolian high school students: extrinsic motivational factors (mean score of 3.394) dominated students' motivation to learn, followed by intrinsic motivational factors (mean score of 3.390), with self-monitoring and improvement (score of 3.60) dominated the intrinsic motivation, highlighting the high value that students place on their academic progress. Meanwhile, there is a significant positive correlation between intrinsic motivation and academic performance, indicating that students with strong intrinsic motivation tend to have better academic performance. Teaching methods, particularly teacher feedback and support (score of 3.45), were also positively correlated with students' academic performance, highlighting the importance of effective teaching strategies in improving academic performance. This study validates the critical role of intrinsic motivation in promoting academic success and reveals how effective teaching methods can support and enhance this intrinsic motivation, emphasizes the need for culturally responsive instructional practices, and demonstrates that improved teaching methods and understanding of students' motivational beliefs can improve their academic achievement. The findings provide educators and policy-makers with valuable insights to help them design effective strategies to support student motivation and achievement in diverse learning environments.

Keywords: Learning Motivation, Second Language Learning, Teaching Methods

1 Introduction

In today's globalization and increasingly connected world, the number of students learning a second language has increased dramatically in various countries. English, as the most widely spoken language in the world, is globally recognized as a global language. Learning English as a second language has a positive impact on personal development and globalization, and is also important for students' access to educational resources and future career development. Excellent communication skills in English provide opportunities for cross-cultural communication and career development. China, as the world's most populous country, is also an important country for teaching English as a second language. English education has been a national priority since the 1980s, while rapid economic and social development has further increased the demand for English proficiency.[1][2] As a result, English has become not only a language subject and an important part of the college entrance examination, but also an important factor in an individual's future development. Proficiency in English in China is closely associated with better academic development, employment prospects and international mobility. However, due to the vastness of China, there are significant differences between English language learning in different regions.

The unique cultural heritage and ethnic traditions of Inner Mongolia in China have had a profound impact on its education system. The region's bilingual education system includes Mandarin and English as well as Mandarin and Mongolian, which adds a layer of complexity to the learning of English as a second language. From a cultural perspective, Inner Mongolia has a unique cultural heritage and ethnic traditions that have had a significant impact on its education system. Some Mongolian schools aim to preserve the Mongolian language and customs while also promoting Mandarin and English in line with national education policies.[3]

In terms of education policy, Inner Mongolia, China, has a nine-year compulsory education system, with students starting school at the age of six, in line with the national policy on English language education, and an examination-oriented education system. English as a second language is a compulsory subject in all schools, and students begin learning English in primary school and continue to learn English as a second language during high school, and even during university. This long-term English language study is initially intended to allow Inner Mongolia students to improve their national and international competitiveness and to acquire a second language in order to adapt to the international environment. Students need to be proficient in multiple languages at the same time in this environment, which may hinder their motivation and proficiency in learning English to varying degrees. Within the broader context of education in China, where the approach to education in Inner Mongolia maintains traditions and is in line with national policies, recognizing the cultural context of Inner Mongolia is crucial to developing effective educational policies for students in the region.[4]

2 Literature Review

2.1 Motivation in Language Learning

Learning motivation plays an important role in the success of second language acquisition, significantly impacting students' engagement and persistence. Motivation provides the driving force for students in second language learning, and helps learners achieve their learning goals. Motivation is a multi-dimensional construct and is complex to describe. Researchers believe that motivation determines human behavior by stimulating and guiding actions. It drives learners to invest time and effort into learning a new language, a process that often requires significant time and energy.[5]

Currently, research on second language learning has made significant progress, particularly led by Gardner and his colleagues' studies on integrative and instrumental motivation, primarily using the socio-educational model. In Self-Determination Theory, motivation is categorized into different types based on different reasons or goals, primarily divided into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors, and has been widely studied by researchers.[6] Intrinsic motivation reflects learners' natural inclination to learn, which is non-instrumental. Thus, intrinsic motivation primarily represents the satisfaction of internal behaviors, while extrinsic motivation is instrumental, often influenced by external responses, usually outcomes, leading to changes in motivation. Therefore, the degree of autonomy in extrinsic motivation varies significantly among individuals. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors have varying degrees of impact on students' learning motivation.

2.2 Contextual Factors

The education system in China is traditional, characterized by a strong emphasis on standardized testing exams, particularly the Gaokao, which determines university admission and future career opportunities. The Gaokao has become a highly significant and competitive exam for students in China, creating a high-pressure learning environment. This system is not designed to identify students' innate talents and has a negative impact on encouraging student autonomy, as students must adhere to the system and authority to gain recognition. Inner Mongolia, as an autonomous region in China, follows the national educational framework but also incorporates unique regional cultural elements, notably a bilingual education policy where students learn both Mandarin and Mongolian or English. However, while bilingual education preserves cultural characteristics, it also places additional cognitive and motivational demands on students.[7]

Educational policies in China and Inner Mongolia often prioritize high academic achievements and performance, leading to reduced student exploration and interest. It is a mandatory subject in schools and usually a prerequisite for university admission and graduation. There is a growing desire for educational reform. Zhang and Koshmanova point out that the Gaokao system undermines creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration skills, with future educational research reforms aiming to develop policies that focus on discovering and nurturing talent through comparative mixed research designs.

Despite a substantial amount of research on student motivation within China and in broader educational contexts, there is a notable lack of studies specifically focused on the Inner Mongolia region. Although research on motivation is diverse, detailed factors affecting student outcomes in the specific context of Inner Mongolia, such as self-monitoring and self-improvement, learning strategies and effort, and social aspects, remain understudied.[8] Most studies on learning motivation focus on national trends, and existing research rarely considers Inner Mongolia's unique regional culture and education system. Instead, data from Inner Mongolia are often generalized to other regions or the whole country, resulting in a lack of in-depth understanding of how regional culture and education systems affect students' motivation to learn a second language in Inner Mongolia. Inner Mongolian learners face unique circumstances, and detailed research could provide insights into local students' motivation and academic performance. By addressing these research gaps, more context-specific teaching methods and policy recommendations can be developed for Inner Mongolia, thereby increasing students' interest in learning and improving academic outcomes in the region.

3 Methodology

3.1 Experimental Samples

In this study, tenth to twelfth grade students were selected as the research subjects, who are in the important stage of high school, facing the academic pressure of preparing for the college entrance examination, and also possessing a more mature mind. Academic performance and motivation at this stage have a significant impact on their future. Examining the motivation of students at this stage helps to identify which motivational factors play a key role in academic performance in this environment. In addition, students in grades 10-12 typically have complete and standardized academic achievement data from their schools, and they generally have high levels of comprehension and presentation skills. This enables them to provide accurate feedback on their learning experiences and motivation, thus providing reliable data to support the study.

To examine this issue, students in grades 10, 11, and 12 of a public high school in Inner Mongolia were selected for the study. The age range of the participants was 15-19 years old. The participants were currently receiving secondary education in Inner Mongolia and their ethnic backgrounds included Han, Mongolian, and Manchu. They were all enrolled in a structured English classroom program with at least five 45-minute English lessons per week. Data for each grade level came from randomly selected classes, and all students surveyed had the intention of taking the Gaokao (college entrance examination).

Most students are required to sit for the entrance exam at the end of Grade 12, which remains an important determinant of university admission (Di, 2019). As one of the main subjects in the examination, English plays a major role in determining whether they can continue their studies. For those students who choose not to take the GCE, direct work or vocational education may be their main option. Although English has become very common in their school studies, Mandarin and Mongolian are still the main languages used in Inner Mongolia. As a result, there are few opportunities for

Inner Mongolian students to use English in their daily lives, except for those who use English for vocational purposes (Borjigin, 2014).

In order to obtain permission to conduct research with students in grades 10-12, a research plan needs to be developed that specifies the purpose and methodology of the research and ensures compliance with ethical standards and legal requirements. An application is then submitted to the school and the objectives and significance of the research are explained to the principal. Informed consent is obtained from the school and the students, ensuring confidentiality measures and the rights of the participants to protect their privacy. Maintain ongoing communication with the school and students during the research process, deal with any information that may affect the participants in a timely manner, and ensure that the research process receives the necessary permissions and support.

3.2 Questionnaire Design

The survey questionnaire includes 42 questions on language learning motivation beliefs and teaching methods, utilizing items from Part D of Oxford's (1990) SILL version 7.0 to measure learners' use of strategies for learning English. Gardner's (1972) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) was referenced to organize and observe learners' motivation and beliefs regarding English learning. However, since Gardner's AMTB was developed for Canadian contexts and English-speaking Canadian students learning French, the questionnaire has limitations and requires modifications to some items to enhance its validity (Mhlongo, du Plessis, and Weidemann, 2022). Therefore, this questionnaire primarily references the refined BALLMI-M.

Moderate adjustments and integrations are made to the above scales, using a five-point Likert scale (Likert, 1932) with options ranging from 1 to 5, which represent "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

Specifically, "1" indicates Strongly Disagree, "2" for Disagree, "3" for Neutral, "4" for Agree, and "5" for Strongly Agree.

Demographic questions were included at the end of the questionnaire to assess the participants' key characteristics, and subjective questions about teaching methods were added to gather relevant information. To facilitate understanding and completion, the questionnaire was translated into localized Chinese and distributed bilingually (Chinese and English) to the participants.

3.3 Data Collection

The research was conducted using a questionnaire with pre-set questions. 111 questionnaires were distributed with a 100% completion and response rate. These included 41 from grade 10, 40 from grade 11 and 30 from grade 12 collected through a mixed method approach, which ensured comprehensive data collection from all target grades. For Year 10 and Year 11 students, the questionnaires were distributed during school hours to ensure that all students received and completed the questionnaires on site. A different approach was used for Year 12 students who had just completed their GCSEs and were no longer attending school. Questionnaires were distributed via an online

platform and QR codes. Students were contacted via social media and telephone to encourage participation to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data collected.

Data were collected from July 10, 2024 to July 15, 2024, and the ages of the participants ranged from 15 to 19 years, with a mean age of 17. Grades 10 were 15 to 18 years old, 11 were 17 to 18 years old, and 12 were 17 to 19 years old. The most common age was 17 years, accounting for 40.5% of the total respondents. Participants came from three different ethnic groups. Han Chinese predominated with 103 students or 91.96% of the total. There were 8 Mongolian students (7.14%) and 1 Manchu student (0.89%).

3.4 Data Analysis

Due to the varying difficulty levels of exams and differences in English proficiency across grades, using the same evaluation standards for the three grades is impractical. To address this, the study implemented a penalties algorithm to assess students' English scores. The maximum score is 150 points, with the English proficiency of 12th-grade participants serving as the baseline, keeping their scores unchanged. The scores of 11th graders are reduced by 5 points, and those of 10th graders are reduced by 10 points from their current scores. This aligns with Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory (1982, 1985, 1989), which posits that learners naturally improve their language abilities with sufficient comprehensible input.[9]

In other words, as 12th graders, their language skills are more advanced than those of 11th graders, and similarly, 11th graders have better language abilities than 10th graders. This progression occurs because as students move up each grade, they receive an increasing amount of comprehensible input, which naturally enhances their language proficiency. For example, a 12th-grade student's score remains unchanged. If an 11th-grade student originally scored 120 points, they would lose 5 points, resulting in a final score of 115 points. Similarly, if a 10th-grade student originally scored 100 points, they would lose 10 points, resulting in a final score of 90 points.

Data was collected and analyzed using descriptive statistics, quantitative analysis, and qualitative analysis. First, descriptive data were obtained using Excel software, including mean, median, mode, and standard deviation, to summarize participants' responses to the questionnaire items. Next, qualitative analysis was conducted to examine the subjective questions in the questionnaire, identifying common themes in students' motivational beliefs and experiences. Qualitative analysis is essential both individually and in the overall research synthesis process.

Subsequently, quantitative analysis was performed using SPSS 22.0. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to assess the relationships between intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and academic performance outcomes. Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's alpha to evaluate the internal consistency of the questionnaire, with a Cronbach's alpha value above 0.70 considered acceptable.[10]

4 Results

The questionnaire included 42 five-point Likert scale questions. However, due to the redundancy of some questions, which were included solely to check participants' consistency, only 39 questions were retained for the analysis. Based on the data, a total of 39 questions were analyzed, with 111 respondents. Among high school students in Inner Mongolia, extrinsic factors had the highest average score for learning motivation, at 3.394. This was followed by intrinsic factors, with an average of 3.390, and finally, teacher's methods, with an average of 3.31. These results are summarized in Figure 1 below.

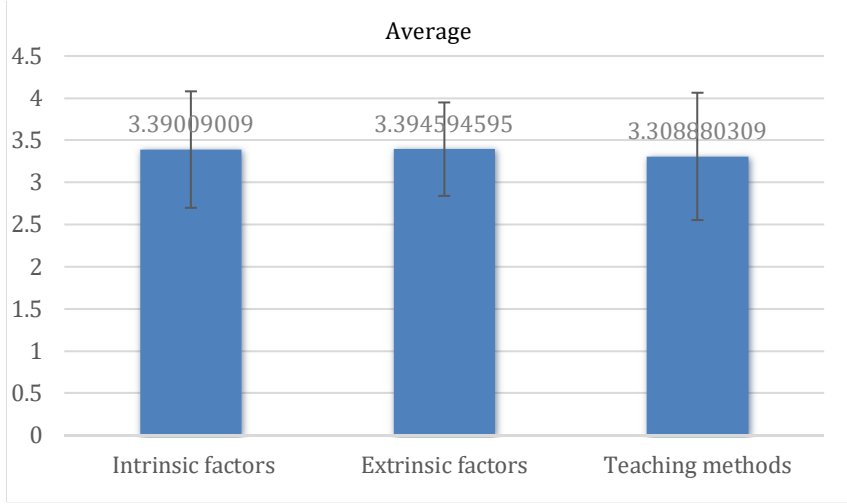


Fig. 1. Different Factors Affecting Learning Motivation of High School Students in Inner Mongolia

In terms of grade levels, the findings revealed distinct patterns of motivation. For Grade 10 students, extrinsic motivation had the highest average score of 3.36, followed by intrinsic motivation at 3.22, and teaching methods at 3.18. In Grade 11, intrinsic motivation led with an average score of 3.53, followed by extrinsic motivation at 3.48, with teaching methods trailing at 3.34. For Grade 12 students, both intrinsic motivation and teaching methods had an equal average score of 3.43, while extrinsic motivation was relatively lower at 3.32. For Han students (103, accounting for 91.96% of the total), both intrinsic and extrinsic factors had the same average score of 3.40, with teaching methods slightly lower at 3.33. For Mongolian students (8, 7.14%), intrinsic factors averaged 3.11, extrinsic factors 3.28, and teaching methods 3.04. For Manchu students (1, 0.89%), intrinsic factors had the highest average at 4.10, extrinsic factors averaged 3.67, and teaching methods had the lowest average at 3.57. The internal and external motivation scores for Han students were the same, while the scores for Mongolian students were generally lower. Manchu students had the highest internal motivation. Due to the small number of minority participants, the data is not significant, as shown in Fig 2.

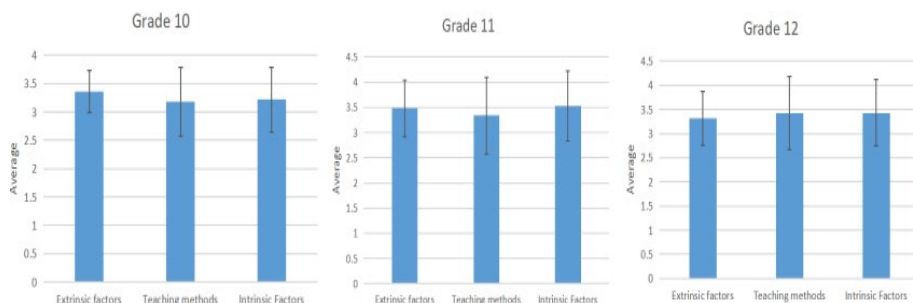


Fig. 2. Different Factors on Motivation at Different Grade Levels

Within intrinsic factors, the average score for Self-monitoring and Improvement was 3.60, higher than Learning Strategies and Effort (3.38) and Self-planning (3.34). Within extrinsic factors, Social Factors had a slightly higher average score (3.52) compared to Goals and Motivation (3.34). For Teacher's Methods, Feedback and Support had the highest average (3.45), followed by Course Design (3.35) and Teaching Style (3.07), as shown in Fig 3.

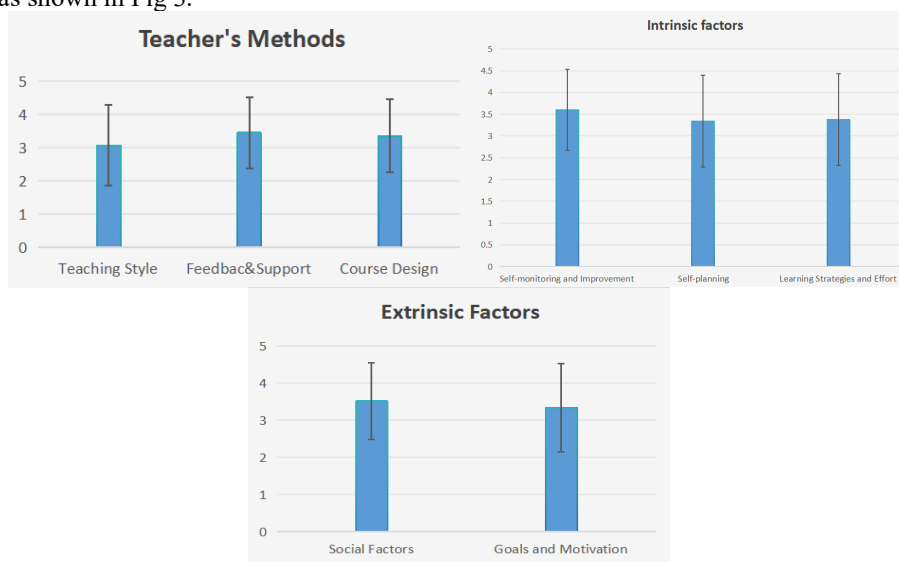


Fig. 3. Mean Value of Specific Reasons in Different Factors on Learning Motivation

The Cronbach's Alpha value for the questions related to intrinsic motivational factors was 0.83, for extrinsic factors was 0.79, and for Teacher's Methods was 0.91. The Cronbach's Alpha value for the entire questionnaire (32 questions) was 0.94.

Specifically, in Pearson correlation analysis, intrinsic factors are significantly positively correlated with student performance($r = 0.39$, BCa CI [0.22, 0.55], $P < 0.01$); extrinsic factors are not significantly correlated with student performance, $r = .16$, BCa CI [-0.3, 0.35], $P > 0.01$; Teaching Method is significantly positively correlated with student performance, $r = 0.38$, BCa CI [0.23, 0.53], $P < 0.01$. In Spearman correlation

analysis, intrinsic factors are slightly correlated with student performance, $r_s = 0.416$, $P < 0.01$; extrinsic factors are not correlated with student performance, $r_s = 0.20$, $P > 0.01$; Teaching Method is slightly correlated with student performance, $r_s = 0.38$, $P < 0.01$. In Kendall's correlation analysis, intrinsic factors are slightly correlated with student performance, $r = 0.3$, $P < 0.01$; extrinsic factors are not correlated with student performance, $r_s = 0.14$, $P > 0.01$; Teaching Method is slightly correlated with student performance, $r_s = 0.26$, $P < 0.01$

(i) Intrinsic factors are significantly positively correlated with student performance, $r = 0.39$ $r=0.39$, BCa CI [0.22, 0.55], $P < 0.01$.

(ii) Extrinsic factors are not significantly correlated with student performance, $r = 0.16$ $r=0.16$, BCa CI [-0.30, 0.35], $P > 0.01$

(iii) Teaching Method is significantly positively correlated with student performance, $r = 0.38$ $r=0.38$, BCa CI [0.23, 0.53], $P < 0.01$

In the question "How important is it for you to become proficient in English?" with a scale from 1 to 3, the average score among the all 111 respondents was 2.297. 54 students thought becoming proficient in English was important, accounting for 48.65% of the total. 45 students thought it was very important, accounting for 40.54%. 12 students thought learning English was not so important, accounting for 10.81% of the total. Due to the fact that most respondents consider English proficiency to be important or very important, this characteristic does not show a significant relationship with student performance, as shown in Fig 4.

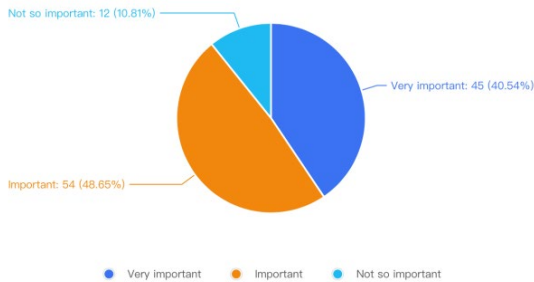


Fig. 4. How Important is it for You to Become Proficient in English

5 Discussion

The data showed that extrinsic motivation factors had the highest average score (3.394) among 10th to 12th graders, indicating that external factors play a significant role in the learning motivation of high school students in Inner Mongolia. This finding is closely related to the exam-oriented teaching methods influenced by policies and is similar to the research by Pan and Block (2011). Intrinsic factors had an average score of 3.390, just slightly lower than extrinsic factors, showing that intrinsic motivation is also an important driver for students' learning. Among the intrinsic factors, self-monitoring had the highest score (3.60), indicating a high emphasis on self-monitoring and improvement by the students. Within extrinsic factors, social factors had a slightly

higher influence (3.52), suggesting that students place more importance on social and communication-related language needs. In teaching methods, feedback and support had the highest impact (3.45), showing that teacher attitudes and encouraging feedback play a significant role in the language learning of high school students in Inner Mongolia. There were also significant differences in motivation patterns across different grades. Extrinsic motivation was highest among 10th graders, intrinsic motivation was highest among 11th graders, and both intrinsic motivation and teaching methods scored equally among 12th graders. As learners advance in grades, different teaching methods may be implemented, possibly leading to varying motivational drivers among students.

Cronbach's Alpha values indicated high internal consistency for intrinsic factors (0.83), extrinsic factors (0.79), and teaching methods (0.91), with the overall questionnaire demonstrating high reliability (0.94).

The Pearson correlation analysis shows a positive correlation between intrinsic factors and student performance ($r = .39$, BCa CI [.22, .55], $P < 0.01$), indicating that stronger intrinsic motivation is associated with higher student achievement. Kendall's correlation analysis ($r = 0.3$, $P < 0.01$), and Spearman's correlation analysis ($r_s = 0.416$, $P < 0.01$) also supports the positive correlation between intrinsic motivation and student performance. This suggests that students with higher intrinsic motivation typically perform better academically. These students not only receive higher scores on standardized tests but may also demonstrate greater persistence in the learning process. This aligns with the findings of Liu, Ma, and Chen (2024), which showed that intrinsic motivation has a positive direct impact on learning outcomes. However, the data indicate that extrinsic factors do not have a significant correlation with the academic performance of students from Inner Mongolia. This suggests that external rewards or pressures may not impact academic achievement as much as intrinsic motivation, which contrasts with the conclusions of Liu, Ma, and Chen (2024). This discrepancy may reflect cultural differences or the specific context of the study. Additionally, the Pearson correlation analysis between teaching methods and student performance shows a positive correlation ($r = .38$, BCa CI [.23, .53], $P < 0.01$), and Spearman's ($r_s = 0.38$, $P < 0.01$) and Kendall's correlation analyses ($r_s = 0.26$, $P < 0.01$) also can confirm this correlation. This highlights the importance of effective feedback and support in improving student performance, validating previous research suggesting a close relationship between teaching methods and student outcomes (Schroeder, Scott, Tolson, Huang, and Lee, 2007).

6 Conclusion

The study reveals a significant relationship between intrinsic motivation and academic performance among high school students in Inner Mongolia. The results indicate that intrinsic motivational factors, especially self-monitoring and improvement, play a more crucial role in driving student success in this context. The positive correlation between teaching methods, particularly feedback and support, and student performance underscores the importance of teacher-student interaction in enhancing learning outcomes. These insights suggest that fostering intrinsic motivation with effective teaching strategies can lead to better academic performance. However, extrinsic factors remain a

major component of language learning motivation, although their impact on student performance is not significant. Therefore, they should also be considered but not prioritized as the main intervention focus.

The data conclusively show that higher intrinsic motivation is positively correlated with better academic achievement, and that students with intrinsic motivation tend to achieve better academic outcomes due to deeper engagement and sustained effort. Intrinsic motivation fosters students' desire to acquire and understand knowledge, which leads to more effective learning strategies and higher academic achievement. Similarly, effective teaching strategies can improve student academic achievement by providing the necessary support and motivation. Teachers' teaching methods, especially encouragement and feedback, are positively correlated with student achievement. Providing effective support and assistance can help students achieve higher grades.

Although this study provides insights into English language motivation, further exploration is needed to enrich the understanding comprehensively. Given that this research is based in Inner Mongolia, future studies could investigate how intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors impact academic performance across different educational contexts, including comparisons between urban and rural settings or different regions, to understand how contextual differences affect motivation and learning outcomes. Besides, due to time constraints, there was insufficient interval between questionnaires to capture long-term development. Future research could track changes in student motivation over time and its effects on academic performance, providing deeper insights into how motivation evolves throughout students' learning experiences and outcomes. The questionnaire method may introduce subjectivity into data collection, potentially affecting the results. Future studies could use other methods to enhance data objectivity and comprehensiveness, such as combining longitudinal tracking with field observations and regular interviews. By continually expanding the understanding of language learning motivation and its relationship with academic performance, we can improve students' learning interests and academic achievements and provide a basis for developing more effective educational policies.

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