

# ***Reviewing Learning Styles and Learning Motivation in Second Language Acquisition***

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**Abstract:** Second language learners encounter particular difficulties as a result of the impact of technological advancement and globalization, which has always been a matter of concern with regard to second language acquisition. Due to these challenges, second language learners should raise their own proficiency and adaptability to provide learning guidance for future employment. This paper reviews the findings of learning styles and learning motivation in the field of second language acquisition. Learning styles have different effect on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners and learning motivation also influence their behaviors from extrinsic to intrinsic goals. Studies suggest that different learning styles perform well in different aspects of language studying. Intrinsic learners perform better than extrinsic learners. Within more learning styles, EFL students act more motivated in language learning and generally perform well in their academic achievement. Drawing from previous studies, the author proposes EFL learners should find their preferred learning styles and try their best to transfer their extrinsic goals to intrinsic goals in foreign language learning.

**Keywords:** learning styles, learning motivation, second language acquisition

## **1. Introduction**

In recent years, focusing on language learners rather than language teaching methodology has been the most significant research endeavor and educational advancement [1]. No matter how talented a teacher is, students will never learn a language unless they make an effort to do so outside of the classroom, claims Harmer [2]. Students should build as many of their own learning strategies as they can in order to overcome the constraints of class time and combat inactivity. In order to help English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students overcome the difficulty of language learning, this paper introduces 4 types of learners based on Kolb's Learning style and 6 mini-theories based on Self-determination theory (SDT). Students can be more motivated and active to study a second language and find their advantage methods to easily gain a high assignment. Language learning can be effective and accessible for EFL learners. Through various of studies, the research of learning styles and learning motivation in foreign language learning will also provide a reference for teacher teaching in the future.

## 2. Learning Styles

Learning styles refer to the preferences or characteristics of individuals by processing the information in their daily lives. Contributed to the effort of many researchers, learning styles have been well developed in many different aspects. The most popular and widely used is the VARK questionnaire by Fleming and Mills which is based on the sensory modality [3]. They are categorized into 4 types of individuals: visual learners, aural learners, reading-writing learners and kinesthetic learners. Visual learners prefer to watch images, pictures and videos; Aural learners prefer to listen to the lecture; Reading-writing learners prefer to search for information by writing or reading the text and Kinesthetic learners prefer manipulating things with their hands. Students with verbal learning styles perform better in speaking than other students, while verbal learners make good progress in writing, social learners make good progress in structure, and verbal and social learners make significant reading progress from other learners. At the very least, the verbal, aural, and social learning styles work adequately when learning a second language [4].

## 3. Kolb's Learning Style Inventory in Language Learning

Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (LSI) establishes a learning cycle that includes concrete experience (CE = feeling), reflective observation (RO = reflecting), abstract conceptualization (AC = thinking) and active experimentation (AE = acting). Through these learning styles mutually affecting each other, Kolb distinguished 4 types of learners (Divergent, Assimilative, Convergent and Accommodative) [5]. The Diverger (CE/RO) usually has many perspectives from a certain situation; the Assimilator are good at organizing and gathering a wide range of information into a logical form; the Converger believes in hands-on experience to solve different situations and the Accommodator prefers adjusting their ways from their previous experiences.

Willing built on Kolb's theories to create his own four categories of L2 learner-specific learning styles [6]. He also divided into 4 types of learners: Communicative Learners, Concrete Learners, Conformists and Convergents. For Communicative Learners, they are intrigued by language study for its own sake but not by analytical research. They are holistic learners who want to take risks and learn outside of the traditional classroom; therefore, they look for chances to interact with native speakers. The Concrete Learners appreciate structure and authority in the classroom, but they also value the social environment. They care about people and are curious about language for communication purposes. The Conformists are independent analytical learners who prefer to study the language rather than use it. They look for authority individuals because they view learning a language as a methodical process and depend on them as experts. They seek out structured professors who are well-organized, so they perform well in classrooms without communication. They like a visual learning technique and enjoy adhering to the textbook and directions. Finally, the Convergents are active loners who detest being in groups of people. They do not use language to convey affect or personal values, but they view it as a subject of study. Instead, they would prefer to gain metalinguistic information about the language. From Willing's description, the most effective foreign language learners appear to be communicative learners (accommodators), as they are open to trying new things, risk-taking, and thrive in a conversational setting. However, in Kolb's research, graduate students and instructors in foreign languages tended to fall into the diverger category (the CE-RO quadrant) that these kinds of students had likely already completed their foreign language requirement during high school or before stepping into college, as evidenced by the very small numbers of accommodators and divergers in these groups. As a result, they were not present in the language classes in the first and third semesters in college. Most students had assimilator learning styles and sought out the solutions to the question "What?" as they were studying. Since assimilator learners prefer to learn by watching and

experiencing, abstract concepts and ideas are important to them. These learners perform better in schools using traditional teaching approaches [7].

## **4. Learning Motivation: Self-determination Theory (SDT)**

### **4.1. SDT**

SDT is a general theory that examines the causes and effects of human motivation [8]. The theory assumes that individuals have growth-oriented and proactive needs in their behavior. Inductively, it can be divided into three needs-autonomy, competence and relatedness. The need for autonomy suggests people can make their decisions of their own volition without any restriction. The need for competence believes individuals can be competent for their work. The need for relatedness reflects they can be a member of a certain group and receive love and concern from others. When three fundamental psychological requirements are satisfied, according to SDT, people gradually change social principles and extrinsic circumstances into their own principles and self-motivations. In contrast, when the needs are not met, people experience decreased motivation and well-being.

SDT can explain why specific orientations are present in some learners but not in others by evoking the psychological mechanisms of perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The goal of language learning is to generate high-quality self-motivation as a result, so that students are motivated to use the new language to participate and gain knowledge without needing constant instructor effort.

### **4.2. SDT's Mini-theories in Language Learning**

With the development of SDT, Deci and Ryan explain a more comprehensive motivation phenomenon into six mini-theories: cognitive evaluative theory (CET), organismic integration theory (OIT), causality orientations theory (COT), basic psychological needs theory (BPNT), goal content theory (GCT), and relationships motivation theory (RMT).

Using a collection of mini-theories, SDT offers a framework for a wide range of characteristics of human motivation. Each of the six mini-theories below explains how people can become more driven and have more rewarding lives. Each offers a set of resources that may be used by academics to tackle important issues including how to define and quantify motivation among learners, how to recognize students who are highly motivated, and how to do the reverse [9].

#### **4.2.1. Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET)**

Firstly, CET argues that external content will affect intrinsic motivation. This mini-theory explains the interaction between humans and their surroundings. CET illustrates how teachers can either assist or obstruct students' ambitions for independence by utilizing the principles of autonomous assistance, framework, engagement, and external control. Students will either progress toward more externally controlled drives through this process or develop greater internalized, autonomous motives [9].

#### **4.2.2. Organismic Integration Theory (OIT)**

OIT explains individual's motivation and engagement can be transferred or controlled to intrinsic motivation from an extrinsic situation. According to certain empirical data, making the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic goals can help predict L2 learning outcomes. For instance, Ramage discovered that continuing students were more intrinsically motivated to study a language for the sake of learning a language than discontinuing students [10]. Students who dropped out were more extrinsically driven, showing a larger interest in language learning as a means to other objectives (such as getting academic credit). To be more specific, OIT can be spanned from motivation to controlled motivation to autonomous motivation. Motivation refers to the situation in which

individuals fail to see the relationship between their actions and the outcomes of those actions. Controlled motivation includes both introjected and external regulation. It needs more external intervention from educators, parents, or close friends. External regulation is an attitude that the subject has no choice but to obey. For instance, students may enroll in a language course to satisfy the prerequisites for learning a foreign language and just aim for a passing mark. More autonomous than external regulation, introjected regulation indicates that students have a fear of embarrassment for failure rather than a reaction to an outside circumstance. Identification of integrated internal rules that need less effort to uphold is a hallmark of autonomous motivation. It is stated that students are regulated if they recognize the importance of learning a language and support it as their own personal objective. Integrated regulation shows that students who have begun to adopt favorable attitudes toward the profession into the individual self-system. Intrinsic regulation represents that learners are fully intrinsically motivated to study a language, they experience interest, joy, and purpose.

#### **4.2.3. Causality Orientations Theory (COT)**

The COT proposes three distinct forms of motivation orientation: autonomous, controlled and impersonal. According to Deci and Ryan, people who are spontaneously motivated are typically more independent, intrinsically motivated, and less susceptible to peer pressure or external incentives [8]. People that have a controlled orientation are frequently ego-oriented or driven by rewards from outside sources or peer pressure. Impersonal orientation refers to behavior that a person perceives chance of failure, incompetence or incapability to control a situation. According to research by Sugita-McEown, Noels, and Saumure, individuals who supported an autonomous direction had higher levels of self-determination in language learning processes, greater willingness to keep acquiring the language, and more self-regulating method of learning [11]. As English is a compulsory subject in many countries, individual students seldom had any options. In these circumstances, students may lack self-confidence and self-determination which may increase their likelihood of embracing impersonal orientation.

#### **4.2.4. Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT)**

BPNT continuously supports the basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. The process of internalizing external motivation was facilitated by the satisfaction of learners' demands for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which allowed them to move along the "learner autonomy continuum" from reliance to independence [12]. In other words, providing learners with the prerequisites for learner autonomy was part of the process of addressing their demands for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Tanaka found that competence was most significantly connected with extrinsic regulation, relatedness to peers was most strongly associated with introjection, and autonomy was most significantly correlated with internal desire for extended reading in English [13]. According to Noels, Clement, and Pelletier's research, intrinsic, integrative, and identified regulation—more autonomous motivational orientations—were positively associated with autonomy and competence satisfaction, whereas extrinsic orientations—a motivation, introjected regulation, and external regulation—were negatively associated with it [14]. The degree of efficacy that students felt during their FL learning predicted independent motivational mechanisms for language learning, which in turn predicted their intentions to keep studying the language. Students' satisfaction with their desire for competence (feelings of efficacy) was a key factor in this prediction.

#### **4.2.5. Goal Content Theory (GCT)**

GCT proposes intrinsic goals lead to a greater performance than extrinsic goals. Intrinsic goals support meeting fundamental needs, advance the learner's well-being and personal development,

foster healthy interpersonal connections, and permit freedom and self-expression. Combining goals for both internal and external motivations have no positive impact on the effectiveness of the goals, instead, it may draw learners' attention away from the intrinsic goal's long-term benefits due to the extrinsic goal's greater tangibility and allure [15].

#### **4.2.6. Relationships Motivation Theory (RMT)**

RMT indicates that relationship satisfaction based on respect and caring for others can affect intrinsic motivation. Because the relationship motivation theory is not directly related to language acquisition in conventional educational settings, it is not taken into consideration. Although the desire to build strong interpersonal ties clearly contributes to more widespread SLA, organized learning environments tend to downplay the width and breadth of this element [16].

### **5. Learning Styles and Learning Motivation**

EFL students' learning motivation and styles of learning were positively correlated. In other words, it was shown that English study motivation was high among students with a range of learning styles. On the other side, it was discovered that pupils with fewer language learning methods had lower levels of motivation to study English [17].

Students in Reflective are more motivated than those in Active. The Active students outperform the Reflective students in terms of learning achievement. Additionally, the learning motivation of sequential and global thinking styles differs significantly. Students who use Global are more motivated than those who use Sequential. Finally, learning outcomes varied significantly depending on learning style (Sensing/Intuitive). Sensing students are more motivated than Intuitive students [18].

According to Dornyei, motivation acts as the key catalyst for beginning language learning and later acts as the engine that keeps the protracted and usually exhausting learning process going [19]. Even those with exceptional skills are limited in their ability to attain long-term goals, and even the best curricula and teaching methods cannot ensure student success in the absence of the right kind of drive. On the other side, having a lot of motivation can compensate for significant barriers to learning such as language and surroundings.

The analysis's findings indicate a strong link between motivation for higher education and learning preferences. The findings indicate that there is a strong association between visual learners' motivation for higher education and test scores [20]. Because visual learners favor reading above other abilities, they can study a large number of books, which is important for higher education.

### **6. Conclusion**

Different learners have different learning styles. Therefore, they should find their own way to learn a second language. While some studies suggest that the accommodator and diverger perform better, that's not absolute. After all, all roads lead to Rome, everyone has their own personality to learn a foreign language.

In order to learn a foreign language, one must convert their own extrinsic incentive into intrinsic motivation. Both inner and extrinsic drives can be converted into one another. This can better promote the student-centered rather than teacher-centered teaching direction, especially after meeting the three needs of self-determination theory, students' second language learning can be better performed.

Learning style and learning motivation promote each other, especially for students with good academic performance, the more learning styles they have, the stronger their learning motivation will be. It proves that learning style can influence students' learning motivation to some extent. Therefore, it is very important to find a suitable learning style and to change the external motivation into the internal motivation can better learn the second foreign language.

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