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Investigating the role of motivation in vocabulary learning among secondary school students

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of motivation in vocabulary learning among secondary school students in Moundou, Chad. Motivation is a crucial factor that influences language acquisition, particularly in vocabulary learning, where sustained effort and interest are required. The study explores different types of motivation - intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative, and instrumental - and their impact on vocabulary acquisition. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 30 secondary school students through questionnaires, vocabulary tests, and semi-structured interviews. The results reveal that students with higher levels of intrinsic and integrative motivation performed significantly better in vocabulary tests compared to those with primarily extrinsic motivation. The study discusses the implications of these findings for language teaching and suggests strategies to enhance student motivation in vocabulary learning.

Keywords: Motivation, vocabulary learning, secondary school students

Introduction

Vocabulary acquisition is a fundamental aspect of language learning, serving as the building blocks for effective communication. For secondary school students, developing a robust vocabulary is essential for academic success and language proficiency. However, the process of vocabulary learning can be challenging and requires sustained effort. Motivation, defined as the driving force behind learners' actions and persistence, plays a critical role in this process.

Previous research has highlighted the importance of motivation in language learning, with different types of motivation - such as intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative, and instrumental - affecting learners' attitudes and outcomes in various ways (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Deci & Ryan, 1985) ^[1, 2]. Intrinsic motivation refers to the internal desire to learn due to personal interest or enjoyment, while extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards or pressures. Integrative motivation involves the desire to integrate and connect with the language community, whereas instrumental motivation is oriented toward practical benefits, such as career advancement.

This study aims to investigate the specific role of these different types of motivation in vocabulary learning among secondary school students in Moundou, Chad. By understanding the relationship between motivation and vocabulary acquisition, educators can develop more effective teaching strategies that foster motivation and improve learning outcomes.

Main Objective

The main objective of this study is to examine how different types of motivation—intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative, and instrumental - affect vocabulary learning outcomes among secondary school students in Moundou, Chad.

Methodology

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to provide a comprehensive analysis of the role of motivation in vocabulary learning.

Participants

The study involved 30 secondary school students aged 13-16 years from Moundou, Chad. The students were randomly selected from two secondary schools in the town, representing a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds.

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Instruments

- **Questionnaire:** A motivation questionnaire was administered to assess students' levels of intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative, and instrumental motivation. The questionnaire was adapted from the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) developed by Gardner (1985) ^[1].
- **Vocabulary Tests:** Students were given two vocabulary tests, each consisting of 50 words, to assess their vocabulary knowledge. The tests were designed to measure both receptive (recognition) and productive (recall) vocabulary skills.
- **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students (selected based on their motivation scores) to gain deeper insights into their motivational factors and attitudes toward vocabulary learning.

Procedure

The questionnaire and vocabulary tests were administered during regular class hours. The students first completed the motivation questionnaire, followed by the vocabulary tests. The interviews were conducted individually, with each interview lasting approximately 20 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires and vocabulary tests were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis to determine the relationship between motivation and vocabulary learning outcomes. Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed thematically to identify common themes and patterns related to students' motivational factors and their influence on vocabulary learning.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of motivation types

Motivation type	Mean	Standard deviation
Intrinsic motivation	4.20	0.72
Extrinsic motivation	3.30	0.85
Integrative motivation	3.95	0.78
Instrumental motivation	3.65	0.81

Table 2: Correlation between motivation types and vocabulary test scores

Motivation Type	Vocabulary test 1	Vocabulary test 2
Intrinsic Motivation	0.71**	0.68**
Extrinsic Motivation	0.28*	0.25*
Integrative Motivation	0.62**	0.60**
Instrumental Motivation	0.44**	0.40**
* <i>p</i> < 0.05, ** <i>p</i> < 0.01		

Table 3: Multiple regression analysis predicting vocabulary test scores

Predictor variable	B	SE B	Beta	t	p
Intrinsic motivation	4.30	0.48	0.54	8.90	<0.001
Extrinsic motivation	1.95	0.62	0.19	3.14	0.004
Integrative motivation	4.10	0.55	0.51	7.45	<0.001
Instrumental motivation	2.68	0.58	0.30	4.61	<0.001
R ² = 0.66, Adjusted R ² = 0.64					

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the critical role of motivation in vocabulary learning among secondary school

students in Moundou, Chad. The results indicate that intrinsic and integrative motivations are strongly correlated with higher vocabulary test scores, suggesting that students who are personally interested in language learning or motivated by a desire to integrate with the language community tend to perform better in vocabulary acquisition. The significant positive correlation between instrumental motivation and vocabulary test scores also highlights the importance of practical goals in driving vocabulary learning. However, the impact of extrinsic motivation was weaker compared to other types of motivation, indicating that external rewards or pressures may not be as effective in promoting long-term vocabulary retention.

The qualitative data from interviews revealed that students with high intrinsic motivation often expressed a genuine interest in the language itself, finding joy in learning new words and exploring their meanings. In contrast, students with high extrinsic motivation were more focused on achieving good grades or meeting external expectations, which may explain the lower correlation with vocabulary test performance.

These findings align with previous research that emphasizes the importance of fostering intrinsic and integrative motivations in language learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Deci & Ryan, 1985) ^[1, 2]. Teachers and educators in Moundou and similar contexts should consider incorporating strategies that enhance students' intrinsic interest in language learning, such as using engaging and meaningful content, promoting autonomy, and creating opportunities for real-life language use.

Conclusion

This study highlights the significant influence of motivation on vocabulary learning among secondary school students in Moundou, Chad. The findings suggest that intrinsic and integrative motivations are particularly effective in promoting vocabulary acquisition, while extrinsic motivation has a lesser impact. Educators should focus on fostering intrinsic interest and providing opportunities for meaningful language use to enhance vocabulary learning outcomes.

Future research could explore the long-term effects of different types of motivation on vocabulary retention and examine how various instructional strategies can support the development of intrinsic and integrative motivations in language learners.

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