

## UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' MOTIVATION TO STUDY THE GERMAN LANGUAGE

**Martin Lachout**

Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem,  
Philosophical Faculty, Department of German Studies,  
Pasteurova 13, 400 96 Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic  
e-mail: [martin.lachout@ujep.cz](mailto:martin.lachout@ujep.cz)

### Abstract

The article explores motivation as one of the key factors in learning. The author focuses on Czech university students who learn a foreign language, specifically German. First, the article briefly introduces the reader to the concept of motivation and its individual sub-types both in terms of its intensity and duration as well as its impact on the individual.

The following part presents a research project concerning the motivation to learn German language, which was carried out by the author and his colleagues among the students of three Czech universities. Then the results of the research are presented.

In conclusion, the author offers several humble recommendations to teachers wishing to boost the motivation of their students for further study of German language.

### Keywords

Motivation; Motivation types; Foreign language; Research; Recommendations.

### Introduction

Today's increasingly globalized world, with greater mobility among its population, generates an ever-growing need to know foreign languages. To believe that proficiency in English, as the so-called *lingua franca*, will suffice for this purpose is illusory; each newly mastered foreign language provides the individual with a surplus value. Even The European Commission, in its 2002 recommendation, operates with the so-called 1+2 rule, according to which every EU citizen should be proficient in minimally two languages in addition to his/her mother tongue. The first one should be, ideally, English, preferably followed by the language of the mother country's geographical neighbourhood.

The growing importance of teaching foreign languages at schools along all educational stages will, therefore, hardly come as a surprise.

In the case of the Czech Republic (and not only the Czech Republic), the first position is occupied by English, which stems from the above-mentioned reason of its existence as *lingua franca*, that is, the most widespread language used for communication among members of various nations, followed by German, Russian, Spanish, French [6] etc. Why certain numbers of pupils learn a given language, why one is more frequently preferred to another, is predicated on a number of factors. Key among these is, undoubtedly, students' motivation as such.

### 1 On the Concept of Motivation

The term "motivation" is derived from the Latin word "movere", which means to move, to set something in motion. Motivation thus involves intrinsic as well as extrinsic factors (see below), or possibly combinations of these, which form our actions and behaviours with the

view of reaching a certain goal. It is, therefore, a mental process linked to increased or decreased activity. Motivation is influenced by the specific individual, his/her personality, capabilities, acquired experience, his/her hierarchy of values and additional variables.

The Dictionary of Psychology [3, p. 328] defines “*motivation as a process of directing, preserving and energizing behaviour, which streams from biological resources*”. Motivation is therefore among key affective factors that are socio-psychological factors which play a role in the efficiency of teaching as a whole, and its essential prerequisite, for instance [5, p. 8]. In this sense, we understand motivation as the individual’s understanding why he/she should learn something in the larger meaning of the word.

Motivation as a key moving factor includes two basic components, namely, stimulation and a motivator. Stimulation is seen as the influence of various factors, labelled as circumstances or actions. Those induce or encourage humans to a certain behaviour, labour, endeavour or activity, and are usually positive in nature. It is a desirable impulse in motivation. Stimulation involves external impulses (inducements), whose task is to influence actions undertaken by an individual.

The motivator is then the emotion that leads to the decision to take a certain step. Although most of us think our decisions are rational, we are often influenced by just such a motivator, and only subsequently endeavor to justify our actions rationally. All contemporary advertising is based on emotions (feelings), occasionally combining these with reason. Motivators are just the first step, which makes it possible to draw attention to a product or a service. Without subsequent steps, however, the first one loses its sense.

Motivation is also a whole, composed of individual parts – motives (specific compelling factors, inducements), of which there can be a large number. Most frequent are needs, but we also encounter instincts, personal interests, aspirations, ambitions, goals, ideals etc.

Motivation, nevertheless, does not always influence performance positively. A negative influence may stem from exceedingly high motivation (attention and dedication focused on a single goal as a maximum, while additional goals are neglected or even injured), so-called “burning enthusiasm” or in the case of exceedingly low motivation (insufficient motivation).

## 2 Classification of Motivation

Motivation can be approached from various perspectives:

In terms of its intensity and longevity we distinguish between:

- a) **Short-term motivation** – the type is characterised by higher intensity and force, on the one hand, and a short duration, on the other. Short-term motivation can be observed especially in younger pupils or in rather less stable individuals, who are easy to enthuse, yet lose their enthusiasm relatively soon.
- b) **Long-term motivation** – typical for older individuals, who are already mentally more mature. The type requires a good deal of determination, often even a degree of self-denial, which leads to reaching the set goal and achieving success. In the paradigm of institutionalised education, it is observed in more senior high-school students, college students, graduate students, adult learners, etc.

In terms of impact on the individual:

- a) **Internal (intrinsic) motivation** – this type of motivation is frequently tied to an individual’s needs to be fulfilled. In a larger meaning of the word, needs may be cognitive, social, existential, etc. [4, p. 45n]. From the educational perspective, we talk of intrinsic motivation once students are internally motivated to participate in learning, while

perceiving that their participation will satisfy a certain inner need of their own. Students driven by intrinsic motivation see their participation in learning as something that will be directly useful to them. An individual's particular learning activity is linked to his/her hierarchy of values. Intrinsic motivation is likewise observed when an individual strives for continuous improvement in order to gain respect from others.

- b) **External (extrinsic) motivation** – such motivation is, as a rule, tied to certain rewards, which, in the case of pupils, most often are to receive a good grade or possibly to avoid being kept back a year, to achieve acceptance to an educational institution of a certain kind etc. In the case of extrinsic motivation, the individual departs from prior experience.

### 3 Exploring Motives to Study/Learn the German Language at University

Researching motivation to study/learn the German language within the framework of tertiary education represents one among the questions of large-scale research in which we have followed various aspects of learning the German language at university.

Overall we contacted 365 respondents at selected faculties of three universities, namely, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem, Masaryk University in Brno, and Metropolitan University Prague.

Our research included not only students of philological fields but also students of non-philological fields. In the internet environment we created a questionnaire, which contained 33 items total, while the problematic of motivation to learn German at university was targeted by question 20. Under question 20, respondents were offered the following 12 closed answers and one open answer (answer number 13):

1. I am obliged to learn the language as one among the subjects required by the faculty.
2. I have a positive relationship to German and German-speaking countries.
3. I shall need it for my future professional career.
4. I need it for travel.
5. I have friends who speak the language.
6. I made the decision independently on the basis of my own interest.
7. Because it was my parents' wish.
8. Because German was one among the options at my elementary/secondary school.
9. I had no other choice.
10. An opportunity to study abroad.
11. Family/relatives living abroad.
12. In childhood I spent a period of time abroad (German-speaking countries).
13. Different motivation:

In items 1 – 12 respondents selected their answers from the scale *strongly agree – somewhat agree – somewhat disagree – strongly disagree*.

In the case of item 13, respondents completed the answer in their own words, according to their own consideration.

**Tab. 1:** Number of students' answers

Answer Number	Answer	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Total number of answers
1.	Faculty	96	69	77	123	365
2.	Positive relationship to the German language	108	112	96	49	365
3.	Profession.	102	150	91	22	365
4.	Travel	54	160	112	39	365
5.	Friends	47	51	103	164	365
6.	Interest	133	109	66	57	365
7.	Parents	27	48	69	221	365
8.	Elementary school choice	150	112	41	62	365
9.	There was no other choice	60	28	70	207	365
10.	Study abroad	46	81	94	144	365
11.	Family abroad	32	29	43	261	365
12.	Childhood abroad	13	15	21	316	365
13.	Different type of motivation	A different answer: 31 x			Total 334 x 0	

**Item number 13 – Different motivation:**

1.	This language is systematic and organized.
2.	One day, I wish to become proficient in German, English, French and Russian so that I could read the best literature in the original.
3.	My own, I enjoy foreign languages, it's a challenge for me.
4.	I simply enjoy the German tongue a lot.
5.	Professional application.
6.	Secondary school instructors.
7.	Professional application.
8.	Better-paid jobs.
9.	My partner.
10.	I study history and sources are in German.
11.	German appeals to me, I like to learn foreign languages.
12.	I live in Sudetenland.
13.	Just personal interest.
14.	Watching series/films which are in German.
15.	On the day of language selection I was absent from school, and that's why I was placed in the group with fewer children.
16.	To earn academic credit.
17.	My parents talked to me in both Czech and German.
18.	It's fun.
19.	I am drawn to literature written in German.
20.	I like to translate German music texts.
21.	A parent teaches German.
22.	I find English difficult.
23.	Future long-term employment or studies in Germany.
24.	Rammstein songs and I simply liked it.
25.	My boyfriend.
26.	Father of German origin.

27.	German suits me better than English.
28.	Personal motivation from the knowledge of another world language.
29.	I am proficient in 7 languages. I enjoy learning another.
30.	Self-improvement.
31.	“Potential” job opportunity.

Source: Own research

The accumulated data in Table 1 clearly manifest that students are driven to study/learn German by internal motives (intrinsic motivation) as well as external ones (extrinsic motivation).

Intrinsic motivation is plainly observable in two closed items: number 2 – “*a good relationship to German*” – where 108 respondents answered “*certainly agree*”, additional 112 “*somewhat agree*” (total 220) and number 6 – “*I made the decision independently on the basis of my own interest*” – where 133 respondents answered “*certainly agree*” while 109 respondents opted for “*somewhat agree*” (total 242).

Other items rather suggest extrinsic motivation, even though internal motives cannot be fully excluded. Among these option 8 “*Because German was one among the options at my elementary/secondary school*” was most frequently encountered, with 150 respondents who “*certainly agree*” and 112 respondents who “*somewhat agree*” (total 262).

We have, furthermore, detected intrinsic motivation in item number 13 (open answer), namely in points number 2, 3, 4, 11, 13, 18, 19, 28, 30, while points 9, 20 and 25 seem to suggest partially intrinsic motivation. We are pleased to see that a considerable portion of respondents did not adopt a utilitarian approach to their intention to study/learn German; the decisive factor in their language choice was their own intrinsic motivation instead.

Finally, we would like to make a few recommendations for teachers hoping to increase their students’ motivation.

- Be a good role model for your students, make it obvious that you yourself are enthusiastic about your subject, that you enjoy what you do.
- Engage your students with the latest pedagogical methods, for instance, project-oriented or problem-oriented learning, among others; preparing a project or solving a problem stimulates curiosity and motivation to acquire more knowledge.
- Try to keep your teaching interactive rather than static, you’ll boost desire for more information on the part of your students.
- Demand pro-activity and creativity from your students themselves. Creativity fosters further motivation.
- Do not be afraid to use modern technologies. Working with them is considerably more entertaining, and as a result more motivating than frontal teaching.
- Base your language teaching on everyday reality. Your students should know why they are learning what at a specific moment, how they will be able to use what they have learnt in their own practical lives.
- Employ and encourage your students’ competitive spirit.
- Be a partner to your students, forget the old-fashioned role of a pedagogue as a “semi-god”.
- Keep in mind that each of your students is an individual. What is fun for Johnny might be sheer boredom for Ginny.

... and your students are guaranteed to look forward to German classes and you too.

## Conclusion

Motivation is undoubtedly among the factors crucial to the outcome of an educational process.

In our opinion, teaching efficiency relies on both the above-described types of motivation, that is, intrinsic as well as extrinsic. We believe that the more significant component in the overall success in teaching languages (and not only a language) is students' intrinsic motivation, which should, therefore, be encouraged and developed. Intrinsic motivation is, nevertheless, predicated on learning activities prepared and selected in a manner that helps students reach those goals that unmistakably match their needs.

In order to trigger interest and nurture intrinsic motivation, we may adopt a variety of teaching styles, for instance, problem teaching.

The ability to motivate students appropriately and to fire their enthusiasm to learn, in our case a foreign language, is an important skill and a great challenge for every teacher. Such skills, if a teacher has them, enhance the results of the educational process as a whole significantly.

Besedová [1, p. 109] views motivation as one among the key factors in foreign language teaching, one closely intertwined with the teaching process agents, that is, the student and the teacher, one that plays a decisive role in the creation of an adequate climate in the classroom.

It is therefore truly imperative that teachers should, prior to each class, prepare not only class content and its necessary steps, but also simultaneously consider and deliberately prepare the manner in which to motivate students to further learning.

Our own research has shown that students do not approach the choice of a foreign language, specifically the German language, in a purely utilitarian fashion; their choice is, instead, intrinsically motivated.

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Doc. PhDr. Martin Lachout, Ph.D.

## MOTIVACE VYSOKOŠKOLSKÝCH STUDENTŮ PRO STUDIUM NĚMECKÉHO JAZYKA

Článek je věnován motivaci jako jedné z klíčových proměnných učení. Autor se v článku zaměřuje na studenty českých vysokých škol, kteří se učí cizímu jazyku, konkrétně němčině.

Článek nejprve ve zkratce seznamuje čtenáře s pojmem motivace i jejími jednotlivými druhy, a to jak z hlediska její intenzity a délky trvání, tak i z hlediska působení na jedince.

Následující část článku seznamuje čtenáře s provedeným výzkumem motivace pro učení se němčině, který autor spolu se svými kolegyněmi realizoval mezi studujícími tří českých univerzit. Zároveň jsou na tomto místě prezentovány i výsledky provedeného výzkumu.

V závěru autor nabízí pedagogům několik skromných rad pro podpoření motivace žáků/studentů pro další studium němčiny.

## MOTIVATION ZUM DEUTSCHLERNEN BEI HOCHSCHULSTUDIERENDEN

Dieser Artikel ist der Motivation als einer der Schlüsselvariablen beim Lernen gewidmet. Im Mittelpunkt des Interesses des Autors stehen dabei tschechische Hochschulstudierende, die Deutsch als Fremdsprache studieren/lernen.

Der Artikel macht die LeserInnen erst mit dem Begriff Motivation bekannt, weiter mit dessen Klassifizierung aus der Sicht ihrer Intensität und Dauer ihrer Wirkung und aus der Sicht ihrer Wirkung auf ein Individuum.

Im nächsten Teil des Artikels legt der Autor seine Forschung zur Problematik der Motivation zum Deutschstudium / Deutschlernen dar. Diese Forschung hat er mit seinen Kolleginnen unter Studierenden aus drei ausgewählten tschechischen Universitäten durchgeführt. In diesem Teil werden den LeserInnen auch die Forschungsergebnisse präsentiert.

Zum Schluss bietet der Autor den LehrerInnen und Dozierenden einige Ratschläge zur Unterstützung der Motivation zum weiteren Deutschstudium / Deutschlernen bei den SchülerInnen / Studierenden.

## MOTYWACJA STUDENTÓW UCZELNI WYŻSZYCH DO NAUKI JĘZYKA NIEMIECKIEGO

Artykuł poświęcony jest motywacji będącej jednym z kluczowych czynników uczenia się. Autor w artykule skupia się na studentach czeskich uczelni wyższych, którzy uczą się języka obcego, konkretnie niemieckiego.

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