MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN BENGALI LANGUAGE AMONG SECONDARY STUDENTS

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Abstract

Language acquisition and proficiency play a vital role in educational attainment, with motivation serving as a crucial determinant of success. This study delves into the complex interplay between motivational factors and academic achievement in Bengali language learning among secondary students. Recognizing Bengali's profound cultural and societal significance, we aim to uncover the nuanced motivations that drive students towards linguistic mastery and subsequent academic success. Drawing on a qualitative research approach, we engaged fifteen secondary students in individual semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis revealed five key motivational themes: intrinsic motivation and personal goals, teacher support and encouragement, perceived relevance to future goals, peer influence and collaborative learning, and resilience in overcoming challenges. These findings underscore the importance of recognizing students' personal goals and aspirations in language learning. Supportive teacher-student relationships emerged as pivotal in fostering motivation, as did the perceived practical relevance of Bengali proficiency in future endeavors. Peer interactions and the ability to surmount challenges further contributed to students' motivation. Theoretical frameworks, including Social Cognitive Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Expectancy-Value Theory, offer valuable insights into the motivational dynamics at play. Implications for practice highlight the need for tailored interventions that nurture intrinsic motivation, promote positive teacher-student interactions, emphasize the practical value of language proficiency, and encourage collaborative learning. While this study provides valuable insights, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations, including the specific demographic focus. Future research could explore motivational factors in broader contexts and consider additional variables that may impact language learning motivation.

This research advances our understanding of the motivational landscape in Bengali language learning among secondary students. The findings offer practical guidance for educators and policymakers to enhance language education practices, with broader implications for language acquisition in diverse educational settings.

Keywords: *Motivation, Bengali Language Learning, Secondary Students, Academic Achievement*

Introduction

Language acquisition and proficiency have long been recognized as fundamental components of educational achievement. Among the myriad factors influencing language learning, motivation stands as a pivotal force, shaping the extent to which students engage with and master a given language. This holds particularly true for secondary students grappling with the complexities of Bengali language acquisition.

Bengali, with its rich linguistic heritage and cultural significance, is not only a medium of communication but also an emblem of identity for millions of individuals in South Asia. In the context of secondary education, proficiency in Bengali is vital not only for academic success but also for a deeper cultural immersion and societal participation. Understanding the motivational underpinnings that drive students in their pursuit of linguistic proficiency is therefore of paramount importance.

This study embarks on a qualitative exploration, seeking to unravel the intricate interplay between motivational factors and academic achievement in Bengali language learning among secondary students. By delving into the perspectives, aspirations, and experiences of these learners, we aim to shed light on the nuanced motivations that propel them towards linguistic mastery, and subsequently, academic success.

1.1 Rationale for the Study

While ample research has explored motivational factors in language learning contexts, the specific dynamics within the realm of Bengali language acquisition at the secondary level remain notably underexplored. Existing studies often offer a broad overview of language motivation, but fail to capture the unique cultural and contextual nuances that influence motivation in Bengali language learning. Furthermore, a dearth of research has examined how motivational factors correlate with actual academic performance in this domain.

This research addresses these gaps by conducting a qualitative inquiry, which allows for a detailed and nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of motivation in Bengali language learning. By engaging directly with the voices and experiences of secondary students, we aim to unearth the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that drive their pursuit of linguistic proficiency.

1.2 Objectives of the Study:
The primary objectives of this research are twofold: first, to identify and categorize the motivational factors that significantly influence secondary students' engagement with Bengali language learning; and second, to explore the relationship between these motivational factors and academic achievement in Bengali language proficiency.

Through a qualitative lens, we seek to capture the rich tapestry of student experiences, providing a holistic view of the motivational landscape. By accomplishing these objectives,

this study aspires to offer valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in the realm of language education.

Literature Review

2.1 Motivation in Language Learning: Motivation is a critical factor in language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2001). Previous research has extensively explored the role of motivation in language learning, highlighting its influence on engagement, persistence, and ultimately, proficiency (Gardner, 1985; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). While some studies have focused on general motivational theories (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Maslow, 1943), others have specifically examined motivational factors in language learning contexts (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

2.2 Bengali Language Acquisition in Secondary Education: Bengali, as the mother tongue of millions in South Asia, holds a unique position in language education. Studies have recognized the challenges faced by secondary students in acquiring proficiency in Bengali due to its complex script and syntax (Haque, 2008). The linguistic and cultural significance of Bengali further underscores the importance of understanding motivational factors in this context (Rahman, 2016).

2.3 Cultural and Contextual Influences on Motivation: The motivational dynamics in Bengali language learning are intricately tied to cultural and contextual factors. Contextual elements, such as curriculum design, teaching methods, and societal expectations, significantly shape students' motivation (Gu & Johnson, 1996). Furthermore, cultural values and identity play a vital role in influencing students' attitudes towards language learning (Norton, 2013).

2.4 Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Motivation in Language Learning: Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have been identified as primary drivers in language acquisition (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation, arising from internal desires and interests, has been associated with sustained engagement and deeper learning (Vallerand, 1997). Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, stems from external rewards or pressures and may impact short-term performance (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999).

Theoretical Framework

3.1 Social Cognitive Theory

Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex interplay between motivational factors and academic achievement in language learning contexts. This theory posits that individuals learn through a dynamic interaction of personal, behavioral, and environmental factors (Bandura, 1986).

In the context of Bengali language acquisition, Bandura's theory suggests that students' beliefs about their own capabilities (self-efficacy) play a crucial role in shaping their motivation and subsequent achievement. Students with higher self-efficacy in Bengali language learning are more likely to persist in their efforts, leading to improved proficiency and academic performance (Bandura, 1997).

3.2 Self-Determination Theory: Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's Self-Determination Theory emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and competence in driving human behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In the context of language learning, this theory posits that students who feel a sense of autonomy and competence in their language

acquisition endeavors are more likely to be intrinsically motivated, leading to deeper engagement and sustained effort (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

For Bengali language learners, fostering a sense of autonomy in their learning process and providing opportunities to demonstrate competence in the language may enhance their intrinsic motivation, ultimately influencing their academic achievement.

3.3 Expectancy-Value Theory

The Expectancy-Value Theory, developed by Eccles and Wigfield (2002), asserts that individuals' motivation is influenced by their expectancy of success and the subjective value they place on a task. In the context of Bengali language learning, students who perceive that they can succeed in mastering the language (expectancy) and attach a high value to this achievement (value) are more likely to be motivated to invest effort and time in their language learning endeavors.

By understanding the individual differences in students' expectancies and values related to Bengali language proficiency, educators and policymakers can tailor interventions to enhance motivation and subsequently improve academic achievement.

Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Research Approach:

This study employed a qualitative research approach to delve into the nuanced experiences, perceptions, and motivations of secondary students learning Bengali language. Qualitative research is particularly effective in exploring complex social phenomena and understanding participants' perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

4. 2 Participant Selection:

4.2.1 Sampling:

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who represented a diverse range of demographics, including age, grade level, and linguistic proficiency in Bengali.

4.2.2 Inclusion Criteria:

Participants were secondary students currently enrolled in a Bengali language program.

4.3 Data Collection Techniques:

4.3.1 Semi-Structured Interviews:

Participants: A total of 15 secondary students were interviewed individually.

Interview Structure: Interviews were semi-structured, allowing for a balance between predetermined questions and open-ended prompts. This facilitated a natural flow of conversation while ensuring key topics were covered (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Topics Explored: Interviews focused on participants' motivations, attitudes towards Bengali language learning, perceived challenges, and the relationship between motivation and academic achievement.

4.3.2 Field Notes:

Detailed field notes were taken during interviews to capture non-verbal cues, participants' body language, and contextual information that might contribute to the analysis.

4.3.3 Data Analysis:

Thematic Analysis: The data from interviews were subjected to thematic analysis, following the guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach involved the systematic identification and categorization of recurring themes and patterns in the qualitative data.

  - Initial codes were generated, and subsequent iterations of coding were used to refine and consolidate themes that emerged from the data.

4.4 Trustworthiness and Rigor:

4.4.1 Member Checking:

Member checking was employed to enhance the credibility of the findings. Participants were provided with summaries of their interviews and given the opportunity to verify the accuracy and interpretation of their responses (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

4.5 Ethical Considerations:

4.5.1 Informed Consent:

Prior to participation, participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights. Written consent was obtained from the participants.

4.5.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality:

Participants' identities were kept confidential, and any potentially identifying information was anonymized in reporting.

Findings

5.1 Intrinsic Motivation and Personal Goals

The interviews revealed a prevalent theme of intrinsic motivation among participants. Many students expressed a genuine interest in mastering Bengali, driven by personal goals such as connecting with their cultural heritage and feeling a sense of belonging within their community. Participant 7 remarked, "Learning Bengali helps me connect with my roots, and it makes me feel more connected to my family and community."

5.2 Teacher Support and Encouragement

Participants consistently highlighted the role of teachers in fostering their motivation. Supportive and encouraging teachers were identified as significant factors in shaping positive attitudes towards Bengali language learning. Participant 12 stated, "When teachers show that they believe in us, it gives us the confidence to try harder."

5.3 Perceived Relevance to Future Goals

Several participants emphasized the practical relevance of Bengali language proficiency to their future academic and career aspirations. They expressed a belief that mastering Bengali would open up opportunities for higher education and employment. Participant 4 articulated, "I want to study literature, and being proficient in Bengali is crucial for that."

5.4 Peer Influence and Collaborative Learning

Peer interactions emerged as a key motivational factor. Students reported feeling motivated by group activities and collaborative learning experiences. They found value in sharing the learning journey with their peers, as it created a supportive environment. Participant 9 shared, "Working with my classmates makes learning Bengali more enjoyable, and we help each other out."

5.5 Overcoming Challenges and Building Resilience: Participants acknowledged the challenges they faced in learning Bengali, particularly for those whose first language differed. However, they also expressed a determination to overcome these obstacles, which further fueled their motivation. Participant 5 reflected, "It's not always easy, but every small success feels like a big achievement."

Discussion

The qualitative findings shed light on the intricate motivational landscape influencing Bengali language learning among secondary students. These themes offer valuable insights into the factors that shape students' attitudes and efforts in mastering the language.

6.1 Intrinsic Motivation and Personal Goals

The prevalence of intrinsic motivation aligns with Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory, emphasizing the importance of internal drives in sustaining engagement and efforts. The participants' desire to connect with their cultural heritage and community is a powerful intrinsic motivator. This finding underscores the significance of recognizing and supporting students' personal goals in language learning contexts.

6.2 Teacher Support and Encouragement

The role of teachers as motivators resonates with the Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), emphasizing the influence of role models in shaping behaviors and beliefs. Participants' experiences of teacher support highlight the potential impact of positive teacher-student relationships on motivation. This finding emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive learning environment through teacher encouragement and affirmation.

6.3 Perceived Relevance to Future Goals

The emphasis on future academic and career aspirations echoes the Expectancy-Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002), which posits that individuals are motivated when they believe a task is relevant to their future goals. Participants' recognition of Bengali language proficiency as a practical skill aligns with this theory. This insight underscores the need for educators to highlight the real-world applicability of language learning.

6.4 Peer Influence and Collaborative Learning

The recognition of peer influence aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, emphasizing the importance of social interactions in cognitive development. The collaborative learning experiences reported by participants highlight the potential benefits of peer-supported environments. This finding suggests that creating opportunities for peer interaction and collaborative learning can enhance motivation in language acquisition.

6.5 Overcoming Challenges and Building Resilience

The acknowledgment of challenges and the determination to persevere aligns with Bandura's (1997) concept of self-efficacy, which emphasizes individuals' beliefs in their own capabilities. Participants' resilience in the face of difficulties underscores the importance of fostering a growth mindset in language education. This finding highlights the potential benefits of incorporating strategies to build students' confidence in their ability to overcome obstacles.

6.6 Implications for Practice

These findings hold several implications for language educators and policymakers. Firstly, recognizing and supporting students' intrinsic motivations and personal goals can

enhance engagement and persistence in language learning. Additionally, fostering positive teacher-student relationships and providing mentorship can significantly influence students' motivation. Furthermore, highlighting the practical relevance of language proficiency to future goals can amplify students' intrinsic motivation. Finally, creating opportunities for collaborative learning and promoting a growth mindset can foster a supportive learning environment.

Conclusion

This qualitative study provides a comprehensive understanding of the motivational factors influencing Bengali language learning among secondary students. The findings highlight the central role of intrinsic motivation, teacher support, perceived relevance to future goals, peer influence, and resilience in shaping students' engagement and efforts in mastering the language. These insights offer practical implications for educators and policymakers to enhance language education practices.

Furthermore, the study underscores the need for continued research in this area, particularly in exploring how motivational factors may vary across different demographic groups and educational settings. By addressing these nuances, we can further refine and tailor interventions to optimize language learning outcomes for secondary students.

This research contributes to the broader discourse on language education and serves as a foundation for future studies seeking to enhance the effectiveness of language learning programs, not only in the context of Bengali but also in other language acquisition endeavors.

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