

# Motivational Structure in Education

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## Abstract

The article focuses on the importance of motivation in foreign language education. The aim of the paper is to analyse the motivational structure towards the foreign language learning in context of the factors of wider social environment in which teaching and learning takes place. The sample of the survey were pupils from three primary schools in Slovakia who learn German language as the obligatory subject according to the school education program. The survey is based on the statistical analysis of the dimensions of the motivational structure, depending on schools and classes attended. The results confirmed the diversity in student motivation among schools. The differences in both intensity and constellation of the motivational structure were recorded. The research findings point to a dynamic link between the participants of the educational process and the wider social context factors.

## Keywords:

Motivational structure  
Second language education  
Intrinsic motivation  
Social context of learning

## 1 Introduction

During the recent decades, the ability to speak foreign languages has become a general requirement in the European context. Furthermore, it has become an integral part of vocational training as well. Successful acquisition of a foreign language is a challenging and long-term process that is affected by numerous internal and external factors. Research conducted in the last decade has stressed the importance of active participation of a learner in the process of education. On the basis of this fact, motivation of a learner plays an extraordinary role in education because it belongs to the basic characteristics of personality that are relatively accessible and it is possible to influence them via education. (Aguado, 2001, p. 596). With the help of the use of appropriately chosen didactic steps, teachers can foster pupils' motivation, while increasing the quality of their teaching (Riemer, 2003, p. 73).

Motivation plays an important role both at the beginning of the educational process and in the later stages of learning. In this context, studies show the decline in motivation to learn foreign languages at a more advanced stage of the educational process (Riemer, 2003; Juhásová, 2016). Overcoming this situation can be considered to be one of the day-to-day problems in our education system that needs to be solved already at primary and lower secondary schools. This is an up-to-date issue on which the success and quality of the educational process depends and which has a direct impact on the quality of the workforce at an older age and also influences the production process in plants and enterprises.

Therefore, the paper focuses on exploring the motivation to learn German in Slovak schools. In the last decades, English language has been regarded to be a lingua franca worldwide, what has reflected in the Slovak school system as well. Nevertheless, German language has maintained a strong regional influence in Slovakia. According to the data taken from the Slovak Statistical Office, more than half of pupils in Slovak schools learn

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German. In majority of the schools, German is taught as the second or the third foreign language. The popularity of this language is rather ambivalent (Hurrelmann, Salomo, 2014, p. 20). As Juhásová (2016) states:

*"The survey showed that German does not belong to the most popular subjects at schools (...). In spite of that, Slovak young people are aware of the fact that the ability to speak German language brings them more job opportunities in their future lives, at least in the Central European area where they live. Though German is not a favourite subject among Slovak learners in general, they regard learning German to be a good investment for their future."* (Juhásová, 2016, p. 36)

The studies open the question, how these heterogeneous trends in the school system and in foreign language education can be related to the motivation of pupils. The submitted paper; therefore, deals with motivation and its importance in foreign language learning and it presents the results of the survey, that was focused on the analysis of the motivational structure towards learning German as a foreign language in the school environment.

## 2 Motivation and Factors of the Social Environment

Motivation as an important determinant of learning a foreign language has long been in the centre of the attention of many experts. Motivation belongs to the dynamic characteristics of personality, which are the least stable; and therefore, they represent an important aspect for pedagogical intervention (Stranovská, 2011, pp. 43-48).

In a broader sense, motivation determines the direction and intensity of each human action (Atkinson, 1999, p. 288). Stranovská (2011, pp. 158-159) defines motivation as the driving force that activates human action. It has the character of strength, because it has its own direction and intensity.

Dörnyei (2014, pp. 518-519) claims that, despite the fact that the notion of motivation is used in both every day and professional communication, there is no uniform definition of this concept. However, each definition contains the following consensus:

*„motivation determines the direction and magnitude of human behaviour or, in other words, the choice of a particular action, the persistence with it, and the effort expended on it.“* (Dörnyei, 2014, p.519).

Human action is therefore, definitely motivated, but an individual may not be aware of his motives. Motivation and its realization are heavily influenced by culture. The demonstration of these motives varies in different cultures, but also under the influence of traditions, customs, or on the basis of belonging to different social groups, etc. (Stranovská, 2011, p. 159).

Motivation cannot be explored independently of the context of its implementation. Motivation is more than just the sum of different motives. In the context of foreign language learning, some of the motives can play an important role at the beginning of this process. However, we must not forget that learning a language is a long-term process and one single motif is generally not enough to achieve success in the process (Kirchner, 2004, pp. 2-3).

Stranovská (2011, pp. 159-160) summarizes the factors that affect motivation as follows: primary biological needs, acquired motivational dispositions, cognition and emotions, time, social interactions, teacher - pupil interaction. Motivation in the light of modern research is fully linked to the individual's cognitive, emotional and social determinants (Dunowski, 2015, pp. 110-111; Dörnyei, 2014, p. 519).

Some authors point to the intentionality of human acting in connection to motivation (compare Dörnyei, 2014, Stranovská, 2011). Thus, the personal goals of an individual and the importance with which a person perceives the educational process play an important role in the process of acquiring a foreign language, as well as in maintaining the adequate motivation and willingness to learn the language.

### 2.1 Motivational Structure

Looking at current motivation research, many authors (see Dörnyei, 2014; Kirchner, 2004; Riemer, 2003) point out that in the 1990s there was a change in understanding of motivation among researchers. The importance of motivation has increased, because many researchers perceive it as the most accessible

determinant of learning a foreign language. Qualitative research that highlighted the great extent of interpersonal variability in this dimension came to the fore. New models were needed that interpreted the dynamic nature of motivation. These new theoretical constructs integrated earlier knowledge, but at the same time, they interpreted the situational impact and greater individual differences in motivation. Since the 70s, the socio-educational theory of R.C. Gardner dominated in understanding of the motivation. His theory is still influential despite the fact that concepts of integrative and instrumental motivation are often discussed (Dunowski, 2015, p. 111). Based on the attitudes towards language and language community, two basic types of motivation are distinguished (Masgoret, Gardner, 2003, pp. 124-129). Integrative motivation is characterized by the interest in culture, country, people and community where the foreign language is spoken (as a native language). On the other hand, instrumental motivation is based on the practical applicability of acquired language knowledge. Gardner's theory emphasizes the social dimension of learning a foreign language – it is not just about learning grammar and vocabulary, the individual compares himself or herself with the linguistic community and culture (Kirchner, 2004, p. 3).

Deci and Ryan (1985, pp. 225-227) understand motivation as a continuum where the two endpoints are represented by intrinsic (internal) and extrinsic (external) motivation. There is always curiosity, spontaneity and interest behind the each internally motivated action. Extrinsic motivation is based on the tasks and challenges from the outside world. These authors call their approach a self-determinative theory of motivation.

The theory of attribution can be considered to be a newer approach for the explanation of motivation. Attributions are cognitive processes that help individuals to explain their achievements and failures. According to Kirchner (2004, pp. 5-6), the most important attributions that follow the motivation are:

- whether the pupil looks for the reason for his or her success / failure in himself or herself or in someone else;
- whether the learner considers these reasons to be stable or changeable;
- whether the pupil assumes responsibility for these changes or delegates it to another person.

On the basis of the attribution theory, it can be expected that a pupil that sees the reasons for his / her success primarily in internal factors related to his or her personality, will be more willing to approach the educational process independently and proactively.

Because of its multidimensionality and clear structure, the survey methodically relies mainly on the concept of Dörnyei (Dörnyei, 2014, pp. 520-522). This model of the motivational self-system (L2 motivational self-system) highlights on the one hand the dynamic nature of the motivation, on the other hand it tries to integrate the previous motivational theories. The author assumes the existence of possible selves, which play an important role in the educational process. The system of possible selves consists of an ideal self (ideal L2 self), an ought-to self, and situational factors. The ideal self depicts the goals of a learning individual. The ought-to-self reflects the individual's expectations and responsibilities that a person has to fulfil. Situational factors take previous experiences in the field of foreign language acquisition into consideration and reflect the social situation in the language class (e.g. relationship with the teacher, group dynamics in the classroom and others). The strength of this model is its compatibility with previous theories. The attribution theory, e.g. corresponds with previous learning experiences, Gardner's integrative motivation could be a part of an ideal self and others. The Dörnyei's model draws the attention to the purposefulness of learning and challenges teachers to encourage pupils to develop systematic, long-term, and positive self-presentation in relation to a foreign language.

According to previous considerations, motivation was perceived as a subjective category of an individual. The definitions usually highlighted the importance of one dimension of motivation as opposed the contradictions, one of which was considered to be a desirable form of motivation (e.g. integrative vs. instrumental, intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation). The positive form of motivation is presented in these theories as the inner conviction of an individual, which is little related to the external conditions of the social environment. External factors were perceived often as inferior forms (see Masgoret-Gardner, 2003; Deci-Ryan, 1993; Kirchner, 2004).

In new multidimensional motivational models the viewpoint on this context has changed. These theories try to grasp the complexity of the motivational structure of the individual and search for the most suitable place in this system. In her research, Stranovská (2011, pp. 159-160) investigates the elements of the social environment, such as social interaction in the classroom, the teacher-pupil relationship, but also factors of wider social nature like traditions, culture and customs. Furthermore, the above described model of the motivational self-system (Dörnyei, 2014, pp. 520-522) examines the previous experience of an individual with learning a foreign language as one of the basic elements, which is to a large extent realized in the social world. Our survey is based on these findings and examines motivation in a wider social context.

### 3 Research design

Based on the facts stated above, it can be concluded that motivation to learn foreign languages has a complex structure and its components interact with each other, while being influenced by the various factors involved in the process of learning. The aim of the survey was to map the motivational structure of pupils who learn German as an obligatory subject at primary schools. The motivational structure was examined in the context of social environment, it means in the context related to the school attended.

The motivational structure was operationalized as follows:

1. *intrinsic motivation* – to what extent a pupil would be willing to learn German if the subject was not classified, "only" to become smarter;
2. *personal goals* – the pupil perceives German language knowledge to be useful, as an important part of the preparation for a future profession (e.g. he or she wants to work abroad);
3. *attractiveness of L2 community* – a learner is interested in the language community, he or she wants to make friends with people from German-speaking countries and considers these countries to play an important role in the world;
4. *worries about learning* – a learner is afraid of the fact that he can get bad marks in German language and that he can upset his parents with his performance in this subject;
5. *learning situation* – factors connected to the situation in the language classroom, e.g. what value the learners attribute to the knowledge of foreign language and to what extent they experience their success in the classroom.

We examined the social environment and the variable was represented by the school attended. The schools involved in the survey were divided into different types. The first parameter was the geographical location of the school (village or urban). Furthermore, the specialization of the school (classical vs. specialized, e.g. sports school) was taken into consideration in the survey as well.

Based on the aims of the survey, the following research questions were set:

1. What is the motivational structure of pupils and what factors is this structure related to?
2. Is the motivational structure associated with some specific social environment factors?

### 4 Methods

The investigation was carried out at primary schools in Nitra region in Slovakia. 84 pupils from three schools participated in the survey. The respondents were pupils between 12 and 15 years out of whose 50% were girls and 50% boys, with heterogeneous motivation and school subject achievement (grades). In the survey, we investigated the motivational structure of learners in lower secondary education (ISCED 2), in the seventh, eighth, and ninth class. At the time of the data collection, the respondents learnt German as the second or the third foreign language according to the school education program. The average number of years of learning German was 3.1 years (depending on the class, 2 to 4 years). Three schools took part in the survey, one of them was located in a village and two schools were in a town. Moreover, one of the schools was a specialized sport school.

The data was collected using a questionnaire. The starting point for the preparation of the questionnaire was the instrument of the authors Dörnyei and Csizér (2002, pp. 428-431). The respondents expressed their opinions on the chosen statements with the help of Lickert scale. The questionnaire was written in the mother tongue of learners.

Each operationalized dimension of the motivational structure included 2 questions, except for the dimension of the situation, which was measured with the help of 3 questions. A negative control question was included in the items as well. Its purpose was to find out whether the learning of German language has got any significance for the respondents.

The collected data were processed using statistical methods. First, a descriptive analysis of the data was carried out, then we tested the differences in the average values of the different dimensions of the motivational structure considering the attended school through the ANOVA analysis of variance.

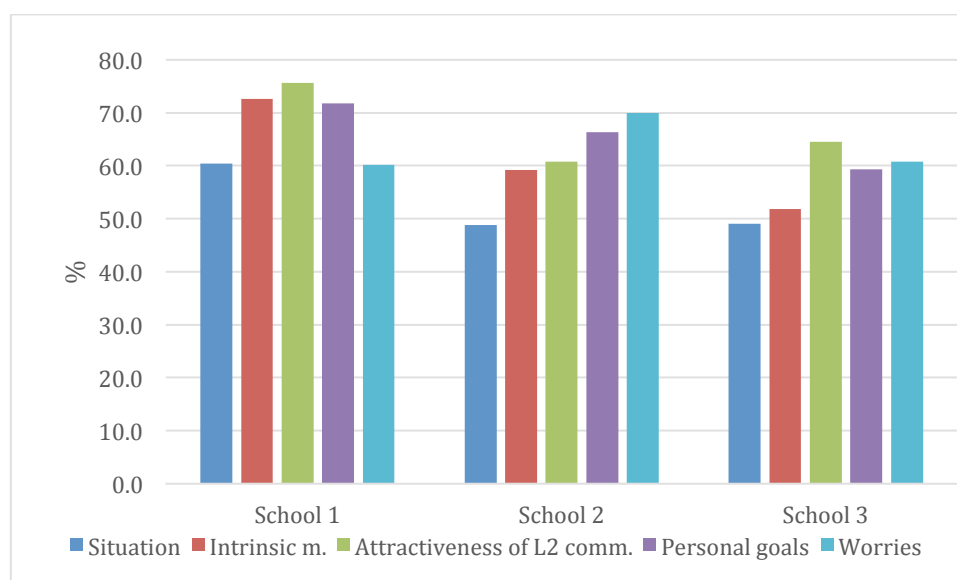
## 5 Results

On the basis of the descriptive analysis (Table 1) we found out that 3 dimensions of the motivational structure, concretely, the attractiveness of the language community, personal goals and worries were perceived as typical by the respondents (the average is approximately 65%). Statements connected to the internal motivation were less accepted; however, the results were still above the 60% boundary. The standard deviation in this dimension was the highest, that indicates significant personal differences in this area. The perception of situational factors with an average value of 51.5% was the most problematic aspect.

Index	Variable	Mean	Mean%	Median	SD	Rel.SD	X_min	X_max
1.	Intrinsic motivation	8.429	60.2	8.5	3.697	0.439	2	14
2.	Goal	9.19	65.6	9.5	3.209	0.349	2	14
3.	Language community	9.119	65.1	9	2.926	0.321	2	14
4.	Worries	9.131	65.2	9	3.505	0.384	2	14
5.	Situation	10.81	51.5	11	4.306	0.398	3	20

**Table 1:** Descriptive analysis of the variables of the motivational structure

Impact of the school attended and the related wider social factors have been demonstrated in relation to the three dimensions of the motivational structure (Figure 1). The extent of the internal motivation and the attractiveness of the language community were significantly associated with the attended school ( $p < 0.05^*$  significant in both cases). The situation in the language class was dependent on the attended school with the tendency ( $p < 0.1+$ ). This trend shows the relationship between the school attended and the perception of teacher's personality as well (question 11 in the questionnaire, statistical significance  $p < 0.01^{**}$ ).



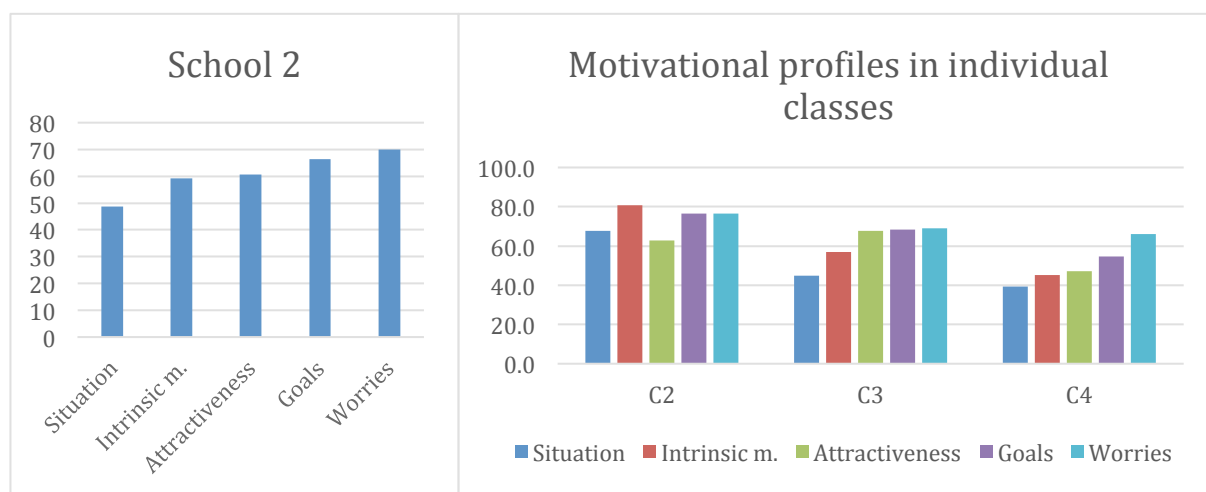
**Fig. 1:** Motivational structure of learners from the schools involved

Except the differences in individual dimensions there were the differences in the constellation of the motivational structure, too. All the dimensions of motivation (except for the worries) were in their highest degree by the pupils of the village school. In this group of participants, the dimensions connected to the ideal self, such as attractiveness of language community, intrinsic motivation and personal goals played the most important role.

Although the next two components of the motivational structure were less typical, they were still accepted with the percentage higher than 60% (situation 60.4% and worries 60.1%). For the pupils at the specialized

sport school the dimension worries was the most typical one (69.9%). These learners are motivated mainly by their worries about a possible failure during their language lessons. Other dimensions that were above 60% were the dimension of personal goals (66.4%) and attractiveness of the language community (60.7%). The dimension of situation was perceived slightly negatively at this school (48.8%). The least motivated learners to learn German language were the participant from the second urban school. The most important motivational factor for them was attractiveness of the language community (64.4%). In comparison to other schools, the lowest average was identified in two dimensions (personal goals 59.3% and intrinsic motivation 51.9%). These values show that the perceiving of the internal motivation and personal goals was to huge extent ambivalent in this group.

In the last phase of the analysis, the possible differences between different classes were studied. Furthermore, we compared the motivational profiles of different classes with the general motivational profile



of the whole school. The motivational profiles from the second school are stated below as an example (Fig. 2).

**Fig. 2:** Motivational structure at the second school in different classes

It can be concluded that the rule “one school – one motivation” is not always functioning. From Fig.2 it can be seen that the general degree of motivation can differ in different classes within one school. This is depicted in the seventh and ninth class at the second school (specialized at sports). The degree of the most important motivational dimension (worries) is still lower in the class Z4 (9. class) than the least typical dimension (attractiveness of the language community) in the class Z2 (7. class).

## 6 Discussion

The results of our survey confirmed the hypothesis that motivation is in dynamic interaction with factors of the external social environment. With regard to the motivational structure of the entire research sample, we can state that pupils characterized themselves as rather motivated to learn German language. The dimension of the intrinsic motivation was the most problematic dimension of the ideal self because the lowest number of pupils agreed with it. Moreover, the survey showed that good grades generally do not foster a significant recognition by classmates. The personality of a teacher also plays an important role among the situational factors. The relationship with a teacher was perceived as ambivalent, there were significant differences in pupils’ opinions on teacher’s personality. It has to be pointed out that general characteristics often hide the particularities of individual groups.

Motivation is the result of the to great extent individualized process (Kirchner, 2004; Riemer, 2003) and this finding is extremely important in this case. The school attended and especially the related factors of the social environment have a great impact on the motivation of pupils. There were large differences between the first and the second and third school. The first school was situated in a village, other schools were urban. The findings confirmed the assertion of Dörnyei a Csizér (2002, pp. 449-452) that focused on the idea that the

popularity of German language decreased rapidly in towns in comparison to smaller villages. This phenomenon can be related to the fact that pupils in towns have got more alternative opportunities to learn a foreign language; and therefore, they are demotivated to learn German at schools. This can be seen on the answer of one of the respondents, too: "I have to learn German because I could not choose another language. I do not like this language. It was the only one choice I had. I would never learn German if I had the choice."

However, the differences are not based only on the location of schools. The pupils had, for example, completely different viewpoint on their teacher as well. A positive relationship with a teacher can raise the interest of pupils even by the less motivated individuals. Frequent changes of teachers and if a teacher is less competent, it can cause the ambivalent or even negative perception by pupils and it can lead to decreasing their motivation.

Moreover, the investigation has shown that the differences can be found not only among schools, but also in different classes, in the degree of motivation, but also in their motivational constellation. According to teachers, there is a class at each school, where pupils are less motivated than others. It is probable that a teacher spends much more energy in such a classroom in order to create a positive picture of his or her personality and of the whole subject. The phenomenon of motivation is a great challenge for pedagogical practice, but it is also a significant opportunity for a teacher. Teachers should influence their pupils as constructively as possible in order to prepare them adequately not only for further education but also for the labor market. Students, at the end of their studies, should be ready and motivated to get into the work process. The role of our education is; therefore, to prepare people for their future jobs and lives so that they are competitive in different fields not only at home, but also in the international sphere. Based on this, foreign languages play an extremely important role. The preparation and support of pupils' motivation at primary schools are the basis for the further studies of professional language at higher levels of education. The aim of the paper is to contribute to a better understanding of motivation at elementary schools and to bring knowledge from this area to teachers and to the professional public.

Our findings also suggest some possibilities for further research. For example, the significance of the teacher's role in the educational process was not explored in depth. It is also possible to compare the motivation to learn German language with the motivation of learners to learn English as the first foreign language. Researching these fields, including different qualitative methods, could deepen our previous knowledge of motivation in context of the school education.

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