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Unlocking Intrinsic Motivation Through Communicative Language Activities

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Abstract

This paper explores the crucial role of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in fostering intrinsic motivation among language learners. Motivation, a vital factor in achieving success in language learning, is examined through the lens of extrinsic and intrinsic drivers. While extrinsic motivation, fueled by rewards, grades, or external pressures, often supports short-term engagement, intrinsic motivation, rooted in personal satisfaction, curiosity, and genuine enjoyment, is essential for achieving sustained and meaningful long-term success. The paper emphasizes how structured CLT activities, as proposed by Elmetaher (2024), can effectively bridge the gap between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. These activities are thoughtfully designed to offer learners opportunities to experience academic accomplishment and learning enjoyment, thereby creating a strong foundation for sustained engagement in the learning process. Such meaningful experiences not only gradually reduce learners' reliance on external rewards but also foster intrinsic motivation by building their confidence, self-efficacy, and belief in their ability to use the target language effectively.

Introduction

Learning a foreign language is a complex and multifaceted process that demands consistent motivation. Motivation differs significantly among learners. Some learners want to acquire a new language out of personal interest, cultural exploration, or future opportunities, while others have to learn it to fulfill external requirements, such as passing school exams, meeting job obligations, or achieving graduation criteria.

The type of motivation learners possess often influences their long-term success. Internally motivated learners, driven by personal satisfaction, might tend to show sustained progress and persistence. In contrast, externally motivated learners, whose engagement stems from outside influences, may cease practicing the target language once their immediate goals are achieved. This decline can gradually lead to a loss of language proficiency. This raises a critical question: How can teachers foster long-term motivation among language learners to ensure consistent engagement and progress? To address this, it is essential to first explore the concept of motivation, understand its types, and identify teaching strategies that help learners move beyond short-term goals to develop lasting intrinsic motivation.

Understanding Motivation in Language Learning

Ryan and Deci (2000) provide a foundational framework for understanding motivation as the driving force behind individuals' actions. They categorize motivation into two distinct types:

1. **Intrinsic Motivation:** This type of motivation originates within the learner, driving them to engage in an activity for the enjoyment, satisfaction, or personal interest it provides, rather than for any external rewards or pressures. For example, a learner may study a foreign language simply because they find joy in exploring new cultures, mastering linguistic challenges, or engaging in meaningful communication.
2. **Extrinsic Motivation:** Unlike intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation is driven by external factors, such as praise, tangible rewards, societal recognition, or external pressures. For instance, a learner may work hard to achieve high scores on language tests, receive a prize, or meet specific academic or professional requirements.

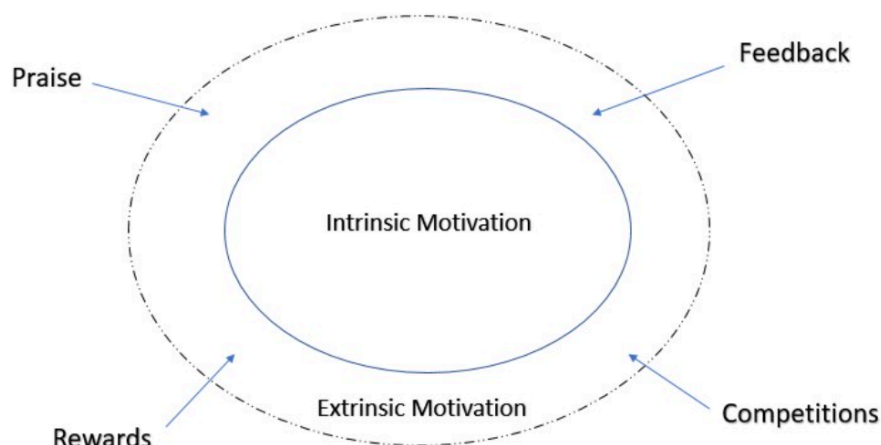
While extrinsic motivation might effectively initiate engagement and drive short-term success, it might not always foster sustained learning. Once external incentives, such as praise or rewards, are no longer available, learners' motivation might diminish. This dependence on external motivators increases the risk of disengagement, especially when external learning goals are no longer present or enforced. Conversely, intrinsic motivation is more enduring and plays a vital role in sustaining long-term language learning. Learners who find personal satisfaction and enjoyment in the process are more likely to remain engaged, actively seek out opportunities for practice, and persevere through challenges. Intrinsically motivated learners experience deeper, more meaningful learning experiences, which lead to long-term language retention and proficiency.

Balancing Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation in Language Learning

Figure 1 illustrates how language teachers address intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in their classrooms. The diagram represents intrinsic motivation as the core foundation of long-term success, symbolized by a solid circle, which signifies its enduring and stable nature. Surrounding it, is extrinsic motivation, represented as an outer dashed circle, emphasizing its temporary nature and the possibility of fading once external incentives are removed. While external incentives such as praise, rewards, feedback, and competitions can successfully spark initial engagement, they may not fully cultivate the intrinsic motivation necessary for long-term learning. Without intrinsic motivation, learners' progress may slow or even regress once the immediate external goals are met.

Figure 1

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation in Language Classrooms



To bridge this gap, teachers should implement strategies that guide learners toward intrinsic motivation. This might be achieved by fostering a sense of academic achievement and learning enjoyment throughout the learning process.

The Role of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Before exploring how CLT might foster academic achievement and learning enjoyment as a pathway to intrinsic motivation, it is essential to first understand what CLT is and its key elements.

What is CLT?

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged in the 1970s as a response to traditional language teaching methods such as Grammar Translation and Audiolingualism (Suemith, 2011). Unlike earlier approaches that emphasized rote memorization and grammatical accuracy, CLT prioritizes the development of communication skills in real-life contexts. It encourages learners to actively use the target language to express themselves, solve problems, and interact meaningfully with others (Elmetaher, 2009; 2021b; 2022). By focusing on interaction and practical language use, CLT has proven to be effective in promoting active learning and engaging students in the classroom (Elmetaher, 2021a; 2021c).

Key Elements of CLT

Elmetaher (2009; 2024) restates four fundamental elements that form the basis of communicative activities:

1. Sender (Speaker): The person who initiates communication by conveying a message.
2. Message: The information or feeling being communicated.
3. Receiver (Listener): The person who receives and interprets the message.
4. Feedback: The listener's response, which indicates whether the message was understood and allows for clarification or further interaction.

These four main elements ensure that CLT activities can contribute to:

- Academic Achievement: Students build confidence and demonstrate progress by using the language effectively to achieve their goals and successfully convey their messages.
- Learning Enjoyment: Activities create engaging and dynamic opportunities for real-world language use, where students experience satisfaction and enjoyment from meaningful communication and interaction with peers.

Building on these principles, CLT activities might provide a solid foundation for fostering both academic achievement and learning enjoyment, two key factors in developing intrinsic motivation.

CLT Activities to Unlock Intrinsic Motivation

To provide practical solutions that language teachers can tailor to their classroom needs, Elmetaher (2024) introduced five CLT activities that align with the main four elements of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and might have the potential to promote intrinsic motivation. The activities are specifically tailored to address diverse classroom settings, varying proficiency levels, and time constraints by:

- Being easy to implement with minimal preparation, making them practical for teachers managing busy schedules or multiple class demands.
- Being adaptable to classrooms with limited access to technology, ensuring inclusivity for various teaching environments, including resource-constrained settings.
- Effectively engaging students across different proficiency levels, offering flexibility to meet the needs of both high- and low-proficiency learners within diverse classroom settings.

- Requiring short and manageable time frames for each activity, allowing teachers to incorporate them effectively within limited class periods.

Table 1 below summarizes the five CLT activities proposed by Elmetaher (2024), along with their suggested proficiency levels and time frames.

Table 1

CLT Activities for Different Proficiency Levels and Time Frames

N	Activity	Suggested Proficiency	Level	Suggested Time
1	Ask & Answer	Beginner (A1)	1	5 minutes
2	Sentence Puzzle	Elementary (A2)	2	5 minutes
3	Job Detective	Pre-Intermediate (B1)	3	10 minutes
4	Photo Chat	Intermediate (B2)	4	10 minutes
5	Shopping Talk	Upper Intermediate (C1)	5	15 minutes

Descriptions of the CLT Activities

Ask & Answer: Students are provided with a list of simple questions and answers. They pair up and take turns matching questions with answers in a conversational exchange.

Sentence Puzzle: Students are given sentence halves printed on cards or slips of paper. They work individually or in pairs to match the halves and form complete, meaningful sentences.

Job Detective: One student selects a profession from a list or card provided by the teacher. The other students take turns asking yes/no questions to identify the profession.

Photo Chat: Students are provided with images or pictures (e.g., scenes, objects, or people). Each student describes the details of their image to their peers, focusing on what they observe.

Shopping Talk: Students are given role cards or shopping lists to simulate a shopping scenario. One student takes on the role of the customer, while the other acts as the shopkeeper, engaging in a structured or improvised dialogue. For more details about each activity and sample materials, refer to Elmetaher (2024).

How CLT Activities Foster Intrinsic Motivation

When learners engage in the aforementioned structured Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) activities and successfully complete them, they gradually develop a clear and tangible sense of academic achievement and learning enjoyment. Cultivating both academic achievement and learning enjoyment can play a significant role in fostering sustained intrinsic motivation, thereby reducing learners' dependence on external rewards (e.g., praise, grades, or tangible incentives) over time. Instead, learners begin to focus on the personal satisfaction, confidence, and enjoyment gained from successfully using the language to accomplish their communication goals. This shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation is essential for ensuring long-term engagement and success in language learning.

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