

Research Article**A STUDY ON THE COUPLING MECHANISM BETWEEN INTERCULTURAL IDENTITY AND CHINESE LANGUAGE LEARNING MOTIVATION OF AFRICAN STUDENTS IN CHINA****^{1,2}Ma Jia and ^{1,*}Boon Keat Ooi**¹School of Education and Social Sciences, Management and Science University, Shah Alam 40100, Selangor, Malaysia²Sanquan Medical College, Xinxiang 453000, Henan, China**Received 20th June 2023; Accepted 27th July 2023; Published online 30th August 2023**

Abstract

China and Africa have a long history of interaction and close cooperation. The friendly relations between China and Africa have contributed significantly to developing China-Africa educational cooperation, with more and more African students coming to China to study. In the process of second language learning, learners' motivation and intercultural identity of the target language impact the learning of the target language. Intercultural identity and language proficiency are essential factors for international students in adaptation. This study aims to investigate the intercultural identity and Chinese language learning motivation of African students studying in China. By analyzing the effects of integrative motivation, instrumental motivation, intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation on intercultural identity, we put forward suggestions to enhance intercultural identity to enhance students' motivation to learn the Chinese language.

Keywords: African students in China, intercultural identity, Chinese language learning motivation.

INTRODUCTION

With the increasing global status in China and the continuous increase in comprehensive national strength, more and more students from different countries choose to study in China. In 2018, 492,185 foreign students from 196 countries and regions studied in Chinese colleges and universities in China (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MOE of PRC, 2019). Education for studying in China is an essential part of the internationalization of China's higher education and a window for Chinese education. Attracting foreign students to study in China and cultivating talents for all world countries is not only an essential part of China's education being internationally recognized but also a necessary way to build educational power. China is the largest developing country in the world, and Africa is the continent with the highest concentration of developing countries. China and Africa are closely linked by common historical encounters, common development missions, and common goals (The State Council Information Office of PRC, 2021). After the founding of New China, the complex and ever-changing international and domestic situation made Africa one of the targets of China's friendly cooperation, and the two countries adhered to the principles of mutual respect, openness and inclusiveness, equality, and mutual benefit, and opened up cultural diplomacy and cooperation. Egypt was the first country on the African continent to start Chinese language teaching, thus kicking off the prelude to Chinese language teaching in African countries (Barbaro, 2020). In the 21st century, with the increasingly close exchanges between China and Africa, African education in China has entered a stage of rapid development. According to the official website of the Ministry of Education, 81,562 students from Africa came to China in 2018, accounting for 16.57 percent of the total number of students studying (MOE of PRC, 2019).

In intercultural communication and learning, language has become the primary obstacle faced by international students in China. As an essential carrier of Chinese cultural transmission, the Chinese language is closely related to the study and life of international students coming to China. Studying the relationship between intercultural identity and Chinese language learning motivation of African students in China can not only provide suggestions for African students to better adapt to their study and life in China in an intercultural context but also has a good promotion effect on African students' understanding and perception of Chinese culture, spreading of Chinese culture, and promotion of cultural exchanges between the two countries.

Learning Motivation**The connotation of learning motivation**

Motivation refers to the intrinsic force that causes an individual to engage in an activity, sustains it, and motivates it to achieve a goal (Borah, 2021). Gardner defines motivation as the degree of effort an individual wants to learn a language (Pham, 2021). Learning motivation is an internal mechanism that inspires an individual to engage in learning activities and makes individual learning activities toward specific learning goals (Seven, 2020). Learning motivation is the driving tendency to stimulate students' interest, initiate and maintain students' learning behavior, and promote students to achieve their academic goals.

Classification of learning motivation

Social psychologists are the first to start serious research on language learning motivation because they are aware of the impact of social and cultural factors on second language learning. (Ushioda, 2020) Language Learning motivation has different classifications according to different perspectives. Two types of motivation used in this study currently have the

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most significant impact on second language learning, namely, integrative motivation and instrumental motivation, proposed by Gardner and Lambert based on the relationship between motivation to learn and external associations (Feng, 2021). Deci and his associates distinguish intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in self-determination theory (Keblawi, 2009).

Integrative motivation and instrumental motivation:

Integrative motivation. Integrative motivation refers to the most influential concepts in Gardner's theory of motivation, including integration, attitudes toward the learning environment, and motivation to learn (Xiao, 2019). This program aims to communicate with the target language community, try to integrate into the culture and living environment of the target language and become a member of the target language community. Integrative motivation focuses on the learner's enjoyment and active language learning. The learner's language learning is more driven, effective, and lasts longer.

Instrumental motivation: Instrumental motivation refers to using language as a tool with the hope that it will be used to fulfill the needs of learning, work, or life (Keblawi, 2009). For example, international students studying in China are trying hard to learn Chinese to pass the HSK exam. Instrumental motivation focuses on learners' needs for language and passive learning. Instrumental motivation is often associated with a specific goal, usually ending when the goal is reached.

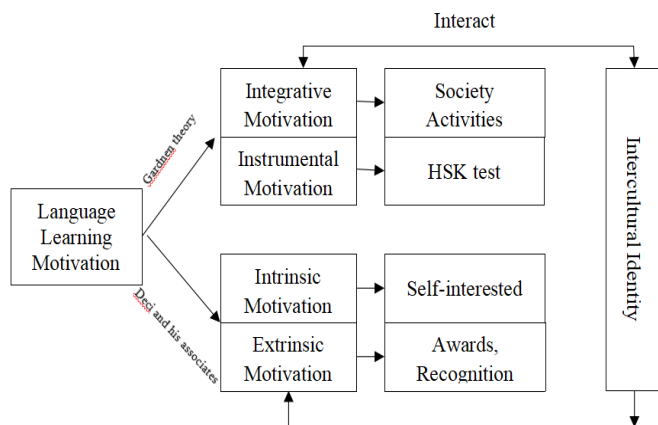


Figure 1. The Relationship between Language Learning Motivation and Intercultural Identity

Intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation: Intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is spontaneously produced by learners, arising from the learner's interest in the thing itself (Keblawi, 2009). Individuals with intrinsic motivation are usually easily satisfied and proud of the realization of their values and their growth. Intrinsic motivation can effectively improve an individual's learning efficiency. For example, international students coming to China take the initiative to learn Chinese because they like or are interested in it.

Extrinsic motivation: Extrinsic motivation is motivation influenced by external factors rather than subjective factors at work (Keblawi, 2009). For example, Chinese learners are motivated to earn praise and rewards, obtain scholarships, and so on, based on what parents, teachers, or others other than the learners propose.

Other Learning Motivation: In addition to the two main classifications mentioned above, there are other classifications

of language learning motivation. From the viewpoint of the relationship between motivation behavior and the proximity of the goal, it can be divided into distant motivation and proximal motivation (Schunk & Di Benedetto, 2021). From the viewpoint of the motivation behind student learning behaviors, it can be divided into general motivation to learn and specific motivation to learn (Dunn, & Kennedy, 2019). Biggs divides learning motivation to surface motivation and deep motivation (Yuan, 2021).

Intercultural Identity

The Connotation of Intercultural Identity

Identity has two primary meanings, identity and identification. The Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud first developed the concept. Freud (1921) believed that identification is a process of emotional and psychological convergence between an individual and a group of others or an object of imitation (Sha, 2022). "Culture" has a long history in the language system. The Chinese discourse on culture began with the Zhou Yi, which gave culture the meaning of civilization and indoctrination. The word culture in the West is derived from the Latin word Cultura, which means farming, practicing, living, etc. It mainly reflects the material life of human beings, but later on, it derives a spiritual meaning, such as moral education (Zhang, 2021). Cultural identity is mainly expressed as both parties having the same cultural background or recognizing and accepting each other's culture (Xiao, 2019). Intercultural identity is the phenomenon of the interpenetration of cultures based on cultural identity due to the increasing global connectivity, the continuous intermingling and linking of cultures between countries, and the continuous development of global information technology. Intercultural identity in this study refers to the ability of African students to cross the cultural differences between China and Africa based on the cultural differences between the two countries; to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the two cultures, to cross the cultural gap, to understand and correctly treat the Chinese culture, and to adapt to the Chinese culture.

Intercultural encounter

The original cognition and values of an individual or a group are relatively stable due to the long-term influence of the country's culture and living habits. As people come into contact with more cultures, they tend to unconsciously use their own existing cultures or values to understand and evaluate each other's cultures while interacting with different cultures. It is easy for them to inject their ideas or emotions into each other's cultures in the form of "preconceived notions," which will gradually expose contradictions and barriers, such as language barriers, cognitive barriers, source culture conflicts, cultural shock, and interest bias, etc., due to the inability to adapt to the interaction or contrast. African students coming to China for the first time will inevitably encounter different barriers in the new environment, especially regarding language. While many African languages have variable sequences, the situation with Chinese characters is more complex. In most cases, the order of the Chinese language is fixed and cannot be changed at will. African students' mother tongue and official language are pinyin characters, vastly different from the Chinese character system (Lian, 2018). These differences in language and culture may make students feel intimidated. Students are prone to mood

swings or psychological instability and may resist and avoid using Chinese characters, hindering their learning of Chinese characters. Poor language communication makes it difficult for students to adapt to life in China. Intercultural identity can help Chinese language learners to correct their cultural mindset in the intercultural process, cross the cultural gap between different cultures and realize effective interaction between cultures. Treat the two cultures with an open and inclusive attitude, be able to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the two cultures, develop the strengths and avoid weaknesses of the local culture, and take the essence and dross of other cultures. Grasp the identity and diversity between cultures, strive to break the barriers between cultures, build stability and harmony within cultures, and achieve cross-cultural understanding and recognition.

Related literature for intercultural identity and chinese language learning motivation

Only a few papers at home and abroad study foreign students' motivation to learn Chinese and their sense of Chinese cultural identity. Feng Guiyang took African students at BOHAI University as his subjects, compiled a questionnaire about learning motivation and cultural identity, and found that African students have a high level of recognition of Chinese culture. Learning motivation is also high, and there is a strong correlation between foreign students' cultural identity and learning motivation. The comprehensive analysis shows that if the cultural identity is higher, the learning motivation will be stronger; if the learning motivation is stronger, the cultural identity will be higher (Feng, 2021). Wang Kangning took high school and above students from Romania as an example. Through questionnaire survey and software analysis, he concluded that there was a significant positive correlation between Chinese cultural identity and the Chinese language learning motivation of Romanian Chinese learners (Wang, 2022). Liu Xiaoya took Thai, Vietnamese, and Indonesian students as examples and found that the cultural identity of foreign students is significantly correlated with integration motivation. The higher their identification with the Chinese ethnic group, the stronger the integration motivation (Liu, 2019). Zhang Huanhuan collects 80 data on cultural identity and Chinese learning motivation of Indonesian young Chinese through questionnaires, and found that the overall cultural identity has a significant positive correlation with Chinese language motivation. When the emotional identity has the strongest correlation with integrative motivation, and the behavior identification has the strongest correlation with internal learning motivation (Zhang, 2021).

Relations of language learning motivation and intercultural identity

The association of integrative motivation with intercultural identity

Integrative motivation is more relevant to cultural identity compared to instrumental motivation. Chinese learners with integrative motivation are more interested in Chinese language learning and culture because they want to adapt to life in China and the Chinese environment as soon as possible (Yang, 2020). African students studying in China firmly intend to communicate with the Chinese-speaking community to achieve goals such as study and employment. They want to join the

target language club to meet more Chinese people. In the process of integrating into Chinese social life, students can have a deep understanding of Chinese people's way of life and thinking through communication and exchanges with Chinese people, and have more insights and perceptions about Chinese culture and deepen their understanding and recognition of Chinese culture (Bai, 2013).

The association of instrumental motivation with intercultural identity

Chinese learners with instrumental motivation tend to start learning Chinese based on a specific goal and are more likely to continue learning Chinese in the future (Yang, 2020). With the increasingly close cooperation and exchanges between China and Africa, Chinese language proficiency has become an essential quality for professionals. African students studying in China expect to realize their development and life planning through the vital medium of the Chinese language. They study hard to learn the Chinese language and professional knowledge, hoping to work in China after graduation or engage in cooperation and exchanges between China and African countries. Some international students who have studied in Chinese universities and colleges have returned to their home countries to find employment because of their outstanding Chinese language proficiency, which has become an essential medium for them to interface with China's economy, and the students have been appreciated and reused by companies as a result. Chinese language learning brings them more choices, helps to stimulate stronger and held motivation to learn Chinese, and deepens their continued understanding and knowledge of Chinese culture (Bai, 2013).

The association of intrinsic motivation with intercultural identity

In the process of Chinese language learning, due to intrinsic motivation, learners will learn Chinese from the bottom of their hearts and immerse themselves in the atmosphere of Chinese language learning. The learners' mentality, state, and thinking will change accordingly, and it is easy to have a deeper understanding of Chinese culture, which will deepen the cognition, understanding, and sense of identity of Chinese culture. African students in China are willing to master and learn Chinese and are eager to participate in Chinese cultural activities. They are more receptive to the Chinese people. The Chinese language brings different experiences to international students due to the differences in phonetics and character shapes. Because of their solid linguistic talent, African students experience the joy of learning a new language while learning Chinese (Bai, 2013). In learning Chinese, students satisfy their interests and hobbies in Chinese language learning and further their understanding of Chinese culture, acceptance, perception, and dissemination of Chinese culture.

The association of extrinsic motivation with intercultural identity

For Chinese learners with extrinsic motivation, the purpose of learning is not to acquire Chinese knowledge but to provide an external reward other than Chinese language learning to satisfy their sense of accomplishment and self-esteem. The role of extrinsic motivation is the most obvious and meaningful and can have an immediate impact. However, Chinese learners with extrinsic motivation are not motivated by interest; once

the external factors disappear or are canceled, they will likely give up Chinese language learning. For example, suppose students study hard to learn Chinese knowledge to win scholarships. In that case, they may temporarily stop learning Chinese after winning the scholarships. Therefore their understanding and perception of Chinese culture is thus interrupted, which is not conducive to a long-lasting impact on Chinese cultural identity. The long-term effect of extrinsic motivation is that Chinese learners will have a higher and higher demand for external rewards, while the cognition of Chinese culture itself and the Chinese culture. Behind Chinese is gradually weakened, which may lead to Chinese learners' interest in Chinese language learning in the long run, and the degree of investment decreases, thus affecting the cycle of identity with Chinese culture.

Strengthening Chinese language learning motivation among African students in China

Improving integrative motivation through cultural education

There is a significant correlation between integrative motivation and cultural identity, and it is necessary to strengthen Chinese learners' integrative motivation when learning Chinese (Yang, 2020). To further stimulate students' interest in Chinese language learning, professional teachers should have a keen cultural awareness mindset and utilize cultural resources for teaching and arousing students' interest in the culture and values of Chinese society, for example, by planning English corners or cultural activities. Through the activities, the Chinese language learners subtly deepen their understanding and awareness of Chinese culture and values. When designing the classroom, it is essential to pay attention to the focus of teaching, teaching content, teaching methods, and teaching styles, such as diversification of teaching methods, interesting teaching content, and active classroom atmosphere (Tao, 2014). Utilizing emotional strengths is also one of the initiatives to stimulate international students' integrative motivation. In the process of learning, the emotions of the foreign students are positively guided so that they can realize that learning Chinese is not just about learning a second language but also about deepening their cultural identity and enhancing their motivation for integrative learning to stimulate the student's interest in learning further (Zhang, 2021).

Strengthening instrumental motivation through regional orientation

Learners who prefer instrumental motivation use language to achieve their goals. Chinese teachers should start from the needs of students when teaching and add practical content based on the original teaching. For example, after students have just arrived in China, the course content can incorporate cultural elements that facilitate students' daily shopping, traveling, and communication, such as the Internet culture behind cell phone payment and the transportation culture behind the high-speed train and subway, etc. Teachers can guide students to do much practice with the language they have learned so that students can take the initiative to use the language they have learned in their life and study. When students can use what they have learned to complete language shopping in daily life and can independently take public transportation by the language, students can truly enjoy the value of language this tool. Students' sense of accomplishment

will be delighted, which will motivate students to learn more Chinese language related to daily life to help them in the adaptation to China. When students adapt to the Chinese culture quickly and realize the fun of using Chinese in their lives, their motivation to learn Chinese will be strengthened, and they will be willing to learn the Chinese language as a tool for their future studies and lives.

Stimulating intrinsic motivation through Chinese cultural activities

Chinese culture is profound and has a long history. Chinese theater, architecture, and traditional dress all attract international students. Chinese culture attracts students from all over the world to study in China with its unique charm. For students, schools should actively organize and carry out cultural series of activities, such as starting with traditional festivals, organizing students to pack Zongzi, making scented sachets and watching historical films during the Dragon Boat Festival, explaining the cultural connotations behind the festivals for the students, and letting them feel the richness and colorfulness of Chinese culture. According to the characteristics of African culture and African students who are good at singing and dancing, elements of culture, music, art, and movies can be added to the teaching to stimulate students' interest in learning Chinese (Lian, 2018). In the classroom setting, students can be guided to actively participate in Tai Chi, calligraphy, and other courses by considering their characteristics. Through the organization of cultural activities, students can understand the meaning and connotation of Chinese culture, deepen their understanding and perception of Chinese culture, and experience the charm of traditional Chinese culture, stimulating students' interest in further understanding Chinese culture. Students can learn the Chinese language through cultural activities and more about the Chinese culture behind it through language learning.

Enhancing extrinsic motivation through positive feedback

Students' Chinese language learning motivation will be affected by teachers' behavior. A teacher's criticism and praise can directly affect students' motivation in teaching and learning. Whether criticizing or praising, the teacher needs to do so with a purpose and not just praise or criticize the students (Dewi, 2020). For example, teachers can criticize students who violate discipline in the classroom, but they must inform students of the purpose of criticism to avoid hitting students' learning motivation. Teachers can praise or appreciate students with good grades moderately, paying attention to ways and means and avoiding generalized compliments, such as "your Chinese characters are beautifully written" and "your pronunciation is very standard."

African students studying in China are more cheerful. For introverted students, teachers can encourage students through language, guide them to participate in the classroom and use more positive and affirmative language when students cannot answer the questions, don't criticize students directly to avoid discouraging them (Yuan, 2021) Students' self-confidence and pride are greatly enhanced when they receive teachers praise and appreciation. Students will put in more effort to learn Chinese and expect more praise and approvals, and in the process of learning, their extrinsic motivation for Chinese language learning will also be enhanced.

Summary

Chinese language learning motivation is the direct reason for Chinese learners to stimulate internal drive and generate learning behaviors in Chinese language learning. This study expounds on the connotation of integrative motivation, instrumental motivation, intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation and their respective influences on intercultural identity. Different initiatives to enhance intercultural identity, such as enhancing learners' intrinsic learning motivation, integrating regional cultures into the teaching process, actively developing Chinese culture, and rationally utilizing reward mechanisms, are used to enhance the motivation for Chinese language learning among African students in China.

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