

Exploring the Dual Role of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivators in Enhancing Oral English Proficiency among Chinese Students

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Abstract

This study explores the motivations behind Chinese students' daily spoken English use, focusing on intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence language acquisition. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six graduate English students from Harbin University of Science and Technology using a qualitative approach. The findings indicate that while extrinsic factors such as career goals and academic requirements drive many students, intrinsic motivations, particularly autonomy, play a significant role in language learning. Autonomy emerged as the most influential factor, with students expressing a strong desire for control over their learning process. Competence and relatedness were also considered motivators, though they had less impact than autonomy. Cultural identity was found to moderate the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. This study contributes to existing literature by highlighting the importance of intrinsic motivation in language learning curricula and its impact on student engagement and English proficiency.

KEYWORDS

Extrinsic motivation, Intrinsic motivation, Language learning, Oral English

1 | INTRODUCTION

The importance of this study lies in the increasing role of English in various aspects of daily life, including commerce, cross-cultural communication, and international integration. As English becomes a global language, its teaching has expanded across educational levels in many countries. Oral English is the most crucial for effective communication among the four essential language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Proficiency in speaking is particularly vital as it is often the skill assessed in real-world situations, such as business interactions and personal engagements. However, many students struggle to develop their spoken English skills, especially at the college and university levels. This study aims to explore the factors influencing oral proficiency among learners, particularly focusing on the role of motivation. Understanding how intrinsic and extrinsic motivators affect language acquisition can provide valuable insights for educators and learners, ultimately enhancing English learning outcomes. By addressing these motivational factors, the study seeks to contribute to more effective teaching strategies to help students overcome challenges in achieving fluency in English.

Consequently, communicating in business and daily life is the common goal of English language learners; speaking is crucial for anyone wishing to learn a foreign language. However, many students find it difficult to speak English, and many English language learners struggle to speak the language fluently, particularly those who attend colleges and universities. According to Brown (1994), categorized speaking is the ability students struggle with the most (Duyen & Hao, 2023).

Students' motivation positively correlates with English achievement, making it essential for effective learning (Al-Qahtani, 2013; Hong & Ganapathy, 2017). High achievers typically have a strong sense of accomplishment, with motivation playing a crucial role in their success. Often referred to as the "heart of learning," motivation encourages active engagement and study persistence. It is a dynamic interplay between individuals and their environments, energizing behavior and guiding learners toward their goals. In language acquisition, motivation significantly influences success or failure in mastering a foreign language (Dörnyei, 2001). Without adequate motivation, even the best teaching strategies cannot ensure student success

(Dörnyei, 1998). A moderate level of motivation is necessary for achieving long-term language learning goals (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). Motivation determines the likelihood of success based on the intensity of an individual's desire to achieve their goals (Gilakjani et al., 2012). It encompasses effort and the joy of learning new things (Kirkpatrick et al., 2024). Gardner (1985) defined motivation in language learning as the extent to which individuals strive to learn due to their desire and satisfaction. Motivation affects performance and influences how and why people learn (Alizadeh, 2016), making it vital for language acquisition. Intrinsic motivation arises from personal enjoyment in learning a language, while external rewards like grades or recognition drive extrinsic motivation. Integrative motivation reflects a desire to connect with a language community, while instrumental motivation focuses on practical goals such as career advancement (Alisoy, 2023).

Countless studies have also been carried out to determine the reasons behind language learners' motivation, measure the level of effort they put forth, or determine the most effective strategies for enhancing the type and intensity of their motivation (Untalan & Caputoan, 2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are two synonymous concepts when discussing motivation. The internal drive to acquire a language out of pure enjoyment and pleasure in the process is known as intrinsic motivation. Conversely, extrinsic motivation stems from external incentives or demands, such as grades, recognition, or the obligation to meet a requirement. The urge to acquire a language to fit in with a particular language community or culture is known as integrative motivation, and it reflects a stronger emotional and identity-related bond with the language. On the other hand, instrumental motivation entails learning a language to achieve a particular objective or practical purpose, like advancing in one's career or gaining access to information (Alisoy, 2023).

This research investigates how different types of motivation, from intrinsic to extrinsic, affect students' engagement and persistence in learning oral English. This study will utilize the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) framework to explore how psychological needs influence motivation among Chinese students learning oral English. Specifically, it will examine how factors such as opportunities for skill improvement and social connections through English communication may enhance intrinsic motivation. To achieve these objectives, the following research questions will guide the study:

1. How do intrinsic and extrinsic motivations influence Chinese students' engagement in learning oral English?
2. How does intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation impact students' persistence in learning oral English?
3. How does the cultural context affect the relationship

between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in learning oral English?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to identify barriers to motivation and propose strategies for enhancing student engagement in oral English learning. Ultimately, this research seeks to provide valuable insights for educators and institutions to support self-directed motivation in language acquisition, contributing to improved proficiency in oral English among learners.

2 THEORY DEVELOPMENT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Self-determination Theory

Self-determination is central to understanding motivation in various contexts, particularly in education and language learning. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), three basic psychological needs, competence, autonomy, and relatedness, are essential for fostering intrinsic motivation and enhancing overall well-being. Below, each component is discussed, along with relevant research supporting their significance.

2.1.1. Motivation

Motivation has traditionally been regarded as a fundamental idea in studies on language learning. Because of this, motivation is a crucial and extensively researched topic in second and foreign language learning (Ditua, 2012; Chang, 2010). There are numerous factors that affect how well pupils learn languages. Several dynamic and multifaceted elements influence students' acquisition of English. Motivation is considered a major contributor to a range of achievements. Many people believe that one of the most important aspects of learning English is motivation.

Dörnyei (2003) claims that throughout the previous fifty years, the major theories of motivation have evolved through three major stages. [2] The first one dates back to the socio-psychological era, when scholars like Gardner and Wallace assert that learning a foreign language (a L2) is motivated by the desire to improve or impair intercultural communication. The cognitive-situated era, which saw Deci and Ryan establish self-determination theory (SDT), came next (Lisha, 2024).

According to SDT, people are motivated to take activities by an internal sense or experience of volition (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000). Three basic notions of individual motivation also known as self-determination—are extrinsic, amotivation, and intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation involves doing so for internal motives like pleasure, happiness, or a sense of fulfilment. Extrinsic motives are impacted by outside variables like receiving a reward or experiencing pressure to finish a task (Perlman, 2013).

Intrinsic motivation is the drive that propels someone to pursue an activity because it is intriguing and pleasurable on an intrinsic level. When learners act on their intrinsic motivation, they typically experience

positive emotions like pleasure, satisfaction, and enjoyment as rewards. Learning efforts can often be sustained solely by pursuing these internal rewards (Benson, 1997). Successful L2 learning is more likely to result from intrinsic motivation (Pan, 2022). Numerous factors influence students' motivation when studying a foreign language. A thorough framework of L2 motivation is offered, who classify motivating elements as either internal or external. Learner-related issues, such as their innate interests in activities and attitudes toward language acquisition, are strongly correlated with internal factors. Conversely, external contexts—like the impact of parents, instructors, the learning environment, etc.—are linked to external elements (Pan, 2022).

As Deci and Ryan (1985) claimed, their intrinsic drive significantly influences pupils' language acquisition. Many students find that achieving high learning outcomes is simple if they can cultivate their intrinsic drive, which includes curiosity and interest in their studies. The general consensus is that extrinsic incentives can potentially erode intrinsic motivation. Many people think that if pupils are required to perform anything to fulfil some extrinsic obligation, they will lose their intrinsic motivation. When teaching a language, educators should place a high value on simulating their students' intrinsic motivation (Zhang & Shao, 2021).

2.2 Types of Motivation

Two categories of motivations are identified in Self-determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) using distinct objectives and cause that motivate behavior. Extrinsic motivation results from outside influences such as prizes or financial gains, but intrinsic motivation is driven by internal forces and inner desires. "The extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity" (Gardner, 1985) was the previous definition of intrinsic motivation. In contrast, extrinsic motivation is the achievement of some instrumental goals, such as earning a reward or avoiding a punishment. Dörnyei (1998) emphasized the importance of extrinsic motivation by proposing that, in the case of a self-determined learner, extrinsic drive can be integrated with or transformed entirely into intrinsic motivation. Motivation is dynamic, as was previously noted; extrinsic motivation can vanish due to a strong inner drive to finish a task, while intrinsic motivation can change into extrinsic motivation. This shift cannot be achieved without observations, despite what Brown (2014) asserts, "formal interviews," "self-determination," and "self-rating tests" with agree/disagree sections can all help achieve it (Umirzak qizi, 2022).

When someone is motivated to immerse themselves in an activity because it makes them feel satisfied or enjoyable, this is called intrinsic motivation. It is the inborn need for autonomy and competence.

When given the freedom to complete tasks, intrinsically motivated people will look for engaging circumstances where they can grow by taking on the challenges that the activity may present. Like extrinsic motives, intrinsic motivations come in different varieties. Motivation from within Understanding drives one to pursue specific goals to learn new concepts and ideas. Motivation from within the satisfaction derived from trying to master a task or reach a goal is called accomplishment. The third kind is intrinsic motivation-stimulation, which refers to the "stimulation" from completing an enjoyable, exciting task involving beauty or artistry.

A wide variety of behaviors that are engaged in as a means to an end and not for their own sake" are included in the category of extrinsic motivation. When learners are exposed to social expectations and obligations that are placed on them extrinsically, their initial state of intrinsic motivation—that is, when they are still children—diminishes. Extrinsic motivation differs from the inherent drive in that it is directed toward achieving the practical goal of learning a language, such as reaping benefits or avoiding penalties. According to current trends, college students' proficiency with language skills appears to be stabilizing. Extrinsic motivation does not always reflect a lack of determination in the behaviors carried. However, it also doesn't mean that the extrinsically motivated kid is motivated only by sheer willpower and perseverance. There are significant differences between extrinsically motivated activities in terms of self-determination (Samejon, 2015)

2.2.1. Intrinsic Motivators

According to Matt and Dale intrinsic motivators include a sense of the subject's significance to life and the wider world, a sense of accomplishment upon mastering it, and a sense of calling. As defined by Harter Chow & Yoong, intrinsic motivation is the genuine human desire that propels people to seek out and take on new tasks. Deci as referenced by Ayub defines intrinsic motivation as the enjoyment and fulfillment one gets from engaging in an activity for its own sake (Filgona et al., 2020). According to Seifert and Sutton, interest—an emotive and intrinsic factor—also increases students' motivation levels (Filgona et al., 2020).

According to Gagne and Deci 2005, fulfilling intrinsic needs comes from carrying out the activity itself—that is, carrying out an activity without seeming to get anything in return. A learner becomes conscious of the urge to learn as a result of this. According to Brown, activities classified as intrinsically motivated are those with no outward reward other than engaging in the activity. According to Brown, people appear to participate in the activities for their own sake rather than because they require an external incentive (Filgona et al., 2020).

According to Matt and Dale, self-sustained and long-lasting intrinsic motivation is possible. Typically, initiatives to foster this kind of drive simultaneously aim to advance students' academic performance (Filgona et al., 2020). According to Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura (in Chow & Yong), intrinsically motivated people have the following traits: they engage in mental and physical activities holistically; they stay highly focused during these activities with clearly defined goals; they are self-critical; they realistically reflect on their actions; and they are typically calm and unafraid to fail when learning (Filgona et al., 2020).

Kids are also shown to be extrinsically motivated to carry out a behavior or participate in an activity to receive a reward or even to evade punishment, criticism, or threats. For instance, students are driven by intrinsic motivation when they work hard in class to achieve a more significant social position, professional development, or a course credit gain the favour of their parents, receive praise from teachers, or even acquire pocket money. However, there was no discernible correlation between achievement and internal or extrinsic motivation. Conversely, Cortright et al. (2013) found that students who exhibit high levels of intrinsic motivation also demonstrate better academic accomplishment, suggesting that these two factors may be significantly correlated. According to Elizabeth and Ena's (2019) findings, intrinsic motivation was more prevalent than extrinsic motivation. Interestingly, Azhari and Daayah (2018) discovered that neither intrinsic nor extrinsic motives had a favourable association with English learning achievement (Chuane et al., 2023).

2.2.2. Here is the Intrinsic Motivator

- **Autonomy** is the need to feel in control of one's actions and decisions. It encompasses the desire to act by one's values and interests rather than being driven by external pressures. Fostering autonomy can lead to greater engagement and satisfaction in learning environments. Deci and Ryan (2000) argue that autonomy is a fundamental aspect of human motivation, positing that environments that support autonomy led to higher levels of intrinsic motivation. Hui and Tsang (2012) discuss how autonomy-supportive teaching practices can significantly enhance students' motivation and engagement, highlighting its importance in educational settings.

2.3. Extrinsic Motivators

Extrinsic motivation comprises external, introjected, identifiable, and integrated regulation (Chuane et al., 2023). Most of these studies have concentrated on specific motivating kinds or have employed qualitative research methods without strong quantitative comparisons. For instance, researchers may examine how intrinsic motivation affects learners' attitudes or how integrative motivation helps students become more

fluent in language. Still, they neglect to directly compare these results to the outcomes of extrinsic or instrumental motivations. The few studies that attempt a comparison methodology frequently provide erratic outcomes.

While some research indicates that extrinsic motivators, including performance-related prizes, might effectively boost language acquisition in some situations, other research suggests that intrinsic motivation leads to higher levels of language proficiency. These differences point to a lack of agreement and the necessity for thorough studies that methodically examine the interactions and effects of various motivational kinds on language learning outcomes. Instrumentally motivated learners frequently see language acquisition as a tool for achieving predetermined external objectives.

Instead of examining motivational kinds with one another, most studies do so in isolation. The few studies that try a comparison approach frequently provide inconsistent results, indicating a lack of agreement and the necessity for a thorough investigation into how various motivational types interact and affect language acquisition outcomes. There are several consequences for educators, students, and researchers from the dearth of thorough studies examining the relative contributions of motivational kinds to language learning. For example, teachers could find it difficult to develop efficient language learning techniques if they don't have a thorough grasp of the interactions between different motivational factors.

Understanding which motivational elements work best in various learning environments and learner demographics is crucial for curriculum designers. Understanding how various motivational styles interact is essential for self-regulation and creating more productive learning environments. Comprehensive research could provide information educational policymakers could use to support language learning nationally and institutionally. Taking motivational diversity into consideration when making policy decisions can facilitate creating policies that value personal interest and cultural participation, in addition to language acquisition.

2.4. Extrinsic Motivators can be Divided into

- **Competence:** it refers to the need to feel effective and capable in one's activities. It involves the perception of mastery over tasks and the ability to achieve desired outcomes. Research has consistently shown that when individuals feel competent, they are more likely to engage in activities with enthusiasm and persistence. Studies emphasize that satisfaction with the competence need is crucial for intrinsic motivation, as it leads to feelings of effectiveness in one's actions. Studies found that experiences of competence significantly enhance motivation among learners, linking it directly to academic performance.
- **Relatedness:** it refers to the need to feel connected

to others, have meaningful relationships, and experience a sense of belonging within a community. This need is crucial for creating supportive learning environments where individuals feel valued and understood. Scholars illustrate that relatedness is essential for well-being and motivation, asserting that feelings of connection can enhance engagement in various activities. A study by Allan et al. (2015) indicates that fulfilling the need for relatedness positively influences both motivation and overall satisfaction in work contexts, suggesting its relevance beyond educational settings.

2.5. Cultural Context of Motivation

Cultural context significantly shapes learners' motivations to acquire a new language. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) emphasize that motivation is deeply intertwined with cultural factors, as learners may be driven by a desire to connect with their heritage or engage in intercultural interactions. For instance, Kim and Kim (2018) found that learners motivated by cultural identity often demonstrate higher levels of engagement and persistence in language learning. This connection between culture and motivation underscores the need for educators to recognize and harness these cultural motivators to enhance language learning outcomes.

Several theoretical frameworks elucidate the relationship between culture and motivation in language learning. Gardner's socio-educational model posits that cultural attitudes significantly influence language acquisition (Gardner, 1985). According to Gardner, learners' motivation is closely linked to their attitudes toward the target language community, which is shaped by cultural perceptions. This model suggests that fostering positive attitudes towards the culture associated with a language can enhance learners' motivation. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), also provides insights into how cultural context affects motivation. SDT posits that intrinsic motivation flourishes when individuals experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness—needs that can be influenced by cultural norms. For example, collectivist cultures may emphasize relatedness more than individualistic cultures, leading to different motivational dynamics in language learning contexts (Hofstede, 1980).

Numerous studies have examined the impact of cultural context on language learning motivation. For instance, many studies explored how their cultural backgrounds influence learners' motivational orientations. They found integrative motivation—driven by the desire to connect with a language community—was more prevalent among learners who identified strongly with their cultural heritage. Conversely, instrumental motivation, which focuses on practical

benefits such as career advancement, was more common among learners from individualistic cultures. Additionally, research conducted highlights the importance of cultural identity in shaping intrinsic motivation among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Their study revealed that learners with a strong sense of cultural identity were more likely to engage deeply with the language-learning process, demonstrating higher levels of intrinsic motivation. This finding aligns with the notion that understanding one's cultural background can enhance engagement and persistence in language learning.

3 Research Hypothesis Development

Research indicates that intrinsic motivation leads to more sustained engagement in language learning than extrinsic motivation.

3.1 Intrinsic Motivation for Learning Oral English

Research suggests that intrinsic motivation, characterized by engaging in activities for their inherent satisfaction, is significantly influenced by the learner's sense of autonomy. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), autonomy is a fundamental psychological need that fosters intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Studies have shown that learners who perceive themselves as autonomous are more likely to engage deeply with language learning tasks, leading to sustained motivation and better language acquisition outcomes (Dörnyei, 2001) found that intrinsic motivation leads to more sustained engagement in language learning than extrinsic motivation, highlighting the critical role of autonomy in this process.

H1: Autonomy is the most important influencing factor of motivation for learning oral English

3.2 Extrinsic Motivation for Learning Oral English

Competence refers to the need to feel effective and capable in one's activities. Research indicates that when learners feel competent, they are more likely to engage enthusiastically in their studies. Studies have shown that competence experiences significantly enhance learners' motivation, linking it directly to academic performance. Thus, while competence may not be as pivotal as autonomy, it plays a crucial role in motivating learners to persist in their language studies.

H2: Competence is the second influencing factor of motivation for learning oral English

Relatedness involves connecting to others and having meaningful relationships within a learning environment. While relatedness is essential for overall well-being and can enhance motivation, its impact may be less pronounced than autonomy and competence in language learning. Research indicates that while relatedness can foster a supportive environment for language acquisition, it does not drive motivation as

strongly as the needs for autonomy and competence do (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

H3: Relatedness has the least significant impact on motivation for learning oral English

3.3 Cultural Context as a Moderator Role

Understanding the dynamics between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations is crucial when considering cultural context in language learning. Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity for its inherent satisfaction, while extrinsic motivation involves performing an activity to achieve external rewards or avoid negative consequences. Cultural factors significantly influence learners' motivations, shaping their attitudes towards language acquisition. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) emphasize that motivation is deeply intertwined with cultural influences. For instance, learners motivated by cultural identity often demonstrate higher levels of engagement in language learning (Kim & Kim, 2018). Therefore, understanding how cultural contexts moderate the interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations can provide insights into optimizing language education strategies tailored to specific learner demographics.

H4: The relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for learning oral English is moderated by cultural context.

4 MATERIAL AND METHOD

4.1 Research design

The study's main objectives were to determine whether Chinese students are motivated to speak English daily. For this purpose, Semi-structured

interviews were conducted. All questions were related to SDT concepts.

4.2 Participants

For this study, 6 students were selected from the 3rd year of the Master's degree in Linguistics at Harbin University of Science and Technology. They have been studying English for several years. A semi-structured interview was chosen to conduct the research. All fourteen questions were provided in Chinese and English. The participant was allowed to respond to interview questions in shifts.

4.3 Instruments

Semi-structured Interview

At first, participants were asked to share information about their motivations and objectives for language learning. Succeeding questions related to motivation to learn oral English. For example, "What are your goals in learning a spoken language"? These general questions were followed by more specific open-ended questions guided by the SDT conceptual framework, specifically addressing motivation for oral English learning related to the three basic psychological needs: (a) autonomy at setting own goals in learning oral English (e.g., "What are your goals in learning a spoken language?"); (b) relationships with various individuals (e.g., "how do you feel interacting with your friends, teachers, foreigners, etc. in English?"); and (c) the feeling of competence on their growth and development in their language skills over time (e.g., "What kind of learning strategies do you like to use in learning oral English"?).

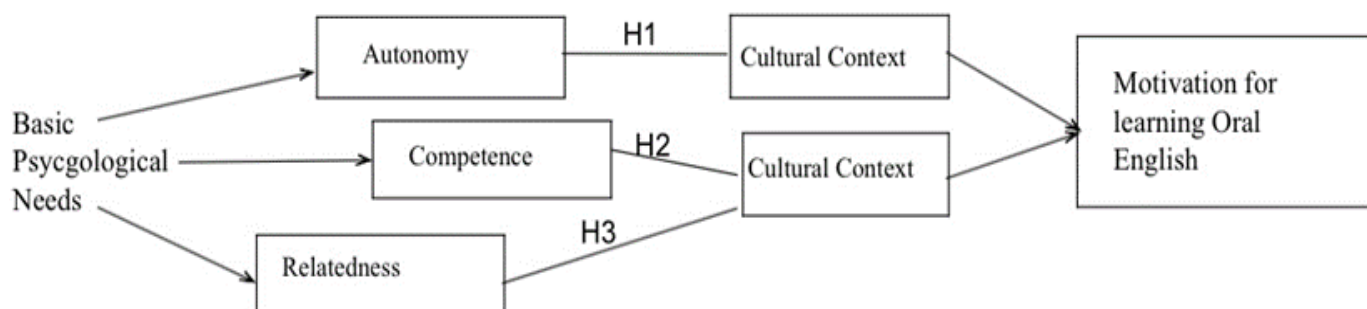


Fig. 1: Research model

5 Findings

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations among Chinese students learning oral English. Through semi-structured interviews with six graduate students at Harbin University of Science and Technology, several key themes emerged that highlight how various factors influence their motivation and engagement in language

learning. The participants expressed a profound desire to engage with the English language, driven largely by personal interests and the satisfaction of mastering new skills.

Many respondents noted that their motivation stemmed from an internal drive to improve themselves and enjoy learning. For example, one participant emphasized that learning English allows them to become a better version of themselves, indicating that

personal growth is a significant motivator. This intrinsic motivation reflects a broader trend where students seek academic proficiency and personal fulfilment through language acquisition. A notable finding was that participants consistently identified autonomy as the most significant factor influencing their motivation to learn oral English. They expressed a strong desire for control over their learning processes and goals. Many students reported feeling more motivated when they could select topics of interest or decide how to approach their studies. One respondent remarked that having the freedom to explore different aspects of the language made learning more enjoyable and engaging, supporting the hypothesis that autonomy is a critical influencing factor.

While intrinsic factors were prominently featured, extrinsic motivators such as career aspirations and academic requirements also played a crucial role in shaping participants' language learning efforts. Respondents frequently mentioned external pressures, including the need for job competitiveness and academic recognition, as significant influences on their commitment to learning English. One student articulated, "Additionally, being proficient in spoken English will help me in my future career, as many multinational companies value employees who can communicate effectively in English" fluency in English is essential for career advancement in multinational companies, demonstrating how extrinsic motivations can drive students to invest time and effort into their studies.

Competence emerged as another important motivator, albeit secondary to autonomy. Participants indicated that achieving milestones—such as successfully delivering presentations or engaging in conversations—enhanced their sense of competence and reinforced their motivation. This aligns with the hypothesis that competence acts as a middle-level influencing factor. Students expressed that feeling capable in their language skills significantly impacted their willingness to engage further in learning activities.

In contrast, while relatedness was acknowledged as important for creating a supportive learning environment, its impact on motivation was perceived as less significant than autonomy and competence. Participants mentioned that positive interactions with peers and instructors contributed to their enjoyment of learning but did not drive their motivation as strongly. This finding supports the hypothesis suggesting that relatedness has a less significant impact on motivation for learning oral English.

Cultural identity emerged as a vital moderator in the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Participants who identified strongly with their cultural heritage often demonstrated higher levels of integrative motivation, seeking to connect with their cultural community through language. Conversely, those from

more individualistic backgrounds focused on instrumental motivations, such as career advancement. This observation confirms that cultural context moderates the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for learning oral English.

Overall, this study underscores the complex dynamics of motivation in language learning among Chinese students. It illustrates how intrinsic desires for personal growth interact with extrinsic pressures from academic and professional environments, shaping learners' experiences and outcomes in mastering oral English. The findings (Table 1) suggest that educators should consider these motivational factors when designing curricula and instructional strategies to foster engagement and language acquisition proficiency. By recognizing the importance of autonomy, competence, relatedness, and cultural context, educators can create more effective and supportive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of students.

6 | DISCUSSION

The findings provide significant insights into how intrinsic and extrinsic motivators interact with autonomy, competence, relatedness, and cultural context in shaping Chinese students' acquisition of oral English skills. Intrinsic motivation emerged as a primary driver for engagement and persistence. Participants highlighted the satisfaction derived from mastering new skills and overcoming challenges, reinforcing their desire to continue learning. This cyclical relationship between achievement and motivation emphasizes the need for supportive learning environments celebrating student successes.

Although extrinsic factors were noted as influential, they may not sustain long-term engagement without accompanying intrinsic motivators. Participants expressed disinterest when overwhelmed by external pressures, suggesting that while extrinsic motivators can initiate action, they are insufficient for maintaining motivation over time. The findings underscore the crucial role of autonomy in fostering intrinsic motivation. Learners who perceived themselves as having control over their learning goals and processes demonstrated higher levels of engagement and persistence. Providing opportunities for autonomy—such as allowing students to choose topics that interest them or decide how to approach learning tasks—can significantly enhance motivation.

Feeling competent in their language skills was another key factor motivating students. Achieving milestones provided a sense of accomplishment that reinforced their desire to continue learning. Competence was seen as essential for sustaining motivation over time; thus, educators should create opportunities for students to experience success in their language endeavors.

Table 1: Participants motivations towards learning oral English

Question	Motivational Type	Key Points from Responses
1. What are your goals in learning a spoken language?	Autonomy	- Desire to communicate fluently with English speakers (Respondent 1) - Improve competitiveness for future career (Respondent 1) - Expand international perspective and communication skills (Respondent 2) - Travel and make foreign friends (Respondent 3) - Enhance academic and professional opportunities (Respondent 6)
2. Do you feel intrinsic satisfaction when you learn spoken language, or are you more motivated by external factors?	Autonomy	- Inner contentment motivates learning (Respondent 2) - Motivation from mastering new aspects of the language (Respondent 3) - Enjoyment of learning spoken English contributes to motivation (Respondent 3)
3. Has your motivation for oral English learning changed since your first year of graduate school?	Autonomy	- No significant change; motivation remains focused on career goals (Respondent 4) - Expanded motivation from academic needs to personal and professional development (Respondent 5, Respondent 6)
4. If your motivation for oral English learning has not changed since your first year of graduate school, what do you think are the factors that keep you motivated to learn?	Autonomy	- Being an English major requires strong speaking skills (Respondent 2) - Attachment to career goals drives continued effort (Respondent 4)
5. What factors affect your motivation to learn oral English?	Competence	- Career planning and professional requirements influence motivation (Respondent 2) - Academic recognition through publishing papers motivates improvement (Respondent 5)
6. What kind of learning strategies do you like to use in learning oral English?	Competence	- Learning pronunciation from videos and practicing through shadowing techniques (Respondent 1, Respondent 3) - Engaging in conversations with native speakers and participating in English activities (Respondent 5)
7. How do you feel when you make progress in learning spoken English?	Autonomy	- Sense of accomplishment and satisfaction motivates further learning (Respondent 4, Respondent 6)
8. What achievement in spoken English learning has been satisfying to you?	Competence	- Ability to communicate without barriers with foreigners (Respondent 3) - Improvement in fluency and pronunciation leads to satisfaction (Respondent 4)
9. Do you think confidence, interest, and mood play an important role in the success or failure of speaking English? Why?	Relatedness	- Confidence allows for more willingness to speak; interest keeps motivation alive (Respondents 2, 5)
10. How do you feel interacting with your friends, teachers, foreigners, etc., in English?	Relatedness	- Communication with friends feels relaxed; interactions with teachers provide feedback for improvement (Respondents 4, 6)
11. What supportive behaviors can you perceive from English teachers or classmates during the process of learning English? Please provide an example for explanation.	Relatedness	- Encouragement from teachers boosts confidence; peer support during practice enhances learning experience (Respondents 3, 5)
12. What difficulties do you encounter in learning spoken English? What have you done to overcome them?	Competence	- Difficulties include lack of vocabulary and pronunciation issues; overcoming these through practice and seeking feedback (Respondents 4, 5)
13. What factors do you think would make you will to spend extra time and energy learning English?	Autonomy & Relatedness	- Personal interest in language and cultural exchange drives willingness; positive feedback enhances motivation (Respondents 4, 5)

The need for relatedness emerged as an important factor influencing motivation. Positive interactions within the learning environment fostered participants' sense of belonging, enhancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Encouraging collaborative activities can strengthen peer relationships and provide social support for effective learning. Cultural identity moderated the relationship

between motivations. Learners who strongly identified with their heritage culture often exhibited higher levels of integrative motivation, driven by a desire to connect with their cultural community through language. Understanding cultural influences is essential for designing tailored instructional approaches that resonate with specific student populations.

The study underscores the importance of balancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for effective language learning. Participants who aligned personal interests with external goals demonstrated higher engagement levels. Educators should aim to create meaningful learning experiences that resonate on both intrinsic and extrinsic levels, encouraging students to see language skills as beneficial for their personal and professional lives.

7 Conclusion

This study highlights the intricate relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations moderated by autonomy, competence, relatedness, and cultural context in shaping Chinese students' acquisition of oral English skills. All these factors are essential for fostering engagement and success in language learning. Educators must recognize the multifaceted nature of motivation when designing curricula and instructional strategies. Creating an environment that nurtures intrinsic motivation through engaging activities, opportunities for autonomy, recognition of achievements, fostering competence through skill-building tasks, and promoting positive social interactions can help sustain long-term interest in language learning. Additionally, understanding cultural context is vital; educators should be cautious about excessive reliance on extrinsic motivators while ensuring strategies promoting intrinsic satisfaction are implemented.

Future research should explore the dynamics between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations alongside autonomy, competence, relatedness, and cultural context across different contexts and learner demographics. Longitudinal studies could provide insights into how these motivational factors evolve and influence language acquisition outcomes. Comparative studies examining motivational influences among diverse cultural groups could enrich the understanding of how context shapes learner motivations. In summary, understanding the multifaceted nature of motivation—including the roles of autonomy, competence, relatedness, and cultural context—is essential for enhancing language education practices. By addressing these factors within teaching frameworks, educators can better support students' journeys toward achieving proficiency in oral English—a skill increasingly vital in today's globalized world.

Author Contributions

The author contributed to the preparation of the manuscript and reviewed and approved the final version for submission.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author has declared that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships

that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data Availability Statement

Data has been collected from a primary data source using a self-administered Likert-Scale questionnaire. The data that support this study's findings are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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