

# PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD MOTIVATION IN MASTERING MANDARIN: PRELIMINARY STUDY FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Sophie Femina Limarta<sup>1</sup>, Sri Tiatri<sup>2\*</sup> & Jap Tji Beng<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Psychology, Tarumanagara University, Jakarta

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Psychology, Tarumanagara University, Jakarta

Email: sri.tiatri@untar.ac.id

<sup>3</sup>Faculty of Information Technology, Tarumanagara University, Jakarta

Email: t.jap@untar.ac.id

\*Corresponding Author

Submitted: July 2022, Revised: December 2022, Accepted: February 2023

---

## ABSTRACT

Product development and science in several countries in the world are currently using Mandarin. Mastery of Mandarin will strengthen Indonesia's economy and development of science and technology. School X in Tangerang is one of the trilingual schools (Indonesian, Mandarin, and English) in Indonesia that applies more than 70% of Mandarin learning at the KB and Kindergarten levels so that students can communicate in two directions (expressive and receptive) orally. The researcher found that most of the students whose parents did not master Mandarin were able to learn Chinese quickly, but some had difficulties and were less motivated. A learning program is needed that can motivate students in mastering Mandarin. This research is an initial study on the development of a program that motivates young children to learn Mandarin, to get a picture of parents' perceptions of motivation to learn Mandarin. The research method is descriptive and quantitative. The participants were 124 parents of Early Childhood Education in School X. The researcher gave an Intrinsic Motivation Instrument questionnaire to parents regarding their perceptions of their children's motivation in learning Mandarin. Interviews were also conducted with students' parents and teachers. The results showed that 18 parents perceived that their child's motivation was extraordinarily high, 34 parents perceived that their child's motivation was very high, 37 parents perceived that their child's motivation was moderate, 23 parents perceived that their child's motivation was very low, and 12 parents have the perception that their child's motivation is unusually low. Based on the results of this study, it is necessary to have a program specifically designed to motivate young children to learn Mandarin.

**Keywords:** Mandarin, motivation, early childhood, learning program.

## 1. PREFACE

The country of China as one of the countries that became the world's economic giant has the largest population spread throughout the world, making Mandarin the language with the most speakers in the world. The development and use of Mandarin is becoming increasingly necessary in Indonesia as more and more Chinese companies are established. Indonesian residents who can speak Mandarin will have an advantage in the eyes of the company if the Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK) score is included in the Curriculum Vitae (CV).

Thus, if more and more Indonesians can speak Mandarin in the work environment to the international arena, it will certainly strengthen Indonesia in several sectors such as the economy and the development of science and technology. Mandarin is also spoken at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and is one of the six official languages of the United Nations (UN). It is not surprising that in the era of globalization, Mandarin is in great demand.

According to Vygotsky, language development has an important role in children's cognitive development. Through language, children will be able to interact and communicate problems to

others who are considered to have the ability to help them solve said problem. Early age is a critical period for children because in this period the child's brain develops very rapidly and can still change according to parental guidance and environmental factors. One aspect of development that must be considered at that time was the aspect of language development. At the age of 2 years, children have mastered 120-200 words and can combine 2-3 words into sentences. At the age of 3 years, children can master 900-1000 words and can ask short questions. At the age of 4-6 years, their interaction with the environment will be wider so that their language development is getting better. Children can understand other people's speech and can express their thoughts.

The research problem was found in school X which is one of the trilingual schools in Indonesia. From an early age, students are taught in Mandarin more than 70% of the time because the golden age is a very effective and important period for optimizing various intelligence potentials, one of which is language development. Based on observations, the researchers found that most of the early childhood children in school X had Indonesian as their first language and came from parents who did not master Mandarin. Most of them can learn Chinese quickly, but some with the same language background have shown difficulty. According to information from the teacher, around 70% of TK A and TK B students have not been able to express their thoughts using Mandarin. An analysis shows that the main reason is that learning Mandarin is not yet attractive so that students' motivation to learn Mandarin is not optimal.

Motivation is generally accepted as an important aspect in influencing students' success in learning a language. The association between motivation and language talent was first postulated by Gardner and Lambert. In their study, motivation in the domain of second language learning is defined as the combination of effort and drive to achieve learning goals, being a favorable attitude towards language learning. It is important to get an overview of the development of student learning approaches in order to provide teachers who know how to implement early intervention strategies in the early years of school. The ecological model system from Bronfenbrenner & Morris provides a framework for understanding the multiple levels of influencing students' approaches to learning.

Children's development is shaped not only by their individual characteristics but is also influenced by the teacher and student interactions as a proximal process of learning. Children who start school at the age of 2 or 3 years will spend a significant amount of time in the school environment every day. Their development can be influenced by many factors in the school environment, the most significant of which is the way teachers implement the learning curriculum and how teachers interact with children during the learning process and socialize in the school area. Teachers who show emotional support and concern for students' learning needs have been associated with student motivation, especially students' feelings of pride in completing assignments and student commitment to learning.

In the Self Determination Theory, Deci and Ryan introduce two categories of motivation that have been widely accepted, namely intrinsic motivation (doing an activity for pleasure and satisfaction obtained from oneself) and extrinsic motivation (performing a task because of external pressure or reward not because of intrinsic interest). According to them, intrinsic motivation is closely related to the feelings and sensations of students. Although intrinsic motivation is very important, most of the activities carried out are not necessarily intrinsically motivated. This is especially true after passing early childhood because the demands of external responsibility are more attractive.

Deci and Ryan claimed that extrinsic motivations can be internalized if they serve the fulfilment of the basic and innate psychological needs of humans. Specifically, intrinsic motivation increases with the satisfaction of our natural need for autonomy (consisting of freedom of choice and integration of values), our need for competence (the tendency to impact the environment as well as to achieve worthwhile outcomes), and our need for relatedness/engagement (a natural sense of belonging towards the people we are together with). In other words, we will not enjoy – and are therefore naturally attracted to an activity – if we are forced to do it, are unsure of its value, cannot master it, or if it takes away our sense of belonging. On the other hand, the more autonomous, competent, and connected we feel while doing it, the stronger the intrinsic motivation.

### **Research Objective**

Based on parents' perceptions of their children's motivation in learning Mandarin which is the main language in School X, researchers can develop a program that aims to increase students' learning motivation. The next interest is that this program can be used for the next level of education if it can be modified according to the age and learning of students so that the intrinsic motivation to learn Mandarin is consistent. In the end, students who are currently in kindergarten level (aged 5-6 years) who will graduate from high school at school X, 18 years later, are expected to have a strong foundation in Mandarin, so that when they enter college and ultimately work, these children are ready to become qualified human resources and ready to compete in 2050 where China is predicted to dominate the world's free market. Another interest is that this program can be applied in other trilingual schools or schools that teach Mandarin as a foreign language in Indonesia.

### **Research Question**

The problem formulated is how are parents' perceptions of their young children's motivation in learning Mandarin?

### **Research Benefit**

Thus, the theoretical benefit of this research is to confirm that early childhood intrinsic motivation can be formed through activities that foster a sense of autonomy, competence, and the need for children to be involved. Meanwhile, the practical benefit is that by knowing parents' perceptions of their children's motivation in learning Mandarin, researchers can suggest a follow-up development program to School X that can increase students' learning motivation.

### **Language Learning Motivation**

Being motivated means being moved to do something. A person who lack the drive or inspiration to act is considered as unmotivated, while those who are energized and active to act to achieve goals are considered motivated.

In Self-Determination Theory, motivation is distinguished based on different reasons or goals that drive action. It is said to be intrinsic motivation if the individual performs an activity for pleasure and satisfaction obtained from within themselves; in other words, inherently interesting or enjoyable. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation refers to a task that an individual performs due to external pressure or reward, and leads to separable results.

An analytical framework for examining motivation, feelings, and growth is provided by the Self-Determination Theory. According to SDT, internal factors play a crucial role in character

building and self-control. Additionally, SDT aims to pinpoint and examine the elements that either strengthen or weaken a person's ability for initiative and willpower. According to SDT, raising intrinsic motivation and internalization will lead to higher achievement, whereas attempting to control achievement results through external factors like rewards, sanctions, and evaluations will typically have the opposite effect and cause individuals' motivation and performance to decline. The psychological growth and mental wellness of kids, rather than the achievement outcomes, are more crucial. Schools must continue to be a safe environment where students may grow while also fostering environments that improve students' mental and adaptive health.

SDT considers three basic psychological needs to be able to explain motivated behavior. The three things are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to acting out of will and choice. Competence is the belief that one is successful in performing a task because this belief facilitates the fulfilment of fundamental psychological needs. The feelings of love and support that a person might offer and receive from their interactions with others are referred to as connectedness.

The environment and social context affect a person's experience, and the fulfilment of some fundamental psychological needs might encourage intrinsic motivation, according to SDT. Behaviour that arises from intrinsic motivation is more adaptable, autonomous, persistent, creative, and efficient. In addition, individuals will also feel happier and more satisfied.

The basis of motivation theory assumes that motivation contributes to explaining differences in the fluency of second language learning, and in some social contexts, it has been presented as the main driver for improving achievement.

Singapore's kindergarten pupils learn Mandarin as their first language because the Chinese make up the majority of the population there. Additionally, it was discovered that Singapore has traditionally placed a strong emphasis on learning Mandarin, which has low student motivation. The classroom atmosphere is one of the numerous causes of students' low motivation to study Mandarin, as earlier studies in other fields have found a correlation between student learning results and the classroom environment. Chua et al's study also sought to discover more about Singaporean students' reasons for wanting to learn Mandarin in a classroom setting.

Many studies look at the factors that influence students' motivation in learning languages, such as individual differences, student characteristics such as attitudes, language anxiety, self-confidence, independence, and other variables; background of the students, including academic level, language test level, gender, and primary language at home. Research also suggests that a good classroom environment can improve students' motivation in language learning.

According to Yu, several factors that can influence students' motivation in learning a language are (a) community (feeling of belonging to or as part of a particular community, for example, a family community who can speak Mandarin / Chinese class community), (b) self-identity (their identity as part of Chinese ethnicity), (c) family (the main language used at home, parental support, parenting), (d) autonomy (individual experience in exploration), (e) social identity (time given to learn Mandarin, dialect or regional language used by extended families), (f) emotion (feelings when individuals are praised or blamed for producing correct/wrong pronunciation), (g)

interlocutors (peer groups), (h) teacher-student interaction (positive relationship between teachers and students).

Oxford and Shearin analysed 12 theories of motivation including those from social psychology, cognitive development, and sociocultural psychology, and identified 6 factors that impact language learning motivation. These are: (a) attitude (sentiment towards the learning community and the target of the language), (b) beliefs about self (hope that individual attitudes towards success, self-efficacy, and anxiety), (c) goals (acceptable clarity and relevance) of learning objectives as reasons for learning), (d) involvements (the degree to which students actively and consciously participate in language learning), (e) environmental support (the extent to which teachers and peer groups, and integration of culture and support outside the classroom in learning experience) and (6) personal attributes (talent, age, gender and previous experience in learning a language).

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Participants**

A total of 124 parents of Kindergarten A students consisting of 116 women (mothers) and 8 men (fathers) have filled out a questionnaire regarding their perceptions of students' motivation to learn Mandarin. Based on data filled in by parents, the gender of the children whose data was filled in by their parents include 67 male students (54%) and 57 female students (46%). Based on their mother tongue, there were 82 students who spoke Indonesian, 16 students spoke Indonesian and English, 8 students spoke Mandarin, 6 students spoke English, 4 students spoke Indonesian and Mandarin, 4 students spoke Hokkien, 2 students spoke Indonesian, English and Mandarin, 1 student spoke Indonesian and Hakka, and 1 student spoke Indonesian, English and Hakka; It can be seen that the majority of students' main language in the family is Indonesian.

Based on data on whether parents use Mandarin at home, it was found that 93 students (75%) whose parents did not use Mandarin and 31 students (25%) whose parents spoke Mandarin. Based on the ability of parents to speak Mandarin passively or actively, it was found that 58 parents (47%) could not speak Mandarin and 66 parents (53%) could speak Mandarin either actively or passively. Based on data from students who started school at School X, it was found that 40 students (32%) had attended since Nursery 1 (already 2 years), 52 students (42%) had attended since Nursery 2 (already 1 year) and 32 students (26%) school started at kindergarten level (almost 1 year).

### **Research Setting and Design**

The operational definition of the measured motivation variable is intrinsic motivation which includes 6 dimensions, namely Interest/Enjoyment, Perceived Competence, Effort, Value/Usefulness, Pressure/Tension, Relatedness, and Perceived Choice.

The Interest/Enjoyment subscale assesses the main interest and pleasure/inner pleasure of individuals when doing an activity. This subscale is a form of self-report of intrinsic motivation. Perceived Choice and Perceived Competence are defined as positive predictors of intrinsic motivation and are related to the basic psychological needs of autonomy and competence. Perceived Choice assesses how an individual feels when engaging in an activity because of their own choice to do so, and Perceived Competence measures how effective an individual feels when they are performing a task. Pressure/Tension is considered a negative predictor because it assesses the pressure experienced by an individual to succeed in a task. Effort assesses the

capacity that individuals spend in completing their tasks. Effort becomes a crucial variable in specific contexts. Value/Usefulness is a manifestation of self-regulation activities that are internalized through experiences that are considered valuable and beneficial for an individual. Relatedness refers to the individual's feelings of being connected to others and the relevance in interpersonal interactions.

Based on the explanation of the definition of each subscale above, it can be concluded that intrinsic motivation can be formed because there is comfort, satisfaction, creativity, opportunity to succeed in association with interesting, challenging and intrinsically motivating instructors. This type of research design will use descriptive quantitative method.

### Measurement (Research Instrument)

*“The IMI has been used in research focused on intrinsic motivation and self-regulation in diverse fields such as sports activities, reading, computer activities, performance of puzzles and training / education. Depending on the nature of the tasks and participants, different subscales and items were included in each of these studies’ IMI versions. IMI’s creators (SDT, n.d.) noted that the instrument needs to be modified to account for various jobs, fields, and even populations.*

It is advisable to adapt the measurement tool for the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory, which includes the subscales mentioned above, to the circumstances in various domains. In order to measure students' motivation for studying as seen by their parents, the researcher adapted a more basic measuring instrument.

Then, from the data that has been filled in by the parents, it is found that the total score of parents' perceptions regarding the motivation to learn Mandarin of their children can be categorized into extraordinarily motivated to extraordinarily unmotivated, then ranked. With the interval limit that has been calculated, the researchers took students who were in the category of moderate to extremely low motivation. To collect more data, this research is still ongoing.

### Intrinsic Motivation Measuring Tool

**Table 1**

*Parents measuring instrument*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Item</b>
Interest / Enjoyment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Children's interest in learning Mandarin</li> <li>● Children's involvement in learning Mandarin</li> </ul>	1, 2, 3
Perceived Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Children's awareness to want to be involved in Chinese lessons</li> </ul>	4, 5
Perceived Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Children's expressions when learning Chinese</li> <li>● Children's feelings when they are able to complete Mandarin tasks</li> </ul>	6, 7
Pressure / Tension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The form of pressure that children feel when learning Mandarin</li> <li>● Children's negative feelings when doing Mandarin tasks</li> </ul>	8, 9
Effort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Efforts made by children who show their curiosity towards learning Chinese independently, in the family, or at school</li> </ul>	10, 11, 12, 13, 14
The value / usefulness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The value of Mandarin in children</li> <li>● Preparing children for learning Mandarin</li> </ul>	15, 16
Relatedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The child's relationship with the Mandarin teacher</li> <li>● Children's feelings towards the Mandarin teacher</li> </ul>	17, 18

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research has found parents' perceptions of their children's motivation in learning Mandarin. Based on the data, 18 parents perceive that their child's motivation is extraordinarily high, 34 parents perceive that their child's motivation is very high, 37 parents perceive that their child's motivation is moderate, 23 parents perceive that their child's motivation is very low and 12 parents perceive that their child's motivation is unusually low. The researchers wish to continue working on a program that is tailored for young pupils in School X and is aimed to increase motivation to learn Mandarin after acquiring the aforementioned data. From the number of students who were judged to have very low and unusually low motivation, as many as 35 students, further motivational development programs for learning Mandarin could be applied. Researchers anticipate that after implementing the motivation development program, parents' opinions of their children's poor motivation will improve in addition to enhancing student motivation.

### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that 52 parents perceive that their child's motivation is high, 23 parents perceive that their child's motivation is moderate and 35 parents perceive that their child's motivation is low. In the future, the student motivation development program will be conducted for 35 students who are rated low by their parents.

#### Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank profusely to all parties who have helped and supported in the process of writing this article.

#### REFERENCES

- A. Harismi, K. Lestari. (2020, Februari 11). Memantau perkembangan anak usia dini, ini yang harus anda perhatikan [online]. Available: <https://www.sehatq.com/artikel/mengoptimalkan-perkembangan-anak-usia-dini>
- B. Y. Hu, T. Teo, Y. Nie, Z. Wu, Classroom quality and Chinese preschool children's approaches to learning, *Learning and Individual Differences* 54, 2017, pp 51-59. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2017.01.007>
- E. L. Deci, R. M. Ryan, *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*, Berlin: Springer Science & Business Media, 1985, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4899-2271-7>
- I. Sutisna, S.W. Laiya. (2020, Oktober). Metode pengembangan kognitif anak usia dini. [online]. Gorontalo: UNG Press. Available: <https://repository.ung.ac.id/get/karyailmiah/6644/Perkembangan-Kognitif-AUD.pdf>
- K. C. Soh, Language motivation and ethnic attitude of high ability student who attended technically homogeneous secondary schools. *Language and Education* Volume 3. 1993.
- N. Zubaidah. (2021, Oktober 26). Potensi raih beasiswa hingga peluang karier, ini manfaat mempelajari bahasa mandarin. [online]. Sindonews.com. Available: <https://edukasi.sindonews.com/read/580350/213/potensi-raih-beasiswa-hingga-peluang-karier-ini-manfaat-mempelajari-bahasa-mandarin-1635243003?showpage=all>
- R. C. Gardner, W. E. Lambert, *Attitudes and motivation in second-language learning*, Newbury House Publishers, 1972.
- R. C. Gardner. (2001, Maret 23). Language learning motivation: the student, the teacher and the researcher. *Texas Papers in Foreign Language Education*, v6 n1 p1-18

- R. Oxford, J. Shearin, Language learning motivation: expanding the theoretical framework, the modern language journal, Vol. 78, No. 1, 1994, pp. 12-28.
- R. Ryan, E. Deci, Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: definitions, theory, practices and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology* Volume 61. 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860>
- R. Ryan, E. Deci, Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: classic definitions and new directions, *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 25, 2000, pp. 54–67. <https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1020>
- S. L. Chua, A. F. L. Wong and D. Chen, Associations between Chinese language classroom environments and students' motivation to learn the language, *Australian Journal of Educational & Developmental Psychology*. Vol 9, 2009, pp 53-64. <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/group/ajedp/>
- V. Monteiro, L. Mata, F. Peixoto, Intrinsic motivation inventory: psychometric properties in the context of first language and mathematics learning. *Psychology/Psicologia Reflexão e Crítica*, 28(3), 2015, pp. 434-443. <https://doi.org/10.190/1678-7153.201528302>
- Y. Yu. (2020, September). Motivation and Language Use of Chinese Heritage Language Learners in a Beginning Level Chinese Language Class. [online]. Available: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344083851>
- Z. Dornyei, K. Csizer, Ten commandments for motivating language learners: results of an empirical study, *Language Teaching Research* 2,3; pp. 203–229, 1998.