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LEARNING MOTIVATION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF BILINGUAL STUDENTS

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Abstract

This article explores the relationship between learning motivation and academic performance among bilingual students. Drawing on theoretical perspectives and empirical research, the paper analyzes how bilingualism affects intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, cognitive engagement, self-regulation, and academic outcomes. Particular attention is given to contextual factors such as educational environment, language of instruction, sociocultural background, and emotional variables. The study highlights both the advantages and challenges faced by bilingual students and emphasizes the role of supportive pedagogical strategies in enhancing motivation and academic success. The findings suggest that when properly supported, bilingualism can serve as a powerful resource for improving learning motivation and academic achievement.

Keywords: Bilingualism, learning motivation, academic performance, bilingual students, educational psychology, multilingual education

Introduction

In the contemporary world, bilingualism and multilingualism are no longer exceptional phenomena but rather defining characteristics of many societies. Educational institutions increasingly serve students who use two or more

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languages in daily life, whether due to family background, migration, or deliberate educational policies. As a result, the academic success of bilingual students has become an important topic in educational psychology and pedagogy. While early research often focused on potential cognitive or linguistic disadvantages of bilingualism, more recent studies have demonstrated that bilingual students may benefit from enhanced cognitive flexibility, metalinguistic awareness, and adaptive learning strategies. However, academic performance is not determined by cognitive factors alone. Learning motivation plays a crucial role in shaping students' engagement, persistence, and achievement.

Bilingualism has become an increasingly common phenomenon in modern educational systems due to globalization, migration, and multilingual state policies. Alongside linguistic competence, bilingual education influences students' psychological, motivational, and academic development. Bilingualism refers to the ability of an individual to use two languages in daily communication and learning, while multilingualism involves the use of three or more languages. In modern educational contexts, bilingual and multilingual students are increasingly common due to globalization, migration, international education, and national language policies.

Students may acquire languages:

Simultaneously, learning two or more languages from early childhood;

Sequentially, learning an additional language after the first language has been established.

These different paths of language acquisition influence students' cognitive development, academic behavior, and emotional well-being.

In educational research, bilingualism among students is commonly classified into several types:

Balanced bilingualism – relatively equal proficiency in both languages.

Dominant bilingualism – higher proficiency in one language compared to the other.

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Academic bilingualism – ability to use two languages effectively for academic purposes.

Social bilingualism – use of two languages primarily for everyday communication.

Understanding these distinctions is essential for designing appropriate teaching strategies and assessment methods.

This article examines how bilingualism interacts with learning motivation and how this interaction influences academic performance. The central argument is that bilingual students' motivation is shaped by a complex interplay of linguistic, psychological, and contextual factors, which in turn affects their academic outcomes.

Bilingualism in education can be defined as the regular use of two languages by an individual for communication and learning purposes. Bilingual students may acquire their languages simultaneously from early childhood or sequentially, with one language learned after the other. These distinctions are important, as they influence language proficiency levels, academic confidence, and motivation.

In educational contexts, bilingualism may take different forms:

- Instruction in two languages (bilingual education);
- Instruction in a second language while maintaining the first language at home;
- Transitional models where the second language gradually replaces the first as the language of instruction.

Each model presents unique motivational dynamics. For example, students who perceive their home language as valued by the school system often demonstrate higher engagement and academic confidence.

Learning motivation refers to the internal and external factors that initiate, direct, and sustain learning behavior. It is commonly divided into two broad categories: **Intrinsic motivation**, which arises from interest, enjoyment, or personal satisfaction derived from learning itself.

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Extrinsic motivation, which is driven by external rewards such as grades, praise, or future career opportunities.

For bilingual students, motivation is often influenced by language-related experiences, such as success or failure in using the language of instruction, attitudes toward both languages, and perceived social value of bilingual competence. Motivational theories emphasize that students who experience autonomy, competence, and social belonging are more likely to develop sustained motivation. In bilingual contexts, these needs may be either supported or undermined depending on educational practices.

Intrinsic Motivation in Bilingual Students -bilingual students may develop strong intrinsic motivation when they perceive learning as meaningful and relevant to their identity. The ability to navigate between languages can foster curiosity, cognitive engagement, and enjoyment in learning tasks, especially those involving problem-solving or communication. However, intrinsic motivation can decline if students experience constant linguistic difficulty or feel that their linguistic background is undervalued. In such cases, learning becomes associated with anxiety rather than interest. Intrinsic motivation in bilingual students emerges at the intersection of cognitive engagement, identity affirmation, and emotional safety. Bilingualism can serve as a powerful source of curiosity, enjoyment, and deep learning when educational environments recognize and support students' linguistic resources. Conversely, when linguistic challenges are compounded by devaluation and anxiety, intrinsic motivation may decline, negatively affecting academic engagement and performance.

Extrinsic Motivation and Academic Goals - extrinsic motivation plays a significant role in bilingual students' academic trajectories. Many bilingual learners are motivated by long-term goals such as higher education, social mobility, or international career opportunities. Proficiency in multiple languages is often perceived as a valuable asset, reinforcing effort and persistence.

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Nevertheless, excessive reliance on extrinsic motivators may lead to surface learning strategies and reduced intrinsic interest, particularly if academic pressure is high. Academic performance refers to measurable educational outcomes such as grades, test scores, and progression through educational levels. Research indicates that bilingual students' academic performance varies widely depending on context.

Bilingualism has been associated with enhanced executive functions, such as attention control and cognitive flexibility. These skills can positively influence academic performance, particularly in complex tasks requiring planning and problem-solving.

At the same time, limited proficiency in the language of instruction may temporarily hinder performance, especially in subjects with high linguistic demands. This challenge can negatively affect motivation if not properly addressed.

Motivation acts as a mediator between bilingualism and academic performance. Students with high motivation are more likely to persist through linguistic challenges, seek help, and adopt effective learning strategies. Conversely, low motivation may amplify the negative effects of language difficulties. Family attitudes toward bilingualism significantly influence students' motivation. Supportive families that value both languages contribute to higher self-esteem and academic confidence. In contrast, negative societal attitudes toward minority languages may undermine motivation and engagement.

Schools play a critical role in shaping bilingual students' motivation. Inclusive pedagogical approaches that respect linguistic diversity foster a sense of belonging and competence. Teachers who use clear language scaffolding, visual supports, and culturally responsive materials help reduce anxiety and increase academic engagement.

Despite their potential advantages, bilingual students often encounter specific challenges that affect motivation and performance: language anxiety and fear of

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making mistakes; identity conflicts related to language use; lower academic self-concept in the second language; limited access to instructional support. If these challenges are not addressed, students may disengage academically, even when they possess strong cognitive abilities.

Effective strategies for supporting bilingual students include: valuing and integrating students' first language into learning activities; providing differentiated instruction and language scaffolding; encouraging cooperative learning and peer support; fostering intrinsic motivation through meaningful and authentic tasks; supporting emotional well-being and reducing language-related anxiety. Such approaches help transform bilingualism from a potential obstacle into a powerful educational resource.

The relationship between learning motivation and academic performance in bilingual students is complex and multidimensional. Bilingualism itself does not determine academic success; rather, its impact is mediated by motivational, emotional, and contextual factors. When educational systems provide supportive environments that recognize linguistic diversity and promote positive motivation, bilingual students can achieve high levels of academic performance. Understanding and addressing the motivational needs of bilingual learners is essential for ensuring educational equity and maximizing the benefits of bilingualism in an increasingly multilingual world.

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