

An Investigation of Motivation and Learning Strategies in Thai University Learners of French

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Received: May 6, 2023

Accepted: May 25, 2023

Online Published: May 26, 2023

doi: 10.5539/elt.v16n6p167

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v16n6p167>

Abstract

Learner motivation and learning strategies play a crucial role in language learning. Therefore, the current study aimed to investigate the patterns of motivation and learning strategies in 144 Thai university learners of the French language. Participants were given a questionnaire asking about their motivation and learning strategy use. The findings suggest a hierarchy of learning strategy use among Thai university learners. The most frequently used taxonomies of learning strategies were social strategies, followed by metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, affective strategies and, finally, memory strategies. The current findings also showed a positive relationship between learner motivation and language learning strategies. However, qualitative investigations need to be considered for further studies to gain in-depth insight into learning strategy use. Such a line of inquiry would yield additional crucial pedagogical and theoretical implications.

Keywords: Motivation, Thai university learners of French, learning strategies

1. Introduction

Learning strategies are tools for vibrant, self-motivated involvement in learning that is vital for acquiring language skills (Chamot, 2005; Oxford, 2017; Sukying, 2021). Learning strategies are not solo actions but a creative series of measures and activities that students dynamically implement. They are most frequently meticulous, detailed action plans or behaviours for problem-solving in language learning, and they are goal-driven (Macaro, 2006; Oxford, 2011, 2017; Sukying, 2021). The taxonomies of learner strategies vary in their focus, but practically every classification incorporates the affective, social, metacognitive and cognitive plans.

There are limited opportunities to use the target language in everyday communication in a foreign context. However, learners might have opportunities to progress in their language proficiency and use the target language more effectively. Oxford (1990) defined language learning strategies as “specific actions taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (p.8). She claimed that using appropriate learning techniques could improve language competence and autonomous learning. Previous research has revealed correlations between strategy use and language proficiency (Griffith, 2013; Sukying, 2021). Oxford’s (2011, 2017) classification of language learning strategies is regarded as more comprehensive than earlier classifications and is the most comprehensive classification to date (Sukying, 2021). Her category comprises both direct and indirect strategies. Direct Strategies contain memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies; indirect Strategies incorporate metacognitive, affective, and social ones.

Research shows strategy use facilitates language learning (Chamot, 2005; Cohen, 1998; Oxford, 2017; Sukying, 2021). Highly strong-minded students are apt to implement strategies more habitually, flexibly, and with a more specific purpose and determination. Indeed, strategies are not solo actions but a creative series of measures that learners vigorously and flexibly implement (Chamot, 2005; Cohen, 1998; Sukying, 2021). Strategies are used to solve problems in learning a language. Competent students clearly understand how to learn languages, and they implement strategies more effectively (Griffiths, 2015; Hashim, Yunus, & Hashim, 2018; Oxford, 2017; Sukying, 2021; Zhang & Xiao, 2014). Moreover, studies have looked at the frequency order of strategies used among

English language learners and found inconsistent findings (Hashim et al., 2018; Khamkhien, 2011; Oxford, 2017; Phonhan, 2016; Sukying, 2021). Indeed, these studies have shown that many factors (e.g., gender, age, motivation) have influenced language learners' language use. However, to the researcher's knowledge, little effort has been made to examine language learners' strategies to learn French, especially in the Thai EFL context.

Research also shows that students' implementation of a particular action or a bundle of measures is associated with their motivation for improving the language, including their capacity, self-belief, and anxiety levels. Indeed, motivation is linked to how learners understand language learning (Oxford, 2011; Zhang & Xiao, 2014), and strategies and motivation are most frequently interrelated (Dörnyei, 2019; Oxford, 2011; Zhang & Xiao, 2014). As such, we must understand the relationship between them. The current study investigated the extent to which learner motivation was related to language ability among Thai university learners of the French language.

Motivation is critical in selecting different learning plans to improve language abilities (Dörnyei, 2019; Griffiths, 2013; Oxford, 2011, 2017; Sukying, 2021). Motivation is regarded as a psychological philosophy that has drawn significant interest in second or foreign language works since it was propagated in language attainment (Dörnyei, 2005; Gardner, 2001). Unfortunately, very little research on Thai learners of French has been documented in English.

2. Motivation and Foreign Language Learning

Much of the research on motivation in foreign (L2) language learning has been rooted in Gardner and colleagues' psychological concept of motivation (e.g., Dörnyei, 2005; Gardner, 2001; Nikoopour et al., 2012;). However, Dörnyei stated Gardner for creating a deceptive distinction between the "instrumental" and "integrative" conceptualization of motivation. As such, the notion of motivation, interchangeably used as an incentive in this study, has brought topical issues for debate (Dörnyei, 2005; Gardner, 2001; Nikoopour et al., 2012; Oxford, 2017).

Integrative motivation reflects the learners' determination and drives to learn a language to socialize with people of other languages because they are interested in their cultures (Gardner, 2001). Additionally, students with determination and drive are enthusiastic about incorporating into the target language culture. By contrast, instrumental motivation is the incentive to acquire the language for an active, realistic determination, including having better employment, achieving a satisfying score on the national examinations, and having a better position for entering a prestigious college or academia.

Motivation can be categorized into different essentials, dependent upon the researchers. Crookes and Schmidt (1991) noted four variables in the attempt to determine internal language learning motivation. Internal learning motivation includes (1) interest in the language, (2) individual needs, (3) success expectations, and (4) sensitivities to the value of the outcomes. Crookes and Schmidt also proposed three external characteristics of motivation that incorporate the judgment to learn the language, perseverance in learning the language over the continuum, and a high engagement level in activities. Motivation may be mitigated if any of these variables are neglected in learners, and language learning attainment will be abridged (Sukying, 2021). In addition, Strauss & Corbin (1998) suggested six groups of self-regulated learning characteristics: (1) conceptualizing English language learning; (2) perceptions of the English Course; (3) learning and working strategies; (4) self-regulation; (5) internal drive; and (6) English proficiency tests. They contended that a complex and dynamic rapport between internal and external incentives and the social environments might define different levels of accomplishment (Sukying, 2021).

Moreover, Gardner (2001) grouped the motivation, namely incentives, into four essentials: goal; aspiration to achieve the established goal; attitudes; and vigilante actions. While these scholars underscore the prominence of integrative incentives, researchers in language learning motivation contend that social and cultural sensibility has not given great attention to classroom-based learning situations where integrative incentives seem less applicable. Dörnyei (2019) accentuates that the motivation construct incorporates several rudiments. Such rudiments should comprise intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: cognitive knowledge, goal establishment, self-belief, course-specific, need for accomplishment, and student-specific and teacher-specific motivational drives.

Based on a comprehensive analysis of the motivation literature, Oxford (2017) suggests three motivation degrees. In the first degree, motivation involves an aspiration to attain the language for cultural and linguistic inclusion. This motivation is found in all degrees within this public and private construct of language learning motivation. The second degree contains integrativeness and attitudes toward the L2 learning phenomenon (Tremblay & Gardner 1995). In the third degree, inspiration embraces the students' effort to attain the language and attitudes towards attaining the language.

Schmidt and his associates (1996) indicated that motivation encompassed three essential foreign language learning motivation dimensions: the affective domain, goal establishment, and expectation of monitoring. They also pointed out that learner motivation was associated with learner strategies and confident choices for techniques and tasks. Specifically, students with high scores on affective stimuli tended to enjoy communication-based classes, while students with high anxiety preferred not to do collaborative learning and communicative pedagogy. These findings align with Sukying's (2021) study that learners' choices of strategy implementation hinge on activities and situations. In brief, students with a conventional pedagogy preferred to implement memorization methods for metacognitive and social practices.

Another critical notion associated with motivation is the concept of learner strategies, also known as language learning strategies. Learner strategies or language learning strategies (LLS), as they are interchangeably termed in the literature, are tools for the dynamic, self-regulated commitment that are crucial for developing language ability (Chamot, 2005; Pawlak & Oxford, 2018; Tieocharoen & Rimkeeratikul, 2019; Sukying, 2021; Zhang et al., 2019). LLS is not a solo action or incident but an artistic series of steps that learners dynamically implement. They are often thorough, methodical action plans for problem-fixing in language learning and are goal-established (Nikoopour et al., 2012; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Sukying, 2021). Learner strategies are typically catalogued into social, affective, metacognitive, and cognitive concepts.

Oxford (2011) defines LLS as fitting into two main categories: direct and indirect, with their support to language acquisition. The former category is further catalogued into memory, cognitive, and compensation, whereas the latter is subdivided into affective, metacognitive and social ones. More specifically, memorization is repeatedly executed to assist the students in loading new knowledge and repossessing it for later language production. The memorization typically includes enlisting new vocabulary items in contexts, applying known words and designating letters and sounds in memory. Cognition often indicates how the students process and achieve knowledge and information to understand better and produce new language communication. The cognitive strategies usually include *précising*, note-taking, analyzing, creating and conceptualizing for deeper insights into a particular issue. Comprehension tactics incorporate actions the students exercise to compensate for information gaps and implement them in language communication. These strategies involve deducing the gist of unfamiliar lexical items and gesticulating while reading or listening, or using familiar expressions and words (e.g., synonyms) or rephrasing when dealing with difficulties that arise in language communication.

However, indirect schemes engage techniques that assist and administrate language learning without simply demanding the learning route in the target language. These strategies contain social, affective, and metacognitive behavioural plans. **Metacognition** enables language students to regulate their learning by allocating, planning, and appraising their learning process. **Affective schemes** assist learners in detecting their affective traits and controlling their emotional feelings and manners. These strategies incorporate relaxation practices (e.g., listening to music or singing songs) in the target language to diminish their learning anxiety. **Societal activities** allow improved interactions in the language learning process. These societal interactions could be seen as questioning, accommodating with peers, and increasing empathy towards other people in naturalistic contexts. Since these strategic practices are interrelated, students typically implement them explicitly and implicitly to achieve their established goals and to attain language acquisition competence.

Like Oxford (2011, 2017), other prominent academics in the field of LLS research argue that these strategic practices hasten language attainment (Chamot, 2005; Khamkhien, 2011; Sukying, 2021; Zhang et al., 2019; Zhang & Xiao, 2014). Highly determined and capable students repeatedly implement strategies with a more pliable and explicit commitment. In general, strategic practices are used to solve problematical issues in language learning. Indeed, capable students clearly understand how to obtain languages and systematically execute learning strategies (Habok & Magyar, 2018; Khamkhien, 2011; Phonhan, 2016; Sukying, 2021; Zhang et al., 2019). Oxford (2017) has virtually called for further inquiries into conduits to boost learner motivation to acquire the target language.

The current study aims to investigate learners' motivation patterns in French language learning at a university. It also aims to explore learning strategies in French major students at the tertiary level of education in Thailand. The current study is based on the following research questions:

1. What kind of motivation patterns do French major students exhibit?
2. How are language learning motivation and learning strategies related to the year of French language study?

3. Methods

3.1 Participants and Setting

This research was conducted at a government university in the northeast of Thailand in 2019. Participants were 144 undergraduates, including 22 males and 122 females). The participants were 19-22 years old, with 26 first-year students, 47 sophomores, 31 juniors and 40 senior students. All participants were enrolled in the French Program, at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, at a public university in the northeast of Thailand.

Participants were selected to represent a range of French language aptitudes varying from advanced beginners to upper-intermediate. In addition, their families also served a range of socioeconomic and occupational backgrounds. The size for this class went from 30 to 50 undergraduates. All participatory students were Thai native speakers, and none had experienced attaining French in a French-speaking environment. At the time of data collection, the participatory students earned an average of 12 hours of French education per week with Thai French language professors and about 6 hours with native French lecturers. Overall, volunteer undergraduates had achieved an average of three to six years of exposure to learning French in a systematic locale in Thailand.

3.2 Research Instrumentation

The questionnaire used in the current study was developed based on Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of language learning strategy (LLS). The questionnaire comprised three parts. Part I included questions about the demographic background information of the participants. Part II involved motivation for language learning in Thai contexts (18 items), and Part III included questions on participants' language learning strategies (50 items). The questionnaire consisted of a total of 68 items. The questionnaire was a 7-point Likert scale whereby 1 = strongly untrue; 2 = moderately untrue; 3 = slightly untrue; 4 = neutral; 5 = slightly true; 6 = moderately true; and 7 = strongly true. Regarding learning strategies, the descriptors for the language learning questionnaire were 1 = very inaccurate; 2 = moderately inaccurate; 3 = slightly inaccurate; 4 = neutral, 5 = slightly accurate; 6 = moderately accurate, and 7 = very accurate.

The questionnaire was used in a pilot group of students before the main study. The Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was used to evaluate the questionnaire using a score range from -1 to +1. The items with scores lower than 0.5 were removed from the questionnaire, and those with scores higher than 0.5 were retained. Five experts verified the questionnaire. These experts held doctoral degrees and, at minimum, ten years of teaching practice in language teaching at tertiary institutions in Thailand. Moreover, the reliability of the internal consistency of the questionnaire was checked, indicating a high level of reliability (0.89). The questionnaire was translated into Thai before the main study.

3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire for motivation and language learning strategies was distributed to all participants in their French classroom a fortnight before the final examination. Before the questionnaire was administered, the guidelines and a few cases of the questionnaires were delivered and elucidated to French-major learners taking part in the study in their L1, native Thai language. Screening procedures were also applied. Participants who left answers blank for any questions were excluded from the analysis. Those who provided the same answer in response to the ten questionnaire items were also excluded.

3.4 Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were conducted to describe participants' responses to the questionnaire items. Inferential statistics were also used to analyze the data. An independent samples t-test was used to compare two group means to assess whether or not they are significantly different from one another. This analysis was combined with an ANOVA to compare three group means. Effect sizes and other related statistics were also used. According to Oxford (1990, 2011), the range from 0% to 49% is low-frequency strategy use, between 50% to 69.9% is considered medium, and 70% or above is regarded as high-frequency strategy use.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Thai French Learners' Motivation and Learning Strategies

Table 1 illustrates the descriptive statistics for French language learners at a tertiary level of education at a Thai government university. The participants reported high-frequency use of language learning strategies, with an average score of 71.07% or 4.98 (SD=1.356). More specifically, the university participants reported that the most frequently used LLS was social strategies, with an average of 72.42% or 5.07 (SD=1.33), followed by metacognitive strategies, with an average of 71.57% or 5.01 (SD=1.298), and cognitive strategies, with an

average score of 71.14% or 4.98 (SD=1.656). The least frequently used strategy was memory strategies, with an average of 70% or 4.90 (SD=1.301). However, overall the type of strategy use was not significantly different (see Table 1). The current findings indicate that Thai learners of the French language employ a wide range of language learning for better communication in the target language.

Regarding learner motivation for language learning, Thai university learners of French reported a high level of motivation, according to Oxford (1990). More specifically, Thai university learners of French reported an average of 73.43% on the motivation questionnaire (SD=1.381).

Table 1. Taxonomy of language learning and motivation in Thai university learners of French

Clusters	Students (n = 144)		
	Mean	Mean (%)	SD
Memory	4.90	70.00	1.301
Cognitive	4.98	71.14	1.656
Compensation	4.95	70.71	1.266
Metacognitive	5.01	71.57	1.298
Affective	4.94	70.57	1.286
Social	5.07	72.42	1.330
Overall	4.98	71.07	1.356
Motivation	5.14	73.43	1.381
Overall	4.99	71.41	1.359

Table 2 illustrates the language learning and motivation information by years of study among Thai university learners of French. The current results showed that the first-year university learners of French reported moderate frequency use of language learning strategies and had an average level of motivation in learning French. However, the second-year, third-year and fourth-year university learners of French applied LLS with high frequency and also had high levels of learning motivation. This suggests that the more advanced the student, the more complex the learning process may be.

The different frequencies of use may also be explained by differences in the learning conditions that shift from one grade to another. Indeed, memory strategies were most often used by second-year learners of French, followed by the third-year participants, then the fourth-year students and finally, the first-year learners. Cognitive processes were the least frequently used by the first-year students, followed by the fourth-, third-, and ultimately, the second-year students. Second-year students most frequently used compensation strategies, followed by third-, fourth-, and first-year students, respectively.

Metacognitive strategies were used more by the second-year learners, followed by the third-, fourth- and, finally, first-year learners. This is likely because first-year learners' French proficiency levels are insufficient for independent or autonomous learning. The same pattern was observed for affective and social strategies. Again, this may be due to limitations in French language proficiency among first-year learners. Overall, the results indicate that first-year French language learners were more likely to use memory strategies rather than the other strategies, and this is likely because they are in the process of constructing and developing their language proficiency.

The ANOVA analysis confirmed that there were significant differences between years of study and language learning strategies (Table 2). This indicates that language learning strategies depend on social learning contexts and learning styles.

Table 2. Learning strategies and motivation by years of study in Thai learners of French

Clusters	Year 1 (n = 26)		Year 2 (n = 47)		Year 3 (n = 31)		Year 4 (n = 40)		F-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Memory	4.50 (64.28)	1.57	5.17 (73.85)	1.24	4.97 (71.00)	1.25	4.80 (68.57)	1.15	43.055
Cognitive	4.48 (64.00)	1.74	5.36 (76.57)	1.15	4.98 (71.14)	1.22	4.87 (69.57)	1.22	33.946
Compensation	4.40 (62.85)	1.61	5.26 (75.14)	1.15	4.93 (70.42)	1.20	4.95 (70.71)	1.07	30.244
Metacognitive	4.34 (62.00)	1.69	5.38 (76.85)	1.12	5.09 (72.71)	1.17	4.93 (70.42)	1.13	53.246
Affective	4.37 (62.42)	1.50	5.26 (75.14)	1.22	5.00 (71.42)	1.17	4.89 (69.85)	1.18	42.537
Social	4.48 (64.00)	1.56	5.51 (78.71)	1.13	5.04 (72.00)	1.28	4.97 (71.00)	1.29	79.899
Overall	4.43 (63.25)	1.61	5.32 (76.04)	1.17	5.00 (71.44)	1.22	4.90 (70.02)	1.17	
Motivation	4.71 (67.28)	1.72	5.45 (77.85)	1.28	5.18 (74.00)	1.22	5.01 (71.57)	1.25	31.76
Overall	4.47 (63.83)	1.63	5.34 (76.30)	1.18	5.02 (71.81)	1.22	4.91 (70.24)	1.18	

Note: $p > 0.001$

4.2 Motivation and Language Learning

The correlations between learner motivation and the different language learning strategies varied from 0.11 to 0.58, suggesting a small to medium association between the two variables. This indicates a small, positive relationship between LLS use and motivation, such that the more frequent the use of learning strategies, the higher the motivation for language learning. The detailed descriptions of the correlations between learner motivation and French learning are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. The correlations between learner motivation and French learning

Clusters	Motivation	Mem	Cog	Comp	Metacog	Affective	Social
Motivation	1						
Memory	0.23	1					
Cognitive	0.11	0.36	1				
Compensation	0.28	0.55	0.32	1			
Metacognitive	0.21	0.56	0.34	0.58	1		
Affective	0.33	0.55	0.30	0.51	0.57	1	
Social	0.29	0.54	0.28	0.56	0.51	0.56	1
Combined Strategies	0.14						

Note: $p > 0.001$

The significant finding of the correlational analysis indicates that learner motivation and LLS are interrelated. This result could be explained by the fact that learner motivation positively determines and drives learning

strategies and plans to acquire French as a target language, which, in turn, increases learning motivation. The small correlations could be accounted for by the motivation degrees. Specifically, the study participants may have undecided learning goals to learn French for realistic determination. Such motivation includes interest, solid objectives, perseverance (self-regulation) in learning French over the continuum, active engagement in learning activities, and social and cultural situations. These findings align with previous studies that learner incentives are linked to learner strategies and self-possessed choices for practices and tasks (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Hakok & Magyar, 2018; Sukying, 2021; Zhang et al., 2019; Zhang & Xiao, 2014). In brief, the study suggests that higher motivation and engagement in learning activities achieve higher achievement in mastering the target language.

5. Conclusion

The current study examined Thai learners' motivation patterns in French language learning at a government university. The results are summarized in the sections below.

5.1 Learning Strategy Use among Thai University Learners of the French Language

The current findings indicated that Thai university learners of the French language employed various language learning strategies. Indeed, the results showed that Thai university learners of the French language frequently used language learning strategies, according to Oxford (1990). The current findings also showed a hierarchy of language learning strategies. That is, Thai university learners of the French language used social techniques the most frequently, followed by metacognitive, cognitive, compensation, affective, and memory strategies.

The second-year students appear to apply their learning strategies the most often, followed by the third-year students and fourth-year peers, respectively. First-year students used LLS the least frequently, suggesting that their language proficiency is not yet sufficient. Overall, the findings indicated that Thai university learners of French use high-frequency language learning strategies and the specific strategy used depends on the learning conditions and contexts.

5.2 Motivation in Language Learning among Thai University Learners of French

The results indicated that Thai university learners were highly motivated to learn French. Regarding the motivation for language learning across different years of study, the second-year students reported the highest motivation for language learning, followed by the third-, fourth- and, finally, first-year students. The current findings also indicated that the level of motivation for language learning was associated with the frequency of LLS use. That is, the higher the motivation, the more frequently LLS are used. In conclusion, these findings indicate that emotional behaviours, attitudes, and motivation are associated with LLS use among Thai university learners of the French language.

6. Implications and Limitations of the Study

The current study yields fruitful information. First, the findings raise awareness of motivation and language learning strategies in determining and driving learning achievement and establishing social and cultural environments. The results also suggest the importance of activities and tasks to engage students learning and collaboration in acquiring the target language. LLS training may be necessary for EFL learners to facilitate their language acquisition and development.

It must be noted that only a small sample of university participants in state academia was included in the current study, with a restricted age range of 17-18. It is feasible that diverse age ranges in distinctive learning environments would give significantly different results. Indeed, the results may vary depending on the learning environments, ages and the influence of others in more demanding contexts. This study was also limited regarding the motivational variables since only three were chosen. Other motives that have not been taken candidly into account could influence the results, which is a possible avenue for future research.

It would also be interesting to conduct qualitative investigations or case studies to better measure self-regulation and students' prophecy of themselves. It could also be interesting to measure accomplishment and the variables that make it possible, such as facility or past experiences. Lastly, the role of personality traits and individual characteristics in LLS use and motivation should also be taken into account.

To conclude, motivation plays an influential role in language learning. By better understanding this role, the learning experience can be enhanced for both teachers and students.

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