

A Study on Chinese Language Motivational Teaching Strategies in Romania¹

Ruihong CAO²

Motivation is is one of the most important determinants of L2 learning achievement. Therefore, it is very urgent to explore “how to stimulate and sustain L2 learner’s motivation”. This paper uses “Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners” presented by Hungarian linguist Zoltán Dörnyei as a theoretical framework and employs questionnaire survey and interview to analyze the characteristics of various motivational teaching strategy adopted in the Chinese language teaching in Romania. Research results indicate that teachers' enthusiasm, a positive classroom atmosphere, and a clear sense of learning goals are the three most effective factors in stimulating learning motivation. Based on these findings, this paper suggests teachers: help students establish clear and achievable learning goals; pay attention to teaching feedback; encourage interactive participation.

Keywords: *motivational strategy, Chinese language learning and teaching, Romania, teaching strategy*

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background and significance

Chinese language teaching in Romania began in 1956 when the Chinese Section of Department of Oriental Languages and Literatures was established in the Faculty of Foreign Language and Literatures, at the University of Bucharest. Subsequently, the first Confucius Institute in Romania was founded in Sibiu in 2006, and in 2017, Chinese was officially integrated into the national education system (Cao et al. 2023). To date, Romania has developed a multi-level Chinese language training

¹ This research is funded by Center for Language Education and Cooperation 2024 International Chinese Language Education Research Project, “Research on the Development of European Chinese Language Education Policies” (24YH05B)

² University of Bucharest, ruihong.cao@lils.unibuc.ro

system, covering higher education, primary and secondary education, preschool education, and non-degree community teaching (Cao 2023).

Among the 13 countries in Central and Eastern Europe, a total of 37 universities offer Chinese language programs. Romania ranks second with six universities, following Poland (Gao and Wu 2022). The country currently has 5 Confucius Institutes, 14 Confucius Classrooms, and nearly 100 teaching points, training more than 8,000 Chinese language learners each year.

The rapid growth of the learner population has made “how to continuously stimulate and maintain learning motivation” a vital issue that urgently needs to be explored in the practical teaching. Hungarian linguist Zoltán Dörnyei classified the foreign/second language (L2) motivational strategies into Motivational Teaching Strategies used by teachers and Motivational Learning Strategies used by students. (Cheng and Dörnyei 2007) However, most existing studies focus on the construction of motivational theories or are situated in English language contexts. There is still a lack of systematic research on motivational strategies in Chinese language teaching as a foreign language, particularly in the contexts of Eastern European languages, and on research focusing on teachers’ motivational practices.

1.2. Research questions and objectives

This study adopts Dörnyei’s *“Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners”* (Dörnyei and Csizér 1998) as an analytical framework. It aims to bridge the research gap in motivational strategies for teaching Chinese in Romania and to provide practical guidance for teachers in the field.

This study has 3 main objectives: to describe the overall situation and characteristics of how Chinese language teachers in Romania apply Dörnyei’s *“Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners”* in classroom teaching; to compare the similarities and differences in learning motivation between students in Chinese Section at universities and those attending interest-based Chinese courses at Confucius Institutes; to examine the influence of teachers’ motivational strategies on learners’ motivation levels and their willingness to continue studying Chinese. Therefore, the project asks three questions: What motivational strategies do Chinese language teachers in Romania primarily employ in their teaching practice? How do the motivation structures of different types of learners vary? Do teachers’ motivational strategies significantly predict learners’ motivation levels and their willingness to continue learning Chinese?

2. Methodology

2.1. Theoretical framework

Dörnyei is one of the most influential scholars in contemporary research on L2 learning motivation and motivational teaching strategies. He attempted to bridge the gap between motivation theories in psychology and L2 acquisition, pioneering a shift in the research perspective of L2 motivation from social context to educational context. Based on long-term empirical research, he constructed a "*three-level motivation*" framework for teaching practice in classroom. This framework consists of three levels: *Language Level*, *Learner Level*, and *Learning Situation Level*, corresponding to the three basic elements of L2 learning: the second language, the second language learner, and the second language learning situation. It also embodies three different language dimensions: social dimension, personal dimension, and educational dimension (Dörnyei 1994).

Given the lack of theoretical and empirical research on motivational strategies, Dörnyei and Csizér conducted a large-scale empirical survey of 200 Hungarian English language teachers' motivational strategies in 1998, based on the "*three-level*" framework. They proposed a framework of "*Ten commandments for motivating language learners*", namely: set a personal example with your own behaviour; create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom; present the tasks properly; develop a good relationship with the learners; increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence; make the language classes interesting; promote learner autonomy; personalize the learning process; increase the learners' goal-orientedness; familiarize learners with the target language culture. Each major category contains several specific strategies, totaling 55. (Dörnyei and Csizér 1998) This framework has opened up a new direction for L2 motivation research, and many scholars have used it as a foundation to study the characteristics of L2 motivational teaching strategies in different regions.

2.2. Data Collection

The data of this research was collected through the method of combining questionnaire survey and interview. It explores the current situation and characteristics of learning motivation and motivational teaching strategies in Romania's Chinese language teaching, based on the descriptive statistical analysis and preliminary comparative analysis.

The questionnaire consists of four sections and covers five motivational dimensions. Section I is the basic background information, including questions about learners' language proficiency, learning experience, and learning goals. Section II is the Likert scale items, which contain 15 statements rated on a five-point Likert scale, encompassing five key dimensions: classroom atmosphere, teachers' motivational strategy, self-belief, classroom activities, and autonomous learning and long-term motivation. Section III is to explore the reasons behind in the changes of motivation and sources of learning drive force with open-ended questions. Section IV is to investigate external influences that may affect motivation, such as learning pressure and exposure to Chinese outside the classroom.

In order to get more in-depth subjective insights from the learners, this research also conducted an interview with 8 students mixed 5 university students and 3 Confucius Institute students, as a complementary method.

2.3. Samples and analytical tools

A total of 37 valid questionnaires were collected, including 20 participants from Chinese language programs in the university and 17 participants from the interest-based courses in the Confucius Institute. Participants' proficiency levels range from HSK1 to HSK4, covering beginner to intermediate learners. The sample distribution is relatively balanced in language levels.

Data were processed by using Excel and SPSS to summarize the average scores and variances of different motivation indicators, and to compare the differences in motivation performance among different types of Chinese language learners from Chinese majors in university and interest courses in Confucius Institute.

Due to time constraints, this study did not conduct longitudinal tracking. However, by analyzing the motivational strategies used in specific teaching situations and students' subjective feedback in the interview, insightful teaching suggestions can still be extracted, laying the foundation for longer-term historical studies in the near future.

3. Findings and analysis

The analytical procedure of questionnaire followed these steps: (1) descriptive statistics is to summarize the overall distribution and characteristics of motivation factors; (2) factor analysis is to verify the construct validity of the questionnaire dimensions; (3) Pearson correlation analysis is to explore relationships between

teachers' motivational strategies and learners' learning motivation; (4) multiple regression analysis is to examine the predictive effect of motivational teaching strategies on learners' long-term learning motivation and persistence. The interview results presented in Chapter 4, further validated the questionnaire survey results.

3.1. Descriptive statistics

Based on the ranking of mean scores on the Likert scale items, the respondents demonstrated an overall high level of learning motivation. The six highest-scoring items were as Table 1:

Table 1. The top-six items of the learning motivation

The six highest-scoring items	M
Learning Chinese is helpful for my future development.	4.54
The classroom atmosphere is positive and supportive.	4.46
Achieving good grades enhances my confidence in learning.	4.43
I am willing to continue learning Chinese in the future.	4.43
The teacher is enthusiastic about teaching.	4.41
Classroom activities are interesting.	4.35

These results indicate that the core driving forces of students' learning motivation mainly stem from three aspects: (1) goal-oriented motivation – focusing on future development and the practical value of learning Chinese; (2) a positive classroom atmosphere – environmental support and emotional engagement, fostering students' sense of belonging and comfort; (3) achievement experience – motivation derived from academic performance and teacher encouragement, enhancing learners' self-confidence and persistence.

3.1.1. *The main motivations of learning Chinese are interest, career development and cultural exchange*

The research shows that more than half of the respondents identified the following three factors as their learning motivations: personal interest (75.68%), career development (59.46%) and cultural exchange (51.35%). It should be noted that the relevant question in the questionnaire is multiple choice.

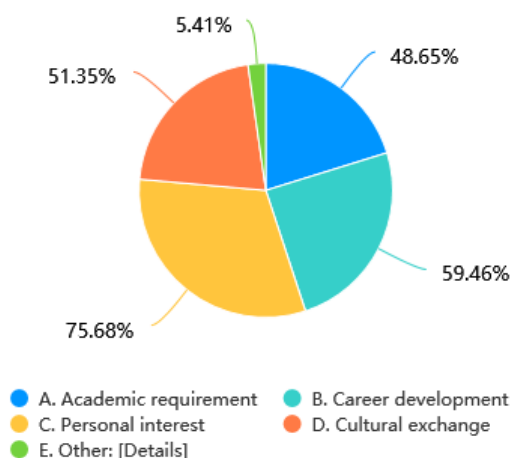


Figure 1. *The distribution of learning motivation*

3.1.2. Chinese learning experience makes clearer learning goal

Comparative analysis indicates that, among those with prior Chinese learning experience, 73.33% strongly agreed that they had clear learning goals and knew how to achieve them, compared to only 26.67% among those without such experience.

Table 2. *Chinese learning experience makes clearer learning goal*

X\Y	Yes	No	No.
Strongly Disagree	1(33.33%)	2(66.67%)	3
Disagree	1(50%)	1(50%)	2
Average	1(20%)	4(80%)	5
Agree	6(50%)	6(50%)	12
Strongly Agree	11(73.33%)	4(26.67%)	15

3.1.3. Goal clarity makes learners more confident in learning ability

Within the group reporting *clear goals*, 86.67% strongly agreed that they were confident in their ability to learn Chinese well, while only 33.33% of the *unclear goal* group expressed the same confidence. This result shows that the clear goal of learning is significant for self-confidence in learning ability.

Table 3. Goal clarity makes learners more confident in learning ability

X\Y	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Average (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	No.	Mean
Strongly Disagree	2(66.6)	0(0.00)	1(33.33)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	3	1.67
Disagree	0(0.00)	1(50)	1(50)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	2	2.5
Average	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	3(60)	1(20)	1(20)	5	3.6
Agree	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	2(16.67)	6(50)	4(33.33)	12	4.17
Strongly Agree	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	2(13.33)	13(86.67)	15	4.87

3.1.4. Teacher enthusiasm and classroom engagement have positive correlation

In the cross-analysis of teacher enthusiasm and classroom activities, among students who strongly agreed that their teachers were enthusiastic, 65.52% also strongly agreed that classroom activities enhanced their motivation.

Table 4. Classroom activities are engaging and increase my motivation

X\Y	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Average (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	No.	Mean
Strongly Disagree	1(50)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1(50)	0(0.00)	2	2.5
Disagree	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	2(66.67)	1(33.33)	3	4.33
Average	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1(50)	0(0.00)	1(50)	2	4
Agree	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1(100)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1	3
Strongly Agree	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	3(10.34)	7(24.14)	19(65.52)	29	4.55

3.1.5. Group differences

Furthermore, university students majoring in Chinese displayed a stronger sense of long-term goals and goal-oriented motivation, while students in extracurricular activities performed better in terms of classroom participation, engagement, and sustained motivation. This suggests that learners from different educational backgrounds have different motivational focuses, and teaching strategies should differentiate between them.

3.2. Factor analysis

To further reveal the underlying structure of learning motivation, factor analysis was performed on the questionnaire data. The KMO value was 0.605, and the result of Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2=728.587$, $df=231$, $p < 0.001$) indicated that the data were suitable for factor extraction. Ultimately, six factors were extracted, accounting for a cumulative variance explanation of 80.22%. The first factor alone explained 32.25% of the variance, suggesting the presence of a prominent main dimension.

The content characteristics of the three main factors are as follows:

Factor 1 (32.25%) is self-efficacy and learning confidence, including *"I believe I can learn Chinese well"* and *"Achieving good grades will boost my confidence"*, reflect the most basic internal psychological mechanisms of learners' motivation.

Factor 2 (18.60%) is teacher enthusiasm and emotional support, for instance, *"my teacher is very passionate about teaching"*, and *"the classroom atmosphere is positive"*, highlight the key role of the teacher in motivating students.

Factor 3 (11.11%) is classroom interaction and participation experience, covering *"the activities in my Chinese class are very interesting"*, and *"I like interactive learning"*, demonstrate the significant impact of instructional activity design on enhancing motivation.

These three major factors essentially encompass the situational motivation, autonomous motivation, and instructional interaction dimensions within Dörnyei's *"Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners,"* confirming the theoretical suitability of the motivational teaching strategy framework (Dörnyei and Csizér 1998).

3.3. Correlation analysis

To reveal the interaction relationships among motivational factors, this paper employs Pearson correlation analysis. The analysis results demonstrated highly significant positive correlations among several key variables:

The correlation coefficient between classroom safety and perceived learning goals was $r = 0.62$ ($p < 0.01$), indicating that students who feel supported and safe are more likely to set clear learning goals.

The correlation coefficient between classroom safety and the enjoyment of classroom activities was $r = 0.58$ ($p < 0.01$), emphasizing the positive effect of a supportive environment on student participation.

The correlation between a sense of learning goals and the enjoyment of classroom activities reached $r = 0.64$ ($p < 0.01$), reflecting that goal-driven students are more inclined to actively participate in interactive activities.

Furthermore, the correlation coefficient between “*I actively plan my learning*” and “*I am willing to continue learning Chinese in the future*” is $r = 0.31$ ($p < 0.01$), indicating that learning autonomy has a certain promoting effect on maintaining long-term motivation. Although the correlation is moderate, it still has practical value.

These findings suggest that a supportive and engaging classroom environment significantly reinforces learners’ sense of goal and enjoyment, while autonomous learning behaviors positively influence their long-term motivation to continue studying Chinese.

3.4. Regression prediction

To explore which factors effectively predict students’ willingness to continue learning Chinese, a regression analysis was conducted using “*future willingness to continue learning Chinese*” as the dependent variable. Four independent variables were included: *teacher enthusiasm* (X_1), *clarity of learning goals* (X_2), *classroom enjoyment* (X_3), and *autonomous learning plan* (X_4).

The regression model showed a good fit ($R^2 = 0.782$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.755$), indicating that the model explains approximately 78.2% of the variance in learners’ continued learning intention. The regression equation is as follows:

$$Y = 1.71 + 0.25X_1 + 0.77X_2 - 0.16X_3 - 0.19X_4$$

Among the predictive factors, clarity of learning objectives ($p < 0.001$) and teacher enthusiasm ($p < 0.01$) were significant. Each unit increase in goal awareness significantly boosted the willingness to continue learning by 0.77 units; each unit increase in teacher enthusiasm boosted willingness by 0.25 units. In contrast, while classroom interaction enjoyment and autonomous planning had positive regression coefficients, their effects were not statistically significant.

These results indicate that clearly goal orientation and teacher enthusiasm served as the decisive variables influencing learners’ sustained willingness to continue studying Chinese. While classroom enjoyment and self-planning ability exerted certain positive effects, they did not show a significant impact in the short term. This suggested that teachers should consciously guide students to establish clear learning goals while maintaining a positive and enthusiastic teaching attitude, so as to foster students’ long-term learning motivation.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

4.1. Discussions of Teaching Strategy

Based on the main findings from Chapter 3, this paper emphasizes the core role of goal clarity, emotional amplification effect of teacher enthusiasm and differentiated motivational structures.

First, a clear learning goal not only enhances learners' self-efficacy, but also provides long-term motivational drive in the absence of immediate achievements. Teachers are suggested to help students design stage-based goal, for instance, set end-of-course language ability goals with the students together at the start of the course, then conduct monthly reviews, during the process also showcase small weekly achievements. This research got the same result from the interview. As one interviewee (R2) stated,

"From my first course, I was told it is more than interesting to learn Chinese, it is also useful. I knew the summer camp organized by the Confucius Institute, the scholarship for going to studying in China³, and the corresponding HSK⁴ score requirements. So the very clear learning goal has been motivating me a lot."

Second, in small-class teaching environments, teachers' attitudes directly shape the classroom atmosphere, strengthening the group support and emotional engagement among learners. Therefore, teachers' emotional feedback would have influential effect on the students' learning motivation. Practical examples, including providing immediate praise in class, giving individual encouragement after class, and publicly display outstanding students' work, make a significant difference. The interview result demonstrates the same. One interviewee (R3) said,

"In the personal life, I am not a confident person. I was not confident either in the Chinese class. My Chinese teacher keeps telling us 'don't be afraid of making mistakes in my class'. I was very happy to find that I feel relaxed and safe in class, and that makes me more confident. What is more important is that, whenever the teacher praised me, I felt I was seen by her, which happened very often in our Chinese class."

Last but not least, university students tend to emphasize goal commitment and academic achievement, whereas learners in Confucius Institute interest-based classes focus more on interactive experience and sustained interest. This suggests

³ It is referred to International Chinese Language Teachers Scholarship established by the Center for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC).

⁴ HSK is the abbreviation of *Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi*, which means Chinese Proficiency Exam.

that motivational strategies should be implemented in a differentiated and context-sensitive manner.

Table 5. Motivational strategy and practical examples based on research findings

Finding	Strategy	Practical Example
Goal clarity best predicts learning willingness	Stage-based goal design	Set end-of-course ability goals at the start → conduct monthly reviews → showcase small weekly achievements
Teacher enthusiasm has a significant impact	Emotional feedback loop	Provide immediate praise in class + give individual encouragement after class + publicly display outstanding students' work
Group differences are evident	Differentiated classroom approach	For university classes: use project-based learning and research; for interest-based classes: enhance game and situational dialogue activities

4.2. Research conclusion

In summary, this study, through questionnaires and statistical analysis, comprehensively reveals the key factors influencing Chinese language learning motivation and the differences among various learning groups. Teacher enthusiasm, classroom atmosphere, and goal clarity collectively form the foundation of students' learning motivation. The differences in motivational focus between students from university and Confucius Institute remind us that teaching strategies need to be tailored to individual students and differentiated.

The highly reliable survey results ($\alpha > 0.9$) and the extracted factor structure further corroborate the important roles of learners' personal confidence, teachers' support, and classroom interaction in language learning.

Correlation and regression analyses provide deeper insights: a supportive environment and clear goals not only improve current learning outcomes but also effectively predict students' future willingness to continue learning.

4.3. Research Limitation and Future Direction

Due to time constraints, there are two limitations in this research. On the one hand, the study is based on only 37 questionnaires, with participants primarily concentrated in Bucharest, limiting the overall representativeness of the findings. On the other hand, as a cross-sectional study, the data cannot capture the dynamic changes in motivation over time.

The future research plans can expand the sample size and geographical scope by including data from multiple universities and cities to enhance representatives. A one-year longitudinal study can be conducted through integrating classroom observation and in-depth interviews to construct a dynamic “motivation–strategy–outcome” model. In addition, future study can further examine the transfer ability and localization of Dörnyei’s motivational strategies across different cultural contexts.

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