

Motivational Factors and Strategies in Language Learning: Perspectives From Military Language Learners

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Abstract—Motivation is a critical factor influencing student learning outcomes in language learning contexts. This study employed a qualitative research design to explore factors affecting military learners' motivation at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) in the United States. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with military students who completed the DLIFLC's Undergraduate Persian Farsi (UPF) program. The research examined the factors influencing language learning motivation and strategies to sustain and enhance motivation from the perspectives of military language learners. Findings revealed that military students perceived their motivation as multifaceted, shaped by a complex interplay of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, academic goals, academic achievement, personal growth, student–teacher relationships, peer relationships, and the learning environment. The study identified motivational strategies such as designing engaging and enjoyable curricula and extracurricular activities that immerse students in the target language, fostering effective communication among learners and stakeholders, creating a positive and supportive learning environment, and ensuring recognition and support from all stakeholders. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the motivational factors influencing military language learners and offer practical strategies to improve learning outcomes in language education settings.

Index Terms—foreign language education, military education, motivational factors, motivational strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

Motivation has been a reappearing theme in the history of language teaching and is crucial for achieving positive language-learning outcomes (Redondo & Martín, 2015). Motivation in the second language acquisition context refers to the language learners' efforts, desires, and positive attitudes that drive them to achieve language-learning goals (Jodai et al., 2013). Some studies indicate that motivation is the most influential factor in language-learning achievement at military institutions (Jodai et al., 2013; Kurum, 2011). There is substantial research on how motivation affects learning outcomes in K-12 and higher education settings. However, U.S. intensive military foreign language programs at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) differ from traditional universities and other military institutions in the length of the foreign language programs, curriculum, and graduation requirements. Also, there is a lack of literature on how motivation affects military student learning outcomes in U.S. military language programs. Therefore, this study investigates the factors that affect military students' language learning motivation and strategies to enhance military learner motivation at DLIFLC.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although motivation plays a fundamental role in achieving positive language-learning outcomes, there is no standard definition of motivation among researchers, especially regarding language learning. In one definition, motivation is “the tendency of a student to find meaningful and useful academic activities and to try to obtain academic benefits from them” (Brophy, 1998, p. 205). Gardner (1985) defined motivation as “the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity” (p. 10). Cole (2007) defined motivation as the “internal state that instigates, directs, and maintains behavior” (Redondo & Martín, 2015, p. 127). According to Deci and Ryan (1985), intrinsic motivation relies on individual feelings, desires, and internal instincts, whereas external motivation is based on the purpose and incentives of external events and stimuli. For this research, motivation refers to the effort, attitude, and desire of military students to achieve the goal of language learning in the military language-learning setting.

Factors Affecting Motivation

Research points to multiple factors affecting second language acquisition motivation. For example, activities in the teaching and learning process, the final learning results, internal motivation, and extrinsic motivation were identified by Skehan (1989) as the four most significant motivating factors. Second language acquisition motivation was affected by the foreign language-learning environment, including student–teacher relationships and peer relationships (Miller & Crowther, 2020; Sipos et al., 2019). Environment-related demotivation factors also negatively affected learners' interest

and language proficiency (Holbah & Sharma, 2021). On the other hand, a positive language-learning environment with effective instruction and positive peer- and teacher–student relationships enhanced learner motivation and success (Drakulić, 2019; Miller & Crowther, 2020; Sipos et al., 2019). According to Drakulić (2019), student motivation was influenced most by students' subjective interpretations of teachers' foreign language teaching competencies.

In the Turkish Military Academy, Kurum (2011) examined the effect of motivational factors on the success of military learners in foreign languages. In this quantitative study, the researcher developed a motivational factors questionnaire adapted from Wen's (1997) Motivational Scale, which consisted of 40 items divided into three parts to collect data on participants' background information, the relationships among different types of motivation, and their foreign language success (Kurum, 2011). The study recruited 50 male military participants with approximately 7 years of English learning experience and collected their data from their first semester of the 2008–2009 academic year. Using frequency, mean, independent *t* tests, ANOVA, and Pearson correlations, the study found a high correlation between military service members' overall learning motivation and their foreign language success (Kurum, 2011). Additionally, significant differences were observed between low- and high-proficient students in their overall motivation and perception of ability (Kurum, 2011).

Some research used the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005) as the main theoretical framework to identify factors affecting learning motivation (Alqahtani, 2018; Miller & Crowther, 2020). According to Dörnyei (2005), the L2 Motivational Self System Theory uses three dimensions: Ideal L2 self (i.e., internal desire and intrinsic motivation), ought-to L2 (i.e., external motivation for professional success or career advancement), and L2 learning experience to investigate learning environment, teaching styles, teaching strategies, learning anxiety, and curricula. The language-learning environment, including student–teacher and peer relationships, was found to be a second language acquisition motivation factor (Miller & Crowther, 2020; Sipos et al., 2019). In addition, different L2 motivational types affected learning approaches and processes through different motivational paths (Papi & Teimouri, 2014). Furthermore, research conducted in U.S. universities found that social context and social status also contributed to second language learning motivation (Chan, 2018; Palfreyman, 2006). Below are some key factors that researchers have found to affect motivation.

Learning Environment. The learning environment encompasses the physical, social, and psychological conditions in which learning takes place. The learning environment includes the classroom setting, available resources, and the atmosphere supporting or hindering learning. Indicators of a positive learning environment include the availability of adequate resources (books, technology, materials), a classroom layout conducive to learning and interaction, a positive and supportive atmosphere, a safe and inclusive environment for all students, and access to extracurricular activities and support services (Fraser, 2012).

Student–Teacher Relationship. Student–teacher relationships refer to the interactions and bonds between students and their teachers, which can significantly impact students' academic and personal development. Indicators of a positive student–teacher relationship include mutual respect and trust between students and teachers, open and effective communication, teachers' responsiveness to student needs and concerns, positive feedback and encouragement from teachers, and students' willingness to seek help and guidance from teachers (Pianta et al., 2012).

Peer Relationship. Peer relationships refer to student connections and interactions, influencing their social development, learning experiences, and overall well-being. Indicators of positive peer relationships include positive and supportive student interactions, collaboration and cooperation in group activities, a sense of belonging and inclusion within the peer group, peer support in academic and personal challenges, and healthy conflict resolution and communication skills (Wentzel, 2005).

Student Effort. Student effort means the amount of time, energy, and resources a student invests in their learning activities while focusing on short-term actions and behaviors, such as studying for exams, completing assignments, and participating in class. Indicators of student effort include regular attendance, actively participating, completing homework, seeking help when needed, and consistently working hard (Fredricks et al., 2004).

Student Commitment. Student commitment refers to a student's dedication to their educational goals and long-term academic success. Commitment focuses on long-term attitudes and beliefs about the value and importance of education and a willingness to persevere through challenges. Indicators of commitment include setting long-term academic goals, maintaining a positive attitude toward learning, staying motivated despite setbacks, and demonstrating resilience (Tinto, 1975).

Social Connectedness. Social connectedness refers to belonging and being part of a community or group. It involves having solid and positive relationships and interactions with others, which can provide emotional support, enhance well-being, and contribute to overall life satisfaction. Social connectedness is crucial for mental and emotional health, as it helps individuals feel valued, understood, and supported by their social network (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Intrinsic Motivation. Internal or intrinsic motivation refers to the drive to engage in an activity due to personal interest, enjoyment, or the inherent satisfaction derived from the activity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Indicators of internal motivation include enthusiasm for learning new topics, persistence in challenging tasks, engagement in learning activities without external rewards, curiosity and desire to explore new ideas, and the initiative to seek opportunities for personal growth (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Extrinsic Motivation. Extrinsic motivation is the drive to perform an activity to achieve external rewards or avoid adverse outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000). It is influenced by external factors such as grades, praise, and avoiding

punishment. Indicators of extrinsic motivation include working hard to earn good grades or rewards; participating in activities to receive praise or recognition; avoiding tasks to prevent criticism or punishment; completing assignments to meet external expectations or deadlines; and seeking approval from teachers, parents, or peers (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Language-Learning Anxiety. Second language-learning anxiety is the sense of tension and apprehension that arises in contexts where a second language is used, including speaking, listening, and learning activities, and it generally hurts the process of second language learning (Alqahtani, 2018). For example, anxious second language learners tend to take more time to learn new vocabulary and have difficulty recalling learned vocabulary compared to other learners in the same class (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). Another aspect of foreign language anxiety is the fear of negative evaluation, which entails a sense of apprehension about being judged by others, a tendency to avoid situations where evaluation might occur, and an expectation of being assessed unfavorably by others (Alqahtani, 2018). Studies found that language-learning anxiety and test anxiety significantly impact learner motivation and learning outcomes (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989).

The literature synthesis indicated that many factors affect student motivation, including student–teacher relationships, peer relationships, and learning environments (Miller & Crowther, 2020; Sipos et al., 2019). Motivation was also the most influential factor in language-learning achievement at military institutions (Jodai et al., 2013; Kurum, 2011). Therefore, there is an opportunity to investigate if those factors exist at DLIFLC, where the author works as an associate professor. The following sections describe the study context at DLIFLC, followed by the purpose of the study and research questions (RQs). Finally, the method is outlined via descriptions of participants, research design, data collection instruments, and data analysis.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Context and Purpose of the Study

The DLIFLC (n.d.-b) employs approximately 1,700 civilian language instructors across the United States and worldwide to teach foreign languages to military language learners from various U.S. military branches. As the Department of Defense's (2022) premier language school, DLIFLC (2021) has a mission to “provide culturally-based foreign language education, training, evaluation, and degrees to safeguard the national security of the United States” (p. 60). As the literature synthesis indicated that motivation might impact students' language learning, the study investigated factors affecting military students' language learning motivation and strategies to enhance military learner motivation at DLIFLC. There is limited research on military language learning motivation, so this study will contribute to understanding this under-studied population and topic.

This research used a qualitative method to collect data about the perspectives of military students at DLIFLC's Undergraduate School of Persian Farsi (UPF) program on factors affecting their language learning motivation. Based on the collected data, this study examined (a) how motivation is associated with student learning outcomes and (b) strategies to enhance learner motivation.

B. Research Questions

The study answered the following questions to understand factors affecting military students' motivation to learn a second language, complete a language program, and achieve learning outcomes:

RQ1: What factors do students identify that influence their motivation for learning?

RQ2: What are the strategies to boost learner motivation?

C. Method

The study employed a qualitative design to explore factors influencing the learning motivation of military service members through semi-structured interviews. Qualitative data were collected from six volunteer participants who had completed the Persian Farsi language program at DLIFLC. Each participant engaged in a one-on-one, semi-structured interview lasting approximately one hour. The interviews addressed the research questions (RQs) and provided a deeper understanding of the factors that impact military learners' motivation to complete a language program. Additionally, the study sought to identify interventions and strategies to sustain and enhance student motivation.

For this study, the researcher used a purposeful sampling method (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017) to select students and recruited a group of student participants ($n = 6$) from the UPF program whose program completion timeline aligned with the researcher's research proposal timeline and who volunteered to participate in the interviews. The RQs guided the data analysis process to code qualitative data.

D. Participants

Student participants were recruited through emails and face-to-face meetings. All participants were adults. The researcher obtained permission to recruit 15 participants through the Human Research Protections Program at DLIFLC. Then, the researcher approached the students in person, provided basic information about the study's purpose, invited them to volunteer, and explained why they were invited. Following the initial conversation with the selected six participants through purposeful sampling, the researcher sent a formal email inviting them to participate in the research. Those who agreed were sent a consent form. After receiving the completed consent form, the researcher arranged the

interview schedules for the participants. All the recruited participants volunteered to be interviewed. Before starting the interviews, the researcher provided hard copies of the consent form for the participants to read again and sign. The researcher did not recruit non-English speakers or individuals who could not consent. Before and during the interviews, the participants were informed that the collected data were confidential. All the interview participants' demographic information was collected during the one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The researcher collected demographic information from each student interviewee, including their military service units, ranks, previous foreign language-learning experiences, Farsi learning experiences at DLIFLC, and foreign language-learning choices before attending DLIFLC.

E. Semi-Structured Interview

In this research, the main instrument used to collect qualitative data was through interviews. Based on the literature review, the researcher designed 13 open-ended interview questions to identify the factors that affected student motivation. The researcher then selected samples to participate in semi-structured interviews. Each interviewee received the same questions, and the data collected through interviews was used to answer the RQs. Each student participated in a one-on-one semi-structured interview at the researcher's office at UPF and answered the same 13 interview questions. These interviews were recorded using Microsoft Teams and Otter.ai with the participants' permission.

This study mainly explored the two constructs within the RQs, including motivation and strategies. For RQ1 (What factors do students identify that influence their motivation for learning?), the construct was motivation. Gardner (1985) defined motivation as "the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity" (p. 10). To address this question, the researcher used qualitative data collected from student interview responses regarding their strategies to maintain motivation and succeed in the program, focusing on how they describe their motivations for learning Persian Farsi and the factors that affected their motivation. For RQ2 (What are the strategies to boost learner motivation?), the construct was strategies. In this context, strategies refer to approaches deliberately designed and implemented to stay motivated and achieve language learning goals.

F. Data Collection

At the start of each interview, the researcher gave participants time to read the printed consent form, requested permission to record audio through Microsoft Teams and Otter.ai software, and asked participants to sign the consent forms. The researcher collected the signed consent forms and sent scanned copies to the participants after the interviews. The researcher promoted openness during the conversations by establishing rapport, assuring confidentiality, maintaining a neutral stance, refraining from expressing personal opinions or judgments, and encouraging participants to share their thoughts openly without fear of criticism to avoid potential bias and increase participant comfort. Participants were reminded that the interview could be paused or stopped anytime. The researcher also observed participants' nonverbal behavior, took notes of their comfort levels and emotions, and checked with participants to see if they felt comfortable continuing the interviews. Throughout the process, the researcher was solely responsible for collecting, accessing, and storing the data. All the qualitative data collected from the interviews were also de-identified. The six audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed and de-identified after data collection. Each recording was assigned a participant number at the point of transcription. The transcripts were verified for accuracy, and the recordings were destroyed after verification.

G. Data Analysis

The researcher used the RQs and the literature review to guide the data analysis and analyze the collected qualitative data. The following section primarily describes the data analysis process for the interview data. The researcher completed a four-step process to conduct the interview data analysis. This process included (a) preparation and organization of the data for analysis, (b) transcription and data preparation, (c) data coding and codebook development, and (d) thematic analysis (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017).

Step 1: Preparation and Organization of Data. The researcher first labeled all the data based on the data type and developed a table listing each data source to stay organized. The data were secured in a locked file with password protection. In this step, the researcher also de-identified the six audio recordings of the interviews and assigned participant numbers.

Step 2: Transcription and Data Preparation. All interview audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to create accurate transcripts (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). Notes taken during the interviews were integrated with the transcripts. The data were then combined into three Word documents based on the interview groups and questions for coding and analysis.

Step 3: Data Coding and Codebook Development. The qualitative data collected from the six interviews were transcribed and analyzed using elemental coding, specifically descriptive codes. Descriptive codes summarize the main topic of a data segment in a word or phrase, allowing for the summarization of similar words or themes (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). Three rounds of coding were conducted for each interview group. Initially, the researcher identified codes based on the interview questions' constructs and selected examples for each code. Then, the researcher combined related codes and categorized them based on their similarities and relationships. The researcher grouped more codes and categories in the third round and moved them to themes. The researcher developed a codebook for the student interviews, indicating the themes, categories, codes, and examples. See Appendix for interview questions.

Step 4: Thematic Analysis. The researcher conducted a thematic analysis based on the codebook regarding the themes, categories, and codes. The analysis explored how the themes addressed the research questions (Creswell, 2013). The five most relevant themes and codes, such as ‘motivation,’ ‘learning environment,’ ‘intervention,’ ‘program completion,’ and ‘language-learning strategies,’ emerged in the codebook.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This empirical study employed a qualitative research approach, collecting and analyzing qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with six military students to explore how factors affect learner motivation at DLIFLC. This section presents the results of the qualitative data analyses and discusses the findings concerning the RQs.

A. Research Question 1: What Factors Do Students Identify That Influence Their Motivation for Learning?

The results below include interviews with six UPF students who completed the Persian Farsi language program. During the interviews, all six student participants responded to the following question: “What strategies or techniques do you use to maintain your motivation and focus to complete and succeed in this program?” Gardner (1985) characterized motivation in language learning as the extent to which an individual consistently and willingly applies themselves to learn a new language, influenced by their desire to learn and the enjoyment they find in the process. Under the theme of motivation, two categories and 12 codes emerged from the interviews. The two categories are behaviors and motivational factors. The codes and examples under each category are presented below.

TABLE 1
MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS

Theme	Category	Code
Motivation	Behaviors	Motivated behaviors and demotivating behaviors
	Motivational factors	Intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, goal setting, personal growth, academic achievement, student–teacher relationship, peer relationship, learning environment, course pace and requirements, and burnout.

Two codes under the behavior category emerged from the interviews, which included motivated and demotivating behaviors. Motivated behaviors are proactive actions and attitudes driven by enthusiasm and persistence toward achieving goals. For example, one student shared, “Build your base, build your habits, because you need to pass your test next year by yourself” (Interviewee 2). Demotivating behaviors refer to actions and attitudes that lack engagement, enthusiasm, and persistence toward goals. Two out of six students responded that they lost motivation during the course. For instance, one student mentioned, “I didn’t study vocab; I didn’t preview for the next day. And I went off base [and] played games. And then I failed a unit test, and that was when I completely lost all my motivation” (Interviewee 1).

Ten codes under the motivation factors category emerged from the interviews: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, goal setting, personal growth, academic achievement, student–teacher relationship, peer relationship, learning environment, course pace and requirements, and burnout. Intrinsic motivation is the internal drive and personal satisfaction derived from learning. Two out of six students described their intrinsic motivation for language learning. For example, one student shared, “I wanted to be a linguist when I joined the military. I felt very committed to the class and felt like I had to work hard to prove that I should be here” (Interviewee 4). Extrinsic motivation refers to motivation driven by external rewards or pressures. Five out of six students mentioned that extrinsic motivation affected their language learning during the interviews. As Interviewee 3 stated, “What affected my motivation most was seeing other students succeed”.

For the goal-setting code, the definition was defining clear and achievable objectives to guide actions and behaviors. This context included setting personal, academic, and career goals. All six students responded that goal setting affected their learning motivation. For example, one student mentioned, “I really wanted to pass. I want to achieve 2+/2/2”¹ (Interviewee 5). Personal growth, which referred to self-improvement through learning, was another code that emerged, with four students sharing their experiences. One participant shared,

“The Defense Language Institute experience allows me to understand how to study because I did not really know how to study before. Again, I just got out of high school, and I think I understand how to utilize my emotions to push myself more than I thought I could.”

Academic achievement refers to reaching educational goals through learning and performance. Three out of six students shared their examples. As one student said, “Seeing good grades is nice” (Interviewee 2).

The student–teacher relationship is the interaction and bond between students and teachers, influencing learning and development. Four out of six students mentioned that the student–teacher relationship affected their learning motivation. For example, Student Interviewee 6 shared, “The things that kept me motivated is that I had a good teacher team, and I had a good relationship with them.” Another student explained, “Teachers here are really encouraging, and the faculty here also helped me a lot, which affected my motivation in a positive way.” Peer relationship is defined as interaction and

¹ Based on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages scale, a 2+/2+/2 score indicates an achievement of an ‘advanced high’ level in reading comprehension (2+), an ‘advanced high’ level in listening comprehension (2+), and an ‘advanced mid or low’ level in speaking (2).

bond among individuals of similar status or in the same class. Three out of six students showed how peer relationship affected their motivation. As student Interviewee 4 explained,

“One motivation factor was I created bonds with a lot of my classmates, so I wanted to pass the class, pass the DLPT so that I could go to the next step with them because they are my friends, so I kind of want to stay in touch with them.”

Another student shared,

“I did not want to quit because of my classmates, who are my friends, who were going to pass, and they said I got to pass with them, that helped with extra bit of motivation when I was feeling on my low points.”

A learning environment is another code that refers to the physical or virtual setting in which educational interactions and activities occur. All six students commented on how important the learning environment was to their learning motivation. For example, Student Interviewee 3 stated, “The classroom environment was like the number one factor affecting a student’s motivation.” Another student shared, “I think the learning environment in the classroom and schoolhouse is really important to me”.

Two factors reported by students negatively affected their learning motivation, categorized under factors affecting motivation. These two codes included course pace and requirements, as well as burnout. Course pace and requirements refer to the speed and demands of a course that impact learning. Two out of six students provided examples of this code. For example, Student Interviewee 4 shared, “What the course expects from us and the speed of the course are factors that affected my motivation negatively.” Burnout refers to physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion due to prolonged stress. Two out of four students mentioned that burnout negatively affected their language-learning motivation. For example, one student mentioned, “Burnout is like the number one thing that causes a lack of disappearance in motivation”.

Also, students mentioned that their motivation to learn in different semesters changed. Each DLIFLC language program has three semesters, regardless of its length. During the interview with military students, Interviewee 3 described the differences in her motivation between Semesters II and III. She shared, “I think I really started to lose motivation toward the end of Semester II, from the middle to the end of Semester II.” Additionally, she mentioned, “At the very end of Semester III, like the last couple of weeks, I did not really study. I did not do any of that. I did not do [anything extra] to prepare. I was like, it is what it is at this point”.

Moreover, all six students responded to an interview question regarding their motivation to join the military, which could contribute to answering this RQ. Two key factors influencing student motivation emerged: financial needs and family influence. Financial needs refer to the monetary requirements for an individual’s well-being and activities. Three out of six students mentioned that their main reason for joining the military was financial needs. For example, one student shared, “I did not have much money because I was a college student” (Interviewee 3). Family influence refers to the impact of family members and the environment on an individual’s decisions, behavior, and development. Three students commented that family influence was their primary motivation to join the military. For instance, one student shared, “I feel like I was raised to join the military just the way that I was raised” (Interviewee 2).

In addition, all six students responded to an interview question about whether Persian Farsi was their first choice of language to study at DLIFLC. Language learning choices refer to the option for students to select the foreign languages they would like to study at DLIFLC. Among the six participants, two reported that they were not given a choice in selecting the languages they were interested in learning at DLIFLC. For example, one student said, “I do not have a choice” (Interviewee 1). Two other students shared that Farsi was not among their top three language-learning choices at DLIFLC. For instance, one student stated, “I did not put Farsi as a choice. My top three choices were Chinese, Korean, Russian” (Interviewee 5). Finally, two students indicated that Farsi was one of their top choices at DLIFLC. One shared, “So I picked my top three; my number one is Farsi” (Interviewee 6).

The results have provided insights into each RQ. First, students described their motivation for learning as multifaceted and primarily positively influenced by intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, academic goals, academic achievement, personal growth, student–teacher relationships, peer relationships, and the learning environment. Also, interviews with students revealed substantial influences of positive and negative learning environments on student motivation, commitment, and learning outcomes. In addition, students who used a broader range of strategies across multiple categories and implemented them consistently and effectively achieved higher learning outcomes and program completion. In addition, students’ motivation fluctuated throughout the course, particularly in Semesters II and III. Addressing these RQs offers a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing student success at DLIFLC.

The student interview participants who completed the language programs described their motivation for learning from several perspectives, including motivational behaviors, demotivating behaviors, factors affecting their motivation, and strategies used to maintain their motivation. Students stressed that when motivated, they were willing to go the extra mile, collaborate with their peers to explore the language, and try to reach their academic goals. The students’ descriptions of motivation align with Gardner’s (1985) conception of motivation as determined by an individual’s desire for and satisfaction from the activity. Conversely, students also shared that when they lacked motivation, they experienced stress and tended to do the bare minimum without putting in extra effort due to negative emotions.

Students described their motivation for learning as multifaceted because it was influenced by a complex interplay of various factors and positively influenced by intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, academic goals, academic achievement, personal growth, student–teacher relationships, peer relationships, and the learning environment. The

students' conclusions on motivational factors echoed previous research findings that multiple factors, including intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and academic achievement, affected motivation (Drakulić, 2019; Skehan, 1989). These findings also corroborated previous research highlighting that the language-learning environment, including student–teacher and peer relationships, was a significant factor in second language acquisition motivation (Miller & Crowther, 2020; Sipos et al., 2019).

Consistent with the literature, this study found that student–teacher relationships, peer relationships, and the learning environment played crucial roles in not only helping students maintain their learning motivation but also enhancing their resilience and improving their commitment to complete and graduate from the language course, as highlighted by Brophy (1998). For instance, students emphasized that supportive and encouraging interactions with their teachers and peers contributed to their sustained motivation and academic success. It also contributed to the trust built with teachers and peers, fostering a positive learning environment. Notably, the students identified motivation as a major factor in completing the language program. This finding was consistent with previous findings that motivation was the most influential factor related to language that related to language-learning achievement at military institutions (Jodai et al., 2013; Kurum, 2011).

Meanwhile, the students emphasized that fast-paced and challenging coursework and burnout negatively affected their language-learning motivation. This finding aligned with V. E. Lee and Burkam's (2003) previous finding that student motivation can decrease, and attrition rates can increase as the students struggle to keep up with academic pace and demands. This finding is also consistent with the report by Sipos et al. (2019) that over 350 students experienced high or very high-stress levels due to academic expectations, lack of sleep, and pressure from civilian classroom instructors. Therefore, adjusting the course pace and providing tailored content based on students' learning progress is important to enhancing learner motivation and engagement (Grove et al., 2008).

In addition, students pointed out that their language-learning motivation was significantly affected by their reasons for joining the military and their language-learning choices. Financial needs such as securing a job, getting paid, and facing family influences were primary reasons for most students joining the military. This result also mirrored Elliot's (2018) previous statement that economic factors played a vital role in military service member retention.

Among all six interviewees, only one student joined the military specifically to become a linguist. Four out of six students reported they had no choice in selecting the languages they would like to study or did not choose to learn Farsi, which showed that the DLIFLC language program prosperities were based on the national foreign language needs. These needs were mainly determined by the broader changes in national defense needs and mission priorities (National Foreign Language Center, 1999). Some students reported taking Defense Language Aptitude Battery (DLAB) and were assigned to learn Farsi based on DLAB scores, but some did not even take DLAB. Fortunately, all six students eventually found the motivation to learn Farsi during the course. The finding also suggests that DLIFLC may consider resuming the DLAB test as a language placement test. Leaders may give every military student a chance to choose their preferred languages based on the national defense strategic language needs, which may help enhance students' overall language-learning motivation and academic goal setting.

B. Research Question 2: What Are the Strategies to Boost Learner Motivation?

The results below include interviews with six UPF students who completed the Persian Farsi language program. During the interviews, all six student participants responded to the following question: “What strategies or techniques have you used to maintain motivation?”

TABLE 2
MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES

Theme	Category	Code
Motivational Strategies	Cultural and immersive extra-curriculum	Curriculum, communication with different stakeholders, learning environment, recognition and support
	Mental health	Well-being

Two codes emerged from the interviews for the strategies to maintain motivation category: cultural and immersive extra-curriculum and mental health. Cultural and immersive activities refer to activities outside the regular curriculum that involve cultural immersion and learning. Three of six students mentioned that cultural and immersive activities were strategies they used to maintain motivation. For instance, one student shared, “Gets us out of the classroom environment, even talking about culture or just immersions, stuff like that really keep [sic] us motivated” (Interviewee 6). Mental health refers to someone's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Two of six students mentioned that mental health was one of their strategies to maintain motivation. For example, one student remarked, “My mental health being really good helped me to keep motivated” (Interviewee 5).

Also, all six student participants responded to the following question: “What are your suggestions to enhance student motivation?”

Four codes emerged from the interviews for the strategies to maintain motivation: curriculum, communication with different stakeholders, learning environment, and recognition and support. Curriculum refers to textbooks, regular classroom instructions, and extra-curriculum. Four out of six students mentioned that engaging in classroom instructions and activities and extra-curriculum to immerse students in the target language and culture are ways to boost student

motivation. For example, one student mentioned, “Bringing something more fun, like picnic days, cookery, something enjoyable while in the target language is essential in my view, like different clubs” (Interviewee 1). Another student shared,

“I know for sure some of my favorite parts of the course were the immersions and times were more immersed in the good parts of the culture, such as Nowruz, clubs, those things like really help you keep a good mindset when going through the course. I would suggest having more cultural experiences to maintain motivation.”

For communication with different stakeholders, all six students mentioned the importance of having effective communication with military units, language instructors, school leadership, and the effective communication among different stakeholders. For example, one student indicated, “To improve military unit communication efficiency, something they need to change is to make communication flow more easily to the students to save time” (Interviewee 1). The same student also mentioned, “Communication between the unit and the Farsi School house is low. Apparently, when they want to call you out for class, the units are supposed to contact the teaching team. That does not happen” (Interviewee 1). Another interviewee commented, “Every school leader, including the chair and the dean, is very good at listening. They will just continue to care about those students and continue to show that compassion and passion for what they are doing because they are the reason why we succeed” (Interviewee 2).

Regarding the learning environment, all six students shared that building a positive learning environment is a great way to enhance learner motivation. For instance, one student shared, “Build a positive class environment, be open to people, even if they’re weird to you or strange, because maybe they will have a feel that you do not have.” (Interviewee 5). For recognition and support, one student shared, “So those things that are how to motivate students giving rewards, telling they are doing a good job. Acknowledging their successes more than complaining about their failures is important. And if there are not as many successes as their own failures, ask how you can help them out to get them there” (Interviewee 2).

Another student mentioned,

“Bring some therapists and counselor here or bringing somebody in who has qualifications to a class and, like, being able to sit down with a student for 20 or 30 minutes and just talk to each student and see how they are doing individually so they feel comfortable sharing. So, if they could talk to a therapist or somebody confidentially without getting to the unit or anything, then I think that would be a big help to motivate students.”

The findings suggest the following major strategies to inform interventions and practices to enhance military language learners’ motivation, improve their learning experiences, and maximize outcomes to align with DLIFLC’s mission (n.d.-b).

(a). *Mental Health and Stress Management*

Students emphasized balancing academic responsibilities with mental health and stress management. They highlighted the need for relaxation and activities to prevent burnout and sustain motivation. However, current practices at military service units and language schools do not prioritize mental health or stress management, which is crucial given the highly intensive nature of DLIFLC’s language courses (n.d.-a; n.d.-b). This finding underscores the necessity for stakeholders at DLIFLC to prioritize mental health initiatives and provide resources such as time management strategies and stress reduction tools to support student well-being (Sipos et al., 2019).

(b). *Extracurricular and Cultural Engagement*

Students identified several strategies they used to maintain motivation, including participating in cultural and immersive extracurricular activities, joining clubs that made learning enjoyable, and spending time with friends to decompress. These suggestions align with previous research indicating that a well-designed curriculum—one that is relevant, engaging, and supportive—enhances student motivation and engagement (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Furthermore, consistent with findings by Albayrak and Şener (2021), students who engaged in extracurricular activities demonstrated higher motivation levels than those who did not, positively influencing attitudes toward language learning.

(c). *Positive Learning Environment*

In response to RQ2, students reiterated the importance of establishing a positive learning environment to sustain and boost motivation. This finding aligns with previous research indicating that a supportive language-learning environment, coupled with effective instruction and positive peer and teacher-student relationships, enhances learner motivation and success (Drakulić, 2019; Miller & Crowther, 2020; Sipos et al., 2019; Tam, 2009).

(d). *Effective Communication*

Students also highlighted the importance of effective communication among all stakeholders—students, teachers, and military service units. This observation aligns with DLIFLC’s Command Guidance (2021), which emphasizes the need for formal and informal communication to foster collaboration and ensure students receive timely support. Addressing miscommunication or communication gaps is critical, as such issues can hinder students from accessing the full range of available resources and support.

(e). *Stakeholder Support and Recognition*

Students identified stakeholder support as a key motivator, consistent with findings that positive reinforcement from drill sergeants and other authority figures can boost self-confidence, motivation, and commitment, indirectly reducing attrition rates (Gibson et al., 2014). Additionally, the study found that extrinsic motivators, such as recognition and external rewards, enhance motivation. This finding aligns with Ryan and Deci's (2000) research, which demonstrates that external factors like praise and recognition positively influence learner motivation.

V. CONCLUSION

In higher education and military contexts, motivation is a critical factor influencing student learning outcomes (Allen & Bell, 1980; Allen et al., 2008; Boton & Gregory, 2015). This study employed a qualitative research design to explore factors affecting military learner motivation at DLIFLC. The data collection and analysis were guided by research questions (RQs) and the literature review (Creswell, 2013; Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). Findings from this study will inform future research and guide potential interventions to improve DLIFLC policies and practices and enhance learner success. These policies and practices emphasize supporting foreign language learning needs, boosting learner motivation, and allocating resources to improve learning outcomes.

The study revealed that military students perceived their motivation for learning as multifaceted, influenced by a complex interplay of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, academic goals, academic achievement, personal growth, student-teacher relationships, peer relationships, and the learning environment. The research findings aligned closely with the themes identified in the literature review and provided strategies to maintain and enhance military language learner motivation. These strategies include:

1. Designing engaging and enjoyable curricula and extracurricular activities that immerse students in the target language environment.
2. Enhancing communication between learners and stakeholders.
3. Creating a positive and supportive learning environment.
4. Ensuring recognition and support from all stakeholders.

The study further emphasized the need for DLIFLC stakeholders to enhance communication and collaboration to provide timely and comprehensive support to students. A positive learning environment incorporating mental health support, stress management resources, and engaging extracurricular opportunities is essential. Additionally, recognizing and rewarding student achievements can sustain motivation and commitment. Together, these strategies create an environment that effectively boosts learner motivation and supports successful outcomes. The findings reinforce the critical role of the learning environment, student-teacher relationships, and peer relationships in student motivation, as supported by prior research (Drakulić, 2019; Miller & Crowther, 2020; Sipos et al., 2019; Tam, 2009). Specifically, positive relationships with faculty and peers and a supportive learning environment significantly enhance student motivation.

Despite these contributions, this research had several limitations. First, some interview questions were not well-aligned with the RQs, and the constructs within the interview design and RQs should have been more clearly delineated. Second, the limited participation of just six military students in this research restricted the generalizability of the findings due to the small sample size. Finally, the study did not compare perspectives from other stakeholders regarding the factors influencing military students' motivation, limiting the comprehensiveness of the findings.

In the broader context of military education, this study underscored the importance of enhancing motivational strategies and learning outcomes for all military learners. Additionally, it addresses a research gap regarding the impact of motivation on the learning outcomes of military students in U.S. military language programs, where existing literature is limited. Future research should focus on identifying additional factors influencing military student motivation and evaluating interventions by interviewing a wider range of participants, including civilian and military language instructors and military students from all language programs at DLIFLC. Surveys and interviews tailored to uncover common motivational factors and intervention strategies should be conducted. The findings can be shared with stakeholders to foster collaboration and develop actionable plans to support learner success. Additionally, suggestions from students on boosting motivation should be collected and shared with stakeholders to encourage collaboration and action. Subsequent studies could assess the effectiveness of these interventions in enhancing motivation and reducing attrition. This research provided a foundation for future exploration and practical applications to enhance military students' motivation and language learning outcomes.

APPENDIX

Student Interview Questions

1. What is your military service and grade?
2. What is your educational background?
3. Is the current foreign language you are studying your first choice?
4. Have you learned any other foreign languages at DLI in the past? If yes, please specify which language.
5. What are your motivation and reasons for joining the military?

6. What strategies or techniques do you use to maintain your motivation and focus to complete and succeed in this program?
7. Which learning strategies do you find most impactful in contributing to your learning outcomes?
8. How is your relationship with your classmates and instructors including teaching team leader, chairperson, Military Language Instructors? Could you please describe your interactions, communication, and level of trust with them?
9. How would you evaluate the impact of the learning environment on your learning motivation, commitment, and academic performance?
10. What is your career goal? How do you think your current studies at DLI help you achieve your career goals?
11. How have the supports and interventions implemented by the school and teaching team influenced student motivation and attrition?
12. What are your suggestions to enhance student motivation and reduce attrition?

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