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Influence of Different Motivation Types on the Effectiveness of Teaching English to Students in a Distance Learning Format

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Abstract

Effective learning within modern programs focuses on ensuring that students possess motivation to achieve success.

The aim of this study is to examine the influence of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among philology students on the effectiveness of learning English in a remote format.

Materials and Methods. The study involved 100 philology students divided into two groups based on their predominant type of motivation. Both qualitative (semi-structured interviews with teachers) and quantitative methods (student surveys, tests) were used. Quantitative data were analyzed using correlation analysis.

Results. The study revealed that intrinsic motivation significantly enhances academic performance, classroom activity, and depth of understanding compared to extrinsic motivation, as evidenced by various non-parametric statistical tests ($p < 0.001$). Intrinsically motivated students also demonstrated greater adaptability, initiative, and satisfaction in learning; their motivation levels increased by mid-semester and remained stable, unlike the decline observed among extrinsically motivated students. Correlation analysis further confirmed strong positive relationships between intrinsic motivation and key learning outcomes, emphasizing its critical role in effective remote English language education.

Conclusion. The findings of the study suggest the need to incorporate methods in educational programs that gradually transform extrinsic motivation into intrinsic motivation.

Keywords: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, academic performance, philology students, self-organization.

1. Introduction

In today's globalized world, knowing English is a key skill for successful professional practice and intercultural communication (Akhmetshin et al., 2024; Dronova et al., 2026). UNESCO's

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Education 2030 program underscores the importance of language education for achieving Sustainable Development Goals, especially in providing quality education for everyone (Novichkov et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2016).

However, the effectiveness of English teaching at universities, especially for philology students, remains a topic of discussion and scientific inquiry (Anikeeva et al., 2024; Wagner et al., 2023). The key factor defining success in foreign language learning is students' motivation. Analyzing existing literature, we found that motivation is an important predictor of students' performance (Dörnyei, 2006; Gardner, 2007; Ushioda, 2011; Zhuzeyev et al., 2026). Researchers tend to distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci, Ryan, 2000; Vallerand et al., 1992). Intrinsic motivation relates to personal interest in and enjoyment of the very process of learning, while extrinsic motivation owes to external factors, such as grades or career prospects (Noels et al., 2000). Research findings indicate that the type of motivation significantly affects students' academic performance (Cerasoli et al., 2014; Ryan, Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation results in a deeper understanding of the material, greater engagement in the learning process, and higher academic achievement (Taylor et al., 2014; Roshchin et al., 2026). Students with predominantly intrinsic motivation tend to show more initiative, persistence in dealing with difficulties, and a creative approach to solving problems (Froiland, Worrell, 2016).

The global events of recent years, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, have drastically changed the landscape of higher education, accelerating the transition to distance forms of learning (Golubeva et al., 2023; Oumelaid et al., 2024; Belevitin et al., 2026). UNESCO reports that over 1.5 billion students worldwide have been affected by school closures, which have led to an unprecedented surge in online education (Zedam et al., 2022). This trend persisted even after the acute stage of the pandemic, with many educational institutions continuing to use elements of distance learning (Polovchenko, 2024; Ybyraimzhanov et al., 2022).

The transition to the distance format in language education created new opportunities and major challenges. The online environment opened access to various authentic materials along with virtual communication with native speakers (Wagner et al., 2022; Dronova et al., 2026). However, problems arose in maintaining students' motivation, providing effective speaking practice, and creating an authentic language environment in the virtual space (Huang et al., 2020).

These challenges are particularly important for philology students learning English given the direct connection of their future professional work with language skills (Chernova et al., 2022; Akhmetshin et al., 2025a). In the context of distance learning, the role of motivation is even more critical (Besser et al., 2022). Students with a high level of intrinsic motivation demonstrate greater self-organization and self-discipline abilities (Shurygin et al., 2024), which is exceptionally important in the absence of direct contact with the teacher (Pelikan et al., 2021). These students show initiative in looking up additional resources, participate in online discussions more actively, and deal with technical difficulties more efficiently (Karkar-Esperat, 2018; Ismagilova et al., 2025).

In the context of distance learning, activity in the classroom manifests in the frequency and quality of participation in online discussions, readiness to answer the teacher's questions, and initiative in posing questions and discussing difficult topics. Highly motivated students, especially intrinsically, tend to be more active, which is conducive to more efficient mastery of language material (Akhmetov et al., 2024; Martin et al., 2020).

Completing optional assignments is also closely associated with the level of motivation. Highly motivated students tend to show more initiative in finding and completing additional exercises, reading supplemental literature in the studied language, and watching movies and video materials without subtitles, which greatly broadens their language experience (Lai, Gu, 2011; Akhmetshin et al., 2025b).

Particular attention should be paid to the depth of understanding of the material. The depth of understanding in the study of English is reflected in the following aspects:

1. Ability to apply language structures in new, unusual contexts.
2. Ability to analyze and interpret difficult English texts, identifying nuances of meaning and the author's intentions.
3. Critical thinking skills in working with English-language sources, including the ability to evaluate the reliability of information and the authors' argumentation.
4. Development of metalinguistic skills, allowing to reflect on the structure and features of English.

5. Ability to use the language creatively, including writing original texts of various genres in English.

High levels of motivation, especially intrinsic motivation, contribute to these aspects of deep understanding because motivated students tend to go beyond the superficial study of the material and strive for deeper understanding and practical application of the acquired knowledge (Pintrich, 2003).

Motivation is a key factor that combines classroom activity, the completion of additional assignments, and the depth of understanding of the material into a single system of effective English learning in the context of distance learning.

The results can contribute to the development of more effective strategies for learning English for philology students through distance learning, which aligns with the global goals of improving the quality and accessibility of language education.

2. Methods

The choice of research methods was conditioned by the research goal and questions formulated in the introduction. To explore the influence of different types of motivation on the effectiveness of teaching English to philology students in the context of distance learning, we used a combined approach that included quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods.

The study involved 100 philology students from two universities studying English in a distance learning format. The participants were split into two groups, 50 people each, depending on their predominant type of motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic) determined by a preliminary survey. The groups were balanced in terms of gender, age, and year of study. All participants had similar English proficiency (B1-B2 on the CEFR scale), which was confirmed by the entry test results.

The study was conducted over the course of one semester with assessments at its beginning (weeks 1-2), middle (weeks 7-8), and end (weeks 14-15). Research hypotheses were formulated based on an overview of the existing literature and preliminary observations.

Hypothesis H0 was put forward to test whether there is a relationship between the type of motivation and academic performance. H0: The academic performance of philology students in learning English does not depend on the predominant type of motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic).

Hypothesis H1 relies on the assumed advantages of intrinsic motivation, which can be particularly pronounced in distance learning settings. H1: students with high levels of intrinsic motivation show greater results in English language learning compared to predominantly extrinsically motivated students in distance learning.

Hypothesis H2 investigates relationships between intrinsic motivation and different aspects of the learning process, which can be instrumental in developing more effective learning strategies. H2: there is a significant link between the level of intrinsic motivation and activity in the classroom, the completion of additional assignments, and the depth of understanding of the material.

The study used quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative ones included student surveys and the assessment of their academic performance and activity in class. These methods provided statistically significant data on relationships between the type of motivation and various aspects of learning. Qualitative methods, which included interviews with faculty members, provided a deeper understanding of the role of motivation in the learning process and uncovered nuances that could be lost in quantitative analysis. The instruments and methods used to assess the parameters considered were as follows:

1. The level and type of motivation were assessed using an adapted version of the Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand et al., 1992), validated for the Russian sample (Vallerand et al., 1992). Motivation was measured on a scale from 1 to 7.
2. Academic performance was assessed based on three tests and the final English exam. These assessments used a 100-point scale.
3. Activity in class was recorded by teachers using a specially developed observation form. The form included the number of voluntary responses to questions, initiated questions, participation in group discussions, and the quality of comments (on a scale from 1 to 5).
4. The depth of students' understanding of the material was evaluated by analyzing their written assignments (essays and reports) using the criteria of comprehensive disclosure of the topic, relevant examples, critical thinking, and the originality of ideas. Answers to open-ended questions in test papers and evaluations of project presentations were also considered. The overall assessment of the depth of understanding was given on a scale from 1 to 10.

5. To assess students' satisfaction with the learning process, we developed an original survey including 10 questions. The answers were given on a 5-point Likert scale. Examples of the items include: "The course materials meet my expectations" and "I feel that my language skills are improving because of this course". The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were tested in a pilot study (n = 30, Cronbach's α = 0.85).

Apart from quantitative data collection, we conducted 10 semi-structured interviews with English teachers to learn their opinions on the impact of motivation on academic performance. The interviews involved 10 faculty members working with English learners remotely. The teachers were selected based on their work experience (at least 3 years of teaching English online) and represented both universities involved in the study. The interviews were conducted online via Zoom and recorded for subsequent analysis.

The semi-structured interviews consisted of a conversation based on a pre-made guide containing key questions and topics for discussion. This format offered us enough flexibility to respond to respondents' answers, ask clarifying questions, and explore new aspects of the topic that emerged during the conversation. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and included the following main blocks of questions:

1. General perception of students' motivation in the context of distance learning.
2. The observed differences between students with predominantly intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.
3. The influence of motivation types on students' activity in the classroom and assignment completion.
4. The relationship between motivation and the depth of students' understanding of the material.
5. The strategies used by teachers to increase students' motivation in the online environment.
6. Problems and challenges associated with maintaining student motivation in distance learning.

Examples of specific questions include "How would you rate your students' level of motivation in the distance learning environment?", "Do you notice a difference in performance between students with different types of motivation?", and "What methods do you use to increase students' intrinsic motivation?".

We conducted the qualitative analysis of the interview data using thematic analysis (Braun, Clarke, 2006). This method allowed us to identify, analyze, and describe the main themes (patterns) in the collected qualitative data.

All surveys and tests were conducted online using Google Forms. Quantitative data were analyzed using the statistical package SPSS version 26.0. We performed the analysis using parametric and nonparametric statistical methods: Student's t-test, Mann-Whitney U-test, Pearson's correlation coefficient, repeated measures ANOVA, and post-hoc analysis using Tukey's criterion.

The study was approved by the ethical committees of both universities. All participants were informed about the study's aims and gave informed consent to participate. All data were anonymized to ensure confidentiality.

3. Results

3.1. Quantitative Results

Data analysis confirmed that most variables had an abnormal distribution (Shapiro-Wilk test, $p < 0.05$), which justifies using non-parametric statistical tests.

Comparison of the levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation across the groups with the Mann-Whitney U-test (Table 1) showed statistically significant differences in the middle ($U = 267$, $p < 0.01$) and at the end of the semester ($U = 301$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 1. Median Motivation Levels (1-7 point scale)

Group	Start of semester	Mid-semester	End of semester
Intrinsic motivation	4.5 (3.8-5.2)	5.2 (4.5-5.8)	5.0 (4.3-5.6)
Extrinsic motivation	4.3 (3.6-5.0)	4.1 (3.4-4.7)	3.9 (3.2-4.5)

Notes: Data presented in the format: median (interquartile range)

Significant differences were found in the analysis of students' academic performance (Table 2), with intrinsically motivated students showing better results.

Table 2. Median Academic Performance (0-100 point scale)

Group	Test 1	Test 2	Test 3	Final exam
Intrinsic motivation	76 (70-82)	80 (74-86)	82 (76-88)	85 (79-90)
Extrinsic motivation	69 (63-75)	70 (64-76)	72 (66-78)	74 (68-80)

The Mann-Whitney U-test indicated significant differences between the groups in the tests and the final exam ($p < 0.001$).

Observations of students' activity in class also showed significant differences between the groups (Table 3).

Table 3. Median Indicators of Activity in the Classroom (over the semester)

Indicator	Intrinsic motivation	Extrinsic motivation	U-test	p-value
Voluntary responses	18 (15-21)	10 (7-13)	412.5	< 0.001
Initiated questions	13 (10-15)	7 (5-9)	487.0	< 0.001
Participation in group discussions	16 (13-19)	8 (6-11)	453.5	< 0.001
Quality of comments (1-5)	4 (3-5)	3 (2-4)	528.0	< 0.01

Assessing the depth of understanding of the material, we once again found significant differences between the two groups. Specifically, students with intrinsic motivation demonstrated a deeper understanding.

Median assessment of the depth of understanding (1-10 point scale):

– Intrinsic motivation group: 8 (7-9),

– Extrinsic motivation group: 6 (5-7).

Mann-Whitney U-test: $U = 389.5$, $p < 0.001$

Our original questionnaire assessing students' satisfaction with learning detected a higher satisfaction level among intrinsically motivated students.

Median satisfaction level (1-5 point scale):

– Intrinsic motivation group: 4 (3-5),

– Extrinsic motivation group: 3 (2-4).

Mann-Whitney U-test: $U = 567.0$, $p < 0.01$

Analysis of the depth of students' understanding of the material showed significant differences between the groups with different types of motivation. Students motivated predominantly intrinsically scored higher across all aspects of the depth of understanding:

1. Application of language structures in unusual contexts: median score of 8 (7-9) for the intrinsically motivated group vs. 6 (5-7) for the extrinsically motivated group ($U = 412.5$, $p < 0.001$).
2. Analysis and interpretation of complex texts: median 7 (6-8) vs. 5 (4-6), respectively ($U = 389.0$, $p < 0.001$).
3. Critical thinking in working with English-language sources: median 7 (6-8) vs. 5 (4-6) ($U = 401.5$, $p < 0.001$).
4. Metalinguistic skills: median 8 (7-9) vs. 6 (5-7) ($U = 423.0$, $p < 0.001$).
5. Creative use of language: median 8 (7-9) vs. 5 (4-6) ($U = 378.5$, $p < 0.001$).

Correlation analysis with Spearman's rank correlation coefficient showed the following relationships between the studied factors (Table 4).

Table 4. Results of Correlation Analysis

Factor	Intrinsic motivation	Academic performance
Intrinsic motivation	-	0.65 ($p < 0.001$)
Activity in the classroom	0.69 ($p < 0.001$)	0.57 ($p < 0.001$)
Depth of understanding of the material	0.62 ($p < 0.001$)	0.68 ($p < 0.001$)
Satisfaction with learning	0.55 ($p < 0.001$)	0.51 ($p < 0.001$)

Analysis of changes in the level of motivation during the semester using the Friedman test demonstrated statistically significant changes in both groups:

– Intrinsic motivation group: $\chi^2(2) = 18.7$, $p < 0.001$,

– Extrinsic motivation group: $\chi^2(2) = 12.3$, $p < 0.01$.

Post-hoc analysis using the Wilcoxon criterion with Bonferroni correction suggests that in the intrinsically motivated group, the level of motivation increased significantly by mid-semester ($Z = -3.8$, $p < 0.001$) and remained elevated at the end of the semester compared to its start ($Z = -3.2$, $p < 0.01$). In contrast, the extrinsically motivated group showed a significant decrease in motivation by the end of the semester compared to its beginning ($Z = -2.9$, $p < 0.01$).

3.2. Results of Thematic Analysis of Teacher Interviews

The analysis of semi-structured interviews with teachers (n=10) pointed to several key themes. Most teachers (8 out of 10) noted more active participation in online classes on the part of students with high intrinsic motivation. Seven teachers reported greater quality assignments from these students. Almost all teachers (9 out of 10) pointed out that intrinsically motivated students more easily adapted to distance learning. All interviewees emphasized greater independence and initiative in looking up additional materials and completing optional tasks among students with intrinsic motivation. Finally, eight teachers highlighted that intrinsically motivated students demonstrated stable interest in learning over the semester, whereas the level of interest among extrinsically motivated learners declined with time (Table 5).

Table 5. Themes Identified in Teacher Interviews

Theme	Subtheme	Frequency (n = 10)	Illustrative Quote
Classroom Engagement	Active participation in discussions	8	Students with intrinsic motivation participate more actively and consistently in online discussions
Academic Performance	Higher quality of written assignments	7	Their essays are more analytical and demonstrate deeper understanding of the material
Adaptability to Distance Learning	Faster adjustment to online format	9	They adapt more easily to remote learning and handle technical challenges independently
Autonomy and Initiative	Independent search for additional materials	10	They often look for extra materials and complete optional tasks without being required
Motivation Dynamics	Stable interest throughout semester	8	Their motivation remains stable, while externally motivated students gradually lose engagement

Proceeding from the findings, we can draw the following conclusions regarding our research hypotheses:

H0 (Students' academic performance does not depend on the type of motivation) is rejected owing to statistically significant differences in academic performance between the two groups ($p < 0.001$).

H1 (Students with intrinsic motivation demonstrate better results) is accepted given the greater academic performance, activity, and depth of understanding in the intrinsically motivated group.

H2 (There is a significant connection between intrinsic motivation and other learning factors) is also accepted based on the results of correlation analysis, which shows significant positive correlations between intrinsic motivation and the studied parameters ($p < 0.001$ for all correlations).

Thus, our findings confirmed the important contribution of intrinsic motivation to the effectiveness of teaching English to students remotely.

4. Discussion

The results convincingly demonstrated the significant role of intrinsic motivation in the effectiveness of teaching English to philology students remotely. These conclusions agree with the theoretical provisions of Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021) on the pivotal role of motivation in foreign language learning and support the conclusions of Ryan and Deci (2020) about the advantages of intrinsic motivation over extrinsic motivation in educational settings.

The observed differences in academic achievement between groups with different types of motivation support the results obtained by Lamb et al. (2019). We agree that intrinsic motivation contributes to deeper and more sustained language learning. However, our study extends these findings by demonstrating that the benefits of intrinsic motivation persist in distance learning.

Our findings of greater engagement in class and deeper understanding of the material in intrinsically motivated students are consistent with the results of Guillén-Gámez et al. (2020). This emphasizes the importance of developing strategies to increase students' intrinsic motivation online.

Our findings on the dynamics of motivation during the semester partially diverge from the theoretical ideas of Besser et al. (2022). While Besser et al. hypothesize a general decrease in motivation during long-term distance learning, our results demonstrate that this parameter remains stable or even increases in students with strong intrinsic motivation. This may indicate that intrinsic motivation is an important factor in resilience to the challenges of distance learning.

The observed differences in the depth of understanding of the material between students with different types of motivation agree with the theory of deep and surface approaches to learning (Biggs, 1987; Marton, Säljö, 1976). According to our study, intrinsically motivated students tend to take a deeper approach to language learning, demonstrated by their ability to apply knowledge in unusual situations, critically analyze texts, and use language creatively. These findings expand the understanding of the role of motivation in foreign language learning, especially in the context of distance learning.

The discovered connection between intrinsic motivation and metalinguistic skills is thought-provoking. This may indicate that intrinsically motivated students are more inclined to reflect on the structure and features of the studied language, which is consistent with the research by Jessner (2006) on metalinguistic awareness in foreign language learning.

Our findings bring attention to the need for specific strategies to develop a depth of understanding in students with predominant extrinsic motivation. It may be worth considering methods to gradually transform extrinsic motivation into intrinsic, as suggested by Ryan and Deci (2020) as part of their Self-Determination Theory.

The results of interviews with teachers supplement and enrich the quantitative data, consistent with the methodological approach proposed by Huang et al. (2020). Teachers' observations of greater autonomy and initiative in intrinsically motivated students support the findings of Namaziandost et al. (2020) on the importance of autonomy in language learning.

5. Conclusion

The results have important practical implications. First, they emphasize the need to develop strategies to develop and support students' intrinsic motivation in the context of distance learning. Second, our findings testify to the value of an individualized approach to students with different types of motivation.

Our study meaningfully contributes to understanding the role of motivation in learning English remotely by providing empirical evidence that can be used to improve educational practices in the context of the digitalization of higher education.

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