



Report

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The University of Manchester

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What is the motivation for foreign language learning at beginners' level at the University of Manchester Language Centre?

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1 Introduction

1.1 Research questions and literature review

The topic of our research was chosen based on our interest in foreign language learning at the University of Manchester. This curiosity augmented when we found out that in the past two decades, there has been a decrease in the number of enrolling and provision of specialist degrees in languages in the UK higher education system (Mansell, 2016). To decipher some insights into this area of study, three research questions were put forward: 1) why do students choose to learn a particular language; 2) how their background has an impact on their motivation; 3) how their motivation affects their input and performance. We posed these questions with three specific languages, namely Arabic, French and Japanese. Each of them had distinct reasons to be chosen: Arabic because of the cultural and religious significance in some ethnic groups (Alikhateeb, 2014); French has been the language most sought after by UK employers (Confederation of British Industry and Pearson, 2013); Japanese due to the rising popularity of Japanese popular culture, such as manga and anime (Allison, 2006; Fukunaga, 2006). According to Schmidt and Savage's (1994 in Schmidt et al., 1996) finding that the intrinsic motivation is culture-specific, we predicted that language learners of different ethnic and academic background would show different inclinations in terms of motivation. Pertaining to the impact that motivation has on learning efforts and outcomes, our hypothesis was projected based on Lukmani's (1972) finding that instrumental motivation correlated significantly with language proficiency.

1.2 Changes to the original plan

One major change we have made is the regrouping of the participants' 1) motivation to learn the language; 2) faculties of the university; 3) nationalities; 4) hours spent weekly on the language; 5) scores of last semester.

In question (9) of our questionnaire, twelve statements regarding motivation were presented and participants could choose more than one statement. To provide comparable results, these statements were regrouped into six clusters: 1) identity-driven - relevance to home languages and religious issues; 2) linguistic - preference for the language inherent features; 3) social-driven - pursuit of better interpersonal communication; 4) leisure-driven - liking of cultural content presented in a particular language; 5) academic-driven - pursuit of better academic performance; 6) career-driven - pursuit of competitiveness in the job market (for the list of the regrouped statements, see Appendix B). Most of these clusters were established based on Gardner's (1985) model, yet the "identity-driven" cluster was a new addition as Nunn (2008) highlighted the heritage-related motivational factors and we perceived it worth investigating in the context of the University of Manchester. Additionally, we excluded option (i) due to its ambiguity from the nature of sentence structure, which we acknowledged as a limitation of our study.

Pertaining to courses, nationalities, learning hours and scores, in light of De Vaus's (2002) point that small samples may result in dissimilar groups thus impede achieving comparability, we cut down the number of the groups by merging several small groups into larger ones. Additionally, we equalised nationality with ethnicity and used the nationalities of participants to represent their ethnic background. This is due to our finding that participants' nationalities were highly consistent with their first languages and extra languages in data collected.

1.3 Method of data collection and data processing

Quantitative methods, including questionnaires and numerical data analysis, were used to produce intuitive data, draw a cross-sectional comparison, and test the hypotheses of motivation to learn a foreign language (De Vaus, 2002). The questionnaire was designed based on the aforementioned research questions. After conducting the pilot survey and gaining approval, physical questionnaires were distributed in the target classes, with full anonymity and confidentiality ensured.

After coding the responses and inputting data into Excel, some regroupings were conducted (as explained in 1.2). Afterward, they were presented in tables and stacked bar charts. It should be noted that since question (9) allows multiple answers, the intensity of different kinds of motivation is measured by the frequency of choice, i.e. by the number of responses to a statement rather than the number of respondents. Hence, the percentages of different types of motivation were calculated in the formula:

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{\text{the number of responses to the statements belonging to a motivation group}}{\text{the number of responses to all the statements}} \times 100\%$$

To determine whether the variables were statistically relevant, chi-squared tests were conducted through SPSS.

2 Findings

In this study, the participants were from Japanese, Arabic, and French classes on beginners' level offered by the Language Centre. 90.6% of the students were volunteered to be part of the survey, namely 68 participants in total. Overall, we had the most responses from Japanese classes (N=27), the second most from the French (N=23), and the least from the Arabic (N=18). 91.2% of the participants were studying as undergraduates or postgraduates in the University of Manchester, and the rest (8.8%) came from the public. The participants' language courses, gender, and degree are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1
LANGUAGE MODULES, GENDER AND DEGREE

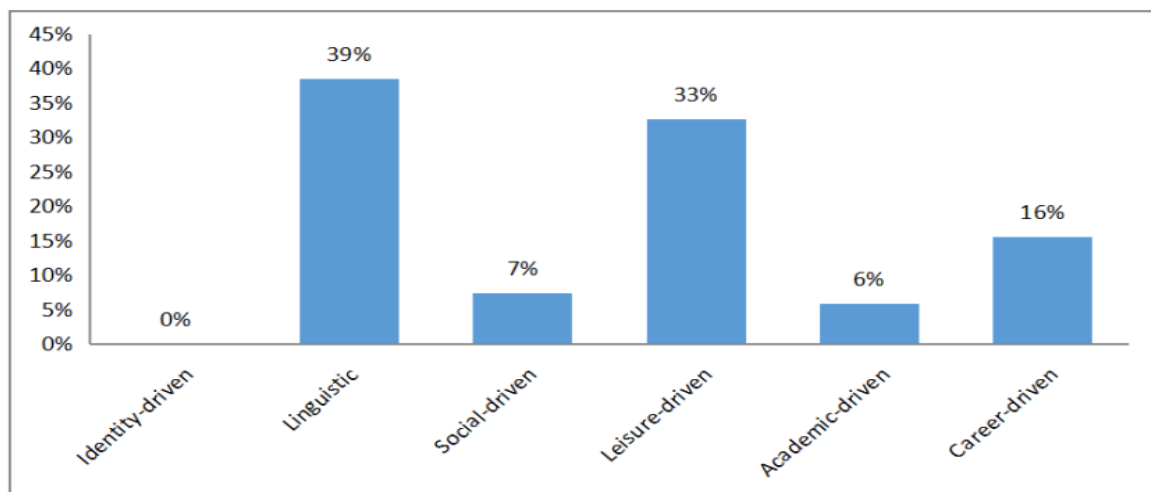
Language	Total	Gender		Undergraduate	Degree	
		Male	Female		Postgraduate	Public
Japanese	27	9 (33.3%)	18 (66.7%)	24 (88.9%)	1 (3.7%)	2 (7.4%)
Arabic	18	7 (38.9%)	11 (61.1%)	13 (72.2%)	2 (11.1%)	3 (16.7%)
French	23	8 (34.8%)	15 (65.2%)	16 (69.6%)	3 (13.0%)	4 (17.4%)
Total	68	24 (35.3%)	44 (64.7%)	53 (77.9%)	6 (8.8%)	9 (13.2%)

The findings from the questionnaire concerning our research questions were as follows.

2.1 Why does the learner choose to learn a foreign language?

Figure 1 below presents the responses of students on their motivation to learn foreign languages.

Figure 1 General distribution of motivation



These results display the extent to which students are driven by different types of motivational factors. Two groups of motivation were significantly effective compared to others: the responses concerning linguistic motivation took up the biggest part (39%), and the effect of leisure-driven motivation was reported by 33% of the responses. The effect of career-driven, social-driven, and academic-driven motivation were lesser than the others, accounting for 16%, 7%, 6% respectively in the total responses.

To have a closer look into the distribution of motivational factors, data were displayed in a more detailed pattern in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 Correlation between motivation and choices of language

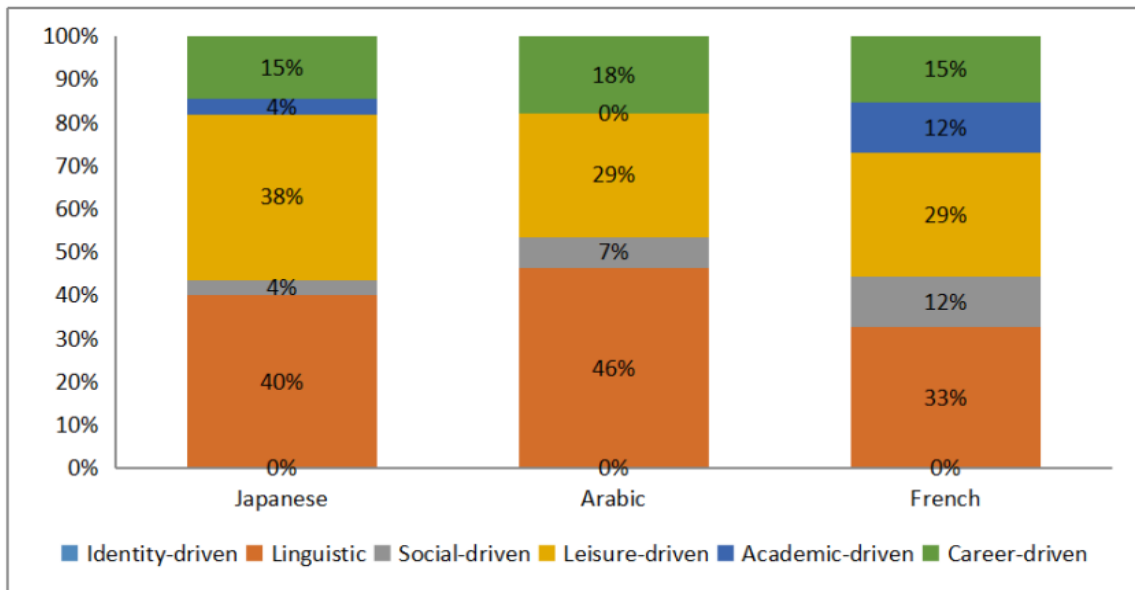


Figure 2 focuses on the motivation within learners of a certain language. All of the three languages were of similar distributional patterns, in line with the results across the languages (see Figure 1), but there were minor differences from language to language. French presented the least concentrated pattern of distribution as it had larger percentages of academic-driven motivation (15%) and social-driven motivation (12%) than the other two languages. With regard to the two most prominent groups, linguistic and leisure-driven motivation, the former exerted more effect on Arabic compared to Japanese and French while Japanese had the greatest proportion of the latter motivation among the three languages. It was surprising that no response from Arabic learners was academically driven. The vacuum may be explained by the lack of representativeness of our sample or the hypothetical fact that the Arabic language may relate to few degree subjects in the university. A chi-square test found that the choice of language was not statistically related to motivation ($\chi^2=17.310$, $df=10$, $p=.068$).

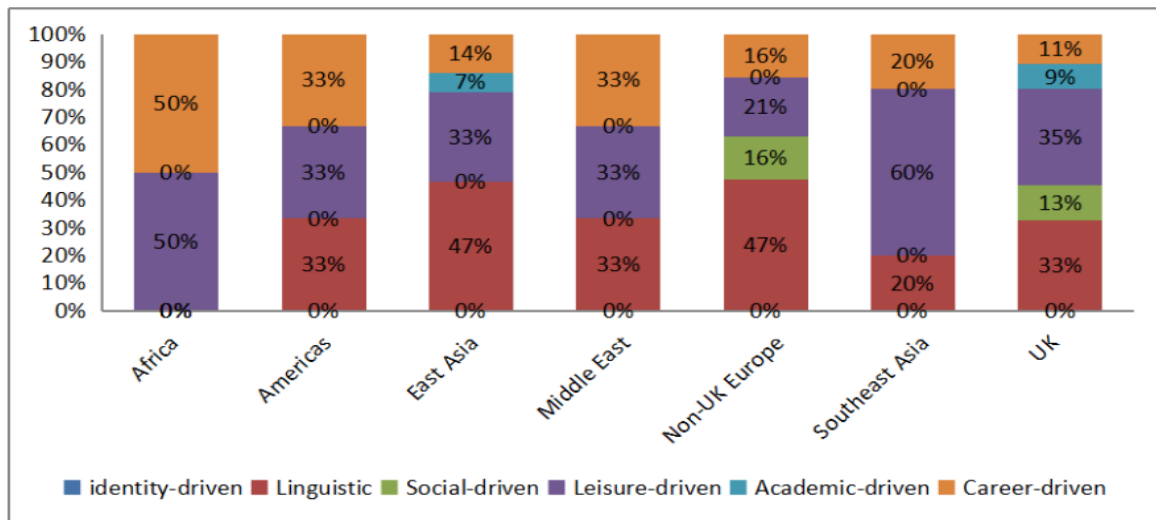
2.2 How does their cultural and educational background affect their motivation?

The table below shows the Ns for each category of nationalities (Table 2).

TABLE 2

Nationality	Africa	Americas	East Asia	Middle East	Non-UK Europe	Southeast Asia	UK
N	1	3	22	2	9	3	28

Figure 3 Correlation between motivation and national background



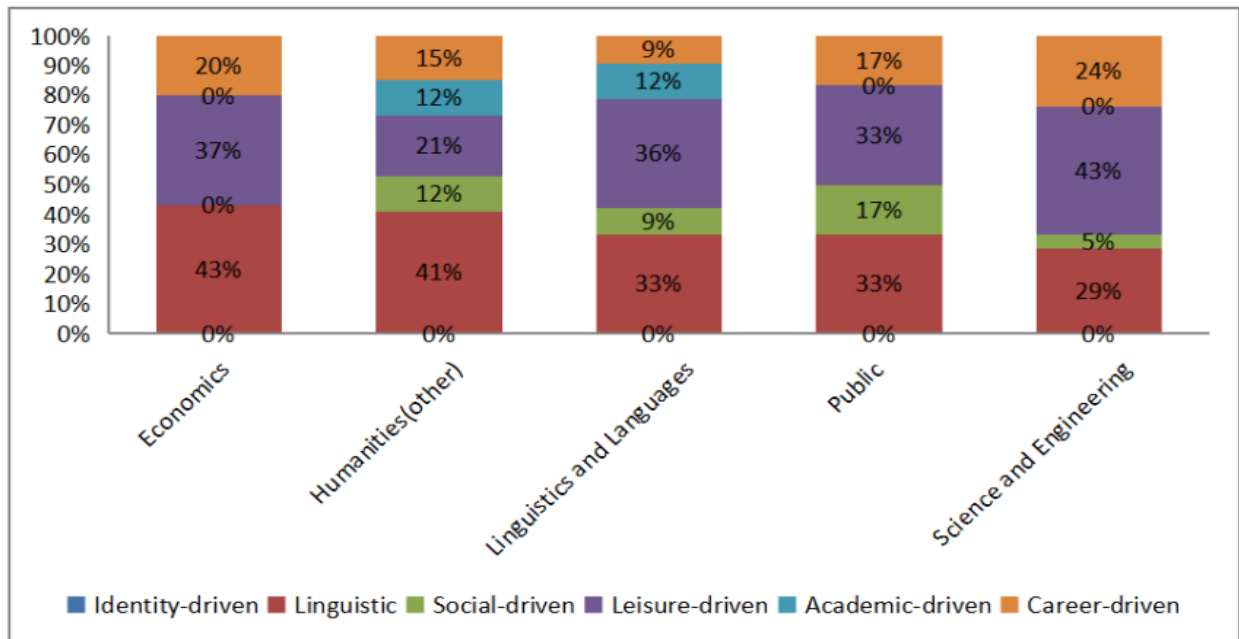
As mentioned, we have used the national background to represent cultural background for an easier interpretation. Figure 3 shows that in every column, the percentages of different types of motivation vary, yet leisure-driven and linguistic factors are still the leading motives in every national group. However, only the participants from Europe perceived themselves as motivated by social-driven factors, and only respondents from East Asia and the UK reported they were motivated by career-related factors. A chi-square test found that nationality was statistically related to motivation ($\chi^2=44.121$, $df=30$, $q=.047$).

Following, the table of the Ns for different courses is as shown below (Table 3).

TABLE 3

Degree	Economics	Humanities (other)	Linguistics and Languages	Science and Engineering	Public
N	16	14	17	11	6

Figure 4 Correlation between motivation and main courses



From Figure 4, it can be observed that among respondents who are taking undergraduate or postgraduate courses in the University of Manchester, the patterns of the figures among different courses are similar: linguistic and leisure-driven factors were more commonly reported than other types of motivation. However, only the participants doing humanities perceived that they were motivated by academic factor and only respondents doing economics did not identify themselves as driven by a social need. A chi-square test found that the participants' courses were not statistically related to motivations ($\chi^2=28.701$, $df=20$, $p=.948$).

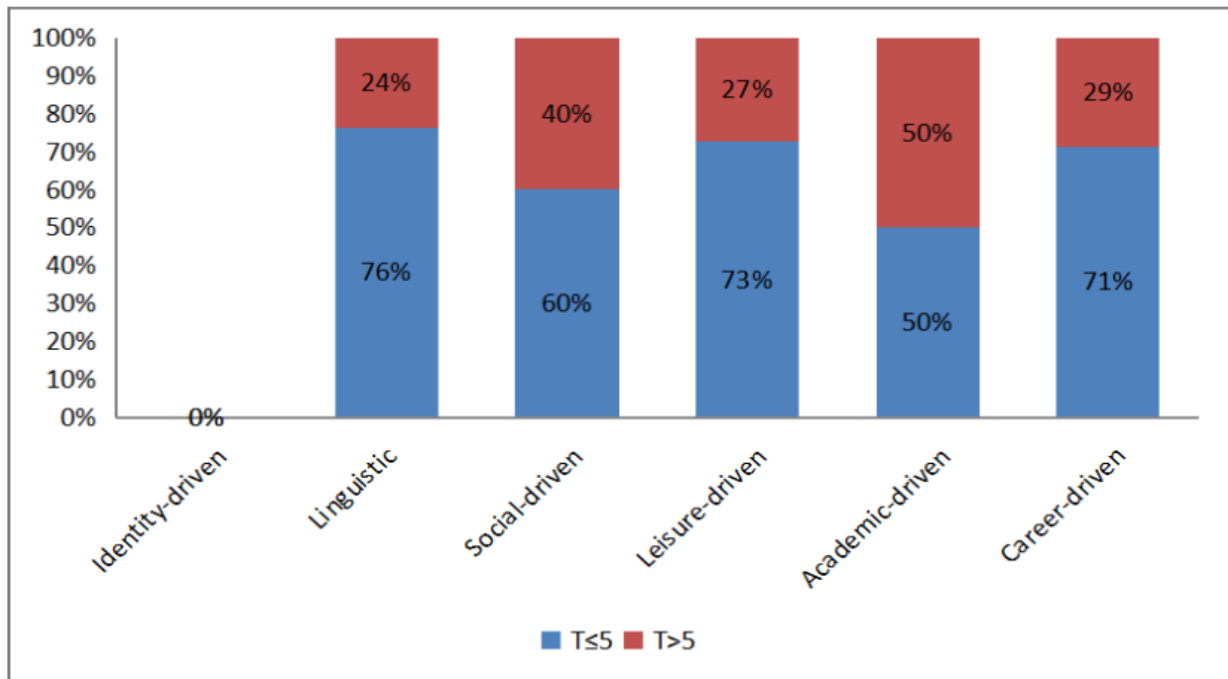
2.3 How does their motivation affect the outcomes of learning?

Our study measured the effort of learners by their average learning hours, and Table 4 displays the number of the participants who chose either of the two intervals (no more than five hours and more than five hours). Figure 5 shows the distribution of learning hours within each kind of motivation.

TABLE 4

T=Time (hour)	T≤5	T>5
N	49	18

Figure 5 Correlation between motivation and weekly learning hours



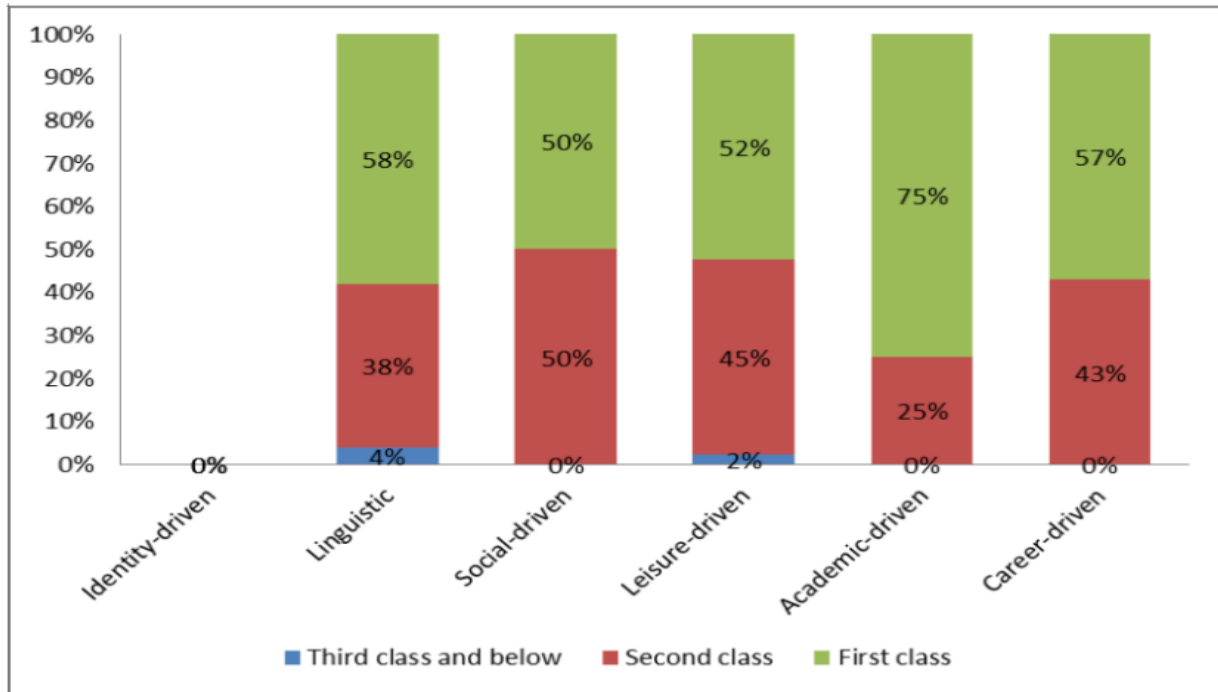
Results in Figure 5 displayed that academic-driven motivation had the greatest proportion of participants responding that they study for more than five hours per week (50%). The results for linguistic, leisure-driven and career-driven resembled each other, with 24%, 27%, 29% of respondents, respectively, spending more than five hours on the language of study per week. A chi-square test found that weekly learning hours were not statistically related to motivation ($\chi^2=4.773$, $df=5$, $p=.444$).

To present the correlation between motivation and outcomes of learning (measured by final grades of the first semester), Table 5 shows the number of takers in each slot, and Figure 6 displays the proportion of different levels of scores within each kind of motivation.

TABLE 5

Grades	Third class and below(49%-)	Second class(50-69%)	First class(70%+)
N	3	26	37

Figure 6 Correlation between motivation and grades



The percentage of the first-class scores in academic-driven motivation (75%) was apparently larger than those of other kinds of motivation, which were fairly close to each other and fell within the range between 50% and 60%. A chi-square test found that the final scores were not statistically related to motivation ($\chi^2=6.771$, $df=10$, $q=.747$).

3 Discussions

The results of Chi-square test show that there is no strong statistical correlation between motivation and any factor covered in our study, that is to say, none of those factors is relevant to motivation, or some (even all) of them interact with each other as well as motivational factors in a certain way. Due to the research design with pure quantitative methods and other practical issues, we were not able to investigate further, which leaves potential questions to future research on this topic. Although the chi-square test disproved the existence of any significant correlation between motivation and other variables, trends can be observed from data collected, which will be discussed in the following section.

3.1 Target language & motivation

It is surprising to note the remarkable similarity among distribution patterns of these languages: leisure-driven, linguistic and career driven motivation are always the most commonly reported in all the three languages, with academic-driven and social-driven taking up rather inconsequential percentages.

These results refuted Alikhateeb's (2014) findings that those seeking to learn Arabic as a foreign language may be driven by identity factors such as preserving their Arabic heritage. Our hypothesis that Japanese learners were mostly identified as fans of Japanese visual culture was partly confirmed, as leisure-driven motivation is the second strongest motivation in Japanese, yet it did not present a highly concentrated distribution with leisure-driven factors taking up the vast majority. In accordance with British Council's report (Tinsley and Board, 2013), we initially projected the hypothesis that French learners may be driven by career-related motivation, which was, again, disproved by our findings.

The findings by Williams et al. (2002) were disproved by our research, as neither social-driven factors nor lucrative factors (career-driven and academic-driven) were reported by the majority of our participants. A study targeting students learning Arabic in a U.S. college (Bouteldjouné, 2012) found that the major incentives for learning Arabic were social-driven and academic-driven, which deviated from our findings. We assume the diverged results are primarily due to the different approaches of data collection and processing. Aforementioned two studies used Likert scale (Likert, 1932) to specify the degree of agreement and measure the effect of motivational factors by means scores, comparing with ours resorting to yes-or-no styled questions and the percentage of a certain group's responses. By using ticks on statements to indicate definite agreement or disagreement, we were able to obtain concrete identification of participants' motivation and ease the data-analysis. However, this may be problematic when dealing with nuanced responses, and multiple motivational factors of one respondent would be rigidly considered as equally influential, so we acknowledged it as a limitation of our study.

It is worth noticing that there are "zeros" in our results: 1) identity-driven factors were reported by none of the participants in our survey; 2) no Arabic learners reported to be motivated by academic-driven factors. The lack of response regarding identity-driven factors went against the findings of a study conducted by the National Heritage Language Resource Centre (UCLA) (Kagan, 2012) that heritage speakers' interest in their home language tended to rise in the later teenage years, prompting the decision to study in college. This divergence may due to the sample of our survey: from responses to question (2), (5) and (6) in the questionnaire, it is found that the participants' nationalities, first languages and extra languages in use were highly uniform, implying that few heritage speakers are covered in our survey. With regard to the lack of responses to academic-driven motivation on learning Arabic, as mentioned in the findings, one contextual factor may be the degree courses provided by the University of Manchester: among all the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes available, the number of the courses that may specifically require or prefer Arabic language skills (such as Arabic studies and Classic studies) was relatively small (<http://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/2018/>).

3.2 Cultural and educational background & motivation

This research question was divided into two parts: searching the relationship between 1) motivation and cultural background; 2) motivation and academic background.

For the first part, the findings partly confirmed our hypothesis that participants from different cultural background have different kinds of motivation to learn foreign languages, according to Schmidt and Savage (1994 in Schmidt et al., 1996) and Markus and Kitayama (1991 in Schmidt et al., 1996). For example, only the respondents from Europe (including the UK) chose the statements concerning social-driven motivation, which might be due to the fact that Europe is the continent with the second highest proportion of immigrants and European students tend to take part in socialising, as the United Nations showed in their World Population Prospects of 2017 (<https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Download/Standard/Migration/>). For the great proportion of the academic-driven motivation among East Asian respondents, one possible reason might be the emphasis on academic achievement in the East Asian culture (Leung, 2006). Surprisingly, despite this, academic-driven motivation was most commonly reported not by East Asian but by British respondents in our survey, which flags further studies due to the lack of supporting evidence. Additionally, many studies (e.g. Rezig, 2015; van den Berg, 2017; Keblawi, 2006) have found that the degree of difference between the learner's home culture and the culture of the target language has an influence on motivation, which can be further explored.

It should be noticed that there is a relatively small number of participant from Africa, Americas, Middle East and Southeast Asia. Therefore, the percentages of them are not stable or representative enough. For example, our sample has only covered one person from Africa so that the result might lose the value of being analysed.

As for the relationship between motivation and academic background, different patterns of distributions within each column verified our hypothesis. Our work concerning this research question is novel since few previous studies look into the relationship between students' motivation and their courses. It is interesting since only the participants doing humanities took academic development into account when choosing a language. We attribute it to the fact that humanities subjects are closely relevant to foreign languages compared to other subjects, so students learning these subjects tend to attach more importance to language skills. For example, by learning a related foreign language, arts students might be able to get access to the first-hand materials to better their understanding of different types of texts. With regard to Economics, no respondent chose social-driven motivation answers. It might be associated with the student composition in Economics, since only 3 out of 16 were from Europe, and Figure 5 above has shown that only European respondents are motivated by social-related factors.

3.3 Motivation, effort and outcomes

The results have confirmed the findings of Anisfeld and Lambert (1961 in Lukmani, 1972) that the learners driven by instrumental factors, referring to a need of fulfilment towards objectives driving from a perception of actual benefits (Loewen and Reinders, 2011 in Alghamdi, 2014), would take more efforts to achieve better outcomes in comparison to those driven by personal preferences.

Given the concept that learning behaviours and learning achievements are highly relevant (Fisher and Ford, 1998), we assessed the results across Figure 4 and Figure 5 by comparing the rankings of learning hours and scores among different groups of motivation (see Table 6 below). We ranked the variables by the proportion of the "favourable component" in terms of hours and scores within the columns, namely the percentage of participants whose weekly learning time was longer than five hours and the percentage of participants who got first-class grades.

TABLE 6

	Linguistic	Social-driven	Leisure-driven	Academic-driven	Career-driven
Hours of learning	5 th	2 nd	4 th	1 st	3 rd
Scores	2 nd	5 th	4 th	1 st	3 rd

The comparison found that learning hours corresponded with scores for respondents who identified themselves as being motivated by leisure-driven, academic-driven and/or career driven motivation. However, for respondents selecting linguistic and/or social-driven motivation, their learning hours disagree with their scores to a large extent. This disagreement may due to two reasons: 1) the functional mechanism of different types of motivation may vary, that is to say, learners driven by different types of motivation may adopt different strategies of learning, which would not be equally efficient; 2) the amount of effort is not fully evaluated with the measure of learning hours alone. The former implies the direction for further study, however, the latter exposes a limitation of our data-collection regarding this research question that we barely measured the effort with rigid length of time, as Fisher and Ford (1998) emphasizes that the amount of effort includes not only time on task but attentional and perceived effort measures. However, despite this, we would rather take a compromise to avoid being too dependent on self-report perceptions.

4 Conclusions

This study explores the correlation between the motivation of foreign language learning and different variables at beginners' level at the University of Manchester Language Centre. Overall, linguistic and leisure are the dominant motivation for the student to learn a foreign

language. Our findings refuted our first hypothesis since similar patterns occurred in three target languages, while the findings partly confirmed the second and third hypothesis that people from different background may have various preferences when choosing a foreign language to learn, and the learners driven by external factors (or, say, lucrative reasons) would take more efforts and achieve better outcomes.

By the understanding of this, the research proposes that the university should address the significance of foreign language learning for the academic and professional career, which might drive students to put more efforts and attaining higher achievement in foreign language learning.

In our research, there are several areas where information is lacking so that concrete claims about the correlation between motivation and other variables cannot be made, which calls for further studies. In particular, there is a lack of empirical studies on the relation among variables other than the motivation (for example, the relation between effort and outcomes) to find out whether they are totally irrelevant or deeply interwoven. With regard to the development on methodology, we propose that future studies should take advantage of qualitative approaches to fill any gaps of knowledge after quantitative surveys and construct more informative questionnaires including both closed-ended and open-ended questions to obtain more reliable data.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Questionnaire

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study titled '*What is the motivation for foreign language learning at beginner level at the University of Manchester Language Centre?*' As a group, we are part of the Multilingual Manchester project at the University of Manchester. The purpose of this research study is to find out what motivates you to take up a foreign language.

This questionnaire consists of 16 questions and will take you approximately 3 minutes to complete. Your participation in this study is entirely anonymous and voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. Your personal information will remain confidential in relation to your answers in this study.

1. Gender:

(1) Male (2) Female (3) Prefer not to say

2. Are you a UK national student?

(1) Yes (2) No. If you are an international student, your nationality is _____

3. What is the name of your course at UoM? (e.g. Linguistics)

[If you are member of the public, please tick here [] and skip this question.]

_____ [] Undergraduate / [] Postgraduate

4. Have you studied in the UK prior to the undergraduate degree (e.g. GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education), A-levels)?

(1) Yes (2) No

5. What is(are) your first language(s)?

[Please specify below. You can write down more than one language.]

6. Do you use (or study) other language(s) except for your first language(s) and the language you are learning in UoM Language Centre?

(1) Yes (2) No

If so, please specify here: _____

7. What language are you learning in UoM Language Centre?

(1) Japanese (2) Arabic (3) French

8. Are you credited or non-credited?

(1) Credited (2) Non-credited

9. Why did you choose this language? [you can choose more than one option]

(a) It is my heritage language (the language which my parents or relatives speak).

(b) This language is required in religious practice.

(c) I have studied this language before.

If you choose this option, please specify when you started to learn this language (e.g. when I was in high school): _____

(d) This language is linguistically close to my first language.

(e) I am interested in this language itself (e.g. written system, pronunciation).

(f) I need to better my communication with people around me (e.g. a friend, a partner or colleagues from different backgrounds).

(g) I hold a positive attitude towards the country/ies where this language is spoken (e.g. I like the people/natural landscape/tradition there).

(h) I like some cultural contents originally presented in this language (e.g. Japanese manga, French cinema).

(i) The cultural background of this language is different from the one I was brought up and I would like to try new things.

(j) This language is closely related to my course and will help my study/research.

(k) Speaking this language is a competitive advantage in the job market (particularly the sector I intend to enter)

(l) I intend to live/work abroad in a country where this language is spoken.

10. Do you use the language you are studying in daily discourse?

(1) Yes (2) No

11. How many hours do you spend studying this language approximately per week?

(1) 2 (2) (3) (4)

12. How likely is it that you will continue learning (or using) the language you are studying once you finish the beginners' course?

(+2) Very likely (+1) Likely (0) Not sure (-1) Not likely (-2) Not at all likely

13. How likely is it that you will take an international standard test of this language?

(e.g. Test de connaissance du français (TCF), Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT), Arabic Language Proficiency Test (ALPT))

(+2) Very likely (+1) Likely (0) Not sure (-1) Not likely (-2) Not at all likely

If you have taken this kind of test already, please tick here []

14. [Optional] What was your grade in the language course last semester?

(1) Less than 40 (2) 40-49.9 (3) 50-59.9 (4) 60-69.9 (5) 70-79.9 (6) 80 and 80+

15. What positive effect do you think learning this language has had on your life so far? [you can choose more than one option]

(a) Better communicative skills in general.

(b) Access to more information resources and leisure options.

(c) For career prospects.

(4) Others: _____

16. Overall, do you feel motivated regarding your language course?

(+2) Very much (+1) Yes (0) Not sure (-1) No (-2) Not at all

Appendix B: The regrouping of statements in question (9)

Group 1: Identity-driven motivation

(a) It is my heritage language (the language which my parents or relatives speak).

(b) This language is required in religious practice.

Group 2: Linguistic motivation

(c) I have studied this language before.

If you choose this option, please specify when you started to learn this language

(e.g. when I was in high school): _____

(d) This language is linguistically close to my first language.

(e) I am interested in this language itself (e.g. written system, pronunciation).

Group 3: Social-driven motivation

(f) I need to better my communication with people around me (e.g. a friend, a partner)

or colleagues from different backgrounds).

Group 4: Leisure-driven motivation

(g) I hold a positive attitude towards the country/ies where this language is spoken (e.g. I like the people/natural landscape/tradition there).

(h) I like some cultural contents originally presented in this language (e.g. Japanese manga, French cinema).

Group 5: Academic-driven motivation

(j) This language is closely related to my course and will help my study/research.

Group 6: Career-driven motivation

(k) Speaking this language is a competitive advantage in the job market (particularly the sector I intend to enter)

(l) I intend to live/work abroad in a country where this language is spoken.

Option deleted (due to ambiguity)

(i) The cultural background of this language is different from the one I was brought up and I would like to try new things.

