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Exploring Demotivating Factors at Different Stages of Learning Chinese as a Second Language: A Case Study of European Adult Learners

Abstract

Demotivation has emerged as a significant issue in second language learning, leading learners to pause, slow down, or even abandon their studies. In L2 Chinese education, numerous empirical studies have focused on motivating factors, but few have explored demotivation, particularly among informal adult learners. Despite that their motivational changes could offer valuable insights into language education, this group has not received sufficient attention from researchers. Drawing on Van den Branden's (2022) integrated language learning motivation model, this study reports a qualitative analysis of demotivating factors based on interviews with three European adult Chinese learners at primary, intermediate, and advanced levels. The findings reveal that dominant demotivating factors varied across different stages of learning, and the impact of co-existing demotivating factors shifted throughout the process. Demotivating factors emerged intensively in the stage when L2 Chinese learners mastered the basics and began applying the language in real-life contexts. When these negative factors were not addressed in a timely manner, they significantly diminished motivation; conversely, timely intervention mitigated their impact. The study also found that demotivating factors often originate from the negative development of motivating factors, with negative perceptions of success and value being the most influential. However, these factors do not necessarily lead to demotivation or abandonment of learning. Finally, a revised multi-level language learning motivation model is proposed, positioning demotivation and motivation on a continuum.

Keywords: motivation, demotivating factors, Chinese as a second language, adult learners, Europe

徐梓涵

探究汉语二语学习不同阶段中的动机削弱因素——欧洲成人学习者案例分析

摘要

动机削弱已成为阻碍二语学习者进步的关键因素之一，常导致其学习停滞、放缓乃至彻底放弃。尽管在汉语作为第二语言的教育研究中，众多实证研究聚焦于动机激励因素，但对于动机削弱，特别是对非正式成人学习者的学习怠倦情况的探究却显不足。尽管这一群体的动机波动特点能为语言教学提供宝贵见解，却未得到学界的充分重视。本研究基于Van den Branden（2022）提出的整合语言学习动机模型，对三名分别处于初级、中级和高级水平的欧洲成人汉语学习者进行访谈并进行定性分析，旨在探讨动机削弱的成因。结果发现，不同阶段的主导动机削弱因素各异，且共存动机削弱因素在学习过程中的影响也呈动态变化。动机削弱因素密集出现在汉语二语学习者掌握基础后并开始尝试在实际生活中运用的阶段。这些消极因素若未得到及时处理，将严重削弱学习动机；相反，适时干预能有效减轻其负面影响。此外，本研究也发现动机削弱往往源于原激励因素的消极演变，其中对成功感和价值感的负面认知最为关键，但并非必然导致动机消退或彻底终止。最后，本文提出了一个修订后的多层次语言学习动机模型，将动机削弱与动机激励置于一个连续体上。

关键字：动机，动机削弱因素，汉语作为第二语言，成人学习者，欧洲

Introduction and literature review
1. Motivation and motivation models

Motivation is one of the most significant predictors of language learning success. There have been multiple motivation models for second or foreign language learning based on studies on learning English and other alphabetic languages. Many of these take the social psychological perspective, such as Gardner's social-educational model, which distinguished the integrative and

instrumental motivation.[1] Dornyei (1994) outlined a three-level L2 classroom motivation construct consisting of the language level, learner level, and learning situation level. Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory distinguished six types of motivation along a continuum system from amotivation to intrinsic motivation. There are other theories focused on various aspects of learners' psychological engagement and learning contexts. Van den Branden (2022) further summarised an integrated language learning motivation model based on prior work.[2] In his model, success, value, and autonomy are the core factors influencing motivation in a specific context.

2. Demotivation and demotivating factors

As many scholars have emphasised, motivation is complex, multidimensional, and dynamic. However, a reduction in motivation has emerged as a significant factor that can cause learners to pause, slow down, or even terminate their language learning. This reduction in motivation is often referred to as 'demotivation' by some scholars. For example, Zhang (2020) reviewed previous literature on the concept of 'demotivation' and defined it as 'the collective force of all the factors perceived to negatively influence learners' motivation'. According to Zhang, the effect of 'demotivation' is 'demotivating', and the factors that are perceived negatively are termed 'demotivating factors'. The definitions of these terms are used in the present study.

As Chinese is an unfamiliar language to most native speakers of European languages, the factors influencing their motivation may differ from those relevant to learning Indo-European languages. Although there have been numerous empirical studies focused on motivating factors in L2 Chinese learning, fewer scholars have explored the concept of demotivation. The limited existing research has shed some light on this topic. Given the linguistic differences, it has often been assumed that Chinese characters would pose the greatest challenge for native speakers of Indo-European languages. However, a survey by Zhang and Wang (2016) of Irish university students found that this linguistic difficulty was not necessarily a demotivating factor. This

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[1]   Gardner 1985: 145.
[2]   Van den Branden 2022: 69.

finding suggests that perceived negative factors do not always lead to a re-
duction or loss of motivation, highlighting the complex nature of motivation.

Campbell and Storch (2011) found that the most dominant demotivating
aspects are related to the learning environment, such as the difficulty of
coursework and institutional changes. Other studies have shown that external
factors, including teachers and their teaching methods, peers, tasks, and ex-
aminations, play an important role in influencing motivation (Pretty, 2019;
Zheng et al., 2023). However, these studies did not explore the influence of
these external factors on learners' internal states. Zhang (2020) further ex-
plored the link between different variables and learners' psychology, identi-
fying six main demotivating factorsranked in order: reduced self-confidence,
teachers, course design, negative ideal L2 self, negative ought-to self, and
influence of another language.

While most existing studies have focused on learners in formal language
classes (Campbell & Storch, 2011; Zhang & Wang, 2016; Pretty, 2019; Zheng
et al., 2023), informal adult learners have not received adequate attention
from researchers. Data from this group can provide a more comprehensive
understanding of the nature of motivation in second language learning, which
is the primary focus of the presentstudy.

3. The present study

The present study aims to explore the factors that potentially weaken Euro-
pean adults' motivation in learning L2 Chinese and how these factors evolve
over time, using Van den Branden's (2022) integrated language learning moti-
vation model. In this context, the term 'L2 Chinese' refers to the Chinese
language being learned by a learner after the first language. The main research
questions are formulated as follows:

RQ 1: What are the main demotivating factors for European adult learners
       in learning Chinese as a second language?
RQ 2: How do these demotivating factors evolve at different stages of learn-
       ing?
RQ 3: To what extent can the 'motivation model' explain the weakening
       of their motivation?

Methodology
1. Participants

Three adult L2 Chinese learners from Germany (P1), Poland (P2), and Belgium (P3) were invited to participate in the study, representing elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels of proficiency. Participants were selected based on their personal backgrounds, Chinese proficiency, and learning experiences.

The first participant, from Germany, began learning Chinese out of interest and for travel purposes after a trip to China. He primarily studied through one-on-one online tutoring and self-learning. Although his learning period spanned three years, he took a one-year break and has maintained only a primary level of Chinese. The second participant, from Poland, studied Chinese for eight years while earning her bachelor's and master's degrees, primarily for professional purposes. She has reached an advanced level of proficiency in Chinese. The third participant, from Belgium, began studying Chinese during the COVID-19 quarantine in 2020 as a hobby and progressed to an intermediate level within three years. The first and third participants' professions are unrelated to the Chinese language, while the second participant works closely with it. While P2 received formal language education, the other two participants relied heavily on informal instruction and self-regulated learning. Details about the participants are presented in Table 1.

	L1	Gender	Age	Profession	Chinese Level	Learning Period
P1	German	Male	50+	Information technology	A2	2020–2023
P2	Polish	Female	25+	Chinese teacher/translator	C2	2015–2023
P3	Dutch	Male	30+	Enterprise resource planning consultant	B2	2020–2023

Table 1. Summary of participant profiles

2. Data collection method

A one-time, audio-recorded, semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant. The interviews with P1 and P2 were arranged online, while the interview with P3 was conducted in person. Prior to the interview, all

participants received an electronic leaflet that provided a simplified expla-
nation of the interview's purpose, key topics, and main questions to be
discussed (see Appendix). They were also asked to draw several simple line
graphs in advance, representing their overall motivation and levels of several
key factors from Van den Branden's (2022) language learning motivation
model.

During the interview, the researcher began by restating the purpose of
the study to the interviewee. The interview was divided into two parts. In
the first part, the researcher invited participants to share their overall L2 Chi-
nese learning experiences and the changes in their motivation over time.
The second part focused on discussing how participants' motivation related
to the motivation model, addressing key factors, such as success, value, auton-
omy, and environment. Each part began with broad questions about their
overall motivation and then moved to how these factors explained their dis-
couraging moments. Participants were also encouraged to provide additional
information that did not fit within the model and to offer their feedback on
the model at the end.

All interviews were audio-recorded with the formal consent of the par-
ticipants and subsequently transcribed into text documents. After several
close readings of the transcripts to identify the main demotivating moments
for each participant, NVivo (version 14) was used for thematic coding and
further analysis.

Data analysis
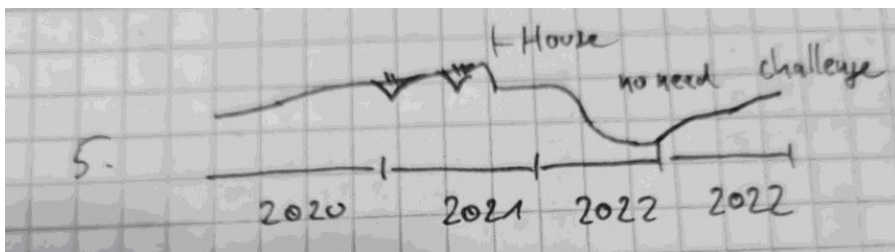### 1. Thematic coding and analysis

This study used NVivo (version 14) for qualitative analysis, coding the main
themes related to motivation in the transcripts of the three interviews. The
interviews were structured around Van den Branden's (2022) integrated lan-
guage learning motivation model to assess its applicability, with thematic
codes applied based on this model. Given the focus of the study on factors
that weaken motivation, the quotes were sub-categorised into 'positive' and
'negative' factors. Here 'positive' refers to relatively favourable conditions,
while 'negative' denotes relatively unfavourable conditions as perceived by
the participants. The coding themes and example quotes are provided below.

Thematic Category	Positive	Negative
Success	*When I do the studies, I felt some success. Only internal factors, right? So I realised some symbols I can really learn fast and I really learn many symbols. And when I started reading, taking these children's books with limited vocabulary and could actually read them. This was fantastic. I had a feeling of so much joy. (P1)*	*I feel in a small portion of demotivation when I see I'm learning a symbol and after 10 times repeating I still don't know exactly how to draw it. It doesn't happen very often, but there are some samples which really demotivate me. (P1)*
Value	*And he told me, yeah, China is kind of prosperous and you learn Chinese. I think the economy is like growing. So if you learn Chinese, I think there will be a lot of job opportunities. (P2)*	*So I thought that I have to study a little bit more to keep my training on a certain level and get a nice job, but it didn't happen this way. The job wasn't easy to find and wasn't that good. It helped. So I think that's when my motivation dropped down and I don't think it will go up from that time. (P2)*
Autonomy	*For me, there is no external force to make me learn Chinese. It's just from inside own interest. So I have all the autonomy and I want. I want to keep it. (P1)*	*But also like having no autonomy wouldn't be good, because I think I would feel frustrated because I'm also an experienced language learner. I'm a teacher and there are some things that need more than some things I'm not interested in, so yeah. (P2)*
Environment	*So we were also challenging each other a bit that there was some competition going on at some point, using the blackboard also to practice writing, so it's a different kind of atmosphere. (P3)*	*I don't have a Chinese friend, I don't have Chinese colleagues. I don't use it in every day. (P1)* *And then I had a break because in just August 2021 I bought this house. And then I made a break until July. (P1)*

Table 2. Thematic framework used to code interview transcripts and examples

## 2. Overall motivation changes and demotivating factors at different stages

By combining data from the hand-drawn graphs created by the participants with the interview transcripts, it became evident that motivation levels and instances of demotivation varied significantly among the three participants. Therefore, the key demotivating moments at different language proficiency levels are presented individually for each participant.

Graph 1: P1's overall motivation curve

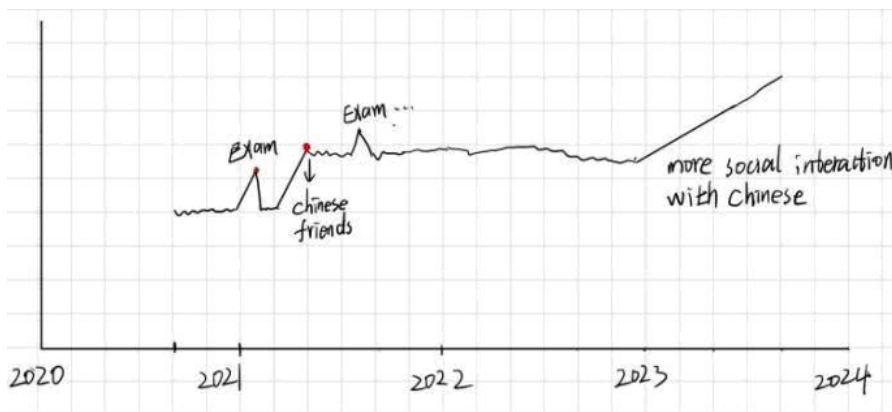| Factors	0–A1	A1	A1–A2
Chinese characters	Forgot easily after repeating many times (light)	Struggled with characters in real contexts, abundance of characters and differences of traditional/simplified, printed/hand-written versions (medium); Found the learning method wrong (strong)	Found proper reading materials such as children's books (medium)
Listening and speaking	Did not concentrate too much (light)	Struggled with listening and speaking (medium); Saw the slight chance of making progress (strong)	Found new learning method (light)
Evaluation of value	light	Decreased of possibility of using Chinese in daily life and traveling due to lock-downs (strong)	Possible to travel to China again (light)
Language environment	light	Struggled to find contexts to use Chinese (medium)	Found new language partners (light)
Negative political view about China	light	light	light
Time	light	Bought a house; needed to take care of family (strong)	Got more free time (light)
Learning resources	light	Far away from off-line classes (light)	light

Table 3. Demotivating factors in P1's learning stages
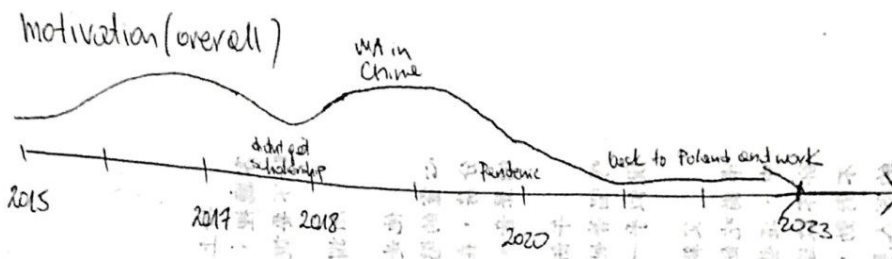
Graph 2. P2's overall motivation curse

Factors	0–B1	B1–C1	C1–C2
Rewards and utility	Failed to obtain scholarship to study in China at the end of bachelor's (strong)	Obtained a different scholarship (N/A)	Failed to find a satisfying job related to Chinese (strong)
Evaluation of value	Decreased possibility of studying in China (strong)	Increased value of Chinese in helping find a job (light)	Decreased possibility of finding a relevant good job (strong)
Autonomy	Low autonomy (light)	Disliked some teachers' teaching methods (medium)	Felt tired of having to use Chinese; not motivated to improve (light)
Life situation	N/A	Lock-downs during COVID-19 pandemic while studying in China (medium)	N/A
Language environment	Lack of language environment (medium)	Found it difficult to use Chinese in contexts beyond daily life (medium)	light
Personal experience with native speakers	Lack of language partners (medium)	Struggled to make close Chinese friends (medium)	Negative experiences with Chinese bosses (strong)
Resources	Struggled to find proper learning materials (medium)	Obtained rich resources while studying in China (N/A)	light
Study environment	N/A	Interruption from roommate (medium)	N/A

Table 4. Demotivating factors in P2's learning stages

Unfortunately, P3 did not draw his overall motivation line. However, according to his description during the interview, the author produced a rough line graph to represent the motivation changes.

Graph 3. P3's overall motivation curse

Factors	0–A2	A2–B1	B1–B2
Study partners	N/A	Demotivated classmates (medium)	Found other study partners (light)
Chinese characters	Struggled with learning Chinese characters (strong)	Chinese characters (medium)	Realised it is sufficient to just type and recognise (light)
Listening and speaking	Did not concentrate much (light)	Focus shifted from characters to this part; realised the differences between dialects and standard accent (strong)	Found more efficient learning methods and resources, but still struggled with real-life conversations and understanding music and videos; feedback from others (medium)
Teacher	N/A	Not used to the approaches of the new teacher at the beginning (light)	Appreciated the new teacher (N/A)
Exams	Felt less motivated after each exams (light)	Did not appreciate the reliability of exams anymore (medium)	Received more reliable exams from China (light)

Table 5. Demotivating factors in P3's learning stages

Results and discussion

1. The main demotivating factors in learning Chinese as a second language

To answer RQ 1, the medium and strong demotivating factors from Tables 3–5 are summarised in Table 6. Note that the three stages are roughly divided by the turning points of the participants' learning curves as discussed in the individual interviews. Stage 1 refers to the very beginning period when the learner's progress grows steadily, stage 2 refers to the stage when the learner reached a certain level according to their own pace and slows down, and stage 3 refers to the latest learning curve of the learner at the time of this study's data collection.

Overall, the most influential demotivating factors identified in the present study of adult L2 Chinese learners differ from those reported by Campbell and Storch (2011) and Pretty (2019), as is discussed in detail below. Their studies found that external factors such as teaching methods, heavy workloads, and exam failures were the dominant sources of demotivation for university students. However, these studies focused solely on current university students and did not consider long-term learning experiences. In contrast, the present study examined learners' memories over three years outside of the formal school context.

	Stage 1			Stage 2			Stage 3		
	P1	P2	P3	P1	P2	P3	P1	P2	P3
Success	Chinese characters; listening and speaking	Lost scholarship	Chinese characters	Chinese characters; listening and speaking; slight chance of making progress	N/A	Chinese characters, differences between dialects and standard accent,	Chinese characters	Failed to find a satisfying job related to Chinese	struggle with real-life speaking and listening
Value	N/A	Decreased possibility of studying in China	N/A	Decreased of possibility of using Chinese in daily life or traveling	N/A	Decreased appreciation of exams	N/A	Decreased possibility of finding a relevant good job	N/A
Environment	N/A	Lack of language environment; language partners; learning materials	N/A	Lack of contexts for using Chinese; interruptions from other commitments	Teaching methods; lack of social interactions and contexts; difficult to make friends; interruption from roommate	Demotivated classmates	N/A	Negative experiences with Chinese bosses	Negative feedback from others

Table 6. Summary of demotivating factors

2. The decisive role of learner's perception of success and value

The data indicates that the most significant demotivating factors are related to perceptions of success and value. Participants' motivation was initially driven by their evaluation of value, which was closely followed by their perceptions of past and future success. These two dimensions are highly interrelated and mutually influential, meaning that decline in the perception of success can easily lead to a decrease in the evaluation of value.

Ryan and Deci (2000) distinguished between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is driven by inherent satisfaction, while extrinsic motivation is driven by external outcomes. The relative importance of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation depends on individual purposes for learning the language and is influenced by factors such as personality, profession, age, language environment, and social relationships.For the three adult L2 Chinese learners in this study, the intrinsic value largely originated from their curiosity about the challenges of the Chinese language, particularly Chinese characters, which are markedly different from alphabetic scripts. This fascination dates back to the 16th century, when the Italian missionary Matteo Ricci described Chinese characters as 'untranslatable images' (Hosne, 2018). Surprisingly, Chinese characters are considered to be one of the most chal-

lenging aspects for Indo-European language speakers, yet many learners are motivated by the challenge. This reminds us that difficulties cannot be directly inferred as factors that weaken motivation.

Meanwhile, intrinsic value is closely linked to intrinsic success, while extrinsic value corresponds to extrinsic success. For instance, P1 noted that failures in mastering Chinese characters led to a decreased perception of value, while P2's failure to obtain a scholarship diminished her evaluation of the Chinese language. The extrinsic value for participants can be further categorised into social value and utility value, including goals such as making Chinese friends, obtaining scholarships, traveling to China, and finding relevant employment. Persistent and severe failures in these areas can become significant demotivating factors for language learning.

3. The impact of environment

After value and success, the environment is another crucial factor influencing motivation. The term 'environment' encompasses a broad range of elements, including the language environment, physical learning spaces, learning resources, and study partners. Compared to intrinsic factors, it is generally easier for adult learners to address and adapt to negative developments in these external factors. Although some environmental factors, such as a lack of resources and time, can present challenges during the learning process, they are often temporary and adaptable.

For instance, P1 attributed his extended learning disruption to his prioritising other important activities but did not view these factors as demotivating. He resumed learning Chinese once he had more free time. Similarly, P3's study partner lost motivation during the A2–B1 learning stage, but he proactively sought out new study partners to sustain his own motivation.

Finally, while autonomy is widely recognised as a significant factor that enhances motivation, it did not appear to be a major demotivating factor for adult learners. As P3 noted, a high level of autonomy can both enhance and potentially diminish motivation. P1 and P2 also indicated that autonomy did not significantly affect their study experience. Although a loss of autonomy can still be a demotivating factor, mature adult learners, especially those not constrained by degree or certification requirements, tend to maintain a high level of control over their decision to start or stop learning.

4. Demotivating factors at different stages

Van den Branden (2022) summarised three key features of motivation (i.e., the complex, multidimensional, and dynamic), which also applies to demotivation. Demotivating factors show several features. First, it is clear that different dominant demotivating factors appeared throughout the individuals' learning periods, and the weight of co-existing demotivating factors also varied at different stages. Our results show that demotivating factors appeared intensively in the middle and ending learning phases. Only if they could not be remedied timely would they reduce the overall motivation, and vice versa. The middle learning stage witnesses a great deal of difficulties, similar to any other learning activities. Learners' long-term learning development can be explained by Alan Fletcher's smooth learning curve theory (as cited in Zhang, 2020).
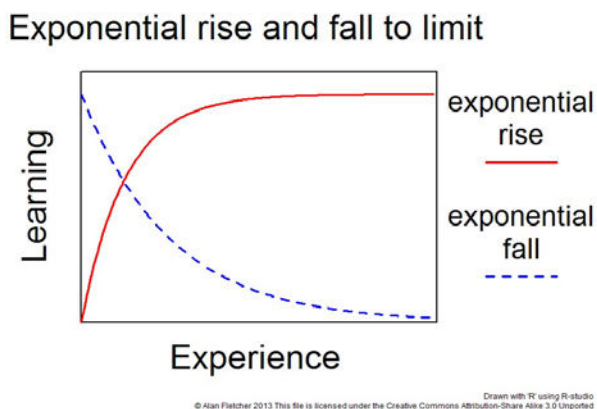
Graph 4. Alan Fletcher's smooth long-term learning curve
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning_curve#/media/File:Alanf777_Lcd_fig05.png

After the initial stage of discovering a language distinct from one's own native language, an accumulation of perceived problems and slow progress often render learners overwhelmed and decrease their power to combat demotivating factors.

Furthermore, the author found that some demotivating factors are constant while others are temporary. Whether such a factor is constant or temporary depends on the nature of the factor as well as learners' personality and ability to deal with it. For example, in P1's first learning stage, his motivation was

slightly reduced due to failure in remembering the characters even with multiple repetitions, and it continued to decrease when he found that the complexity of the system of Chinese characters far exceeded his previous expectations. His motivation was severely hit when he realised that his learning method was wrong and that he had wasted significant time and effort. However, this issue became milder after he started to gain confidence and satisfaction by reading children's books at an easier language level.

> *When I do the studies, I felt some success. Only internal factors, right? So I realised some symbols I can really learn fast and I really learn many symbols. And when I started reading, taking these children's books with limited vocabulary and could actually read them. This was fantastic. I had a feeling of so much joy.* (P1)

P3 also struggled with Chinese characters at the first stage, but he emphasised that the demotivating influence of characters decreased when he realised that listening and speaking were even more difficult and urgent. In such a case, one's previous enemy (i.e., characters) can become a friend, meaning that a demotivating factor can turn into a motivation-enhancing factor and vice versa.

> *But these demotivating factors, they change because you find at some point you feel comfortable with characters and instead of seeing that as the most difficult part it becomes ironically the easiest part because you find that at that point. Wow. Like someone speaks to me and I didn't get a thing.* (P2)

The force of the same demotivating factor varies from individual to individual due to different personal traits, especially different levels of self-efficacy as explained in Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory. Self-efficacy refers to one's belief to perform necessary actions to produce designated attainments. While individuals with a high level of self-efficacy engage in activities, exert effort, maintain persistence, and attain achievements, less efficacious learners invest less effort and time in learning activities in the face of difficulties and thus are unsuccessful (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021). Self-efficacy interacts with related outcomes and other factors in the environment. Therefore, in a dynamic learning period, a mixture of various demotivating factors constantly affects one's motivation.
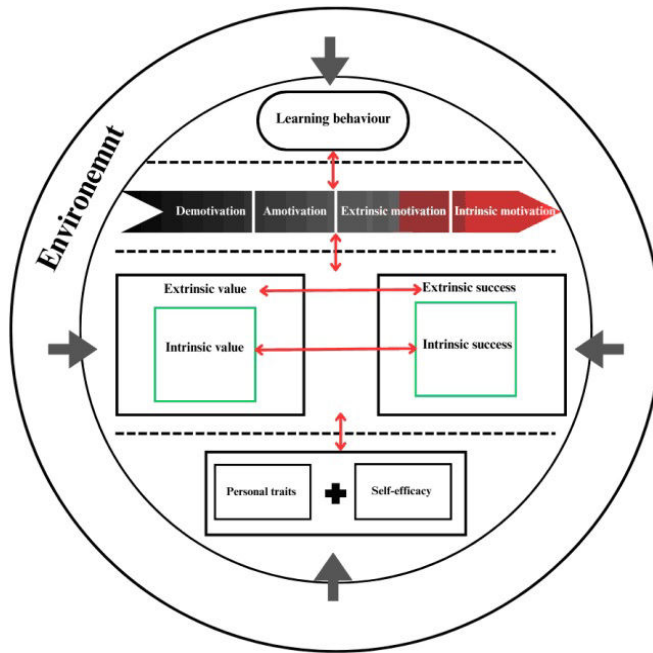
5. Demotivation in L2 learning motivation models

Many language learning motivation models, such as those proposed by Gardner (1985) and Dornyei (1994), are also based on relatively formal classroom settings, where intrinsic motivation can be challenging to sustain (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For adult L2 learners, particularly those for whom the language is not directly relevant to their profession, intrinsic pleasure in learning is crucial. Cronin-Golomb and Bauer (2023) highlighted the importance of exploring self-motivated learning to understand both child and adult learning behaviours.

To fully grasp the motivation mechanisms, it is necessary to consider self-regulated learning and its influencing factors. Cronin-Golomb and Bauer (2023) categorised motivators into situational and personal motivators. Situational motivators include social interaction, problem-solving, and a love of learning, which align closely with Van den Branden's (2022) concepts of 'social value', 'utility value', and 'attainment value'. As Van den Branden emphasised, motivation formation is a process that begins with personal factors such as individual traits and self-efficacy.

The qualitative analysis of this study indicates that most demotivating factors can still be categorised within the components of Van den Branden's (2022) model, as acknowledged by the participants. However, there is room for optimising this model. The discussion highlights the intricate relationship between demotivation and motivation and how both are subject to change.

The findings suggest that personal traits and self-efficacy are the driving forces behind learners' additional language learning behaviours, which in turn shape their perceived value of learning a new language. Value and success operate as secondary motivational drivers, mutually influencing each other. Environmental factors, including resources, learning spaces, and opportunities, along with other contextual factors, create a motivational context that impacts the entire motivation and behaviour system. Furthermore, there is mutual influence across different levels of motivation. The overall level of motivation affects the direction of learning behaviours, whether it be initiating, continuing, or terminating the learning process. We propose a multi-level model to represent this system, which is visually summarised in Graph 5.

Graph 5. A multi-level L2 learning motivation model
Source: designed by the author

The proposed model does not seek to encompass all existing models in the literature but aims to highlight several key concepts for understanding the motivational system of adult L2 learners.

First, motivation arises from various inner traits, such as personality and personal beliefs. As Cronin-Golomb and Bauer (2023) assert, personal traits and beliefs about self-efficacy are powerful drivers of learning behaviour. Second, the overall level of motivation is largely influenced by perceived successes that align with the values that learners attach to their learning activities. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), it is reasonable to view different types of motivation as existing on a continuum. However, the concept of 'demotivation', a negative motivational state resulting from failing to reach a positive motivation threshold, should also be included in this continuum. All variables, including environmental factors, interact dynamically within this system, creating a complex motivation mechanism that can be likened to a 'mixture chemical reaction'. In summary, the motivation mechanism is a multi-dimensional, dynamic, and multi-level system.

Conclusion

This study conducted a case study based on three individual interviews with three adult European L2 Chinese learners to examine demotivating factors at different learning stages. Several key points emerged from the study. First, a reduction in motivation often results from the negative development of initial motivating factors, and the most influential demotivating elements originate from negative incidents that decrease a learner's perceptions of 'success' and 'value'. Second, different dominant demotivating factors appeared throughout the individuals' learning periods, with the weight of co-existing factors varying at different stages. Third, demotivating factors were most intense immediately after the initial phases of learning, and unless addressed promptly, these factors could significantly reduce overall motivation. Conversely, timely intervention could mitigate their impact. Finally, the author proposed a multi-level motivation model, emphasising that the motivation mechanism is a multi-dimensional, dynamic, and multi-level system. The loss of motivation is attributed to the failure to reach the positive motivation threshold.

However, the study has several limitations, primarily due to its small sample size. The research could have been improved by adopting an exploratory mixed-methods approach, incorporating a follow-up survey to collect quantitative data on the weakening of motivation among L2 Chinese learners. A larger dataset would enable a correlational analysis of demotivating learning behaviours and negative variables, helping identify the most influential factors. Additionally, the language learning motivation model proposed at the end of the discussion is highly simplified and lacks support from extensive theoretical and empirical research.

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Appendix. Interview Instruction leaflet

Dear participant,

Thank you for participating in this interview that aims to investigate demotivating factors in the learning of L2 Chinese among European adult learners. I understand that you may have encountered various difficulties and experienced demotivation while learning Chinese, a language distinct from your native tongue. It can be challenging for native Chinese speakers to imagine these obstacles. Therefore, your personal stories and opinions are highly valuable to this research, which focuses on individual differences in demotivating factors in long-term Chinese learning.——

Main questions in the semi-structured interview:

1. Can you please share your overall experience of learning Chinese so far?

2. Were there any moments when you felt demotivated in learning Chinese?

I would like to invite you to draw a line graph for each to present the changes of your overall motivation, your perception of success, value, autonomy, and environment by time in advance. Don't worry about the drawing, it's just a visual way to present the invisible motivation.

Let's move on. Do you think this motivation model applies to you? I would like to hear your stories and opinions. You can contribute to building this model! Studies have shown that motivation in language learning is influenced by various major factors, including success, value, autonomy, as well as environment. Like this picture below, I will explain later.

factors	explanation	examples	questions
success	Your evaluation of your past and expectancy for future achievements	Extrinsic success: external rewards, e.g. higher salary; praises from others; Intrinsic success: internal rewards, e.g. self satisfaction Long-term vs short-term successes	• How did your perception about success demotivate you in learning Chinese?
value	Your evaluation of the value of the stake and the outcomes of your language learning	Intrinsic value: learning Chinese learning itself is fun or not Social value: social usefulness of your Chinese learning Utility value: usefulness of learning Chinese Attainment value: the significance you attach to learning Chinese, this learning behavior itself.	• What type of values demotivated you in learning Chinese?
autonomy	How much freedom do you feel in learning Chinese	High autonomy: decide learning materials, time and pace, goals by yourself Low autonomy: other decides your learning goals and materials	• How would autonomy demotivate you in Chinese learning?
environment	Environment refers to both physical and virtual surroundings where you learn Chinese	Learning resources: like courses, textbooks, apps, etc. the exact place where you study Or teaching approaches, and the relationships between you and your peers and the teachers. Or it can also include a wider range of the relationship between China and your own country, represented by the media	• What are the factors from the environment that could demotivate you? And how?
Other	Not covered by the model	Anything you would like to add Or you would like to make some comments about this model?	• Are there any demotivating factors or incidents from your personal experience that couldn't fit in the model we just discussed?