



Motivated Minds: Unpacking the Reasons for Learning German as Foreign Language

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ABSTRACT

In the context of foreign language teaching and learning motivation plays a crucial role, as it influences how effectively and persistently a learner acquires the language. The complexity of language learning requires not only cognitive skills but also a range of emotional and psychological factors, among which motivation is considered a primary determinant. Motivational theories in language acquisition have evolved over the years, highlighting various dimensions of motivation, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as well as integrative and instrumental orientations. In this study, Indian German as foreign language learners with English as their first language were asked about their motivation for learning German. The approach was quantitative; a questionnaire survey was conducted with students at Amity University Rajasthan in Jaipur who were learning German as foreign language as Value added course for 2 credits as part of their Bachelor of Business Administration studies. Both internal personality factors and external factors were included in the study and results are displayed by descriptive statistics.

Introduction

In the contemporary, globally interconnected society, globalization has exerted a significant influence on various dimensions of life, including education and the growing demand for proficiency in foreign languages. The escalating necessity for multilingual individuals within the international labor market, combined with the proliferation of global educational opportunities, has positioned language acquisition



as a fundamental aspect of modern education. Consequently, the motivation to learn foreign languages extends beyond the mere acquisition of an additional skill; it is intrinsically linked to accessing opportunities and effectively navigating a globalized world. In this context, understanding the motivations behind students' interest in learning German, particularly those pursuing non-technical disciplines, is of considerable academic interest.

The process of learning a new language extends beyond the mastery of grammar and vocabulary; it is equally concerned with maintaining motivation throughout the learning journey. Motivation, encompassing both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, plays a pivotal role in determining the success of language learners. However, within the classroom context, motivation is frequently marginalized in favor of instructional methodologies or curricular content. This research project seeks to examine the various factors that influence the motivation of foreign language learners, with particular emphasis on the classroom environment. Specifically, it will explore the role of educators in shaping students' motivation and investigate how learners' personal goals and interests affect their language acquisition. Through the use of surveys and interviews with language learners, this study aims to provide valuable insights that can inform and enhance classroom practices, fostering a more motivated and engaged learning community. While extensive research has been conducted on language acquisition, there remains a notable gap in understanding the impact of motivation on language learners within the classroom setting.

Research on second language (L2) motivation encompasses a variety of approaches and theoretical perspectives. Prior to the 1990s, the social-psychological framework proposed by Gardner largely dominated the field. Gardner and Lambert (1972) underscored the significance of attitudes toward the target language, its speakers, and the culture associated with it, alongside the role of learner orientations in shaping motivation. Central to their model was the distinction between integrative and instrumental orientations, a categorization that has spurred considerable debate in literature. Specifically, an integrative orientation is characterized by a desire to engage with the target language community, either to understand its culture or to interact with its speakers, while an instrumental orientation is driven by more pragmatic concerns, such as acquiring a language for career advancement or educational purposes. Clément and Kruidenier (1983) expanded upon instrumental orientation¹ by introducing additional categories, including travel, friendship, and knowledge orientations, further enriching the understanding of motivation in L2 acquisition.

Zoltán Dörnyei has developed the theory of the L2 Motivational Self System, which focuses more strongly on the learner's individual self-reference. Dörnyei defined Motivation as:



“a process whereby a certain amount of instigation force arises, initiates action, and persists as long as no other force comes into play to weaken it and thereby terminate action, or until the planned outcome has been reached”. ⁱⁱ

He refers to the tangible experiences a learner encounters throughout the learning process, which include perceptions of success and frustration, as well as the dynamics of their relationship with educators. Furthermore, the self-image that a learner cultivates, influenced by external expectations—such as those from parents, teachers, or employers, also plays a significant role in shaping motivation. In addition to Dörnyei, numerous other scholars have engaged with contemporary motivation research, both theoretically and empirically, contributing to the advancement of the field.

According to Deci and Ryan (1985), intrinsic motivation necessitates self-determination, as it is driven by fundamental human needs such as autonomy, the need for self-regulation, and the desire for self-initiation. Consequently, the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is not always clearly defined. Learners become motivated when they perceive the activity as engaging and enjoyable. For instance, an individual may choose to learn a language due to a genuine interest in the culture or the language itself. In contrast, extrinsic motivation is driven by external factors, such as grades or social recognition. This type of motivation exists on a continuum, ranging from the least autonomous (external rewards) to the most autonomous (integrated regulation).

Motivation can be conceptualized as a facet of an individual's personality or as a reflection of their personal desires and interests, such as the desire to travel, within the framework of integrated regulation. This form of extrinsic motivation is associated with the highest degree of self-determination. Mihaljević (1993) emphasized that motivation for language learning is complex and encompasses a range of social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, rather than being restricted to a binary distinction between integrative and instrumental motivations. Emotional factors, such as enjoyment, personal interest, and cultural appeal, significantly influence the desire to learn a language. According to Mihaljević, motivation is shaped by both external factors (e.g., social status, rewards, societal expectations) and internal factors (e.g., personal goals, linguistic interest, and cultural curiosity). For example, learners may be driven by intrinsic motivations, such as the enjoyment of the learning process or the desire for self-expression, while external influences, such as societal pressure or aspirations for professional advancement, can also play a considerable role in motivating language acquisition.

A key study in the field of German as a foreign language is Riemer's (1997) work, which explores the interplay between motivation and various influencing factors in the context of foreign students learning



German. In her research, Riemer investigates the roles of social, affective, personality, and teaching-related factors in shaping language learning motivation. Riemer highlights that motivation in language acquisition is often significantly affected by the learner's cultural background, suggesting that the motivations for learning a language can differ according to one's social, cultural, and personal context. Moreover, she underscores the importance of goal setting in sustaining language learning motivation. When learners establish specific, well-defined goals for their language learning, they are more likely to maintain motivation and remain engaged throughout the learning process.

Methodology

This research project utilized a mixed methods approach to explore the impact of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on student engagement. A Questionnaire survey was administered to 45 students enrolled in bachelor's course (Bachelor of Business Administration)ⁱⁱⁱ, with questions designed to assess students' perceptions of learning German and their own levels of engagement. The survey included 20 questions, primarily using Likert scale and multiple-choice formats, and was distributed via email. Alongside the survey, classroom observations were conducted over a period of four weeks, with two observations per week. Detailed notes on teacher-student interactions and student engagement during lessons were taken. Observations were semi-structured, focusing on the effectiveness of instructional strategies and the classroom environment. Survey data were analyzed using frequency analysis, while qualitative observation data were analyzed using thematic coding. Ethical considerations were paramount, and all participants provided informed consent with assurances of confidentiality. The limitations of the study include the relatively small sample size, and the specificity of the classroom settings observed.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 40 foreign language learners (26 males, 14 females) ranging in age from 17 to 20 years. All participants were undergraduate students at Amity University Rajasthan India, enrolled in value added German as foreign language course^{iv} during the semester. The learners have studied English and one regional language in their school, before started with German as beginners. Participants were selected based on their enrollment in a language course in the first semester. The study aimed to examine both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors influencing their language learning behavior. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.

Data Collection



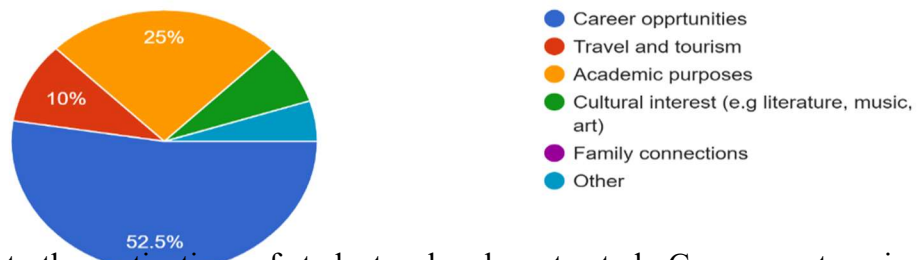
A Questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data from students. It included 15 questions with a mix of Likert scale, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions. The questions were intended to assess students' attitudes, behaviors, and experiences related to German as foreign language. The survey was distributed through an online link to students' emails and was open for two weeks, ensuring anonymity and voluntary participation.

The purpose of this analysis is to examine the motivation levels of German as foreign language learners (FL) through a questionnaire. The questionnaire focuses on intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, attitudes towards learning, and the perceived challenges of learning a foreign language. A 15 -item questionnaire contained questions on intrinsic Motivation (e.g., interest in the language, enjoyment of learning), Extrinsic Motivation (e.g., career opportunities, academic requirements), Attitudes towards the Language (e.g., cultural appreciation, language utility), and Challenges (e.g., difficulty of grammar, lack of practice opportunities).

Presentation of Results

The statistical data reveals a notable trend among Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) students, who have increasingly selected German as their preferred foreign language over other options such as French, Spanish, and Chinese, which are also offered as value-added courses by the university. This shift in preference can be attributed to the perceived advantages that proficiency in German offers, particularly in relation to enhanced job opportunities in fields such as business and international relations. The growing interest in German suggests that students recognize the strategic value of this language in the global job market, where German is often regarded as a key language in business, commerce, and diplomatic contexts. This trend highlights the influence of career-oriented motivations in shaping students' language learning choices, reflecting an awareness of the competitive advantages that linguistic skills in German can provide in their future professional endeavors.

Figure 1. What motivated you to choose German as a foreign language?
40 responses



This data presents insights into the motivations of students who chose to study German, categorized by their primary reasons for selecting the language. Half of the students (50%) selected German as a

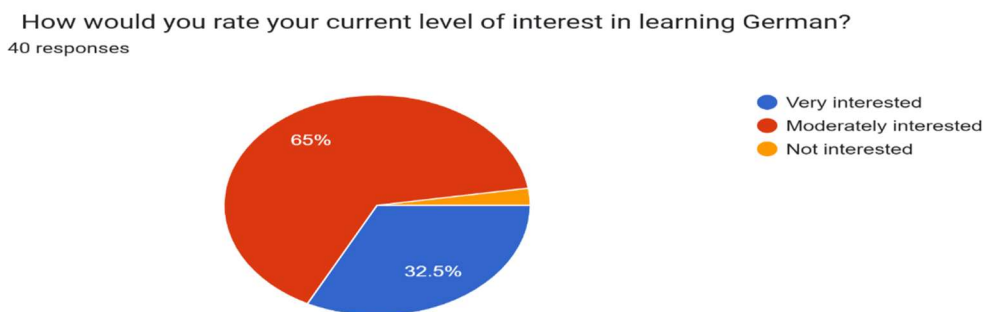


strategic choice, motivated by job opportunities. This significant percentage suggests that the students perceive proficiency in German as an asset for securing positions in international companies, fostering global business relations, or enhancing their employability within industries where German is a key language. The importance of German in multinational organizations and sectors like engineering, science, and finance may be factors contributing to this preference. A quarter of the students chose German for academic reasons, indicating an interest in German literature, culture, or specialized academic programs. This group likely values the language for its academic richness, offering access to classic works in philosophy, literature, and history, as well as enabling participation in research or university programs conducted in German.

A smaller portion, 10%, selected German with tourism in mind. This group likely sees the language as a tool for travel and cultural exploration, which may include enhancing their ability to navigate German-speaking countries and engage more deeply with local cultures during trips.

The smallest proportion, 8%, chose German due to cultural interest. While this is a minority, it reflects an appreciation for the broader cultural aspects of German-speaking regions, such as art, music, and traditions, indicating that for some students, the language serves as a gateway to deeper cultural understanding.

Figure 2.



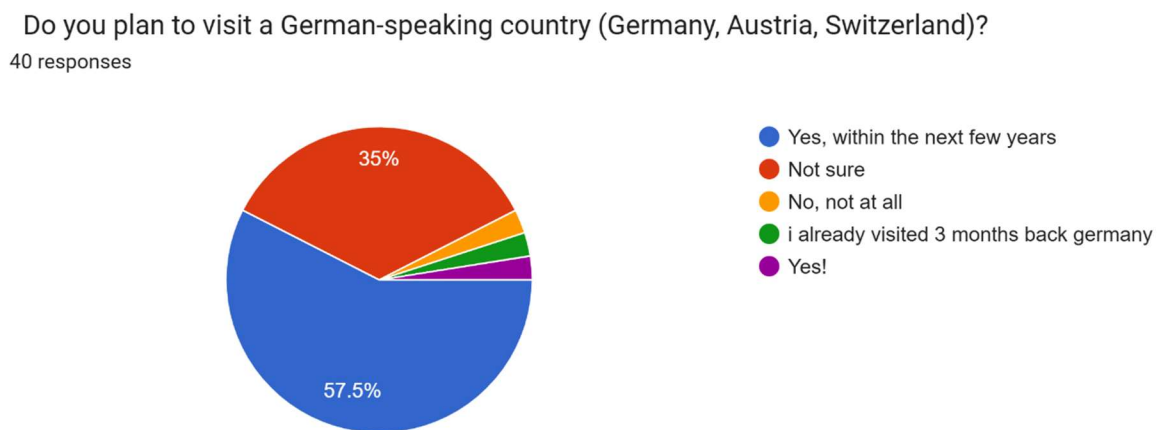
The next statistical data indicates varying levels of interest among students in learning German, which can be categorized into two primary groups based on their responses. Approximately 32 percent of students demonstrate a strong interest in learning German. This suggests that nearly a third of the students are highly motivated by the language, likely to indicate a deeper or more passionate connection to its study. This group might be driven by factors such as a strong academic or career-related goal, cultural interest, or personal reasons that create a high level of enthusiasm toward mastering the



language. A larger proportion, 65 percent, shows a moderate level of interest. This indicates that most students are somewhat engaged with the idea of learning German, but their motivation may be less intense compared to the 32 percent with strong interest. Students in this category may view the language as useful or beneficial but may not have the same level of passion or commitment as the highly interested group. The reasons for this moderate interest could include practical considerations, such as fulfilling an academic requirement, enhancing employability, or having a casual interest in the language without a strong drive to become highly proficient.

The data reveals a disparity in the levels of enthusiasm among students, with a clear divide between those who are deeply invested in learning German and those who show a more reserved or moderate interest. This suggests that while German is seen as valuable, its appeal may not be universally compelling. For educators or program designers, this could inform strategies for enhancing engagements such as offering tailored learning experiences that cater to both highly motivated learners and those with moderate interest, thus fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for language acquisition.

Figure 3



The statistical data suggests a clear connection between the prospect of visiting a German-speaking country and the motivation of students to learn the German language and engage more deeply with German-speaking cultures. The responses reveal that the potential for travel serves as both a tangible and intangible incentive, driving students to learn German. This can be categorized as extrinsic motivation, where external factors, such as the desire to visit Germany, influence students' interest in acquiring the language.



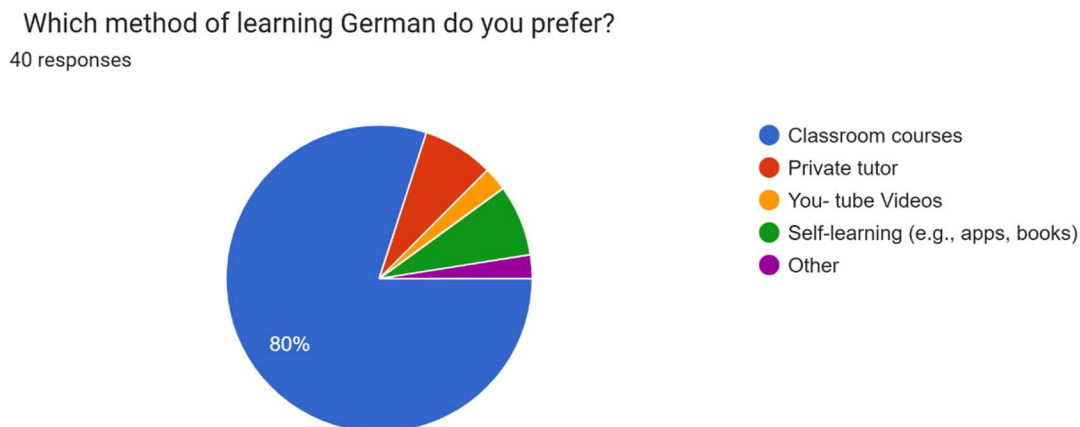
The fact that most respondents expressed a strong desire to visit Germany in the coming years highlights the importance of travel as a motivating factor. This desire to travel is likely linked to the perceived cultural, economic, or educational benefits that come with visiting a German-speaking country. 35% of respondents who were uncertain about whether they would visit soon could indicate a degree of hesitation or uncertainty about the feasibility or immediacy of such a trip, but their interest in learning the language may still be driven by the long-term goal of eventual travel.

The survey results align with established theories on extrinsic motivation, where external rewards (in this case, the opportunity to visit a German-speaking country) significantly influence behavior. This suggests that for many students, the motivation to learn German is not solely driven by an intrinsic interest in the language itself, but by the external incentive of travel and the associated experiences.

Overall, the data highlights the important role that extrinsic motivation—specifically the desire to travel to Germany—plays in students' decisions to engage with the German language and culture. It suggests that fostering opportunities for students to connect their language learning with real-world applications, such as travel, could enhance their overall motivation and learning outcomes.

In the subsequent section, data was collected regarding students' preferred methodologies for acquiring a foreign language.

Figure 4

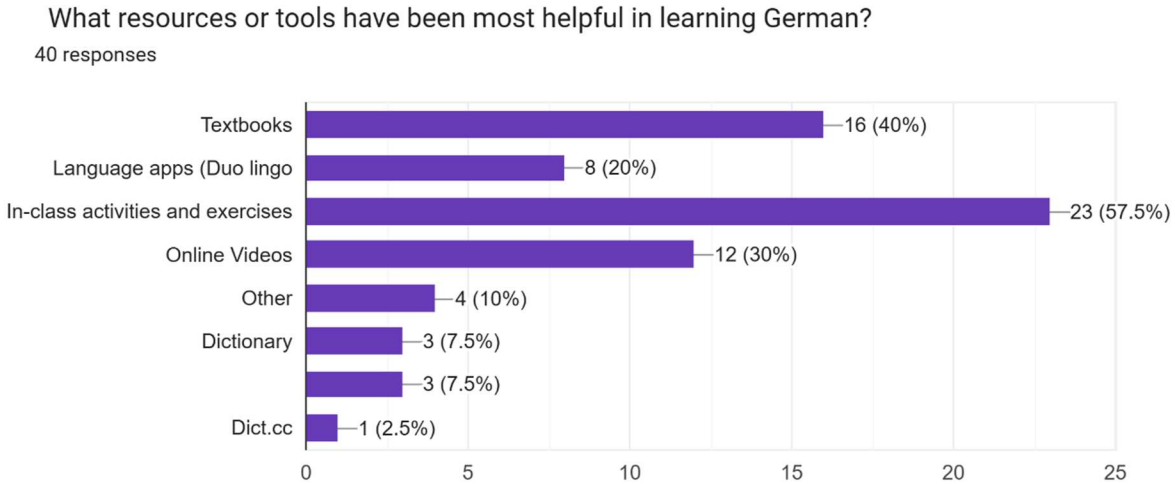


As illustrated in Figure 4, a substantial majority of participants, comprising 80 percent, expressed a preference for learning languages through formal classroom courses, thereby indicating a clear inclination toward structured, instructor-led environments. Conversely, only 10 percent of respondents



avored self-directed learning tools, which implies that the majority of students perceive greater value in direct instruction and interactive engagement within a classroom context.

Figure 5



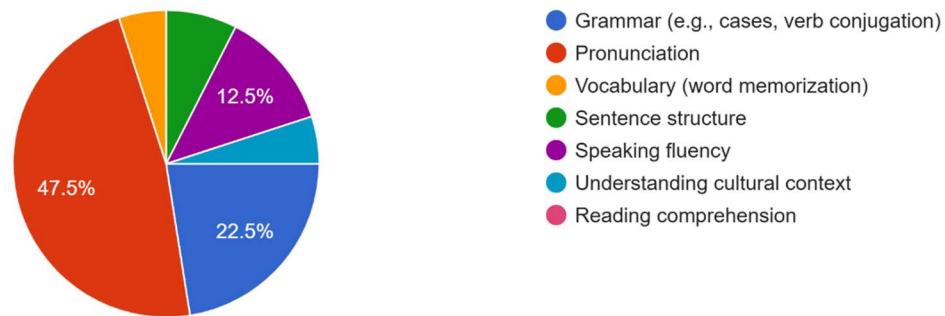
The following question requested students to indicate which tools or resources they considered most effective in learning German. According to the results, 58% of participants identified language learning applications as the most beneficial resource. Additionally, 40% of respondents regarded textbooks as essential to their language acquisition process. A further 30% of students highlighted the usefulness of online video resources, particularly for improving pronunciation and listening skills. Only 10% of students reported utilizing supplementary resources such as language apps and online dictionaries.

The next section of the questionnaire sought to gather students' perceptions regarding the difficulty level of learning German as a foreign language.

Figure 6

Which aspect of the German language do you find most challenging?

40 responses



Students provided diverse perspectives on the perceived difficulty of the German language. While some participants considered the language relatively easy to acquire, others identified significant challenges, particularly in areas such as pronunciation, grammar, and speaking fluency. A notable number of students reported greater difficulty in comprehending native speakers, whereas some expressed higher levels of confidence in reading and vocabulary acquisition. Overall, there was a consensus that German is moderately difficult; however, many students expressed confidence that, with consistent practice, they would continue to make progress in their language learning journey.

According to Gardner and Lambert's theory, learners' efforts, including the time and energy dedicated to learning, are influenced by the type of motivation they possess. The effort component of learning is typically assessed through self-reports, such as the amount of time spent on homework or the initiatives the learner is willing to undertake. This effort can also be viewed as an observable behavioral manifestation of motivation rather than merely an influencing factor. Mihaljevic (1994) posits that effort and persistence are contingent upon various factors, with the learner's evaluation of the course content's relevance and the teacher's competence potentially exerting a particularly strong influence. In contrast, the perceived difficulty of the course or the learner's general attitude toward learning appears to play a less significant role.

Conclusion

In conclusion, motivation constitutes a central and multifaceted determinant in the process of second and foreign language acquisition, influencing learners' cognitive engagement, behavioral persistence, and affective orientation toward the learning experience. The dynamic interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors profoundly shapes the depth and sustainability of language learning



outcomes. A comprehensive understanding of motivation—its sources, fluctuations, and contextual dependencies—is therefore indispensable for both educators and researchers aiming to optimize pedagogical effectiveness.

Educators who deliberately design instruction to activate both intrinsic motivation (arising from personal interest, enjoyment, and self-fulfillment) and extrinsic motivation (derived from external rewards such as grades, career advancement, or social recognition) create a pedagogical environment that supports sustained learner engagement and goal attainment. This dual focus acknowledges that while intrinsic motivation fosters autonomy and long-term commitment, extrinsic incentives often serve as the initial catalysts for engagement, particularly in formal academic settings.

Given that motivation is not static but evolves in response to learners' experiences, perceptions of success, and sociocultural contexts, ongoing empirical research is necessary to delineate the complex interrelations among motivational constructs and learning trajectories. The gradual transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation—observed as learners begin to derive enjoyment, self-efficacy, and intercultural insight from the learning process—illustrates the developmental nature of motivational orientation.

This study underscores the continued significance of extrinsic motivation among undergraduate learners, for whom pragmatic considerations such as career prospects, academic achievement, and global mobility function as key drivers of sustained effort. Consequently, language programs that strategically integrate extrinsic motivators while simultaneously fostering conditions for intrinsic growth can enhance not only learner persistence but also the cultivation of intercultural competence and global readiness. In an increasingly interconnected world, such an approach ensures that language learning serves as both an academic pursuit and a means of professional and personal empowerment.

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ⁱ This involves how learners perceive and organize knowledge. It may include their ability to recognize patterns, make connections, and use prior knowledge to approach new concepts.

ⁱⁱ Dörnyei 1998

ⁱⁱⁱ BBA is an undergraduate degree program that focuses on providing students with a comprehensive understanding of business management, administration, and organizational skills. The course is designed to equip students with knowledge in areas such as marketing, finance, human resources, economics, accounting, operations management, and business communication.

^{iv} The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India emphasize skill development, multidisciplinary learning, and the integration of value-added courses into mainstream education.