Young learners’ motivation for learning English

Yingying Li, Ye Han and Xuesong Gao

Introduction

In view of the perceived importance of English competence for individuals’ personal and professional pursuits, a rapidly growing number of children are starting to learn English at an early age globally and in diverse contexts, including countries such as China and Spain (e.g., Butler 2015a; Copland et al. 2014). In these contexts, English has been promoted as an important academic subject in elementary schools, which constitutes ‘possibly the world’s biggest policy development in education’ (Johnstone 2009, p. 33). In addition to formal English education, children of well-off families learn English out of class by attending private tutorials, using learning materials and participating in tailored study-abroad programmes (e.g., Butler 2015a).

The growing global popularity of English among young learners has been followed by an increasing scholarly attention to the learning processes and achievements of young language learners. However, current knowledge about young learners is still limited with regard to (a) what motivates them to learn English; and (b) the motivational process as they progress through schooling. Despite an explosion of studies on adult language learners’ language learning motivation, findings generated from studies on adult learners may not be applicable or generalizable to young ones since adults and the young learn English in different situations with different cognitive, psychological and affective levels of maturity (Boo et al. 2015). In this chapter, we present a critical review of research on young learners’ motivation to learn English as a second language (‘L2’) or a foreign language (‘FL’). To clarify the scope of this review, young learners are defined as children up to and including the elementary school level (typically up to 12–13 years old) (see Butler 2015a, 2015b).

Historical perspectives

Since language, as ‘an integral part of an individual’s identity involved in almost all mental activities’ (Dörnyei 1996, p. 72), serves as an interpersonal communication system and a tool for social organisation, research on language learning motivation has been influenced by both social and cognitive theories. Among a variety of theories of motivation in the field
YLs’ motivation for learning English

(Boo et al. 2015; Dörnyei 2005; Dörnyei and Ryan 2015; Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011), three major theories have dominated the scene: Gardner’s (1985) socio-educational model, self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 1985; Ryan and Deci 2000) and Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self System (‘L2 MSS’). In the following sections, we introduce theoretical constructs commonly used in contemporary motivational research so that these constructs can be used to discuss research related to young learners’ language learning motivation.

**Integrative versus instrumental motivation**

Drawing on social psychology research, Gardner’s (1985) conceptualisation of motivation emphasises individual learners’ attitudes towards L2 and the L2 community and differentiates integrative motivation from instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation refers to learners’ ‘willingness to be like the valued members of the language community’ (Gardner and Lambert 1972, p. 271), which can involve L2 learners’ positive feelings toward the L2 group and the desire to interact with and even become similar to members of the target language community. In contrast, as the utilitarian counterpart of integrative motivation, instrumental motivation speaks of pragmatic gains from L2 proficiency, such as getting a better job or a higher salary.

Although Gardner’s (1985) motivation model dominated the field for many years, we found that most of the related studies covered secondary or post-secondary adult L2 learners. Gardner’s (1985) study has not been used to explore young learners’ L2 motivation, with only a few exceptions including Donitsa-Schmidt et al. (2004) and Lamb (2004). This lack of research may be due in part to the fact that during the period when this model (integrative versus instrumental motivation) dominated academic research, i.e., from 1950s to 1990s, young learners’ L2 learning was scarcely examined, in general. When young learners started to attract more research attention, limitations of Gardner’s model of L2 motivation were recognised and criticised. Gardner’s (1985) L2 motivation model has also become less applicable to the contemporary world as English is becoming the lingua franca, more widely used between non-native speakers (e.g., Butler 2015a, 2015b; Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011; Kim 2012a, 2012b; Zhang and Kim 2013). Not all learners, therefore, interact and establish connections with the target language community (Butler 2015a). In fact, young learners, especially those in EFL countries with low socioeconomic status (‘SES’), usually have little direct contact with English when out of class and have few opportunities to interact with members of a target language community. This probably explains why some of the Indonesian students (11–12 years old) in Lamb (2004, 2013) were found less likely to identify themselves with the target language community and culture even though they were highly motivated to learn the language.

**Intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation**

Researchers have also conceptualised individual learners’ language learning motivation in light of the self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci and Ryan 1985; Ryan and Deci 2000). Unlike the Gardner’s motivation model, SDT focuses on individual language learners’ selves to explain what motivates them to learn in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Intrinsic motivation refers to ‘behavior performed for its own sake in order to experience pleasure and satisfaction, such as the joys of doing a particular activity or satisfying one’s curiosity’ (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2011, p. 23), while extrinsic motivation involves ‘performing a behavior as a means to some separable end, such as receiving an extrinsic reward (e.g., good grades) or avoiding punishment’ (ibid.).
Previous research has consistently shown that intrinsically driven motivation is more beneficial than the extrinsically controlled motivation as it can enhance learners’ self-efficacy, positive emotions and engagement with learning (Corpus et al. 2009; Noels et al. 2000). Therefore, a central question in SDT is how a person originally driven by external factors can become more self-regulated in the presence of social support that meets psychological needs, including autonomy, competence and relatedness.

With regard to young learners, SDT has been more frequently used than other L2 motivation frameworks (e.g., Butler 2015b; Carreira 2006, 2011, 2012; Kissau et al. 2015; Mady 2010; Noels et al. 1999; Wu 2003). Carreira’s (2006, 2011, 2012) studies on young learners in Japan have revealed that the participants’ motivation may become more internally controlled when psychological needs (such as autonomy, competence and relatedness) are satisfied. In China, Wu (2003) found that teachers can enhance young learners’ (four- to six-year-olds) intrinsic motivation by fostering their sense of ownership of the learning process and self-perceived competence. Furthermore, research informed by SDT has shown that development of children’s intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation may differ across age groups and contexts, demonstrating the complex nature of motivation constructs. However, researchers (e.g., Butler 2015a, p. 319) have cautioned against employing linear statistical models as implied in the SDT framework to explore young learners’ motivation and have suggested ‘more contextualised approaches to [understanding] motivation’ in specific settings.

While previous findings have shown a strong consensus on the decline of intrinsic motivation as children grow older, the developmental path of extrinsic motivation is less clear. Some studies have reported a decline in both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation as students move from the third to the sixth grade (Carreira 2006; see also Enever 2009 for pupils’ decreasing positive attitudes towards foreign language learning activities), whereas others have reported an increase in extrinsic motivation in the same period (Anderman et al. 1999). Research has also revealed that extrinsic motivation emerges at age 11 or 12 and is more frequently perceived as the driving force underlying L2 learning by elder learners (11–14 years old) than by younger learners (6–10 years old) (Nikolov 1999).

L2 motivational self system

Echoing the SDT’s focus on self, Dörnyei and colleagues (e.g., Csizér and Dörnyei 2005; Dörnyei and Ushioda 2009) proposed a new theoretical model to investigate L2 motivation, i.e., the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei 2009). This model consists of three main components: (1) the Ideal-L2 Self, referring to the idealised images learners have of themselves as future L2 users; (2) the Ought-to L2 Self, composed of idealised images generally intended to please others or avoid negative repercussions; and (3) the L2 Learning Experience, involving ‘situated, executive motives which are associated with the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g., the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success)’ (Dörnyei 2009, p. 29). Although the L2 Motivational Self System has gained popularity as a major theoretical framework of L2 motivation (e.g., Haggerty and Fox 2015; Iwaniec 2014; You and Dörnyei 2016), it has not yet been widely used in young learners’ motivation research. Lack of research with orientation to the L2 Motivational Self System on young learners is not entirely unexpected since young learners, especially those before or in elementary school, tend to be less self-conscious (suggested in Kissau et al. 2015) and have a vaguer self-system than adults (Iwaniec 2014). Their self-system is still emerging and developing, and the process is most likely to be shaped by the
YLs’ motivation for learning English

immediate learning environment – parents, peers, teachers and instruction in and out of class. However, this does not mean that the L2 Motivational Self System cannot be applied to young learners of L2; given the paucity of research from this theoretical orientation and the changing nature of self-system of young learners, researchers should consider using the L2 Motivational Self System when exploring participants’ L2 motivation.

Although we present the three theoretical frameworks of L2 motivation separately, it is worth noting that empirical research on L2 motivation of young learners does not necessarily follow only one theoretical perspective. It has been quite common for researchers to draw concepts and constructs from more than one framework. For instance, Lamb (2004) investigated instrumental versus integrative motivational orientation but criticised this distinction and suggested the importance of future self as a motivating factor. Cheung and Pomerantz (2012) categorised the motivational orientations emerging in their data into identified motivation, introjected motivation, extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. Thus, the theoretical constructs reviewed earlier may be employed in a variety of combinations in specific empirical studies based on the researchers’ operational conceptualisation of L2 motivation.

Critical issues and topics

When appreciating young language learners’ motivation, it is important to remember that young learners are less likely to be motivated for integrative reasons, as they usually have limited direct contact with native speakers in many contexts. Unlike adults, they do not face the urgency of getting a good job or entering higher education (motivated for instrumental reasons) (Huang 2011). In addition, their consciousness of selves may be vaguer than that of adults, and still developing. Given these characteristics of young learners, researchers have increasingly recognised that L2 learners’ motivation can be mediated by a wide range of factors and specific learning situations that they experience (Dörnyei 1998; Pinter 2017). Specifically, motivation can be shaped by people involved in or related to their learning of English (e.g., parents, teachers and peers) and teaching and learning in the classroom environment (e.g., learning activities and way of instructions), or other related factors. These become the critical issues and topics that need to be explored.

Parental involvement

Research in educational psychology has recognised the important role parents play in their children’s educational attainments (e.g., Bakker et al. 2007; Gonzalez-DeHass et al. 2005). Much evidence presented by researchers has shown that parents’ involvement in children’s learning, such as discussing children’s school work with them and offering immediate help for learning whenever needed, can help children foster positive attitudes towards education and strengthen self-efficacy beliefs, which in turn enhance learning achievements (Butler 2015b; Cheung and Pomerantz 2012; Grolnick et al. 2009; Pomerantz and Moorman 2010).

L2 learning research has also acknowledged the critical role of parents (e.g., Sung and Padilla 1998; Gardner et al. 1999; Gao 2012). Empirical research has showed that parental involvement can help predict students’ attitudes towards and motivation of learning an L2 (e.g., Mady 2010). Gardner et al. (1999) showed that parents’ encouragement motivates children to invest efforts in language learning (also see Mady 2010). Such findings are highly significant since research into challenges and issues of teaching English to young learners (e.g., Copland et al. 2014; Garton 2014) has reported that young learners to some
extent lack motivation and interest in learning English, as they may not fully understand the value of learning the language.

It must be noted that many studies on language learning motivation in East Asian countries have projected parental involvement as a common phenomenon since parents tend to impose high standards of academic excellence on their children (Bong et al. 2014). A comparison of Asian parents with European American and Latino parents (Okagaki and Frensch 1998) showed that the former had significantly higher expectations, as well as the ‘ideal’ image, of their children’s educational attainments. Asian parents, especially those with higher socioeconomic status, heavily invest time, energy and money in their children’s education. For instance, Gao (2012) examined the parental involvement in adolescents’ vocabulary learning in the Chinese context and found parents regulate and control children’s learning processes through mediating motivational discourses, beliefs and knowledge. In response, children in East Asian cultures have a strong sense of gratitude and indebtedness to their parents, especially in early school years, so children think it is their obligation to study harder to repay their parents and meet expectations so as to gain their approval (Park and Kim 2006). Although the parent-oriented motivation is controlled rather than autonomous (Cheung and Pomerantz 2012), it may still be beneficial to help enhance children’s engagement and ultimate academic achievement as a type of extrinsic motivation.

Parents’ socioeconomic status (SES)

Researchers have noted that language learning involves both individual cognitive activities and the efforts to obtain access to resources provided in social activities (e.g., Norton and Toohey 2001; Zuengler and Miller 2006), such as opportunities to communicate with competent speakers of the language and to use materials that can assist learning of the language (Palfreyman 2006). However, considerable differences exist across learners in terms of access to resources for learning English both within and outside the formal school system, which can largely be attributed to differences between SES of parents (e.g., Butler 2015b; Carhill et al. 2008; Gao 2012; Zou and Zhang 2011).

In EFL contexts, English is not used as the major language for communication, and frequent use of English is limited to people in certain communities, such as business and media (Feng 2012). Learners in such contexts often have few opportunities to ‘receive sufficient input to acquire practical communicative competency in English’ (Butler 2015a, p. 305). To learn and use English thus tends to require learners to pay extra money and to obtain more resources, which may not be affordable for people of low SES backgrounds (Hu 2009). The reality that learning English is costly in these contexts helps to explain the widening ‘gaps in accessibility and achievement in English by SES and region’ (Butler 2015a, p. 305). The unequal access to English-learning resources and the growing gaps in achievements resulting from SES of parents have prompted empirical research on the association between SES and children’s English learning motivation and achievements (e.g., Butler 2015b; Fernald et al. 2013; Gao 2012). Butler’s (2015b) mixed-method study on Chinese children found that parents with higher SES adjust their behaviours to their children’s changing needs and are able to provide greater opportunities for English communication outside of school, which is conducive to developing self-determined motivation. Gao’s (2012) study involving elite young Chinese adolescents also suggests that students whose parents have higher SES may obtain easy access to English-learning resources and are more likely to start learning English at an early age. These advantages may help to establish their confidence and enhance English competence, as well as strengthen motivation for learning.
it. Therefore, Butler (2015b, p. 411) contends that it is necessary for researchers to integrate the socioeconomic dimension into SLA theories which can help to ‘make a more meaningful contribution to improving language education, particularly given its implications of social equity’.

**Teacher and teaching-related factors mediating young learners’ English learning motivation**

Apart from parental involvement and parents’ SES, teachers and teaching programmes also mediate children’s motivation (Hamada 2011; Kikuchi 2009; Sakai and Kikuchi 2009). In their research on students’ (fourth to sixth grade) motivation for learning Arabic as an L2, Donitsa-Schmidt et al. (2004) discovered that students’ satisfaction with their Arabic language programme could best predict their motivation. This finding adds support to previous research arguing for the important role of quality language programmes in mediating enthusiasm and satisfaction with the learning environment (e.g., Ushioda 1998), which in turn influences motivation for learning the language. The quality of language programmes is largely dependent on teachers’ roles. However, the teacher’s role in shaping student motivation is a complex mechanism (e.g., Donitsa-Schmidt et al. 2004; Dörnyei 2001) since it involves various factors, such as teachers’ personality, classroom management skills and knowledge of the content. Dörnyei (1998), in his investigation of the relationship between students’ attitudes towards L2 and demotivation, found that the teacher is a main factor that demotivates students’ learning. Teachers’ personality, commitment, competence and teaching method were found to have influenced students’ motivation to learn languages. In particular, researchers have examined the impact of teacher instruction on young learners’ motivation to learn English (e.g., Huang 2011; Sundqvist and Sylven 2014). In Taiwan, Huang (2011) found that six-year-old first graders in the Content-Based Language Instruction (CBLI) class displayed more motivated behaviours, such as volunteering more eagerly in class, although he argued that the finding could also be attributed to other factors, such as class/lesson atmosphere, reward, difficulty of questions or tasks, and activity settings. Sundqvist and Sylven (2014) identified that computer-assisted language learning (CALL), in the form of digital games used in learners’ English language-related activities outside school, positively influenced fourth-grade English learners’ (aged 10–11) motivation to learn in Sweden.

Another influencing factor is assessment, such as standardised high-stakes language tests, which ‘possess power to exert an expected influence on teaching and learning because of the consequences they bring about’ (Qi 2007, p. 52). Researchers have been much concerned about the considerable influence that high-stakes examinations have on teaching and learning (e.g., Black and William 1998; Haggerty and Fox 2015; Ross 2008; Stobart and Eggen 2012). They have explored the relationship between assessment (such as high-stakes language tests) and students’ motivation for learning (e.g., Black and William 1998; Haggerty and Fox 2015; Harlen and Deakin Crick 2003). Choi (2008, p. 53) argued that such tests may create ‘unwarranted pressure’, ‘lead to invalid consequences’, and even raise ‘ethical issues regarding children’s right to learn in an appropriate manner’. Findings have revealed that under-achieving adolescent test takers are more likely to become ‘overwhelmed by assessments and demotivated by constant evidence of their low achievement thus further increasing the gap’ (Harlen and Deakin Crick 2003, p. 196).

With regard to young learners, Haggerty and Fox (2015) drew on the theoretical model of the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei and Ushioda 2009) to explore the complex
relationship between assessment practices and the motivation to learn English as a FL among young adolescents (12–15 years old) in South Korea, where there is a strong tradition of an exam-oriented learning. They found that the participants’ L2 motivation is significantly associated with the amount of time spent in L2 test preparation. Less motivated students were found to have spent less time, confirming the role of language assessment in mediating young learners’ L2 motivation. The issue deserves further investigation, particularly in test-intensive educational contexts, to further our understanding of influences of assessment on young learners’ L2 motivation.

In sum, multiple external factors can impact young learners’ dynamic motivation to learn English as an L2 or FL. More research is needed to explore how exactly each factor mediates motivation, how these factors interact with one another and whether the mediation of these factors changes as young learners grow older in specific contexts.

Current contributions and research

Recent research has highlighted the dynamic nature of L2 motivation, especially temporal variations (e.g., Dörnyei 2001; Dörnyei and Ushioda 2009, 2011; Kim 2012a). Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011, p. 6) stated that ‘motivation does not remain constant during the course of months, years or even during a single lesson. It ebbs and flows in complex ways in response to various internal and external influences’. In other words, the temporal dimension also constitutes an important aspect of L2 motivation of young learners (Dörnyei 2000). Empirical research has shown the complex and non-static nature of young learners’ motivation.

One important pattern of shifts in L2 motivation is that student motivation has been found to be decreasing over school grades (e.g., Carreira 2006, 2011, 2012; Enever 2009, 2014; Kim 2011, 2012a, 2012b). Carreira (2006) looked at young learners’ (eight- to 11-year-olds) motivation for English language learning and found students’ motivation decreased with age and intrinsic motivation of third graders was significantly higher than their sixth-grade counterparts (also see Carreira 2011 on young learners in Japan). When reviewing literature of developmental trajectories of children’s motivation, she argued that the ‘developmental decline for motivation for language learning [and learning in general] may be a common phenomenon among school students, despite the contextual differences’ (Carreira 2011, p. 92). Some other studies (e.g., Kim 2012a), however, have suggested that the change of motivation can be more complex and nonlinear. Kim (2012a) found that Korean students’ L2 learning motivation changed following a curvilinear pattern, with a continuous decrease from the third through the ninth grade and an increase from the 10th to 12th grade.

A follow-up question that interests researchers is the underlying reasons for the high and low points of motivation during their school years. From the perspective of SDT, the decrease of intrinsic motivation can be attributed to the ‘inappropriate and/or cognitively undemanding instructional practices’ (Carreira 2011, p. 97). Children begin to strive for increased autonomy and personal growth as they grow up, but schools focus on discipline and usually provide few opportunities for decision making (Lepper and Henderlong 2000). In addition, if children have limited access to English (in Carreira 2011, children only attend one English class per week), they may not develop the feeling of competence in English language learning, which can be translated into lack of motivation. As mentioned earlier, parental influences seem to be another main factor mediating children’s L2 motivation (e.g., Kim 2012b). Kim’s (2012b) qualitative interviews have revealed that parents might exert negative impacts on their children’s L2 selves if they fail to provide timely advice and support. In addition, teachers can also play an important role in mediating young learners’ L2
motivation. Some research on adolescents has indicated that teacher-related factors might be the most detrimental factor that demotivates students’ L2 learning, especially for high school students (Hamada 2011; Kikuchi 2009). Further research on the reasons and processes underlying young learners’ L2 motivation can enrich the current understanding of the dynamic nature of motivation.

Recommendations for practice

So far, we have reviewed three popular theoretical perspectives on motivation research and the relevant constructs, factors mediating motivation as well as the dynamic developmental trajectories of young learners’ L2 motivation. Relevant research has provided rich insights for researchers, practitioners and parents, especially in terms of the decline of intrinsic motivation as children grow older, and the roles parents, teachers and the teaching and learning environment play in shaping young learners’ motivation.

Given parents’ involvement, particularly positive beliefs about L2 learning and their actions to regulate children’s L2 learning, it is necessary for L2 teachers to closely work together with parents so that they can synergise efforts to foster positive attitudes towards L2 learning among children and enhance their motivation (e.g., Bakker et al. 2007; Gao 2012). Since differences in SES of children result in creating considerable gaps between young learners from different socioeconomic groups, education policy makers should take this phenomenon into consideration and take steps to improve the unequal access to L2 learning resources of high SES- and low SES-young learners (e.g., Butler 2015b). It is likely that low SES children can become more aware of the communicative value of English when provided with more opportunities to interact with English-speaking communities. Encouraging the use of online resources that are free or low-cost in formal English teaching and learning programmes for young learners can have great potential to serve this purpose.

Furthermore, teachers and curriculum developers should be aware that fine-tuning and adjustment of instruction and assessments can help to maintain or improve children’s L2 motivation. Classroom activities catering to young learners should be able to develop a sense of competence and relatedness with significant others, and would probably work best if implemented in a form that attracts elementary school students, such as using technology and multimodality. In addition, since young learners’ L2 motivation is changing and is subject to multiple external factors, teacher training programmes should explicitly inform teachers about the particularity of young learners and the possible strategies that can help enhance or maintain motivation. In-service teachers facing young L2 learners should also be encouraged to reflect on their students’ motivation, beliefs and performance, in order to help them adapt teaching practices accordingly.

Future research directions

This chapter has reviewed the current research on young learners’ motivation to learn English as an L2 or FL. We have highlighted theoretical perspectives and constructs widely used in this area of inquiry, the dynamic developmental trajectories of young language learners’ motivation, and factors mediating motivation.

Reflecting on the landscape of research on young learners’ L2 motivation, we would like to suggest some directions for future research. There might not be any single framework (e.g., SDT) that can account for the complexity of young learners’ L2 motivation; therefore, more research taking different theoretical perspectives should be conducted to develop
theories of L2 motivation to specifically address young L2 learners. Moreover, while drawing constructs from different perspectives can benefit our understanding of the phenomenon, researchers should make efforts to enhance the conceptual clarity of constructs and terminologies used in their own studies, so as to allow for synthesis or meta-analysis across studies in the future.

Another direction is to continue exploring the dynamic nature of young learners’ L2 motivation to understand the developmental trend of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and how they interact, as well as what factors (in addition to what have been reviewed here) mediate children’s L2 motivation and how. Among the factors that were found to mediate young learners’ motivation, parental involvement is the most frequently examined. Since most research into parents’ influences on L2 motivation has been conducted in East Asia, where parents tend to impose controls over their children’s learning, there is far more to explore in other parts of the world with different cultural heritages, especially where parents usually give their children more autonomy (see Okagaki and Frensch 1998). It would also be enlightening to explore L2 motivation of children in East Asia who have received greater autonomy from their parents, i.e., those who were raised less traditionally with the parents as facilitators and friends as opposed to authoritative standard-makers. Our current knowledge about young language learners’ language learning motivation would be enriched if more investigations were conducted in diverse sociocultural and socioeconomical contexts. The socioeconomic status (SES) of young learners’ parents needs to be further examined in young language learners’ motivation research (e.g., Butler 2015b; Gao 2012; Zou and Zhang 2011). It would also be particularly interesting to expand the research on how assessment practices, as well as the innovation of assessments, impact young learners’ L2 motivation. In terms of research methods, given that a number of cross-segmental studies have employed questionnaires as a major instrument to look into young learners’ L2 motivation, more contextual, qualitative data are needed to complement the quantitative results and to provide in-depth insights into young learners’ motivation. For instance, young language learners may be encouraged to use drawings to express their feelings and represent their language learning experiences if they are not able to articulate them through words (İnözü 2018). Their motivations also can be examined through Elicited Metaphor Analysis (EMA), in which ‘commonplace metaphorical expressions’ such as ‘driving’ and ‘running’ were analyzed to identify young language learners’ conceptual representations of deeper thoughts with regard to learning English (Jin et al. 2014, p. 289). The EMA approach can be effectively implemented to gather data on young learners’ perceptions ‘using cards, picture stories, games, drawings, which would be otherwise difficult to obtain’ (ibid.). Besser and Chik (2014) have also used a photo-elicitation method, through which young learners took pictures of English learning opportunities and then described them in narratives, to understand young language learners’ identity construction in the learning process. Longitudinal research needs to be undertaken to capture the shifting language learning motivations of young language learners over the years. Replication studies can also be conducted to check the generalisability or transferability of previous results to young learners in other sociocultural contexts.

Further readings


This article surveys the origins and surge of interest in language learning motivation research. It presents an overview of theoretical and methodological trends in relevant research over a decade.

This article reviews studies on teaching English to young learners in East Asian contexts including the Chinese mainland, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan with foci on major policy-related discussions and relevant empirical studies of English learning and teaching.


This article reports on the challenges that those teaching English to young learners have to cope with in five different countries. Motivation emerged as one of the most significant challenges faced by these teachers in different contexts.


This is a comprehensive guide for those teaching language to young learners, covering topics such as assessment, child development, Content language integrated learning (CLIL), intercultural awareness and material development. It has a nice balance of updated research and innovative pedagogical practice.


This fully revised edition provides a highly accessible and comprehensive account of motivation research. It offers suggestions on how theoretical insights could be integrated into classroom practices.

**Related topics**

Assessment, gaming, the age debate, difficult circumstances

**References**


YLs’ motivation for learning English


