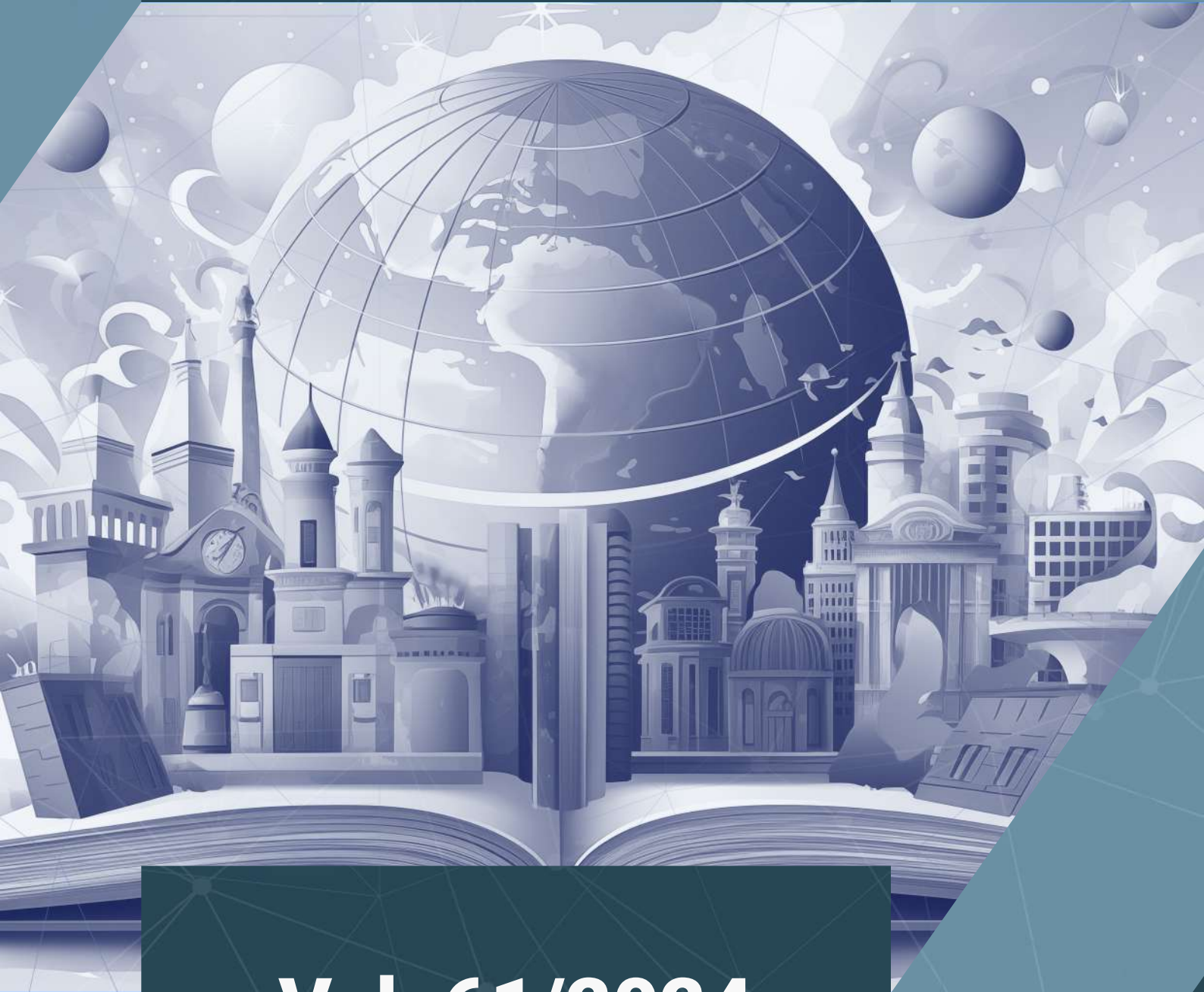




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## **Motivation for Learning Chinese as a Second Language: A Case Study of Students at Thu Dau Mot University**

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**Abstract.** This study investigated the motivation of Chinese language learners by surveying over 138 students from various majors who are studying Chinese as a foreign language at the Foreign Language Center of Thu Dau Mot University. The results showed that students have a relatively positive learning motivation. In terms of the relationship between achievement and learning motivation, the motivation to fulfil the university's foreign language requirements accounted for the highest proportion (81.7%). This was followed by the motivation to find a job easily (66.7%), as they believe this is an essential condition that determines the material results of their work after graduation. The motivation to have the opportunity to advance in their careers later on is also relatively high (accounting for 62.7%). The motivation to learn Chinese to listen to music, watch movies in Chinese, the motivation to learn because of interest in Chinese music and cinema (49.2%), and a liking for Chinese history and culture (33.3%) are factors that affect students' academic performance.

**Keywords.** Learning motivation; learning Chinese as a second language; students; Thu Dau Mot University, Vietnam

### **1. Introduction**

On the current trend of international integration, in addition to English, Chinese is increasingly attracting the attention of many people, and has become an indispensable means of professions for the young generation. However, using all of Chinese language skills fluently is not easy for many people. In addition to learning efforts, learners' individual learning motivation also plays an important role in achieving success. Learning motivation is considered the key factor that drives learners to achieve their desired results. Some studies show that, even though learners are in the same class with the same curriculum, lecturer, and learning environment, each learner's motivation to learn Chinese is different, leading to different outcomes. Therefore, this article conducts a survey to point out the characteristics of motivation and basic influences on students' motivation to learn Chinese. This aims to help them realize the importance of foreign language learning motivation, which is the key to improving the effectiveness of their learning process in the current tendency of globalization and international integration.

## **2. Theoretical background**

Motivation is the driving force that stimulates people to make choices, take actions, make efforts, and persist in taking action to achieve their desired goals. In the 1970s of the twentieth century, Gardner and Lambert (1972) conducted the first research on instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. If integrative motivation deals with learners' individual desires, referring to "positive attitude towards the target language group and the potential for integrating into that group" (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p.103), instrumental motivation refers to functional reasons such as seeking a better career opportunity, getting a pay raise, or simply passing a test. Both integrative and instrumental motivations are basic factors that make learners successful in learning a foreign language. Gardner and Lambert (1972) suggest that learners with a positive attitude towards a language and a desire for assimilating into the culture of that language's speakers are more motivated in learning and acquire that language more successfully than those who simply learn the language for instrumental purposes such as getting good job opportunities. In a work published in 1983, Gardner classified motivation into two groups: (1) instrumental motivation referring to learning a foreign language for a number of pragmatic goals such as employment, exams... and (2) integrative motivation dealing with some needs related to human and cultural connection. And, in a follow-up work, Gardner (1985b), points out that motivation is composed of 4 factors: goal setting, individual learning efforts, desire to achieve goals and the right attitude to human behaviour. Motivation is the key to success in learning and teaching a foreign language. Learners are only successful when they have the right learning motivation that will generate efforts to motivate them to complete the difficult tasks that the learning process sets out.

Schiefele (2001) argues that intrinsic learning motivation, the learners' sincere desire for the language, plays a decisive role in the process of acquiring the language. However, external factors including the social environment and the conditions of the foreign language learning environment such as teachers, learning materials, classmates, etc. also have an influence on inspiring and motivating students as well as forming their attitudes. Specifically, the role of teachers is very large, especially if the foreign language learning environment is not in a native speaker's country but mainly in the classroom under a teacher's guidance. Therefore, teachers play the main role in stimulating students' learning motivation. Learning materials are able to reduce students' motivation if they find their contents and tasks too difficult, or conversely, too easy for their language level or stiff with little update or change. In particular, the compilers of teaching materials need to pay attention to the learners' needs, desires and qualifications so that the material can effectively promote its spiritual values. According to Gardner's (2005) model of social education, the motivation to learn a foreign language is formed by one of the three factors: (1) Learning a foreign language as a tool to achieve personal goals (instrumental motivation); (2) Learning a foreign language due to the need to integrate into the native community or the language community outside the classroom (motivation for integration); (3) Learning foreign languages by having a positive attitude towards the learning environment. These factors are linked together by solid and broken lines showing the different roles of factors of individual identity affecting the language acquisition environment and thereby shaping learning outcomes. practice. During the teaching process, we noticed that students have different learning motivations, and their learning efficiency is also not the same.

Due to its high level of effectiveness, Gardner's model has been being employed by many researchers who put their research focus on learner's motivation in learning foreign languages. In 2013, Busse and Walter employed Gardner's theory of motivation to explore the motivation of the first-year students at two major universities in the United Kingdom in doing

German degree courses. They found that although students' wish, as an intrinsic motivation, to become proficient in German is at high level, they show their decreased effort to engage with language learning over the course of the year. They also found that such a change resulted from the decreasing levels of intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy beliefs. Most recently, Mohd Akhir and Mohamed Mokhtar (2024) have done a study at Universiti Teknologi Mara also using Gardner's theory of motivation to see if students were more motivated to learn English for intrinsic or extrinsic reasons. The result has shown that extrinsic motivation levels were greater than intrinsic motivation levels because the majority of students were motivated to study English for external reasons. Also, Alshammari et al. (2024) used Gardner's theory to discover the learner's motivation in learning Arabic as L2 (second language). The researchers found that all Muslim learners' motivation in learning L2 Arabic comes from their desire to know more about culture and Islam in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In addition, Arciaga and Lucas (2024) also did a study based on Gardner's theory to discover what kinds of attitudes, motivations, and beliefs the learners have in the context of online language learning. The study's findings revealed that learner's attitudes, motivations and beliefs in learning foreign language had been influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, learners generally have positive attitudes toward online language learning. Similarly, having seen that motivation plays an important role in learners' hard work in achieving their goals, Ivanova et al. (2024) did an investigation into the integrative and instrumental motivation of Turkish students who study Macedonian, English and German online. The results suggest that instrumental and integrative motivation for the Turkish students who study Macedonian, English and German language varies by age, gender, income, education, linguistic background, and target language. Dos Santos (2024) also did an investigation into the motivations for students to decide to study Chinese as their fourth foreign language in the European Union, using Belgium as a case study. The study found that the Chinese language is chosen to be learnt because it offers business and career opportunities for young European people to excel in their skills in the Asian region. Moreover, in an investigatory study based on Gardner's theory, Franchisca et al. (2024) found that learners' motivation evolves not only over the course of language programs but also within individual classes, influenced by external factors such as the learning environment and the presence of anxiety.

Researchers have different classifications of learning motivation. This study utilizes Gardner's (2005) framework to analyse the findings from our investigation. Gardner in his educational model has classified motivation into three groups: instrumental motivation, integrative motivation and attitude motivation towards the learning environment. In Gardner's model, the first two motivations act as the foundation to form foreign language learning attitudes before learners are exposed to learning. Then, they will be present during and after the learning process. The motivation related to the element in the classroom, only arising when learners have participated in foreign language learning activities, plays the role in nurturing and maintaining existing attitudes and giving rise to new ones.

### **3. Methodology**

To achieve the research objective which is to identify which (groups of) motives greatly affect students' attitudes toward learning Chinese, the author designed a questionnaire for students, the main population, and semi-structured interview questions to collect the data for this study. The data for analysis were collected quantitatively from 138 students (25 males, 113 females) studying non-majored Chinese at levels 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 at Thu Dau Mot University's Foreign Language Center and qualitatively from 20 collaborators. The data collection procedure took place on May 2023 through a questionnaire of 25 questions and

through in-depth interviews. Out of the participants who are students, the total number of first-year students is 10 (7.2%), accounting for the lowest percentage; the total number of second-year students is 25 (18.1%); the total number of third-year students is 65 (47.2%), accounting for the highest percentage; the total number of final-year students is 38 (27.5%), accounting for the second highest percentage. The students participating in the survey are studying different majors, but the majority of them major in English language, (53 students, accounting for 38.4%), then Economics (Business Administration, Accounting), followed by other majors in equal proportions. They are currently doing courses on the 6-level non-majored Chinese curriculum which is stated to develop students' Chinese competence at the level 3 (B1) of CEFR framework, assisting them in finding job after graduation.

#### **4. Findings and discussion**

##### *4.1. Self-assessment of students' Chinese ability*

It can be said that learning a foreign language is a long journey with the resonance of many factors from family, school and society. Of the 138 students surveyed, most of them started learning Chinese at university.

Awareness of the role of Chinese: Chinese is an important and valuable part that students need to accumulate to have a solid motivational foundation when graduating from the university with expectations to accomplish goals for their future. The need also stems from social demands, which are: learning Chinese to get a job easily as well as supporting career development later on.

It is also because of the recognition that Chinese is necessary in future' practice, so it is inevitable that the role of Chinese is recognized by the survey group with a high rate of agreement.

The percentage of students who find learning Chinese necessary for the future has slightly increased in amplitude of 95.6%, showing that students predict Chinese will continue to hold an important position and will be even more important in the future. Only a very small number of 1.3% oppose the view that "Learning Chinese is necessary for the future". The reason for these choices is partly related to self-determining future career goals.

The survey results indicate that students want to learn Chinese not only because it is a foreign language, but they also want to get knowledge, to connect with people, and to apply directly or indirectly to life what has been learned through the learning content. After graduation, if they mainly use Chinese for profession-oriented activities, the actual use of Chinese by students while sitting in the lecture hall is much richer, for example, for entertainment, studying, communicating, looking for scholarship opportunities and also part-time work, etc. Only 8.5% of the participants gave a negative opinion about "The importance of Chinese in the application". This ratio also shows that students not only affirm the necessity of and expect to acquire skills in using Chinese as a communication tool (in other words, mastery of Chinese listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills) but also expect that the content presented in that language must be useful and help them accumulate valuable knowledge in order to be able to apply into other learning activities as well as practice. However, when asked about "satisfaction with the current level of Chinese", the minority of students have a very satisfactory and satisfactory attitude towards their current Chinese level, accounting for 5.8% and 20.3%, respectively; at the same time, only 13.0% and 2.2% of the students have a dissatisfactory and very dissatisfactory attitude, respectively, whereas up to 58.7% of the students have a neutral satisfactory attitude towards their current level of Chinese (see Figure 1)

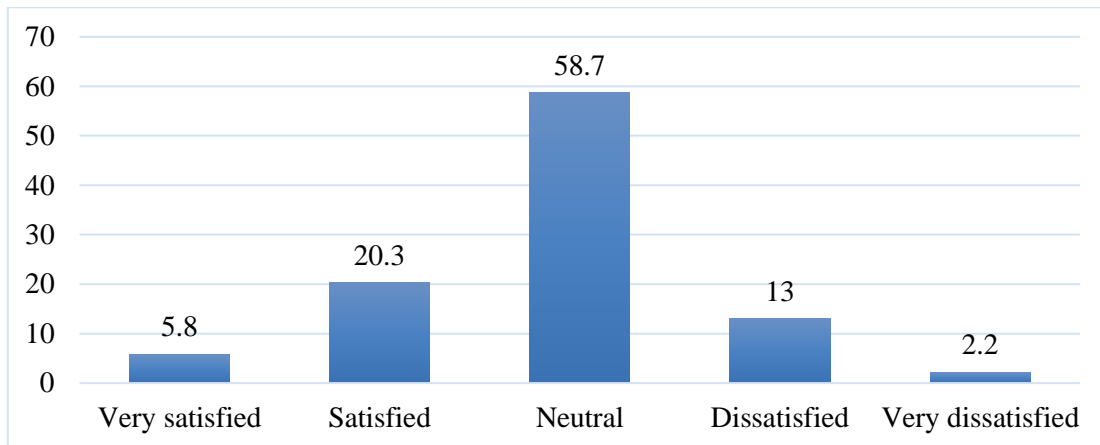


Figure 1. Participants' satisfaction of their current level of Chinese

The survey results also identified several challenges that students face in learning and using Chinese. The most common difficulty, reported by 70.1% of students, was having a limited vocabulary. In addition, 44.5% of students reported struggling with both ineffective learning methods and a lack of time to practice writing, which consequently hindered their ability to read and write Chinese. Other challenges included a lack of patience and tendency to get bored (37.2%), limited opportunities to practice speaking Chinese in a real-world environment (32.8%), and a fear of making mistakes coupled with a lack of confidence (32.8%) (see Figure 2).

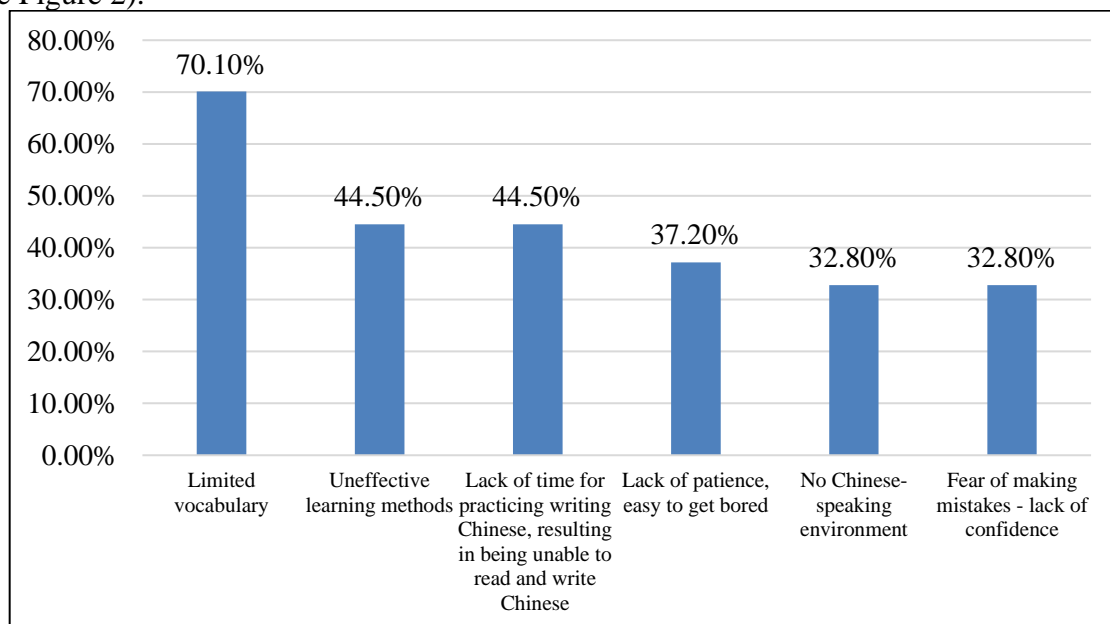


Figure 2. Participants' difficulties in learning Chinese

From this result, it is required that the teacher and the textbook should be chosen and designed, respectively, in accordance with a specific group of learners so that they do not feel bored and monotonous, assisting them in fostering their positive learning attitude, which makes them more excited to practice foreign language skills. If so, foreign language learning activities are no longer simply learning a new language, but also acquiring necessary knowledge of life in that foreign language as well.

#### *4.2 Students' motivation to learn Chinese*

The article analyzes the survey results from two angles: groups of motivation and selection ratio, specifically as follows:

##### *4.2.1 According to groups of motivation*

**Instrumental motivation group:** In general, this group of motivation assists learners in acquiring language achievement because instrumental reasons account for the highest proportion of all motive groups. Out of the instrumental motivations, the individual motives, stemming from the learners' own needs (such as entertainment, excitement in Chinese music and movies, applying for scholarships, studying abroad, etc.), are much lower in term of ratio than other common motives of the entire group of motivation such as achieving the prescribed output standards, applying for a job, and having the chance of success in the future. Out of all motives except individual motives, the motive for learning Chinese to achieve the prescribed output standards accounts for 81.7% (the highest proportion), then the motive for learning Chinese to apply for a job after graduation is clearly reported by 66.7% of the participants learning Chinese because they believe that this is necessary and decisive condition for their career achievement (applying for a job to earn money).

**Integrative motivation group:** Despite not occupying as high rate as the instrumental group of motivation, the group of integrative motivation plays an indispensable role in promoting learners' motivation. The highest percentage in this group of motivations is from the desire to integrate into the modern life of the world because Chinese is the world's most used language, whereas other individual motivations occupy lower percentage, such as traveling (49.2%), making friends with Taiwanese and Chinese (32.5%). Notably, the environment-influenced integrative motivations such as learning Chinese because of friends or learning Chinese to participate in social activities account for a relatively high proportion (19.8% and 23.8%, respectively). This indicates that most of the participants obtained their motivations before taking Chinese courses at the university and that their friends or extracurricular activities do have much influence on their initial motives. In these two subgroups, that the participants are more interested in extracurricular activities requires solutions, if developed, to be taken into account in terms of how these extracurricular activities develop learners' positive emotions and minimize negative emotions such as anxiety and apprehension when practicing the language.

**Motivation related to attitudes toward learning environment:** This group occupies a more modest proportion. However, the modesty in proportions has an objective cause. This motivation is not available since learners are exposed to a language, but it is formed while or after the learners take part in foreign language learning activities at school. This aspect reasons the fact that the proportion of the participants considering this motivation important is lower than the other two groups, instrumental and integrative motivation groups. However, considering specific inspiring aspects each such as learning environment, friends, family, and lecturers, the percentage of participants who choose this motivation is still relatively high. This shows that the learners' previously shaped attitudes can be changed by these types of motivations.

##### *4.2.2 According to the selection rate*

Classified according to the selection rate (see Figure 3), the motive for learning Chinese to achieve the regulated standards on foreign languages accounts for the highest percentage (81.7%). The following are: getting a job after graduation (66.7%), getting a chance to advance in future careers (62.7%) (which is in instrumental motivation group). The motivation to learn Chinese to entertain (listening to music, watching Chinese movies) accounts for a relatively high proportion (56.3%). This shows that, (1) learners are well aware of the

skills needed in the future according to the needs and requirements of society to ensure that they find the best career opportunities for themselves; (2) the trend of globalization is guiding learners in choosing a language to learn and having a positive or negative attitude towards that language. According to the statistics of the Foreign Language Center of Thu Dau Mot University, currently out of 21,298 students studying non-specialized foreign languages at the Foreign Language Center (excluding 3,934 students who have not yet chosen an input foreign language), there are up to 17,123 students (80.4%) choosing English, 4,077 students (19.1%) choosing Chinese, and only 98 students (0.46%) choosing French. This proves that learners choose to learn the language which brings benefits both in the immediate future (meeting the regulated output standards on foreign languages) and in the future (easily applying for jobs, getting opportunities for career advancement).

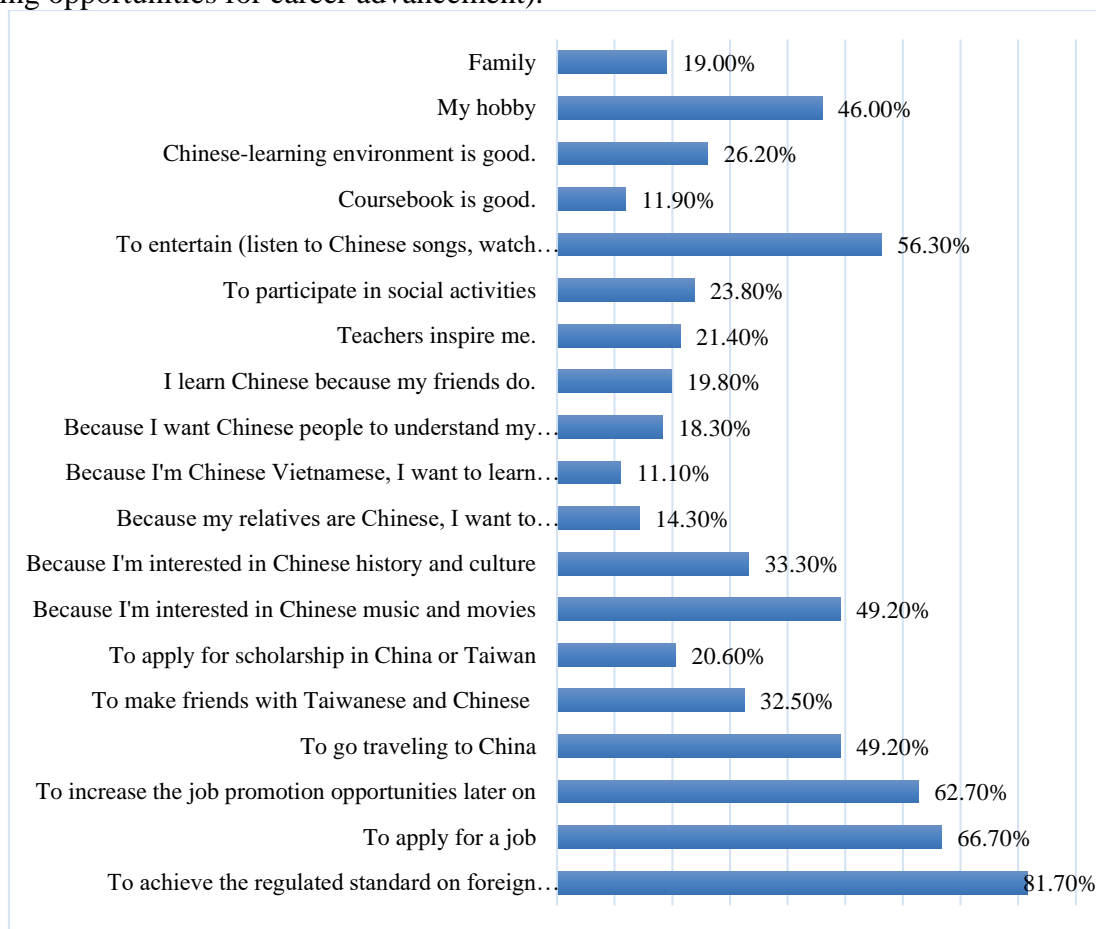


Figure 3. Motivation in learning Chinese

From what have been discussed so far, we identify the impacts of motivation on students' Chinese learning, which are: (1) motivation has a great impact on Chinese learning achievement; (2) students choose the instrumental motivation with a high percentage because the professional requirements also have a positive impact on the attitude and effectiveness of learning; (3) the interest in the "imported" factors such as culture - society - individual in the group of motivational integration shows that its impact on attitudes towards learning Chinese is variable and influenced by social reality; (4) motivation related to attitude towards the learning environment shows learners' positive orientation when they admit that their inspirational teachers or friends make their Chinese learning become comfortable and exciting.

This is the type of motivation that only appears after learners start learning Chinese; (5) among the motivational factors affecting learners' Chinese learning, the factors related to the tendency of societal crowd, curriculum and documents show the faintest part of the learners' views on learning and teaching.

### **5. Conclusion**

Motivation is a key factor in learning Chinese as a foreign language. In fact, the majority of students are well aware of the role of Chinese in their future careers, so they have found the motivation to learn it. The survey results show that students learn Chinese to support their future job, to meet the regulated output standards on foreign languages, to integrate globally, and to advance in future career and affirm that no factor other than the motivational factors can form, promote, destroy, or delay linguistic attitudes. The impact of motivational factors depends on the rightness of learners' motivational awareness as well as their ability to maintain their motivational awareness.

The survey results have shown that any of the motivational factors, even the one that is rarely considered important by learners, if it is promoted, can become a source of motivation and promote the achievement of learners. No matter how right the initial awareness of motivation is, if the teaching method does not focus on or promote it, that motivation will stop or be eliminated and can even negatively affect learning outcomes. Therefore, it is necessary to value all types of motivation regardless of whether they are long-term and instrumental motivations, or short-term and instantaneous ones.

Although the objectives of the study have been reached, the results have shown some limitations that future studies on the topic should resolve. Regarding limitations, the current study was carried out with the limited number of participants, just 138 students who are studying non-majored Chinese at only one university. More importantly, the study has yet to examine whether the students' learning motivation changes over the time of course or not. Therefore, based on these limitations, the current study suggests that the future studies on the topic should set a focus on the following aspects. First, the data for the analysis should be improved concerning number and research sites to ensure the representativeness of sample. Second, factors that may change student's motivation should be uncovered in order to propose strategies in maintaining or enhancing the factors that foster student's learning motivation as well as eliminating the factors that decrease student's learning motivation.

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