



Long Paper

# From Nihongo, Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin: A Triangular Perspective on Foreign Language Learning in Philippine Higher Education

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## Abstract

This study investigates the motivation, effort, and achievement of university-level students enrolled in four Foreign Language (FL) electives—Mandarin, Korean, Spanish, and Nihongo. Using self-reported measures and performance ratings, the research examines six dimensions of motivation, revealing that while students in Mandarin reported exceptionally high motivation in communication and global citizenship, all language groups displayed uniformly high motivational levels. Learning effort was evaluated via seventeen behavioral indicators, and results show consistently high effort across the FL electives. Achievement, measured using the reverse-scaled rating system of the University, differed slightly among the groups; while Nihongo and Korean courses attained ratings indicative of high achievement, Spanish trended toward moderate achievement. Correlation analyses among motivation, effort, and achievement generally produced weak and non-significant relationships for Mandarin, Korean, and Spanish. Notably, Nihongo exhibited a significant positive association between motivation and effort, alongside an inverse relationship between motivation and achievement. These mixed correlations underscore the complexity of translating strong affective and behavioral indicators into academic success and suggest that additional factors—such as



instructional quality, assessment design, and pedagogical practices—substantially influence learning outcomes. These insights contribute to the broader literature on foreign language education by offering an integrative perspective that can contribute significantly to curriculum design, enhance learner support systems, and inspire future research to optimize foreign language instruction in higher education institutions (HEIs).

**Keywords** – Foreign language education, Nihongo, Mandarin, Korean, Spanish

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Foreign language proficiency has long been considered a fundamental aspect and yardstick of global competence, even more so for ASEAN countries that push the boundaries of globalization, where the cultural and professional boundaries are increasingly becoming porous. It is within this view that the AB English Language program has been updated with mandatory 12 units of Foreign Language electives by virtue of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order number 24, series of 2017. With this push, CHED, along with all universities and colleges offering the AB English Language and AB English Language Studies program, hopes to hone graduates who can navigate multilingual and multicultural global environments.

From its formative years during the Social-Psychological period of the 1960s to 1990s, to the Cognitive-Situated 1990s, the Process-Oriented period of the 2000s, and finally to the current Socio-Dynamic period (Dornyei, 2005; Luo, 2023), the study of how multiple factors interact and influence language education continues to be explored. One such pioneering research is the work of Alsayed (2003), where he explored the triadic relationship of motivation, effort, and achievement through systematic examination. Accordingly, Alsayed noted the cyclical nature of how these components influence each other (higher motivation leads to higher effort, which then results in higher achievement, which again heightens motivation further).

It is from this work that this study seeks to further address by examining how the aforementioned factors influence each other within the multicultural and multilingual nature of the Philippines. This research seeks to generate insights that contribute to the overall scholarly discussion of Foreign Language Education within the broader socio-cultural dynamics of the Philippines.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To ascertain the current state of foreign language education in the AB English Language program across the three Pangasinan State University (PSU) campuses offering the degree.

2. To compare the levels of motivation, effort, and achievement of students enrolled in the four foreign language electives of the program, utilizing Alsayed's (2003) *Foreign Language Triangle* as the evaluative framework.
3. To evaluate the four foreign language offerings of the AB English Language program in terms of the correlations among students' motivation, effort, and achievement.
4. To propose evidence-based suggestions and pedagogical interventions, grounded in the outcomes of the study, aimed at improving the overall status and effectiveness of foreign language education in the program.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### ***Theoretical Foundations of Foreign Language Education***

The study of language within the lens of motivation and attitudes was started as early as the 1970s, with the pioneering work of Gardner and Lambert (1972). Through their 12-year research, the intricate nature of psychology and language learning came into the fore, culminating in the identification of Integrative Motivation and Instrumental Motivation, with the former linked to deeper and more sustained achievement in language learning. In fact, this research would later serve as the bedrock for Gardner's (1975) Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition, which emphasized the role of Motivation (both integrative and instrumental), attitudes toward the learning situation, language aptitude, and cultural openness.

Deci & Ryan (1985) then reframed motivation as a matter of not mere quantity, but rather quality. Their Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emphasized that learners thrive when their basic psychological needs are met, proposing a "continuum" of motivation, with Autonomous motivation linked to higher achievement, persistence, and even enjoyment in the language learning process.

The Self-Determination Theory would then have its first systematic application in a landmark study on second language (L2) learning by Noels et al. (2003). With the unique setting at the University of Ottawa, where bilingual students were required to exhibit competence in either French or English as their L2. Through this study, the nature and role of motivation in language learning were better understood, establishing a "bridge" between theoretical assumptions and actual language education, essentially providing empirical foundations for SDT's real-world application.

In 2010, however, Zoltan Dornyei (2005) provided the much-needed paradigm shift in language learning research that has long been dominated by Gardner's social-psychological orientation with his monumental L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS). Dornyei, taking cues from the Possible Selves Theory of Markus & Nurius (1986) and the Self-Discrepancy Theory of Higgins (1987), developed a three-part framework that argued for the role of internalized visions of the learners' self, particularly in an increasingly

globalized and multilingual context. This was a monumental paradigm shift from Gardner's external factors to internalized self-concepts. As a result, this framework effectively accommodates learners in varying contexts, especially those without direct cultural contact and integration.

### ***Contemporary Frameworks and Cross-Cultural Adaptations***

The theories and frameworks in language learning and education, however, are never all-encompassing. More recent research and studies have started to apply these frameworks and theories in new approaches and methodologies in hopes of testing their applicability in the ever-changing educational landscape.

First, Henry & Liu (2023) offered methodological critiques of Dornyei's L2MSS. By identifying systemic discriminant validity problems that seem to occur commonly in L2MSS scales, he argued that the Ideal and Ought-to Self may not be psychometrically distinct from related constructs like self-efficacy. With this, he called for a moratorium on substantive L2MSS research, effectively pausing all research using the L2MSS framework until such a time that its tools have been duly verified before further empirical expansion.

As for SDT, several subsequent studies and attempts to verify its applicability across various contexts yielded varying results. Parrish & Vernon (2022) tested the application of SDT and L2MSS for language education programs in England and found that SDT is more suitable due to its ability to capture choice, autonomy, and classroom factors, particularly in larger language communities. Meanwhile, the study of Oga-Baldwin & Hirosawa (2022) tracked how SDT is starting to "take root" in language education by constructing a systematic framework from which other "mini-theories" of SDT apply to L2 learning. Through their research, SDT has been shown to have matured into a coherent ecosystem with principles that can be considered universal across varying cultural contexts. This, in turn, is further validated by the study of Zarfsaz & Hosseini (2023) in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the Iranian context. Through this, SDT's relevance is further substantiated, but with an added caveat of non-uniformity across various socio-cultural settings. Subsequently, Alamer et al. (2025), through their multi-level meta-analysis, provided the much-needed robust quantitative evidence that autonomous motivation is indeed the most effective driver of L2 learning success, further solidifying SDT's role in language learning.

Furthermore, several studies have linked these already established frameworks and applied them to regional and country-specific contexts. Zhao and Xiao (2021) explored how different multilingual education policies in Asia (China, Singapore, the Philippines, and India) intersect with the identities and motivations of their learners. By synthesizing multiple empirical case studies, Zhao stressed the importance of cultural specificity, particularly the role of imagined communities and identity negotiation of learners. Nizigama et al. (2024), on the other hand, applied L2MSS within a Burundi multilingual (French, English & Kiswahili) context and established that L2 learning experience is still

the strongest predictor of intended effort across all three languages. Finally, Ren (2025) focused on the development and validation of a comprehensive psychometrically verified motivation scale tailored for Southeast Asian language learning (specifically languages that are underrepresented compared to English/Spanish). The result was a 19-item scale with strong reliability and validity that then became a new measurement instrument for studying the motivation of lesser taught and less common languages.

### ***The Role of Motivation in Language Education***

With multiple duly tested and validated lenses and frameworks from which motivation can be viewed in terms of its role, effect, relationship, and impact on language learning, it can be said that it has become one of the most decisive factors in successful language learning and education. Motivation, however, can also be multi-faceted and cannot be seen as a singular aspect alone, which then became the focus of research in the field of language learning and education.

One such type of motivation duly applicable to foreign language education is the concept of global citizenship and social orientation of learners, which was the focus of multiple studies, such as that of Rahman et al. (2025), that explored the context of Malaysian university students. Their study showed that global identity-oriented motivations dominate in higher education, effectively becoming a mirror of the multiple thrusts in higher education towards globalization and global citizenship. Arciaga and Lucas (2024) also found in a separate study that integrative motivation (strong cultural/identity-driven motives) even amidst the pandemic that forced foreign language education to internet/online modalities.

Contextual and personal factors are also important shapers of motivation in the field of language learning. This was explored by two independent studies by Villamor (2025) and Quintos (2022) in the Philippines. The former focused on the personal and contextual factors shaping the motivation of learners in marginalized communities in the Philippines (last-mile schools). The study showed that motivation, even in the most extreme cases, remained resilient and not bound by the individual backgrounds of learners, and highlighted the importance of context-sensitive and learner-centered approaches. Quinto, on the other hand, focused on Filipino learners of LOTE (languages other than English) and showed the multifaceted nature of motivation and its direct emotional consequences in multilingual contexts.

### ***The Role of Effort in Language Education***

Aside from motivation, another important factor and underemphasized dimension of language learning is effort. It is through effort that the aptitude and motivation at the initial stages of language learning are sustained, whether through time, energy, and persistence. Also, much like motivation, effort has been explored in various research

relating to language learning, whether as a mediator of achievement, effort in specialized language contexts, or even in cross-cultural comparative studies of effort.

Giladi et al. (2022) explored the role of effort in the English learning self-efficacy of students. By framing effort as a mediating variable, he established that effort is more than just the outcome of motivation but rather a mechanism that consistently translates into achievement. Further, the results of the study established that interventions designed to boost the self-efficacy of learners can therefore enhance achievement.

With regards to the role of effort in specialized language contexts, Ozer (2020) showed that learners tend to have varying levels of effort depending on the perceived relevance of English to their field, effectively establishing that learners who saw direct utility of the target language (in this case, English) exerted more effort.

Finally, in localized cross-cultural studies of effort, several studies showed that effort played varying roles depending on the context of the learners. Opare & Dramanu (2002) in Ghana, for example, established that effort acts as an effective buffer against socioeconomic disadvantage, showing that effort is a socially situated construct. Aratibel (2013) in Spain, on the other hand, showed effort as multi-dimensional, and learners have the tendency to shift effort allocation depending on their prevailing priority, even more so with multiple languages. Finally, Inagaki (2014) in Japan showed that effort is goal-oriented, thereby necessitating clarity of learning goals to sustain effort, and that the role of the teachers in this context is to help learners articulate concrete and personalized goals that tend to translate directly into effort.

### ***Alsayed's (2003) Foreign Language Learning Triangle***

With all the foregoing, a seminal work on the interconnection of motivation and effort, and their relationship with actual measurable achievement in language learning, culminated in Alsayed's study and his proposed triadic relationship. By effectively positioning Motivation, Effort, and Achievement in a "spiral" relationship, and providing empirical evidence to support this triadic relationship, Alsayed provides a "culminating" look at the two most often discussed factors of language learning and relates them directly to language learning achievement. In his study, Alsayed found that motivation showed the highest correlation with actual language achievement/performance and established effort as the direct behavioral manifestation of motivation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Design***

This study is quantitative in nature, particularly a descriptive-correlational design. Through this, the study aims to describe the relationship between three important

concepts in Foreign Language learning: Motivation, Effort, and Achievement across the four foreign language offerings of the AB English Language Program (Nihongo, Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin).

### **Respondents of the Study**

The respondents of the study shall be the AB English Language students enrolled in the three campuses of Pangasinan State University offering the degree program: Bayambang Campus, Lingayen Campus, and Urdaneta City Campus. While the respondents are from the three campuses mentioned, they utilize the same curriculum and pool of foreign language teachers, thereby warranting the comparison even across the three campuses.

As the Foreign Language (FL) offerings are spread out over the four-year degree program, respondents were requested to only answer specific sections of the questionnaire corresponding to the FL courses they have already taken. Nihongo is offered during the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of 2<sup>nd</sup> year, Spanish for 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester of 2<sup>nd</sup> year, Korean for 1<sup>st</sup> Semester of 3<sup>rd</sup> year, and Mandarin for 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester of 3<sup>rd</sup> year. Since the study was conducted during the second semester of academic year 2024-2025, fourth-year students answered all sections of the instrument, while third-year students answered the Nihongo, Spanish, and Korean sections, and the second-year students only answered the Nihongo section. No first-year students took part in the study as they have yet to take a foreign language elective.

Table 1. Respondents per Foreign Language Elective

	<b>Total Respondents</b>
Nihongo	411
Spanish	355
Korean	355
Mandarin	183

### **Data Gathering Instruments**

As this study sought to verify Alsayed's (2003) proposed triadic relationship between motivation, effort, and achievement in language education, three sets of questionnaires were utilized to measure each of the said specific dimensions:

- To measure motivation, Gonzales' (2006) 6-factor model of Foreign Language Learning Motivation Questionnaire (FLLMQ) was used. This was further refined in a subsequent study (Gonzales & Lopez, 2016) that validated the same questionnaire using Confirmatory Factor Analysis, yielding high reliability indices.
- To measure effort, the Foreign Language Learning Effort Scale (FLLES) by Karabiyik & Mirici (2018) was utilized for its high psychometric reliability, more

than sufficient factorial validity, and good correlation measures with related constructs.

- To measure achievement, the actual incurred course grades of the students in their respective foreign language electives were utilized. The institution employs a numerical grading system ranging from 1.0 to 5.0, where 1.0 represents the highest possible grade, 3.0 denotes the minimum passing grade, and 5.0 indicates failure. This grading scale provided an objective measure of students' academic performance, allowing for direct comparison with their reported levels of motivation and effort.

Of the overall 411 respondents, 183 were 4<sup>th</sup>-year students, reflecting the total number of responses for Mandarin, as they are the only group that has finished Mandarin. Additionally, 172 were 3<sup>rd</sup>-year students, reflecting the total cumulative responses with the 4<sup>th</sup>-year students for both Spanish and Korean. Finally, 56 respondents were 2<sup>nd</sup> year students, reflecting the total cumulative responses with the 3<sup>rd</sup> year and 4<sup>th</sup> year students for Nihongo.

## RESULTS

### *Foreign Language Learning Motivation*

Table 2 below shows the overall FLLM of the respondents for the four foreign languages. For Nihongo, as can be seen, all six factors recorded high levels of motivation (difference between the six factors ranged from 0.016 to 0.108), with Desire to Communicate and Affiliate with Foreigners the highest at 3.968 and Self-Efficacy the lowest at 3.795. Consequently, foreign language learning motivation for Spanish, the range of differences among the six factors is from 0.010 to 0.121, with the maximum mean at 3.700 for Desire to Communicate and Affiliate with Foreigners, while the lowest mean is at 3.500 for Self-Efficacy.

Meanwhile, as can be observed for Korean, Desire to Communicate and Affiliate with Foreigners received the highest mean at 3.700, while Self-Efficacy was the lowest at 3.500, indicating a range of 0.200. For the foreign language learning motivation of the respondents in Mandarin, as observed above in Table 5, Desire to be a Global Citizen received the highest mean at 3.912, while Self-Efficacy incurred the lowest mean at 3.635. All in all, the range of values for Table 5 is 0.277.

Across all language groups—Nihongo, Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin—the computed Average Weighted Means (AWM) for each factor consistently fell within the range corresponding to High Motivation.

Table 2. Overall Foreign Language Learning Motivation

	<b>Nihongo</b>		<b>Spanish</b>		<b>Korean</b>		<b>Mandarin</b>		<b>OVERALL</b>	
	AWM	Int	AWM	Int	AWM	Int	AWM	Int	AWM	Int
Desire for Economic Growth	3.910	H	3.700	H	3.718	H	3.968	H	3.824	H
Desire to Become a Global Citizen	3.912	H	3.695	H	3.698	H	3.952	H	3.814	H
Desire to Communicate and Affiliate with Foreigners	3.835	H	3.651	H	3.683	H	3.922	H	3.773	H
Desire for Self-Satisfaction	3.733	H	3.567	H	3.562	H	3.814	H	3.669	H
Self-Efficacy	3.635	H	3.500	H	3.584	H	3.795	H	3.629	H
Desire to be Integrated with other Cultures	3.770	H	3.577	H	3.594	H	3.852	H	3.698	H
<b>Overall FLLM Across Six Factors</b>	<b>3.799</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>3.615</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>3.640</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>3.884</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>3.735</b>	<b>H</b>

**Legend:** 4.21 – 5.00 (Very High Motivation);  
 3.41 – 4.20 (High Motivation);  
 2.61 – 3.40 (Moderate Motivation);  
 1.81 – 2.60 (Low Motivation);  
 1.00 – 1.80 (Very Low Motivation)

The overall mean scores for each language group were as follows:

- Nihongo: 3.739
- Spanish: 3.615
- Korean: 3.640
- Mandarin: 3.884

The combined overall mean across all four languages was 3.735, likewise interpreted as High Motivation.

### **Foreign Language Learning Effort**

Table 3 above shows the effort exerted by the respondents in terms of foreign language learning across the three (3) categories: Academic Integrity and Classroom Conduct, Core Academic Responsibilities, and Self-Directed and Engaged Learning Behaviors. For Nihongo, Academic Integrity and Classroom Conduct received the highest mean at 4.395, with the two remaining categories not lagging, with mere differences at 0.266 and 0.556, for a total range of 0.822.

Also reflected above is the Spanish language learning effort of the respondents. As seen, Academic Integrity and Classroom Conduct received the highest mean at 4.305, and Self-Directed and Engaged Learning Behaviors received the lowest mean at 3.506. The pairwise differences between the values are at 0.257 and 0.542, indicating close clustering of the values.

Table 3. Overall Foreign Language Learning Effort

	Nihongo		Spanish		Korean		Mandarin	
	AWM	Int	AWM	Int	AWM	Int	AWM	Int
<i>Academic Integrity &amp; Classroom Conduct</i>	4.395	VH	4.305	VH	4.321	VH	4.503	VH
<i>Core Academic Responsibilities</i>	3.839	H	3.763	H	3.722	H	3.881	H
<i>Self-Directed and Engaged Learning Behaviors</i>	3.573	H	3.506	H	3.499	H	3.446	H
<b>Overall Foreign Language Learning Effort</b>	<b>3.828</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>3.753</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>3.715</b>	<b>H</b>	<b>3.812</b>	<b>H</b>

**Legend:** 4.21 – 5.00 (Very High Effort);  
 3.41 – 4.20 (High Effort);  
 2.61 – 3.40 (Moderate Effort);  
 1.81 – 2.60 (Low Motivation);  
 1.00 – 1.80 (Very Low Motivation)

Much like the case of Nihongo and Spanish, Academic Integrity and Classroom Conduct also received the highest mean (4.321), and Self-Directed and Engaged Learning Behaviors received the lowest (3.499). The overall range of values is 0.822, still showing close clustering, albeit not to the level of Nihongo and Korean.

As for the case of Mandarin, effort exerted in terms of Academic Integrity and Classroom Conduct received the highest mean at 4.503, and like with the other foreign languages, Self-Directed and Engaged Learning Behaviors recorded the lowest mean at 3.446. The overall range of values between the categories of foreign language effort in Mandarin is 1.057.

Overall, for Academic Integrity and Classroom Conduct, the Average Weighted Means (AWM) were 4.395 for Nihongo, 4.075 for Spanish, 4.321 for Korean, and 4.095 for Mandarin. For Core Academic Responsibilities, the AWM values were 3.839 for Nihongo, 3.763 for Spanish, 3.722 for Korean, and 3.881 for Mandarin. For Self-Directed and Engaged Learning Behaviors, the AWM values were 3.573 for Nihongo, 3.506 for Spanish, 3.499 for Korean, and 3.446 for Mandarin. Finally, the Overall Foreign Language Learning Effort yielded AWM values of 3.828 for Nihongo, 3.753 for Spanish, 3.715 for Korean, and 3.812 for Mandarin.

### **Foreign Language Learning Achievement**

Table 4 presents the overall foreign language learning achievement of students in Nihongo, Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin. Achievement was measured using the respondents' incurred grades based on the University's grading system, which ranges from 1.0 to 5.0, with 1.0 as the highest possible grade, 3.0 as the passing grade, and 5.0 as failing. As can be seen, the students collectively incurred the highest grades in Nihongo (with a mean of 1.575) and the lowest in Korean (with a mean of 1.927).

Table 4. Overall Foreign Language Learning Achievement

	Mean	Desc. Equiv.
1. Nihongo	1.575	High
2. Spanish	1.889	High
3. Korean	1.927	High
4. Mandarin	1.922	High
<b>AWM</b>	<b>1.828</b>	<b>High</b>

### **Triadic Correlations**

Table 5 presents the correlations among learning motivation, learning effort, and learning achievement. The results for Nihongo show that learning motivation was correlated with learning effort ( $r = 0.312$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ) and with learning achievement ( $r = -0.394$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Learning effort was also correlated with learning achievement ( $r = -0.200$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). All reported correlations were statistically significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

For Spanish, the data indicate that motivation and effort were positively related, with a correlation coefficient of 0.239 ( $p = 0.000$ ). Motivation also showed a negative relationship with achievement, yielding a coefficient of -0.330 ( $p = 0.000$ ). In addition, effort was found to be negatively associated with achievement, with a coefficient of -0.162 ( $p = 0.002$ ). All reported values were statistically significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

For Korean, the results show that motivation and effort were positively correlated, with a coefficient of 0.197 ( $p = 0.000$ ). The association between motivation and achievement was very weak, recorded at 0.014 ( $p = 0.795$ ). Meanwhile, the link between effort and achievement was slightly negative, with a coefficient of -0.058 ( $p = 0.273$ ). Of these, only the correlation between motivation and effort reached statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

Table 5. Triadic Correlations

		Motivation	Effort	Achievement
<b>Nihongo</b>				
<b>Learning Motivation</b>	Correlation Coefficient		0.312	-0.394
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000
<b>Learning Effort</b>	Correlation Coefficient	0.312		-0.200
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000
<b>Learning Achievement</b>	Correlation Coefficient	-0.394	-0.200	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	
<b>Korean</b>				
<b>Learning Motivation</b>	Correlation Coefficient		0.197	0.014
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.795
<b>Learning Effort</b>	Correlation Coefficient	0.197		-0.58
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.273
<b>Learning Achievement</b>	Correlation Coefficient	0.014	-0.058	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.795	0.273	
<b>Spanish</b>				
<b>Learning Motivation</b>	Correlation Coefficient		0.239	-0.330
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.00	0.000
<b>Learning Effort</b>	Correlation Coefficient	0.239		-0.162
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.002
<b>Learning Achievement</b>	Correlation Coefficient	-0.330	-0.162	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.002	
<b>Mandarin</b>				
<b>Learning Motivation</b>	Correlation Coefficient		0.298	-0.307
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000
<b>Learning Effort</b>	Correlation Coefficient	0.298		-0.194
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.009
<b>Learning Achievement</b>	Correlation Coefficient	-0.307	-0.194	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.009	
<b>OVERALL</b>				
<b>Learning Motivation</b>	Correlation Coefficient		0.261	-0.277
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000
<b>Learning Effort</b>	Correlation Coefficient	0.261		-0.151
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000
<b>Learning Achievement</b>	Correlation Coefficient	-0.277	-0.151	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	

As for the Mandarin language group, the analysis revealed a positive association between motivation and effort, with a coefficient of 0.298 ( $p = 0.000$ ). In contrast, motivation and achievement showed a negative relationship, recorded at -0.307 ( $p =$

0.000). The relationship between effort and achievement was also negative, with a coefficient of -0.194 ( $p = 0.009$ ). All three reported correlations were statistically significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

Finally, the table also presents the overall correlations. The analysis shows that motivation and effort were positively related, with a correlation coefficient of 0.261 ( $p = 0.000$ ). In contrast, motivation and achievement were negatively associated, with a coefficient of -0.277 ( $p = 0.000$ ). Similarly, effort and achievement also demonstrated a negative relationship, with a coefficient of -0.151 ( $p = 0.000$ ). All reported correlations were statistically significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

## **DISCUSSION**

### ***Foreign Language Learning Motivation***

The data recorded for the motivational levels of the respondents across the six factors in the FLLMQ show a clear hierarchy, with Desire for Economic Growth (3.824) and Desire to Become a Global Citizen (3.814) as the clear dominant factors. This particular result mirrors that of the study of Dos Santos (2024), which also identified economic growth and career opportunities as the primary motivators for foreign language learning, even more so in the increasingly globalized interconnectedness of society.

Furthermore, the results also serve as strong support for Gardner's (1975) Socio-Educational Model, specifically its instrumental orientation component that refers to language learning as a practical avenue for career advancement. This, in turn, echoes the findings of Li & Pan (2009) that showed more successful foreign language learners tend to view language learning as a strategic investment for their professional development.

With regards to the differential motivation levels across the languages, Mandarin, with the highest overall motivation (3.884), reflects the broader geopolitical and economic realities in the Philippine context, and in extension, Southeast Asia. Yue et al. (2022) also opine that high motivation for learning Mandarin aligns with the growing economic influence of China in Southeast Asia and the world. Hence, most students have relatively higher motivation learning Mandarin as they believe it opens more opportunities for them after graduation.

On the other hand, Spanish recorded the lowest overall motivation (3.615) despite the cultural and historical connection between Spain and the Philippines, which reflects the perceived diminished practical utility of the language. This is further supported by the study of Raup et al. (2024), which showed significantly reduced motivation for learning languages that do not show clear economic benefits.

The consistent lower ranking of Self-Efficacy among the motivation factors across all foreign languages is indicative of the current perceived challenges of Philippine university students in successfully learning foreign languages. Comanaru and Noels' (2009) research on the role of feelings of competence further supports this, as relatively lower self-efficacy scores indicate crucial pedagogical interventions to raise the students' personal confidence in their language learning abilities.

As for the high scores for Desire to Become Global Citizen (3.814), this can be viewed through the lens of Dornyei's (2005) L2MSS as the Ideal Self component. As such, the strong desire for global citizenship mirrors the findings of Papi (2010), showing that the Ideal Self component is indeed a powerful motivator for language learning.

The moderate scoring for Desire to be Integrated with Cultures (3.698) and Desire to Communicate and Affiliate with Foreigners (3.773) will fall under Gardner's (1975) integrative motivation, or the openness to taking on characteristics of other cultural/linguistic groups. This follows the pattern of several studies in Asian contexts, particularly Raup et al.'s (2024), that students may have the tendency to express interest in understanding foreign cultures, but this does not, however, automatically mean their willingness to fully integrate into foreign cultural communities.

### ***Foreign Language Learning Effort***

Across the three classifications under the FLLES, Academic Integrity and Classroom Conduct consistently score the highest-rated dimension, with Mandarin showing the strongest performance (AWM = 4.503). This pattern of consistent "Very High" interpretations indicates the inherently stronger academic integrity behaviors of the respondents due to the structured nature of language instruction and clear manifestation of behavioral expectations. This echoes the results of Baysal-Caliskan and Razi (2025), suggesting that fostering a culture of academic integrity leads to better navigation of academic challenges and integration of integrity as a core value in the professional growth of learners.

Core Academic Responsibilities account for the middle tier of effort investment of the respondents, with AWMs ranging from 3.722 to 3.881. This reflects the consistent engagement of the respondents in various academic tasks as defined and elaborated in the Course Syllabus, duly distributed to the students at the beginning of the semester. Additionally, performance of core academic responsibilities has been shown as a direct and foundational element of language learning (Karabiyik & Mirici, 2018; Gilada et al., 2022).

Subsequently, Self-Directed and Engaged Learning Behaviors consistently scored the lowest across the four foreign languages, with the lowest being Mandarin (AWM = 3.446) and Nihongo the highest (AWM = 3.573). While not inherently alarming, as the means still fall under the "High" descriptive equivalent, it is important to note that self-directed

learning behaviors are crucial to language learning and acquisition beyond the bounds of the classroom. As such, this can be noted as an important avenue for exploration of possible pedagogical interventions and enhancements.

For the language-specific patterns, Japanese scored the highest overall effort at 3.828, correlating with findings of other studies showing the continuous and sustained cultural interest and perceived career benefits of learning Nihongo (Hayes, 2009; Gonzales, 2016; Raup et al., 2024; Singh et al., 2021). Considering the high motivation levels, this high level of self-directed effort can be seen as a reflection of high intrinsic motivation on the overall value of Nihongo skills in the global market.

Closely behind Japanese' effort level is Spanish' at 3.753, mirroring the results of similar studies on Asian learners of the Spanish language (Lu & Fernandez Sanchez, 2025; Yue et al., 2022), which show a significantly high achievement value due to sustained high confidence level. Viewed through the expectancy-value motivation framework, it appears that Spanish learners derive satisfaction from learning and perform better academically.

Interestingly, Koreans incurred the lowest overall effort ( $AWM = 3.715$ ) despite the already established and continuously growing Hallyu (Korean Wave) influence. When analyzed with the findings of Damron & Forsyth (2010)'s study showing high attrition rates (up to 85%) in Korean language classes, it becomes clear that these lower effort scores is reflective of initial enthusiasm that easily wanes over time due to either the complexity of the language or the learner's inability to translate cultural fascination into actual effort stemming from authentic academic or professional motivations.

### ***Foreign Language Learning Achievement***

The overall achievement scores of the respondents for the four (4) foreign languages unilaterally received an interpretation of "High" and language-specific achievement scores ranging from 1.575 to 1.927, all above the institutional passing mark of 3.00. Additionally, the results indicate strong academic performance and successful attainment of learning outcomes. When viewed with the consistently high motivation and effort scores so far, the results indicate the positive association of the aforementioned factors with foreign language achievement that has been well-established in previous research (Zamani et al., 2023; Giladi et al., 2022). Furthermore, the above-average achievement scores reinforce the notion that similarly high outcome scores can be yielded with varied motivational paths, provided that student expectations align with curricular and instructional supports.

Achievement scores in Nihongo recorded the highest mean at 1.575, suggesting heightened learner motivation and interest in Japanese language and culture. Similar to the pattern discovered by Singh et al. (2021), motivation and effort scores were also consistently high for the respondents in learning Nihongo, which can be attributed to the

strong cultural appeal and perceived high professional advantages attached with the language.

Slightly below Nihongo and Spanish are the achievement scores for both Mandarin (Mean = 1.922) and Korean (Mean = 1.927). While still well-above the institutional passing score, the lower scores reflect the relative difficulty or novelty of these languages for Filipino FL learners, the same observation forwarded by several studies (Wen & Azlan, 2019; Sae-Thung & Boonsuk, 2022; Damron & Forsyth, 2010; Shehadeh et al., 2024).

### ***Triadic Correlation***

The correlation test results present the complex triadic relationship between motivation, effort, and achievement for Nihongo, Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin, showing the underlying significant differences across the languages. Overall, the correlation results demonstrate small to moderate effect sizes, aligning with already established research (Alamer & Alrabai, 2023; Zamani et al., 2023) on the dynamic nature of language learning variables.

Of particular note is the positive correlation between motivation and effort across all languages (values range from 0.197 to 0.312), confirming established theoretical foundations that highly motivated learners tend to exert more effort and energy in learning activities, albeit to varying degrees owing to several language-specific factors such as perceived difficulty, prospective opportunities for professional and career development, and cultural appeal (Alamer & Alrabai, 2023; Singh et al., 2021; Giladi et al., 2022; Noels et al., 2019).

Nihongo demonstrated the strongest correlational patterns overall (moderate motivation-effort correlation and the strongest motivation-achievement effort). These findings confirm research on Nihongo language learning that integrative motivation (like cultural interest) and instrumental motivation (like career and professional benefits) work in tandem to promote sustained effort, which in turn works synergistically to higher achievement (Kondo-Brown, 2006). As was previously discussed, this unique motivational profile for Nihongo learners is mainly attributed to fascination with Japanese customs and culture, and perceived career opportunities.

Spanish, meanwhile, represents a balanced triadic relationship where all three components contribute meaningfully to the learning process. Lu & Fernandez Sanchez (2025) observed the same in their study, showing that Spanish learning environments tend to successfully translate motivation into effort, and effort into achievement.

Korean, on the other hand, presents a disconnected triadic relationship where high motivation does not translate effectively into achievement. As mentioned before, this can be attributed to the high initial enthusiasm when starting Korean language classes (due to Hallyu cultural phenomena) that fails to properly translate to sustained effort, resulting in considerable challenges in the actual language learning process. Damron &

Forsyth's (2012) study correctly identified that this phenomenon reflects the structural differences between the Korean language and the respondents' first language (usually Pangasinan, Ilocano, or Filipino).

The issue arising from the distinct difference between the target language and the first language of the learners also becomes evident in the case of Mandarin, where the correlation scores show that while motivation effectively drives both effort and achievement, the effort-achievement pathway is compromised. Furthermore, research on language learning has shown that the relationship between motivation and achievement is easily navigated with factors like career benefits and global opportunities; the link between effort and achievement is much more complex (Bai & Wang, 2020).

Overall, the correlation patterns indicate effort as a partial mediator in the motivation-achievement relationship, to varying degrees across the four foreign languages studied. Of these, Nihongo and Spanish recorded the highest mediating effect of effort, while Korean demonstrated minimal effects. Particularly, these findings align with research determining the role of effort between motivational constructs and academic achievement (Shang & Ma, 2024; Hui et al., 2025). Additionally, the effort-achievement correlations are consistent with studies conducted across multiple contexts, showing that students who invest greater effort tend to achieve higher achievement scores.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study was conducted to assess the triadic relationship of motivation, effort, and achievement in foreign language learning across four (4) foreign language electives: Nihongo, Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin. Additionally, this study was conducted within the context of tertiary-level students in the multilingual and culturally diverse setting of the Philippines.

Considering the results of the study, the following conclusions and accompanying recommendations are hereby forwarded:

### ***Motivation as a Consistent (but Language-Dependent) Correlate***

Motivation consistently emerged with strong association across all languages, though its strength of correlation and impact varied. It can be said that motivation alone is not monolithic and therefore should be understood in each language's unique socio-cultural and educational context.

For Nihongo and Mandarin, motivation was closely tied to greater effort on the part of the students and resulted in higher achievement. This particularly reflects prevailing research findings that show motivation as a powerful fuel for student engagement, but its effects are largely dependent on various factors like cultural appeal, perceived career potential, and personal preferences.

Of particular interest is how the pronounced instrumental motivation present in Nihongo, Mandarin, and Spanish, the same cannot be said for Korean, highlighting that Korean's cultural allure does not effectively translate to measurable achievement gains.

### ***"Compensatory Drive" Exists, but is not Universal***

In this case, “compensatory drive” refers to the notion that high enough motivation and effort can always translate to high achievement, even with considerable challenges. The results, however, belie that universality of this compensatory drive, as while it is robustly observed in Nihongo, it was noticeably absent in Korean. This divergence aligns with research findings indicating that motivational surges sparked by cultural trends like the Hallyu quickly plateau in the face of considerable linguistic and structural differences. As such, to surmount such challenges in language learning, individual drive should be scaffolded with effective instructional support, responsive curriculum design, and sustained personal relevance.

### ***Effort Matters, but only in Certain Contexts***

The results of the study also highlight the context-specific nature of effort's role in foreign language learning achievement. As was observed, effort showed significant effects on achievement across three languages (Nihongo, Spanish, and Mandarin), but these effects were significantly reduced or statistically negligible for Korean. Without meaningful channels for application, effort alone is insufficient to bridge the achievement gap – even more so for languages already perceived as being more challenging to learn.

### ***Motivation-Effort Cascade is Universal***

The robust and significant link between motivation and effort, herein referred to as the Motivation Effort Cascade, is present across all languages studied. This aligns with theoretical models like Self-Determination Theory, stating that motivated students will almost always invest more effort in various learning activities. The downstream effects, however, were variable, particularly on achievement. For Nihongo and Mandarin, this cascade is evidently stronger in terms of delivering achievement scores. The same, however, cannot be said for Spanish and Korean, which see diminished payoffs.

Evidently, this variability points to the necessity of integrated approaches that better foster motivation, channel meaningful effort, and ensure instructional frameworks that are responsive and adaptive.

## ***The Importance of Structural and Programmatic Factors***

The findings of the study also highlight the intrinsic role of programmatic and structural supports. As already established, high achievement scores become more likely when effective motivational-effort linkages are strengthened by providing students with access to consistent pedagogical support, differentiated tracks, and targeted resources that effectively align with each language's specific strengths, advantages, difficulties, and opportunities.

Finally, institutional flexibility in the form of adaptive curriculum for Korean and Mandarin and enhanced extracurricular opportunities for cultural immersion can effectively strengthen the already existing, albeit varying in degree and strength, of the triadic relationship of motivation, effort, and achievement in foreign language learning.

## ***Curricular Reform***

Curricular offering of foreign languages can also be revisited and reframed based on the findings of the study. Instead of offering the four foreign languages in Introductory classes, Mandarin (High Motivation) and Nihongo (High Motivation and Best Achievement Score) can instead be the focus and be offered in Multi-Level Curricular Tracks of Beginner and Advanced. By doing so, the institution can better concentrate its resources to further develop the curricular content, resulting in higher instructional quality, more robust teacher training, and more sustained learner progression.

Mandarin and Nihongo were chosen as both carry significant global, economic, and cultural capital. Additionally, the demand for globally competent professionals able to converse effectively in both languages remains strong in the ASEAN region and globally, aligning with student aspirations.

Finally, the offering of Mandarin and Nihongo in Beginner and Advanced tracks should be seen as a pilot program with built-in continuous and rigorous evaluation metrics that take into consideration student feedback, achievement data, and attrition rates. The results should be revisited annually and revised accordingly. Spanish and Korean, on the other hand, should be maintained as limited-offer electives, with a possible re-entry into the main FL curriculum after careful re-evaluation and redesign, provided that results align with evidence.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

The overall findings of this study provide crucial insights for higher education planning, particularly in the field of foreign language education. The established language-specific variation in the triadic relationship between motivation, effort, and achievement paves the way for higher education institutions to move away from the unilateral and universal

structure of foreign language education and instead move towards differentiated support systems.

Additionally, at least for the context of Northern Luzon, where the study was conducted, the strong performance of Nihongo and moderate success of Spanish and Mandarin programs point toward the possibility of establishing specialized learning hubs for these languages. By doing so, Northern Luzon can start the journey towards being established as a center for Asian language education in the Philippines.

Furthermore, with the strategic position and robust educational infrastructure in Northern Luzon, coupled with the high achievement levels across all languages, situates the graduates from the region as potential contributors to the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) workforce. These, in turn, become the basis for supporting cross-border business operations and sustained cultural exchange initiatives.

At the national level, the findings of the study also provide a strong basis for the expanded implementation of the national foreign language education policy. Rather than treating all foreign languages uniformly, however, the results of the study suggest that certain languages, like Korean, require additional enhanced pedagogical support, while Nihongo and Mandarin programs can serve as models for effective implementation and practice.

Also, the findings point towards the competitiveness of Filipino tertiary graduates who can and do achieve high proficiency in economically strategic languages. This, in turn, gives the Philippines a dominant position in ASEAN skills mobility initiatives. Conversely, the multilingual capability of Filipino FL learners could help offset growing concerns about the declining English proficiency, positioning the country instead as a multilingual workforce hub.

Finally, though the study was conducted in a single multi-campus HEI in Northern Luzon, the insights generated resonate across multiple levels, from local to national, to regional and global contexts. The study also demonstrated how localized educational research becomes the backbone for further broadening of research on multilingual education effectiveness and international language policy development.

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## DECLARATIONS

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

### **Informed Consent**

All participants were informed of the purpose and scope of the study, and their voluntary participation was secured. Respondents provided informed consent before completing the survey instruments, with assurances of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any stage without repercussions.

### **Ethics Approval**

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of research involving human participants. All procedures complied with national guidelines on research ethics in the Philippines.

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