



Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation in Bilingual Schoolchildren

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Introduction

Building from previous research showing a bilingual advantage in school, the present study investigated the link between bilingualism and academic motivation. We asked whether bilingual students would exhibit higher levels of either *intrinsic* (i.e., inherent to the self or task, volitional) or *extrinsic* (i.e., originating from others, controlled)¹ motivation than their monolingual peers, and the extent to which those forms of motivation would be in tension with one another.

Background

Bilingual Advantage in School

- In the United States, children of immigrants who retain their parents' country-of-origin language have shown a myriad of academic advantages, higher interest in school, and a greater sense of obligation to their families compared to their peers who only speak English.²⁻³
- Evidence for stronger interest in school might suggest higher levels of intrinsic motivation.
- Higher educational aspirations of bilingual immigrant populations appear strongly grounded in family obligation, which might suggest higher levels of extrinsic motivation.

Bilingualism and Cognitive Flexibility

- Bilingual children typically outperform monolingual children on tasks of cognitive control.⁴

Cultural Factors and the Bilingual Advantage

- Retaining parents' country-of-origin language alongside English provides access to a form of cultural capital unavailable to children who speak only English.³
- This deeper connection to one's immigrant culture appears to potentiate the sense of family obligation for immigrant children.

The Relationship Between Intrinsic and Extrinsic Forms of Motivation

- Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are less negatively correlated among racial minority students than their Euro-American peers.⁵⁻⁶

Research Questions

- Do bilingual students exhibit higher levels of intrinsic or extrinsic motivation than their monolingual peers?
- To what extent are these forms of motivation in tension with one another?

Method

Participants: 1047 3rd-8th grade students; 851 English monolingual; 196 Bilingual (mostly Spanish, Mandarin, Russian, Vietnamese). Data were drawn from a longitudinal study of motivational change.⁷

Measures: Students completed surveys assessing Intrinsic Motivation and Extrinsic Motivation (see below) in both the fall and spring semesters using reliable and valid scales from Corpus et al. (2009). They also reported demographic information, including what language they spoke at home.

Intrinsic Motivation
17 Items

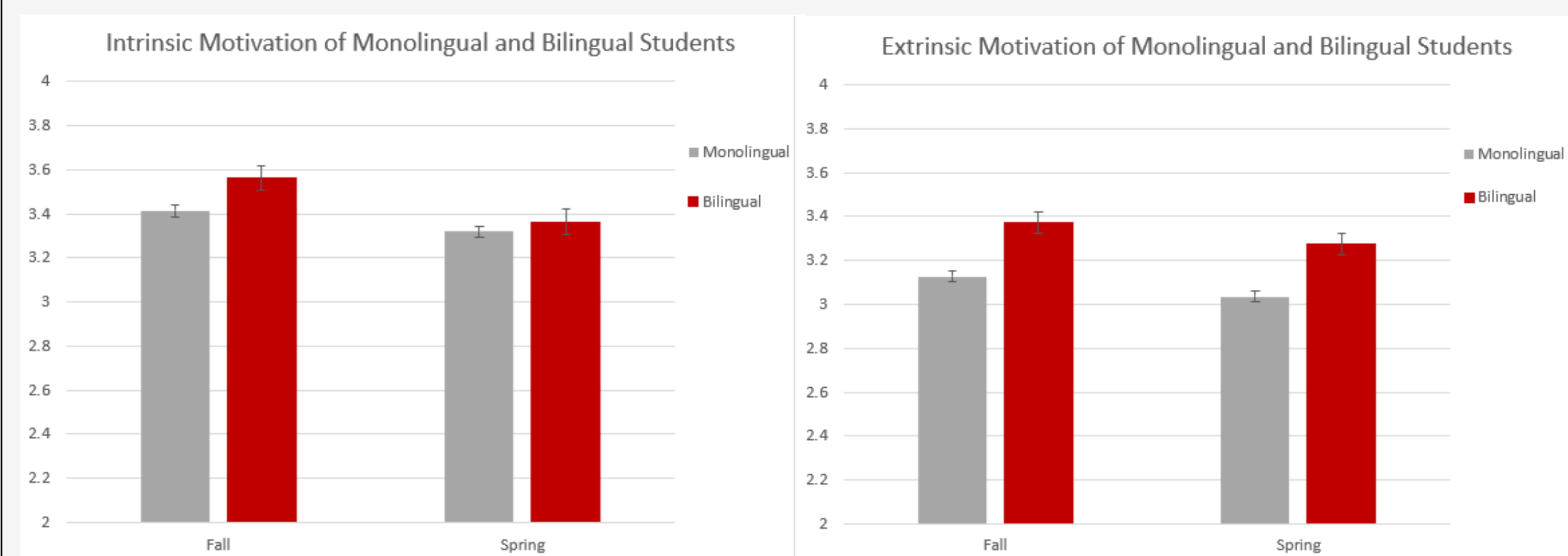
- Challenge Seeking
- Curiosity-based Engagement
- Independent Mastery

Extrinsic Motivation
16 Items

- Desire for Easy Work
- Pleasing Authority Figures
- Dependence on Teachers

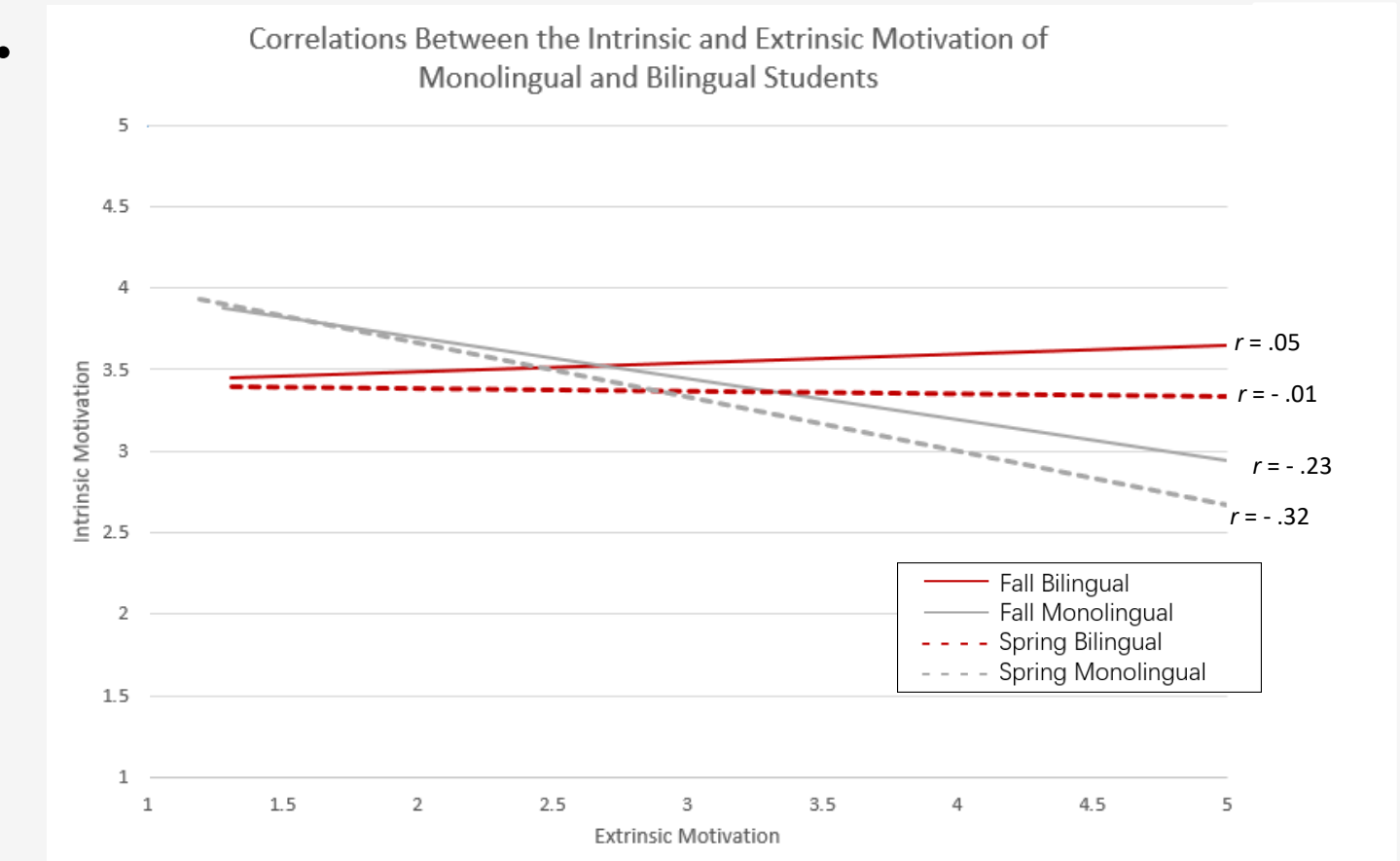
Results

Figure 1.



- Bilingual students exhibited higher levels of intrinsic motivation than their monolingual peers in the fall semester ($p < .05$).
- Bilingual students exhibited higher levels of extrinsic motivation than their monolingual peers in both spring and fall semesters ($ps < .001$).

Figure 2.



- The correlations between intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation were significantly less negative among bilingual students ($ps < .001$).

Conclusions

Bilingual students reported higher levels of intrinsic motivation in the fall, and higher levels of extrinsic motivation at both timepoints (Figure 1).

- Bilingual students endorse intrinsic and extrinsic motivation simultaneously, reflected by less negative correlations between the two types of motivation (Figure 2).
- Perhaps the experience of speaking two languages affords students cognitive skills that monolingual students cannot access.
- Speaking the same language as their parents often embeds children in an immigrant culture and can help them to discuss school, personal problems, and hopes for the future - all of which may shape their academic motivation.

Limitations

- No access to specific language spoken at home by bilingual students, nor their degree of English fluency
- Assessments were conducted in English

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