

MOTIVATION TO LEARN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND THE CORRELATION WITH STUDENT GENDER

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Abstract

Motivation is an individual difference which affects Second Language Acquisition. “Motivation is responsible for why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, and how hard they are going to pursue it” (Dörnyei 2000: 15). The aim of this paper is to investigate university students’ level of motivation and attitudes towards learning English and its correlation with student gender. The study uses a modified 44 – item survey adapted from Gardner (1985). The study reveals that students in South East European University are more instrumentally than integratively motivated to learn English as a foreign language. It seems that female students are more motivated to learn English than males but the correlation between gender, attitudes and motivation is not so significant in their levels of achievement in English classes. The study suggests that teachers play an important role in increasing student level of motivation. Therefore, they should discuss the goals and attitudes with their learners in order to make them aware of the reasons why they learn English.

Keywords: Second Language Acquisition, motivation, age, integrative, instrumental, gender.

Introduction

The status of English in Macedonia

The English language is one of the most important foreign languages studied in Macedonia and its role is functional since it is used as a lingua Franca language throughout the world. In this country, there are many private schools, colleges, universities and even kindergartens which use English as a language of instruction. These schools are well equipped with teaching materials needed to teach English. English has been taught in primary schools from the third grade for several years. However, starting from 2007, it is a required subject from the first grade and the students take two classes per week. The traditional textbooks have been changed and the students are provided with more modern books which include pictures, dictionaries, communicative activities and focus on language skills. The same situation exists in high schools where the students attend two to four English classes per week. However, the number of students in classes is 30-40 and this is still an issue that must be resolved in the near future. More and more English teachers are being trained in modern methods of English teaching and they attend local and international conferences. Old teaching methods are rapidly being replaced with modern ones. Unfortunately, the curricula are determined by the Ministry of Education without consulting English teachers and students. However, this is not true for universities where the teachers design curricula based on the students’ needs and interests. Furthermore, the students are encouraged to learn English by their parents because they are aware of its importance. They know that their children should be able to read the most up-to-date literature in English, understand the news on English TV channels and attend the many lectures given by guest professors in English. English has become a tool of communication for every guest coming to Macedonia for different purposes and in the many conferences that are conducted in English. There are four State Universities in Macedonia and a number of private universities. South East European University where the present study is done is located in Tetova and

it has around 7000 students, undergraduate and postgraduate. The students have different nationalities Albanian, Macedonian, Turkish, Greek, Roma, etc. The students have different motives for learning English but most of them learn it for their future careers. Students from all faculties must take English classes levels, 1-4.

2. Literature Review

Language acquisition is the process by which the learners learn any foreign language which involves natural acquisition or picking up a second language through exposure as well as through classroom instruction. Language acquisition or language learning differs among individuals and there are many predictors that determine second language learning success. Motivation is a very complex phenomena which can result from learning and also cause learning. Many studies have shown that the most succesful learners are those who are more motivated to learn a language. Ellis (2009:75) point out that “motivation involves the attitudes and affective states that influence the degree of effort that learners make to learn an L2”. According to Neimal et.al. (1978) “the most successful learners are not necessarily those to whom a language comes very easily but they are those who display certain typical characteristics, most of them clearly associated with motivation. They are: positive task orientation, ego involvemnt, need for achievement, high aspirations, goal orientation, persevance and tolerance of ambiguity”. There are two types of motivation, instrumental and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation is understood as a tool to meet the requirements at school, for example studying for an exam. “This is generally characterized by the desire to obtain something practical or concrete from the study of a second language” (Hudson 2000 cited in Norris-Holt, 2001, para.7). On the other hand, “when someone becomes a resident in a new community that uses the target language in its social interactions, integrative motivation is a key component in assisting the learner to develop some level of proficiency in that language” (Norris-Holt 2001, para. 2). Both these types of motivation are considered as essential elements of success. The students who like people speaking a certain language and admire their culture are highly motivated to learn that language. Brown (2000 cited in Norris-Holt 2001: para.8) makes the point that “both integrative and instrumental motivation are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Learners rarely select one form of motivation when learning a second language, but rather a combination of both orientations”. Gardner (2005) believes that integrativness, instrumentality, language anxiety and attitude toward language are directly linked with the language achievement- proficiency but still they have an important impact in the overall process. All these variables are considered personal variables which affect motivation for learning foreign languages considerably.



Figure 1: The Socio-educational Model (Modified from Gardner 2005: 6)

As Dörnyei (2001: 116) points out “teacher skills in *motivating* learners should be seen as central to teaching effectiveness”. Thus, English language teachers should guide their students and offer them a set of techniques and provide an interesting learning environment in order to increase student motivation. Attitude on the other hand, is a way of feeling or thinking about someone or something, especially, as this influences one’s behaviour (Longman Dictionary of contemporary English 2004: 11). Ellis (2000: 38) believes that “learner attitudes have an impact on the level of L2 proficiency achieved by individual learners who are themselves influenced by this success. Thus, learners with positive attitudes, who experience success, will have these attitudes reinforced. Similarly, learners’ negative attitudes may be strengthened by lack of success”.

3. Research Methodology

The main purpose of this study is to examine instrumental and integrative motivation among students at SEEU, to investigate their attitudes, and to see if the student gender affects student motivation to learn English. The present study aims to answer the following questions: Are SEEU students instrumentally or integratively motivated to learn English? How does gender difference affect SEEU students’ motivation to learn? What is the most frequent reason that students learn L2?

3.1 Participants

One hundred and twenty students (sixty female and sixty male students) participated in this study. Their age ranged from 18- 23 and they had different levels of proficiency, Level 1, Level 2, Level 3 and Level 4.

A sample was chosen randomly from the total of four hundred students who take language courses at the Language Centre, SEEU. The Language Centre provides language courses from Level 1 to Level 4 and Academic English to all students at the University. They take 2-8 classes a week English according to their proficiency level. These courses are offered as core courses to the Faculty of Law, Faculty of Business Administration, Faculty of Public Administration and Political Sciences, Faculty of Contemporary Sciences and Technologies and Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication. According to the university three-year study cycle, all the students are required to take minimum two semesters of Basic Skills English. Classes meet from two to eight hours per week, with the lower levels receiving the most hours of instruction. Each level comprises a full semester of instruction. Instruction is designed to take students from Common European Framework (CEF) levels A1 to C1 of English language proficiency. This study employed a mixed qualitative, quantitative and comparative research approaches in order to provide more detailed results drawn from the study.

3.2 Procedures

The participants first were asked to write down their background information including their age, gender, proficiency level and their major. The second study instrument was motivation questionnaire which asked the participants to indicate if they strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree on the questionnaire items. The third study instrument was an attitude interview where the participants express their opinions regarding the learning of English.

Study results

The results of the data from the student questionnaire reported by SEEU students taking English language courses in the 2011/2012 academic year are presented in two sections. The first section deals with the personal and background information gathered from the students’ responses to the first part of the questionnaire: name, nationality, L1, age, gender, languages known, and students self reported English-language proficiency. The second section presents the students’ responses to the tenth items motivation questionnaire. It will present the students’ perceptions about their motivation in learning English.

4.1 Background questionnaire

One hundred and twenty (120) students involved in the study out of which 60 male and 60 female students filled out the background questionnaire. The participants’ data collected are presented in Table 1.

<i>Student age</i>	<i>Proficiency level</i>	<i>Major</i>	<i>Student Number</i>
18-23	Level 2	Public Administration	23
	Level 3	Business Administration	37
	Level 4	Law	13
	Level 1	Computer Sciences	31
	Level 5	Languages, Cultures and Communications	26

Table 1: Participants’ Background

4.2 Questionnaire results

Regarding the data obtained from the second part of the questionnaire to each of the five levels of agreement “Strongly disagree”, “Disagree”, “Neutral”, “Agree”, and “Strongly agree” for the 10 items, the frequencies and percentages of students’ responses, are presented to determine the female and male motivation. It aims to find out gender differences for learning English.

Female responses

Table 2 shows female responses on their instrumental and integrative motivation. Regarding question 1, ‘Studying English can be important to me because it will allow me to be more at ease with other people who speak English’ 35% of the participants strongly agree, 25% agree, 20% are neutral, 15% disagree and 5% strongly disagree. Regarding question 2 ‘Studying English can be important for me because it will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people’ 28% of the participants strongly agree, 22% agree, 27% are neutral, 21% disagree and 2% strongly disagree. Regarding question 3, ‘Studying English can be important for me because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate British art and literature’, 19% of the participants strongly agree, 20% agree, 21% are neutral, 22% disagree and 18% strongly disagree. Regarding question 4, ‘Studying English can be important for me because I will be able to participate more freely in the activities of other cultural groups’, 12% of the participants strongly agree, 19% agree, 35% are neutral, 14% disagree and 20% strongly disagree. Regarding question 5, ‘Studying English can be important for me because I’ll need it for my future career’, 70% of the participants strongly agree, 14% agree, 6% are neutral, 5% disagree and 5% strongly disagree. Regarding question 6, ‘Studying English can be important for me because it will make me a more knowledgeable person’, 45% of the participants strongly agree, 11% agree, 11% are neutral, 13% disagree and 10% strongly disagree. Regarding question 7, ‘Studying English can be important for me

because I think it will someday be useful in getting a good job’, 68% of the participants strongly agree, 8% agree, 4% are neutral, 12% disagree and 8% strongly disagree. Regarding question 8, ‘Studying English can be important for me because other people will respect me more if I have knowledge of a foreign language’, 35% of the participants strongly agree, 14% agree, 11% are neutral, 14% disagree and 16% strongly disagree. Regarding question 9, ‘Studying English can be important for me because that it will become natural to me’, 18% of the participants strongly agree, 14% agree, 25% are neutral, 25% disagree and 18% strongly disagree. Finally, regarding question 10 ‘Studying English help me understand to understand News in English’, 20% of the participants strongly agree, 23 agree, 9% are neutral, 14% disagree and 34 % strongly disagree.

Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Studying English can be important to me because it will allow me to be more at ease with other people who speak English.	5%	15%	20%	25%	35%
2. Studying English can be important for me because it will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people.	2%	21%	27%	22%	28%
3. Studying English can be important for me because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate British art and literature.	18%	22%	21%	20%	19%
4. Studying English can be important for me because I will be able to participate more freely in the activities of other cultural groups	20%	14%	35%	19%	12%
5. Studying English can be important for me because I'll need it for my future career.	5%	5%	6%	14%	70%
6. Studying English can be important for me because it will make me a more knowledgeable person.	10%	13%	11%	11%	45%
7. Studying English can be important for me because I think it will someday be useful in getting a good job.	8%	12%	4%	8%	68%
8. Studying English can be important for me because other people will respect me more if I have knowledge of a foreign language.	16%	14%	11%	14%	35%
9. Studying English can be important for me because that it will become natural to me	18%	25%	25%	14%	18%
10. Studying English help me understand to understand News in English	34%	14%	9%	23%	20%

Table 2: Female responses

It seems that the female participants are more instrumentally motivated to learn English because two largest categories of 70% and 68% are connected to a desire to learn English for their future career and to get a better job.

Male responses

Table 3 is the results of male responses to the motivation questionnaire.

Items	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Studying English can be important to me because it will allow me to be more at ease with other people who speak English.	10%	25%	10%	19%	36%
2. Studying English can be important for me because it will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people.	18%	21%	13%	35%	13%
3. Studying English can be important for me because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate British art and literature.	30%	13%	15%	19%	23%
4. Studying English can be important for me because I will be able to participate more freely in the activities of other cultural groups	13%	34%	13%	18%	22%
5. Studying English can be important for me because I'll need it for my future career.	10%	10%	3%	20%	67%
6. Studying English can be important for me because it will make me a more knowledgeable person.	20%	9%	11%	20%	40%
7. Studying English can be important for me because I think it will someday be useful in getting a good job.	8%	12%	6%	25%	55%
8. Studying English can be important for me because other people will respect me more if I have knowledge of a foreign language.	20%	22%	10%	19%	29%
9. Studying English can be important for me because that it will become natural to me	21%	27%	20%	20%	12%
10. Studying English help me understand to understand News in English	10%	25%	20%	27%	18%

Table 3: Male responses

Comparing the results from both genders, males and females, learn English for their future career and for their job. It seems that female students are more motivated to learn English than males but the correlation between gender, attitudes and motivation is not so significant in their levels of achievement in English classes. The most dominant (female) motivation with 68% in item 7 'Studying English can be important for me because I think it will someday be useful in getting a good job' whereas 55% of males agree. Overall, the gender plays a role in students' motivation and generally all participants are instrumentally motivated to learn English at SEEU. These results are to some extent similar to the results obtained from the Canadian students and done by Dörnyei (1990). The participants of this study felt a need to learn English for their achievement that is to pass their exams.

4.3 Attitude Interview

The second study instrument was the attitude interview. The questions were: What is the importance of speaking two and more languages? What is the value of a person with knowledge of English language? What is the importance of English for travel? What are the characteristics of a good language learner? Do you need English for your personal goals? The data obtained from the interviews show that the students' attitudes toward learning English is very positive. The data from the above tables suggest that the students have highly positive attitudes toward English as a subject. The highest score was for the statement 'Learning English may be important to my goals' and this shows that participants have changed their attitude towards English and they believe that it can help them achieve their goals in life. On the other hand, the lowest score is for statement 'I think I am a very good language learner' this shows that students do not hold a very positive attitude towards themselves.

Conclusion

This paper offers an important angle since it analyses the types of motivation among SEEU students. It reveals very useful information in terms of instrumental and integrative motivation and also gender differences in learning English as a foreign language in Macedonia. Another important issue was to investigate the student attitudes towards learning English. In fact, student attitude towards the course they take is crucial for their success. As a consequence, the capacity to know what the students think about these issues can help to improve the quality of the English language teaching/learning process. Student motivation crucial for their success and it is probably one of the essential determinants of individuals' action. After the analysis of the data, this paper provides some conclusions: The findings suggest that SEEU students are more instrumentally motivated to learn English than integratively but both instrumental and integrative orientations are relevant factors in English learning. According to the results, English in Macedonia is very important for the student future career and the participants, both males and females, believe that English may be important to achieve their goals. Nevertheless, the study shows that students do not believe that they are good in learning English which shows that they criticize themselves and this makes them work harder. This study demonstrates that affective factors play an important role in learning English language and these new findings can help teachers to increase student motivation. The study recommends that foreign language teachers should discuss the goals and attitudes with their learners in order to make them aware of the reasons why they learn English and designing classroom activities which increase student level of motivation.

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