



Attitudes, motivation and study habits of English language learners of young students

Actitudes, motivación y hábitos de estudio de los estudiantes de inglés de jóvenes estudiantes

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Abstract

The research was conducted in several English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at a Midwest American university town. The study participants were 15 international students from various different Secondary Schools who are currently enrolled at this university. Data was collected by using a mixed-methods approach with surveys and follow-up interviews, and was analyzed using descriptive statistics and content analysis. Results have shown that learners' beliefs and their learning background have an influence on their perceptions of learning activities and teaching methods. In terms of enjoyment of such practices, there was an apparent inclination towards interactive and communicative approaches rather than traditional, non-communicative ones, whereas no distinct style was favored in regard to effectiveness.

Key words: language, learning, young student

Resumen

La investigación se realizó en varias clases de inglés como segundo idioma (ESL) en una ciudad universitaria del medio oeste de Estados Unidos. Los participantes del estudio fueron 15 estudiantes internacionales de varias escuelas secundarias diferentes que

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actualmente están matriculados en esta universidad. Los datos se recopilaron mediante un enfoque de métodos mixtos con encuestas y entrevistas de seguimiento, y se analizaron mediante estadísticas descriptivas y análisis de contenido. Los resultados han demostrado que las creencias de los alumnos y sus antecedentes de aprendizaje influyen en sus percepciones de las

actividades de aprendizaje y los métodos de enseñanza. En cuanto al disfrute de tales prácticas, hubo una aparente inclinación hacia enfoques interactivos y comunicativos en lugar de los tradicionales, no comunicativos, mientras que no se favoreció un estilo distinto con respecto a la efectividad.

Palabras clave: lenguaje, aprendizaje, joven estudiante.

Introduction

There are some students who do not like English language, I think they don't know the importance of English for professionals, they do not have an extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Currently, parents and teachers are more concerned about the child's motivation to learn English. A lot of students are weary of learning English. Performance cannot improve. In some cases the problem is that students have lost learning motivation. It is the issue we are facing in promoting quality education, improving the quality of teaching.

First, students lack motivation in learning English mainly because no clear learning objectives and plans. During high school and every school year, each semester, students don't know what to learn, how to learn, or seldom think of what requirements should achieve. They wonder whether they need to learn English, or hesitate to learn a certain amount of knowledge is necessary.

No sense of achievement, aspirations and ideals, no intellectual curiosity and self-motivation. The schools also do not develop a variety of incentives and a sense of urgency to learn the language. Lack of appropriate learning methods. Students who lack learning motivation in general have a negative attitude in study. It is impossible for them to work out a set of their own learning method. The above problem lead to the lack of learning motivation for students. Understanding the background and the underlying causes of the problem will be able to achieve the target and also can solve the problem.

In addition, there are also numerous educators who would love to try out different techniques, but are simply not sure where to start or which ones are effective. It is in every educator's best interest, and usually it is their intention, to help learners be successful in their studies. Therefore, a key duty of teachers is to help and support students in their learning processes by finding strategies and methods that are

effective. Additionally, they should facilitate their learning in general, and with regard to language learning, make them feel confident and competent in using the foreign language.

The students at first level at Cenid at the Technical University of Babahoyo who do not feel extrinsic and intrinsically motivated to learn English.

I think the reason is because they have English class only once time a week two hours per week, and 32 hours in all semester. For that reason today, the students are in our classroom without having developed a motivation to learn because they do not know the English importance for professionals

Language learning requires time and effort. Most of the time students lose their interest and enthusiasm towards language learning due to negative feelings such as low self-confidence and esteem, excessive anxiety, teacher's harsh and discouraging attitude and psychologically insecure classroom atmospheres. However, it is not impossible to make students more willing to learn. By making lessons more appealing through different activities, building supportive environments, and reinforcing students positively, teachers can foster students' interest and take sound steps on the path to increasing motivation.

The last half-century has been marked by substantial advances in the understanding of second language learning, energized by developments in linguistics and bolstered by the realization that other fields too are critically implicated in the process (Spolsky, 2000: 157).

One of these advances is the addition of the concept of motivation to models of second language learning. This major contribution has been made by social psychologists, especially Wallace Lambert and Robert Gardner (Spolsky, 2000).

Their work dominated the area until 1990s. However, with the realization that the model presented by Gardner's socio psychological theory was not adequate in investigating different aspects of motivation, researchers developed different theories in order to expand foreign language learning motivation.

Theories of motivation

Gardner's Social Psychological Theory

Gardner (1979) asserts that at schools, the learning of a second or foreign language is seen as any other school subject; however, there is a significant distinction between them. In most of the school subjects, students learn their own cultural heritage. However, in the case of leaning a second or foreign language, the students learn new information such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and more importantly they are "acquiring symbolic elements of a different ethno-linguistic community". The students are in a way imposed to acquire elements of the target

culture. Therefore, the process of second language acquisition is of vital importance since the learners' harmony with their own society and willingness for identification with the target culture is concerned. Williams (1994) also agrees that learning a foreign language is different from other school subjects because "language, after all, belongs to a person's whole social being: it is part of one's identity, and is used to convey this identity".

Dörnyei (2005) maintains that according to Gardner and Lambert (1972), second languages played a role as "mediating factors between different ethno-linguistic communities and thus regarded the motivation to learn the language of the other community as a primary force responsible for enhancing or hindering intercultural communication and affiliation" (p. 67). He also claims that their social psychological approach is based on the principle that attitudes of the students have a great impact on students in whether they will be successful or not in learning the target language. Dörnyei (2001b) comments that in Gardner's motivation theory (1985), motivation includes three elements: "motivational intensity, desire to learn the language and attitudes towards learning the language". Gardner (1985) thinks that a language learner who is truly motivated embodies all of the three. The function of orientations is to increase motivation and lead it to a set of goals. This can be done either with a strong interpersonal quality (integrative) or a strong practical quality (instrumental) (Dörnyei, 2001b: 49). According to Gardner (2003), integrativeness "implies an openness on the part of the individuals that would facilitate their motivation to learn the material"; whereas instrumental orientation "refers to the economic and practical advantages of learning English" (Gardner, 1985: 52).

According to Dörnyei (2001b: 68), Gardner's motivation theory has four areas:

1. the construct of the integrative motive;
2. a general learning model, labeled the socio-educational model, which integrates motivation as a cornerstone;
3. the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB);
4. a recent extended L2 motivation construct developed together with Paul Tremblay (Tremblay and Gardner, 1995).

The first area is integrative motive which is explained as a "motivation to learn a second language because of positive feelings toward the community that speaks that language" (Gardner, 1985: 82-3). It has got three main components:

The first one is integrativeness, which includes integrative orientation, interest in foreign languages, and attitudes towards the target community, which show the learner's willingness and interest in interacting with the people of the other communities (Gardner, Tremblay and Masgoret, 1997). The second one is attitudes towards the learning situation, which covers attitudes towards the teacher, the

course, the course materials, and extra-curricular activities (Gardner, 2003; Dörnyei, 2001b). The third and the last one is motivation, which includes effort, desire and attitudes towards learning.

The second area, the socio-educational model, has vital importance since it distinguishes the four separate characteristics of the second language acquisition process:

1. antecedent factors (which can be biological or experiential such as gender, age or learning history)
2. individual difference (i.e. learner) variables such as intelligence, language aptitude, motivation, and language anxiety
3. language acquisition contexts
4. learning outcomes Dörnyei, 2001b (p. 52)

The third area of Gardner's motivation theory is the Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB hereafter). The AMTB is a very useful instrument in that it is designed to follow psychometric tenets which govern the questionnaire. It is also a scientific tool regarding its presentation and content (Dörnyei, 2005). It functions as the major components of Gardner's theory and includes over 130 items. These items address attitudes towards the French community (10 Likert-scale items, LSI hereafter), interest in foreign language (10 LSI), attitudes towards European French people (10LSI), attitudes towards learning French (10 LSI), integrative orientation (4 LSI), instrumental orientation (4 LSI), French class anxiety (5 LSI), parental encouragement (10 LSI), motivational intensity (10 multiple choice items, MCI hereafter), desire to learn French (10 MCI), orientation index (1 MCI), evaluation of the French teacher (25 semantic differential scale items), evaluation of the French course (25 semantic differential scale items) (Dörnyei, 2001b; Dörnyei, 2005).

The fourth and the last area of Gardner's theory is Tremblay and Gardner's revised model. Upon receiving reviews from Crookes and Schmidt (1991), Dörnyei (1994a, 1994b), and Oxford and Shearin (1994) that "a consideration of constructs from other research areas" (Tremblay and Gardner, 1995: 505) would be very useful in researching motivation in L2 acquisition, Tremblay and Gardner revised and extended Gardner's motivation construct. They added three new elements to it namely goal salience which pertains to "the specificity of the learner's goals and the frequency of goal-setting strategies used; valence which comprises "the traditional scales of 'the desire to learn the L2' and 'attitudes towards learning the L2', thus denoting a L2-learning-related value component", and self-efficacy which includes anxiety and expectancy of being able to carry out a wide range of language activities by the end of the course (Dörnyei, 2001b: 53).

Gardner's motivation theory had dominated the area until 1990s. However, as Gardner (1985) himself puts forth, it was "not the true or the final one". He insisted:

I do feel, however, that it contains many elements which must be considered in future developments. A true test of any theoretical formulation is not only its ability to explain and account for phenomena which have been demonstrated, but also its ability to provide suggestions for further investigations, to raise new questions, to promote further developments and open new horizons.

This model has those capabilities and, hopefully as a result of the account given here, they will be realized.

As Gardner himself claimed that the model would promote further investigations due to the fact that the model he developed embodied elements that could be used to shed light on different aspects of motivation, the model did promote developments in the area after 1990s. In 1990s, in many research studies, it was pointed out that the socio-educational model was not sufficient in explaining different aspects of motivation, such as the nature of the task, the person's attribution of success, and the kind of reward involved in successful completion of the task. This shift was more in line with how teachers perceived motivation, more related to classroom applications (Crookes and Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994a, 1994b; Dörnyei and Csizér, 1998; Dörnyei and Kormos, 2000; Nikolov, 1999; Oxford and Shearin, 1994; van Lier, 1996).

Another cognitive theory which McDonough (1989) claims to be "the most cognitive and non-mechanistic theory" is attribution theory (p. 147). Attribution theory relates learners' past experiences to their future success endeavors by means of the causal attributions as the mediating link (Dörnyei, 2005). These references of learners could be different causes for example, lack of ability, effort, intention, others' ability, luck.

Therefore, this theory attempts to outline perceptions, motives and opinions of the learners which affect their performance (McDonough, 1989). In the case of a language learner, if he/she fails to learn to a foreign language, he/she can ascribe his/her failure to his/her lack of ear for languages, and he/she can be demotivated and unwilling to take part in activities in class. Dörnyei (2001b) claims that although the importance of attributions has been expressed over and over, it is surprising that there are very few studies conducted on attributions.

There are very interesting results of the studies conducted on attributions. The first research studies were conducted by Ushioda (1996). From his two studies with Irish learners of French, he found that to be able to sustain a positive self-concept and a belief in personal potential against negative experiences, there were two important attributional patterns. There was a tendency to ascribe L2 achievement to personal ability or other internal factors such as effort, perfectionist approach. However, attributing L2 failure or lack of achievement involved temporary deficiencies; for instance, lack of effort, lack of opportunity to spend time in an L2 environment, which could be overcome.

Williams and Burden (1999) also conducted a research on the aspects of the development of learner attributions in L2 studies. The findings of their study revealed that there were obvious distinctions between the age groups. The groups consisted of participants aged between 10 and 12 claimed that they attained success due to listening and concentrating, however, older children demonstrated many more attributions which comprised ability, level of work, circumstances, and the influence of others.

Graham (2004) found that students with higher levels of success were those who attributed their achievement to their effort, high level of ability, and use of productive use of learning strategies. The students willing to carry on learning

French after they were 16 also attributed achievement to these factors, however, the students who did not have plans to continue French were less likely to attribute success to ability, effort and strategy use. They were more likely to attribute achievement to luck or chance, and their own assumptions of low ability. For their failure, they put the blame on the difficulty level of the task, lack of effort and inadequate use of strategies.

Materials and methods

This chapter will give information about the methodology of the research. It also informs about the overall of the study in terms of the setting and the participants, the data collection tools and procedures, and the data analysis.

In this study, the researcher will attempt to examine students' attitudes towards learning English language, motivation level and orientations as a language learner and also how these students' study habits differed according to their motivation level. In order to investigate attitudes and motivation, the survey technique was used to gather data. The reason for this is surveys are the most commonly used methods to gather descriptive data for a variety of scopes from small studies to large-scale studies. The advantage of using a survey is that the researcher does not do anything to manipulate the situation, which means the researcher does not do anything to influence the subjects. The subjects are free to give their own perspectives while the researchers just observe them "without trying to alter anything" (Jaeger, 1988:307).

The survey will use for the purpose of collecting data is a partial replication of the survey. It is partial replication in that the attitudes and motivation scales; however, since the researcher also will attempt to investigate study habits, I will question students to write whether they were more or less motivated to learn English when they were in secondary school. The researcher added a statement which will ask students to write down their study habits when studying English. Also, in order to better picture students' study habits, they were also required to answer five questions according a given situation for their vocabulary study habits.

The sampling method will use for the study is convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is best when there are no chances to “select a random or a systematic nonrandom sample” (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003). It is also useful when investigating a problem in a specific context.

At Technical University of Babahoyo there is a high rate of failure in English courses and a high rate of absenteeism. This is assumed to be due to the fact that students studying at this university do not have positive attitudes towards learning English and they are not sufficiently motivated. As a result they do not attend classes, study outside school and they fail the courses. Taking into consideration this problem, the researcher administered the survey in second-year classes he taught in order to examine whether the assumption had any scientific value.

The purpose of this study is to acquire a deeper understanding of students' perceptions regarding language learning activities as well as English language learning in general. Thus, the participants are all nonatives students who are currently attending English language courses concurrently to their regular university classes to improve their English skills in certain areas (for example, speaking and academic writing).

The participants of the study will be 30 students Technical University of Babahoyo, who are studying in the first semester, academic year 2017. Seventeen of these participants are female students, and thirteen of them are male students. Their ages ranged between 18 and 21. Their level of English is beginner A2. Three of the students had been studying English since kindergarten. Twelve of them had been studying English since they were primary school students. Ten of them started to learn English when they were at High School, and finally eight students started to learn English at university.

The surveys will be distributed to the 30 students during their normal class session during which time they were given clear instructions and explanation for filling out the surveys. The surveys will be then collected upon completion.

With the aid of the questionnaire, I wanted to examine the perceptions of students studying English as a foreign language with respect to the effectiveness of and their preferences in various language learning activities. This included the investigation of their motivation for and attitude towards English language learning in general and also the participants' view on their previous foreign language learning experiences in their native country. The research participants and I met at a designated time and place, which I had individually scheduled with each of them.

Results

Expectancy-value theories

In addition to self-determination and attribution theory, expectancy-value theories also became influential after the 1990s. Oxford & Shearin (1994) assert that individuals take part in activities which are seen as instruments to achieve some valued ends. The individual seeks to answer the question “Should I expend the energy or not?” before carrying out the task (18). Dörnyei (2001b) claims that there are two important factors for students to determining whether they will spend energy in fulfilling the task: the individual’s expectancy of success in a given task, the value the individual attaches to success on that task. The greater the chances of attaining the goal, and the greater the value of the goal, the more incentive the students have, which means the higher the degree of motivation. However, if the students sees that however hard they strive, they will not be able to reach the goal or the task will not lead them to the goal they value, they will not exert energy on completing the task. Oxford & Shearin (1994) explains that the difference between expectancy-value theories and need theories is in need theories there is an element, tension, however, in expectancy-value theories, the individual expects to attain a valued reward. Also, contrary to need theories whose hierarchal nature and the means to meet the needs are specific, expectancy-value theories are uncertain about the nature of the rewards.

Self-efficacy Theory

The last theory in cognitive-situated period is self-efficacy. In self-efficacy theory, it is believed that students’ academic performance is strongly influenced by the judgments they have about their own capabilities to organize and fulfill the action (Mills, Pajares and Herron, 2007). Students who have a high level of academic efficacy are willing to take difficult tasks, exert energy, show persistence in spite of drawbacks, have lower anxiety, demonstrate more flexibility in learning strategies, evaluate their academic performance themselves. On the other hand, students with low self-efficacy tend to carry out simple academic tasks, they expend minimum effort and perseverance, and they may even avoid completing the task at all (Mills, Pajares and Herron, 2007). The reasons for this may be since these students perceive challenging tasks as personal threats, the thing on which they concentrate becomes their own inadequate capabilities and the difficulties. They cannot focus on how they can carry out the task (Dörnyei, 2001b). Dörnyei (2001b) also emphasizes the fact that self-efficacy beliefs are not directly related to actual ability and adequacy of the learner since these are the results of “a complex process of self-persuasion that is based on cognitive processing of diverse sources” such as ideas of other people,

feedback, observations on other learners, how much they know about suitable task strategies.

The study carried out by Mills, Pajares and Herron (2007) on the effect of self-efficacy and motivational beliefs on the attainment of French demonstrated that achievement of French language was better predicted by self-efficacy for self regulation than by self-efficacy to obtain grades in French, French anxiety in reading and listening and French learning self-concept. Students who had an inclination to be successful more were aware that they were able to use their abilities to use metacognitive strategies in an effective manner so as to observe their own academic work time productively.

Need Theories

Another theory which was focused on after the 90s was need theory. According to Brophy (1998), behaviors are the individual's responses to his needs. These needs may come from birth or may be universal like hunger, thirst, or self-preservation, or they can even be learnt within the culture and be developed to differing extents from one person to another. Oxford and Shearin (1994) claim that there are two need theories which are founded on needs producing tension until needs are met. The best known one is developed by Maslow (1962), called hierarchies of need. Needs, according to this hierarchy, are arranged in an order presented below:

1. Psychological needs (sleep, thirst).
 2. Safety needs (freedom from danger, anxiety, or psychological threat).
 3. Love needs (acceptance from parents, teachers, peers).
 4. Esteem needs (mastery experiences, confidence in one's ability).
 5. Needs for self-actualization (creative self-expression, satisfaction of curiosity)
- (Brophy, 1998: 5)

The second need theory is known as need-achievement which is as the name suggests based on need for achievement. Need-achievement theory is concerned with fear of failure and fear of success inclinations. Past success in a certain situation may lead the individual to attempt to display similar behaviors in the future in a similar context. However, failure may cause the individual to feel fear and fail to attain success (Oxford and Shearin, 1994). In the context of language learning, the implication is that since some students feel the need to attain success or to avoid failure, they should be provided with activities that make students feel that they can do it, and as a result there will be positive results which are valuable for the students.

Equity theories

Equity theories also became part of the language studies after the realization of the inadequacy of Gardner's socio educational model. Equity theories are concerned

with “equity, which is characterized by a mathematical ratio of inputs to outcomes” (Oxford and Shearin, 1994: 19). For the learner, input consists of any element which the learner thinks can contribute to the work such as intellectual competence, personal characteristics, experience. Outcomes, on the other hand, comprise personally valuable goals which can be attained by the end of the activity or task like exam results, evaluation of performance, praise or reward. If the learner manages to establish a link between input and outcome, they evaluate the value of the task to their own or others’ standards. As a result of this evaluation, if the learner realizes that there is a big gap between the two, they become unhappy or demotivated.

Oxford and Shearin (1994) claim that in the context of language learning, if the learner cannot set up this link, if they cannot see valuable outcome of the tedious language learning process, they are likely to give up, which happens very often in many institutions.

Reinforcement Theories

In second language studies, reinforcement theories were also exploited in order to understand motivation from different perspectives. According to reinforcement theories, in order to establish and maintain behavior, reinforcement which can be defined as anything increasing and sustaining the frequency of behavior acts as the first element. Examples of reinforcement may include verbal and written praise, rewards (Brophy, 1998). Spaulding (1992) also emphasizes that when students display desired behaviors, teachers should reward them in order to encourage other students to demonstrate similar behaviors. The students who performing inappropriate behaviors, on the contrary, should be punished so that either the student displaying inappropriate behavior or the other students do not act in the same way in the future. Oxford and Shearin (1994) claim that reinforcement theories are the ones with which teachers are more familiar with. Teachers can reinforce behavior extrinsically by praise or tangible prizes. Although this can be done in class, intrinsic rewards are more effective; therefore, teachers should also help students to discover intrinsic rewards within themselves or by means of the language tasks.

Conclusions

The purpose of the data collection was to answer the following research questions: 1. What is the learner’s motivation for studying English? 2. What is the learner perception of instructional methods and learning activities in terms of effectiveness and enjoyment? In order to answer the first question, regarding the motivation of students to learn English, several ways of data collection were used. First, the questions 4 to 7 specifically ask for the individual’s explanation on his/her motivation to study English (Question 6) and the reasons for studying in an English speaking

country (Question 7). Furthermore, by asking whether the respective language is perceived as important in the participant's native country (Question 4) and his/her personal opinion on the importance of its learning (Question 5), the answers indirectly revealed the attitude toward the studied language, and disclosed any possible correlation between the motivation to study it and the value of having sufficient knowledge about it. In addition, Question 9, in which participants were asked to identify additional activities they had done to improve their language skills (if they had done any), also gave further information on the individual's motivation and reasons for learning English. Data collected and analyzed from Questions 8, and 11-13 were used to answer the question on what kinds of instructional methods and activities were thought to be enjoyable and enhancing to one's learning. The second research question was answered by analyzing the percentage numbers and frequency counts, which were obtained through these survey questions, by looking at the characteristics of salient items and also comparing the activities that were perceived as helpful (or not useful at all) and those which were seen as fun and motivating (or not at all). Moreover, the participants' statements made during the follow-up interviews served as further source of information to get more in-depth insights into their reasoning for their particular selection of choices.

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