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STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN EFL CONTEXT: MOTIVATIONAL INFLUENCES AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Summary: This paper analyses students' motivation to learn English as an optional foreign language at the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, with respect to their success in learning. Motivation to learn a foreign language is a complex concept which is under the influence of cognitive factors, affective (emotional) factors and the context in which learning takes place. In this respect, the research reported in this paper analysed three stages in the students' motivation (preactional, actional and postactional stage) during two phases of research, on a sample of eighty-seven (N=87) first and second year students. For the purpose of gathering data, two questionnaires, which contained items that were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, were used during the research. The results of the research indicate that there is a relationship between certain aspects of motivation and the success students achieved in learning English. Specifically, the results indicate the following: first of all, the influence of the preactional stage in the institutionalized context of learning English is decreased; second of all, there is a direct connection between the actional stage and the results of the proficiency test; finally, the postactional stage can be a strong indicator of future success.

Key words: motivation, students, the English language, process model of motivation.

1. BACKGROUND

The goal of this paper is to give an analysis of the students' motivation to learn the English language in an EFL context and to offer suggestions for possible teacher interventions aimed at establishing

a learning environment conducive to the development of motivation. Although a great amount of work in the field of motivational psychology research has been done for various learning and working contexts, comprehensive studies of motivation in foreign language classrooms are relatively scarce. Among many reasons for this, two are particularly important. First of all, the very definition of motivation is a complex issue and a focus of a great deal of studies. Although there is a fundamental understanding that motivation is a basic impetus because of which we initiate certain actions and sustain them, the definition is far from final or generally accepted. Dörnyei (1998) believes that the main reason for this lies in the fact that theories of motivation are trying to answer one of the most elemental questions in psychology: why do people behave in certain ways?, so that, depending on the approach to the matter, they offer different interpretations. The second reason for the relatively small number of studies investigating foreign language learning motivation lies in the complex nature of language itself. As Dörnyei (1998) holds, language is both a coded system for communication, taught as a school subject, and an inherent part of one's identity, active in almost all mental activities, and the most important tool of social organization. Therefore, motivation includes a complex array of cognitive, affective and social factors, all of which need to be considered if one wants to gain a deeper insight into this problem.

In an EFL context, numerous studies demonstrate that the factors present in the classroom, such as task choice, grading and reward structures, the nature of student-teacher and peer relationships, the level of students' autonomy will significantly influence students' motivation (Dörnyei 1994; Stipek 1996). In order to fully account for the complexities of learning a foreign language in an institutional setting, a model of motivation needs to recognize specific situations arising in a classroom and to address the

temporal dimension of foreign language learning. Responding to the aforementioned requirements, Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) propose a Process Model of Motivation which is based on a dynamic view of motivation and accounts for the changes in its quantity and quality over time. This is particularly important given the long time needed to master a foreign language, if indeed mastery is ever achieved. The model includes three distinct temporal phases with different motivational influences operating in each phase: preactional, actional and postactional phase.

The main focus of the preactional phase is the generation of motivation, which includes setting goals, forming intentions and initiating intention enactment. In an educational setting, goals focus an individual's attention and action toward a target, mobilize effort in direct proportion to the difficulty of the task that needs to be accomplished, promote effort over time and establish a reference point that provides information about one's performance (Alderman 2004). However, simple selection of a goal is not enough to initiate action – there must be a volition element to goal commitment. An individual needs to choose to extend thoughts into action (Locke and Latham 1990). The final step in generating motivation involves the creation of an action plan, which includes situation specific guidelines with appropriate strategies and a time frame. In an EFL setting, a socio-cultural context in which learning takes place will significantly affect students' motivation (Gardner 1985; 2001). It is, accordingly, important to distinguish between two general orientations affecting goal creation and overall motivational disposition: namely, integrative and instrumental orientation (Gardner and Lambert 1972). Integrativeness includes positive attitudes towards the target language and culture, which, when they are developed, foster a student's desire to integrate with the culture of the target language community and become similar to its speakers. Instrumentality, on the other hand, includes practical reasons for learning a foreign language,

such as a good grade, financial reward, job promotion etc.

The main focus of the actional phase is the maintenance and protection of the generated motivation. This is achieved by means of three sub-operations, which include the generation and implementation of subtasks, an ongoing evaluation of one's achievement, and self-regulatory actions. One of the main motivational influences at this stage is associated with the individual's response to the learning experience (pleasantness, task attraction, need significance etc.). Furthermore, motivation is at this stage affected by the individual's belief in his or her own ability to successfully carry out tasks at hand. This belief, known as self-efficacy (Bandura 1997), will influence the choice of tasks and problems the individual tackles, exerted effort and persistence. A further influential factor is the student's sense of self-determination. Deci and Ryan (2000) believe that people have an innate need to be independent, to make their own choices and to have control over what they do. A classroom environment that is conducive to the development of self-determination encourages the student's need for independence (a possibility to choose one's own goals and the manner in which those goals will be completed), the student's need for the development of skills and abilities and the student's need for relatedness. In other words, all people share the motivation to form relationships with others in their environment, to believe they are able to function in that environment and to choose how they will behave in that environment (Brophy 2004).

The postactional phase begins either when the goal is accomplished or when the action is discontinued. The most important process taking place at this stage deals with postactional retrospection and evaluation. The student appraises the outcome of his or her actions, based on which assumptions about the possible future outcomes are formed. As a result, causal attributions are made with the potential to significantly influence

the student's self-image. As Graham (1994) indicates, in Western culture, attributions are normally associated with abilities (such attributions are stable, outside of one's control and internal to person) and effort (such attributions are also internal to the person, however, they are unstable and under one's control). Another motivational influence operating at this stage also includes an individual sense of self-efficacy, which may be altered as a result of the outcome, namely by success or failure of the action, and may, in turn, influence motivational evaluation. Finally, the process of retrospection will be affected by the received feedback, which may be informational, when it includes comments on competence, and controlling, when it includes judgements on performance based on external standards (Brophy and Good 1986).

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In the present study, motivational factors affecting separate phases of the motivational process in an institutional setting were tested with the aim of providing an answer to the following research question:

1. Is there a connection between motivational factors and academic achievement in students who are learning English as a foreign language?

Corresponding to this research question, a set of null hypotheses are as follows:

1. There is no statistically significant correlation between the preactional motivational influences, as observed by integrative and instrumental orientations and the students' scores on the test of English.
2. There is no statistically significant correlation between the actional motivational influences, as observed by the students'

self-determination, self-efficacy and the quality of the learning experience and their scores on the English test.

3. There is no statistically significant correlation between the postactional motivational influences, as observed by students' attributions, received feedback and the post-outcome self-efficacy.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study adopts a quantitative research design the goal of which is to arrive at possible generalizations regarding the matter at question. The research was conducted according to the following plan:

1. During the first phase, a month after the beginning of the first semester, the participants completed Questionnaire 1, which gathered data regarding the preactional and the actional phase of students' motivation;
2. In the second phase, three months after the beginning of the first semester, the participants took an English aptitude test;
3. During the third phase, a month after the beginning of the second semester, the participants completed Questionnaire 2, which gathered data regarding the postactional phase.

The investigation included a total of eighty-seven ($N = 87$) first and second year students, studying at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, who took a course in English as a faculty requirement. Approximately 82.5% of the respondents were female, 17.5% were male. The ages ranged from 18 to 24 with the average age of the respondents being 19.36.

The instruments used in the study included Questionnaires 1 and 2, which were constructed based on four different sources of questionnaires used in motivational research (Dörnyei 2001; Jacques 2001; Kormos and

Dörnyei 2004; Tennant and Gardner 2004). Both questionnaires used statements which students graded on a five-point Likert scale, with the full list of variables shown in Table 1. For the purpose of testing the level of students' English language knowledge, a written test was used which tested their knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar.

	Variable	Number of items	Kronbach alpha (α)
Questionnaire 1	Instrumentality	6	0.722
	Integrativeness	6	0.751
	Self-determination	8	0.731
	Quality of the learning experience	9	0.847
	Self-efficacy 1	7	0.794
Questionnaire 2	Self-efficacy 2	7	0.776
	Feedback	6	0.702
	Attributions 1 (effort)	3	0.836
	Attributions 2 (aptitude)	3	0.822

Table 1: Research variables

4. FINDINGS

For each motivational phase and their associated variables, Table 2 summarizes the mean and standard deviation, as well as the Pearson's correlation coefficient between the scores from the questionnaires and the scores on the English language knowledge measure.

With respect to the null hypotheses, the following can be concluded:

1. Since no significant correlations have been found between either instrumentality or integrativeness and the knowledge test scores the first null hypothesis cannot be rejected.
2. The statistical analysis of the data collected in this study demonstrated that certain motivational influences associated with the actional phase can be directly connected with the students'

achievement on the test. Significant correlations ($p < 0.01$) have been found on the Self-determination measure ($r = 0.306$) and on the Quality of the learning experience measure ($r = 0.611$). In this respect the second null hypothesis can be partially rejected.

3. The analysis of the data reflecting the postactional motivational influences demonstrated that post-outcome retrospection is directly connected with the results students achieved on the English knowledge test. Significant correlations ($p < 0.01$; $p < 0.05$) have been established between test scores and all measured variables. It is therefore, possible to fully reject the third null hypothesis.

Motivational phase	Variable	Mean	SD	r
Preactional	Instrumentality	4.29	0.71	0.156
	Integrativeness	3.84	0.73	0.166
Actional	Self-determination	3.58	0.69	0.306**
	Quality of the learning experience	3.69	0.73	0.611**
Postactional	Self-efficacy 1	3.68	0.92	0.127
	Self-efficacy 2	3.61	0.74	0.622**
	Feedback	3.74	0.65	0.569**
	Attributions 1 (effort)	3.28	1.09	0.532**
	Attributions 2 (aptitude)	3.31	0.85	0.356*

** $p < 0.01$

* $p < 0.05$

Table 2: Pearson's correlation coefficients between test scores and tested variables

Since causal attributions that are formed after the termination of an action greatly depend on whether the individual sees the actional outcome as a success or as a failure, an additional correlational analysis was performed with the aim of determining a connection between attributions and the academic achievement of more successful students on the one hand, and less successful students on the other. The division into more

and less successful students was conducted based on the students' own estimates of the outcome of the test.

	Test – More successful students	Test – Less successful students
Attributions 1 (effort)	-0.101	0.737**
Attributions 2 (aptitude)	0.342*	-0.613

** $p < 0.01$

* $p < 0.05$

Table 3: Pearson's correlation coefficients for students' attributions

Based on the results summarized in Table 3, it can be concluded that more successful students attribute their success to their language ability ($r=0.342, p<0.05$), whereas less successful students attribute their low test score to the lack of effort ($r=0.737, p<0.01$).

5. DISCUSSION

The aim of the quantitative research conducted for the purpose of this paper was to describe students' motivation to learn the English language and to offer an interpretation of the motivational influences on the students' achievement. What follows are general conclusions based on the presented results.

Statistical analysis of the first set of variables indicates that the influence of the preactional phase in an institutional setting is decreased. In analyzing the respondents' answers to individual items testing Instrumentality and practical reasons for learning English, the results reveal that the respondents hold a general belief that knowing English in the current socio-cultural and economic context has numerous benefits: they believe that English will be beneficial when they look for job (mean score=4.31), that it will be useful during their studies (mean score=4.55)

and when they are travelling (mean score=4.01). In this respect, it can be concluded that when students are learning a language because they feel it is necessary for their professional advancement, the choice of the language is not influenced by motivational processes (setting goals and forming intentions), but by the fact that English is a necessity in a global society. Moreover, it should be noted that with this sample of participants, potential instrumental incentives are neither immediate nor indirect, because the respondents are first and second year students, who are years away from looking for a job during which English would be helpful. Integrativeness, as another preactional motivational influence, has been identified in a number of previous researches (Gardner 1985; Gardner and MacIntyre 1991; Csizér and Dörnyei 2005) as an important element in learners' success in foreign language learning. Statistical analysis indicates that with this sample of respondents there is no link between positive attitudes towards the target language culture and its speakers, and students' scores on the language measure, invalidating any generalizations regarding the matter at question. In this case, the respondents are young people receiving a university education in a multicultural setting. It is therefore likely that any ethnocentric tendencies were diminished even before the EFL classes and the cultural input that the students received. The results, however, indicate that high scores on the integrative measure are in proportion with high scores on the instrumental measure, which corroborates claims that students can have both instrumental and integrative motives to learn a foreign language and that these two orientations can simultaneously contribute to students' motivation.

Significant correlations in the actional phase have been established for variables testing self-determination and the quality of the learning experience. The results show, first of all, that the respondents who tested high on the three factors which affect self-determination, namely on

the measures of control, independence and relatedness, also had more success in learning English. Furthermore, research findings indicate that more successful students had more positive experiences in the classroom, whereas low-achieving students gave lower scores to the quality of the learning experience. Students form and reshape their attitudes about the subject, the teacher, teaching methods and other aspects of the learning context during the actional phase of motivation, after they have set goals. Since, in an institutional context, the preactional phase is relatively dormant and has a limited range of influence, the actional phase plays a crucial role in directing and maintaining motivated actions, which, in turn, may significantly influence students' achievement in learning English.

The research findings, finally, indicate that the postactional phase may be a significant indicator of future success. First of all, based on the correlation found between test scores and variable Self-efficacy 2, it may be concluded that upon receiving the scores which indicated their level of English, the students re-evaluated their own abilities. The grade they received strongly affected their self-confidence and belief that they can successfully complete tasks and learn new content. Furthermore, the results of the statistical analysis testify to the potential value of giving informational feedback to students, based on which they can evaluate the progress they have made, and determine how much more effort they need to exert in order to achieve the desired progress. Lastly, the correlation between attributions and test scores points to the fact that students think about the reasons for their successes and failures. These reasons are important, regardless of the fact that they might not be formed based on objective factors, because they influence future goal formation and the student's overall motivation when dealing with a similar task. The research established a positive tendency based on which students attribute their successes to stable factors, such as abilities and skills, and their failures to

unstable factors, such as not enough time devoted to self-study.

6. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Research findings have identified several aspects of foreign language learning that may be influenced by language teachers. Because the preactional phase proved to be relatively inactive in classroom settings with this sample of respondents, the remaining two motivational phases and their corresponding influences will have a pivotal function in enabling positive outcomes both in terms of motivation and success in foreign language learning.

One of the conclusions addresses the importance of enabling students to feel independent and in control of their learning. This may be achieved with activities that provide challenges, that require students to take responsibility for their actions and initiative. Students' sense of self-determination may also be boosted by paying regard to the factor of relatedness, which is enhanced by promoting good relations between students, a positive atmosphere and a learning setting. Classroom orientation which encourages mastery goals (Ames 1992) by reducing the importance of normative comparisons of students or public assessment contributes to the development of self-determination and, in light of the presented findings, to positive learning outcomes.

With respect to students' attributional styles, which are likely to influence future motivation and learning results, it is important to note that teachers and language instructors can affect their creation: feedback, whether informational or controlling, a praise or criticism, potentially plays a role in attribution formations during every single class. A student who learns to attribute his or her failures to stable factors, such as lack of ability or intelligence, will have low levels of achievement motivation.

The results presented in previous sections, show that students think about the causes of their successes and failures. It is the teacher's task, therefore, to capitalize on this retrospection by identifying erroneous and harmful attributions.

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Јагода П. Топалов

МОТИВАЦИЈА СТУДЕНАТА У НАСТАВИ ЕНГЛЕСКОГ ЈЕЗИКА КАО СТРАНОГ: УТИЦАЈИ И ПРАКТИЧНЕ ИМПЛИКАЦИЈЕ

Резиме: У раду се разматра мотивација у учењу енглеског језика као изборног предмета студената Филозофског факултета у Новом Саду у контексту академске успешности. Мотивација у учењу страног језика представља сложен конструкт који укључује како когнитивне, тако и афективне факторе, те утицаје конкретног контекста у коме се учење одвија. У складу са тим, истраживање на коме се овај рад заснива укључило је испитивање три стадијума студентске мотивације (предизвршни, извршни и послеизвршни стадијум) током две фазе истраживања, на узорку од осамдесет и седам (N=87) студената. У циљу прикупљања података, током истраживања коришћена су два упитника са ставкама које су испитаници оцењивали на петостепеној Ликертовој скали. Резултати истраживања указују на везу између одређених аспеката мотивационог конструкта и успешности у учењу енглеског језика. Конкретно, резултати добијени истраживањем сведоше, као прво, о смањеном утицају предизвршне фазе мотивације у оквиру институционализованог учења енглеског језика, као друго, о директној вези између извршне фазе мотивације студената и оствареног успеха на тесту знања енглеског језика и, као треће, о улози послеизвршне фазе мотивације у предвиђању будућег успеха.

Кључне речи: мотивација, студенти, енглески језик процесни модел мотивације.