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Motives of second language learning: A quantitative study

Abstract: This article discusses the issue of international students' motivation in second language learning in Budapest, Hungary. Based on the theoretical background, 6 groups of motives such as intrinsic, extrinsic, cognitive, perspective, social and motives of achieving success were identified. All these groups of motives are used in a standardized questionnaire to measure the levels and dominate type of motivation towards English language learning. An online survey administered to 80 international students. The data was analyzed by using the SPSS program. The study reveals that all groups of motives are strongly expressed by highly motivated students in learning English than students who expend less effort in language learning. Still, it is found that integrative motivation is higher than instrumental motivation.

Introduction

Second language (L2) motivation is extremely important field because it influences students' success or failure in language acquisition (Richards, Schmidt, 2002). In the field of second language learning a 'motive' can be characterized as an action or effort to acquire foreign language competence (Gardner, 1985). The range of potential motives can affect human behaviour: the decision to do something influenced by a variety of factors such as personal needs, benefits, cognitive curiosity, or a pleasure of learning a language (Dörnyei, Kubanyiova, 2014: 177). It is interesting to note that students differ in the content of language learning motives (Noels, Pelletier, Clément, Vallerand, 2003), consequently, they have different motives to learn an L2. Studying abroad is one of the possibilities for students to engage in contact situations, to improve knowledge and linguistic skills (Badstubner & Ecke, 2009; Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Wang, 2010). In this

regard, it is very interesting to investigate students' dominant motives who are learning English as a second language in the international environment because it might influence their level of motivation to achieve a high level of proficiency in English.

Based on the literature review, L2 learners' generalized motives can be described in terms of six groups: cognitive, internal, social, perspective, external, and motives of achieving success. The next step of the study is investigating students' dominant motives and examining whether students have dominantly integrative or instrumental motivation towards English language learning in a study abroad environment. It should be noted that there are a few studies (e.g. Islam et al., 2013; Kim & Kim, 2014; Rajab et al., 2012) that have examined students' type of motivation in learning the L2 but this study focuses on identified and generalized groups of motives based on university students' orientations and basic learning goals to determine their choice preferences to continue learning English as a foreign language in a study-abroad context.

The study

Participants

An online survey is conducted at a large urban university located in Budapest, Hungary. 80 international students are asked to take part in this research. They are ranged in age from 18 to 32. They come from a variety of majors: English and American Studies, Business Administration, Computer Science, Education and Psychology, Engineering, Environmental Science, Chemistry, Cartography, International Relations, Health Policy, Planning, and Financing, etc. They speak English as their L2 describing themselves as upper intermediate.

Instrument

In this study, a questionnaire was used to investigate the participants' motivation. The original 7-point Likert scale format of Gardener's Test Battery was adapted into 5-point Likert scale which was used as the instrument of this study. The respondents were offered a set of close-ended questions or statements, ranging from 'Completely true' to 'Not at all true'. The questionnaire was posted online using the Google Forms platform. The advantages of this form of survey outweigh its disadvantages due to a small sample. The advantages are rapid return times, automatic online storage of answers, low costs and convenience for respondents (Shashkina, 2010).

Data analysis procedures

All the questionnaires were computer-coded and the data was analyzed by using the SPSS program (Statistical Package For Social Sciences). First, Cronbach Alpha was calculated to determine the reliability of the scales. Secondly, descriptive statistics were computed. Thirdly, the data were conducted by means of paired samples T-test, Pearson correlation coefficient and cluster analyses. The Fisher r-to-z transformation was also used to measure a value of constructs to assess the significance of the difference between correlation coefficients. Next, cluster analysis was used to identify homogeneous subgroups within a sample. Finally, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) utilized as a factor to appropriately constitute the data and to be sure that there were the substantial differences between the groups of motives.

Results and Discussion

The results in Histogram 1 show what a dominant group of students' motives is in English language learning (see below).
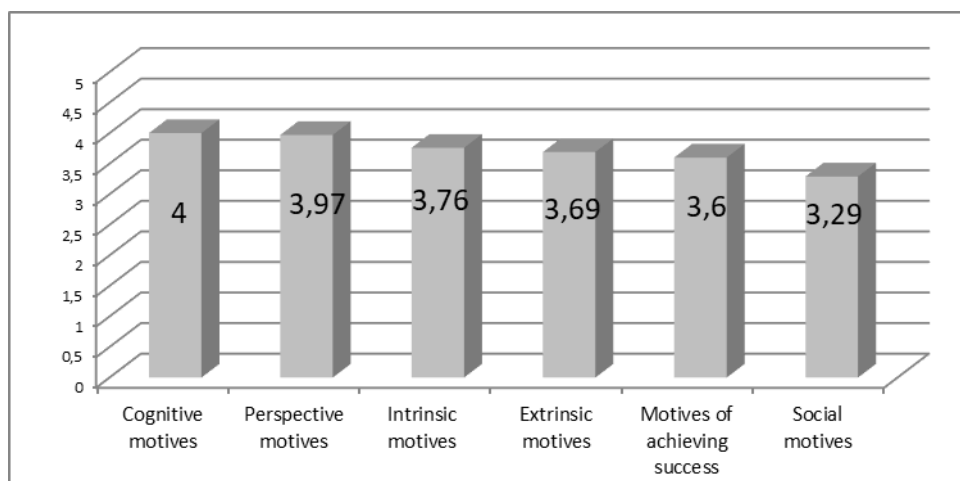
Histogram 1. Dominant groups of motives in second language learning among international students

Since the descriptive statistics were applied, it could be suggested that international students showed highly motivated learning behaviour (*M*=4.01, *SD*=.77) to improve English with a slightly higher level of integrative motivation. In order to make sure that it is true a paired sample T-test was used, which was also conducted to find whether differences between the mean values of the scales would emerge. The results show that the scales of cognitive (*M*=4.00, *SD*= .68) and perspective (*M*=3.97, *SD*= .80) motives have significantly higher mean values than the other scales. They have no statistically significant difference between **cognitive and perspective motives** (*t*= .47, *Sig.*= .671). This indicates that these two types of motives can be regarded as dominant motives for students in a study abroad context. The group of cognitive motives might be attractive for the

students because they realized that they would not be able to become competitive specialists in a rapidly developing society without a systematic expansion of knowledge, abilities, and skills in the field of language. The fact that the scale of perspective motives is also dominant can probably be explained by pointing out that the problem of choosing an educational institution to continue studies (MA, Ph.D.) or a future profession stands before every student.

Special attention focuses on two main groups of motives, such as **intrinsic and extrinsic**, in relation to other constructs. With the help of paired sample T-test analysis it was found that the difference between the two types of motives is statistically insignificant. This indicates that these two types of motives can be the main drives in learning English.

Concerning the scale of **motives of achieving success**, it is noticeable that the mean value (M=3.60, SD= .89) is moderate. The students also consider success to be the main motive for learning English. The paired sample T-test's results revealed that the scale of motives of achieving success has a significant difference with the scale of intrinsic motives (t=2.041, $Sig.$= .045). However, data shows that the scale of motives of achieving success has no significant difference with the scale extrinsic motives (t= .90, $Sig.$= .371). I t can be concluded that international students with intrinsic motives are able to achieve a more significant success than students with extrinsic motives for learning a language.

The scale of **social motives** (M=3.29, SD= .85) has a weaker mean value in the structure of students' motives. To interpret this unexpected finding, they do not realize that speaking English is also significant, for example, for participation in conferences, competitions, Olympiads, and its role in their personal development. It means, in particularly, that students have just recently become interested in getting new knowledge in order to master English perfectly.

The research included the choice of a three-cluster solution in order to easier identify low (Group 1), moderate (Group 2), and high (Group 3) levels of students' motivation. These three motivational clusters that observed in the analysis are described using their mean values for all variables (see Table 1).

There were 17 international students with more intrinsically motivated behaviour in Group 3 and 29 students with more extrinsically motivated behaviour in Group 1. However, despite the fact that Group 2 had a moderate mean value in relation to motivated behaviour and the other scales, it was found that 34 international students were more intrinsically motivated to improve their English proficiency. The students in Group 1 have weak scores on the scale of intrinsic motives and moderate scores on the scale of extrinsic motives. It may be supposed that these international students have not developed strong L2 selves but they are motivated to learn English by extrinsic motives in their foreign environment.

Table 1

ANOVA results comparing the mean scores of cluster membership

	Group 1 (n=29)	Group 2 (n=34)	Group 3 (n=17)	F	Sig	df	Tukey's post-hoc tests
Intrinsic motives	2.71	3.81	4.34	47.5	.000	2	1<2<3
Extrinsic motives	3.19	3.49	4.22	22.6	.000	2	1<2<3
Cognitive motives	3.02	3.88	4.64	20.6	.000	2	1<2<3
Perspective motives	2.64	2.90	4.15	64.8	.000	2	1<2<3
Social motives	2.54	3.39	4.50	56.8	.000	2	1<2<3
Motives of achieving success	3.49	3.82	4.53	62.3	.000	2	1<2<3
Motivated learning behaviour	3.39	4.21	4.36	15.7	.000	2	1<2<3

*n – number of students in each cluster group
$p < .001$

Group 3 have very high scores in all of the groups of motives. Such students seem to have realized the pragmatic benefits of L2 learning. They have strong cognitive motives and motives of achieving success in learning English. Unlike Group 1, these students fully shaped intrinsic motives, with both social and professional aspects, and at the same time, strong extrinsic motives to learn English. Group 2 has moderate scores on most of the scales. The students seem to have moderately strong motivation in learning the L2.

Group 3 and Group 1 differed not only in terms of their motivational intensity but also in terms of their intended effort, and showed a constant growth in terms of their motivated behaviour. Therefore, Group 1 includes the weakly motivated students, Group 3, on the other hand, is the inverse of Group 1 containing the highly motivated students, and Group 2 consists of the students who are moderately motivated to improve the L2. It is possible to claim that the balance between all groups of motives and motivated learning behaviour in Group 3 is the most effective motivational configuration. Papi and Teimouri (2014) suggested that the combination of such results shows that learners with a balanced self-system might perform the great amount of motivated behaviour and have behavioural characteristics necessary for long-term language learning.

The overall outcome is that the students are highly motivated towards learning English language. It is concluded that the dominant groups of motives were cognitive (4.00) and perspective (3.97) motives, relating to high level of motivation. At the third and fourth places were intrinsic (3.76) and extrinsic (3.69) motives, relating to moderate level of students' motivation and motives

of achieving success (3.60) and social motives (3.29), related to low level of motivation. It is possible to say, from the one hand, that the participants had intrinsic motivation and, from the other hand, English was perceived by the students as utilitarian value, the first place of it is seeking a job, enhancing career opportunities and getting a high salary.

Conclusion

As shown by this investigation, there are three groups of international students categorized by their different motivational intensity and motives in learning English. The first group consists of the students with low level of motivation, who are basically motivated to learn the L2 due to external rewards such as getting a diploma, a good job, or high salary. However, cognitive motives also dominated in this group. The other extreme is Group 3, consisting of the students with high level of motivation across all groups of motives. These students fully shape intrinsic motives with a social aspect, and at the same time, with strong extrinsic and cognitive motives to learn English.

The focus of the analysis demonstrated that groups of motives such as cognitive and perspective are more dominant than other groups. These groups of motives seemed to have more affected students' motivation on language improvement in a study-abroad context.

This study also addressed the question whether students are predominantly integratively or instrumentally motivated towards learning English. It was turned out that the students who are studying abroad have generally high and circular motivation. It was obvious fact that integrative motivation is relatively higher than their instrumental motivation in learning English. In this context, the findings illustrate the importance of study abroad programs which may provide an optimal learning environment, enhance students' motivation and, consequently, increase the results in foreign language learning.

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