# The Relationship Between Moroccan EFL University Students' Motivation Orientation and Their Classroom Participation: Exploring the Variables of Gender and Proficiency Level

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**Abstract**

This paper explores the relationship that may exist between the students' motivational orientation and their participation in the classroom. The designed questionnaire was concerned with two main points. A motivation section that tapped the students responses to two orientations related to motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic also known as integrative and instrumental. The first one is characterised by the learner's positive attitudes towards the target language group and the desire to integrate into the target language community. The second one underlies the goal to gain some social, academic or economic reward through L2 achievement which suggests a functional purpose of the target language learning. The second questionnaire section targeted the willingness and actual participation of students inside the classroom. Two variables were taken into account, the gender and the proficiency level of the subjects. Results show that almost all the respondents have an intrinsic/integrative motivation orientation, a fact that has a noticeable positive effect on their classroom participation. Other results show that while gender proved to be an influencing factor on classroom participation, the degree of students' proficiency appeared not to have any significant effect on any of the research variables.

**Keywords:** Motivation orientation, classroom participation, gender, proficiency level

## Introduction

Recent research has shown special interest in determining what distinguishes successful from unsuccessful language learners. This has led to a characterization of 'modifiable' second language (L2) variables among which figures predominantly L2 motivation (Wharton, 2000). It is widely believed by both teachers and researchers that Motivation is one of the key factors influencing the rate and success of second/foreign language learning. Motivation is typically defined as "the forces that account for the arousal, selection, direction, and continuation of behaviour" (Biehler and Snowman, 1997: 1).

The literature on motivation that is relevant to schooling describes students as being oriented towards both a need for success and a need to avoid failure. Accordingly, this continuum is also represented as having a high vs. low need for achievement, having high or low test anxiety, or having mastery vs. ego orientation to learning (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Many factors determine whether students in any given class are motivated or not motivated to learn. It is therefore not surprising that no single theoretical interpretation of motivation explains all aspects of student interest or lack of it. Different theoretical interpretations do, however, shed light on why some students in a given learning situation are more likely to want to learn than others (Dörnyei, 2001; Woolfolk, 2001; Eccles and Wigfield (2002); Yule (2006); Cox and Williams, 2008). Furthermore, each theoretical interpretation can serve as the basis for the development of techniques for motivating students in the classroom. Here are some major theoretical interpretations of motivation.

## 1. Theories on Motivation

Interest in L2 motivation started since forty years ago. Several models of language learning motivation were proposed accordingly. Lambert (1963) has suggested a 'social psychological model' in which he has emphasized cognitive factors such as language aptitudes and intelligence, as well as affective factors such as attitudes and motivation. According to his model, he sees that the extent to which an individual successfully acquires a second/foreign language is very much dependant on ethnocentric tendencies, attitudes towards the other community, orientation towards language learning and motivation.

Another pioneer in this field, Gardner (1985), defines L2 motivation as "the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity" (p: 10); more specifically, motivation for him subsumes three components, motivational intensity, desire to learn the language, and attitude towards the act of learning the language. Motivation in Gardner's theory does not contain any integrative or instrumental elements. There does exist an integrative or instrumental dichotomy in Gardner's model but this is at the orientation (i.e. goal) level, and as such, is not part of the core motivation component; rather, the two orientations function merely as motivational antecedents that help to arouse motivation and direct it towards a set of goals, either with a strong interpersonal quality (integrative) or a strong practical quality (instrumental).

Noels et al. (2000) states that several motivational goals, or orientations, have been proposed, but two

have received the most empirical attention. The first is *instrumental* orientation, known also as extrinsic motivation, which tackles reasons for language learning that emphasize the pragmatic consequences of L2 learning, such as job-hunting or improving one's education. The second is *integrative* orientation, or intrinsic motivation, which refers to reasons relating to interaction and communication with members of the L2 community for social-emotional purposes.

A substantial amount of research has been conducted in the study of motivation in second/foreign language learning. The very early research on the field were exclusively focused on the relationship between motivation and language achievement. First empirical studies, Gardner and Lambert (1959); Clement, Gardner, and Smythe. 1977; Gardner, Smythe, and Clement (1979) investigated attitude and motivation and their correlation with linguistic performance of learners. Further later studies emphasized other aspects in relation to student's motivation such as the effect of the L2 culture on learner motivation and progress (Sasaki, 2002), the relationship between L2 culture stereotypes and motivation (El-Dash & Busnardo, 2001), the relationship between target culture interaction and motivation Bongartz & Schneider's (2001), or even the relationship between motivation and the academic achievement of language learners (Rostami et al, 2011; Binalet & Guerra, 2014).

## 2. Classroom Participation

The linkage between classroom participation of students and academic achievement is undeniable (Gomez, Arai and Lowe, 1995: 2). For this reason, Many EFL instructors are faced with the challenge of getting their students to participate in the language classroom. Research has shown that participation in classroom activities is important for effective learning (Finn and Cox, 1992; Kennedy, 1992). Many factors have been found to gear the students' classroom participation such as low self esteem, negative inter-group relationship (Pipkin and Yates, 1992), low communicative competence (Garcia, 1992), classroom discourse with the teacher (Diaz, 1986) or even the students ethnic background (Collier and Powell, 1990). Ghala (1986) relates this reluctance to classroom participation to four main reasons: The teacher's expectations and modelling, the classroom atmosphere, the instructional format and the teaching activities. The primary purpose of this study is to examine the effect of another factor on students' participation namely the students' motivational orientation.

This study purports to investigate the EFL Moroccan university students' motivation orientation as it relates to their participation in the classroom. My reason behind the choice of this topic is that I notice a decline in the students' participation in class especially at the university level. This reluctance may be due to different general factors such as the learning context or the teaching method, as well as to personal factors such as the students' personalities or their motivation orientations. Therefore, this study aims at investigating the relationship between participation and motivation, and seeks to discover other potential influencing factors, namely gender and proficiency level.

The two motivation orientations under focus in this study are intrinsic and extrinsic (integrative Vs instrumental). The first means innate or within. It is the stimulation or drive stemming from within oneself. In relation to language, one is compelled to learn by a motive to understand originating from one's own curiosity, challenge or pleasure. The second orientation is encouraged from an outside force, and behaviors are performed based on the expectance of an outside reward. The two types are not necessarily opposite or mutually exclusive. Both may exist within the individual at the same time and in different strengths and degrees.

## 3. Study Methodology

### 3.1 Subjects and Research Instrument

Subjects of this study are 20 students from two different levels: 10 first year university students studying English at the faculty of letters and humanities in Mohamed V University in Rabat, Morocco and 10 English Master students from the faculty of education also in Rabat, Morocco. To control the variable of gender, both groups were chosen encompassing the same number of male (N=5) and female students (N=5). As a research instrument, a questionnaire is designed in a way to elicit relevant information about two issues namely: The orientation of motivation and the perceived willingness to participate in the classroom, since actual participation can't be measured without class observation as a research instrument. The research questions are the following:

### 3.2 Reseach Questions

1-What is the relationship between the student's motivation orientation and his/her perceived participation in the classroom?
2-Does motivation orientation relate to the student's gender and/or proficiency level?
3-Is the willingness of classroom participation affected by the student's gender and/or proficiency level?

## 4. Results and Discussion

The research has a quantitative design since the questionnaire was analyzed and made to yield numerical data

that were conducted to statistics. The first statistical analysis consists of a one way ANOVA to compare the means of the degree of the subjects' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in relation to their participation. The analysis showed significant differences between the effects of both motivation orientation and participation for all the subjects (Table 1). Hence, results showed that intrinsically motivated students tend to participate more than extrinsically motivated ones (p<.05).

**ANOVA**

|  |  | Somme des carr閲閲 | ddl | Moyenne des carr閲閲 | F | Signification |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| INTRINM | Inter-groupes | 17,675 | 5 | 3,535 | 4,551 | ,011 |
|  | Intra-groupes | 10,875 | 14 | ,777 |  |  |
|  | Total | 28,550 | 19 |  |  |  |
| EXTRINM | Inter-groupes | 17,825 | 5 | 3,565 | 1,654 | ,210 |
|  | Intra-groupes | 30,175 | 14 | 2,155 |  |  |
|  | Total | 48,000 | 19 |  |  |  |

**Table 1**. ANOVA results of groups with motivational different orientations (intrinsic/extrinsic) and participation rate.

A series of t-test analyses was run to present descriptive statistics on the relation that may exist between each two variables. The first t-test examined the difference between gender and its effect on participation, which was found more significant for the second group or female group (t=-3.823; df =18; p<.01). This implies that girls tend to participate more than boys in class. The second t-test rated female students as more intrinsically oriented in their motivation than male ones with a mean of 4.00 compared to 2.70 for males.

The third t-test didn't give any significant result concerning the variables of participation and proficiency. And so was the last t-test that addressed the relationship between proficiency level and intrinsic motivation orientation, the results of which were not proved significant.

The results yielded suggest that all the subjects tend to have an intrinsic motivation orientation even if they are also extrinsically oriented to some extent. Moreover, among subjects, girls are more intrinsically oriented in their motivation, and, consequently, given that intrinsically oriented subjects are found to be fonder of participation, girls are, therefore, more willing to participate in the classroom. A last important finding is that the subjects' proficiency level was surprisingly found to exert no influence anyhow on all the other variables.

It seems clear that the gender variable was shown to have an effect both on classroom participation as females exhibit an intrinsic motivation orientation. Gender differences have been found relevant in so many areas of language learning and social development. Second and foreign language researchers have generally found that females are favored in most areas of language acquisition. The most pertinent to this is 'socialization', which has been suggested as one of the main causes of gender differences in not only social behavior but also cognitive development. Studies revealed that female show more interest in social activities and are less competitive and more cooperative than males (Oxford, 1993); Females have a higher desire to please and gain approval through good grades and social behavior than males (Bardwick, 1971; Oxford et al, 1988; Nyikos, 1990;). Females tend to show greater ability in articulation, are more fluent and utter longer and more complexly formed sentences than males (Oxford, 1993), and usually score higher than boys in verbal ability and reading tests (Slavin, 1988). All these are elements that are obvious in classroom participation, which make of the female students more prone to such an activity.

Still, the issue of motivation and classroom participation in Moroccan universities is complex. One cannot simply observe language classes to know whether students are motivated or not. It is necessary to explore a number of factors which contribute to the way in which English language is taught in such a context. One of the most influential factors is that of the structure of university courses which ultimately determine the way and amount of students' participation. Therefore, the focus of what is taught and how is taught is an important determiner of the whole situation. Most of the times, the focus of the courses is not directed toward the speaking and listening skills of students. For this reason, students see no need to participate, especially that such an activity will not be examined or scored. This fact is a major reason why a high percentage of both high and low proficiency level students do not see it important or appealing to participate in the classroom.

The results presented above are far from being conclusive since only a small sample of subjects was examined. This can be avoided in further research through having a larger sample of population and using more than one instrument, for example. Nevertheless, we can draw some pedagogical implications that direct the teacher in an EFL classroom. Such teacher is asked to recognize varieties and natures of his/her students' motivation and work with both types in materials and content bearing in mind that motivation can influence, among other factors, the rate and success of language learning. Moreover, when it comes to classroom

participation, teachers should encourage intrinsic motivation through a de-emphasis on evaluation and by making salient the intrinsic rewards of an activity to enhance their participatory behaviors, especially that all students have varying degrees of that participation enabling orientation.

## 5. Conclusion and Suggestions for Teachers

In order to make the language learning process a more motivating experience, instructors need to put a great deal of thought into developing programs which maintain the students' interests and have obtainable short term goals. Teachers need to create interesting lessons in which the students' attention is gained. This can sometimes be accomplished by the use of teaching strategies which are not often called upon by other teachers in mainstream subject areas. Encouraging students to become more active participants in a lesson can sometimes help them to see a purpose for improving their communication skills in the target language. Because it is only when students will witness a degree of success in the target language communication that they should feel some sense of accomplishment. Research in the area suggests that L2 achievement strongly affects learner motivation (Strong, 1983, cited in Ellis 1997).

Teachers should also use behavioral techniques to help students exert themselves and work toward remote goals. They should direct learning experiences toward feelings of success in an effort to encourage an orientation toward achievement, a positive self-concept, and a strong sense of self-efficacy. This can be done through making use of objectives that are challenging but attainable and, when appropriate, that involve student input. No matter what the underlying motivation to study a second language can be, what cannot be disputed is the fact that motivation is an important variable when examining successful second language acquisition.

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