

The Effects of Motivation on Female EFL Students' Language Proficiency

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Abstract

This paper presented the results of a study which was carried out to identify the relationship between EFL female students' motivation and learning the English language. The study investigated two types of motivation : internal and external. The study sample consisted of 102 English majored female students at Yarmouk University, Jordan. A two section questionnaire was used for data collection. The findings showed that the subjects' are internally motivated for learning the English language. And there was a positive relationship between students' internal motivation and their proficiency in English as a foreign language. On the other hand, data for the students' external motivation revealed that there was a counterproductive relationship between external motivation and proficiency in learning English.

Keywords: EFL, Motivation, Internal motivation, External motivation, Jordan

1.Introduction

Motivation plays an important role in success in every aspect of our lives, especially in learning new things as they are considered as challenges and one has to try his/her best in order to achieve the desired goals which he/she is seeking. In the same vein, since motivation is regarded as "a key component of a model of language learning" (Spolsky,2000:158) and learning a foreign or a second language is not considered an easy task especially for adults a matter that requires from any adult to be highly motivated and has a definite goal that must be accomplished. Thus the adult learner should be highly motivated to learn the target language which he/she wants to learn. No matter what the underlying motivation to learn a second or a foreign language, what can't be disputed is the fact that motivation is an important variable when examining successful second/ foreign language acquisition; therefore, more attention should be paid to the role of motivation in foreign language classes as it is considered one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of foreign language learning.

(Norris,2001) asserts that motivation has an important role in L2 achievement. Thus it is essential to identify both the type and combination of motivation that assist in the successful acquisition of a second/foreign language. And it is also necessary to look at motivation as one of a number of variables in a complicated model of interrelated individual and situational factors which are unique to each language learner.

Motivation has been defined as "the factors that determine a person's desire to do something". Richards, Platt& Platt (1992 :238). In second language and foreign language learning, learning is affected differently by different types of motivation. Richards, Platt& Platt, (1992:238) distinguished them as the instrumental and the integrative motivation. Brown (2002: 19) distinguished motivation into internal and external motivation though. He, says that internal motivation "means that you are doing something because you want to do it or because you have made your own choice to do it; you don't need a reward from someone else to do so well. Your success is your reward". Whereas external motivation according to Brown refers to the fact that one is influenced by others such as teachers or school requirements which push him/her to do something. Here one normally needs to receive rewards, like high grades and praise.

Since people are different in many respects then it is normal that they have different forms of motivation or in other words, the same factors do not have exactly the same effects on human learning and performance. From this point, one could adopt Brown's classification of learners according to their type of motivation; internal or external. He argues that internal motivation means that one did something because he wants to do it and he does not need a reward from others for doing it well, his/her reward is success in accomplishing the task. On the other hand, external motivation is seen when someone did something to please others or to have a reward such as praise or high scores (Brown, 2002:19). Thus intrinsically motivated learners tackle assigned tasks willingly and are eager to learn classroom activities and they are more likely to process information in effective ways. Moreover, intrinsically motivated students are interested in learning for their own sake since they work to fulfill internal feelings of self-determination and competence (Elydirim, and Ashton,2006:2). In contrast, extrinsically motivated learners may have to be entered or prodded, may process information only superficially and are often interested in performing easy tasks and making minimal classroom requirements, and they are normally not so

successful. In other words, they only carry out certain tasks to achieve some instrumental desire such as a reward or to avoid punishment. (Elyidirim, and Ashton,2006:2).

Studies in the field cater for such an important factor in language learning and tried to shed light on the aspects that could help in developing and improving the process of teaching and learning a second/foreign language.

2.Review of Related Literature

Since motivation has several effects on students' learning and behavior, there were many attempts to explore the effect of such a complicated factor on learners. Here are some of these studies.

In a study conducted by Berwick and Ross (1989), a group of 90 first-year Japanese university students enrolled in an international commerce and a compulsory English course were examined to determine their degree and form of motivation. The students were found to possess instrumental motivation, with the underlying reason for studying English being the entrance exam requirements for university. Typically, upon entrance to the desired establishment the student's interest to continue study declined. Prior to beginning the English class the students were tested for motivation, which was found to be low. However, on completion of 150 hours of class time the motivation level of students had improved. Some suggestions for this alteration in motivation included the use of a variety of instructional techniques and the recent adoption of an exchange program with an American sister university. This may have affected students' perceptions and thus, their motivation to study the language. (Norris, 2001)

Benson (1991) studied the attitudes of 500 freshmen in a Japanese university. In his survey, Benson asked for a self- assessment for English skills, the motivation for studying English, and the functions for which English was felt to be most useful. Results of his study showed that integrative and personal reasons for learning English were preferred over instrumental ones.

Ababneh (2013:43) conducted a study that aimed at investigating vocational education female students' at Al-Huson University College, Al-Balqaa University, Jordan, motivation in terms of three motivational constructs: instrumental motivation, integrative motivation, and personal motivation The study sample consisted of 56 female students. Findings of this study showed that the subjects were instrumentally motivated to learn English as a foreign language. They mainly learn English for practical and academic reasons. Moreover, personal reasons were also regarded as important motives by the students. However, regarding the integrative reasons, the results provided evidence that learning English as a part of the culture of its people had the least impact in students' English language motivation.

Furthermore, there are some recurring themes about students' motivation drawn from educational literature.

Norris (2001) claimed that 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 students interest and have obtainable short time goals. At university level, this may include any number of foreign exchange programs with other universities or any other activities to improve their target language proficiency. At the secondary school level, this task proves more difficult with the focus of study being directed toward university entrance.

In a study conducted by Ababneh and Al-Momani (2011: 65), the subjects attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language proved that they realized learning English is very important for their future jobs or if they want to complete their graduate studies. This kind of result surely could be interpreted in terms that the students are aware of the importance of learning English for external motives.

Elyidirim, and Ashton, 2006, examined Turkish students' attitudes and motivation towards learning English and they concluded that "both attitudes and motivation are complex social, cultural, and psychological factors that influence how a student approaches many situations in life , including second language learning. When students have a positive attitude, it acts as a motivational impetus to enable a greater effort to achieve the goal of learning the language." (p.10)

To sum up, it is obvious that studies in the field cater for such an important factor in language learning and tried to shed light on the aspects that could help in developing and improving the process of teaching and learning a second/foreign language. Results of some of these studies showed that there's a correlation between intrinsic motivation and success in learning English while others proved the opposite ,i.e., that there is a strong connection between success in learning English and extrinsic motivation. However, one could not deny the fact that there is evidence which show that both types of motivation play a significant role in language learning successfully. (Ellis, 1994; Brown, 2000).

3.Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which EFL female students are influenced intrinsically or extrinsically towards learning English and to see if there are any significant relationships between their type of motivation and their proficiency in learning English as a foreign language. Specific questions for the study

were:

1. Is there any significant relationship between students' internal motivation and their proficiency in English?
2. Is there any significant relationship between students' external motivation and their proficiency in English?
- 3.

4.Methodology

This study was conducted to identify Jordanian EFL female students' motivation in learning English as a foreign language. To achieve this objective, the researcher adapted a questionnaire from (Brown, H. Douglas, 2002:18) as a research tool.

4.1.Participants

The participants of the study were purposefully chosen from the female students registered in the first semester of the academic year 2011/2012 in two compulsory English courses taught at the English department, Yarmouk University, which were namely, an introduction to syntax and an introduction to semantics. Only female students fill in the questionnaire Motivation as the researcher wanted to measure their motivation and attitudes towards learning English, because there are no such studies that cater for studying only the EFL female students' motivation as far as the researcher knew as well as it is a fact that the number of female students is greater than of their male colleagues in this major as compared with other majors. The number of the participants was (102) female students.

4.2.Instruments

The primary method of inquiry used in this study was a questionnaire. It consisted of two sections:. In Section A, five items were used to collect information regarding the students' internal motivation. Section B consisted of five more items which aimed to identify students' external motivation to learn the English language. The researcher adapted these questions from (Brown, H. Douglas, 2002:18).

4.3.Data collection

Giving the description of the questionnaire items, this part presents the procedures used in the administration process. In November, 2011 the researcher started carrying out the main study at Yarmouk University. Before administering the questionnaire, permission was sought from the professor who taught the two courses and the time was arranged with him. Prior to distributing the questionnaire, the students were informed of the objectives and significance of the research. They were also requested to state their true and honest responses. Moreover, the subjects were able to ask for any clarifications they might have. Then, the questionnaire was administered.

4.4.Data analysis

The present study basically ought to identify EFL female students' motivation in learning English, so the data collected from their responses on the questionnaire items was analyzed in terms of means, using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), and percentages were also computed. To see if there are any significant relationships between internal /external motivation and students' proficiency in English, Pearson Correlation was computed.

5.Findings and Discussion

Research Question 1

The first research question sought to investigate if there is any significant relationship between internal motivation and students' proficiency in English. To answer this question the mean scores and the standard deviations for the questionnaire items which test the internal motivation of the students towards learning English were computed (see Table (1)).

Table (1) shows that the highest mean score went to the first item with a mean of (3.42) and the lowest went to the fifth item with a mean of (2.97). Both the second and the third items had the same mean of (3.39), followed by the fourth item with a mean of (3.27). However, the overall mean for students' internal motivation was (3.29).

To see if there is any significant relationship between students' internal motivation and their proficiency in English, Pearson Correlation was computed between internal motivation and students' proficiency in English, Table (2) below shows that.

As seen from Table (2) the correlation coefficient scores between internal motivation and proficiency in English is (0.24). This result indicates that there is a significant correlation between students' internal motivation and their proficiency in English.

Sample Regression between internal motivation with proficiency in English was applied too. Table (3) shows that.

Table (3) shows that the correlation coefficient reached (0.25) and the value of R- Square reached (0.06). The F

value reached (6.42) by Sig. (0.01), this proves that there is a relationship between internal motivation and proficiency in English. This result supported the result gained from table (2) which shows that β . value reached (0.25) for internal motivation with proficiency in English.

Research Question 2

The second question tried to investigate if there is there any significant relationship between external motivation and proficiency in English. To answer this question the same descriptive statistics applied to the first question were used. Thus the mean scores and the standard deviations for the items of the questionnaire that examine the extent to which the students are externally motivated were computed. Table (4) shows that.

Table (4) shows that the highest mean score was (1.98) which was for the first item, followed by the second item with a mean of (1.85). The third and the fourth items got the same mean of (1.80) while the least mean was (1.77) which was for the fifth item. The overall mean scores for the students' external motivation was (1.84).

In order to investigate whether there is a significant relationship between students' proficiency in English and their type of motivation, the researcher computed Pearson Correlation between external motivation and their proficiency in English. Table (5) shows that.

Table (5) shows that the correlation coefficient between external motivation and their proficiency in English was (-0.20). This result indicates that there is a significant correlation between external motivation and proficiency in English. The researcher used the Sample Regression test between students' external motivation with their proficiency in English. Table (6) summarizes that.

Table (6) shows that the correlation coefficient reached (0.20), and the value of R- Square reached (0.04). F value reached (4.18). The data obtained from table (6) indicate that there is a counterproductive relationship between students' external motivation and their proficiency in English. This result is also supported by the results obtained from table (5) which shows that β . value was (-0.20) for the relationship between the external motivation and the proficiency in learning English.

6. Conclusions

Brown (2001:77) concluded that if the "learners are given an opportunity to "do" language for their own personal reasons of achieving competence and autonomy, those learners will have a better chance of success than if they become dependent on external rewards for their motivation." . From this conclusion one could argue that the results obtained from the present study go in the same line with what Brown is preaching. As it is clear that the subjects of this study show that they have a strong internal motivation for learning English and this fostered their proficiency in learning English for internal aims rather than for external ones. This result somehow may contradict with the results obtained from another study conducted on Jordanian female students by Ababneh (2013). This contradiction might be explained in terms of the difference in the academic major of the subjects in the two studies. In the present study, the subjects' academic major is English while it was vocational education for subjects of the other study. As for the English major students it's their choice to study English since they have chosen to indulge in this major, and thus they seek to be proficient and successful in their second/foreign language, English. However, the vocational education students do not need to be proficient in English so the only thing which they cater for was to fulfill their external goals which are mainly to succeed in the course or to pass the exam. However, this result surely is supported by Browns principle in which he states that " The most powerful rewards are those that are intrinsically motivated within the learner. Because the behavior stems from needs, wants, or desires within oneself, the behavior is self -rewarding; therefore no externally administered reward is necessary". (Brown,2001:59)

Another conclusion drawn from this study is that the subjects have a counterproductive relationship between their external motivation and proficiency in English. This result also proves that the subjects are willing to learn English to satisfy their own internal motives and are not affected with the goals or needs of the others. This result showed that the subjects are fully aware of the importance of being proficient in English for their own good and not to get rewards from others.

From the above conclusion, it is obvious that in foreign / second language teaching the motives and attitudes of the learners can make it or break it. Thus if the learner has positively motivated towards learning the language then he/she will show a rapid progress in his/her learning. Thus many students' fail in their study of English because they don't have a strong motive to study it. To sum up, Aggarwal, (1996: 46) claimed that "motivation is the very heart of the learning process. It energizes and accelerates the behavior of the learner".

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Table (1). *Mean scores and Standard Deviations of Students' Internal Motivation*

No.	Item	Mean	S.D
1	I have set my own goals for learning English and want to be successful in reaching those goals.	3.42	0.83
2	I want to learn English well so that I can talk with native speakers of English.	3.39	0.77
3	English will help me to get a good job someday.	3.39	0.77
4	English will help me to be successful in my studies.	3.27	0.80
5	I hope to meet (or have already met) a special friend who speaks English.	2.97	1.09
Total		3.29	0.57

Table (2). *Pearson Correlation between Students' Internal Motivation and their Proficiency in English*

Variable	Pearson Correlation	Sig.
Internal motivation	0.24	0.00
Proficiency in English		

Table (3). *Result of Sample Regression between Internal Motivation and Proficiency in English*

Variable	B	T	R	R- Square	F	Sig.
Internal motivation	0.25	2.53	0.26	0.06	6.42	0.01
Proficiency in English						

Table (4). *Means and Standard Deviations of Students' External Motivation*

No.	Item	Mean	S.D
1	My parents want me to learn English, so I am here to please them.	1.98	1.16
2	I am studying English because it is a required course in my school or university.	1.85	1.02
3	I need to pass an English proficiency test (like the TOEFL or an Entrance exam).	1.80	0.93
4	I am studying English because I want to please my teacher and get good grades.	1.80	0.94
5	I am studying English because most of my friends are good in English .	1.77	0.97
Total		1.84	0.67

Table (5). *Pearson Correlation between External Motivation and Students' Proficiency in English*

Variable	Pearson Correlation	Sig.
External motivation	-0.20	0.00
Proficiency in English		

Table (6): *Result of Sample Regression between External motivation with proficiency in English*

Variable	B	T	R	R- Square	F	Sig.
External motivation	-0.20	-2.04	0.20	0.04	4.18	0.04
Proficiency in English						

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