

Motivation in the Attainment of Proficiency in English Universidad de Guayaquil

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SUMMARY: *Indeed, experts from all academic spheres, that is, developers of curriculum material, researchers and tutors, are of the opinion that student motivation is a key component in the gaining linguistic skill in foreign languages. This concept is known to possess a certain degree of complexity as one would be required to employ the use of several respectable disciplines in order to acquire a comprehensive understanding of all its aspects. That the impact that motivation has on the attainment of L2 is one of the principal subjects of discussion in linguistic quarters should go without saying. Therefore, the following study shall seek to expound on the role that motivation, together with attitude, has to play in one's ability to learn English. In accordance with findings from this particular study, it can be deduced that one's level of motivation is a key determinant in process of language acquisition. It has also been found to have an indirect impact on the degree of one's expertise in speaking the foreign language. This article shall discuss an empirical study whose basis lies in findings from a questionnaire issued by the research team. This study involved 310 participants selected uniformly at the University of Guayaquil. Findings from the research undertaken suggest that the majority of individuals prefer tutelage in English when the teaching sessions also entail "informal learning situations" instead of the conventional, or rather, "classic" learning situations that involve reading and writing. Therefore, it can be said that the more practical/'informal' a tutelage session is, the higher the level of student motivation to learn English as an L2 at the University of Guayaquil. It can also be argued that a student's attitude (Uribe et al., 2008) directly correlates to his/her commitment to learning English regardless of one's duration of exposure to the language.*

Keywords: *foreign language, motivation, informal learning situation, language acquisition*

I. INTRODUCTION

The term, 'motivation', has been said to refer to "the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language." (Gardner, 1985). Moreover, it has been thought of as the impulse and emotion that compels one to undertake a particular activity (Brown, 2000). Motivation is said to consist of three primary stages (Dornyei, 2003): the first one, pre-actional stage is the one in which motivation is generated. The second one, known as the actional stage, entails the maintenance of the generated motivation while the third phase, post-actional phase, involves the thorough evaluation of the task towards which one is motivated.

There are generally two varieties of motivation: "Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivation" (Gardner, 1988). Motivation of the intrinsic variety encompasses the desire to engage in activity owing to how enjoyable it is, while extrinsic motivation is founded upon the attainment of a separable outcome or external reward. Of importance to note is the fact that intrinsic motivation is pegged upon the following cornerstones: Knowledge, Accomplishment, and Stimulation (Noels, 2001). Intrinsically motivated learners are believed to exhibit an advanced degree of competency in linguistic skill attainment as opposed to the extrinsically motivated counterparts (Ushioda, 2008).

Moreover, there exist two types of motivation that ought to be put into consideration with regard to foreign language acquisition. These are: 'Classroom' and 'Language' learning motivation Classroom learning motivation, according to Gardner (2008), encompassed a host of factors which include the tutor, the educational (country's education system), as well as the cultural context (personality, ideals, convictions). Language learning motivation, on the other hand, encompasses any compulsive characteristic of the student to learn a language. Of particular interest is the fact that it is subject to variations under particular circumstances despite its relative stability (Genesee&Riches, 2006).

Renowned Canadian psychologist, Robert Gardner, came up with a model that attempted to expound on four primary factors that had significant impact on one's desire to gain proficiency in foreign dialect. They are as follows: Individual variations among learners, learning achievements, environmental influences, as well as context, which can be either formal or informal. Gardner also placed assertion on his belief that integrative motivation culminated in more successful learning outcomes with regard to understanding of lexical structures as opposed to instrumental learning.

In light of the above information, this paper shall seek to present the findings of a study carried out to determine the role that motivation has to play in L2 Learning at the University of Guayaquil, Ecuador. The study shall target 310 respondents selected from different departments at the university. The participants are of varying genders and degree programs, thus eliminating any possibility of bias and the consequential unreliability of data.

II. METHOD

This study uses 310 participants who were selected with the use of a random sampling technique applied across the various departments, degree programs, and schools at the University of Guayaquil. The teaching was undertaken in various ways. It was carried out either as an extra-curricular activity prior to and following the formal sessions, or as “content and language integrated learning” (Gardner, 2008). The tutors involved in this study were experts in foreign languages, particularly English, and also doubled up as University Lecturers specialized in teaching foreign languages to university students.

In order to carry out this study, a questionnaire was formulated in order to obtain an idea of the students’ opinion of L2 Learning. It was prepared in English and comprised a total of nine close-ended questions. Examples of motivational facets explored by these queries include: views towards motivational inducers, motivational goals, as well as the students’ acknowledgement of the benefits provided by one’s proficiency in second languages. The presentation of our queries in the form of simple questions was established to be appropriate for this particular set of respondents as it would culminate in the elicitation of the most accurate responses with regard to the individuals’ desire to learn the foreign language. The study would carry on for a period of six months and entailed close supervision of the different individuals taking English classes at the university. This was coupled with practical sessions during which the participants were obliged to read aloud a written paragraph around 200 words long every morning during the six-month period. Each student’s speed of pronunciation as well as the ease with which they read the passage was carefully assessed (Fraser, 2000). The data was collected in collaboration with the instructors who taught the 310 participants, that is, after consent was sought from all involved stakeholders. Most of the questionnaires were issued and filled in the university’s academic hall. Allowing the students to fill the questionnaires by themselves enabled further assessment of the students’ reading and writing expertise.

III. RESULTS

The results obtained indicate that 84% of the participants like learning English “very much”, while 14% “like it quite a bit” while the remaining 2% do not like it at all.

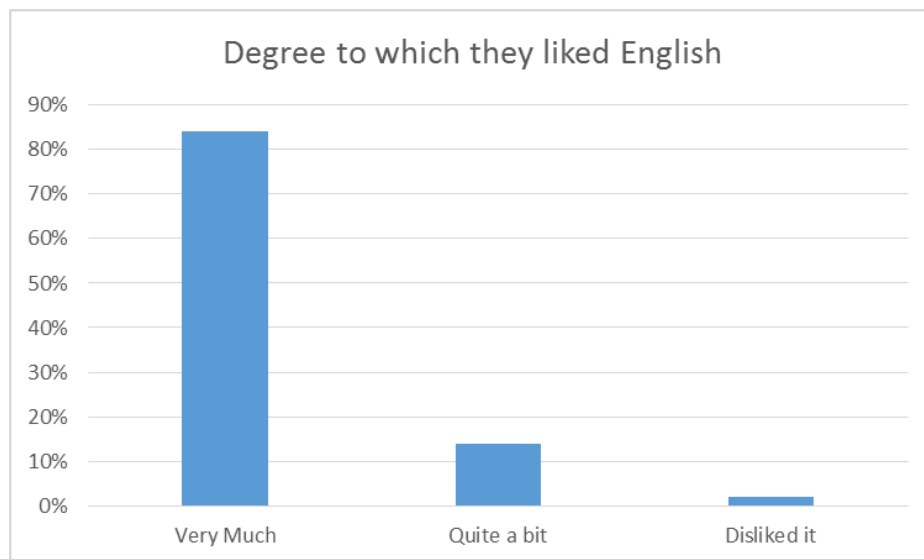


Figure 1: Graph depicting the extent to which students liked English

In terms of difficulty, about 49% of the respondents found it to be “easy”, 47% found it to be in between easy and difficult while 4% percent considered it to be “difficult”.

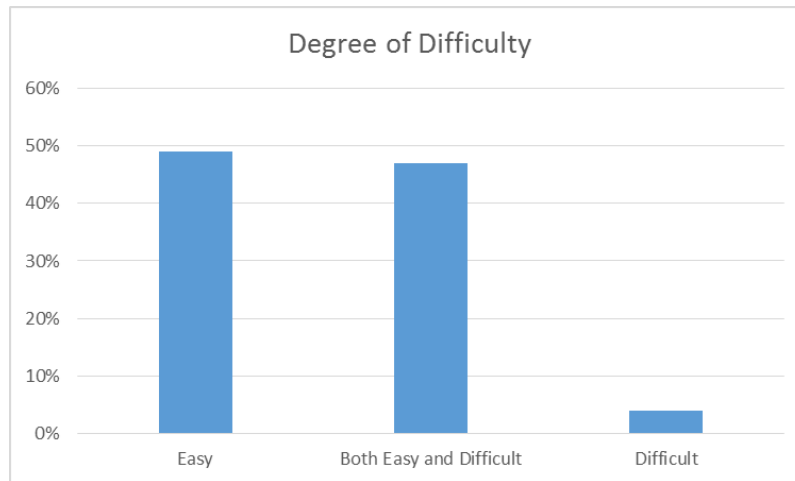


Figure 2: Graph representing how difficult students found the language to be.

50% of the students considered themselves to be “very good” at learning English, 44% “good” and the remaining 6% “not too good”.

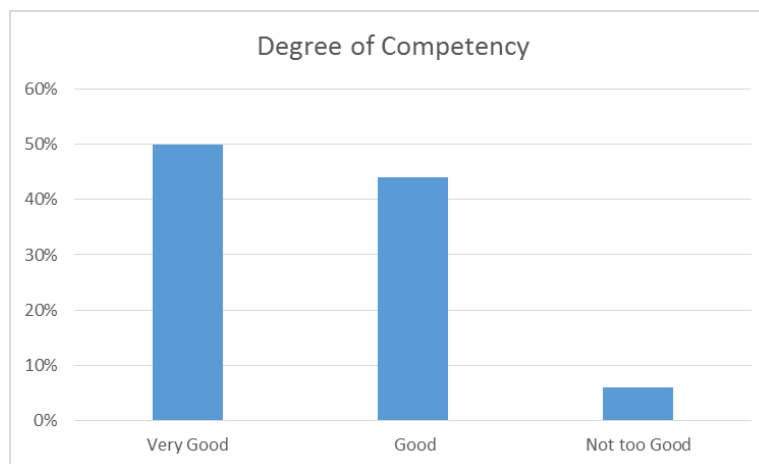


Figure 3: Graph representing the students' level of competency in the language

Furthermore, about 67% of the students acknowledged the importance that learning English would have in their future endeavors, hence their motivation towards learning it. 12% claimed that they took the lessons just because they “liked” the English language. 11% took the class only to please their guardians while 7% took it because it was a class requirement. The remaining 4% took it for miscellaneous reasons.

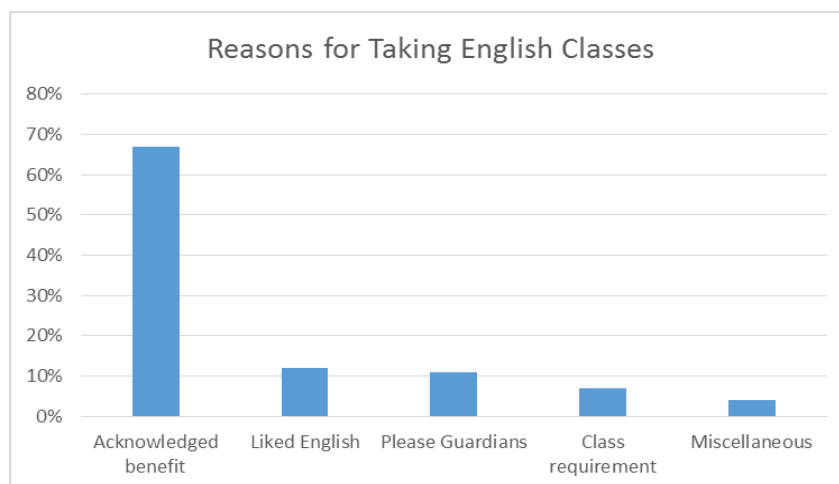


Figure 4: Graph representing the students' reasons for taking English classes

IV. DISCUSSION

Certainly, one can confidently say that the findings depicted in this scientific article prove our initial hypothesis that motivation is undeniably a critical component in the attainment of proper know-how in a foreign dialect, which is English in this case. They, therefore, go hand in hand with prior research findings, as well as pedagogical-psychological discoveries by recognized scholars such as Robert Gardner. Truly, intrinsic motivation for learning English is primarily dependent by one's individual development while the induction, preservation, as well as amalgamation of this motivation is mainly influenced by the prevailing socio-cultural and education contexts. This is especially the case when the foreign language, English, grants the students the ability to drive towards their circumstantial interests, fulfill their developmental requirements, and gain further exposure to the language within the school and its environs, either through the media or day-to-day interactions with other individuals (Wentzel, 2005).

The results obtained in the course of the research study indicate that students at the University of Guayaquil possess majorly intrinsic motivation for the acquisition of knowledge in the English language. Nearly a third of the participants reported that they preferred English sessions when they incorporated physical activities from which they could derive enjoyment and satisfaction, that is, informal learning situations. An almost similar proportion reported their preference for the more classical or formal learning situations which involve reading and writing.

The reasons expressed by the students with regard to why they enrolled for the English lessons also seem to indicate that students at the University of Guayaquil possess a comprehensive understanding of the merits, as well as significance, of mastering the art of reciting, inscribing, and conversing in English. Many were of the opinion that proficiency in the English tongue made a substantial contribution to the social, emotional and cognitive growth. It would thus equip them with the means to expanding their social networks as well as the fulfillment of their intellectual needs and wellbeing.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is quite evident that a student's level of motivation, as well as attitude, plays a crucial role in the determination of one's success in the acquisition of skill in a second language. It is therefore vital that instructors employ high quality techniques in the teaching of English, while at the same time putting into consideration not only the intellectual, but also the motivational aspects of linguistic education (Goldenberg, 2008). In order to do so, they must be well-versed in the rapid recognition of their students' motivational needs and requirements. This will, in turn, facilitate the optimal harmonization of scheduled learning activities hence allowing for the students' optimal development in the English language.

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