

A Longitudinal Study of Motivation as a Dynamic Process in Learning English as Second Language (ESL) among Undergraduate Students of Engineering University at Jamshoro

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate motivating factors of students to learn English as a second language and dynamical changes in their motivational level. Factors that motivate can be integrative or instrumental and, moreover, can bring fluctuations in learners' motivation from time to time. Mehran University of Engineering and Technology, Jamshoro offers English Language course on the curriculum of various engineering degree programs. Students' past learning experiences affect their present learning. Therefore, this study explores students past and present motivation for learning English. This study is qualitative in nature in which semi-structured interviews were conducted. Interviews were divided into two phases. Phase one was conducted before the beginning of the English language course in which participants were asked about their perceptions for learning English Language and phase two was conducted after the end of the course which compared students' previous perceptions with current level of motivation. This paper found motivation as a dynamic process and students' level of motivation was increased due to proper teaching and learning environment.

Keywords: Longitudinal study, Dynamic Motivation, Engineering University Students, English as a second language.

1. Introduction

Pakistan is enlisted in one of those sixty seven countries where English language is considered as an official language. Mehboob (2004) notes more than six million people speaking English language in Pakistan. It is used in schools, colleges, and universities as a medium of instruction. Moreover, it is a key to success for job interviews. As English has earned its prestige all over the world so other professional fields consider English as an important subject.

This study was conducted in a professional engineering university (MUET, Jamshoro) where English is taught as a compulsory subject to the undergraduate students. The students studying in MUET, Jamshoro belong to different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Among multicultural and multilingual students, motivation plays a basic role for learning a second language and puts strong influence on students' learning process. Motivation for learning English differs from student to student and their level of motivation changes from time to time. Thus, this study intends to discover how students' motivational level and temporal changes occur in their motivational level for learning English at MUET, Jamshoro.

Motivation for learning English shows learners' intensity and enthusiasm. However, Ushioda (2007) is of the view that motivation is unstable and it is a dynamic process. It varies from person to person. Ushioda (2007) also suggests that due to temporal perspective of motivation, qualitative paradigm on L2 motivation would be more effective than quantitative. Thus, this study follows only qualitative paradigm. Motivation in learning language shows the curiosity of learner in getting knowledge (Shahriar, Pathan, Mari, & Umarani, 2011). A successful language learner is one who has positive motivation for learning language.

1.1. Aims and Objectives

Based on the above discussion, this study aims at exploring the dynamic nature of motivation to learn English as

a second language among the undergraduate Engineering students in a public sector university. The following objectives were formulated:

- a. To identify the engineering university students' motivation to learn English as a second language.
- b. To investigate the dynamic nature of motivation before and after taking English course.

1.2. Research Questions

Following the aims & objectives, the questions formulated were as under:

- a. What motivates engineering university students to learn English as a second language?
- b. What are the motivational dynamics that affect students' level of motivation before and after taking English language course?

2. Literature Review

Research on L2 motivation has been widely spreading in the field of psycholinguistics after Gardner (1985) and his fellows' contribution in second language acquisition (Dornyei, 2001). Generally speaking, research on L2 motivation is divided into three developmental periods. 1. Socio-Psychological Period, 2. Cognitive period and 3. Temporal Dimension period. Last stage of this development has concluded motivation as a dynamic process. Williams and Burden, 1997; Ushioda, 1996, 1998, 2001; Dörnyei and Ottó, 1998, and Dornyei, 2001 have considered the concept of motivation as a dynamic process.

2.1. Williams and Burden's (1997) Model

Williams and Burden (1997) propose their model that consists of three stages: The first stage demonstrates reasons for doing something; the second stage refers to deciding to do something, and last stage shows sustaining the efforts or persistence. They (1997) further argue that three stages occur within the framework of socio-cultural context because the influence of culture of society impact on each stage. In simple words, they are of the view that these three stages are interrelated. Williams and Burden's model explain motivation as process and express its dynamic approach.

2.2. Dornyei and Otto's (1998) Process-Oriented Model

Later, Dornyei and Otto (1998) developed a process model of L2 motivation which was further explained by Dornyei (2000, 2001c). A process-oriented model analyses the dynamic and temporal nature of L2 motivation in classroom environment (2000). The process-oriented model is divided into three phases: (1) Preactional phase, (2) Actional phase, and (3) Postactional phase.

1. Preactional Phase:

The Preactional phase refers to an initial act which leads to a task or goal selection. There are three sub-process of this phase: (1) goal setting, (2) intention formation, and (3) initiation of intention enactment.

2. Actional Phase:

The Actional phase refers to the stage when intention is changed into an action. There are three process (1) subtask generation and implementation, (2) a complex ongoing appraisal process, (3) the application of a variety of action control mechanism (Dornyei, 2001b, p.89).

3. Postactional Phase:

The Postactional phase begins after the accomplishment of the designed goal or an interruption of an action for a long period. It often determines the learners' behaviour and the outcomes of their action (Dornyei, 2001b, p.90-91).

The Process-Oriented model is helpful in understanding the role of teacher in motivating students in L2 classroom. Dornyei (2005) develops his new approach (i-e) L2 motivational self-system in which number of influential L2 motivation theories along with self research in psychology is combined. Dornyei (2005) is of the view that the psychological research on the self is the notion of 'possible selves' which means the individuals' action in moving from the present to future relate to initiating behaviour. Dornyei (2005) concludes that the self system offers three basic sources of the L2 motivation. 1. the learners' vision on self as an effective L2 speaker, 2. the social pressure coming from the learners' environment and 3. positive learning experiences.

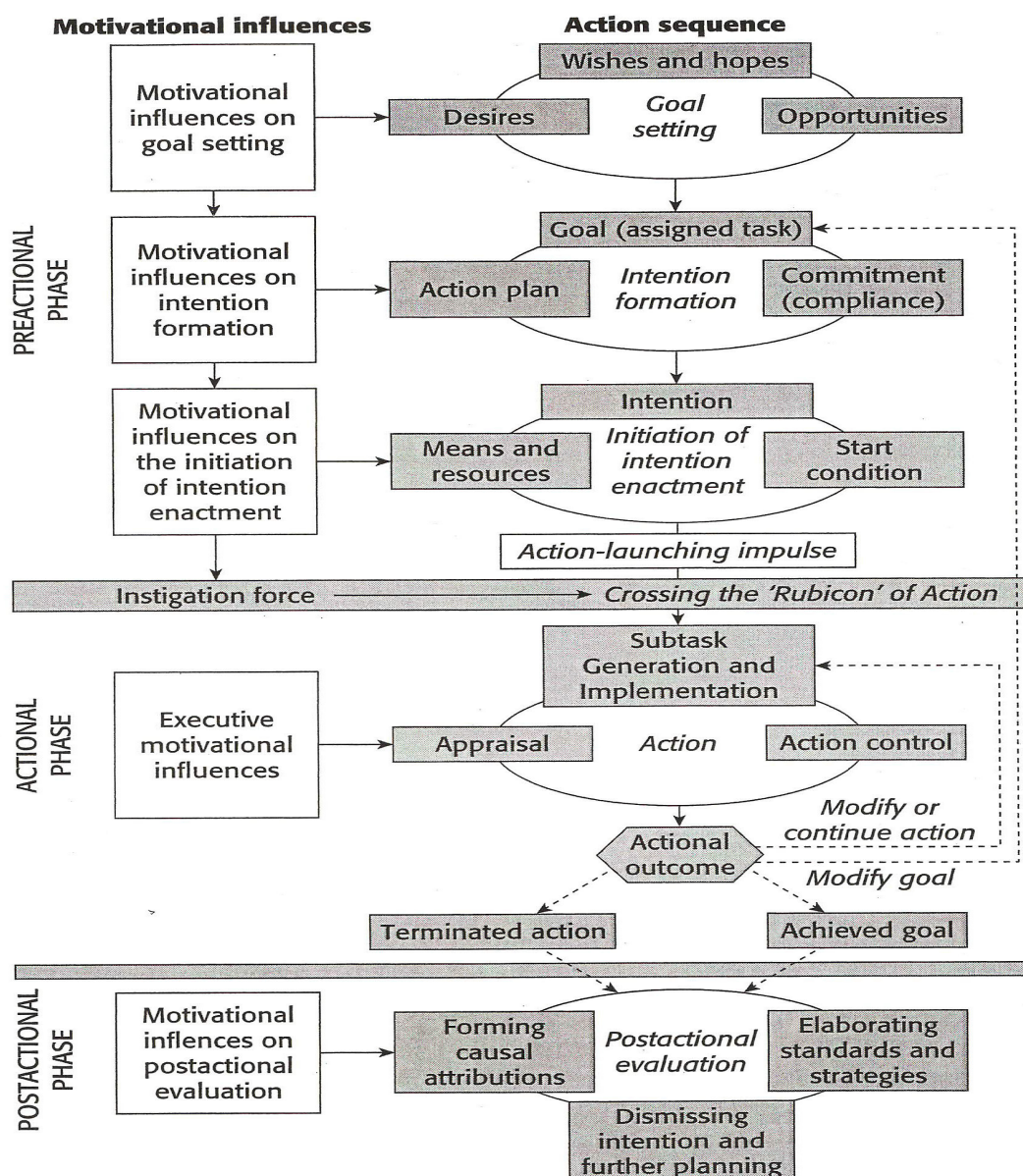


Figure 1. Dörnyei and Ottó's process model of L2 motivation

2.3. Ushioda's (2001) theoretical framework

Ushioda's (2001) contribution on dynamic process of motivation has provided future researchers a new gateway towards temporal dimension of motivation. We have already discussed her suggestion for doing research in qualitative paradigm instead of quantitative. She (2001) carries out a research and selects a qualitative paradigm in which she conducts longitudinal interview with Irish learners of French language. She discovers eight descriptive motivational aspects to learn French language. These are: 1. Academic interest; 2. Language related liking; 3. Desired level of L2 competence; 4. Personal goals; 5. Positive learning history; 6. Personal satisfaction; 7. Feelings about French speaking communities; 8. External incentives. She (2001) divides these eight aspects into two causal attributions. One is L2 related experience and other is directed towards end or future goal. Her (2001) theoretical framework is based on these two casual attributions.

Figure 2 refers to Ushioda's belief in motivation as a temporal damnation. Here, there are two types of learners. One is learner A, who is motivated by positive learning experiences while goal-direction plays a minor role. On the other hand, learner B is motivated by a primarily goal-directedness. Her (2001) findings indicate that learners' positive learning experiences refer to intrinsic motivational factors while their less successful learning experiences are due to their personal goals i.e. primary motivation to learn French as a second language.

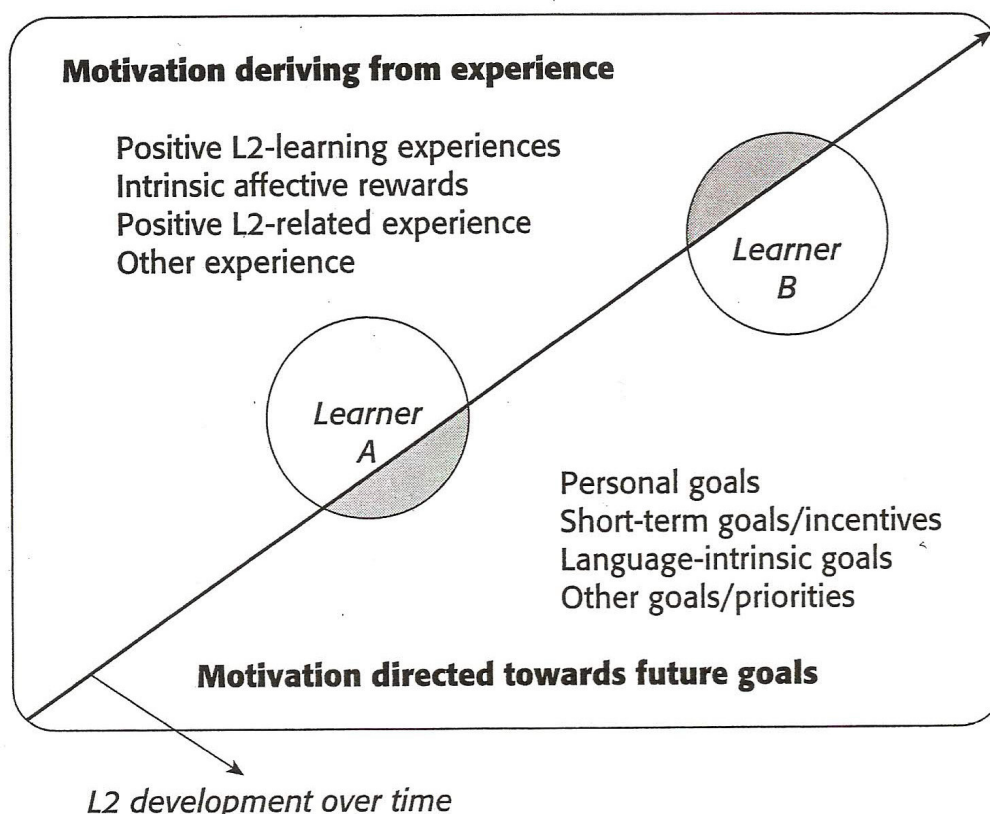


Figure2. Ushioda's conceptualization of learner motivation

3. Research Methodology

The study used qualitative research design in collecting and handling data. The qualitative research is an increasing demand of researchers of social sciences (Dornyei, 2007). Research in qualitative paradigm refers to the procedures of collecting data in open-ended questionnaire that analyse transcribed recordings in qualitative content analysis. Researchers of applied linguistics welcomed the qualitative paradigm in the mid of 1990s. (Dornyei, 2007: 36). They realized that the process of language acquisition is influenced by socio-cultural and situational factors and qualitative paradigm has strength to explain such factors (ibid.). However, in applied linguistics, qualitative research offers observations, interviews, and authentic documents of communication behaviour (p.193). The study is longitudinal in nature.

The longitudinal approach refers to an extended observation that detects changes in behaviour and patterns of development over the time. Therefore, longitudinal research is used in this study in order to investigate dynamic motivation in learning English. In longitudinal study, data are collected in two or more than two times and researchers compare the data between the times (Dornyei, 2007). Due to dynamic process of motivation, a number of researchers of L2 motivation prefer longitudinal research. Following them, this research has collected the data at two times. First time, data was collected before the beginning of the course and then finally after the end of the course.

3.1. Participants and Study Site

This study focuses on the engineering university students who take English as a functional language course. Mehran University of Engineering and Technology (MUET), Jamshoro established English Language Development Center (ELDC) which is responsible for facilitating students to enhance their English language skills. ELDC offers English language course to the students of all disciplines in 1st year of education. This study takes three participants from each given five engineering disciplines: *Electronics Engineering, Civil Engineering, Environmental Engineering, Telecommunication Engineering, and Textile Engineering*. The participants of this study were interviewed at two phases, first in their beginning of first year of first semester and second at the end of their first semester.

3.2. Interview

This study uses interview as an instrument in order to get in-depth knowledge about students' motivation for

learning English and dynamics in their motivation. Best (1970) states that the interview is better than other data collection device. He (1970) further states that before the formal interview session, an interviewer can share his/her purpose of study and answer the participants' queries. However, participants feel more comfortable to speak instead of writing. Thus, this study conducts oral interview. Among a number of different kinds of interviews, this study uses semi-structured interview because it gives freedom to participants to explain the phenomena in their own way. Following are interview questions that the participants were asked:

Questions asked before the beginning of the course:

- Q1. Why do you like to learn English?
- Q2. What are your expectations from your English language course?
- Q3. How was your past learning experience?
- Q4. How much are you good at English at this stage?
- Q5. What do you think about the connection of English with your Engineering profession?

After the end of course

- Q1. How do you feel after the journey of English language course? Respond in connection with the past.
- Q2. What do you think about expectations that you had with English language course? Were they fulfilled or not?
- Q3. What were the most interesting aspects in English language course? (Any good or bad learning experience)
- Q4. How much are you good at English now?
- Q5. What do you think your English language course will help you in your Engineering profession?

4. Summary of findings

The findings of this study are based on questions that were asked in interview from fifteen participants of five different engineering disciplines. Interviews were recorded individually by cell phone and made fifteen separate folders.

Before the beginning of the course

Q1. Why do you like to learn English?

To the answer of this question, among fifteen participants, only four participants said that they like English people and their culture. They were integratively motivated because they intend to shift from their country to English countries. On the other hand, eleven participants were instrumentally motivated to learn English. They were of the view that English is important for their career.

Q2. What do you think about expectations that you had with English language course? Were they fulfilled or not?

All fifteen Participants had different expectations with their English language course in past. nine out of fifteen had got private schooling so that they were satisfied and believed that they had communication practices at previous learning. It is also found that most of them were still weak at English because they did not have communication environment outside the class. Remaining six participants had schooling from public institutes and contrary to their expectations their past English language learning was not up to the mark.

Q3. How was your past learning experience?

Eight participants had positive learning experiences while there were six participants who were of the view that they were not encouraged to participate in class activities. Furthermore, they were discouraged by their teachers. Their teachers followed traditional method in teaching and classes were teacher-oriented rather than student – oriented.

Q4. How far you are good at English at this stage?

Ten out of fifteen participants answered that they are not good enough in speaking and were quite bad at understanding native accent. They shared that they have neither good vocabularies nor communication practice outside of classroom. On the other hand, five participants replied that they are good at English because their parents, friends, and teachers speak in English.

Q5. What do you think about the connection of English with your Engineering profession?

All participants agreed that English has direct connection with their present academic years as well as professional fields because it is used as a medium of instruction and communication in the job environment. As a matter of fact it will help contact and exchange professional experiences with fellow of the field at global level.

This study focused in above interview participants' motivation for learning English and explored their perceptions about English language learning. In the light of above interview discussion, this study further took another interview after the completion of the course. This interview intended to explore changes between their pre and post perceptions for learning English.

After the end of English Course

Q1. How do you feel after the journey of English language course? Respond in connection with the past.

In response to this question, twelve participants showed excitement about English language course and they were unhappy with the completion of the course as they liked English. They said that English language class is source of entertainment for them; the teacher brought variety of activities in classroom which facilitated learning

process effectively. They were seen to be motivated because of the teachers' friendly behavior and her teaching methodology, whereas, three participants were quite happy with completion of course. Because for them, English like other subjects was a burden which needs to be reduced with each passing semester.

Q2. What do you think about expectations that you had with English language course? Were they fulfilled or not? Among fifteen participants, twelve were satisfied as they thought course ended successfully. They said that they had succeeded in attaining their goals in language course. Their level of English language improved particularly communication skills and confidence. They showed their willingness to sustain their level of proficiency attained through the course. The remaining three participants were instrumentally motivated to learn English so they wanted English for a certain time period in order to be able to cope with academic and professional challenges. This shows a fluctuation in motivation among the participants. After the course, a greater number of participants have turned to be integratively motivated in contrast to their mode of motivation at the beginning of the course.

Q3. What were the most interesting aspects in English language course? (Any good or bad learning experience) In response to this question, twelve participants said to have had good experience in English course. They liked the material that teacher brought in the classroom and the type of activities like presentations, group discussion, peer learning. All these teaching methods motivated them to learn effectively while three participants equally enjoyed the classroom environment and maintained that these activities really helped them enhance social skills. Before the course, only five students were noted to have good experience in learning English. After the course, this number of participants increased and more students were motivated.

Q4. How much are you good at English now?

Before beginning of the course, ten students were found to have poor English due to certain unspecified reasons. After the course, a change occurred in the proficiency level of students. nine students said they had really improved their spoken and written skills due to regular opportunities in the classroom by the teacher while 2 students could not improve due to their lack of motivation for certain reasons which they avoided to mention. The remaining four students noted that their level in English was better than the past because of their continuous involvement in the classroom activities.

Q5. What do you think your English language course will help you in your Engineering profession?

Most of the participants agreed that their English language course would be helpful to them in their professional field. They said that English is one of the important required skills in job interview and in the field. Such course in the university trains them for meeting needs in English language in their fields.

Conclusion

Learning L2 is the result of certain motivational factors. Thus, motivation has come to be studied as an important topic in the field of applied linguistics for the last few years. Various studies have been conducted to study motivation as a construct which fosters or hinders learning a foreign language. Gardner (1985), Dörnyei (2001a) and others have contributed a lot to the topic. The current study investigated the dynamic nature of motivation by using Ushioda's concept of temporal dimension which supports the view that motivation is not stable. It keeps fluctuating from time to time and place to place. The study involved engineering students as participants from various departments of Mehran University of Engineering and Technology, Jamshoro and found that the motivation is a changing phenomenon. The students were interviewed before and after taking English language course and they showed different levels of motivation for learning English language.

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