MOTIVATION AND LEARNING PREFERENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN MOROCCO

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Abstract – *This study explores the motivation and learning preferences of high school students in Morocco regarding their learning of English as a foreign language. The study sought to identify the students' preferences in relation to a number of instructional practices, and to identify the nature and strength of their motivation towards learning English. Teachers' views concerning the usefulness of different instructional practices were also investigated. A factor analysis of students' sources of motivation produced five factors, which were labelled intrinsic motivation, short-term instrumental motivation, long-term instrumental motivation, social integrative motivation, and cultural integrative motivation. The students had well defined and coherent learning preferences. They were highly visual and kinaesthetic, but weakly auditory. They highly valued cognitively oriented activities which involved grammatical awareness. The students' preferences seemed to be at odds with their teachers' views, who saw communicative activities as the most useful for learning. Such findings suggest that there is a need to bring teachers and students closer together, in a learner-centred approach to teaching.*

Introduction

$\mathcal{T}$his study explores the motivation and learning preferences of high school students in Morocco regarding their learning of English as a foreign language. The study sought to identify the students' preferences in relation to a number of instructional practices, and to identify the nature and strength of their motivation towards learning English. Teachers' views concerning the usefulness of different instructional practices were also investigated.

Morocco's history and geographical position have always facilitated contacts and relations with both the USA and Great Britain, and have as a result contributed to the introduction of English and its culture in Morocco. English Language teaching (ELT) was first introduced into Moroccan secondary schools during the era of the French protectorate, in the 1930s, with French as the first language of instruction. Since independence in 1956, a strong trend for learning English has

dominated Morocco amongst both pupils and adults (see Abu-Talib 1985). This growing interest in English has been accompanied by an explosion of private courses. At university level, a degree in English studies is widely seen to secure more job opportunities than a degree in French studies (Sadiqi 1988).

English is taught to secondary school students from the age of 15 to 18, as part of their Baccalaureate studies. The aims of ELT at the secondary level are set out in official Ministry texts (Ministère de l'Education Nationale 1994). These outline the main aims as follows:

1. To help learners meet the requirements of the English Baccalaureate paper.
2. To enable learners to communicate with other users of English, either in speech or writing.
3. To develop students' awareness of the language system of English, and to enhance their awareness of the specificity of their own language.
4. To promote students' understanding of other cultures as well as awareness of their own cultural identity.
5. To enable the learners, in the course of post-secondary education to use reference material in English.
6. To meet the needs of the job market.

As a result of such developments, increasing interest is now being paid in Morocco to key issues concerning ELT, particularly regarding student motivation, and the teaching and learning activities used to foster progress.

Much research has been conducted in other countries over the years, exploring the main sources of motivation amongst students for learning a foreign language (see Ellis 1994; Cook 1996). The study reported here draws upon earlier work by Gardner (1985) in Canada, who developed a socio-educational model of foreign language learning. In this model he identified two important sources of motivation: integrative motivation (learning a language in order to take part in the culture of its people) and instrumental motivation (learning a language for practical reasons or rewards, such as enhancing educational and career opportunities). In addition to these two sources of motivation, it was felt that a third source of motivation was also important: intrinsic motivation (learning a language because one finds it an interesting and enjoyable experience). The importance of intrinsic motivation has been identified in a number of models of foreign language learning (see Crookes and Schmidt 1989).

Research on students' learning preferences has received increasing attention in recent years in the wake of research exploring students' learning styles. The point has been made by a number of writers (e.g. Ellis 1994) that if students have preferred styles of learning, then the effective teaching of a foreign language needs

to take account of such preferences in order to maximise pupil progress. This study drew upon a number of studies which have explored students' learning preferences (e.g. Duda and Riley 1990; Nunan 1988).

Research design

The data for this study were collected in a number of high schools in Rabat, the capital city of Morocco. The study was divided into two phases. In the first phase, two preliminary studies were conducted based on questionnaires which explored students' motivation and learning preferences, and also obtained teachers views of their students' motivation and behaviour in classes. The first preliminary study involved 54 students (aged 16-18) from two schools, and the second preliminary study involved a further 65 students (aged 16-18) from two schools.

In the main study, conducted in phase two, 336 high school students (aged 17-18) from seven schools completed a 59-item questionnaire regarding their motivation and learning preferences, and 25 teachers completed a 32-item questionnaire regarding the usefulness of different learning activities. The questionnaires used Likert-type rating scales. Follow-up semi-structured interviews were then conducted with 26 of the students and 11 of the teachers. In total, 455 students and 26 teachers completed questionnaires, and 26 students and 11 teachers were interviewed.

It is important to note here that French is an important language of teaching and discourse in these schools (Sefrioui 1996). As such, all the questionnaires were written in French. The interviews were conducted in French and Arabic.

Findings and Discussion

The percentage of students in the main study ($N = 336$) who 'strongly agreed' with each of the 19 items concerning the sources of motivation learning English (*'pour quelles raisons apprenez-vous l'anglais?'*) is shown in Table 1.

It was expected that the students' motivation would be accounted for in terms of three main sources of motivation: intrinsic, instrumental and integrative. However a factor analysis of the motivation items revealed five factors. The factor loadings are also shown in Table 1. The first factor (Factor I) was labelled intrinsic motivation. Instrumental motivation was split into two factors, one focusing on short-term goals for learning English (Factor V) and the other on long-term goals (Factor II). Integrative motivation was also split into two factors, one dealing with

TABLE 1. Percentage of respondents (N = 336) who 'strongly agreed' with these state-ments as reasons for them learning English ('pour quelles raisons apprenez-vous l'anglais?') grouped together in terms of their loading on each of the factors extracted. The original statements were written in French.

Factor loading for each statements (with percentage who 'strongly agreed')

FACTOR I: INTRINSIC MOTIVATION
(Eigen Value 4.68)

0.78   Because I like English (48%)
0.77   Because I find English very interesting (40%)
0.65   To speak English with a good accent (60%)
0.60   To speak English as fluently as the English or Americans (49%)
0.57   Because English sounds pleasant to hear (44%)

FACTOR II: LONG-TERM INSTRUMENTAL MOTIVATION
(Eigen Value 1.78)

0.75   Because I may need English at university (46%)
0.74   To inform myself about scientific and technological developments (24%)
0.72   Because English may help with my job later (54%)

FACTOR III: SOCIAL INTEGRATIVE MOTIVATION
(Eigen Value (1.52)

0.69   To get to know English or American people (28%)
0.63   Because my favourite singers/writers are English or American (31%)
0.63   To visit anglophone countries (36%)
0.61   Because I like the culture and manner of anglophones (9%)

FACTOR IV: CULTURAL INTEGRATIVE MOTION
(Eigen Value 1.38)

0.70   To get to know about anglophone culture (23%)
0.69   To understand the way of life of anglophones (10%)
0.60   To copy the good aspects of anglophone culture (13%)

FACTOR V: SHORT-TERM INSTRUMENTAL MOTIVATION
(Eigen Value 1.23)

0.67   To get good baccalaureate grades (53%)
0.55   To learn and use beautiful English expressions (45%)
0.49   To understand documents or references written in English (52%)
0.47   To inform myself about what is going on in the world (39%)

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social integration (Factor III) and the other with cultural integration (Factor IV). These results suggest that Gardner's model of motivation towards foreign language learning (developed in Canada) may not readily apply to other cultural and educational settings. This point has now been made by a number of authors (e.g. Dörnyei 1990; Lennon 1993; Oxford and Shearin 1994). It is also interesting to note that intrinsic motivation, which was somewhat played down in the Canadian context, was particularly prominent in the Moroccan context.

Intrinsic motivation items were highly endorsed by the students (i.e received a relatively high percentage of 'strongly agree'), and this dimension was significantly correlated with students' (self-reported) strength of motivation and classroom level of (teacher-reported) motivation. This would suggest that intrinsically motivated students tended to display a stronger desire to learn English, seemed to deploy more effort to do so, and manifested a higher level of interest in the class.

In terms of strength of item endorsement by the students, the two instrumental motivation dimensions (short term and long-term) received a relatively moderate level of endorsement, and the two integrative motivation dimensions (social and cultural) received the lowest levels of endorsements. This suggests that the language itself seemed to be a more powerful source of motivation than a desire for social and cultural integration.

The strength of students' agreement, in the main study ($N = 336$), with each of the 32 items concerning their learning preferences ('Comment *préférez-vous apprendre l'anglais?*') was recorded, and placed in rank order. The ten activities with the highest preference ratings were as follows:

1. Listening to and understanding the teacher's explanation of grammar.
2. Practising English pronunciation.
3. Listening to English songs and the teacher explaining the words.
4. Reading in English, and guessing the meaning of words.
5. Noting the rules of grammar with examples in my exercise book.
6. Reflecting on and finding solutions to problems discussed in class.
7. Speaking and participating in class discussion.
8. Looking for words in a dictionary.
9. Reading aloud in English.
10. Doing grammar exercises.

A factor analysis of these data revealed seven factors. These seven preferred learning styles were labelled as follows: studial learning, naturalistic learning, reflective learning, concrete learning, communicative learning, active learning, and learning through songs.

Overall, it appeared that the students' learning preferences were well defined and coherent. They were highly visual and kinaesthetic, but weakly auditory. They highly valued cognitively oriented activities which involved grammatical awareness.

Students' self-reported strength of motivation was measured using eight items. A factor analysis of these items revealed two factors. The first factor (comprising five items) was concerned with the effort made to learn English (an example item was 'I always work hard at English'), and the second factor (comprising three items) was concerned with the desire to learn English (an example item was 'I really want to learn English'). This suggests that students' strength of motivation may be made up of two components, one concerned with an awareness of their 'internal' wish to learn (desire), and the second concerned with a recognition of their 'external' behavioural manifestation (effort). It was thus decided to compute a separate score for 'desire' and 'effort' rather than to use the eight items to compute a single score for strength of motivation.

A number of significant correlations between the key variables used in the study were obtained. Of particular interest was the fact that intrinsic motivation correlated more strongly with effort ($r = .48$, $p < 0.05$) and desire ($r = .47$, $p < 0.05$) and with a wider range of learning preferences than did the other four sources of motivation. This suggests that intrinsically motivated students were more likely to have a wider repertoire of preferences. This finding was supported by the interview data from both teachers and students, who frequently maintained that 'a motivated student likes everything'!

The interviews with students and teachers enabled their views to be probed further. Of particular note was that the students attached more value to traditional activities, whilst teachers attached more value to communicative activities.

Conclusion

One of the most interesting findings that emerged from this study was that students' most powerful source of motivation for learning English was intrinsic in nature. In addition, the factor structure which emerged here indicates that in attempting to characterise student motivation, the underlying factors may need to be investigated within each cultural context. This study was the first of its kind in a Moroccan setting. The factor structure reported here will need to be replicated by further research before we can be confident of it. Nevertheless, it indicates that researchers must be prudent and explore the factor structure which underpins student motivation afresh in each new setting, rather than generalising readily across cultures and contexts. The concern expressed by several writers that

Gardner's framework may not adequately generalise to other cultures and contexts appears to be supported by the findings here, and it is clear that the development of a framework for understanding students' motivation towards foreign language learning requires more attention to be given to settings (see Dörnyei 1994; Gardner and Tremblay 1994).

The study indicates that students' perceptual modality preferences were strongly visual and kinaesthetic, but weakly auditory. The students also highly valued cognitively oriented activities which involved grammatical awareness over behavioural, audio-lingual practice involving mindless repetition. Another noteworthy finding was that the teachers expressed a greater preference for communicative activities over traditional ones than did the students. Taken together, such findings suggest that there is a need to bring teachers and students closer together, in a learner-centred approach to teaching.

An important area for further research is to explore the degree to which teachers are aware of and can take account of students' needs and preferences, and whether doing so can lead to greater motivation and progress amongst students.

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