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# Attitudes and Motivation in learning English as Second Language in high school students

Sayid Dabbagh Ghazvini<sup>a</sup>, Milad Khajehpour<sup>a</sup> \*<sup>a</sup>Islamic Azad University, Roudehen Branch, Young Researchers Club, Tehran, 1773854661, Iran

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## Abstract

This study investigates Iranian students' attitudes and motivations toward learning English. The sample of the study consists of 123 male and female students from two high schools in the second academic years. The instrument used is a questionnaire which comprises 18 items developed to achieve the aims of the study. Results showed that the Girl students are more integrative motivated and boy students are more instrumental motivated to learning English. In addition, the girls have more positive attitude toward learning English than boys, they also are more inclined to bilingualism. However, there is no significant difference between high school students in motivational orientations, while they have positive attitude to learning English as a second language.

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*Keywords:* Attitude; instrumental motivation; integrative motivation; foreign Language; L2

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## 1. Introduction

A major concern to second or foreign language (L2) researchers has been the role played by attitudinal/motivational factors in L2 learning. These factors are deep within the students' minds. Motivation has been widely accepted by both teachers and researchers as one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second/foreign language learning. The original impetus in second/foreign (L2) motivation research comes from the social psychology since learning the language of another community simply cannot be separated from the learners' social dispositions towards the speech community in question.

Lambert (1963b) has proposed 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. In his model, he proposes that the extent to which an individual successfully acquires a second language will depend upon 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 is conceptualized to subsume three components, motivational intensity, desire to learn the language, and an 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

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\* Sayid Dabbagh Ghazvini. Cellphone.: +98-912-303-5466  
E-mail address: [HopeSparkle@yahoo.com](mailto:HopeSparkle@yahoo.com)

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).

The level of the relationship between students' own cultural background and the background projected by the L2 culture often influences their attitudes toward L2 in particular and toward their motivation to learn it in general. In this respect, researchers such as (Lambert, 1990) distinguished between two major types of bilingualism: 'additive' and 'subtractive'. In additive bilingualism, the learners feel that they are adding something new to their skills and experience by learning a new language, without taking anything away from what they already know.

In subtractive bilingualism, on the other hand, they feel that learning a new language threatens what they already gain for themselves. Successful L2 learning takes place in additive situations; learners who see the second language as diminishing themselves will not succeed. However, learners show a strong identification with bilingual or trilingual identity. The majority of those involved in the study conducted by Cummins, Lopes and King in 1987 rejected a unilingual identity, be it English or Portuguese. In other words, the students appeared to be opting for additive bilingualism, which might be a form of identity quite different from that of the Portuguese, or the Anglo unilingual (d'Anglejan, 1990).

The work of Gardner and Lambert seems to have laid the foundation stone for a large body of research. They distinguished between two major kinds of motivation that could be related to L2 learning: integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation, on the one hand, reflects the learner's willingness or desire to be like a representative member of the other language community (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). It also reflects the learner's high level of effort to learn the language of a valued L2 community in order to communicate with the group. Moreover, integrative motivation reflects an interest in L2, a desire to learn the target language and an attitude toward the learning situation, and the target language community (Gardner, 1982).

Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, is characterized by a desire to gain social recognition or economic advantages through knowing an L2 (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). It is also characterized by an interest in learning L2 for pragmatic and utilitarian benefits such as a high salary, power, or career (Johnson, 2001).

L2 motivation does not necessitate choosing either integrative or instrumental motivation. Both types are important. A learner might learn an L2 well with an integrative motivation or with an instrumental one, or indeed with both (Cook, 1991). The level of identification with bilingual or trilingual identity is also influenced by the learners' attitudes toward the learning situation. These attitudes refer to the individuals' reactions to anything associated with the immediate context (e.g., the course and the teaching environment) in which the language is taught (Gardner, 1985). Various studies conducted on the areas of attitudes and motivation aimed in most cases at identifying the students' attitudes toward learning L2 and the kind of motivation they have for learning it. The majority of these studies focused on the students' perceptions of English as an L2 in particular and on European languages in general. They will be regarded to be a base for discussing the results obtained from the present study. Regarding Norwegian learning context in which (Svanes, 1987) elicited the views of 167 L2 students enrolled in classes at the University of Bergen, results demonstrate that Middle Eastern, Asian and African students show more instrumental motivation to study Norwegian than European and North American ones. The results also demonstrate no significant sex differences in integrative motivation in any of the groups. Concerning instrumental motivation, men show somewhat higher instrumental motivation than women do.

It seems that the students who come from South American have a different view of the reasons why they learn an L2. That is they are more instrumentally motivated to learn it than North American students. In other words, the major factors that encourage them to study L2 are conscientiousness (work-related values), social agreeableness and personal warmth (El-Dash, 2001). In an attempt made by (Ladegard, 2000) to test the hypothesis which suggests that male subjects would be closer to the foreign language and foreign culture, and that they would express more positive attitudes towards in-group members than female subjects would, results show that male subjects have more vernacular feature in their language, and that these subjects express more genuinely positive attitudes towards the local vernacular than female subjects do.

As a result of an investigation made by (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003) which focused on the relationship of second language achievement to five attitude/motivation variables, results clearly demonstrate that the correlation between achievement and motivation is uniformly higher than that between achievement and integration, and that this correlation is somewhat lower than that between achievement and attitudes toward the learning situation.

In an exploration carried out by (Yashima, Zenk-Nishide & Shimizu, 2004) on Japanese adolescent learners'

willingness to communicate (WTC) in English as an L2, results show that those who have higher WTC scores tend to communicate more in the classroom and to ask questions or talk to teachers more frequently outside class. Those who have more interest in international vocation/activities seem to be more willing to communicate in English and voluntarily engage in communication more frequently.

We notice from the literature above that subtractive bilingualism occurs when a group feels that there is a threat to their original identity by learning an L2. We also notice that additive bilingualism takes place when this group and L2 learners in general do not feel of such a threat. Moreover, we notice that the majority of the studies done focused on students' attitudes toward learning English and European languages, the learning situation in which they study, and toward the English and European cultures in general. And finally, we notice that these studies emphasized either the independent variable 'sex' or 'achievement'.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Population and Sample*

The population of the study consists of all students studying in east of Tehran high schools. The sample of the study was 123 second year students who were chosen by available sampling method from the population. From this sample, 63 students are female and 60 are male.

### *2.2. Instrument*

The attitude and motivation scales of the original 6-point Likert Scale format of Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Gardner, 1985) were adapted to a 5-point scale, ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'. The AMTB is reported to have good reliability and validity (Gardner, 1985; 1980; Gardner and Smythe, 1981) and the internal consistency estimate of reliability for the modified questionnaire was calculated, and Cronbach's Alpha was 0.7. Since the students came from different academic and socio-economic backgrounds with different levels of proficiency in English, the questionnaire was administered in the mother tongue. However, the major focus in this study was on different types of motivational orientations (instrumental and integrative) and the attitudes of the students regarding the language (positive and negative). Integrative Orientation scale includes four items to find out how much the learners learn English with a genuine interest to assimilate with the target language, culture, community, their way of life, literature etc.; this would show their Integrativeness towards the target language. On Instrumental Orientation scale, there are four items and the respondents are asked to measure their utilitarian reason for learning English. The attitude scale has ten items to investigate student's attitude toward learning English as a second language.

### *2.3. Research questions*

- 1- Whether there is a significant difference between boys and girls motivation in learning English as a second language? (instrumental, integrative and motivation in general)
- 2- Whether there is a significant difference between boys and girls attitude in learning English as a second language? (positive, negative and attitude in general)
- 3- Is motivation orientation of second year high school students more integrated or more instrumental?
- 4- Is attitude of second year high school students toward learning English positive or negative?

## **3. Results**

The respondents were asked to indicate on a five point scale how important each reason was for their learning English as a foreign language. The focus was on two types of motivational orientation: Integrative and Instrumental and on attitude to English learning following Gardner and Lambert's (1972) definition. The students' responses to the questionnaire were analysed in terms of descriptive and inferential statistics. In order to find the answer to the first and second questions, Comparison between the mean scores of motivational orientation (instrumental,

integrative and motivation in general) and attitude in girls and boys (positive, negative and attitude in general) illustrated in table 1.

Table1: Differences of average between types of motivational orientation and attitude in female and male students

Variables	G	n	M	SD	t
INS Motivation	F	63	10.42	4.36	2.05 *
	M	60	12.26	5.48	
INT Motivation	F	63	11.73	5.92	2.71 **
	M	60	9.11	4.78	
INS & INT Motivation	F	63	11.08	5.23	.43
	M	60	10.69	4.81	
Attitude to English Learning	F	63	30.86	6.81	4.14 **
	M	60	25.18	6.17	
Positive Attitude (Bilingualism)	F	40	39.89	8.71	2.24 *
	M	29	35.41	7.78	
Negative Attitude (Monolingualism)	F	23	18.81	5.86	.27
	M	31	18.36	6.07	

\*\*  $\alpha=0.01$       \*  $\alpha=0.05$

As it is shown in tables 1, male students are more instrumental motivated to study or learn English ( $\alpha=0.05$ ), however female students are more integrative motivated ( $\alpha=0.01$ ), while wasn't found significant difference between male and female students in learning foreign language in general. Attitude of female students to learning foreign language is more positive than male ( $\alpha=0.05$ ), however wasn't observed significant difference among girls and boys in negative attitude. Also female students have more positive attitude to learning English as a foreign language than male students in general ( $\alpha=0.01$ ).

In order to find the answer to the third questions, the average of motivation scores are compared in the table 2.

Table2: Differences of average between type of motivation orientation in high school students

Variables	N	M	SD	t
Motivation	INS	123	11.32	4.79
	INT	123	10.45	5.17

As we can observe in the above table, there is no significant difference between types of motivation (instrumental and integrative) in high school students.

According to the fourth question of this study, difference ratio test of two traits in one unit community was conducted between positive and negative attitude students and its results is shown in table 3.

Table 3: ratio test between two ratios of positive and negative attitude high school students

Variables	N	P	Z
Attitude	Positive	69	.561
	Negative	54	.44

\*\*  $\alpha=0.01$

As is apparent in the above table, calculated Z is greater than the critical Z in level of 0.01. So we can say with 99 percent confidence high school students have positive attitude toward learning English as a second language.

#### 4. Conclusion and discussion

The results of the study reveal that the girl subjects are more inclined to bilingualism than boys. They think they add something new to their experience by studying English. In addition, they feel it is important to speak two languages. However wasn't observed significant difference among girls and boys in negative attitude. These results are contrary with the hypothesis suggested by (Ladegard, 2000) which says that male subjects would be closer to L2 and to its culture than female subjects would. This kind of inclination to bilingualism is similar to that of L2

learners who have the characteristic ‘additive bilingualism’ (Lambert, 1990), and to that favoured by the subjects involved in the study conducted by Cummins, Lopes and King in 1987. This inclination to bilingualism may also explain their integration in learning English. This integration is not the same as that shown by the subjects involved in the studies done by Svanes (1987). This shared belief may make them more interested in English and more inclined to broaden their horizon and to build-up their personality through learning this language. Authors also think that the subjects’ inclination to bilingualism and integration is an attempt to reshape their identity in a way that makes it resonate to English culture and the descent beliefs of Iranians and their way of thinking.

As regards gender, results show significant differences between the subjects’ responses to each of the instrumental and integrative types of motivation and to both together. Male students are more instrumental motivated to study or learn English, however female students are more integrative motivated, while wasn’t found significant difference between male and female students in learning foreign language in general. Although the girl subjects are integrative motivated to learn English, results demonstrate that there are major instrumental factors that make them do so: respect in the society and utilitarian benefits. These factors are similar to ones that often make Asian students study an L2 (Svanes, 1987 & Dornyei, 1990).

Also female students have more positive attitude to learning English as a foreign language than male students in general. There is no significant difference between types of motivation (instrumental and integrative) in high school students. Whereas, we can say with confidence high school students have very positive attitude to learning English as foreign language.

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