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AN EVALUATION OF THE MOTIVATION AND ATTITUDES OF IRANIAN MEDICAL STUDENTS TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract

This study examines motivational and attitudinal factors involved in medical students' retention of English courses together with some suggestions of how the teachers of EAP can encourage their students to continue their English study in to advanced levels. To gather the data concerning motivational factors on one hand and attitudes of the students of English language .we distributed a questionnaire to university students of Zanjan. Then we used SPSS to analyze the data. The results Proved the results of the previous studies on the positive role of motivation and attitude on learning of medical students.

Introduction

In the past four decades much research has been conducted on the relationship between motivation and language learning. Previous studies have examined the types of motivation that lead to enhancement of language learning (Dornyei, 1990; Gardner and Lambert 1972).

Deci (1985) examined types of motivation in a foreign language context and identified two types, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is that type of motivation that is derived from internal interests but extrinsic motivation arises from interests such as getting good job. Highly motivated students tend to develop insightful beliefs about Language learning process. They also tend to develop a more active and autonomous attitude that allows them to take charge of their learning. (Anstey 1988). Teachers must therefore acknowledge and react students' attitudes and experience and help them overcome any harmful perceptions and blocks. The present study closely examines the relationship between motivational and attitudinal orientation and their effect on language learning.

METHOD

This study is for the most part based on Gardner and Lambert (1972) whose pioneering work has laid the foundations for a systematic research into the role of attitudes and motivations as determinants of success or failure in language acquisition.

The participants in this study were 100 learners studying at Zanjan University of medical sciences which studied English as their curriculum 2 hours a week. They were 18 to 21 years old and the class level ranged from first year to second year of English.

A questionnaire that investigated the learning reasons was administrated to all of the participants. (Appendix).

The questionnaire contained questions on:

1) instrumental and integrative motives, 2) Questions eliciting demographic data such as age, sex, and course and 3) a set of attitudes and motivation questions and scales adapted from Gardner(1985) and Flaitz (1988). The questions were based on the Likert Scale which ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree. After analysis of the data using SPSS all the data coded from 1 meaning strongly agree to 5 indicating strongly disagree. Then the data was analyzed for further study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For most psycholinguists, either in language learning situation or in a second language acquisition context the importance of the second language attitudes and motivation plays a major role.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1993) claim that most motivational theories have focused on extrinsic motivation ignoring the intrinsic motivation, which emerges when language skills and challenges are balanced and the learner experiences pleasure in the activity itself. Some authors such as Gardner (1985:169) see motivational source unimportant, while others propose that different sources of motivation exist.

Gardner and Macintyre(1993q:4) cf (Tremblag and Gardner1995:507) state that the important point is that motivation itself is dynamic. The old characterization of motivation in terms of integrative vs. instrumental motivation is too static and restricted.

Krashen's motivation model considers motivation and attitudes most influential in unconscious language acquisition. The learners' motivation level plays an affective role. (Krashen 1981:102). In Carol's conscious reinforcement model (1981), language learning begins when the learner feels motivated to communicate something to somebody. In Lambert's *Social Psychology* (1974) causal links are established between attitudes, orientation, motivation and proficiency in L2. That is, Learners' achievement largely depends on their attitudes and motivational state.

Dornyei (1990) also identified factors contributing to motivation (interest in foreign languages, culture and people, desire to broaden one's view and avoid provincialism, desire for new stimuli and challenges). This study was expanded by Schmidt et al. (1996) in a comparative factor analysis of Dornei(1990).

Dornyei (2002) analyzed how the partners' motivation influenced the amount of talk produced in the same augmentation task. He found out the motivation disposition of an interlocutor is a key factor that affects the learners' appraisal and action processes.

Motivational factors affect the quality and quantity of students' performance in an L2 communication task.

MOTIVATION

Language learners learn a language because they want to learn it. They want to communicate or to get a good job or to find friends or perhaps wish to be acquainted with their culture or history of that country. Whatever the reason may be, they learn it because they want to. But if they do not have any desire to learning a second language imposed on them at school or university, what will happen.

In Iran, many students pass years of compulsory study of at least seven years to learn English, but only a few of them learn English at a satisfactory level. We believe that motivation to learn has something to do with this situation. If one has higher amount of motivation, it will affect the degree of effort one puts into foreign or second language learning. More amounts of motivation and holding positive attitudes lead to success in learning and vice versa.

Attitudes

In Webster's dictionary (1913) we find definition of attitude as a complex mental orientation involving beliefs and feelings and values and dispositions to act in certain ways.

Schuman (1975) conducted the early research on the role of attitude in second language learning and also studied the factors involved such as language shock, culture shock and language stress and anxiety.

Attitude and motivation scales

The first index, Orientation comprises 12 questions dealing with the views of the respondents regarding the reasons for wanting to learn English. The questions are listed below. Items 2, 3 and 9 have been classified as measuring integrative orientation. Items 1,4,6,7,8,10 and 12 were subsumed under instrumental orientation. Finally, items 5 and 11 were categorized as "coercive reasons."They were asked to reach each item and indicate the extent to which they agreed/disagreed with such reasons for studying English.

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1. I think it will some day be useful in getting a good job.
 2. I think it will help me to better understand English speaking people and their way of life.
 3. It will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people.
 4. Fluency in English is a sign of a good education.
 5. It is a part of school curriculum.
 6. I want to study in an English-speaking country.
 7. Studying English will make me a more knowledgeable person.
 8. It will enable me to be informed about the attitudes of other countries towards Iran.
 9. I like English.
 10. English is the language of progress and modernization.
 11. My parents want me to learn it.
 12. I want to get an EFL qualification
-

The second index, Attitudes towards learning English, consists of 3 positively worded and 3 negatively worded questions. This scale was constructed to measure the respondents' attitudes toward the learning object itself.

1. I love learning English.
 2. I think learning English is dull.
 3. I plan to learn English as much as possible.
 4. I would rather spend my time rather than English.
 5. English is an important part of the school program.
 6. Learning English is a waste of time.
-

The third index, Attitudes towards learning a foreign language comprises 6 positively worded statements. The idea underlying this scale was that students who are generally favorably disposed to foreign language learning might show a more favorable attitude to learning English.

1. Studying a foreign language is an enjoyable experience.
 2. I often wish I could read newspapers and magazines in another language.
 3. I wish I could speak another language perfectly.
 4. I would like to be able to speak the language of the people.
 5. I would study a foreign language in school even if it were not required.
 6. I would really like to learn a lot of foreign languages.
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The fourth index, Parental Encouragement, is an indication of students' perception of the degree of encouragement they had received from their parents in their study of English. A set of 4 statements was used which the students evaluated on a 3-point scale.

1. My parents try to help me with my English.
 2. My parents have stressed the importance English will have for me when I leave school.
 3. My parents show considerable interest in anything to do with my English lessons.
 4. My parents really encourage me to study English.
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The fifth index, Motivational intensity, comprises 9 multiple choice statements designed to elicit information about the interest level and the amount of commitment shown to the study of English.

1. Compared to others in my English class, I think I:
 - a) do less anything than most of them
 - b) study about as much as most of them
 - c) do more studying than most of them

2. I think about what I have learned in my English class:
 - a) hardly ever
 - b) once in a while

- c) very frequently
3. Compared to my other lessons I:
 - a) do less work in English than any other lesson
 - b) do about as much work in English as I do in any other lesson
 4. I do my English homework with extra care:
 - a) never
 - b) fairly regularly but not always
 - c) always even if it takes several hours
 5. When doing homework in English I find that I:
 - a) become very interesting in what I am doing
 - b) do the work without much interest
 - c) cannot keep my mind on what I am doing
 6. If English were not taught in school (university) I would:
 - a) not bother learning English at all
 - b) try to obtain lessons in English elsewhere
 7. As regard to English I can honestly say that I :
 - a) will pass on the basis of sheer luck or intelligence
 - b) do just enough work to get along
 - c) really try to learn English
 8. When it comes to English homework I:
 - a) just skim over it
 - b) put some effort into it but not as much as I could
 - c) work very carefully, making sure I understand every thing
 - 9) When I have a problem understanding some things we are learning in English class I :
 - a) immediately ask the teacher for help
 - b) only ask for help just before the exam
 - c) just forget about it
-

Results and Discussion

The sample comprised 0.8% male and 89.2% female. The mean age of participants was 19. The students were students of operation room, nursing, environmental health, family health and anesthesia, all of whom were studying at Zanzan University of medical sciences.

In order to understand attitudes and motivation of students of medicine to learning English, we divided the items under five major categories. Then each category per se included relevant items.

In analyzing the reasons of why they are studying English, as we consider reason No.1, that is, whether learning English language will help them one day in finding an

appropriate job 75% were agree,4% showed their disagreement with this item , and 22% didn't exhibit any idea. Therefore, it can be argued that majority of pupils acknowledge by their responses that learning English will be helpful in finding a good career.

The second item of the same category reflects students 'ideas on whether knowing English language helps better understand English speaking people,78% agreed.

In addition to the majority of agreement with item No.2, responses to item3which include72%of agreements and is in the favor of English will help them meet more and varied people, these answers reflect that students acknowledge the social dimension of English as a language that can offer the opportunity of cross-cultural exchanges. Also, item3 indicates that English primarily is seen to be a link to a wider world.

Item No.4 of this category has got a large amount of opponent views, and this is the only item that was not endorsed by the majority of pupils. This is an indication of uncertainty regarding their future plans.

Item No.11 informs less agreement with parental or institutional authority.

Item No.12 is an indication of instrumental motivation of students, because they seek their achievement through learning English.

On the other hand, item11 shows that there is an extent of force from the part of parents to learn English.

Attitudes towards learning English

Attitude was measured by means of six items. If we look at the percentage distribution of the responses we see the outcome of this measurement is very interesting and hopeful. The majority of respondents indicated that they loved learning English. Also majority of them preferred to spend much of their time on English-related subjects. Also 58.2% of the subjects indicated that English is an important subject in their curriculum. This is a reflection of the priorities of students towards English in spite of the inadequacies we observe in learning English at universities. Concerning item No.6 there was a general disagreement that learning English is a waste of time.90.9%showed disagreement with this idea. Others didn't have any idea. There was not any indication on their agreement. This is a direct reflection of the respondents' perception that learning English will be fruitful for them in future.

Measuring Attitudes to studying foreign languages

Students' attitudes towards learning a foreign language were measured by 6 items. The high degree of agreement with five of the items is the reflection of the generally positive feelings of students to foreign language learning. The low rate of agreement with item 5 may be an indication of students' dissatisfaction with the quality of foreign language lesson at universities.

Also positive attitudes to foreign language learning are accompanied by similar attitudes to English language learning and vice versa.

The role of Parental Encouragement

Parental encouragement is very important in increasing motivation of pupils to language learning. Gardner (1985) suggests that although the students' perception of their parents support is not directly related to their performance in class, nevertheless their willingness to learn and their motivation are substantially enhanced by suitable encouragement from their parents.

Parental encouragement tends to highly effective results in language learning. Four items designed to measure the relationship between parental support and language learning.

Item one, i.e., *my parents try to help me to learn English*, in this measurement has got the lowest level of respondents' agreement. The reason may not be that the parents do not want to help them, but it may be a reflection of their inability in this regard.

Following this item, the second item, i.e., *my parents show consideration and interest in anything to do with my English lessons*, has got the low mark. Again, this may not be an indication of their unwillingness of parents to help their children with their English, but again a reflection of their inability to do so.

Motivational intensity

In the fifth index, we come up with motivational intensity. It comprises 9 multiple choice statements designed to elicit information about the interest level and amount of commitment passed to the study of English. Concerning item1, the pupils show that they study English as much as any other subject. Also 71% of students say that they think about what they have learned in their English class. This may indicate that learning English is important for them even in situations out of the classroom, and also it shows their concern for this subject.

Item No.5 has received the highest number of answers. It means that when they are doing homework in English, they find that they become very interested in what they do. The answer given to itemsNo.7 and 8 again, represents the motivation of students in English, since they have got the highest level of marks.

Conclusion

Motivation and positive attitudes to second language learning has striking role in second language learning .If we do not find our classroom successful in second language learning or we find the students uninterested, the root may go back to their motivational and attitudinal speculations. It is our role as teachers to increase students' motivations. We should encourage students to be autonomous learners, to increase their confidence and try to get rid of anxiety they have in learning. One of the strategies is to use needs analysis. By this we can find the areas of the interest in individual students and we can design tasks to support thoughts, interests and values. Although a lot of research has been done in this regard, it is hard to say exactly what

they are. This paper began with the definition of attitudes and motivation and their roles they have in learning second language and went forward by studying factors involved in motivation and attitudes of the learners.

We can summarize the findings as follows:

1. The respondents showed favorable attitude towards learning English.
2. They generally think that learning English helps their socialization.
3. There is a positive and significant relationship between motivational and parental support.
4. Providing our learners with the motivation to learn is one of the best steps we can take to facilitate learning success.
5. Learning should be fun and any motivation problem that may appear, there should be an attempt to convert it to an enjoyable activity to the learner.
6. Creating the best motivational conditions involves setting the scene for the use of motivational strategies.
7. If we provide proper situation and knowledgeable teacher the students will gain more motivation.
8. The activities should be goal-oriented, so that students recognize what they will do with the language they are learning.
9. The curriculum must be revealed for the learners.
10. Realistic learner beliefs must be created. To this end, learners need to develop an understanding of the nature of the second language learning.

In general, motivation is the neglected heart of our understanding of how to design instruction (Keller 1983, quoted in Donyei). Many teachers believe that by sticking to the language materials and trying to discipline their refractory students, they will manage to create a classroom environment that will be conducive to learning. But, it should be considered as a fact that learning a foreign language is different from learning other subjects. Therefore, language teaching should take account of a variety of factors that are likely to promote or even militate against success. Language is part of one's identity and is used to convey this identity to others. As a result, foreign language learning has a significant impact on the social being of the learners, since it involves the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors and ways of thinking.

Suggestions for the teachers:

Taking Oxford and Shearin (1996, 139) suggestions, teachers are assumed to carry the following roles:

1. Teachers should diagnose the needs of their students and the reasons underlying their learning a new language. This diagnosis is a great contribution in leading teacher's activities towards that end, so that motivation of the students can be expanded by emphasizing on those already determined activities.

Teachers can expand students thoughts and imaginations of a new world by emphasizing on learning of a new language, so that so that students can be convinced that by learning another language they can gain new friends ,knowledge about culture and style of life and etc.

Teachers have the ability to create friends, positive classroom situations and they can reduce anxiety of learners by increasing their motivation through interesting activities.

We confirm Bassno's (1986:15) suggestions where he offers the teachers six steps towards dealing with student's beliefs:

- A. become aware of student's past classroom experiences and their ideas concerning language learning
- B. build student's confidence
- C. teachers are assumed to begin from the actual state of the students' level and move slowly
- D. teachers must confirm the students that they are improving and acquiring achievement
- E. teachers duties include awareness of students' interests and concerns

Accordingly, Morogan (1993) affirms that teachers should involve students' in classroom activities; classroom situation must have novelty or show a change; and students should struggle with materials and reach their own conclusions

Limitations of the study

The results of the present study may not be applicable to other situations and times. It is necessary to do the same research on other classroom settings and situations. Furthermore, it is important to add that although the questionnaire was valid, but other extrinsic variables were not under close control.

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