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Why do Primary school English teachers decide to teach English?

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to explore the nature of L2 teachers' motivation towards English language learning and their decision to become English teachers. A total of 45 third-year prospective Primary school English teachers at the University of the Balearic Islands completed a small-scale survey adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMBT) in order to investigate their main type of motivation (integrative or instrumental) (Gardner 1985). Results show that participants are clearly integratively motivated towards English language learning. However, in line with Dornyei's 'L2 motivational self-system' theory (2009), results suggest a no longer clear-cut separation between integrative and instrumental motivation.

1. Introduction

In the field of social psychology and education, considerable research has long recognised the critical role that motivation plays in determining L2 achievement (Gardner, 1985; Ellis, 1994; Dornyei, 2001). Thus, Gardner (2006) asserts that "students with higher levels of motivation will do better than students with lower levels" (p. 241). In fact, Gardner and Lambert (1972) explain that motivational factors may override language aptitude. The relevance of motivation in L2 learning is also highlighted by Dornyei (1988) who explains that motivation provides the necessary impetus to initiate L2 learning in the first place, functioning later as a driving force to sustain "the long

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and often tedious learning process" (p. 117). Cheng and Dornyei (2007) further point out that "without sufficient motivation even the brightest learners are unlikely to persist long enough to attain any really useful language proficiency" (p. 153).

Although it has proven difficult to provide an exact definition of motivation due to its complexity and multifaceted nature, Gardner (1985) defined motivation as a "combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes toward learning the language" (p. 10). Thus, according to Gardner, a motivated L2 learner is thought to be one who is: a) eager to learn the language, b) willing to expend effort on the learning activity and c) willing to sustain the learning activity (ibid). Research on L2 learning motivation has often distinguished two main types of motivation, namely, instrumental and integrative motivation (Brown, 2000). The former involves concepts of practical value for learners such as career promotion, business opportunities, prestige, access to scientific and technical information, or just passing a test or exam (Gardner, 1983; Saville-Troike, 2006). As Richards (2003) explains, instrumental motivation involves "wanting to learn a language for the practical benefits it brings" (p.14). Conversely, integrative motivation focuses on the individual's need to belong and become integrated into the target language community (Gardner, 1983). According to Richards (2003) integrative motivation is defined as "wanting to learn a language in order to interact with and become similar to valued members of the target language community" (p.14). However, the internationalisation of English has hindered the very notion of that 'valued community', which has led Dornyei and Csizer (2002) to reformulate 'integrativeness' in terms of their 'L2 motivational self-system'. Therefore, integrativeness now becomes an identification process with 'the ideal L2 Self' (Dornyei, 2009), an ideal image of oneself as a proficient L2 speaker which reinforces learners' integrative disposition. This redefined concept of integrativeness is seen to feed on both attitudes towards members of a (possibly international) L2 community and purely instrumental aspects such as future professional success, blurring in this way the clear-cut distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation.

In addition to learners' motivation, L2 motivation studies also highlight the key role that the motivation of L2 teachers plays in enhancing L2 language learning in formal contexts. As Ellis (1997) states, the teacher is probably the major factor in classroom life and, therefore, exercises some of the most prevailing influences on students' motivation (Dornyei, 2001). As Dornyei (2001) explains, "broadly speaking, if a teacher is motivated to teach, there is a good chance that his or her students will be motivated to learn" (p. 156). With the same views, Winne and Marx (1989) claim that motivation is both a necessary condition, as well as, a result of, effective instruction. Despite its great importance, the issue of teachers' motivation has long been a neglected area of research in educational psychology. This study is an attempt to contribute to the exploration of this major area of L2 teaching research.

2. Research questions

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the type of motivation of prospective Primary school English teachers at the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB) towards English language learning in terms of two constructs: instrumental and integrative motivation (Gardner, 1985). It also attempts to examine participants' decision to become future English teachers. To reach this objective, the following research questions were addressed:

1) What kind of motivation do pre-service Primary school English teachers have towards English language learning?
2) Which are their main reasons to become Primary school English teachers?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants in this study were 45 third-year pre-service Primary school English teachers of the Faculty of Education at the University of the Balearic Islands' (UIB). The majority of participants were female (N= 34, 77.3%) as opposed to males (N= 10, 22.7%). Ages ranged from 18 to more than 35 years old.

3.2 Instruments

A small-scale motivational questionnaire was used to collect data in the second semester of the 2012-2013 academic year (May 2013). The questionnaire was divided into 2 main sections. Following Wimolmas (2013), in order to identify students' motivation, the first section (Section A) comprised 20 questions based on Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Attitude/Motivation Index, AMI)), as well as Prapphals' Attitudes Testing (Prapphal, 1981). The subjects were asked to rank the 20 statements on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5). The statements represented two motivational constructs: integrative motivation (items 1-10) and instrumental motivation (items 11-20).

The second section of the questionnaire (Section B) included 3 open-ended questions addressing the issue of participants' initial motivation to study their degree and become Primary English teachers (items 21-23).

4. Results

4.1. What kind of motivation do pre-service Primary school English teachers have towards English language learning?

The first question included in the questionnaire attempted to find out whether pre-service Primary school English teachers were either more integratively or instrumentally motivated. The results are shown in the following two tables (Table 1 and Table 2). Overall, the data seem to indicate that respondents are more integratively oriented. Furthermore, Table 1 reveals that participants seem to possess a high level of integrative motivation since all items related to this type of motivation registered mean scores above 3 points on a 5-point scale. The average mean score of integrative motivation is also very high ($x^- = 4.12$), which clearly demonstrates the relevance of this type of motivation among participants.

Table 1. Participants' integrative motivation

Items: Integrative motivation	N	Mean	SD
15. 'Learning English enables me to transfer my knowledge to other people, e.g. giving directions to tourists'.	45	4.67	0.522
11. 'Studying English enables me to understand English books, films, pop music, etc.'	45	4.67	0.564
13. 'Studying English enables me to keep in touch with foreign acquaintances'.	45	4.62	0.650
14. 'Studying English enables me to discuss interesting topics in English with people from other national backgrounds'.	45	4.56	0.546
20. 'I am determined to study English as best as I can to achieve maximum proficiency'.	45	4.27	1.074
16. 'Studying English enables me to participate freely in academic, social, and professional activities among other cultural groups'.	44	4.23	0.912
12: 'Studying English enables me to better understand and appreciate the ways of life of native English speakers'.	45	3.84	1.205
18. 'Studying English enables me to appreciate English arts and literature'.	45	3.76	1.131
17. 'Studying English enables me to behave like native English speakers: e.g. accent, using English expressions'.	45	3.42	1.138
19. 'Studying English helps me to be an open-minded and sociable person like English speaking people'.	45	3.22	1.295
Overall mean = 4.26			

As can be seen from Table 1, the three aspects registering the highest scores were item 15 ('Learning English enables me to transfer my knowledge to other people, e-g. giving directions to tourists', $x^- = 4.67$), item 11 ('Studying English enables me to understand English books, films, pop music, etc.', $x^- = 4.67$) and item 13 ('Studying English enables me to keep in touch with foreign acquaintances', $x^- = 4.62$). All three items seem to make reference to the more communicative aspects of language learning including the possibility of transferring knowledge, which may in turn be related to vocational aspects of the teaching career. Additionally, item 11 would also point to a sense of affinity with the target language community, which may not exclusively comprise nationals of a particular English-speaking country.

As for the lowest-scoring items concerning integrative motivation, participants cited the following: 'Studying English enables me to better understand and appreciate the ways of life of native English speakers', (item 12, $\bar{x}$ = 3.84), 'Studying English enables me to appreciate English arts and literature' (item 18, $\bar{x}$ = 3.76), 'Studying English enables me to behave like native English speakers: e.g. accent, using English expressions' (item 17, $\bar{x}$ = 3.42) and finally, 'Studying English helps me to be an open-minded and sociable person like English speaking people' (item 19, $\bar{x}$ = 3.22). All four items appear to relate to the assimilation of the cultural aspects of the target language community, as perceived by the learners, this time more clearly presented in national terms. These findings seem to give support to Dornyei's 'L2 motivational self- system' theory (2009), which suggests that the 'integrativeness' that drives participants is frequently related to their wish to belong in, and fluently communicate with, a broader international community rather than to the appreciation of a specific valued target language community. At any event, it should be noted that, although those aspects had the least impact on participants' motivation, the mean scores are still fairly high.

Table 2. Participants' instrumental motivation

Items: Instrumental motivation	N	Mean	SD
6. 'Learning English is important for travelling abroad.'	44	4.68	0.740
7. 'Learning English is important for making me a knowledgeable and skilful person'.	45	4.64	0.712
9. 'Being proficient in English can lead to more success and achievements in life'.	45	4.07	1.053
1. 'I mainly focus on using English for class assignments and the exams'.	45	3.98	1.288
8. 'Learning English is important for making me an educated person'.	45	3.93	1.232
2. 'I simply quote the textbooks and do not really communicate myself when speaking or writing in class'.	44	2.91	1.294
10. 'Being proficient in English makes other people respect me'.	45	2.58	1.252
3. 'I am interested in reading only English textbooks for my university study, but no other English texts, e.g. newspapers. magazines'.	44	2.00	1.034
5. 'I am more interested in furthering my higher education than in learning the English language itself'.	45	1.96	1.127
4. 'I am more interested in earning a university degree and a good job than learning the English language itself'.	45	1.58	0.839
Overall mean = 3.23			

As regards instrumental motivation, as can be seen from the data shown in Table 2, the three highest-scoring items associated to this type of motivation were the following: 'Learning English is important for travelling abroad' (item 6, $\bar{x}$ = 4.68), 'Learning English is important for making me a knowledgeable and skilful person' (item 7, $\bar{x}$ = 4.64), 'Being proficient in English can lead to more success and achievements in life' (item 9, $\bar{x}$ = 4.07). It is noteworthy to mention that even though all three items clearly relate to the more instrumental aspects of language learning motivation, item 6, which is in fact the highest-scoring item measuring both types of motivation, may be argued to merge somehow with aspects which are more integratively oriented, pointing again to a sense of affinity with a broad, international community. Moreover, it may also be seen to relate to the communicative aspects of language learning which, as has already been seen, are granted a great deal of importance by respondents.

The three lowest-scoring items measuring instrumental motivation were the following: 'I am interested in reading only English textbooks for my university study, but no other English texts, e.g. newspapers, magazines' (item 3, $\bar{x}$ = 2.00), 'I am more interested in furthering my higher education than in learning the English language itself' (item 5, $\bar{x}$ = 1.96) and 'I am more interested in finishing my university degree and getting a good job than in learning the English language itself' (item 4, $\bar{x}$ = 1.64). These latter results seem to confirm that respondents are clearly granting more importance to the learning of the English language *per se*, and therefore to the more integrative aspects, rather than to purely instrumental reasons for learning the language. The overall mean score for all the items measuring instrumental motivation was 3.23, that is, 0.89 points lower than the overall mean score of integrative motivation. This last figure seems to confirm that participants tend to veer more clearly towards the integrative end of the motivation continuum.

4.2. Which are the participants' main reasons to become Primary school English teachers? Which are the most and least motivating factors?

The second section of the questionnaire asked participants to state their main reasons to become Primary school English teachers. Although different responses were mentioned by participants, the results seem to be in line with those previously presented, highlighting the integrative nature of participants' motivation towards learning the English language. Thus, the most frequently reported factors express participants' liking for the English language ('I like English', T = 22), as well as for foreign languages and cultures in general (T = 4). It is worth mentioning that three participants expressly indicated that teaching English is the only reason as to why they wanted to become Primary school teachers. At all events, instrumental motivation also had a presence in the participants' comments, pointing to the vital role English plays in today's world for different reasons, although mainly relating to their career prospects (T = 18). This includes awareness of the current Balearic Government policy to promote trilingualism (Spanish, Catalan and English) at schools. Moreover, two participants made it clear that they would not have chosen to specialise in English were it not for the ample job opportunities it offers.

Finally, students were also asked to comment on what motivates them the most as prospective English teachers. In this respect, the most frequently mentioned aspects were clearly vocational (i.e. teaching and improving education, love of children) (T = 12) and outnumber those other answers related to more specific aspects of English language teaching. As for the least motivating factors, participants seem to largely complain about the Balearic education authorities being unable to deal with the most pressing problems (T = 7). Results also point to participants being aware of problems perceived to affect the Spanish education system (e.g. lack of motivation among students and the poor social recognition that teaching practitioners enjoy in Spain) (T = 6). Lastly, some students also highlight their perceived low competence in English as a key demotivating factor (T = 4).

5. Conclusion

The results of this study reveal that integrative motivation was clearly the primary source of the motivation of pre-service Primary school English teachers towards the learning of the English language. Likewise, the data also indicate that the respondents' most motivating factors to become Primary school English teachers seem to be integratively oriented, emphasising the strongly vocational nature of the teaching profession. On the contrary, the most demotivating factors reported by participants appear to be strongly related to the current education language policies and the lack of motivation among Spanish students, and the society at large, as far as the learning of English is concerned. Participants' inclination towards integrative motivation is a positive finding since previous research has related integrative motivation in teachers with valuable teaching skills and more supportive learning environments (Lam, Chem and Ma, 2009). Interestingly, however, results seem to indicate that the 'integrativeness' that primarily drives participants is not quite so much their appreciation of a specific 'valued community' but rather their wish to belong in, and fluently communicate with, a broader international community, as hypothesised in Dornyei's 'L2 motivational self- system' theory (2009). This new approach to motivation involves a no longer clear-cut separation between integrative and instrumental motivation.

Although further research is necessary to ascertain the real nature of prospective Primary school teachers' motivation, the findings of this study may be used to promote the development of teachers' motivational strategies and techniques devoted to improve classroom practices and arouse students' motivation towards the learning of English.

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