Exploring the motivation of international students to learn Hungarian: A qualitative study

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ABSTRACT

In today's globalized, multicultural and multilingual world, diverse social processes and macrocontextual factors are influencing people's motivation to learn a new language. According to OECD, the students' mobility to study abroad has increased more than two times during the past 2 decades, which plays a significant role in the world's future development. This paper aims to obtain a deeper understanding of international students' motivation for learning Hungarian in Budapest, Hungary. To achieve this aim, in-depth interviews were conducted with 17 international students who were awarded the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship and have achieved between A1 and B1 level in Hungarian as a foreign language. The interview guide was adapted from Dörney's L2 Motivational Self System and Taguchi, Magid, and Papi scales. The collected data was analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings revealed that international students have integrative and instrumental motivation for learning Hungarian. However, their integrative motivation purposes are more common than their instrumental motivation.

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INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language provides multiple benefits for international students who study abroad. For instance, learning about culture, developing language skills, and immersing in the new environment (Casas, Mohammed, & Saleh, 2020). Moreover, learning the local language influences the international students' academic and social satisfaction in the host community (Howes, 2021). Thus, students who learn a new language develop an awareness of intercultural communication, which is associated with respect and understanding of other cultures (OECD, 2021).

Hall (1976) introduced the term cultural iceberg to indicate that when learning a language, people are exposed to non-observable elements, such as religion, beliefs, traditions, customs, and values. Regarding people who learn Languages Other Than English (from here on LOTEs), Amorati (2021) claimed that students' motivation is an important non-observable element that helps them to communicate and collaborate with people with different cultural backgrounds.

Although motivation is constantly researched all over the world, Boo, Dörnyei & Ryan (2015) claimed that 72,67% of the students on L2 motivation are focused on English language learning, which reflects a strong imbalance in researching between L2 motivation to learn English and LOTEs (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2017). The international research based on LOTEs has expanded in recent decades. For instance, Mendoza and Phung (2019) explored 30 studies on LOTEs in three world regions: Europe, Inner Circle English-speaking countries, and Asia. They found that German, French, Spanish, and Mandarin languages dominate on LOTEs across Western Europe, East Asia, and English-dominant countries.

Similarly, various research has been conducted to highlight the importance of expanding the research focus on students' motives to learn different languages other than English (Gong, Ma, Hsiang, & Wang, 2020; Lu, Zheng, & Ren, 2019; Mearns, de Graaff, & Coyle, 2020; Sun & Gao, 2020; Zou, Huang, & Xie, 2021). Thus, this research strives to explore the type of motivation that international students have to learn the Hungarian language in Hungary.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section opens with a discussion about what motivates international students to learn Hungarian. Afterward, we explain the influence of instrumental and integrative motivation on learning Hungarian. At the end of this section, we focus on the multifaceted motivation, which occurs when learners are integrative and instrumentally motivated to learn a language at the same time.

Motivation for learning Hungarian

In recent years, the interest in exploring the students' motivation for learning Hungarian had grown; several studies have been conducted to explore the motivation that students have to learn Hungarian (Hosseini-Nezhad, Safdar, & Luu, 2019; Khudur, 2019; Xueyan, 2020; Zhang, 2018). This interest may be due to the rise in the number of international students during the last decade. According to the Tempus Public Foundation (2020), which is a non-profit Hungarian organization that manages international cooperation programs, the number of international students increased from 11,783 in 2011 to 38,422 in 2019.

When we speak about the motivation for foreign language learning, the impact of the learning experience needs to be taken into consideration, because of the important role that has on the learner's motivation (Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Kormos & Csizér, 2007; Kormos, Csizér, & Iwaniec, 2014; Lamb, 2012; MacIntyre & Serroul, 2015). Csizer and Kalman (2019) pointed out that the learning success combined with the teacher's character, contact experiences, and the attitudes towards the language community as the most influential factors.

Xueyan (2020) claimed that the opportunity for language development provided by the state Tempus scholarship foundation (TPF), both for learning English and Hungarian languages plays an essential role in choosing Hungary as international students destination. For instance, Zhang (2018) found that Chinese students have positive attitudes towards learning Hungarian for academic purposes and personal integration in the local community. Similarly, Hosseini-Nezhad et al. (2019) stated that students are motivated to learn Hungarian because they want to be part of the new culture and to be familiar with its multicultural environment.

Therefore, by learning a new language and being part of the target community, learners can interrelate culture, cognition, and use of language (Duff, 2007; Hafner, 2015; Vickers, 2007). In the next section, we introduce some of the factors, which influence the international students' socio-cultural adaptation in the host country (Gui, Safdar, & Berry, 2016).

Integrative motivation

Gardner and Lambert (1959, 1972), in their socio-educational model, claimed that integrative motivation relates to the learner's positive attitudes towards the targeted language, country, culture, or people. In his model, he presented the construct of integrativeness and integrative motive (Gardner, 1985). He defined integrativeness as a "genuine interest in learning the second language to come closer to the other language community" (Gardner, 2001: p.5). Thus, when learners construct integrativenes, they develop openness and respect towards the new community without self-exclusion from the native group (Gardner, 2001).

Concerning the integrative motive, Gardner (2001) describes it as a construct that consists of three elements. The first is the effort for the person to learn the language. The second is the goal that the person wants to achieve in connection with the language. The third element is the attitude that the person has towards learning the language. The importance of integrative motivation is pointed out as more relevant for learners who have direct contact with the native speakers, than the one who does not have it (Dörnyei & Clément, 2001).

However, Kruidenier and Clément (1986) criticized Gardner and Lambert's claims as they found that according to the structural factors in the learning environment, the integrative motivation can take different shapes like a desire to make friends, acquire new knowledge, or even travel. Likewise, Dörnyei (1990) pointed out that there may have been a variety of sociolinguistic factors which influenced Gardner and Lambert's research because it was conducted with English speakers, who were learning French, in a country where this was the second official language.

Dörnyei (1990, 2003), suggested that the integrative dispositions of the learners can be found in their identification with the target language community psychologically or emotionally. This makes the integrative motivated language learners have a high level of intercultural contact, which influences higher levels of motivation for learning the language (Masgoret and Gardner 1999, 2003).

From here on, integrative motivation will be applied as "a favorable attitude towards an L2 community and an inclination to interact with and become part of that community." (Kim & Shin, 2021, p.328). Thus, the integrative motivation relates to the language learners' positive attitudes towards the country, people, or culture of the language they are learning (Hong & Ganapathy, 2017; Khorsheed, 2021; Purnama, Rahayu, & Yugafiati, 2019).

Instrumental motivation

Gardner and Lambert (1972) claimed that instrumental motivation is a part of the socio education model that deals with practical reasons for learning a language. These types of reasons may be passing an exam, getting good grades, being admitted to a certain school or university, or finding a job. Although the socio-education model went through certain modifications made by Gardner (2001), the core ideas stayed the same.

Instrumental motivation is an essential element for promoting career prospects (Dörnyei, 2009; Higgins, 1987). Busse's (2010) doctoral dissertation research about first-year students who study German in the UK revealed that the "ideal L2 self together with instrumental orientation and task-based self-efficacy" (p. 393) have a strong influence on the students' motivated behavior in learning the foreign language.

Zhang, Dai, and Wang, (2020) stated that instrumental motivation influences the learner's language proficiency such as achieving academic recognition, developing their professional career, or going abroad after graduation. Likewise, Engin (2009) associated instrumental motivation with the student's beliefs in succeeding in learning the foreign language. Thus, these statements better fit with the situation when knowing the language improves the academic and professional status (Cocca & Cocca, 2019).

Multifaceted motivation

Several studies have shown an overlap between the integrative and instrumental motivations during the learning language process (McEown & Baldwin 2019; Siridetkoon & Dewaele, 2018; Zhang et al., 2020). Junko (2005) claimed that this overlapping is not a dichotomy between the integrative and instrumental motivations, but a multifaceted phenomenon, which appears during language learning.

The concept of motivation was seen as a multifaceted phenomenon in various studies (Al Othman & Shuqair, 2013; Dörnyei, 1998; Hartnett, St George, & Dron, 2011; Saheb, 2015; Winniford, Carpenter, & Grider, 1997). Dörnyei (1998, p.131) claimed that "motivation is indeed a multifaceted rather than a uniform factor and no available theory has yet managed to represent it in its total complexity." Thus, the multifaceted motivation explains the complexity of the language learning process by taking into consideration the effect of the social context on learners' behavior (González-Becerra, 2019; King, Yeung, & Cai, 2019).

Engin (2009) pointed out that teachers play a vital role in initiating and fostering both integrative and instrumental motivation to increase students' desires for learning a foreign language. In this way, the course materials should be closer to the students' needs and expectations they have outside the classroom, for instance, cultural understanding and immersion in the language community (Grenfell, Kelly, & Jones, 2003; González-Becerra, 2019).

Some studies found that when the students reported a higher level of integrative over instrumental motivation, they tend to have a higher level of socio-cultural and academic adaptation,

study satisfaction in the host country, as well are being more successful at an advanced level of the language learning (Abdulrasoul, 2012; Yu & Downing, 2012; Yu & Wright, 2016).

Having in mind the nature and complexity of the motivation for foreign language learning (Brezina & Pallotti, 2019; Csizér, 2020; Liu, 2019; van den Berghe, Verhagen, Oudgenoeg-Paz, Van der Ven, & Leseman, 2019) study tries to gain a deeper understanding of the international students' motivations for learning Hungarian. Because of the complex nature of the students' motivational dispositions to learn a language, we addressed the following questions:

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1   Which aspects motivate the international students to learn Hungarian?

RQ1 (a)   Which integrative aspects motivate the international students to learn Hungarian?

RQ1 (b)   Which instrumental aspects motivate the international students to learn Hungarian?

RQ1 (c)   What type of multifaceted motivation do the international students have to learn Hungarian?

METHODOLOGY

The focus of this study was to explore the student's motivation for learning Hungarian during their studies in Hungary. For achieving this goal, an explanatory sequential design based on Creswell and Plano Clark, (2017) was conducted in this research. The first phase started with the collection and analysis of quantitative data by surveying 203 international students who were learning Hungarian. Then, according to the results, a semi-structured interview schedule was designed to explore and obtain an in-depth understanding of students' motivation for learning Hungarian.

Sample

The sample in this study was collected from the international students' community in Budapest, Hungary. The self-selection sampling method was used in this research, as the participants voluntarily contacted the researcher to participate in the interviews (Lavrakas, 2008). Consequently, 17 international students (10 females and 7 males), who hold the Stipendium Hungaricum Scholarship agreed to be interviewed. All of them were studying in different universities in Budapest, Hungary. They attended Hungarian language courses at their universities or private language schools.

Regarding their native language, were interviewed (4) African, (6) Arabic, (3), (2) Filipino, (1) Spanish, and (1) Azerbaijani native speakers. The participants' age ranges between 20 and 40 years old and their average time living in Hungary was 2.4 years. The participants' self-perceived proficiency level was between A1 and B1, based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe.Council for Cultural Co-operation.Education Committee.Modern Languages Division, 2001, p. 32). Table 1 displays the relevant characteristics of the participants.

Table 1. Overview of the participants' biographical data

Participant number	Gender	Place of origin	Study level	Native language	Self-perceived proficiency level
Participant 1	M	South Africa	Master	Swati	A1
Participant 2	M	South Africa	Bachelor	Sepedi	A2
Participant 3	M	Western Asia	Ph.D.	Arabic	A1
Participant 4	M	Western Asia	Master	Azerbaijani	A1
Participant 5	F	Northern Asia	Bachelor	Russian	A2
Participant 6	F	South America	Ph.D.	Spanish	B1
Participant 7	F	North Africa	Ph.D.	Arabic	A1
Participant 8	M	Western Asia	Bachelor	Arabic	A2
Participant 9	F	Northern Asia	Ph.D.	Russian	A1
Participant 10	M	West Africa	Ph.D.	Fante	B1
Participant 11	F	North Africa	Ph.D.	Arabic	A1
Participant 12	F	North Africa	Bachelor	Arabic	B1
Participant 13	F	South Africa	Bachelor	Africans	A1
Participant 14	F	Northern Asia	Master	Russian	B1
Participant 15	M	Southeast Asia	Ph.D.	Filipino	A2
Participant 16	F	Southeast Asia	Ph.D.	Filipino	A1
Participant 17	M	Western Asia	Master	Arabic	A1

Ethical issues

Before data collection, ethical consent and permissions were obtained from program co-ordinators and participants at Hungarian universities. Also, anonymity for the participants was ensured and the recordings were kept confidential. A research call was shared with the international students at different universities in Budapest. This call consisted of a detailed introduction of the research background, management of the gathered data, and emails of the researchers for contact. Electronic consent was given by each of the participants before starting the interview. Participation in this research was entirely voluntary.

Instrument

A semi-structured interview was conducted to explore the participants' goals, thoughts, feelings, or beliefs about the research topic (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). After conducting a survey based on Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (2005, 2009) and Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009) scales, the interview guide was developed. The instrument covered the following sections: Demographic questions; Self-perceived Hungarian language proficiency; Motivation for Hungarian language learning; Attitudes towards the language community; The influence of the integrative and instrumental motivations on the motivated learning behavior.

The interview guide received external expert validation and it was piloted on five participants. According to participants' answers, the instrument was adjusted and modified. The 17 interviews were collected online through WhatsApp, Viber, and Skype because this approach made it more convenient for the participants, especially due to the recent world pandemic situation. They were audio-recorded, and after that transcribed through Word. Each participant was asked between 10 and 15 questions and each interview lasted around 40 min.

These are examples for some of the questions: What is your motivation for learning Hungarian? How do you perceive the Hungarian people? How did learning Hungarian help you understand the Hungarian culture? How would you describe your experience when learning Hungarian? In what ways does learning Hungarian help you to integrate into the Hungarian community? What kind of future benefits do you perceive from learning Hungarian?

Data collection and analysis

The research call was shared by the program coordinators in a few universities in Hungary. Also, it was posted on Facebook and WhatsApp groups. The data was collected in English, during the autumn semester of 2020. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 17 participants.

In this study, thematic analysis was applied to find common themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) pointed out 6 phases to conduct a thematic analysis, namely "familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, producing the report" (p.5–11). The interviews were transcribed verbatim, which was analyzed by the researchers for coding common patterns and finding emerging themes (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

During the coding process, the continuous comparison of new codes with the already established ones helped to find codes that have explicit meaning and others that needed to be coded inductively with higher levels of abstraction (Mikusová, 2019; Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, & Braun, 2017). These are some examples of the established codes: the willingness for socialization and integration, finding a job, and practical everyday use of the language. The main themes found in this study were related to integrative, instrumental, and multifaceted motivation. To ensure trustworthiness, the coding procedures were sent to two external researchers to review them. Besides, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the participants' assigned numbers were written under each quotation taken from the interviews.

RESULTS

Below we present the results from the thematic analysis for each research question separately.

Motivation for learning Hungarian

The purpose of the first research question was to explore the aspects which motivate the international students to learn Hungarian, therefore, the first few research questions of the interview focused on finding the aspects that motivate international students to learn Hungarian. The main aspects were related to social integration with the Hungarian people, cultural understanding, and future vision.

Integrative motivation for learning Hungarian

The first sub-question focused on finding the integrative motives the learners have for learning Hungarian. The main motives were social integration with the Hungarian people (communicating with native speakers and meeting new friends) and cultural understanding (being part of the local community). These findings are elaborated on below.

Social interaction with the Hungarian people

The majority of the participants expressed that communicating with native speakers is their main motivation for learning Hungarian, as participants 3 and 7 told us:

"For instance, if you go to the supermarket and you want to ask something, you need the language. Sometimes it is difficult to find someone who speaks English in different places. Therefore, learning the language is essential to living in this country and to have an easy life in this community." (Participant 3)

"I am planning to live here during my studies for around 3 years, or probably more. Therefore, I will need to learn the language to be able to go to different places to communicate with Hungarian people." (Participant 7)

The interview extracts also show that the majority of the participants are motivated to learn Hungarian because it provides many opportunities to meet local people and make new friends. Participants 6 and 9 stated:

"Well, I decided to learn Hungarian because I wanted to make new friends from this country. As an international student, it is important to make local friends because they can help you fill in or sign governmental documents, find a job, or provide information about Hungarian culture." (Participant 6)

"I'm good at organizing different cultural events. For example, I have experience in organizing Hungarian art exhibitions. For that reason, learning Hungarian was mandatory to meet interesting people and find new friends." (Participant 9)

Besides, participants 15 and 4 mentioned the importance of learning Hungarian to be part of the local community:

"For me, learning Hungarian is not only an obligation but is the best way to be part of the Hungarian society. Thus, when you learn the language, you can share your time not only with friends from your native country but from Hungary as well." (Participant 15)

"I'm a Ph.D. candidate here in Hungary. As a teacher, I think it is fundamental to learn Hungarian because it helps you be part of the local community. Thus, you can, at least, partially understand their mentality." (Participant 4)

Cultural understanding

Some of the participants indicated that besides wanting to learn the Hungarian language, they wish to get better familiar with the Hungarian culture. Participant 10 stated the following extract:

"Learning Hungarian is important not only to communicate with local people but to understand their culture, traditions, and beliefs. For me, being proficient in Hungarian has provided me with exciting experiences such as understanding some stories that I found interesting to know. So, I get to know more and get closer to Hungarian people and to the country itself." (Participant 10)

The contact with the host culture was a positive experience for participant 3. The participant acknowledged that learning the language contributed to understanding the culture, values, and habits of Hungarians:

"Basically, after mastering the language, I wanted to learn more about the customs and culture of this country. By communicating with local people, I could understand their culture. I could realize the values, principles, and views that they have towards society. It is something amazing!" (Participant 3)

Instrumental motivation for learning the Hungarian language

The second sub-question explored the instrumental aspects that motivate international students to learn Hungarian. The majority of students pointed out the future vision of their professional careers as one of the main instrumental motivation aspects for learning Hungarian.

Future vision

Participants 13 and 11 stated that their motivation to learn Hungarian increased when they decided to find a job.

"I would love to work here in Hungary. I feel that it would be much easier, and I would be much more successful in my career if I can speak Hungarian." (Participant 13)

"I plan to continue my studies and to get a job here. For that reason, I started to learn Hungarian. I have some colleagues who told me that if I want to have better job opportunities, learning Hungarian is mandatory." (Participant 11)

Besides, participant 8 stated that he is motivated to learn the language because it is essential for professional development in Hungary.

"Here, in Budapest, there are many trainings and events related to my field. However, the majority are held in Hungarian. Due to this, learning Hungarian was one of my main goals during my studies. Nowadays, I attend these trainings with fewer language difficulties, but I am still learning Hungarian to achieve a better proficiency level" (Participant 8)

Cases of multifaceted motivation

The third sub-question investigated what type of multifaceted motivation the international students have to learn Hungarian. Findings from this study demonstrate that some students are both, integrative and instrumental motivated to learn Hungarian. For example, participant 7 stated that she is learning Hungarian because she wants to talk with her friends and colleagues at her job.

"As an international student, I found that some Hungarian people do not speak English. For that reason, I decided to start learning this language. After acquiring some knowledge, I could find a part-time job and be part of some Hungarian events. (Participant 7)

"First of all, I would like to communicate with the people who speak Hungarian. And I would like to start my job here if I had the opportunity. So, the language is very important, and it is needed. Especially in my field because I'm a civil engineer. And this type of work needs a language." (Participant 8)

Some participants stated that his motivation to learn Hungarian was related to integrative and instrumental purposes such as finding a job, renting a flat, and attending Hungarian events. According to this, participant 16 stated:

"I think that if people wanSt to live in Hungary, they have to learn the language. When I moved in to live here, I have faced many difficulties when renting a flat or finding a job because of the lack of Hungarian knowledge. Besides, I could not be part of interesting Hungarian events. Those were the main important reasons to learn this language." (Participant 16)

DISCUSSION

In this paper, we investigated the international students' motivational dispositions for learning Hungarian during their studies in Hungary. Even though the participants' motivation to learn Hungarian was determined by integrative, instrumental, and multifaceted motivations, the majority of the participants decided to learn Hungarian because they want to be part of or have contact experience with the Hungarian community.

The integrative motivation for learning Hungarian was pointed out by the majority of the participants in this study. The participants learn Hungarian because they want to use the language to socialize with Hungarians in everyday conversations. Thus, they can meet new friends, find a partner, and understand their culture. Therefore, as Dörnyei (1990, 2003) stated, integrative motivated language learners, desire to have a high level of intercultural contact with the local community.

On the other hand, only a few students are instrumentally motivated to learn Hungarian. Even though, these participants perceived learning Hungarian as a challenging process, they stated that learning Hungarian was an essential aspect for professional development and finding better job opportunities. Dörnyei (2009) supports these findings by indicating that some students are instrumentally motivated to learn Hungarian as a way to have better opportunities in their careers.

Finally, in terms of multifaceted motivation, a few participants seemed to possess both, integrative and instrumental motivation, at the same time. These participants indicated that they decided to learn Hungarian to communicate and socialize with Hungarians, and at the same time, to find better job opportunities, find accommodation, and academic purposes. Thus, they expressed their willingness to use the language outside the classroom to communicate with the Hungarian native speakers (Al Othman & Shuqair, 2013; Hartnett et al., 2011; Saheb, 2015; Winniford et al., 1997).

CONCLUSION

The results presented in this paper have revealed that international students have integrative, instrumental, and multifaceted motivations to learn Hungarian. An interesting finding is that the majority of students decided to learn Hungarian due to integrative rather than instrumental purposes. For instance, students who were integrative motivated to learn Hungarian, are the ones who want to be part of the local community and to have a deeper social connection to learn about Hungarian culture and customs.

Only a few students expressed their willingness to learn Hungarian for instrumental purposes. They claimed that becoming proficient in Hungarian was an essential aspect to find better job opportunities within the country and to perform daily activities such as renting a flat or asking for directions. Likewise, a few participants are multifaceted motivated to learn Hungarian. They expressed their desire to learn Hungarian because they wanted to explore the Hungarian culture and to have better opportunities for their careers in Hungary.

Therefore, it would be advisable for the Stipendium Hungaricum program, language program leaders, teachers, and stakeholders to consider the result from this study to create more opportunities where international students feel more motivated to learn Hungarian. Thus, new policies need to be adapted in the Hungarian language programs to encourage international students to use the language authentically outside the classroom (Engin, 2009; Grenfell, Kelly & Jones 2003; González-Becerra, 2019).

This study has some limitations. All the participants were studying and living in Budapest during the data collection process; it would have been better to include participants from all over Hungary to obtain more consistent results. Besides, the interviews were performed online; due to this, some technical difficulties affected the normal course of some interviews. Finally, all the interviews were conducted in English, which is not the native language of the participants and researchers, thus clarifications of the participants' answers had to be done to avoid research bias (Maxwell, 2012).

The results from this research confirm the importance of understanding international students' perspectives regarding motivation to learn a language. The further implementation of new policies and guidelines can contribute to the development of their international students' integrative and instrumental motivation to learn Hungarian. In this way, the Hungarian knowledge from the classroom will empower international students to use the language authentically (Kramsch, 2014).

The findings from this research provide directions for future studies about what motivates the international students to learn the local language, in this study, Hungarian. Likewise, it would be interesting to focus on international students who do not want to learn this language to discover the reasons for their demotivation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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