

INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES ON STUDENTS' ENGLISH LEARNING ATTITUDE AND MOTIVATION

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Abstract. This study aims to investigate the impact of individual differences on English learning attitude and motivation of undergraduate students. The research tool used was in the form of a self-reported questionnaire. The respondents were students from Nong Lam University, Ho Chi Minh City. The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS version 20. The results show that in terms of integrative and instrumental motivation, female is more self-motivated than male, and parents' foreign language proficiency has substantial effect on the integrative and instrumental motivation. Students in rural areas have higher instrumental motivation than those in urban areas

Keywords: attitude, motivation, individual, instrumental motivation and integrative motivation.

1. Introduction

Since the appearance of human languages on earth, the need of acquiring other languages has initially formed and continually risen throughout history in order that cultural exchanges and trading could smoothly take place and offer benefits to people. To satisfy this growing demand, a variety of studies in different fields have been conducted with regard to the scientific foundation for language teaching and learning. Various teaching and learning approaches have been being developed and applied into reality, and related sciences being discovered for the ultimate objective of successful learning outcomes. The studies all agree that language learning is a complicated process that requires a combination of a number of factors to guarantee the expected results in which attitude and motivation work as a thrust for the whole process. As Carroll (1964) claimed attitude is one of the keys in predicting the learning achievements of students. In other words, the final success of language learning remarkably depends on how positive an individual learner perceives the subject. An adequately positive attitude towards language learning, accompanied by strong motivations to obtain certain targets can boost the efficiency in learning. This viewpoint is reinforced by the recognition of Gardner (1985) regarding motivation as the fundamental factor that could give power to an individual's activities including learning. With respect to these theories, language

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teaching and learning involve not only particular content or curriculum but also accurate discovery of learner's attitude and after that, appropriate adjustments for the best learning efficiency. To this point, another problem may derive when the general attitude of a collection of individuals is difficult to identify. Obviously, each student is a distinctive individual with unique social background, personality, interest, or ambition, so what positively perceived by a learner may annoy others and be rejected. Such differences in personal traits affecting learning outcomes have attracted attention of many researchers. While Cook (2013) indicated individual variations such as learning style, gender or even first language level have critical influence on the overall learning success. Lightbown & Spada (2013), in their later study, bolster the previous point when asserting the determining role of learners' characteristics in their successful language learning. Language educators, therefore, should be take individual differences into consideration so as to make use of learners' strengths. In this context, this study is conducted to investigate the impact of individual differences on English learning attitude and motivation of undergraduate students at Nong Lam University in order to reveal insights for the sake of effective English teaching and learning.

2. Content

2.1. Literature review

Dörnyei (1990) defines motivation as a set of external and internal factors that partially determine a person's actions. Oxford (1996) considers motivation as an important aspect in which learners are fully involved in the learning process. Littlewood (1996) has shown that motivation is the force that determines whether a learner embarks on a task, the energy the learner spends on it, and how long it lasts.

Motivation, as defined by Gardner et al. (1985) refers to a combination of effort plus a desire to achieve a language learning goal plus a positive attitude towards language learning. According to the model of Gardner et al. (1985), which was developed from his earlier work with Smythe (1975) (Gardner & Smythe, 1975), motivation has two forms - integrative motivation and instrumental motivation.

Instrumental motivation is based on students' desire to learn the language for some pragmatic goal, such as to pass an exam, to use it at work, to use it during a vacation abroad, to watch a foreign television program, or as required by a training program (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Meanwhile, integrative motivation is elicited by the learners' interest in the language and culture of a country and the desire to communicate with the target foreign language group. In other words, to know more about the culture and values of the foreign language group... to interact with people who speak different languages... living in different countries (R. C. Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

Attitude is a relatively complex concept. At present, there are many different definitions of attitude. Robert C. Gardner (1985) considers attitude as a component of motivation in language learning. According to him, motivation is seen as a combination of effort plus a desire to achieve a language learning goal plus a favorable attitude towards language learning". However, Wenden (1991) proposes a broader definition for the concept of attitude. He argued that the term attitude includes three components that are cognitive, affective and behavioral. The cognitive component is made up of beliefs

and ideas or views about an object. The affective component refers to the feelings and emotions a person has towards an object, 'like' or 'dislike'. Finally, the behavioral component refers to the actions or behavioral intentions of a person towards an object.

There are many researchers conducting studies on individual differences in learning a foreign language. A recent study by Sabry Daif-Allah & Aljumah (2020) reported that students of different gender had different perspectives about English learning. Kaid Mohammed Ali & Rashad Ali Bin-Hady (2019), Feng & Chen (2009) found individual differences have a significant impact on overall foreign language acquisition.

2.2. Methodology

A correlational research design was used for this study. The motivation, attitude, and personal characteristics variables were collected by a self-reported questionnaire. The survey was conducted at Nong Lam University. A sample of 850 students was conveniently selected.

Data collection tool

For the purpose of this study, a questionnaire was designed based on a scale developed by (Robert C Gardner, 1985) called Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and a revise version by Al-Khasawneh & Al-Omari (2015). The official questionnaire used for the study consists of 2 parts, part 1 has 3 scales, measuring information about integrative and instrumental motivation and attitudes, each scale consists of 10 statements (items) measured by a 5-level Likert scale, part 2 is demographic information.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 22. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation and percentages were used to describe the data on demographics. T-test and one-way ANOVA were used to find out if there is a significant statistical correlation between the respondents' demographic variables and English Learning Attitude and Motivation.

2.3. Results

2.3.1. Demographic characteristics

Table 1. Respondent Demographic characteristics

		Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	339	39.9
	Female	511	60.1
Place of origin	Rural	591	69.2
	Urban	259	30.8
Parent's level of foreign language	Very good	5	0.6
	Good	13	1.5
	Normal	145	17.2
	Weak	176	20.8
	None	506	59.9

Of the 850 respondents who took part in the study, 511 (60.1%) were female and 339 (39.9%) were male. A larger number of respondents (n= 591) come from rural areas, accounting for 69.2%.

Most of them live in families whose educational background is just beyond the average, and the foreign language competence of their parents is significantly low.

Regarding the parents' competence in foreign languages, 506 out of 850 parents, accounting for 60%, are unable to use any foreign language. In contrast to this number, the number of parents who can use a foreign language fluently take less than 2%.

2.3.2. Analysis of the differences in students' motivation and attitude towards learning English according to the demographic characteristics of students

Gender

The t-test in Table 2 indicates that the significance level of the factor of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation is less than 0.05, so it can be concluded that there is a statistical significant difference in students' integrative motivation and instrumental motivation by gender. Specifically, female students have a higher integrative motivation and instrumental motivation than their male counterparts. This result is in line with the study of Sabry Daif-Allah & Aljumah (2020). However, it runs counter to the findings of Akram & Ghani (2013) in which there is no statistically significant difference found between male and female student in English learning motivation.

With regard to the difference in attitudes towards learning English by gender, the results of t-test show $t=-0.05$ and the significance level $Sig=0.96$ (greater than 0.05), so it can be concluded that there are no statistically significant differences between male and female in their attitude to learn English. This result is significantly relevant to the findings of Akram & Ghani (2013) who stated the same result that there exists no statistically significant difference between men and women in attitude towards learning English.

Table 2. Results of T-Test for Differences in attitude, motivation by gender

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Attitudes	Equal variances assumed	4.93	.03	-1.19	846.00	.24	-.04	.03	-.107	.026
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.18	700.65	.24	-.04	.03	-.108	.027
Integrative motivation	Equal variances assumed	15.64	.00	-2.37	840.00	.02	-.08	.03	-.148	-.014

	Equal variances not assumed			-2.34	682.78	.02	-.08	.03	-.149	-.013
instrumental motivation	Equal variances assumed	60.14	.00	-3.86	844.00	.00	-.09	.02	-.129	-.042
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.62	568.57	.00	-.09	.02	-.132	-.039
Academic Achievement	Equal variances assumed	1.87	.17	-3.44	848.00	.00	-.32	.09	-.50929	-.13942
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.42	705.46	.00	-.32	.09	-.51073	-.13799

2.3.3. Parents' foreign language proficiency

With the hypothesis that students whose parents have good proficiency in a second or foreign language will have a positive attitude and high motivation to learn English, one-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relationship between attitude and integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. In this study, the results of ANOVA analysis showed that parents' foreign language proficiency is not statistically relevant to the attitude towards learning English. However, the above parents' foreign language proficiency results in a significant difference in the integrative and instrumental motivation. Specifically, the results of post hoc analysis show parents with good competence in a foreign language can generate better integrative motivation (sig=0.05) in their children than the group of students whose parents' foreign language proficiency is classified as average and poor. Besides, the respective former group of students also possess greater instrumental motivations (with statistical significance at 0.05) than the latter group with parents of average and low language proficiency.

Table 3. Results of ANOVA analysis between motivation, attitude and foreign language proficiency of parents

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Attitudes	Between Groups	1.26	4.00	.32	1.35	.25
	Within Groups	196.37	838.00	.23		
	Total	197.64	842.00			
Integrative motivation	Between Groups	2.90	4.00	.72	3.09	.02
	Within Groups	195.19	832.00	.23		
	Total	198.09	836.00			
instrumental motivation	Between Groups	.91	4.00	.23	2.24	.06
	Within Groups	84.90	836.00	.10		
	Total	85.81	840.00			
Academic Achievement	Between Groups	10.17	4.00	2.54	1.39	.23
	Within Groups	1534.27	840.00	1.83		
	Total	1544.44	844.00			

Table 4. Post Hoc Analysis

Multiple Comparisons							
Dependent Variable	(I) Parent's foreign language proficiency	(J) Parent's foreign language proficiency	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Attitudes	Very good	Good	-.246	.266	.969	-1.35	.86
		Average	-.110	.248	1.000	-1.27	1.05
		Very poor	-.110	.247	1.000	-1.28	1.06
		Don't know foreign language	-.045	.246	1.000	-1.22	1.13
	Good	Very good	.246	.266	.969	-.86	1.35
		Average	.136	.112	.905	-.22	.49
		Very poor	.136	.110	.892	-.22	.49
		Don't know foreign language	.201	.106	.499	-.15	.55
	Average	Very good	.110	.248	1.000	-1.05	1.27
		Good	-.136	.112	.905	-.49	.22
		Very poor	.000	.054	1.000	-.15	.15
		Don't know foreign language	.066	.047	.828	-.07	.20
	Very poor	Very good	.110	.247	1.000	-1.06	1.28
		Good	-.136	.110	.892	-.49	.22
		Average	.000	.054	1.000	-.15	.15
		Don't know foreign language	.065	.041	.681	-.05	.18
	Don't know foreign language	Very good	.045	.246	1.000	-1.13	1.22
		Good	-.201	.106	.499	-.55	.15
		Average	-.066	.047	.828	-.20	.07
		Very poor	-.065	.041	.681	-.18	.05
Integrative motivation	Very good	Good	-.800	.374	.451	-2.60	1.00
		Average	-.487	.377	.840	-2.28	1.30
		Very poor	-.536	.376	.780	-2.33	1.26
		Don't know foreign language	-.477	.375	.850	-2.28	1.32
	Good	Very good	.800	.374	.451	-1.00	2.60
		Average	.313*	.042	.000	.19	.43
		Very poor	.264*	.036	.000	.16	.37

		Don't know foreign language	.323*	.021	.000	.26	.38
	Average	Very good	.487	.377	.840	-1.30	2.28
		Good	-.313*	.042	.000	-.43	-.19
		Very poor	-.048	.056	.992	-.21	.11
		Don't know foreign language	.011	.047	1.000	-.12	.15
	Very poor	Very good	.536	.376	.780	-1.26	2.33
		Good	-.264*	.036	.000	-.37	-.16
		Average	.048	.056	.992	-.11	.21
		Don't know foreign language	.059	.042	.830	-.06	.18
	Don't know foreign language	Very good	.477	.375	.850	-1.32	2.28
		Good	-.323*	.021	.000	-.38	-.26
		Average	-.011	.047	1.000	-.15	.12
		Very poor	-.059	.042	.830	-.18	.06
Instrumental motivation	Very good	Good	-.400	.245	.678	-1.58	.78
		Average	-.241	.247	.951	-1.41	.93
		Very poor	-.298	.246	.876	-1.47	.88
		Don't know foreign language	-.292	.245	.882	-1.47	.89
	Good	Very good	.400	.245	.678	-.78	1.58
		Average	.159*	.030	.000	.07	.25
		Very poor	.102*	.023	.000	.04	.17
		Don't know foreign language	.108*	.014	.000	.07	.15
	Average	Very good	.241	.247	.951	-.93	1.41
		Good	-.159*	.030	.000	-.25	-.07
		Very poor	-.056	.038	.776	-.16	.05
		Don't know foreign language	-.051	.033	.742	-.15	.04
	Very poor	Very good	.298	.246	.876	-.88	1.47
		Good	-.102*	.023	.000	-.17	-.04
		Average	.056	.038	.776	-.05	.16
		Don't know foreign language	.005	.027	1.000	-.07	.08

	Don't know foreign language	Very good	.292	.245	.882	-.89	1.47
		Good	-.108*	.014	.000	-.15	-.07
		Average	.051	.033	.742	-.04	.15
		Very poor	-.005	.027	1.000	-.08	.07
Academic Achievement	Very good	Good	.56923	.71319	.990	-2.0178	3.1563
		Average	1.12414	.59544	.552	-1.6187	3.8670
		Very poor	1.07273	.59048	.587	-1.6949	3.8403
		Don't know foreign language	1.12213	.58621	.544	-1.6686	3.9128
	Good	Very good	-.56923	.71319	.990	-3.1563	2.0178
		Average	.55491	.42800	.865	-.8383	1.9481
		Very poor	.50350	.42108	.908	-.8812	1.8882
		Don't know foreign language	.55290	.41507	.845	-.8251	1.9309
	Average	Very good	-1.12414	.59544	.552	-3.8670	1.6187
		Good	-.55491	.42800	.865	-1.9481	.8383
		Very poor	-.05141	.15236	1.000	-.4812	.3783
		Don't know foreign language	-.00200	.13487	1.000	-.3832	.3792
	Very poor	Very good	-1.07273	.59048	.587	-3.8403	1.6949
		Good	-.50350	.42108	.908	-1.8882	.8812
		Average	.05141	.15236	1.000	-.3783	.4812
		Don't know foreign language	.04941	.11094	1.000	-.2632	.3620
	Don't know foreign language	Very good	-1.12213	.58621	.544	-3.9128	1.6686
		Good	-.55290	.41507	.845	-1.9309	.8251
		Average	.00200	.13487	1.000	-.3792	.3832
		Very poor	-.04941	.11094	1.000	-.3620	.2632

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

a. Dunnett t-tests treat one group as a control, and compare all other groups against it.

2.3.4. Residence

The t-test in Table 5 shows that the significance level of both the attitude factor and the integrative motivation factor is greater than 0.05, so permanent residence is said to cause no marked fluctuation between integrative motivation and attitude. On the other hand, the difference between instrumental motivation and student's permanent residence is worth considering as it is statistically significant. Specifically, students in rural areas have higher instrumental motivation than those in urban areas (the mean value of instrumental motivation of rural and urban students is 4.26 and 4.16, respectively).

Table 5. Results t-test for Equality of Means between motivation, attitude and students' permanent residence

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>	<i>Std. Error Difference</i>	<i>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</i>	
									<i>Lower</i>	<i>Upper</i>
Attitudes	Equal variances assumed	6.45	.01	1.49	836.0	.14	.05	.04	-.02	.125
	Equal variances not assumed			1.47	478.2	.14	.05	.04	-.02	.127
Integrative motivation	Equal variances assumed	8.33	.00	1.78	830.0	.07	.07	.04	-.01	.137
	Equal variances not assumed			1.75	468.4	.08	.07	.04	-.01	.138
Instrumental motivation	Equal variances assumed	23.00	.00	2.44	834.0	.01	.06	.02	.01	.105
	Equal variances not assumed			2.26	416.2	.02	.06	.03	.01	.109
Academic Achievement	Equal variances assumed	14.44	.00	-4.83	838.0	.00	-.48	.10	-.68	-.28711
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.48	419.5	.00	-.48	.11	-.70	-.27154

3. Conclusion

The rapid development of information technology has placed an increasing demand of cross-cultural communication, and thus, stimulated foreign language learning. In order to assist effective learning, profound studies on attitude and motivation of language learners have been implemented, and their findings are making significant contributions to the field worldwide. However, distinctive places of origin, family background, or living environments may generate different levels of motivation as well

as impact a particular group of learners. Regarding this study, which aims to investigate individual factors involved in the learning attitude and motivation, the results show that in terms of integrative and instrumental motivation, female is more self-motivated than male, and parents' foreign language proficiency has substantial effect on integrative and instrumental motivation. Obviously, with parents as role models, students have a tendency to reach the target available, and with the support and even guidance from the elders they may engage more actively in their language learning and consequently achieve better academic performance. While motivations in learning a foreign language vary according to gender and parents' proficiency in a language, these two factors do not make major impacts on the attitude towards the subject. Apart from the above factors, the permanent residence of foreign language learners has remarkable influence on their instrumental motivation. Those who are born and raised in distant regions with poor educational facilities and services which restrict the authentic use of a foreign language in reality are more motivated than their urban counterparts. Competence in a language beside mother tongue, to the previous group of learners, has been recognized as a mean to improve their life quality which generate more motivations in learning.

Despite the small population of interviewees of this study, its findings could be potentially generalized to a wider context in the country because the research respondents have a variety of places of origins that reflect different cultural and educational features. This study may provide an initial foundation for further researches on other factors involved in language learners' motivation and on applicable improvements in teaching and learning to enhance it in accordance with specific groups of students. To this end, all factors which significantly impact the learning attitude and motivation would be interrelated and properly adjusted for the learners' better experience and competence in their foreign language learning.

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