

Motivation of Second Language Learners with Particular Reference to Undergraduates of Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka and Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka

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Abstract: Since motivation is an inevitable key to succeed in second language learning, this study aimed to investigate the motivation and the motivation orientation levels of the undergraduates in Sabaragamuwa University (SUSL) and Uva Wellassa University of Sri Lanka (UWU) towards learning English. The study was carried out with 110 second-year and 69 first-year undergraduates in SUSL and UWU respectively. Results indicated that 72% undergraduates in SUSL and 100% in UWU possess high level of motivation and high instrumental orientation to learn English.

Keywords: motivation, motivation orientation, instrumental orientation

Introduction

It is a remarkable fact that English language has become an inevitable key to succeed in any scenario in all over the world. It is considered as a world language mainly because the world's knowledge is enshrined in English. However, it is observed that the competency level in English of Sri Lankan students is not that optimistic. Further, with the first-hand experience as university lecturers for more than 4 years, the researchers can assure that in spite of the great efforts exerted in the universities to teach English as a Second Language (L2), one can hardly come across undergraduates' fluency in English. Unfortunately, many undergraduates attend the English classes with a passive attitude only to pass the compulsory English examinations. Majority of the students struggle to

perform in English and as a result acquiring a prestigious occupation becomes a dream to them. This situation is also common to some of the graduates who pass out from the university system and lack of knowledge of English becomes a hindrance to them when trying to climb up the social ladder. In spite of all the efforts taken by the government and relevant authorities to improve the English language knowledge of the undergraduates, the numbers of students who get the maximum benefit of those attempts seem to be less. The informal talks with the administrators, lecturers and instructors at the universities reveal that students' motivation should be questioned.

Accordingly, all lecturers and instructors believe that without motivated students in class, it is inevitable to have high failure and absenteeism rates. Their beliefs are in line with what Dörnyei (2005, 65) puts forth that motivation "provides the primary impetus to initiate L2 learning and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process". He also underlines that even if a learner has the best abilities, he cannot attain long term goals without an adequate amount of motivation. He further supports his claim that neither suitable curricula nor good teaching alone is sufficient to guarantee that the individual will succeed.

However, as language teachers, we should start thinking how we can contribute to the improvement of students' motivation and enhance their language achievement. As only a very few studies were conducted on motivation of university students in Sri

Lanka, the present research attempts to identify motivation levels and motivation orientation levels of students in University of Sabaragamuwa and Uva Wellassa University towards learning English.

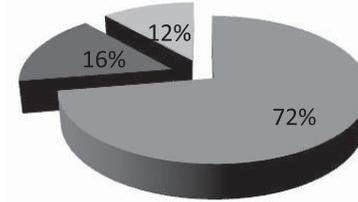
Methodology

The current study will employ a mixed method design which includes both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The data consist of both primary and secondary ones. The primary data was collected by distributing questionnaires for 110 students in SUSL and 69 students in UWU and conducting informal interviews with both the lecturers and students. All the students study English as a compulsory subject at the above mentioned universities. Further, the study will be firmly based on a theoretical base using materials such as internet articles, books and other sources.

Results and Discussion

The study attempted to demonstrate the motivation levels of the 110 participants in SUSL and 69 participants in UWU.

As can be seen from the Fig. 1, nearly 12 % SUSL students embodied low level of motivation, approximately 16% students had moderate level of motivation, and about 72% students had high level of motivation. Thus, it can be seen that over 70% SUSL students had high motivation level towards learning English whereas in Uva Wellassa University all the participants (100%) had high motivation towards learning English which can be considered as a positive sign. In addition, according to the class room observations of the present study it was found that students had a great interest in learning English and it was evident from their class room behavior. For example, they came with their own answers, and ideas along with some questions even without the teacher's request. Also, the following statements made by the students in the interviews justify their high motivation towards learning English



■ High Level ■ Moderate Level ■ Low Level

Figure 1:
Motivation Levels of Second Year Students in SUSL towards English Language Learning

“I want to learn English to add value to my skills.”
“I just love the language, how it is written, read and spoken.”
“I never miss my English lectures because I want to improve English.”
“I know I am very poor in English, but I like to learn English very much.”

In addition, for the question “Do you like to learn English?” majority of students (67) stated their answer as “Yes, very much and only two students stated their answer as “To some extent”. The following graph states this situation. Further, most of the students had scaled “strongly agree or “agree” for the statements provided in the five point likert scale which measured their motivation level.

Integrative orientation of the students: Motivation has been identified as the learner's orientation with regard to the goal of learning a second language (Crookes & Schmidt 1991). It is thought that students who are most successful when learning a target language are those who like the people that speak the language, admire the culture and have a desire to become familiar with or even integrate into the society in which the language is used (Falk 1978).

According to the results, 64% second year students of SUSL had high level of integrative orientation towards learning English whereas 21% of students had moderate level. Only 15% students had low level of integrative orientation towards learning English.

The table 1 provides evidence of SUSL students' integrative orientation towards learning English. Altogether 74 % students study English because they believe it enables them to better understand and appreciate English art and literature. As a whole 81% agreed that it is important for them to know English in order to know the life of the English-speaking nations. Not only the life and culture of English-speaking nations but 73% students mentioned that

studying English is important to them because it will enable them to get to know various cultures and people. Altogether 54% students agreed that studying English is important to them so that they can understand English pop music. This clearly illustrates that in almost all the cases students admire the English life and culture and have a desire to become familiar with or even integrate into the society of the English-speaking nations.

Table 1:
Integrative orientation of SUSL students-Attitudes towards the target culture

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
Studying English can be important for me because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate English art and literature.	5%	8%	13%	44%	30%
It is important for me to know English in order to know the life of the English-speaking nations.	2%	5%	12%	47%	34%
Studying English is important to me so that I can understand English pop music.	6%	17%	23%	44%	10%
Studying English is important to me because it will enable me to get to know various cultures and people.	4%	5%	18%	41%	32%

Table 2:
Integrative orientation of SUSL students-Attitudes towards the target community

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA
The British people are open-minded and modern people.	3%	10%	21%	46%	21%
The Americans are sociable and hospitable.	5%	17%	28%	37%	13%
The more I learn about the British, the more I like them.	7%	14%	29%	34%	16%
The British and Americans are kind, friendly and cheerful.	5 %	15%	39%	27%	14%

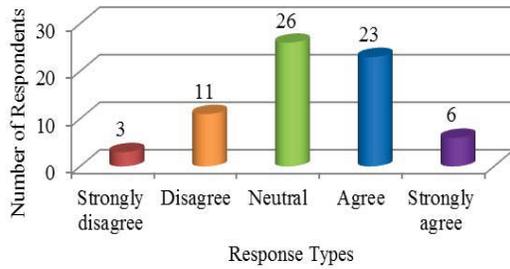


Figure 2:
Response of UWU students for the statement:
“I like English culture and its native speakers”

The Fig. 2 depicts the UWU students’ preference for English culture and its native speakers. It demonstrates that majority of students (26 students, 37.7%) doesn’t have a clear idea about English culture and their preference is almost neutral. Only 6 (8.7%) students strongly agreed that they like English culture and its native speakers while 3 students strongly disagreed with this preference for English culture and native speakers. Hence, the study findings illustrated that majority of the students have a neutral feeling towards English culture and native speakers. Further some students have a positive attitude towards the target culture and speakers while some strongly disagreed with it. In addition in the interviews held with students it was proved that they don’t have a clear idea about English culture and speakers.

The table 2 indicates SUSL students’ attitudes towards the target community. Almost 67% students mentioned that the British people are open-minded and modern while only 13% mentioned that they disagree with the statement. Also, 50% students agree that the Americans are sociable and hospitable whereas another 50% students agreed with the statement, “The more I learn about the British, the more I like them”. As a whole, 41% students also believed that the British and Americans are kind, friendly and cheerful. This depicts the students’ attitudes towards target community which is very clear to be a positive one which in turn justify their integrative orientation.

Similarly, in UWU except few students nearly 55 students strongly agreed or agreed that they like to speak in English with foreigners. Further, in the

interviews held with students they revealed that whenever they meet a foreigner in a bus they like to talk with them and mentioned that these foreigners are very friendly in conversations.

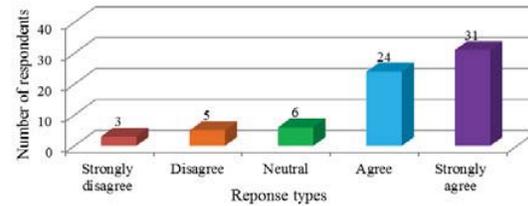


Figure 3:
Response for Statement: “I like to speak with foreigners in English”

Instrumental orientation of the students: Instrumental orientation is characterized by the desire to obtain something practical or concrete from the study of a second language (Hudson 2000). According to the results obtained, only 10% SUSL students had low level of instrumental orientation while 77% students had high level of instrumental orientation towards learning English. However, about 13% students had moderate level orientation.

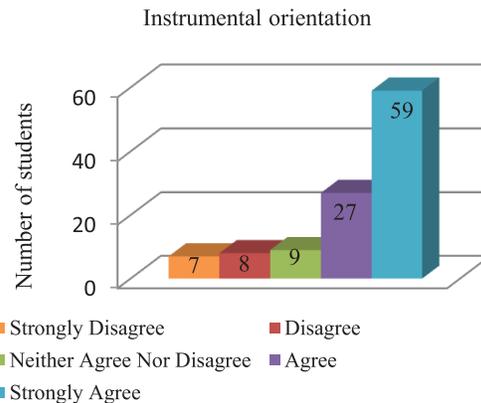


Figure 4:
Instrumental orientation of second year students in SUSL on “Studying English can be important for me because I may need it later (e.g., for job, studies)”

The Fig. 4 illustrates that 59 students strongly agreed that studying English can be important for them because they may need it later (e.g., for job, studies). Another 27 students also agreed with the

statement. Thus almost 86 (76%) students were aware of the fact that English is needed if they are to survive in the job market and also if they wish to pursue higher education then a good knowledge of English is indispensable. This awareness itself is a positive picture from which we can understand that the students know the economic and practical advantages of learning English. Hence, they are instrumentally motivated to learn English.

This statement is based on SUSL students' interest in English films, videos, TV or radio. According to the Fig. 5, altogether 78% students had positive attitudes and were interested in such entertainment items. About 8% students mentioned that they were not interested in them while 15% students were neutral on this statement.

The responses of the UWU students for the statement "I am interested in English movies, songs etc." proves, altogether 42 (60.9%) students had positive attitudes and that they are interested in such entertainment items. Only 2 students were not interested in them at all and 19 (27.5%) students had a neutral attitude on this statement. Hence, from the present study it was found out that majority of students have a favorable attitude towards English movies and songs and they stated that they enjoy them. In the interviews, they mentioned that English movies are really interesting and creative.

Thus it is evident that most of the students in SUSL and UWU were motivated to learn English to apply for a lucrative job in the job market; to pursue higher education; to get the respect from others in the society; achieve higher social status; to obtain a degree with a first class; to travel abroad; to make friends with the foreigners; to have entertainment, etc. this indicates that majority of students in both universities are instrumentally motivated to learn English. Hence, it explains that students are motivated to learn English with the aim of fulfilling their personal achievements rather than getting identified or integrated with the target culture.

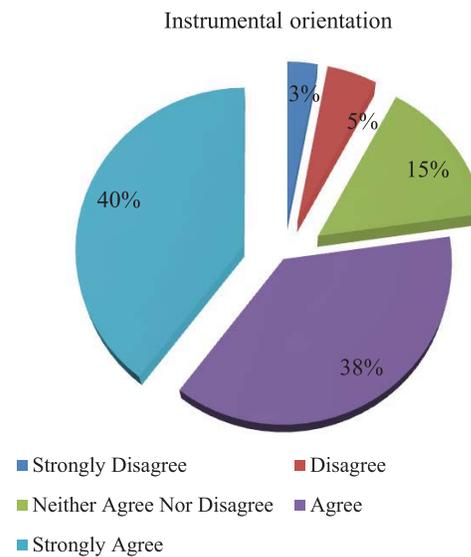


Figure 5:
Instrumental orientation of second year students of FSSL in SUSL on "Studying English is important to me so that I can understand English-speaking films, videos, TV or radio"

Hence, as far as students' motivation orientations were concerned, the analysis illustrated that most of the students had high levels of instrumental orientation rather than integrative orientation. In addition, in foreign language settings, it is not possible to expect that integrative orientation leads to better language attainment (Ehrman, et al : 2003). Dörnyei (1990, 1994a) also comments that "affective predispositions toward the target language community are unlikely to explain a great proportion of the variance in language attainment" (1990) in EFL situations due to the fact that students have little contact with the target language community. Aacken (1999) also agrees with Dörnyei (1990) that lack of a chance to have direct interaction with the native speakers of the target language and instrumental value of the language for career plans contributed to all of the participants' having instrumental motivations to learn Japanese. Petrides (2006) also found that the students who believed that English would be very beneficial for their future life were more competent learners than the others. Similarly, Liu (2007) claimed that Chinese students had positive attitudes towards

learning English and were highly motivated to learn English. Yet, they were more instrumentally motivated than integratively. However it should be noted that there are also cases in which both instrumental and integrative orientations can be equally influential on motivation of language learners in an EFL situation.

However, the findings of the study showed that there are several suggestions for further research. The first one is that in order to be able to have results that can be generalized, the number of participants should also be increased. The research analysis should also include students' background in learning English with regard to how long they have been learning English. Moreover, a language learner is a social being who is coming from different socio cultural and geographical areas. Therefore the geographical area from where they have come from should also be considered; whether the participants are from rural or urban areas. It can also focus on gender differences; how male and female students differ in their their motivation levels and orientations.

The findings of this study may provide insights into the assumption of the lecturers at SUSL and UWU that the students are unsuccessful and there is a high level of absenteeism because they lack motivation to learn English which turned out to have no scientific value since the findings of the present research revealed that only nearly 12 per cent of the participants embodied low level of motivation in SUSL and surprisingly 100 percent participants had high level motivation in UWU. Hence, considerable attention should be paid not only for the students' motivation but for the content of the English course, lecturers, teaching methods, the materials used, etc. as well. This might suggest that there is a need for a needs analysis which might help to identify students' needs so that the necessary steps could be taken to remedy the situation including material developers developing materials that can better meet the students' needs and can increase students' attendance in the lectures and success rates in English lessons. Kormos and Csizér (2008) claim that "teachers, materials, and activities are instrumental in shaping attitudes to learning". Since students lose their motivation to learn English and their attitudes towards learning a foreign language

formally deteriorate over time (Lamb 2007), for teachers, it is of utmost importance to implement a wide variety of motivational strategies in order to sustain the students' positive attitudes, and motivation, and even increase their motivation level. Therefore, the findings of this study will enlighten the teachers of the fact that SUSL students have positive attitudes towards learning English and possess high level of motivation; however, as teachers, we need to help the students to sustain and develop the motivation.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Dr. R.C.K. Hettiarachchi, and Professor Rathna Wijethunga for their excellent guidance and suggestions to make this study a success. The authors also wish to record their sincere gratitude to Dr. Thilantha Dammalage for helping extensively by sharing his knowledge, expertise and wisdom whenever required.

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