Good Language Learner and Motivation

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Abstract--- This study investigated the interrelationships between learner motivation and good language learning. The study participants were 30 students studying English at Hafez language institute in Mashhad. The students' motivation was measured through BALLI questionnaire. Their language ability in English was identified based on their GPA of the last 3 terms. Then the learners were divided into two groups of good language learners and bad language learners based on their GPA. To analyze the data the researcher used a Chi square and compared the responses of the good language learners (over achievers) to that of bad language learners (under achievers). The results of the study revealed the existence of positive and significant relationships among the two variables.

Keywords :*Motivation, Good Language Learner, Attitude, Personality*

I. INTRODUCTION

Recently more attention is directed towards learner characteristics and the needs. It is believed that characteristics of the language learner play a more important role in their success in SLA. A number of factors, such as intelligence, aptitude, personality, age, learning styles, strategies, learning environment, motivation and attitudes are investigated in the role they may play in second language learning.

Good language learner studies form an important part of second language acquisition research. Through observations, interviews, questionnaire surveys and other methods, researchers try to identify successful learners and the learning strategies they use, with the belief that second language teaching can improve if these strategies can be introduced to all learners. As Griffiths (2008) puts it, Good language learner studies have tried to investigate the reason why some language learners are more successful than others and how learner characteristics such as motivation, beliefs, aptitude, age, gender, style, personality culture and learner behavior such as strategy use, metacognition, or autonomy relate to effective language learning. The focus of the present study is specifically on determining whether motivation correlates with success in language learning and features of good language learners.

The Good Language Learner

A number of writers using informal observation, interviews, and surveys in the 1970s and 1980s tried to define the characteristics of a good language learner and to classify these characteristics into groups of learning strategies. Although each writer defined the characteristics somewhat differently, all share common observations. In the area of cognitive strategies, the good language learner is believed to seek clarification, verification, and meaning; ask questions; make inferences; and use deduction (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Rubin, 1987). Furthermore, good language learners see the target language as a system amenable to understanding through analysis and reasoning (Naiman et al., 1978; Rubin, 1987). They use their memories efficiently, practice and self-evaluate in order to achieve accuracy (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Naiman et al., 1978; Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1987). In the realm of metacognition, good

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language learners organize their learning around preferred learning techniques and choose, prioritize, and plan their learning (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Rubin, 1987). Good language learners do not neglect socio-affective factors that contribute indirectly to learning. Because good language learners know that language is communicative, they will seek ways of practicing the language and maintaining conversation (Naiman et al., 1978; Rubin, 1987). Additionally, they will be aware of affective factors that may undermine learning and have a tolerant and empathic attitude towards native speakers of the target language (Naiman et al., 1978; Stern, 1980). Above all, according to these writers, the good language learner is an active participant in the learning process (Ellis & Sinclair, 1989; Naiman et al., 1978). Conversely, "ineffective learners are inactive learners" because they lack an "appropriate repertoire of learning strategies" (Wenden, 1985, p. 5).

Among the factors which have been hypothesized to explain the facts of differential success include : social-psychological variables, personality, cognitive style and learning strategies.

Social-Psychological Factors Attitude and Motivation

The social-psychological factors of attitude and motivation have long been thought to have an important effect on language learning success. In (1959) Gardner and Lambert were able to identify two factors which were responsible for the French proficiency of English speaking students of French in Montreal: aptitude and attitudes towards French Canadians including motivational intensity and integrative motivation. For Gardner and Lambert (1959), there is actually an indirect relationship between attitude and successful SLA. Attitudes affect motivation, which in turn affects SLA. Since Gardner and Lambert's pioneering research, much work has been done on refining the relationship among the constructs. In the area of attitudes alone, for example, learners' parents' attitudes towards speakers of the TL, attitudes of peers, learners' attitudes toward their learning situation, teachers' attitudes towards their students, and one's attitudes towards one's ethnicity were all studied for their influence on SLA. In the area of motivation, the strength of learners' instrumental (a utilitarian motive for learning an L2) versus integrative (identification with L2 group) motivation has been measured to test predictions of their differential effect on L2 learning outcomes. Different researchers have reached different conclusions about hypothesized correlations depending upon the learner context; perhaps the only reliable finding is that the intensity of the motivation is more important than the type. Clearly more research is needed on the different influences on motivation. For example, in a study conducted by Strong (1984) on the acquisition of English by Spanish-speaking children living in the United States, it was concluded that motivation does not necessarily promote acquisition, but rather stems from it. The children in his study who met with success became more motivated to continue their study than those who were less successful.

Personality Characteristics

Some of the personality characteristics which have been associated with successful language learning are :

1. being willing to take risks
2. having high self esteem
3. being inquisitive
4. having strong motivation
5. having positive attitude

From among these factors motivation is the one which the present study focuses on.

Motivation

Brown (2000) defines motivation as "the extent to which you make choices about goals to pursue and the effort you will devote to that pursuit" (p. 72"). Heckhausen (1991, p.9, cited in Dornyei, & Otto, 1998, p. 64) defines motivation as:

A global concept for a variety of processes and effects whose common core is the realization that an organism selects a particular behavior because of expected consequences, and then implements it with some measure of energy, along a particular path. (p.64)

Mitchell and Myles (2004) consider motivation as a complex construct with three main components: the desire to achieve a goal, the effort extended in this direction, and the satisfaction with the task. According to Dornyei (1999a), Gardner talks about three central components of motivation "motivational intensity, desire to learn the language, and an attitude towards the act of learning and language" (p.528).

Different models and approaches of motivation have been introduced based on the underlying psychological perspective on human behavior. In psychology two distinct traditions explain human behavior, one focusing on individual aspects, motivational psychology, and the other focusing on social aspects, social psychology. Under this categorization, some of the most influential theories will be explained.

Motivational psychological theories

Self-determination theory. Self-determination theory as one of the most influential approaches in motivational psychology includes the well known distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. According to Ryan and Deci (2000) extrinsic motivation refers to "the performance of an activity in order to attain some separable outcome and, thus, contrasts with intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing an activity for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself" (p. 71). In the self-determination theory the types of motivation with their regularity styles are placed on a continuum between the self-determined (intrinsic) and controlled (extrinsic) forms of motivation depending on their degree of internalization, which refers to the extend the regulation has been transferred from outside to inside the individual. The external regulations are the least autonomous and externally motivated behaviors, such as the ones performed to receive rewards; introjected regulation involves a relatively controlled form of regulation to avoid guilt or anxiety or to attain ego enhancements; identified regulation is the conscious valuing of a behavioral goal; integrated regulation refers to the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation involving behaviors that are fully assimilated with the individual's other values, needs, and identity; and pure intrinsic regulation.

Concerning the combination of external and internal regulatory factors that almost always occur in L2 learning, Noels, Clement, and Pelletier (2001) studied intrinsic, extrinsic, and integrative orientations of French Canadian Learners of English to explore their relationship. The study supported the theoretical relations of autonomy and competence, intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for language learning, and various language outcomes. The intrinsic motivation is encouraged if learners' autonomous learning and competence are encouraged by others such as teachers and family members in their social world. They also found that integrative orientation is most similar to more self-determined forms of motivation and to intrinsic motivation in particular. In Noels, Clement, and Pelletier's (1999) study, the perceptions of teachers' communicative style and its relation to students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation were investigated. The results revealed that perceptions of teachers' communicative style were related to intrinsic motivation in a way that the more students perceived their teachers to be controlling and less informative, the lower their intrinsic motivation was. Moreover, they found that "stronger feelings of intrinsic

motivation were related to positive language learning outcomes, including greater motivational intensity, greater self-evaluations of competence, and a reduction in anxiety" (p. 23).

Expectancy-value theories. Based on expectancy-value theories, two key features produce motivation in performing various tasks: "the expectancy of success in a given task and the value the individual attaches to success in that task" (Dornyei, & Skehan, 2003, p. 615). A number of sub-theories, such as attribution theory, self-efficacy theory, self-worth theory can be identified based on this framework. Attribution theory among motivation theories is the first one which has successfully challenged Atkinson's classical achievement motivation theory according to Dornyei (2003). It is also important because it introduces causal attributions as mediating links between individual's past experience and future achievement. According to Weiner (1992, cited in Dornyei, 2003), the main proponent of the theory, individual's motivational disposition is to a large extent shaped by the subjective reasons attributed to the person's past successes and failures. According to Crozier (1997) attribution approaches to motivation suggest that " metacognitive and self regulatory processes moderate the relationship between attributions to effort and performance" (p. 165). Self-efficacy theory refers to people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action (Crozier,1997), and self-worth theory declares that "the highest human priority is the need for self-acceptance and to maintain a positive face" (Dornyei & skehan, 2003, p. 616). According to Oxford (1990), the sense of efficacy is reflected in attitudes and influences learner's motivation to keep on trying to learn.

Based on social psychological theories of action, "attitudes exert a directive influence on people's behavior since one's attitude toward a target influences the overall pattern of one's responses to the target" (Dornyei, 1999b, p.3). Oxford (1990) declares that attitudes affect motivation, and both attitudes and motivation work together to influence language learning performance; this includes global language proficiency and proficiency in specific language skills.

Goal theories (Ames, 1992; Locke, & Latham, 1990, cited in Dornyei, & Skehan, 2003) "propose that human action is triggered by a sense of purpose, and for action to take place, goals have to be set and pursued by choice" (p. 616). Thus the key concept in goal theories is goal properties. Accordingly, Tremblay and Gardner's (1995, cited in Dornyei, 2003) focused on orientation studies and their proposed motivation construct became linked to goal theories. In their theory they introduced a central component, 'goal salience', consisting of "the specificity of the learner's goals and the frequency of goal-setting strategies used" (p. 9).

Neurobiological investigations: Schumann, in 1990s introduced a new line of research into L2 studies concerning brain mechanisms involved in SLA, and the first area he studied in this regard was the neurobiological bases of L2 motivation. The key concept in his theory is 'stimulus appraisal', that occurs in the brain along the five dimensions of *novelty, pleasantness, goal/need satisfaction, coping potential, and self- and social image*. Stimulus appraisal becomes "part of the individual's overall value system through a special memory for value module, and thus they are largely responsible for providing the affective foundation of human action" (Dornyei, 2003, p. 10). Schumann in expanding his theory has considered learning as a sort of mental foraging which is "generated by an incentive motive and potentiated by the stimulus appraisal system" (Dornyei, 2003, p. 10).

According to Dornyei and Skehan (2003):

None of the available theories in motivational psychology offers a comprehensive overview of all the critical motivational factors, in the sense that their absence can cancel or significantly weaken any other existing motives, whereas their active presence can boost learning behavior. (p. 616)

In fact "different theories highlight different aspects of an extremely elaborate construct with multifarious constituents" (Dornyei, 1999a, p.527). Moreover, no superordinate variable exists that has the possibility of overruling any other rules universally and which "could rightfully be considered the core motivational constituent" (Dornyei, 1999b, p.3).

Social psychological theories

The social psychological approach to the study of L2 motivation was initiated by Gardner and his colleagues Lambert and Clement in Canada. They saw motivation as the primary force responsible in learning the language of other community which enhanced or hindered intercultural communication and affiliation. The theory centered around language attitudinal variables where attitudes toward the target language and L2 community influenced one's L2 learning behaviors based on social psychology. They developed standardized instruments for data collection, the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery, and based their theory on firm empirical evidence (Dornyei (1999a).

Considering the effects of integrative and instrumental motivation, Gardner and Lambert (1972, cited in Larsen-Freeman, & Long, 1991) believed that integrative motivation was better than instrumental motivation. However, the idea was challenged and they qualified their statement and said that "in settings where there is urgency about mastering a second language, instrumental approach to language study is extremely effective" (p. 174). This statement even seems to be an understatement and what is clear now is that instrumental motivation can be just as powerful as integrative motivation (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). Cook (2001) offers the results of a survey in which 29 percent of young people in Europe wanted to learn languages for career possibilities, 14 percent to live, work and study in the country, and 51 percent were motivated by personal interests, which revels the fact that integrative and instrumental motivations are not the only types of motivation.

Integrative motivation has a sort of a psychological and emotional identification attached to it which according to Gardner (2001, cited in Dornyei, 2003) concerns the L2 community; however, Dornyei (1990) believes that in the case of foreign language learning "the identification can be generalized to the cultural and intellectual values associated with the language as well as to the actual L2 itself" (p. 6).

Tremblay and Gardner (1995, cited in Dornyei, 1999a) proposed a new model of L2 motivation which is the extension of Gardner's original work of 1985 as a social psychological construct. In this new model attitude still has the basic role besides some new elements from expectancy-value and goal theories- goal salience, valence, self-efficacy, and attributions- as mediating variables. "Thus, the model attempts to synthesize a socially motivated construct and recent cognitive motivational theories"(p.528). According to Ellis (1994), in Gardner's socio-educational model the social and cultural milieu, individual learner differences, the setting and learning outcomes are interrelated and the strength of the model is in its explanation of how setting is related to proficiency.

Motivation as process-oriented

A process-oriented model of L2 motivation was proposed by Dornyei and Otto (1998) in which they defined motivation as "the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritized, operationalized, and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out"(p. 64). In other words, the process model outlines the way initial wishes and desires are transformed into goals then into operationalized intentions which by being enacted lead to goal accomplishment and the final stage of process evaluation.

In this perspective motivation is not a static attribute but a dynamic factor displayed in three different phases-preactional, actional, and postactional- based on the work of German psychologists Heckhausen and Kuhl. Preactional stage is the stage in which motivation is generated and called choice motivation which leads to the selection of the goal or task. Actional stage, the second stage is the time where the motivation is maintained and protected while the action lasts. This is referred to as executive motivation. Finally, the postactional stage follows the completion of the action and concerns the learners' retrospective evaluation of the way things went on and is termed motivational retrospection(Dornyei, & Otto, 1998).

In the L2 classroom, the actional stage is of greatest importance since learner with a certain level of motivation encounters a new set of motivational influences and a complex process of motivational processing begins. Ongoing appraisal and action control are two mechanisms involved while learners are engaged in a task. Ongoing appraisal refers to the continuous appraise of the coming stimuli and the comparison of the actual performance with the predicted ones, and action control involves the knowledge and strategies used to control cognitive and noncognitive resources as self regulatory process. "Motivational processing, then, is seen as the interplay of the appraisal and the action control systems" according to Dornyei (2002, p. 142). The strong point of a process-oriented approach is in the possibility of interpretation and integration of the many motivational factors that influence the students' learning behavior in a classroom setting. However, the problem is that the borderline between preaction and action stage is not that much clear. In other words, it can be said that in many cases "the 'choice' phase of one actional step might happen simultaneously with the executive phase of another, resulting in complex interferences" (Dornyei, 2002, p. 142).

According to Dornyei and Skehan (2003), it is this temporal reality of motivation and the adoption of a dynamic model which marks the difference between the traditional social psychological conceptions of L2 motivation and its reformed conceptualization.

Language learning motivation

According to Dornyei (1996) "motivation to learn a second language is a complex and eclectic psychological construct that involves several non-social factors as well" (p. 72). Since language is a communication coding system, an integral part of the individual's identity, and the most important means of socialization, language learning motivation will contain not only social aspects but also educational and personal aspects. Clement, Dornyei, and Noel's (1994) study led to the representation of a tripartite construct of L2 motivation consisting of integrative motivation, linguistic self-confidence, and appraisal of class environment based on a group dynamics approach which focused on group cohesion, evaluation of the English teacher and the English course which all together resulted in the idea that whatever happens in the classroom has considerable effects on learners' affective disposition. Following this research a framework for language learning motivation was proposed in which three levels of motivation are distinguished: the language level, the learner level, and the learning situation level. This categorization not only reflects the social, personal, and the educational dimensions of language learning, but also it coincides with the constituents of the second language learning process, namely, the target language, the learner, and the learning environment. In this framework, the language level includes *integrative and instrumental* motivational subsystems; the learner level involves various fairly stable personality traits, some of which being language specific, such as *linguistic self-confidence*, and some others in relation to learning and achieving in general, such as *the need for achievement*. The third level, the learning situation level, involves situation-specific motives and is related to

language learning in a classroom setting. It includes *course-specific, teacher-specific, and group-specific motivational components.* According to Dornyei (1996), since these three levels have a vital impact on the overall motivation and have influences independent of each other, separating the three levels of motivation seems appropriate.

Dornyei and Csizer (1998) based on a study provide ten commandments for motivating language learners (p.215). They are:

1. Set a personal example with your own behavior.
2. Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.
3. Present the tasks properly.
4. Develop a good relationship with the learners.
5. Increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence.
6. Make the language classes interesting.
7. Promote learner autonomy.
8. Personalize the learning process.
9. Increase the learners' goal-orientedness.
10. Familiarize learners with the target language cultural

In addition to these commandments, Dornyei (2003) has provided a comprehensive framework of motivational teaching practice which can help in the development of motivational strategies, and in the formulation of self-motivating strategies. It consists of four main dimensions:

1. Creating the basic motivational conditions
2. Generating initial student motivation
3. Maintaining and protecting motivation
4. Encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation

Motivation vs. Attitude

The relationships between attitude, motivation, and successful language learning seem unclear. Gardner (1979 in Larson-Freeman and Long 1991:175) suggests that attitude affects motivation and subsequent acquisition. Crookes and Schmidt suggest that motivation research has failed to adequately separate motivation and attitude (1991:501). Lightbown and Spada point out that "If the speaker's only reason for learning the second language is external pressure, internal motivation may be minimal and general attitudes toward learning may be negative" (1999:56). This would suggest ineffective learning, yet this external pressure may arise from the need for good English skills to get a good job, and thus may provide the student with instrumental motivation, which can be as strong a motivator as integrative motivation. It has also been suggested that it may be success that fosters motivation and not motivation that fosters success (Strong 1984:10-2).

A final personality characteristic to consider is extroversion and introversion. Common belief is that extroverts learn quicker than introverts, however according to Larson-Freeman and Long (1991) the research is inconclusive. According to Brown (2000) it is reasonable to suggest that extroversion may facilitate the learning of spoken English, but that introverts have more patience and thus may excel in areas of pronunciation, reading, and writing.

Research question

Are there any relationships between motivation and good language learning?

II. METHOD

Participants

This study was conducted with 74 students of English as a foreign language at Hafez language institute in Mashhad. They were studying general English at this institute. Their age ranged from 18 to 22.

Instruments

Data were collected through Horwitz's (1987) (BALLI) , a 34-item, 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire. In this section, the subjects were asked to read a statement and decide if they: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) agree, or (5) strongly agree with each statement.

III. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In this research data were gathered through BALLI questionnaire. Students were asked to read each statement and indicate a response ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

This study focused on the learner motivation concerning SLA, therefore the responses of each learner to the items related to this construct were added up and the score is derived for each student which provides a description of students' motivation concerning second language learning. Later the responses of the two groups of the learners, good language learners and bad language learners were compared through non-parametric statistics, i.e. chi- square.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the present study the relationship between learner motivation and language achievement was investigated. Responses of learners to the BALLI items which were related to motivation were compared through a non-parametric statistics chi- square. The results are presented in tables and also in the bar graph below.

Table 1: Motive * Achieve Cross-tabulation

			Achieve		Total
			high achievers	low achievers	
Motive	**high motivation**	**Count**	30	15	45
		% within Motive	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
		% within Achieve	81.1%	40.5%	60.8%
		% of Total	40.5%	20.3%	60.8%
	low motivation	**Count**	7	22	29
		% within Motive	24.1%	75.9%	100.0%
		% within Achieve	18.9%	59.5%	39.2%

		% of Total	9.5%	29.7%	39.2%
Total		**Count**	37	37	74
		% within Motive	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
		% within Achieve	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%

The data represented in table one indicate that:

40.5% of the subjects who were highly motivated were good language learners.

20.3% of the learners who were highly motivated were low achievers and therefore bad language learners. Only 9.5% of the learners who had low motivation were among the high achievers. 29.7% of the learners who had low motivation were among the low achievers and therefore bad language learners.

Table 2: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	f	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.759(b)		.000		
Continuity Correction(a)	11.114		.001		
Likelihood Ratio	13.245		.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.001	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	12.586		.000		
N of Valid Cases	74				
a Computed only for a 2x2 table					
b 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 14.50.					

As it can be seen in table number 2 the Chi- square analysis presented in table number the P value is lower than .05 i.e. it equales 0.00. This indicates that there is a meaningful and significant relationship between the two variablesmoptivation and the degree of language achievement which is the characteristic of good language learners.therefore the null hypothesis of this study is rejected.

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