The Extent of Satisfaction on the Key Factors that Affect Learner Motivation

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on a small-scale research conducted at the Institute of English, University of Sindh, Pakistan. The research participants include the students of B.A. (Hons.) Part- II, who had studied English language as a subject during B.A. (Hons.) Part- I as well. The data was collected through questionnaires, which asked questions related to English language learners' satisfaction on their language teacher, teaching learning environment, syllabus, and testing and assessment system, which are considered as the most factors that can affect and enhance learner motivation. The extent of their satisfaction, that they showed, in turn explains their motivation towards learning English language. The findings of the research include learning of English for both integrative and instrumental reasons with 'for getting importance' as the most commonly chosen reason. 100% students showed willingness to attend the language class, yet a number of them find it boring and gave suggestions related to improvement. Students showed a lot less satisfaction towards their teacher and the teaching method and suggested proper teacher training along with some other things. Suggestions are also given on the improvement of the content of syllabus, yet it needs further investigation. The most dissatisfying factor brought forward by this research is the assessment system, so the research definitely calls for the introduction of a proper improved assessment system. This research paves way for future research as it raises a number of issues and questions for researchers to address.

Key Words
English language learning, language learners' satisfaction , learner motivation

This paper is based on the findings from a research conducted to find out the extent of satisfaction on the various factors that affect learner motivation among the English language learners in the Institute of English, University of Sindh, Pakistan. This small scale research is conducted to find out whether the current conditions in the target situation are favourable and motivating for the language learners.

Dornyei (2000b) argues that, "Motivation is responsible for *why* people decide to do something, *how long* they are willing to sustain the activity, and *how hard* they are going to pursue it". Language is taught to a group but it is learnt by individuals. That is why a group may be taught one thing but each individual learner in the group learns it in his own way. The traits of the environment, social and academic, affect the personality of the learner, which in turn affects his learning. The extent of willingness on the part of the learner in addition to the openness of the environment allows positive learning. Language learning is, therefore, affected by, firstly**, the learning environment,** secondly, **the teaching method,** thirdly, **the content of the course** and finally**, the progress of the individual itself**. A good language learner can only be produced if all the mentioned factors help motivating him to learn the language. In the questionnaire used for the purpose of the research, I have asked questions related to the extent of learners' satisfaction regarding these factors.

Target Situation at a Glance

In a non-English speaking country like Pakistan, English Language Learning is treated as a subject at the university level. Language learning has an immediate short-term goal of achieving good marks at the end of the academic term in the written exams and in some cases, the long-term goal of getting better jobs. Sheorey (2006) mentions that in a non native country like India (one can consider Pakistan here as well because the context is not much different) the attitudes and motivation are usually different from those learning in close contact with the target language community. The learners are most of the times, **instrumentally motivated**.

This research is conducted to find out whether the current learning situation at a public-sector university for the students of language learning is motivating. The questionnaires are to be filled by the students of B.A. (Hons.) Part- II, Institute of English, University of Sindh, Pakistan. These students have studied English as their compulsory subject in Part- I as well. They also have varied prior knowledge of the language due to their varied schooling, i.e. rural/urban, public/private etc.

The questionnaire asks the questions related to the use of language learning, the teaching and learning environment, the teacher and the teaching method, the content of the syllabus and the testing and assessment system. Through these questions, the questionnaire is supposed to find out whether the students find motivating circumstances for learning a foreign language. Both Rahman (2004) and Mansoor (2005) suggest that these four categories need to be focused upon for improving the standard of education in Pakistan. Mansoor (2005) mentions that the curricula are outdated and therefore, do not interest the learner and also, testing system is no more reliable. Rahman (2004) notes that the resources and environment in Public and Private sector universities (except two private universities mentioned, Aga Khan University and Lahore University of Management Sciences) are

unsatisfactory and so is the quality of teaching. He recommends that students should be asked to judge the performances of their teachers on a regular basis for the improvement of teaching. This recommendation is followed by HEC and has become a common practice in most of the universities in the country recently. But its effect on learning is yet to be seen.

Research Questions:

Main Question:

- Whether the learning situation at the University of Sindh is motivating for the undergraduate language learners?

Sub Questions:

- How far is the content of the syllabus satisfactory?
- How far is teaching method satisfactory?
- How far is teaching environment satisfactory?
- How far is testing and assessment system satisfactory?

Learner Motivation: A Primary Factor to Learning Success

Motivation, one of the key words in learning, especially in language learning, stands for the interest of the learner in acquiring knowledge and the efforts taken by him in the pursuance of his interest. Dornyei (2000a) claims motivation (besides, aptitude) to be one of the two primary learner traits that determines learning success. He notices that primarily motivation encourages the learner towards learning, and later it acts as a dynamo which helps keep him on the long and tedious track of learning. Shoaib and Dornyei (2000a) note that motivation is not a static condition, it keeps changing from time to time. Dornyei (2007) mentions that, in second language learning, besides, the quality and quantity of L2 input, the nature of the language learning tasks, the teaching methodology applied, and various learner traits and strategies, motivating classroom environment is essential for achieving long-term goals. Crookes and Schmidt (1991: 498-502; cited in Peacock, 1997) say that the motivation for learning a language can be judged through finding interest and enthusiasm of the learner in learning methods and materials used for language learning, and his attention and concentration in the various tasks and activities going on in the classroom throughout his stay in the classroom. Peacock (1997) agrees with this view and quotes Ushioda (1993: 1-3), who calls this view of motivation, 'practitioner-validated'. Ushioda (1993) makes it clear that learner participation and concentration result from the interest in the in-class happenings. Dornyei (1998) makes it clear that even the learners with remarkable aptitude and intelligence cannot achieve long term goals in language learning without sufficient motivation.

A Practical Reason for Learning a Language: A Motivating Factor

The language learner must know the importance and use of the second language that he is learning. Then only will he be motivated to learn it. Cook (1991) points out that the learners must realize that L2 acquisition is additive (an addition to the efficiency

and knowledge of the learner), not subtractive. Cook (1991) presents the results of the 'Assessment of Performance Unit' (1986), according to which, 64% school-going English children, who are taught French as a Foreign/Second language, do not think learning French beneficial. He mentions that the French teachers help the learners in cultivating motivation. Cook (1991) also gives example of Hungarian English course '**Angol Nyelv Alapfolcon**' (Edina and Ivanne, 1987) and British course book '**Blueprint One**' (Abbs and Freebairn, 1990), both of which help motivating the learners by presenting such tasks in the native context that encourage learners to use L2. Thus, lack of interest in second language learning is a universal phenomenon; it is not unique with Pakistani learners. But the Pakistani learners need similar efforts to be taken to develop motivation among them. Dornyei et al. (2006) mentions that the Hungarian teenagers support one target language over the other (out of five target languages focused in the study) on the basis of integrativeness, instrumentality, attitudes towards the target language community, cultural interest and the vitality of the target language community. And following these, English (followed by German, French, Italian and Russian respectively) is the most preferred second language for the Hungarians. Also, through his research, Timori (1977) finds that practical necessity followed by economic advantage and status symbol is the commonest of the motivations found among Nigerians for learning English. Therefore, as these learners realized the practical uses of learning a second language, so can such uses be made clear and available to other second language learners, including Pakistani undergraduates, in order to develop and increase motivation.

Creation of a Motivating Environment

The harmony between the learning environment, the content of the course and the needs of the learners is important for a highly motivating environment for learning. Corder (1973:202) writes that language teaching can only be successful when the objectives of teaching match the demands of the learners. Kharma (1977) mentions textbook used, objectives of the syllabus, teaching methods, progress during the process of learning and individual differences like aptitude, intelligence and interests as important components of the motivation found among language learners. While Girard (1977) notices that motivation comprises four main factors, **t**he sociolinguistic context, the learner, the method used and the teacher. Girard finds that the sociolinguistic context paves the foundation for motivation, the learner's personal attitude towards the learning process is something which is already developed or which develops on its own but the method used for teaching can be altered according to the needs, whereas the same method can be successful with one teacher and a complete failure with another. Therefore teacher is the most important factor in language learning and in arousing the motivation of the learners.

Integrative or Instrumental Motivation

Spolsky (2000) presents a chain of action in the language learning process; he notes that the language attitudes and (instrumental and integrative) orientations give rise to motivation which in turn results in second/foreign language learning. Hence, a

learner gets motivated broadly due to two main reasons, either he is integratively motivated to learn the target language in order to become a member of the target language community through cultural assimilation or instrumentally motivated in order to acquire a perceived utility and immediate use in the field of study. But many of the scholars find integrative motivation as more powerful than instrumental motivation. Lambert (1967:101) writes that a successful language learner is always willing to accept and adopt the behaviours of the target language community. Lambert also points that the culture of the learner develops his attitude toward learning the second language and the target language culture; this attitude, in turn, motivates him and determines his success. Johnson (2001) also approves it that integratively motivated people often succeed as language learners. Gardener and Lambert (1972; cited in Johnson, 2001:130), the social psycholinguists, also mention that integrative motivation and proficiency are interdependent. Gardener and Lambert (1959) prove that 'aptitude and verbal intelligence as well as a sympathetic orientation toward the other group' are essential to learn other group's language. They proved that sympathetic orientation sustains a strong motivation, therefore the learners with integrative motivation are more successful than those with instrumental motivation. Gardener's follow-up study (Gardener 1960, cited in Lambert 1967: 102) confirms these findings. Csizer and Dornyei (2005) also find, through the answers of language learners to their research questions, that integrativeness is the most important factor which affects all the other factors. Yet Dornyei et al. (2006) notice that English is now becoming a language of world communication and is losing a link with any specific target language community, therefore, Gardner's concept (1985) of integrative motivation is losing grounds gradually.

Along with the reason given above, integrative motivation is, in fact, not a commonly found phenomenon. As it is not easy for a Far East Asian or a South Asian, a North African, a South American or even an East European to get integrated into English culture and to adopt it as a result of which he will be able to acquire the English language. Most of the language learners are instrumentally motivated, as mentioned by Sheorey (2006) above. Dornyei et al. (2006) define instrumentality as 'perceived pragmatic benefits of second language proficiency'. Noel et al. (2000) present four orientations of language learning, namely, travel, friendship, knowledge and instrumental orientations to be common to all learners. Even Anisfeld and Lambert (1961), Gardner's associates, proves through a study that both intellectual capacity and attitudinal orientation equally affect language learning. Therefore, one can say that strong motivation brings successful learning, be it integrative or instrumental.

Lukmani (1972; cited in Johnson, 2001:130-1), Cook (1991) and Ellis (1986) agree upon the idea that the learners with greater motivation have greater proficiency. Harmer (1983:04) also supports the view. Besides, Cook (1991) makes it clear that motivation cannot be limited to instrumental and integrative; there can be other possible types also, like, manipulative, intellectual etc. In one of the earliest and most commonly quoted studies in South Asian context by Lukmani (1972), it is noticed that the subjects (Indian Marathi-speaking female college students in Mumbai) learn English for practical purposes like, academics, job and travel. Sheorey (2006) writes that instrumental motivation plays an important role in the English language

achievements of the learners in India with learners' schooling and exposure to the language being more important factors than motivation. He notes that other studies, for example, Khanna (1983) and (1994), Khanna and Agnihotri (1982), Agnihotri and Khanna (1997) and Agnihotri, Khanna and Mukherjee (1982), also had similar findings.

Research as Conducted

For my research, I prepared a questionnaire (see Appendix A) for the data collection. The questionnaire had eighteen questions. At the top of the questionnaire I gave a brief description of my research, followed by a paragraph addressing the student, who had to fill it. I assured the student of the confidentiality of the information provided.

The personal information I asked for was the age, sex and the marks obtained in the last exam of English language. The reason behind taking the information about marks was to differentiate between the levels of proficiency of students. I also left some space for name and contact at the end of the questionnaire but I told the students while handing the questionnaire over that these two were optional.

The questionnaires were distributed among 67 students present in the language class of B.A. (Hons.) Part II, Institute of English University of Sindh, Pakistan. These students have studied English as their compulsory subject in Part-I and are continuing with it in Part-II. Like a typical second language learning setting, they vary in the level of aptitude and motivation.

The questionnaires were handed to the students in their class, in front of their teacher. The presence of the teacher can be taken by the students as a threat to the confidentiality. But despite the presence of their teacher some students very confidently gave remarks against whatever that they disliked. This, of course, gave life to the study.

A number of questionnaires were incomplete. I included these questionnaires as well. The only thing that I could do about them was that I mentioned the number of students who left a question unanswered. This may be taken as either they were unwilling to give any negative remarks or they could not understand the question.

Amongst a lot of other things, one weakness of the study is that whether the students were true and honest in their answers. The data was collected through questionnaires only. No other mode of data collection was used. The reason behind that was the shortage of time and that this is a small scale study. Besides, the questionnaires were even solely prepared for the students, though there are other stakeholders, like teachers etc, also involved in this process and they can also opine on learner motivation. Yet these other people are only indirectly related to the issue of the interest of this research. Thus, for a more reliable and comprehensive work by any future researcher a greater care is required.

Findings and Discussion

The findings from the questionnaire (see also Appendix B) are presented with some discussion on them in this section.

None of the students mentioned their marks to be below 40. Though that is not impossible but that is a rare possibility. Only four students got 40 marks (I considered these as below average students). The rest got 50 and above. 50 are the passing score.

The first question was to obtain a general idea of their motivation towards learning a foreign language. It asks, whether they find language learning useful or not. All the students, who attempted the question, except one, chose 'yes' option. There were some who did not answer the question. The overall response to the first question is itself an eye-opener. We always think that the learners might not know anything else but they at least know that learning a foreign language is useful, especially English language, as it is the medium of education and international communication. Yet the one student replying negatively (the few others who preferred not to reply) for the first question made it clear that the things are not the way we assume them to be. Besides, there were others who did not answer the question. This in turn hands a duty to the language teachers that before anything else they must make it clear to their learners why they are learning a foreign language, as in case of Timori (1977) and Dornyei et al. (2006), the learners knew the reasons behind language learning.

The second question was on the reason behind learning English. I gave eight most common reasons as the choices to the students and left a ninth place for any other reason they might have. One third of the students chose the option 'b', which was, 'they learn English for getting importance'. Almost all the above average students chose this option. The rest of the two third, mostly opted for 'e', 'g' and 'h', which were, 'for getting a good job', 'due to interest in English culture' and 'for a change' respectively. From those who chose the option 'i' which was 'mention if any other', most answers were 'because it is the medium of international communication'. Some students even chose more than one options. The response to this question brings forward the idea that the learners in Pakistan are not just instrumentally motivated, following Sheorey's (2006) assumption mentioned above, but unlike the assumption of Dornyei et al (2006) discussed above, Gardner's integrative motivation is also found among learners from Pakistan (18% learners chose option 'g'). A part from this, it is also clear that the learners find English language to be a medium of getting importance in the society, like Timori's (1977) Nigerian learners quoted above. A person who can speak English is considered as a member of educated class or elite class in the target situation. Only 6% students chose option 'a' (due to exams), but one student wrote in the general remarks, "We do not want to attend class, but we take it due to the exams".

Factors affecting Learner Motivation

The rest of the questionnaire can be divided into four main factors in the learning scenario that affect motivation:

1. **The teaching and learning environment**
2. **The teacher or the teaching method**
3. **The content of the syllabus**
4. **The testing and assessment**

1. *The Teaching and Learning Environment:*

Table 1

Teaching and Learning Environment						
Questions	03		04		05	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	100	00	67	33	12	88

The questions 3, 4, 5 and 17 are related to the teaching and learning environment. The surprising thing in answer to Question 3 was that the one student who said 'no' as answer to Question 1 (Do you think learning a second language or a foreign language is of any use?) and those who did not attempt Question 1 also showed willingness to attend the language class in Question 3. Most of the students filled the remarks space after Questions 3 to 5 are showing willingness to attend the language class. Their remarks were about all three questions. One student wrote, "Why should I bunk my class, I am here to learn!" Another remarked that as they want to improve their language they should not bunk their class. Therefore, as desired in the literature review, the learners are aware of the importance of language learning and as desired by Girard (1977), they have already developed their personal attitude towards the learning process.

The students gave varying reasons for their boredom in the class. Some blamed teacher for repeating the same ideas and others for giving long lectures instead of allowing them to do something, sometimes, which creates boredom. One of the students found that whenever he goes to the class without prior preparation, he finds the class boring.

The difference between the number of students who want to attend the language class (question 3) and those who are satisfied with the teaching environment (question 17) is vast, i.e. 100% want to attend their language class, but only 15% chose 'most satisfied' on the satisfaction scale for teaching environment. The biggest reason for this vast difference is the answer to question 4, in which 67% students accepted that they find their language class boring sometimes. The reasons behind this boredom are many. And this problem needs to be solved. It calls for the future research in the area.

2. *The teacher or the teaching method:*

Table 2

Teacher or the Teaching Method						
Questions	06		07		08	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	67	21	71	23	21	79

The questions 6, 7, 8 and 16 are related to the teacher and the teaching method. The satisfaction scale of question 16 is satisfactory. But the answers to question 6, 7, and 8 need some quick steps to be taken by the authorities for improvement.

As an answer to question 6, 21% students clearly mentioned by choosing 'no' option (12% left the question unanswered) that their language teacher does not stand for their ideal of a language teacher. About an equal number of students even said that their teacher does not know the art of making his/her class interesting. Besides, they also showed that their language teacher also do dislikable things. Though the number of these students for each of the mentioned questions is around one-fourth but their presence in the class is alarming and it needs measures to be taken, since Girard (quoted above) also mentions that teacher and teaching method are the most important factors in language learning. One of the students, who marked 'no' for both questions 6 and 7, says that the teacher is not bad but he/she is not an ideal. Some of the students insisted upon proper teacher training.

One of the students (who can be considered below average because of getting 40 marks in the last examination) said, "The teachers are only teachers, they are not friends". The students wished if their teachers were more cooperative, friendly and helping. Whereas one student very innocently remarked that every teacher has his/her own style, the students adjust with that slowly and gradually.

The students also have hard feelings for the teacher for keeping favourites. One even, remarked that the teacher's continuous attention to some students discourage him. Another found that the teacher does not realize that they have not done O-levels etc. Students also blamed the teacher of making things complex instead of easy. A student also had the feeling that the teacher does not have a good knowledge of the subject. But another believed that though the teacher has knowledge, he/she lacks the art of teaching.

3. ***The content of the syllabus:***

Table 3

Content of the Syllabus						
Questions	09		10		11	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	88	12	79	21	79	21

 Questions 9, 10, 11 and 15 are about the content of the syllabus. 88% students showed satisfaction on the content of the syllabus in question 9. This can be compared to the answer to question 15. 88% students chose option 1, 2 and 3 of question 15, which is also about scale satisfaction on the content of the syllabus.

The answer to question 10 in comparison with question 11 has brought great realities to the limelight. 79% students said that they find the course book interesting (Q.10). Whereas for the next question 79% said that the content of the books needs improvement. This brings forth a truth that though the students find the course book

interesting and it addresses to their needs also yet they want some improvement in the course books. And following Corder (1973), quoted above, the objectives of the course and the demands of the learners need to be harmonized. This produces room for future research on, "Which improvements do the students need in the course book?"

The only remarks about the improvements were about the inclusion of the listening exercises in the syllabus and language games and puzzles. As Sheorey (2006) also writes, while quoting other researches as well, that in India, exposure to the language is more important factors than motivation, therefore, Pakistani student also have a right to ask for a greater exposure to the language. And, the students can be further investigated on what type of language games and puzzles they would like in the syllabus. The lack of remarks on the improvements required by the students in the course book shows that students themselves are not very clear about the improvements needed. They may be just feeling something lacking. This can also mean that students have too much to suggest and they may be waiting for the proper time when a researcher has specifically this question to solve.

Amongst the few remarks given at the end of this set of questions, one student said that the course book is dry and boring; he attends the class as a compulsion. Another said that the books can be more interesting. One student said that some exercises in the books waste time. He probably means that there are some exercises in the book which are not as enriching as they are time consuming. Students also have regrets against the length of the syllabus that it is unevenly distributed in different terms i.e. sometimes it is too lengthy and sometimes too short. The surprising remark by one of the students who obtained good scores of 66 marks in last exam of English was, "the syllabus is difficult."

4. *The testing and assessment:*

Table 4

Testing and Assessment						
Questions	12		13		14	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
	71	23	68	32	56	44

Questions 12, 13, 14 and 18 are related to the testing and assessment. The answers to both questions 12 and 18 show that the students are satisfied with the testing system. Their regret is on the assessment criteria. Question 13 asked, 'Do you get marks according to your abilities?' 68%, which seem to be a small number, chose 'yes' option. The rest showed dissatisfaction on the marks they obtain. The surprising thing was not even all the highest scorers were satisfied with their result. A strong dissatisfaction of more than 50%, on the assessment in question 14, calls for an assessment criterion or if there is any it needs revision. As one of the students said, "Testing system is good but I did not deserve the marks I got, I deserved more." Students want their teacher to let them know the requirements of the test beforehand and inform them of their errors after the tests. One student asked for the

change in the testing and assessment system, another asked to stop favouritism while a third asked the teacher to realize his/her fault when a number of students do not get good marks. But among all these students, there is also one who said that he feels that he got less marks than he deserved but marking and assessment is the job of the teacher and the teacher knows better who deserves what. A number of students also suggested weekly or even monthly tests (presently there are mid-term and end-term exams).

This research tells us that the level of satisfaction among undergraduates at the University of Sindh is varied on different factors involved in language learning. It is also found that some were unaware of the basic value of language learning which calls for the need to enhance the motivation. To Noel et al.'s (2000) findings, quoted above, this research adds some other orientations common among language learners, yet as discussed by Anisfeld and Lambert (1961) strong motivation brings successful learning.

The issues, that the learners are concerned about, must be taken seriously and should be investigated further.

CONCLUSION

In order to find out whether the current learning situation in the University of Sindh, Pakistan, is motivating or not, I conducted a research through questionnaires, which were filled by 67 students of B.A. (Hons.) Part- II, Institute of English, University of Sindh, Pakistan. The students provided a great range of data, which is analyzed and discussed in through this paper.

The data collected through the questionnaires clarified that the learners have varying reasons for learning English language but there are some factors that hinder their motivation. Among the hindrances, boredom in the class was at the top of the list, which was followed by dissatisfaction with the assessment and the results. The suggestions included, teacher training, interesting improvements in the course books, monthly tests and careful assessment.

The research opens the gate for future detailed study for solving the problems which hinder learner motivation in language learning in the target situation. Since, *the more the motivation, the more will be the learning*.

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