SoLLs.INTEC.13: International Conference on Knowledge-Innovation-Excellence: Synergy in Language Research and Practice

The Importance of Immediate Learning Context: An Investigation on the Arabic as a Foreign Language Classroom

Ashinida Aladdin[a]*

[a]*School of Language Studies and Linguistics, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities,
UKM, 43600, Malaysia*

Abstract

The importance of the immediate learning context (ILC) on language learning motivation (LLM) has been asserted by different theorists and researchers and incorporated in a number of LLM models. The teaching materials, amount of variety in classroom work, the nature of the classroom organization, and the nature of the teacher-student relationship can all influence motivation. The aim of this study is to investigate the different motivational variables in the immediate learning context among the non-Muslim Malaysian learners of Arabic (NMMLAs). The focus variables of the immediate learning context in this study are teacher's personality and teacher's method of teaching. The study adopts a mix method approach where a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were employed to obtain the data. The questionnaires were distributed to 207 respondents who are non-Muslim Malaysians learning Arabic as a compulsory subject at the Faculty of Law in UKM. In order to gain more insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 respondents. The findings reveal that teacher's personality seems to play the most important role in shaping the culture of learning Arabic as a foreign language. The teacher's style and method of teaching is another important component in language instruction that motivated the Arabic language learners in their classroom.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +6-003-89216544 fax: +6-003-89254577.
*E-mail address:*ashi@ukm.my

1. Introduction

The importance of the immediate learning context on language learning motivation (LLM) has been asserted by different theorists and researchers and incorporated in a number of LLM models. In general, motivation appears to be the second strongest predictor of success in second language learning, behind aptitude (Skehan 1989). Julkunen (2001: 31) asserts that teaching and learning can be either experienced as motivating or demotivating. According to Gardner (1985) "Motivation involves four aspects, a goal, effortful behaviour, a desire to attain the goal and favourable attitudes toward the activity in question" (Gardner 1985: 50). Although, Gardner (1985) does not give the immediate learning context particular attention, he included in his model, a component that would examine learners' attitudes towards the learning situation that involves attitudes towards the teacher and the course.

However in general, research on LLM has not properly addressed the effect of the immediate learning variables, particularly that deriving from the socio-educational model. Gardner (2001) states, 'To date, research deriving from the socio-educational model of second language acquisition has not considered these types of effects, though it may well be a valuable next step.' Julkunen (2001) claims, 'less research has been done in the actual learning situation, although it is reasonable to assume that students' motivation and attitudes can best be affected in the classroom.' Wigfield *et al.* (2000) argue that recent research on motivation [i.e. following the cognitive revolution] focused more on the characteristics of the individuals, including their perceptions and interests and how these affect their choices, persistence and performance.

Other researchers have also emphasized the influence of the immediate learning context on motivation. Skehan (1991: 281) proposed a language learning motivation model in which the learning situation plays an important role. According to Skehan, the teaching materials, amount of variety in classroom work, the nature of the classroom organization, and the nature of the teacher-student relationship can all influence motivation.

Two studies by Inbar *et al.* (2001) and Donitsa-Schmidt *et al.* (2004) on Jewish students learning Arabic showed that good quality instructional efforts can positively affect learners' attitudes and motivation even when the relations with the groups are marked with serious political tension. In another study in same context, Abu-Rabia (1998) found that seventh grade Jewish learners of Arabic had negative attitudes to Arabs and Arabic but had positive attitudes toward the learning situation. The latter, i.e. attitudes to the learning situation, were the only strong predictor of learning. Thus, he concluded that, in this context, teachers had more influence on these students than the general social context. In a different context, Nikolov (1991 in Dörnyei 2001) carried a longitudinal study on Hungarian learners of English between 6 and 14. It was found that the most important motivating factors for all age groups were related to specific learning situation such as the learning context, the teacher, the tasks and the materials and that these factors had more influence on learners that integrative or instrumental motivations.

2. Objectives of the research

The aim of this study is to investigate the different motivational variables in the immediate learning context among the non-Muslim Malaysian learners of Arabic. The focus variables of the immediate learning context in this study are teacher's personality and teacher's method of teaching.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopts a mix method approach where a set of questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were employed to obtain the data. The questionnaires were distributed to 207 respondents who are non-Muslim Malaysians learning Arabic as a compulsory subject at the Faculty of Law in UKM. In order to gain more insights, semi-structure interviews were conducted with 20 respondents.

4. Data Analysis