

12th International Conference on Application of Fuzzy Systems and Soft Computing, ICAFS
2016, 29-30 August 2016, Vienna, Austria

Statistical reasoning of impact of motivation on students' achievement in foreign language learning

Ediz Tuncel^{a,*}, Saide Sadikoglu^a, Konul Memmedova^a

^{a,*} Faculty of Atatürk Education, Near East University, P.O.Box:99138, Nicosia, North Cyprus, Mersin 10 Turkey

^b School of Tourism and Hotel Management, Near East University, P.O.Box:99138, Nicosia, North Cyprus, Mersin 10 Turkey

Abstract

This research focuses on statistical reasoning in motivation issues in learning a foreign language. The opinions of university students studying at different departments and taking a foreign language course have been investigated through 43 statements related to motivation issues in order to find out their opinions on motivation sources in general, classroom motivation sources and motivation problems that arise or they encounter during their foreign language studies. The responses of participants through all the statements were in very close line with each other, without revealing any significant difference. The relation between the participants achievement level in foreign language courses and motivation revealed contradiction as the respondents claim lack of motivation but have a achievement level over the minimum pass level. This result reveals that in terms of statistical reasoning there is a contradiction between negative motivation and positive achievement.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of ICAFS 2016

Keywords: statistical reasoning; achievement; foreign language learning; higher education; motivation

1. Introduction

Motivation, defined as a physical, psychological or social need which motivates the individuals to reach or achieve their goals and fulfill their needs and, finally, feel satisfied as a result of achieving their aims¹ is a phenomenon regarded as one of the most important requirements for success and satisfaction. The role and importance of motivation is no different in education, as well. In this respect, motivation is regarded as one of the basic, most needed and important factors for academic learning and achievement across childhood through

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +905428685369; fax: +0-000-000-0000 .
E-mail address: ediz.tuncel@neu.edu.tr

adolescence^{2,3}. Deci and Ryan⁴ point out that motivation is related to various outcomes such as curiosity, persistence, learning and performance. According to Self Determination⁵ there are three types of motivation; extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation, and amotivation. Intrinsic motivation is related to mental satisfaction which is achieved by others' praise, while, extrinsic motivation is related to incentives activated by external factors such as getting rewards for achievements and success. In amotivation, individuals neither intrinsically motivated nor extrinsically motivated and lack any type of motivation for some reason. The amotivated individuals experience feelings of incompetence and suffer from feeling of insufficiency which is caused by uncontrollable forces out of their own control. Academic intrinsic motivation plays a significant role in achievement, competency and academic learning. Deci and Ryan⁴ put forward that intrinsic motivation generates due to the innate psychological needs of competence and level of self determination. Regarding the role of motivation in language learning, there are several claims that positive motivation increase the level of achievement whereas negative impact of motivation decreases the level of achievement^{6,7}. According to Cook⁸ the performance and presentation of a number of learners in the context of foreign language learning is improved and superior than others due to positive motivation. Cook also claims that there are three factors which influence the language learning: age, personality and motivation. However, it could be claimed that motivation is the most important and effective factor amongst the mentioned three factors that affect second language learning. Supporting this assumption, Ellis argued⁹ that the learning process simply occurs when a person is motivated for learning. In this respect, it could be argued that two kinds of motivation can be observed among learners; the type of motivation which has a positive, efficient, and useful effect in learning and the second one is the type of motivation which has negative effects on learning and weakens the language learning process.

Tengku and Sepideh¹ claim that the aims of the class should be in such a way that motivate the learners who have instrumental motivation in order to become aware of and realize the value of the learner who thinks about foreign language as an instrument for reaching a particular goal such as achieving grades.

Besides, it is generally agreed that in order to make the learners have a positive view about their own effort, some rewards such as grade, degree, and any sort of educational, scholastic, and academic encouragement should be given to them^{6,7,10}. In addition to this, the policies developed for encouragement of the learners in classroom environment play an important role in achievement and in obtaining a good or a positive learning outcome. Consequently, motivation directly influences and affects the language learner's learning methods, skills, and practices. That is, motivation has a high effect on learner's communication with foreigners, determining learning amount, in addition to developing the desired levels of language teaching such as reading, comprehension, speaking, and writing. In all respects, motivation has a direct effect on both quality and quantity of language learning.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants of this research are 57 male students and 22 female students studying at different departments of a multinational university and taking optional foreign language courses apart from their departmental courses. Their ages vary between 18 and 22, and they are from 11 countries.

2.2. Instruments

A questionnaire consisting of 43 statements within three groups of statements related to general motivation sources, classroom motivation sources and motivation problems while learning a foreign language. An opinion based (strongly disagree, disagree, moderately agree, agree, strongly agree) likert scale with five level was used to obtain the responses. In the first section, 18 statements were used to obtain opinions of participants on motivation sources in general. In the second section, 8 statements were used to obtain the opinions of participants on classroom motivation sources, and in the third part of the questionnaire, 17 statements were used to obtain opinions of participants on motivation problems.

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