STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND MOTIVATION FOR LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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The article is devoted to the evaluation of students' motivation for learning foreign languages dimensions. The analysis of the students' sense of responsibility and readiness to clarify their needs constitutes the novelty of the study. 132 first-year students (21 males and 111 females) participated in the investigation. The research includes a qualitative data analysis of the students' answers based on the grounded theory. The quantitative analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire adapted from Gardner's Attitudes/Motivation Test Battery defined the students' motivational orientations. The study revealed the growing trend of the students' desire for intellectual development combined with a practical approach to learning foreign languages. The following leading motives for learning languages were defined: "self-development", "opportunities" and "necessity". The students saw self-development as getting acquainted with the culture and broadening their mind to join the international community. Opportunities were associated with career growth and competition. The necessity of learning languages implied moving abroad for a better life or meeting academic demands at university. The findings suggest that modern students want to expand their knowledge, improve communication skills and get integrated into the international community. The analysis also discerned worrying patterns of students' perceptions of learning languages, such as unclear reasons for learning languages and illogical shift of pronouns signifying the students' avoidance of responsibility, the lack of self-confidence and referring to general values accepted in the society. The most important implications for teachers include monitoring their students' perceptions and creating an effective educational environment; raising the students' self-confidence and responsibility.

Keywords: learning foreign languages; motivation; motives; necessity; opportunities; perception; responsibility; self-development.

Introduction

The effectiveness of foreign languages learning has always been considered dependant on students' motivation and aptitude, on the one hand, and teachers' professional and personal qualities, on the other. Psychologists of education and specialists in language acquisition emphasise the importance of learners' personal characteristics and attitudes to learning languages, students' perceptions of themselves in relation to their educational activities, resilience and motivation which impact their performance. These ideas resulted in the development of instructional approaches depending on the teachers' beliefs about students' abilities, motivation and language identity study (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Anya, 2011), perception and motivation in EFL learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Lukmani, 1972).

The problem of feedback as a motivation technique remains relevant in creating a favourable learning environment. It has been addressed by some studies where researchers (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) emphasise the importance of relevant feedback keeping students motivated for learning in challenging environments. On the other hand, as other investigators (Yeager op.cit.) admit, despite teachers' efforts to establish an efficient learning environment some students remain not motivated to perform better.

Thus, the present study focuses on what learning English (EFL) and other foreign languages means for students and what motives they find to be the most relevant for learning nowadays.

EFL learners' perception and motivation

Positive attitudes and perceptions are considered conducive to learning (Clement & Gardner, 1977). General positive mental climate and natural curiosity of students can bolster their motivation and perception of successful and enjoyable language learning. Besides the sense of acceptance in the classroom, the sense of acceptance and belonging to a greater community also supports and improves the students' motivation to learning EFL. Another perception type is a sense of comfort and order the students feel in a foreign language learning environment. However, challenging tasks increase the students' curiosity and motivation.

Multiple theories of motivation tried to define factors which determine students' desire to learn. For example, in one of them, R. Gardner offered to differentiate two kinds of motivation: integrative which implied the desire to communicate with native speakers and instrumental which stated the students' wish to get a better job and a higher salary (Gardner, 1985). In another theory, R. Ryan and E. Deci defined intrinsic (internal) and extrinsic (external) classes of motivation and argued about their relation to basic human needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In spite of many motivation theories, this term still remains not defined and encompasses attitudes, goals, orientations, loci of control, persistence, curiosity and other dimensions. In this study, motivation is seen as a dynamic, context-dependent complex of

internal and external factors keeping students' interest in learning. The students' perceptions of learning foreign languages are viewed as their attitudes to learning based on their past experiences. As most researchers agree with the importance of organising both a qualitative study of students' vision of themselves as FL learners and a quantitative analysis of data results, it induced the author to conduct this tentative but encouraging investigation.

Thus, the present study seeks to detect the students' perceptions and leading motives for learning foreign languages. The analysis of the students' sense of responsibility and clarity in defining their needs constitutes the novelty of the study. In this framework the research questions can be conceived as the following:

1 What are the students' perceptions of learning English and/or other foreign languages?

2 How clear are the students' motivational goals?

3 What are the implications for teachers of foreign languages in order to meet their learners' needs?

Method

Participants. This research was conducted in Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, which is a student-centred, research-intensive university with the philosophy of servant leadership. The study covered 132 first-year students: 21 males (15.9%) and 111 females (84.1%) in the following specialities: Advertising and Public Relations, Journalism, Publishing and Editing, History, Country Studies, Management and Law. The students' background information included their age, gender and background in learning English. The majority of students were 17-18 years old (85.6%) and the rest of respondents 19-20 years old (14.4%). Most students' background in learning English was over 10 years (74.2%), with the rest of respondents having 6-10 years of experience (19.7%) and 0-5 years (6.1%).

Materials. The research involved two main instruments: 1) the students' written feedback on their perceptions of learning foreign languages, and 2) the questionnaire adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) to identify the students' motivation orientations in terms of instrumental or integrative reasons.

Procedure. First, the students were asked to respond in writing to the question concerning their desire and reasons to study English and/or other foreign languages. This task was administered before the AMTB questionnaire to get insight into the participants' perception of learning foreign languages and the clarity of their perception. Having been conducted in the reverse order the items in the questionnaire could have helped them to clarify their ideas which would impede the aim of the research. The research was pursued in the second semester of the students' first year at university. It was interesting to see how much their perception and motivation depended on the academic requirements at university versus learning for their own intellectual development. The participants were allowed to respond in either English or Ukrainian to put them at ease. The task was completed during the class of English and lasted 20 minutes. The majority of students (84%) chose to respond in English. Their responses were collected for a qualitative data analysis based on the grounded theory with an application of an inductive approach. After a detailed and thorough revision, several codes concerning the reasons to learn English and/or other foreign languages were identified. To prove the validity of the study three experts selected from university teachers of English were involved to review the codes and after a series of discussions, the codes were organised in order to generate the themes.

The second stage of the research process implied answering the questionnaire adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). The questionnaire consisted of 34 items which comprised 4 sections: 1) interest in learning foreign languages (1-6); 2) desire to learn EFL (7-16); 3) attitudes towards learning EFL (17-26); 4) motivation (27-34). Participants were asked to rate all items in the questionnaire on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree for items which express positive attitudes (1-11, 17-21, 27-34) and 5 – strongly disagree to 1 – strongly agree for items which express negative attitudes (12-16, 22-26). The data were analysed using the SPSS program and the scale demonstrated the level of agreement and disagreement with the items in the questionnaire and interpreted according to the following criteria: 3.68 – 5.0 mean a high degree of motivation, 2.34 – 3.67 – moderate degree, and 0 – 2.33 – low degree of motivation. Cronbach coefficients were calculated separately for each section to check for internal consistency for the scales: 1) interest in learning foreign languages ($\alpha = 0,609$; 6 items); 2) desire to learn EFL ($\alpha = 0,721$; 10 items); 3) attitudes towards learning EFL ($\alpha = 0,831$; 10 items); 4) motivation ($\alpha = 0,720$; 8 items). The items demonstrated a good level of internal consistency with this specific sample (132 participants). The questionnaire was administered in English at the class of English with the test administrator present to help with difficulties in understanding the items. The participants were given 20 minutes to complete the test.

Results

The qualitative analysis results. This section contains the students' perceptions of learning English and other foreign languages and their reasons for that. The major themes generated as a result of the students' responses content analysis were the following: "self-development", "opportunities" and "necessity" (Table 1).

Table 1

Themes and codes for reasons to learn foreign languages

Themes and Codes		
Self-development (74)	**Opportunities (92)**	**Necessity (57)**
For self-development (51)	Great opportunities (16)	To pass an exam (14)
To understand the culture (9)	Competitiveness at work (52)	To move abroad (32)
It's interesting (6)	For successful communication (11)	It's necessary and prestigious (11)
Languages broaden our minds (8)	To travel (13)	

Self-development. The idea of studying foreign languages for self-development was mentioned in a majority of responses often combined with other reasons. It seemed evident for the respondents to associate self-development with acquiring more knowledge and skills: "It helps me to become more intelligent, interesting and I can develop myself." The students saw their personal development as the way to join a larger community and get integrated into the international society: "I study English for being a part of the international community and for my development." Belonging to some community is impossible without getting to know the culture. Some students associated learning languages with joining the culture of the country of the origin: "I study English because I want to communicate with people from different countries; I want to understand their culture and traditions." Some participants found learning a language "interesting" and their reason was "to read interesting books in the original, watch interesting films in the original" or learning "for pleasure". Stating that languages "broaden our minds", the students often changed the personal sentences into generalised statements which seemed not to appeal to the students themselves: "I like to study other foreign languages. Learning foreign languages broadens our minds, people become educated."

Opportunities. Besides the importance of self-development, the participants also highlighted the increased opportunities that language learning can provide. The students often mentioned opportunities without clarifying exactly which ones: "The more languages I know, the more doors and opportunities will be open for me." In most cases, these opportunities generally referred to making a career and professional growth. Students believed in languages fostering their chance to "become competitive in a job market" and sometimes provided more details: "It will help me to work with more foreign clients…" Another worrying fact was an illogical shift in pronouns in the students' responses. Many of them used "you" in sentences as if setting a distance between themselves and the idea: "I think that knowledge of different languages is very important today. Especially if you want to become a specialist." Some of them seemed to give advice to others rather than talking about their own attitude and experience: "You do not need a lot of effort to learn English. Therefore in future, you will be able to use it in any sphere of activities. Thus, you will be able to hold a high position at work and get a bigger salary." Communication was recognised as an important part of our life so the students stated the possibility to make more friends from abroad and noted that learning other languages would help them do that: "I want to have acquaintances from other countries." Travelling was not as popular as work opportunities or moving abroad. The participants mainly mentioned the desire to "travel around the world" and sometimes associated it with communication: "I'd like to study other foreign languages because I can cooperate with foreigners face-to-face without barriers. Also, I want to know the languages of countries of G7. It is my desire because I wish to visit these countries." Overall, the students emphasised the significance of FL learning for their future careers and getting opportunities.

Necessity. Quite many students viewed learning languages as an inevitable and therefore forced way to achieve success, for example, to pass an exam: "I need to study English in order to pass an exam." Sometimes the students mentioned passing exams as the way to change their life drastically, for example, to move abroad: "I would like to pass the international exam (IELTS) and move abroad." According to their responses, moving abroad appeared to be desirable for 24 % of students. Some of them stated it as a possibility they are currently considering: "I study English mostly for my personal development but keep a possibility of moving abroad in mind." Another important aspect of learning languages was the students' beliefs in general rules accepted in the society. Students admitted prestige and necessity of speaking foreign languages to attain success in life: "I think that nowadays if you know a few foreign languages you have a success." Sometimes they chose to emphasise the importance of learning languages in general thus setting a distance from their own purposes: "Now learning and speaking several languages have become the integral

part of our life." 11 students out of 132 wrote they didn't need to study other foreign languages besides English because they were not interested (3), not ready to start another language before they speak perfect English (3), found learning foreign languages difficult (3), English was enough for communication (2).

As the results of the students' answers content analysis represented a mix of motivational reasons, the AMTB questionnaire was administered to get some insight of which motives were predominant.

The AMTB results. The first section (items 1-6) attempted to examine how interested the students were to learn English and/or other foreign languages. The mean scores and standard deviations were calculated separately for each section of the questionnaire.

Table 2

Interest in learning English and/or other foreign languages

Items	N	Mean	SD	Rating of interest level
1. I wish I could speak another language perfectly.	132	4.42	0.77	High
2. I want to read the literature of a foreign language in the original language rather than a translation.	132	3.99	1.04	High
3. I often wish I could read newspapers and magazines in another language.	132	3.77	0.93	High
4. I would study English in university even if it were not required.	132	3.98	0.86	High
5. I enjoy meeting and listening to people who speak other languages.	132	4.4	0.77	High
6. Studying a foreign language is an enjoyable experience.	132	4.13	0.89	High
Overall mean = 4.12				

As can be seen in Table 2, the respondents possessed a high level of interest in learning foreign languages the average mean score being 4.12. Items 1 (I wish I could speak another language perfectly) and Item 5 (I enjoy meeting and listening to people who speak other languages) had the highest means (4.42 and 4.4, respectively). Item 3 (I often wish I could read newspapers and magazines in another language) had the lowest mean (3.77).

The second section (items 7-16) aimed at defining the level of students' desire to learn EFL as it is their mandatory subject at university. Since items 12-16 express negative attitudes their values were reversed so that a high value expressed a positive attitude on every item.

Table 3

Desire to learn EFL

Items	N	Mean	SD	Rating of desire level
7. I have a strong desire to know all aspects of English.	132	3.89	0.92	High
8. If it were up to me, I would spend all of my time learning English.	132	3.09	0.98	Moderate
9. I want to learn English so well that it will become natural to me.	132	4.46	0.68	High
10. I would like to learn as much English as possible.	132	4.06	0.79	High
11. I wish I were fluent in English.	132	4.53	0.75	High
12. Knowing English isn't really an important goal in my life.	132	4.0	1.04	High
13. I sometimes daydream about dropping English.	132	4.2	1.05	High
14. I'm losing any desire I ever had to know English.	132	4.08	0.97	High
15. To be honest, I really have no desire to learn English.	132	4.43	0.92	High
16. I haven't any great wish to learn more than the basics of English.	132	4.36	0.82	High
Overall mean = 4.1				

Table 3 reveals that Item 11 (I wish I were fluent in English) had the highest mean (4.53) while the desire to spend all time learning English (Item 8) scored the lowest point (3.09) showing the moderate level. The overall mean score (4.1) was considered as a high degree of interest to learn English.

The third section (items 17-26) referred to positive attitudes towards learning English. The values for items 22-26 were reversed as they expressed negative attitudes.

Attitudes towards learning EFL

Items	N	Mean	SD	Rating of positive attitudes level
17. Learning English is really great.	132	4.39	0.66	High
18. I really enjoy learning English.	132	4.05	0.82	High
19. English is an important part of the university programme.	132	4.54	0.74	High
20. I plan to learn as much English as possible.	132	4.15	0.85	High
21. I love learning English.	132	4.0	0.9	High
22. I hate English.	132	4.75	0.48	High
23. I would rather spend my time on subjects other than English.	132	3.83	0.86	High
24. Learning English is a waste of time.	132	4.77	0.55	High
25. I think that learning English is dull.	132	4.51	0.74	High
26. When I graduate from university, I shall give up the study of English entirely because I am not interested in it.	132	4.42	0.77	High
Overall mean = 4.34				

As can be observed, Item 24 (Learning English is a waste of time) had the highest mean score (4.77) assuming that its value was reversed and thus having the highest positive attitude. The lowest mean score (3.83) was for Item 23 (I would rather spend my time on subjects other than English). The overall mean (4.34) demonstrated the general positive attitude towards learning EFL.

The fourth section (items 27-34) revealed the participants' results on motivation, items 27-30 representing the integrative motivation and items 31-34 the instrumental motivation.

Motivation

Items	N	Mean	SD	Rating of motivational level
27. Studying English can be important to me because it will allow me to be more at ease with people who speak English.	132	4.44	0.67	High
28. Studying English can be important for me because it will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people.	132	4.48	0.67	High
29. Studying English can be important for me because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate English art and literature.	132	4.07	0.83	High
30. Studying English can be important for me because I will be able to participate more freely in the activities of other cultural groups.	132	4.09	0.77	High
31. Studying English can be important for me only because I'll need it for my future career.	132	3.61	1.15	Moderate
32. Studying English can be important for me because it will make me a more knowledgeable person.	132	4.3	0.74	High
33. Studying English can be important to me because I think it will someday be useful in getting good jobs.	132	4.39	0.75	High
34. Studying English can be important for me because other people will respect me more if I have knowledge of a foreign language.	132	3.56	0.91	Moderate
Overall mean = 4.12				

It can be seen that Item 28 (Studying English can be important for me because it will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people) gained the highest mean score (4.48) and Item 34 (Studying English can be important for me because other people will respect me more if I have knowledge of a foreign language) got the lowest (3.56) showing the moderate level of motivation. The integrative motivation items got average mean score 4.27 while the instrumental motivation items got 3.97. However, the overall mean score on both types of motivation (4.12) indicates a high level of students' motivation to learn EFL.

Discussion

The present study implies that students learning foreign languages are motivated by multiple dimensions including both internal and external ones. The results were consistent with the idea of extrinsic and intrinsic motives being intertwined (Gardner op.cit.) and showed various dimensions of students' perceptions of learning foreign languages. No significant difference between groups of participants concerning the reasons for learning languages was found. The most salient dimensions in respect to the EFL context included "self-development", "competitiveness at work" and "moving abroad". On the one hand, foreign languages were viewed as expanding general knowledge and cultural level of students. The respondents claimed to feel more educated and intelligent and stressed upon the possibility to belong to some international community. On the other hand, the participants also attached importance to the instrumental function of foreign languages to help find a better job or move abroad.

A worrying pattern referring to the clarity and precision of the students' perceptions was discerned in their works. The majority of respondents gave brief answers such as "for self-development", "for great opportunities" or "to move abroad" which looked like clichés drawing an inference that most of them were uncertain about the FL necessity. They preferred to avoid giving extended commentaries. According to Y. Lukmani, the ideas of getting a better job and moving abroad are considered to represent instrumental motivation (Lukmani, 1972). Thus, the respondents expressed more instrumental reasons along with the desire to travel, pass an exam and prestige.

To the contrary, a large amount of such reasons as "for self-development" testified the students' lack of purposefulness and clarity in defining their motivational goals. Another significant finding which showed the students' uncertainty in their attitude towards learning languages was the syntax of most developed answers – illogical shift of pronouns. The transition from personal "I" statements to "you" statements distanced and weakened the perceived association with the students themselves and echoed other studies of linguistic strategies which refer to intergroup relations (Housley, Claypool, Garcia-Marques & Mackie, 2010) and supported the idea of a language shaping social perception. The students seemed to hide behind socially accepted norms of a foreign language importance and not to assume responsibility for their own opinions. The mix of motivational reasons and unclear opinion expressions in the students' responses caused the necessity to administer a questionnaire (AMTB) to see which type of motivation – instrumental or integrative – was predominant in the participants' opinions.

The AMTB results revealed that the students are slightly more strongly integratively motivated rather than instrumentally. These findings showed that the majority of students wished to efficiently communicate with the international community and get acquainted with other cultures (Dörnyei op.cit.). The affective component (interest and desire to learn foreign languages) got high values in the students' responses. Interestingly enough, the items which started with "I wish I could speak…" and "I wish I were fluent…" gained the highest mean scores. That choice confirmed our belief that the students preferred to express more generalised desires rather than stating more definite goals, such as reading periodicals and literature or knowing all aspects of a foreign language. The findings of this study also showed that, overall, the students had positive attitudes to learning EFL which contributed largely to their high level of motivation.

These results are consistent with similar investigations (Gardner & Lambert op.cit.; Amengual-Pizarro, 2017) where the students showed higher values in integrative motivation and are contrary to other findings (Lukmani op.cit.; Madrid, D. & Pérez Cañado, M. L., 2001; Wimolmas, 2013) where the participants were more instrumentally motivated. As to be integratively motivated proved to be more efficient for learning EFL successfully (Gardner & Lambert op.cit.), it can be considered a positive finding. Meanwhile, the desire to learn English to travel can have both integrative and instrumental importance as the language serving as a means for communication can also contribute to people's integration into the foreign society and culture. Thus, the results of the content analysis of the students' responses showed their more practical and materialistic attitude to EFL, while the questionnaire results demonstrated integrative motivational reasons being more valuable. That occurred due to the questionnaire items helping the students to express their opinions more clearly if compared to the open question task. Along with the obviously high degree of

students' motivation to learn foreign languages, what remained to be worrying was a certain degree of immaturity in the students' thinking and setting learning goals.

That calls for further implications for EFL teachers to create a favourable learning environment. One implication is that students expect teachers to prepare them for real life challenges connected with studies and work, travel and moving to live abroad. Therefore teaching materials should contain up-to-date information in all areas of our life including computerisation and using modern real-life vocabulary. Introducing videos containing cultural issues, reading and discussing news and participating in real-time online student conferences can make students more involved into intercultural communication and feel part of the international community.

Another implication concerns the students' mind-set maturity and responsibility. The EFL learning designed around the dimensions "self-development", "opportunities" and "necessity" and elaborating their meaning and contents in group discussions can contribute to students having clear ideas on these life-long dimensions. Bearing in mind the fact that human behaviour and motivation are dynamic (Dörnyei op.cit.) and perceptions can change under different circumstances, the teachers should acknowledge that most statistical data are relevant in a definite moment of collecting them. The students' perceptions of learning languages may reflect only the current state of students' minds and different factors appearing constantly may influence those perceptions.

Thus, teachers need to hold permanent monitoring of their learners' motives and attitudes in order to focus their teaching to organise an effective learning environment and obtain better results. As the investigation was conducted in one Ukrainian university among the first-year students, the results of the study can constitute some possible limitations. Further study is considered necessary to collect information from a larger quantity of respondents from different universities and representing different years of studies to monitor the dynamics of their perceptions of learning EFL. Future study in this area can also focus on establishing the gap between students' and teachers' perceptions of learning foreign languages and the role of teachers in a learning process. Application of observational methods can shed light on how to make the learning environment more beneficial and effective for EFL learners.

Conclusions

To conclude, the present study gains more understanding of students' perceptions of foreign language learning, including such leading motives as "self-development", "opportunities" of becoming competitive in a job market and the "necessity" of moving abroad. The research was based on the qualitative data analysis of students' feedback on learning foreign languages and quantitative data results of the AMTB. The findings of the content analysis revealed the growing trend of desire for intellectual development combined with a practical approach to learning foreign languages. Most students acknowledged the necessity to keep their intelligence developing as well as recognised the practical need to be competitive professionals in the modern world. The AMTB results showed the integrative motivational goals to be more important than the instrumental ones. The study also discerned worrying patterns of students' perceptions of learning languages, such as uncertainty and unclear vision of the reasons for learning languages and illogical shift of pronouns showing the students' avoidance of responsibility, the lack of self-confidence and referring to general values accepted in the society. The most important implications for teachers include monitoring their students' perceptions and building EFL teaching in compliance with their students' current needs; introducing authentic materials and fostering live communication with other cultures; developing the students' clear thinking skills; raising confidence in their opinions and responsibility.

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