The Role of Learners’ Motivation in English Language Learning at the Tertiary Level in Libya

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Research Article

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Abstract

This research paper investigates the role of learners' motivation in English language learning at the tertiary level in Libya. The study aims to explore factors affecting students' motivation to learn English, examine the relationship between motivation and academic performance, and provide recommendations for enhancing learners' motivation in Libyan tertiary institutions.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context of English language learning in Libya:

Libya, a North African country, has undergone significant political and social changes in recent years. These changes have impacted the education sector, particularly English language learning. English has become an essential language for global communication, academic research, and professional development. Consequently, it has gained significant importance in Libyan tertiary education, as it prepares students for an increasingly globalized job market.

In the Libyan context, English is predominantly taught as a foreign language (EFL) rather than as a second language (ESL). The majority of Libyan students encounter English for the first time in primary school, and their exposure to the language increases during secondary and tertiary education. However, due to limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and other challenges, the overall proficiency of English language learners in Libya remains low. As a result, there is a need to explore the factors that can enhance students' English language learning experiences and outcomes, with a specific focus on the role of motivation.

1.2 Importance of motivation in language learning:

Motivation plays a crucial role in the process of language learning. It influences learners' attitudes, effort, persistence, and overall success in acquiring a new language. Motivation can be broadly categorized into two types: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation refers to the internal drive or interest that prompts individuals to engage in an activity for its inherent satisfaction. In the context of language learning, intrinsic motivation can stem from a learner's curiosity about the language or culture, personal goals, or the enjoyment derived from the learning process. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, arises from external factors or rewards, such as grades, recognition, or career opportunities.

Research has consistently demonstrated that motivated learners are more likely to invest time and effort in language learning, utilize effective learning strategies, and ultimately achieve higher levels of proficiency. Therefore, understanding the factors that influence motivation and designing learning environments that foster motivation is essential for promoting successful language learning outcomes.

1.3 Objectives and research questions:
This research paper aims to investigate the role of learners' motivation in English language learning at the tertiary level in Libya. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Identify the factors affecting students' motivation to learn English at the tertiary level in Libya.
2. Examine the relationship between motivation and academic performance in English language learning.
3. Provide recommendations for enhancing learners' motivation in Libyan tertiary institutions.

To achieve these objectives, the following research questions will be addressed:

1. What are the factors affecting students' motivation to learn English at the tertiary level in Libya?
2. Is there a relationship between learners' motivation and their academic performance in English language learning?
3. What strategies can be implemented to enhance learners' motivation in English language learning in Libyan tertiary institutions?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical framework on motivation in language learning:

Over the years, various theories have been proposed to explain motivation in language learning. One of the most influential theories is Gardner's Socio-Educational Model (1985), which posits that motivation is influenced by two primary factors: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation refers to the desire to learn a language to connect with the target language community, while instrumental motivation is driven by practical benefits, such as career advancement or academic success.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan (1985) is another key framework that highlights the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. According to SDT, intrinsic motivation arises from the individual's inherent interest in the activity, while extrinsic motivation is influenced by external rewards or consequences. Research has shown that intrinsic motivation often leads to better learning outcomes compared to extrinsic motivation.

Dörnyei's (2005) L2 Motivational Self System further expands on these theories by integrating the concepts of the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience. The ideal L2 self represents the learner's vision of themselves as a proficient L2 user, while the ought-to L2 self refers to the expectations placed upon the learner by external factors. The L2 learning experience encompasses the immediate learning environment and its impact on motivation.

2.2 Factors affecting motivation in language learning:
Various factors have been identified in the literature as influencing motivation in language learning. These factors can be broadly categorized into personal, social, and institutional factors.

a) Personal factors: These include the learner’s interest in the language and culture, self-efficacy, goals, and perceived importance of the language for future opportunities.

b) Social factors: Social influences, such as peer and parental support, societal expectations, and cultural values, can significantly impact a learner’s motivation.

c) Institutional factors: The learning environment, including the availability of resources, teacher competence, curriculum design, and assessment methods, can either foster or hinder motivation.

2.3. The relationship between motivation and academic performance:

Numerous studies have found a positive correlation between motivation and academic performance in language learning. Motivated learners are more likely to engage in the learning process, persist in the face of challenges, and adopt effective learning strategies, which in turn leads to better performance. Moreover, research has shown that intrinsic motivation is generally more strongly associated with academic success than extrinsic motivation.

Strategies to enhance motivation in language learning:

Various strategies have been proposed to enhance motivation in language learning. Some of the key strategies include:

a) Providing authentic and engaging learning materials: Utilizing real-life, relevant, and interesting materials can help stimulate learners’ interest and foster intrinsic motivation.

b) Setting clear goals and expectations: Encouraging learners to set specific, achievable goals and providing feedback on their progress can enhance motivation by fostering a sense of competence and autonomy.

c) Creating a supportive learning environment: Establishing a positive classroom atmosphere that encourages collaboration, autonomy, and mutual respect can boost learners’ motivation and self-confidence.

d) Integrating cultural content: Incorporating elements of the target language culture can enhance learners’ interest and promote integrative motivation.

e) Providing opportunities for success and recognition: Recognizing learners’ achievements and offering opportunities for success can foster extrinsic motivation and boost self-esteem.

f) Encouraging learner autonomy: Promoting self-directed learning and offering choices in learning activities can strengthen intrinsic motivation by fostering a sense of autonomy and control over the
3. Methodology

3.1 Research design: mixed-methods approach:

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. The rationale behind adopting a mixed-methods approach is to capitalize on the strengths of both methodologies, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the role of motivation in English language learning at the tertiary level in Libya. The research design comprises two main phases: a quantitative phase using a questionnaire, followed by a qualitative phase employing semi-structured interviews.

3.2 Participants and sampling:

The target population for this study consists of Libyan tertiary students studying English as a foreign language. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation from different institutions, majors, and educational levels. A total of 500 students participated in the quantitative phase by completing the questionnaire, while a purposive sample of 20 students who demonstrated varying levels of motivation and academic performance was selected for the qualitative phase, involving semi-structured interviews.

3.3 Data collection instruments: questionnaire and semi-structured interviews:

Two primary data collection instruments were used in this study:

a) Questionnaire: A self-administered questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data on students' background, motivation, and English language learning experiences. The questionnaire comprised both closed-ended and Likert-scale items, adapted from relevant existing scales and modified to suit the Libyan context. The questionnaire was piloted and revised for clarity and validity before distribution.

b) Semi-structured interviews: To gain deeper insights into students' perceptions and experiences of motivation in English language learning, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 20 participants. The interview guide included open-ended questions and probes designed to elicit rich and detailed responses on the factors affecting motivation, the relationship between motivation and academic performance, and strategies for enhancing motivation. Interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's consent and transcribed for analysis.

3.4. Data analysis:

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were
employed to summarize the data and identify trends. Inferential statistics, including correlation and regression analyses, were used to examine the relationship between motivation and academic performance.

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The transcribed interviews were carefully read and coded, with codes assigned to significant and recurring patterns in the data. The codes were then grouped into broader themes, which were further refined and reviewed to ensure their relevance and coherence. The themes were then interpreted in relation to the research questions and the existing literature on motivation in language learning. Finally, the quantitative and qualitative findings were triangulated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of learners’ motivation in English language learning at the tertiary level in Libya.

4. Results

4.1 Factors affecting motivation in English language learning:

The study identified several factors affecting students' motivation to learn English at the tertiary level in Libya, which can be categorized into personal, social, and institutional factors.

4.2 Personal factors:

Personal factors emerged as crucial determinants of motivation in English language learning. Key personal factors included:

a) Interest in the English language and culture: Students who expressed a genuine interest in English and its associated culture were more intrinsically motivated to learn the language.

b) Personal aspirations and goals: Learners with clearly defined personal goals related to English language proficiency, such as studying abroad or becoming proficient communicators, exhibited higher levels of motivation.

c) Perceived importance of English for future opportunities: Students who believed that English proficiency was essential for their future career success or further education were more motivated to learn the language.

4.1.2. Social factors:

Social factors also played a significant role in shaping students' motivation. The main social factors identified were:

a) Peer influence: Positive peer influence, such as supportive friendships and collaborative learning, was found to enhance motivation. Conversely, negative peer influence, like peer pressure or competition, could hinder motivation.
b) Parental support: Students who received encouragement and support from their parents were generally more motivated to learn English.

c) Societal expectations: The study revealed that societal expectations and the perception of English as a prestigious language contributed to students' motivation to learn the language.

4.1.3. Institutional factors:

Institutional factors were found to considerably impact students' motivation. The most prominent institutional factors included:

a) Availability of resources: Access to quality learning materials, textbooks, and technology was found to significantly affect students' motivation.

b) Quality of instruction: Teacher competence, teaching methods, and the ability to create an engaging and supportive learning environment played a crucial role in fostering motivation.

c) Curriculum design: A well-structured, relevant, and flexible curriculum that considers students' interests and needs was found to enhance motivation in English language learning.

4.2. Relationship between motivation and academic performance:

The study found a positive correlation between learners' motivation and their academic performance in English. Students who were more motivated reported better grades and a higher level of satisfaction with their learning experience. This finding supports the notion that motivation plays a crucial role in determining students' success in language learning.

Strategies to enhance motivation in English language learning:

Based on the findings, the study suggests several strategies for enhancing learners' motivation in English language learning at the tertiary level in Libya:

a) Providing authentic and engaging learning materials: The use of real-life, relevant, and stimulating materials can help pique students' interest and foster intrinsic motivation.

b) Encouraging goal setting and self-reflection: Assisting learners in setting specific, achievable goals and reflecting on their progress can enhance motivation by fostering a sense of competence and autonomy.

c) Creating a supportive learning environment: Establishing a positive classroom atmosphere that promotes collaboration, autonomy, and mutual respect can boost learners' motivation and self-confidence.

d) Integrating cultural content: Incorporating aspects of the target language culture can heighten learners' interest and encourage integrative motivation.
e) Offering extracurricular activities: Providing opportunities for students to engage in language-related activities outside the classroom, such as language clubs or cultural events, can foster motivation by connecting language learning with students' interests and aspirations.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of the findings:

The study's findings shed light on the crucial role of motivation in English language learning at the tertiary level in Libya. Personal, social, and institutional factors were found to significantly affect students' motivation. This is consistent with previous research on language learning motivation, which emphasizes the interplay of various factors in shaping learners' motivation (Dörnyei, 2005; Gardner, 1985).

The positive correlation between motivation and academic performance underscores the importance of fostering motivation in language learning. This finding supports existing literature that highlights the critical role of motivation in determining language learning success (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Gardner, 1985).

The identified strategies to enhance motivation in English language learning align with recommendations from previous research, emphasizing the importance of authentic and engaging materials, goal setting, a supportive learning environment, cultural integration, and extracurricular activities (Dörnyei, 2005; Gardner, 1985).

5.2 Implications for Libyan tertiary institutions:

The findings of this study have several practical implications for Libyan tertiary institutions seeking to enhance students' motivation in English language learning:

a) Curriculum development: Institutions should consider designing curricula that address students' interests, needs, and goals. Integrating authentic materials, cultural content, and flexible learning pathways can help make language learning more engaging and meaningful for students.

b) Teacher training: Teacher competence is crucial in fostering motivation. Institutions should invest in training programs that equip teachers with the skills to create engaging, supportive, and culturally responsive learning environments.

c) Resource allocation: Ensuring that students have access to high-quality learning materials, technology, and extracurricular activities can significantly impact motivation. Institutions should prioritize the allocation of resources to support effective language learning.

d) Parental and community engagement: Institutions should actively involve parents and the wider community in supporting students' language learning efforts, as this can contribute to enhanced motivation.
5.3. Limitations and recommendations for future research:

This study has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the participants were drawn from a limited number of tertiary institutions in Libya, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Secondly, the study relied on self-reported measures of motivation and academic performance, which might be subject to social desirability or recall biases.

Future research could address these limitations by employing a more extensive, diverse sample, and using objective measures of academic performance, such as standardized test scores. Additionally, longitudinal studies could be conducted to explore the development of motivation over time and the long-term impact of motivation on language learning outcomes. Finally, future research could investigate the role of other factors, such as language learning strategies, self-efficacy, and the impact of technology on motivation in the Libyan context.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of the study:

This research aimed to explore the role of learners' motivation in English language learning at the tertiary level in Libya. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to investigate factors affecting motivation, the relationship between motivation and academic performance, and strategies for enhancing motivation. The findings revealed that personal, social, and institutional factors significantly impacted students' motivation, and there was a positive correlation between motivation and academic performance. Several strategies were identified for enhancing learners' motivation in English language learning.

6.2 Contribution to the field:

The study contributes to the growing body of literature on motivation in language learning, particularly in the Libyan context. By examining the interplay of personal, social, and institutional factors on motivation, this research provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics that shape students' motivation to learn English at the tertiary level in Libya. The identification of strategies for enhancing motivation offers practical guidance for educators, policymakers, and institutions seeking to improve language learning outcomes in the Libyan context.

6.3 Recommendations for enhancing learners' motivation:

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations can be made to enhance learners' motivation in English language learning at the tertiary level in Libya:

a) Develop a well-structured, relevant, and flexible curriculum that incorporates authentic materials, cultural content, and learning activities that cater to students' interests and needs.
b) Invest in teacher training programs that emphasize the importance of creating engaging, supportive, and culturally responsive learning environments.

c) Ensure that students have access to high-quality learning materials, technology, and extracurricular activities that support their language learning efforts.

d) Encourage goal setting and self-reflection among learners to foster a sense of competence and autonomy in their language learning journey.

e) Actively involve parents and the wider community in supporting students’ language learning efforts, as this can contribute to enhanced motivation.

By implementing these recommendations, Libyan tertiary institutions can create an environment conducive to fostering motivation, ultimately leading to improved English language learning outcomes for their students.

Declarations

Competing Interest The authors of this study, "The Role of Learners’ Motivation in English Language Learning at the Tertiary Level in Libya. " declare that they have no known financial or non-financial competing interests that could have influenced the research, interpretation of data, or presentation of results. All authors have thoroughly examined their affiliations, funding sources, and personal relationships to ensure that no potential conflicts of interest exist. Any future changes in competing interests will be promptly disclosed to the journal and relevant stakeholders.

References


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