

Analysing L2 motivation within pre-service teachers: The importance of gender

Análisis de la motivación en L2 entre futuros maestros: la importancia del género

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Resumen

El papel que juega la motivación en el proceso de aprendizaje de una segunda lengua o de una lengua extranjera es innegable (Dörnyei & Ushioda). No obstante, al analizar la motivación es conveniente tomar en consideración otros factores que intervienen en este proceso como el género (Kissau). Los estudios realizados hasta la fecha han demostrado que las alumnas suelen estar más motivadas que sus compañeros cuando aprenden un idioma. Por lo tanto, los objetivos principales de este estudio son contribuir al cuerpo de investigación existente y determinar si existen diferencias de género con respecto a la motivación dentro de los estudiantes universitarios del grado de Maestro en Educación Primaria. Para ello, los informantes cumplieron en clase un cuestionario cuantitativo. Los resultados indican que las participantes encuestadas obtuvieron puntuaciones más altas que sus homólogos masculinos, lo que indica que están más motivadas.

Palabras clave: motivación en L2, futuros maestros, género

Abstract

The role played by motivation in the process of learning a second or a foreign language is widely acknowledged (Dörnyei & Ushioda). When analysing motivation, it is appropriate to take into consideration factors involved in this process such as gender (Kissau). Studies to date have shown that female learners are usually more motivated than males when learning a language. The main objectives of this study were to contribute to the existing body of research and to determine whether there are gender differences regarding motivation

within student teachers (M= 19.5) in the university context. To that end, informants completed a quantitative questionnaire in class. Results indicate that female respondents obtained higher scores than their male counterparts, indicating that they are more motivated.

Key words: L2 motivation, pre-service teachers, gender

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning a second (L2) or foreign language (FL) tends to be the norm rather than the exception in this globalised world and is a significant feature of –any curriculum (Ruiz Cordero). People of all ages, cultures and backgrounds feel the need to communicate with the rest of the world. As the official, common language of science, commerce and publicity, English has acquired status as *lingua franca*.

Many have been the authors who have ventured to study the complex realm of learning an L2/FL. Unlike the mother tongue, which is acquired without conscious effort, a second or foreign language is usually learned in formal contexts (Marsh 2, 3). Learning languages can be challenging for some people, while others seem to have a natural talent for it (Marsh, 2, 3, 4).

1.1. L2 motivation and Self-determination Theory

When analysing how individuals learn we cannot solely take into consideration factors such as intelligence and/or language skills since the human being is a complex organism. It is most important, for example, to consider affective variables such as motivation. Most authors would agree that the notion of motivational variables in SLA started with Gardner and Lambert. For Gardner, “a successful language learner exhibits numerous affective features made up of a flexible and accepting orientation towards the TL (target language) group: positive attitudes towards the language learning circumstances and elevated motivation” (Gregersen *et al.* 33). Thus, motivation and positive attitudes can play a significant role in the successful learning of a second or foreign language. According to Gardner (196): “Individuals who are truly motivated not only strive to learn the material but also seek out situations where they can obtain further practice.”

One of the most prominent theories regarding L2 motivation is that of Self-determination (SDT) which originated within the field of psychology and due to its great applicability within the language learning field soon began to be of great use to researchers in said field. It is based on the premise that human beings need to have their needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) met in order to progress (Deci & Ryan; Ryan & Deci) and the

extent to which those needs are met has an impact on individuals' motivation (Noels et al., 149).

SDT presents a continuum composed of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation (16). Intrinsic motivation refers to the realisation of an activity out of pleasure and/or interest (Deci & Ryan) and is inherent to the person (Kim et al., 2019: 150). Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is related to the attainment of a specific goal (Deci and Ryan). The individual is not interested in the activity per se, their interests fall outside (Noels et al., 151).

Amotivation, for its part, is "the absence of any kind of motivation" (Dörnyei & Ushioda 23) and is usually associated with non-acting or passive behaviours (Ryan & Deci 17). Amotivated students are more prone to experience hopelessness or even unhappiness, which may terminate in disengagement, avoidance or ultimately withdrawal from the classroom, activity, and so on (Noels et al. 151, 152).

The role played by significant others (family members, language teachers, other members of the learning community) has a tremendous impact on learners' needs and thus on their motivation (Noels et al., 153). As literature shows, whenever students feel their needs as being supported by their teachers, their engagement in activities increases (Oga-Baldwin & Nakata; Wu). As highlighted by Noels et al. (159): "Students who feel satisfied with their psychological needs are more self-determined and engaged in LL (language learning), as a result, are likely to achieve academically, linguistically, psychologically, and socioculturally".

1.2. L2 motivation and gender

When analysing motivation within the language learning process, other factors such as gender, should also be considered. Traditionally, women have been associated with the fields of arts and humanities and men with that of science. In a similar vein, in the case of second or foreign language learning, female learners appear to be more motivated than their male counterparts when it comes to studying such languages (Baker & MacIntyre; Dörnyei, Csizér & Németh,; Martinovic & Soric; Mori and Gobel; Merisuo-Storm; Kissau; Psaltou-Joycey, Vrettou & Penderi).

Kissau (415), reflecting on the results of his own study and attempting to find an explanation for this phenomenon, blames society for 'feminising' the learning of a language and its culture, in addition to labelling boys and/or men as being less masculine for being interested in learning a language. Kissau stated: "Boys reported being less interested in

learning about French culture because society has made it clear that this is more of a female concern” (Kissau, 415).

Baker & MacIntyre; Dörnyei et al.; Fernández-Fontecha; Kisaau; Merisuo-Storm; Mori & Gobel demonstrated in the European and Canadian contexts that, among participants between 6 and 18 years of age, females are more motivated than their peers to learn languages. In the Hungarian context, Dörnyei et al. (645, 650, 1026, 1048) demonstrated that amongst adolescent participants between 13 and 14 years of age, girls were more interested than their male counterparts in traveling to countries where they can practice their L2.

More recently, Psaltou-Joycey et al. (416) carried out a study with primary (M=11) and lower secondary school students (M=14) in Greece. In both levels, female students outperformed their male counterparts regarding motivation (Vrettou; Williams, Burden & Lanvers, 2002). Psaltou-Joycey et al. (427) attribute this phenomenon to girls being more mature than boys at these stages. In the words of Psaltou-Joycey et al. (427):

Being biologically and psychologically more mature in this age span, girls seem to be more personally involved in language learning (through books, songs, games, etc) and concerned about their future career opportunities, hence their higher scores in the personal interest and instrumental/career categories.

Martinovic and Soric (37) showed that female Croatian university students were more motivated than their male counterparts to learn English as a foreign language. Females also showed more interest in learning an L2 along with intended effort (Martinovic & Soric 50).

2. ANALYSIS

The main aim of this study was to investigate whether there are any gender differences regarding motivation. Having reviewed the pertinent literature on this topic, details of participants, methodology and results of the study will now be presented.

2.1. Participants

The total number of participants was 24. They were undergraduate students in their 2nd year (M= 19.9) of a Primary Education Degree at the University of Castilla La-Mancha, in Cuenca where the study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is compulsory for them. Groups of students tend to be heterogenous due to the fact that a 50% has an A1 level, a 48% has a B1 level and a 2% has a B2 level. Regarding gender, female students compose 66.7% of the total, which tends to be the norm in Education degrees where female student teachers appear to outnumber males.

2.2. Methodology

A quantitative questionnaire, based on that piloted and operationalised by Ryan (2009) (see appendix 1), was adapted to the needs of the study. It was administered in class at the beginning of the academic year and the purpose of the project was explained to the participants by the researchers. Time was allocated to allow for any queries on the part of the informants. Our version had 20 questions regarding extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (extrinsic motivation: 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19; intrinsic motivation: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 14, 16, 18, 20). Along with these questions we were also interested in the biodata of participants. Once the data had been gathered, a one-factor ANOVA was used to analyse the results obtained.

2.3. Results

As can be seen in table 1 (appendix 2), female students outperformed male students in nearly all the questions (1, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20), whereas male students obtained better results than their female counterparts solely in questions 2, 3, 5 and 11 (see table 1-appendix 2). However, statistically significant differences were found only in question 4 (If I were visiting a foreign country, I would like to be able to speak its language), question 6 (Studying English is important to me because I would like to become close to other English speakers) and question 20 (Learning English is one of the most important aspects in my life). In other words, female student teachers were genuinely interested in communicating when abroad, in becoming close to the target language group and consider English a priority in their lives, all of these being salient features of intrinsic motivation.

These results are consistent with those obtained by numerous authors in previous studies (Baker & MacIntyre; Dörnyei et al.; Martinovic & Soric; Mori & Gobel; Merisuo-Storm; Kissau ; Psaltou-Joycey, Vrettou & Penderi), who demonstrated in the European and Canadian contexts that female informants are more motivated than their male counterparts with regard to learning languages.

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results obtained demonstrate that female student teachers showed higher levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in comparison with their male counterparts, implying that they are more motivated to learn English simply because they enjoy the process. What is more, they consider it important in their everyday lives. Intrinsic motivation is also reflected in their desire to speak English with native speakers of the language and abroad.

Likewise, they are aware of the need to use English as a means to an end in their present and future professional lives.

The results are consistent with those in existing literature. However, these should be interpreted with caution due to the fact that only three were statistically significant. In order to obtain more precise results and thus a bigger picture of the situation, it would be advisable to adopt a mixed methods methodology for follow-up studies bearing in mind the benefits of qualitative research. As Ushioda stated:

Qualitative inquiry has contributed not only to different ways of thinking about and theorising language learning motivation. It has contributed also to a different way of conceptualising language learners that takes account of their context-bound histories, social relationships and lived experience as well as individually. Furthermore, this way of conceptualising language learners has encouraged a richer and more holistic focus on how L2-related motivations and self-and-identity development may interact with a person's whole complex system of motivations, emotions and behaviours, instead of focusing only on language learning motivation in isolation. (Ushioda, 203, 204)

With regard to future research, a greater sample, preferably with students from other groups/campuses/universities, both nationally and internationally, would be most interesting. This could facilitate a more comprehensive study with which the contrasting and comparison of results could be affected. What is more, adapting the instrument validated and utilised by Owa-Baldwin and Fryier will certainly throw relevant results. Finally, analyzing the level of motivation of our sample in other subjects will determine whether female students are more motivated than their counterparts generally or only in the English subject.

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Appendix 1. The questionnaire



Departamento de Filología Moderna.

Facultad de Educación de Cuenca

FL MOTIVATION

Answer the following questions:

Age:

Gender: M F

Decide to what extent (from 0 to 10) you agree with the following questions/statements.

1. Do you think English is important in the world these days? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
2. If I could speak English well, I could get to know more people from other countries. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
3. Do you think English would help you if you travelled abroad in the future? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. If I were visiting a foreign country, I would like to be able to speak its language. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
5. Do you think knowing English would help you to become a more knowledgeable person? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
6. Studying English is important to me because I would like to become close to other English speakers. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
7. Do you think English would help your future career? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
8. Learning English is important to me because I would like to travel internationally. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
9. For me to become an educated person I should learn English. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
10. I'm always looking forward to my English classes. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
11. English ability would help me get a better paying job. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
12. Studying English will help me to understand people from all over the world, not just English-speaking countries. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
13. Studying English will help me get into better schools. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
14. I think I would study English even if it weren't compulsory. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
15. A knowledge of English would make me a better educated person. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
16. I would like to be able to use English to communicate with people from other countries. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
17. Learning English is necessary because it is an international language. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
18. I really enjoy learning English. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
19. Studying English will help me get a good job. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
20. Learning English is one of the most important aspects in my life. 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Appendix 2-ANOVA results

		Sum of squares	Gl	Quadratic mean	F	Sig.
AAge	Inter-groups	9,547	1	9,547	,615	,442
	Intra-groups	310,271	20	15,514		
	Total	319,818	21			
Q01	Inter-groups	,373	1	,373	,367	,551
	Intra-groups	21,366	21	1,017		
	Total	21,739	22			
Q02	Inter-groups	,047	1	,047	,033	,858
	Intra-groups	29,866	21	1,422		
	Total	29,913	22			
Q03	Inter-groups	,224	1	,224	,411	,528
	Intra-groups	11,429	21	,544		
	Total	11,652	22			
04	Inter-groups	14,014	1	14,014	11,557	,003
	Intra-groups	25,464	21	1,213		
	Total	39,478	22			
Q05	Inter-groups	,066	1	,066	,026	,874
	Intra-groups	53,152	21	2,531		
	Total	53,217	22			
Q06	Inter-groups	15,684	1	15,684	5,699	,026
	Intra-groups	57,795	21	2,752		
	Total	73,478	22			
Q07	Inter-groups	5,405	1	5,405	3,392	,080
	Intra-groups	33,464	21	1,594		
	Total	38,870	22			
Q08	Inter-groups	,019	1	,019	,017	,896
	Intra-groups	22,938	21	1,092		
	Total	22,957	22			
Q09	Inter-groups	,140	1	,140	,020	,890
	Intra-groups	150,295	21	7,157		
	Total	150,435	22			
Q10	Inter-groups	,014	1	,014	,003	,957

	Intra-groups	99,464	21	4,736		
	Total	99,478	22			
Q11	Inter-groups	2,242	1	2,242	2,516	,128
	Intra-groups	18,714	21	,891		
	Total	20,957	22			
P12	Inter-groups	1,492	1	1,492	1,460	,40
	Intra-groups	21,464	21	1,022		
	Total	22,957	22			
Q13	Inter-groups	2,610	1	2,610	2,060	,66
	Intra-groups	26,607	21	1,267		
	Total	29,217	22			
Q14	Inter-groups	12,025	1	12,025	2,075	,165
	Intra-groups	121,714	21	5,796		
	Total	133,739	22			
Q15	Inter-groups	5,497	1	5,497	,987	,332
	Intra-groups	116,938	21	5,568		
	Total	122,435	22			
Q16	Inter-groups	11,484	1	11,484	2,450	,132
	Intra-groups	98,429	21	4,687		
	Total	109,913	22			
Q17	Inter-groups	1,541	1	1,541	1,247	,277
	Intra-groups	25,938	21	1,235		
	Total	27,478	22			
Q18	Inter-groups	3,075	1	3,075	,647	,430
	Intra-groups	99,795	21	4,752		
	Total	102,870	22			
Q19	Inter-groups	6,561	1	6,561	1,617	,217
	Intra-groups	85,179	21	4,056		
	Total	91,739	22			
Q20	Inter-groups	33,000	1	33,000	11,186	,003
	Intra-groups	59,000	20	2,950		
	Total	92,000	21			

Table 1-ANOVA results