EXPLORING MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS IN TESL THROUGH THE LENS OF THE SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

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ABSTRACT

The prominent role of the English language has led to the teaching of the language as a second language worldwide at tertiary level as a requirement to be assured of better prospects in a student's life. English language teaching (ELT) has been a never-ending topic as it is seen as an uphill task for teachers due to the motivation factor in the acquisition of the language among the learners. Hence, one of the most valuable concepts used in relation to the success and failure in second language acquisition is motivation. It is apparently one of the most important constructs of individual differences (IDs). As the theories on motivation are countless, this paper is limited to its focus on review of relevant literature and investigation on the broad self-determination theory (SDT) that embodies three different types of motivation: (i) autonomous regulation, (ii) controlled regulation, and (iii) amotivation, and its relationship with the acquisition of English as a second language (ESL). It is concluded that the SDT plays a vital role in second language acquisition (SLA) with particular reference to ESL; and its implications could have a positive effect on the implementation of ELT in the higher education institutions (HEIs). This paper is mainly aimed at establishing the motivational factors related to the SDT and its important role in the teaching and learning of ESL in the HEIs.

Key Words: Self-determination theory, motivation, amotivation, autonomous, controlled, ESL, HEIs, IDs

BACKGROUND OF MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS INVOLVING ESL STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEI)

For several decades, the scholarship in the field of Second Language Learning (SLL) has undoubtedly proved that it is a highly complex process. It is an issue surrounding all educational administrators, instructors and curricula specialists who are faced with a major challenge in addressing the unique needs of ESL learners. It is interesting to note that some people learn languages better than others. Gholamreza and Hojat (2015) stress the importance of research on individual difference (ID). It cannot be denied that every individual has unique differences related to language learning.

In seeking an explanation to this strange phenomenon, proponents in the acquisition of SLL, to name a few, beginning with Freud, and Gardner, Lambert, Kleinginna, Oiler, Shaw, Lukmani, Spolsky, Ausubel, and Maehr have been concerned with the role of attitudes and motivation in second language acquisition for almost fifty years based on what was pointed out by Gardner (2007). While the list of variables which may contribute to successful SLL is almost endless, a full description of all of the variables which are part of a descriptive and explanatory theory of second language acquisition is as yet, not complete.

It is hoped that this undertaken research, instead of reviewing the vast number of past and current studies and presenting tedious statistics, will be able to discuss and focus on the importance of motivation with particular reference to the self-determination theory (SDT), and in this regard, the acquisition of English as a second language (ESL). Incidentally, it could not be denied that we have been tied down to the narrow concept of ESL. We should treat the language as an international language that belongs to everyone and "it should not be considered as a property of its native speakers" as it is felt that the ESL learners would develop a sense of belonging to the language. This could act as a foundation for motivation to acquire the language.

Coming back to the topic per se, in addition, the undertaken study also attempts to demonstrate that SLL especially in the case of learning ESL and its acquisition involve many complicated elements that include, to name a few, phonetics and phonology, grammar, syntax and semantics, socio-political and cultural aspects. It is not just a matter of wanting to learn the language as motivation in ESL is interdependant on all factors mentioned earlier. Therefore, any language learning situation is unique in its own way (Gholamreza Zareian and Hojat Jodaei, 2015).

At this juncture, it is appropriate to agree with Smith and Strong (2009) that "adult language learners are goal-oriented and direct their learning to fulfill particular needs or demands: to advance their studies, to progress up the career ladder, to follow business opportunities, or simply to be successful users of the language".

DEFINITION OF MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS ON THE ESL ACQUISITION AMONG STUDENTS OF HEIS

In everyday life, there is motivation linked to the vicissitudes and the challenges that one faces in one's life. Even in early childhood, one's life begins with motivation when parents promise gifts for their children to perform well in their school life. It goes on to achievement in college and university, and there is no end. Humans, from birth onward, in their healthiest states, are active, inquisitive, curious, and playful creatures, always being ever-ready to venture into the acquisition of new learning experiences without being lured into with promises of incentives any sort. This natural motivational tendency is a critical element in cognitive, social, and physical development because it is through acting on one's inherent interests that one grows in knowledge and skills (Ryan and Deci, 2000). One might wonder if it is some kind of a myth! Psychologists, educators and psychopathologists have always been interested in exploring motivation theories. Huitt (2011) in relation to motivation, cites Kleinginna and Kleinginna (1981) that motivation is innate need, desire or want that are innate and goal-oriented. They are all inter-connected and lead one to the ultimate behaviour to doing or achieving something.

Abbas et al, (2012) concur with the pioneer researchers that in order to be motivated, a learner needs to have a purpose related goal or objective to accomplish or gain in second language learning (SLL). Among the reasons cited are: *achieving a sense of success, fulfilling others' expectations, and securing a better job* that necessitates the demonstration of competence in English are in agreement that motivation is comprised of three levels, namely, (i) the language that involves integrative and instrumental motivation while (ii) the learner level includes such traits as need for achievement and self-confidence, and (iii) the learning situation level is determined by intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

In view of the vital role these three levels play in the teaching and learning of a second or foreign language, these factors, evidently, make a significant contribution to the role of motivation in ESL among students enrolled in HEIs.

Another additional definition of motivation is based on Iaccarino's (2012) agreement with Deci and Ryan's (2000) definition on the study of motivation as the "energisation and direction of behaviour" where energy represents "the feeling of needs" while direction is "the processes and the structures of the organism that give meaning to the internal and external stimuli, thereby direction toward the satisfaction of needs". These needs are energized by motivation especially intrinsic motivation that is affected by different factors.

On the other hand, according to Gardner (2007), it is not possible to give a simple definition of motivation as the theorist Gardner attributes some of the characteristics of a motivated individual as cognitive in nature, and while some are affective, some are behavioural. These characteristics are based on Gardner's observation that a motivated individual, who is "goal directed, expends effort, is persistent, is attentive, has desires (wants), exhibits positive effects, is aroused, has expectancies, demonstrates self-confidence (self-efficacy), and has reasons (motives)".

Masoud and Elham (2013) stress the point that intrinsic motivation can be affected by different factors including environment and time based on Dornyei and Otto's model of L2 motivation, also known as the process-oriented model. This L2 model on motivation, according to Dornyei and Otto (1998), as cited by Mosoud and Elham, may not be stable during the learning process in the long run. They also believe that intrinsically motivated learners are superior to the extrinsically motivated individuals.

Dornyei (1998), on the other hand, admits that "it is rather surprising how little agreement there is in the literature" with regard to the exact meaning of the concept of motivation. Undoubtedly, researchers agree that motivation plays a key point in "determining human behaviour by energizing it and giving it direction" (ibid).

IMPORTANCE OF MOTIVATION

Generally, the research on motivation and its importance seem to differ according to researchers. Apparently, motivated students are believed to be highly motivated in language classes and have a positive influence on their cohorts. Effective language acquisition, according to Pulvermuller and Schumann (1994), is dependent on two main factors, i.e. (i) motivation to learn the language, and (ii) the learner's ability to acquire grammatical knowledge. In addition, Ellis (2008) believes that (i) language aptitude and (ii) motivation are the 'two big' constructs that have been confirmed as the main psychological factors that contribute to individual differences (IDs) in L2 acquisition. Since aptitude, as a trait, is not changeable, motivation can be considered the most influential factor of IDs which affect L2 acquisition.

In the context of this research, the importance of motivation is focused on ESL with particular reference to motivation among students of HEIs in learning English as a second language, instead of motivation in general. Dornyei (1998) agrees that motivation is one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second language acquisition. In addition, Knowles' acknowledgement of the importance of motivation in learning is pointed out by (Smith, 2002) that in addition to the four

assumptions made in 1980 about the characteristics of adult learners (as the learners in HEIs are adults) in relation to andragogy, Knowles added his fifth assumption, i.e. motivation to learn.

According to Knowles, among other motivational factors, adults are most responsive to external pressures such as increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, and quality of life. The inclusion of the term andragogy in the discussion is prompted by the fact that the students of HEIs are all

considered adult language learners. This goes to prove that proponents of adult learning theories have always emphasized the role of motivation, and all the studies carried out by psychologists in the field stress the conviction that motivation has an undeniable influence on behaviour (and not vice versa as behaviourists would hold).

Perez (2011) cites the importance of feedback provided by ESL instructors to the learners so that they know if they are making progress in the classes because it helps the learners to elevate their motivational level.

THE ROLE OF MOTIVATION IN ESL

Undoubtedly, Gardner and Lambert, as pioneers in the field of motivation in the 1970s, have highlighted the critical role of motivation in successful SLL in institutions of higher learning in a totally different situation and environment.

One of the most important elements within the process of adult ESL instruction is the ability to understand the needs, demands, and interests of ESL learners in combination with their distinctive need to accommodate these within current societal demands.

Previous researchers have identified several variables that are all interrelated that affect a student's motivation to study a second language. One of the classroom variables is the teachers' attitudes that Noel (2003) studied based on the communication style of the teacher. Apparently, the relationships among L2 achievement, in this case ESL achievement, language attitudes, motivation, and anxiety influence one another. When SDT is applied to L2 learning, intrinsically motivated learners are those who freely choose to learn the language because they view learning L2 itself is interesting, meaningful, and fun to do. Noel (ibid) attributes that this voluntary behaviour is not the result of any external coercion, such as reward or punishment.

Another additional aspect that ought to be considered is the significant role of the language learning environment on learners' attitudes and motivation. If an ESL classroom consists of fully enthusiastic and highly motivated learners, it would evidently be a positive sign. On the other hand, if the scenario is reversed, what could one expect the outcome to be but devastating?

Dornyei (1998) stresses how significant the role of motivation is by pointing out that "without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals, and neither are appropriate curricula and good teaching enough on their own to ensure student achievement".

It is our humble notion that whatever information has been put forward so far in this paper is just a drop in the ocean compared to the vast subject of motivation as research on motivation is an ongoing endeavour that is open to countless new theories useful to mankind.

After the brief discussion on the subject of motivation in general, let us have a close look at the SDT, as it is the main focus of this paper.

SDT AND ITS RELEVANCE TO ELS LEARNERS IN THEHEIS

The SDT which concerns with human motivation, personality and optimal functioning was originally developed by researchers Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan. This theory focuses on different types of motivation rather than just the degree (or extent) of motivation. According to this theory of motivation people tend to be driven by a need to grow and gain fulfilment. The first assumption of the SDT is that people are activity-directed toward growth which is a positive development from a lower or simpler to a higher or more complex form. This fulfilment leads to a positive sense of achievement accompanied by satisfaction.

The proponents of the SDT - Ryan and Deci, (2002), defined the SDT as an approach to human motivation and personality that utilizes traditional empirical methods that highlight the role of inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs that are the basis for one's self-motivation and personality integration.

Motivation has always been a central concern among people on how to move themselves or others to act. Evidently, the SDT seeks to answer such inquisitiveness as it deals with extrinsic forces such as reward systems, grades, evaluations, and intrinsic forces such as personal interests, curiosity, and lasting values among learners. Obviously, the intrinsic forces lead to

intrinsic motivation which is the ideal point in the continuum of motivation that begins with amotivation and ends with intrinsic motivation.

One might wonder why SDT has been the chosen subject of this paper. Undoubtedly, there are numerous types of motivation theories with variations according to the different fields involved such as education, healthcare, organizations, relationships, and psychotherapy among others. The SDT has evolved from a macro-theory of human motivation and personality in the 1970's, and it has been formally introduced and accepted as a sound empirical theory in the mid 1980's. Motivation is one of the most important constructs of individual differences in learning a foreign language, and any language learning situation has its own unique model (Gholamreza & Hojat, 2015). Taking this unique model as an example, it is felt that the SDT, as for all theories one could consider, is a broad motivational theory that addresses the issue of motivation concerning learners to try harder to achieve their goals. This is especially so when it involves students in the HEIs as the importance of the SLL plays a critical role in the HEIs.

SDT, according to Lee (2008), assumes that people are innately striving to master ongoing challenges and integrate their experiences into coherent sense of self. This is in congruence with the focus of this paper where the students tend to achieve their target to pass the English test which is prerequisite for graduation. This tendency is facilitated by feelings of friendship and comraderie of socializing with others as well as a feeling of competence. This leads to autonomous regulation which needs social support. This social context has to foster the students' natural tendencies to be actively involved in activities that enhance their motivation. Thus, the SDT plays a vital role in the students' behaviour, experience, and development on the basis of healthy discussions between the natural tendency and the social context.

As for all theories one could consider, SDT is a broad motivational theory that addresses the issue of motivation concerning learners to try harder to achieve their goals. As pointed out earlier, SDT embodies three different types of motivation that lie on a continuum of self-determination, beginning with the distinction between the three different types of motivation, namely:

- autonomous regulation (i.e., acting out of choice and pleasure) that includes *intrinsic* motivation, and *identifie*d motivation,

- controlled regulation is comprised of *external* motivation, and *introjected* regulation (behaving out of a sense of guilt or obligation or a need to prove something), and

- amotivation (i.e., lack or absence of autonomous and controlled regulation motivation) is observed when individuals do not perceive the links between their actions and their consequences.

AUTONOMOUS REGULATION

As a part of the SDT, autonomous regulation involves engaging in an activity with eagerness and volition, in other words, not forced into but voluntarily, with a sense of choice, willingness and acting out of choice and pleasure. In this context, one has the choice of one's behaviour and responsibility and stands behind one's own behaviour Deci & Ryan, 2000 in Sapmaz et al, 2012. Autonomous regulation, generally, can be classified into (1) intrinsic motivation, and (2) controlled motivation.

Intrinsic **motivation**, according to Ryan and Deci (2000), involves doing a task because it is interesting and spontaneously satisfying. An intrinsically motivated person does something merely for the fun or challenge rather than being prodded into it or merely for rewards. There is a tripartite taxonomy of intrinsic motivation as posited by Vallerand, Pelletier, Hreire and Vallieres (1992). They identified as intrinsic motivation (i) to know, (ii) to accomplish things, and (iii) to experience stimulation. A more detailed description of the three types of intrinsic motivation is as follows:

i. Intrinsic Motivation to know

This is made up of several constructs such as, among others, exploration and curiosity, intrinsic intellectuality, motivation to learn, understand, including the search for meaning. In short, intrinsic motivation to know is doing something or performing an activity merely for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from it (Vallerand et al., 1992).

ii. Intrinsic Motivation toward Accomplishments

Vallerand et al (ibid) postulate that individuals interact with the environment in order to feel competent, and derive pleasure and satisfaction when attempting to accomplish or create something.

iii. Intrinsic Motivation to Experience Stimulation

This happens when someone engages in an activity in order to experience stimulating sensations based on sensory pleasure, aesthetic experiences, as well as fun and excitement derived from the activity.

Identified **motivation**, which is a well internalized form of *extrinsic motivation* involves doing the task because it feels personally important to look good to other people.

Extrinsic Motivation, (Ryan and Deci 2000) believe that naturally the freedom to be intrinsically motivated decreases as social demands pressure one to perform extrinsically interesting tasks as a means to an end. Apparently, this theory applies to ESL learners where their intrinsic motivation starts decreasing as they move up the grades in school. The higher the level the weaker their intrinsic motivation gets. Inevitably, the vacuum is filled by extrinsic motivation.

Another interesting observation is that "unlike some perspectives that view extrinsically motivated behaviour as invariantly non-autonomous, SDT proposes that extrinsic motivation can vary greatly in the degree to which it is autonomous" (Ryan and Deci 2000). For instance, a student doing the assignment for fear of being singled out is extrinsically motivated because doing the assignment is required to avoid sanctions. Similarly, another student who does work due to the belief that it would be valuable for his or her career, is also extrinsically motivated as it is done it for its instrumental value rather than finding it interesting. Here, it could be noted that although both instances represent intentional behaviour, the two types of motivation vary in their relative autonomy.

The SDT model of change, autonomy leads to gaining a sense of competence. When an individual is volitionally involved and is really willing to play a positive role, it leads the individual to apply new strategies and competencies. Applied to SLL, the instructor could assume the role of a facilitator; by striking the right chord, he or she succeeds in getting the students to roll up their sleeves to get to work spontaneously. This is supported by the SDT prediction that competence alone is not sufficient to ensure adherence; it must be accompanied by volition or autonomy (Sapmaz et al, 2012). Koestner, Otis, Powers et al (2008) advocate that, based on their studies, when implementing plans, it would be advisable to concentrate on autonomous motivation rather than focusing on controlled motivation. SDT maintains that autonomous regulation is more fully internalized and integrated into the self (Deci, 2000 in Koestner et al, 2008). Thus, as part of the self, autonomous regulation is believed to have better stability over time and across situations. For example, if a student studies for autonomous reasons, he or she will study regardless of the external influences.

In addition, according to the SDT, there are three basic psychological needs: (i) autonomy, (ii) competence, and (iii) relatedness (Sapmaz et al, 2012). As autonomy has been dealt with earlier, let us look at the need for competence. It requires the effort to succeed toward changing tasks and the ability to attain the desired outcomes despite challenges. Likewise, the need for relatedness calls for a sense of belonging to the environment, and establishing close and meaningful relationships in Sapmaz et al, 2012].

CONTROLLED MOTIVATION

In contrast to autonomous motivation, studying for controlled reasons forces one to act based on what the situation demands, for example, studying when there is an examination or due to peer pressure. (Koestner, Otis, et al, 2008). Controlled motivation involves doing a task with a sense of pressure (possibly peer pressure), demand, or coercion. It comprises two subtypes of extrinsic motivation that have not been well internalized by the individual:

- *external motivatio*n, which means doing the activity in order to receive a reward or avoid a punishment; and

- *introjected motivation*, which results from partial internalization of the extrinsic contingencies and involves doing an activity because the person would receive approval for doing it, or feel guilty and unworthy for not doing it. When a learner's motivation corresponds to *introjected regulation*, the individual learns L2 because of some pressure that the individual has internalized. For example, learners may think that they have to learn L2 because they do not want to disappoint a teacher or parent, or; they think they can "out-do" others on a language test.

Koestner et al, (2008) seem to be convinced that "it is predominantly (and perhaps exclusively) autonomous motivation that influences goal progress, particularly in conjunction with implementation plans". In other words, intervention to help people change their behaviour should focus on strengthening autonomous motivation instead of trying to reduce controlled motivation.

AMOTIVATION

According to Rattelle, *et al,* (2007), amotivation is the lack or absence of autonomous and controlled regulation where the individual fails to differentiate between actions and their consequences. This could be related to the ignorance of the role of psychological need satisfaction on happiness in terms of the SDT.

Amotivation could be construed as being independent of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan (2000) define it as "the relative absence of motivation that is not caused by a lack of initial interest but rather by the individual's experiencing

feelings of incompetence and helplessness when faced with the activity" (cited in Dornyei, 2007 a, p. 144). Vallerand (1992) mentions four major types of amotivation: (i) amotivation due to lack of self-confidence, (ii) amotivation due to wrong strategy, (iii) amotivation resulting from the perception that the task is too demanding, and (iv) amotivation due to the feeling of helplessness belief where one feels that effort does not pay.

FEW EXAMPLES OF PREVIOUS SDT-RELATED STUDIES AMONG STUDENTS OF HEIS

Admittedly, there have been many studies carried out based on motivation among ESL / EFL learners; among them, to name a few are: a study was carried out in Iran on students' performance in the Iranian university entrance examination by Aliakbari and Alhossein, (2015). Ming et al., (2011) studied the attitudes and motivation of secondary students towards learning ESL.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATION AND BENEFITS OF THE APPLICATION OF THE SDT AMONG STUDENTS IN HEIS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

It is an undeniable fact that ESL in the HEIs is there to continue with the requirement for a satisfactory grarde in TOEFL and IELTS which have worldwide recognition, and the Malaysian University English Test (MUET) for Malaysian students and a whole range of other internal

English proficiency tests conducted in various HEIs as a prerequisite for university entrance or graduation, whatever the case may be. The report by the ICAS task force on the status of ESL students in the segments of public higher education in California mentioned earlier is an example of the prominent role of the ESL in HEIs. It could strongly be opined that the issue of ESL in HEIs is not parochial but universal.

One of the pedagogical implications beneficial to teachers is to collect, analyze, and interpret classroom data about learners' feelings and opinions toward learning tasks that would enhance learners' motivation as suggested by Ma, (2009). From the literature available on the implementation of the SDT in addressing the challenges faced by the ESL academia in the HEIs, it could be concluded that the SDT is essential in SLL in general. Collecting, analyzing, and interpreting classroom data about learners' feelings and opinions toward SLL can be beneficial in fine-tuning the ESL curriculum which can enhance their learners' motivation.

Instead of efforts on extending the general study on motivation and acquiring additional knowledge on the SDT, there ought to more emphasis on a pragmatic approach to the teaching and learning of ESL. There could be more pilot projects based on the implementation of the SDT on ESL in the HEIs. It is recommended that the selection of ESL instructors in the HEIs be prioritised to specialists in the SDT. In order to expect desired results, the HEIs could look into special programmes drawn up for ESL instructors on the SDT to ensure that the students are intrinsically motivated to learn the four macro-skills in the English language. A random check on ESL instructors in HEIs applying the SDT could be shocking as there are always the negative remarks on the achievement of the ESL students in the HEIs.

If the SDT is taken seriously and applied conscientiously, one could expect to see positive results with intrinsic motivation among ESL learners.

It should be noted that this paper is limited to highlighting the basic factors related to the SDT and to stress the importance of the SDT in the HEIs and ESL. It is our hope that, as a follow-up, there would be an in-depth study on teaching methods based on the SDT to address this phenomenon as a further contribution to the teaching and learning of ESL.

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