

English Learning Motivation and Achievement of Police Students in Ho Chi Minh City from a Sociocultural Perspective

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Abstract: Among the factors influencing students' studies, motivation is considered to be one of the most important factors for different achievement levels. The purposes of this study were (i) to find out the students' levels of motivation to study English, (ii) to identify the sociocultural factors influencing that motivation and (iii) to investigate the relationship between students' motivation and their achievement. The subjects were 509 first-year students at the People's Police University (PPU). The instruments used for data collection were questionnaires and focus group interviews. The data from the returned questionnaires was statistically analyzed using the SPSS program to derive percentages, frequencies, means, standard deviations, as well as to perform exploratory factor analysis and multiple linear regression. Findings from this study indicated that the majority of the students were motivated and had a positive attitude toward learning English; however, their reasons for learning English were utilitarian as a means to an end such as to pass the exams rather than for pleasure or, simply, to broaden their knowledge. Students' motivation and their English learning achievement were strongly and positively correlated with each other ($p=.000<.05$). If we want to improve achievement, we should influence motivation, especially with regard to two of the most important motivational factors: learning situational components and group cohesion. The findings could be useful for researchers and teachers in improving students' achievement by devising effective teaching and learning strategies to increase students' motivation.

Keywords: Students' motivation, academic achievement, socio-cultural perspective.

1. Introduction

In life in general, motivation is the driving force behind every human action. In language learning in particular, differences in motivation levels account for the fact that some students spend more time and energy learning a new language than others. Motivation has been

empirically proven to correlate directly with academic success or achievement, i.e., the more motivated someone is, the greater the chance of success he/she has. This is especially true in the case of language learning, as it often requires long periods of study, great effort, and persistence. Motivation is affected by both social factors such as values, tendencies, and language learning opportunities; and psychological factors such as attitudes, desires

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and effort, and language use anxiety. Of all these factors, students' purposes for studying the language, course content, and teaching methods are of particular importance. A good learning environment tends to inspire sufficient motivation in learners so that learning becomes a self-directed process. However, many learners sign up for language classes without well-defined motivations and attitudes [1]. They are unclear as to why or how languages should be learnt to further their personal and educational pursuits. One class might be excited about the classroom activities, while other classes would not show much interest. Even within one class, some students would be interested but others would not share that enthusiasm. Initially, most students are enthusiastic about studying English but this excitement gradually seems to decrease and, even worse, their academic results appear to slump correspondingly until the only thing they want to do is to pass the exam.

In this study, the researcher investigated students' motivation to learn a foreign language, in hopes of answering the following question:

“What is the relationship between students' motivation and their academic achievement from a sociocultural perspective?”

2. Theoretical framework for the study

2.1. Motivation

Motivation is a construct that is difficult to define. Yet this term is used widely in situations involving learning a foreign/second language. Scholars from different backgrounds may define motivation in different ways. In this study, Ushioda's conceptualization of motivation as a, “socially mediated process” [2:

90] was adopted. This definition was based on the notions that “learning is constructive rather than reproductive,” and “learning is a social, cultural and interpersonal as well as intrapersonal process” [2: 91].

2.2. Sociocultural perspective on L2 learning motivation

Motivation theories that focus strongly on context are often described as *sociocultural* theories of motivation. This section considers socioculturally oriented theories of motivation and, more broadly, the role of context in motivation theories. It contrasts sociocultural theories with more conventional theories, considers the distinctions between different sociocultural theories of motivation, and considers the practical implications of such theories in motivating students in classroom situations.

One theoretical tradition in particular that illustrates the socially constructed nature of motivation is Vygotskian's sociocultural theory. This approach suggests that motivation is (a) socially negotiated (what it is and how it is displayed), (b) socially distributed (not just in a child's mind), and (c) context specific (determined by features of the activity setting). The most obvious implication of this approach is that motivation must be conceptualized as a “situated” phenomenon: located not solely within individuals, but within “systems” of activities involving other persons, environments, resources, and goals. From this perspective, motivation is accomplished, it is created, it is socially and culturally relative, and it is context-specific. It is not a unitary phenomenon, a general, invariant property of the individual mind, or an abstract property of individuals; it is manifested in activities,

involving most prominently, the mediation of other human beings. In Sivan's words, ". . . the individual no longer acts as the instigator of motivation. Rather, motivation is a socially negotiated process that results in an observable manifestation of interest and cognitive and affective engagement" [3: 210]. Simply put, we view motivation not as an individual construct but as a socially and culturally mediated phenomenon, located not within the student but in the student's interactions with others during specific activities.

2.3. Dornyei's three -level framework

Learning a language is a very complex process. Apart from mastering new information about and knowledge of the language, social factors and personality traits are also important factors in L2 learning. A second language is a) a communication coding system that can be taught as a school subject; b) an integral part of the individual's identity involved in almost all mental activities; c) the most important channel of social organization in the culture of the community where it is used [4]. A good L2 motivational construct should correspond to the unique nature of the L2 learning process and the specific language.

Taking Clement's approach as a basis [5], and also inspired by Crookes and Schmidt's approach of examining motivation at various conceptual levels [6], as well as other L2 motivation literature and research related to motives in the learning situation, Dornyei [4] proposed that the variables or components derived from different areas or aspects of psychology should be categorized into three sets of motivational components: the language level, the learner level and the learning situation level. The purpose was to better understand L2 motivation from an educational perspective.

Comparing Gardner's early conceptualization [7], which defined motivation in terms of effort, goals, and favorable attitudes, to Dornyei's tri-level system [4] (language level, learner level and learning situation level), it is apparent that the latter embraces more components such as the factors advanced by the achievement and attribution theories of motivation, extrinsic and intrinsic factors, the concept of self-efficacy, and context-specific issues.

The focus of most prior research was the social and pragmatic aspects of L2 motivation mainly based on Gardner's socio-educational theories. Some researchers and scholars worked on expanding L2 motivational constructs. For instance, Brown [8] added intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to the construct; Dornyei [9] and Skehan [10] considered the impact of past successes and failures as a component of L2 motivation; Clement [5] and Clement and Kruidenier [11] demonstrated that self-confidence played an important role in L2 motivation and the learning process. Other variables, for example, classroom tasks, group cohesion, course content and teaching materials, teacher feedback and rewards are also important components of L2 motivation ([8], [12-17]). A noteworthy merit of Dornyei's extended framework of L2 motivation is that the three levels are in accord with the basic components of the second language learning process, and reflect the multifaceted nature of language.

This framework not only reflects the multifaceted nature of language (the social dimension, the personal dimension and the educational subject matter dimension), but also corresponds to the three basic components of the L2 learning process (the L2, L2 learner and the L2 learning environment). The best feature of this framework is the combination of internal and external motivational factors with a

Gardnerian account of L2 learning motivation. The introduction of three different levels of factors allows for the inclusion of motivational orientations, as well as specific situations involving the learner and his or her external context. As can be seen from this model, motivation not only resides within the individual, but is also socioculturally bound.

This is reminiscent of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which posits "learning is a social, cultural and interpersonal as well as intrapersonal process" [18: 735]. As the focus of this study is to explore the relationship between motivation and academic achievement from a sociocultural perspective, Dornyei's framework of L2 motivation was chosen [4].

LANGUAGE LEVEL	Integrative motivational subsystem Instrumental motivational subsystem
LEARNER LEVEL	Need for achievement Self - confidence Language use anxiety Perceived L2 competence Causal attributions Self-efficacy
LEARNING SITUATION LEVEL	
<i>Course-specific motivational components</i>	Interest (in the course) Relevance (of the course to one's needs) Expectation (of success) Satisfaction (one has in the outcome)
<i>Teacher-specific motivational components</i>	Affiliative motive (to please the teacher) Authority type (controlling vs. autonomy - supporting) Direct socialization of motivation Modeling Task presentation Feedback Goal - orientedness
<i>Group-specific motivational components</i>	Norm and reward system Group cohesiveness Classroom goal structure (cooperative, competitive or individualistic)

Figure 1. Dornyei's framework of L2 motivation [4: 280]

3. Research Methodology

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative techniques by utilizing questionnaires and focus group interviews.

3.1. Instruments

The language learning motivation questionnaire consisted of 46 items based on

Dornyei's three-level framework of L2 motivation [4]. The items used in the questionnaire were based on statements made in discussions conducted in preparation for this study, along with existing questionnaires used in previous research into L2 motivation ([9], [12]). The participants filled out the questionnaires by indicating their agreement or

disagreement with various statements on five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). All the items were designed to assess students' attitudes towards learning English, their orientations (reasons for learning a foreign language), need for achievement, language use anxiety, group cohesion among the students and their attitudes towards the language learning environment.

The achievement test for this study was a written test on the topics and skills covered in the general English course. The test had two sections: reading and writing. Most material for the test was taken directly from the exam section of the teacher's book, or adapted from the students' book or workbook activities. All the items on the test were double-checked by experienced teachers to ensure the reliability and validity of the test. This achievement test accounted for 75% of the total semester score while the other components such as participation, a presentation, and midterm test made up the remaining 25%.

The topics for the focus group interviews were derived from the research questions and based on the data from the questionnaires with the aim of gaining in-depth information mainly about the participants' motivation levels with regard to studying English. During the course of the interview, two kinds of questions, Wh and Yes/No questions, were used in order to facilitate the interview process and to enhance the reliability of the interview data.

3.2. Participants

There were two sample groups of participants in this study: The respondents to the questionnaire (n=509) were first year students. Most of them were 18-20 years of age

and studied English in classes of 50 students each. The group was highly heterogeneous as the students came from different backgrounds and environments, ranging from cities to remote mountainous areas. At the time of this study, they were in their first semester at PPU.

All of the interviewees also filled out the questionnaire. We selected the sample for the focus group interviews from within the larger sample group for the questionnaire. The students enrolled in the D22 course at PPU were divided into 10 classes. Based on the class lists, we randomly selected eight students from each class. 80 students in 10 groups participated in the interviews. The size of the sample is 16 % of the total number of survey participants. The purpose of the focus group interviews was to explore ideas which could not be explained completely in the questionnaires.

3.3. Procedure

The motivation questionnaires were administered to all first-year students during a single class period (n=509) in the first week of the semester. This was followed by a round of focus group interviews (n=80). The focus group interviews were conducted to provide an insight into the responses recorded on the questionnaires. All the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese so that the students could easily express their opinions without the hindrance of using English. The interviews were conducted informally and confidentially and were all meticulously recorded by the researcher for later data analysis. The purpose of the questionnaires and the focus group interviews was to determine the level of students' motivation to study English and to identify which factors affected their academic achievement. Their scores for the semester exam were used to establish a hypothetical

relationship between their motivation levels and their academic achievement.

4. Results and discussions

4.1. The PPU students' motivation to learn English

The students' motivation to learn English was determined using data collected from questionnaires drawn up in accordance with Dornyei's three-level framework of L2 motivation ([9], [12]) and focus group interviews. The results of this study confirmed the validity of Dornyei's categorization of motivational components into three levels: the Language level (instrumental and integrative motivational subsystems), the Learner level

(individual motivational characteristics) and the Learning situation level (situation - specific motives relating to the course and social learning environment).

A high rating for each item reflected a positive attitude towards learning English which, in turn, indicated a high level of motivation to learn the language. We focused on measuring the PPU students' motivation to learn English through the use of ascending rankings from the instrumental orientation, knowledge orientation, and attitude towards learning English, anxiety when using English to complete tasks while studying in groups.

Overall, they rated their motivation quite highly, from 3.5 to 4 on a scale of one to five: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree.

Table 1. Frequencies and Descriptive Statistics of motivation to learn English

Factors	Overall Mean	
	Score	Std. Deviation
Instrumental Orientation	3.89	.890
Knowledge Orientation	3.76	.945
Attitudes towards Learning English	3.69	.945
English Class Anxiety	3.78	.929
Perceived Group Cohesion in the Student	4.03	.879
English Teacher Evaluation	4.34	.976
English Course Evaluation	4.37	.939
Need for achievement	4.33	.883

The analysis of the data from the focus group interviews supported the findings of the questionnaires. As one of the universities belonging to the armed forces, all the students here have to live in the dormitory during the five-year study period except for summer and Tet holidays. All of the freshman students found everything strange. They were unfamiliar with the new school and new friends who come

from different places. PPU students come from an area encompassing Quang Tri in central Vietnam to the Southern provinces of the Mekong Delta. This is a hugely heterogeneous area with vastly different cultural traditions and in which different dialects of Vietnamese are spoken. This means that the incoming students face a range of cultural barriers. Their motivation to study English was increased by

the availability of various learning forums such as clubs or study groups to help students overcome their initial hesitation to interact with each other due to the above mentioned cultural barriers and concerns that their pronunciation might not be clear.

When they came together at university, they tended to cooperate with each other. Consequently, this teamwork had a positive effect on group members. Many students said that they preferred learning English in pairs or groups, that working together improved their English skills, and that they hoped to have more opportunities to practice English in groups or pairs. Most of the students realized that the more they worked in groups or pairs, the more group cohesion they developed. In terms of the interaction between teachers and students, the results revealed that teachers succeeded in sharing their knowledge and motivating their students. In other words, teaching methods and the interaction between learners and teachers had a considerable impact on learners' motivation. Although English is considered to be a required component of the curriculum, students clearly felt a desire to obtain good results.

However, the results also showed that students held many conflicting opinions about English. English is a mandatory subject which

students need to take in order to meet the demands of social trends or professions, rather than a self-motivated or elective subject. Some students admitted that they forced themselves to study English because they needed to pass it in order to meet the university's requirements.

4.2. The relationship between students' motivation to learn English and their academic achievement

In statistics, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is a common technique utilized for social science research to describe the variance of several measured variables in terms of a smaller number of underlying latent variables (factors) to derive greater meaning while still retaining most of the data from the original list of variables [19]. We utilized this technique to refine and reduce the total of 46 items related to the motivation of the People's Police University students to learn English.

The thirteenth EFA revealed that 26 indicators satisfied all the criteria for the EFA model and six main factors were extracted. This provided a simple structure of observable clusters of variables relating to an underlying factor based on the above theoretical orientation and which accounted for 69.268 % of the variance. Each factor was assigned a name representing the related cluster of observed variables as shown below.

Table 2. Rotated Component Matrix for the thirteenth EFA

Items	Components					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
I am satisfied with what I am studying	.871					
My teacher spends a lot of time planning the lessons	.871					
My teacher is very strict with students	.619					
My English teacher has a dynamic and interesting teaching style	.544					
I look forward to going to class because my English teacher is so good	.574					
My teacher's teaching style is very attractive	.898					

My teacher takes students' learning styles into account	.823	
My teacher cares about my progress on the course	.822	Learning situational components
The syllabus is appropriately designed	.788	
My teacher is very enthusiastic about teaching	.699	
The course is directly relevant to my major	.699	
I get nervous and confused when I speak in my English class	.969	
It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class	.748	Anxiety
I am afraid that other students will laugh at me when I speak English	.697	
If I were to participate in another group like this one, I would like it to include people who are very similar to those in this group	.697	
Group activities and pair work in English are very effective	.764	
One of the most important things in this class is getting along with other students	.764	
I like English learning activities in which students work together in pairs or groups	.856	Group cohesion
I prefer to work with other students	.788	
Working with other students enhances my learning experience	.540	
Because an educated person is supposed to be able to speak English	.976	Motivational orientation
So that I can read English books, newspapers, or magazines	.976	
Because I will need it for career development	.737	
Because I think I'll need it for further studies	.730	
I do not particularly like the process of learning English and I do it only because I may need the language		Attitudes towards English learning
Because I would like to learn as many foreign languages as possible		.906
		.905

Through factor analysis, six factors which influenced academic results at the People's Police University were identified. Using each of the six newly identified factors separately, we calculated the Pearson correlation coefficients (r) for the 6 factors and used them in a multiple regression equation to evaluate the effect of student motivation on their academic achievement.

To answer the question “*What is the relationship between motivation and achievement from a sociocultural perspective?*” Multiple Regression Model (MLR) was used.

Research hypothesis Ho: Their motivation has no correlation with their academic achievement, which means none of the factors have any correlation.

X1. Satisfaction with English class and teacher's role has no correlation with their academic achievement

X2. Learning situational components have no correlation with their academic achievement

X3. Anxiety has no correlation with their academic achievement

X4. Group cohesion has no correlation with their academic achievement

X6. Attitudes towards English learning have no correlation with their academic achievement

X5. Motivational orientation has no correlation with their academic achievement

Table 3. Multiple Linear Regression loading Coefficients (a)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	7.155	.044		162.209	.000					
1 Satisfaction with English class and teacher's role	.149	.044	.252	1.119	.001	.052	.353	.052	.600	1.671
Learning situational components and expectation	.173	.044	.461	.227	.001	.511	.441	.011	.670	1.433
Anxiety	.236	.044	.318	.812	.001	.438	.438	.038	.701	1.354
Group cohesion	.332	.044	.354	.734	.001	.334	.235	.434	.732	1.457
Motivational orientation	.272	.044	.224	.508	.001	.324	.394	.309	.734	1.892
Attitudes towards English learning	.219	.044	.221	.454	.001	.321	.354	.317	.732	1.578

According to the regression loading table, variables X1 to X6 had positive effect on Y (achievement), because their regression loadings B had a statistically significant $p = 0.001$. When we compared the effect of the 6 variables on Y, X2 (Learning situational components) had the most important effect on Y with a beta of $X2 = 0.461$, following by X4 (Group cohesion) with a beta of $X4 = 0.354$, X3 (Anxiety) with a beta of $X3 = 0.318$, X1 (Satisfaction with English class and teacher's role) with a beta of $X1 = .252$, X5 (Motivational orientation) with a beta of $X5 =$

.224 and lastly X6 (Attitudes towards English learning) with a beta of $X6 = .221$.

The identified correlation function between motivation and academic achievement is shown below:

$$Y = 7.155 + 0.252.X1 + 0.461.X2 + 0.318.X3 + 0.354.X4 + 0.224.X5 + 0.221.X6$$

The loadings all being positive indicated that the motivation to study had a positive correlation with academic achievement, when the former increased, the latter also increased, and vice versa.

In a nutshell, the Ho hypothesis was rejected. The results showed that motivational factors had a positive effect on academic achievement.

In short, after running EFA, the questionnaire's eight initial factors were refined down to six ones. When considering the level of endorsement of each of the factors, it was clear that the students were motivated to study English. Higher rankings for Learning situational components and Group cohesion indicated that the learning environment had a huge impact on motivation which resulted in better achievement. Consequently, if we want to improve achievement, we should manipulate motivation, especially these two most important and influential factors.

5. Conclusion

The results from the questionnaires and focus group interviews showed that the majority of the students involved in this study were motivated and had a positive attitude toward learning English; however, their reasons for learning English were more instrumental in nature with utilitarian purposes such as passing the exams rather than studying for pleasure or broadening their knowledge. They were not motivated to study English because of external pressures such as getting a better job or salary or understating their specialties. This is understandable since each PPU student is guaranteed a position after graduation, which lowers students' motivation to study English to some extent.

Motivation and English learning achievement were positively correlated with each other. The results of the study indicated that there was a strong positive relationship

between student achievement and motivation. This might be due to the fact that the students who got high grades for English tended to be interested in learning English. The students' achievement had a bolstering effect on their motivation. It enabled students to use the target language more often, encouraged communication with others in the language and created a safe classroom environment for engaging in discussions and other communicative activities.

The investigation into the students' motivation levels to study English at the Police University also showed that motivation is a socially mediated process. An individual's motivation comes not only from within, but is also socioculturally mediated through interacting with others in the broader social context. It means that motivation is derived from specific aspects of the learning situation. As Oxford and Shearin [20] argue, while the source of motivation may not be of particular importance to scholars, it is very important in a practical sense to teachers who want to stimulate students' motivation. "Without knowing where the roots of motivation lie, how can teachers water those roots?" [20: 15]. The application of Dornyei's model [4] to investigate the motivation of Police students in this case relates to Oxford and Shearin's [20] recommendation that foreign language learning be improved or bolstered with advice to teachers regarding how to motivate students at each of the three levels in the model. At the same time, the results also identify which of the factors cause demotivation and affect motivation most. This helps us come up with appropriate ways to increase students' motivation and design effective strategic plans for English teaching and learning.

However, this was a preliminary study to determine the students' motivation level at PPU after they completed their first semester of English studies. This procedure will be repeated with the same group of students in the second semester to identify the dynamic aspects of motivation and to confirm or reject the hypothetical relationship between motivation and academic achievement identified in the first semester.

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Động cơ và kết quả học tập môn tiếng Anh của sinh viên trường Đại học CSND TP. Hồ Chí Minh theo quan điểm văn hóa xã hội

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Tóm tắt: Trong số những yếu tố ảnh hưởng đến kết quả học tập của sinh viên, động cơ được xem là một yếu tố quan trọng. Mục tiêu chính của nghiên cứu này là xác định mức độ động lực học tập, xác định những yếu tố văn hóa xã hội ảnh hưởng đến động lực học tập và mối liên hệ giữa động lực học tập với kết quả học tập môn tiếng Anh của sinh viên trường Đại học CSND. Khách thể nghiên cứu bao gồm 509 sinh viên năm thứ nhất. Công cụ thu thập số liệu là bảng hỏi và phỏng vấn nhóm. Các phương pháp sử dụng để phân tích số liệu bao gồm thống kê mô tả để xác định động lực học tập tiếng Anh của sinh viên, dùng phân tích nhân tố để xác định các thành tố của động lực và dùng phép tính hồi quy đa biến để xác định mối liên hệ giữa động lực học tập và kết quả học tập. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy phần lớn sinh viên đều có động lực và thái độ tích cực học tập môn tiếng Anh. Tuy nhiên, lý do của việc học tiếng Anh chỉ là để đạt điểm theo quy định chứ không phải vì yêu thích môn học này hay vì muốn mở rộng kiến thức. Kết quả phân tích cho thấy rằng động lực tương quan thuận với kết quả học tập, trong đó cần chú trọng hai thành tố tác động đến động lực học tập là môi trường học và liên kết nhóm. Kết quả nghiên cứu sẽ là nguồn tham khảo hữu ích giúp cho giảng viên cũng như nhà nghiên cứu có biện pháp phù hợp và hữu hiệu nhằm tăng động lực học tập tiếng Anh cho sinh viên của trường.

Từ khóa: Động lực học tập của sinh viên, kết quả học tập, quan điểm văn hóa xã hội.