

THE MOTIVATION OF UNDERGRADUTES LEARNING MANDARIN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Motivation has been defined as the learner's orientation with regard to the learning goals of a second or foreign language. Scholars and researchers believe that second or foreign language learners will devote considerable effort to achieve their learning goals. Learning goals are essential for learning a second or foreign language successfully. Thus, this study applied a qualitative research design which emphasized data collection from educational artefacts. Convenience sampling method was used for collecting data. Essays written by 65 students providing their goals for learning Mandarin from a university which only caters for indigenous students were collected and analysed. All the essay writers were students who were enrolled in a Mandarin course in three different levels. All of them were aged 21-22 with an average age of 21.7. Content analysis was employed to explore information from the transcripts. Thirty themes of learning goals were found from the data which were subsequently grouped into nine motivational categories: *Future Career*, *Communication*, *Future Self*, *Interest*, *Friendship*, *External Influence*, *Culture*, *Academic Requirement*, and *Travel*. The study recommends curricula planners to strengthen the present curriculum for the Mandarin courses with the students' learning motivations as one of the ways to encourage learners to devote more efforts to their language learning. The study also suggests that for the future, similar studies should be replicated with a blended motivational framework and a triangulation method designed to find support for the findings of this study as well as to explore more fully the relationships among various types of motivations.

Keywords: Motivation, motive, orientations, integrative, extrinsic, intrinsic.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Mandarin refers to Standard Chinese or Standard Mandarin which is based on the particular Mandarin dialect spoken in Beijing. It is the most common spoken language amongst the Chinese throughout the world. Many synonyms are used for Mandarin in different countries. It is called "Putonghua" (general spoken language) and "Hanyu" (Chinese language) in China, "Guoyu" (national language) in Taiwan and "Huayu" (Chinese language) in South-east Asian countries such as Malaysia and Singapore. Mandarin functions as the official language of the People's Republic of China, the official language of the Republic of China (Taiwan), one of the national languages of Singapore, and it also functions as a lingua franca amongst the Malaysian Chinese who speak different Chinese dialects.

Due to the rapid development of the economy and huge market in China, the interest in learning Mandarin as a foreign language is noticeable in many countries (Ramzy, 2006). In Malaysia, a country which has developed a tight diplomatic and economic relationship with China since 1976, the interest in learning Mandarin as a foreign language among the non-Chinese learners is also growing where there is a quantum leap of learners at tertiary level. For example, Cheun (2006) noted that the number of students who learned Mandarin as a foreign language in 1994 at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) was about 788 and the number increased tremendously to about 8000 students in 2004.

According to Malaysia Census 2011 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2016), Malays and other natives form 67.4 % of the population in Malaysia, followed by the Chinese at 24.6 %. The Indians at 7.3 % were the third largest race while those categorised under others made up just 0.7 % of the population. The Malay language is the national language and most Malaysians use the Malay language to communicate among themselves. English is the second language for Malaysians; it is widely used in education, legal and administration besides communication purposes. Mandarin is only widely used among the Malaysian Chinese community. Very few non-Chinese Malaysians know Mandarin. It does not serve as a means of communication outside the Chinese community. In view of that, Mandarin is viewed as the mother tongue of the Malaysian Chinese and as a foreign language for the non-Chinese Malaysians.

Although more and more non-Chinese Malaysians are learning Mandarin, the learning of Mandarin as a foreign language does not seem to achieve the desired outcomes. As Naimah (2005) noted, most of the foreign language students cannot communicate effectively in the language they learn. Many factors might cause the ineffective results. Cheun (2006) revealed that the learners might face learning problems due to the interference of their mother tongue, a non-conducive learning environment and insufficient learning time. On the other hand, Tan and Hoe (2009) think that lacking of vocabulary is one of the causes why the learners cannot communicate effectively. Tan and Hoe (2007) postulated that more studies need to be carried out to investigate the learners' psychological factors especially the learners' learning motivation.

Many studies have showed motivation is a major determining factor in language learning success (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Ellis, 1994; Gardner, 1985; 2001; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) noted that over the past decade, "of all the constructs covered in this book, motivation is the one that has been subject to the most thorough theoretical overhaul" (p. 72). It is important for the curricula planners and practitioners to address the learners' motivation, because if the students' learning motivation is known, then syllabus, materials, and activities can be tailored to appeal to their values and interests (Dörnyei, 2001) and it will help keep the learners more invested in the learning process (Oxford & Shearin, 1994).

On the other hand, various researchers (e.g. Fotos, 1994; Kimura, Nakata, & Okumura, 2001) have expressed their concern that the previous studies on language learning motivation employed less diverse research methodologies as most of the studies used quantitative research design which solely used self-reported survey as their instrument. For example, Fotos (1994) said, research in this area "has been typically conducted using survey methods that have varied little since Gardner published his general research design in 1968" (p.44). They have postulated that more diverse research methodologies should be used for research purpose.

To address the concern raised, that is, to employ diverse design and to know the learners' motivation, this study applied a qualitative research design which emphasized data collection from educational artefacts to answer the following research question:

What is the language learning motivation of students learning Mandarin as a foreign language?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Specifically in the field of second or foreign language (L2) learning, language learning motivation refers to the learner's orientations with regard to the goal of learning a second or foreign language (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Norris-Holt, 2001). Gardner (1985) as one of the pioneering researchers in L2 motivation, defines language learning motivation as "the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity" (p.10). He also believes that a language learner will "devote considerable effort" to achieve a particular goal, and subsequently "experiences satisfaction in the activities associated with achieving this goal" (Gardner & McIntyre, 1993, p.2).

Gardner and Lambert (1972) examined language learning motivation as a number of different learning orientations which are further clustered into two basic types, namely, integrative and instrumental motivations. Gardner and Lambert (1972) define integrative motivation as "reflecting a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other group" (p. 132). On the other hand, instrumental motivation refers to the motive for utilitarian purposes of learning a language, such as to get a better job, to enhance job promotion prospects and to pass a required examination (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

Although the integrative-instrumental dichotomy has influenced virtually all L2 learning motivation related research, the criticism of Gardner's integrative-ness has urged many L2 motivation researchers to advocate new theoretical frameworks to incorporate new ideas (e.g., Dörnyei, 1994; Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 2001; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Among the proposals made, the self-determination theory (SDT) which emphasizes intrinsic - extrinsic motivation is one of the influential approaches that has been adapted and embraced by scholars in the field of L2 learning to be utilized for a better understanding of L2 motivation. In SDT, Ryan and Deci (2000a, 2000b) define intrinsic motivation as the desire of an individual to engage in an activity in anticipation of internally rewarding feelings that accompany the activity such as pleasure, satisfaction, enjoyment, sense of competence and self-determination. On the other hand, Deci and Ryan (1985), and Ryan and Deci (2000a, 2000b) consider extrinsic motivation as the desire in doing an activity other than an interest in the activity itself; the engagement in the activity is due to pressure or reward from outside and beyond the actor's self. In their later work, Ryan and Deci (2000b) categorized extrinsic motivation into three sub-types, namely, external regulation, introjection regulation, and identified regulation.

Since the year 2000, the study of L2 motivation has witnessed two directions of development. Some researchers especially those in Asia prefer to incorporate integrative-instrumental and intrinsic-extrinsic dichotomies with other motivational models from main stream psychology, and then use factor analysis to identify the underlying factors (e.g. Chan & Chin, 2008; Gonzales, 2010; Kimura, Nakata, & Okumura, 2001).

On the other hand, there are some researchers who are moving towards accommodating the Self Concept from mainstream psychology whilst maintaining the roots of previous integrative-instrumental and intrinsic-extrinsic dichotomies. Dörnyei (2005, 2009) is the main scholar who started this movement by introducing a L2 Motivational Self System which consists of three dimensions, namely, the Ideal L2 self; the Ought to L2 self and L2 Learning Experience. The Ideal L2 self is defined as a "desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves" (p. 29), whereas, the Ought to L2 self concerns "the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes" (p. 29). On the other hand, L2 Learning Experience focuses on "situated executive motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience" (p. 29).

3.0 METHODOLOGY

A type of educational artefact, that is, essays written by students were collected for content analysis. The analysis of the essays was an attempt to gain insights into students' motivation or orientations towards learning Mandarin. According to Gall, Gall and Borg (2007), written materials including text book, completed homework and so forth are educational artefacts. Essays written by the students constitute completed homework, thus, it is considered as one type of educational artefacts. Content analysis was employed to elicit meaning from the essays and to summarize the message content. The method used to analyze the data was through reading and rereading the essays. All essays collected were coded to facilitate easier management of data and the citation of specific contributions. For example, 'M1/FM8' - M1 refers to Mandarin Level One while FM8 refers to the essay written by the eighth female student. The task of analyzing data to arrive at a conclusion followed three key stages as suggested by Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, and Sorensen (2006): (i) familiarization and organization, (ii) coding and recoding, and (iii) summarizing and interpreting. The coding of themes and the grouping of categories in this study were verified by two cognitive science academicians from a neighbouring university.

Convenience sampling method was used for collecting data. The participants involved in this study were undergraduates from a branch campus of a Malaysian university situated in a northern state of Malaysia. The participants were 187 students who were studying a Mandarin course during the duration of the study. The researcher invited the participants through their instructors to write an essay of around 200-300 words. The students were told it was not for assessment purpose but to address their reasons to select this language as their compulsory elective course. The students were asked to use a pseudonym as a way to encourage the students to tell their true reasons. The students were given a form to fill in and it was attached to their essay. The form consisted of questions regarding the students' particulars such as age, sex, faculty, Mandarin level, their contact with the Chinese community and so on. A total of 70 students agreed to participate voluntarily, but only 65 essays were collected during the next Mandarin lesson.

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS

4.1 Participants' Information

The participants in this study were from a university which only caters for indigenous students. The students in this university were required to learn a foreign language as a compulsory elective to meet the university's foreign language requirement. Besides Mandarin, Arabic, French, German, Italian, Korean, and Japanese were offered to the students. The assessment of the foreign language course is the same for every language which include listening, speaking, and writing tests and a group language project. The Mandarin course consists of three levels (Levels One, Two and Three). Each level consumes two hours per week per semester. The students learn Mandarin through "Hanyu Pinyin" (Romanised Chinese) but not Chinese characters. They only learn very limited Chinese characters at Level Three.

A total of 65 students participated in this study. They are Malays, aged 21-22 with an average age of 21.7. Among these 65 students, 17 students were from the Faculty of Office Management and Technology, five of them were males and the remaining were females. Sixteen students, comprising two males and 14 females were from the Faculty of Business Management. Another 32 students, consisting of 17 males and 15 females, were students from the Faculty of Engineering.

Before studying in the university, the students have been learning English in school as a second language for twelve years. English is the medium of instruction of the university where they are studying. Chinese is not foreign to them. They have Chinese friends, schoolmates and neighbours. However, they communicate in the Malay language or English. There are numerous Chinese programmes on television,

and those who like to watch these Chinese programmes usually refer to the Malay sub-titles without understanding the language.

4.2 Analysis of Essays

Thirty themes of learning orientations were found in the students' essays. The frequency count of the occurrence of each coding theme from the analysis of the essays is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The Frequency Count of Coding Themes from the Analysis of Essays

No.	Code	Theme	Male	Female	Total
1	JOB	better chance to get a job	7	28	35
2	HIFC	helping in their future career	9	5	13
3	TIAW	to interact at workplace later	2	5	7
4	TIWC	to interact with Chinese society	2	15	17
5	TIWN	to interact with neighbours	-	1	1
6	TIWF	to interact with friends	2	3	5
7	TCPG	to communicate for purchasing goods	5	2	7
8	TRCC	to be closer to Chinese community	6	2	8
9	TSF	to strengthen friendship	5	2	7
10	TRHU	To foster the racial harmony and unity	3	2	5
11	GMF	get more friends	5	4	9
12	FFT	foster family ties	2	1	3
13	INT	interested in the language	3	12	15
14	LIKE	like the language	1	1	2
15	FUN	it is fun	2	-	2
16	UFL	attracted by the unique features of the language	1	13	12
17	LLH	learning foreign language as a hobby.	1	1	2
18	WMLS	watching movies and listening to songs	8	8	16
19	CCC	to learn the Chinese customs and culture	4	10	14
20	CLW	Chinese will be an important language in the world	4	8	12
21	DTC	desire to travel to China	3	6	9
22	WMK	will be more knowledgeable	3	9	12
23	WMC	I will be more confident	1	5	6

24	LCC	learn Chinese as a challenge	1	4	5
25	BEN	it will benefit me		2	2
26	BML	wish to be multi-lingual	3	11	14
27	IFM	influence by family members	2	1	3
28	IFF	influence by friends		1	1
29	TAR	to fulfil the academic requirement	4	5	9
30	THM	easy to score high marks	1	2	3

Nine categories were created from the thirty themes found in the essays: *Future Career, Communication, Future Self, Interest, Friendship, External Influence, Culture, Academic Requirement, and Travel*. These categories are displayed in Table 2.

Category	Code belonging to the category	Frequency
(i) Future Career	JOB, HIFC, BEN	50
(ii) Communication	TIWF, TIAW, TIWC, TIWN, TCPG	37
(iii) Future Self	WMK, BML, WMC, LCC	37
(iv) Interest	INT, LIKE, FUN, UFL, LLH,	33
(v) Friendship	TRCC, TSF, TRHU, GMF, FFT	32
(vi) External Influence	WMLS, IFM, IFF, CLW	32
(vii) Culture	CCC	14
(viii) Academic Requirement	TAR, THM	12
(ix) Travel	DTC	9

The analysis of essays showed that a predominant number of the texts (50 cases) recorded the perceived benefits to their future careers as the motive for learning Mandarin. Specifically, 35 students learned Mandarin because they believed it would enhance their employment prospects after graduation. They believe that if they can communicate well in Mandarin, they will easily get a job as many local companies are owned by Malaysian Chinese. Furthermore, China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong are among the major investors in Malaysia. On the other hand, a few (15 cases) foresaw that the knowledge of Mandarin would be useful for future career advancement; they believed that knowledge of Mandarin would help them to stand a better chance in getting a promotion. In addition, two students thought that learning Mandarin would benefit them in their future.

The findings from the essays also revealed that *Communication* was an important consideration. Learning for communication purposes emerged as one of the major motives as divulged in the essays. It was

mentioned in 37 cases. Four types of *Communication* were identified: to interact at the workplace, to interact with neighbours, to interact with friends and to communicate for purchasing goods. Among these 37 cases, 23 cases mentioned that they might interact more efficiently with the Chinese community if they could speak Mandarin, especially with their Chinese friends and neighbours.

Learning Mandarin for self-development reflects the desire for a better future self of some students (37 cases). Some of the students were of the opinion that they would be more knowledgeable by learning an additional language since it would facilitate the acquisition of more knowledge through the reading of books, journals, and newspapers in the additional language. They also realized that learning Mandarin would make them multi-lingual. Besides, the essays also revealed that the learners felt that they would be more confident and competitive than those who had no knowledge of Mandarin. Although they seemed to be fully aware of the difficulties involved in learning the language, they treated learning Mandarin as a challenge to themselves.

A total of 33 students' motives were grouped under *Interest*. Some of them revealed that they learned the language because they were interested (15 cases) and liked the language (2 cases). Two students thought that it was fun learning the language while two students treated learning Mandarin as their hobby. Moreover, some of them (12 cases) were learning Mandarin because they were attracted by the unique features of the language.

The *Friendship* factor was cited as a motive by many students (32 cases) to strengthen friendship or relationship and foster racial harmony with the Chinese. These students believed that learning Mandarin would make them more at ease with their Chinese friends, strengthen their friendship and foster racial harmony and unity in Malaysia. Some of them wanted to make more friends by taking up Mandarin.

Entertainment, influence by others, fostering closer family ties, and the belief in Mandarin as a future influential language constituted the category, *External Influence*. There was evidence to show that some students (16 cases) were learning Mandarin because they wished to understand the Chinese dramas and movies which they enjoyed watching. On the other hand, several students (12 cases) revealed that their motive for learning Mandarin was because they noticed the current development of China in the world's economy and they were influenced by the prediction that China will be a strong economic power besides America and Russia. This made them perceive Mandarin to be an important language in the world. Additionally, there were students (3 cases) who revealed that they wanted to learn Mandarin because of the influence from their family members. One of their parents or grandparents was Chinese. They hoped to foster closer family ties with their Chinese relatives through communication in Mandarin. Some were encouraged or influenced by their Mandarin speaking family members to learn the language. On the other hand, there were also some students who learn the language just to follow their friends.

Culture, Academic Requirement and *Travel* were categories of the learning motives which were less frequently mentioned by the students. Only 14 cases mentioned that they studied the language because they wished to learn Chinese customs and culture. None of them revealed the motive to integrate with the target language community. Some students (9 cases) revealed that they were learning Mandarin just to fulfil the academic requirement, and there were some students (5 cases) too who revealed that they picked up Mandarin because they thought that it was easy to score high marks. On the other hand, several students (9 cases) reported that they were learning Mandarin because of their motive to travel to China, Hong Kong or Taiwan.

5.0 DISCUSSION

The results show that there is a wide variety of orientations which motivate the students to learn Mandarin. It is obvious that *Future Career*, *Communication*, *Future Self*, *Interest*, *Friendship*, and *External Influence* were the learning orientations that urged the majority of students to learn Mandarin. However, there were also some orientations such as *Culture*, *Academic Requirement*, and *Travel* which do exist among some students.

Future Career, *Travel*, and *Academic Requirement* are elements of instrumental motivation, whereas *Friendship*, *Communication*, and *Culture* are elements of integrative motivation. On the other hand, *External Influence* is a characteristic of extrinsic motivation, and *Interest* is obviously an intrinsic motivation. This result once again strengthens some scholars' view that situations which include both intrinsic-extrinsic motivation and integrative-instrumental motivation may coexist, although the close proximity of intrinsic-extrinsic motivation and integrative-instrumental motivations has been noted (e.g., Brown, 2007; Schmidt, Boraire & Kassabgy, 1996).

There are two previous studies on a similar topic (Li, 2012; Tan, Ooi, & Hairul, 2012). Tan, Ooi and Hairul's (2012) study investigated the learning orientations of students through face-to-face interviews. The participants of their study were from another branch campus of the same university as in this study. Four major categories of learning orientations were grouped in the study: Career-Oriented, Enjoyment and Interest, Friendship, and Influence by others. The findings of the current study are congruent with their findings. On the other hand, Li (2012) used mix method to investigate her 75 participants from another university, Universiti Malaysia Kelantan. Her findings, which indicated that the participants learned Mandarin for "interaction", "job's prospect", "self-advancement" and "like the language", have also shown congruent results.

When the findings of this study are compared to the definition of L2 Motivational Self System, it shows the absence of the Ought to L2 self and L2 Learning Experience. The findings do not postulate that the students who learn Mandarin as a foreign language have "the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29). They also did not focus on "situated executive motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience" (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 29). The findings of this study only partially support the L2 Motivational Self System.

In short, the study shows that the learning motivation of the students is composed of a hybrid type of learning motivation, with majority of the students being instrumentally motivated which oriented to the learners' future career, particularly in enhancing their opportunity when seeking employment. The results support most of the findings of the quantitative studies done in Asia which showed the existence of hybrid motivation in learning foreign languages, with "career-oriented" as the most important motivation (e.g., Chan & Chin, 2008; Gonzales, 2010; Kimura, Nakata, & Okumura, 2001; Li, 2012). However, just like most of the past studies in Asia, the students in this study inclined to relate motivation to their personal goal or interests, they did not relate their motivation in a specific situation—classroom settings mention 'acculturated external motivation,' or peer recognition, and student-teacher relationship which are key factors that influenced some students' motivation and learning in classrooms (Loima & Vibulphol, 2016).

6.0 CONCLUSION

The present study clearly indicates that the language learning motivation among Malay undergraduates who learn Mandarin as a foreign language is complex. The data of the study shows that the students attend Mandarin courses for a variety of motivations including instrumental, integrative, intrinsic and

extrinsic motivations. For example, the students who learn Mandarin for Communication motive are also motivated by other orientations, such as for entertainment, travel, friendship and other orientations. This indicates that language learning motivations that may seem antithetical can coexist. For instance, students with strong instrumental motivation are also motivated to learn the language for integrative motivation as well. However, the data has shown that majority of the students are most likely to appreciate the instrumental and intrinsic values in learning Mandarin for future career benefits, enjoyment and also to have an interest in making contact with the Chinese community as well.

The study recommends curricula planners to strengthen the present curriculum for the Mandarin course with the students' learning motivations found in this study. This will help to strengthen the students' learning motivation and encourage them to devote more efforts to achieve their learning goals. As this study was also only limited to analysis of educational artefacts, it is suggested that for future studies on the motivation of students learning Mandarin as a foreign language, a blended motivational framework and a quantitative method should be applied to support the findings of this study as well as to explore more fully the relationships among various types of motivation.

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