

Creating a learning environment to enhance student motivation education essay

[Environment](#), [Environmental Study](#)



Motivation to learn a second language is considered as one of the main determinants of student achievement. Once language study begins, factors related to the learning environment are the most important factors to impact on motivation, and are also most likely to demotivate learners. The purpose of this empirical study was to explore the perceptions of students concerning its EFL learning environment in three aspects: the physical environment, instructional arrangements and social interaction. The study also investigated the relationship between the learning environment and student motivation. Results of the questionnaire conducted for 20 college students at a private university in Turkey indicate that student motivation was positively correlated with the learning environment. The study also found that the physical environment was perceived by students to be an obstacle to their learning while the instructional arrangements and the social interaction were considered to be an incentive.

Introduction

Statement of Purpose

This present study, using quantitative methodology, examined how students at a private university in Turkey perceived the EFL learning environment in terms of the physical conditions of their school, the instructional arrangements and the social interaction. The study also examined the impact of these three aspects of the learning environment on student motivation.

Research Question

The current study sought to answer the following research question;

Does learning environment in an EFL classroom enhance student motivation to study English?

Research Hypothesis

The learning environment affects student motivation.

Communication is considered as one of the hallmarks of the 21st century and English has become the language of global interaction. Therefore, in the specific area of English Language Teaching, an important issue is how to promote teacher skills to produce more active and motivated learners (Al-Ansari, 2005). Csizer, Dornyei and Nemeth (2006) claimed that motivation is an important factor in student learning and achievement (Huang, 2008). Many second and foreign language learning researchers such as Rueda and Chen have emphasized that “ students with greater second/foreign language learning motivation, in most cases, receive higher grades and achieve better proficiency in the target language (Rueda and Chen, 2005, p. 210). Likewise, Hsieh (2002) claimed that a positive relationship exists between the learning environment and student motivation. Another important determinant of language learning achievement is the opportunity for communication in authentic situations and settings (Perez, 2004). There are various studies conducted to examine different aspects of learning environment such as cooperative learning methodology and online EFL interaction which are believed to increase student learning motivation.

Prior to the discussion of the studies regarding the learning environment, it would be good to advert to the motivation construct and its various components. Gardner and Lambert's (1959) theoretical framework hypothesized two motivational orientations: integrative and instrumental. The former is associated with a second language learner wishing to learn more about the culture of the target language and eventually be accepted as a member of that group (Rueda and Chen, 2005) whereas the latter is related to "the potential gains of L2 proficiency, such as getting a better job or a high salary" (Dornyei, 1994, p. 274). As cited in Rueda and Chen's (2005) article although these two components were considered as essential to success in learning a second language, it was the aspect of integrative motivation that was found to sustain long term success. Bernaus and Gardner (2008) conducted a study in Spain which investigated language teaching strategies and their effects on students' motivation and English achievement. The participants were 31 EFL teachers and their students (N=694) who rated the frequency of use of 26 strategies in their classes. In addition, the mini-Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993) was used. The results indicated that integrativeness, attitudes toward the learning situation, and instrumental orientation contribute positively to motivation and that motivation was a positive predictor of English achievement, whereas attitudes toward the learning situation and language anxiety were negative predictors. It was also noted that these relationships vary somewhat from class to class. Likewise, another study which was conducted by Ibarra, Lasabaster and Sierra (2007) investigated attitudes toward languages and preferences for class activities

of native and foreign students in the Basque country. A questionnaire was designed and the results revealed that both groups preferred classroom activities that involved communication and active participation using authentic materials in the language classes instead of simply following the textbook. Some studies have suggested that motivational beliefs about foreign language acquisition vary from culture to culture. However, in one study which was conducted in California, motivational processes in language acquisition across different ethnic groups were tested through a background information survey, a motivation information questionnaire and a learning outcome questionnaire. The results revealed that a student's motivational belief about foreign language learning is impacted by the individual's cultural background and that the main factor leading Chinese American students to acquire Chinese language is to be part of the Chinese-speaking family (Rueda and Chen, 2005, p. 222).

There are also some studies that have attempted to extend the Gardnerian construct by adding new components, such as extrinsic motivation which are characterized by behaviors that the individual performs to receive some extrinsic reward (e. g., good grades) and intrinsic motivation which is associated with internal reward (e. g., the joy of doing a particular activity) (Dornyei, 1994). As cited in Bernaus and Gardner's (2008) article, Noels, Clement, and Pelletier (1999) studied the relation between student perceptions of their teacher's communicative style and the students' motivation and language competence. The study found that " intrinsic motivation was negatively associated with class anxiety, with perceptions of

the teacher as controlling, and with perceptions of being controlled by the environment, but that it was positively related to motivational intensity, to intention to continue language study and to self evaluation of language skills" (Bernaus and Gardner, 2008, p. 388).

Another important point concerning the field is that " motivation itself is dynamic" as stated by Gardner and MacIntyre in Dornyei's (1994) article. In their longitudinal and cross sectional study Campbell and Storch (2011) examined learner's motivation to learn Chinese as a second language through conducting interviews with learners at different year levels over the course of a university semester. The study findings showed that " the motivation of second language learners is diverse and complex, and that L2 learning motivation changes and fluctuates over time" (Campbell and Storch, 2011, p. 184). As cited in Dornyei and Skehan's (2003) article, " most learners experience a fluctuation of their enthusiasm/commitment sometimes on a day-to-day basis" (Dornyei and Skehan, 2003, p. 617).

In countries, where there is not a surrounding population using English actively, the language is often taught as a traditional classroom subject, with students interacting solely with their teachers and classmates - far from an authentic learning environment. These environments rarely include the opportunity to interact with native speakers of English and authentic materials are believed to be conducive to learning the target language. It was claimed that there is a positive relationship between the learning environment and student motivation and that a good learning environment increases the chances of learning and inspires the learning spirit (Chang &

Shu, 2000). Wu, Yen and Marek (2011) conducted a study at a technical university in Taiwan with the participation of 227 EFL learners. For the purposes of the study, a survey methodology, Exploratory Factor Analysis and Structural Equation Modeling were used to examine which elements of learning via videoconferencing most beneficially affect motivation, confidence and ability. The study revealed that well designed videoconferencing for interaction with native speakers, rich in cultural information does increase confidence and improve motivation. The findings led the researchers to the conclusion that online learning, used well, and managed by the teacher, providing authentic interaction with native English speakers, can be particularly well-suited to move learners from passivity into active, highly motivated learning” (Wu, Yen, Marek, 2011, p. 120). Therefore, it was explicitly suggested in their article that EFL instructors attempt to replicate the target language environment through technology-assisted teaching, inject authenticity and shift the focus of the classroom from lecture and memorization to active learning.

Besides the use of technology, an impressive body of research found that cooperative learning – students working in mixed-ability groups – can be an effective instructional method. To illustrate, Hancock (2004) carried out a study at a university in the United States and investigated the effects of fifty-two graduate students’ peer orientation on achievement and motivation to learn with cooperative learning strategies while enrolled in an educational research methods course. The researcher used the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ; Pintrich et al., 1991), the Learning Style

Inventory (LSI-2; Kolb, 1985) to assess peer orientation and techniques of qualitative research analysis to evaluate students' narrative responses to the items regarding what they liked and disliked about the course. The findings of this study indicated that differences in the achievement of students with high and low peer orientation were not statistically significant. However, Hancock pointed out that the motivational levels of those students differed significantly. Students who had high peer orientation were significantly more motivated to learn when exposed to cooperative learning strategies than were students with low peer orientation (Hancock, 2004). In a similar study, Wilson (1998) found that graduate students working in cooperative learning groups demonstrated less anxiety when the professor used humor, applied statistics to real-world situations, discussed students' anxiety, and lowered the threat of evaluation (Hancock, 2004, p. 160).

All in all, in the literature review above, studies regarding the motivational constructs and the impact of learning environment on motivation to study English have been presented. Considerable evidence has been found regarding the importance of motivation in second and foreign language acquisition. In the light of the above discussion, EFL instructors should take into consideration the importance of motivation on student achievement and attempt to create a suitable learning environment. This study aims to explore the factors that are conducive to the creation of a learning environment and its influence on student motivation to study English. It also investigates various aspects of an authentic learning environment such as

the use of computer-mediated communication and cooperative learning method.

Methodology

Population and Sample

In this survey research, a questionnaire was administered to 20 Turkish EFL students who were selected randomly out of 400 students. These 20 participants were enrolled in the preparatory school in a private university in Istanbul, Turkey. The educational backgrounds of the participants demonstrated that they began to study English at 8.55 years old and that their university exam score was 358.53 on the average. The participants' average age was 18.55 years. The sample for the present study was selected using random sampling in order to provide each student with an equal opportunity to be selected (Anceay & Anceay, 2009). The students were exposed to English 30 hours per week, including grammar and four skills. However, it should be kept in mind that this number decreases when they go to their respective faculties as they will start having their faculty courses and the instruction may not necessarily be given in English.

Instrumentation

This study was inspired by Wen-chi Vivian Wu and Pin-hsiang Natalie Wu's (2008) study entitled *Creating an Authentic EFL Learning Environment to Enhance Student Motivation to Study English*. Data was collected using a questionnaire which was developed by these researchers.

The students were asked to complete the questionnaire during class hour using a five-point Likert scale ranged from “ 1” indicating not at all to “ 5” indicating very strongly (see Appendix 1). The questionnaire was divided into two sections with 54 items in total. Section A - motivation for learning English consisting of 20 items asked the participants to rate how motivated they were to study English. The items used in this section are divided into two categories: instrumental and integrative. That is, item 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16, and 18 are related to instrumental motivation whereas items 7, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18 and 20 are concerned with integrative motivation. Therefore, it should be kept in mind that in this section of the questionnaire, most of the questions check instrumental motivation as they outnumber the other category.

Section B involved 34 items regarding the characteristics of the EFL learning environment. The 34 question items in this section were presented in three categories: physical environment, instructional arrangements, and social interaction. Two separate questions were used for each question item in Section B.

These questions were:

How much is each of the following a part of your EFL Program?

How important is each of the following to your learning in the EFL Program?

The first question per item asked the participants about how much each item was present in their environment using a five-point Likert scale ranged this

time from “ 1” indicating not at all to “ 5” indicating very highly. The second question asked how important this item was to their learning by using the same five-point Likert scale.

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered to 20 participants during the class period which lasted 45 minutes. The participants were all present in class and they received the questionnaire at the same time. In order to ensure that all the items on the questionnaire were clearly understood by the participants, the researcher went through each item on the questionnaire mostly providing the students with explanations in their native language. The participants were also informed about how they can rate the items according to the Likert scale which ranged from 1 to 5. Before the participants indicated their opinions in Section B, the researcher drew their attention to the two questions that needed to be responded separately. The researcher went over each item in turn giving the participants sufficient time to respond to both questions. The questionnaire sheets were collected from all participants by the end of the class period.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze the quantitative data. By using Pearson’s r coefficient, the association between motivation and learning environment was calculated to find out how strongly they were related to each other and whether that correlation was positive or negative. The researcher did not use some of the

measures of central tendency in this research because they were not valid for questions that use the ordinal scale. Consequently, the mean and the standard deviations were not calculated for questions using the ordinal scale. Descriptive statistics was used to compare the percentages of the students' responses to the survey items.

Results

Pearson product-moment correlations were used to analyze the inter-correlations of two motivation factors which are instrumental and integrative motivation. Similarly, the correlations among the three categories of the learning environment - physical environment, instructional arrangements and social interaction - were calculated as well. Since there are two questions to be responded regarding Section B of the questionnaire, six variables are obtained for learning environment. That is, three categories indicate the first question which is related to "existence" and three categories refer to the second question concerning "existence". Therefore, the researcher formed an eight by eight (8 x 8) matrix correlation which involve instrumental motivation, integrative motivation, existence of physical conditions, instructional arrangements and social interaction, and the importance of physical conditions, instructional arrangements and social interaction. Table 1 reports the correlations among these dimensions.

Table 1. Correlation Matrix of Categories in the survey

Instrumental Motivation

Integrative Motivation

Physical Environment (Existence)

Instructional Arrangements (Existence)

Social Interaction (Existence)

Physical Environment (Importance)

Instructional Arrangements (Importance)

Social Interaction (Importance)

Instrumental Motivation

Integrative Motivation

- . 098

Physical Environment (Existence)

. 003

. 250**

Instructional Arrangements (Existence)

. 035

-. 014

. 174*

Social Interaction (Existence)

. 085

-. 052

-. 115

. 259**

Physical Environment (Importance)

. 273**

. 117

. 117

. 099

. 106

Instructional Arrangements (Importance)

. 176**

. 067

-. 004

. 204**

. 323**

. 375**

Social Interaction (Importance)

. 039

. 114

. 016

. 300**

. 581**

. 137

. 388**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0. 01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0. 05 level (2-tailed).

In Table 1, the correlations among the variables are very low and not meaningful. The number of observations among the categories are not equal (see Table 2). Therefore, frequency table was used and based on the frequency table, the researcher ran a correlation matrix. Table 3 indicates the percentages of the participants' responses to each category on the questionnaire. In other words, descriptive statistics were used to compare the categories.

Table 2. The number of observations on the questionnaire**STATISTICS**

Instrumental Motivation

Integrative Motivation

Physical Environment (Existence)

Physical Environment (Importance)

Instructional Arrangements (Existence)

Instructional Arrangements (Importance)

Social Interaction (Existence)

Social Interaction (Importance)

N

Valid

240

160

160

160

360

360

160

160

Missing

120

200

200

200

0

0

200

200

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for motivation and learning environment

VALID PERCENT

MOTIVATION

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Instrumental Motivation

Integrative Motivation

Physical Environment (Existence)

Physical Environment (Importance)

Instructional Arrangements (Existence)

Instructional Arrangements (Importance)

Social Interaction (Existence)

Social Interaction (Importance)

Not at all

16.3

13.8

24.4

8.8

15.0

2.5

5.6

3.8

Very Little

14. 2

8. 8

21. 9

9. 4

15. 3

7. 5

15. 0

6. 9

Moderately

20. 4

17. 5

23. 1

15. 6

20. 3

17. 8

21. 9

17. 5

Strongly/Highly

17. 1

28. 1

21. 3

30. 0

30. 3

33. 1

30. 6

38. 8

Very Strongly /Very Highly

32. 1

31. 9

9. 4

36. 3

19. 2

39. 2

26. 9

33. 1

As for the two aspects of motivation, integrative motivation seemed to be higher than instrumental motivation. Descriptive statistics revealed that 60 per cent of the participants have integrative motivation whereas 49. 2 per cent of the participants rated for instrumental motivation. Student respondent perceptions concerning the extent that environmental factors were present in their learning environment included three issues - physical, instructional and social environment. As it is seen in Table 3 above, the results show that the majority of the

learners participating in this study were aware of the importance of the three components of the learning environment. For each of the item included in the second part of the questionnaire, more than 65% of the learners (70% in average) pointed out that they consider the importance of the three factors regarding the learning environment as either ' very highly' or ' highly' for their learning in the EFL program.

For the physical environment, respondents rated the importance of the environment (66. 3 %) as higher than the students who perceived factors actually being in existence (30. 7 %) in their EFL environment. 46. 3 per cent of the participants claimed that the physical conditions in their learning environment are not sufficient. For the instructional arrangements, only 10 per cent of the students claimed this factor is not important. On the other hand, 72. 3 per cent rated for the importance of instructional arrangements.

49. 5 per cent of the student respondents claimed that instructional arrangements exist in their learning environment. Likewise, when social interaction is considered, students who rate for its importance represent a high amount of the population (71. 9 %). On the other hand, 57. 5 per cent of the participants emphasized the existence of social interaction in their EFL learning environment.

Based on the frequency table, the researcher ran a correlation matrix to determine how strongly the eight variables were related to each other and whether that correlation was strong or weak (see Table 4).

Table 4. Correlation Matrix of the Likert Scale

Instrumental Motivation

Integrative Motivation

Physical Environment (Existence)

Instructional Arrangements (Existence)

Social Interaction (Existence)

Physical Environment (Importance)

Instructional Arrangements (Importance)

Social Interaction (Importance)

Instrumental Motivation

Integrative Motivation

. 751

Physical Environment (Existence)

-. 918*

-. 731

Instructional Arrangements (Existence)

. 036

. 651

-. 054

Social Interaction (Existence)

. 480

. 798

-. 524

. 809

Physical Environment (Importance)

. 759

. 978**

-. 804

. 628

. 855

Instructional Arrangements (Importance)

. 732

. 955*

-. 765

. 673

. 921*

. 987**

Social Interaction (Importance)

. 541

. 930*

-. 580

. 843

. 944*

. 945*

. 964**

*. Correlation is significant at the 0. 05 level (2-tailed).

** . Correlation is significant at the 0. 01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 comprises quite high correlations among the variables. The correlation coefficient between instructional arrangements and physical environment in terms of importance is . 987** which represents a very strong positive relationship at the . 01 level. Significant correlations at the . 01 level were also found between physical environment (importance) and integrative motivation ($r = . 978$, $p < . 01$). That is, there is a very strong positive correlation between these two variables. In contrast, instrumental motivation was not significantly correlated with instructional arrangements (existence) ($r = . 036$). On the other hand, there is a significant negative correlation between instrumental motivation and physical environment (existence) at . 05 level. For the participants in this study, negative and high correlations existed between the physical environment (existence) and the other dimensions of the learning environment. For instance, the magnitude of correlation between the existence and importance of the physical environment was observed to be quite strong ($r = -. 804$).

Discussion

The most striking finding of this study was that the participants considered the physical aspect of the EFL environment to be an obstacle to their learning while the instructional arrangements and the social interaction were perceived as an incentive. The results displayed the importance of the three

aspects of the learning environment: physical environment, instructional arrangements and social interaction. One can conclude that the majority of the participants in this study were aware of the importance of these three aspects while undergoing the process of learning. It seemed that more than half of the student respondents perceived the physical environment as of crucial importance to their learning and that 46.3 per cent of them claimed that the physical conditions in their learning environment were not sufficient. The correlation matrix also indicates that the importance and the existence of the physical environment are negatively correlated with one another and this correlation is a very significant one. For the other aspects of the learning environment, more than 70 per cent of the participants seemed to value instructional arrangements and social interaction notably. However, only a quarter of them (25% in average) think that instructional arrangements and social interaction do not exist or have very little existence in their learning environment. Therefore, the physical aspect of the learning environment seemed to be the least existing factor in the students' EFL learning environment. In other words, while the physical environment was perceived to be an obstacle to the students' learning, the instructional arrangements and the social interaction were considered by the students as an incentive. It was noted, however, that these relationships vary somewhat from class to class, indicating that class variables have an effect on these relationships as Bernaus and Gardner (2008) stated in their study.

This study also investigated the relationship between the learning context and student motivation. As Chang and Shu (2000) argued in their study,

there is a positive relationship between the learning environment and student motivation and that a good learning environment increases the chances of learning and inspires and boosts the learning spirit. The results of this study indicate that there is a significant association between the learning environment and student motivation. Regarding the intercorrelations of the variables and the desired outcomes, the participants in this study appeared to have integrative motivation more than instrumental motivation. The data indicated high and positive relations between integrative motivation and all seven measured variables except for the physical environment (existence). Since there is a high and negative correlation between integrative motivation and the physical aspect of the learning environment, it can be concluded that the participants consider the physical conditions in their EFL learning environment as insufficient and an obstacle to their learning.

Changing learning environment elements that are under the school's control will show students that their university is working to meet their needs and support students' optimum learning success. As Hsieh (2002) stated in his study, improving the physical environment would improve student motivation and thereby student achievement, giving students what they need, and letting them know about it, urges them to do more on their own. The researcher presents certain recommendations based on the results of this study. Since the findings of the study indicate that the physical environment has a powerful effect on learning motivation, the school can avoid learning contexts that decrease student motivation by installing

modern multimedia in all classrooms, building language labs with audio / visual materials and providing the classrooms with good lighting and air conditioning. Creating an English Corner is another recommendation meant to encourage students to visit individually or with friends. Including non-academic settings (such as restaurants, karaoke) and fun extracurricular activities (such as inviting English speaking authors, hosting English games, watching English movies) in the English Corner program will attract the students' attention and give them a chance to practice their English outside of class time and be engaged with activities where English is essential. Likewise, providing the classrooms with notice boards where students can display their projects and assignments might contribute to their peripheral learning.

The results of this study have certain implications. First, the results demonstrate that students differ from one another in terms of the types of motivational beliefs. Even though students report similar motivators, their purposes may be different. The differences in motivational beliefs could result from family cultural values or socioeconomic status and their perceptions of education. The generation of these motivational orientations was beyond the scope of this study but would be an important focus for further research. Second, as Campbell and Storch (2011) stated in their study, the motivation of second language learners is diverse and complex, and that L2 learning motivation changes and fluctuates over time. Therefore, provided that the questionnaire was reassigned to the participants at a later time, different results might be observed. Third, because the results of this

study are drawn from EFL students at a private university, to generalize the findings to all foreign language learning situations is inappropriate. The role of motivational factors in foreign language acquisition needs to be further examined among learners from different age groups, socioeconomic status and proficiency levels.