

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: A SURVEY OF MOTIVATION AND PREFERRED ACTIVITIES AMONG ENGINEERING STUDENTS IN POLYTECHNIC KUCHING SARAWAK

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## ABSTRACT

Language learning is influenced by various factors determined by learners or educators. Motivation is one of the many factors that had sparked the interest of many educationists as it is known to give impact to the learning process and the performance of the students. In line with that, this research was carried out to find out the types of motivation (instrumental and integrative) and the preferred language activities among engineering students. A total sample of 100 students from four engineering departments in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak, namely Electrical Engineering Department, Mechanical Engineering Department, Petrochemical Engineering and Civil Engineering Department were selected randomly. The distributed questionnaires consists of two main parts; types of motivation and language activities. 'Statistical Package for Social Sciences' (SPSS) was applied to analyze the feedback obtained. The findings had shown that most of the students are instrumentally motivated in learning English. Majority of the students responded that they learn English in order to pass the course of their study and increase their future career opportunities. Interactive activities such as problem-based activities and role playing are preferred by the students in learning English.

**Keywords:** motivation; activities; English language learning.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Factors contributing to language learning are complex but the role of motivation in the learning process is a particularly interesting question that deserves to be studied. This is because learners' motivation has been widely accepted as a key factor which influences the rate and success of second/foreign language learning (McDonough, 1983; Ellis, 1994).

In Malaysia, the importance of being able to converse in English language has been acknowledged widely to the point that it is placed as the second language and in education policy, it is taught as a second language. In tertiary level, most colleges and universities used English language as medium of instruction in order to prepare the students with English proficiency which is highly needed nowadays. Previous research in the field of engineering showed that English language is of paramount importance in the academic and professional lives of the engineering students (Basturkman, 1998). It has been a big

question mark when it comes to what actually motivates the students in learning English language as motivation is closely related to the end result of the students' performance. The findings of this survey about motivation could be a helping hand to the educators as it is something that they have some control over.

Apart from motivation as one of the possible reasons that could determine the success or failure in language learning, students' preferred activities are another deciding factor that should be taken into consideration. For engineering students, the approach used is somehow different if to be compared to students from other streams. Very much similar to motivation, activities prepared for the students are again something that the educators have control over. There are cases where some students prefer to engage more in the discussion, some would emphasize on the grammar side and some are likely to present themselves in front of the others.

In line with the matter, students' different needs and preferences in the learning process should be taken seriously by the educators. Generalization in the approach or activities prepared could be risky as changes in the learning process take place from time to time.

## **2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study aims at investigating engineering students' motivation and preferred activities towards learning the English language. The objectives are as follows:

- To determine which of two the types of motivation (instrumental and integrative) could be the primary source of engineering students' motivation towards learning English language.
- To find out the preferred activities towards learning English language among engineering students.

## **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Learning English as second language is undeniably important among all level of students. Students have been exposed to English since the earlier stage of education system as well as tertiary level. Despite the debates on the issue of English deteriorating the quality of Bahasa Malaysia as the national language among the students, English is to be made a compulsory pass for Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) in 2016. As reported in The Star (2013), the implementation is vital in order to produce future generations who are bilingually proficient and are able to survive in this developing country.

Various reasons and factors which influence second language learning have been revealed in the previous researches. A survey conducted by Tsuda (2003) pointed out that majority of the students think English is necessary for travelling and entertainment, such as movies and music. These factors could be regarded as the factors which motivate the students in learning. Motivation is undeniably one of the essential tools in second language acquisition, apart from learners' age, aptitude, personality, socio-cultural background and cognitive style.

Motivation is generally defined as an internal process that activates, guides, and maintains behaviour over time (Eccles, 2002; Elliot, et al., 1999). It encourages ones to be persistent in achieving any needs or desire. Crookes and Schmidt (1991) previously stated that

motivation has been identified as the learner's orientation with regard to the goal of learning a second language. The investigation of motivation and language has taken place since the late of 1950s by Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert, which led to the finding of two forms of motivation: integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation is a key component for people who learn a target language in order to become familiar and integrate into a society in which the language is used. In contrast, desire to obtain something practical or concrete from the study of a second language is characterised as instrumental motivation (Hudson, 2000). An individual will be identified as instrumentally motivated if he or she learns the target language in order to pass an examination or for the benefits of future career.

A Number of studies conducted in the past have concluded that students' instrumental motivation was higher than their integrative motivation in learning second language (Qashoa, 2006; Vaezi, 2009; Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009; Wong, 2011; Adila, 2012). For instance, in his research, Wong disclosed that Chinese undergraduates of Journalism, English Language, Chinese Studies, Advertising, Public Relation and Pshychology departments at Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman are more instrumentally motivated in learning second language. On the contrary, a research about Malaysian students' attitude toward Arabic language carried out by Obeidat (2005) revealed that most respondents who are studying at Al-Albeit University and Yarmouk University are integratively motivated in learning Arabic as they enjoyed mixing with the Jordanian citizen. Another research of instrumental and integrative motivation among undergraduate Libyan students by Ahmed (2012) has shown a similar result. Regardless of being instrumentally or integratively motivated in learning a second language, both motivations are vital in achieving fluency and proficiency. As being stated in Oxford and Nyiko's model (1989) of the effects among individual variables: motivation, strategies used by the learners in learning a language and proficiency have strong influence on one another and play role to lead learners to success in language learning.

To keep students motivated, it is crucial for the educators to choose the classroom activities based on the students' need. Alcorso and Kalantzis (1985) found out in their research that most students refused to participate in communicative type of activities and showed their preferences toward traditional classroom work such as grammar exercises, memorizing and structured discussion/conversation. In another research by Qin (2012) conformed that learners favoured activities like "reading aloud", "doing listening exercises" and "reciting tests" more than the teachers who prefer communicative activities. As the educators have control in selecting the materials and classroom activities, the need to understand the ways in which the learners are different from each other in terms of needs and preferences is important in driving their force for learning English as a second language.

#### **4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This research was carried out to find out the types of motivation (instrumental and integrative) and the preferred language activities among the engineering students.

1. What is the type of motivation among engineering students in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak hold towards learning English language?
2. What is the language activity that the engineering students in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak prefer the most?

## **5. METHODOLOGY**

### **5.1 Participants**

The participants of the survey were 100 semester one students' from engineering departments available in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak namely Civil Engineering Department, Mechanical Engineering Department, Electrical Engineering Department and Petrochemical Engineering Department.

### **5.2 Instrument**

This survey used questionnaire as its medium of instrument. 5 point Likert scale was then employed to rate the questions ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree'. Some of the items of the questionnaire were adopted from Ratanawalee Wimolmas's Survey of Motivation (2013). There are 22 main items or questions in the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of four parts: department, motivation in learning English, preferred learning styles and preferred activities.

### **5.3 Data Collection**

The questionnaires were distributed to the 100 students during their normal class session. It was distributed by the researchers in order to avoid any confusion which they would explain the instructions and clarify any possible doubts. The questionnaires were then collected upon completion.

### **5.4 Data Analysis**

The data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed by using '*Statistical Package for the Social Sciences*' (SPSS). Descriptive analysis was then employed to find out the answer on the questions of motivation and preferred activities.

## **6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The finding is divided into two parts; the first part discusses on the type of motivation the engineering students of Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak belong to and the second part discusses on the students' preferred language activities. The researchers have analysed the participants' responses to the questionnaire given by using SPSS Statistics Software.

### **6.1 Students Background Information**

The following table shows the number of participants' for each engineering course and semester studied.

Table 1 shows the number of students participated in the research and the semester they are currently in. There are 25 students of Civil Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Engineering and Petrochemical Engineering in Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak have been selected randomly and all of them are currently in Semester 1.

**Table 1: Students' Background Information**

No.	Department	Number of students
1.	Civil Engineering	25
2.	Mechanical Engineering	25
3.	Electrical Engineering	25
4.	Petrochemical Engineering	25

## 6.2 Students' Type of Motivation in Learning Second Language

In carrying out the survey, the participants are required to give response to 20 questions which determined the type of motivation they belong to. There are 10 items of instrumental category and 10 items for integrative category have been included in the questionnaire and the participants will be identified as instrumental or integrative type of learners based on the high score they rate to any of the category.

Table 2 and 3 shows the type of motivation the participants belonged to in learning a second language. Based on the data collected, the participants have scored highest in the instrumental category. The participants mostly agreed that they learn English because it is more important for travelling overseas. The result is basically similar to previous studies result completed by Qashoa (2006), Vaezi (2009), Al-Tarmimi & Shuib (2009), Wong (2011) and Adila (2012) which indicated that students' were instrumentally motivated in learning second language. As the participants are currently pursuing their studies in engineering stream, their job prospects require them to travel overseas. Thus they would have the perception that learning a second language is useful for traveling purposes in expanding their career.

The researchers also found out that item 11, 7 and 15 were the most influential instrumental motive that motivate students to learn English. With the mean of 4.45, item 11 (I study English because it is important for traveling overseas) followed by item 7 (I learn English to pass my diploma and to get a good jobs in the future) have shown the highest scores. Item 3 (I always copy sentences directly from books/article even though I do not understand the meaning) has shown little instrumental influence while item 5 (I only read English materials that are related to my assignments) showed the least instrumental reason the students had in learning English.

In the analysis of the participants' responses towards integrative motivation item, the researchers noticed that the integrative motive with the highest influence was item 20 (I want to learn English as best as I can so that I can have better proficiency and understanding of the language) with the mean score of 4.34. The participants also have rated high score on item 2 (I learn English because it can help me to understand English books, movies, pop music etc.) with the mean of 4.20. This has shown that the most influential integrative motive in learning English was the drive to understand the language better. The least influential reason for integrative motivation was item 14 (I learn English because it allows me to behave like native English speakers, for example the accent and using English expressions. The item has the mean score of 3.53. The low motivation on this purpose occurs as the students may not think the importance of having similar accent as English native speakers is necessary as comprehending English language.

**Table 2: Descriptive Analysis for Instrumental Motivation**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I only use English to do my assignments and the exams.	100	1	5	3.20	1.025
I always copy sentences directly from books/article even though I do not understand the meaning.	100	1	5	2.81	1.012
I only read English materials that are related to my assignments.	100	1	5	2.76	1.046
I learn English to pass my Diploma and to get a good job in the future.	100	1	5	4.25	1.077
I learn English language just because I am interested in furthering my higher education.	100	1	5	3.37	1.160
I learn English because it is important for travelling overseas.	100	1	5	4.45	.744
I learn English to look more sophisticated and knowledgeable.	100	1	5	3.63	.895
I learn English to have a better career in the future.	100	1	5	4.24	.842
I learn English because it can lead to more success and achievements in life.	100	1	5	4.18	.744
I learn English because being proficient in English makes other people respect me.	100	1	5	3.27	1.033
Valid N (listwise)	100				

**Table 3: Descriptive Analysis for Integrative Motivation**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I learn English because it can help me to understand English books, movies, pop music etc.	100	1	5	4.20	.899
I learn English because I want to know and learn about the native English speakers' ways of life.	100	2	5	3.88	.913
I learn English because it allows me to discuss interesting topics with people all around the world.	100	2	5	4.08	.837
I learn English because I am very interested to join activities organized by local and international institution.	100	1	5	3.58	1.093
I learn English because it allows me to transfer my knowledge to other people. For example, giving directions to tourists.	100	2	5	4.11	.875
I learn English because it makes me more open-minded, and friendly like English native speakers.	100	2	5	4.07	.820
I learn English because it allows me to behave like native English speakers. For example, the accent and using English expressions.	100	2	5	3.53	.846
I learn English because I am interested about the culture of people around the world.	100	2	5	3.85	.903
I learn English because I am interested to get to know other people from other cultures.	100	3	5	4.11	.790
I want to learn English as best as I can so that I can have better proficiency and understanding of the language.	100	2	5	4.34	.714
Valid N (listwise)	100				

### 6.3 Students' Preferred Learning Style

In order to discover the students' preferred learning style, the researchers have designed relevant questions to determine whether the participants are fond of learning individually, in pairs, small group or large groups.

As displayed in Table 4, the participants are most likely enjoy learning in small groups (M=3.64). They disfavoured the activities which require them to work individually. Participants love working in small groups as they are used to the practice of exchanging and discussing the ideas where they can rely on each other and put collaborative learning into practice.

**Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Preferred Learning Style**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I like to learn English individually.	100	1	5	3.18	1.149
I like to learn English in pairs.	100	1	5	3.64	.905
I like to learn English in small groups.	100	1	5	4.10	.823
I like to learn English in a large groups.	100	1	5	3.46	1.259
Valid N (listwise)	100				

### 6.4 Students Preferred Language Activities

Based on Table 5, the participants have chosen games as their preferred language activity in learning a second language as the mean of this activity has shown the highest value among others (M=3.96). The second highest mean was 3.94 which belonged to learning through role plays and dramas. Considering the close result of these two activities compared to the others, it is concluded that the engineering students of Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak value communicative and problem solving activities more than the non-communicative activities.

The result of this part appears to be different from the result of the previous research mentioned earlier. Alcorso and Kalantzis (1985) disclosed a different result in their study which stated that the students enjoy activities such as grammar activities, copying written materials and reading books more than the communicative classroom activities. As mentioned earlier, the educators need to regard the selection of classroom activities as a serious matter; as the needs and preferred approach of engineering students may differ from the other streams. Inability to make suitable choice might reduce their motivation in learning a target language.



**Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Preferred Activities**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
To learn English, I like to practice speaking with my friends in class.	100	1	5	3.73	.952
To learn English, I like to listen and copy notes from the board.	100	1	5	3.68	.827
To learn English, I like to play games in English.	100	1	5	3.96	1.034
To learn English, I like to read a lot of English materials.	100	1	5	3.90	.980
To learn English, I like to do role plays and dramas.	100	1	5	3.94	.839
To learn English, I like to make summaries of what I have learned in class.	100	1	5	3.47	.846
Valid N (listwise)	100				

## 7. CONCLUSION

Based on the data collected and discussed in the finding, it is concluded that the students from the engineering stream of Polytechnic Kuching Sarawak are instrumentally motivated. The students basically learned English as they think this can benefit them when traveling overseas. As for learning styles, they preferred to be in small groups rather than individual, pairs or large groups. The result also has provided the evidence that the students showed their fondness toward the communicative and problem solving activities in learning English.

To ensure a more joyful learning among the students, a deliberate selection of the materials as well as classroom activities should be done by the educators. As each students may have different needs and expectation, the educators cannot rely on their own preferences of activities in conducting the lesson as this might hinder the students' motivation in acquiring the knowledge and learning a second language.

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