

Aspects of Motivation within the context of an ESP course

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Abstract

The author conducted a study in order to collect information regarding the issue of motivation within the context of an ESP course. Data from 92 questionnaires were compiled aiming at getting insights on Greek students' orientations in relation to learning English in University. The results indicated that Greeks' orientations are characterized by performance rather than learning goals. Good marks seem to be students' incentive to study English. External rewards appear to be controlling and it is shown that achievement related behaviours such as task choice and persistence are linked to self-confidence which seem to be linked to the teacher's behaviour. Some educational implications are offered placing thus significance on effective group work incorporated in a communicative syllabus of an ESP course.

Keywords: Group work, extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation, achievement

Rationale

The Greek case regarding education is surely worth analyzing it since the status of public free education is at stake. In particular, foreign languages teaching is being put on the spot provoking diverse reactions and beliefs. According to a survey (2006) carried out by the European Committee entitled 'Europeans and their languages' when asked how Europeans have learned or improved their language skills, the majority of them refer to school. In specific, 59% of the Europeans indicate that they have learned languages at secondary school, whereas 24% started language learning at primary school when it comes to the first foreign language. This finding indicates that a significant number of Europeans learn languages only at school, which illuminates the importance of the education systems and language teaching. Greeks reported that 13% started learning languages in primary school and 55% in secondary school. This implies that in Greece more than half believe that school is the place to learn languages. The interesting point comes in relation to the Europeans' perceived effectiveness of the learning environments and the most suitable learning methods. 57% of the Europeans consider that language lessons at school are effective and 50% indicate that long or frequent visits to the country where the language is spoken is an efficient way to learn languages. Other ways of learning were considered such as one-to-one lessons with a native speaker (44%) and a language course in the country where the language is spoken (44%). Greeks reported that 12% of them consider that language lessons at school are effective, a finding that implies that many Greeks are not given the chance to learn languages at school as they would like to. More statistical data might make more complex these findings regarding the Greek case. When asked which way to learn languages would best suit the Europeans' lifestyle 20% of them reported that group lessons with a teacher was chosen followed by 18% indicating that language lessons at school would suit their daily routines and 16%

preferring one-to-one lessons with a teacher and long or frequent visits to the country where the language is spoken. Some 17% of the Europeans responded that none of these ways would suit them with 34% of Greeks being of this opinion. These findings indicate that Greeks are not satisfied with the teaching offered at school and their lifestyles imply that they would be willing to try other methods to learn. It is also apparent that Greeks are citizens with time constraints since 40% of them reported that they haven't got time to study properly languages and this is a main reason why they are discouraged from language learning. The level of motivation to learn languages is found to be generally moderate within the European community with 18% of them starting to learn a new language or improving their language skills during the years 2003-2005 and 21% intending to improve their skills over the next year. A very embarrassing result regarding the Greeks indicate that only 6% of them have recently improved their skills and only 9% intend to do so in the following year.

Nevertheless 75% of Greeks evaluate language skills as beneficial with 96% of them considering that children should learn English. 92% of the Greeks reported that the best age to start learning foreign languages is from 6 years onwards and 27% thought that a second foreign language should be taught to children after the age of 13. 74% of them reported that Greek citizens should know their mother tongue language plus two more. Competencies in languages are seen as a means for better work opportunities for Greeks (92%). An interesting finding is that 80% of Greeks assess that the supply of language courses in their local area to be good, obviously not the language teaching offered in school as shown above. This implies that Greeks think that in other places the language teaching is effective. According to data gathered from the Ministry of Education 7169 private language centres operate all over Greece. Additional statistics released by the Centre of Educational Policy revealed that foreign language acquisition in private centres or private lessons in Greece cost around 540 million euros annually. These data indicate that in Greece private foreign language learning is dominant regardless the cost undermining in this way foreign language teaching in the public sector.

The European survey in 2006 also revealed that 82% of Greeks think that language teaching should be a political priority and this might explain that 44% of them reported that the choice of languages available in the Greek national school systems is insufficient.

All the above data indicate that there is evidence that Greeks are de-motivated to learn foreign languages in state institutions. It is necessary, therefore, to carry out a needs analysis on Greek students' attitudes to foreign language learning and their motivation to study languages in state institutions.

Literature Review

This paper is an expansion of recent research regarding Greek students' attitudes to an ESP course at the University of Ioannina (Katsara, O., 2008b). In specific, it investigates aspects of motivation within the context of the ESP course attempting to evaluate the Greek students' individual reactions towards the specialized language course. According to Katsara, O. (2008b) Greek students appeared to have specific

attitudes towards the ESP course reporting the ways, which these attitudes were put in shape and the ways in which these attitudes can have a tremendous effect on specialized learning in the state sector. These results are in accordance with those found by Ypsilandis, G. S. and Kantaridou, Z. (2007), where it is made crystal clear that in the Greek educational system, student types and administrative issues provoke a conflict between the teaching of foreign languages and the other subjects offered at University.

ELT literature indicated that a generalized teaching strategy regarding the EFL and ESP learning situation is difficult to be outlined since research has proven that individual experiences are valuable. The most recent research includes the following studies.

Chen, P.C. (2005) suggested that a task-based syllabus (CTBS) for Business English instruction in an EFL classroom is useful since this syllabus encourages learners to transfer the language skills taught in class to practical business situations. This research has indicated the value of the implementation of the creativity and co-operation of the learners in each task.

Davies (2006) explained how the use of class-specific questionnaires proved useful in the course planning since this method brought into surface unique personal understanding of the learners' needs. As he points out class-specific questionnaires have a more narrow focus and they are designed to reflect local classroom content and events reducing in this way learner's misinterpretations of the teachers' intentions.

Hawkey, R. (2006) investigated whether learner's perceptions of the prominence of classroom activities are similar to those initiated by the teachers. Hawkey gathered data from student questionnaires, interviews from teachers, school heads and parents and video-recorded class lessons. Hawkins stated that Hamp-Lyons (2000:586) suggests the 'limitation of the term "washback" to influences on teaching, teachers, and learning (including curriculum and materials)' and the inclusion of 'discussion of wider influences of tests' under the term "impact". Hawkey's research focused on the washback elements of an impact study indicating thus that mismatching of learners and teachers perceptions of learning activities is a crucial element in the process of quality improvement in teaching.

Chen, R. and Hird, B. (2006) carried out research on group work in the EFL classroom in China examining in particular, aspects of the Chinese students' behaviour when they worked in group discussions. Their results indicated that although group work is an advantage in language learning, it is impossible to neutralize student differences making thus the teacher's job more demanding.

Tar, Ildiko. K. (2006) underlined a new challenge that post-secondary language departments are facing regarding the survival of ESP teaching and suggested ways that teachers can use in order to assist students to gain competitive ESP knowledge and professional behavioural skills. This research reflected the need to get hold of teacher's methodologies in order to offer greater curricula.

Chen, Y. (2006) researched the implementation of common core and specific language skills in the development of an ESP curriculum. His research proved that learners' needs, wants and lacks are essential in the successful completion of an ESP course design.

Kaur, S. (2007) underlined the importance of making the ESP teaching learner-centred. It was proved that when learners are invited to negotiate aspects of the course design, then the course content has relevance for the learners feeling thus more motivated to participate in class. The final product of such an effort appeared to match the learners' needs to the aims of the course.

The aforementioned studies imply that personal considerations are useful and that it is difficult to reach to a conclusion unless you gather every single one. However, it is definitely precious to get hold of as many as possible in order to be able to get an insight of potential similar lines regarding teaching and learning. Thus, it is implied that the starting point in ESP syllabus design should be students' learning needs analysis and their attitudes to learning. This is also suggested by Liuoliene, A. and Metiuniene. R (2006).

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study were:

- a) To examine whether students are motivated to learn or not.
- b) To examine students' orientations
- c) To examine students' motivational behaviour

Methods and Participants

The researcher used questionnaires to gather data on student motivation to learn in an ESP classroom (see appendix A). The content of the questionnaire was mostly based on the literature available on motivation, so that I could test the hypotheses discussed in other surveys and based on my results be able to offer some reliable and valid conclusions. The questionnaire was developed in February 2008 after the distribution of five pilot copies to students of the Department of Business Administration of Agricultural Products and Foods in the University of Ioannina. The purpose of this piloting was to check whether the questions in the questionnaire were unambiguous and easy to read. The pilot students did not experience any problems and thus no changes were made to the questionnaire. After this piloting three hundred questionnaires were produced. A letter was attached to the questionnaire signed by the researcher promising anonymity. In April 2008 an announcement was made and students could pop in the researcher's office at certain times to get a questionnaire. The researcher gathered 92 questionnaires from the Department of Business Administration of Agricultural Products and Foods and the Department of Environmental and Natural Resource Management in the University of Ioannina.

Presentation and discussion of the results

The researcher collected the completed questionnaires from her pigeonhole in the University of Ioannina. Some students preferred to submit the completed questionnaires by hand to the researcher in her office. The findings of this study are presented in the same sequence as the questions asked in the questionnaire that is using the questionnaire structure as an analytic framework. The findings are then subjected to statistical analysis.

Section A: General information

This section contains basic information about the students. It covers questions 1-5. It is shown that more than half of the respondents were female.

Q1. Sex of the students

Sex	Number	Percentage
Male	30	32,6%
Female	62	67,39%

Table 1 Sex of the students

Q2. Age of the students

Age	Number	Percentage
17-21	80	12
Over 21	86,95%	13,04%

Table 2 Age Group

Most students belonged to the age group 17-21.

Q3. University Departments

University Department	Number	Percentage
Department of Administration of Agricultural Products and Foods	66	71,73%
Department of Environmental and Natural Resource Management	26	28,26%

Table 3 University Departments

The majority of students who completed the questionnaire belonged to the Department of Business Administration of Agricultural Products and Foods. This

finding might be explained from the fact that the researcher's main position belonged to that Department. However, she taught two courses of English at the Department of Environmental and Natural Resource Management.

Q4. Year of study

Year of Study	Number	Percentage
1	15	16,30%
2	30	32,60%
3	36	39,13%
4	0	0%
5	11	11,95%

Table 4 Year of Study

The findings indicate that students showed willingness to help the researcher draw some conclusions regardless their year of study. It must be noted that the English courses are usually taught during the first two semesters of study in the first year. Students who fail the exam of the courses are permitted to resit as many times as they want till the pass the courses. Most of the times, it is technically impossible to attend the failed course again because new courses of the subsequent year are delivered at the same time. Thus, these results are encouraging in the sense that 39% of the respondents who completed the questionnaire were attending their third year of study, which means that theoretically they have passed or attended the English courses. On the other hand, 16% of the first years appear to have submitted a questionnaire. More statistics show that as the years go by students seem to realize the importance of the English courses since 33% of the second years showed interest in the research. Table 4, however, shows that 0% of the students who attended their fourth year of study and 12% of the students who attended their final year took part in this survey. According to Katsara (2008b) students have a heavy work load during their University years and the English courses are put behind in the undergraduate level. It is shown therefore, that the Greek education system of assessment and thinking affects their learning pace.

Q5. Qualifications in English

English Qualifications	Number	Percentage
Cambridge First Certificate (FCE)	32	34,78%
English Certificate of Competency (ECCE)	20	21,73%
State Certificate B2 Level	9	0,097%
Cambridge Proficiency in English (CPE)	4	0,043%
Certificate of Proficiency in English (ECPE)	6	0,065%
Edexcel level 3	10	10,86%
Edexcel level 5	4	0,043%
IELTS	7	0,076%

Table 5.1 Qualifications in English

English qualifications in English	Number	Percentage
Lower	71	77,17%
Proficiency	14	15,21%
IELTS	7	0,076%

Table 5.2 Qualifications in English

The results indicate that the majority of the students had been awarded the Lower Certificate in English. Again this finding reflects the Greek educational system regarding foreign languages. Students enter University without having reached the proficiency level of their English skills. This is a very surprising finding since competency in languages is an indispensable qualification when it comes to job seeking in Greece (Katsara, 2008a, b, Eurobarometer, 2006).

Section B Reasons for learning English

This section contains some information on Greek students' reasons for learning English. The total number exceeds 92 as some students chose more than one reason. As table 6 shows 85% of the students and 74% of them responded that learning English is associated with getting better job and study opportunities. These statistics correspond to the statistical data drawn from Eurobarometer (2006) and the qualitative data gathered by Katsara (2008a, b). The Greek educational system encourages people to be instrumentally motivated as far as English learning is concerned. The majority of Greek Universities require EFL certificates from candidates in postgraduate courses, which explains why some students choose to study English in their late semesters before completion of their undergraduate course. The results indicate that students have a greater disposition towards the role English plays. According to Gardner (1985), who discussed the social dimension of language learning, there are two types of orientation referred to as instrumental and integrative respectively. Instrumental orientation is associated with pragmatic gains target language proficiency may accrue, such as getting a better job. The latter refers to a learner's positive response to the culture of the target language community. As seen in table 6 16% of the respondents noted that they want to learn English because they would like to understand the English culture. This finding shows that Greeks are not integratively orientated to learn English. However, according to Dorneyi (1994:275) contextual circumstances play a very important role in foreign language learning. More statistics in table 6 explain this suggestion. Additional orientations to learn English by Greeks were identified. In particular, travel orientations (45%), friendship (45%), sociocultural (36%) and the English media (25%) were chosen. According to Gardner, these orientations are lumped into the general integrative orientation, which suggests that the context influences the boundaries of these two dimensions (Belmechri and Hummel, 1998:220).

Q6. Reasons for Learning English

Reasons for Learning English	Number	Percentage
Because I want to make foreign friends and be able to communicate when I visit another country	41	44,56%
Because I want to understand the English culture	15	16,30%
Because English can be useful in the future for my studies	68	73,91%
Because English can be useful in the future for my job	78	84, 78%
Because my family is pressuring me to learn for social issues	33	35,86%
Because I want to be able to understand English movies/songs and be able to read English books and newspapers	23	25%

Table 6 Reasons for Learning English

Section C Focus on Tasks or Task consequences

This section consists of 9 questions. Questions 7-10 involve teacher statements. Questions 11-12 have to do with teacher feedback and questions 13-15 have to do with group work.

Questions 9-12 involve the student attitude to learning in relation to teacher statements and feedback. The results indicate that students' behaviour is characterized by performance rather than learning goals. Questions 7 and 8 indicate that performance oriented instructions motivate students while questions 9 and 10 show that students' main focus is good performance. Question 9, in particular indicate that students' focus is much higher on task sequences (49 %) rather than on the task (21%) itself. This finding provides evidence that attitudes towards the task and not the characteristics of the task are what matters for students. This finding further discussed with reference to questions 8 and 11, which investigate the teacher's role to promote certain goals might lead to a possible hypothesis that students' motivation to learn may be extrinsic because it is related to the teacher's behaviour According to Leo and Galloway (1996:38) with extrinsic motivation 'students are motivated by external controlling variables' such as grades and teachers' personalities. Question 8 indicated that the teacher's usual statements promote understanding the purpose of the task in relation to a successful outcome (50%) while question 11 indicated that the teacher's evaluation method is the combinatory type (100%) giving thus marks to students who engage in other activities apart from the final examination. Question 12 moreover indicated that all respondents (100%) showed preference towards the extrinsically motivated type of evaluation. Additional comments from students in the associated open-ended question following question 12 indicated that students' high extrinsic motivation for learning occurs due to anxiety for good performance with 87% of them responding that they are being negatively influenced by negative expectations of completing a task due to difficulty. Thus, it can be deduced that achievement is proportionate to anxiety.

As far as group work is concerned, not surprisingly the statistical data indicated that 98% of them reported that group work is a favourable learning context and 89% of

them believed that group performance provokes unequal contributions. However, their comments in the additional open-ended question suggest that students have misinterpreted the role of group work. Their comments elaborated on the fact that they disapprove of unequal contribution in the sense that it affects the group in a negative way. Their comments indicated that students thought that unequal contribution is unfair and that low achievement by some members is seen as an obstacle rather than an incentive for effective performance.

Q7. Students' reports on teachers' statements before an exam

Effect by teacher's statements	Number	Percentage
Yes	81	88,04%
No	11	11,92%

Table 7 Effect by teacher's statements

Distribution on students who reported that teachers' hypothetical statements affect them before an exam.

Teacher's hypothetical statements that affect students	Number	Percentage
It is important for you to understand the nature of the exam. Probably, the exam questions will be of similar type. Please pay attention to what I say	53	57,60%
The purpose of the examination is for you to practice dealing with examination questions in English language testing. I want to see whether you have understood the basic concepts or not. Don't worry that much about any mistakes	27	29,34%
You have three hours for the exam. At the end of these three hours you have to submit your papers	12	13,04%

Table 8 Teacher's hypothetical statements that affect students

Q8. Students' reports on teacher's usual statements

Teacher's usual statements	Number	Percentage
It is important for you to understand the nature of the exam. Probably, the exam questions will be of similar type. Please pay attention to what I say	46	50%
The purpose of the examination is for you to practice dealing with examination questions in English language testing. I want to see whether you have understood the basic concepts or not. Don't worry that much about any mistakes	46	50%
You have three hours for the exam. At the end of these three hours you have to submit your papers	0	0%

Table 8 Teacher's usual statements

Q9. Students' reports on their focus in exams

Students' focus in exams	Number	Percentage
Understanding the nature of the examination Questions	19	20,65%
Getting as many right answers as possible	28	30,43%
Getting as high mark as possible	45	48,91%

Table 9 Students' focus in exams

Q10. Students' reports on influence of negative expectations due to difficulty

Influence of negative expectations due to difficulty	Number	Percentage
Yes	80	12
No	86,95%	13,04%

Table 10 Influence of negative expectations due to difficulty

Q11. Students' reports on teacher's methods of evaluation

Teacher's methods of evaluation	Number	Percentage
General mark for total performance	0	0%
Separate mark for homework, separate mark for team work and separate mark for exam performance	92	100%

Table 11 Teacher's methods of evaluation

Q12. Students' reports on preferred methods of evaluation

Preferred evaluation type	Number	Percentage
General mark for total performance	0	0%
Separate mark for homework, separate mark for team work and separate mark for exam performance	92	100%

Table 12 Preferred evaluation type

This question had an additional open-ended question where students could write down the reasons why they preferred a specific evaluation method. Students' comments revealed that they were in favour of a combined evaluation method so that they could gain marks via various activities and thus lessen the anxiety of a possible failure at the final exam. Their answers indicated that in this way they were more motivated to study for the course systematically and they were also getting into the habit of working on the course throughout the whole semester.

Q13. Students' reports on the teaching context they feel relaxed.

Teaching context students feel relaxed	Number	Percentage
Work in a Group	90	2
Speak in front of the class	97,82%	0,02%

Table 13 Teaching context students feel relaxed.

Q14 Students' reports on unequal contribution

Unequal contribution	Number	Percentage
Often	79	85,86%
Sometimes	13	14,13%
Rarely	0	0%

Table 14 Unequal contribution

Q15. Students' reports on unequal contribution affecting group performance

Unequal contribution affecting group performance	Number	Percentage
Yes	82	89,13%
No	10	10,86%

Table 15 Effect of Unequal contribution on group performance

This question had an additional open-ended question where students could write down why unequal contribution affects the performance of the whole group. Comments showed that students felt that since some students do not contribute to the completion of the task given by the teacher, it is unfair for those students to get a mark. They thought that they could have been more productive if there was willingness among all members of the group to work on the task. They also noted that in some cases students were not participating due to linguistic deficiencies and they offered their views in Greek to the other members.

Section D Confidence and Students' behaviour in class

The questions in this section are linked to learner related motivational components. Thus the following analysis focuses upon student self-perceptions and their effects on achievement-related behaviours. As shown above, students appeared to have performance goals and therefore were mostly concerned with task consequences. This finding implies that the learning context has an achievement flavour. In particular, in this section, it was found that most of the students who completed the questionnaire were mid achievers (61%) who preferred easy tasks (59%), felt intimidated by their teacher's comments (59%) and got disappointed after a failure of a task. However, most of them ascribed the failure to low effort (57%). These results indicate that achievement related behaviours such as task choice and persistence are linked to self-

confidence and the need for achievement, which in this survey is related to marking. According to Stipek (1988:82) individuals perceive various causes of achievement referring to sources of the cause, kinds of causes and duration of the causes. In this survey, students were found to ascribe failure mostly on lack of effort, a behaviour which shows that they perceived the cause as lying within themselves. Even though this behaviour is controllable, the majority of students appeared to get disappointed opting for easy tasks. This finding might be explained if we speculate reasons for this behaviour and why most got intimidated by the teacher's comments. Bandura and Shunk (1981) suggested that self-efficacy has to do with students' belief about whether they can apply their capabilities in context or not. Such beliefs develop through a cognitive processing of sources both internal (past experiences) and external (other people's opinion). In this study, students appeared to get influenced by their teacher's comments, which reflect that their self-confidence is linked to the teacher's behaviour. Praise on the other hand, was associated with positive influence on students' self-esteem (63%), even in the case of non-credible praise (88%).

Q16. Students' marks

Mark	Number	Percentage
1-4	21	22,82%
5-7	56	60,86%
8-10	15	16,30%

Table 16 Students' marks

Q17. Students' preferred task type

Preferred task type	Number	Percentage
Difficult but not impossible	11	11,96%
Of Average difficulty	27	29,34%
Easy	54	58,69%

Table 17 Students' preferred task type

Q18. Reports on students' feelings after failure

Students' feelings after failure	Number	Percentage
Intimidated by your teachers' comments	54	58,69%
Don't care on other students' opinions and the low Mark	13	14,13%
Aim to learn so that same mistakes won't be repeated	25	27,17%

Table 18 Students' feelings after failure

Q19. Students' behaviour after failure

Students' behaviour after failure	Number	Percentage
Work harder	28	30,43%
Get disappointed	64	69,56%

Table 19 Student's behaviour after failure

Q20. Students' attribution of failure

Students' attribution of failure	Number	Percentage
Lack of effort	52	56,52%
Lack of ability	30	32,60%
Task difficulty	10	10,86%

Table 20 Students' attribution of failure

Q21. Students' efforts on effects of praise on them

Effect of praise	Number	Percentage
Boost self-esteem	58	63,04%
Reassurance/work less	34	36,95%

Table 21 Effects of praise

Q22. Students' reports of non-credible praise on their self-confidence

Effect of non-credible praise	Number	Percentage
Positive	81	88,04%
Negative	11	11,95%

Table 22 Effects of non-credible praise

Section E Direction on English learning pace

This section deals with questions that investigate students' intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. What stands out of the results of this section is that there is lack of student autonomy. This finding arises from the study of the questions 23, 24, 25, 26. In question 23, 56% of the students reported complete control offered by the teacher when it comes to group work. This finding indicates that their behaviour is controllable. In question 23, a substantial portion of students (84%) reported that they preferred boring tasks which can offer them a good mark. It is apparent, therefore, that students' needs for curiosity and autonomy, aspects, which according to Williams and Burden, (1997: 125) are dimensions of intrinsic motivation are violated. Nevertheless, question 25 offers an encouraging result on the positive effect of intrinsically oriented tasks. 86% of the students reported that doing role plays motivates them. Thus, the aspect of challenging tasks, a intrinsic dimension of

motivation suggested by Williams and Burden, (1997:125) seems to correspond to what Lier suggested (1996: 110) that ‘intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are like two forces which may well start out as being separate, but which converge and intertwine’. In this study, both types of motivation can be in progress when students engage in an activity. They can do role play because they find it interesting and enjoying (intrinsic) on the one hand, but also because they want to improve their speaking skills in order to gain marks from in-class activities (extrinsic), on the other. The interesting part comes when we look at questions 25 and 26, where students’ reports indicate that rewards have a controlling behaviour. 87% of the students reported that they were motivated to do a task when it might help them get prepared for an exam and 82 % of them reported that this motivation is discontinued when the reward is ruled out. This finding indicates that students are extrinsically and controllably motivated. These results can foster the hypothesis that rewards are controlling and explain students’ answers to question 28, where it was found that students give up easily when they find difficulty in doing a task (90%) and to question 30, where students’ orientations seem to be performance oriented (58%). In addition, question 31 shed some additional light in order to establish an association between achievement and self-confidence. Students who completed the questionnaire attended the course often (80%) and were mid achievers (61%). Question 31 indicates that 63% of them reported that their linguistic abilities are very good, a finding that reflects that students feel that within an extrinsically context based course, their self esteem is boosted.

Q23. Students’ reports on motivation to work in a group

Motivation to work in a group	Number	Percentage
Teacher tells you exactly what to do	51	55,43%
Teacher interferes when students ask for help	30	32,60%
Teacher gives some introductory guidance and waits for students to finish	11	11,95%

Table 23 Motivation to work in a group

Q24. Students’ task choice

Students’ task choice	Number	Percentage
Interesting and quite difficult	15	16,30%
Easy but boring	77	83,69%

Table 24 Students’ task choice

Q25. Students’ focus when doing a role play

Focus on role play	Number	Percentage
Realistic context	79	85,86%
Others’ opinion	13	14,13%

Table 25 Students’ focus when doing a role play

Q26.1 Effects of external rewards on their immediate performance

Effect on external rewards on immediate Performance	Number	Percentage
Yes	80	86,95%
No	12	13,04%

Table 26.1 Effects of external rewards on their immediate performance

Q26.2 Effects of external rewards on continuing motivation

Effects of external rewards on continuing motivation	Number	Percentage
The same	6	0,06%
Limited	10	10,86%
No longer exists	76	82,60%

Table 26.2 Effects of external rewards on continuing motivation

Q27 Students' reading English books/newspapers

Students reading books	Number	Percentage
Often	2	0.02%
Sometimes	14	15,21%
Rarely	76	82,60%

Table 27 Reading English books/newspapers

Q28. Students' persistence

Students' persistence	Number	Percentage
Dedicate more time and effort	10	10,86%
Give up	82	89,13%

Table 28 Students' persistence

Q29. Students' attendance to the English course

Students; attendance to The English course	Number	Percentage
Often	73	79,34%
Sometimes	19	20,62%
Rarely	0	0%

Table 29 Students' attendance to the English course

Q30. Students' orientations

Students' orientations	Number	Percentage
Performance	53	57,60%
Learning	39	42,39%

Table 30 Students' orientations

Q31. Students' self-evaluation of proficiency

Self-evaluation of proficiency	Number	Percentage
Excellent	0	0%
Very good	58	63,04%
Good	20	21,73%
Average	0	0%
Poor	14	15,21%

Table 31 Self-evaluation of proficiency

Some key educational implications

This study has revealed that clearly, there are motivational problems within the context of a foreign language course in University. One message that has emerged strongly from this study is that these problems seem to be of a sociological nature. Poor relationships between teacher and students and the relationship between students themselves were detected. This finding is consistent with what Hanrahan suggests (1998:750) 'a neglected area of the classroom learning environment which may enhance positive motivational beliefs may be a sociological one'. In specific, students appeared to be intimidated by their teacher's comments as the percentages revealed in question 18 and that their relationships between students were not always harmonious as their comments indicated in the open question following question 15.

The implication is what Hanrahan (1998:750) suggests that what is important is 'a community which values not only the end goals, but also all progress towards them'. Thus, it seems that the teacher should be as encouraging as possible developing close rapport with students and creating a supportive atmosphere. Students on the other hand should value the importance of good relationships with other students and build up trust and respect to each other resolving conflicts and overcoming insecurities, which are apparent due to competitiveness.

In pedagogical terms, what I propose is that teachers should take into consideration the merits of effective group work in the classroom. Teachers should foster group cohesion and instruct students on the true meaning of unequal contribution in the group. According to Michaelsen, Fink and Knight (1997) a way to promote the development of cohesive groups is to motivate discussion among members of the group. They suggest that if teachers require from students to make a concrete decision in order to apply a rule or solve a problem, then everyone in the group have the opportunity and the incentive to participate in completing the task because genuine member input is a valuable resource. This finding accords with the suggestions made by Mingzhi (2005). He proposes that the student workshop or

presentation is very helpful in enhancing interaction in an EFL classroom because students will be required to demonstrate the techniques they have learned and play the role of the teacher in class. This suggestion explains why unequal contribution helps in the formation of a harmonious sociological climate within the group members. When students work in groups individual high achievement of a group member is favoured by his/her co-workers because maximum group achievement is attained. Thus since high achievers help the weaker ones, their bonds become stronger and the result is positive. Group productivity reaches a peak and co-workers feel accepted. Also this way enables students to work autonomously away from their tutor. Thus, students realize the importance of the task in relation to student goals within the group. This finding is in accordance with the conclusions of a survey carried out by Peterson and Miller (2004: 180) and some observations made by Katsara, O. (2006: 16-17) within the context of an ESP classroom. However, students' comments in the current study reveal that some students are very weak and there are cases where some do not contribute at all. According to their explanations, this is happening because students lack the necessary skills for succeeding on the tasks assigned. The implication is that teachers should focus their attention on designing challenging tasks which will help students experience the most positive involvement when engaged in tasks for which they have the appropriate skills. This finding is consistent with the findings published by Peterson and Miller (2004:181).

Putting the findings together, it is deduced that good performance is what mostly motivates students. It was also found that this makes behaviour controllable. This finding is in accordance with Katsara, C (2000) who investigated motivation within the context of a Greek private centre (frontistirio) to learn English. She found that Greek students' main aim was to pass the exam and get hold of the first certificate in English. Thus, their motivation was found to counter students' intrinsic motivation. She also found that students' behaviour appeared to resemble the behaviour of the Greek students in the university classroom researched in this survey. It was apparent that external rewards fostered competition which in turn triggered students' self-concept concerns. This survey revealed that even though students appear to care for good marks instead of an enthralling learning experience, intrinsically assigned tasks motivate them. Thus, it is implied that the degree to which students are motivated to engage in work has some bearing on their approach to educational contexts. (Ryan & La Guardia, 1999). The teacher therefore should place emphasis on the increase of intrinsically motivated tasks without excluding external rewards.

According to Henderson-King and Smith (2006:196-197) the attached meanings of education ascribed by students are susceptible to sociocultural influences. Katsara, O. (2008a:17-18) found that Greeks come from an educational background that promotes an interest in the pragmatic concerns regarding career opportunities. This study revealed that most of the students (83%) were not integratively motivated to read English newspapers and books as a hobby, showing thus no genuine interest in English. This finding suggests that the teacher should adopt a communicative approach to language teaching if she/he wants to make students develop an interest in extending their knowledge in English for its own sake. Teachers should try to incorporate into the syllabus tasks which make students develop their communicative ability and make use of authentic materials which can help students get familiarized with the English culture. Grammatical accuracy could still be part of the teaching but in a way that does not hinder students' progress drawing attention away from preoccupation with good marks.

Limitations of the research and future explorations

There are certain limitations that need to be mentioned in order to contextualize the research outcomes.

The percentage return rate for the completed questionnaires is not that high as the researcher would have liked to be. This might have happened because students were very busy doing assignments for other courses and had no time to fill in the questionnaire.

In addition, the majority of students who completed the questionnaire were attending the course regularly and thus the results might just apply to the specific group of the investigation but not necessarily to others as well. Thus, the results may offer insights to the issue of motivation, which can trigger questions of a larger-scale investigation, which could yield more reliable results. For example, the study could be expanded if the focus of the research was on reasons why students do not attend language classes at all giving thus more evidence on better understanding of individual interpretations of education.

With respect to student orientations and with their attitudes to learning, there is a limitation concerning the fact of whether students' orientations have been the cause or result of successful progress. In this research, there is a complexity in the identification of such conclusions since this study reflected the association of instrumental orientations with performance goal orientations. In this survey, there is no evidence of whether students' obsession with marks is a matter of transfer of such beliefs from school, or if the system of University promotes it. Katsara, O. (2008a:17-18) made an initial survey on the impact of the education system on students' learning preferences, which certainly indicate that Greeks are being put under serious stress to enter University. This finding however, would need further research in order to clarify some of the parameters established so that a more generalized conclusion could be reached and measures could be instituted to resolve problems. Even if Greek students enter University with some ingrained mentalities, the scope of this research was to offer some educational implications for improvement of the system of foreign language learning in University.

It would be particularly interesting if other researchers could make a series of studies relating to the issue of continuing motivation and interview students after they completed their university studies. In this way, it would be very useful to check on students' motive to study English at a later stage and to what extend. In addition, it would be valuable if cross-sectional research was carried out in order to outline generational differences in meanings of learning English within an educational context. Thus, a possible model of motivational processes that occur over time could help to better understand individual interpretations.

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Appendix A

April 2008

Help me to help you

Dear Students

I am doing research on student motivation and I need to examine what it is that mostly gives you the incentive to study and learn English. I am trying to identify how to support you better. Hopefully with your contribution I can introduce new teaching techniques that can point to motivational problems in the classroom and therefore identify new teaching policies that need to be changed for your benefit.

Please help me to help you by completing the attached questionnaire. It should not take that long. Any information you give will be treated in total confidence. Please be as honest as possible.

Thank you very much in advance and best wishes for your studies.

Yours sincerely,
Ourania Katsara

A. General Information

Please circle the appropriate answer

1. Sex

- a. Female
- b. Male

2. Age Group

- a. 17-21
- b. Over 21

3. Department.....

4. Year of study.....

5 English Qualifications.....

B Reasons for Learning English

6. Below there are some reasons why you may learn English. Please circle as many you like.

- a. Because I want to make foreign friends and be able to communicate when I visit another country.
- b. Because I want to understand the English culture.
- c. Because English can be useful in the future for my studies.
- d. Because English can be useful in the future for my job.
- e. Because my family is pressuring me to learn for social issues.

- f. Because I want to be able to understand English movies/songs and be able to read English books and newspapers.

Please add any other if you like.....

C Focus on Tasks or Task consequences

Below there are three hypothetical statements that your teacher can make before an exam.

- a. It is important that you know the nature of the exam. Probably, the exam questions will be of a similar type. Please pay attention to what I say
- b. The purpose of the examination is for you to practice dealing with examination questions in English language testing. I want to see whether you have understood the basic concepts. Don't worry that much about any mistakes.
- c. You have three hours for the exam. At the end of these three hours you have to submit your papers.

7. Would any of the above statements influence your concentration while sitting the exam? Circle the appropriate answer.

- a. Yes b No

If yes, circle which one would make you work harder.

a

b

c

8. Which of the above reminds you most of what your teacher tells you?

a

b

c

9. When you are sitting exams what do you mostly care about?

- a. Understanding the nature of the examination questions
- b. Getting as many right answers as possible
- c. Getting as high mark as possible

10. The examination test is difficult. Does this scare/affect negatively your performance?

- a. Yes
- b. No

11. When your teacher evaluates your performance does she

- a. Gives a general mark for your total performance in the course.
- b. Gives a separate mark for your homework, a separate mark for your team work and a separate mark for your performance in the exam

12. If you could choose which method would you prefer?

- a.
- b.

Why? Please write below

13. When do you feel more relaxed to say your opinion?

- a. When you work with others in a group
- b. When you have to speak in front of the class.

14. When your teacher asks you to work in groups do you feel that others contribute more and others less?

- a. Often

- b. Sometimes
- c. Rarely

15. If your answer in 14 is a or b, do you think that this affects how well the whole group does?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Why? Please write below

D Confidence and your behaviour in class

16. Your marks are usually between

- a. 1-4
- b. 4-7
- c. 7-10

17. Do you prefer homework assignments that are:

- a. Difficult but not impossible
- b. Of average difficulty
- c. Easy

18. If in a group task in class your teacher has marked you badly do this

- a. Intimidates you for what your teacher might say
- b. You are not concerned about the other students' opinion and the low mark.
- c. Your main aim is to learn so that you won't repeat the same mistakes in the future.

19. What do you do if you don't do well in a group task?

- a. Try work harder next time
 - b. Get disappointed and think you will have similar results next time
- 20.** When you have failed, why do you usually think you didn't do well?
- a. Because you did not try/ study enough
 - b. Because the group task was difficult for **YOU** but not necessarily for everyone else.
 - c. Because the exam/group task was objectively difficult for everyone.
 - d. Because the teacher was strict in marking
- 21.** When you receive a good mark and your teacher praises you for that does this:
- a. Makes you happy/ work harder in a following group task
 - b. Reassures you and make you study less that you could have done in a following group task
- 22.** If your teacher praised you on giving the right answer on a very easy question would that:
- a. Make you feel happy even though it was easy.
 - b. Make you feel that your teacher doesn't believe in you and thus doubt your abilities.

E Direction on English Learning Pace

- 23.** Your teacher divides you into groups and asks you to do a group project. When do you show more interest and work harder?
- a. When she tells you exactly what you have to do and checks all your steps.
 - b. When she leaves you relatively free as far as how to do the project and interferes only when you ask her, or at intervals to see how you are doing.
 - c. When she just gives you some introductory guidance on what is expected from you and waits for you to finish it.
- 24.** Your teacher assigns you a task/ activity which

- a. interests you but it is quite difficult
- b. is relatively easy but boring. Nevertheless it might help you get a good mark

Which of these do you prefer?

- a.
- b.

25. Your teacher assigns you a role play. When are you more dedicated? When

- a. You find the subject interesting and you like the idea of practicing what you have learned in a realistic context?
- b. When you are not really interested in that but you are concerned about your classmates and teachers' opinions?

26. Suppose that at the end of term you have a term test and to prepare for it your teacher asks you to do a relevant assignment once a week. This assignment unfortunately is boring but it can help you do well on the test. Would this urge you do the assignment?

- a. Yes
- b. No

If your answer is Yes in question 25

At the end of term and the relevant test, your teacher asks you to keep on doing the assignment because it would help you expand your knowledge. You know though that there isn't going to be another test so from that point of view, the assignment is not useful to you. Do you still feel like doing it?

- a. Yes
- b. Yes but to a limited extent
- c. I am no longer interested.

27. Do you read English books/ newspapers because this might help you do well?

- a. Often

b. Sometimes

c. Rarely

28. When you find it difficult to do an assignment do you

a. dedicate more time and effort

b. Give up quickly

29. Do you attend the English course?

a. Often

b. Sometimes

c. Rarely

30. What is your main goal out of this course?

a. Pass the final exam

b. Extend your knowledge for its own sake

31. Generally speaking do you evaluate your English as being

a. Excellent

b. Very good

c. Good

d. Average

e. Poor