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A Correlational Study of Language Learning Motivation and Language Learning Strategies of Turkish Preparatory School Students

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Abstract: This study aimed at exploring the relationship between Turkish EFL learners' motivation types and their preferred language learning strategies. The needed data were gathered through the questionnaire, containing three parts; namely, personal data, Motivational Questionnaire (MQ), and Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). To ascertain whether there exists a relationship between motivation and strategy use, Pearson Correlation Coefficients were run as well as descriptive statistics. The analyses of the results revealed that the participants of the study were found to be more integratively oriented. They also reported to employ meta-cognitive, compensation, and social strategies more frequently than memory, cognitive and affective strategies. Additionally, a strong positive relationship was found between motivation and strategy use. That is, motivation significantly correlates with language learning strategies.

Keywords: *language-learning motivation, language-learning strategies, correlation, preparatory school.*

Introduction

*“Where there is a will, there is a way”
Anonymous*

For the last twenty years, studies in the field of second/foreign language learning and teaching have shifted from instructional methods to learner characteristics. In this respect, the importance of these learner characteristics cannot be neglected. As Dörnyei put forward (2002: 170):

When students embark on the study of an L2, they are not merely ‘empty vessels’ that will need to be filled by the wise words of the teacher; instead, they carry a considerable ‘personal baggage’ to the language course that will have a significant bearing on how learning proceeds.

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Of the key components of this ‘personal baggage’, learning motivation and language learning strategies have stood out as they determine how fast and how well one is likely to master a second/foreign language, and more importantly they are not beyond the teacher’s control, which indicates that the teacher can increase the effectiveness of language learning and teaching by enhancing motivation and raising awareness of learning strategies among learners. (Brown, 2007) That is to say, such other components of language learning and teaching as age, gender, educational/social/economical background are beyond the teacher’s control. When compared to them, motivation and learning strategies are more flexible, manipulable and manageable. This provides ESL/EFL teachers with great opportunities to make language learning journey, from which most suffer unfortunately, more endurable, efficacious and enjoyable. However, we are confronted with the truth that not enough emphasis is put on motivation and learning strategies, so to say the “rescue team” of language learning.

Numerous studies on the relationship between learning motivation and language learning strategies have been carried out, overwhelmingly in Asian context; however, no such a study has been recorded in Turkey despite the existence of separate investigations on motivation and language learning strategies. Having realized the poverty in studies on the relationship between motivation and strategy use, we aim to contribute to filling the gap in this research area. Therefore, the present study will ascertain motivation types and preferred learning strategies of Turkish EFL learners as well as determining whether there exists a relationship between motivation and strategy use, and to what extent they correlate with one another, if any. With this purpose in mind, this paper seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What are Turkish EFL learners’ language learning motivation types?
2. What are Turkish EFL learners’ language learning strategy types?
3. What is the correlation of Language Learning Motivation with Language Learning Strategies?

Review of Literature

On Language Learning Motivation

Motivation can be simply identified as a combination of desire and action. As Gardner (1985; Tremblay and Gardner, 1995) indicated, a learner cannot be described as truly motivated unless he not only desires learning L2 but also makes an effort to do so. According to Forman (2005), motivation enables individuals to increase their action or performance either

internally or externally. As explained by Dörnyei (2001), motivation is related to behavior itself, not to achievement directly. He further states that motivation counts why people behave as they do rather than how successful they will be.

In addition to aforementioned definitions of motivation, regarding what motivation is and what it means to say that someone is motivated, main schools of thought have proposed three motivation theories. From a *behavioristic* point of view, a learner is motivated by anticipation of reward and desire to receive positive reinforcement. Additionally, external, individual forces control the behavior. In *cognitive* terms, the way a person behaves relies heavily on basic human needs, which means that behavior is driven by internal, individual forces. That is to say, individuals' decisions play a crucial role in why they perform certain actions. According to *constructivist* view, on the other hand, each person is motivated in a unique way, which is determined by social context and community. This point of view places greater emphasis on social status and being a part of a social group. Furthermore, internal, interactive forces control behavior (Brown, 2007).

There is no doubt that the greatest contribution to motivation in second/foreign language learning was made by Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1972). As a result of their 12-year extensive study in Canada, several parts of the United States, and the Philippines, two basic types of attitudes, namely instrumental and integrative orientations to motivation, have appeared. As the name indicates, integrative orientation is associated with a desire to interact with the target culture and to become a member of the target group as well as being closely related to positive attitudes towards the L2 community. On the other hand, instrumental motivation presents reasons for L2 learning which are associated with pragmatic gains such as academic achievement and getting a good job.

Another issue concerning motivation is whether a learner is motivated intrinsically or extrinsically, which were distinguished in Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-determination Theory as two underlying distinctions based on what triggers an action. Deci (1975) defined intrinsically motivated activities as the ones whose award is the activity itself. In other words, the reason for doing an action results from the fact that the action is inherently enjoyable and stimulating. Extrinsically motivated activities, however, are executed by external powers rather than genuine interest in the activity. It is worth mentioning that this extrinsic-intrinsic motivation model complements the model of integrative-intrinsic distinction rather than substituting for it. Brown (2007:174) illustrates this distinction as follows:

One could for highly developed intrinsic purposes wish to learn a second language in order to advance in a career or to succeed in an academic program. Likewise, one could have a positive effect toward the speakers of a second language for extrinsic reasons, such as parental reinforcements or a teacher's encouragements.

It is well worth studying motivation from language learning perspective on the grounds that learning a language requires identification with its speakers and adoption of their speech patterns and styles as well as acquiring knowledge of the target language. Consequently, motivation is of vital importance considering that it yields to a better learning/teaching environment and contributes to language learning success, though not directly as stated above. In the following part, language-learning strategies, which play a leading role in foreign language learning, will be dealt with.

On Language Learning Strategies

Of the main factors that determine how and how well students learn a second/foreign language, learning strategies are defined as “the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information” (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990, p.1). In Oxford's (1990) view, strategies are actions that the learner adopts “to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval, and use of information” (p.4). He maintains that this adoption can be carried out in two ways, with the first being *direct strategies* that “require mental processing of the language” and thus “directly involve the target language”(1990: 37); and the second being *indirect strategies* that “provide indirect support for language learning through focusing, planning, evaluating, seeking opportunities, controlling anxiety, increasing cooperation and empathy and other means” (1990:151). Direct strategies involve cognitive, memory, and compensation strategies, whereas indirect strategies consist of meta-cognitive, affective, and social strategies.

As Murcia (2001) indicates, what makes a given strategy either positive or negative is the context of its use. He further claims that a strategy is useful as long as it complies with certain criteria, which can be portrayed as relating to the L2 task, fitting the learner's style and being used effectively by being linked to other relevant strategies. However, despite the countless benefits that the language learning strategies provide, the main problem lies in the fact that learners are not aware of their magical power unfortunately.

Research into the Correlation of Language Learning Motivation with Language Learning Strategies

A good number of studies have been carried out to examine the relationship between language learning motivation and language learning strategies in second/foreign language environment. (Prokop, 1989; Ehrman and Oxford, 1989; Oxford and Nyikos, 1989; Ely, 1989; Oxford, 1993; McIntyre and Noels, 1996; Okada, Oxford and Abo, 1996; Schmidt, 1996) Below we prefer to report more recent investigations, which have been remarkably inspired by the aforementioned ones.

Schmidt and Watanabe (2001) carried out an investigation on motivation and strategy use among learners of five different foreign languages. One major finding is that strategy use is not affected by all aspects of motivation equally, and motivational factors are not affected by all strategies equally. This study further demonstrated that motivation was reported to be the strongest predictor of the use of language learning strategies.

Sadighi and Zarafshan (2006) explored the effects of attitude, motivation, and years of study on the use of language learning strategies by Iranian EFL university students by administering Strategy Questionnaire and Background Questionnaire. Analysis of the results presented that highly motivated students showed greater use of language learning strategies, indicating that there exists a positive correlation between motivation and strategy use.

Moriam (2008) examined the relationship between motivation and strategy use of university students by administering Motivational Questionnaire (MQ) and Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). Based on the results of the study, the relationship between motivation factors and strategy use was not very significant and strong. The most striking result is that the motivational factor *determination to learn* showed a higher relationship with *Meta-cognitive and processing* and *Coping Strategies*.

Feng (2010) conducted a correlational study using a motivation scale and (SILL) and found out that there is a significant correlation between three types of motivations (instrumental, situational and cultural) and six categories of strategies, indicating that the more motivated learners report using strategies more frequently.

Another research assessing motivation and language learning strategies was carried out by Stoffa, Kush and Heo (2011) on Korean immigrant students. The instruments used were Motivated Strategies for

Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) and SILL. As a result, no correlation was found between motivation and direct learning strategies, while a significant relationship was evidenced between motivation and indirect language learning strategies.

Matsumoto (2011), in his study on the effect of motivation and proficiency on strategy use of Japanese university students, came up with that frequency of strategy use is affected by motivation level, which reveals that students with a higher level of motivation tend to use learning strategies more often than those with low motivation.

Xu (2011) conducted a study on the relationship between language learning motivation and the choice of language learning strategies among Chinese graduates of non-English majors. The findings obtained from two sets of questionnaires, namely MQ and SILL indicated that the motivation of Chinese students was found significantly correlated with their learning strategy use, showing that the more motivated students proved to employ more strategies.

Another recent article on motivation and learning strategies is from Greece, by Togia, Stella and Malliari (2012), in which the data were collected with the Science Motivation Questionnaire (SMQ) and MSLQ. Motivation was reported to be closely related to use of cognitive strategies and self-regulation and to have positive and significant correlation with use of learning strategies. The findings further indicated that the more motivated learners were more cognitively engaged and more likely to control their learning and effort.

Nikoopor, Farsani, Salimian and Salimian (2012), investigated the relationship between motivation and strategy use among Iranian EFL learners and found different levels of positive and negative correlation of motivation types (intrinsic, integrated, identified, introjected and external) with six subcategories of direct and indirect learning strategies.

Although various studies have been carried out on motivation and learning strategies separately, no correlation study has been performed in Turkish context yet. Karadeniz, Büyüköztürk, Akgün, Çakmak and Demirel (2002) adapted MSLQ to Turkish to administer on primary and high school students for a variety of subjects such as Turkish language, science, mathematics and social science. Kırkgöz (2005) identified Turkish students' main sources of motivation to study at an English medium university and the possible difficulties that they are likely to encounter. König (2006) aimed to identify orientation, motivation and attitudes of Turkish university students learning a second foreign language. Another related study conducted by Karahan (2007) explored the relationship between language

attitudes towards the English language and its use in Turkey. Sariçoban and Sarıcaoğlu (2008) attempted to recognize the learning strategies used by students and teachers, including such variables as gender, age and department, and examined the effect of language learning strategies on academic achievement. Considering the scarcity of studies on the correlation of language motivation with language learning strategies, the present study has been embarked on to reduce this gap in Turkish context.

Method

Participants

A total of 100 students, 50 males and 50 females, who were learning English at Schools of Foreign Languages of Anadolu University and Kastamonu University during the implementation of the experiment, participated in the present study. The participants were intermediate (n: 56) and upper-intermediate (n: 44) level students with the ages ranging from 17 to 23.

Instruments

The instrument in the present study consists of three main sections: 1) Personal data, 2) Motivation Questionnaire (MQ), 3) Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). It is worth mentioning that MQ was in English, while a Turkish version of SILL was utilized. Regarding the reason why MQ was applied in English was that not a standard Turkish translation was present. The first section covers age and gender only. The second and the third sections are explained in detail below.

To explore students' motivation, the Modified Questionnaire adapted from Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and Li's (2005) research work "Chinese Students' Motivation to Learn English", by Degang (2010), was administered. This questionnaire consists of two main parts: a) instrumental motivation, b) integrative motivation; each of which involves 10 items. It is a five-point Likert Scale ranging from 5= Strongly Agree to 1= Strongly Disagree. Degang noted that the questionnaire was revised by language specialists and experts and adjusted based on their suggestions for the purpose of ensuring its validity. As a consequence of these comments and advice as well as the implications taken from its pilot study, the final version of the questionnaire was developed as a valid instrument.