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Turkish students' motivation to learn English at public and private universities

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Abstract

This study investigates whether Turkish university students are motivated to learn English, why they want to learn English, and what kind of role English plays in their lives. Furthermore, it examines whether there are significant differences between language learners in a public university and a private university. The study is descriptive in nature with an extension of analyzing two subpopulations and comparing their results.

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Keywords: Motivation; language learning; private university; Turkish students.

1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that learners' motivation plays an important role in language achievement. Language learning motivation has been conceptualized and investigated within different frameworks such as psychological framework -as linguistic self-confidence (Clement, Dörnyei & Noels, 1994), self-determination (Brown, 1994, Dickinson, 1995), and neurobiological model (Schumann, 1998)-, social psychological framework (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985; Giles & Byrne, 1982), and social framework (Schumann, 1986; Norton, 2000).

Gardner's socio-educational model, which is well-known with its instrumental versus integrative motivation distinction, has dominated the field. According to Gardner (1985) instrumental motivation involves the pragmatic reasons of learning a second language, such as obtaining a job, whereas integrative motive involves learners' positive attitudes toward the language community, their interest in integration or socialization with the other community, and learners' openness to other ethnic groups and language. In ESL context, integrative orientation is considered as the main motivation of the language learners whereas in EFL context, instrumental motivation is believed to explain language learners' desire to learn English (Dörnyei, 1990). However, further studies in EFL context illustrated language learners' integrative motivation as well as instrumental (Aydın, 2007; Colak, 2008; Dörnyei 2001; Kaylani, 1996). Recently, English language learners' integrative motivation in EFL context is explained with global status of English language (Lamb, 2004; Dörnyei, 2006; Kaylani, 1996; Yashima, 2002). It is hypothesized that in EFL context, students perceive English as an international language and do not closely

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associate the language with its native speakers, instead with international community. However, there has not been sufficient study in various EFL contexts to illuminate this aspect.

Furthermore, the importance of researching immediate learning context has been emphasized; however, the researchers have neglected to investigate the effects of school setting on learners' motivation in EFL context. Therefore, the current study examines Turkish university students' motivation to learn English in two different school settings namely at a public university and a private university.

2. Study

The study is descriptive in nature with an extension of analyzing two subpopulations and comparing their results. The purpose is to compare learners who attend a public university with the learners who attend a private university in terms of; their level of motivation to learn English in Turkey, their reasons of studying English, and the role of English in their everyday lives.

2.1. Participants

From two universities, 228 students who were attending English preparatory classes participated in the study. The participants were Intermediate level students, taking over 25 hours of compulsory English classes before taking their major area courses which were conducted only in English at the private university and partly in English at the public university.

2.2. Method of Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through a questionnaire which was adopted from Dörnyei (2001) and analyzed through SPSS. Descriptive statistics and t-test were utilized to explain the learners' motivation and compare the group differences.

3. Findings and Discussion

The results obtained from the study are presented and discussed below under three headings, each presenting one of the posed research questions.

3.1. Are Turkish university students, both at public and private institutions, motivated to learn English?

Language learners both at a public university and a private university are moderately motivated to learn English. While public university students' mean of motivation is 2.47 out of 4, private university students' mean is 2.77 which is higher than public university students. As can be seen in Table 1, private university students' motivation to learn English is significantly higher than public university students'.

Table 1. Differences between public and private university students in motivation to learn English

	School	N	Mean	Std	Sig.
Motivation	Public	115	2.47	.54	.00
	Private	113	2.77	.51	

Almost all of the public university (94%) and private university (97%) students believe that to be proficient in English is necessary for them. More than half (53%) of the public university students and almost half (48%) of the private university students indicated that they would choose to learn English as primary foreign language if they had a chance to choose.

3.2. Why do Turkish university students attending public and private institutions want to learn English?

Almost all of the students, 108 out of 115 at public university and 108 out of 113 at private university, want to learn English in order to get a well-paying job. Their main motivation to learn English is instrumental. At the same time, they also want to watch English movies; English broadcasting TV channels, and listen to the radio.

Furthermore, they want to have foreign friends and be in contact with them. On the other hand, they neither want to be like British and/or American people, think and act like them, nor read their literature.

Their motivation to learn English cannot be categorized solely as integrative or instrumental since they seem to exhibit features of both. While their desire of finding a better job can be categorized as instrumental motivation, their desire to have foreign friends and continue this friendship can easily be categorized as integrative motivation.

These results can be explained within the framework of reinterpreting the term ‘integrative motivation’ and ‘instrumental motivation’ in EFL context in terms of global English (Dörnyei, 2006; Lamb, 2004) and with the notion of “investment” (Norton, 1995, 2001). Integrative motivation can be reinterpreted as integration to international community through the international language rather than integration into British or American communities. Similarly, instrumental motivation can be interpreted as an investment in global market. Norton (1995) maintains that “if learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital” (p. 17). Regardless of the school context, these learners seem to be motivated to learn English to find a better job and to connect to the international community through media and interpersonal exchanges.

Table 2. Reasons of wanting to learn English

	Public		Private			
	N	%	N	%		
To find a better job			108	94	108	96
To watch movies in English	105		91	105	93	
To watch TV and to listen to the radio	101		88	99	87	
To have foreign friends	98		85	106	94	
To follow instructions in English	87		76	107	95	
To keep contact with foreign friends	91		79	104	92	
To be like British/American people	4		3.5	14	12	
To think and act like British/ American people	11		9.6	30	26	
To read literature in English			18	15.7	29	26

3.3. What is the role of English in these students’ lives?

Learners in both public and private universities seem to spend time mostly by listening to music, watching movies and TV channels in English, and searching web sites. Listening to music seems to be these learners’ favorite activity which is followed by watching movies in English. While learners at the private university spent more than one and a half hour to speak with foreigners, public university students watch TV channels. The results indicate that in both contexts, learners spent time mostly by listening activities in English.

Table 3. Time spent using English in an average week.

	Public	Private
	Mean (Minute)	Mean
Watching TV channels broadcasting in English	60	75
Watching movies in English	90	160
Listening music in English	20	170
Listening to the radio broadcasting in English	45	60
Reading newspaper in English	10	30
Reading magazine in English	12	45
Reading books in English	40	60
Searching web sites in English	60	120
Communicating with foreigners through the Internet	45	80
Speaking with foreigners	40	100

As can be seen in Table 4, private university students spent more time by listening, reading, speaking, and writing in English compared to their counterparts in public university. While private university students spent 95 minutes using English in an average week, public university students spent less than an hour (55minutes) in an

average week. These results suggest that while English has some place in these learners' life especially the lives of private university students, overall English does not seem to be playing a major role in neither contexts.

Table 4. The difference between public and private university in time spent using English

	School	N	Mean	t	df	Sig.
Time spent	Public	115	55	-6.49	225	.00
	Private	113	95			

Considering that these students are taking classes to improve their English proficiency level and indicated that they want to learn English, they do not spend enough time to use English. Public university students spent only around an hour and private university students one and a half hour during a whole week. They claim they want to learn English but it seems like they do not act on it. As Dörnyei (2001) indicated “Simply having the incentive to strive for a goal does not guarantee that the person will actually undertake the effort that is required” (p.94).

4. Conclusion

Overall, students at the public and the private university are moderately motivated to learn English, although private university students' motivation level is significantly higher than public university students. Their primary motivation to learn English is to find a well-paying job in both private and public university. In addition to this, they want to learn English so that they can connect to the international community through media and interpersonal interactions. Private university students seem to be more interested in having interpersonal exchanges in English than public university students. This might be because of the opportunities the private university students have. Since these students are coming from families with higher socio-economic background, most of them have already had contact with English speaking communities either for travelling or business purposes. As a result of this, they may want to maintain this relationship.

Furthermore, private university students spent more time using English in their lives than public university students. However, overall neither public nor private university students spend much time using English. Further research can be undertaken to investigate the mismatch between the desire of the students to learn English and their lack of effort. When asked, all the students without hesitation state the importance of learning English in their lives, for their future career, etc. and their desire to learn; however, when the time and effort spent to learn English is considered, it seems they do not put enough effort to accomplish this goal. Some other qualitative research can be conducted to investigate the motivational process that these students undergo throughout the one-year-long preparatory education.

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