

**TEACHING ADVANCEMENT AT UNIVERSITY (TAU) FELLOWSHIPS
PROGRAMME**

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PROJECT TITLE: *Students' level of motivation towards learning English as a 2nd language (L2) major at a South African higher education institution*

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Aim and Processes

Students enrolled for English as a second language (L2) major at a tertiary institution in the Northern Cape have been observed to be underperforming. This is evident from the high **low pass rates** and **class averages** over the past three years (2016 – 2018). The aim of this investigation, therefore, was to determine student's level of motivation towards learning English as a second language (L2) major subject.

Data gathering instruments (Instrumentation)

In order to test the students' motivation towards learning English as a second language (L2) major subject an adapted version of Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (2004) was used. This shortened version of the AMTB was found to be appropriate since it was applicable to the majority of students whose mother tongue is not English, but rather Afrikaans, Setswana, isiXhosa, or any other official South African language.

Owing to the limited scope of the project only five constructs were measured, namely *Interest in Foreign Languages*, *Attitudes toward Learning English*, *Integrative Orientation*, *Instrumental Orientation* and *English Class Anxiety*. A 4 point Likert Scale varying from strongly *disagree* (value = 1), *disagree* (value = 2), *agree* (value = 3) and *strongly agree* (value = 4) was used to measure the items of each construct. The unit of analysis was the 2018 1st year cohort of students doing English as a 2nd language (L2) major. The population comprised 130 1st year students from which a sample of 91 (n=91) respondents were selected. Convenience sampling as a form of nonprobability sampling was used as a sampling method because of the availability and accessibility of the participants.

Data analysis

Data elicited from the items measuring the different constructs in the questionnaire were descriptively summarized using Excel.

Outcomes

Biographical profile of students

The majority of students who participated in the study were females (63.7%) younger than 20 years of age (53.8%) while another significant percentage were between the ages of 21 – 25 (44.4%). Only a small percentage of participants were older than 26 years of age (2.4%). It is also noted that, with regard to language distribution, the majority of the participants' home language is Setswana (52.7%) while only a small percentage of participants reported English (13.1%) as their home language.

Presentation of results elicited from the Likert scale items measuring the following five constructs

Interest in Foreign Languages

Interest in Foreign Languages as a construct with 9 items (Q1 – Q9) endeavoured to measure the respondents' interest in foreign languages. The mean score for this construct was 3.06 while the median score was 3.09. The standard deviation from the mean was reported at 0.328498.

Attitudes towards Learning English

This construct consisting of 10 items (Q10 – Q19) was used to measure the respondents' attitude towards learning English. The mean score for this construct was 2.48 while the median score was 3.00. The standard deviation from the mean was reported at 0.792209.

Integrative orientation

The construct *Integrative orientation* which consisted of 4 items (Q20 – Q23) was used to measure the respondents' efforts to associate and identify culturally with the target language community. The mean score for this construct was 3.44 while the median score was 3.49. The standard deviation from the mean was reported at 0.151838.

Instrumental orientation

Instrumental orientation consisting of 4 items (Q24 – Q27) endeavoured to measure the respondents' desire to learn a language for practical purposes. The mean score for this construct was 3.00 while the median score was 3.13. The standard deviation from the mean was indicated at 0.391449.

English class anxiety

The construct *English Class Anxiety* consisting of 5 items (Q28 – Q32) was used to determine the respondents' level of anxiety in an English class environment. The mean score for this construct was 2.17 while the median score was 2.11. The standard deviation from the mean was indicated at 0.165457.

Discussion

In terms of gender, the majority of students who participated in the study were female (63.7%). While a significant percentage of respondents were between the ages of 21 – 25 (44.4%) the majority of students were younger than 20 years of age (53.8%). Only a small percentage of participants were older than 26 years of age (2.4%). It is also noted that, with regard to language distribution, the majority of participants' home language is Setswana (52.7%) while only a small percentage of participants has English (13.1%) as their home language.

The scores for the constructs as mentioned above represent the aggregate scores for all the items in a particular construct. The median score was used as a measure of central tendency since the distribution of the data is assumed to be skewed or asymmetrical. In the case of a 4 point Likert scale, as is the case with the instrument used in this particular case, the middlemost value of 2.5 was used as a benchmark against which the scores obtained for each individual construct could be measured.

The median score of 3.09 for the construct **Interest in Foreign Languages** indicates that respondents shows an interest in learning foreign languages. In the case of **Attitudes towards Learning English** the median score of 3.00 suggests that respondents have a positive attitude towards learning English as foreign language.

The construct **Integrative orientation** where a median score of 3.49 has been reported suggests that respondents have a keen interest to associate and identify culturally with the target language community. This score is marginally higher than the scores for the previous two constructs suggesting that this construct plays a significant role in the respondents' efforts to learn English as a second language. With regard to **Instrumental orientation** the median score of 3.13, which is lower than the scores for integrative orientation also indicates a positive inclination towards learning a foreign language. Of all the constructs which have been measured **English class anxiety**

received a negative median score of 2.11 suggesting that respondents encountered high levels of anxiety in their English class.

The positive scores for instrumental and integrative orientation is in line with findings of research done elsewhere (Ellis, 1985; Young, 1987; Cheng-Chang Tsai and I-Cheng Chang, 2013; Khasawneh1 and Ahmad Al-Omari1, 2015).

Conclusion

Investigating the students' level of motivation towards learning English as a second language major brought some new insights regarding their performance or achievement levels. The findings suggest that students in the Northern Cape have more or less the same level of motivation towards learning English as any other student elsewhere in the world whose mother tongue is not English, especially with regard to constructs such as instrumental and integrative orientation. The motivation of students at the tertiary institution where the investigation was conducted were similar. One may therefore conclude that student performance may be influenced by other factors which may not necessarily be related to motivation. These may include student-related factors such as language proficiency, academic literacy, academic preparedness, reading ability, comprehension, etcetera. Low levels of student achievement or performance may even be educator-related or learning environment-related. These factors would therefore also need to be investigated.

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