Motivation to Complete Homework: Insights from ESL/EFL Learners in Malaysia

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Abstract
Homework plays an important role in students' learning process by enforcing them to practice the acquired knowledge on their own. Some learners are reluctant to complete their homework due to various reasons which have been seldom explored. This paper aims to investigate motivation of ESL/EFL learners to complete classwork or homework by examining a sample of 117 learners from an English centre in Penang, Malaysia. It applies a well established motivation scale, namely Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ-A) developed by Ryan and Connell (1989), and strives to validate its factorial structure in a culturally different context. Exploratory factor analysis resulted in a 3-factorial structure. Findings of the study indicated introjected motivation to be the most important motivation of ESL/EFL learners to complete classwork/homework followed by intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.

Keywords: Academic Motivation, ESL/ EFL Learners, Motivation Types

Introduction

Attitude is an important concept about learning. Students' attitude toward learning affects how well or how often they do it, and how much enjoyment they gain from it. Many students who are learning a language find it difficult and sometimes they think they are not successful in that. However, this difficulty is not related to ability, but rather related to the attitudes that are held to learning (Yenilmez et al., 2007). Attitude is a mental set or disposition, readiness to respond and the psychological basis of attitudes, their permanence, their learned nature and their evaluative character. It includes object things, peoples, places, ideas or situations.

Intelligence is not the only determinant of academic achievement but also high motivation and engagement in learning results in students' success (Kushman et al., 2000). Students' motivation is an important criterion in learning (Daniels, 2008) and lack of motivation displayed by students is a major concern for many teachers. As argued by Tileston (2004, p. 2) students learn new materials so long as three things are present: (1) the desire to learn new information or new processes, (2) the right method of learning, and (3) consistency. Learning does not commence with cognitive process, but rather it begins in the self-system. It is also called as "Do I wanna?" system by Tileston (2004), which refers to the decision of the learner as to whether he/she is going to pay attention, engage in the learning, or simply ignore it.

Motivation is defined as "a student's willingness, need, desire and compulsion to participate in, and be successful in the learning process" (Md. Yunus and Wan Ali, 2009).

Motivation has long been a controversial issue with researchers in learning. This is not because there is any doubt about the importance of motivational factors in general for learning, but because the contrast between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which has dominated the debate, is subject to serious criticisms. Importance of motivation in learning has been highlighted in literature for 40 years (Cleary and Chen, 2009).

Students can gain a high level of participation and also better understanding of material when they have confidence and are motivated (Fisher and Baird, 2005). There are several factors that can motivate students. One of them is peer learning. Learning from peers leads

to better learning outcomes, teamwork, reflection, communication skills, and learning meaningfully (Boud, 2001). According to Topping (2005) peer learning is the acquisition of knowledge and skills through active help. Putting students into a teaching role, makes them motivated to review, learn, and comprehend the material (Cavallaro and Tan, 2006). Besides, by doing working in groups they can support each other, and thus ensure that their learning goals are fulfilled (Liaw et al., 2008).

This paper strives to examine an established scale of academic motivation developed by Ryan and Connell (1989) in a culturally different context to verify the validity and factorial structure of the scale. The objectives of this paper are to investigate whether the originally proposed four sub-dimensions of academic motivation still exist in the population of ESL/EFL learners in Penang, Malaysia, and to examine the motivation of EFL/ESL learners in completing their homework.

Academic Motivation

Interests and motivations have been a key issue in studies of educational psychology. Interest is defined as an interactive relation between the individual learner and his or her environment or aspects thereof including objects, events, and ideas (Krapp, 2002). Figure 1 shows the four types of motivation that can impel people to act.

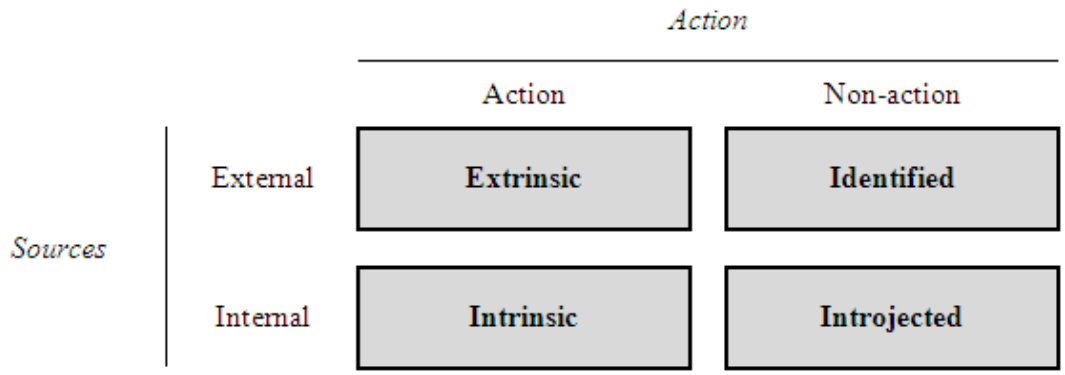

Figure 1: Four Types of Motivations

Motivation is drive to do something and can be both in the form of internal or external driver. The former is can be either intrinsic or introjected, while the latter can be classified as both extrinsic and identified motivation. Intrinsic motivation is the drive which comes from within. This is when students do something for the sheer joy of doing it or in order to discover something, find the answer to a question or achieving self-accomplishment (Tileston, 2004). Introjected motivation is similar to intrinsic motivation in that it is internalized, with the main difference in that the person feels the tension of guilt, if it is not done. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is the desire to do something because of the promise of a tangible and marketable reward (Tileston, 2004). This type of motivation is highly linked with behaviourism and was supported by B. F. Skinner, who conducted numerous experiments on animals. However, before his death, Skinner himself stated that it was foolish to think that human beings react similar to other experimental animals. Caine and Caine (1997, p. 16) also criticise the behaviourism approach in learning and argue that a single behaviour of teacher might have vast, but initially invisible, consequences. Finally, identified motivation is where a person knows that something needs to be done, but has not yet decided to do anything about it.

Methodology

The required data for this study was collected by using and distributing a structured questionnaire among ESL/EFL learners in an English centre located in Penang, Malaysia. Questionnaire link was emailed to learners and they were invited to participate in the research by completing the online survey. Participation was voluntary. A total of 117 learners participated in this research (64 male and 53 female).

The measurement items for this study were adapted from Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ-A) developed by Ryan and Connell (1989). The original scale had 4 dimensions (9 items to measure the external motivation, 9 items to measure the introjected motivation, 7 items to measure the identified motivation, and 7 items to measure the integrated or the intrinsic motivation). However, in the current study, only 22 items which appeared to be relevant to the context were selected and applied for further investigation. Respondents were supposed to announce their agreement to either of the statements using a 5-point likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

To analyze the collected data, descriptive, reliability and exploratory factor analysis were applied using SPSS version 13. In order to explore dimensions of academic motivation based on collected data, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on the questionnaire items. In order to assess the factorability of the data and ensure adequacy of sampling, Bartlett's test of sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (Kaiser, 1970, 1974) were applied. For the factor analysis to be considered appropriate, Bartlett's test of sphericity should be significant ($p<0.05$) and KMO index should be higher than 0.6 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001).

In this study, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p=0.000$) and initial KMO index was measured to be 0.630 which indicates a good data suitable for EFA. Normally, factor loadings are considered to be high when they are greater than 0.6 and moderately high when they are above 0.3 (Kline, 1994). In this study, a factor loading of 0.60 or greater on one factor was considered significant as suggested by Chin et al. (1997). As for tackling the issue of high-cross loadings, the criteria set by Snell and Dean (1992) was applied whereby we deleted items when the differences between the loadings across factors were less than 0.10.

Findings and Discussion

After removing a number of items to ensure that anti-Image correlation and communalities are within the acceptable limit (items 12 and 3 respectively), and removing the item with a factor loading below the cut-off point (item 1), the final rotated component matrix using Varimax was obtained and is shown in Table 1. The result of factor analysis indicated a 3-factorial structure explaining 78.5% of total variance.

Table 1: Results of exploratory factor analysis for academic motivation

Item No.	1	2	3
ITEM 14	**0.936**	-0.004	-0.004
ITEM 13	**0.869**	0.078	0.261
ITEM 8	**0.865**	0.012	0.230
ITEM 11	**0.865**	-0.068	-0.188
ITEM 7	**0.856**	0.137	0.150
ITEM 5	**0.796**	0.251	0.193
ITEM 21	**0.610**	0.477	0.306
ITEM 17	0.068	**0.965**	0.154
ITEM 16	0.055	**0.926**	0.137
ITEM 9	-0.016	**0.914**	0.114
ITEM 18	0.118	**0.887**	0.073
ITEM 15	0.382	**0.777**	0.330
ITEM 22	0.080	-0.006	**0.853**
ITEM 20	-0.008	0.476	**0.792**
ITEM 19	0.259	0.280	**0.745**
ITEM 4	0.288	0.000	**0.744**
ITEM 6	0.364	0.053	**0.744**
ITEM 10	-0.198	0.475	**0.722**
ITEM 2	-0.456	0.451	**0.601**

The internal consistency of each scale was assessed using Cronbach's α levels and verified as all the scales had a Cronbach's α levels higher than 0.70, except dimension 5 where the Cronbach's alpha is slightly lower than 0.70 due to the small number of items. Table 2 shows the Cronbach's α levels for the scales applied in this study.

Table 2: Reliability analysis

Scales	Number of Items	Reliability Coefficients
Dimension 1 (Extrinsic Motivation)	7 items	0.937
Dimension 2 (Introjected Motivation)	5 items	0.942
Dimension 3 (Intrinsic Motivation)	7 items	0.877

Result of descriptive statistics for identified dimensions is summarized in Table 3 and reveals that dimension 2 (introjected motivation) is the most important motivation for ESL/EFL learners to do their homework followed by dimension 3 (intrinsic motivation) and dimension 1 (extrinsic motivation).

As shown in Table 3, introjected motivation possesses the highest mean score which indicates that most of the students do their homework because of their internal motivation and goals. The distinctive aspect between introjected and intrinsic motivation is that in introjected motivation the person feels the tension of guilt, if it is not done. The second highest score is for intrinsic motivation. Besides, the least important motivation is found to be extrinsic motivation. This shows that internal factors have greater impacts on students to do their homework as compared to external factors. It indicates that the strongest motivations to do homework come from students' themselves, as well as internal drivers rather than external forces.

The students in the case centre learned English through team work and cooperative learning which increases their motivation and helps them to achieve their goals. As mentioned earlier, learning from peers leads to better learning outcomes, teamwork,

reflection, communication skills, and learning meaningfully (Boud, 2001). Putting students into a teaching role, makes them motivated to review, learn, and comprehend the material (Cavallaro and Tan, 2006). By working in groups students can support each other, and thus ensure that their learning goals are fulfilled (Liaw et al., 2008). Therefore, working in groups increases students' motivations toward learning to achieve their goals. On the other hand, achieving goals is an internal factor of one's success. Therefore, it is conjectured that learning in groups can increase students' internal motivation toward learning and being successful.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for academic motivation

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation
Dimension 1 (Extrinsic Motivation)	3.409	1.110
Dimension 2 (Introjected Motivation)	4.757	0.696
Dimension 3 (Intrinsic Motivation)	3.673	0.856

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research is an initial investigation of the revised SRQ-A scale among EFL/ESL learners. Findings of this study reveals that the 22 selected SRQ-A survey items do not fit well on the four factorial structure as we used a new population in our study and items have loaded on a three-factorial structure and three items had to be removed. This warrants researchers to be cautious while using the SRQ-A scale to measure students' academic motivations.

By examining a group of EFL/ESL learners who learn English in cooperative environment, this study highlighted the greater role of internal motivations over external motivations in students' endeavours to complete their homework. However, this does not deny the importance of external influences. Teachers can also play an important role in increasing students' engagement in learning through bringing high energy to their teaching which can boost students' motivation and improve their overall participation in the learning process. This can be achieved by creating an interactive lesson plan which ensures students' participation in learning process through team work and peer collaboration. In conclusion, one of the most important factors which increase students' internal motivations is team work and peer learning. It is important to cultivate a learner-centred culture in the classroom. Such an environment is encouraged by teachers when they directly teach and observe student-directed learning strategies (Wehmeyer et al., 2000).

This study is not without limitations. The main limitation of the study pertains to study sample which was selected from one centre and limits the generalizability of the findings. Future studies might explore the issue further by examining the effect of academic motivations on study success of EFL/ESL learners.

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