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AGE AND MOTIVATIONAL INTENSITY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES LEARNING: A CASE STUDY OF FRENCH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Nesrine EL-ZINE
Sana'a University, Yamen
correspondence: nelzineut@gmail.com
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Abstract
Motivation is one of the most researched concepts in the different fields of education, and the field of language learning is certainly not an exception. In the present research, the objective is to examine the Motivational Intensity as being one of the motivation's components. Also, this research investigates the impact, if any, of the factor of age on the examined component. The research addressed the two following questions: To what extent the Yemeni undergraduate learners of the French language are motivated to learn French? Does age have any impact on the degree of motivation of the Yemeni undergraduate learners of French? To answer the research questions, a survey was conducted in the Department of French Language and Literature at Sana'a University. The survey was composed of 5 questions that were selected and modified from Gardner's AMTB (Attitude, Motivation Test Battery Questionnaire). The results of the survey demonstrated a statistically high degree of motivational intensity among the Yemeni undergraduate learners of French in general. However, the younger Yemeni learners were more motivated than their older counterparts.

Keywords: Motivational intensity, learners' age, undergraduate learners, French as a Foreign Language (FFL).

Introduction
Due to its undeniable importance in the field of learning a foreign/second language, many researchers have investigated motivation and its crucial role on the learners' progression and achievement (Dörnyei 1994, 2003, 2008; Gardner et al. 2004; Chambers 1999, 2000; Oxford & Shearin 1994; Williams et al. 2002). Several definitions were given to the concept of motivation. For Keller (1983), motivation represents the "choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid, and the degree of effort they will exert in that respect" (p. 389). For Paul Eggen & Kauchak Don (2005), "Motivation is a force that energizes, sustains, and directs behavior toward a goal" (p. 349). Similarly, Brown (1994) describes motivation as "the extent to which you make choices about (a) a goal to pursue and (b) the effort you will devote to the pursuit" (p. 34). Pandey (2005) states, "motivation, defined as the impetus to create and sustain intentions and goal-seeking acts, is important because it determines the extent of

the learner's active involvement and attitude toward learning" (p.79). Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) highlight the importance of motivation on learners' achievement; "Without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals, and neither are appropriate curricular and good teaching enough to ensure student achievement" (p. 203). In social psychology, motivation refers to the reason of making a specific choice over another or/and the frequency of picking the same choice repeatedly "Social psychologists use the term "motivation" to describe why a person in a given situation selects one response over another or makes a given response with great energization or frequency." (Bargh, Gollwitzer, & Oettingen, 2010, p. 268). Also, the research argued that motivation to achieve a task or attend a goal is very carefully impacted by the degree of efforts expended, "Brehm defined effort as the investment of resources that enable the execution of behavior, arguing that it functions to sustain activity that is needed for goal attainment. He also suggested that effort investment is primarily governed by a resource (or energy) conservation principle: given that resources are important for survival, individuals are motivated to avoid wasting them and aim at investing only those that are required for successful task execution." (Richter, Gendolla & Wright, 2016, p. 150-151).

In the field of learning second/foreign languages, the conceptualization of motivation was developed from different perspectives and examined under various theories/models: Attitudes and motivational orientations (Gardner 2001; Gardner and Lambert 1972; Lamb 2004, 2013), the Self-Determination Theory (Noels et al. 2000, 2003; Ryan & Deci 2000; Deci & Ryan 2011), the process-orientated approach (Dörnyei & Ottó 1998; Boo, Dörnyei & Ryan 2015), L2 Motivational Self-System (Dörnyei 2005; Ushioda 2009; Ryan & Dörnyei 2013; Mercer 2015). Nevertheless, most of the research focused on the typologies of motivation (integrative/instrumental) rather than analyzing its different components. Gardner (1985), a pioneer researcher in the field of motivation and second language learning, defines motivation as "a multi-faceted construct in that it involves effort (motivational intensity), cognition (desire) and affect (attitudes)" (Gardner, 1985. Cited in Nakata, 2006: 55). Hence, motivation comprised three main components, which are the learners' motivational intensity, their desire to learn the target language, and their attitudes toward that language as well as the people who speak it (Gardner, 2001, P. 13). Motivational intensity refers to a degree of effort and persistence that learners apply consistently during their language learning process (Gardner et al., 1997). Some research stressed the critical factor that motivational intensity plays in any second/foreign language learning process, implying that motivational intensity is pivotally responsible for language learning success (Gardner & Smythe 1975; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Dörnyei (1998) suggested that the learners' "motivated behavior" can be, clearly, detected through their motivational intensity. Otherwise, through their efforts to accomplish the learning tasks, "The proof of motivation is in displaying it in action -hence the importance of the 'desire' measure, which directly taps into the individual's wish to perform the action; and, even more directly, the 'motivational intensity' measure that explicitly focuses on motivated behaviour" (p. 122). Pintrich & Schunk (2002) also identify in motivational intensity the fundamental factor for language learners to succeed in their learning of the target language. In

their research on the correlation between efforts, ability, and success, Hufton et al. (2002) interviewed learners aged 15 years from the United States of America, England, and Russia. The results showed that the English and American interviewees recognized the importance of effort rather than the ability to succeed in language learning. However, Russian learners attributed success to ability. Nevertheless, in their understanding of the concept of ability/capability, Russian learners stressed the importance of including a higher degree of effort in order to succeed. On the same line of thinking, Zhu (2002) argued that persistence and determination are fundamental for learners of foreign languages to succeed. From another perspective, in their study, El-Zine & Aamer (2020) addressed the gender factor and its correlation with motivational intensity and desire to learn French among the Yemeni learners of the French language. Their study's findings implied that male learners were found to have a higher motivational intensity and more desire to learn French than their female counterparts.

Some of the research addressed the impact of the age factor on language learners' progression and attitudes. Munoz (2010) argued that younger learners seem to be less efficient in the earlier stages of their language learning process. Afterward, they acquire a higher proficiency, which can be almost as same as native-like language skills. Nevertheless, older learners might be faster learners compared to younger learners, and they show more efficiency at the beginning of the language learning process. Munoz (2006) explains, "if the older learners' advantage is mainly due to their superior cognitive development, no differences in proficiency are to be expected when differences in cognitive development also disappear with age" (p. 34).

Furthermore, based on Larson- Hall investigations (2008), younger learners have a better attitude towards studying a second/foreign language than older learners. According to her, "age does seem to play a non-negligible role in improving second language acquisition, given that language learners receive enough input" (Larson- Hall 2008, p.24). Similarly, Seright (1985), cited in Singleton & Ryan (2004), discussed that some studies indicated that younger learners perform better than older learners.

Other research on learning motivation assessed the relationship between the demographic variable of age and motivation to learn the target language. However, the results were not always conformed. Some of the research results suggested that older language learners are more motivated than younger learners, while some other research implied the opposite. For example, in their study on the Hungarian secondary school students, university students, and adult learners of English, Kormos & Csizér (2008) studied English learning motivation in relation to the factor of age. The results of their research showed that the youngest learners (secondary school students) were the least motivated in their learning of English. Likewise, older Polish learners of the German language were found to be more motivated than the younger learner in the research conducted by Okuniewski (2014). Nevertheless, in their study on motivation and learning French in a secondary school in Flanders, Ruyffelaert & Hadermann (2012) found that younger learners showed more motivation in their learning of French than the older learners. The findings of the research of Ghenghesh (2010) and Bećirović (2017) also demonstrated that younger learners' motivation for learning English was significantly higher than the motivation of older learners.

Questions and Hypotheses of The Current Research

The current research addresses the two following questions:

1. To what extent the Yemeni undergraduate learners of the French language motivated to learn French?
2. Does age have any impact on the degree of motivation of the Yemeni undergraduate learners of French?

Hence, the research proposed the two following hypotheses:

1. The Yemeni undergraduate learners of the French language are highly motivated to learn French.
2. Age has no significant impact on the degree of motivation of Yemeni undergraduate learners of French.

Method

Data Collection

To answer the research questions, the researcher conducted a survey in the Department of French Language and Literature at Sana'a University. The total targeted population of the students during the time of the study was 125 students. Hard copies of the survey were distributed to the students during their break time. The students were asked to fill out the survey and submit them to the administrative office once completed. A total of 74 questionnaires were completed and received. However, only 69 were adequately answered by undergraduate students from different levels. This sample represented 55.2% of the department's population of 125 students. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and that participation was voluntary. They were also reassured of the anonymity of the results of the given survey.

Research Instrument

The survey consisted of two parts: the first part was intended to gather information for the demographic background of the research, such as age, gender, study level, and academic performance. The second part was a questionnaire that examined the variable of motivational intensity. It comprised of 5 questions that were selected and modified from Gardner's AMTB (Attitude, Motivation Test Battery Questionnaire, 1985). The questions were translated into Arabic by the researcher and distributed to five college professors for their feedback. A couple of questions were modified and rephrased based on the feedback received from the reviewers. Also, a pilot study was conducted with ten randomly selected students. As a result of the pilot study, a couple of instructional sentences were added. This approach aimed to clarify for students how to answer some of the survey questions.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the collected data answered the two questions of this research. Thus, the obtained data analyzed the degree of motivational intensity among the Yemeni undergraduate learners in their learning of the French language. It also examined age as a factor of impact on the learners' motivational intensity.

Analysis of the Demographical Background Data

As we can see in Figure 1, a total of 69 Yemeni undergraduate learners participated in the research survey. Among the 69 participants, 38% were male, and 62% were female. It is interesting to note, at this point, that the number of female learners in the Department of French language is generally higher than the number of male learners, which is also the case in the other departments of Languages in Sana'a University. The justification for such phenomena might be related to the social-cultural belief in the Yemeni society that men are usually better than women in the scientific fields. In contrast, women are more suitable for areas related to Languages, Arts, and Literature. However, nowadays, we see many girls are becoming more and more interested in joining the scientific faculties in Yemeni universities. Still, generally speaking, the number of girls joining departments of Languages and Literature is always higher than boys in universities in Yemen. Also, according to the results in Figure 2: The majority of the participants were from the fourth year with 33%, 31% from the second year, 13% from the first year, and 23% from the third year of the Undergraduate Program.

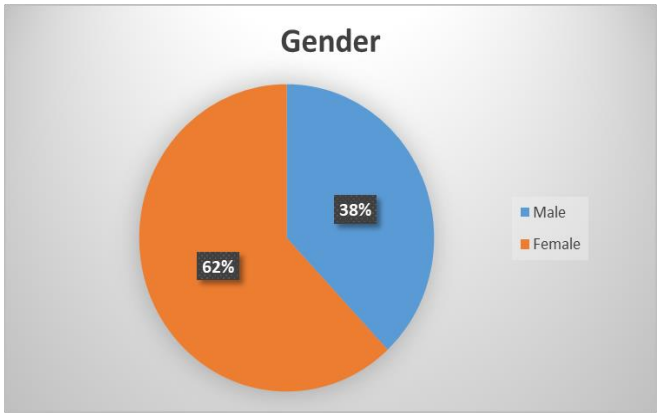


Figure 1: Gender distribution

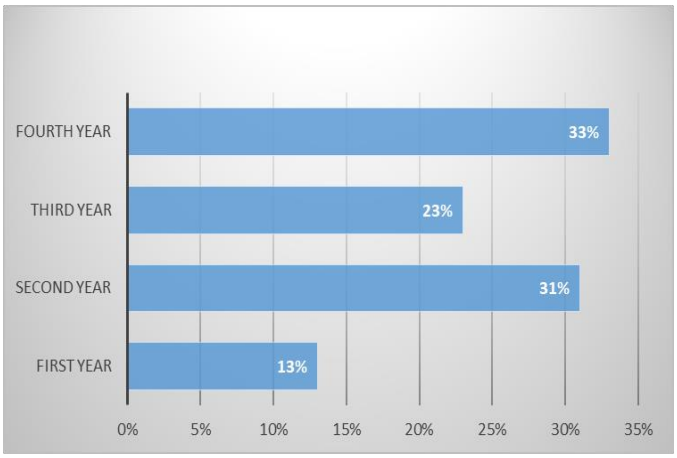


Figure 2: Study level distribution

Analysis of the Motivational Intensity (MI.) and Age Data

Based on the data obtained from the questionnaire (AMTB) in the second part of the survey, the motivational intensity of the Yemeni Undergraduate learners was examined (Table 1). Moreover, to ensure a better understanding of the Yemeni Undergraduate learners' motivational intensity, they were also analyzed based on their age (Table 2).

As Tables 1 and 2 indicate, for Question 1, "I actively think about what I have learned in my French class," the majority of the participants agreed on answer A, "Very frequently" (48%), while answer C, "Once in a while" (14%), had the lowest percentage. Concerning the age factor, results showed that the degree of motivational intensity of the group of age "22-25 years" was the highest (64%) among the other groups of age. The statement in Question 2 "When I have a problem understanding something we are learning in my French class, I…" the highest percentage was given to answer A, "immediately ask the teacher for help" (45%), whereas, answer C "just forget about it" recorded the lowest percentage among all the three answers with 13%. Likewise, learners between the age of 22 and 25 years old were the highest in their rate for this answer with 58%. For Question 3, "When it comes to French homework, I…" the findings also revealed a high motivational intensity in the participants' answers. 42% of the participants chose answer B, "work very carefully, making sure I understand everything," while only 19% of the participants declared that they "just skim it" (answer C). For this question too, the group of age "22-25 years" was the highest level in its motivational intensity, recording 55% among the totality of the four groups of age. Similar to the other Questions, the analyzed data for Question 4 also reported a high degree of motivational intensity among the Yemeni undergraduate learners. Thus, 45% of the participants confirmed that they would "definitely volunteer" (answer B) if the "teacher wanted someone to do an extra French activity." Yet, the motivational intensity of participants aging between 22 and 25 years old was still the highest (49%) in comparison to the other groups of age. Finally, for the last two questions 5 & 6, "After I get my French assignments back, I…" and "When I am in French classes, I…" respectively, results demonstrated in both questions a significantly high level of motivational intensity with 54% obtained for answer A. Participants reported that they rewrite and correct the mistakes in their assignments when the teacher returns them (Question 5). They volunteer to answer as much as they can when they are in their French classes (Question 6). In respect of their group of age, participants between the age of 22 and 25 years old showed the most potent motivation in their answer for both questions recording 57% for answer A (Question 5) and 54% for answer A (Question 6).

Table 1: Percentage distribution of Motivational Intensity

Question	Answer	Percentage
Q 1: I actively think about what I have learned in my French class	**A. very frequently**	48%
	B. hardly ever	38%
	C. Once in a while	14%
	Total	100%
Q 2: When I have a problem	**A. immediately ask the**	45%

Question	Answer	Percentage
understanding something we are learning in my French class, I…	**teacher for help**	
	B. only seek help just before the exam	42%
	C. just forget about it	13%
	Total	100%
Q 3: When it comes to French homework, I…	A. put some effort into it, but not as much as I could	39%
	B. work very carefully, making sure I understand everything	42%
	C. just skim it	19%
	Total	100%
Q 4: If the teacher wanted someone to do an extra French activity, I…	A. definitely not volunteer	25%
	B. definitely volunteer	54%
	C. only do it if the teacher asked me directly	21%
	Total	100%
Q 5: After I get my French assignments back, I…	**A. always rewrite them, correcting my mistakes**	54%
	B. just throw them in my desk and forget them	10%
	C. look them over but don't bother correcting mistakes	36%
	Total	100%
Q 6: When I am in French classes, I…	**A. volunteer answers as much as possible**	54%
	B. answer only the easier questions	30%
	C. never say anything	16%
	Total	100%

Table 2: Percentage distribution of the highest Motivational Intensity by Age

Question	Answer	Age (Year)				Total
		18-21	**22-25**	**26-29**	**> 30**	
Q 1: I actively think about what I have learned in my French class	**A.** very frequently	30%	64%	3%	3%	100%
Q 2: When I have a problem understanding something we are learning in my	**A.** immediately ask the teacher for help	26%	58%	13%	3%	100%

Question	Answer	Age (Year)				Total
		18-21	**22-25**	**26-29**	**> 30**	
French class, I…						
Q 3: When it comes to French homework, I…	**B.** work very carefully, making sure I understand everything	28%	55%	10%	7%	100%
Q 4: If the teacher wanted someone to do an extra French activity, I…	**B.** definitely volunteer	35%	49%	8%	8%	100%
Q 5: After I get my French assignments back, I…	**A.** always rewrite them, correcting my mistakes	35%	57%	5%	3%	100%
Q 6: When I am in French classes, I…	**A.** volunteer answers as much as possible	30%	54%	11%	5%	100%

Contribution of the current research

In general, research that studies learning foreign languages in the Yemeni context are significantly few. The majority of the existing research assesses the learning of the English language in particular. Thus, the current research is one of very few that focus on Yemeni learners of French (EL-Zine & AL-Naggar 2017; AL-Naggar & EL-Zine 2018), It also adds to the body of knowledge for the variable of motivational intensity in learning French in a non-francophone country.

Conclusion

The current research attempted to examine the degree of motivational intensity among the Yemeni undergraduate learners in their learning of the French language. Also, the research aimed to analyze the impact of age on the degree of motivational intensity of the learners. Per our first hypothesis, the research's findings proved that Yemeni undergraduate learners are highly motivated in their learning of the French language. As far as the impact of age on the degree of the learners' motivational intensity, in the context of our research, the results refuted our second hypothesis and revealed that age had a significant impact on the learners' motivational intensity. Hence, the younger learners demonstrated a significantly higher level of motivational intensity than their older counterparts. Based on our knowledge and our personal experience in teaching the learners in the Department of French Language and Literature at Sana'a University, we firmly believe that there is a high desire among most of the learners to travel to France or any other French-speaking country to continue their studies or to work. Hence, the results in the present research indicated that learners between 22 and 25 years old are the most motivated. Otherwise, these younger learners are still in the phase of planning for the future, and they consider their learning of the French language as a direct means to achieve their objective as clarified above.

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