Relationship between Motivation and Students’ English Learning Achievement: A study of the Second – year vocational certificate level Hatyai Technical College Students

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Abstract

Among the factors influencing students’ learning, motivation is thought to be an important reason for different achievement. The purposes of this study were (i) to find out the levels of motivation in students with high and low achievement, (ii) to investigate the differences and similarities in motivation of students with high and low achievement, (iii) to investigate the relationship between motivation and students’ achievement. The subjects were 140 second-year vocational certificate students in electronics technology program and building construction program, Hatyai Technical College in the first semester of the Academic Year 2010. The instruments used for data collection were a questionnaire and an in-depth interview. The data from the returned questionnaire were statistically analyzed by using the SPSS program for percentage, frequency, mean, standard deviation, \( t \)-test and correlation coefficient. Findings from this study indicated that the motivation of students with high and low achievement were at high levels. There were no significant differences of motivation between the high and low achievement group. The correlation between motivation and their English learning achievement was significantly correlated with each other (\( r = 0.184 \), \( p < 0.05 \)). The participants mentioned that they have studied English in order to be successful in their future education and career and instrumental motivation was found to have more impact on students than integrative one. In conclusion, motivation has positive relationship with students’ English learning achievement. The findings could be useful for researchers and teachers in improving students’ achievement by conducting effective teaching and learning strategies to develop students’ motivation.

Key words: Motivation, Instrumental motivation, Integrative motivation, Students’ achievement, High achievement group, Low achievement group
Background

With the rapid progress of information and communication technology during recent decades, a vast amount of knowledge has been spreading through the borderless world. In the trend of globalization, the most important language being used among countries, institutions and individuals all over the world is the English language (Punthumasen, 2007). In Thailand, English remains a foreign language (Noytim, 2008). Nonetheless the role of English in Thailand is rather important as it is in many other developing countries (Wiriyachitra, 2002). For many years the Thai Government has recognized the importance of English language and required the Ministry of Education to develop English language education in accordance with the world trend (Office of the Education council, 2006). Moreover, the Ministry of Education has placed great emphasis on teaching and learning English in the Thai educational system (Watcharajinda, 2009). However, to date, there is general agreement among academics and teachers that the aims of the policy are not yet being met, and that English competence of Thai students remains low (Prapphal, 2001; Wiriyachitra, 2002; Kongpetch, 2004; Forman, 2005).

Factors responsible for low English proficiency of the majority of Thai students include traditional pedagogical prescriptive approaches (Bunnag, 2006; Forman, 2005; Kongpetch, 2004), the influence of Thai culture, EFL learning environments (Saengboon, 2004; Wongsothorn, et al., 2003) and low motivation in learning a foreign language (Srikrai, 2008). Therefore the Thai government has identified the urgent socio-political, commercial and educational needs for Thai people to be able to better communicate in English (Wongsothorn et al, 2003).

Although Thai government has made great efforts to improve English skills in vocational and technical education; it is a serious problem because of a lack of interest and poor basic principles of English in Thai vocational and technical students. The Office of Vocational Education Commission reported that Vocational and Technical college students have limited abilities in speaking, reading, writing or understanding the English language (The Office of Vocational Education Commission, 2008). Additionally, it has been found that Thai technical students’s achievements are very poor in all four skills. They do not realize how important the English language is. This is because there is not any motivation for them in learning English (Boonrangsri, 2004).

Motivation is the process through which individuals are driven to increase their action or performance either by internal (intrinsic) or external (extrinsic) factors (Forman, 2005).
Motivation is viewed as a dynamic, situated and social construct (Norton, 2000) and closely related to learners’ identity construction (Dornyei, 2005; Gao et al., 2007; Gardner, 2000). According to Yu-mei (2009), motivation is one of several important factors that may influence students’ English achievement. Learners’ motivation has been widely accepted as a key factor which influences the rate and success of second/foreign language learning (Ellis, 1994; Mcdonough, 1983). Among the factors influencing students’ learning, motivation is thought to be an important reason for different achievement. Motivation is a very important factor which determines the success or failure in second language learning because motivation can directly influence the frequency of using learning strategies, willpower of learning, goal setting, and the achievement in learning (Li & Pan, 2009). Therefore, motivation would explain why students ignore or achieve learning English.

The investigation of language learning motivation is an important field in language pedagogy since it is seen as one of the key variables contributing to the successful acquisition of a foreign or second language (Kormos & Csizer, 2010). These studies revealed a variety of results that reflected the complexity of examining motivation in language learning. Moreover, several studies in the foreign and second language field have acknowledged the social and contextual influences on individual motivation. Most importantly, these studies were concerned with what kind of motivation led to higher proficiency achievement (Gardner et al., 1997; Mills et al., 2007).

In Thailand, many recent studies were based on Gardner and Lambert’s theory. For instance, research conducted by Degang (2010) showed that students were found to be about equally motivated both instrumentality and integratively to learn English. Jehdo’s (2009) study indicated that the subjects’ motivations were mixed between instrumental and integrative motivation. In Pruksashewa et al (2008) findings, it was found that all of the students in this study, whether they liked or did not like studying English, were motivated by both types of motivation: integrative and instrumental motivation. According to Puengpipattrakul’s (2007) results, it showed the highest level of significant relationship between integrative and intrinsic motivation. Although many researchers reported their studies conducted with undergraduate students, little study has been done in the context of vocational or technical students. The lack in the literature regarding studies on Thai technical students’ motivation and achievement has been another motive to investigate these factors.
It can be seen that in Thailand, there is a lack of studies conducted on motivation in vocational and technical context. It is, therefore, worth conducting this study to research and report the relationship between motivation and students’ achievement.

**Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

This study was conducted to examine the relationship between motivation and students’ English learning achievement in Hatyai Technical College students. The present study is an attempt to recognize one of the main individual differences, motivation.

The present research addresses the following questions.

1. What are the levels of motivation of students with high and low achievement?
2. Are there any significant differences in motivation between students with high and low achievement?
3. Are there any significant relationships between motivation and students' achievement?

**Technical Terms**

**Motivation** means the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language which leads to a conscious decision to act, and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to attain previous set goals. In this study, motivation is classified into two types: Instrumental and integrative motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

**Instrumental motivation** refers to a learner’s desire to acquire a new language for utilitarian reasons and to reflect the practical value and advantages of learning a target language (Gardner & Lambert, 1959; Hudson, 2000).

**Integrative motivation** refers to a learner’s desire to learn more about the cultural community of the target language or to assimilate in the target community (Gardner & Lambert, 1959; Norris-Holt, 2001).

**Students’ achievement** means grades average obtained from the English course in the first year of their study.

**High achievement group** refers to 70 students in electronics technology program.

**Low achievement group** refers to 70 students in building construction program.
This study was based on Gardner and Lambert’s theory (1959), which defined motivation as the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language. Through the lens of Gardner and Lambert’s theory, this research focused on instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. These two types of motivation show obvious goals of learners in language learning and are widely accepted and studied (Jehdo, 2009). The variables impacting on students’ achievement is shown as follows.

**Motivation**

| I | **Instrumental motivation**: a learner’s desire to acquire a new language for utilitarian reasons and to reflect the practical value and advantages of learning a target language |
| II | **Integrative motivation**: a learner’s desire to learn more about the cultural community of the target language or to assimilate in the target community |

Students’ achievement

In this study, the independent variable was English learning achievement of the students who are studying in the fields of electronics and building construction. They were represented high and low achievement groups respectively. The dependent variable was motivation which was classified into two perspectives: instrumental motivation and integrative motivation.

**Significance of the study**

The learners’ types of motivation play an essential role in language achievement. Additionally, different levels of their achievements may be impacted by two types of motivation. It is, therefore, essential to investigate the relationship between two types of motivation and students’ English learning achievement.

The findings of this study revealed, it should describe the state of students’ motivation in southern vocational context of Thailand. The knowledge gained from this study can add to the data base for practice, research and theory.

In practice, this could be used as a basis for administration, management and to plan for efficiency and effectiveness in technical level and to raise technical colleges’ competitive abilities to international levels. Additionally, it could help encourage teachers to select activities and tasks that tap students’ motivation and improve their achievements. The results
of this study may also provide useful guidelines for teachers concerned with developing English-language instruction. Moreover, the results of this research will be beneficial in encouraging students to improve their motivation and their achievement.

With regard to research, the present study is an attempt to recognize one of the main individual differences, motivation, at Hatyai Technical College. There is a lack of studies conducted on motivation in southern vocational context. Therefore, when the findings of this study should add to the literature on students’ motivation, especially in southern vocational context.

Concerning theory, the theoretical framework of Gardner and Lambert has been used in the western context to analyze instrumental motivation and integrative motivation in language learning. It is, therefore, necessary to test these two types of motivation to understand the relationship between motivation and English learning achievement in the eastern context, southern vocational setting of Thailand in particular.

**Research Methodology**

The present study employed both quantitative and qualitative data by utilizing a questionnaire survey and an in-depth interview. A triangulation research technique was formulated and applied in this study. In a process of triangulation, the research aimed to elicit possible trends in the ways in which students feel about, and relate with their achievements through data comparisons across participants and between questionnaire and interview data for each subject (Creswell, 1994). In the first stage, quantitative data were collected from the subjects with the use of a questionnaire to investigate students’ motivation and English learning achievement. Then, in the second stage of the research an in-depth interview was utilized to collect qualitative data from the subjects’ perspectives.

A questionnaire which was developed to elicit the data on students’ motivation in English language learning consisted of 3 parts. Part 1 contained 8 items asking about general background of the students. Part 2 consisted of 17 items asking about Instrumental motivation in English language learning and Part 3 consisted of 8 items asking about Integrative motivation in English language learning, measured by a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5= strongly agree) (Gao et al., 2007). The questionnaire was translated into Thai in order to ensure that the subjects clearly understood each item. Subjects were required to choose a number on a 5-point Likert scale that best represented their response to the items pertaining to the motivational factors.
The content validity and reliability of the questionnaire was checked by the supervisor and two raters. The checking was focused on the content validity and appropriate language used. To assure its content validity and reliability, the approved questionnaire was piloted with 30 Second-year vocational certificate students in the electronics technology program and the building construction program who were not be included in the group of the subjects of the main study. The reliability index of the questionnaire was 0.82.

To further elucidate findings from the questionnaire, the in-depth interview was used to gain a personal insights into the feelings of the subjects. The pilot interview was conducted on the five students from the electronic technology program and five students from the building instruction program. All subjects were asked the same series of the questions. The emerging themes were grouped to determine two types of motivation: instrumental and integrative. The analysis process used was content analysis. Each interview was examined to find similarities and differences in responses and grouped for recurring themes.

The subjects of this study consisted of the second-year vocational certificate students in the electronics technology program and in the building construction program, Hatyai Technical College in the first semester of the Academic Year 2010. Sample size was calculated by using the 27% technique (Hughes, 1989), gaining a sample of 120. However, to compensate for incomplete questionnaires and maintain the desired sample size, the subjects of this study were 140 students. Consequently, the students were divided into two groups: 70 students in each group. The English grades average of the first year of their study was used to divide participants into two groups: high achievement and low achievement groups. The 70 students in electronics technology program were the high achievement group because they got highest English grade average in the first year of their studies while 70 students in building construction program were the low achievement group because they got lowest English grades average in the first year of their studies. For the interview, the researcher also selected 15 subjects from each group to gain insights into the subjects perspectives.

Conclusions

This part reports the finding of the study obtained from the analysis of the questionnaires returned and the in-depth interview. The main results are presented in the following sections:

Part I: General background of the subjects
The data of subjects’ background was presented in number and percentage. The majors of the subjects were Electronics (50%) and Building construction (50%). Most of the subjects were male (96.4%). They were less than 18 years old (85.7%). Concerning GPA of their first year, the majority of the subjects had GPA between 2.50-2.99 (37.1%). In case of English course GPA, showed that most of them had English GPA less than 2.5 (47.1%). The majority of the subjects began to learn English when they were in kindergarten school (75%). About 95.7% did not have experiences in English speaking countries while 4.3% did, especially in Singapore, Malaysia, and the United Kingdom where they joined exchange programs, traveled and participated in technical course training.

From investigating the frequency of activities involving English of the subjects, the six highest frequency were: listening to English songs (everyday=44.3%), playing English game (everyday=22.9%), searching English information from internet (2-3 times per month=27.1%), watching English TV. Program (2-3 times per month=26.4%), self-studying from textbook and multimedia (1 times per month=27.1%) and testing English in class (Once a week=29.3% and 2-3 times per month=29.3%). The six lowest frequency in participating activities were: joining English camp (never=67.9%), role playing in English (never=60.7%), translating English news (never=60.7%), reading English newspaper (never=60.0%), asking questions in English (never=55.7%) and speaking or talking in English in front of class (never=52.9%).

Part II: Analytical results of the levels of motivation in students with high and low achievement

To answer the research question on what the levels of motivation of students with high and low achievement are, the mean scores were calculated. In the high achievement group, the range of mean scores was between 4.51 and 3.57 for instrumental motivation and the range of mean scores was between 4.34 and 3.56 for integrative motivation. Regarding the low achievement group, their range of mean scores was between 4.56 and 3.51 for instrumental motivation and the range of mean scores was between 4.31 and 3.64 for integrative motivation. For overall motivation, the mean score of the high group was 3.98 and the mean score of the low group was 3.91. According to the data in the table below. The motivation of both high and low group were at a high level. The data was presented in the table below.
## Motivational items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrumental motivation</th>
<th>High achievement group</th>
<th>Low achievement group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I have to use English in my future career.</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I want to get good position.</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I want to get good income.</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I want to broaden my knowledge.</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I want to know and communicate with foreigners.</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I want to learn various events around the world.</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I can read textbook.</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I can understand English movie, video or radio program.</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I want to search for English information on the internet.</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I want to get good grade.</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I want to further my study.</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I want to travel to English speaking countries.</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Learning English make me feel happy.</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Learning English can give me a sense of achievement.</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. The knowledge in English can enhance the achievement in various aspects.</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Other people will respect me more if I know English.</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. An educated person is supposed to be able to speak English.</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integrative motivation</th>
<th>High achievement group</th>
<th>Low achievement group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I want to be a part of English – speaking groups.</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I want to keep in touch with foreign friends and acquaintance</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I want to learn about foreigners’ lifestyle in English speaking countries.</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The more I get to know native speakers, the more I like/appreciate them.</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I want to learn their culture and various English speaking people.</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I want to participate in the activities of other cultural groups.</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I want to understand English arts, literatures and history.</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I want to understand the relation between languages, cultures and native speakers’ lifestyles.</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total** | **3.98** | **.45** | **3.91** | **.46** |
Part III: Analytical results of the differences between motivation of students with high and low achievement

To answer the research question on the differences of motivation of students with high and low achievement, the mean score of all aspects of motivation of the two groups were compared by comparative analysis of the t-test. It was found that the p-value of the comparison of motivation with high and low group was .39 which was higher than 0.05. There was a 39% chances of being wrong in rejecting the null hypothesis; therefore, it can be concluded that the two means of motivations in high and low group were not significant at the level of 0.05. The data are shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>-.86</td>
<td>.39 ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ns-Not significant at the level of .05

Part IV: Relationship between Motivation and Students’ English Learning Achievement

To answer the research question on Relationship between Motivation and Students’ English Learning Achievement, the 140 subjects’ mean scores of instrumental motivation was analyzed from the items number 1-17 from part 2 in the questionnaire while the mean score of integrative motivation was analyzed from the items number 1-8 from part 3 in the questionnaire. It was found that instrumental motivation is at high level at the average of X=4.10 (X = 4.10, S.D. = 0.46), integrative motivation at high level at the average of X=3.79 (X = 3.79, S.D. = 0.56) and overall motivation at high level at the average of X=3.95 (X = 3.95, S.D. = 0.45) respectively. The mean score of instrumental motivation was higher than integrative motivation which was presented in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Rating Scale Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental motivation</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>High degree of motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrative motivation</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>High degree of motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall motivation</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>High degree of motivation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From statistical analysis by using statistical packages Pearson correlation for motivation and English learning achievement, motivation and English learning achievement were significantly positive correlated at the low level with each other ( r=.184 , p< 0.05 ).
Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
<th>Instrumental Motivation</th>
<th>Integrative Motivation</th>
<th>Overall Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.170*</td>
<td>.158* ns</td>
<td>.184*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* significant at the level of 0.05, ns- Not significant

When analyzing each type of motivation, it was found that the integrative motivation was not significantly correlated with English learning achievement at the level of 0.05. However, the instrumental motivation was significantly correlated with English learning achievement at the level of 0.05 (r=.170, p< 0.05). These results were corroborated by the in-depth interview results which showed the greater impact of instrumental motivation on students’ perceptions than integrative motivation. Regarding to the in-depth interview, students were more motivated by instrumental motivation than by integrative motivation. All of the students considered English is very important for their future. The importance that they attached to English gave them a variety of motivations to learn English. The motivations ranged from broad reasons such as contributing to globalized world to very specific personal reasons. Three interrelated instrumental motivations in studying English were identified: future study, scores and career. In addition the students mentioned that good marks in English were required for their future studies and a good qualification for their careers. In contrast, integrative motivation seemed to be a very remote concept. More than half of the students explained that it is difficult to integrate because of the limitations of their abilities and the differences of cultural backgrounds kept a distance from the native countries world. Besides, being self-motivated for either instrumental and integrative motivation, the students were affected by external influences for example teachers, peers and motivational change. They thought the English learning atmosphere that the teacher and classmates created was vital in boosting, maintaining or demotivating their interest in learning English. In addition, they mentioned that their motivation changes occurred during different periods of their English study.

Discussions

This study identified several significant results as follow.

1. In whole, the findings of this research showed a high level of motivation in both high and low group. In the high achievement group, the mean score of instrumental motivation was higher than the mean score of integrative motivation and the mean score was in the same way in the low achievement group. This might be because the students prefer to
learn English for their future success rather than to be associated with English speaking countries or native speakers. Moreover, the students had little chance to interact with native speakers. For technical students, they need to use English for their technical works in order to meet the increasing demands for skilled manpower in industrial sectors. These current findings were consistent with Chen (2008), which revealed that the Republic of China Military Academy freshman cadets’ motivation was instrumental factors. Similarly, Qashoa (2006) found that the United of Arab Emirates students had a higher degree of instrumental motivation than integrative ones toward learning English.

2. The motivation of students with high and low achievement are not different at statistically significance 0.05. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that both high and low achievement students, especially since all of them were technical students, had little opportunity to participate in English activities and native speaker teachers’ instructions. Most of the subjects from high and low achievement group mentioned that English is a tool for their future study and career. It was possible that the level of achievement put less impact on their motivation. These findings were in line with Halawah’s study (2006) revealed that the correlations between motivation, family environment, student characteristics and academic achievement were small and practically not significant.

3. The motivation and English learning achievement were significantly positively correlated with each other. The results of the study indicated that there was a positive relationship between their achievement and motivation. This might be due to the fact that the students who got a high grade average in English courses tended to be interested in English learning. The students’ achievement had an ameliorating effect on their motivation. It enabled students to use the target language more often, encouraged communication with others in the language, created an environment for stimulating classroom activities, and gave variety to language learning. These significant results were in line with Liu (2007). The study showed that motivation of the students was positively correlated with their English proficiency.

**Recommendations**

1. A study on the various factors affecting students’ motivation should be carried out so that the findings could be useful for researchers and teachers in improving students’ achievement. In addition, the researcher should conduct a research using a different framework, especially one which is new.

2. English teachers should evolve effective teaching and learning strategies for English language to develop students’ motivation to the subjects.
3. To encourage students to become self-motivated independent learners, instructors should design effective course contents and create an atmosphere that is open and positive to raise students’ motivations.

4. The English lecturers should enhance students’ integrative motivation for the better and effective students’ perceptions in language learning.

References


