

Secondary School Students' Language Learning Motivation as a Predictor of their Academic Engagement

تحفيز تعلم اللغة لطلاب المدارس الثانوية كمنبه لمشاركتهم الأكاديمية

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ABSTRACT:

The aim of this study is to perceive the significance of students' academic engagement to predict their language learning motivation and scholastic success. It seeks, as well, to explore the possible differences in the level of language learning motivation and academic engagement in relation to gender among the students. The sample of the study involved (35) male and female adolescent students from Bourmadia 2 secondary school in Relizane within the age range of 16-20 years and their EFL teachers. Two research instruments were used: (a) the Inventory of School Motivation (ISM) developed by McInerney and Ali (2007) to measure learners' and (b) a semi structured interview. The data collected from these research instruments were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings of the study revealed a moderate correlation between adolescents' academic motivation and their academic engagement.

Keywords: Adolescent learners; EFL learning; motivation; Academic engagement; Gender; Secondary school.

ملخص البحث

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى إدراك أهمية المشاركة الأكاديمية للطلاب للتنبؤ بدوافع تعلم اللغة والنجاح الدراسي. كما تسعى الدراسة إلى استكشاف الاختلافات المحتملة في مستوى دافع تعلم اللغة والمشاركة الأكاديمية فيما يتعلق بالجنس بين الطلاب. شملت عينة الدراسة (35) طالبا وطالبة من ثانوية برماديه 2 في ولاية غليزان ضمن الفئة العمرية 16-20 سنة ومعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية. تم استخدام أداتين بحثيتين (أ) جرد الدافع المدرسي (ISM) الذي طوره McInerney (2007) و (ب) مقابلة شبه منظمة. تم تحليل البيانات التي تم جمعها من أدوات البحث هذه كمياً ونوعياً. كشفت نتائج الدراسة عن وجود علاقة معتدلة بين الدافع الأكاديمي للمراهقين ومشاركتهم الأكاديمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطلاب المراهقين: تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية : التحفيز: المشاركة الأكاديمية: الفروق بين الجنسين: المدرسة الثانوية.

1. Introduction:

The 21st century is a new era that has shaped all previous conceptualizations. It is characterized by a rapid change affecting all domains of life. In this new era, education and educational institutions are confronted with the challenge of meeting the new demands of the contemporary communities and satisfying the needs of the new generations of learners who proved to be quite aware of the necessities of this global era. Traditional instruction which constituted the basic form of teaching and learning for decades has proved to be ineffective in an age that requires instruction to be totally reformed in views, conceptions and approaches. The new trend focuses on providing ample learning opportunities to both the students and teachers. Therefore educational institutions, targeting their graduating students' effective education, manage to provide them with unremitting training. Contemporary approaches to instruction give primacy to deep learning over memorization or encyclopaedic information. The novel instructional practices point out the importance of considering both the cognitive and affective factors that boost students' academic performance and success.

The Algerian educational system has been in continual pursuit of the most effective instructional practices to overcome the obstacles in an attempt to enable the Algerian learners to reach an acceptable level of instruction as well as master all skills that enable them to function in today's world. The actual challenge has been how to involve students in a competitive learning process and assure positive outcomes. The issue has met the major concern of educationists, psychologists and all of those connected to the educational process on how to put forward strategies and tools to initiate, direct and maintain students' optimum motivation, especially during adolescence.

Understanding Algerian learners' academic motivation, particularly, in foreign language learning, is necessary to ensure that secondary school adolescent students achieve their potential and guide their behaviour towards a specific goal. Year after year, many of them find themselves in a state in which they do not have the desire to go through the different classroom assignments nor even have the will to carry out their studies. They do not pay attention to what the teacher is doing in class and are caught engaged in other parallel activities.

The following research questions are formulated to guide this study:

RQ₁: To what extent does adolescents' language learning motivation contribute in the development of their academic engagement?

RQ₂: Are there statistically significant differences in the level of language learning motivation and academic engagement in relation to gender among secondary school students?

RQ₃: How can EFL teachers boost adolescent students' language learning motivation and academic attainment?

The following hypotheses were set to answer the framed research questions:

H_{a1}: Secondary school students' high language learning motivation can contribute in the development of their academic engagement.

H_{a2}: There are statistically significant differences in the level of language learning motivation and academic engagement in relation to gender among secondary school students' sample.

H_{a3}: EFL teachers can contribute significantly in implementing new language learning strategies that target their learners' individual differences in the classroom context and, thus, enhance their learners' motivation and academic success.

The focal point of the present study, explicitly, addresses the issue of adolescent students' language learning motivation as a predictor of their academic engagement. It attempts to investigate the impact of learners' gender differences on learning motivation and academic outcomes, as well as, guiding EFL teachers to help their students understand and interpret their goals and performance in different learning situations.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 What is Academic Motivation?

The issues of student motivation in education, in general, and secondary education, in particular, and its significant effect on academic engagement across childhood through adolescence are seen as an imperative aspect of effective learning (Elliot & Dweck, 2005, p. 141). Indeed, many psychologists and educators consider it as the most essential drive for students to get along with successful school learning. Academic motivation is among the most prominent determinants of students' success or failure in school (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000, p. 156). Despite the uncontested position of motivation in learning, there is no agreement on the exact definition of motivation. The complexity of the concept resides in its *"endeavours to explain individuals' actions and behaviour"* (Dörnyei, 2000, p. 520). Greenberg and Baron (2003) defined it as: *"The set of processes that arouse, direct, and maintain human behaviour towards attaining some goal"* (p. 190). Motivation is thought to be responsible for *"why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity and how hard they are going to pursue it"* (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 1). Ryan and Deci (2000) stated that *"to be motivated means to be moved to do something"* (p. 54). Unlike unmotivated people who have lost drive and inspiration to act, motivated people are energized and activated to the end of a task to allow goals to persist, and lead to choosing or preferring a particular behaviour.

2.2 Language Learning Motivation

In the context of foreign language learning, motivation plays an important part. Gardner (1985) defined language learning motivation as *"the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity"* (p.10). He believed that language learning motivation requires a learner to *"devote considerable effort to achieve a particular goal"*, and as such to *"experience satisfaction in the activities associated with achieving this goal"* (Gardner & McIntyre, 1993, p. 2). In the absence of effort, learning will remain a wish or desire. This process of transforming the desire into reality has been described as *'motivational intensity'* which refers to *"the degree of effort the individual expends to achieve a goal"* (Gardner, 1985, p. 51)

Language learning motivation is, indeed, a basic tool to language learning success. In such an issue, Dörnyei (2005) argued, *"Motivation provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the L2 and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process"* (p. 68). Gardner (2005) believed that the students who are endowed with high levels of motivation will have a better accomplishment than those with lower levels because their executed effort will be more attentive, more persistent, and they will enjoy the experience more, display optimal levels of arousal as well as have expectancies and more self-confidence in their performance (p. 5).

2.3 Academic Engagement

Simon-Morton and Chen (2009) defined academic engagement as “*the extent to which students are interested in, committed and curious about what they are learning in their classes*” (p. 4). Academic engagement is believed to be a multidimensional construct encompassing behavioural, psychological/ cognitive and affective components (Reschley & Christenson, 2012, p.3). It is the converging experience that bonds the learners to the school. Veiga (2016) expressed that students who are engaged and successful in their school activity tend to have a solid knowledge in various subjects, to internalize efficient learning strategies, to obtain good academic results, and experience satisfactory interpersonal relationships (p. 817). Many studies have confirmed that engaged students are more likely to perform well on several key outcomes that indicate adolescents' healthy development, positive functioning, and social adjustment (Appleton et al., 2006; Darr, 2009 ; Chase, Hilliard et al, 2014). Skinner (2009) stated that engagement is “*the outward manifestation of motivation*” (p. 22). In his study related to the development of young adolescents' motivation and achievement, Reeve (2012) explained that every student's classroom engagement is invariably a “*joint product of his or her motivation and classroom supports versus thwarts*” (p. 152).

2.4 The Effect of Gender on Motivation and Student Engagement

Gender may play an important role in the process of students' engagement and the development of motivation, and help to explain the eventual differences in proficiency worldwide (Education First, 2015). Most studies show that, on average, girls do better in school than boys. Girls get higher grades and complete high school at a higher rate compared to boys (Spinath, Eckert, & Steinmayr, 2014; Al-Bustan & Al-Bustan, 2009; Ghazvini & Khajehpour, 2011). Differences in how boys and girls engage with language learning may result from differences in basic interaction styles and identities (Henry & Cliffordson, 2013, p. 273). Furthermore, personality and motivation were found to play important roles in explaining gender differences in school attainment (Spinath, Eckert, & Steinmayr, 2014, p. 231).

3. Method

In order to test the formulated hypotheses of the present study, the following steps were followed for the selection of participants, instruments and procedure.

3.1 Participants and sampling procedure

The sample population of the study comprised secondary school adolescents and their EFL teachers.

A convenience sampling technique was employed to select a representative sample of the subjects in this study. The target participants involved 35 informants issued from the 3rd secondary school literary class study level within the age range of 16-20. The adolescent students are following their study at Bourmadia 2 secondary school in Relizane. They represent the secondary education level, a terminal stage that engenders important decision-making for their future expectations and professional careers.

The participants' age, gender, and stream of study are shown in the following table:

Table 1. The Participants' age and gender

Gender	Stream 3 rd LLE	Age average	Percentage
Male	16	16 -20	45,71%
Female	19	16 -20	54,29%
Total	35		100 %

The study included three EFL teachers (1 male and 2 females) teaching at Bourmadia 2 secondary school. One teacher holds a 'Licence' degree in English while the two others hold a Master degree in English didactics. They are in charge of the three levels in all streams. All teachers are full time teachers with varying experience ranging from six to twenty years.

3.2 Instruments

To achieve the main objectives of the present study, a mixed method design was employed to address the formulated research questions. To obtain more reliable answers to the study problematic, two research instruments entailed the use of (1) an adaptation of the Inventory of School Motivation (ISM) developed by McInerney and Ali (2007) and (2) EFL teachers' semi structured interview sessions.

The survey questionnaire (ISM) was set to measure students' language learning motivation and school engagement. This tool was started with a pre-section about the students' demographic information along with two parts. Part A: students' motivation in learning English where they were required to give their opinions by degrees of agreement about learning the English language according to a 5 point Likert scale type. Part B included 8 items designed to gather information about students' perceptions of their academic engagement. The items were rated on a scale ranging from 1= *strongly agree* to 5= *strongly disagree*.

The second instrument consisted of semi-structured interviews to evaluate the EFL teachers' insights of their students' English language learning and academic engagement, besides, the possible enhancement intervention strategies that can enhance adolescents' language learning achievement.

3.3 Procedure

After being permitted to conduct the study at Bourmadia 2 secondary school, the questionnaire was delivered by the end of the second term. The purpose of the study was clearly explained. The participants had about 20 minutes to go through the different items of the questionnaire during class time. The EFL teachers' interviews were conducted in their respective classrooms shortly after the second term exams. Each session lasted approximately 40 minutes and was captured through handwritten notes. The three EFL teachers were requested to reflect on their teaching methods, learners' motivation to learn the target language and academic engagement.

It is worth mentioning that these research instruments were administered in the secondary school setting during the school year 2019-2020.

3.4 Data Analysis

The survey questionnaire, completed by the respondents, was coded according to (male/female; high /moderate /low achievement groups) then analysed descriptively. The first quantitative analysis was performed to compute percentages, means and standard deviations of the

students' motivation and academic engagement scales. The second qualitative analytic method was used to examine the data from the semi-structured interview sessions.

4. Results

The first research question was set to investigate the potential relationship between the secondary school adolescent students' language learning motivation in regard of their academic engagement. The data of the students' scores on their academic motivation questionnaire and their general achievement in the subject of English were computed to obtain the final relationship between these two variables.

4.1 Adolescent Learners' Language Learning Motivation

In order to apprehend students' self-perceptions of their academic abilities in EFL learning, the informants were requested to select their reasons, of learning English, from a suggested list of possibilities. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Respondents' motivation for learning English

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
To do well in my examination	5	14.28%
A compulsory subject in the syllabus and the final exam	4	11.42%
Interest in English language, people and culture	24	68,57 %
To sing and listen to English songs	4	11.42%
For the future job	20	57,14%
To study abroad	11	31,4%

Table 2 reveals that (68, 57%) of the third year students expressed their interest in the language as a medium to interrelate with its native speakers and culture; nonetheless, they did focus on the reason that English would be an important asset for their future careers (57, 14%) and to study abroad (31, 4%). One possible reason to these motivational orientations could be related to their uncontrolled anxiety vis-à-vis the Baccalaureate exam and fear of failure.

4.2 Adolescent Learners' Self-reported Effort in Learning English

The degree of language learning achievement depends thoroughly on the degree of effort students put in their learning. Therefore, the aim of this item was to corroborate adolescent students' claims and opinions considering their EFL learning or simply refute them. The results are demonstrated in Figure 1:

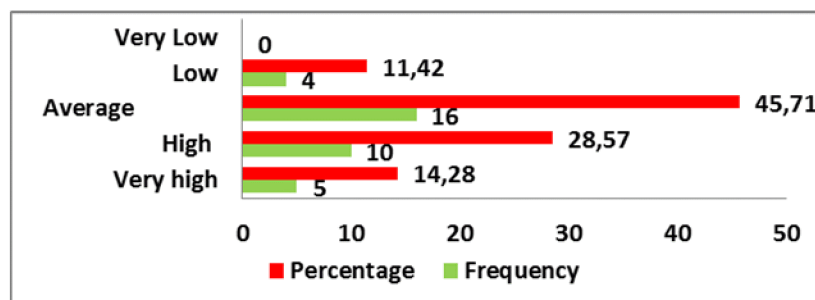


Fig 1. Respondents' effort in learning English

Figure 1 reveals that (42.85 %) of third year level students seemed to put great efforts to learn English. (45. 71 %) of them presented a quite normal description of their strain to learn the language.

4.3 Adolescent Learners' Perceived Importance of Learning English

It is essential to investigate how students value their English learning. As displayed in Figure 2, 29% of the respondents qualified learning English as very important to them. Another 29%, of them, revealed that it was rather important for them while 34% of the students stated that it was normal and, thus, stood in half way position. Only 8% of the informants did not highly evaluate the importance of English learning stating that it was little important.

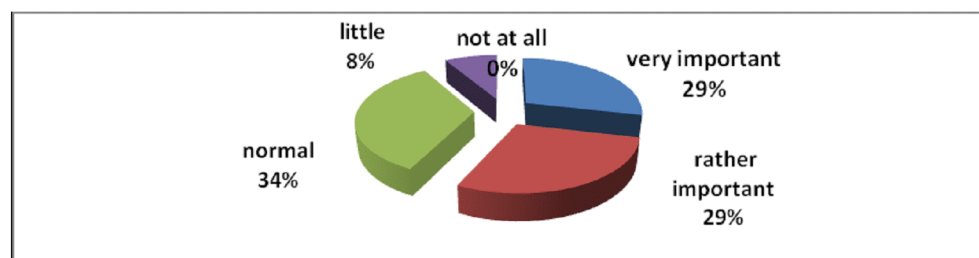


Fig 2. Perceived importance of learning English

In a summary of the students' diverse perceptions of their motivation in learning English, the different findings revealed acceptable score values for their self-reported aptitudes and efforts in learning the language.

4.4 Adolescent Learners' Perceptions of their Academic Engagement

The respondents were required to indicate, among a 5 point Likert-scale type, the various aspects that constitute a mark of their engagement to school and classroom activities. The mean and standard of deviation values of the different items related to the school motivation of the students are presented in Table 3:

Table 3. Respondents' perceptions of their academic engagement

Items	M	SD
1. Extra lessons in my school would improve my grades	4.2	0.89
2. I get good grades in subjects where teachers listen to what I have to say.	4.0	0.92
3. If the class is small, I can follow lessons more easily.	3.7	1.10
4. I do my best work at school when I work with others.	4.1	0.98
5. If I need extra help, I receive it from my teachers.	4.1	0.94
6. Getting a reward for my good school work is important to me.	3.9	1.12
7. I do best when teachers use teaching aids to support their lessons (e.g. pictures).	3.9	1.06
8. I feel comfortable when taught by competent and flexible teachers.	4.1	0.88

Referring to the recorded findings, the majority of the students affirmed that extra lessons could improve their grades and that teachers' attention influences their performance. Also, many informants stressed that class size could impact on their performance. The respondents agreed that

peer group support had a positive effect on their motivation. The students reported that ICTs and other teaching aids were likely to improve their academic performance.

In all, the students were not indifferent in regard to their engagement to school. They insisted vividly on the fact that factors such as extra lessons, teacher attention, peer support, and teaching aids could motivate them and contribute in their academic attainment.

4.5 Adolescent Learners' Motivation and academic engagement across Gender

The study was, also, interested in exploring the possible differences in the level of language learning motivation and academic engagement in relation to gender among the sample secondary school adolescent students. Thus, the data were analysed with respect to male and female participants' identified scores.

Table 4 reveals that the mean gender difference for the various motivation and engagement scales is quite significant for all the informants. This variation is in favour of female participants as compared to male students ($M=3.75$, $SD=1.08$; $M= 4.1$, $SD=0.85$ respectively).

Table 4. Adolescent learners' scores in academic motivation and academic engagement across gender

3 rd year level			
	Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Motivation scale	Male	3.5	1.23
	Female	4.0	0.56
Engagement scale	Male	4.0	0.93
	Female	4.2	1.15
Total Mean	Male	3.75	1.08
	Female	4.1	0.85

Thus, the study findings agree with most studies which suggest that, on average, girls do better, in school, than boys.

4.6 EFL Teachers' role in boosting their Students' Academic Engagement

The third research question dealt with the EFL teachers' insights in an attempt to consider the possible enhancement intervention strategies that can boost the adolescents' academic engagement and motivation to go through the different EFL classroom assignments. It required an analytical interpretation of the interview sessions.

When asked about their perceptions of their students' interest in school, the EFL teachers had varied opinions. They believed that all students cared about school but this was linked to how much benefit they could get out of it. In considering the adolescents' abilities to learn English, EFL teachers were quite ambivalent about how their students felt about that.

The teachers' discernments of their students' real drives to learn and competition in class incited the researcher to inquire about the actual role of instructors to guide their students' motivation towards constructive learning. The teachers agreed that their friendly rapports with the students imply their engagement in positive learning. The teachers were asked if they considered their students' individual characteristics and how much they can do to help them to cope with their anxiety and confidence problems in classroom setting. All of them expressed that they managed to consider their students' individual needs that they understand their fears and worries that are

directly linked to their future careers. They explained that most of adolescents were anxious and their fear of failure increases level after level till they reach the final year and find themselves confronted to the Baccalaureate Exam. When asked about the type of interaction they had with their pupils and how well they got along with their learners, the teachers agreed that the good relation with the students imply their good learning. When asked about the most appropriate actions they believed they could prompt their students' academic involvement in the various classroom activities, the EFL teachers, in respect to their field experience, agreed on a set of intervention actions that can improve adolescent students' learning and performance in class. All of them emphasized positive feedback, praising learners, setting realistic goals, choosing interesting tasks, using authentic materials, employing ICTs, raising their awareness about their academic aspiration and its importance in their engagement and academic successes, helping them to believe in their abilities, and encouraging the small efforts they can do in class. The teachers believed that the dynamic involvement of learners in the different EFL classroom activities would prompt them progressively to engage academically.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

The first objective of the study was concerned with the possible impact of academic motivation on adolescent learners' engagement in academic settings. The findings revealed that the participants, most likely, had constructive motivational drives. Most of respondents displayed a moderate effort in completing their tasks and revealed to hold muddled beliefs about their academic potentials.

The second common objective, in this study, was to evaluate academic differences among male and female learners. the descriptive statistics relating to the sample's gender differences demonstrated that the secondary school adolescents reported ample differences in terms of their self-perceived academic motivation and academic engagement with female adolescents demonstrating higher academic self-awareness than male students.

The third objective was to explore the EFL teachers' insights of their students' academic motivation and engagement in classroom activities. The qualitative interpretation revealed that the secondary school teachers, still, hold traditional views closely tied to principles of teacher-centred rather than learner-centred processes. The problem of large and overcrowded classes, loaded programmes, and lack of materials inhibit all teachers' efforts to consider the individual differences among learners and create discipline problems and ineffective learning environments.

Therefore, it appears to be quite reasonable to adapt the teaching methods in a way that adolescent students learn English in a more communicative and supportive environment. Hence, EFL teachers can help establish a cooperative atmosphere, in the classroom, by encouraging collaborative learning and guide their learners to relate their academic beliefs to their learning objectives. It is recommended that EFL teachers focus on more communicative language teaching approaches in an adequate learning environment so that they can overcome their learners' lack of motivation and negative perception of the EFL classroom.

This study was limited in some ways to the participants who represented one secondary school stream. Further research may incorporate a larger sample of participants from a more representative number of streams. Secondly, other variables that may influence language learning could be used extensively to compare and contrast the actual results.

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7. Appendices

APPENDIX A QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS

This survey questionnaire is designed to help you find how much you are engaged in language learning and school. Your assistance in completing the following items is highly appreciated. All the information provided by you is of great use and solely for the study purpose. Thank you!

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Are you? ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. How old are you?

A. STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN LEARNING ENGLISH:

1. Why do you learn English?

- To do well in my examination
- A compulsory subject in the syllabus and the final exam
- Interest in English language, people and culture
- To expand my linguistic skills
- For the future job
- To study abroad

2. How is your effort in learning English?

A. Very high B. High C. Normal D. Low E. Very low

3. How is learning English important to you?

A. Very important B. Rather important C. Normal D. Little E. Not at all

B. STUDENTS' SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT

Using the scale below, indicate to what extent each of the following items presently corresponds to you.

<i>Strongly agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Undecided</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Strongly disagree</i>
<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>

Items	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. Extra lessons in my school would improve my grades	1	2	3	4	5
2. I get good grades in subjects where teachers listen to what I have to say.	1	2	3	4	5
3. If the class is small, I can follow lessons more easily.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I do my best work at school when I work with others.	1	2	3	4	5
5. If I need extra help, I receive it from my	1	2	3	4	5

teachers.					
6. Getting a reward for my good school work is important to me.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I do best when teachers use teaching aids to support their lessons (e.g. pictures).	1	2	3	4	5
8. I feel comfortable when taught by competent and flexible teachers	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX B

EFL TEACHERS' SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

1. Do your students care about school? Why? Why not?
2. Do your students compare their performance to others?
3. When you teach, do you take into consideration your students' individual characteristics?
4. How well do you get along with your students?
5. How much can you help students to cope with their anxiety and confidence problems in classroom setting?
6. What are the most important actions you think they can do to help your students to engage in classroom activities?
7. Do you think it is important that a teacher notices the effort of his students in class?