The relationship between motivation and the Internet

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HUMANISTINEN TIEDEKUNTA KIELTEN LAITOS

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Kandidaatintutkielma Englannin kieli Toukokuu 2009

19 sivua + 1 liite

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli kartoittaa kuinka vahvasti Internetin vaikutus näkyy nykynuorten motivaatiossa, taidoissa ja asenteissa englannin kieltä kohtaan. Motivaatiota ja Internetiä on tutkittu suhteellisen paljon, mutta enimmäkseen erikseen. Aikaisempia tutkimuksia tähän aiheeseen liittyen löytyy täten erittäin vähän.

Tutkimus on toteutettu kyselylomakkeella, johon vastasi 21 oppijaa erään lukion viidenneltä englannin kielen kurssilta. Lomake sisälsi sekä monivalinta- että avoimia kysymyksiä. Tutkimus oli määrällinen siitä syystä, että tulosten haluttiin olevan edes hieman yleistettäviä. Laadullinen tutkimus olisi vaatinut paljon laajamittaisempaa tutkimusta, johon tämän työn puitteissa ei ollut resursseja.

Tuloksista kävi ilmi, että oppilailla oli hyvin korkea motivaatio englannin kieltä kohtaan. Myös suuri osa kyselyyn vastanneista oli sitä mieltä, että Internet on kohentanut heidän kielitaitoaan. Avoimissa kysymyksissä kävi ilmi, että Internet-yhteisöt, joissa voi kommunikoida toisten kanssa, ovat suuressa suosiossa, kun taas informatiiviset Internet-sivut on vähemmän käytettyjä oppijoiden keskuudessa. Myös yhteydenpitoa ulkomaalaisiin ystäviin pidettiin tärkeänä.

Tutkimustuloksista on toivottavasti hyötyä kieltenopettajille, jotka joutuvat pohtimaan omia opetustyylejään sekä punnitsemaan omia opetusmetodejaan teknologian ja vanhojen opetusmenetelmien välillä. Aihe on kuitenkin varsin tuore vielä, koska teknologiapohjainen kieltenopiskelu on vasta saamassa jalansijaa koulumaailmassa, ja täten on äärimmäisen tärkeää, että tulevat ja nykyiset kieltenopettajat tietävät myös itse, miten teknologia, erityisesti Internet, toimii ja millä tavalla sen avulla saadaan nykynuoret opiskelemaan kieliä entistä motivoituneemmin ja monipuolisemmin.

Asiasanat: motivation, Internet, English

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1. Introduction

Motivation has been a central concept in second language learning for decades, and yet, there still is no one way to understand it. In other words, the term can raise a number of issues since using the word 'motivation' may have different connotations for different people. Nevertheless, there are some basic concepts related to motivation in an L2-environment: *integrative* and *instrumental* motivation, which I will present and discuss in this paper. Those terms provide some insight into how the concept of motivation can be seen when learning a second language.

The second part of my study will focus on the Internet and how it affects young learners' willingness to learn English outside school. In other words, I am curious to find out whether the Internet can be seen as an incentive for learning English. For this, I have conducted an empirical study in a high school in Western Finland, using a questionnaire.

My ultimate intention is to combine motivation and the Internet, and discuss them together. I think that in today's world, in which technology keeps constantly growing and growing, it is highly important to take advantage of that in second language teaching/learning. Even though the times of using blackboard and overheads are not over, it should be accepted that today's kids may be more interested in learning English in new ways. During the last ten years, there have been enormous technological developments, and nowadays young people spend more time in front of computers than ever. Using the Internet, those young learners unintentionally absorb English through various channels. As a future language teacher, I think that this phenomenon is worth investigating.

This paper consists of a small-scale study supported by theoretical background based on motivation and the Internet. First, I am going to introduce the topic, which is followed by defining the actual study, data collected, and the results. At the end of the paper, I am going to discuss this issue in a larger scale and present my personal opinions.

2. Motivation theory

Motivation has been studied quite a lot in recent years, and better yet, decades. It is one thing that will never change when it comes to learning. Thus, the effect motivation has on language learning, and the reasons behind it, is probably going to be a never-ending debate among researchers. There are a number of motivational studies focusing on why some learners succeed better than others, and these studies have been able to gather a great deal of information on this subject. Gardner and Lambert (1972) present two common, and maybe a bit fallacious, explanations why there might be differences in the way learners learn at a different rate. They say that it all depends on how the second language is taught. The other explanation has to do with the concept of *language aptitude*: "some people have a knack for languages, others do not" (ibid: 1). These are more like layman terms for explaining the difference between higher/lower achievers, and they vitiate this idea by saying that since everyone has been able to acquire their first language, there is no evidence that they could not learn other languages as well. Motivation theories of today strongly rely on the same assumption that everyone is capable of learning a foreign language.

Regardless of the massive number of studies related to language learning motivation, more research is needed all the time, especially as the English language and the motives for learning it keep changing along technological advancements such as the Internet.

2.1. What is motivation?

The term 'motivation' is difficult to define, even though it seems an easy everyday word. As Dörnyei (2001) says, people do not necessarily know its meaning but what they do know is that it has to do with something important. He presents Atkinson's achievement motivation

theory that has been popular in the field of motivational psychology in the past decades. According to the theory, there are two aspects when it comes to motivation and human behavior. The first one is *need for achievement*, which means that people who are seeking for success in something, tend to "work with heightened intensity at these tasks" (Dörnyei 2001: 21). The second aspect to this theory is the concept of *fear of failure*. Its basic underlying assumption is that the achiever wants to avoid any negative outcome while doing a task. Other motivation theories that have been well-received are expectancy-value theories and goal theories. Expectancy-value theories have to do with the belief that

humans are innately active learners with an inborn curiosity and an urge to get to know their environment and meet challenges, and therefore the main issue in these value theories is not *what* motivates learners but rather what directs and shapes their inherent motivation (Dörnyei 2001: 20)

Goal-setting theories, on the other hand, refer to the concept that people are willing to set goals which help them pursue what they want. Dörnyei (2001) points out that goal theories were originally developed for studying children's learning at school, and nowadays are probably one of the main areas of research on student motivation.

To conclude, motivation has been studied from various angles in the field of psychology during the last century, and there is no consensus among researchers in regards with only one theory that could explain all the aspects and the processes of motivation in human behavior. The next question is - how can these psychological motivation theories be applied into language learning motivation theories in the 21st century?

2.2. Motivation in language learning: *integrative* vs. *instrumental*

It is assumed that learning takes place optimally when the learner is motivated (Julkunen and Borzova 1997). Motivation is usually divided into two sub-categories: *integrative* and *instrumental*. *Integrative* motivation occurs when the learner is interested in the target community in an open-minded way, and s/he possibly wants to become a member of that

community (Gardner and Lambert 1972). In other words, *integrative* motivation refers to a situation in which the learner genuinely wants to learn the target language for his/her own sake, without any ulterior motives. *Instrumental* motivation, on the other hand, is about different kinds of ulterior motives. As Gardner and Lambert (1972: 3) say: "the orientation is said to be *instrumental* in form if the purposes of language study reflect the more utilitarian value of linguistic achievement", which can basically mean some sorts of rewards that the learner gets when s/he is successful in learning the new language. However, the division between the two motivation types is not that clear-cut, and according to Julkunen and Borzova (1997), the difference between *integrative / instrumental* motivation has been widely criticized.

Dörnyei (2001) brings up a different kind of approach to language learning motivation: social dimension, or the microcontext, of L2 learning. He says that social context plays an important role in the learning process. There are factors such as parents, teacher, school, and learner group influencing one's learning process.

Thus, two rather different L2 motivation theories have been covered here, which both are a relevant part of language learning. Now I am going to move on to the second part of my theoretical background which deals with the active role of the Internet in today's world and how its advantages can be integrated into learning the English language at school setting.

2.3. The Internet

The rise of the Internet in the last ten years has been a major booster for the English language worldwide. As Graddol (1997) states, the Internet is regarded as the flagship of global English. Knowing this, it is easy to draw the conclusion that people today are exposed to English more than earlier. According to Tilastokeskus (2008), ninety-nine percent of all Finnish students had used the Internet during the last three months at the end of the year 2007. It is rather safe to say that students in Finland are very reliant on the Internet. As for

people in working life, the figure was ninety percent, and finally the group of senior citizens in which thirty-six percent of the population had been engaged in an Internet-related activity during the past three months. Unfortunately, the study by Tilastokeskus did not show how the three groups had spent their time on the Internet. In other words, we do not know which web pages they had been browsing and in which language. Nevertheless, the article mentions a couple of web sites that are popular among Internet users. YouTube and Facebook, for example, create certain Internet communities where everyone can participate in. Weblogs are also an inherent part of today's web communities. What is positive, from the point of view of a future language teacher, is that all those three web communities are mostly English-based, and thus it is likely that people engaged in them are exposed, and even forced, to learn English to some extent. However, it must be noted that Facebook and blogs can also be available in Finnish, and, thus, it is not always obvious that Finnish users absorb English when using them.

Improvements in technology such as the Internet, are seen as beneficial when it comes to language learning. The Internet makes it easy to access lots of information and keep contact with people in a foreign language. As Coniam and Wong (2008) point out, "From a motivational point of view, the benefits which IRC chat programs such as ICQ afford are substantial". They go on saying that in their study of Hong Kong secondary school students, the learners showed positive attitudes towards chat programs as a medium for learning English.

In more general terms, the relationship between language learning and the Internet is an interesting one, and I hope that more research will be done in this area in the future. It is highly likely that the young learners of today are relying more and more on the Internet, and it should be taken advantage of in language teaching, especially in English-based classrooms.

3. The study

In my study, I wanted to combine both the Internet and motivation, however, focusing more on the Internet than motivational factors. This is because, all in all, there are so many studies focusing solely on motivation but only a few that take the role of the Internet into account as well. The research questions are as follows:

- 1. What effect does the use of the Internet have on high school students' motivation to learn English?
- 2. Are there any gender differences? For example, do boys use the Internet more than girls, and thus, benefit more from it?

The first question dealt with the relationship of motivation and the Internet in general. My intention was to get sort of an overall impression of the situation. Then I wanted to find out if there were more similarities or differences between boys and girls. There were some other research problems that I would have wanted to include in this study but there simply was neither time nor space. I hope to do that when writing my Master's Thesis later on.

The problem with this topic choice was that there really were no previous studies where the focus had been entirely on the relationship between the Internet and the motivation to learn English, i.e., there was no study I was able to compare the results with. Thus, it is kind of an "untapped" field of study, which makes it also very interesting. It can hopefully bring some new information to the field of learning English as a second language from the point of view of the Internet.

4. Data & methods

I conducted the study in a middle-sized high school in Western Finland. The participants

were 17-18-year-olds, and I was able to gather as many as twenty one answers; 12 girls and 9 boys. I wanted to conduct my study in a high school environment since I think that they are mature enough to assess their own learning and interests. At this level, the learners have already studied English nearly 8-9 years, and the English language could be considered an inherent part of their everyday lives. This particular group consisted of boys and girls taking the fifth English course, and even though they will not be taking the matriculation exam until next term, their focus was clearly on that already.

My study was quantitative, including both multiple choice questions and some open-ended questions. I did not even think about doing a qualitative study since it would have been too time-consuming, and my intention was not to get highly detailed answers in the first place. Instead, I wanted to get more of an overall picture of this issue. Nevertheless, when writing my Master's Thesis, I am planning to go more into detail by conducting interviews and so on, and this current study is supposed to serve as a pilot study for that.

I wanted to formulate the questionnaire by myself since I could not find a model questionnaire that would have suited my research questions. As for the multiple choice questions, I used a Likert scale from one to five:

- 1 = I fully disagree
- 2 = I somewhat disagree
- 3 = I cannot say
- 4 = I somewhat agree
- 5 = I fully agree

I did not find it necessary to use Cronbach's alpha to test the reliability of these multiple choice questions since I only had three of them. The purpose of these three questions was to get a quick overall picture of how the learners felt the Internet affects their relationship with the English language.

I also had three open-ended questions in which the participants had more chance to reflect their thoughts. The three questions were more Internet-related, whereas the multiple choice questions dealt also with motivation. I thought it was important to include open-ended questions in this questionnaire since if there were mere multiple choice questions, the results could be very superficial and unsupported.

I decided to write the questions in Finnish instead of English so that every participant could really understand what was being asked. This made it possible for them to write freely and not to worry about the English grammar.

I piloted the questionnaire among a couple of peers and ended up changing some of the questions because I wanted the sheet to be only one page long and, thus, I needed the questions be as concise as possible. I visited an English teacher in my home town in January 2009, and she was willing to have the questionnaires filled out by her students. At first, I was prepared to face the classroom myself but the teacher suggested that it could be better if she handed the questionnaires to the students since they would probably be calmer if there were no outsiders present. I do not know whether it was because of that but I ended up having 'no-nonsense' answers from the participants, which shows that they took the questions seriously.

The questionnaire consisted of three different parts: at very first, I asked the participants' gender and the grade they had received from their last English course. Then there were the three multiple choice questions (Table 1.) which were followed by the open-ended questions (Table 2). I think the structure worked quite well and the participants had obviously given a lot of thought as for their answers. As already mentioned, the test group had a slight female majority: 12 girls against 9 boys, and the deviation between their last English course grades was rather noticeable since there were grades from 4 to 10.

Even though I can say that the questionnaire might have been slightly better in terms of the amount of multiple choice questions, I still think that it basically provided me with all the

information that I wanted get for analyzing this issue. The questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 1.

5. Results

Table 1. The scores for multiple choice questions.

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. I'm motivated to learn English	4,0476	0,973457
outside school		
2. The Internet pages I usually browse	3,19	1,249762
are in English		
3. The Internet has enhanced my	3,8095	1,030488
English skills		

Table 2. Open-ended questions.

- 1. How important it is to know English when using the Internet?
- 2. What kinds of activities do you usually engage in on the Internet?
- 3. How do you feel the Internet has enhanced your English skills?

5.1. Internet & English

It turned out that the Internet has a major role when it comes to high school learners' willingness to learn English. As can be seen in Table 1, the Internet clearly affects learners' English skills in a positive way. They were really motivated to learn English outside school. The result of multiple choice question number three was encouraging since almost 80% of the participants thought that the Internet has enhanced their English skills.

The open-ended questions (Table 2) provided more in-depth answers in regard to the importance of the Internet. Question number one "How important it is to know English when using the Internet?" elicited rather obvious answers. Most of the participants thought that it is very important to know English when using the Internet. Many of them even said that it is not possible to survive without some knowledge of English. They went on saying that the role of English would possibly be even greater in the future. Nevertheless, some of the participants stated that they do not visit English-based web sites very often, and thus, are not that dependent on whether they know English or not.

The second question was about the different kinds of English-based activities the participants usually engage in on the Internet. Here is a summary of the answers:

Table 3. Most often viewed web sites.

Type of web site	Number of participants
Facebook	16/21
Messenger	14/21
Hobbies	7/21
Commerce	4/21
Blogs	3/21
Dictionaries	3/21
News sites	3/21

Facebook and Messenger were by far two the most single popular activities on the Internet as a clear majority of the participants used them. The next biggest group was hobbies-based web sites and online shops. Blogs, news sites, and dictionaries were all used by no more than 3 participants.

The final open-ended question was to gather information on whether the participants felt the Internet had had an effect on their English skills. The results can be seen in Table 4:

Table 4. The Internet's effect on the participants' English skills.

A noticeable effect	10
Somewhat	3
Not really	4
Cannot say	4

The answers were divided to some extent. However, a clear majority stated that the Internet has enhanced their English skills, and only four said that there was no much of an effect. Three participants stated that they had learned English a little via the Internet while four could not say anything.

5.2. Gender differences

As was mentioned earlier, my second research question was to find out whether there were any gender differences regarding motivation and the Internet. There were twelve female participants in the group, and nine male participants.

To my surprise, there was actually no difference between female and male learners. Both groups felt the same way about their willingness to learn English and the Internet as a tool for learning it. Both female and male participants were keen on using Facebook and Messenger, with the exception that the girls seemed to have more friends abroad to talk with. There were no male participants who mentioned using English for interactional purposes. Even so, the girls and boys seemed to share similar interests overall. Also, one thing that should be mentioned is that the female participants seemed to be a bit more fluent in English

compared to the boys in terms of the grades they had received from their previous English class. However, drawing conclusions on their overall English skills based only on their last grade can be too fallacious. There is no way one grade can account for their overall real-life performance.

6. Conclusion

Conducting this study has been an extremely fruitful process. First of all, choosing the topic, planning the questionnaire, conducting the study, and then analyzing the results was something I was not familiar with at all. Secondly, this study taught me a number of things about the relationship between high school learners' motivation to enhance their English skills and the Internet. I was really surprised that the participants put such a high status on the English language in their everyday lives. One striking fact was also the popularity of Messenger and Facebook - online activities which main purpose is to help people communicate with each other. Could it be that even cellular telephones are outdated among the new generation of adolescents? Obviously, chatting online is cheaper than calling on the cell phone or sending constant text messages. In addition, talking over the phone can sometimes be rather intimidating. When chatting online, it is not so easy to lose one's face because the interlocutors have more time to think about what they want to say and how they want to say it. For this study, it would have been interesting to ask the participants whether they felt using more time online talking to their friends instead of actually calling them.

Even though it was positive that ten out twenty-one participants stated that the Internet has been of great help when learning English, it was perhaps a slight disappointment that the rest of them did not feel the same way. It seems it must be admitted that not everyone learns English via the Internet. Also, only three people mentioned using Internet dictionaries which definitely should be taken advantage of more.

However, over 80% of the participants said that they were motivated to learn English outside school (Question 3). These are really positive figures, and shows how today's adolescents have taken up the English language. It would be interesting to know whether the role of English, since the birth of the Internet, has always been so dominant in the lives of young Finnish people, and whether young learners' attitudes towards it have stayed the same over the years.

Question two was also rather surprising for me since apparently well over half the web pages that are browsed are English-based. One reason for this may be that there actually are not that many Finnish-based web sites that are popular among young people. It seems that online communities are more popular than 'prototypical' web sites, i.e. interactive communities such as Facebook and YouTube are more widely used compared to Finnish-based informational sites, for example. Another explanation for this could be that writing and reading English-based web sites is more trendy than those of in Finnish. However, these are only my personal assumptions and I have no evidence to support them.

Why is it then that Facebook and Messenger have such clear dominance over other web-based activities? It is obvious that for the participants of the target group, it is important to maintain contact with their friends. Both Facebook and Messenger serve this purpose. Evidently, it is also important for them to maintain their social status.

Blogs and hobbies could probably fall under the same category since, most of the time, blogs deal with people's hobbies and interests. In consequence, people sharing similar interests are those who actually read the same blogs. In my opinion, these categories were overly unrecognized. It was surprising to see that only less than a half engaged in these activities. However, it must be noted that hobbies were not mentioned in the questionnaire as one the example categories I gave them. That may be one explanation why so few participants had mentioned it.

As most of the participants saw the Internet as a helpful tool for learning English, many of them still said that TV and books were much more useful compared to the Internet. Could it possibly be that even in the modern day, when online activities keep constantly growing, there are still a handful of teenagers who do not take advantage of them, and, thus, prefer 'old-fashioned' language learning methods such as reading literature? Those participants saying that there has not been a clear effect on their English skills seemed to be those who did not visit any English-based web sites. Instead, they mainly used only Facebook and Messenger, and not, for example, blogs and discussion forums. On the other hand, those who had answered that there has been a noticeable effect when it comes to their English skills, were more prone to read in English and talk to their friends abroad, i.e., using English as a means of communication.

As for taking a more holistic view regarding the relationship between motivation to learn English and the Internet, I could have had also direct questions about for what kinds of purposes the participants were learning English, i.e. whether they were oriented in an instrumental or an integrative way. Were they aiming at getting a decent grade in matriculation exam or did they want to travel abroad and be able to use English? However, as said earlier, writing this Bachelor's thesis does not give a chance to study a topic too deeply. All these corrections that I have suggested could then be applied to my future Master's Thesis.

This phenomenon is worth studying in a larger scale, and will probably be one of the most researched areas in the future. There are already a number of studies concentrating on Internet phenomena such as Facebook, blogs, and net lingo in general, but more research is needed on the Internet and motivation as one entity. As technology keeps becoming more eminent, it would be a waste not to take advantage of it in teaching and learning English. Graddol (1997) even states that people who are capable of speaking English have often be the first to enjoy new technological advancements, and today's school children are possibly more interested in learning by using a computer compared to more old-fashioned methods. I am not saying that technology-based language teaching can replace all of the old methods but it

can definitely complement them. In addition, learners would probably be more motivated if they were able to learn English in a realistic way, e.g., making sense of web sites written in a foreign language or talking with real people via Messenger or discussion groups. I would say that there should be courses, or, in a smaller scale, projects, in which learners needed to find a pen pal with whom to talk via Messenger or Skype, for example. Another project could require learners to find some exact information or details by using Internet articles on the English-based Wikipedia. There are no limits when it comes to combining L2-teaching and the Internet. As a future English educator, I really hope that exploiting technology becomes a serious issue in school environment. It could be called 'teachnology' - a new approach to language teaching.

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Appendix 1: The questionnaire

Kysely internetin käytöstä ja englannin kielen oppimisesta

1. Sukupuoli (ympyröi oikea vaihtoehto): mies nainen						
2. Minkä arvosanan sait viime englannin kurssista?						
I						
Ympyröi vaihtoehto, joka parhaiten kuvastaa suhdettasi interne	etiin	ja eng	lannir	ı kiele	een:	
1 = Olen täysin eri mieltä 2 = Olen osittain eri mieltä 3 = En osaa sanoa 4 = Olen osittain samaa mieltä 5 = Olen täysin samaa mieltä						
1. Olen motivoinut oppimaan englantia koulun ulkopuolella:	1	2	3	4	5	
2. Internet-sivut, joilla yleensä käyn, ovat englannin kielisiä:	1	2	3	4	5	
3. Internet on edistänyt englannin kielen taitojani:	1	2	3	4	5	
II						
1. Kuinka tärkeää englannin kielen osaaminen mielestäsi on in	terne	tiä kä	yttäes	sä?		
2. Minkälaisia aktiviteetteja yleensä teet internetissä? (esim. er Messenger, chatit, sähköposti, Facebook, erilaiset foorumit, bl			n neti	isivuj	en selaa	minen,

3. Kuinka koet (jos koet) internetin kohentaneen kielitaitoasi / haluasi oppia englantia?	

Voit halutessasi jatkaa sivun kääntöpuolella!

Kiitos vastauksistasi!