ATTITUDES TOWARDS LEARNING ENGLISH: A STUDY OF MOTIVATION AND RESPONSIBILITY AS AIDS TO HUMAN RESOURCES

Monica-Ariana Sim, Anamaria-Mirabela Pop
Department of International Business, Faculty of Economic Sciences, University of Oradea, Oradea, Romania
msim@uoradea.ro
mipop@uoradea.ro

Abstract: *The paper presents the results of a survey carried out at the Faculty of Economic Sciences, University of Oradea, in order to identify attitudes, beliefs, motivation and self-responsibility among students when it comes to learning the English language. The main issue investigated was motivation set at the basis of the learning process together with students' attitudes regarding the use of English in the Romanian social and educational context, as well as the use of the English language in general. A valid questionnaire was designed and tried to a convenient sample of students; the results of the study are discussed in terms of the principal components that were established including attitude towards motivation, self-responsibility, and language learning approaches. Research and experience show that English is of utmost importance in the academic and future professional lives of students majoring in economics. Therefore, this paper provides some theoretical aspects of motivation, beliefs and responsibility in the context of second language acquisition. Among the important achievements of the study we should mention the observations of students' behaviour concerning responsibility. It appears that most students are not ready to take complete responsibility for learning. They are either afraid of the teacher, or feel embarrassed, and are ashamed to openly utter their ideas. Thus, teamwork and pair-work facilitate the effective learning of the foreign language and encourage students' collaboration. The teacher is not the central actor, the controller anymore; s/he becomes the facilitator and source of knowledge. It is important for the teacher to know the basic needs of his/her students and cater for these according to level of their importance, to be aware of the reasons that propel students towards learning, improving or just surviving English as a foreign language.*

Keywords: *human resources; motivation; responsibility.*

1. Introduction

English is the language which can be internationally used for communication. It is the language of science; all university students, regardless of their specialization, will need to look for information and acquire knowledge, hence most of the universities worldwide include English as one of their requirements. One of the greatest challenges after 1989 in Romania has been to provide sufficient Foreign Language education so as to meet the ever growing demands of the labour market. Research and experience in the field of economics showed that the

English language is or should be, of utmost importance in the academic and professional lives of students. The knowledge of how to stimulate students to participate meaningfully in the classroom will greatly assist the learning. Therefore, this paper provides some theoretical aspects of motivation, beliefs and responsibility in the context of second language acquisition, to better understand what they are, how they function, and how to apply them to the day-to-day classroom teaching/learning activities.

2. Definition of concepts

2.1. Motivation

Motivation is a concept quite difficult to define, as Gardner rightly considers itto be, "a very complex phenomenon with many facets", impossible to contract it to one simple definition only, an inspiration that propels someone into an action, successively seen as "the anticipation of reward" (Gardner, 2006:242). In Brown's view,motivation refers to "the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid", or as the individual's decisions within certain   social contexts (Brown, 2000:160).   In spite of all the very different approaches and explanations, the importance of motivation in the process of second/foreign language learning is a fact. According to Oladele, motivation is a process by which the learner's internal energies are directed toward various goal objects in his/her environment (Oladele, 1998).These energies push an individual in achieving his goals. The individual may be highly motivated to perform well in a task and completely unmotivated in another. As a result, when people get motivated, they will work ceaseless to achieve their aspirations. Lifrieri underlines that "when asked about the factors which influence individual levels of success in any activity – such as language learning –, most people would certainly mention motivation among them" (Lifrieri, 2005:4), while Brown stresses once more that when it comes to foreign language learning, "it is easy to claim that a learner will be successful with the proper motivation" (Brown, 2000:160). It is undeniable that being equipped with motivation it is easier to manage the acquisition process. In other words, "if one is motivated, he/she has reasons (motives) for engaging in the relevant activities, expends effort, persists in the activities, attends to the tasks, shows desire to achieve the goal, enjoys the activities, etc" (Gardner, 2006:243).

Specialists make a clear distinction between several types of motivation in the studies referring to second language learning: namely, *instrumental*, *integrative* and *developmental* motivation on account that they are either internally or externally driven (Cooper and Fishman, 1977: 239-276).

Instrumental motivation represents the external or environmental factor which sets the individual's behaviour into motion; it is the wish, desire and willingness to learn a language for external purposes such as: getting a job, a promotion, passing an exam, being able to communicate when abroad, meeting the requirements of the syllabus etc. (Schrader, 1999:37-55) or, as Gardner defines it as "learning a language because of someone or less clearly perceived utility it might have for the learner" (Gardner, 1983:203).

A student that is extrinsically motivated will execute an action in order to obtain some reward or avoid some sanctions. For example, a student who read hard for the examination did so because of the desire to obtain a better grade.

The questions included in the survey aimed at revealing the instrumental motivation of students of the Faculty of Economics, Oradea, are:

English will be important for my future career; English will help me get a better job; English will help me get a job abroad; English will help me pass my exams/ perform my academic research; English will help me when travelling abroad; Studying English can be important for me because I think it will someday be very useful/useful/ neutral/ useless in getting a good job. English is going to be needed for: explaining/ giving information/ asking for information, negotiations, making presentations/ writing texts/ reading reports/ email/ internet use/ traditional correspondence/ talking on the phone/ face-to-face communication.

Integrative motivation is considered to be the wish to learn a foreign language only for the sake of it, of finding out more about the culture, mentality and values of the people speaking it.Thus, it isan inner force or motive within the individual which pushes him/her to perform certain behaviour. This type of motivation can make an individual have the feelings of self-confidence and competence. A student who is intrinsically motivated may carry out a task because of the enjoyment he/she derives from such a task.

The following set of questions was meant to depict the integrative motivation of students:

Studying English can be important for me because other people will respect me more if I have knowledge of a foreign language. My priorities at the English course are: personal development/ communication skills/ improving pronunciation/ improving grammar issues. *Studying English can be important to me because it will allow me to be more at ease with other people who speak English. Studying English can be important for me because it will make me a more knowledgeable person.*

Developmental or personal motivation refers to motivation relating to "personal development or personal satisfaction", comprising leisure time activities, meant to fulfill you at the very personal level: listening to /understanding music, watching movies and reading books in English (Cooper and Fishman, 1977:243).

Instrumental, integrative and personal reasons will count when identifying the economics students' type of motivation in the process of learning the English language.

Here are the questions aimed at identifying students' developmental motivation.

In your spare time you prefer: watching movies in English/ reading books/ reading newspapers/ magazines/ researching topics for academic tasks/ your hobbies/ your specialization. When working on-line you prefer: discussion lists, browsing dictionaries/ encyclopedias/ reading online books/ watching movies/ chatting and socializing.

2.2. Responsibility

Responsibility means duty, obligation to perform a task in such a way as to be able to meetcertain imposed requirements, and which has a consequent penalty in case of failure. Anderson and Prawat consider that responsibility is a two sided story: it has   "both visible components (behavior) and invisible components (cognition, affect, and attitude)" (Anderson and Prawat, 1983:62-66).

The traditional educational pattern sees the teacher, who passes the knowledge, to be the only one in charge of the process of learning, taking full responsibility for the success or failure of the process. Nevertheless, this attitude brings along students'

passivity and fails to stimulate their active participation in the teaching/learning process. Thus, it has been argued by more and more authors that the responsibility of learning should reside increasingly with the learner who clarifies his/her own understanding and that s/ he does not simply mirror and reflect what s/he reads (E. von Glasersfeld, 1989:162-163).

In order to successfully learn, students should be put in charge of their own education. Teachers have to encourage students to take greater responsibility in their instruction by facilitating their access to resources, expectations, and opportunities for contribution and collaboration. This attitude determines not only a sane educational process, but it also builds the profile of the modern student: a mature, creative, responsible person, who is involved in life-long development of own abilities. In the new setting, the characters play reversed parts: the student is the subject of the process, fully responsible for his/her learning, whereas the teacher turns into the facilitator of the learning process, he/she is no longer the only source of knowledge.   According to A.B. Knox, "active interest and participation are likely in the cases when students help to set aims, to make decisions, to select tasks" (Knox, 1985). The development of self-confidence and responsibility will foster better results for the performed activity and, as D. E. Schrader states, giving possibility to choose the way and content of studies determines the high quality of learning (Schrader, 1999:37-55).

Questions regarding the presence/ lack of responsibility in students' learning habits:

During the English classes I prefer working: in a pair (peer-work), in a team (team-work), alone, on the computer. Your work/ activity during the English class should be assessed by the teacher/ by the computer/ by another person. English classes should focus more on: reading exercises/ writing tasks/ conversation on a given topic/ presentations/ grammar exercises/ vocabulary exercises.

3. Purposes of the work
a. Investigating the reasons behind satisfactory/ less satisfactory learning performance in English of university students at the Faculty of Economic Studies, University of Oradea, in order to improve the level of proficiency.
b. Substantiation of responsibility development possibilities in communicative English learning classes.

4. **Tasks of the work**
The investigation of students needs for foreign language studies; to determine the motives of foreign language learning and fields of its use; to analyze the methods of foreign language learning; to discuss the responsibility development possibilities in practical foreign language classes.

5. Methodology of the work

5.1. Methodology - Figures and Tables
The research is based on the research carried out at the beginning of 2012. To achieve the objective of the study, a questionnaire was used. The respondents -

the 1st and 2ⁿᵈ year students from the Faculty of Economics, University of Oradea, enrolled in the academic year 2011-2012. Traditionally it is believed that students of the Faculty of Economics have a good knowledge of English and a logical thinking well anchored in the economic and social reality.

At the Faculty of Economics, University of Oradea, the curriculum provides three years of instruction that qualifies the students to graduate with a BA degree in Economics. All students are taught a two year course of English (general issues in the first year and Business English in the second year). Later on, if they choose, they can study Business Correspondence in the third year. Out of the total number of students enrolled, 70 first and second year students were selected as a sample to fill in the questionnaire.

5.2. Results

The questionnaire was meant to determine the motives of foreign language learning; the foreign language skills students consider to be important for their professional carrier; the fields of language activity that are essential for students as future specialists; the foreign language teaching/learning method that is the most acceptable for students and the advantages of this method.

The analysis of the collected data revealed the students' need for foreign language studies.

The questionnaire asked students to assess the following motives of foreign language learning: use for future professional career, need in everyday academic activity (to perform academic research, pass the exams), for getting a job abroad, travel abroad.
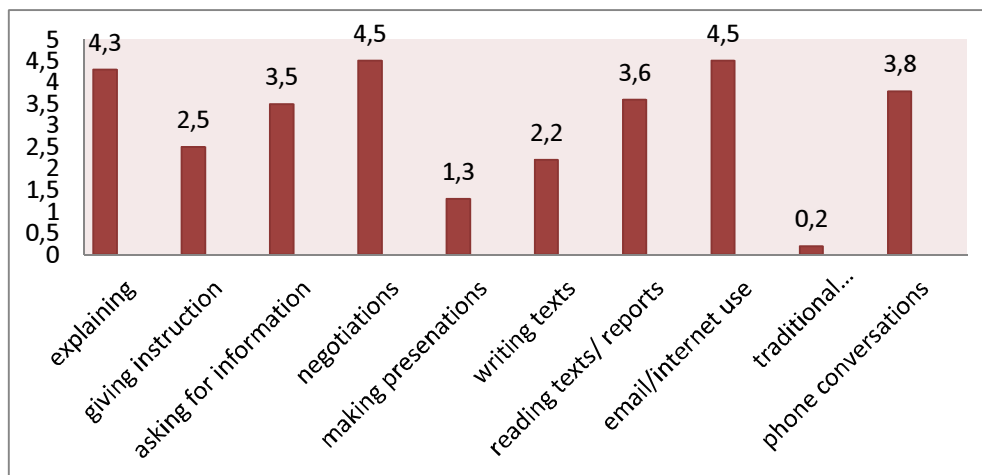

Figure1. Types of motivation
Source: Authors' investigations

Figure1. depicts the three types of motivations all the stated reasons fall into: *instrumental motivation, integrative motivation* and *developmental motivation* with the resulted percentages. From the three motivational constructs, the instrumental motivation received the highest scores of all the subjects' results. For example, the students highly favoured learning English for the purpose of getting a job or as an

aid for their future carrier as this reason had received the highest score. Learning English to perform their academic tasks or research was followed next in order).

The analysis of responses about the most important fields of foreign language application (Figure 2.) showed that students are truly aware of the need of English in the future, and that they can imagine themselves in various foreign language related situations where different abilities are needed.
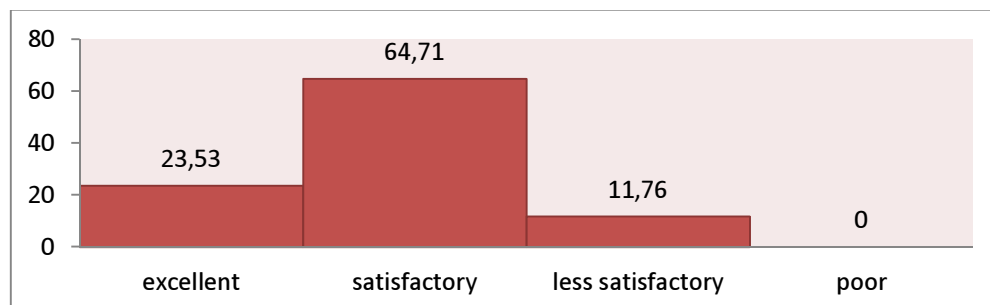

Figure. 2. English is going to be needed for
Source: Authors' investigations

Given the multitude of reasons to learn the English language, students were asked to specify their own opinions to the idea of attending more English language training courses that would help them improve their proficiency. The results in Figure3. indicate that *97.5%* of them responded positively.
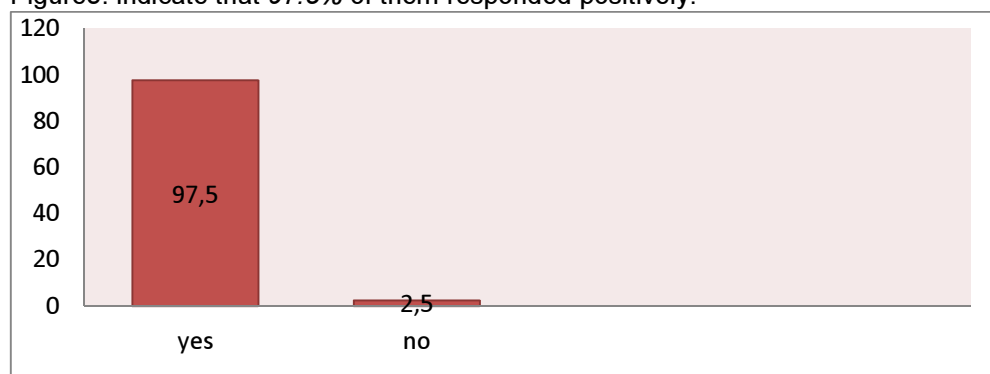

Figure 3. How do you rate your English proficiency?
Source: Authors' investigations

The analysis of the students' opinions about learning individually and in groups showed that the greatest scores were given to learning in pairs, followed by teamwork; the analysis of students' attitude towards work enables us to distinguish two aspects: the willingness to assume responsibility while working and carrying tasks as well as the self-development as personality. Approximately half of the respondents indicated that they preferred pair work and 34% were for teamwork which reveals the fact that students are more secure when sharing responsibility in solving exercises. Students agreed that teamwork determined the development of creative thinking and collaboration.
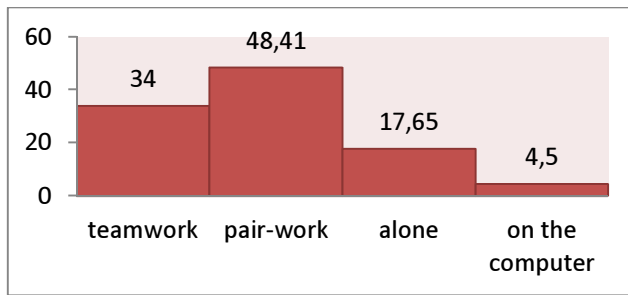
Figure 4. During English classes I prefer working:

Source: Authors' investigations

6.   Conclusion

The present study was conducted to identify the type of motivation, the attitudes and degree of responsibility that lie behind the performance in English language acquisition of students in economics. The results demonstrate the students' emphasis on instrumental motivation for learning the English language (getting a job, performing academic tasks etc.). This stresses the idea that students see English as playing a vital role in their lives, either at present or in the future. This conclusion is relevant as students seem prepared to face the status of English as the international language of science and technology since resources, books, papers, handbooks, journals, etc. written in English are included in their reading lists. Moreover, the English language is one of their most valuable resources in the labour market.

Among the important achievements of the study we should mention the observations of students' behaviour concerning responsibility. It appears that most students are not ready to take complete responsibility for learning. They are either afraid of the teacher, or feel embarrassed, and are ashamed to openly utter their ideas. Thus, teamwork and pair-work facilitate the effective learning how to use of the foreign language and encourage students' collaboration. The teacher is not the central actor, the controller anymore; s/he becomes the facilitator and source of knowledge. To conclude, it is important for the teacher to know the basic needs of his/her students and cater for these according to level of their importance, to be aware of the reasons that propel students towards learning to be aware of the reasons that propel students towards learning, improving or just surviving English as a foreign language. Students' views and needs have to be respected, so their confidence boosts and develops, the attitude grows positive, and motivation activates, which are all the necessary ingredients for the successful language course.

93

References

Anderson,L.M.and Prawat,R.S., R.S. (1983) "Responsibility in the classroom: A synthesis of research on teaching self-control" in Educational Leadership, 40, pp, 62-66.

Deci, E.L.and Ryan (1985) "Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behaviour", New York: Plenum, .

Gardner, R. (2006) "The socio-educational model of second language acquisition: A research paradigm", in *EUROSLA Yearbook,* 6, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 203-243.

H. Brown, H. (2000) "Principles of language learning and teaching", New Jersey: Prentice Hall, p.160.

Knox, A.B. (1985) "Adult Learning and Proficiency." In D. Kleiber and M. Maehr (eds), *Advances in Motivation and Achievement. Vol. 4: Motivation in Adulthood*., Greenwood, Conn.: JAI Press.

Lifrieri, V. (2005) "A sociological perspective on motivation to learn EFL: The case of escuelas plurilingües in Argentina", M.A thesis, University of Pittsburgh, p.4.

Oladele, J.O (1998) "Fundamentals of Educational Psychology. Yaba", Johns-Lad Publishers Ltd.

http://www.nou.edu.ng/NOUN_OCL/pdf/EDU/EDU%20822%20ADVANCED%20PSYCHOLOGY%20OF%20LEARNING.pdf

CooperR. L,and Fishman,J.A.. (1977) "A study of language attitudes". In J. A. Fishman, R. L. Cooper, R.L.and Conrad,A.W. (Eds.), *The spread of English,* Rowley, MA: Newbury House, pp. 239-276.

R. L Cooper, R.L,   Fishman, J.A. (1977) "A study of language attitudes". In J. A. Fishman, R. L. Cooper, & A. W. Conrad (Eds.), *The spread of English,* Rowley, MA: Newbury House, pp. 239-276.

"Learning another language: a true social psychological experiment. In *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 2, p. 203 http://jls.sagepub.com/content/2/2-3-4/219.abstract

Schrader, D. E. (1999) "Justice and caring: Process in college students' moral reasoning development". In *Justice and caring: The search for common ground in education*, ed. M. S. Katz, N. Noddings, and K. A. Strike, New York: Teachers College Press, pp. 37-55.

Schrader, D. E. (1999) "Justice and caring: Process in college students' moral reasoning development". In *Justice and caring: The search for common ground in education*, ed. M. S. Katz, N. Noddings, and K. A. Strike, 37-55. New York: Teachers College Press, pp 37-55.

Von Glasersfeld, E. (1989) "Constructivism in education". In T. Husen & N. Postlewaite (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education* [Suppl.], Oxford, England: Pergamon Press, pp.162-163.

Wilkins, D. (1972)*Linguistics in language teaching*. Cambridge: CPU, p.184.