

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION: A STUDY OF STUDENTS LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This study intended to investigate the level of intrinsic motivation for English learning of 206 Mattayomsuksa (Secondary) two students at a government high school in Thailand, and to compare the levels of intrinsic motivation for English learning of the students based on average grade and expected elective program. The percentage, mean (M), and standard deviation (SD) were the basic descriptive statistical analyses used to describe the levels of intrinsic motivation for English learning. T-test was also conducted to determine whether there were significant statistical differences in the responses according to the independent variables. The results showed that these students had medium level of intrinsic motivation for English learning. In addition, there were significant differences between students whose average grade was lower than 2.5 and those whose average grade was 2.5 or higher. Nonetheless, there were no significant differences between the students whose expected elective program were Science and Language.

Keywords: Intrinsic Motivation, Language Learning, EFL, Motivation, Students

แรงจูงใจภายใน: การศึกษานักศึกษาที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษาค้นคว้าครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาระดับแรงจูงใจภายในในการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษของนักเรียนชั้นมัธยมศึกษา(Secondary) ปีที่ 2 จำนวน 206 คน ที่โรงเรียนมัธยมโรงเรียนหนึ่งของรัฐบาลในประเทศไทยและเพื่อเปรียบเทียบระดับแรงจูงใจภายในของการเรียนรู้ภาษาอังกฤษของนักเรียนจากเกรดเฉลี่ยและวิชาเลือก เปอร์เซนต์ ค่าเฉลี่ย (M) และส่วนเบี่ยงเบนมาตรฐาน (SD) เป็นพื้นฐานการวิเคราะห์ทางสถิติ

พรรณนาที่ใช้อธิบายระดับของแรงจูงใจภายในสำหรับการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ ได้ใช้ t-test เพื่อตรวจสอบว่ามีความแตกต่างอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติในการตอบสนองตามตัวแปรอิสระหรือไม่ ผลการศึกษาพบว่านักเรียนเหล่านี้มีแรงจูงใจในการเรียนภาษาอังกฤษระดับปานกลาง นอกจากนี้ยังมีความแตกต่างอย่างมีนัยสำคัญระหว่างนักเรียนที่มีเกรดเฉลี่ยต่ำกว่า 2.5 และบรรดาผู้ที่ มีเกรดเฉลี่ย 2.5 หรือสูงกว่า อย่างไรก็ตามไม่มีความแตกต่างอย่างมีนัยสำคัญระหว่างนักเรียนที่มีความคาดหวังที่จะเรียนวิชาวิทยาศาสตร์และภาษา

คำสำคัญ: แรงจูงใจภายในการเรียนรู้ภาษา EFL แรงจูงใจนักเรียน

Background of the Study

English is considered one of the most important languages in the world. In many countries, English has become the second or third language (Harmer, 2007). Accordingly, the Ministry of Education (2008) was aware of the importance of English as it was a vital tool used for communication, education, occupation, cultural understanding, and the connecting of the world's communities. Thus, the Ministry of Education encouraged English to be a compulsory subject that all Thai students had to learn.

The Ministry of Education (2001) stated that most Thai students could not communicate in English effectively enough due to their low English competence. That is, the teaching and learning of English in Thailand still needed further development so as to improve the English competence of Thai students (Limpapayom, 2004, cited in Phothijak, 2006). One of the causes of such phenomena could be that students lacked motivation in learning (Sotithimanont, 2005). Since motivation was something of such critical importance, a large number of studies relating to the teaching and learning of English was conducted to investigate how the nature and role of motivation related to and worked on the second/foreign language (L2) learning process (Dornyei, 1994). Due to the fact that learning is better developed when students are motivated to learn, Gardner (1985) and Dornyei (1994) confirmed the importance of motivation as a vital factor in learning a second and foreign language. The three vital aspects of motivation were the individual's attitudes, desires, and effort (Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997). Similarly, Dornyei (1994) claimed that motivation was one of the main determinants of second/foreign language (L2) learning achievement. It was an impetus to generate inherent learning and to sustain that force throughout the whole process of acquiring the language. Moreover, there were many researchers who were studying motivation in L2.

For example, Gardner and Lambert (1959) found that there were two aspects of motivation: integrative and instrumental. Deci and Ryan (1985) proposed intrinsic and extrinsic as major types of motivation. Most researchers and methodologists came to the view that intrinsic motivation produced better results than its extrinsic counterpart (Harmer, 2007).

Despite the importance of intrinsic motivation for English learning as stated earlier, not many studies on intrinsic motivation for learning in Thailand, especially with English, was conducted (Choochom, Sucaromana, & Suawallee, 1999). Therefore, this present study intended to investigate the level of intrinsic motivation for English learning of Mattayomsuksa two students at a government high school and to examine the differences of intrinsic motivation for English learning based on average grade and expected elective program.

Intrinsic motivation and L2 Learning

Ryan and Deci (2000) introduced the topic of intrinsic motivation on learning, of which the importance was widely acknowledged. Nonetheless, their theory did not deeply address L2 learning in the framework, but learning in general (Noels, et al., 2003). In such theory, intrinsic motivation was considered a potential central motivator of the educational process (Dornyei, 1994). Several studies showed that the intensity of intrinsic and extrinsic goals had a relationship with second language learning success, as some students wish to study language for their own interest (intrinsic motivation), whereas other students study for an outside goal like a degree or a better job (extrinsic motivation). Studies regarding socio-educational theory found that students' positive feelings in learning a second language positively affect the students' learning success. Though second language learning was not considered in the theory about student choice, research showed the usefulness in using intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to calculate the success of learning a second language (Noels, et al., 2003).

Similarly, Chang and Lehman (2002) investigated the effects of intrinsic motivation and embedded relevance enhancement within a computer-based interactive multimedia

(CBIM) lesson for English as foreign language (EFL) learners. The results revealed that (a) no matter how high or low intrinsic motivation students had, the embedded relevance enhancement facilitated their language learning, (b) regardless of enhancement strategies, students with higher

intrinsic motivation level performed better than those with the lower ones, (c) more highly intrinsically motivated students who received the specific treatments performed the best among all, and (d) there was no significant interaction between the two variables. The study recommended that teachers try to use various instructional strategies with their teaching in language classroom so as to help develop students' intrinsic motivation and to facilitate their learning

Moskovsky and Alrabai (2009) measured the levels of intrinsic motivation of Saudi EFL learners. The questionnaire used in the study distinctively emphasized on investigating intrinsic motivation level; however, other types of motivation including integrative, instrumental, and extrinsic were also targeted. The results showed that although the study focused on intrinsic motivation, there were no statistical significant differences in the ranking of such motivation and the other three types of motivation on Saudi EFL learners. The results also showed that the administration of the survey might not yield clear outcomes in relation to the second language motivation in this population. The findings indicated a very high level of intrinsic and the other three motivation types in Saudi EFL learners regarding the overwhelming positive answers derived through the survey. However, the researchers found the results were too simplistically interpreted because there was a contradiction between high levels of intrinsic and the other three motivation types and low level of L2 achievement. The results seemed to strongly indicate that the respondents had underlying motivation and positive attitudes towards EFL learning which could be exploited to yield better learning outcomes if under more suitable conditions.

Although each finding discussed above was unique on its own, the findings were also a useful basis for this study. According to the related research addressed earlier, not many studies on intrinsic motivation for English learning, especially in Thailand, were specifically conducted (Choochom, et al., 1999). Like the descriptions of motivation on language learning reviewed previously, this study intended to obtain the answer to the level of intrinsic motivation for English learning among Mattayomsuksa two students and to find out whether there were some significant differences between intrinsic motivation for English learning among the participants by their average grade and by expected elective program.

Participants

The participants consisted of 206 secondary two students including 94 males and 112 females. The participants were selected through simple random sampling. The recruited participants were those who formally indicated their consent to participate as respondents in this study. All students were also informed that their identity would be kept anonymous.

Instrument

The study used a questionnaire that was adapted from the intrinsic motivation questionnaire constructed by Choochom, et al. (1999). The modelled factors were based on the theories of Haywood and Burke (1977), Harter (1981), and Deci and Ryan (1990) in order to collect data. The questionnaire consisted of two main parts. The first part included general demographic information of the participants: average grade and expected elective program. The second part inquired about the level of the students' intrinsic motivation that related to the various aspects of English learning.

The questionnaire included 31 items adapted to measure the levels of intrinsic motivation for English learning of secondary two students at a government high school. All items were positive. The questionnaire was based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from true (5) to not true (1). Following this, the content validity was measured by three experts. Consequently, according to the comments and suggestions of the experts, the questionnaire items or terms used that were unclear were revised. Therefore, the questionnaire could be used in the actual study afterwards.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data by using a program called Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 10.5. Also the means (M), and standard deviations (SD) were the basic descriptive statistical analyses used to describe the levels of intrinsic motivation for English learning. Moreover, T-test was also conducted to establish whether there were significant statistical differences in the responses according to the "average grade" and "expected elective program" categories.

Results

Based on the questionnaire, the results shown in Table I indicates that of the total participants (206), the average grade of the majority of them, 173(83.98%), was of 2.5 or higher, while those whose average grade was lower than 2.5 were 33 (16.02%). As for the participants' expected elective program, 48.54% of them expected to attend the science program while 51.46% of them expected to choose the language program when they move up to high school grades in the near future.

Table I. Frequency and percentage of Mattayomsuksa two students at a government high school

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Average Grade		
Lower than 2.5	33	16.02
2.5 or higher	173	83.98
Total	206	100.00
Expected Elective Program		
The Science Program	100	48.54
The Language Program	106	51.46
Total	206	100.00

To investigate the level of intrinsic motivation for English learning of Mattayomsuksa two students in a government high school, the overall mean score of levels of intrinsic motivation is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Level of Intrinsic Motivation for English learning of Mattayomsuksa two Students at a Government High School

Factor	N	M	SD	Level
Determination	206	3.61	.80	High
Need for Competence	206	3.67	.78	High
Need for Autonomy	206	3.43	.75	Medium
Interest-Enjoyment	206	3.25	.87	Medium
Challenge	206	3.02	.91	Medium
Overall	206	3.36	.75	Medium

As shown in Table 2, the participants had a medium level of intrinsic motivation for English learning with an average score of 3.36 ($SD = .75$). Moreover, they had a medium level of intrinsic motivation for English learning on the last three factors, including need for autonomy, interest-enjoyment, and challenge with the average score of 3.43 ($SD = .75$), 3.25 ($SD = .87$), and 3.02 ($SD = .91$) respectively. Nevertheless, the remaining two aspects, determination and need for competence, were at high levels, with an average score of 3.61 ($SD = .80$), and 3.67 ($SD = .78$) respectively.

Table 3 presents the overall mean score by comparing the level of intrinsic motivation for English learning of the participants based on average grade.

Table 3. Comparison of Level of Intrinsic Motivation for English learning of secondary two Students at a Government High School by Average Grade

Factor	GPA	N	M	SD	t
Determination	Lower than 2.5	33	3.03	.96	-3.95**
	2.5 or Higher	173	3.72	.71	
Need for Competence	Lower than 2.5	33	3.07	.94	-5.08**
	2.5 or Higher	173	3.78	.69	
Need for Autonomy	Lower than 2.5	33	2.82	.95	-4.19**
	2.5 or Higher	173	3.54	.65	
Interest-Enjoyment	Lower than 2.5	33	2.72	.95	-3.90**
	2.5 or Higher	173	3.35	.82	
Challenging	Lower than 2.5	33	2.45	.86	-4.08**
	2.5 or Higher	173	3.13	.88	
Overall	Lower than 2.5	33	2.79	.89	-4.19**
	2.5 or Higher	173	3.47	.67	

Note: ** $p \leq .001$

As demonstrated in Table 3, there was obviously a significant difference between the levels of intrinsic motivation for English learning of secondary two students based on average grade ($p \leq .001$). The overall mean score indicated that these participants whose average grade was lower than 2.5 ($M = 2.79$, $SD = .89$) had lower levels of intrinsic motivation for English learning than those whose average grade was 2.5 or higher ($M = 3.47$, $SD =$

.67). Furthermore, the mean score of those whose average grade was lower than 2.5 in terms of individual factor, including determination ($M = 3.03$, $SD = .96$), need for competence ($M = 3.07$, $SD = .94$), need for autonomy ($M = 2.82$, $SD = .95$), interest-enjoyment ($M = 2.72$, $SD = .95$), and challenge ($M = 2.45$, $SD = .86$) apparently showed that they had lower levels of intrinsic motivation for English learning than those whose average score was 2.5 or higher ($M = 3.72$; $SD = .71$, $M = 3.78$; $SD = .69$, $M = 3.54$; $SD = .65$, $M = 3.35$; $SD = .82$, and $M = 3.13$; $SD = .88$ respectively).

Table 4 reports the overall mean score by comparing the level of intrinsic motivation for English learning based on expected elective program.

Table 4 *Comparison of Level of Intrinsic Motivation for English learning of Mattayomsuksa two Students at a Government High School by Expected Elective Program.*

Factor	Program	N	M	SD	t
Determination	Science	100	3.72	.70	1.97
	Language	106	3.51	.87	
Need for Competence	Science	100	3.78	.69	1.99*
	Language	106	3.56	.85	
Autonomy	Science	100	3.53	.71	1.94
	Language	106	3.33	.79	
Interest-Enjoyment	Science	100	3.28	.79	.50
	Language	106	3.22	.95	
Challenging	Science	100	3.15	.90	2.06*
	Language	106	2.89	.90	
Overall	Science	100	3.45	.68	1.63
	Language	106	3.28	.81	

Note: * $p \leq .05$

As presented in Table 4, the overall mean score of secondary two students whose expected elective program was Science ($M = 3.45$; $SD = .68$) was not significantly higher than those whose expected elective program was Language ($M = 3.28$; $SD = .81$). Therefore, it can be initially concluded that there was no significant difference between the levels of intrinsic motivation for English learning of these students whose expected

elective program was Science and those of Language ($p \leq .05$). However, when looking at the two factors: need for competence and challenge, the mean scores of secondary two students whose expected elective program was Science ($M = 3.78$; $SD = .81$ and $M = 3.15$; $SD = .90$) were higher than those whose expected program was Language ($M = 3.56$; $SD = .85$ and $M = 2.89$; $SD = .90$). That means that there was a significant difference between the levels of intrinsic motivation for English learning these students whose expected elective program was Science and those of Language ($p \leq .05$) according to these two factors.

Discussion

According to the results of the study, secondary two students in a government high school, regardless of determination or need for competence, generally had a medium level of intrinsic motivation for English learning. According to Choochom, et al's (1999) findings, students in high school grade-level had higher intrinsic motivation level than those in the secondary school level in the aspects of determination, autonomy, and challenge. As the results of this study indicated, secondary two students had a medium level of intrinsic motivation for English learning which was lower than that of a high school level. Therefore, the results of this study were consistent with such result in terms of autonomy and challenge. Although the overall mean score reported that secondary two students' intrinsic motivation for English learning was at a medium level, two factors including determination and need for competence were found to be at a high level. It could be interpreted that these students considered English task fulfillment more mentally rewarding to them than external rewards. Furthermore, regarding the current situation in the world, one's English competence is required for further study or job opportunities in the future. Despite the medium level of intrinsic motivation for English learning regarding overall mean score, the students still need to learn, to develop skills, and to feel competent. Thus, they had high intrinsic motivation for English learning regarding these two factors.

Moreover, this study demonstrated that there was statistically significant difference between the levels of intrinsic motivation for English learning among such students based on the average grade ($p \leq .001$). The results were consistent with Choochom, et al's (1999) findings that students' average grade had a relationship with intrinsic motivation on learning. In other words, the higher the average grade, the higher the level of intrinsic motivation on learning that the students obtained. In addition, it was

noteworthy that the Mattayomsuksa two students who obtained an average grade of 2.5 or higher had higher levels of intrinsic motivation for English learning than those whose average grade was lower than 2.5. It could be explained that the students who could attain learning success with an average grade of 2.5 or higher felt that the learning was more internally rewarding than the group of students with a lower average grade. Consequently such feeling, regardless of the other subjects, led them to develop more of an intrinsic motivation for English learning. In other words, those who had higher levels of intrinsic motivation for English learning could attain higher English learning achievement. In contrast, the students whose average grade was lower than 2.5 had a lower level of intrinsic motivation for English learning than the other group of students. It could be generalized that low learning achievement tended to lessen students' intrinsic motivation on learning in general, which included the English subject in this study. In other words, the students' average grade was dominant to their intrinsic motivation for learning (Choochom, et al, 1999).

According to the overall mean score, the findings of this study demonstrated that there was no statistically significant difference between the levels of intrinsic motivation for English learning of these secondary two students based on their expected elective program. It could be generalized that intrinsic motivation for English learning was not a dominant factor for the students' expected elective program preferences even though those who expected to attend the Language program in high school seemed to have more inclination toward intrinsic motivation for English learning. Despite the discussion stated previously, there was a significant difference between the levels of intrinsic motivation for English learning based on students' expected elective program in terms of two factors, need for competence and challenge ($p \leq .05$). As the students whose expected elective program was Science had higher level of intrinsic motivation for English learning than those of Language regarding such factors, it could be concluded that expected elective programs were influential on the level of intrinsic motivation for English learning of the students in this study.

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