



Exploring the Predictors of Amotivation in ESL Learners in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the predictors of Filipino students' amotivation in learning English. The students answered questionnaires on reasons for amotivation, approaches to learning, and use of language in activities outside the English classroom. Results show that amotivation is positively predicted by surface learning approaches but negatively predicted by deep learning approaches. Frequency of use of English in activities outside school also predicted some dimensions of amotivation. The results indicate how amotivation arises from how students perceive their English classes and the importance of English in their life.

Introduction

As more Asia countries consider making English a required course in the curriculum, the issue of students' motivations in learning English become important. To better understand the motivations of English language learners, research has been undertaken to explore the structure and consequences of these motivations. But not much has been done to understand the absence of such motivations or *amotivation* in English language learning. In this brief report, we explore some possible predictors of amotivation in a sample of Filipino students enrolled in a mandatory English language course in university.

Motivation and Amotivation in Learning English

Much of the recent work on motivation in English language learning has adopted the motivational framework of Dornyei (2009), which assumes that language learning motivations are tied to issues of identity. Progress has been made in studying these motivations in English language learning (Wong, L., Chai, Chen, & Chin, 2013; Wong, R., 2012). In these studies, lack of motivation is understood as a decline in the levels of motivation (Berwick & Ross, 1989; Kim & Seo, 2012). However, motivation researchers in other domains propose that the dimensions of amotivation may be different from those of motivation.

The concept of amotivation as the absence of motivation has been explored within self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), where amotivation was considered a distinct dimension in the



range of motivations. In particular, amotivation is defined as a state in which individuals cannot perceive a relationship between their behavior and that behavior's subsequent outcome; instead, the outcomes are perceived to be determined by factors beyond their control. Applying this to learning, amotivated students cannot predict the consequences of their behavior in school, and cannot see the reason for engaging school activities. They may have feelings of detachment from and invest little effort in their actions. Academic amotivation has been associated with boredom and poor concentration in class (Vallerand et al., 1993), poor psychological adjustment and higher stress (Baker, 2003), and dropping out (Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997).

Legault, Green-Demers, and Pelletier (2006) classified students' reasons for being amotivated in a taxonomy with four dimensions that relate to how students perceive the learning tasks and their own capabilities to engage the tasks. These dimensions are (a) *value of task* – how important learning tasks are in the student's life, (b) *ability beliefs* – the belief that one does not have the personal ability to execute and complete the required tasks, (c) *task characteristics* – negative perceptions or attitudes about the tasks, and (d) *effort beliefs* – the belief that they cannot maintain the effort required to complete the tasks. In this study, we

adopt this taxonomy to explore amotivation in a sample of English language learners in the Philippines.

Predictors of Amotivation

Our study focused on factors that might influence the reasons for being amotivated in English learning. The first factor considered was students' approach to learning in their English classes. Approach to learning is an important predictor of academic achievement (Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983; Marton & Saljo, 1984) even with Filipino students (Bernardo, 2003; Watkins, Hattie, & Astilla, 1986). Studies typically differentiate between deep and surface approaches to learning. Deep approach involves more conceptual learning strategies to understand the meaning of the learning material and to attaining higher levels of mastery and performance. Surface approach involves the use of rote memorization and other lower level learning strategies to meet required levels of performance.

We hypothesize that amotivation arises in students who adopt surface learning approaches, but less so in students with deep learning approaches. The adoption of surface approaches could be associated with beliefs about the low value and negative characteristics of learning tasks, and/or low beliefs about one's ability to complete the task. In contrast, students who adopt deep learning approaches are more likely to give importance and have positive



perceptions of the learning tasks and their ability to complete such tasks. We predict that the dimensions of amotivation would be positively associated with the surface approach but negatively associated with deep approach.

We also propose that the students' language related activities outside the classroom could be associated with reasons for being amotivated, as the use of English in various activities outside the classroom could indicate how integral English is in their lives. For example, students who use English frequently in conversations with family and friends are likely to value the various learning tasks in their English class, and perhaps to feel competent in tasks that require the use of English. Students who read books and magazines or watch television shows and movies in English are also more likely to have the same beliefs related to learning English. The reverse might be true for students who use their first language, Filipino, more frequently in these activities outside school. However, the use of English or Filipino is not a zero-sum proposition, and students might actually use both as frequently outside the English language classroom. So we predict that it is the frequency of use of English that would be negatively associated with various reasons for being amotivated, whereas use of Filipino may not be consistently associated with amotivation.

Method

Participants

Participants were 225 first year university students (60.7% female, ages: 16 to 18 years) enrolled in a freshmen English course who gave their informed consent to participate in the study.

Instrument

Academic Amotivation Inventory.

The scale developed by Legault, Pelletier and Green-Demers (2006; Green-Demers, Legault, Pelletier, & Pelletier, 2009) was used to assess amotivation in the English class the students were taking. The scale had 16 items describing reasons why students sometimes lack motivation in class, which were grouped into four subscales: *value of task* ($\alpha=.85$; sample item: "Because I have no good reason to study"), *ability beliefs* ($\alpha=.88$; "Because the task demanded of me surpass my abilities"), *task characteristics* ($\alpha=.80$; "Because my school work is not stimulating), and *effort beliefs* ($\alpha=.83$; "Because I'm a bit lazy"). For each item, participants were supposed to answer in a scale from 1 (*does not fit me or my situation*) to 7 (*exactly fit me or my situation*). A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to establish the configural validity of the scale with the sample, and most the fit indexes indicated an adequate fit between the data and the four-factor model:



$\chi^2(94)=284.57$, $p<.001$; $\chi^2/df=3.03$, CFI=.92, AGFI=.81, and RMSEA=.095.

Study Process Questionnaire.

The Study Process Questionnaire (R-SPQ-2F) developed by Biggs, Kember, and Leung (2001) was used to assess the students' approaches to learning. A version of the same questionnaire was previously used and validated with similar Filipino university students (Bernardo, 2003). The 20 items in the questionnaire are grouped into two scales: *surface approach* ($\alpha=.71$; sample item: "I only study seriously what's given out in class or in the course outlines.") and *deep approach* ($\alpha=.77$; "I find that at times that studying gives me a feeling of deep personal satisfaction"), and were answered using a scale from 1 (*this item is never or only rarely true of me*) to 5 (*this item is always or almost always true of me*). The participants were asked to think about the English class they were taking when answering the items. Each scale can be further divided into the *motive* and *strategy* subscales with 5 items each, but only the scale scores were analyzed in this study. A confirmatory factor analysis also indicated an adequate fit between the data and the two-factor model: $\chi^2(162)=273.21$, $p<.001$; $\chi^2/df=1.69$, CFI=.85, AGFI=.80, and RMSEA=.055.

Language-related activities. The students were also asked to indicate how often they engaged in some language related activities outside the classroom (see Table 1). The students

were asked to answer using a scale from 1 (*never or rarely*) to 5 (*always*).

Results

The descriptive statistics are summarized in Table 1, but the results of interest are in Table 2, which shows the relationship between the dimensions of amotivation and the other variables. As predicted, surface approach was positively correlated with all amotivation dimensions, and deep approach was negatively correlated with three of these dimensions. These relationships were further explored using multiple regression analysis, and the results summarized in Table 3 confirm the results of the correlational analysis.

The predictions regarding the influence of language activities outside the English classroom where only partially supported. The negative correlation between use of English in various activities was only consistently found with ability beliefs; not all activities were correlated with the other amotivation dimensions. Interestingly, there were some positive correlations between use of Filipino outside the classroom and some of the amotivation dimensions. These results were also confirmed in the multiple regression analysis of the results shown in Table 3. Only the regression model for ability beliefs was significant, and only reading in English and talking to parents/family in English seemed to negatively predicted ability beliefs.

Discussion



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The results of our study suggest that there may be indicators of vulnerability to amotivation in English learners: those who use more surface approaches (and less deep approaches), and those who do not use English as often in their conversations and leisure activities outside the English classroom. These indicators should not be viewed as causing amotivation, as our research design does not warrant such an assertion. But the identification of such predictors is a small but important step towards knowing which students are at-risk for amotivation and developing a fuller understanding of the processes that cause amotivation in English language learners.



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Table 1
 Descriptive statistics

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Amotivation		
• Value of task	1.82	1.04
• Ability beliefs	2.05	1.16
• Task characteristics	2.29	1.12
• Effort beliefs	2.66	1.21
Approaches to learning		
• Surface approach	3.02	0.59
• Deep approach	2.68	0.58
Language-related activities		
• Use English at home when talking to family	2.51	1.19
• Use English when talking to friends	2.63	1.08
• Read books, magazines or newspapers in English	3.91	1.07
• Watch TV shows and movies in English	4.30	0.90
• Use Filipino at home when talking to family	3.77	1.23
• Use Filipino when talking to friends	3.88	1.04
• Read books, magazines or newspapers in Filipino	1.93	0.99
• Watch TV shows and movies in Filipino	2.50	1.07



Table 2
 Correlates of amotivation

Learning approach	Correlations (<i>r</i>)			
	Value of task	Ability beliefs	Task characteristics	Effort beliefs
• Surface approach	.36**	.28**	.39**	.38**
• Deep approach	-.19**	-.02	-.18**	-.22**
Language-related activities				
• Use English at home when talking to family	-.07	-.27**	-.10	-.11
• Use English when talking to friends	-.12	-.25**	-.14*	-.14*
• Read books, magazines or newspapers in English	-.14*	-.28**	-.10	-.18*
• Watch TV shows and movies in English	-.08	-.25**	-.01	-.03
• Use Filipino at home when talking to family	-.02	.12	.01	.05
• Use Filipino when talking to friends	.02	.19**	.09	.15*
• Read books, magazines or newspapers in Filipino	.00	.09	-.04	-.00
• Watch TV shows and movies in Filipino	.02	.14*	.07	.01

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$



Table 3
 Summary of multiple regression analysis

Learning approach	Standardized coefficients (β)			
	Value of task	Ability beliefs	Task characteristics	Effort beliefs
• Surface approach	.36**	.28**	.39**	.38**
• Deep approach	-.19**	-.01	-.17**	-.22**
• R^2	.17	.08	.18	.19
• $F(2,221)$	21.98**	9.52**	24.74**	26.00**
Language-related activities				
• Use English at home when talking to family	-.02	-.19 ⁺	-.06	-.05
• Use English when talking to friends	-.13	-.06	-.08	-.05
• Read books, magazines or newspapers in English	-.13	-.17**	-.11	-.19*
• Watch TV shows and movies in English	-.01	-.12	.08	.07
• Use Filipino at home when talking to family	-.10	-.13	-.16	-.13
• Use Filipino when talking to friends	-.02	.08	.09	.17
• Read books, magazines or newspapers in Filipino	.01	.04	-.09	.01
• Watch TV shows and movies in Filipino	-.00	.01	.11	-.05
• R^2	.04	.15	.05	.06
• $F(8,215)$	1.04	4.68**	1.32	1.73

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, + $p = .056$