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# SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS' MOTIVATION AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF TEACHERS' MOTIVATION

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## Abstract

International students learning English as a second language in Australia were studied to find how their perception of teachers' level of commitment to teach them English affects their own motivation to study English. A questionnaire survey was administered on the learners at three different levels of proficiency to also identify the relationship between the levels of study and the learners' perception of teacher as a factor affecting the learners' motivation. The results showed that there is a positive correlation between the learners' motivation and their perception of teachers' commitment to teach, and the intermediate level is the most problematic stage in English study in terms of motivation. The results also found that the level of study is a factor which affects the learners' perception of teacher factors which most strongly influence the learners' motivation. These findings support the general claim that language teachers are one of the most important factors influencing learners' motivation, but the learners' level of proficiency may be a factor that needs to be taken into consideration for a further discussion regarding the validity of a certain teaching strategy to motivate second language learners.

## Introduction

Recent research on motivation in second language acquisition (SLA) has focused on factors affecting second language (L2) learners' motivation (e.g. Csizér and Dörnyei 2005; Dörnyei 1990, 1994a, 1998, 2001a; Dörnyei and Clément 2001; Oxford and Shearin 1994; Noels 2003). Among the factors, teachers are commonly regarded as one of the most significant determinants of L2 learners' motivation (Dörnyei 1994a; Tanaka 2005). A number of researchers, then, have investigated what teacher factors positively affect learner motivation in what way (see e.g. Dörnyei 1994a, 2001a; Dörnyei and Csizér 1998; Jacques 2001; Tanaka 2005). These studies have claimed that L2 teachers play one of the most important and influential roles for learners engagement and persistence in the long process of L2 acquisition. In fact, in actual L2 classes, teachers are often required to play multi-dimensional roles; such as an initiator, facilitator, motivator, ideal model of target language speaker, mentor, consultant, and mental supporter, which are assumed to influence each learner's motivation continuously. Because L2 acquisition usually requires a much longer period of time to achieve at a high proficiency than ordinary learners expect (Ramage 1990), teachers often attempt to enhance learner motivation so that learners positively and actively engage in their learning until they achieve their common primary target in L2 learning, successful acquisition of a high competency in the target language. However, the effect of teaching strategies in motivating students should depend on students' perception of the strategies as Dörnyei (2001b, p.179) has suggested. That is, how L2 learners view the different teacher factors, including teaching strategies, should be an important issue in identifying the real nature of L2 learner motivation. Based on this contention, the current study focuses on the learners' perception of teacher as a factor affecting their own motivation, and what teacher elements are perceived as the factor most strongly affecting their motivation by learners at the different proficiency levels in the context of L2 English learning in Australia.

## Research background

The early study of motivation in L2 learning was led primarily by Robert Gardner and his Canadian associates (see Gardner and Lambert 1959, 1972; Gardner 1985; Gardner and MacIntyre 1991;

Gardner and Tremblay 1994). Initiated and inspired by them, extensive studies had been conducted to identify the most facilitative type of motivation understood in terms of a binary system: integrative and instrumental motivation. The former is associated with a learner's affective attitudes towards a target language and its community, and his/her desire to interact with the target language speakers and eventually become a valued member of the target community (Gardner and Lambert 1972), while the latter is a language learning motivation based on the pragmatic values that placed on the mastery of target language, such as being ahead of others or passing an entrance examination (Gardner and Lambert 1972). Gardner and Lambert's (1959) original claim stated that integrative motivation is more facilitative for successful L2 acquisition based on French as a second language learning context in Canada, but the studies in the following two decades did not reach the general agreement on this claim. These early studies of L2 motivation were based on social psychology, and approached the motivational paradigm by viewing L2 learning as a social phenomenon rather than an educational one. Based on the findings, a model of L2 motivation known as Socio-Educational Model was constructed by Gardner (1988). This model integrates L2 motivation as an important social factor that is determined in the social milieu and works with learning aptitude to affect the success or failure in L2 acquisition. Since motivation is viewed as thoroughly influenced by the social environment to which L2 learners belong, the model did not pay much attention on L2 teachers as a factor affecting the learners' motivational traits. Since the late 90's, however, following a number of arguments about the validity of Gardner and Lambert's (1959) claim that an integrative motivation is more facilitative for L2 learning than an instrumental motivation, the new era of motivation research has changed its focus to the classroom based educational psychological perspectives (Dörnyei 1998, p 125). That is, identifying what factors in language education affect learner motivation and at which stage in the long process of L2 learning has become one of the main streams of study in motivation. As a result, some different approaches from Gardner's Socio-Educational Model have been developed to account for the L2 learning motivation. Dörnyei (1994a) has introduced a framework of L2 motivation (see Figure 1 below) based on three perspectives relevant to L2 learning in more formal educational contexts.

Figure 1 Dörnyei's (1994a) framework of L2 learning motivation

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| LANGUAGE LEVEL           | Integrative Motivational Subsystem<br>Instrumental Motivational Subsystem   |
| LEARNER LEVEL            | Need for Achievement<br>Self-confidence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language Use Anxiety</li> <li>• Perceived L2 Competence</li> <li>• Causal Attributions</li> <li>• Self-Efficacy</li> </ul>   |
| LEARNING SITUATION LEVEL | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course-specific Motivational components               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interest (in the course)</li> <li>Relevance (of the course to one's needs)</li> <li>Expectancy (of success)</li> <li>Satisfaction (one has in the outcome)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Teacher-Specific Motivational Components               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Affiliative Drive (to please the teacher)</li> <li>Authority Type (controlling vs. autonomy-supporting)</li> <li>Direct Socialization of Motivation                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modelling</li> <li>• Task presentation</li> <li>• Feedback</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• Group-Specific Motivational Components               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Goal-Orientedness</li> <li>Norm &amp; Reward System</li> <li>Group Cohesiveness</li> <li>Classroom Goal Structure</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

In his framework, Dörnyei has separated the motivation-affecting components into three levels; *language, learner, and learning situation levels*, and introduced affecting factors relevant to the three levels. Among them, teacher-specific components are at the learning situation level, and the components are sub-divided into language learners' *affiliation* (i.e. learners' desire to please teachers), their teachers' style of teaching, and their teachers' use of particular teaching strategies, including *Modelling, Task-presentation* and *Feedback*. Dörnyei (1994a) further discusses how the sub-components of these teacher factors affect L2 learners' motivation. He first claimed the importance of some characteristics of teachers, insisting that the L2 teacher should be *empathic* that is sensitive to learners' needs and feelings, *congruent* so that teachers "behave according to their true self" (p 282), and *accepting* in being non-judgmental. He also encouraged teachers to be facilitators rather than authorities, to show a strong commitment to the learners' L2 achievement, and to promote learner autonomy. Finally, he also emphasised the importance of particular teaching strategies, including the introduction of tasks to develop learners' intrinsic motivation, and of motivating and informative feedbacks.

Figure 2 Williams and Burden's (1997) framework of L2 motivation (cited in Dörnyei 2001a)

| INTERNAL FACTORS   | EXTERNAL FACTORS   |
|--|--|
| Intrinsic interest of activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arousal of curiosity</li> <li>• Optimal degree of challenge</li> </ul>   | Significant others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents</li> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• Peers</li> </ul>  |
| Perceived value of activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal relevance</li> <li>• Anticipated value of outcomes</li> <li>• Intrinsic value attributed to the activity</li> </ul>  | The nature of interaction with significant others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mediated learning experiences</li> <li>• The nature and amount of feedback</li> <li>• Rewards</li> <li>• The nature and amount of appropriate praise</li> <li>• Punishments, sanctions</li> </ul> |
| Sense of agency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Locus of causality</li> <li>• Locus of control re: process and outcome</li> <li>• Ability to set appropriate goals</li> </ul>   | The learning environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comfort</li> <li>• Resources</li> <li>• Time of day, week, year</li> <li>• Size of class and school</li> <li>• Class and school ethos</li> </ul>   |
| Mastery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feelings of competence</li> <li>• Awareness of developing skills</li> <li>• Self-efficacy</li> </ul>  | The broader context <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wider family networks</li> <li>• The local education system</li> <li>• Conflicting interests</li> <li>• Cultural norms</li> <li>• Societal expectations and attitudes</li> </ul>  |
| Self-concept <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realistic awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses in skills required</li> <li>• Personal definitions and judgements of success and failure</li> <li>• Self-worth concern</li> <li>• Learned helplessness</li> </ul> |  |
| Attitudes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To language learning in general</li> <li>• To the target language</li> <li>• To the target language community and culture</li> </ul>  |  |
| Other affective states <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confidence</li> <li>• Anxiety, fear</li> </ul>   |  |
| Developmental age and stage  |  |
| Gender   |  |

Williams and Burden (1997) have also presented a framework of L2 motivation primarily based on issues relevant to educational psychology (see Figure 2). They approached the framework from the

perspectives of factors affecting L2 learner motivation, and separated them into two categories; *internal* and *external factors*

In their framework, *teachers* are seen as a part of external factors in the category of *significant others*, and interactions with teachers, including *learning experiences, feedback, rewards, praise* and *punishments* are also seen as relevant factors which may affect L2 learners' motivation.

Oxford and Shearin (1994) also advocated further development of the framework for studying L2 motivation. They insisted that there were four causes for confusion in the study of L2 motivation which were '1) absence of a consensus on a definition of L2 learning motivation; 2) confusion surrounding motivation in second vs. foreign language situations; 3) L2 research's omission of some key motivational and developmental theories taken from many areas of psychology; and 4) teachers' lack of knowledge about their students' real reasons for learning a language' (p. 13). They suggested five implications for the role of teacher in understanding motivation. First, teachers should identify students' real reason for learning another language. They note that students' reasons for learning a language may change during their learning, so asking about reasons periodically is recommended. Second, teachers should help students have challenging but achievable goals. In order to assist in achieving these goals, Oxford and Shearin also suggested that students have immediate, achievable sub-goals which give them a sense of progress. Third, teachers need to educate students so that they realise L2 learning can provide them with a variety of benefits for their future career, mental development and even contribute to world peace. Fourth, teachers should be mindful of making the L2 learning environment non-intimidating, welcoming, and with a minimum of anxiety. Finally, teachers should encourage students develop a high but realistic self-efficacy which in turn can develop a positive intrinsic motivation. However, these implications are suggestions based on Oxford and Shearin's understanding of the relevant issues for the development of future research on L2 motivation. More empirical research that supports the suggestions is required to help L2 learners become more successful in their own learning.

Along with the shift of the focus on the research in L2 motivation, one of the recent claims made in the study of motivation is the Process Model introduced by Dörnyei (2000) and Dörnyei & Otto (2001). Though Dörnyei (1994a) admits that Gardner and his associates' early studies contributed extensively to the construction of the foundation work in motivation research in SLA, he has insisted on the need for further development, linking motivation research in SLA with the recent theoretical findings in educational psychology, and has strongly encouraged the introduction of a more comprehensive paradigm for the consideration of the complex nature of motivation for the L2 learning. One of the important claims in the Process Model is to view L2 learner motivation not being static but continuously changing along with the long process of L2 learning. Dörnyei has divided the L2 learning process into three phases; namely the *preactional phase*, the *actional phase*, and the *postactional phase*, and at each phase, different motivational forces may cause different motivational actions. At the pre-actional phase, *initial motivation* is involved with goal setting, intention formation, and initiation of intention enactment. *Executive motivation* in the actional phase sustains the intended action of learning the language with continuing appraisal of daily learning events, taking various factors into consideration, which leads to either persistence or termination of learning. Finally in the post-actional phase, *motivational retrospection* evaluates learning actions by forming causal attributions, and determines an action for further study or termination of learning. In addition, factors that may influence each motivation include cognitive, affective, and situational factors or conditions. In the Process Model, teachers may have the strongest impact on executive motivation at the actional stage, since this is the time when learners' interaction with teachers is likely to be the primary source of L2 learning. Dörnyei (1998, p. 58-59) has claimed in the model that quality of learning experiences, teachers' influence (e.g. task presentation, praise and feedback), and classroom reward are the main motivational influences on L2 learners' motivation.

As review above shows, among the factors which affect L2 learners' motivation, the teacher has consistently been regarded as important in affecting L2 learners' motivation. However, the research on

motivation that teachers have to teach a second language, and how the motivation affects learners' motivation to learn the language has not been conducted extensively, and more research on various contexts is regarded to be extremely in demand (Dörnyei 2000, 2003). Among a few studies on teacher as an affecting factor on learner motivation (e.g. Chambers, 1999; Dörnyei 1994a, 2001a; Dörnyei & Csizér 1998, Jacques 2001), Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) investigated the teacher's actual use of teaching strategies to motivate learners. Jacques (2001) also investigated similarities and differences in the preferences of teaching strategies between foreign language learners and teachers in Hawaiian context. These studies are meaningful from the pedagogical point of view; however, students' motivation is the result of their own appraisal of various learning events (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Matsumoto, 2006; Wen 1997). That is, whatever strategies the teacher uses or affective characteristics the teacher possesses to enhance students' motivation, the effect of the teacher results only from how each student perceives these as a motivator for their own L2 study. Williams and Burden (1997) noted that 'all learners are likely to be influenced by their personal feelings about their teachers, and therefore, their perceptions of their teachers and of the interactions that occur between them and their teachers will undoubtedly affect their motivation to learn' (p. 133). Given this, the next important issue to investigate would be how exactly teachers affect L2 learners' motivation. Based on this, the current study aims to find any relationship between learner's own intensity of motivation and his/her perception of the strength of teacher's motivation. In addition, Dörnyei & Csizér (1998) stated that teacher-specific motivational components can be divided into three perspectives; teacher's *behaviour*, *personality* and *teaching style*. Therefore, the present study has also investigated which factor of these three will be perceived as most attractive by the learners. Furthermore, students' current level of study is also considered an important factor which may influence students' perception of teacher as an affecting factor as has been indicated by a number of studies on motivation (see Gardner, Smythe, and Brunet 1977; Keuneman and Sagona 1992; Matsumoto 2006), because depending on their previous study and current proficiency level, their perception of which teacher factor affects their own motivation most strongly may vary. Thus, the results of the study will be analysed based on three levels of the study; elementary, intermediate, and advanced.

## Methodology

Based on the review of previous literature on L2 learner motivation, the current study raised four research questions:

- 1) Is there any difference in the level of learners' motivation and learners' perceived level of teachers' motivation among the students at the different levels of study?
- 2) Is there any correlation between the level of L2 learners' motivation and of their perception of their teacher's commitment to teaching according to the level of study?
- 3) Is there any difference in the learners' perceptions of the teacher as a factor influencing their motivation to study English depending on their level of study?
- 4) Is there any difference in the perception of the teacher factors which most strongly affect learners' motivation among the students at different levels of study?

The subjects are students studying English at Bond University English Language Institute (BUELI) located on the Gold Coast, Australia. BUELI offers two courses; General English (GE) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). GE has six levels (GE 1 to 6) and EAP offers three levels (EAP 1 to 3). On the basis of general English proficiency, GE 1 and 2 are at elementary, GE 3 and 4, and EAP 1 can be regarded as intermediate levels. Students at GE 5 and 6, and EAP 2 and 3 are at the advanced level of study in English.

Approximately 280 students in total were enrolled in the 19 classes at the three levels when the survey was administered. The questionnaire was distributed to the students manually at each class and the objectives of the survey were directly explained to them so that the anonymity and the voluntary were

assured. In total, 121 students responded, but two of them did not indicate their level of study, so they are excluded from the level-based study. Among the 119 respondents, 16 students were at the elementary, 45 were at the intermediate, and 58 students participated from the advanced level respectively.

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to find any relationship between the subjects' level of study and their perceptions of their own and teacher's motivations. Kendall's tau was computed to identify relationship between the subjects' perception of the level of their own and teachers' motivation for the whole sample, as well as at each study level, and Chi-square tests were used to analyse the teacher factors and the level of study. The minimum significant level for the statistical analysis was set at  $p < .05$ .

In order to collect relevant data to answer the above questions, the present study employed a questionnaire. The questionnaire collected data regarding students' perceptions of the level of intensity in their own motivation to study English and their teachers' level of commitment to teaching English for them in the class. It also asked their level of agreement with the idea that the level of teachers' commitment to teach English affects the subjects' own motivation to study English. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the levels of intensity and agreement. The questionnaire also asked the subjects to indicate one particular teacher factor which most strongly affected their motivation from a choice of nine factors, and a blank was also provided so that the subjects could indicate any additional relevant factor. The following nine teacher factors are chosen from the three areas; behaviour (B), personality (P) and teaching style (T):

1. Teacher's personality (P) (e.g. cheerful/quiet, extroverted/introverted, good organiser, time management in the class, approachability)
2. Teacher's attitude towards teaching (T) (e.g. his/her teaching style; authority/academic -oriented, democratic/fun-oriented; passion/commitment to teach English)
3. Teacher's attitude towards students (B) (e.g. strict/generous, fairness)
4. Teacher's appearance including cloths s/he wears (P)
5. Teacher's teaching skills/techniques (T) (e.g. good use of materials, good explanations, interesting tasks)
6. Teacher's way to comment/feedback on your work (T)
7. Teacher's pronunciation of English including accents and voice (B)
8. Frequency of teacher's encouragement on your English (B) (e.g. your English has improved!)
9. Nothing about teacher affects my motivation.

## Results and Discussion

The intensity of students' own motivation and their perceived level of teachers' motivation are indicated in Table 1. The results in the total number of subjects ( $N = 119$ ) show that the mean score for perceptions of teachers' motivation ( $\chi = 3.80$ ) is slightly higher than the mean for the subjects' own level of motivation ( $\chi = 3.68$ ). This is also true in the comparison at each level. It seems that students may tend to rate their teachers' motivation higher than their own motivational level. This may be a reflection of Dörnyei's (1994) *affiliative motive* to please their teachers. Although the confidentiality and anonymity of the responses were assured to all the students, the learners' fundamental attitudes to please their teachers by rating them as having a strong commitment to their teaching cannot be totally excluded when the respondents actually filled in the questionnaire.

In the comparison between the levels, the elementary level shows the highest mean for both students' ( $\chi = 3.94$ ) and teachers' ( $\chi = 4.06$ ) motivations, while the intermediate level has the lowest mean scores for both students' ( $\chi = 3.40$ ) and teacher's ( $\chi = 3.62$ ) motivations. Among them, the results of Kruskal-Wallis test indicate that the difference between the levels is only significant for the students' motivation ( $\chi^2 = 6.892, p < .05$ ).

**Table 1 Level of students' and perceived teachers' motivations**

|                |      | Elementary | Intermediate | Advanced | Total |
|----------------|------|------------|--------------|----------|-------|
| Ss' Motivation | Mean | 3.94       | 3.40         | 3.82     | 3.68  |
|                | N    | 16         | 45           | 58       | 119   |
|                | S.D. | .772       | .780         | .892     | .858  |
| Ts' Motivation | Mean | 4.06       | 3.62         | 3.86     | 3.80  |
|                | N    | 16         | 45           | 58       | 119   |
|                | S.D. | .854       | .777         | .963     | .889  |

Kruskal-Wallis test: Ss' motivation  $\chi^2 = 6.892$ ,  $P < .05$   
 Ts' motivation  $\chi^2 = 3.748$ , n.s.

L2 learners are likely to be most strongly motivated at the time when they first engage in learning English; and the level of motivation appears to lower as they study at the intermediate level where they are most likely to struggle in order to progress to the advanced level. At the advanced level, the level of motivation rises again though it is not as high as at the elementary level, probably because learners may find themselves closer to their goal, acquisition of a high level of English proficiency. At the elementary level, the learners are more likely to be excited by a new learning environment away from their own countries, being in a diverse cultural and linguistic context<sup>1</sup>. It is also relatively easy for the elementary learners to see their actual progress, and generally the target tasks of the class is not very challenging, while the target at the intermediate level is often more diversified depending on each learner's individual strong and weak points, and more complex expressions and structures are required to learn based on deeper understanding of target culture. As a result, learners at the intermediate level may be more likely to be confused and lost during their study since they may not be able to see the clear progress that they used to find at the elementary level.

The above results coincide with the results given by Gardner et al. (1977). In their study, compared with students at the other two levels, elementary and advanced, students at the intermediate level showed the least interest in continuing French study and, as a result, had the least positive attitude towards the community speaking the target language. The researchers also stated that students at the intermediate stage of L2 leaning are less certain about their future language studies (p. 251). Given this, the students at the intermediate level may lose their goal of acquiring a high proficiency in a target language since they may consider how much further they have to go to reach the targeted high level of proficiency. This may cause the deterioration of learning motivation particularly at this level of study. As for the learners' perceived level of teachers' commitment, the result does not show a statistically significant difference among the levels of study; however, there is a similar tendency to that found for the level of learner motivation. That is, although an argument cannot be statistically supported, there may be some tendencies that learners at the elementary level rate the highest while learners at the intermediate level rate the teachers' commitment lowest, which coincide with their own levels of motivation. Next, the correlation between students' and teachers' motivation was computed (see Table 2).

**Table 2 Kendall's tau between students' and teachers' motivations**

| Ss' & Ts' Motivation    | Elementary | Intermediate | Advanced | Total  |
|-------------------------|------------|--------------|----------|--------|
| Correlation Coefficient | .393       | .231         | .330**   | .332** |
| Sig. (2-tailed)         | .088       | .085         | .004     | .000   |
| N                       | 16         | 45           | 58       | 119    |

\*\* =  $p < .001$

<sup>1</sup> Students at BUELI are from Europe, Africa, Middle East, Northern and Southern Asia, and Middle and South America.



Significant results in the Kendall's tau are obtained at the advanced level ( $r = .330, p < .001$ ) and in the total subjects ( $r = .332, p < .001$ ), but were not found at the elementary and the intermediate levels. According to the results, generally speaking, learners' perception of their teachers' level of commitment/motivation for teaching has a positive influence on their own level of motivation to learn English. That is, when learners find their teachers teach English to them enthusiastically, then, the learners come to be more strongly motivated to study English. This claim is also statistically valid at the advanced level. These results seem to confirm the researchers' (e.g. Csizér and Dörnyei 2005; Dörnyei 1994a, 2001a; Dörnyei and Csizér 1998) claim that teacher is a factor affecting learners' motivation.

**Table 3 Students' perceived level of agreement in students' and teachers' motivations**

|      | Elementary | Intermediate | Advanced | Total |
|------|------------|--------------|----------|-------|
| Mean | 4.31       | 3.64         | 4.29     | 4.05  |
| N    | 16         | 45           | 58       | 119   |
| S.D. | .602       | .883         | .937     | .928  |

Kruskal-Wallis:  $\chi^2 = 19.686^{**}, p < .001$

What, then, do learners think of their teachers' commitment? Do they think that teachers' enthusiasm in teaching affects their own commitment to study more? The overall mean score for the learners' perceptions regarding whether or not teacher's commitment affects their own motivation is  $\chi^2 = 4.05$ , which means they agree more than "strongly" that the teachers' commitment affects their own motivation to study (see Table 3). This further supports the idea that the teacher is an important factor that influences L2 learners' motivation. The result also has statistical significance for the levels of study ( $\chi^2 = 19.686, p < .001$ ), showing that affects are different at different levels of study. The students at the elementary and the advanced levels show similarly high mean scores (Elementary = 4.31, Advanced = 4.29) while the intermediate level has the lowest mean,  $\chi^2 = 3.64$ . Especially the students at the elementary level have an extremely small standard deviation of 0.602. This signifies that the students not only have the highest level of agreement with the idea that the teacher influences their own motivation but also they have a very similar level of agreement. That is, L2 learners at the elementary level may be more likely to depend on their teachers for their learning and for their motivation in learning compared to the learners at higher levels of study, and they might think that teachers should be helping them and guiding them to improve their proficiency. In other words, they might expect teachers to take the initiatives in the classroom. This consideration is not within the scope of this research, but it may be an important issue to be explored in the future study.

The intermediate level students show again the lowest mean score for this question. They rate the lowest in terms of their own motivation, and of their perception of their teachers' level of commitment. In addition, they do not think their teachers affect their motivation to study as strongly as their lower or higher level counterparts do. The current research was not able to explore further the exact reasons why this tendency of the intermediate students showed in the results; therefore, a concrete discussion for the reasons of this phenomenon cannot be made. However, there is a possibility that the intermediate level may be the most vulnerable stage in L2 learning. They might be more easily confused in their learning, lose focus in their study and confidence in learning. It may be necessary to study further to find out what teachers can do to solve the problem that intermediate students may have. Finally, students' level of study and the perceived importance of various teacher factors will be discussed. The students' perceptions of the teacher factor most affecting their motivation are indicated in Table 4. The result shows that there is a difference in the teacher factor perceived as most affecting motivation among the students at the three levels of study, and the difference is statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 39.687, p < .001$ ). The most important factor for the elementary students is the teachers' personality (60.0%), while the students at the intermediate level indicate teachers' teaching style

(31.1%) as the most influential, while teachers' actual teaching skill/technique (42.1%) is the most important factor for the students' own motivation among the advanced level students.

**Table 4 Students' perception of most affecting teacher factor for their own motivation**

|              |       | Teacher Factors |      |     |   |      |     |      |      |     |     | Total |
|--------------|-------|-----------------|------|-----|---|------|-----|------|------|-----|-----|-------|
|              |       | 1               | 2    | 3   | 4 | 5    | 6   | 7    | 8    | 9   | 10  |       |
| Elementary   | Count | 9               | 1    | 1   | 0 | 0    | 0   | 2    | 1    | 1   | 0   | 15    |
|              | (%)   | 60.0            | 6.7  | 6.7 | 0 | 0    | 0   | 13.3 | 6.7  | 6.7 | 0   | 100   |
| Intermediate | Count | 7               | 14   | 3   | 0 | 10   | 2   | 0    | 6    | 3   | 0   | 45    |
|              | (%)   | 15.6            | 31.1 | 6.7 | 0 | 22.2 | 4.4 | 0    | 13.3 | 6.7 | 0   | 100   |
| Advanced     | Count | 6               | 13   | 2   | 0 | 24   | 4   | 2    | 4    | 1   | 1   | 57    |
|              | (%)   | 10.5            | 22.8 | 3.5 | 0 | 42.1 | 7.0 | 3.5  | 7.0  | 1.8 | 1.8 | 100   |
| Total        | Count | 22              | 28   | 6   | 0 | 34   | 6   | 4    | 11   | 5   | 1   | 117   |
|              | (%)   | 18.8            | 23.9 | 5.1 | 0 | 29.1 | 5.1 | 3.4  | 9.4  | 4.3 | 0.9 | 100   |

Chi-Square test:  $\chi^2 = 39.687$ ,  $p < .001$

1 = teacher's personality, 2 = teacher's attitude towards teaching, 5 = teacher's teaching skill/techniques.

These results indicate that depending on the level of proficiency in the classroom, students perceive different aspects of teachers as their motivator to study English. That is, a general discussion of the effect of teaching strategies on L2 learning motivation, and as a result, on learners' success in learning should take students' level of L2 proficiency into consideration for its validity. Compared with other subjects, L2 teaching/learning has an issue which differentiates it from other teaching/learning context in that it is possible for learners to lack basic or sufficient language skills to communicate with their teachers in the classroom where their learning occurs. Especially, when teachers are native speakers of a target language and the students have multi-cultural backgrounds, such as is common in English classes in Australia, including BUELI, the teachers are unlikely to speak all the students' first languages at the high level of fluency. That is, a high level of verbal communication between students and teachers may often be impaired, especially when the students' proficiency is at introductory or elementary level. Given this, in accordance with the ability to communicate with teachers, students may depend on different factors among teachers as an important motivator.

As found in the results of the present research, elementary level students found teacher's personality the most influential for their motivation. Because they cannot fully interpret or comprehend what teachers try to communicate in English, it is likely that they will focus more on factors, such as teachers' personality which does not require the students to comprehend fully or interpret what the teacher is doing in the classroom. Students at intermediate level show that teacher's attitudes towards teaching is the most important factor and this can be regarded as the manifestation of teacher's teaching/educational belief. Since intermediate level students have more learning experience as well as better communication skills in English than elementary students, they may be more able to view how teachers behave to them as a language teacher in the classroom. Therefore, they may come to view more teaching-based aspects of their teachers as the primary factor for their motivation. At the advanced level, students regard how teachers teach them, including their use of particular teaching skills, techniques, materials, etc. as the most important element that influences their own motivation. Since the advanced level students have the highest level of communication skills in English as well as the most experience of English learning among the three groups, they may be able to interpret what a teacher does and says well. That is, they are most likely to be affected by what exact teaching techniques or skills teacher utilises in the classroom.

The current research results confirm that teacher is an important factor affecting L2 learners' motivation, but they also show that various teaching strategies as an effective motivator having been discussed in the previous studies (e.g. Dörnyei 1994a, 2001a, 2001b; Dörnyei and Csizér 1998; Jacques 2001; Oxford and Shearin 1994) may work differently depending on learners' current level of proficiency. Learners' level of proficiency may be an important variable which determines the perceived validity of the uses of a particular teaching strategy. Learners with a lower level of proficiency are more likely to depend on non-verbal communication-based aspects, such as teachers'

personality, and as they develop their proficiency, they may shift their preference to more teaching/learning-based aspects, such as teaching style at the intermediate level or teaching skills and techniques at the advanced levels.

## **Conclusion**

The current study on L2 learners' motivation and the effect of perceived levels of teachers' commitment reconfirms that a teacher influences his/her students' motivation. In addition, the study also indicates that learners' levels of proficiency may be an important factor which can determine the effectiveness of teaching strategies as a motivator for learners. With regard to the level of proficiency, there are two issues raised with particular importance. First, the learners at the intermediate level seem to be in the stage of learning English which involves the most struggling with their learning. They appear to be more weakly motivated and to view their teachers less actively as a motivator compared to learners at lower or higher levels of proficiency. Probably because they have been engaged in English study for a long time, they may have developed a sense of "helplessness" primarily due to the lack of a clear indication of progress, or because they may be overwhelmed by the contents introduced in the course. Whatever the reason is, the results suggest that L2 learners' intensity of motivation changes as they study English and their proficiency level increases. The importance of taking changes in motivation into consideration has been strongly advocated by Dörnyei (2000) who stated that 'during the lengthy process of mastering certain subject matters, motivation does not remain constant but is associated with a dynamically changing and evolving mental process, characterised by constant (re) appraisal and balancing of the various internal and external influences that the individual is exposed to' (p. 523). The current research further demonstrates that the learners' level of proficiency differentiates the teacher factor most affecting their own motivation. The learners tend to shift the importance in teacher-related factors from personality-based ones to teaching skill-based ones as they develop their proficiency. This may be one of the reasons for the phenomenon that Jacques (2001) noted that 'some classroom practitioners often discover that some activities just don't seem to "hit the mark" with some language students' (p. 204). This supports what Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) concluded when they stated that 'no motivational strategy has absolute and general value because such strategies are to be implemented in dynamically changing and very diverse learning contexts, in which the personality of the individual learners and the teacher, as well as the composition and structure of the learner group, will always interplay with the effectiveness of the strategy' (p. 224). The current study shows that students' levels of proficiency seems to be one of the most important factors which contribute to this 'dynamically changing learning context', and it needs to be considered in the selection of an effective teaching strategy for a particular group of students.

These conclusions, however, are drawn from a study based on a single learning/teaching context; therefore, as Dörnyei and Csizér (1998, 224) have insisted, there is clearly much room for further research in order to consolidate the claim and for the development of revised framework of the L2 learner motivation.

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## Appendix

### QUESTIONNAIRE (Students)

Please tick an appropriate blank

Level of study:

Elementary (     ) – Enrolled class GE 1, 2

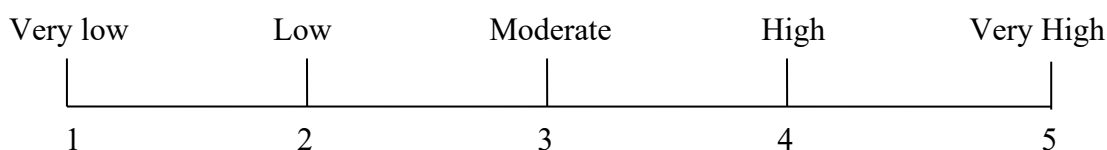
Intermediate (     ) – Enrolled class GE 3, 4, EAP 1

Advanced (     ) – Enrolled class GE 5, 6, EAP 2, 3, FCE

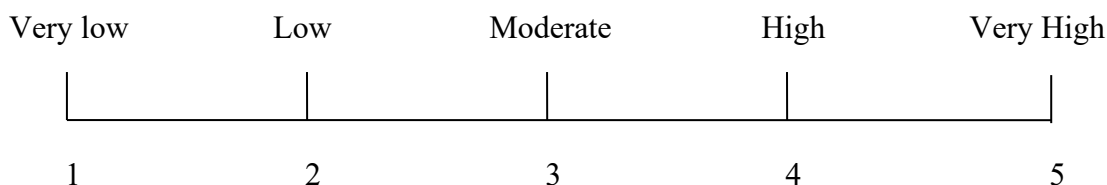
Gender: (     ) Male (     ) Female

Region you are from: (     ) Europe (     ) Africa  
(     ) North East Asia (China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan)  
(     ) Middle East (     ) Other Asian region  
(     ) South/middle America (     ) Pacific region

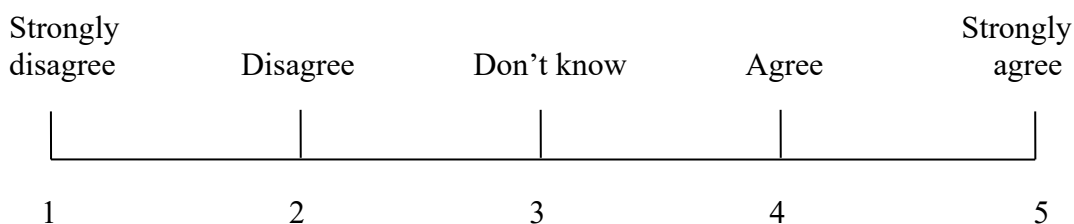
1. How do you rate your current level of motivation for learning English? Please circle an appropriate number in the scale below.



2. How do you rate your teacher's level of motivation (commitment) for teaching English in your class? Please circle an appropriate number in the scale below.



3. Do you agree that the level of teachers' enthusiasm (passion) for teaching English in the class affects your motivation to study English? Please circle an appropriate number in the scale below.



4. What factors listed below do you think affect most strongly your motivation (commitment) to study English? Please tick **ONLY ONE** factor. If there is other factor that is related to teachers, please write it in the blank provided.

- (     )     Teacher's personality (e.g. cheerful/quiet, extroverted/introverted, good organiser, time management in the class, approachability)
- (     )     Teacher's attitude towards teaching (e.g. his/her teaching style; authority/academic -oriented, democratic/fun-oriented; passion/commitment to teach English)
- (     )     Teacher's attitude towards students (e.g. strict/generous, fairness)
- (     )     Teacher's appearance including cloths s/he wears
- (     )     Teacher's teaching skills/techniques (e.g. good use of materials, good explanations, interesting tasks)
- (     )     Teacher's way to comment/feedback on your work
- (     )     Teacher's pronunciation of English including accents and voice
- (     )     Frequency of teacher's encouragement on your English (e.g. your English has improved!)
- (     )     Nothing about teacher affects my motivation.

Other factor: \_\_\_\_\_

That's all. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

**Please put the completed questionnaire in a sealed envelop provided and give it to HSS reception on level 2 by Friday 3 October 2008.**

BUREC Protocol No, RO-856

Principle researcher: Dr Masanori Matsumoto, Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences



## **SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS' MOTIVATION AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF TEACHERS' MOTIVATION**

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