

# REVISITING MOTIVATIONAL CONSTRUCTS AND LEARNING PREFERENCES IN AN IMMERSION CONTEXT: DOES CULTURE MATTER?

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## Abstract

This study is devoted to investigating dynamic motivational construct on learning structures in an immersion context. Due to the ever-changing motivational construct, which, in particular, is driven by learning structures in a new environment, this study assumes that the preferred learning structure commonly favoured in the research participants' home countries might shift that will eventually affects their learning motivation. This study takes place at the English Language Institute of University of Hawai'i at Manoa, USA. The research participants are mostly graduate students taking English courses to improve their language skill. This study found several surprising findings. The first finding is that although cooperative learning has the highest contribution to intrinsic motivation, they do not show any significant correlation ( $r=.279$ ). On the other hand, competitive learning negatively correlates with intrinsic motivation ( $r= -.407$ ), suggesting that if competitive learning is enacted, the participants' intrinsic motivation decreases. In terms of learning preference, individualistic learning is favored most, which might be affected by learning cultures commonly adopted in graduate programs in the US.

**Keywords:** *Self-Determination Theory, learning types, extrinsic and intrinsic motivations*

## I INTRODUCTION

In a classroom setting, one of the major problems in learning is learners' motivation, which is caused by several factors including teaching technique (Tahir & Yucel, 2019). Regarding teaching technique, Richards, Hull, & Proctor (1997: IX) suggest that to avoid student's boredom, the teacher can employ various delivery techniques in teaching speaking skills such as group work, pair work, models of cooperative learning, role play, presentation, information gap, as well as frequently vary the pair or group work arrangement so that they work with different classmates. Since motivation is one of the key factors to get success in a learning, many educational institutions try to find strategies to motivate learners such as improving instructional materials including the use of media.

Motivation is a dynamic construct that fluctuates even in a single lesson (Dornyei, 2003). Such fluctuation is influenced by several factors such as learners' attitudes toward the materials and the classroom atmosphere (Julkunen, 2001). This implies that learning situations in a classroom, to some extent, affect learners' motivation (e.g., Sivrikaya, (2019). In classroom context there are three common learning situations reflected in how classroom activities are carried out namely cooperative, competitive and individualistic ones (Johnson & Johnson, 1987). Those learning situation may construct different kinds of motivation.

### 1.1 MOTIVATIONS IN L2 LEARNING CONTEXT

In the classroom context, intrinsic motivation plays a very important role. This type of motivation is considered more important than extrinsic motivation since many studies about motivation claim that intrinsic motivation is better in term of a long-term retention (Brown, 2007). Similarly, Stipek (1988) said that a learner learns optimally when he or she is motivated intrinsically because she or he wants to rather than has to. This implies that internal drive is considered superior factor in learning. Thus, learning with intrinsic motivation is more enjoyable than working on tasks for external rewards. In addition to giving autonomy to learner, promoting cooperative learning can also enhance intrinsic motivation. The Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) posits that one of factors making a student motivated is relatedness and cooperative learning caters such kind of relatedness as it follows the principle social interdependence (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). Studies show that cooperative learning becomes a preference in classroom context (Alcalá, Garijo, Pueyo, Fernández-Río, 2019; Ada, Çetinkalp, Altıparmak & Asçi, 2018; Julkunen, 2001). Their research reveal that tasks and situations affect learners' motivation. They concluded that regardless of task types, cooperative situation is the most motivating the learners experience.

In addition to giving autonomy and enhancing relatedness, intrinsic motivation can be promoted through facilitating learners to develop their sense of competence such as by giving informative feedback (Noels, 2001). Feedback should be given in a positive way to encourage them to keep being motivated such through compliment, constructive suggestion etc. Through those feedback and constructive suggestions, learners know what they have to do to improve their competence. Another way to improve intrinsic motivation is by building curiosity as recommended by Stipek. Stipek (1988, p.65) pointed out that “pleasure or enjoyment can be achieved through creating, investigating or processing stimuli that are moderately discrepant”. This means that stimuli exposed to learners should be discrepant or new to them to arouse their interest. However, if it is too discrepant, the learners potentially ignore the stimuli and create anxiety. This is probably relevant to Krashen’s comprehensible input hypothesis that by giving knowledge one level above learners’ present knowledge, they will be challenged and be willing to attend to the input.

The last type of motivation which is unfortunate to happen to any learner is demotivation. Learners even with good competence might not achieve well in classroom if they are not well motivated. This type of motivation is the opposite of other two motivations. Demotivation is defined as a situation in which there is no relation between people’s actions and the consequences of their actions and the consequences are seen as arising due to factors beyond their control (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In this situation, they have no reasons why they perform the activities. Another factor why demotivation happens is when there is no relation between their activities and outcomes. As a result, they are not motivated to perform such activities.

To sum up, in classroom setting, intrinsic, extrinsic and demotivation are product of teaching and learning models. This implies that how teaching and learning are carried out will much influence learners’ motivation. Therefore, a teacher who has important role to run the class must carefully employ teaching techniques, learning strategies or situations that are relevant to nature of classroom and learners.

## 1.2 LEARNING TYPES IN L2 LEARNING

There are many types of learning in classroom atmosphere. They are cooperative, competitive and individualistic learning. Cooperative learning is an instructional method employing small group, allowing students to collaborate for better learning outcome (Jacob, 1999; Johson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1994). There are numerous types of learning such as visual learning, relational learning, holistic learning, episodic learning, competitive learning, cooperative learning and so on. To void the broadness of the covered topics, the researcher focuses on three common types of learning in classroom atmosphere. They are cooperative, competitive and individualistic learning.

The next type of learning is competitive learning or learning through competition. This type of learning might may also generate motivation particularly the extrinsic as they compete commonly for rewards such as compliments. Schmidt at.al (1996) uncovers that different learning types might affect different motivation. Competitive situation in classroom might also create an unhealthy classroom atmosphere will be very possibly created. Anger, anxiety, and hostility toward others, teacher even institution potentially happen. Such situation will also lead to a negative perception that can create hopelessness among the losers. Although this type of learning has been widely criticized, it has positive points when carried out appropriately such as for reviewing the learned materials by putting emphasis on drill rather than for true competition. Thus, the teacher should know when to use competitive learning or it will be boomerang not only for him or herself but also for the institution in addition to worsening classroom atmosphere.

In competitive situation, learners truly rely on their ability. They think that their competence will make them win and worthwhile. Therefore, they will keep on trying to achieve their higher competence level. Such effort will generate a challenge for them that eventually will lead them to be more self-determined. Thus, as stated in Self- Determination Theory, such competence pursuing certainly motivates them to learn.

Individualistic learning refers to goal-self achieving (Johnson & Johnson 1994). In this learning situation, learners perform task in their own pace and they have to be responsible with their own accomplishment. In other words, individuals realize that they have their own fate, struggle for self-benefit (Johnson & Johnson, 1987). Even though decreasing interaction intensity, this type of learning is able to enhance students’ motivation if implemented appropriately. individualistically structured activities in learning may supplement cooperative learning through a division of assignment in which

each student learns materials or skills that later to be used in cooperative activities (Johnson & Johnson, 1994).

In short, different learning situations create different motivations. Schmidt, Boraire & Kassabgy (1996, p.18) further pointed out that “competitive, cooperative and individualistic goal structures elicit different types of motivation, and students who have been socialized into different motivational styles may prefer different learning structures. This implies that further studies need to be carried out to see how learning situations affect learners’ motivations. I think this is very interesting because of two reasons. First, classroom is a very complex community with different background, traits, and motives to learn. Second, motivation is very dynamic that changes over time even in a single lesson. By conducting studies in this area, situated learning situations and motivational patterns can be identified and this will help teachers, school administrator and other stakeholders design ideal instruction.

Referring to the literature reviews, intrinsic motivation is one of the most important aspects in learning and there are three learning situations that are potentially able to enhance that motivation although cooperative learning is said to be able enhance that motivation most. However, the reviewed studies were carried out in non-immersion context. The contrast findings might be found in this study carried out in an immersion context, in which motivation in relation to learning types and preferences might change due to different learning cultures they encounter. Hence this study seeks to reveal the learning preferences and learning situations contributing to intrinsic motivation in a such context.

## II METHODS

This study employed correlation design. To collect the data, the researcher used questionnaire. Questionnaire itself can consist of closed, open ended questions or combination of both (Nunan, 1992). In this survey, the questionnaire contains closed questions. The questionnaire consists of 2 parts. The first part asks learners about their motivations whether they are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated as well as demotivated. The second part of questionnaire is asking learners about their learning situation preferences, cooperative, competitive and individualistic situations.

The questionnaire was distributed to students taking speaking and listening class at English Language Institute, University of Hawai’I at Mano, USA. This place is used to improve international students’ English competence. The class comprises 17 students, 11 women and 6 men. The researcher is only able to access this class due to strict regulations of conducting research in the language institute. All of them are from non-English countries such as China, Japan, Korea, Germany and Indonesia and they are mostly graduate students studying at Maters and Doctoral program at University of Hawaii.

### 2.1 PROCEDURES AND ANALYSIS

The students’ questionnaire was distributed in early fourth month as the class has already been in the third month. The students answer the questionnaires after their class session so that there is no ‘face threat’ of the teacher. The students should keep in a distance one others to avoid interference and had to answer the questions honestly. Soon after completing the questionnaires, the answers were collected for data analysis. The researcher employed correlation statistics namely Pearson Product Moment and processed the data using SPSS 16.0 to observe the correlations between learning types and intrinsic motivation. To see whether the students have intrinsic motivation or not, the researcher asked students to complete 3 types of motivation questionnaires namely intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and demotivation. To know their learning situations contributing to that motivation, the researcher asked them to complete 3 learning situations. The researcher treated motivations as dependant variable and learning types as independent variable. Then the researcher also tried to see correlation between the most preferred learning situation and the highest scored motivation.

## III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 RESULTS

This section presents the results of questionnaire to answer the research question on what learning types relating to intrinsic motivation by correlating them to observe their contribution to the research participants’ intrinsic motivation at ELI-80 class. Among three learning situations, cooperative, competitive and individualistic ones, cooperative learning has the highest contribution to intrinsic motivation. The results show that cooperative learning (CL) has value  $r = .279$ , which is lower than  $r$  table value, 0.48, and greater than significance level( $p$ ), 0.05, which further suggests that there is no significant correlation. Meanwhile, competitive and Individualistic learning have value  $r = -.407$  and  $r =$

.168 respectively which are not also significant as referred to  $r$  table value and significance level ( $p$ ). These all indicate that all learning types do not 'contribute' to their intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, the negative value (-) of competitive learning shows a contradictory fact; meaning that the more competitive learning is promoted, the less intrinsic motivation they have. In terms of strength of correlation, the three types of motivation have weak correlation to intrinsic motivation since their  $r$  values are below 0.50 (Arikunto, 2013), implying that those three types of learning have weak or low relation or contribution to intrinsic motivation

In addition to the result above, the researcher obtains several results concerning types of motivation and a learning type preference. The results show that extrinsic motivation ranks the highest, with mean 3.50 of a 1-5 likert scale, meanwhile, intrinsic and demotivation have means 3.25 and 1.74 respectively. In learning type preferences, individualistic learning is the most preferred learning type with slight difference in score from cooperative learning and competitive learning in which individualistic learning's mean is 2.85 followed by competitive learning, mean 2.72, and cooperative learning, mean 2.70. The high score in extrinsic motivation is very likely that the research participants' motivation is driven by external rewards such as academic grades

### 3.2 DISCUSSION

It is a surprising fact that the class shows high extrinsic motivation although the teacher frequently promotes cooperative learning in the ELI-80 class and this type of learning as widely discussed above will enhance intrinsic motivation. Relatedness, one of self-determination elements, that is always promoted through cooperative learning such as through pair work, group work, peer evaluation, and other method by our classroom teacher likely does not enhance intrinsic motivation. Based on the answer of questionnaire on extrinsic motivation items, they are primarily extrinsically motivated because English improvement is perceived as instrumental end and English is thought very important for their future career. Moreover, I also assume that due to small participants of research, only 17 students, which does not have good statistical power, the reliability is also low which, in turn, results in low reliability of findings and thus those findings are hard to generalize into a bigger population.

Another interesting finding is that individualistic learning is the most preferred learning situation. Cooperative learning, which is frequently applied in ELI 80 class seems unable to change their preference to learning situation. Several books and articles such as those written by Johnson & Johnson (1987; 1994), Brown (2007), and Slavin (1985) who advocate the advantages of cooperative learning and criticize competitive and individualistic learning seem 'irrelevant' to this class. Furthermore, Julkunen's study (2001) also demonstrates that the participants enjoy cooperative learning in doing different tasks. This class's learning preference is probably influenced by several factors such as nature of class which is 'good' for individualistic learning, learners' personality, and again, too few participants in the study. Based on the answer of questionnaire on items of individualistic learning, learners prefer setting their own goals and strive to reach them and achieving their "personal best" for them is the most important.

The participants' preference to individualistic learning might be caused by the class structure model employed by the professors in their main respective classes, which is different from learning structure in the bridging class, ELI course 80 where this study is performed. Learning is not merely acquiring the knowledge from classroom, but acculturation or adaptation might take place (Gavelek & Kong, 2012). Thus, the individual learning which is commonly employed in graduate level may affect learners' learning preferences as shown by the result of the questionnaire.

## IV CONCLUSION

This research seeks to examine the learning situations correlated to intrinsic motivation in classroom setting, ELI 80 class, by employing quantitative method to find out what learning situation is favored most as well as what the highest-scored motivation is. As previously assumed that the class has good intrinsic motivation since one of enhancing factors of this motivation, relatedness, is always promoted by classroom teacher through cooperative learning. This further suggests that motivation and learning preferences are dynamic construct which are affected by numerous factors, one of which is the operating cultures.

The findings of this study seem contradictory to the existing theories or study, however, there is a limitation in this study, the small number of participants, only 17 students. Such a small number affects the internal consistency or reliability of the constructs that also result in low reliability of findings. Therefore, further studies need to be conducted with a larger number of participants so that better

reliability can be achieved. Through these findings, the classroom teacher can apply types of learning that are compatible with the classroom learning atmosphere and individual learning preferences so that an ideal learning situation can be achieved for a better learning outcome.

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