

Journal article review by Rhodes Muyunda

Motivation and cultural correlates of second language acquisition: An investigation of international students in the universities of the People's Republic of China,

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Hypotheses:

1. Motivation, integrativeness, and instrumental orientation would all affect Chinese language proficiency positively, while anxiety would have a negative relationship with Chinese language proficiency. Motivation would have a stronger relationship with Chinese language proficiency than integrativeness, whereas cultural distance would have a significant and positive correlation with Chinese language proficiency.
2. Students at different levels of their Chinese course would exhibit different levels of motivation, integrativeness, instrumental orientation, and language anxiety. The Asian students' level of Chinese proficiency would be rated higher than that of the western students.
3. The motivational factors will affect Chinese language proficiency. Cultural factors will also contribute to Chinese language proficiency.

Description of the Population

The researchers used a group of 115 international students between the ages of 20 and 30, who were at the time of the research studying at two Chinese universities. This group of students comprised of 35 students from western countries while the rest were from other Asian countries. Furthermore, all the participants in this study had studied Chinese for at least some months.

Methods and Research Design used

In order to gather information about the participants, the researchers used a two-section questionnaire. The first part of the questionnaire was designed for soliciting students' background information, while the second part was in a form of the Attitudes/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). Information about the students' proficiency levels was obtained from their teachers, who were also responsible for the distribution of the questionnaires to them. Their proficiency ranged from beginning to advanced levels. To ensure confidentiality, students were told not to write their names, but rather their university enrolment numbers.

Results

The results of the study showed that highly motivated and integrated students exhibit higher Chinese language proficiency. The opposed was also true. With regard to which of the two variables, motivation or integrativeness, had a stronger correlation with Chinese language proficiency, integrativeness came out top. Furthermore, it was discovered that anxiety had a significant and negative influence on Chinese language proficiency. As far as the cultural distance is concerned, it was discovered that a greater distance between student culture and target culture (in this case Chinese) led to a reduction in language anxiety, thereby enhancing Chinese language proficiency.

Furthermore, in what appears to be a longitudinal study, the researchers found out that there was an increase in integrativeness and a decline in language anxiety over a period of time. The only exception was the second year (intermediate level) where the level of integrativeness went down while anxiety went up. Western students actually attained higher levels of Chinese language proficiency compared to their Asian counterparts. The researchers attributed this to the Asian group of students' reluctance to speak Chinese to their teachers and classmates.

Practical/Pedagogical Implications

The researchers noted that it should be the teachers' responsibility to ensure that their learners are not only integratively motivated inside the classroom but also outside. This is apparently due to the fact that integrativeness helps to enhance students' willingness to learn an L2. Furthermore, universities should come up with ways to help students at intermediate level of studying Chinese since this stage was sought to be problematic for the students. This can be done by developing a Chinese language curriculum for with more engaging activities and themes that learners have interest in. Teachers of Chinese language should also be educated about certain features of Asian students that hinder their L2 learning. This will help the teachers to come up with ways of helping them.

Evaluation/Response to the Study

Although most of the results of this research were what was expected, there were a few surprising findings. The one that stood out was on the relationship between cultural distance and Chinese language proficiency, in which it was discovered that a greater cultural distance enhanced Chinese language proficiency. This was in contrast to the results of previous research such as that of Svanes (1987, cited by Watkins & Yu, 2008). Based on those conflicting results, it may be logical to assume that cultural distance does not have a significant impact on language proficiency. There may be other factors.

Furthermore, in the researchers' hypothesis of whether students at different levels of their Chinese course would exhibit varying levels of integration, motivation, instrumental orientation, and language anxiety, only the results of integrativeness and language anxiety were reported. In any case, from the other results provided, it is clear that for learners to attain an optimal level of proficiency in an L2, both motivational and cultural factors should be considered.

Reference

Watkins, D.A., & Yu, B. (2008). Motivation and cultural correlates of second language acquisition: An investigation of international students in the universities of the People's Republic of China. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31(2), 171.