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Investigating education students' language learning beliefs and motivation for learning English

Abstract

Institutions responsible for the training of educators have a duty to ensure that students develop adequate mastery of subject content and pedagogy. This paper investigates the language learning beliefs (LLBs) of pre-service Foundation and Intermediate Phase educators and their alignment with language learning principles from applied linguistics research on second language acquisition (SLA). The study also examines the students' motives for learning English since motivation plays a part in sustaining language learning. Gardner's socio-educational model and Dörnyei's L2 motivational self system are used as theoretical frameworks in addition to the work of scholars such as Horwitz, Griffiths, and Weideman and Lepota on language learning strategies and beliefs. The results of a cross-sectional survey using the Beliefs About Language Learning and Motivation Inventory Modified (BALLMI-M) are analysed. The findings show that students are highly motivated to master English but do not wish to integrate with the English speech community. Furthermore, they lack understanding about the nature of language skills and have conflicting LLBs that should be addressed in future amendments to the language curriculum.

Keywords: language learning motivation, additional language teaching, literacy levels of Education students, language learning beliefs, language learning strategies

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Introduction and rationale

Institutions responsible for the training of educators in South Africa have to ensure that students develop adequate mastery of subject content and pedagogy. This is a matter that requires prioritisation, since the quality of teacher training at tertiary institutions has come under severe criticism (Grosser & Nel, 2013; Centre for Development and Enterprise, 2015). In order to carry out their mandate, universities have to address diverse literacy needs of pre-service educators, especially with regard to their ability to use English as the language of learning and teaching (LOLT) at schools and universities. Language proficiency is a key component of literacy, an area of extreme concern in South Africa. The effects of inadequate development of early literacy in South African schools, reported in numerous studies (cf. Madiba, 2013; Spaull, 2017; Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena & McLeod Palane, 2017), are far-reaching and complicate the efforts of institutions responsible for higher education.

Although there are measures in place at universities to address the problem of low literacy levels, these may not be sufficient. For instance, Foundation (Grades R-3) and Intermediate Phase (Grades 4-6) teachers who have been trained by such institutions still lack subject knowledge and the necessary competence in English as the LOLT when they embark on their teaching careers (Spaull, 2015; Spaull, Van der Berg, Will, Gustafsson & Kotze, 2016). Their own inadequate language skills compromise their ability to teach their students to read well and to master other essential skills. Low literacy levels are therefore perpetuated rather than resolved. Ineffective teaching strategies are a further compounding factor in respect of the low levels of literacy in the early grades of schooling (Madiba, 2013: 9; Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016). In order to address the mentioned issues, an investigation of attributes that may facilitate or impede language learning can be helpful.

This paper forms part of a larger study that investigates determinants of success in language education at tertiary level (see Mhlongo, 2019). Drawing on the definition of applied linguistics as a discipline of design that seeks solutions to large-scale or pervasive language-related problems (Weideman, 2017), we investigate the nature and role of education students' language learning beliefs (LLBs) and motivation in mastering English. In higher education, this mastery would entail the ability to access and process lexically dense information in different formats (Patterson & Weideman, 2013), an ability that requires the integration of the skills commonly referred to as listening, speaking, reading and writing, along with higher order thinking and application (Weideman, 2020).

Insights gained from the study can be used to inform curricula development for more effective training of educators. Failure to address the shortcomings in teacher education can undermine the opportunity to change the lives of future generations of school and university students for the better. A strong education system depends on the ability of its teachers to assist learners to gain the knowledge and skills that they need for the advancement of the broader society. As Spaull (2015: 39) cautions, "no education system can go beyond the competencies and quality of its teachers." We

thus need to scrutinise the training of educators from all possible angles, including what pre-service teachers believe about language learning and the role of motivation in the language classroom.

Research questions

The focus of the current paper is to explore the LLBs and language learning motivation (LLM) of education students. The study aims to answer the following specific questions:

i.   Do students' LLBs align with prominent views on effective language learning approaches and strategies? If not, what implication(s) does this have for language teaching and for future studies investigating language learning in multilingual contexts?

Ii.   What is the nature of the students' LLM? Does motivation play a prominent role in multilingual settings that require the learning of English as an additional language? What implication(s) does this have for language learning and teaching in our context?

In order to answer these questions, principles relevant to the learning of additional languages are first discussed, in particular insights gained from the studies of Lepota and Weideman (2002) and Griffiths (2008). Hereafter, models and principles used to gauge LLM are considered. Of particular interest here are the work of Gardner (2005) and Dörnyei (1994, 2005). After discussing the research methodology used for the study, the results of a survey questionnaire used to probe the LLBs and motivation of education students are presented and recommendations made.

Beliefs about language learning

All teaching approaches are informed by certain beliefs about language learning (Weideman, 2002). These can be defined as students' preconceived ideas and assumptions about how languages are learned that are reflected in learning strategies (Lepota & Weideman, 2002; Boakye, 2007). For example, students who believe vocabulary is the key to mastering a language, may devote most of their time to broadening their lexical knowledge. The effect of beliefs on language learning can also be seen when students discontinue their language studies because they battle to master the language and believe that they do not have the right abilities (see Horwitz, 1987).

LLBs can influence learning and instructional approaches and potentially play a role in the performance of students. As Lepota and Weideman (2002: 207) point out:

Where these learners' teachers have recently been professionally trained and, therefore, use methods of language teaching and approaches that, for example, promote fluency and communication instead of conventional grammar teaching, it is quite possible that conflicts may arise between learners' beliefs and expectations on the one hand, and teachers' instructional practices on the other. Learners' resistance to instructional practices may well be related to such a conflict between expectations and beliefs.

Furthermore, Loewen *et. al.* (2009: 91) highlight a number of factors associated with students' LLBs. That is, they enable language teachers to predict students' language learning behaviour, and that these variables relate to strategy use, proficiency, motivation for language learning, autonomous learning and anxiety. Erroneous LLBs or misconceptions on how languages are learned can inhibit the language learning process (Loewen *et. al.* 2009: 91). In the interests of professional teaching practice, it is incumbent on all educators to question their own beliefs regarding language learning and to interrogate the effectiveness of teaching approaches.

Precisely how LLBs are shaped remains uncertain, however. Some scholars cite cultural background as a possible contributing factor (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006; Ellis, 2008), while others argue that personality and cognitive style play a role (Horwitz, 1999). We propose that LLBs may be the product of self-efficacy or belief in one's "own capabilities" and the attainment of "specific goals" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010: 526). Self-efficacy could be inculcated through conducive learning environments and the influence of mentors and role models. This assumption is supported by White (2008: 121), who argues that LLBs "are not only cognitive constructs but also social constructs arising from experience".

Although the basis of LLBs may not be clear, there is general consensus that beliefs can be categorised into a few dominant types. The following categories, deriving from the work of Horwitz (1987: 284), appear to be most widely referenced (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006: 211): aptitude to learn language; difficulty associated with learning a language; the nature of language learning; communicative strategies used in language learning; and motivational factors related to language learning. These categories were used in the survey questionnaire that was developed to explore the LLBs of the education students and how they aligned with what Griffiths (2008) and Sykes (2015) refer to as good language learning strategies, viz. self-management of learning, expanding vocabulary, improving knowledge of grammar and understanding language as a system, employing additional resources, and developing all language skills.

Autonomy or self-management as a strategy in language learning refers to the ability of a language learner to accept responsibility for learning and take decisions relating to goals, learning processes and needs (Richards & Schmidt, 2010: 44). Although autonomy is referred to in the above definition as an 'ability', some learners may hold the erroneous belief that learning a language is something that is restricted to the classroom and that the teacher bears the main or sole responsibility for the students' learning. Research

shows that successful language learners take initiative to employ a variety of learning strategies that facilitate the learning of a language (Benson, 2006; Griffiths, 2008; Sykes, 2015), such as metacognitive strategies to manage learning, and resourcefulness in respect of ensuring adequate access for themselves to spoken and written forms of language.

Apart from self-directed learning, an extensive and rich knowledge of **vocabulary** is essential in order to master a language (Nation, 2005). This statement is strongly supported by Pretorius, Jackson, McKay, Murray and Spaull (2016: 12) in their research that shows a strong correlation between vocabulary knowledge and "all aspects of language proficiency – in both HL [Home Language] and in a FAL [First Additional Language]". Furthermore, a rich vocabulary is strongly correlated to general knowledge and has an effect on student performance and self-confidence (Pretorius *et al*. 2016). The importance of vocabulary knowledge in learning an additional language can also be traced to the early work on LLBs by Horwitz (1987: 283). In view of recent research findings that teachers in many South African schools have a severely limited vocabulary (see Mail & Guardian 2016; Moyo, 2018), prospective educators need to understand the importance of vocabulary in language learning, even if vocabulary knowledge is not foregrounded in the prescribed South African Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS).

Similar to vocabulary, the importance of **grammar** in learning a language continues to draw enormous research interest (Loewen *et. al*, 2009: 91-92). Findings of numerous studies reveal that many learners and teachers still view grammar as an essential element that everyone should master if they are to learn a language successfully (Bade, 2008; Saaristo, 2015).

The belief that grammar is central to learning a second language provides the grounds for many of the techniques to be found in the grammar translation approach and audio-lingual method (ALM). There is no doubt that these conventional language teaching methods have had a tremendous influence on the LLBs of language teachers and students (Weideman, 2002). The ALM, for example, is "a method of additional and foreign language teaching that is characterized in the first instance by the fact that it is grammatical in orientation" (Weideman, 2017: 98). It is derived from a behaviourist approach which views "language learning [as] the learning of a set of habits" (Weideman, 2002: 20). Weideman (2017: 98) observes that:

> The obsession with language structure, specifically with structural units at and below the level of the sentence, is the outcome of a firm belief that language is in fact nothing but structure. Not only does it identify language with its structural units: it also views language learning as nothing more than the mastery of such structures. (Weideman, 2017: 98)

During its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s, the emphasis on these starting points of the ALM by teachers was so strong that it was often perceived as the "correct method of teaching additional and foreign languages" (Weideman, 2017: 98). However, despite

the initial popularity of the ALM amongst English teachers and language practitioners, subsequent research has questioned the superiority of explicit instruction in the knowledge of grammar over language teaching that seeks to nurture communicative competence. There is consensus that a language cannot be learnt by teaching discrete units of grammar and the repetition and memorisation of rules. Research also indicates that students find this method tedious and demotivating (Griffiths 2008).

This debate about grammar teaching continued when Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) took over from the ALM as language teaching orthodoxy in the mid-1980s (Weideman, 2017: 107). Of particular interest was the question whether language teachers should aim for 'fluency' among learners, or for 'accuracy' (i.e. grammatical correctness). In terms of CLT, if language is primarily about meaning making, then grammar cannot be the most important part of learning a language. Such contradicting views are evident particularly in the teaching of English as an additional language at schools. That is, teachers are often encouraged to enforce grammatical correctness when teaching, but at the same time, to disregard accuracy when assessing, provided that learners' responses offer a meaning.

Some scholars distinguish between meaning-focused instruction (MFI) and form focused instruction (Loewen *et. al*, 2009: 92). Meaning-focused instruction is informed by the belief that the acquisition of L2 takes place unconsciously and implicitly (Loewen *et. al*, 2009: 92). That is, only comprehensible input and conducive learning environments are essential when learning a language; devotion to linguistic forms as well as corrective feedback are disregarded (Loewen *et. al*, 2009: 92). This aligns with the Universal Grammar (UG) theory of the capacity of humans to learn a language through natural exposure and opportunity to interact with speakers of the language (Musumeci 2011: 46). Contrary to MFI, form-focused instruction (FFI) emphasises explicit teaching of linguistic structures or grammar rules.

The debate about the explicit and implicit teaching of grammar – and the awareness of grammatical correctness or error – relates also to how the correction of errors should be undertaken (if at all) by teachers. Although **error correction** is often encouraged, there is uncertainty regarding its effect on learners' work. Despite the scarcity of studies in South Africa investigating the role of error correction, an early study by Botha (1987: 46), shows that error correction does not really improve the language proficiency of second language (L2) learners. Botha observes that even though teachers provide feedback on learners' written and oral tasks by means of error correction, they often do that with little hope that learners will actually process the information and not repeat the error again later (Botha, 1987: 46). Similarly, some advocates of CLT argue strongly that the correction of errors is not helpful in improving the language proficiency of learners. That is, errors are an indication of growth and development of the target language, and teachers are encouraged to spend less effort correcting errors (Weideman, 2002: 2; Van der Walt, Evans & Kilfoil, 2009: 50). It could also be argued that although error correction may result in minor improvement in learners' work, this is often on an individual basis and not a reflection of the whole class (Weideman, 2002: 2). This raises questions as to whether increased language proficiency is due to correcting of errors, or to other factors.

Individuals in favour of error correction may hold differing views from those discussed above. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that students and teachers hold certain assumptions about the importance of error correction and this may determine how they respond to feedback and the effectiveness of such practice (Truscott & Hsu, 2008; Polio & Williams, 2011). Therefore, unless the conflict between learners' and teachers' LLBs is addressed, or at least some desirable alignment of beliefs about language learning is established between the learners and their teachers, learning is less likely to occur. The current investigation on the awareness of pre-service teachers about functional and communicative ways to teach grammar is thus worth pursuing.

Motivation and language learning

The role of motivation in learning an additional language is well recognised (see Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). However, no singular definition of motivation exists. Motivated language students usually display certain behaviour and characteristics, such as being goal-directed, making an effort to attain learning goals, perseverance, confidence and employing learning strategies (Gardner, 2005: 3). Although these attributes offer some insight on motivation, they do not define the concept. Attempts to come up with a universally acceptable definition continue to surface, adding to the difficulty of conceptualising motivation (Gardner, 2007: 10; Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2007: 1087; Ryan & Deci, 2000: 54). Dörnyei and Csizer (1998) liken motivation to the fuel that sustains a long and often tedious language learning process. Without motivation there is no guarantee of ongoing language learning success. Furthermore, motivation can compensate for substantial deficiencies "both in one's language aptitude and learning conditions" (Dörnyei & Csizer, 1998: 204).

Gardner's socio-educational model of SLA (Gardner, 1985; Gardner, 2005; Woodrow, 2010) has been influential in research on LLM. The model proposes that language learning depends primarily on *ability* and *motivation*. Whereas ability incorporates aptitude and intelligence, motivation for learning a second language involves two main "classes of variables" – "attitudes toward the learning situation" and 'integrativeness' (Gardner, 2005: 6), as shown in Figure 1.
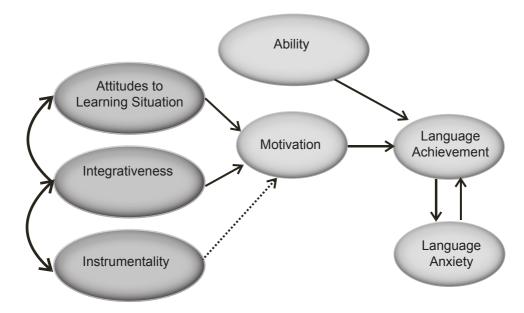
Figure 1: The socio-educational model (Gardner, 2005: 6)

The integrative motive includes motivational intensity and a number of variables relating to the target language community (Gardner, 1985: 54). The third class of variables, instrumentality, pertains to language learning reasons based on "practical or utilitarian purposes" (Gardner, 2005: 11). The interaction between variables and their influence on one another can also lead to an increase in LLM (Gardner, 2005: 8).

The socio-educational model was used to develop Gardner's Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), designed to measure the constructs outlined in Figure 1. Owing to criticism of some of the statements relating to the conceptualisation of integrativeness, which in essence relates to the desire to identify with the community of speakers of another language (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003: 126), the AMTB could not be used in its existing format for the current study. Further points of criticism directed at the model concerned a lack of accommodation of diverse learning contexts (Dörnyei, 1994: 515; Dörnyei, 2006: 52).

In response to the perceived inadequacies of Gardner's battery, Dörnyei (2009: 9) proposed "the L2 motivational self system". In terms hereof, the concept of integrativeness was reinterpreted so as to extend beyond the literal meaning of the root word by incorporating several influential L2 theories (Dörnyei, 2005: 94, Dörnyei, 2006: 53). The L2 motivational self system consists of three components which are perceived

as the most powerful motivators for L2 learners. The *Ideal L2 Self* refers to the person a language learner would like to become. It is a powerful motivator to learn an additional language because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between the actual and ideal self. Traditional integrative and intrinsic motives would typically belong to this component. The second component, the *Ought-to L2 Self* concerns the attributes that one believes a person ought to possess to meet expectations of others and to *avoid* possible negative outcomes. This dimension appears to correspond to extrinsic or instrumental motivation. The third component, *L2 Learning Experience,* refers to situated, 'executive' motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience, for example the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, and the experience of success (Dörnyei, 2009: 29).

In summary, individuals who have a clear idea of what they would like to become and the qualities they believe are necessary to realise this ideal, as well as a favourable learning environment and experience, are more likely to succeed in learning an L2. The *Ideal L2 self,* which is the representation of one's wishes, dreams, visions, hopes, aspirations and desires, is thus the essential component of the L2 motivational self-system that regulates the changes in one's motivation.

Also relevant for the purposes of the current study are a number of language learning macrostrategies identified in an earlier study of Dörnyei and Csizer (1998) aimed at improving classroom interaction between teachers and students. The study resulted in *the Ten Commandments for motivating language learners* summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Ten commandments for motivating language learners (Dörnyei & Csizer 1998: 215)

1.	Set a personal example with your own behaviour.
2.	Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.
3.	Present the tasks properly.
4.	Develop a good relationship with the learners.
5.	Increase the learners' self-confidence to use the target language.
6.	Make the language classes interesting.
7.	Promote learner autonomy.
8.	Personalize the learning process.
9.	Increase the learners' goal-orientedness.
10.	Familiarize learners with the target language culture.

The above macrostrategies were used to develop the questionnaire for the current study, in addition to a selection of statements from Gardner's AMTB and Horwitz's Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) as modified by Lepota and Weideman (2002). Motivational statements unsuitable for our South African context were removed (for a full discussion see Mhlongo, 2019).

Research methodology

As mentioned earlier, this paper forms part of a larger empirical study on the relationship between LLBs, motivation and course performance. For the full study quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments were used, including the following: a survey questionnaire with closed- and open-ended statements pertaining to LLBs and motivational aspects, a standardised academic literacy test, and a range of non-standardised language assessment instruments. Different sets of data were correlated and analysed statistically using SAS and SPSS software. By adopting a mixed-methods approach, the researchers could triangulate results and generalise findings to other student populations of a similar composition (O'Leary, 2014; Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016).

The current paper focuses purely on the findings of the cross-sectional survey. The process to develop, pilot and refine the 5-point Likert scale survey statements used in the Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory Modified (BALLI-M), with a Cronbach reliability index of 0.93, is reported fully elsewhere (Mhlongo, 2019: 92). In brief, the modified instrument was based on an analysis of discrimination indices of survey statements and inter-item correlations using SAS and SPSS. This was done for the purpose of ensuring consistency of measurement and so as to include enough items in the scale. Ethical clearance was granted for the study (UFS-HSD2016/1564).

Due to financial and time constraints, the study employed convenience sampling based on the availability and willingness of the participants (Dörnyei, 2007: 129). Of the 443 students registered for the English course as part of the BEd (Foundation and Intermediate Phase), 274 (62%) completed the survey questionnaire. The descriptive statistics of the research population are provided below.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of research population

GENDER					
		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Valid	1 Male	54	19.7	20.2	20.2
	2 Female	213	77.7	79.8	100.0
	Total	267	97.4	100.0	
Missing	System	7	2.6		
TOTAL		274	100.0		
RACE					
		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Valid	2 Black	158	57.7	59.2	59.2
	3 Coloured	36	13.1	13.5	72.7
	5 White	71	25.9	26.6	99.3
	6 Other	2	.7	.7	100.0
	Total	267	97.4	100.0	
Missing	System	7	2.6		
TOTAL		**274**	**100.0**		
AGE					
		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Valid	1 Younger than 18	4	1.5	1.5	1.5
	2 18-20	172	62.8	64.9	66.4
	3 21-23	60	21.9	22.6	89.1
	4 24-27	16	5.8	6.0	95.1
	5 28 or older	13	4.7	4.9	100.0
	Total	265	96.7	100.0	
Missing	System	9	3.3		

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
TOTAL		**274**	**100.0**		

HOME LANGUAGE					
		Frequency	**Percent**	**Valid Percent**	**Cumulative Percent**
Valid	1 English	13	4.7	4.9	4.9
	2 Afrikaans	100	36.5	37.6	42.5
	3 IsiZulu	24	8.8	9.0	51.5
	4 SeSotho	69	25.2	25.9	77.4
	5 IsiXhosa	20	7.3	7.5	85.0
	6 Setswana	20	7.3	7.5	92.5
	7 Sepedi	9	3.3	3.4	95.9
	8 Other	11	4.0	4.1	100.0
	Total	266	97.1	100.0	
Missing	System	8	2.9		
TOTAL		**274**	**100.0**		

With regard to gender, 80% of the respondents were females and 20% males. The group consisted of diverse races with black students (59%) being the majority, followed by white students (27%). Coloured students made up about 13% and other races under 1%. Most respondents were between the ages of 18-23 (87.5% of the survey sample). By far the majority were non-native speakers of English (95.1%) who had studied English at school as an additional language. Although the students represented a highly diverse group in terms of demographics and language background, they were all required to complete the same generic English language course.

Research findings

Despite the fact that students had no choice as to whether they wanted to register for the language course, their responses to the survey statements show that they were highly motivated to learn English. The survey instrument was designed to enable the calculation of a motivation score, similarly to that of Gardner's instrument. Students who did not respond to all of the motivation statements were excluded for the purposes of calculating the total motivation score. This explains why the results of 244 students are shown in Figure 2 and not the full cohort of 274 students.
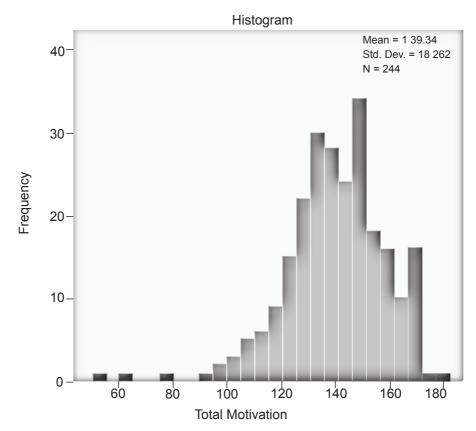

Histogram

Mean = 1 39.34
Std. Dev. = 18 262
N = 244

Figure 2: Histogram of total motivation score of survey cohort using the BALLMI-M

In terms of the distribution of scores, the negative skewness of the histogram is a further indication of students' favourable responses to a number of motivation statements. Furthermore, the Normal Q-Q Plot shows a normal distribution with "no real clustering of points, with most collecting around the zero line" (Pallant 2010: 63). In the current study, few outliers are observed.
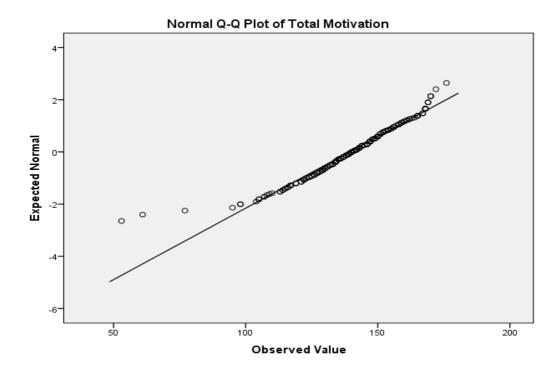
Figure 3: Normal Q-Q Plot of total motivation

What is insightful in the motivation study is the negative responses to statements such as "it is important for me to know English in order to be more like an English person", and "if I am fluent in English, people will respect me more". These statements are burdened by the students' perception of cultural identity. In light of Coetzee-Van Rooy's (2002) findings that language learners associated positively with their own cultural groups and showed no intention of adopting the identity of native users of English, this is not surprising. That is, the negative responses to these two statements associated with Gardner's conceptualisation of integrativeness align with the findings of Coetzee-Van Rooy. Integrativeness does not play the same role in second language acquisition in South Africa that it does in some other countries:

> [In South Africa,] English operates as a lingua franca and this provides a mainly pragmatic motivation to learn it as a second language. Secondly, the target language group (English first language speakers in South Africa) is a small group with fairly exclusive group boundaries ... Integration with the South African English first language group is, therefore, not a prime reason for learning English in South Africa, and successfully mastering English is not enough reason to be accepted as part of the English-speaking community in South Africa. (Coetzee-Van Rooy 2002: 76-77)

Although it is difficult to determine the precise nature of students' motivation, closer scrutiny of the survey responses revealed that a variety of factors motivated students to learn English. Those that featured most strongly included extrinsic or instrumental factors, course and lecturer-specific executive motives, and learner-specific aspects related to intrinsic forms of motivation. The full results are reported in Mhlongo (2019).

Table3: Motivation statements selected by more than 75% of the respondents as being particularly relevant (N=274)

Motivation statements	% of respondents who agree	Neutral	% of respondents who disagree	Motivational component
Studying English is important to me because I think it will someday be useful in getting a good job.	91.2	6.6	2.2	Extrinsic or instrumental/ Ought-to L2 Self
I love to try my best when doing an English task.	89.8	8.1	2.2	Intrinsic learner-specific/ Ideal L2 Self
If I make more effort, I am sure I will be able to master English.	89.7	9.2	1.1	Intrinsic learner-specific/ Ideal L2 Self
I am sure I have a good ability to learn English.	88.5	9.3	2.2	Intrinsic learner-specific/ Ideal L2 Self
My English lecturer always welcomes inputs from learners.	84.5	11.4	4.1	Executive/L2 Learning experience
I am confident I will be able to use English very well if I continue studying English.	83.9	13.2	2.9	Intrinsic learner-specific/ Ideal L2 Self

Motivation statements	% of respondents who agree	Neutral	% of respondents who disagree	Motivational component
I want to learn English so well that it will feel natural to me when I use English.	83.0	10.3	6.6	Intrinsic learner-specific/ Ideal L2 Self
My English lecturer makes positive comments when giving feedback.	82.3	15.8	1.8	Executive/L2 Learning experience
I would like to learn English so that I can study successfully.	81.0	13.9	5.1	Extrinsic or instrumental/ Ought-to L2 Self
When I have a problem understanding something in my English class, I can always ask my lecturer for help.	80.6	15.8	3.7	Executive/L2 Learning experience
English class activities accommodate a wide range of individual abilities.	77.5	18.4	4	Executive/L2 Learning experience
Practical tasks make learning enjoyable.	75.9	19.3	4.7	Executive/L2 Learning experience
I really like my English lecturer.	75.6	19.2	5.2	Executive/L2 Learning experience
The better the kind of English used by my lecturer, the more motivated I am to learn English.	75.4	16.9	7.7	Executive/L2 Learning experience
I find it important to create opportunities for myself to use English outside of class.	75.1	18.3	6.6	Intrinsic learner-specific/ Ideal L2 Self

Based on the responses to the above statements, students displayed confidence in their ability to learn English, which may have influenced their attitude towards the compulsory course. Despite their high total motivation scores reported in Figures 2 and 3, it is interesting to note that the role of motivation in language learning did not feature in students' responses to the open-ended survey question on factors that contributed towards mastering English. Furthermore, high motivation did not correlate strongly with

increased proficiency in English (Mhlongo, 2019). This suggests that in multilingual contexts such as ours motivation is not as strong a determinant of success as it may be in additional language learning environments elsewhere.

In what follows, we report the results of the survey on LLBs. For the purpose of the current paper, responses to the 5-point Likert scale were amalgamated to reflect three categories: disagree, agree and neutral. The following table summarises the students' LLBs identified in the responses to closed-ended statements.

Table 4: LLBs expressed as a valid percentage according to responses to closed-ended questionnaire statements

Abbreviated LLB	% of respondents who agree	Neutral	% of respondents who disagree
60. Regular repetition of work improves English	89.1	8.2	2.2
9. I am most responsible for learning	87.9	9.5	2.6
11. Vocabulary most important part of language learning	85	9.5	5.5
55. Practising English gives confidence	78.6	16.2	5.2
19. Grammar most important part of language learning	70.7	23.1	6.3
57. Lecturer to correct every error to avoid bad habits	65	26.1	8.8
54. Rehearse in mind what to say before speaking	62.9	19.6	17.4
48. Fluency in communicating is the most important	62.8	27.6	9.5
35. Learning English is different from other subjects	62.6	23.4	13.9
23. Children learn English easier than adults do	61.1	23.2	15.8
31. Guessing meaning of words improves vocabulary	59.8	22.3	17.9
39. Translating from L1 to English most important	59.7	26.7	13.5
7. Some have special ability to learn English	58.5	26.8	14.7
27. Spend time memorizing meanings of new words	53.1	30.4	16.5

Abbreviated LLB	% of respondents who agree	Neutral	% of respondents who disagree
51. English one of most difficult languages to learn	31	31	38
45. Learners should rely on lecturer to explain work	23	30.5	46.5
42. Women are better language learners than men	9.9	23	67.1
15. Only speak if can use English correctly	8.4	14.2	77.3

It is encouraging to see how many respondents agreed that vocabulary was the most important part of language learning (85%) and that autonomy in language learning played a significant part (87.9%). Nonetheless, there were conflicting LLBs in the students' responses. We see some confusion in respect of the role of repetition of work. A high percentage of students (89.1%) agreed with statement 60 that regular repetition of work improves English. Repetition is mostly associated with the ALM approach and the importance of mastering language structure (Weideman, 2002: 20). At least 70.7% of the students cited grammar as being the most important part of learning English, which contradicts their responses to statement 11 on vocabulary learning. Obsession with language structure can discourage students from expressing themselves in English, as their language may contain errors. It is clear that students do not understand the difference between fluency and accuracy. Whereas 77.3% of students disagreed that one should "only speak if one can use English correctly" (statement 15), and 62.8% of students agreed that "the most important part of learning English is to become fluent in communicating" (statement 48), as many as 65% of students cited the importance of having the lecturer "correct every error to avoid learning bad habits" (statement 57). Moreover, around 62.9% of the students thought that rehearsing what you want to say first before speaking is important. This contradicts their responses to statements 15 and 48 mentioned above. An emphasis on using correct English and rehearsing what you want to say may delay the attainment of fluency. The percentage of students (59.7%) who believed that learning to translate from their L1 into English was the most important part shows that the education students do not have a clear understanding of language learning approaches. This would explain the contradictory responses to the survey statements.

Responses to the open-ended questions were categorised and compared to those provided in the closed-ended section. They are summarised briefly below.

Table 5: Factors supportive of achieving language proficiency

What would you say has helped you to develop your level of English proficiency?	Number of responses	% of responses
Speaking English with others	92	22.2
Reading novels, magazines, newspapers, articles	80	19.3
Doing class activities and homework exercises	58	14.0
Spending time on learning vocabulary	53	12.8
Attending and participating in classes	39	9.4
Spending time on learning grammar	24	5.8
The teaching style of the lecturer	23	5.5
My high school English teacher	21	5.1
The English and academic literacy course	13	3.1
Repeating and reflecting on the work done in class	12	2.9
TOTAL	**415**	**100.0**

The responses with the highest percentage suggest an awareness of the importance of learner autonomy (speaking, reading, engaging in activities, etc.) and align with responses to the survey statements. However, repetition of work, which most students indicated in the closed-ended survey as playing an important part in language learning, did not feature prominently in the open responses, which shows a conflict of opinion.

Table 6: Skills in need of more development

Which skills do you think need more development?	Number of responses	% of responses
Grammar	86	32.1
Fluency in speaking	73	27.2
Vocabulary	48	17.9
Writing	46	17.2
Reading	14	5.2
Idioms	1	0.4
TOTAL	**268**	**100.0**

The responses to the second question show that students do not necessarily understand what language skills refer to. More time in the English course thus needs to be devoted to clarifying this and increasing awareness of how an integrated approach to language learning could be more productive than a separation of skills. The fact that grammar drew the most responses (32.1%) shows that there is a belief that grammar teaching improves proficiency. This aligns with students' responses to the closed-ended survey statements.

Table 7: Kinds of assistance proposed by students

What kind of assistance do you think can help you to improve your English skills?	Number of responses	% of responses
Practising or speaking English with other people	34	15.6
Class activities/ exercises	34	15.6
Reading books, newspapers, magazines, etc.	30	13.8
Class/ group discussions/ participating in class	26	11.9
My lecturer can assist	22	10.1
Developing vocabulary	22	10.1
Reading and/ or writing practice	21	9.6
Learning grammar	16	7.3
Motivation/ gaining confidence	7	3.2
Learning on my own/ putting in more effort	6	2.8
TOTAL	**218**	**100.0**

The responses to the question on this indicate that students believe that doing more practical activities will benefit them. This aligns with their beliefs on the importance of fluency, but does not reflect autonomy. Once again, grammar was mentioned, but only by a few students (7.3%) this time.

Implications for the English language course and future studies

Education students need strong language skills in order to be effective teachers. Since language learning takes time and effort, it needs to be accompanied by motivational factors that help to sustain learning. The cross-sectional survey shows that these students were highly motivated to master English at a higher level and that the nature of their motivation was both extrinsic and intrinsic. However, the students did not indicate a desire to integrate with the L1 English speech community. As multilingual language learners studying at a multicultural university, they did not believe it necessary to change

their identity. The notion of integrativeness clearly does not fulfil the same role in second language acquisition in South Africa that it does in countries such as the UK. What is needed is an instructional approach that will maintain extrinsic motivation, but increase intrinsic motivation, while also positively shaping students' perceived notions (LLBs) about learning English.

In keeping with other studies on LLBs, such as that of Horwitz (1987), Lepota and Weideman (2002), Boakye (2007), and Griffiths (2008), many education students selected statements in the survey that are indicative of autonomous learning. In addition, the majority cited vocabulary acquisition, the learning of grammar, and their preference for error correction as the most important aspects of learning a language. Despite this familiar trend in studies investigating LLBs, the analysis revealed that students' LLBs are in many ways conflicting or eclectic. The emphasis on grammar, repetition of work covered, and error correction are mostly associated with traditional approaches to language teaching and their primary concern with language structure rather than communicative competence. The inconsistencies shown in the LLBs investigated may be an indication of a mismatch between teachers' and students' beliefs. In particular, there appears to be confusion as to what grammar refers to and how structural aspects can be covered effectively in CLT so as to attain fluency in the first instance, whilst not ignoring accuracy. From the students' responses to the survey statements, it seems that the practical course component should be strengthened and innovative approaches be explored to address grammatical accuracy in a communicative manner.

The study on LLBs and LLM is not aimed at identifying the most effective approach to teach English as an L2 at university. Rather, it endeavours to encourage education students and language teachers to reflect critically on what they believe about language learning, and about which approaches and techniques could meet the needs of South African students. Facilitating language learning will depend on the multiplicity of factors unique to each classroom, and also on the formulated "plans that are locally appropriate and relevant, and unique to the circumstances of the particular context" (Weideman, 2017: 130). In other words, the focus on instructional strategies, more specifically, on providing input, interaction, and ensuring sensible and meaningful output, is somehow "a shift from designs directly relatable to method to a more open-ended kind of instructional design, that is at the same time more sensitive to local classroom and educational conditions", or what may be termed a postmethod condition (Weideman 2017: 130). Striving for a postmethod condition in a way that does not abandon the necessity of theoretically justifying one's approach will no doubt help language educators to confront at least some of the challenges present in teaching English in a thoughtful and deliberate manner.

This paper has explored the LLBs and LLM of a group of education students undergoing university training. The next step would be to examine the extent to which their beliefs align with the approach adopted in the compulsory language course and curriculum, and the relationship between LLBs, motivation and gains in proficiency.

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