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## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENT MOTIVATION TO LEARN ENGLISH AND THEIR GRAMMAR TEST SCORES

### Abstract

*Motivation is an important factor in acquiring any language and in learning a foreign language. The students' proficiency of a language depends on their motivation to learn all aspects of a language, grammar included. It may be said that, in schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina, too much emphasis is placed on learning grammar, and that, despite the current trends in teaching, grammar is still considered a predominant factor by which someone's knowledge of a language is assessed. The present study aims to investigate whether there is any correlation between the achievement in a grammar test taken by the first through fourth year university-level students of English as a foreign and their motivation to learn and acquire the language knowledge. The chief hypothesis is that such a correlation does exist. The assumption, not tested in the present paper though, is that the correlation is due to the traditional view of the importance of grammar held by the majority high school teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina.*

**Key words:** motivation, grammar, foreign language learning,

### Introduction

From a *behavioral* perspective, motivation is seen as the anticipation of reward (Brown, 2007). In *cognitive* terms, motivation places much more emphasis on the individual's decisions, "the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid, and the degree of effort they will exert in that respect" (Keller, 1983, p. 389 as cited in Brown 2007).

Motivation is an important factor in acquiring any language and in learning a second or foreign language it may be even more important. This topic has been the key point for many researchers and they all tend to focus on student-oriented approach in their work. As Dornyei (1998:117) stated, motivation is "responsible for determining human behavior by energizing it and giving it direction" and this plays a huge role in motivating students to acquire a foreign language. Motivation according to Gardner (1985) consists of several different areas which directly or indirectly influence foreign language acquisition.

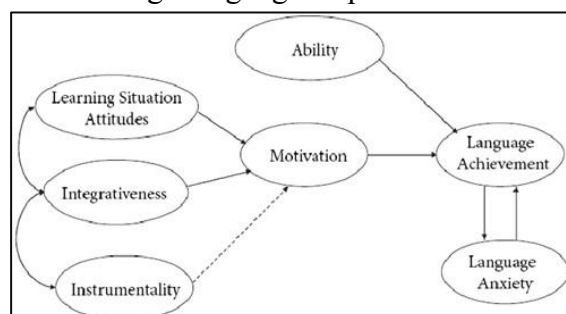


Figure 1: Gardner's socio-educational model (adopted from Lai, 2013)

If we look at the representation of his socio-educational model we see that motivation is influenced by the attitudes of learners in the learning situation which in a sense include attitudes towards other learners, teachers or even curriculum. When it comes to the second aspect, integrativeness, it is related to the desire of the learner to get acquainted with the society by learning target language and thus integrating fully in it. This aspect also includes instrumentality which is related to work aspect of one's life and relates to the necessity of language for improvement in the business realm.

If all of these aspects are present, then we have a learner who should be able enough to achieve specific language knowledge. However, one also must not forget the two remaining elements, extrinsic and intrinsic factors, which are also very influential in respect to motivation of an individual for acquiring a foreign language. Jeremy Harmer (2007) also discusses the importance of external and internal motivation stating that an accepted distinction is made between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, that is, motivation that comes from 'outside and from 'inside'. In other words, all external factors from our surroundings may be the driving force that will propel us towards the success in learning. Those factors may include some sort of reward (usually money or sweets) from their parents and/or teachers or a good grade for their achievement. These extrinsic motivational factors, as we can see, up to a certain extent correlate with learning situation from previously mentioned Gardner's model. In respect to intrinsic motivation we may talk about our inner drive that may or may not be provoked by external motivation. It may be our desire for self-realization, satisfaction from obtaining certain achievements or any other enjoyment or pleasure stemming out from the very act of learning.

Another important part of motivation in the classroom is the relationship between the teacher and the student. If they have good relationship and the attitude of both is healthy and full of respect and understanding, the great deal of necessary conditions for learning is fulfilled. Students like to have good teachers and they must be sure that they know what they are doing or as Harmer (2007) says 'this confidence in a teacher may start the moment we walk into the classroom for the first time – because of the students' perception of our attitude to the job.' We definitely need to know the matter we teach and we need to respect all other requirements such as dress code, code of conduct, etc.

Following all these different ideas about motivation it is always necessary to strive towards having motivated students who are eager to learn and acquire a foreign language almost effortlessly. Therefore, it may also be necessary to note some of the characteristics of a motivated learner (Penny Ur, 1996):

1. *Positive task orientation.* The learner is willing to tackle tasks and challenges, and has confidence in his or her success.
2. *Ego-involvement.* The learner finds it important to succeed in learning in order to maintain and promote his or her own (positive) self-image.
3. *Need for achievement.* The learner has a need to achieve, to overcome difficulties and succeed in what he or she sets out to do.
4. *High aspirations.* The learner is ambitious, goes for demanding challenges, high proficiency, top grades.
5. *Goal orientation.* The learner is very aware of the goals of learning, or of specific learning activities, and directs his or her efforts towards achieving them.

6. *Perseverance*. The learner consistently invests a high level of effort in learning, and is not discouraged by setbacks or apparent lack of progress.

7. *Tolerance of ambiguity*. The learner is not disturbed or frustrated by situations involving a temporary lack of understanding or confusion; he or she can live with these patiently, in the confidence that understanding will come later.

Because in the majority of schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina, teachers traditionally place a great deal of emphasis on grammar, in this paper we wanted to investigate whether the students too, specifically those of English language, also consider grammar an important part of their language proficiency and whether their success in a grammar test designed based on the course books they used can be said to be related to their motivation to learn English and grammar in particular.

Having in mind all previously mentioned statements about motivation, the present research, therefore, aims to test whether there is any correlation between the achievement in a grammar test taken by the first through fourth year university-level students of English as a foreign and their motivation to learn and acquire the language knowledge. The chief hypothesis is that such a correlation does exist. The assumption, not tested in the present paper though, is that the correlation is due to the traditional view of the importance of grammar held by the majority high school teachers in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

## **Methodology**

The current research involves university students from the first to the fourth year of study. They have been learning English for about 12 years on average, based on their responses and educational system they have completed prior to their enrollment in the Faculty of Philosophy. In reference to their social and educational background, they completed different high schools ranging from vocational to language oriented high schools. Having this in mind, this aspect will not be involved in the research. According to the High School Curriculum, the level of their English language is B2 upon the completion of high school and should rise up to C1/C2 upon the completion of their study. The number of participants is 47, the first and the fourth year being the most numerous with 10 and 17 students, respectively. Students were tested using online Google forms app and the results were coded and inserted into SPSS statistical analysis tool.

The test consisted of three parts. The first included questions regarding their general information and background, the second part was aimed at motivation-related questions and the third contained grammar questions. The motivation-related questions included were of the type:

- When your teacher tells you that you are going to work on grammar, you are thinking...;
- When I have to prepare for my grammar exam I feel...;
- I like learning grammar during my studies;
- Learning grammar improves my language learning skills!
- Knowing grammar is an important skill for future English teachers!
- Grammatical competence is an important part in foreign language teaching.

The responses were coded using Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree with the above statements.

In addition to these, two more questions were also included to give an opportunity to students to provide their own answer, which did not prove to be very exploited by the

participants. These questions addressed the situation in the classroom and the behavior of not only participant but also their teachers as well. These questions include:

- Are you engaged during a class where English grammar is taught?
- To what extent do you find grammar instruction useful?

Following this section, the survey continued with the grammar test including open-ended and multiple-choice questions.

Testing was performed using Google forms application and it was administered during the fall semester of 2019. Afterwards the data was collected, transferred into excel format and further encoded to ensure anonymity of the participants and to make it easier to further analyze data using SPSS statistical analysis tool.

## Results and discussion

The results of the research provided an insight into students' motivation and attitude toward grammar and its perception, particularly, whether it is a necessity or just an obstacle they need to overcome. It also provided helpful insight into the importance of proper teaching methods, the relationship between the teachers and the students and, more importantly, whether the students' perception of grammar changed over the years spent studying English, based on the responses given by the students of all four years of English study.

The results of the descriptive analysis are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Cumulative data

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
IG	14	54.48	83.33	67.1229	7.84558
IIG	4	66.02	80.13	75.0000	6.37128
IIIG	9	55.13	85.26	76.5656	9.07619
IVG	16	51.92	82.69	72.9563	8.78749
Valid N (list wise)	4				

Looking more closely at Table 1 it can be noticed that there is a significant discrepancy in the number of points scored per year. This deviation is the most significant in the case of third-year students, which shows that we have the greatest difference among students scoring the highest and the lowest score during testing.

Based on the results of one-sample test presented in Table 2, and the difference between the lowest and the highest score it may be concluded that the achieved scores per study year belong to the normal distribution.

Table 2 - One-sample test results

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
IG	32.012	13	.000	67.12286	62.5930	71.6528
IIG	23.543	3	.000	75.00000	64.8619	85.1381
IIIG	25.308	8	.000	76.56556	69.5890	83.5421
IVG	33.209	15	.000	72.95625	68.2737	77.6388

This table also shows that second year students scored the best, followed by third year students. For further analysis, it is necessary to address the issue per study year individually. Therefore, in order to determine whether there is any correlation between their results in grammar tests and their motivation represented in their responses to the questions related to motivation, we will look at the correlation tables for each year individually.

Table 3 - First year correlation results

Correlations										
		Percentage score	Going grammar	Engaged class	Instruction useful	Prepare grammar	Like grammar	Grammar improves	Knowing grammar	Grammatical competence
Percentage score	Pearson Correlation	1	.358	.564*	-.763**	.003	-.644*	.060	.119	.524
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.208	.036	.002	.993	.013	.837	.686	.055
	N	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	14

Table 3 shows the results of the correlation analysis of the score among first year students. In this respect we can notice that there is statistically significant correlation ( $<0.05$ ) between the grammar score and motivation questions - Are you engaged during a class where English grammar is taught? - To what extent do you find grammar instruction useful? And I like learning grammar during my studies. The rest of the questions did not show any significant correlation result. There is also the possibility for external influences in teacher-student relationship or the students' previous knowledge, which are not discussed in this paper.

Table 4 - Second year correlation results

Correlations										
		Percentage score	Going grammar	Engaged class	Instruction useful	Prepare grammar	Like grammar	Grammar improves	Knowing grammar	Grammatical competence
Percentage score	Pearson Correlation	1	-.247	-.814	.940	-.491	-.520	-.403	.537	-.403
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.753	.186	.060	.509	.480	.597	.463	.597
	N	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4

When it comes to the second year students, correlation Table 4 indicates that there is no statistically significant result ( $<0.05$ ) in respect to the correlation between the score in the grammar test and the motivation questions.

Table 5 - Third year correlation results

Correlations										
		Percentage score	Going grammar	Engaged class	Instruction useful	Prepare grammar	Like grammar	Grammar improves	Knowing grammar	Grammatical competence
Percentage score	Pearson Correlation	1	-.076	.386	-.262	-.384	.090	.283	-.359	-.121
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.845	.304	.496	.308	.818	.461	.342	.757
	N	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9

The results of the third year students are in respect to correlation results similar to the second year students and are presented in Table 5. However, the only difference is in the connection to the question about class engagement which has borderline result.

Table 6 - Fourth year correlation results

Correlations										
		Percentage score	Going grammar	Engaged class	Instruction useful	Prepare grammar	Like grammar	Grammar improves	Knowing grammar	Grammatical competence
Percentage score	Pearson Correlation	1	-.399	-.105	-.142	-.356	-.171	-.221	-.105	-.420
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.126	.698	.599	.176	.527	.411	.698	.106
	N	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16

Fourth year students continue the trend of no correlation between the motivation questions and the grammar test score. However, the discrepancy between the two is even greater than with the third year students.

Overall, the results presented show the higher the study year, the smaller the correlation between the motivation questions and the test score. The reason may be attributed to the fact that, because they are exposed to the English language in a variety of ways and course contents, higher level students, i.e. students studying English for two, three and four years, see grammar not as a separate competence, but as an integral part of English language proficiency. More importantly, they deviate from the traditional belief still present among the freshmen students, that grammar is and should be the focus of language learning. The freshmen students come from high school where grammar is taught usually in direct method and thus possibly poses a difficulty for most of students. Therefore, their perception may be that grammar is complicated and difficult to acquire. However, during their years of study, grammar as such is no longer presented to the students directly and explicitly with such a great focus. Hence, the students' perception changes as they progress in their studies. This could also be the reason behind such great difference among the first and fourth year students.

## Conclusion

The primary intention of this paper was to determine whether there was any correlation between the achievement in a grammar test taken by the first through fourth year university-level students of English as a foreign and their motivation to learn and acquire the language knowledge. The chief hypothesis was that such a correlation did exist. However, the statistical analysis has shown that such a correlation between the student's motivation and their success at the grammar test exists only in reference to the freshmen students, which means that our hypothesis has only been partially confirmed. Such correlation does not exist in reference to the second, third and fourth year students through, meaning that our hypothesis in that respect has been refuted. The perception of grammar changes as students advance through their study year. They do not see it as a separate competence, but as an integral part of language proficiency, which should be the case. The drawback of this study is that it did not investigate all aspects of student motivation. Those are the issues that will need to be taken into account in some other future research that should possibly include more participants and be conducted in more than one university.

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## POVEZANOST MOTIVACIJE STUDENATA U UČENJU ENGLESKOG JEZIKA I NJIHOVOG USPJEHA NA GRAMATIČKOM TESTU

### Sažetak

*Motivacija je važan faktor u usvajanju bilo kojeg, pa i stranog jezika. Poznavanje stranog jezika studenata zavisi od njihove motivacije da uče sve aspekte jezika, uključujući i gramatiku. Može se reći da se u školama u Bosni i Hercegovini prevelika pažnja poklanja učenju i podučavanju gramatike, te da je gramatika i dalje dominantan faktor na osnovu kojeg se procjenjuje nečije poznavanje stranog jezika. Cilj ove studije je istražiti da li postoji korelacija između uspjeha na gramatičkom testu među studentima prve, druge, treće i četvrte godine engleskog kao stranog jezika i njihove motivacije da uče taj jezik. Glavna hipoteza je da takva korelacija postoji. Pretpostavka, koja međutim nije testirana u ovom radu, jeste da uzrok te povezanosti leži u tradicionalnom viđenju važnosti gramatike, kakvo ima većina nastavnika u srednjim školama u Bosna i Hercegovini.*

*Ključni pojmovi: motivacija, gramatika, učenje stranog jezika*