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Motivation towards learning French among undergraduate students in Thailand

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Abstract

The main objective of this research was to study factors contributing to the increase in happiness and motivation towards learning French among Thai undergraduate students in Thailand using the Socio educational Model to analyse the situations. French is one of the important languages and is used across the globe. However, for some learners in Thailand, French is only the second foreign language following English. Through experience as a French lecturer at the tertiary level, the researcher found that learners had the motivation to choose French as their major at university, but after they had started to learn for a certain period, the motivation began to decline. For some learners, they lost their motivation towards learning French and eventually changed their study plan. For this problem, the researcher became interested in studying the attitudes towards the French language and learning experience of the learners in order to seek supportive and corrective guidelines so that the learners continue to hold the motivation towards learning French. It was found that the motivation type towards choices to learn French was Instrumental Motivation. It meant learning French for employment opportunities. Most learners had positive attitudes towards French learning and French speaking communities. The learners wanted to have experience in using a foreign language particularly in Europe in order to learn the customs that were different from the Thai counterpart. In general, the learners demonstrated positive attitudes towards French learning at the university, also towards the lecturers and the course.

Keywords: Motivation; amotivation; French language; learning French as a foreign language.

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1. Introduction

Despite being the language that is used around the world, for some learners, French is only the second foreign language following English in Thailand. Besides, Asian languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, or even Vietnamese and Khmer began to play a role following the inception of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Previous research related to the causes of motivation towards learning French as a foreign language by Eiammongkhonsakun (2016), which was a qualitative study, indicated that more than half of the sampling group thought about giving up on learning French. This was based on numerous reasons including advantages of learning other foreign languages, difficulty in the principles of French, lack of confidence in terms of achievement, or even lack of a close friend who would study French of which this was a specific problem in Thai learners. However, some learners would like to learn French as a foreign language because of admiration in French art and culture.

The research agreed with Dornyei (1998) who stated that a study on motivation was complex and each context of the study held its own characteristics. This means it can be studied from various perspectives based on the foreign language of interest, which plays a different role in each society. For example, a study related to motivation towards learning French in the context of Thai learners may be different to that of the context associated with French learning in England. Thus, the researcher is of the opinion that a qualitative study based on the aforementioned method would allow better understanding of the current situations as well as revealing positive and negative factors affecting choices of learning French at the university level. Therefore, the objective of this research was to study the motivation towards learning French among Thai undergraduate students in Thailand. After analysisng theories relevant to motivation written by Keblawi (2011), the researcher selected the Motivational Theory, which concentrates on an educational context as proposed by Gardner (2010) because it focuses on the integration of learners in a society or a situation where a second language is used.

2. Socioeducational model

The researcher chose to study the Socioeducation Model (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003) because the research findings of the study on causes of motivation towards learning French in Thailand (Eiammongkhonsakun, 2016) indicated that most learners chose to learn French because they wanted to be able to communicate in French for employment opportunities or further study in a French speaking country. Consequently, participation in an L2 communication became the goal of the learners and the attitudes towards the French speaking community could have been an indicator for identifying the type and level of motivation towards learning French. The Socioeducational Model meets the objective of this study, which focused on three primary components including motivation, integrativeness and attitudes towards a learning situation. Masgoret and Gardner (2003) explained that motivation constituted a direct effect upon success of the learners whilst integrativeness and attitudes towards a learning situation were correlated and considered as a driving factor for the learners to continue learning a foreign language.

This model places a specific emphasis on the context of learning a foreign language. On the contrary, the Self-Determination Theory (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991, Ryan & Deci, 2000A, Ryan & Deci, 2000B, Ryan & Deci, 2000C) pays attention to the cognitive perspective without the focus on the educational context. However, the Self-Determination Theory shows that there are different types of motivation based on the reason for a specific activity. For instance, choosing to learn French because of the admiration in the language and the culture of France is Intrinsic Motivation whereas being forced

to learn French is Amotivation, and learning French to achieve good grades is Extrinsic Motivation. These examples are useful for the study focusing on the causes of motivation to participate in an activity.

2.1. Motivation

The researcher agreed with Rueda and Demb (1995) who claimed that students' acquisition was a study related to motivation. As a result, the focus of this kind of study should be on why the learners choose to learn or participate in an activity rather than identifying what the learning or activity participation periods are. Gardner (1985) and Masgoret and Gardner (2003) suggested that the motivation towards learning language was related to three factors. The first was the desire to achieve learning objectives. In order to achieve, effort had to play as a second factor. The final factor was attitude in which the learners had to hold a positive one towards learning language particularly French for this study. In the study of learning motivation, Gardner (1985) divided motivation into two types: Integrative Motivation and Instrumental Motivation. Integrative Motivation was the learners' desire to communicate using French or the learners' ability to happily become integrated in a French speaking society. Instrumental Motivation meant the need to learn French for employment purposes such as employment opportunities and family communication.

2.2. Integrativeness

Integrativeness (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003) is willingness to learn a foreign language including being involved in a situation where French is used for communication. The study on Integrativeness of each individual may be divided into three categories. The first is attitudes towards the target language group or attitudes towards a French speaking society. A French speaking country provides a broader definition than 'Francophonie' that many learners may mistake it for France. In fact, 'Francophonie' includes any country where French is used for domestic communication and is related to France through history in terms of culture, military or politics. Thailand is only a French speaking country. It is not considered 'Francophonie' (Gonthier, Morgienztern, Pontault & Woff, 2007). Regardless of this, the researcher predicted that the group sample held positive attitudes towards a French speaking community; therefore, they chose to learn French.

The second category is interest in foreign languages. It means an interest of a learner towards learning a foreign language. A learner who is interested in language or even a person who has a need to learn language would have more motivation towards learning compared to a learner who prefers to learn other fields of study. This is also true for a person who has no positive motivation towards learning language. Through experience as a lecturer of French as a foreign language, the researcher found that a number of people who chose to study language already had appreciation in learning it. However, the choice of a particular language depended on a personal interest such as accent, pronunciation, culture, art and fashion.

The third category is integrative orientation. It is the various reasons, which drive a learner to choose to learn a particular language. Gardner (1985) and Masgoret and Gardner (2003) indicated that integrative orientation was different from another type of motivation, which encouraged learners to do or attempt to do something of their desire and that something made them happy. This type was Intrinsic Motivation according to the Self-Determination Theory (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991, Ryan & Deci, 2000A, Ryan & Deci, 2000B, Ryan & Deci, 2000C). Therefore, integrative orientation is Extrinsic Motivation that is derived from various types of regulation.

2.3. Attitudes toward a learning situation

A learning situation according to Gardner (1985; 2001) is divided into the course and the lecturer. These two components directly affect the level of motivation towards learning. Some learners may have a high level of motivation in the beginning, but this decreases when in a situation does not contribute to learning. This may be because of a personal desire such as the content of the subject does not meet the personal desire or the learning activities do not suit the personality of the learner. Other factors that

affect the decline in motivation include classroom environment that is not suitable for learning as well as team-working with classmates who do not pay attention in class. On the contrary, a learner who lacks motivation or has a low level of motivation in the beginning may increase the motivation when the learner is in a situation that is suitable for learning. Therefore, a study on external factors may be of significance in relation to forming or, at least, maintaining the level of motivation of the learner. This is because the more motivation the learner has, the more effort the learner will put in to achieve the objective in spite of the fact that there may be much to learn and a number of obstacles.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sampling group

The researcher selected 15 participants by asking for their willingness in order to study their motivation towards learning French at the undergraduate level. All of the participants were in their 3^{rd*} year of the study. The reason for selecting these participants at this level came to the fact that it was during the period when the participants had been able to adjust themselves and had some experience in learning at the undergraduate level. As a consequence, the participants would have been able to express their opinions against the questions clearly and most accurately. The participants consisted of two male students and 13 female students. Their ages ranged between 20-22 years old. All of the participants started learning French during their high school level and they have chosen French as their major at the undergraduate level. They were also at A2-B1 levels in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Conseil de l'Europe, 2005). During the time of the data collection, the participants had already completed 13 French courses. There were two courses that the participants had not known the results: French Listening and Speaking 2 and Translation 1. Therefore, only the results of 11 French courses were provided and based on six groups as follows:

- 1. French Language (FR 1 FR 5)
- 2. French reading and writing (RW)
- 3. Basic oral French (BO) and French listening and speaking (LS 1)
- 4. French civilization (FC)
- 5. French Phonetics (FP)
- 6. 17th 18th century French literature (LIT)

Since the Grade Point Average (GPA) may have an impact upon the attitudes towards learning language and learning French, the researcher had grouped the participants in the format of S1-S15 by calculating the GPAs for the above courses from the highest (S1) to the lowest (S15). The GPAs of the participants were 0-4 as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. GPA for French courses of the participants

	Course											
Student	FR 1	FR2	FR3	FR4	FR5	RW	BO	LS1	FC	FP	LIT	GPA
S1	4	3.5	4	4	4	3	3.5	3.5	3.5	4	4	3.77
S2	3.5	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	4	3	3.68
S3	4	4	4	4	4	3.5	2.5	3	4	3	3	3.55
S4	3.5	3	3.5	3.5	4	4	3	3	4	4	3	3.50
S5	3.5	3.5	4	3.5	3.5	3	3	2.5	3.5	3.5	3	3.32
S6	3.5	3	3.5	3.5	4	2.5	3	3	3.5	3	3	3.23
S7	4	3	3	3.5	3.5	3.5	3	3.5	3	2.5	2.5	3.18
S8	3.5	2.5	3.5	4	4	3	2.5	2.5	3	3	3	3.14
S9	3	2.5	3	2.5	3.5	\mathbf{w}^{\dagger}	2.5	3	4	1.5	2.5	2.80
S10	2	1.5	3	3	3	2.5	2	2.5	4	2.5	3.5	2.68
S11	2.5	1.5	2.5	1	2.5	3	3	2.5	2.5	3	3	2.45
S12	2	1	2.5	2	2.5	3	2	2.5	3	2.5	3	2.36
S13	2	1.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	3	2	2.5	3	1.5	2.5	2.32

^{*} An undergraduate program in Thailand is 4 years.

[†] withdraw

S14	2.5	1.5	2	1	2	1	2.5	2.5	3	3	3	2.09
S15	2	1	2.5	1.5	2.5	0	2.5	2	3.5	2	3	2.05

3.2. Interview

The interviews were conducted in Thai to allow the participants to express their opinions clearly and most accurately against their personal feelings. The questions were open-ended questions divided into two parts based on the theory of Gardner. The first part focused on integrativeness including eight main questions as follows:

- 1. Is your reason to learn French a need, a passion or a desire? Why?
- 2. Did the results of your French learning at the high school level affect your decision to choose French major at the university or not? Please explain.
 - 3. Why did you choose to study French major at the university?
 - 4. Do you think learning French is a good value in the Thai society or not? Why?
 - 5. Are French speaking countries good places for work or not? Why?
 - 6. Are French speaking countries good places for further education or not? Why?
 - 7. Is News related to French speaking countries worth studying or not? Why?
 - 8. Are the cultures of French speaking countries worth studying or not? Why?

The second part focused on the attitudes towards the learning situation, which was divided into two sections: the lecturer and the course. During the interviews, the researcher asked the participants to express their opinions about the particulars in which they were satisfied and dissatisfied with the situation related to their own learning. The lecturer section was divided into the characteristics of the lecturer and the classroom management of the lecturer. The course section was divided into courses, learning activities both in-class and outside-class, and learning environment.

4. Analysis

The data analysis was divided into three parts based on the Socioeducational Model (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003): motivation, integrativeness and attitudes towards a learning situation. These were to study the motivation and the attitudes towards French, learning and French speaking society.

4.1. Motivation

Following the criterion for student admissions at the undergraduate level, which requires that French major students have prerequisite knowledge of French; therefore, all of the participants of the research were the ones who had learned French since high school. This resulted in the analysis of motivation towards learning French being divided into two time periods: choices to learn French at the high school level and at the undergraduate level. This was because the researcher believed the reason for choosing to learn French at the undergraduate level was correlated to the attitudes of the participants towards learning French at the high school level. Further, based on the interviews with 15 participants, only two were of the opinion that learning French at the high school level did not affect their reason for choosing to learn French at the undergraduate level. 10 participants believed that they chose to learn French at the undergraduate level because they had good grades at the high school level. They were convinced that this was the right direction and their future would be good if they continued this path. Two participants' opinions were slightly different because they did not focus directly on French learning. Rather, their opinions were based on the fact that having good grades provided better chances of passing the admissions* exam regardless of the field of study. On the contrary, one participant stated having low grades in French; therefore, the participant failed to be accepted to study in the field the participant intended to get into so this participant had to continue choosing to learn

 $[^]st$ Admissions to study at the undergraduate level in Thailand after completing high school.

French. As a result, it may be said that the reasons for choosing to learn French for these participants were not Intrinsic Motivation.

At the high school level, the participants provided the reasons for choosing to learn French as follows. Six participants wanted to learn based on desire, S8 and S12 had Instrumental Motivation to choose to learn French, and both of them agreed that knowing an additional language other than English would provide them better chances of employment compared to other people. S1, S2, S5 and S10 had Integrative Motivation. They explained that there were other choices of languages such as Chinese, Japanese and German, but they chose to learn French because they liked French pronunciation, culture, films and fashion. S1 emphasised that knowing French seemed better than knowing other languages. S2 believed that French grammar was relatively similar to English grammar, which made it easier to understand in comparison to other languages. S2, S6, S7, S13 and S14 liked French because it was a beautiful language and France was a beautiful country. These participants also liked French culture. S13 showed Instrumental Motivation by explaining that having relatives in France making the participant want to be able to communicate with the relatives. Four participants chose to learn French based on need. S3 and S9 had to learn French because their schools did not offer other languages. Thus, this decision was derived from Amotivation (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier & Ryan, 1991, Ryan & Deci, 2000A, Ryan & Deci, 2000B, Ryan & Deci, 2000C). However, the decisions of S11 and S15 came from Instrumental Motivation in which both participants believed that knowing French would provide easier employment opportunities because there were not many people who knew French, which meant less competition.

In order to study at the undergraduate level in Thailand, students have to pass an examination called 'Admission' and the exam results may be used to choose the rank of a faculty as well as a major at a university. Students are allowed to choose four places, and surprisingly, no participants of this research stated that they chose to learn French. Nine participants (S1, S3, S4, S6, S9, S10, S11, S12 and S15) imparted they chose other majors such as English, tourism, music or other faculties such as communication art, education in their earlier priorities while French was their last priority, but they were accepted into French. However, every participant confirmed they did not accept to learn French based on force, in fact, after learning French they became happy. S7, S8, S13 and S14 had Instrumental Motivation. This means they choose the French major because they intended to use it for employment opportunities. S2 and S5 chose to learn French because of their Integrative Motivation. They chose it because they were passionate about France in all aspects; therefore, they would like to be able to communicate in French.

4.2. Integrativeness

The Based on the above discussion, the Socioeducational Model looks at integrativeness in three dimensions. First, most participants had the interest in foreign languages other than French. There were only four participants, S8, S10, S13 and S15, who claimed that they did not like learning language. Nevertheless, after learning French S8 stated having a positive attitude towards French. S1 stated knowing French was a good quality in the society. S4 and S6 stated they only liked learning English and French. S7 stated liking learning European languages because of the existing background in English. This was similar to S3, S5 and S12 who enunciated they did not want to learn other languages at the undergraduate level because of the lack in background knowledge. S15 liked the languages with similar pronunciation to French and did not like pronunciation of Chinese.

The second was related to the attitudes towards the target language group. The researcher focused on studying the attitudes towards French speakers both in Thailand and in foreign countries. This was divided into five areas: 1) attitudes towards learning French in Thailand, 2) interest in working in a French speaking country, 3) interest in further education in a French speaking country, 4) interest in news from a French speaking country and 5) interest in the culture of a French speaking country. The findings indicated that most participants believed they chose to learn French because it was a good value in the Thai society. S2, S5, S6 and S12 stated that this was the case because there were less students who learn French; therefore, knowing French would be an advantage. Only S1, S3, S7, S11 and

S13 did not agree that it was a good value because it was similar to learning other fields of study. In relation to working in a French speaking country, based on the participants, they mostly thought of countries in Europe and Canada. However, S3, S11 and S15 refused to go to work in these countries because of the concerns related to culture and racism. They were afraid of being looked down. Their main reason of interest in going was to practice French in a real situation and high salary. Similarly, 13 participants wanted to further their study in a French speaking country because they wanted to improve the knowledge they learned in a real situation as well as employment. Notwithstanding, S4 and S5 were interested in learning the local language and culture of the country other than learning French. As for receiving general news, 10 participants stated that it was interesting to learn the news because it was general knowledge. Particularly, if it was news related to tourism and health technology. Five participants stated that they were not really interested in the news because it was not necessary for them. However, if this was related to the French culture, S14 expressed an interest in it. The area that the participants were most interested in was food. S3, S6 and S7 talked about integrativenss in terms of intercultural awareness, which would allow them to adjust themselves in the new society. According to this research, S2 also had Instrumental Motivation because he explained that knowing a new culture may be beneficial to employment opportunities. Further, S15 had an interest in cross cultural knowledge by stating that, in one French speaking society, French may be used as in any other French speaking society, but the cultures may be different. Therefore, the comparison of the differences may be interesting.

The last was integrative orientation, which contained four main topics. The first was communicative competence in which it was found that all of the participants wanted to improve their French communicative skills learned from the high school level. The reasons that most participants agreed upon were future employment opportunities, intention to go to France and intention to communicate with foreign nationals using French. The findings in the second topic related to employment opportunities confirmed that the previously discussed attitudes of the participants who learned French because of the benefits for employment opportunities. On the contrary, the third reason from the question which asked about the passion in learning grammar, only five participants responded that they chose to learn French at the undergraduate level because of the passion in grammar. S2 explained that because French grammar was different from Thai grammar, which made French a challenging language to learn. All of the five participants, S2, S3, S5, S8 and S9 imparted that learning French grammar was fun. The last reason was related to culture. Only S4, S8 and S9 did not choose to learn French because of the passion in the French culture. What interested the participants most was French gastronomy. The other was lifestyle, especially, the cultivation of children that allowed more freedom to decision-making compared to the Thai society. Two other interests were fashion and cinema. S2, S5 and S14 believed that knowing and understanding intercultural knowledge was beneficial to adjusting into a given society. This was considered a positive attitude and indicated that the participants had the intention to be involved in the French speaking society.

4.3. Attitudes toward a learning situation

A study on the opinions about the learning situation of the participants was divided into the lecturer and the course. Based on the interviews, the participants had a positive attitude towards the lecturers. All of them stated that the lecturers had profound knowledge and were dedicated to the teaching as well as being very active lecturers. This constituted a good model and encouraged the participants to become enthusiastic. In addition to the academic aspect, the participants stated that they were able to seek advice from the lecturers about any issues and the lecturers could provide good advice in which the participants were able to apply it for future use. Furthermore, S7 stated personal appreciation in some lecturers' French dress styles. The aspect that many participants were not satisfied with was on some lecturers who put pressure upon the students instead of motivating the students to learn. Also, the other learning situation caused by the lecturers was teaching management. More than half of the participants stated that they were satisfied with the fact that the lecturers tried to create learning environment, which allowed every student to participate, follow the content and conclude the knowledge by himself or herself before the lecturers would explain to provide more clarification again.

Besides, the lecturers added personal experience they gained during their study in France and other experience related to the course. This made the learning environment more interesting. S14 added that the lecturers taught in an easy sequence allowing easier understanding whereas S11 liked the way that the lecturers informed in advance of the content to be taught. This allowed time for students to make preparation. S6 was satisfied with the lecturers who followed up on the students to check their understanding. The teaching materials were found to most attract attention of the participants were video and listening materials. Games also helped to make the learning environment livelier. The teaching technique that did not create any motivation was lengthy teaching sessions of some lecturers. This did not allow the participants to participate in class but simply take notes and practice pronunciation as the class. Furthermore, some lecturers who paid more attention to certain group of students created some degree of dissatisfaction.

Another learning situation based on the Socioeducation Model was the attitudes towards the course. The participants held certain agreement that they liked the French Language course because it focused on the grammar and the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. For French Listening and Speaking, S1 added that there should be more listening and speaking activities because currently there was insufficient practice. The course the participants liked the least was Translation. This was because reading and translating articles as well as using the language to respond to each context were difficult. As for the French Literature course, its content was far from reality and the participants did not know how to use it in real life. The activities that most participants were satisfied with was group work regardless of it being reading articles together and summarising comprehension or discussing their opinions in class. Individual pronunciation practices, French listening practices and skill practices through games could also increase the motivation level. These techniques increased the level of motivation for the participants. Additionally, S7 and S13 stated that they were satisfied with the lecturers who informed in advance of the content to be taught in the next class so that they would make preparation for it. The activity that could increase and decrease the motivation in learning French was presentation in from of the class. All of the participants stated that the learning environment that increased the motivation in learning was the participation of everyone in class in relation to answering questions. On the other hand, when the lecturer was the only one who talked in class using a monotone voice, it made the participants lose their concentration and attention to the class.

5. Conclusion

All the findings of the research indicated the participants had positive attitudes towards the language, the culture and the French society. They also wanted to be involved in "endolingual" environment. Grades did not have any impact upon these attitudes and this was a good beginning. Therefore, forming motivation to learn is not an impossible task. It is the lecturers who have to understand the learners by noticing their characteristics and asking their expectations in the courses along with the set objectives. This is to create learning environment that is interesting and most beneficial to the learners. However, the causes of why the students do not prioritise learning French when seeking admissions to study at the undergraduate level may be something that should be studied further. The researcher suspects that it is due to the role of the French language in the Thai society, which is insignificant or needing more promoting. Thus, choosing to learn French is simply a value that has been practised with the hope for employment opportunities. Additionally, understanding among students should be formed so that they know language is simply a communication tool. Looking for employment with no other skills other than communication may be difficult. This may push the students to reach out for other knowledge to support their language learning, which will make them more proficient students.

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