Engaging English language learners through imagery and motivational activities

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This research study analyses the impact of imagery on the motivation of fifty-nine English-major students in the first year of their degree in Modern Languages at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, using Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS). The main objective is to explore the changes in the participants' motivation by observing what the students' L2MSS looks like before and after carrying out language learning activities based on imagery.

The present study was carried out by fifty-nine students (14 male, 34 female and 2 non-binary) enrolled in an obligatory integrated skills English course (Inglés I), which requires a B1 level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference. The initial level test indicates participants level varies from B1 (30) to B2 (27) and C2 (2). Both the level test and the L2MSS questionnaire were completed at the beginning and at the end of the course. The statement-type instrument used responses measured by the six-point Likert scales designed by You, Dörnyei, and Cziser (2016) and Gardner (2004) and allowed us to analyse the following variables: 'intended learning effort' as the dependent variable, 'ideal L2 Self', 'Ought-to L2 Self' and 'L2 learning experience' as the main components of the L2MSS, and other relevant variables usually related to the L2MSS. The IBM SPSS programme (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 25.0 was used in order to analyse the data.

In the first part of the course participants carried out several activities aimed at raising awareness about the role of imagery and motivation when learning languages. Students watched a video in which Dórnyei explained vision and carried out a role model roleplay activity (Dörnyei & Hadfield 2014) which invited them to first observe two successful language learners and then imagine themselves as such by recording a video and interviewing each other.

The descriptive statistics of the data show similar results in students' motivational levels at the beginning and at the end of the course, which indicates Modern Languages participants are strongly motivated to learn English as a foreign language and which confirms findings obtained in other studies (Brady 2009, Author 1). However, correlations and lineal regressions indicate that the activities carried out had a clear impact on students' motivation as 'intended learning effort' correlates with more variables in the second part and these are stronger. Furthermore, although the linear regression shows significant results in the first part (Sig. .000; R Pearson .667; R Square .445; F Change 4.396), in the second one these results improve considerably (Sig. .000; R Pearson .804; R Square .646; F Change 9.951). This time 65% of the variables explain the effort students make when learning English as a foreign language.

In conclusion, data analysis reveals the participants in the survey are highly motivated and engaged in the learning process. It also shows the importance of introducing motivational activities related to imagery in the English class as results indicate their positive impact on students' motivation.

Keywords: L2 Motivational Self System, imagery, English L2, language learning, motivation.

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