

Language Learning Motivation

Abstract

This study aimed to measure how authentic material motivates students to perform well and have positive attitudes toward foreign language learning. Participants were 32 eighth grade students at Aquinas College in Nassau the Bahamas. Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (adapted Gardner, 2004), interviews, and open ended discussions were used.

Statement of the Problem

In an ever changing, global society, Bahamians have come to realize the importance of learning a foreign language. Additionally, the Bahamas government stands by its commitment to prepare its citizens to compete for jobs on a global scale. To this end, the National Spanish examination at the Junior High level will be re-introduced in 2016. Moreover, foreign language teachers are in search of innovative ways to motivate their students to not only excel in foreign language classes but also to retain information for longer periods rather than just being prepared for a test.

The idea of conducting this study came about from a lack of motivation on the part of some students in foreign language classes. Many of them suggested that their unfavorable grades were the result of not being interested in the lessons, the textbook being boring and difficult to understand and even more interesting that the lessons were not enjoyable. What stood out most was that some students felt that because they were not interested in careers where possessing the skill of speaking, reading or writing in Spanish were mandatory, they did not see the need to perform well.

Statement of the Purpose

This study sought to measure the attitudes and motivation as a result of the use of authentic material in language learning. Moreover, it discussed and examined the four types of motivation and how each may or may not have affected the success and attitudes of students toward language learning.

Literature Review

Many people assume that language learning is difficult. I-Cheng, Pei-Jui, Tzu-Pu, Hsing, Kuo-shu & Chung (2011) stated that, “language learners’ motivation could change from time to time, and the elements which influence motivation may vary from phase to phase” (p. 86). The study examined, “how aural authentic materials help to enhance learner motivation in a process-oriented conceptualization” (p. 86). The researchers uncovered that, “Aural authentic materials are beneficial in terms of initiating learner motivation because learners tend to have positive educational attitudes towards such materials and learners also attach more language related values to aural authentic materials” (p. 93).

Gardner (2005) states, “Motivation refers to the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid, and the degree of effort they will exert in this respect” (p. 3). Motivation also can be seen as a trait or characteristic of an individual (p. 14). With this in mind, he further asserts that highly motivated students perform better, they put forth more effort, are goal oriented and confident. To diagnose the motivation and attitudes of learners toward Language Learning, Gardner creates several versions of the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery which assess “Attitudes toward the Learning Situation, Integrativeness, Motivation and Language Anxiety and Instrumentality” (p. 10).

Ushioda (2013) notes that there are two kinds of motivation that shape language learners, “Motivation as a matter of choice and autonomy and as a matter of personally meaningful casual learning” (p. 1). According to Khorshidi and Nimchahi (2013), there are varying categories of motivation based on certain perspectives. Engin (2009) asserts that teaching and learning of a foreign language are dependent on positive motivation (p. 1035) He went on to say that

“Instrumental motivation is derived from a personal desire to know the native speakers of the target language and understanding their way of life” (p. 1035)

Living in a country such as the Bahamas, which is merely a dot on the world map, language learners whether intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, young Bahamians must be aware that possessing the skills of Reading, Writing, Speaking or being able to comprehend in a foreign language is like the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The job market requires individuals who are competent and well trained in order to meet the demands of a global and ever changing world.

Methods

Setting

Aquinas College was founded in 1957 under the direction of Sister Jean Patricia and five other Dominican Sisters. At present, Aquinas College has an enrollment of 495 students; including Bahamians and non-Bahamians. Undoubtedly, the guiding principles of Goodness, Discipline and Knowledge still reign supreme at this Catholic institution.

Participants

The participants of this study were 32 students (six males and 26 females) in the eighth grade at Aquinas College located in Nassau, Bahamas. Participants represented a cross section of the working/middle class of the Southwest District of Nassau, Bahamas.

Instruments

To conduct interviews and group discussions, an Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (adapted Gardner, 2004) questionnaire, a survey Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (adapted Gardner, 2004) and open ended questions were used to discuss the interests, attitudes and motivations which surround the participants' academic success and their overall feelings about language learning.

Procedures

Participants were surveyed individually, having to answer no more than 20 survey questions in an informal setting. Additionally, one-on-one and focus group interviews using open ended questions took place during various class sessions. Participants were also required to submit exit tickets after various lessons.

Analyses

Throughout the duration of this study, the data was analyzed via charts and tables illustrating data from surveys and questionnaires.

Results

This study aimed to investigate the attitudes and motivation of the participants towards language learning. Overall, there were no significant differences in the attitudes and motivation of the participants. The results of the initial questionnaire are presented in Table 1.

As opposed to the most preferred method of instruction by some educators, it was uncovered, that the participants preferred the instructional strategies used throughout the duration of the study as opposed to traditional methods of instruction (i.e chalk and talk). The results of the survey completed by participants during the second week of the study are presented in Table 2. Additionally, the majority of participants demonstrated extrinsic motivation as the main reason for favoring the subject due to the fact that Spanish was a pre requisite for future employment.

The results of the final survey are presented in Table 3. The participants of this study were members of the school's accelerated program. To this end, these individuals were intrinsically motivated to succeed despite varying factors. During informal group discussions participants mentioned their interest in Spanish for many reasons. Additionally individuals noted their desire to be proficient in all areas of the language.

Implications

The findings of this study yielded positive results. The purpose of the study was not to measure how much vocabulary was remembered or whether the participants would perform better on unit or vocabulary tests. The ultimate goal was accomplished because the participants enjoyed the presentations, they noted that Spanish would be a top choice for the duration of the academic career and they were receptive to the methods of instruction.

Gone are the days when chalk and talk was sufficient for inquiring minds. Presently, educators are now mandated to create and employ new and innovative methods of instruction which engage students in their academic pursuit.

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Table 1: Questionnaire: Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (adapted from Gardner, 2004)

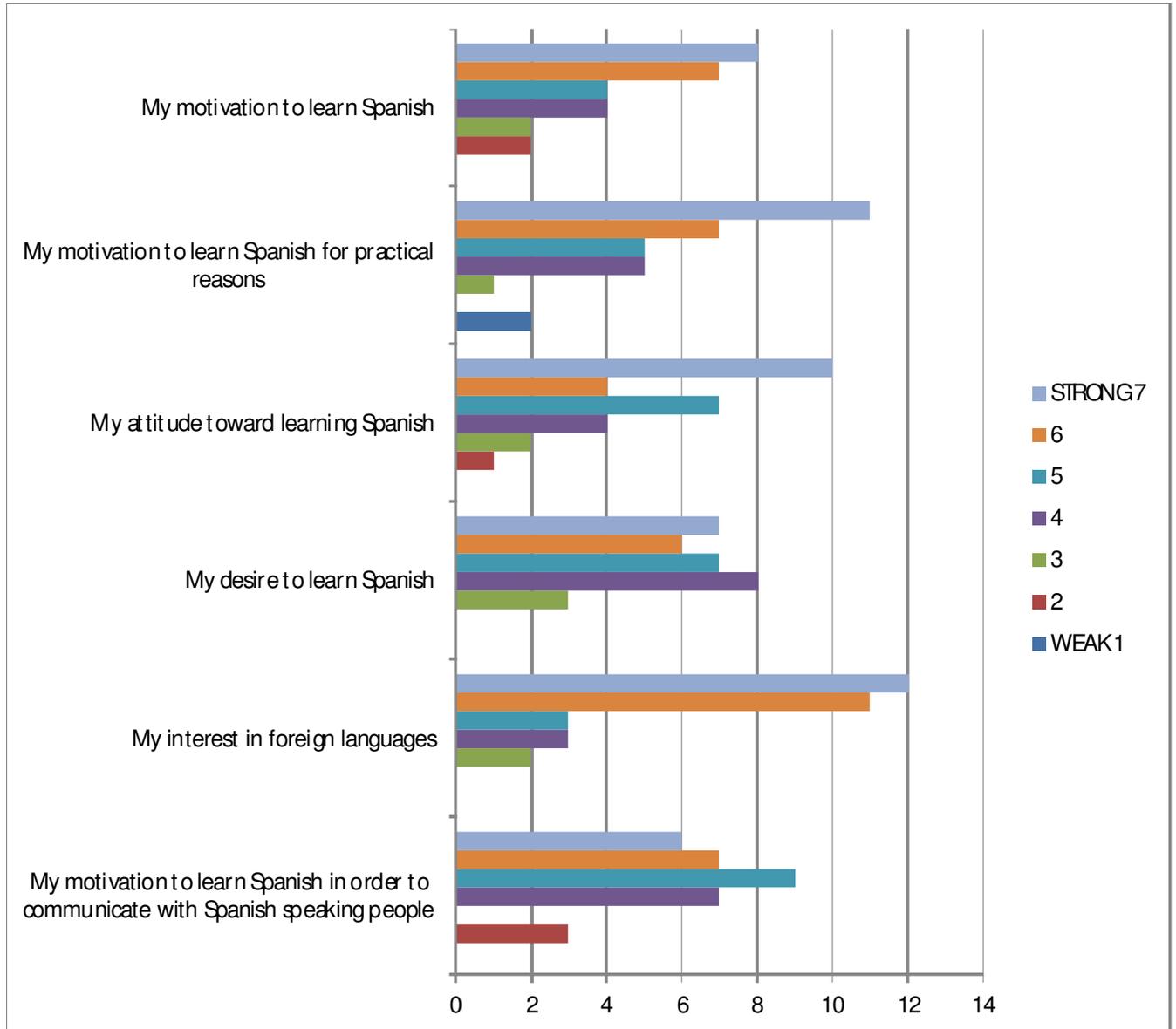


Table 2: Survey: Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (adapted from Gardner, 2004)

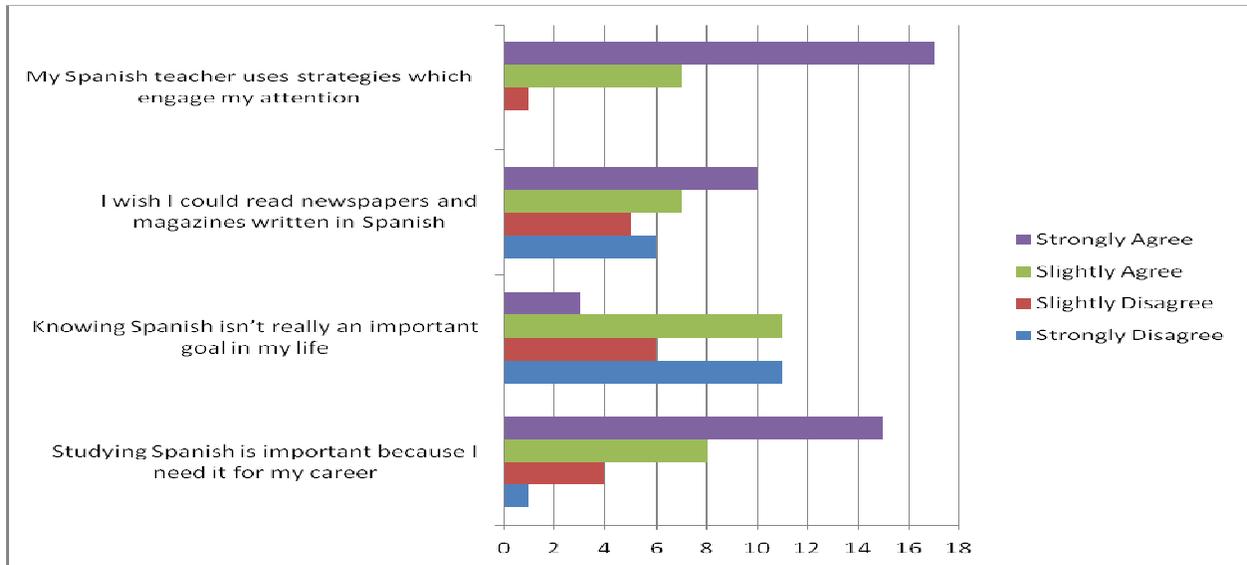


Table 3: Survey: Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (adapted from Gardner, 2004)

