Analyzing the Effectiveness of Learning Motivation in Enhancing Communicative Competence among Learners of Arabic as a Foreign Language in Brunei Darussalam: A Field Study at the Faculty of Usuluddin, Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the Communicative Arabic course in enhancing students' learning motivation and engagement in educational activities. Employing a descriptive-evaluative quantitative methodology, the research integrates statistical measurement with a nuanced pedagogical analysis of the psychological and behavioral dynamics associated with language acquisition. A purposive sample of twelve first-year students from the Faculty of Usuluddin at Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA) was selected, as they represent a key demographic actively involved in learning Arabic as a foreign language. The study utilized a structured, closed-ended questionnaire developed in alignment with well-established theories in educational psychology, including Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 2000), and Self-Regulated Learning Theory (Zimmerman, 2002). The instrument's validity was ensured through expert review, and its reliability was confirmed with a high Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.89, indicating strong internal consistency and statistical significance. The findings reveal that a significant majority of participants (88.3%) demonstrated high intrinsic motivation toward learning communicative Arabic. Additionally, 93.3% reported positive emotional attitudes toward the course, exhibiting the same high level of active participation in classroom activities (93.3%), alongside a strong commitment to completing homework assignments (91.7%). These indicators reflect the course's substantial pedagogical effectiveness and its capacity to foster learner motivation and constructive engagement. Such outcomes align with contemporary learner-centered educational paradigms that emphasize meaningful, participatory, and student-driven learning experiences. Based on these results, the study recommends a comprehensive redesign of language curricula to strengthen intrinsic motivational components and collaborative engagement. It further advocates for teacher training programs that equip educators with strategies grounded in student-centered learning principles. Moreover, it calls for the adoption of modern assessment tools focused on measuring self-engagement and cognitive regulation within second and foreign language learning contexts.

Keywords: Motivation, Communicative Arabic, Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA)

1. Introduction

The teaching of Arabic as a foreign language has witnessed significant growth across the globe, driven by the increasing demand for its acquisition for religious, cultural, and academic purposes. Within this global context, communicative competence has emerged as the central objective in language instruction, positioning the language not merely as a set of grammatical rules, but as a dynamic tool for meaningful interaction. However, in non-Arabic speaking environments, fostering this competence presents a formidable challenge, primarily due to the absence of authentic linguistic immersion (Canale & Swain, 1980, pp. 5–6).

Among the key psychological variables influencing learners' success in developing communicative competence, learning motivation stands out as a decisive factor. Contemporary literature underscores the critical role of motivation—particularly intrinsic motivation—as a powerful cognitive and behavioral driver that shapes the learner's engagement in educational activities and responsiveness to both formal and informal learning environments (Dörnyei, 2001, pp. 8–10; Gardner, 1985, pp. 10–15). In the context of Arabic language education, this factor becomes even more salient due to the language's structural complexity, its diglossic nature (Modern Standard Arabic and regional dialects), and the limited opportunities for real-world language use in non-Arabic settings.

Numerous prior studies have explored the impact of motivation on second language acquisition, variously focusing on cognitive and affective dimensions, or on the relationship between learning contexts and learners' productive competence. These studies consistently demonstrate that learners with strong intrinsic motivation and positive emotional orientation toward the language tend to achieve higher levels of communicative competence, particularly when engaged in learner-centered, communicative instructional settings (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, pp. 94–96).

It is within this framework that the present study seeks to address a research gap in the literature on Arabic language education in the Malay-speaking world. Specifically, it investigates the effectiveness of learning motivation in enhancing communicative competence among students of the Faculty of Usuluddin at Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA) in Brunei Darussalam—a prominent institution devoted to Arabic language instruction for non-native speakers within a culturally and linguistically diverse Islamic context.

This study aims to answer the following central research question:
To what extent is learning motivation effective in enhancing communicative competence in Arabic among students of the Faculty of Usuluddin, considering Arabic as a foreign language?

The research is grounded in the hypothesis that both intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation represent pivotal variables in the development of communicative competence. These motivational factors influence learners' academic behaviors, classroom interactions, and commitment to assigned tasks.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the empirical evaluation of motivation in a non-Arabic educational environment. Moreover, it offers pedagogical insights that may inform the development of curriculum design and instructional methods aligned with the cognitive and affective profiles of learners in the Malay-speaking context. The researchers hope that the findings will enrich academic discourse on Arabic as a foreign language and advance communicative teaching practices rooted in self-determined learning and active student participation.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a constellation of contemporary educational, psychological, and linguistic theories that aim to explain learner behavior and its relationship to the development of communicative competence in second language acquisition. These theoretical foundations guided both the construction of the research instrument and the interpretation of findings. The most pertinent theories include the following:

2.1.1 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, Self-Determination Theory explores the psychological dimensions that motivate individuals to engage in learning. It emphasizes the pivotal role of intrinsic motivation in promoting academic performance. According to the theory, learners who experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness are more likely to engage effectively in the learning process (Deci & Ryan, 1985, pp. 32–35). In this study, the high proportion of students demonstrating intrinsic motivation toward learning communicative Arabic aligns with one of the core tenets of SDT—that genuine motivation emerges from internal desire rather than external pressure.

2.1.2 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Ajzen's (2000) Theory of Planned Behavior is one of the most influential behavioral models for explaining the relationship between behavioral intentions and antecedent factors such as attitudes, beliefs, and perceived behavioral control. According to TPB, positive affective attitudes toward a subject—such as Communicative Arabic—contribute directly to learners' behavioral engagement and participation in related activities. This notion is corroborated by the study's findings, which highlight strong affective inclinations among students (Ajzen, 2000, pp. 665–688).

2.1.3 Self-Regulated Learning Theory (SRL)

Zimmerman (2002) conceptualizes self-regulated learning as a multidimensional process encompassing cognitive, behavioral, and emotional strategies by which students manage their own learning. The students' consistent completion of homework and active participation in classroom activities reflect the application of effective self-regulation strategies, such as goal-setting, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation (Zimmerman, 2002, pp. 65–70).

2.1.4 Communicative Competence Model

Proposed by Canale and Swain (1980), this model offers a comprehensive framework for the competencies required in effective linguistic communication. It includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic, and discourse competencies. The present study's field data revealed strong evidence of students' activation of communicative competence through classroom-based interactive tasks, affirming the significance of real-life contexts in supporting communicative language learning (Canale& Swain, 1980, pp. 5–6).

2.2 Literature Review

The current study is further supported by a critical review of recent scholarly literature that investigates the relationship between motivation and communicative competence, as well as effective pedagogical strategies for teaching Arabic as a foreign language. Notable contributions include:

- Gardner (1985), in his seminal work on motivation in second language learning, identified motivation as the most powerful predictor of learner success, especially in contexts lacking natural language immersion. The present study echoes his conclusions, as it reveals high levels of motivation among students toward learning Arabic (pp. 10–15).

- Dörnyei (2001) introduced an integrated model of educational motivation that encompasses psychological, social, and cognitive factors. He highlighted the central role of collaborative classroom environments, teacher behavior, and instructional context in shaping learners' motivation. This model is reflected in the strong indicators of classroom engagement and self-regulated behavior found in the present study (pp. 8–10).

- Richards and Rodgers (2014) emphasized in their influential work on language teaching methods the importance of interactive classroom activities and the use of real communication approaches in foreign language instruction. Their pedagogical vision aligns closely with the outcomes of this study, which reported high levels of student engagement in communicative Arabic activities (pp. 94–96).

- Alrabai (2016), in an applied study conducted in Saudi Arabia, asserted that motivation is the most influential factor in the acquisition of communicative competence. He recommended the cultivation of a psychologically supportive and emotionally responsive learning environment—an insight that resonates with the findings of this study.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-evaluative quantitative research design, recognized as one of the most suitable approaches in educational research aimed at measuring the effectiveness of psychological and behavioral variables—such as motivation—and their impact on student performance. This design enables both a detailed description and analytical evaluation of the educational phenomenon from the perspective of the participants, while assessing the extent to which learning indicators are achieved within a non-Arabic instructional environment.

The efficacy of this methodology has been substantiated in previous studies focusing on learning outcomes and student perceptions. Notably, Creswell (2014, pp. 155–159) recommended the use of descriptive quantitative methods in analyzing questionnaire-based data, while Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012, pp. 390–392) emphasized its importance in linking statistical results to pedagogical interpretations.

3.2. Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of all first-year students enrolled in the Faculty of Usuluddin at Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA) in Brunei Darussalam, who registered for the course Communicative Arabic during the 2024 academic semester. The total population comprised 30 students. Based on the nature and objectives of the study, a purposive sampling technique was employed to select a sample of 12 students who had completed the course—representing 40% of the total population.

Purposive sampling is well-suited to research that targets a specific group of participants with relevant cognitive and experiential attributes related to the research topic. As noted by Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016, pp. 2–3), such sampling allows for the extraction of preliminary, yet directionally meaningful, findings—especially in exploratory studies or those with unique educational dimensions.

3.3. Data Collection Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a structured closed-ended questionnaire, developed based on literature related to motivation in foreign language learning—particularly the models proposed by Deci & Ryan (1985) and Gardner (1985). The questionnaire items were adapted to suit the sociolinguistic context of Malay-speaking learners in an Arabic learning environment.

The instrument comprised items measuring multiple dimensions of motivation—including intrinsic, extrinsic, and behavioral aspects—and their relationship to students' engagement in both classroom and extracurricular activities. Face validity was confirmed through expert review by specialists in Arabic language education for non-native speakers. Reliability was established by calculating the internal consistency coefficient using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a reliability score of 0.89—a statistically acceptable value based on established standards in educational research (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994, p. 265).

3.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including weighted means and percentages, to determine students' levels of motivation and their responsiveness to various educational activities associated with the Communicative Arabic course. The statistical analysis

was conducted using SPSS software (version 26), applying appropriate statistical formulas to interpret students' attitudes and levels of engagement.

The analysis employed standard descriptive quantitative techniques, including frequency counts, percentages, and mean scores, using the formula:

$$P\ (\%) = (N \cdot 5\ \sum f\ i\ \cdot x\ i\ ) \times 100$$

Results were categorized into high, moderate, and low levels based on final index values, as recommended by Best & Kahn (2006, p. 389). Interpretation of the findings was grounded in pedagogical standards related to assessment quality in foreign language education programs.

Quantitative analysis was deemed the most appropriate approach for identifying accurate and actionable indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional program. As highlighted by McMillan & Schumacher (2010, pp. 149–150), this method is particularly critical in contexts where natural exposure to the target language is limited, thus underscoring the value of statistical analysis as a tool for monitoring educational performance.

4. Field Study: Quantitative Data Analysis and Discussion

This section presents an analysis of field data collected through a closed-ended questionnaire comprising multiple items designed to assess students' levels of motivation and engagement in instructional activities related to the Communicative Arabic course. The data were analyzed using relative statistical methods, with the weighted mean formula applied for accuracy and interpretability.

4.1. Students' Motivation Toward Learning Communicative Arabic

The results of the first item reveal that 50% of the participants (6 out of 12 students) strongly agreed that they possessed a high level of motivation to learn communicative Arabic, while 41.7% (5 students) expressed moderate agreement, and 8.3% (1 student) remained neutral. Notably, no respondents expressed disagreement or disapproval.

Using the weighted mean formula:

$$P(\%)= 12 \cdot 5\ (6 \cdot 5)+(5 \cdot 4)+(1 \cdot 3)\ \times 100= 60\ 53\ \times 100=88.3\%$$

The result indicates that 88.3% of the participants exhibit a high level of motivation to learn communicative Arabic. This outcome may be attributed to their intrinsic engagement in the learning process, aligning with the principles of Self-Determination Theory, which posits that autonomy in decision-making enhances intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985, pp. 32–35).

4.2. Affective Attitudes Toward the Communicative Arabic Course

According to the data, 66.7% of the students (8 respondents) reported a strong liking for the course, while 33.3% (4 respondents) indicated a moderate level of agreement. There were no instances of neutrality or disapproval.

$$P(\%)= 12{\cdot}5\ (8{\cdot}5)+(4{\cdot}4)\ \times 100= 60\ 56\ \times 100=93.3\%$$

This indicates that 93.3% of students hold positive emotional attitudes toward the course, reflecting the appeal of its content and its impact on learners' mental and emotional readiness for learning. This finding is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which posits that positive attitudes are strong predictors of behavior-related intentions in learning contexts (Ajzen, 2000, pp. 665–688).

4.3. Classroom Engagement: Participation in In-Class Activities

The data show that 66.7% of the students (8 participants) strongly agreed that they actively participated in the classroom activities assigned by their instructors, while 33.3% (4 participants) indicated moderate participation. No students reported neutrality or opposition.

$$P(\%)= 12{\cdot}5\ (8{\cdot}5)+(4{\cdot}4)\ \times 100= 60\ 56\ \times 100=93.3\%$$

This high percentage (93.3%) demonstrates the effectiveness of the participatory instructional environment and provides clear evidence of students' responsiveness to task-based teaching. It further supports the principles of active learning, where the execution of authentic tasks fosters deeper engagement. Numerous studies have underscored the importance of real-life linguistic practices in developing communicative competence (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, pp. 94–96).

4.4. Commitment to Homework Assignments

In response to their commitment to completing assigned homework, 58.3% of participants (7 students) reported a high level of engagement, while 41.7% (5 students) indicated moderate commitment.

$$P(\%)= 12{\cdot}5\ (7{\cdot}5)+(5{\cdot}4)\ \times 100= 60\ 55\ \times 100=91.7\%$$

The result reveals that 91.7% of students consistently fulfill their homework obligations, a strong indicator of academic discipline and personal responsibility. This behavior aligns with the principles of Self-Regulated Learning (SRL), which emphasizes learners' cognitive awareness and behavioral control in managing their own educational progress (Zimmerman, 2002, pp. 65–70).

5. Conclusion, Suggestions, and Recommendations

5.1. **Conclusion**

The quantitative analysis of the field data yielded several critical findings that significantly contribute to assessing students' motivation and engagement in the Communicative Arabic course. The main results are as follows:

- High levels of motivation toward learning Communicative Arabic:

The analysis revealed that 88.3% of the students exhibited a strong motivation to learn the subject. This elevated level of motivation can be attributed to students' sense of autonomy and intrinsic involvement in the learning process—core principles of the Self-Determination Theory, which posits that granting learners autonomy in decision-making fosters a deep, self-driven commitment to learning (Deci & Ryan, 1985, pp. 32–35).

- Positive affective attitudes toward the course:

Approximately 93.3% of students expressed varying degrees of fondness for the Communicative Arabic course, indicating its effectiveness in stimulating emotional and cognitive readiness for learning. This finding aligns with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which emphasizes that positive affective attitudes are strong predictors of expected learning behaviors (Ajzen, 2000, pp. 665–688).

- Effective classroom interaction and engagement in instructional activities:

The data showed that 93.3% of students actively participated in classroom activities, underscoring the success of task-based, interactive pedagogy and the high degree of student engagement in applied linguistic practices. This result is consistent with the communicative approach to language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, pp. 94–96).

- Strong commitment to completing homework assignments:

A substantial 91.7% of students demonstrated regular completion of homework tasks, indicating the presence of effective self-regulatory behavior characterized by discipline, awareness, and academic responsibility. This supports the principles of Self-Regulated Learning, which emphasizes the learner's cognitive awareness and self-discipline in managing their educational journey (Zimmerman, 2002, pp. 65–70).

5.2. Suggestions

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are proposed:

- Foster autonomy-driven learning environments:

Encourage students to make decisions related to planning and executing their learning tasks, thereby enhancing intrinsic motivation in accordance with Self-Determination Theory.

- Integrate emotionally engaging instructional content:

Incorporate affectively stimulating and relevant learning materials that foster psychological attachment to the subject and reinforce positive learner attitudes.

- Promote task-based collaborative learning:

Design classroom activities that simulate real-life scenarios and enhance functional language use, embodying the principle of learning through use.

- Develop self-regulation skills:

Introduce strategies for self-directed learning and guide students toward managing their academic goals, organizing their time, and structuring tasks effectively.

5.3. Recommendations

Grounded in the study's outcomes, the following actionable recommendations are presented:

- Align curriculum design with learners' motivational profiles:

Reassess and restructure course content—particularly oral communication modules—to meet the psychological and cognitive needs of learners more effectively.

- Train educators in motivation-enhancing instructional strategies:

Implement targeted professional development programs for teachers that focus on cultivating classroom management skills designed to stimulate motivation and engagement.

- Support future research on learning motivation:

Encourage studies that explore the intersection between cultural-educational contexts and modern teaching methodologies, particularly in multilingual environments.

- Adopt diagnostic tools to assess learner engagement:

Utilize innovative instruments for measuring and monitoring levels of active participation and self-discipline among students in foreign language learning contexts.

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