How does language learning context affect motivation?

Sofía Moratinos Johnston, María Juan Garau, Joana Salazar Noguera

Universitat de les Illes Balears, Spain

Given that motivation plays a key role in determining success in language learning, it is worth exploring how three different language learning contexts (LLCs) - i.e. formal classroom instruction (FI), content and language integrated learning (CLIL), and study abroad (SA) - affect motivation. To this end, the 'Language Learning Context and Motivation Questionnaire' was created following Dörnyei’s (2009) L2 Motivational Self System, a dynamic theoretical framework that amounts to a turning-point in the area of motivation studies. The questionnaire was administered to 1,050 Spanish university undergraduates selected using stratified random sampling. Results reveal that on the 'Ought-to L2 Self Scale', which measures the extent to which learning English is influenced by the expectations of others, it is those students that have experienced all three language learning contexts - the 3LLCs- who score higher than all the rest. As for the 'Ideal L2 Self Scale', there was no statistical difference between those 2 LLC students that had experienced either FI+CLIL or FI+SA. On this scale, the score for the 3 LLC students was the highest of all combinations and significantly higher than that for FI-only students. This suggests that the 3 LLC students are more capable of picturing themselves as L2 speakers. These results coincide with Perez-Vidal’s (2011) Combination Hypothesis in that the three contexts are complementary and allow the learner to benefit from the advantages of both formal and naturalistic language acquisition contexts.


Keywords: higher education, L2 Motivational Self System, L2 motivation, language learning context.