

Motivation towards learning a second language (A Case Study-Part2. Denmark)

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In this case study, I will analyse and discuss the results of a survey concerning motivation towards learning a second language conducted in one Danish high school. The students surveyed were between the ages of 13-18. This section, part two of the study, was conducted in Copenhagen, Denmark. This region of the world was chosen because bilingualism is quite common there and a large portion of the school-aged community is learning a second language and often a third and even a fourth. Denmark, a European country, is different than Canada (Case Study-Part 1.) because it neighbours many countries, which use different mother tongues.

1. INTRODUCTION

Living in and teaching ESL in Japan, a monolingual country, one may notice many different attitudes students have toward learning a second language. In the ESL classroom in Japan some students are always eager while others are always uninterested and of course there are many between these extremes. Whatever the attitude toward learning a new language, Japanese students are usually reserved and quiet. In this monolingual country it is often difficult to know how the students feel about learning a new language and if they are aware of the rewards associated with this skill. In Long's paper (Oct 1997), *Investigating and Responding to Student Attitudes and Suggestions For Course Improvement* he notes that "Reid (1987) found that Japanese students had negative attitudes towards language learning as compared to other language groups, and speculated that culture may play a role in this variance."

However, before conducting a survey in Japan, it is of interest to see how students on other continents and in other cultures deal with learning a new language. Do they embrace the challenge or do they avoid it? Does their immediate environment like friends, family, school, country and culture have an effect on their perception of learning a new language? Or does it simply boil down to individual factors? In this short and simple paper I intend to investigate whether or not culture and geography play a role in students' motivation to learn a second language.

Student perception and attitude are very important in the classroom. "Teachers who do not solicit student attitudes often face three predicaments: (a) they simply receive less feedback and gain fewer insights...(b) they may continue in certain practices that negatively affect the students' self-esteem...(c) they (teachers) do not conduct

reviews of previous lessons...relevant to their students' needs. (Resulting in low) language abilities and...self-confidence...poor attendance and (the students) do just enough to pass, or...simply drop out of class." (Long, 1997)

2. THE SURVEY

The questionnaire used in this analysis consists of 37 questions. All the questions are directly or indirectly related to attitudes toward or benefits of learning a second language. However, after further reflection, I chose to analyse only 19 of the original 37 questions due to time constraints and reader interest. All Questions served to help the subjects think about language and how it relates to their life. All in all, the subjects answered in a constant manner according to their true beliefs. This survey is an integer-based survey using a six-point scale representing a continuum of satisfaction. The points are as follows: 1=no/never, 2=a little/not often, 3=some ability/sometimes, 4=good ability/often, 5=yes/always and 6=no answer. To review the 19 questions with student responses refer to Table 1. A full copy of the questionnaire is available in Appendix 1.

3. RATIONALE FOR THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The aim of the questionnaire is to explore the issue of motivation when learning a new language. The questionnaire was designed to pinpoint how the students feel about acquiring second language skills: how do they view the process in general? I am trying to determine if the subjects find the experience positive or negative by trying to answer questions such as: Do the students like learning a new language? Does the language learning process excite them to learn? Does their motivation, desire to learn and ability increase or decrease over time?

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What may be the determining factors in their overall attitude towards learning a new language?

4. PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this survey were Danish students ranging from the 9th to 12th grade. All the students were approximately 14 to 18 years of age and living in Copenhagen, Denmark, at the time of the survey. Some students were also studying multiple languages, such as English, French, Italian, Latin or Spanish. To elaborate, they are Native Danish speakers in a regular Danish high school. As well as taking language courses, they may also have been studying other subjects such as Geography, History, Math, Science etc. Denmark has only one National Language, although, I found that most of the people I met were quite fluent in English and had some third language skills varying in capacity. However, I did also meet a few people in the city who were not able to or not comfortable expressing themselves in English. All in all, I found people to have great language skills.

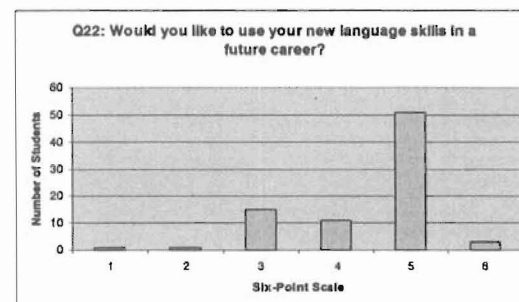
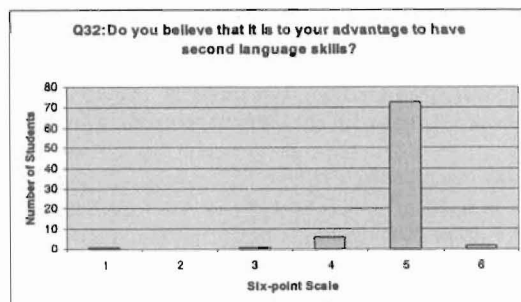
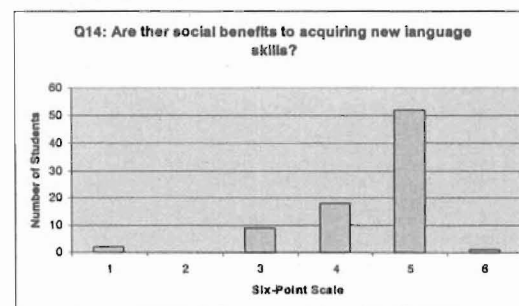
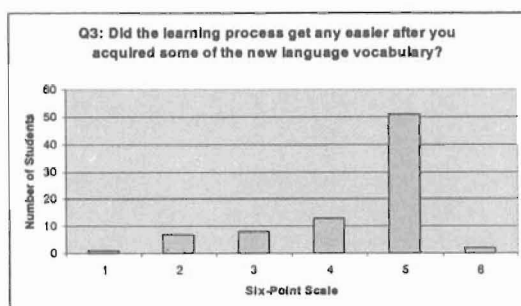
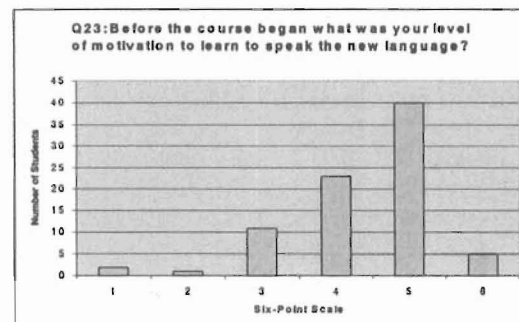
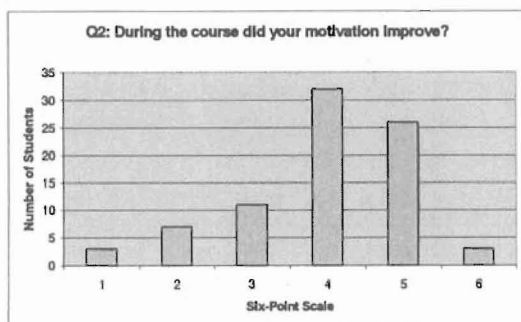
5. ADMINISTERING THE QUESTIONNAIRE

A total of 82 questionnaires were collected from the students in Denmark. The surveys were conducted

during class time at school and lasted approximately 30 minutes. As each question was read aloud, the students checked one of five possible answers or left the question unanswered. When more than one answer was checked, they were given "No Answer" status in the final tabulation. The students were not required to include their names and anonymity was respected.

6. THE RESULTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Table 1 shows the students' responses to questions about motivation concerning the acquisition and use of a second language. The results show that these particular students were positive about acquiring or possessing a second language. (Q23: 49%) Although the responses were varied as to their degree of motivation before the course began, almost half felt motivated. (Q2: 39%) A substantial number of the students had observed that their motivation did indeed improve during a course of study. (Q3: 62%) Furthermore, an even greater number felt that the learning process got easier after they had acquired the fundamentals of the new language. (Q24: 49%) Once the students learned to speak at a basic level, many experienced a boost in self-esteem and confidence in speaking the new language. (Q10: 91%) Although many of the students may not have been bilingual in the true sense of the term, all but a few considered



themselves speakers of more than one tongue. (Q13: 49%) To reinforce these findings many students had felt that their daily environment did cater to the learning and the use of bilingualism. Furthermore, most students (63%) recognised the social benefits (Q14: 63%), and 89% believed it was to their advantage to have multiple language skills. (Q32: 89%) In addition, 62% anticipated using their knowledge of languages in a future career. (Q22: 62%)

30% reported that sometimes they did get discouraged during language studies (Q25: 30%), but 44%, a large proportion found motivation through their teachers (Q31: 44%), and many found language learning to be a positive experience. (Q27: 73%) In addition to being a positive experience 61% enjoyed the process of learning a second language, (Q34: 61%) so much so, that 76% expressed the belief that anyone who wishes to do so could learn (Q35: 76%), and they would also recommend the process to their peers. (Q37: 93%) A considerable number agreed that in the future, they would play an active role in encouraging their children to learn a second tongue. (Q33: 94%) Three-quarter felt that at least one of their own parents were speakers of other languages. (Q11: 76%)

7. CONCLUSION

From the findings in the second part of this study, one can deduce that these groups of students are motivated and have positive attitudes toward learning a second language. Many students liked learning languages. (Q34: 61%) Many also believed that anyone who wished could learn a second language, (Q35: 76%) and they would also recommend that other people learn as well. (Q37: 93%) The benefits were clear to these students as well as rewarding. During the time spent with the students, I could see that they were eager to speak to me in English. Without being told by their teachers, they also had many questions to ask me in English, their second language, about Japan and Canada. Their over-all eagerness and appetite for knowledge about foreign countries and cultures displayed their readiness to embrace new

things. Their second language ability was impressive and I could see that they took pride in their abilities to communicate quickly and easily between the two tongues. (Danish and English) It is my opinion that their attitudes and environment play a big role in their abilities.

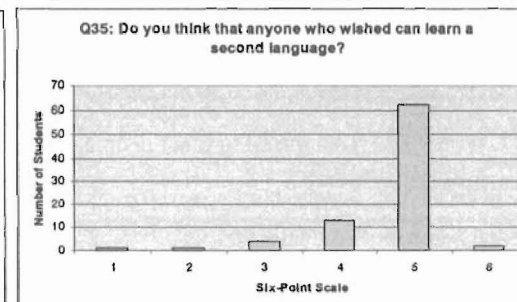
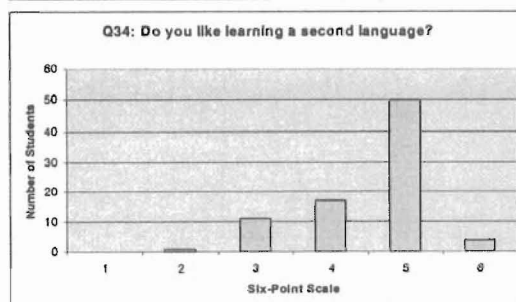
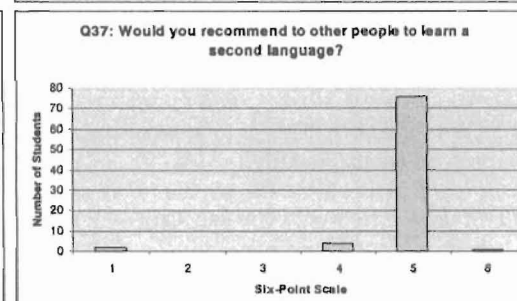
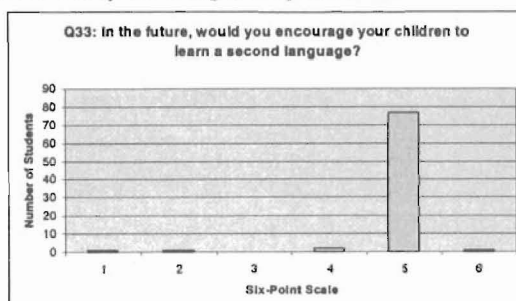
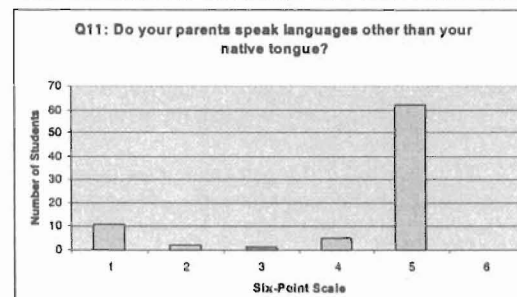
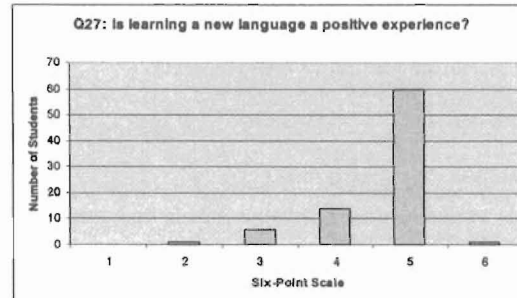
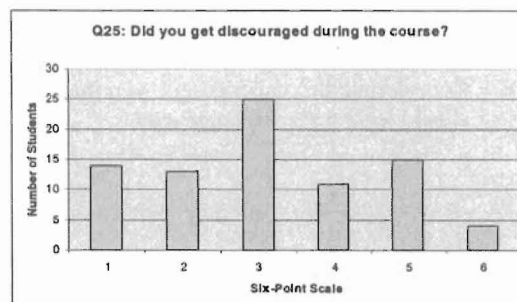


Table 1.

Student Responses

	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. During the course did your motivation improve?	3 3.7%	7 9%	11 13%	32 39%	26 26%	3 4%
3. Did the learning process get any easier after you acquired some of the new language vocabulary?	1 1.2%	7 9%	8 10%	13 16%	51 62%	2 2.4%
8. Considering the challenges, do you think that everyone should learn a second language?	1 1.2%	0 0%	4 5%	2 2.4%	74 90%	1 1.2%
10. Do you speak more than one language?	0 0%	1 1.2%	3 4%	3 4%	75 91%	0 0%
11. Do your parents speak other languages other than your native tongue?	11 13%	2 2.4%	1 1.2%	5 6%	62 76%	0 0%
13. Does your daily environment cater to the learning or use of bilingualism?	10 12%	5 6%	10 12%	16 20%	40 49%	2 2.4%
14. Are there social benefits to acquiring new language skills?	2 2.4%	0 0%	9 11%	18 22%	52 63%	1 1.2%
20. Do you think that leaders of our country have a better understanding of peoples needs by having second language skills?	11 13%	5 6%	13 16%	10 12%	41 50%	2 2.4%
22. Would you like to use your new language skills in a future career?	1 1.2%	1 1.2%	15 18%	11 13%	51 62%	3 4%
23. Before the course began what was your level of motivation to learn to speak the new language?	2 2.4%	1 1.2%	11 13%	23 28%	40 49%	5 6%
24. After you learned to speak the new language at a basic level, did your self esteem improve?	5 6%	5 6%	16 20%	14 17%	40 49%	2 2.4%
25. Did you get discouraged during the course?	14 17%	13 16%	25 30%	11 13%	15 18%	4 5%
27. Is learning a new language a positive experience?	0 0%	1 1.2%	6 7%	14 17%	60 73%	1 1.2%
31. Do your teachers motivate you to learn a second language?	14 17%	6 7%	10 12%	15 18%	36 44%	2 2.4%
32. Do you believe that it is to your advantage to have second language skills?	1 1.2%	0 0%	1 1.2%	6 7%	73 89%	2 2.4%
33. In the future, would you encourage your children to learn a second language?	1 1.2%	1 1.2%	0 0%	2 2.4%	77 94%	1 1.2%
34. Do you like learning a second language?	0 0%	1 1.2%	11 13%	17 21%	50 61%	4 4.8%
35. Do you think that anyone who wishes can learn a second language?	1 1.2%	1 1.2%	4 5%	13 16%	62 76%	2 2.4%
37. Would you recommend to other people to learn a second language?	2 2.4%	0 0%	0 0%	4 5%	76 93%	1 1.2%

Total number of students=204

1=no/never

2=a little/not often

3=some ability/sometimes

4=good ability/often 5=yes/always 6=no answer

Appendix 1:

Variable Attitudes Towards Learning a Second Language

Please answer the following questions according to your personal experience.

1 = no/never

2 = a little/not often

3 = some ability/sometimes

4 = good ability/often

5 = yes/always

1. Have you ever taken a language course in a second language?	1 2 3 4 5
2. During the course did your motivation improve?	1 2 3 4 5
3. Did the learning process get any easier after you acquired some of the new language vocabulary?	1 2 3 4 5
4. Do you anticipate using the new language in the future?	1 2 3 4 5
5. Do you use your new skills once given the opportunity?	1 2 3 4 5
6. Does learning a new language give you a better understanding of that culture?	1 2 3 4 5
7. If you had the choice, would you put the effort in learning a second or third language?	1 2 3 4 5
8. Considering the challenges, do you think that everyone should learn a second language?	1 2 3 4 5
9. Has learning a second language helped you in your personal development?	1 2 3 4 5

10. Do you speak more than one language?	1 2 3 4 5
11. Do your parents speak languages other than your native tongue?	1 2 3 4 5
12. Do you want to learn a second or third language other than your native tongue?	1 2 3 4 5
13. Does your daily environment cater to the learning or use of bilingualism?	1 2 3 4 5
14. Are there social benefits to acquiring new language skills?	1 2 3 4 5
15. Does acquiring a new language improve your social life?	1 2 3 4 5
16. Does learning a second language limit your time for after school activities?	1 2 3 4 5
17. Have you had the opportunities to use your second language at home?	1 2 3 4 5
18. Have you had the opportunity to use your second language socially?	1 2 3 4 5
19. Do you think that leaders of our country should be bilingual?	1 2 3 4 5
20. Do you think that leaders of our country have a better understanding of peoples needs by having second language skills?	1 2 3 4 5

21. Are there educational benefits to acquiring new language skills?	1 2 3 4 5
22. Would you like to use your new language skills in a future career?	1 2 3 4 5

Appendix 1: (Continued)

23. Before the course began what was your level of motivation to learn to speak the new language?	1 2 3 4 5
24. After you learned to speak the new language at a basic level, did your self-esteem improve?	1 2 3 4 5
25. Did you get discouraged during the course?	1 2 3 4 5
26. Are you eager to use the new language?	1 2 3 4 5
27. Is learning a new language a positive experience?	1 2 3 4 5
28. Do your new language skills help you in your native language skills?	1 2 3 4 5
29. Do your new language skills hinder your native language ability?	1 2 3 4 5
30. Does learning a new language increase your daily workload?	1 2 3 4 5
31. Do your teachers motivate you to learn a second language?	1 2 3 4 5
32. Do you believe that it is to your advantage to have second language skills?	1 2 3 4 5
33. In the future, would you encourage your children to learn a second language?	1 2 3 4 5
34. Do you like learning a second language?	1 2 3 4 5
35. Do you think that anyone who wishes can learn a second language?	1 2 3 4 5
36. Do you believe that learning a second language improves your memory skills?	1 2 3 4 5
37. Would you recommend to other people to learn a second language?	1 2 3 4 5

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