



Attitudes and motivation and their impact on the performance of young English as a Foreign Language learners

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Abstract

This article is based on a research that was carried out as part of a more extensive PhD research regarding variables that have an impact on the performance of young EFL learners in listening and speaking interaction. The current article focuses on a very important factor in foreign language learning; attitudes and motivation. Data regarding the attitudes and motivation of the children was gathered through a questionnaire and then, it was statistically analyzed in relation to the results of the examinees on an end of primary school listening and speaking test in order to examine whether there is a relationship between the two factors. The first part of the article presents a review of existing literature regarding attitudes and motivation. Research methodology and procedure are analyzed later on and the last sections offer a review of result and a discussion based on the conclusion, which indicate that motivation is indeed a crucial factor in foreign language learning which ought to be taken into consideration whenever material are prepared or a language programme is designed.

Attitudes and motivation and their impact on the performance of young English as a Foreign Language learners

“Language is the centre of human life” (Cook 1996: 1). It is one of the most important ways of expressing ourselves, communicating with people, planning our lives, remembering the past, exchanging ideas and preferences. The ability to do so in more than one language multiplies the opportunities for people to experience all these functions and even master them as well as advancing their career opportunities.

Foreign Language learners vary in terms of many factors such as attitudes, motivation, learning style, age, gender, aptitude.

The notion of learner –centred instruction in foreign and second languages grew out of the recognition that language learners are diverse, in their

reasons for learning another language, their approach to learning, and their abilities. (Wenden 2002:32).

These differences have influenced relevant research and the findings have had a profound effect on language education. This article presents part of a study on variables that influence foreign language learning; it discusses the impact of attitudes and motivation on the performance of young EFL learners in listening and speaking.

There has been a great deal of research on the role of attitudes and motivation in second/ foreign language learning. Lambert (1955) began to investigate this factor by speculating that an interest in learning a foreign language develops because of emotional involvement with the target language's community or because the learner has a direct interest in the language. Research findings show that attitudes and motivation are indeed related to successful L2 learning but it has not been indicated how they do so (Lightbown and Spada 1993).

Motivation is such a complex phenomenon that it cannot be defined by a single widely accepted theory. Presumably, it can mean different things and it may be affected by:

- a. *cause*, related to personal goals of the learner or outside incentives such as rewards or punishment;
- b. *behaviour*, which relates to persistence, effort of the learner or enjoyment;
- c. *outcomes*, referring to evaluation of performance and reaction to success or failure.

In Foreign Language Learning theories, it is suggested that motivation can be defined in relation to two factors: the *needs* of the learners and their *attitudes* towards the second language and the second language community. Learners are motivated if they need to learn the language in order to achieve a goal or if they want to communicate with speakers of the target language and learn about the country where the language is spoken (Nakanishi T, 2002). Additionally, it is grouped together with various aspects of personality and emotion, hence the reference to attitudes and motivation.

Brown (1981) distinguishes three different types of motivation:

- (1) global; a general orientation for learning;
- (2) situational; relates to the situation in which learning takes place, and
- (3) task motivation which relates to specific tasks.

Gardner (1985) proposes that motivation is described in the following equation:

Motivation = effort + desire to achieve a goal + attitudes

He points out that there are several components of effort (effort to succeed, to please the teacher or the parents, to pass examinations) and it is important to identify them as some of them might not link directly to learning a language. He defines attitudes as the base for the middle term of the equation, relating them to behaviour. Moreover, he refers to two types of motivation: integrative and instrumental. Integrative refers to the attitude of the student towards the target language, the target culture and the people of this culture and instrumental relates to ulterior motives, like learning a language for academic purposes (the need to pass exams or to enter university).

Research findings are contradictory, failing to show clearly if any type of motivation is superior. Early research findings suggested that integrative motivation was stronger than instrumental motivation. Those suggestions were called into question when studies found no advantage for the integrative form of motivation (Gardner and Lambert, 1972, Chihara and Oller, 1978). There are situations where instrumental motivation is stronger.

One school of researchers examined motivation as a result of actions, arising from either failure or success in learning, rather than causing either of them (Burstall 1975, Strong 1984). Learners were motivated to associate with native speakers of the target language or they developed positive views about a language because of high achievement ‘whereas relatively unsuccessful learners might acquire negative attitudes’ (Crookes and Schmidt 1991:474). The truth is almost certainly a combination of the two views as it can be alleged that motivation is both a predisposing factor and a factor influenced by performance.

Another limitation in determining the role of motivation in learning a foreign language possibly derives from the existence of different definitions of the term; although motivation is considered by both teachers and researchers as a prime factor in language learning (Macleod 2002) there is no consistency between the way the term has been used by researchers and how it is used by teachers.

When referring to motivation, teachers are concerned with the behaviour of the pupil. Students are considered motivated if they are actively involved in a task and the main aim of language teachers is to encourage as many pupils as possible to be involved in classroom activities hoping that this will aid learning. “The usual meaning of motivation for the teacher is probably the interest that something generates in the students” and it relates to the attitudes of children towards the target language, as these are rooted in their minds and their background. (Cook, 1996). Attitudes are related strongly to motivation, it is evident that people with a negative attitude towards a language could not be motivated learners, and there is evidence to support the correlation between the positive attitude about a language and high achievement. (Wilhelm 1999).

It is, however, argued that in the case of young children motivation may be affected by the relevance of tasks (task motivation, Brown, 1981) to the interests and the needs of the learners, to their need for achievement and social affiliation, and by the teaching methodology and material. (Crookes and Schmidt 1991). Little research has focused on the material and methodology in relation to motivation but there is evidence (Peacock 1997) that authentic materials generate interest in the lesson. Burden (2000) suggests a number of criteria that relate to task motivation: the difficulty of the work must match the ability levels of the learners, the materials should provide useful structure and they should captivate the interest of the children.

This study aimed to relate attitudes of children and their motivation (as examined through questionnaires) to their performance in order to investigate if there is a relationship between the two.

Methods

Participants

Criteria for the choice of the groups that constituted the sample of the current research relate to the teachers. It had been decided, from the very beginning, that teachers would be the control variable of the current study, chosen according to specific criteria in order to establish a homogeneous group. This decision was made in an attempt to eliminate the different ways in which teachers can influence learning. Nevertheless,

...not all language classrooms are alike. The conditions for learning differ in terms of the physical environment, the age and the motivation of the students, the amount of time available for learning, and many other variables. Classrooms also differ in terms of the principles which

guide teachers in their language teaching methods and techniques.
(Lightbown and Spada 1993:72).

An attempt has been made to avoid all these differences in order to focus on the other variables that influence learning, identified above. Since the system is centralized that was quite easy to achieve. Official materials are the same in every school, and so is the suggested methodology. The age of the students and the time available for learning at school is also the same and the group of teachers was as 'similar' as possible in terms of attitudes towards the language and qualifications. The choice of teachers was based on their responses to a questionnaire (Rodiki, 2004) that was designed to collect data regarding their skills and qualifications in the English language and their attitudes towards the language and the lesson of English. Cook (1996), when commenting on the role of language teachers, refers to the way learners are treated; this includes the language used by the teacher, the attitudes of the teachers towards the language and the learners, the methods and materials used, or, generally speaking, the environment where the language is used. If teachers cannot handle the language adequately in the classroom and they are not motivated and enthusiastic towards the target language, then, it is very likely that their students will fail and they will adopt a negative attitude for the particular language for the rest of their life. Chaudron (1988) refers to the uniqueness of the language classroom, as language is not only the subject of teaching; it is the means for organizing and controlling the classroom as well. The teacher's language is very important in language teaching as it provides learners with most of the input they receive.

It was decided that the teachers involved in the study needed to:

- be qualified Primary School Teachers;
- have a certain level of language proficiency. (Have passed the GCE exams, which is an acceptable qualification in Cyprus, or other similar exams);
- be willing to teach English;
- feel confident in teaching the language;
- have at least two years experience in teaching English;
- have had training in ESL teaching;
- and if possible, have had some additional post graduate qualification on Language Teaching, from an English Speaking University.

Moreover, the questionnaire ensured that teachers follow the guidelines and suggestions of the Ministry of Education and Culture and that they have possible attitudes towards the English Language and the teaching of the language.

It should be explained here that all teachers in public primary education in Cyprus are qualified primary school teachers; all the qualifications mentioned above are additional qualifications, regarding EFL teaching.

The target group was year 6 pupils as the aim of the study was to measure their performance at the end of primary school. Questionnaires were sent to 304 schools all over Cyprus (Senior Primary schools – years 4-6, or unified schools, years 1-6). 187 responded on time. From these 187, 131 year 6 teachers stated willingness to participate in the research and twenty – two teachers were qualified in accordance with the criteria mentioned earlier. Twelve of those twenty two teachers participated in the study with a total of 250 children.

Design

- Questionnaire 1

A 'tick the right box' questionnaire, seeking information on the qualifications of the primary teachers of English in Cyprus, and their attitude towards the lesson of teaching English as a Foreign Language was prepared to enable us to establish a homogeneous group of teachers that would constitute the sample of the research.

The issues on the questionnaire, dealt with attitudes towards the language as well as qualifications and methodology, aiming to cover all factors that relate to teachers as described earlier. This questionnaire was given on a trial basis to twenty teachers who did not take more than fifteen minutes to complete it. It was the concern of five of them that some teachers may not wish to respond to a questionnaire that asks for their name and the name of their school. This could not change, however, as the questionnaire would be followed by a test with the children in the English class of the teacher. Thus, it was a risk that had to be taken. What was done to reduce this risk was to try, through the covering letters, to reassure teachers and head teachers of confidentiality. It was thought that it was not necessary to translate this questionnaire as it was addressed to teachers of English who, allegedly, are competent speakers of the language.

- Questionnaire 2. (Rodiki, 2004)

In this case, the focus was the children taught by the teachers that have been selected in accordance with the first questionnaire used. The children had to complete a questionnaire at school; while in class, they were asked to put them in the envelopes provided, seal them and give them to the researcher. These questionnaire sought information on a number of variables that could have an impact on their performance; the attitudes of children towards the English language and the lesson of English are only described in this article though.

A draft of the questionnaire was initially prepared identifying the issues that would be raised in order to collect the necessary data regarding the issues under investigation. After the issues were indicated, the questions had to be revised, in a lay - out that would allow us to use the SPSS program, for the analysis of data. Most of the questions on the final version of the questionnaire turned out as 'tick the right box' questions, asking the pupils to do so using a scale from one to five, that was described at the beginning of each question.

Then the questionnaire had to be translated into Greek as it was decided that to ensure maximum understanding of the pupils, a Greek version of it would be used. After the translation was completed, the questionnaire needed pre - piloting, thus, it was sent to a colleague who teaches English. He gave the questionnaire to a group of seventeen pupils, who found it quite 'straight forward' and needed between nine and twenty - five minutes to complete it. The questionnaire was used in both the pilot and the main study as it proved that no revision was necessary.

- Testing (Rodiki, 2004)

Testing aimed to measure the performance in Spoken Interaction and Listening in English of children at the end of primary school. Two tests were used; a Listening and a Speaking test. Bearing in mind the existing literature, tests had to be prepared, piloted and revised if necessary in order to constitute appropriate research instruments that would elicit all the necessary, useful and meaningful information regarding performance in English as a Second Language in Spoken Interaction.

Validity and reliability are among the most crucial characteristics of any testing method. Reliability and validity should not be seen as independent characteristics; reliability is a requirement for validity. According to Bachman (1991) they are

complementary aspects of an attempt to reduce error in test measurement by identifying and controlling the factors that may affect test scores. Reliability is a quantity of test scores whereas validity is a quality of test interpretation and use. (Bachman, 1991). Practicality regards time efficiency in designing and demonstrating a test that would provide the desirable data.

Underhill (2003) argues that in order to design a 'good' test you need to know the purpose of it, the available resources, and to have knowledge of the learners and their expectations. The purpose of the specific tests relates in this case to the learners, that is the candidates, their assumed knowledge and expectations and it relies on the curriculum and the functions as listed in the course books (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1994). The other crucial point that had to be taken into consideration while designing the tests was the limited time availability; schools were willing to cooperate with us only for a half or full school day.

The first step was to identify the language functions and the relevant structures that are taught in each of the three years of formal instruction in English, at primary level, in Cyprus. After that, the functions and structures used in listening activities in the language classroom were identified. After the functions were identified a test ought to be designed, which would be appropriate for the specific children and representative of their actual knowledge. Thus, the tasks in the test had to agree with the content of the books in terms of function coverage and difficulty. It was also important that it would not be a long test that would tire and bore both teachers and students and would be practical in its administration. So, the decision was made to prepare a twenty to thirty minute listening test. A draft listening test was designed basing questions and statements on the textbooks to ensure full coverage of the range of functions taught in the classroom.

The items on this test were designed to relate to students' textbooks and the vocabulary the students are expected to be familiar with at the end of primary school. The language functions in the books were identified and categorized (table 1) and then they were grouped according to O'Sullivan and colleagues (2002), and relevant statements were prepared according to those in the books (table 1). Thus we ended up with five different groups; each group consisted of subgroups and as there are at least four statements for each one of them, the test consisted of eighty - eight questions as shown on the last column of the table. Statements (possible answers), however, were of a different number, one hundred and sixteen in total. Each set included two statements more than the number of questions in order to check actual knowledge and understanding and decrease the possibility of guessing some of the answers. The total number of sets made the test too long, so it was decided to work with two shorter versions; thus, two tests were created with four sets of statements each, including fifty - one items. Set A, which consisted of fourteen items was common to both tests in order to facilitate a comparison of performances. Thus, for the piloting stage of the research in May – June 2001, it was decided that both versions would be used separately; half of the schools would be tested with version A (Test 1) and the rest with version B (test 2). This seemed like a suitable way to try out versions that would ensure coverage of the necessary language functions as well as sufficiency, and it would also allow time availability for changes, if necessary, before the actual research in May 2002.

A tape was prepared, where a female native speaker was asking the pupils the questions that constituted each set. Students were expected to match the statements they had in front of them, in script, to the questions, after listening to the tape. To be

more specific, they were given in writing four sets of statements and they were asked to number the statements in the right order to agree with the order of the questions. Table 2 presents an example from the first set of the test and the relevant tape script. A practice version of the test was prepared with two sets of items, to help the pupils get used to this type of test which is not something they usually do during classroom teaching.

Likewise, the functions used in speaking activities were identified and a speaking test was designed in accordance with them. The speaking test consisted of three parts:

Part A; questions about the examinees, their family and friends, habits, likes and dislikes;

Part B; questions regarding a given picture;

Part C; Story making based on a sequence of pictures.

Procedure

The piloting of the study was implemented during the second half of May 2001. It was essential to wait until May in an attempt to be as close to the end of the school year as possible, since the main research question is whether students cover what they are expected to by the end of primary school. The main study was implemented one year after the pilot.

- Listening test.

As already stated two different versions of the listening test were used at this first stage of the research. It was decided that the piloting would take place in seven different schools, so four of the groups, a total of ninety-seven pupils, were given Listening test 1 and the remaining three groups, which consisted of seventy - seven students, were given Listening test 2. Before having to do the actual test, students were given a practice test. This practice test consisted of two sets of items. The first set was already completed to make clear to the students what they were expected to do. The second set was done in class, as an example. This was considered necessary because the kind of test that was used was unfamiliar to the children. After doing this practice test, pupils were given five minutes to rest; then they were asked to do the actual test. For this test they had to listen to each set of questions twice; during the first time there was a thirty second break after the sixth question each time, but the second time the tape was non-stop. This test took approximately twenty - two minutes to complete and students were not given any extra time or help.

After the pilot study was implemented and the relevant data analysis was completed, some statements were removed or changed according to the reliability analysis. A couple of items were moved from one set to another as the pilot study indicated that there were similar answers in one set and that was rather confusing to the children. After that, the two tests were merged and we ended up with one longer test, which consisted of eighty - three different items, divided into eight sets. The items that were removed were not replaced as that could change the reliability of the test. Content coverage was still satisfactory since, when initially preparing the pilot tests, more than four items were included with reference to each function in order to ensure that even if items had to be removed, content coverage would be satisfactory. An example of the listening test is presented in table 2 (see others).

The procedure followed during the main study was very similar to the pilot study procedure. Twelve schools were involved this time with a total of two hundred and fifty

pupils. The study took place in the last three weeks of May, that is, between the 12th and the 31st of May, according to the preferences of the schools that were involved. Most of the schools did not wish to have any visitors in June, as schools break up at the end of the third week of June for the summer holidays. Apparently, with all the matters that need to be taken care of, visitors would not be welcome in the schools then. This created some problems with the availability of time; it was not possible to start at an earlier time as the two weeks preceding the time selected for the implementation of the research were the school Easter holidays (the Orthodox Easter is usually at a later time of the year than the Catholic one). Visiting the schools before the Easter holidays was again impossible as it would be very early in the school term and most probably, a great number of units would not have been covered by then. Therefore it was decided that those three weeks of May would have to satisfy the needs of the study. The test was always implemented by the researcher, who visited the schools according to their day and school period preference, as stated on the statements teachers were asked to complete at an earlier time during the school year. This statement was sent to the selected schools early in October of 2001, reminding the schools that participated in the pilot study of our intention to re – visit them before the end of the year in order to carry out the main study or explaining the whole situation to schools that did not take part in the pilot study.

Existing research can point to many cases where examiners provided support to candidates in a number of ways; either by giving them different time limits or allowing them to have a break or even supplying relevant vocabulary to them. These are only some of the ways of help provided by examiners to pupils as stated by Gibbs and Stobart (1993) and Lazaraton (1996). Any guidance or support changes the circumstances of test administration and this should not be allowed because a test which is not well administered is unreliable. Weir (2004) provides a checklist for successful test administration suggesting that precise steps should be followed to ensure that the test is administered in exactly the same way for all candidates. This checklist refers to:

- giving all candidates clear and precise instructions;
- making sure that physical conditions are appropriate for the test (minimal background noise, appropriate rooms);
- having a uniformity of administration so that the testing conditions are the same for all candidates.

For the current research, the fact that the administration of the tests was always done by the researcher sorted any problems that could occur under different circumstances guaranteeing a fair treatments of all candidates. The behaviour of the researcher was always the same, candidates were given the same instructions and explanations. No help or guidance in Greek was offered to them. The time allowed for the listening test was the time they needed to listen to the tape twice (approximately thirty – five minutes for the listening test) which depended on the tape and not on the students; the time allocated for the speaking test for each candidate depended on their ability to answer the questions or not, as weak students who could not respond to all questions needed less time than more advanced ones.

Pupils were told what the whole research was about, and they were reassured of the anonymity of the results. They were also informed that participation was voluntary.

All groups were given the same version of the test this time, which included seven different sets with a total of eighty - three different items. After explaining to the students what they were expected to do, the same practice test that was used the previous year was used to ensure full understanding of the test. After spending five

minutes with the practice test, they were allocated thirty - five minutes approximately to complete the actual test. That was the necessary time to listen to each set of statements on the tape twice and number the statements. During the first time of listening to the tape, there was a pause in the middle of each set of statements. The second hearing was, however, non - stop.

The tests were marked by the researcher. One point was allocated to each correct answer and since there were eighty three items on the test, the total score was out of eighty - three. The marker reliability of the test, was likely to be very high as it was marked by a sole researcher and there was only one correct answer for each listening test item which was indicated by a single number. So, there was no chance that the marking would not be fair; the marker had to treat all the tests the same, allowing one point to each correct answer.

To ensure marker reliability and have strong evidence for this, the researcher randomly selected thirty tests and went through them again, at a later time, marking them again according to the tape - script. Additionally, a colleague was given a set of thirty scripts, together with a tape - script of the questions that were on the tape, and was asked to mark them. In both cases the scripts were photocopied and the initial marking was erased from the copy so that the second marking would not be influenced by the first one. In both cases the results were the same indicating the marker reliability of the test is high. This, inter-rater reliability is statistically established via correlation in a similar manner to the way the internal consistency of a test is calculated. Perfect agreement between the raters is indicated by a correlation of 1.0, and 0.7 is the minimum acceptable level of correlation (Weir 2004). In this case, the first marking of the researcher was correlated to that done by the colleague, on SPSS, indicating a correlation of 1.0 (table 3).

- Speaking test (Rodiki, 2004)

The piloting of the speaking test was implemented on the same days and at the same schools as the listening test. At the beginning of the visit, the English teachers were asked to indicate four of the strongest and four of the weakest pupils in ESL who would constitute the sample that would be tested orally. This decision was taken to ensure that the sample would be representative of the actual picture of the class, and to compensate for the limited time availability. It was crucial to identify what would appear to be very easy for the advanced students and what would be very hard for the weak students and in order to save time average students would not be involved in the pilot study.

After the listening test was done, the questionnaires were completed and collected by the researcher students were told about the oral test some of them would be asked to do, explaining to them the whole procedure. They were informed that it was totally voluntary and they were reassured of anonymity. It was also explained that their interview would be taped.

The oral test was carried out in a separate, quiet room and the whole test was taped. The researcher used a marking scheme marking 1 or 0 at the time of the implementation of the test; any understandable answer, even if not totally correct in terms of structure, grammar or syntax, would get a mark. Anything different did not get a mark. This was done not only for practical reasons but to ensure reliability as well. If any more marking options were to be used then there was the danger of marking to vary according to the mood of the researcher at the time and the test results would not be reliable. If it was only a matter of a right answer, defined as an understandable response that allows communication to emerge, or a wrong one in terms of irrelevance to the question, and

lack of meaning, then the administration of the test would be easier for the researcher and the pupils as well. This decision took into consideration the young age of the children, since for them the primary concern is communication and not accuracy. This agrees with the curriculum aims as well, which briefly suggest that the primary goal of EFL teaching is for pupils to be able to communicate in English and to 'use a reasonably accepted pronunciation and appropriate intonation' (National Curriculum 1994: 175).

In order to ensure a high marker reliability of the speaking test, the same colleague who helped with the listening test, was given some samples of the speaking test, (a tape where these interviews were recorded and the marking scheme for the speaking test) and was asked to mark them, taking into consideration the points mentioned above. Precautions were taken to avoid biased results, so the second marker was given blank samples of the speaking test marking scheme. They were asked to listen to the tapes (the test was taped) and mark each student focusing on communication. As with the listening test, the second marking matched the researcher's marking; there was a perfect correlation again and this is clearly indicated in table 4.

After the reliability analysis was run on the SPSS and the items that failed were identified the indicated changes were implemented and the actual test was designed, which now consisted of forty - three items, the first three of which were again greeting questions and were not marked. Therefore the students got a mark out of forty.

Again, the procedure for the main study was very similar to that of piloting the test. All the tests were carried out by the researcher and they were marked at the time of the implementation of the interview, on the marking scheme that was prepared for this purpose.

The speaking test had to be implemented on the same day as the listening test because school teachers were not willing to allow a second visit during that busy period of time. This raised a big issue of time availability. Schools operate between 7.45 and 1.05. The first three periods are usually allocated to Greek and Maths. The listening test was implemented after those periods, that is after 10.00 and for the test to be implemented and the questionnaires to be completed we needed around one hour. Each oral test needed between five and eight minutes to be implemented, and if all the pupils in one classroom were to be interviewed then we would need more than one school day. As a result teachers were asked in advance, to prepare a list indicating five weak, five average and five good pupils in the lesson of English and only those were interviewed. It was thought that by ensuring that all the categories were represented, this would enable us to have a valid and reliable picture of the abilities of the whole classroom in the speaking test. There were a couple of schools where the visit started early in the morning and that allowed us to interview a greater number of children but, for most of the schools this was not the case.

As with the pilot test, all tests were marked by the researcher, allocating one point to each comprehensible answer even if it was not very accurate. The total listening test score was out of forty.

Questionnaire for teachers

Early in February 2001, the questionnaire was sent by post to every school in Cyprus that was defined as suitable to participate in the research, in an envelope addressed to the head teacher of the school. The questionnaire was accompanied by a covering letter for the headteacher and the English teacher of each school. Teachers were asked to complete this brief questionnaire providing information on their qualifications in education and

their qualifications in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language. In addition they were asked to state briefly their attitudes towards teaching the language at primary level in Cyprus. The choice of the sample has been based on the responses of the teachers.

A brief letter informed headteachers and teachers them of what was expected of them and what would follow if their school were to be chosen to participate in the research. It also explained to them that participation was voluntary, and if for any reason they did not wish to be involved in this research, they were asked to return the questionnaire without having their teachers complete it.

The selection was based on the questionnaires that were returned on time and these were 187 within the first six weeks. This number represents 61.5% of the total number of schools that were asked to complete the questionnaire. 38.5% of the schools did not respond at all.

- Questionnaire for pupils

In this case, the focus was the children taught by the teachers that have been selected in accordance with the first questionnaire. The questionnaire was used in both the pilot and the main study as it proved that no revision was necessary.

Pilot study.

The questionnaire was given to the children on the same day that they were tested. After completing the listening test and before proceeding with the oral test, the students, while still in the classroom, were given the questionnaire to fill in. The questionnaire took them between fourteen and twenty six minutes to complete and in most of the cases they were done in class, while I was present. In two instances, due to time shortage I was forced to give them the questionnaires to take home, and the result was that some of them did not return them to their teachers as they were asked to do. As a consequence, there were test data that could not be related to any other data and at this point, it was decided to omit it from the SPSS file. It was clear after that, that for the actual study, in the following year, this could not be the case; it was crucial to ensure availability of time at each school for both tests and the questionnaires.

Main study.

The procedure was very similar to that described above. The only difference is that if there was available time, the questionnaire was given to the children to complete and return to me while still in their class. Otherwise, the teacher of the class was asked to make sure the children would be given some extra time to complete the questionnaires while in school, either on that or the following day. Questionnaires in these cases were collected by the teacher and handed to the researcher on another day.

Results

Testing

After the tests were corrected and the results were logged in an SPSS file containing all the data that was accumulated through the questionnaires that were given to the children, the test results had to be evaluated. Reliability statistics were run for both the speaking and the listening test, indicating an Alpha of .9672 for the speaking and .9590 for the listening test.

Rasch Analysis was used in order to take account of the relative, and not the actual, abilities of the trial group, enabling us to gain a picture of how the whole potential population of candidates would react to the specific items and how difficult the items

would be for them. Rasch takes into account the degree of matching between the candidate's ability and the items' difficulty. This is done through a mathematical relationship which estimates the probabilities of a candidate of a certain ability to achieve a certain score on an item of given difficulty and it is expressed as the probability of a certain response. In simple words, the chances of a correct response to a test item depend on the difference between the person's ability and the difficulty of the item. According to the Rasch analysis, from a total of one hundred and twenty three items (eighty three questions on the listening test and forty on the speaking test), sixty – five have a negative Rasch estimate of difficulty, indicating that they are quite easy. Additionally, thirty - nine items have a Rasch estimate of difficulty between zero and one, and are therefore classified as quite easy. Finally, from the remaining nineteen items which are the hardest of the test, seventeen do not go beyond three, a number which confirms that they are not difficult. Summing up, more than half of the test items are on the negative side of the scale, and almost one third of them are between zero and one. It is therefore safe to imply that the test's level of difficulty agrees with the curriculum objectives.

The tests were discussed with twenty colleagues who served as judges; it was decided that a clear cut off point for the test results would be forty out of a hundred. Following this, items with a facility value below forty per cent, would be indicated as 'problematic' items, being the items that caused difficulty to the majority of the children that participated in the study. As the facility value indicates the percentage of correct answers on each item, items with a facility value below forty per cent were correctly answered by less than forty per cent (40 %) of the children that constituted the sample of the research.

No matter what the border line is, however, the case is that most of the children could not respond correctly to eighty - five of the test items;

- a. twenty - seven listening test items present a facility value below 40%, a fact that indicates that less than forty percent of the children who participated in the research managed to respond to them correctly. For twenty – eight of these items the proportion of correct responses was between forty and fifty which, even though it is above the suggested baseline, is still an unsatisfactory result. What is more, there is not one single item which was successfully answered by all the candidates. In fact the most successful one, which was the first question in the first set, indicates a facility value around ninety - seven per cent (96.8%).
- b. The speaking test results are similar; in fact they are even more disappointing as the highest facility value was below seventy percent which indicates that the 'most successful' question was answered correctly by less than seventy percent of the candidates. For thirty of these items the results were below fifty and for twenty - three they were below the border line of forty.

Attitudes and Motivation

After the actual study was implemented, all the data, gathered through tests and questionnaires, was logged in an SPSS file. One way ANOVA analysis of all the background factors referring to the students, was carried out which indicated the statistical significance, if any, of each factor, in the learning of the children involved in the study, in Spoken Interaction, of English as a Foreign Language. Many items that relate to attitudes and motivation indicated a statistical significance as their value was lower than 0.05. Some of these items were had an impact on both tests others though, appear to have an impact on one of the two tests, thus, on only one of the two

language modes under examination. Table 5 presents the questions that relate to attitudes and motivation and have proved to have a statistical significance, according to one way Anova analysis. Items 1 – 5 relate to task motivation, and indicate that children who like the lesson of English at school, do not find it hard, think of it as interesting and fun perform better than others. Moreover, items 6 to 9 relate to attitudes towards the target language and indicate a clear relationship between performance and positive attitudes. Items 10, 11 and 12 relate to external motives; children who want to be good pupils and please their parents did better than their classmates. Last, but certainly not least, items 13 and 14 relate to instrumental motivation as described earlier. Pupils who think that they will need the language in the future are more competent in English than others who do not share the same motives.

Discussion

It appears that from a general point of view, the curriculum aims are not met by the majority of the children. The tests were designed according to the curriculum, they were discussed and approved by twenty teachers and then they were piloted in order to ensure that they would be valid and reliable. It was the belief of the teachers who saw the tests that the items on them were a reasonable test of the students' ability after three years of formal instruction. All the items were cross referenced by the researcher and the judges who went through the tests at the pre piloting stage of the research, to the language functions as they appear in the school textbooks ensuring full coverage of the functional range in the books and avoiding inclusion of items that do not relate to the curriculum and the books used in the language classroom. Still, children failed to meet the expected level of competence in the language. Moreover, the results indicate clearly that young Greek Cypriots have greater difficulties to communicate in speaking than in listening interaction. These are alarming conclusions; it is crucial to identify the reasons that led to this failure of the pupils to reach the required standards in order to manage to improve the language programme and these could be the aim of further research.

English is important for Cypriots for a number of reasons and pupils need to learn how to communicate in this widely used language. In order to manage this, they need to satisfy the primary school curriculum aims and objectives which will offer them a good start in EFL learning. Research findings suggest that attitudes and motivation are important aspects in successful language learning (Lightbown and Spada 1993, Gardner and MacIntyre 1993). Gardner (1985) describes motivation as the equation of effort, desire and attitudes. These children seemed to be influenced by their positive attitudes (I like the language, it is easy to learn, it is not hard) and their desire to be good pupils and use it in the future. The latter statement indicates instrumental motives (Gardner, 1985). Finding the books easy and fun and the lesson at school; interesting, fun and not hard were the statements that indicated this, highlighting the crucial role of both the teacher and the teaching material in the outcome of the language classroom. Having language materials that are relevant to the age and the interests of the children, and teaching in a motivating and interesting way can promote successful learning.

The results of this study should be taken into consideration by anyone involved in the EFL teaching programme, not only in Cyprus but in any other country as well. These indications can enable the people of the Ministry of Education and Culture to improve the programme and lead to better results but they could be taken into

consideration by other bodies involved in EFL teaching as well, as they can provide valuable insights as to which variables have an impact on the performance of children in English as a foreign language.

Motivated children with positive attitudes towards the target language, learners who enjoy being in the classroom and who feel that what they learn will be useful for them in their life perform better than others. Thus, it should be the aim of any body involved in designing language programmes to promote enjoyable learning, through a pleasant atmosphere and interesting material, in order to promote motivation. How can this be achieved?

Firstly, by providing learners with a variety of activities and a variety of material and sources, including new technologies and fun activities, relevant to their age and interests (Brown 1981) which can lead to an upsurge interest in the language classroom and to better results. Pictures, objects, signs are an important tool for every language teacher, especially for those working with young children as they make the lesson easier, understandable and interesting. Books and other material need to be designed “with the objective of facilitating and exploiting learner interactions with and through materials” (Breen et.al. 1979: 9) and keeping the needs of the learners in mind. Visual material such as pictures in the books, flashcards, charts, slides and any other material should be available to the teacher. Attractive presentation, according to Cunningsworth (1995), is of high importance but “it is of primary importance that visuals should be rooted in the teaching material rather than superimposed on it” (:52). Audio material is very important as well, mainly for reading practice and listening comprehension activities. Visual aids “supply the extra linguistic context that helps the acquirer to understand and thereby to acquire” (Krashen and Terell 1983:55), as they help in comprehension and encourage communication. New technologies provide learners the opportunity to acquire knowledge in an enjoyable way and allow individualization of the work of the learner. They can work according to their own needs and interests and they can use authentic material, which promote the interest of learners (Peacock 1997) such as magazine or newspaper extracts, news, songs, announcements. Moreover, it is essential to provide the learners with opportunities to use the language for real life situations and for actual communication and to come across native speaker models either in real life (visits, tele - conferencing, e-mails) or through the use of new technologies and available resources such as web sites with authentic material. Finally, families and teachers need to understand that motivation and attitudes are rooted in the minds of children. Children need to realize that by learning a foreign language they can communicate with more people, they can make new friends and they can travel abroad and meet new places. This can motivate them and this is very important as according to Gardner (1990) motivation is a result of a desire to achieve a goal.

Limitations

The first limitation relates with the decision to have only one examiner and marker for all the pupils in both tests (speaking and listening). It can be suggested that the researcher could be biased and therefore the results would not be reliable. As explained though, it was thought that the nature of the marking (0 for a wrong answer and 1 for any understandable answer even if not accurate) did not leave enough room for doubts regarding marking. The decision to have a random selection of tests marked by a second marker and the perfect agreement between the markings can diminish this limitation. Moreover, the decision to have only one examiner, the researcher, whom the pupils were not familiar with, was taken in order to ensure equal

and fair treatment of all the examinees. If there were to be more examiners involved, then, they would have to be some of the qualified EFL teachers; however, all the qualified teachers who were willing to participate in the research were already part of the sample of the research. Thus, that would mean that they would be examining their pupils. This was a fact that we wanted to avoid, as there is research that suggests that teachers often help their pupils, in a variety of ways, in order to enable them to perform better (see Gibbs and Stobart, 1993). It is therefore quite clear, that having a sole examiner and rater was the best possible solution under the circumstances.

Another limitation relates to the kind of test that was used. The listening test which was used was not a type of test that children are familiar with. It was a 'match responses to questions' test (written responses to questions on the cd) where as what they usually have to do is listen and tick the right picture, listen and put in order or listen and choose the correct answer. However, it was a kind of test that allowed us to test comprehension of the children, as they needed to understand what was in front of them and what they heard in order to match them correctly and most importantly, it enables us to do it in a reasonable time period (no more than 30 – 35 minutes). Thus, it was decided to use it and to prepare a practice test as well so that pupils would get used to it before the actual examination.

It is believed that if the results and the proposed suggestions of this research are taken into consideration, major improvements could occur in the language teaching programme, leading to higher performance by primary school pupils. It is also believed that further research is necessary to provide insights regarding reasons why certain test items caused difficulty to the pupils and to identify more variables that have an impact on the performance of young children.

This article has focused on the relationship between attitudes and motivation and performance in English as a Foreign Language. A research that was implemented with 250 young learners indicated that there is such a relationship, indicating as significant factors that relate to task motivation, instrumental motivation and attitudes. It is believed that the insights provided by this study regarding the relationship between attitudes and motivation and foreign language performance can be taken into consideration by anyone involved in EFL teaching to young children, and not just Cypriots.

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Table 1. Functions as they appear in the books and the tests.

functions	
1. Providing personal information	Asking for other people names (year 4) Introducing oneself and others (year 4) Talking about age (year 4) Talking about abilities (year 4) Expressing possession- (year 4) talking about ownership (year 6) Talking about oneself and others (address, tel. Number, where are you from..., birthdays) (year 5) Talking about occupations (year 5) Talking about nationalities (year 5) Talking about routines and habitual activities (at present, in the past) (year 5) Talking about future plans and arrangements (making a phone call) (year 5)
2.Describing	Talking about people, animals and objects (identify, locate, describe appearance) and situations (Year 4, year 5, year 6) Describe family relationships (year 4) Describe colors (year 4) Telling the time (year 4, year 5) Talking about the seasons and the months of the year and the weather (year 4, year 5) Describe ways of travelling (year 5) Describe and define places (year 6) Talking about quantity (year 5) and countable and uncountable things Talking about price (year 5) Describe a sequence of events (present and past) (year 5) - use present

	continuous, present simple and past simple – talk about past activities and about actions that were in progress at a certain time (year 6) Talking about distance, time and frequency (year 6) Describe possible future events and their consequences (year 6) Talk about dates of birthdays and special events (year 6)
3. Suggesting	Give instructions (year 4) Express obligation (year 5) Give directions (year 5) ?? Making-accepting and refusing offers, requests and suggestions (year 5, year 6) Give advice and warnings (year 5, year 6) Suggest an idea (year 6)
4. Asking for confirmation	Asking for confirmation of suggestions or requests (year 6)
5. Expressing	Express preferences, likes and dislikes (year 4, year 5) Express prediction (year 6) Express desire, wishes and anxiety (year 5, year 6)
6. Agreeing	Agree with other speakers (other than non verbal or yes) (year 6)
7. Disagreeing	Disagree with other speakers (apart from no or non-verbal communication) (year 6)
8. Asking for opinion	Ask for opinion and express own opinion (year 6) Talk about physical and emotional state (year 5)
9. Comparing	Compare people, animals and objects (year 6)

Table 2. An example of the test.	
Test statements.	Tapescript.
_____ At 9:30	1. Where do they want to go to study?
_____ It's nice.	2. Whose is this red bike?
_____ No I don't	3. Which is your favourite season of the year?
_____ No, I don't think so. I think she is much older.	4. What were you doing when the fire started?
_____ It's about 100 kilometres.	5. How far is Oxford from London?
_____ It's Tony's.	6. Can you tell me how to go to the nearest church on foot?
_____ She is 25 years old.	7. What do you think of my new dress?
_____ To England. They don't want to go to the United States.	8. When is your birthday?
_____ After the bank turn left and then take the 3 rd turn on your left again	9. What time does the film start tonight?
_____ Summer.	10. I think Athina is only 16, what do you think?
_____ No, I'm not scared, I like horror films.	11. What shall we do on Sunday?
_____ In March	12. Do you like football?
_____ Sleeping.	13. You are scared!!!
_____ She is very beautiful.	
_____ Why don't we go swimming.	

Table 3. Correlation between the two markings of the listening test.

Correlations			
		their initial listening test mark	their second listening test mark
their initial listening test mark	Pearson Correlation	1,000	1,000**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,	,000
	N	30	30
their second listening test mark	Pearson Correlation	1,000**	1,000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,
	N	30	30

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4. Correlation between the two markings of the speaking test.

Correlations			
		their total mark in the speaking test, out of 40.	the second mark
their total mark in the speaking test, out of 40.	Pearson Correlation	1,000	1,000**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,	,000
	N	30	30
the second mark	Pearson Correlation	1,000**	1,000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,
	N	30	30

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5. Questionnaire items with a statistical significance

Questionnaire items	Significance value
1. the lesson of English at school is hard	0.00 both tests
2. English at school is fun	0.00 both tests
3. School English lessons are interesting	0.04 list. test only
4. the school course is easier than the private lessons	0.033 list. test only
5. school books are easy and fun	0.00 both tests
6. English is one of my favourite subjects	0.00 list. test 0.007 sp. test

7. I like the English language	0.00 both tests
8. English is easy to learn	0.019 list.test 0.016 sp.test
9. English is hard to speak	0.00 both tests
10. "I learn English because everybody does so"	0.038 list. test 0.053 sp. test
11. Learn the language because I want to be a good pupil	0.29 list.test
12. Learn it to please my parents	0.53 list.test
13. English is useful for future studies	0.08 list.test
14. English is useful for future employment	0.04 list.test