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## **IRANIAN ENGLISH LEARNERS' MOTIVATION TO LEARN ENGLISH IN HIGHER LEVELS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Motivation, the most heard and the most ignored factor in English classes, is the psychological quality that leads people to achieve a goal. Interestingly, among other psychological variables, it plays an effective role on academic achievement among students in general and English language learners in particular. It has been widely accepted by both teachers and researchers as one of the key factors that influences the rate and success of second/foreign language learning and as one of the most important reasons for different achievement among all the other factors. The current study investigated Iranian EFL learners motivation to and attitudes towards learning English. Accordingly, 120 Iranian EFL learners, who were studying English in higher levels, were chosen to participate in this study. With regard to instrument, a modified survey adapted from Gardner's (1985) and Clement et al.'s (1994) was administered. The study revealed that not only the students had positive attitudes toward learning English but also were highly motivated to study it. Strictly speaking, Iranian EFL students in this district were more instrumentally than integratively motivated to learn English.

**Key Words:** *Motivation, EFL Learners, English Proficiency*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Motivation is the driving force by which humans achieve their goals. In fact, it is the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language which leads to a conscious decision to act, and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to attain previous set goals. Second and foreign language motivation has been researched in different paradigms and numerous language learning contexts in the past decades (Dörnyei, 2005). Interestingly, how do we go about teaching students the language skills so that they become more interested in learning the language? According to Gardner and Lambert (1972), motivation to learn a second language is grounded in positive attitudes toward the second language community and in a desire to communicate with valued members of that community and become similar to them. The motivation desire is *integrative orientation* or *instrumental orientation*. Motivation has been identified as the learner's orientation with regard to the goal of learning a second language (Crookes and Schmidt, 1991). It is thought that students who are most successful when learning a target language are those who like the people that speak the language, admire the culture and have a desire to become familiar with or even integrate into the society in which the language is used (Falk, 1978). This form of motivation is known as integrative motivation. In contrast to integrative motivation is the form of motivation referred to as instrumental motivation. This is generally characterized by the desire to obtain something practical or concrete from the study of a second language (Hudson, 2000). With *instrumental motivation* the purpose of language acquisition is more utilitarian, such as meeting the requirements for school or university graduation, passing entrance exam successfully, applying for a job, requesting higher pay based on language ability, reading technical material, translation work or achieving higher social status. Instrumental motivation is often characteristic of second language acquisition, where little or no social integration of the learner into a community using the target language takes place, or in some instances is even desired.

**Extrinsic motivation**, like instrumental orientation, refers to the desire to learn a second/foreign language because of some pressure or reward from the social environment (such as career advancement or a course

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credit), internalized reasons for learning an L2 (such as guilt or shame), and/or personal decisions to do so and its value for the chosen goals (Noels *et al.*, 2001).

**Intrinsic motivation**, like integrative orientation, refers to students taking personal pleasure of learning second or foreign language. Actually, intrinsically motivated students, like integratively motivated ones, learn an L2 because of the inherent pleasure in doing so; they are expected to maintain their effort and engagement in the L2 learning process, even when no external rewards are provided (Oxford and Shearin, 1994; Noels *et al.*, 2001). When a learner has no extrinsic or intrinsic goals for learning a language, *amotivation* or lack of motivation arises. Accordingly, the learner may quit learning the target language at the earliest convenience (Noels *et al.*, 2001). As these concepts have gained popularity, it is claimed that intrinsic motivation plays a central role in learning a second/foreign language (Noels *et al.*, 2001; Oxford and Shearin, 1994).

Therefore, one important aim of the current study is to investigate Iranian student's motivational orientation and its effect on learning language achievement. In fact, it is worth conducting research about motivation, specially, in Iran as a country in which there is no enough chance to use target language or communicate with native speakers. Accordingly, in this study the probable relationship between student's motivation and their language proficiency is to be probed.

### **Background of the Study**

#### *What is Motivation?*

Although 'motivation' is a term frequently used in both educational and research contexts, it is rather surprising how little agreement there is in the literature with regard to the exact meaning of this concept. Interestingly enough, researchers seem to agree that motivation is responsible for determining human behaviour by energizing it and giving it direction, but the great variety of accounts put forward in the literature of how this happens may surprise even the experienced and seasoned researcher. This diversity is, of course, no accident; as Dörnyei (1996a) points out, motivation theories in general seek to explain no less than the fundamental question of why humans behave as they do, and therefore it would be naive to assume any simple and straight forward answer; indeed, every different psychological perspective on human behaviour is associated with a different theory of motivation and, thus, in general psychology it is not the lack but rather the abundance of motivation theories which confuses the scene. Additionally, motivation to learn an L2 presents a particularly complex and unique situation even within motivational psychology, due to the multifaceted nature and roles of language itself. Language is at the same time: (1) *a communication coding system* that can be taught as a school subject; (2) *an integral part of the individual's identity* involved in almost all mental activities; and also (3) the most important *channel of social organization* embedded in the culture of the special community where it has been used. Therefore, the motivational basis of language attainment is not directly comparable to that of the mastery of other subject matters in that knowing an L2 also involves the development of some sort of second language identity and the incorporation of elements from the L2 culture (Gardner, 1985); thus, in addition to the environmental and cognitive factors normally associated with learning in current educational psychology, L2 motivation also contains featured personality and social dimensions. To sum up, L2 motivation is necessarily a multifaceted construct, and describing its nature and its core features requires particular care.

As discussed in the previous part about instrumental and integrative motivation the role of orientation is to help arouse motivation and direct it towards a set of goals, either with a strong interpersonal quality (integrative orientation) or a strong practical quality (instrumental orientation) (Dörnyei, 2001), Gardner (1985) developed the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) to measure L2 learner's motivation a multi-component motivation test made up of around 130 items concerned with such variables as attitudes towards French Canadians, European French people and learning French, interest in foreign languages, orientation to learn French, French class anxiety, parental encouragement, motivation intensity, desire to learn French, and motivation index. The development of the Battery has resulted in numerous research studies on L2 motivation, which reveal that, in general, motivation enhances second/foreign language

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acquisition, and that learners ranking high on integrative orientation work harder and learn faster than those who are low on integrative motivation (Clément *et al.*, 1994; Gardner, Lalonde and Pierson, 1983; Gardner *et al.*, 1985; Gardner *et al.*, 1987; Gardner *et al.*, 1989; Gardner and MacIntyre, 1991; Lai, 2000; Masgoret and Gardner, 2003; Tremblay and Gardner, 1995). Gardner *et al.*, 's study (1983) supported the claim that proficiency in a second language was affected by attitudinal variables, which was confirmed by a later research study (Gardner *et al.*, 1985). The study also showed that motivation had a direct effect on situational anxiety and second language achievement. In addition, two other studies led to the conclusion that integrative orientation was closely related to persistence, language attrition and retention (Gardner *et al.*, 1987; Gardner *et al.*, 1989). Clément *et al.*, (1994) applied Gardner and Lambert's (1972) in order to investigate the role of motivation in foreign language learning, social and psychological constructs to the acquisition of English in the unicultural Hungarian setting. A survey assessing student's attitude, anxiety, and motivation toward learning English as well as their perception of classroom atmosphere and cohesion was administered to 301 students in Grade. Meanwhile, the teachers were asked to rate each of the students on proficiency and a number of classroom behaviors and to evaluate the cohesion of each class group. It was revealed that achievement in English was significantly related to self-confidence, the evaluation of the learning environment and the motivational indices. The attitude and effort index was also found to be related to self-confidence, the learning environment, and a cluster of affectively based attitudes and motivational factors.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Research Methodology**

#### *Subjects*

The current study was conducted on a sample of 120 EFL students (both male and female). The subjects were randomly chosen from 250 English students in higher levels in Sirjan, Iran. Actually, Sirjan is a prosperous city in South-east of Iran. The subjects' age range was between 18 to 32.

#### *Instrumentation*

The instrument used in the study consisted of a motivation survey and an English proficiency test.

#### *English Proficiency Test:*

With regard to the participants' English proficiency, a simulated TOEFL English proficiency test was specifically designed. The test, like the real TOEFL, consisted of four parts : listening comprehension (30 items, 30points); vocabulary (20 items, 10 points); structure (25 items, 20 points); reading comprehension (40 items, 40 points).In addition, a piece of translation from Persian to English and English into Persian (8 items, 8 points); and writing (20 points) were presented. The first four parts were multiple-choice questions to test student's knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, and understanding of the details, intentions and implications of listening and/or reading materials. Concerning writing, the students were supposed to write an argumentative/persuasive writing of at least 200- words in 35 minutes. The translation part required the students to translate a some English sentences, written by researcher, into Persian.

#### *Procedure*

The survey items were translated into Persian and checked twice. The survey was first piloted to a small sample and then administered to real group. The students were asked to finish the survey within 20 minutes during the normal teaching period of their classes. All the questionnaires were collected by the class teachers and given to the researcher. 8 days later, the simulated TOEFL was administered. With regard to the results of the survey, they were computed in terms of mean, standard deviation, and mode, median and range to examine the student's levels of attitudes towards and motivation to learn English. The correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationships between the student's attitudes and English-learning motivation and their English proficiency. Although this survey had translation and writing tests as well, only the multiple-choice objective measures—listening comprehension, vocabulary,

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cloze and reading comprehension were marked to examine the relationships between student's English proficiency and their attitudes and motivation to learn English, mostly to avoid bias.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

**Table 1: Statistical Analysis of the ALE**

Number of subjects	Median	Mean	Mode	Range	Standard deviation
120	38.22	35.10	36.01	8-25	3.50

According to table 1 data, many of the participants believed that studying English was an enjoyable experience and planned to learn as much English as possible. However, some students showed extremely negative attitudes towards learning English. To them, studying English was dull and not interesting and enjoyable at all, as indicated in the survey items. They might even hate English or would give up the study of English entirely when leaving. Regardless of this point, a mean score of 35.10, a mode of 36.01 and a median of 38.22 on the attitude, all far more than the average score of 24.00, indicate that the majority of the English language students had moderately or strongly positive attitudes towards learning English,

**Table 2: Statistical Analysis of the MS and its Subscales**

	Mean	Median	Mode	Range	Standard Deviation
Integrative Orientation	29.55	30.01	33.14	15-46	3.96
Instrumental Orientation	54.91	55.76	59.00	25-74	5.75
Travel Orientation	18.00	17.80	21.41	7-34	2.00
English-learning Motivation Scale					

Statistically speaking, the mean, standard deviation, median, mode and range of the Motivation scale were computed to know the general tendency of the student's English learning motivation. Since the scale has 38 items with a score range of 38 to 180, a total score of more than 144 on the scale implies that a respondent is strongly motivated to learn English. A total score of 108 to 144 reveals moderate motivation and a total score of less than 108 indicates no/little motivation. In other words, the higher the score, the more motivated a respondent was to learn English. As it was mentioned before the motivation survey consists of three components: integrative orientation, instrumental orientation (InsO) and travel orientation. Accordingly, the mean, standard deviation, median, mode and range of each of these three subscales were also computed. Given the total number of items of each subscale, a total score of more than 56 on the integrative orientation which has 14 items (with a score range of 14 to 70) implies that a respondent is strongly integratively motivated to learn English, a total score of 42 to 56 represents moderate integrative orientation and a score of less than 42 signifies no/little integrative orientation. A total score of more than 64 on the Instrumental Orientation which has 16 items (with a score range of 16 to 80) implies that a respondent is strongly Instrumentally motivated to learn English, a total score of 48 to 64 represents moderate instrumental orientation and a score of less than 48 reveals no/little instrumental orientation. A total score of more than 24 on the travel orientation which comprises 6 items (with a score range of 6 to 30) shows that a respondent has a strong orientation to learn English for travel, a total score of 18 to 24 represents moderate travel orientation and a score of less than 18 signifies

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no/little travel orientation. Interestingly enough, it can be concluded that the higher the score the more motivated the respondent was to learn English integratively, instrumentally, or by travel. The results are reported in Table 2.

As presented in table 2, with regard to Integrative Orientation, a mean score of 29.55, a median of 30.01 and a mode of 33.14 on the Integrative Orientation, all far below the average score of 42.00, suggest that the majority of the students were not integratively motivated to learn English. As a result, they seldom had the idea to learn English well enough to be like native speakers of English such as American or British people. Interestingly, these results are similar to the result of Meihua Liu study (2007), from Tsinghua University that was conducted with 202 third-year non-English majors in a southern university in China.

However, the learners were fairly strongly instrumentally motivated to learn the English language. Although some students (with a score of 25) were not instrumentally motivated, a mean score of 54.91, a median of 55.76 and a mode of 59.00 on the Instrumental Orientation, all far above the average score of 48.00, reveal that the majority of them were strongly or moderately instrumentally motivated to learn English, as found in previous studies (Belmechri and Hummel, 1998; Dörnyei, 2001; Gardner, 1985; Gardner and MacIntyre, 1991, 1993; Noels *et al.*, 2001; 2007). Interestingly, they wanted to learn to have a prosperous future, to pass entrance exam with high English mark, to search for information and materials on the Internet, to chat with native speakers, to be more knowledgeable, and to know what was happening in the world, as indicated in the survey items. Therefore, they preferred to study it hard.

With regard to travel orientation, a mean score of 18.00, a median of 17.80 and a mode of 21.41 on the Travel Orientation, all slightly above the average score of 18.00, indicate that most of the students were moderately or strongly motivated to learn English by travel, as found in Belmechri and Hummel’s (1998) and Oxford and Shearin’s (1994) studies. They believed that they needed to study English in that it would enable them to travel abroad and make their life easier when staying abroad, as implied in the survey items. In addition, the language could broaden their outlook and enable them to make friends with foreigners.

**Table 3: Correlations between Student’s Attitudes, Motivation and their English Proficiency**

	Attitudes	Instrumental Orientation	Integrative Orientation	Travel Orientation	Motivation Scale
Integrative Orientation	.101	-	1	-	-
Instrumental Orientation	.652**	1	.101	-	-
Travel Orientation	.425**	.754**	.191*	1	-
Motivation Scale	.712**	.824**	.133	.312**	1
English proficiency	.199**	.395**	.97	.289**	.378**

\*.P<0.05. \*\*.P<0.01

As revealed in the above table, the student’s attitudes and different English-learning orientations except for integrative orientation were not only significantly but positively correlated with their English proficiency. Actually, it was to some extent similar to previous studies in this field, especially Meihua Liu (2007) study in China. Interestingly, since china and Iran are both Asian countries it can be concluded that the results are to some extent, similar in different cultures and nationalities in the same continent. However, the coefficient was not so high as that in Gardner’s studies (1982, 1989). It may be assumed

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that it is because of situation. Gardner study was conducted in Canada, native environment, whereas the current study was conducted in Iran and targeted Iranian EFL learners. Hence, the impact of attitudes towards the target language on proficiency in that language might to some extent vary. In this part a correlation analysis was conducted to explore the relationships between the student's attitudes and motivation and their English proficiency. The more positive attitudes the students had towards learning English, the higher they scored on the proficiency test ( $r = .199$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). It is also revealed in the previous studies such as Gardner and Lambert (1972); Gardner *et al.*, (1985); Olshtain *et al.*, (1990) and Meihua Liu (2007) as well. Strictly speaking, the more instrumentally motivated the students were to learn English, the higher scores they achieved on the proficiency test ( $r = .395$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). It was the same with travel orientation and the overall motivation scale ( $r = .289$  and  $.378$  respectively,  $p < 0.01$ ), similar to previous studies (Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Gardner *et al.*, 1985; Hao *et al.*, 2004; Olshtain *et al.*, 1990 and Meihua Liu ,2007). All in all, it can be concluded that the more positive attitudes and the higher travel and instrumental orientations, the more proficient in English the student was. Nevertheless, it might be examined from two important aspects:

1- The more proficient in English the student was the more positive attitudes s/he had towards English learning and the more motivated s/he was to learn the language.

2-The more positive attitudes s/he had towards English learning and the more motivated s/he was to learn the language, the more proficient in English the student was.

### **Conclusion**

According to researchers motivation is responsible for determining human behaviour by energizing it and giving it direction, but the great variety of accounts put forward in the literature of how this happens may surprise even the seasoned researcher. The current study attempted to investigate Iranian EFL learners attitudes toward learning English, English-learning orientations Instrumental and Integrative motivation , and the correlations between these measured variables and the student's English proficiency. As the statistical analyses revealed, in the years that students learned English, they had positive attitudes toward learning English and were highly motivated to learn the language as well. Interestingly enough ,the students were more instrumentally than integratively motivated to learn English, maybe due to limited contact with English native speakers in Iran and specially in Sirjan. Infact, this finding is different from Gardner's (1985) claim that integrative orientation was more influential in achieving success in second language learning. Generally speaking, to have a brighter future (such as passing entrance exam successfully, or getting better job) seemed to be a more deciding factor for these students to learn English than to better know or behave like the British or American people. The common instrumental orientations found among these students were: passing entrance exam successfully, getting promoted in career development, getting a good job, searching for information on the Internet, being better educated, knowing the world, studying and working abroad. On the other hand, the learners were highly motivated by travel as well. The correlation analysis revealed an interesting result about English learners in Iran that the students who had more positive attitudes towards learning English tended to score higher in the proficiency test and that the students who were more instrumentally and/or travel motivated tended to perform better in the test. However, worth to be mentioned, more positive attitudes and higher instrumental and travel orientations might be also the result of higher English proficiency. The most interesting result of this study is that , the student's attitudes and different English-learning orientations except for integrative orientation were not only significantly but positively correlated with their English proficiency. Interestingly, it was to some extent similar to previous studies in this field, specially, Meihua Liu (2007) study which was conducted in China. Likewise, since china and Iran are both Asian countries it can be concluded that the results are to somehow, similar in different cultures and nationalities in the same continent.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

The capability of putting the findings of every research into practice is most important and interesting purpose and challenge of every scientific study. Since Motivation is a very important part of learning

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second language, a teacher must equip himself with up-to-date techniques and methods of motivating students. Interestingly enough, the present study has implications for learners, teachers, and teacher educators in the realm of TEFL in particular and education in general. It helps teachers in accomplishing their challenging task of teaching English in EFL contexts where learners have less exposure to language compared to ESL contexts. In other words, it is up to the researchers, textbook writers, and in service programs for teachers to inform foreign language teachers of the recent findings of the researchers in the field teaching and learning. Otherwise, the findings of research are of little value. It is clear that if one is to be an effective and successful English language learner; one must not only have the some skills and sub skills to but also the desire or motivation to read. As mentioned in previous parts, Motivation is defined as “beliefs, values, needs and goals that individuals have” (Guthrie and Wigfield, 1997). So all the teachers should be aware of the role of motivation in learner’s point of view and reaction toward learning English. Therefore, the results of this research can be evaluable for language teachers, especially in non native environment, additionally, it could help those dealing with foreign language teaching, such as syllabus designers, material developers, test makers, and the like.

### **Hints and Suggestions for Teachers**

It is teacher responsibility to make English class interesting and challenging. Therefore, to make the language learning process a more motivating experience, instructors need to put a great deal of thought into developing programs which maintain student interest and have obtainable short term goals. At the institutes, and especially higher levels, this task may prove more difficult. With the focus of study being directed toward university entrance students may have little desire or indeed motivation to improve language proficiency. For the foreign language teacher this may result in a certain level of frustration due to the general lack of interest and commitment by some students. Teachers not only need to know about instrumental, integrative, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, but also create interesting lessons in which the student’s attention is gained. Interestingly, this can sometimes be accomplished by the use of teaching strategies which are not often called upon by other teachers in mainstream subject areas. Encouraging students to become more active participants in a lesson can sometimes assist them to see a purpose for improving their communication skills in the target language. Successful communication using the target language should result in students feeling some sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. No matter what the underlying motivation to study a second language, what cannot be disputed is the fact that motivation is an important variable when teaching and examining successful second language acquisition.

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### Appendix 1

#### English-learning Motivation Scale

Direction: Please answer the following items by circling the letter of the alternative which appears most applicable to you. We would urge you to be as accurate as possible since the success of this investigation depends upon it.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Time to start to learn English \_\_\_\_\_

1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree

4 = agree 5 = strongly agree

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#### Attitude Questions

**1 2 3 4 5**

1. Studying English is an enjoyable experience.
2. I really enjoy learning English.
3. I plan to learn as much English as possible.
4. I hate English.
5. I would rather spend my time on subjects other than English.
6. Learning English is a waste of time.
7. I think that learning English is dull.
8. When I leave school, I shall give up the study of English entirely because I am not interested in it. A 1

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1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree

4 = agree 5 = strongly agree

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#### Integrative Orientation

**1 2 3 4 5**

9. Studying English can be important for me because I would like to meet foreigners with whom I can speak English.
  10. Studying English can be important for me because it will enable me to better understand and appreciate English art and literature.
  11. Studying English can be important for me because I will be able to participate more freely in the activities of English groups.
  12. It is important for me to know English in order to know the life of the English-speaking nations.
  13. The British people are open-minded and modern people.
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14. Studying English is important to me so that I can understand English pop music.

15. The Americans are sociable and hospitable.

16. The more I learn about the British, the more I like them.

17. Studying English is important to me because it will enable me to get to know various cultures and peoples.

18. Studying English is important to me so that I can keep in touch with foreign friends and acquaintances.

19. I would like to know more about American people.

20. The British are kind and friendly.

21. The Americans are kind and cheerful.

22. I would like to know more British people.

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*1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree*

*4 = agree 5 = strongly agree*

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**Instrumental Orientation Questions**

**1 2 3 4 5**

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23. Studying English can be important for me because it will make me a more knowledgeable person.

24. Studying English can be important for me because I may need it later (e.g., for job, studies).

25. Studying English can be important for me because other people will respect me more if I have a knowledge of a foreign language

26. Studying English can be important for me because I will be able to search for information and materials in English on the Internet.

27. Studying English can be important for me because I will learn more about what's happening in the world.

28. Studying English can be important for me because language learning often gives me a feeling of success

29. Studying English can be important for me because language learning often makes me happy.

30. Studying English is important to me because it provides an interesting intellectual activity.

31. Studying English is important to me because it offers a new challenge in my life, which has otherwise become a bit monotonous.

32. Studying English is important to me because an educated person is supposed to be able to speak English.

33. Studying English is important to me so that I can understand English-speaking films, videos, TV or radio.

34. Studying English is important to me because without it one cannot be successful in any field.

35. It is important for me to know English in order to better understand the English-speaking nation's behavior and problems.

36. Studying English is important to me because it will enable me to get to know new people from different parts of the world.

37. Studying English is important to me so that I can read English books.

38. Studying English is important to me because it will enable me to learn more about the English world.

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*1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = Neither disagree nor agree*

*4 = agree 5 = strongly agree*

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<b>Travel Orientation Questions</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
39. Studying English is important to me because I would like to spend some time abroad.					
40. Studying English is important to me because I would like to travel to countries where English is used.					
41. Studying English is important to me because it will help me when traveling.					
42. Studying English is important to me so that I can broaden my outlook.					
43. Studying English is important to me because without English I won't be able to travel a lot.					
44. Studying English is important to me because I would like to make friends with foreigners.					

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