EXPLORING THE MOTIVATION OF BENINESE DEAF POST-BEGINNER STUDENTS IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN BENINESE SECONDARY SCHOOLS BY NONLONFOUN JEAN-MARC

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GNONLONFOUN JEAN-MARC

GRI-DiGeST/ENSET-Lokossa Republic of Benin

Abstract

This study aims to describe the deaf and hearing-impaired Beninese post-beginners' English learning motivation. Data have been collected using an adapted version of the Language Learning Motivation Questionnaire. The results show that the attitude of the students in the English language is generally positive, but their experience of their own competence and ability is quite low. Females' self-esteem is in this area seems lower than males', but females appear to have a greater desire to succeed in English. Therefore, it is important that teachers try to build the pupils' belief in their own abilities. Learners are to be encouraged to make plans, set goals and find their own ways of learning English. Because integrative orientation seems to become such a major motivational force in time, learners need to be guided towards networking, making contacts, and internalizing the integrative orientation already early on. Diversifying teaching methods should also reduce the boredom effect of motivational decline.

Keywords: EFL learning, motivation, deaf and hard-of-hearing Beninese learners

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1 Problem and Purpose

Motivation is among the most important factors influencing the learning of any second or foreign language, and this is why it is also widely researched. Motivation, however, has proven to be such a wide concept that devising a motivational theory that encompasses its multifaceted nature has been problematic.

Minorities with unique and distinguishable qualities, like the Deaf, have been much neglected in motivational studies (Coyle & Cole, 2004; Haydon and Musti-Rao, 2011; Landrum and Sweigart, 2014; McDonald, Reeve and Sparacio, 2014; Riley et.al., 2011; Stevens et.al., 2010; Thompson et.al., 2012). The term Deaf is to be considered, in the frame of this study, as all those who identify themselves as members of Deaf community and share its language and culture. However, a recent study by Hanni (2007) examined the experiences of seven Deaf adults in learning English from elementary school to adulthood. Hanni unveiled many interesting points from the area of motivation and beyond, but the focus is put on the first nine years of schooling since the foundation for future language learning is laid there.

The present study draws on Hanni and attempts to describe the state of motivation Beninese deaf and hard-of-hearing post-beginner learners have for learning English as a foreign language. It also examines differences between male and female post-beginners motivation. The study also intends to reveal the factors that are particularly strong and weak in affecting the selected research population's English learning motivation, with the aim of providing relevant tips, strategies and techniques to both teachers and learners for a better performance. It has been hypothesized that: (i) that girls will be more motivated than boys to learn English, (ii) that students' motivation will decrease in time, and that (iii) that hard-of-hearing students, who have a (limited) ability to hear English and are thus able to apply auditory methods in their language learning, will have a higher motivation than those who are wholly deaf.

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2 Literature

2.1 Theories of motivation

Motivation has been acknowledged to be one of the most crucial factors influencing the learning of English or any second or foreign language. Motivation itself is a very wide concept that has been studied exhaustively with a multitude of different theories. The problem, however, is that there has not been a theory that would represent motivation in its total complexity. According to scholars (Chapman, 1989; Deci et.al., 1992; Dörnyei, 2001; Kaplan et.al., 1996), most researchers only deal with a narrow view of motivation, depending on their particular field and research priorities.

However, there have been attempts to synthesize the different aspects of motivation, and one proposal has risen above others. Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model has been the basis of much research on motivation during the past two decades.

The model used in the present study was developed by Williams et al. (2002). It is a multifaceted model that emphasizes the dynamic interaction between external and internal factors. External factors include parents, teachers and the learning environment, while internal factors have been categorized into three groups: Attitude (What do I think about it?), Identity (How do I see myself?) and Agency (How do I do it?). The model has also integrated and taken into account a person's cognitive processing, which starts with the individual construction of meaning (importance of the language studied), leading to goal-setting and decisions on appropriate action, and finally to self-regulating action. The model was then used by Williams et al. (2002) in the construction of a new questionnaire, referred to as the Language Learning Motivation Scale (LLMS).

The LLMS draws many elements from Gardner's motivational models, but incorporates a number of other motivation theories and factors recognized as contributing to the motivational process. Most of these can be traced to the area of achievement theories in cognitive psychology—a group called *expectancy-value* theories. Generally speaking, expectancy-value theories are interested in the relationship between an individual's expectancy of success and the value attached to it, suggesting that motivation to perform a task is greater when success is more likely and the goal offers a greater incentive (Wigfield 1994, cited in Williams et al. 2002:506).

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The expectancy dimension can be divided into *attribution theory*, *self-efficacy theory*, and *self-worth theory*, while the value dimension consists of *attainment value*, *intrinsic/extrinsic value* and *cost*. Self-efficacy theory and selfworth theory are about judging one's own abilities and competence to perform a given task, and about maintaining one's self-esteem while doing so, respectively. For example, if doing badly at a task feels threatening to one's self-esteem, this probably results in a lack of effort. From the value dimension, attainment value attaches a personal importance on mastering a task, intrinsic value finds an innate gain in doing the task itself (just for the sake of it), and extrinsic value finds value in how completing the task helps in gaining future goals. Cost relates to the emotional costs of expending effort to a task (Dörnyei 2001:20-25).

2.2 Deaf language learners

Although students' motivation to learn English has been somewhat well researched, the literature (Beart, Hardy and Buchan, 2005; Boswell, Knight and Spriggs, 2013; Burnett, 2001; Koyama and Wang, 2011; Maulik et.al., 2011; May and Howe, 2013) is strongly limited with respect to the deaf and hard-of-hearing minority. Their disability makes the task of learning English and other foreign languages unique and challenging. Indeed, in addition to mastering Braille, which is the first language for most of them, they have to learn the written form of the language of the majority, French. After that, they have to immediately expand to other foreign written languages—in this case English. Furthermore, they cannot use English as a spoken language, which means English cannot be used in personal communication situations, other than in written form. The additional help of acquiring the language by "picking it up" from natural communication situations is also closed for them. (Hanni 2007:33.)

Deaf children normally start their English lessons just as in normal hearing schools. However, factors such as each pupil's linguistic background, competence in Braille and French, as well as their facility to learn and the level of their hearing deficiency affect the decisions made on individual goals. Because of this, and because there are a few deaf children in the first place, the study groups are small and very heterogenic, which also poses a challenge to deaf education. The contents and methods of teaching English thus vary greatly depending on each group's particular demands and limitations. The scope of this study remains on the motivational state of the deaf and hard-of-hearing pupils.

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3 Methodology

The data for the present study was collected using an adapted version of the Language Learning Motivation Questionnaire (LLMQ) by Williams et al (2002). The Likert-type questionnaire used here (see table 1 in annex) consists 16 constructs that relate to motivation, each of which is represented by four items. Participants had to respond to the items along a four-point scale ranging from *definitely true* to *definitely not true*, which results in a maximum of 16 points and minimum of 4 points for each construct.

The questionnaire was translated from English to French and then to Braille with all the necessary adjustments. It was then sent to the three deaf schools of the country located respectively in Cotonou, Akassato and Parakou. A total of 120 post-beginners from the three schools filled the questionnaire under their English teachers' supervision. Prior to this, the researcher had provided all necessary explanations to the teachers. The filled questionnaire sheets were sent back to the researcher. Out of the 120 sheets, 20 were found useless because they were incomplete and not filled as expected. Therefore, 100 questionnaire sheets were considered giving a response rate of 83, 33%.

The scores of each questionnaire were computed using Microsoft Excel® 2007. Comparisons were then made between boys' and girls' mean scores and between groups with different amounts of experience in English lessons. Some comparisons are also made between deaf and hard-of-hearing pupils. Statistical significance of the differences is measured using an independent, 2-tailed samples t-test, the results of which are found in the tables' sig-columns. The most significant results are found at $p \le 0.01$ (marked with three asterisks), which indicates a possibility of only 1% or less that the difference is more due to chance than actual difference. The quantitative method was selected to provide a set of measureable data on the field of motivation from the deaf and hard-of-hearing target group, which has not been done before. It was also selected to provide a point of comparison for further studies.

4 Results

The mean scores of the entire group, as well as the males and the females' scores separately and the difference between them have been gathered in the table 2 in annex. The general findings on the scores of the entire group are be discussed first, followed by comparative

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examinations on differences based on gender, experience/age (Tables 3 and 4 in annex) and the level of hearing (Table 5 in annex) while considering possible reasons for specific results.

4.1 Scores of the whole group

Of the four areas of motivation listed in Table 2, *Attitudes* proves to be the strongest with overall highest scores (12.99). The pupils show a very strong desire to learn English well (14.15) and perceive it to be an important skill to master (13.70). In fact, the *desire*-construct Is the highest of all the 16 constructs, which suggests a fertile starting point for other areas of motivation to be positively influenced. Still, the pupils *enjoy* English lessons and learning English considerably less (11.60), which might suggest that there is a conflict between the wants and needs of the pupils and how those needs are met (does the "supply" meet the "demand"?). It poses a challenge for teachers to find ways of making the learning experience more enjoyable. The pupils also showed a strong integrative orientation (13.55) and a fairly positive level of intrinsic motivation (11.95).

Feelings of *Agency* ranks second of the four areas (11.86). The pupils show a fairly strong sense of responsibility for their own learning (12.70). They also generally feel that they make an effort to learn English (12.10) and experience a connection between effort and positive learning outcomes (12.35). The pupils have a fairly positive level of awareness about the reasons behind doing well or poorly in English lessons (11.75), but seem to have a slightly harder time utilizing strategies to improve their learning results (11.20). The use of metacognitive strategies is also fairly limited (11.05).

External influences come in third place (11.68). The pupils' parents seem to provide a generally good influence on learning English (12.25), while teachers' (11.65) and groups' (11.05) effect is lower. *Identity* comes last and scores notably less than the other areas (10.80). The pupils' sense of competence and ability is questionable overall, but also shows a significant difference between boys and girls.

4.2 Gender differences

The first thing to address concerning gender differences is related to hypothesis (i): the one according to which girls, overall, were more motivated than. The results (Table 2) were not consistent with this hypothesis since the girls in the present study score higher than boys only on 9 of the 16 constructs.

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Although boys and girls are more equal in this study, many clear differences are present. In the area of *Attitudes*, the most interesting difference is a stronger contrast between desire and enjoyment among the girls: the girls clearly have a stronger desire to learn English (sig at $p \le 0.01$) and seem to perceive it as more important than boys do, but still seem to enjoy the learning process clearly less than boys. In *External influences* the boys experience a generally positive influence from teachers, parents and the learning group quite evenly, but for the girls the school-based external influences—teacher, and especially the learning group (sig at $p \le 0.05$)—provide a much weaker effect.

A clear difference is also evident in the area of *Identity* (sig at $p \le 0.05$). While the boys have a fairly positive sense and perception of their competence and ability in English, the girls' equivalents are clearly low. In *Agency*, the boys and the girls are more equivalent with no significant differences, although girls still score higher on 5 of the 6 constructs. This could suggest that the girls do slightly more in order to learn English and are slightly smarter in analysing their learning process. It seems that it is especially hard for the boys to utilize strategies to improve their learning. The girls also seem to feel more strongly that learning English is up to them, although the sense of responsibility is the highest ranking construct of the area for both the boys and the girls.

It can be deduced from the gender differences mentioned above, that girls, even though (or perhaps because) they seem to have a poorer self-image as language learners, employ a greater desire to learn English, do more in order to be successful but are still more sensitive to and more easily affected by the limitations of the teaching methods and the teaching environment. Boys, on the other hand, enjoy a more positive level of enjoyment and interest and contentment with the teacher and the teaching environment. They see themselves more positively, but are less self-analytical about their learning process.

The reasons behind the girls' poor self-image of their language skills are particularly interesting: do the low scores actually portray an analytically correct assessment of their own skills and abilities, or just typical modesty and setting the bar too high? This would apply to both the boys and the girls, and is a question which Hanni (2007:85) also brought up. Her

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informants were also hard on themselves and had felt the lack of language skills and the uncertainty of their abilities as discouraging. Her data does not, however, show a clear difference between boys and girls in this area. A possible answer to the gender difference could be found in the fact that the world has changed since Hanni's informants were in school, and English has come closer to the everyday lives of even school children. In written form, English is more clearly present in the internet and video games, which might be domains more attractive for boys (especially the latter). It could be possible that boys, with more contact with the English language, have also developed a better language identity, but this cannot be proven without qualitative research. Another explanation could be found from recent studies which indicate that girls in general have more self-esteem issues than boys during teenage years. Whatever the real reason, it seems that a lower self-perception has a negative effect on enjoyment, but increases the desire to be successful.

The low scores in *enjoyment* and *teacher influence* signals that there may be problems with teaching methods and materials, which is also backed up by Hanni's (2007:70-76) study. Her results show that English teaching was generally experienced as uninteresting and unmotivating: especially formal and repetitive teaching methods that followed books to the letter were experienced as uninspiring, while inventive deviations from the learning materials were experienced more positively. Teachers themselves were considered both negative and positive factors, depending on the teacher's personality. Competence in teaching and language skills were raised as problems, as well as the fact that some teachers' expectations for their pupils' language learning were too low and that they consequently demanded too little of them. This led to poor learning results for the pupils. The heterogeneity of the learning group was also mentioned as a factor that did not particularly raise learning motivation, and might explain the low scores for *group ethos*.

4.4 Motivation

Williams et al. (2002) discovered that motivation in foreign language learning is prone to decrease in time: Fifth year students showed higher levels of motivation compared to those of Seventh year students. A similar examination was made in the present study, but since pupils in deaf schools start their English lessons at varying stages, this study chooses to focus rather on how many years they have studied English, making comparisons between those with less

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experience (2-4 years), and those with 6 years and those with 7 years of experience in English lessons. The significant results of these comparisons are shown in Table 3 in annex.

The results show a curve that differs from Williams et al.'s (2002) declining curve. Here the trend seems to be that pupils start with low motivation in their early years of English learning, but then leap higher by the 6th year, and then decline slightly on the 7th year of English studies. This happens in 9 of the 16 constructs. Three constructs (intrinsic motivation, parental influence and sense of responsibility), however, seem to ascend throughout the years while one (teacher influence) seems only to decline.

The constructs of desire, perceived importance, and integrative orientation are found among the most significant increases (at $p \le 0.05$) from the early years to year 6: all of them rise from a fairly positive level to a very strong level by the 6th year. All three also decline from year 6 to year 7, with the only fairly significant decline (at $p \le 0.1$) concerning the perceived importance. Significant increases (at $p \le 0.01$) can also be found in attributional awareness and effort outcome, rising from a questionable level to a good level by the 6th year, but with no significant decline by year 7. The pupils' sense of competence suffers a big blow moving from year 6 to year 7 with a significant decline (at $p \le 0.05$) from a healthy level to a very low level.

In addition to the differences that come with the years spent learning English, a comparison is made based purely on the pupils' age to uncover any differences that come with maturity. This comparison reveals a curve that is clearly ascending with the older group scoring higher on 15 of the 16 constructs. Table 4 shows the significant leaps (at $p \le 0.05$) found in three constructs. The older group seems to be more interested in English, have a stronger integrative orientation and feel that they expend more effort to learn English.

In analysing the motivational curves, the results seem to go against the initial declining hypothesis based on Williams et al. (2002), which has been observed in numerous other studies as well. It could, however, be that this is only due to the special circumstances of the

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Deaf target group. The challenges of learning the written form of a spoken language quite certainly take their toll on motivation in the first years of language lessons. Then, when the pupils get past the first difficulties and get more familiar with the language, motivation also rises and, in a sense, normalizes; the pupils experience the outcomes of their efforts more positively and understand the reasons for their failures and successes better. At this point the initial hypothesis takes effect, and motivational decline can be observed, as the boring repetitiveness and tedious grinding of grammar and vocabulary gets to the pupils.

Looking at the change brought on by maturity, similar findings were made by Hanni (2007: 62-64), who found that the motivation to learn English was improved overall over time as experiences are gained and international contacts made. This has a particular effect on integrative orientation, which in the case of Deaf young people usually refers more to their want to connect with other Deaf people around the world and being part of the global Deaf community through written English, and not to a desire to identify solely with people who speak English as a first language.

4.5 The value of the hearing factor

Because English, like all spoken languages, is primarily meant to be heard and spoken, it is justifiable to question the motivational ramifications of having only the written form of the language at one's disposal and not being able to learn it using auditory means. This is why the present study also makes an effort to make comparisons between deaf and hard-of-hearing pupils. Hanni (2007:11) did not find any major differences between deaf and hard-of-hearing pupils' learning experiences in her qualitative study, since both needed similar learning arrangements and the hard-of-hearing students could not learn using auditory means. However, it is still possible that there are differences that are not that apparent, and differences that lie deeper in the subconscious.

There were only twenty-five pupils among the informants who listed themselves as hard-of-hearing, twenty of whom were girls. That is why, to avoid boys' and girls' inherent differences tipping the scale and affecting the analysis in this area, comparisons in hearing are made only among the girls. The results can be found in Table 5 in annex. Putting the two

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groups in opposition here is, however, admittedly somewhat artificial, since there is not enough detailed information on the severity of the pupils' hearing loss and whether the hard-of-hearing pupils actually are willing to use English as a spoken language.

Similarly to the findings outlined in the literature (Allday et.al., 2012; Burnett, 2010; Craft, Alber and Heward, 1998; Crawley, Lynch and Vannest, 2006; Duchaine, Jolivette and Fredrick, 2011; Hanni, 2007), there are hardly any differences between deaf and hard-of-hearing girls. In most of the constructs the differences are minimal and without statistical significance. Still, the results show that hard-of-hearing girls clearly (sig at $p \le 0.1$) have a higher level of enjoyment and interest towards learning English, and that deaf girls have a significantly stronger sense of responsibility in doing well in English (sig at $p \le 0.05$).

The first difference is quite understandable, since having no hearing can make learning a spoken language that much harder and thus less enjoyable. Still, there is little to no difference in deaf and hard-of-hearing pupils' desire to learn English and their perception of its importance, which is notable. The second difference, however, is more interesting. It could be that being profoundly deaf, and thus clearly at a disadvantage in learning spoken languages, can make one realize that succeeding is even more decisively up to oneself. Deaf cultural history could also contribute to this, since the Deaf have always had to suffer the hearing majority telling them what they cannot do because of their deafness. This kind of oppression can make Deaf people even more driven to be successful in life.

Conclusion

The results of the analysis have brought up many interesting points, many of which could be useful information for English teachers in trying to enhance their pupils' motivation. First, the strong desire to learn English should be encouraging, but the relative weakness of enjoyment and perceived teacher influence should be taken as a challenge to diversify teaching methods. Second, the poor self-perception of girls, particularly, should be noted, and a positive feedback culture and encouragement should be kept up. Teachers' expectations should never fall too low, but instead try to build the pupils' belief in their own abilities. Third, the relative weakness of strategic awareness and metacognitive strategies also show an untapped source to

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positive results. Pupils should be encouraged to make plans, set goals and find their own ways of learning English. Fourth, because integrative orientation seems to become such a major motivational force in time, pupils should be guided towards networking, making contacts, and internalizing the integrative orientation already early on, which may raise the low motivation of the first years of learning English. Diversifying teaching methods should also reduce the boredom effect of motivational decline in the last years of school.

There are some important limitations to the scope of this study. The limited number of participants' makes statistical analysis more unreliable compared to what a larger set would provide. Since the target group in general is so small, it poses the question whether quantitative methods should be used at all to study the deaf community.

The present study may also suffer from a lack of certain validity tests a more experienced quantitative analyst could have done, although the tests and analysis made are quite sufficient considering the small scale of the study.

This study is mainly exploratory in nature, and tries to uncover new areas of study and interest. New and more explanatory studies could be more effectively done by qualitative methods. Problems in self-perceptions and changes in motivation over time, for example, could be interesting and useful subjects for further study.

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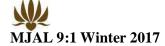
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ANNEX

Table 1. LLMQ constructs and item examples (adapted from Williams 2004:171)

			opted from Williams 2004:171) Options					
Heading	Constructs	Statements	Definitely True	True	Not True	Definitely Not Tue		
	Enjoyment and interest	I enjoy English lessons						
	Desire	I want to be good at English						
Attitude	Perceived importance	It will be important for me to know English						
	Integrative orientation	I'd like to meet English people						
	Intrinsic motivation	I'd like to learn English even if I didn't have to						
External influences	Teacher influence	My teacher is helpful to me in learning English						
	Parental influence	My parents encourage me to learn English						
	Group Ethos	The students in our class work well together as a group						
I.i	Sense of Competence	I usually do well in English lessons						
Identity	Perceived ability	I think I'm good at English						
	Expended effort	I work hard at English						
Agency	Effort outcomes	However hard I try, I'll never do well in English						
	Attributional awareness	When I get good marks in English I usually know why						
	Strategic awareness	If I do badly at English, I usually know how to do better next time						
	Sense of responsibility	Doing well in English is up to me						



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Metacognitive	I try to set myself goals when I study English				
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Table 2. Mean scores and the difference between boys and girls

	Whole	Males	Females		Significance
	Group			Females)	
ATTITUDE	12.99	12.74	13.27	0.50	0.302
Enjoyment and interest	11.60	12.30	10.90	-1.40	0.263
Desire	14.15	13.10	15.20	2.10	0.009***
Perceived importance	13.70	13.10	14.30	1.20	0.233
Integrative orientation	13.55	13.70	13.40	-0.30	0.778
Intrinsic motivation	11.95	11.50	12.40	0.90	0.331
EXTERNAL	11.68	12.27	11.10	-1.17	0.074*
INFLUENCES					
Teacher influence	11.65	12.50	10.80	-1.70	0.155
Parental influence	12.25	12.10	12.40	0.30	0.811
Group ethos	11.15	12.20	10.10	-2.10	0.033**
IDENTITY	10.80	11.70	9.90	-1.80	0.018**
Sense of competence	10.80	11.70	9.90	-1.80	0.112
Perceived ability	10.80	11.70	9.90	-1.80	0.100*
AGENCY	11.86	11.57	12.15	0.58	0.184
Effort expended	12.10	11.90	12.30	0.40	0.699
Effort outcome	12.35	12.00	12.70	0.70	0.493
Attributional	11.75	11.60	11.90	0.30	0.684
awareness					
Strategic awareness	11.20	10.50	11.90	1.40	0.189
Sense of responsibility	12.70	12.30	13.10	0.80	0.513
Metacognitive	11.05	11.10	11.00	-0.10	0.943
strategies					

^{***=}p\le 0.01

Table 3. Significant differences between mean scores according to years of experience

		2&4	6	7	Difference	Significance	Difference	Significan
		yrs.	years	years	between B-		between C-	ce
		(A)	(B)	(C)	A		В	
Ш	Desire	12.20	15.43	14.67	3.23	0.017**	-0.76	0.264
ITUDE	Perceived importance	12.00	15.43	13.50	3.43	0.022**	-1.93	0.079*
ATT	Integrative orientation	11.40	14.43	13.67	3.03	0.016**	-0.76	0.556

 $^{**=}p \le 0.05$

 $^{*=}p \le 0.1$



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IDENTITY	Sense of Competence	10.80	12.14	9.17	1.34	0.329	-2.98	0.052**
NCY	Outcomes of Effort	9.80	13.86	13.17	4.06	0.002***	-0.69	0.420
AGENCY	Attributiona 1 awareness	10.60	12.57	12.17	1.97	0.003***	-0.40	0.689

^{***=}p\le 0.01

Table 4. Differences in mean scores according to the students' age

		Age 14-15	Age 16-18	Difference	Significance
		(A)	(B)	between B-A	
	Interest and	10.33	12.64	2.30	0.050**
ATTITUDE	enjoyment				
ATTITUDE	Integrative	12.22	14.64	2.41	0.020**
	orientation				
AGENCY	Effort expended	10.89	13.09	2.20	0.024**

^{***=}p\le 0.01

Table 5. Significant differences between deaf and hard-of hearing girls

Tuble 2. Significant anticrences between dear and nata of hearing girls							
		Deaf	Hard-of-	Difference	Significance		
		(A)	Hearing (B)	between B-A			
ATTITUDE	Interest and	10.17	12.00	1.83	0.056*		
ATTITUDE	enjoyment						
AGENCY	Sense of	14.33	11.25	-3.08	0.024**		
	responsibility						

^{**=} $p \le 0.05$

^{**=} $p \le 0.05$

 $^{*=}p \le 0.1$

^{**=} $p \le 0.05$

^{* =} $p \le 0.1$

 $^{*=}p \le 0.1$