

Motivation Among Arab Learners of English in the UK

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Abstract : As more and more students are travelling to different countries to study and, in particular, to study English, the question of what motivates them to make such a large move has come under question. This is particularly pertinent in the case of Arab students who make up nearly 15% of the foreign student body in the UK. Given that the cultural differences between the UK and Arab nations are extremely wide, the decision to come to this country to study English must be driven by strong motivational forces. Numerous previous studies have considered what motivates foreign students to travel to the UK and other countries for their education or language learning but the specific motivators of Arab students have yet to be explored. This study undertakes to close that gap by examining the concepts and theories of motivation, both in general terms and in relation to English learning and foreign study. 70 Arab students currently studying in the UK were asked to participate in an online questionnaire which asked about their motivations for coming to the UK and for studying and learning English. A further six individuals were interviewed on a face to face basis. The outcomes have indicated that the factors which motivate the decision to come to the UK are similar to those that motivate the desire to learn English. In particular a motivation for self-improvement, career advancement and potential future benefits were cited by a number of respondents. Other indications were the ease of accessibility to the UK as an English speaking country, a motivation to experience different cultures and lifestyles and even political freedoms. Overall the motivations of Arab students were not found to be conspicuously different from those of other foreign students, although it was noted that their motivations did change, both positively and negatively following a period of time in the country. These changes were based on the expectations of the students pre-arrival and their actual experience of the country and its teaching approaches and establishments and were, as indicated both good and bad. The implications for the Arab student population and UK educational establishments are reviewed and future research pathways highlighted.

Keywords : motivation, Arab learners of English, language teaching, applied linguistics

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