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Motivation for Second Language Learning in the Czech Armed Forces

Abstract

The subject matter of the paper is motivation for second language learning under specific conditions of military service in the Czech Armed Forces. Motivation is the fundamental source of any human action, influencing goals and objectives, attitudes and efforts but also results achieved by each individual. As such, motivation belongs to the most important factors of learners' success. The paper is based on an explanatory research perspective, aiming at identifying the relative importance of different factors of motivation in second language learning. The presented paper methodology consists of a questionnaire survey, followed by an analysis and interpretation of gathered data. The research material, covered by the survey, is the motivation of the Czech Armed Forces personnel attending foreign language courses to learn second foreign language at the University of Defence Language Centre in 2022. This survey has been designed to enable language educators to identify and further analyse relative significance of individual motivational factors and their perception by second language learners as either internal, or external. As the survey outcomes show, the Czech military personnel motivation to learn second foreign language is not primarily generated by their current job needs and requirements. At the same time, the Czech military personnel attending foreign language courses perceive their learning motivation as predominantly internal.

Keywords: motivation, second language, learning, motivational factor, survey, Czech Armed Forces

Introduction

Motivation is considered to be one of the most significant factors influencing students' success and satisfaction in the process of second language acquisition. Motivation contributes to higher effectiveness of the learning process. Reynolds *et al.* (2002) stated:

The disposition and commitment of the learners, their motivation to learn, is one of the most critical factors affecting training effectiveness. Under the right conditions, a strong disposition to learn, enhanced by solid experience and a positive attitude, can lead to exceptional performance. (Reynolds *et al.* 2002: 34)

Sufficient second language competences belong to essential prerequisites for military career success in the Czech Armed Forces (CAF). The reason for our research into learners' motivation to increase their second language competences is our effort to reach the goals having been set by the Czech Ministry of Defence (MoD) in the area of second language acquisition with the limited number of lessons for direct instruction teaching methods. The objective of research is to ascertain which motivational factors are significant and have a potential to contribute to the success in the CAF second language acquisition process. Considering the bureaucratic, rather rigid and predominantly directive style of human resources management in the CAF, two initial hypotheses have been suggested:

H1: The CAF personnel are motivated for second language learning mainly by formal requirements related to their military service.

H2: With regard to motivation for second language learning in the CAF, external motivation prevails over internal motivation.

Motivation and Second Language Learning

Motivation is an extremely complicated psychological phenomenon. It is defined in the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2008: 928) as 1) enthusiasm for doing something and 2) the need or reason for doing something. As it is mentioned by Ellis (2015):

motivation is a complex construct that involves the reasons or goals learners have for learning a second language, the effort they put into learning, and the attributes they form as a result of their attempts to learn. (Ellis 2015: 51)

Gardner (2010: X Preface) notes that "motivation is multi-faceted, involving affective, cognitive, and behavioural elements, and there is a distinction between language learning motivation and language classroom motivation." Motivation being a complex mental process is also mentioned by Brown and Seibert (2019: 1) who quote Dörnyei (2005) that this "complex mental process extends from a multiplicity of both internal (*e.g.* enjoyment, interest) and external (*e.g.* social support, potential rewards) factors." Ellis adds that "early theories distinguished *instrumental* and *integrative motivation* and *extrinsic* and *intrinsic motivation*" (*cf.* Özgür and Griffiths 2013: 1100), as well as that "theories of motivation have continued to develop and currently emphasize its dynamic nature and the importance of context." (Ellis 2015: 51) The fact that motivation is not static and depends on the situational context is mentioned

by Shan (2020: 549–559) in his critical examination of a good learner from the perspective of intrinsic motivation. Context is also mentioned by Gardner (2010), according to whom:

the concept of motivation is applicable to many situations and contexts. In the area of second language learning, we can distinguish between two aspects of motivation, language learning motivation and language classroom motivation. Language learning motivation is the major focus of the socio-educational model in that it is concerned with accounting for the major processes underlying individual differences in the success in which the language is acquired. (Gardner 2010: 9)

The importance of context mentioned by Ellis and Gardner deserves further explanation in relation to our research. The terms *success* and *context* are integral parts of our research, although research into motivation-success and motivation-context relations is beyond the scope of this paper. It should also be taken into consideration that our survey of motivational factors is based on the perspective of language learning motivation rather than the language classroom motivation. Perception of success may be different under different circumstances, in different contexts. While success for the University of Defence students might be the achievement of Standard Language Profile 2 (SLP 2) according to the NATO Standardized Agreement (STANAG) 6001 (*cf.* NATO Standard ATrainP-5 Language Proficiency Levels) by the end of the 6th semester as required by curriculum, success for the language course real beginners might be the achievement of SLP 1 at least in two language skills at the end of the course. Perception of success might be either measurable in the form of progress after certain period of time, or quite subjective. We acknowledge the fact that without implementing a qualitative aspect of research in the form of *e.g.* semi-structured interviews it will be difficult to find the relationship between the level of motivation and success in the L2 acquisition. Thus, we can avoid extreme cases of analysing highly-motivated students with low aptitude for languages, whose levels of L2 acquisition, despite the progress made, are still lower than the levels of knowledge of low-motivated students with high aptitude for languages, whose starting knowledge was satisfactory, but there is little or no progress. Context may also lead to various research outcomes. Although there are two quite homogeneous groups of respondents – 1) the UoD students, and 2) the DoD language courses participants, emphasis may be put on various motivational factors in different subgroups of respondents defined by their age, gender and job experience.

As it has already been mentioned above, motivation can be characterized by diversity and complexity and early theories distinguished instrumental and integrative, as well as extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Oxford and Shearin (1994: 12) concluded that the currently prevalent theory of second language learning motivation emphasizing integrative and instrumental aspects might not cover all possible kinds of second language motivation. The adoption of broader range of motivation is challenging, because there is no single motivational theory which could make it easier to understand all the elements affecting motivational behaviour (*cf.* Tremblay and Gardner 1995: 505–518).

Quan (2014: 3) quotes Brown (1994) in his overview of the history of research on motivation and its application in learning and teaching that:

the intrinsic – extrinsic continuum has almost got the same significance as the integrative – instrumental one. And this intrinsic – extrinsic continuum in motivation is applicable to foreign language classmates around the world to harness the power of intrinsically motivated learners who are striving for excellence, autonomy and self-actualization. (Brown 1994: 157)

When intrinsic motivation prevails, we can say that we want to learn, we are interested. Armstrong ([1977] 2014: 170) points out that it is associated with the concept of engagement. On the other hand,

when extrinsic motivation prevails we can say that we must, or we have a necessity to *e.g.* pass an exam or keep a job. Integrative motivation reflects our effort to understand the culture and the people who speak the language we learn. (*cf.* Gardner 2012: 215–226) Instrumental motivation shows our effort to fulfil the tasks which have been set by others, *e.g.* a school management, or an employer. Carrió-Pastor and Mestre examined integrative motivation and instrumental motivation in their study in order to establish relation between the form of motivation and successful second language acquisition. Carrió-Pastor and Mestre (2014) point out that “in later studies, integrative motivation has continued to be emphasized, although now the importance of instrumental motivation is also stressed.” They also note that:

instrumental motivation has been acknowledged as a significant factor for the group of students interested in specific language learning, whereas integrative motivation is linked to general second language acquisition. (Carrió-Pastor and Mestre 2014: 243)

Nemeth (2020) claims:

what appears to be essentially important is not whether motivational factors are intrinsic or extrinsic to the learning process, but whether they are internalised and self-determined, thus originating from within the learner, or externally enforced and governed by teachers, peers, curricula, educational and societal expectations. (Nemeth 2020: 153)

Gardner (2010: X Preface) expresses thought provoking opinion and argues that “what is important is not the type of motivation but rather its strength, and that this must be considered in light of all of its elements.”

Awareness of complexity of the subject matter under scrutiny requires clarification of the term *motivational factor* within our research. Thus, the term has a quite broad connotation and includes respondents’ goals, attitudes and efforts. Such an approach is supported by Dewaele (2013: 161) who mentions that “SLA researchers point to concepts such as motivation (including attitude), investment or desire as being at the heart of success in foreign language learning.” The same author quotes Gardner’s (1985: 10) definition of language learning motivation as “the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language” (Dewaele 2013: 161). Interrelation between attitudes and motivation was mentioned by Entwistle (2001: 6), who stated that, according to previous studies, different approaches are related to different forms of motivation. Besides intrinsic and extrinsic motivation other forms of motivation were mentioned by the same author, such as fear of failure and necessity for achievement. According to Dornyei and Csizer (2005) there is not a clear motivation-outcome relationship. They point out that:

although motivation obviously matters with respect to how successful learning is likely to be, several factors other than motivation also affect the strength of the motivation-outcome relationship (*e.g.* the learners’ ability, learning opportunities, or the quality of instruction). (Dornyei and Csizer 2005: 20)

According to Ellis (2015: 51), motivation is the key conative factor. However, there are also cognitive factors, such as language aptitude and intelligence, and affective factors, such as language anxiety. When considering motivation and language competence as two important factors of success we dare to propose our internal classification of students into the following four categories: 1) highly motivated and language competent students; 2) highly motivated but language incompetent students; 3) low motivated but language competent students; and 4) low motivated and language incompetent students.

It is obvious that motivation is just part of success and students who are equally motivated succeed differently in the second language acquisition, depending on the factors mentioned above. However, knowing how much motivation contributes to the success in the second language learning process would be highly beneficial. With the first category of students being the dream of every teacher, it is possible to work with all categories of students, although different teaching and/or motivation strategies have to be applied. In case of language incompetence, we should rather apply such teaching strategies that increase the chances of success, which may spark increased motivation in return. In case of low motivation attention should be focused on the reasons of low motivation. And last but not least, it must not be forgotten to work with highly motivated students, not only to analyse the reasons of their high motivation, but also to maintain the level of their motivation high.

As students have different motivation for studying a language, it is important to identify their motivation and to design appropriate motivational strategies. Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011: 996) state that “it is important to identify both the type and combination of motivation that assists in the successful acquisition of a second language.” They also believe that “motivation fluctuates, and it is challenging to keep language learners’ motivation at a high level all the time” (Oroujlou and Vahedi 2011: 995).

Methodology

To analyse the motivation for second language learning in the CAF and gather data necessary for verification of the hypotheses stated above, we conducted a questionnaire survey (*cf.* Disman 1993: 140–176). The research target audience consisted of the CAF personnel sent by the MoD to various English language courses with the aim to achieve certain level of Standard Language Profile (SLP) according to the NATO Standardized Agreement (STANAG) 6001¹ at the University of Defence Language Centre during the second half of 2022. Out of 180 second language learners in the English language courses held at the University of Defence Language Centre in the second half of 2022, 105 responses have been collected in total, *i.e.* approx. 58%. The questionnaires were distributed by teachers in language courses and completed by the respondents anonymously (pen & paper format) with teachers being directly available to respondents to explain the aims and purpose of the survey in more detail.

The questionnaire form consists of three parts. The first part includes twelve questions regarding the relative significance of the following twelve motivational factors (factor or element of given respondent’s motivation to learn second language):

1. Language requirement related to a given appointment/position;
2. Superior’s requirement;
3. Career prospects/development;
4. Prolongation of military service/contract with the MoD;
5. Service abroad (NATO/EU structures *etc.*);
6. Military deployment abroad;
7. Interest in learning something new;
8. Interest in getting better job opportunities after retiring from the military;

¹ See more at: <https://www.natobilc.org/files/ATrainP-5%20EDA%20V2%20E.pdf> [date of access: 20 Dec. 2022].

9. Communication with foreigners;
10. Following foreign media, literature, *etc.*;
11. Necessity to have language competences to do his/her job;
12. Necessity to read foreign texts.

The respondents were asked to state their personal perception of relative significance of the above-mentioned motivational factors using a Likert scale significance (very high, high, medium, low, negligible). In addition, for each of the motivational factors, the respondents indicated if they perceived these individual motivational factors as either internal (intrinsic), or external (extrinsic), or as a combination of both internal and external.

The second part of the questionnaire survey consists of five questions aimed at gathering additional information about the respondents' attitudes to second language learning. Partially, these questions enable us to verify answers provided by the respondents to the questions in the first part of the questionnaire form. Furthermore, this part of questionnaire enabled the respondents to provide any additional information regarding their second language learning motivation (*e.g.* any further motivational factor not included in the survey) or any information considered important within the context of this survey.

The third part of the survey serves to classify the respondents, second language learners, into different subgroups, such as the type of the course (SLP level), age, gender, education, length of previous military service (or employment with the MoD), rank and the type of position held (command/management, technical, *etc.*).

Survey Outcomes and Discussion

Approximately 47% of respondents indicated that the factor of required language competences related to a given appointment/position was of a very high or high significance. On the other hand, for approximately 22% this motivation factor is either negligible or of little significance. Perception of this motivation factor as either internal or external is close to be equally distributed. Moreover, nearly 42% of learners view this factor as both internal and external (see: charts 1 and 2).

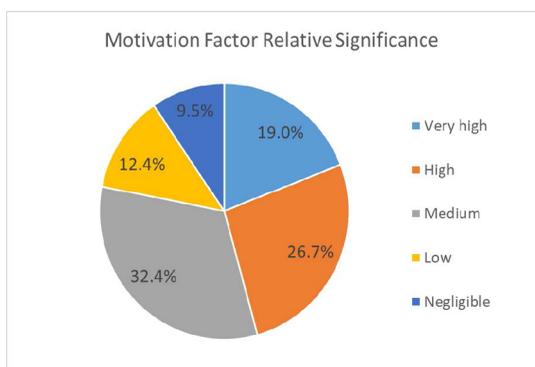


Chart 1: Motivation Factor Relative Significance: Language requirement related to a given appointment/position. Source: Authors' own work.

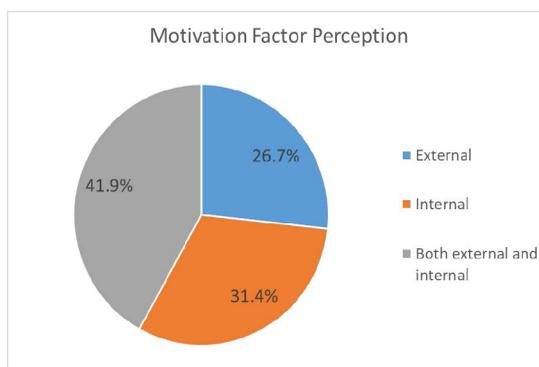


Chart 2: Motivation Factor Perception: Language requirement related to a given appointment/position. Source: Authors' own work.

The respondents indicated the following motivational factors as those with the highest relative significance for their motivation to learn second language:

- Interest to learn something new – 80% of learners indicated this motivation factor as either of very high or high significance. Just 5.7% considered it to be little significant and no one negligible. This motivation factor has the strongest link to internal motivation, when 79% of respondents perceive it as internal, additional 18.1% as both internal and external and just 2.9% as external (see: charts 3 and 4).
- Interest in getting better job opportunities after retiring from the military – this motivation factor was indicated as either of very high or high significance by 60% of respondents. More than 16% viewed it as little significant and no one as negligible. This motivation factor is also strongly related to internal motivation when 76% of respondents perceive it as internal, additional 21% as both internal and external and just 2.9% as external (see: charts 5 and 6).
- Career prospects/development (e.g. promotion, better appointment etc.) – more than 58% of learners considered this motivation factor to be either of very high or high significance. At the same time, it was little significant or negligible for approx. 17% of learners. This motivation factor was viewed as predominantly internal as well – internal for nearly 46% of respondents, external for approx. 14% and both internal and external for 40% of respondents (see: charts 7 and 8).

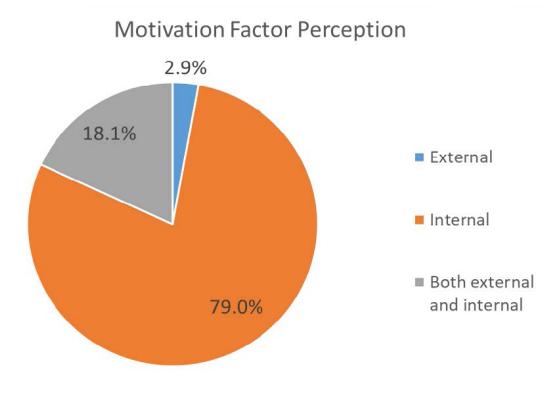
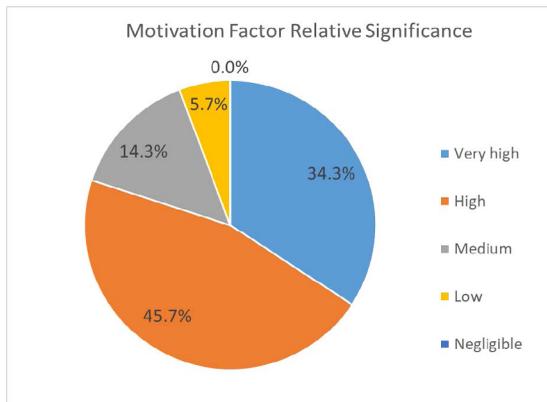


Chart 3: Motivation Factor Relative Significance: Interest in learning something new. Source: Authors' own work.

Chart 4: Motivation Factor Perception: Interest in learning something new. Source: Authors' own work.

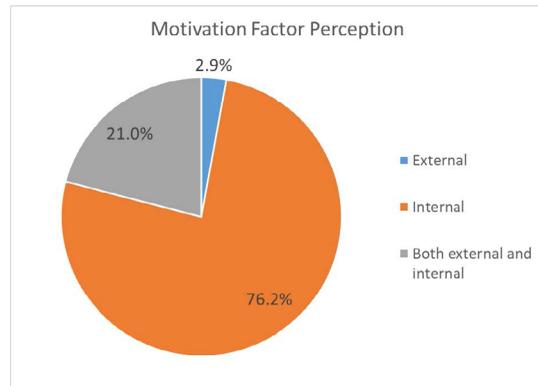
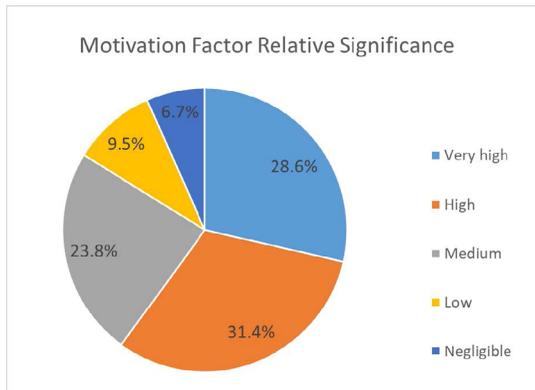


Chart 5: Motivation Factor Relative Significance: Interest in getting a better job. Source: Authors' own work.

Chart 6: Motivation Factor Perception: Interest in getting a better job. Source: Authors' own work.

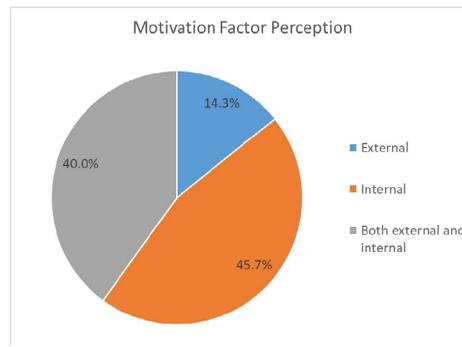
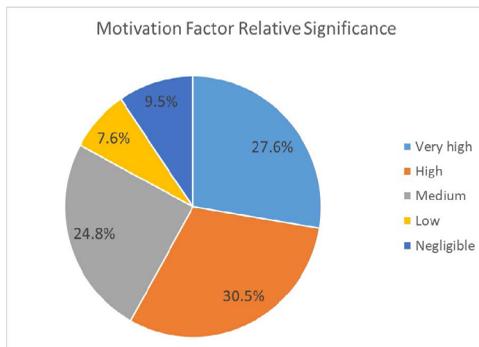


Chart 7: Motivation Factor Relative Significance: Career prospects/development. Source: Authors' own work.

Chart 8: Motivation Factor Perception: Career prospects/development. Source: Authors' own work.

Respondents indicated the following motivational factors as those with the lowest relative significance for their motivation to learn second language:

- Necessity to have language competences to do his/her job – nearly 47% of learners indicated this factor as negligible or of little importance. It was of very high or high significance for nearly 26% of respondents. Slightly more than half of respondents related this factor to their internal motivation whereas just 11.4% related it to purely external motivation (see: charts 9 and 10).
- Necessity to read foreign texts – this motivation factor was negligible or little significant for more than 53% of learners. On the other hand, more than 27% of them indicated it as of

very high or high significance. More than 53% of learners perceive it as part of their internal motivation, more than 15% of them as external motivation and nearly 31% as both internal and external motivation (see: charts 11 and 12).

- Military deployment abroad – this motivation factor was negligible or of little significance for 39% of respondents. More than 31% of them indicated it as either of very high or high significance. Nearly 48% of them have indicated it as a part of their internal motivation while approx. 18% connected it with purely their external motivation (see: charts 13 and 14).

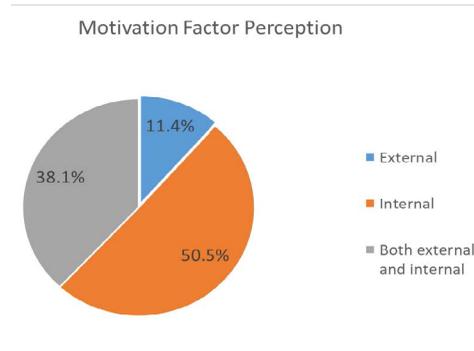
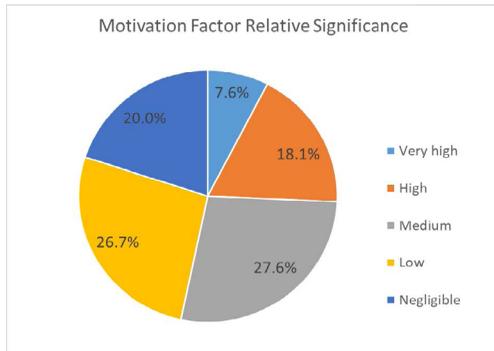


Chart 9: Motivation Factor Relative Significance: Necessity to have language competences to do my job. Source: Authors' own work.

Chart 10: Motivation Factor Perception: Necessity to have language competences to do my job. Source: Authors' own work.

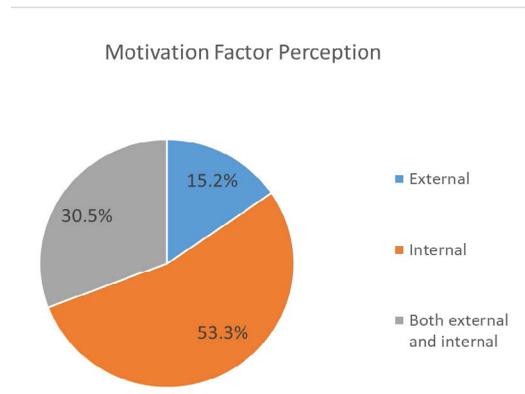
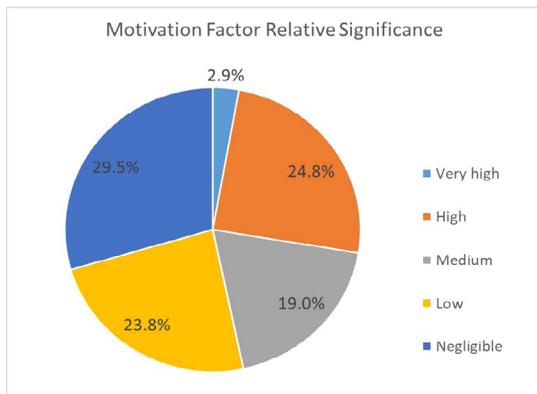


Chart 11: Motivation Factor Relative Significance: Necessity to read foreign texts. Source: Authors' own work.

Chart 12: Motivation Factor Perception: Necessity to read foreign texts. Source: Authors' own work.

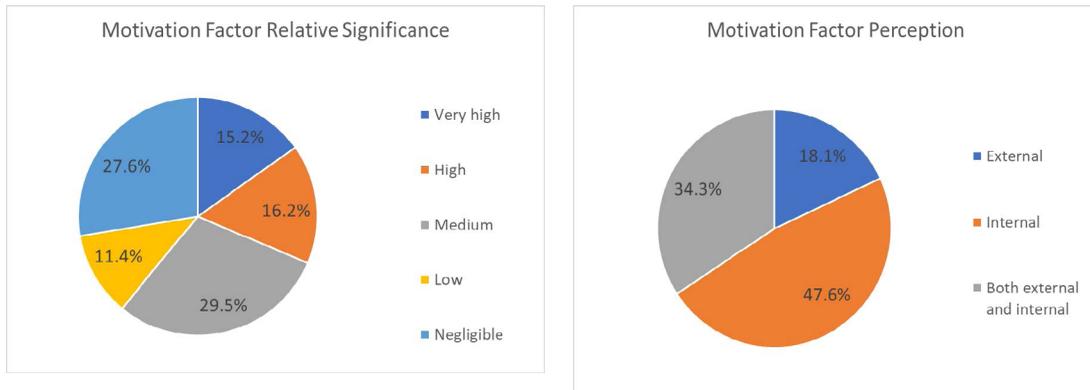


Chart 13: Motivation Factor Relative Significance: Military deployment abroad. Source: Authors' own work. Chart 14: Motivation Factor Perception: Military deployment abroad. Source: Authors' own work.

Outcomes of the survey show that the motivation factors perceived by respondents as the most significant for their second language learning are not directly related to the current needs and/or formal requirements based on their military service. Motivational factors with the highest relevant significance proved to be the interest to learn something new, get better employment opportunities after retiring from the military and the interest to be promoted and/or get better appointments. Only this interest in being promoted and/or getting better appointments is related to the requirements of military service, although not with regard to current job requirements or requirements of superiors but to learners' motivation to develop their careers.

An even more notable finding is the fact that the necessity for second language competences to do learners' jobs proved to be the least important motivational factor, being indicated as little significant or negligible for nearly half of the respondents (and highly or rather significant for just a quarter of respondents). It means that majority of second language learners attending English language courses at the Language Centre do not need English language competences in connection with their current job duties. This finding evokes two questions: first, why does the MoD invest in educating CAF personnel in second language if they don't need the second language for their service; second, and even more important, what will the retention of the language competences be after certain period of time, e.g. five years of service in positions where these competences are not needed. A further motivational factor having the lowest relative significance is the necessity to read foreign texts. This factor is more than likely related to the previous one, i.e. the overall necessity for second language competences related to current learners' jobs. The third least significant factor of motivation for second language learning is military deployment abroad. This can be related either to the fact that a major number of respondents are not interested in being deployed abroad, do not expect that they would be deployed, or that they might not need English language competences in foreign deployments. Based on these findings, we can deduce that the *H1 hypothesis: CAF personnel are motivated for second language learning mainly by formal requirements related to their military service* has not been confirmed.

With regard to perceiving individual motivational factors as either internal, or external, or both internal and external, the survey showed respondents' vastly different views e.g., even the motivational

factor of requirements related to given appointment/position was indicated slightly more as internal than external. All the three motivational factors indicated as those with the highest relative significance were also predominantly indicated as internal. On average for all the twelve motivational factors included in the survey, respondents indicated these factors as external in 15.6% of cases and as internal in 52.4% of cases (remaining 32% of cases are those when respondents perceive motivational factors as both internal and external). Based on these figures, we can conclude that internal motivation seems to be prevailing for second language learners' motivation in the CAF and therefore, that the *H2 hypothesis: With regard to motivation for second language learning in the CAF, external motivation prevails over internal motivation* has not been confirmed.

Conclusion

Motivation belongs to critical factors of success of any activity of human beings. This fully applies to learning, especially second language learning, which represents a rather long-term process requiring consistent effort and persistence of learners. Knowing motivation of learners of second language in the CAF might become a valuable tool for managing language education policy within the MoD. This study has proved that motivation for second language learning among the CAF personnel is not primarily related to formal requirements of their current military appointment or to the requirements formulated by their superiors. The survey also showed that competences in a second language are not necessary for the majority of second language learners to carry out their daily duties. These findings contradict the initial assumptions of the research team that motivation of Czech military personnel to learn second language is based on formal requirements related to military service and is predominantly perceived by learners as external. The fact that learners' motivation is less connected with their military service requirements than expected might be viewed as a challenge in the effort to increase efficiency of second language learning in the CAF. On the other hand, what can be viewed as a finding with potentially positive effect on learning efficiency is the fact that learners declare their motivation for second language learning to be dominantly internal.

For further utilization of the information included in the replies gathered within the conducted survey, it seems to be necessary to increase the number of respondents, *i.e.* repeat the survey in coming years. Higher numbers of respondents will enable us to analyse in detail potential differences in second language learning motivation among different categories of learners based on individual SLP levels, as well as on gender, age, education, rank and previous service experience. Another potentially highly valuable contribution would be to link the information acquired on second language learning motivation with the students' test results.

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