

MOTIVATION-BASED TEACHING PRACTICES

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Abstract

One of the factors that have been found to significantly influence EFL language learners' success is motivation. It is said that it provides a strong impetus to initiate learning and, at the same time, a driving force to sustain the long, often tiring process of learning. Hence, it is crucial for instructors to consider how to foster this important variable. The present article argues that motivation can be stimulated through a number of teaching practices. It will set out to review some research concerning motivation along with its different components. Moreover, the article will explain how motivation helps learners pursue their challenging learning goals in the path of success. The bulk of the final part will be devoted to some of the instructional practices that teachers may use so as to get learners motivated as well as sustain their motivation. Finally, the conclusion of this article will also shed light on the idea that although motivation is a key factor for success, it is not the only variable that EFL instructors should seek to take into account. There are other variables that can be held responsible for successful learning.

Keywords: Teaching; language, EFL, learners, motivation

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1. Introduction

As learners approach the task of foreign language learning, they usually face difficulties which make the learning process tedious to embark upon and to sustain. A question which may, thus, be worth asking is: how can EFL learners continue their struggle toward the path of success? For a long period, foreign language teaching had been principally focusing on linguistic forms and functions. This language-centered methodology, which consisted of a number of methods and techniques, assumed that merely having learners practise some language structures and functions will ultimately lead to mastery of the target language (Kumaravadivelo, 2006). To this end, drills and role plays were some of the classroom activities used. However, researchers have come to realize that such a teaching methodology failed to produce effective learning. Alternatively, they have turned their attention towards studying individual learners. The result of this new focus of attention is the realization that there are some individual learner differences, like motivation, which affect the learning process (Littlewood, 1998). Therefore, the present article assumes that one answer to the previously asked question in this introduction is that learners need to be motivated. Other equally important questions that will be explored are: What is motivation? How can motivation influence EFL learning? How can teachers develop and maintain learners' motivation?

2. Understanding motivation

One of the approaches to understanding EFL motivation is the process model. It views motivation as being dynamic, changing overtime. In this regards, Dörnyei argued that "motivation cannot be viewed as a stable attribute of learning that remains constant for several months or years. Instead, what most teachers find is that their students' motivation fluctuates, going through certain ebbs and flows" (2001, p. 19). Looking at it from this perspective, motivation is not static but continuously changing as a result of a number of factors such as: the type of activity, teacher's behaviours. This process-oriented approach focuses on three stages: preactional stage, actional stage, postactional stage. They are respectively called: choice motivation, executive motivation, motivational retrospection. Each phase includes motivational functions and motivational influences. During choice motivation, three functions are to be realised: setting goals, forming intentions, and launching actions. Some of the influences are likely to be goal relevance, attitudes, expectancy of success. The initially generated motivation needs to be sustained, which is the function of the second stage. Executive motivation entails functions like carrying out subtasks, ongoing appraisal, and self-regulation. The main influences include: quality of the learning experience, social influences (parents, teachers, peers), knowledge of self-regulatory strategies. After particular actions have

been completed, critical reflection and evaluation is needed. This is the third phase in which some influences may be: self-confidence, external feedback, and achievement grades.

3. Motivation and EFL learning

Researchers have frequently underlined the importance of motivation in EFL learning. This variable has been linked to effective language learners. Ushioda believed that: “It almost goes without saying that good language learners are motivated” (2008, p. 19). Without motivation, students may not be able to pursue their long-term goals. As far as Dörnyei (2008) is concerned, high motivation can make up for considerable deficiencies in language aptitude. Finally, it is argued that the long-term, sustained learning cannot take place unless the instructor provides- in addition to appropriate instructional practices, sufficient inspiration and enjoyment to build continuing motivation in learners (Dörnyei, 2007). For these reasons, it is necessary to motivate EFL learners. This will be discussed in the following section.

4. Some motivation-based instructional practices

Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) compiled a list of ten motivational strategies which they called ‘Ten Commandments for Motivating Learners’. Such strategies are:

- 1) set a personal example with your own behaviour;
- 2) Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom;
- 3) present the tasks properly;
- 4) develop a good relationship with the learner;
- 5) increase the learner’s self-confidence;
- 6) make the language classes interesting;
- 7) promote learner autonomy;
- 8) personalise the learning process;
- 9) increase the learner’s goal-orientedness;
- 10) familiarise learners with the target language culture.

Later, Dörnyei (2001) suggested some classroom techniques to generate and maintain learners’ motivation. These techniques can be grouped under three main phases: creating basic motivational conditions, generating initial motivation, maintaining and protecting motivation.

The first phase implies that certain conditions have to be in place before any attempt to generate motivation. It involves appropriate teacher behaviours, pleasant and supportive environment, and appropriate group norms. Classroom techniques include: expressing commitments towards students’ academic progress through offering to explain even individually or outside the class, showing concern when things are not going well, responding

immediately when learners ask for help, establishing a norm of tolerance and accepting mistakes as a natural process of learning, using humour, formulating with learners' appropriate rules of conduct in the classroom.

Once the motivational conditions have successfully been established, the individual teacher should seek to generate initial motivation partly through creating realistic learner beliefs. This entails highlighting the difficulties that students may face in EFL learning and the realistic rate of progress, as well as the different ways that may help students learn. Another way of generating initial motivation is through increasing learner goal-orientedness, that is, agreeing with students on a number of goals. Drawing on previous research, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) suggested some principles underlying classroom goals, which are:

- 1) goals should be clear and specific;
- 2) goals should be challenging and realistic;
- 3) goals should have a stated completion date;
- 4) teachers should provide feedback that increases students' self-efficacy.

The importance of setting goals stems from the fact that they direct attention and effort towards classroom tasks; they regulate the amount of effort needed; they adjust this effort according to the difficulties faced, and they encourage persistence.

After creating initial motivation it is important to maintain and protect students' motivation. EFL Teachers nurture motivation as they make learning stimulating and enjoyable, build students' self-esteem as well as confidence, and promote cooperation among learners. At this level, there is a spectrum of practices which includes: breaking the monotony of learning by using different organizing classroom formats (from whole-class organization to group work and pair work) as well as different channels of communication (auditory and visual), teaching learner strategies, reducing anxiety provoking elements (like, avoiding social comparison, helping learners accept mistakes and a natural part of learning), encouraging students by drawing their attention to their abilities and strengths. In this context, it may be worth pointing out that the teacher should try to promote effort attributions .i.e., encouraging learners not to ascribe their failure to their abilities, but to think about failure as a result of lack of effort, and if failure occurs in spite of hard work then the teacher should highlight the inadequacy of learning strategies.

5. Conclusion

Foreign language learning never takes place in a vacuum. There are a number of variables which should be present for success in this process. Drawing on research from the process approach, this article has highlighted one important variable, which is motivation. This

latter has been presented as complex and multifaceted consisting of components related to the learner (like self-confidence), and the language learning situation (like the instructor, materials). Then, different pedagogical practices have been suggested. They range from setting the necessary conditions of motivation to sustaining learners' motivation. However, other learner characteristics have been found to influence motivation, like anxiety, learners' beliefs, and language learning strategies which help EFL learners initiate an action, regulate the process, and evaluate the effectiveness of the action. Therefore, any pedagogical intervention should not be confined to one variable, but should attempt to address different learner characteristics.

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