



Exploring Motivation in English Language Learners in Oman

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is in the area of motivation in an Arab EFL context, particularly in Oman. It is found incumbent to explore motivation in a higher education institution so that instructors can provide the necessary support to their EFL learners. Understanding the meaning, types and factors of motivation enables instructors to form the basis for their teaching process. Understanding that autonomy, students' sense of relatedness, their interest in the given tasks and enhancing their sense of competence are utterly essential in motivating EFL learners.

Key words: motivation, intrinsic, extrinsic, instrumental, integrative, demotivation.

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1. Introduction

Teachers, in English as a foreign language context (EFL) encounter great difficulty in improving students' language proficiency in a short time as is the case in the one-year foundation programme offered by Muscat College, my current teaching context. Teachers exert their utmost efforts to provide a conducive environment for students so as to avoid boredom, further results in lack of motivation to perform language learning activities, in some cases drop out of college. Despite the fact that there are different factors which have various levels of impact on learning efficiency, researchers [1], argue that learning motivation is an essential factor in the learning process. Motivation, particularly in EFL context, is more crucial when compared to other considerations taken in teaching EFL. It was stated that EFL context lack the conditions which make learning English successful for students as there is no ample English input in the environment, there are not enough opportunities for learners to interact in English and there may not be strong role models to promote the English language. In other words, students are exposed to the first language (L1) outside the classroom and there is no chance for them to use English communicatively outside the educational institutions. Most researchers do agree that motivation is the choice of doing a certain action, the persistence to pursue the action, and the effort expended on the action. The aim of this paper is to explore motivation in the Omani EFL context (e.g. Muscat College in Oman) where English is taught as a foreign language, types and components of motivation, motivation in my current teaching context, factors of motivation and what teachers ought to do so as to enhance motivation in their students [2].

2. What is Motivation

Gardner's socio-educational model [3] interrelates four aspects of the target language learning comprising of the following; the social and cultural environment where the learners grow up, and their attitudes towards learning of L2, individual differences of learners, such as intelligence,

language ability, motivation and anxiety, formal or informal learning contexts; and final learning outcomes. However, several researches have been carried out to investigate the role of motivation in L2 learning process [4]. Although there is little agreement among researches on the exact definition of motivation, there is agreement that motivation determines human behaviour as it energises it and gives it direction [5]. Motivation is also defined as 'the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained' [6]. They view that motivation involves mental processes which initiate and maintain actions. Nevertheless, this theory was considered odd justifying this by saying that motivation is understood as a psychological or emotional state or as a goal, but not as a process [5]. Another definition for motivation is that it is a 'process whereby a certain amount of instigation force arises, initiates action, and persists as long as no other force comes into play to weaken it and thereby terminate action, or until the planned outcome has been reached'[5]. It was also defined as a kind of an internal drive to encourage the individual to pursue a course of action [7]. Motivation greatly affects a learning process and if someone wants to conduct a long-term learning activity efficiently, motivation is extremely very crucial to conduct such activity [8]. The aforesaid definitions of motivation were reviewed [9] as were based on the three historical schools; *The Behaviourism School*, which considers motivation as an expectation of reward, *Cognitivism*, which sees motivation as the needs or drives behind the choices people make and *Constructivism* which sees that motivation differs from one person to another according to social context and individual personal choices.

3. Types of Motivation

Many researches of foreign/second language acquisition see that integrative/ instrumental motivation and intrinsic /extrinsic motivation are the two best-known types of motivation. Integrative motivation was defined as the type of motivation in which the student learns the target language because he/she desires to identify himself with culture of the target language [10] and [11]. The learner

wishes to explore the value and culture of the target language community or sometimes or, in some cases, to live in a country where English is the first language. On the other hand, instrumental motivation is defined [10] as "learning a language because of someone more or less clearly perceived utility it might have for the learner (p. 203.)". Instrumentally motivated learners wish to learn the language for a certain purpose such as using the language in a job, study or holiday. On the other hand, it was distinguished between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation [12]. Intrinsic motivation is based on internal desire and termed as "feeling of competence and self-determination" (p. 17.). Extrinsic motivated students learn the target language for external rewards such as securing a job, assessment purposes, or avoiding punishment.

On the other hand, in spite of the wide difference between the two said types, there is correlation between them [9]. In his taxonomy, he explained that extrinsic and intrinsic may turn into both integrative and instrumental orientations. Extrinsic motivation could be considered as integrative motivation if somebody else wants the L2 learner to learn L2 interactively; extrinsic motivation may become instrumental one if an external force like parents, employer urge the learner to learn the target language. On the other hand, intrinsic motivation may become integrative, if the learner internally wishes to identify with the target language culture; intrinsic motivation may also become instrumental motivation if the learner wants to accomplish any aspired goals using L2. As a result, it is clear that intrinsic and extrinsic orientation is correlated to integrative and instrumental orientation when it comes to language learning.

3.1. Dörnyei's Levels of Motivation

Motivation consists of three levels:

1. The language level in which motivation processes can be described by using integrative and instrumental orientations. As mentioned above, the integrative orientation refers to the desire of the learner to have contact with the members of the L2 community. Instrumental orientation, on the other hand, refers to the desire to learn the language so as to achieve practical purposes such as securing a career.

2. The learner level in which motivation is influenced by different personality traits of language learners which involves the need for achievement and self-confidence which encompasses language anxiety, perceived L2 competence, casual attributions and self-efficacy.

3. The learning situation level which is affected by a number of motives which is based on intrinsic interest on the activity and is based on an innate enthusiasm and extrinsic motives which is based on the rewards extrinsic to the activity.

In addition, researches classify English learning motivation by four categories: seeking knowledge type, in which learners would like to master and identify with the target language culture, achievement type, in which learners seek compliments and admirations of their teachers and classmates, development type, which is apparent in learners who seek good jobs after they graduate and passive coping type, in which learners have no zeal for learning English

and see English as a burden and they learn English only for assessment purposes[13]. This type will be highlighted more hereinafter when it comes to motivation in my current teaching context.

4. Factors of motivation

Many researchers have found that it is crucial to recognise the components of motivation as a multi-factorial entity. Despite the numerous factors of motivation included in some studies, I will focus on the factors mentioned by two studies because they are very much related to my EFL context.

4.1. Oxford and Shearin's Six-factor Study

Six factors affecting motivation in language learning were mentioned in this study; (1) Attitudes and interest of students in the target language, (2) expectancies of success or failure, (3) outcomes or rewards learners anticipate, (4) engagement in L2 learning, (5) Environmental support of the teacher and peers and (6) individual attributes such as age, gender and precedent experience of language learning [14].

4.2. Littlejohn's Four-factor Study

The second study [15] focused on four factors which can significantly affect motivation as follows:

1. *The Locus of Control* refers to what people believe about who controls actions, and the effect this can have [16]. It has two types; 'internal locus of control', in which an individual thinks that he/she controls events directly, whereas 'external locus of control', in which actions are determined by external factors. The development of personality and social situations, as suggested by research, build up the beliefs of a person about the locus of control. Men, for instance, prefer to perceive the locus of control as more internal than external.

However, internal locus of control is generally related to high levels of motivation [17]. If learners see they get control over something, they may feel committed to it. Yet, this individual belief may vary from one person who fails to do anything about a situation to a person who has the ability to do it. Thus, to make an internal locus of control meaningful, the context for practising meaningful control must be provided.

2. *Availability of sense of value and purpose*; researches, [18]; [19]; [20]; [21]; [22], have observed a big gap between the purpose and value of the classroom activities such as games, conversation, self-correction, etc. What the students see as of high value is seen otherwise by the teachers, which develops feelings of resistance because teachers reflect a 'progressive' orientation while learners adopt a 'traditional' orientation [23]. This gap is the cause of the mismatch between what the teachers are teaching and what students are focussing on [24]. One can argue that if the teacher focuses on doing any classroom activity without giving the students a reason why it is useful to do such activity, we may not see high level of motivation of the learners.

3. *The Preservation of Self-esteem*, where learners' view of themselves considerably affects their level of motivation and achievement of the tasks given. When learners feel the threat of failure, they resort to a number of surviving techniques, to avoid threat to their self-

esteem, such as avoiding to be noticed if they keep quiet, blaming others for any failure, denying reality and being indifferent [25]. Research suggests that any failure of any student to do the required task should not be interpreted, by the teacher, as the learner is totally indifferent and is reluctant to learn, but it can be a normal reaction to a threat of self-esteem. The teacher should provide a healthy learning environment where students' self-esteem is not threatened.

4. *Feelings of Success*; the importance of the feelings of success motivation in the classroom is highlighted as when students' sense of achievements enhances their motivation [26]. Therefore, when the teachers match the classroom tasks to the levels of learners in a way which shows the learners' strengths, not weaknesses, their level of motivation for more achievement may rise.

5. Factors of Demotivation

It is important to explore the most common factors which may demotivate students before discussing what teachers should do to enhance motivation of L2 students which will be looked at hereinafter. There are plenty of factors which hinder students' learning motivation and thus result in unsuccessful proficiency of English language. For example, five factors of demotivation of learners in high school learners were identified [27] as follows:

- a) Course content and material when the course materials are boring or above the learners' level, students get bored and they lose interest in learning L2. So, it preferable that course materials provided to students should not be above the level of the learners.
- b) Teacher competence and teaching style, especially when teachers use typical teaching approaches. When teachers are unwilling to vary different teaching approaches, students may not enjoy learning L2.
- c) Inadequate school facilities, which is clear in lack of technology and unavailability of spacious classrooms.
- d) Lack of intrinsic motivation, in which students lose interest in the activities given (e) test scores, particularly when their scores are below the standard.

Furthermore, the majority of the demotivating factors are associated with the "teacher" [28] and [29]. What is more, the eight factors on a study investigating the factors which demotivate Taiwanese junior high school students' L2 learning, are learning difficulties, threats to self-worth, monotonous teaching, poor teacher-student relationship, punishments, general and language-specific anxiety, lack of self-determination and poor classroom management [30]. Both of the said studies agree on that teachers plays a great role in demotivating students, especially if the teacher is confining himself in one teaching approach.

6. Motivation in my current teaching context

In my teaching context, Muscat College offers different programmes such as Engineering, Computer Sciences, and Accountancy and Business Management. English is the medium of instruction of the said programmes. Before joining these programmes, students must pass the English Modular Programme. Full-time students are mostly public-school graduates while very few are private school graduates. Integrative motivation is limited here as students learn English for their undergraduate study. This coincides

with the study carried out in one of the secondary schools in Dubai to examine the students' instrumental and integrative motivation for learning English and the factors which affect their motivation [31]. The findings of this study concluded that students had a higher level of instrumental motivation than integrative motivation, and also the most demotivating factors for students are the impediments they encounter with English modules like vocabulary, grammar and spelling. Most of the students have got scholarships by the government in Oman and are pushed by their parents to attend classes. Some of the students consider English as a burden and they are concerned with the tests at the end of each semester. This coincides with the passive coping type of motivations mentioned earlier in this paper. Unlike ESL language learners who are exposed to English language outside the classroom, Arab EFL learners whose main input of language is the classroom environment do not have ample chances to communicate in English outside the classroom, excluding inconsiderable interaction chances via social media platforms.

7. What should English Language Teachers do to enhance students' motivation?

Based on the factors of motivation mentioned earlier in this paper, there are some areas where English language teachers can increase their students' motivation. These areas include attitude and interest, locus of control, sense of value and purpose, preservation of self-esteem and feeling of success. In addition, teachers can work on the factors of demotivation so as to provide a healthy environment for their learners.

Students need to have a clear purpose of learning the target language. When students know why they are required to do any learning activity, they are likely to become intrinsically motivated. They also need to know that they use English to communicate, not merely for study purposes [32]. Realising the importance of learning L2, students seek to acquire the target language even after they finish English exams.

In mixed ability classes, there are different levels of learners. Individual differences should be taken into consideration. One might suggest that students should be given generic tasks according to the levels of the students so as not to kill motivation in students. It is important to consider individual differences among EFL learners [33]. Challenging tasks demotivate slow learners while easy tasks make outstanding students feel bored, then demotivated.

Teachers should also make their classroom interactive and students should be given the chance to interact freely and learn from each other's mistakes. Teachers should vary their teaching style and avoid talking too much in the classroom and encourage more engagement in the classroom. This can be done through group and pair work activities, which makes students practise the target language more naturalistically [34]. Students should be divided into groups of six or eight. Each member of the group should feel responsible by giving them roles such timekeeper, messenger, team leader. Also, teachers should avoid using discouraging comments on the activities done

by students as such comments may cause a threat to the students' self-esteem, especially to that of female learners. Furthermore, the activities or the exams prepared by the teachers should upgrade the students' language abilities, not to show the teachers' strengths. It has been noticed that some students, at Muscat College, drop out of college because the tests are above their level.

Teachers involve all students in the activities in the classroom. This can be done through more games and use of technology in learning English, especially when the college have three well-equipped language laboratories allocated for the students in the English foundation programme. Learning in groups [35] and using technology in teaching [36] changed the focus from classrooms controlled by teachers to learner-centred ones.

8. Conclusion

It is evident that motivation plays an essential role in learning a foreign language. We have seen that there are

different types and levels of motivation including the integrative and instrumental motivation, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and how they increase English Language proficiency of EFL learners. We have also seen the factors which help raise motivation in language learners. On the other hand, a number of demotivating factors of motivation mentioned above can be avoided so as to create a conducive learning environment. The teacher plays a crucial role in improving motivation in language learners. Thus, in addition to encouraging learners to have a positive attitude and interest towards the language, English language teachers should explain to the students the reasons behind doing any learning tasks in the classroom, value students' work, avoid comments which represent threat to students' self-esteem, involve all students in the tasks and setting achievable goals by using tasks appropriate to the students' levels.

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