Article on Working with learners' Motivation and success: Tracing the sources of low motivation and a learner-centered approach

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Abstract

It is said that the essence of success derives from motivation. The same is true in EFL pedagogy too. Over the years, researchers have found that success has a significant correlation with motivational intensity. To further this point, if we explore the prevailing EFL pedagogy in Bangladesh and elsewhere it becomes clear that learner motivation has a significant role to play in making the EFL programme successful. The current paper explores some of the sources of low motivation amongst the FFL learners in our academic context through an empirical study. The paper also attempts to make some recommendations so as to highlight the motivation-generating and learner-centered pedagogy in the EFL classes in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Learners, SLA, Low Motivation, Language Acquisition

Introduction

Learner motivation and needs have always had a central place in discussions of both naturalistic and classroom SLA vis-a-vis success of different SLA programmes. It has been observed by researchers and language teachers that learners/students with high motivation perform much better than those with less motivation.. Highly motivated learners progress rapidly and are more likely to become successful language learners while, it has been noticed, learners with little interest or low motivation learn slowly and in many cases, give up way short of native speaker-like competence, i.e. become fossilized. It is little wonder then that learner motivation is one of the greatest concerns of EFL teachers and consequently many studies have been done in this Field. The present study aims at exploring the nature of the relationship between success and motivation, the orientation of the students towards learning the English courses at Millennium University, Bangladesh, and tracing the sources of low motivation and finding out ways to make students more motivation to help them achieve greater proficiency in all the four skills, especially in reading and writing.

Definition and explanation of the terms "motivation" and "success"

In SLA research literature, the term "motivation" has been defined and classified differently by different linguists. While Gardner and Lambert define motivation in terms of the L2 learners' overall goal or orientation, Schumann views motivation as an affective factor like "culture-shock". There is thus, a lack of general agreement in this regard. We will, however, try to examine the term and discuss the most important types relevant to our language learning situation.

"Success" on the other hand, implies the over-all achievement by the learners, instructors, curriculum designers involved with the language teaching programme. Whether a particular EFL or ESL teaching programme is successful or not is largely determined by the progress the students make in achieving the objectives of the language programme in question.
Brown identifies three types of motivation: 1) global motivation, which consists of a general orientation to the goal of learning a L2; 2) situational motivation, which varies according to the situation in which learning takes place; 3) task motivation, which is the motivation for performing particular learning task.

In very general terms, educational psychologists point to three major sources of motivation in learning. Simply put, these are:
- The learner's natural interest: intrinsic satisfaction
- The teacher/institution/employment: extrinsic reward
- Success in the task: combining satisfaction and reward

Rationales behind the study and Review of the Literature

a. Relation between motivation and success

From the practical experience of teaching at the university level for sometime, the authors are convinced that motivation plays a huge role in the success of the learners in achieving proficiency in the target language. While most of the studies conducted in this field confirm the writers' belief, there are still a good few of them that fail to find any correlation between the two factors. Abbashar (1977) carried out an investigation among Arab graduate and undergraduate students learning EFL and found that neither integrative nor instrumental motivation significantly contributed to proficiency in English. Again, Hansen's study (1981) exhibited that neither integrative nor instrumental orientation was related to ESL proficiency and the less motivated students were more proficient in the target language. However, the pioneering study among American university students learning French as a second language by Lambert (1963) revealed that there was an association between attitudes, motivation and proficiency. Hence, the need for a fresh study in a rapidly changing new social context seems a timely one.

b. Instrumental or integrative?

Now the question that arises in mind is which type of motivation works better for the learners. It has been found out that it depends on the learning situation. In certain situations an integrative motivation may be more powerful in facilitating successful L2 learning; but in other situations instrumental motivations may count far more. For instance, Gardner and Lambert (1977) found that an integrative orientation was related to successful learning of French in schools in both Canada and USA, but that instrumental motivation was more important in the Philippines. They explained this in terms of the role the L2 plays in the learner's community. Where the L2 functions as a "foreign language" and therefore, not important outside the classroom for the learners, an integrative motivation helps; but where the L2 functions as a second language and therefore used as a means of wider communication outside the classroom, and instrumental motivation is more effective.

Tracing the Sources of Low Motivation

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to point to a single factor which would account for the lack of motivation in many EFL learners. As all teachers know, and as Marion Williams in an article published in "English Teaching Professional" has explained there are many, many factors which affect students' commitment to study. Many things-perhaps most-are beyond our control as language teachers. And fall outside the confines of the few lessons that we have with them in a week. Home background, physical tiredness, events in their personal life, health previous educational experience, personality and the onset of adolescence are just some of the factors that can affect how individual students appear to us in our classes (Littlejohn 2001). Nevertheless, we believe that in many cases the explanation of why many learners lack motivation or lose enthusiasm for learning may indeed lie in their experience of their English classes in short, in how their classes are organized.
Ways to make students more motivated

Different researchers have suggested different means to make students more motivated towards the learning tasks at hand. Peter H. Schneider (1995) has suggested “pair-taping” to be used in oral proficiency skills. Many other language practitioners suggest games to be used in the class. Language learning is hard work... Effort is required at every moment and must be maintained over along period of time. Games help and encourage many learners to sustain their interest and work.’

Little John (2001), however, has doubts about the use of games, songs that only a relatively small number of students get a sense of intrinsic satisfaction from learning English, and the learner's natural interests is not, therefore, something which we can rely on to generate sustained motivation in language learning. Being aware of these facts, many teachers turn to a second source of motivation, extrinsic reward, and its opposite extrinsic punishments, as a mean of motivating students. In the classroom, for example, teachers may reward students with good marks or in effect, punish other students with low marks. But, the reward system itself can be demotivating for the weaker students. Little John argues that the increase in the motivation of the better students is more or less proportional to the decrease in motivation of the weaker students.

Methodology

The survey included questionnaire, study of classroom experience recorded in my note books and individual/group interviews done on total of 50 students who were doing their undergraduate studies at Millennium University. The respondents ranged from students doing their first year to those doing their third year but I made sure all of them had done the general English courses fairly recently. I was apprehensive that students who had done English courses long ago might have forgotten the texts, test items, class room techniques, etc. The subjects chosen included students from commerce faculty, English and Bangla department. Thus, a more representative sample was ensured. I made prior appointments with the students in their respective office rooms for the interviews as well as answers of the questionnaire. During the interviews, the students were asked to feel free and relax first. After a few minutes of the casual talks, I asked the respective students to write answers to the questions on the questionnaire frankly and sincerely. The students were reassured that it was being done to help better their syllabus and enrich classroom activities. Then they felt free and answered the question in friendly environmental.

The questionnaire had 30 minutes litit. However, the subjects responded to it in 20-25 minutes. During the interview, I had 10-15 minutes session with every students depending on the progress of the conversation.

Explanation of Finding

Relation between motivation and success in exam

From the study of the correlation between students' half yearly exam results, final grades and student interviews, I found out that there is a very significant correlation between success and motivation. The majority (50%) confessed that they were more motivated or less motivated after their 1st and 3rd year exam results were published. 46% admitted to being affected by their performance in the exam. However, a small percentage of students said that they were not affected and very little affected.

Interrogative / Instrumental

It was found that learners were more instrumentally than interrogatively motivated. The majority of the respondents voiced the need for the language in the present global context. They placed a utilitarian value on proficiency in the target language. Only a few showed a genuine interest in the very act of learning the language. But, a good number of them were both instrumentally and interrogatively motivated.
Syllabus, Method and some class-room related issues

A. Course content/class room materials
The respondents showed greater diversity of choices towards the text types and topics. The majority of the students seem to show greater affinity towards contents related to their own culture. Many of them have also stressed the importance of including authentic materials that might be useful for their future course of life. Thus, while most of the business students prefer texts related to trade and commerce , economy, etc, the English students wanted more literary texts which would give them more orientation with their future line of study.

Class-room related issues
A. Class size
An overwhelming majority of learners felt that an ideal class size should between 25-30 students. 47% students supported a 25 student class . 31% wanted a 20 student class while for the other two options there was very little preference. Only 14% students liked a 15 students class-room and 8% a 30 students class size.

B. Types of Teacher
Predictably, the majority of the learners felt that a friendly teacher would be most useful for a language class. While only 6% of the respondents wanted strict and formal instructor, 49% learners believed a teacher should be both friendly and strict. A nearly close percentage (31%) opted for a friendly and informal instructor. 14% of the students, however, said that the teacher should be friendly, but formal.

Teaching Techniques
A. Peer review
The findings in this category is rather puzzling. While some 31% learners liked peer correction. 39% strongly disliked the idea. 16% of the learners said that they strongly liked whereas 14% of them just disliked peer review.

B. Games brain storming
None of the respondents said s/he never enjoyed brainstorming exercise before starting a comprehension passage. 20% students sometimes liked it whereas the majority (43%)said they often liked the exercise and 37% of the learners said they liked it always.

C. Reward and Punishment
A vast majority of the students (70%) said that they felt encouraged when the teacher said a word of praise for them. Only 16% replied they felt happy while 8% learners said they felt relaxed and another 6% felt complacent and secure.

D. Home work and assignment
Although 25% of the learners wanted to do home work assignment alone and 33% in a group with friends, a good percentage of them (30%) liked to do assignment/home work sometimes alone and at times in a group. However, 12% of the respondents did not like home work.

Recommendations
The recommendations that follow are based on the findings of the empirical study, students interviews, and the authors' experience of teaching undergraduates at the tertiary level for sometime. Learners needs/wants have been taken into consideration.

1. Help develop a passion for learning English among learners
For many learners, learning English is a duty, something that they have to but don't want to do. This is the first and biggest problem that an instructor faces because a person who does not like to
learn English will not learn it well. They need to treat time spent on English as time for pleasure and relaxation. Ideally, learning English should be a hobby.

2. **Influence learners to make a few changes to their life**
   
The decision to learn English requires changes in the learner's habit. For example, one should decide that s/he will read a book in English for 30 minutes every day and will stick to that decision. Learners should remember that studying English for 15 minutes every day will give them much better results than studying for a whole day once a month.

3. **Guide learners to make a list of various activities and ensure the stick to them**
   
   While the first change is the most difficult one each subsequent one is hard too. A lot of learners take the first step and stop there. They do not engage in other English-building activities. The challenge for the teacher, therefore, is to ensure that learners hold onto them. A good learner will have a set of activities. The challenge for the teacher, therefore, is to ensure that learners hold onto them. A good learner will have a set of activities and choose from that set according to his/her mood.

4. **Use authentic and interesting texts**
   
The use of authentic and interesting texts can also help increase the motivation level of students in classrooms. We must incorporate texts which contain materials that capture the interest and imagination of the students. Culture sensitive and well-written foreign texts full of activities can be useful means to generate and sustain the motivation of learners.

5. **Use games**
   
   It was also found that students enjoy games a lot. They also help students get rid of monotony. Thus, it can be suggested that the treachery tactfully selects a few interesting games and uses them sparingly.

6. **Reward and punishment**
   
   It has been confirmed that learning is increased amazingly if the teacher gives proper encouragement by withholding his criticisms and rewarding the pupils in various ways. Reward success of the students immediately. Words of encouragement, if not a pat on the back and praise before others are strong elements that mentally motivate the learner. This leads to a sense of achievement in his/her which is greater reward for his/her than anything else. On the contrary, absence of the sense of achievement hampers the process of learning. Punishment in any form acts as a deterrent. Psychologists confirm through experiments that in other forms of learning also rewards accelerate and reinforce learning while punishment hampers it. Thus encouragement and reward play crucial role in motivating the learner.

**Conclusion**

This study focuses on the role that a teacher or curriculum designer may play to make the students more motivated towards achieving the objectives of a given language learning programme. We have tried to keep my focus on the issues closely related to the classroom and the institution that might help motivate learners in and outside the classroom. We have revisited the old strategies that instructors have been using and some new ones which teachers can make use to make students more involved and more importantly, more motivated. Concede a few constraints of the study. If all the recommendations are used in learning English, student will be more motivated and learning process will be easy and successful.
References
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Appendix

Questionnaire

Name:........................................
Subject:......................................
ID:.............................................

Academic Background: Graduate Level.

Interview Questions

Did you do well because you were more motivated? Or is it that you became motivated by your success in English exam?

Did you do poorly because you were less motivated? or is it that you became less motivated by your not so-good results in the English exams?

Why do you like working alone rather than in a group? Why do you prefer working in group rather than working alone?

Why do you like a large class? What are the benefits of a large class?

What do you think are the advantages of a small class?

Why do you think mother tongue should be used at times?

Why do you think mother tongue should never be used?

Who do you like to compete with? With yourself or with others? Why?

Why do you think a friendly and strict teacher will be best for a language class in our context?

Why do you think a strict and formal teacher would be best for a language?