

Exploring Motivation and Motivational Strategies in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract: *The purpose of this research paper is to discuss motivation and motivational strategies in the context of the EFL classroom, and incorporate pragmatic action plans and classroom activities into the motivational framework. In introduction, we will explore the meaning of motivation and delineate its significance & role in the EFL classroom. After that, we endeavor to create a framework for motivational strategies, and try to emphasize why the framework is of paramount importance. In the present paper, the framework of motivational strategies is based on the process-oriented model of Dornyei and Otto (1998). It is categorized into four major stages, (1) Creating the basic motivational conditions, (2) Generating initial motivation, (3) Maintaining and protecting motivation, (4) Encouraging positive self-evaluation. We then move on to elaborate the pragmatic action plans and classroom activities to be implemented in each of the above mentioned stages of the framework for motivational strategies. Finally, we can hope that the suggestions of this paper will enlighten and serve as a guiding light to EFL practitioners in the context of motivation and motivational strategies.*

Key Words: *EFL, Motivation, Motivational Strategies, Action Plan*

Introduction

Motivation refers to the impetus to create and sustain intentions and goal-seeking acts (Ames, 1989). Most of the educational psychologists in the field of learning and education delineate motivation relating it to the mechanisms or processes that can (a) stimulate and instigate behavior, (b) give direction or purpose to behavior, (c) continue to allow behavior to persist, and (d) lead to choosing or preferring a particular behavior (Wlodkowski, 1985).

Motivating students is a fundamental part of teaching. It is the stimulus by which teachers accomplish their task of imparting knowledge and skills to their students effectively. As Dornyei (2001: 116) emphasizes, ‘teacher skills in motivating learners should be seen as central to teaching effectiveness’. This is especially relevant in an EFL classroom.

Framework for Motivational Strategies

We have already emphasized that skills of teachers in motivating students is of utmost importance. Infact, if we can motivate students in an EFL classroom dexterously, we can safely assume that half of the battle is already won. Motivating students consistently and systematically requires a framework. Thus, it is of paramount importance to devise a framework for motivational strategies and then following it up with pragmatic action plans in the EFL classroom.

Traditionally, rewards and punishments may be the crux of the teaching-learning process. But the teachers' arsenal should have a wide range of tools to stimulate the process of motivation. It has been rightly pointed out by Dornyei (2001: 119) that 'the spectrum of other potentially more effective motivational strategies is so broad that it is hard to imagine that none of them would work'.

In the present paper, the framework of motivational strategies is based on the pivotal process-oriented model of Dornyei and Otto (1998). The following are the crux of its taxonomy:

- (a) Creating the basic motivational conditions
- (b) Generating initial motivation
- (c) Maintaining and protecting motivation
- (d) Encouraging positive self-evaluation

Creating the Basic Motivational Conditions

Setting the environment for motivation is of crucial importance. For this purpose, some basic motivational conditions have to be created. They are:

- (a) Cultivating appropriate teacher behavior and establishing that all-important rapport with the students

A teachers' behavior always creates a powerful and motivational impact on students. There are many aspects of teacher behavior that motivate their students which includes caring about the students, being helpful and supportive, building a good rapport with the students, being a role model, perennial communication with students about their issues in L2 etc.

(b) Creating a relaxed and supportive classroom environment

A conducive, safe, and pleasant classroom milieu optimizes motivation among students. On the other hand, a serious and tense classroom can demotivate learners. A language classroom has to be fun and interesting. An ideal EFL classroom is one where students are entitled to freely express themselves and the teacher is sensitive and supportive of their language learning needs.

(c) Creating a cohesive learner group

A cohesive learner group encourages cooperation among students and thereby enhances motivation. A cohesive class helps learners to cooperate in group work, group activities, interaction among themselves etc. A cohesive class can be created by encouraging the students to interact and spend time with each other. A cohesive class environment would minimize the fears and inhibitions of the students and motivate them to participate.

Generating Initial Motivation

We now move on to the next level of the framework which follows on from creating the basic motivation. The next level is generating initial motivation. The idea is to help students develop positive attitudes toward learning EFL, thereby recognizing and addressing their language learning needs. Initial motivation can be generated by:

(a) Making the initial experience with EFL as positive as possible

In an EFL situation, the first interactions in the language are very crucial for the class. It creates the first impression, which once formed, will hugely impact how they respond and learn in the future experiences with the subject. Therefore, teachers should categorically indicate their cooperative intentions to help students learn. They should elaborately highlight the personal and professional benefits students would get with a better proficiency level in English. The financial

and other benefits can also be pointed out. The students should be able to visualize their futuristic benefits vis-à-vis English proficiency. Thus, it is highly recommended that EFL teachers should spare the first class in every semester to be exclusively dedicated to create that initial motivation despite the probable instructions of the 'higher authorities' to 'get on' with the prescribed syllabus from the very first day.

(b) Enhancing the objectives of learning

In an EFL classroom, students should be able to comprehend the objectives of language learning. Many a times, it is possible that the learning objectives created by outsiders i.e. teachers or curriculum, may not be compatible and thereby unacceptable to the learners. This serves as an impediment and a source of demotivation among learners. Thus, to enhance the objectives of learning, students could be permitted to design their own criteria for what should be their learning objectives as a group.

(c) Making a needs analysis for the learners

There should be a thorough needs analysis to understand the requirements of the students and engage them in activities which motivate them to excel in EFL. Efforts should be made to find out their practice preferences in terms of ELT practices and attitudes, and try to incorporate them into the EFL classroom. According to Chambers (1999 : 37), ' If the teacher is to motivate pupils to learn, then relevance has to be the red thread permeating activities'.

(d) Creating realistic learner beliefs

Learner beliefs play a very crucial role in the acquisition of L2. Consequently, it is of optimum importance to help learners to get rid of any inhibitions or detrimental notions which can serve as impediments in the process of their language learning. Teachers should help learners to set realistic beliefs about the nature of second language learning, expectations of students, the pace of their progress etc.

Maintaining and Protecting Motivation

This stage of the framework is the longest and thereby contains a long list of EFL practices. There is a natural human tendency to get distracted or bored from monotonous classroom activities. This necessitates motivation to be sustained and protected. The following are the ways of achieving it:

(a) Innovative methods of teaching

Motivation can be sustained and protected by using innovative methods of teaching like language games, group tasks, group discussions, role plays etc. These activities make a significant impact on learners' level of interest and language learning ability, and thereby serve as a catalyst for sustaining and protecting motivation.

(b) Using cooperative learning and competition in the classroom

Involving students in the class for cooperative learning like group tasks and activities encouraging speaking and interaction among themselves is a huge motivating force. Furthermore, with competition, learners are motivated to succeed and beat the other students which thereby encourage them to focus better.

(c) Enhancing learner autonomy

Another effective technique for sustaining motivation in the long run is by allowing learners greater autonomy. This idea is based on the humanistic psychology that 'the only kind of learning which significantly affects behavior is self-discovered self-appropriated learning' (Rogers, 1961: 276). Learner autonomy can be enhanced in various ways like encouraging self-study, encouraging independent interaction with learning materials, independent use of information and communication technologies (ICT), modifications in the teacher-learner relationship in the classroom which enhances the autonomy of the learners, and incorporating the concept of learner control from the process of planning to the contents of the syllabus as a whole.

(d) Using social networking to sustain motivation

Social networking like the Facebook, Twitter, Watsapp can be effectively utilized to sustain interest and motivation of the learners. The learners of a classroom can be made into a group with the teacher as the administrator. These groups can be used for various language learning activities, which will captivate their interests and sustain motivation of the learners in the long run.

Encouraging Positive Self-evaluation

This is the last stage of the motivational framework. The purpose of this stage is building learners' confidence by positive self-evaluation and thereby maximizing reinforcement. The way learners feel about their achievements and progress, and the level of self-satisfaction they experience with every accomplished task, makes a significant impact in their motivation level. Therefore, it is highly advisable for EFL teachers to help students to self-evaluate themselves positively, taking due credit for their achievements. Positive self-evaluation can be encouraged in the following ways:

(a) Recognizing students' efforts

Recognizing students' efforts is crucial for encouraging positive self-evaluation. It naturally leads to appreciation of the efforts, thereby encouraging learners to evaluate themselves in a positive light. The focus should always be efforts rather than ability of the learners.

(b) Providing motivational feedback

Interactional feedback by the teachers enhances the motivation level of the students in the target language. Thus, EFL teachers are highly advised to include motivational feedback as one of the main speaking practices in their classes. Teachers should make sure learners benefit, in the context of positive self-evaluation, from the motivational feedback given to them.

(c) Enhancing learner satisfaction

Satisfaction is the crux of motivation which plays a crucial role in reinforcing sense of achievement among learners. Consequently, learners should be encouraged to be proud of their progress and achievements, which would thereby enhance their satisfaction level. Furthermore,

using rewards and encouraging them to celebrate success will further optimize the satisfaction of learners.

Conclusion

Motivation is a major influence in the EFL classrooms worldwide. But it is a neglected area of instructional practices in the EFL classroom. Many teachers share the misnomer that by simply adhering to the prescribed syllabus and the teaching materials, they will be able to create an ideal EFL classroom environment. Apparently, they fail to comprehend the behavioral and psychological aspects of their learners and thereby fail to motivate them. Consequently, exploring ways to raise teachers' awareness of their motivating practices and to train them in using skills to motivate learners is of paramount importance. Learning a foreign language exposes the learner to numerous psychological, cultural and social influences. Nevertheless, motivation serves as the panacea for the learners to adapt to these new developments and succeed in the EFL classroom.

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