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Enhancing students' motivation in foreign language learning

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Abstract

Motivation has been considered one of the main contributing factors to academic success, particularly in foreign language learning classes where there is little contact with the target language community. This is because highly motivated students tend to be ready to learn and engage themselves in the lesson, which allows them to receive more input that will help them to succeed in language learning. Hence, motivation is regarded as an internal power that drives students' abilities to perform well. However, it is worth noting that motivation in foreign language learning is complicated as every language student walks into the class with different levels of motivation, requiring teachers to be creative in designing the lesson to help them meet their needs and goals. This article discusses common types of motivation and their importance, as well as ways to sustain students' motivation in language learning. The article concludes with a variety of classroom tips that can be useful in keeping students motivated in learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Motivation; foreign language learning; types of motivation; online learning

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Introduction

Motivation is widely believed to be a significant factor determining success in most fields of learning because to achieve success, a person needs to have a desire driving them to act. Without such drive, an individual may not make any efforts to do something to achieve a goal. Therefore, success or failure in a foreign language learning context where students appear physically and emotionally isolated from the second language (L2) community depends on students' motivation (Dörnyei, 1990; Thohir, 2017). This means that if language students are motivated, they are likely to acquire L2 regardless of language abilities. In contrast, those with sufficient intelligence cannot attain any L2 goals if they are not motivated (Hadfield & Dörnyei, 2014). As Filgona et al. (2020) pointed out, unmotivated students only attend the class physically without intending to learn anything, which is different from motivated students who are cognitively ready to acquire new things, thereby making the classroom environment interactive and fun as a result of their enthusiastic engagement.

Given its importance, McCoach and Flake (2018) regard motivation as an internal drive that pushes students' abilities to perform well. This concept is closely aligned with Williams and Burden's (1997) definition of motivation; that is, it is a state of cognitive arousal which provokes a decision to act; as a result, there is sustained intellectual and physical effort to achieve previously set goals. However, motivation in foreign language learning is complex because every language student gets into the classroom with different levels of motivation, requiring teachers to be creative in designing the lesson that can arouse their motivation. Against this background, this article discusses common types of motivation and their importance before offering ways to sustain foreign language students' motivation. The article concludes with classroom tips that can be useful to engage students further and help them stay motivated in their learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Types of motivation

Due to the interrelation between language and culture, language learning entails not only understanding vocabulary and grammar but also becoming a part of the L2 culture to some extent (Brown, 2002). Based on the assumption that students may appear to be motivated by their positive attitudes toward or

aspirations to be a member of the L2 community, Gardner and Lambert (1972) classified motivation into two types: integrative and instrumental. The former refers to language learning aimed at becoming L2 members, while the latter can be characterized as learning for functional purposes – acquiring L2 skills for better employment (Brown, 2000; Dörnyei, 1990; Gardner, 1985).

In the context of foreign language learning, students have little interest in integrating themselves into the L2 culture (Dörnyei, 1990). Thus, learning a foreign language, according to Leaver et al. (2005), may have been driven by some internal and external factors such as personal interest, the need for a future career, or parental influence. All these are what self-determination theorists have described as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Drawing on the definition of motivation by Williams and Burden (1997), Harmer (2001) distinguished between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is an internal force that pushes individuals to complete a task or participate in an activity to satisfy their curiosity or excitement. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, refers to any sort of external stimulation that motivates students to engage in an activity to attain a certain goal, such as passing an exam or earning a reward (Harmer, 2001). In a similar view, Ryan and Deci (2000) and Schunk et al. (2014) defined intrinsic motivation as a voluntary involvement of individuals in any academic activities for their pleasure regardless of external pressure or reward. More specifically, these activities seem to have been a particular kind of special reward found in each individual (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Schunk et al., 2014). In contrast, extrinsic motivation, as Ryan and Deci (2000) put it, is an engagement of the individuals in any tasks or activities with an anticipation of some separable outcomes, such as earning rewards, receiving praise, fulfilling academic requirements, or avoiding punishment (see also Brown, 2000; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Schunk et al., 2014). Therefore, such outside influences encourage language students to take part in academic tasks, even if the tasks themselves are not interesting (Chow & Yong, 2013).

The importance of motivation

Research has shown that these two types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic, have various impacts on students. For example, Cho (2012) and Niemiec and Ryan (2009) noted that intrinsic motivation helps improve students' progress, making them more process-oriented and determined in learning and likely

turning them into autonomous students who seek growth and self-development. Furthermore, students who possess this kind of motivation are more likely to take risks in their learning, do challenging tasks to broaden their knowledge, enthusiastically engage in activities while remaining highly focused with a clear determined goal, know exactly what they are doing, and critically reflect on their learning (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2014). They also prefer to learn or do tasks on their own without any external forces or assistance from the teacher and draw a connection between what they have learned in school and their own experiences (Stipek, 1988, as cited in Chow & Yong, 2013). Moreover, intrinsic motivation enhances success in language learning, for internally motivated students will make every effort for their self-esteem and fulfillment and optimistically continue to learn regardless of the presence or absence of external rewards (Maslow, 1970; Schunk et al., 2014).

Even though intrinsic motivation plays such a vital role, extrinsic motivation should not be overlooked. Certain external factors, such as rewards and the relevance of the task, are said to serve as a major source of motivation to encourage students to learn when given a task that looks boring or when they feel demotivated to participate (Cho, 2012; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). For this reason, Assor et al. (2002) suggested that teachers should engage students by explaining to them the fact that their willingness to work on and contribute to classroom tasks will in some ways help them accomplish their set goals. Thus, it can be concluded that intrinsic motivation alone cannot always encourage students to learn. Therefore, for successful language teaching and learning, teachers should understand these types of motivation to help students to achieve their learning goals.

Sustaining students' motivation in language learning

Motivation plays a leading role in language classrooms as the flow of every learning activity is determined by student motivation. Without it, a class is just an abandoned room. Given this importance, knowing factors affecting students' motivation can aid teachers in directing and getting their students to continuously engage in academic activities (Thohir, 2017). Harmer (2001) and other researchers such as Gilakjani et al. (2012) and Niemiec and Ryan (2009) identified at least four factors that influence students' motivation in language learning.

First, social attitudes of family, friends, and living environment may play a part in influencing students' attitudes to the language being learned. Students' attention and seriousness in language learning depend on the supportive attitudes of these environments. Second, the teachers' attitude is another source of influence on student motivation, fostering their curiosity and interest in learning. Third, teaching methods and materials also affect students' motivation and excitement in the classroom. Last, students' personalities can be another factor influencing their motivation. It is worth noting that every student possesses distinctive characteristics – some are active and confident while others are passive and shy, thus having different learning styles. For these reasons, teachers should implement a variety of techniques as suggested below to influence and increase students' motivation.

As a role model in the classroom, it is necessary for teachers to be professionally dressed, show enthusiasm for language, and pay close attention to students' progress, thereby making students' interest in the subject grow (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998). As their interest expands, Dörnyei (1994) argued that students are willing to take their learning more seriously and take more risks to reach their goals in learning a foreign language. One of the possible ways to achieve this is to integrate some sort of relaxing activities, for example, using the target language music to make students develop more interest in the language. Research by Dolean (2016) on the impact of using songs on foreign language anxiety has proved that songs can decrease foreign language anxiety. Moreover, music has been claimed to have helped break down affected barriers and foreign language anxiety, making them more receptive to language learning as a result of a stress-free learning environment (Engh, 2013).

Furthermore, teachers can directly influence students' motivation by using their learning goals (Harmer, 2001). Long-term objectives, such as obtaining competency in the L2, and short-term goals, such as being able to write a short paragraph, are the two sorts of learning goals that students have. As long-term goals might be difficult to achieve, teachers should employ short-term goals to encourage students by assisting them in completing weekly assignments, which will have a substantial impact on their motivation. According to Ushioda (2014), the feeling of achieving these short-term goals can help students to develop perceptions of competence that lead to cultivating and strengthening their intrinsic motivation for learning.

Teaching approaches, activities, materials, and instructional practices all influence students' excitement in the classroom. Hence, handouts and worksheets should be neatly and well organized. At the same time, various activities should be designed to meet diverse types of intelligence (Degrave, 2019) to keep students engaged and their enthusiasm high. Concurrently, providing tasks must be somewhat challenging because language students are more motivated when they accomplish tasks that are neither too easy nor too difficult (Harmer, 2015; Schunk et al., 2014). Besides, when presenting the task, teachers should keep their instruction short, simple, clear, and well-organized (Filgona et al., 2020; Martin, 2020) so that the students know and understand the clear goal of doing it because the way the task is presented is influential in raising students' interest in the activity (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998). For this reason, the task itself should be relevant to students' interests and experiences so that they can relate it to their personal lives.

Establishing a supportive learning environment that allows students to catch up with one another and make mistakes without fear of being judged by other classmates can be an essential means of sustaining students' participation in classroom activities. Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) stated that activities that can generate such pleasant atmospheres include games or game-like competitions. When students sense this emotionally positive atmosphere, they will voluntarily engage in the activities, which will in turn keep them progressing and motivated.

Moreover, praising students and offering constructive feedback can be powerful tools to sustain their engagement in classroom activities because they not only strengthen students' confidence and self-esteem (Filgona et al., 2020) but also provide a feeling of competence and self-determination that will eventually lead to maintaining their motivation (Thohir, 2017). According to Dörnyei and Csizér (1998), such competence is subjective, meaning that it is certainly not what a person knows or can do but what he or she thinks he or she knows and can do. Therefore, feedback should contain information that is firmly convincing to the students that they are competent enough to complete their task if they put more effort and show them some positive examples that the task itself can be achieved within their resources (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Further, feedback should be given regularly (Dörnyei, 2001) and delivered in a kind manner by, for example, beginning with the good points before pointing

out what needs to be improved (Filgona et al., 2020). This can make students believe that making mistakes is a simply natural part of learning.

In addition to praise, some sort of reward can also help maintain students' motivation. Thus, to avoid negative impacts on students' motivation, teachers should offer such incentives when students have accomplished a difficult assignment rather than just doing it for their sake (Schunk et al., 2014) or participating in the activity (Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Brophy (2010) and Schunk et al. (2014) advised that giving rewards should be associated and provided with informative feedback on students' progress and improvement in the language, ensuring that students witness their language development. This way will eventually foster students' motivation to learn and progress.

Finally, giving students chances to explore the language on their own and take charge of their learning can be another way to motivate them. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), students become more intrinsically motivated when given opportunities to study independently. This can be encouraged through collaborative learning; that is, the use of group work that provides students with choices and voices in the activities (Assor et al., 2002; Brown, 2000; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009), and the use of self-assessment to help students evaluate their progress (Farrel & Jacobs, 2010). Moreover, Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) suggested that students should take as much responsibility as possible in their learning. This can be done by having them involved in organizing the learning process and deciding on the learning materials. As Dörnyei (2001) and Farrell and Jacobs (2010) put it, having a choice allows students to witness that their learning is their responsibility. Thus, when they realize that success or failure in their learning relies on their efforts and strategies (Dickinson, 1995), they will try harder, which will eventually make them more independent and obtain a better chance of achieving L2 (Brown, 2000). Furthermore, teachers should consider adopting a role of a facilitator, who creates a classroom environment that allows not just everyone to self-direct their learning but also for more capable peers who may know better techniques to provide scaffolding to lagging-behind classmates (Dörnyei, 2001). Dörnyei also asserted that such peer teaching practice could be an effective approach for low achievers to catch up with others.

Motivating students in online learning

The rapid spreading of COVID-19 has forced educational institutions globally to switch from physical to virtual classrooms (Heng & Sol, 2021; Sun, 2020). This sudden shift has given teachers tough times adjusting their teaching techniques and materials to adapt to this new normal. As a result, teachers tend to fail to engage students and maintain their motivation in learning as some students, instead of paying attention to class, spend time browsing Facebook, streaming videos on Tik Tok, and even playing online games, while others have been discouraged by tons of assigned works and by disengaging teaching techniques that prevent them from learning what they are supposed to (Sun, 2020). For this reason, to some students, participating in an online class is similar to exploring an unknown island (Sun, 2020). To make online classes more effective and practical, teachers should adapt and vary teaching activities to sustain students' motivation. In addition to what has been mentioned above, what follows are some more tips to help teachers motivate their students during online classes.

First, teachers should schedule the meeting for the class in a well-organized manner and be on time for every session, just as in physical class, because students will choose to do other activities like online gaming while waiting for teachers. Given this problem, starting class in or on time can develop discipline in students and exhibit care and commitment made by the teachers. Thus, students are likely to take their learning more seriously, actively participate in learning activities, and become more punctual (Gilakjani et al., 2012).

Second, teachers should start the class every week by letting students know what they are supposed to do and what they will get after doing that. These kinds of goals, as Oxford and Shearin (1994) argued, have to be specific, difficult but attainable, agreed upon by the students, and accompanied by constructive feedback. When goals are precise and achievable, students will be able to cultivate realistic expectations about their L2 learning (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998) which will in turn give them reasons to engage in the lesson and put more effort into it.

Third, teachers should assist students in organizing their study plans so that they can remain focused while studying remotely. The study plan can act as a self-motivating language learning strategy that helps students to accomplish

their goals. It is important to note that some students, even without their teacher's assistance, still strive for their goals more than others (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). The reason behind this is self-motivation which refers to an effective and meaningful positive thought about the learning experience, learning goals, and personal control of one's engagement in learning (Ushioda, 1997, as cited in Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). According to Dörnyei (2018), to cultivate self-motivation, students should be encouraged to create their future vision – what they want to see their L2 selves in the future – to generate their desire to learn the L2. Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) proposed that this future self-guide can be effectively enhanced with a sharp vision that is realistically expected and achievable. Once they have a clear picture of their desired L2 selves, they will employ various strategies to help themselves get through any challenges during online learning while remaining self-motivated.

Fourth, teachers should make the class more interactive and lively by integrating online games such as Kahoot or Quizizz as a new form of formative assessment rather than using quizzes or mini-test to evaluate students' progress. Wang and Tahir (2020) have presented a finding that indicated positive impacts of using Kahoot (i.e., a game-based learning platform) in assessing students' learning despite some technical challenges. Their study found that Kahoot could provide a real-time assessment of students' grasp of the lesson, increase motivation and engagement, enhance concentration and perceived competence, and promote the students' enjoyment, satisfaction, and self-esteem.

Fifth, during the class, each student should be called to answer questions to keep them from getting distracted by the environment or other online activities. Also, everyone must be given fair chances to participate in every classroom activity, thus resulting in a sense of togetherness that encourages students' voluntary participation in the activities (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Sixth, to show appreciation for students' contributions, teachers should use emojis or GIFs to praise them or create virtual certificates to celebrate their achievements. In addition, marks and grades are powerful extrinsic motivators that can keep adult students engaged. However, in online classes, rewards should be given to those who interact maturely and respectfully and put their efforts into completing the tasks because these incentives will make appropriate

behaviors continually show up and reflect hard work and better progress in learning (Brophy, 2010; Schunk et al., 2014).

Seventh, as the pandemic has given students studying online more stress, anxiety, and isolation from teachers and peers (Daniel, 2020; Gillet-Swan, 2017, as cited in Heng & Sol, 2020), teachers should encourage collaborative learning by assigning them to work in pair or group so that students can have time to discuss different topics, share and learn from one another, as well as develop interpersonal relationships with each other as if they were in the physical classroom. This kind of activity will not only remove students' feelings of isolation but also allow them to build up social networking among themselves (Stavredes, 2011). Besides, teachers should establish a good interpersonal relationship with the students by chit-chatting and letting them express their fear or worries to reduce their feeling of isolation (Stavredes, 2011). Furthermore, calling out students' names and paying attention to their personal information, such as hobbies and birthdays, can make them feel warm. Martin (2020) suggested that teachers should also keep in touch with students through various means such as email, class group chat, or the school's online learning platform.

Lastly, using a soft tone can also make students feel comfortable and less tense when joining the class. Woolway (2021), for example, indicated that tone of voice does have an impact on students' attention. His study showed that the tone of voice could make students stay engaged in the lesson when getting distracted, and a change in voice could help bring back students' attention to what was being said. In short, these suggestions may be helpful for teachers to keep their students motivated and engaged in online classes.

Conclusion

Motivation is an internal force that turns students' abilities into action. In foreign language learning, it is one of the main factors determining success. However, it has generally been neglected by language teachers. This article has demonstrated that different types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic, do have a significant impact on language students, and keeping them motivated is teachers' responsibility. Thus, teachers should be committed and enthusiastic toward the target language, employ students' goals, vary teaching activities

that give students choices, and create a supportive and interactive learning environment in which making mistakes is just a natural part of learning. During online learning, teachers are recommended to attend to students' social, mental, and emotional well-being through close communication, engage them through various gamification, and use collaborative learning.

Finally, to gain more insight into language students' motivation, consideration should be given to research into factors affecting students' motivation and engagement in online learning. The focus should also be placed on self-motivated strategies that language students implement during remote learning. In addition, research should be conducted to evaluate whether gamified techniques, such as assessing students' understanding through Kahoot or other learning platforms, can be an engaging method for online teaching and a powerful tool to engage students in language education.

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