

The importance of language learning motivation in language learning process

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Abstract

We live in a global world where communicative skills, in more than one language, can be not just an added bonus but rather a true necessity. The knowledge of at least one foreign language, especially English, is besides other key competences (e.g. computer skills) the marker of general knowledge of individuals, moreover, the basic requirement of modern job market. The ultimate goal of every English language teacher should not only be teaching English as a foreign language for the moment, but instilling within a learner a sense of what it is like to be a lifelong English learner. Having English language learners more motivated can ideally have so much needed a long-term impact.

Key words Language learning motivation, Language learning process, Teacher

1 LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS

Why does language learning differ from learning other subjects? The possible explanation can be Williams's opinion (Dörnyei, 1998, p. 122): „*There is no question that learning a foreign language is different to learning other subjects. This is mainly because of the social nature of such a venture. Language, after all, belongs to a person's whole social being: it is part of one's identity, and is used to convey this identity to other people. The learning of a foreign language involves far more than simply learning skills, or a system of rules, or a grammar; it involves an alteration in self-image, the adoption*

of new social and cultural behaviours and ways of being, and therefore has a significant impact on the social nature of the learner“.

As presented in Straková (2004, p. 6) most definitions describe learning “as a conscious process of internalization of new facts, retention of information or skill, gained mostly through formal instruction”. It stands in contrast to acquisition, which is frequently defined as a process in which learners internalize facts, rules or skills subconsciously, unaware of the reception process and without the connection to formal instruction” (Straková, 2004, p. 6). However, Littlewood (Oxford, 1990, p. 4) states that “our knowledge about what is conscious and what is subconscious is too vague for us to use the [learning-acquisition] distinction reliably”. In addition, Oxford (1990) mentions that some elements of language use are firstly conscious and then through practice they become unconscious or automatic. Moreover, many scholars suggested that both – acquisition and learning – are necessary for communicative competence, especially at higher skill levels. (Oxford, 1990)

Language learning proficiency will not come overnight. Learning a new language is a life-long process which is complex and dynamic, not necessarily connected with a classroom and a teacher. (Straková, 2004) Furthermore, there are many factors which have an influence on a language learning process. They can be divided into two groups, i.e. internal factors and external factors as presented in the figure below.

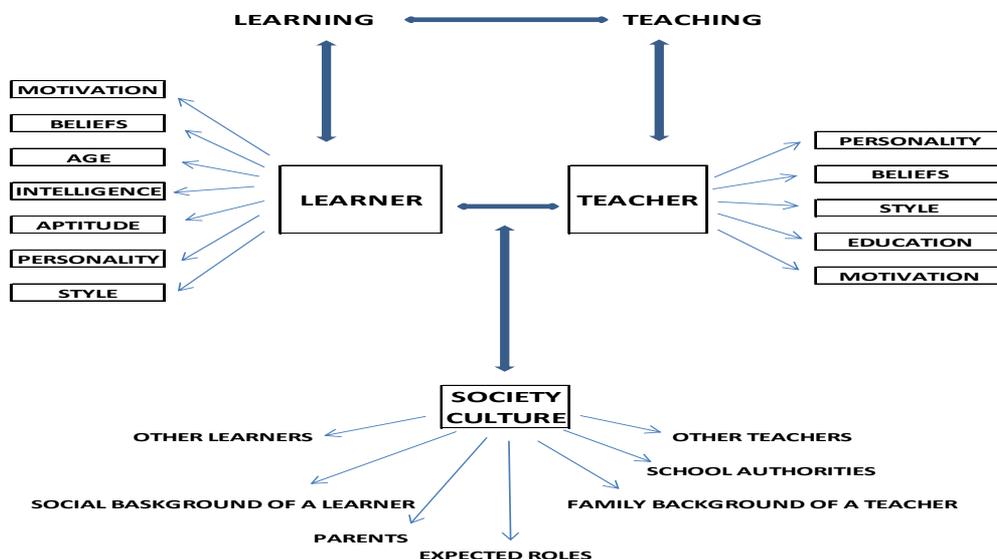


Figure 1 Factors Affecting Language Learning (Straková, 2004, p. 9)

2 LANGUAGE LEARNING MOTIVATION

In educational psychology, the definition of what it is to be motivated is quite simple: *“to be motivated is to be moved to do something”* (Ryan, 2000a, p. 54). However, further breakdowns of the term tend to become rather complicated. Many researchers have examined and defined motivation in foreign language learning, but yet a general agreement on the definition of motivation is missing.

Most of the scholars have elaborated on Gardner’s (1985, p. 10) definition of motivation as *“the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity”*. Additionally, he proposed that *“effort alone does not signify motivation. The motivated individual expends effort toward the goal, but the individual expending effort is not necessarily motivated.”* (Gardner, 1985, p. 10) Therefore, he pointed out that motivation comprises four aspects: *“a goal, effortful behavior, a desire to attain the goal and favorable attitudes toward an activity in question”* (Gardner, 1985, p. 50). In other words, language learning motivation is defined as the combination of learner’s effort, attitudes and inner desire to achieve the goal of mastering the language.

On the other hand, Dörnyei (1998, p. 118) claimed that L2 motivation *“is multi-faceted construct, and describing its nature and its core features requires particular care”*. According to Dörnyei’s definition (1998, p. 118), motivation *“is a process whereby a certain amount of instigation force arises, initiate 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”*. Richards and Schmidt (Al-Badi, 2011, p. 46) defined motivation in the field of language learning as *“a combination of the learner’s attitudes, desires, and willingness in expending effort in order to learn the second language”*, moreover, as *“the driving force in any situation that leads to action”*. Richards and Schmidt (Al-Badi, 2011) reported that people are motivated to do something they feel is worth doing and they expect to be successful in doing. In these both cases motivation is seen as a force that makes a person initiate an action and keep on until the goal is achieved.

Furthermore, based on Deci and Ryan’s Self-Determination Theory, which has been stated by researchers to be one of the most comprehensive and empirically supported theories of motivation available today, motivation was classified as intrinsic and extrinsic based on the degree of self-determination. It assumed that humans have inherent tendencies to be intrinsically motivated, to assimilate their social and physical worlds, and to integrate their external regulations into self-

regulations (Tanaka, 2008). In this theory human behavior is considered to be volitional and self-determined.

In a highly influential study of motivation, Crookes and Schmidt (1991) pointed out that researchers should focus not only on finding out what motivates students, but they should focus on what concepts of motivation teachers believe are critical for successful language learning as well. Furthermore, Dörnyei (2001a, p. 51) highlighted that *“the most pressing question related to motivation is not what motivation is but rather how it can be increased”*. All teachers would agree that motivated students are easier to work with because they are willing to learn. Dörnyei (2003, p. 173) described this explicitly when he wrote the following: *„The motivated individual expends effort, is persistent and attentive to the task at hand, has goals, desires and aspirations, enjoys the activity, experiences reinforcement from success and disappointment from failure, makes attributions concerning success and or failure, is aroused, and makes use of strategies to aid in achieving goals“*. Furthermore, it is interesting to notice Dörnyei ‘s (2001b) opinion that a demotivated person is someone who initially has had motivation to achieve a goal or to engage in an activity but has lost it because of negative external factors. Therefore, increasing students ‘motivation in their language learning process should be the most important task for teachers in their teaching process.

2.1 THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE LEARNING MOTIVATION IN LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS

Although opinions differ as to the definition of language learning motivation, there is a general agreement on the important role that motivation plays in the success of language learning process. Dörnyei and Csizer (1998, p. 203) for instance, asserted that *“L2 motivation is one of the most important factors that determine the rate and success of L2 attainment...without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals”*. As presented there is a generally accepted opinion that the motivation to learn a language is as important as any other factors affecting the language learning process, such as the learner’s aptitude, attitude, style, personality, etc.

Teachers tend to consider that a foreign language learning motivation is the most important factor in advancing effective learning. (Dörnyei, 2001b) Furthermore, Dörnyei (1998) argues the importance of motivation by the statement that motivation provides learners the primary stimulus for initiating the language learning, and later motivation becomes the driving force to be persistent in demanding language learning process, so that learners may not be able to achieve their long term goals the without

the sufficient motivation. As seen motivation has a crucial and leading position among all factors affecting the success or failure of each individual learner's language learning process.

Moreover, worth noticing is Gardner's (1985) statement that language learning motivation itself is a dynamic process throughout language learning. In addition, motivation is perceived by Dörnyei (2001b) as cyclic, going up and down, affecting the language achievement and vice versa. It can be said that the flow of motivation changes over time, e.g. differs not only during a foreign language course, but also during the class/seminar or even during the task itself. Therefore, teachers should be aware of that flux in motivation and be ready not only to maintain, but also increase the language learning motivation in their students' learning process.

3 CONCLUSION

Successful students of English do not have to be only a teacher's dream – students motivated to work hard, adding their own goals to those of the classroom, focusing their attention on the task, using language learning strategies effectively, moreover, learning autonomously can be believed to be real in every English class. The teachers have to be aware of the fact that the reason why some language learners excel and others struggle lies in how much motivated learners are. The dream can come true by English teachers' focusing on increasing language learning motivation among their students.

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