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## Second Language Motivation; The Role of Teachers in Learners' Motivation

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to explore the main body of literature on motivation in second language learning. It aims to discuss the major theories of motivation on the influence of teachers on learners' motivation and to explain how teachers can generate and maintain motivation in their teaching practices. Based on the vast body of research on motivation, this paper suggests that teachers have a huge responsibility to initiate learners' motivation and keep it alive throughout the learning process. Moreover, it synthesizes the conclusions drawn from the literature on motivation conducted to identify strategies and principles appropriate to be used by teachers in their classrooms.

### **Introduction**

Motivation plays a significant role in the rate and success of second and foreign language learning in general, and in classroom language learning in particular. Motivation “provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the second language and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process” (Dörnyei, 1998, p. 117). Motivation, however, is “a complex” and “multifaceted construct” (Gardner, 1985; Williams & Burdoen, 1997). It consists of such factors as the attached value of a task, the rate of success expected by learners, whether learners believe they are competent enough to succeed, and what they think to be the reason for their success or failure at the task (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

Motivating learners to develop in the target language is acknowledged to be a complex process. In many instances, students face many obstacles in learning English and are often demotivated to learn. However, certain motivational strategies, identified by research on motivation, can help learners adopt more positive attitudes towards language learning. This paper synthesizes major theories on motivation, discusses the role of teachers in motivating students, and presents a comprehensive review of motivational strategies that can be used by teachers in their classrooms. This paper concludes with a call for teachers to focus more on learners' motivation and try to employ appropriate motivational strategies so that they can achieve their ultimate purpose of helping students make the most of their language learning experience.

## **Overview of Theories on Motivation**

Research into second language motivation dates back to the late 1950s and flourished in the 1970s with the pioneering work of Lambert and Gardner. Gardner (1985) proposed three key components of L2 motivation: (a) “motivational intensity or effort,” (b) “desire to learn the language,” and (c) “attitudes towards learning the language”, (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 41). Gardner distinguishes between motivation and what he called orientation, where orientation stands for a goal. Orientation is an incentive that gives rise to motivation and steers it towards a set of goals. Strictly speaking, orientations are not part of motivation but function as “motivational antecedents” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 41). Gardner identified two main orientations through his research: an integrative orientation, which is an interest in interacting with the L2 language group; and an instrumental orientation, an interest in the more materialistic and practical advantages of learning a new language, such as aspiration for a better career. The integrative component in Gardner’s work is consistently cited in empirical studies as “explaining a significant portion in the variance in language learners’ motivational disposition and motivated learning behavior” (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 5). Gardner described the difference between these orientations and actual motivation. For example, an integrative orientation was a class of reasons suggesting why a person might undertake language study, including a desire to integrate with a particular language community. By itself, this reflected a goal that might or might not lack motivational power. In contrast, an integrative motive included this orientation, plus the motivation, which included desire, motivational intensity, and a number of other attitudes involving the target language community.

However, Gardner’s socio-educational model was criticized on the basis of its emphasis on the integrative orientation. Clement and Kruidenier (1983) conducted a research study in order to identify additional factors that influence motivation. The findings showed four different orientations to language study. The instrumental orientation was an important factor, associated with reasons such as travelling, seeking new friendships, and acquiring knowledge. They asserted that “relative status of learner and target groups as well as the availability of (or at least familiarity with) the latter in the immediate environment are important determinants of the emergence of orientations” (p. 288).

The 1990s saw a shift from the socio-educational model of motivation to an emphasis on a psychological model, which views motivation as a more dynamic factor, more cognitive in nature, and more established in the educational contexts where most L2 learning occurs. This shift came with Dörnyei’s concern to expand the model of motivation beyond two orientations. He stated that “the exact nature of the social and pragmatic dimensions of second language motivation is always dependent on what languages where” (Dörnyei, 1994, p. 275). His motivational model was categorized into language level, learner level, and learning situation level. The language level refers to aspects of the L2, including the culture, community, and the values and benefits associated with it. The individual level consists of the learner characteristics that language learners bring to the classroom. However, the learning situation involves various factors including the classroom environment, teacher, learning context, teaching methods, classmates, and teacher personality. The intriguing factor in Dörnyei’s model is that each of the three levels of motivation operates independently of the others.

Unlike Gardner's focus on integrativeness, Dörnyei argued that in an EFL context, instrumental orientation would have a greater impact on language learners. In addition, research on L2 motivation by Dörnyei (1990, 1994, 1997, 2001a, 2001b), Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), and Williams (1994) revealed a need for a more pragmatic education centered approach, investigating classroom reality and identifying and examining classroom specific motives. Cortazzi and Jin (1999), on the other hand, found that culture and identity are two essential variables in motivating L2 learners. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) introduced a new approach in L2 learning labeled "L2 motivational self-esteem," which links the learning of a foreign language to one's personal identity. This approach has implications for learning a foreign language in that the learner develops self-maturity and thus self-motivation in acquiring the target language.

Another theory, which captures both the dynamic dimension of motivation and its relevance for classroom applications, is the self-determination theory. The theory was initially developed by Deci and Ryan (between 1985-1995); it is concerned with supporting learners' natural or intrinsic tendencies to behave in effective ways. The self-determination theory contains three orientations to motivation, which are placed on a continuum of increasing self-determination: amotivation, extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation. First, amotivation occurs when learners see no relation between their actions and the consequences of their actions. Amotivated language learners believe that they are wasting their time studying the L2. They do not value language learning and do not expect to be successful (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Amotivation should not be confused with demotivation, which refers to a reduction of motivation due to some specific external forces (Dörnyei, 2001). Dörnyei (2001) made a distinction between amotivation and demotivation. Demotivation concerns "specific forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action" (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 143). Demotivation refers to a decrease of motivation. Demotivated learners were once motivated, but due to some external causes, they became demotivated. Demotivation might be brought by an attractive alternative or distraction. For example, a student decides to watch TV instead of doing homework. On the other hand, Dörnyei (2001) claims that when the outcomes are believed to be unrealistic and unreasonable, this results in amotivation. Amotivation, thus, is brought about by a belief that there is no point in doing something. That is to say, the learner realizes that that goal is not achievable and it is beyond his or her ability. Basically, amotivation is a lack in motivation.

Extrinsic motivation refers to the pressure or reward from the social environment to learn a language. Extrinsically motivated learners aim to obtain a better career opportunity, a teacher's praise or recognition or even to prove that one is a good learner. However, a characteristic of external motivation is that it implies some kind of external pressure which, once removed, may result in the language learner quitting the L2 learning (Noels, Clement, & Pelletier, 2001).

Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is more self-determined and refers to internal factors such as enjoyment and satisfaction for oneself. Intrinsically motivated learners perform an activity for the feelings associated with exploring new ideas and developing knowledge, the sensations related to attempting to master the task or achieve a goal. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), the feelings of satisfaction in intrinsic motivation come from a sense of competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

## **The Influence of the Teacher on Learners' Motivation**

Research into motivation in second language acquisition (SLA) in recent years has focused on the factors which affect second language (L2) learners' motivation (e.g., Csizer & Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Clement, 2001; Dörnyei & Otto, 1998; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). The researchers concluded that teachers are one of the most determinant factors of L2 learners' motivation (Dörnyei, 1994; Tanaka, 2005). Other studies set out to investigate how teachers positively affect learners' motivation (e.g., Kikuchi, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Tanak, 2005). These studies proposed that L2 teachers play one of the most influential roles to help students engage and persist in the long process of second language acquisition. Among the role that teachers play in L2 classes are initiator, facilitator, motivator, ideal model of the target language speaker, mentor, consultant, and mental supporter. These roles are assumed to influence each learner's motivation. Ramage (1990) suggested that teachers should attempt to enhance learner motivation so that learners positively and actively engage in their learning until they reach their common target in L2 learning. However, the impact of teaching strategies on motivating students should rely on students perceptions of the strategies, as Dörnyei (2001) has proposed.

Many empirical studies of teacher's motivation were conducted to identify how teachers influence learners' motivation. Dörnyei and Csizer (1998) have studied the use of teaching strategies to motivate learners among Hungarian teachers of English. The researchers assigned 51 motivational strategies and studied the significance attributed to each strategy by the teachers and how often teachers employ each strategy in their classes. This study leads to ten commandments for teachers to motivate language learners: teachers should set a personal behavior example, make sure that the class atmosphere is relaxed and pleasant, present task properly to the learners, have good teacher-student relationships, work on increasing learners' self-confidence, ensure that the language class is interesting to the students, promote as much as possible learners' autonomy, personalize the learning process, increase learners' goals, and make sure that learners are familiar with the target language culture.

Other studies, which propose that teachers are an important influence on learners' motivation, include Dörnyei's 1994 study. Dörnyei (1994) claimed that teacher-associated components that influence learners are language learners' affiliation (i.e., learners' desire to please teachers), teacher's style of teaching, and the use of particular teaching strategies, including modeling task-presentation and feedback.

L2 learners' interactions with teachers, including learning experiences, feedback, rewards, praise, and punishments, are claimed to be relevant factors that may impact L2 learners' motivation (Williams & Burden, 1997). Oxford and Shearin (1994) proposed five implications for the role of the teacher in understanding motivation, suggesting that teachers should (a) figure out learners' real reasons for learning the L2; (b) help students build challenging but achievable goals; (c) show students the benefits of learning the L2; (d) create a safe, welcoming, and non-intimidating teaching environment; and (e) motivate students to develop high but realistic intrinsic motivation.

These studies show that teacher-related factors can be categorized into three main components: (a) teaching materials and methodology, (b) teacher personality, and (c) teachers' ways of interacting with the learners. These components are similar to Dörnyei and Csizer's

(1998) suggestions about teacher-related motivational components, which were divided into three perspectives: behavior, personality, and teaching style.

## **How can Teachers Promote Motivation in the Foreign Language Classroom?**

### **Creating the Basic Motivational Conditions**

It is imperative that before attempting to create any kind of motivation, teachers should take some conditions into consideration. We have seen above that teachers play a significant role in affecting learners' motivation; teachers' actions and behaviors in the classroom have motivational influence on students. Dörnyei and Csizer (1998) confirmed this claim through their study of 200 Hungarian teachers. They argued that teachers' behavior is a powerful tool of motivation in classroom. It is argued that teachers' behavior can influence the students' engagement in class. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a class atmosphere of mutual trust and respect with the learners (Alison & Halliwell, 2002). Teachers can promote such respect and trust through interacting with students on a personal level and show that they care about their students' personal issues or challenges that they face in the classroom or even outside. Enthusiasm is another factor that can impact learners' motivation. Enthusiasm is contagious in classrooms; therefore, if students recognize their teacher's enthusiasm to the task, they, too, will be enthusiastic (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

Another motivational condition is classroom atmosphere. Students' anxiety is one of the most recognized factors that undermine learning effectiveness and second language motivation (Dörnyei, 2007; MacIntyre, 2002; Young, 1999). Safe classroom environments are the most productive in involving the learner in the learning process. In such environments, students are encouraged to express their opinions and perspectives on different issues because they feel safe and protected from embarrassment and sarcasm. Creating a safe teaching environment also includes developing a sense of community and promoting "a palpable sense of belonging" (White, 2007, p. 104).

The third basic condition is concerned with creating a cohesive learner group with convenient group norms. Cohesiveness among learners has an influential motivational impact on learning. Uncooperative groups can have ineffective results in learning. Effective group norms are those developed by both teacher and learners. Group norms that are mandated by teachers have been proved to be ineffective unless the majority of the class agrees that they are appropriate and right (Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998). Dörnyei (2003) suggested that it is important to build group norms early and involve students in building these norms, explain their purpose and get students agreement to include a particular rule or not, and finally the teacher along with the whole class should agree on a particular set of rules, and the ramifications of breaking these rules. Another important norm that contributes to cohesive groups is the tolerance of learners' mistakes and viewing them as something positive which may contribute to improvement and an indication of learning new information.

## **Generating Students' Motivation**

It is every teacher's dream to have in his/her class a motivated student, who is driven by the curiosity to learn and achieve his or her goals. However, this is rarely the case in L2 learning. Wong and Csikszentmihalyi (1991) found out in a longitudinal study carried out in a U.S. context that schoolwork was rated as the least rewarding activity among learners. Thus, it is the job of the teacher to generate students' motivation and help them build positive attitudes towards the L2. Teachers can achieve this aim of generating students' motivation through implementing various strategies. First, teachers should enhance learners' values and attitudes toward the language, including their intrinsic, intercultural, and instrumental values. Generating learners' interest and enjoyment to study is a key issue here. Teachers should know how to "whet the students' appetite" and attract their attention to learn the language (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 114). The target culture is also a useful tool to generate the integrative orientation of the learners through introducing authentic materials which reflect the target culture and community of the target language. However, for some learners, learning the language is a means to an end, and teachers should be aware of that and try to pay attention to the instrumental value of learning the language. For instance, some learners study the target language in order to gain a rewarding career. Therefore, teachers should draw the students' attention to the fact that speaking the language fluently is crucial to their achievement of their ambitions.

Second, teachers should promote the learners' expectations of success in the L2. This notion is based on Atkinson and Raynor's (1974) achievement motivation model. The theory conceptualized that students will have a greater tendency to do an activity if they feel they will succeed in that particular activity. Hence, it is unlikely to aim for something if we know that we will eventually fail. Brophy (1998) states that, "the simplest way to ensure that students expect success is to make sure that they achieve it constantly" (p. 60). Other ways to increase students' expectancy of success include assisting them and giving them time to prepare for tasks, explaining to them what success is involved in the task and how to achieve it, and help them overcome any obstacle they may face (Dörnyei, 2011).

Third, teachers should orient the students toward particular goals and work together to realize these goals. In fact, in many teaching situations, teachers work with a pre-determined syllabus and already planned goal of the course, but many research studies have found that these goals most often do not match the students' goals. More importantly, many students have been reported that they do not understand why they are given a particular activity. As a result, it is the role of the teacher to steer the class towards a particular goal and explain to the students the purpose of each activity and help them achieve that goal. One of the problems that may face both teachers and learners is the diversity of learners' goals in the sense that every learner may bring a distinct goal, and some of them are in the classroom because not that they have a goal but rather they have to be there. "It is fundamental to the successful working of a group to have a sense of direction and a common purpose. Defining and agreeing aims is one of the hardest tasks that the group has to undertake together" (Hadfield, 1992, p. 134, as quoted by Dörnyei, 2001, p. 60).

The implication here is that teachers should understand each learner's goals and with the learners create a set of goals for the whole group and work to fulfill these goals.

The fourth strategy to generate motivation is to make the teaching materials relevant to the learners. Brophy (1998) argues that schools build their curriculum on societal norms and what the society thinks students should learn rather than giving students a choice to learn what they think is relevant to their needs. So, the motivation to learn decreases dramatically when the learners learn something they do not see any relevant to their lives. Dörnyei (2001) suggests that teachers should make materials as relevant as possible to the students' lives and, if necessary, teachers should supplement some activities in textbooks with more relevant materials that can motivate students to learn because they can apply it to their own experiences.

Finally, teachers should help students create realistic beliefs about language learning. Some learners bring some unrealistic learning beliefs about how much progress or learning they can achieve in a particular class. If they do not see that their beliefs or expectations are not achieved, they will become disappointed and lose interest in the course. Teachers, therefore, should explain the complexity to learn an L2 and develop students' understanding of the nature of the process. Moreover, teachers should help students realize that there are various ways to achieve success in the learning process and encourage each learner to find his/her distinct ways of learning.

### **Maintaining and Protecting Motivation**

While it is significant to generate and initiate learners' motivation, it is equally important to maintain and protect motivation. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) cautioned that, "the natural tendency to lose sight of the goal, to get tired or bored of the activity, and to give way to attractive distractions or competing action tendencies will result in initial motivation gradually petering out" (p. 118). One way to maintain motivation is to make the learning experience enjoyable and stimulating. This can occur in variety of ways. For instance, teachers can make teaching more interesting through varying their teaching styles, presentations, different materials, and learning tasks. Interesting tasks have been viewed as one of the greatest components of motivation (Anderman & Anderman, 2010). Teaching can also be interesting if teachers introduce novel techniques and make the task challenging but achievable. The way teachers present tasks can be either motivating or demotivating depending on teachers' administration of the tasks. This includes clarifying the aim of the task, arousing learners' anticipation toward the task, and offering suitable strategies for doing the task.

Learners' self-esteem and confidence play key roles in maintaining motivation. Learners will not be able to progress if they have any doubts about their abilities (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Teachers can promote learners' self-confidence in different ways. For example, they can focus on the positive aspects of their learners by showing their learners what they can do rather than what they cannot and by giving them a chance to make a useful contribution in class. They can also make the students feel that they can come forward to offer help (Alison & Halliwell, 2002), and making the teaching context relaxing and less stressful. Motivation can also be preserved when students feel that they can demonstrate a positive social image and show their strength. Similarly, learners' social image can be enhanced in an environment where learners are not criticized or humiliated and where students can work in groups so that the norms of tolerance

and acceptance are established. In addition, many research studies in educational psychology (e.g., Benson, 2007, 2010; Little, 1991) have pointed out that encouraging learners' autonomy is beneficial to learning. Teachers can foster learning autonomy in different ways, including sharing learning responsibilities, involving them in making decisions regarding classroom materials, and giving them positions of authority through peer teaching and project work (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011).

Most of the discussions on maintaining motivation emphasized the teacher's role, but if we also give the students the opportunity to share this responsibility, it will be beneficial. Learners who motivate themselves exhibit more success in pursuing their goals. Teachers can promote their students' self-motivation by drawing their attention to useful strategies, such as favorable expectations, incentives, dealing with procrastination and boredom, and eliminating distractions.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, the author addressed some major influential theories of L2 motivation and the role of the teacher in enhancing learners' motivation and helping them achieve continuous progress in their language learning process. The body of literature in the field of motivation has shown that teachers play significant roles in increasing, or decreasing, students' motivation. The implications of motivational models and strategies can be beneficial for ESL and EFL teachers. Teachers would find it so helpful to integrate these motivational strategies in their classrooms and help their students make the most of their L2 learning. While each of the theories and strategies that I reviewed has some value, no single theory or strategy can sufficiently explain learners' motivation. Therefore, it would be wise if teachers drew eclectically from these theories and strategies, or at least most of them, and try different combinations in their classrooms, taking into consideration that learners are different and thus different motivational strategies may work differently with each group of students. In addition, it is significant that teachers should be aware of their actions and behaviors in classroom because it is very likely that teachers' actions can demotivate learners.

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