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The Role of EFL Teachers in Increasing High School Students' Motivation in Classroom

Mohammad Reza Surname: Pahlavannejad

Education: BA in TEFL , MA in Linguistics, PhD in Linguistics, Associate Professor, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran

Hossein Surname: Nejatiyan Bostani

Education: BA in TEFL, MA in Linguistics, PhD candidate in Linguistics, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran

Abstract

This study is a report of some best ways teachers can employ to surge up EFL students' motivation in class. It aims to let the teachers know which ways to use and how to use them to motivate EFL students in classroom. It also intends to make EFL teachers familiar with the positive effects motivation can have on students' progress in class. The result of this study reveals students' early knowledge of the course syllable and assessment, rewards and positive reinforcement they receive and their chance of group work and role play will considerably increase the students' motivation to learn English provided that the teachers creates a mutual and respectful relationship with the learners. Also it shows that motivation increase will highly affect the student's language learning development. This study is done based on the analysis of oral interviews of a survey done by the researcher on forty male students learning English as a foreign language in a high school in Iran.

Key words: motivation, teachers' role, learning, student's progress

Introduction

Skehan (1989: 38) defined motivation as “an inner drive that energizes, directs, and sustains behavior which moves and directs the students in a particular direction. It is the second more important determinant of educational success, the first being aptitude, a learner's cognitive capacity” (cited in Tsiplakides, 2010, P.222). Similarly, Guay et all (2010, p. 712) referred to motivation as “the reasons underlying behavior”. Also Brophy (2004) stated motivation is “the

degree to which students invest attention and effort” (cited in Tsiplakides, 2010). Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris (2004) believed “the students’ motivation is reflected in personal investment and in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement in school activities” (cited in Skinner et al., 2007, P.2). Blumenfeld, & Paris’s idea to motivation is also very similar to that of Reeve (2011). Motivation has an important role in mastering a second or foreign language, especially in a foreign language setting. The model presented by Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002) showed that motivation affects academic achievement. If students know that English is helpful both in their everyday lives and future careers, they will increase their motivation to learn. This, of course, calls the help and responsibility of teachers to surge up students’ enthusiasm for learning another language, then. The teachers can have a great role in enhancing the students’ motivation while the students are learning another language. Teachers can do many things to motivate students to learn and behave in ways that promote their success and productivity in the classroom. Brophy (1987) referred to the role experience has on motivation. He believes that experience develops students’ motivation but it needs teacher’s help and modeling. Also, the environment, where learning is taking place, can highly enhance a learner’s motivation to learn, what Paris & Turner (1994) and Rueda & Moll (1994) referred to as “situated motivation”.

It is very important that ELF teachers build up motivation in their students. They should believe in the positive effects motivation can have on developing language learning success. They must know that the focus on learning alone is not sufficient and that they had better find ways to enhance the students’ motivation because it is of paramount importance to students’ success. Students work harder and more intensively when they are motivated.

Motivation can be categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic, both affecting the achievement of students. However, the importance of external motivation, for example, reinforcement, is not taken into great consideration by many EFL teachers. Some students may be intrinsically motivated and interested to learn another language, but the extrinsic motivation can push up not only the interested students’ desire to learn but also it fosters that of the less interested students. If the external motivation is valued in the classroom, the degree of students’ achievement will increase. In a supportive environment where there is a sense of belonging and where everyone is valued and respected, the students’ motivation will grow and they can pay their outmost attention to learning.

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study have been forty high school students studying English as a foreign language. They were in grade two, and all were males. They have had English classes once a week as part of their academic curriculum during one year. The students of two classes, twenty students in each class, were studied. The small groups were chosen to find ample time for doing the oral interviews in the class.

Instruments

This study is done based on the three oral interviews done three times during one academic year.

The students gave oral responses to the interviews which were all recorded for later review. The students' voice was recorded using a small recording instrument.

Procedure

The students needed enough time to think about the interviews before responding. Thus, the researcher recorded the interview questions and let the students hear the questions twice at the end of one class session and asked them to give an answer to the interview questions in the next session after listening to the questions again. This way, the students could reflect on what they planned to say in advance. Sometimes, the students had shared attitudes which showed they consulted each other about the interview questions before giving a response. As the oral interview was intended to be done in the class, one class session was spent wholly on the interview responses by the students three times during the academic year. The first questions in the interview aimed to draw students' attitudes about the ways the researcher thought they could be motivated to study English. The next two interviews which were conducted in the middle and end of academic year concentrated on the students' reflection on the way the teacher, here the researcher, had succeeded to increase their motivation. The interview results were carefully analyzed by the researcher and shown by percentage in this paper. It had been tried to provide a pleasant environment for the interviewees in the class so that they could comfortably air their views. The students were asked to express their personal ideas and not to copy their classmates' responses.

Result and discussion

Motivating students is among the big challenges English language teachers encounter. Schunk et al (2008:40) warned the English teachers that not everything motivating students in one setting can prove helpful in other circumstances. Thus, not every method can be useful in EFL setting to motivate the students. However, based on the survey done, the researcher has discovered that there are some simple ways teachers can employ to foster the students' motivation in English class. The researcher proposes some of these ways as he used them directly and practically in the survey in an EFL class.

Some basic questions used in the oral interview, translated from Persian to English here, are listed below. However, these questions were explained in details to the students before asking them to respond.

a) Interview questions at the beginning of the academic year:

-How do you like to know about the course syllabus at the beginning?

-Do you think receiving rewards, like positive points for giving true answers or for being involved in class activities will increase your motivation?

-What's your idea about group activities?

-Do you think taking the role of teacher in the class will make you more interested in learning English?

-Is it important for you to know how and when the assessments are to be done in the class?

b) Interview questions at the mid academic year

-How has your knowledge of course syllabus in advance improved your motivation?

-Do you think you will like to learn English more if you are awarded in the class?

-How much has the group work made you more eager to take part in English class?

-How did/do you enjoy taking the role of teacher in the class?

-How has your knowledge of the assessment in the class improved your motivation and language learning?

c) Interview questions at the end of the academic year

-We tried to meet your knowledge of the course syllabus, the rewards you liked, group activities, taking teacher role, and assessment with an aim to increase your motivation. Which ones have you found the most effective? Why?

-How has the teacher helped you increase your motivation?

-Do you think the teacher's role have been positive enough to encourage your motivation?

-How do you assess the effect of this motivation increase on language learning development?

-How have you been pleased with the motivation increasing activities in the class?

Based on the interview responses, some ways the researcher found the most effective in increasing the EFL students' motivation in the class, how they should be employed by the teachers and their effect on students' language learning development are discussed and proposed here.

Let the students know the course syllabus at the beginning of the academic semester

The first thing in the survey was to find out the possible effect of students' early familiarity with the syllabus, the expected outcomes and the planned processes on the degree of their motivation. The interview results revealed that this familiarity would dramatically mount up their motivation.

98.5 Percent out of 40 students taking an EFL class instructed by the researcher announced that the course syllabus acquaintance had a positive effect on the degree of their increased motivation up to the end of the course and it helped them accomplish the learning tasks better. Few if any students didn't mind about the identified syllabus of the course as an affective factor motivating them while learning English. Many students announced that they could prepare themselves in advance in every session when they knew what was about to be done in that session. They proclaimed that this let them take more participation in the class activities, that they could relate the new activity to their background knowledge better, that they were more ready to take risk in asking or answering questions as they learned to work on their own and that they felt they could rule in the class just because their motivation for learning had gone up by learning about the plans and processes of learning activities earlier.

Provide opportunities for group work

The importance of group cooperation in fostering students' motivation can not be denied. Students feel a sense of protection when they are actively involved in group work. They feel less anxious if they make mistakes and they develop a sense of support of the group members. So their motivation will go up to help each other and improve the weakness of their group members. The responsibility they gain in this sort of activity will surge up their motivation for being more involved in the activities, and they will learn more from each other. As Hedge (2000) believes working together will increase independence and creativity. Students will learn more when they are imaginative and creative because creativity is a very important milestone in learning development.

In this survey, the researcher found that the group work activity encouraged even those students who were not interested in learning. He found that 88% of the students were positive about group activities. They revealed that they not only enjoyed while working together, but they rarely if ever felt apprehended, anxious or uninterested. Here, the percentage dropped a bit because the students had less chance for group activities in writing activities. But they could work together well enough during the speaking and reading activities.

Give the students chances to take the role in the class

Students feel competent when they are engaged in teaching and learning activities and when they feel they are valued. They take more responsibility for their own learning when they are directly involved in presenting some part of work in the class. In this survey, the researcher found that approximately more than half of the students claimed they could learn better when they took the responsibility of teaching some part of the lesson to their classmates. They said it increased their motivation when they were involved in teaching and presenting the materials to other students. Among the less interested students, many volunteered to take part in the activity as they felt less apprehended up to the end of the course. They also mentioned that it moved up their motivation as they managed to take the role in the class.

Let the students know about the assessment

Teachers should find ways to help students apply what they learned in a way that is meaningful to them because their motivation for learning can be fostered this way. In this regard, the process of classroom assessment can serve an important role in increasing the students' motivation and achievement. Crooks (1988) and Stiggins (2005) emphasized on the impact of assessment on students' motivation. Also, Stiggins (2005) believes assessment should aim to increase both the students' motivation and their achievements. He found evidence of the importance of a motivational aspect in relation to classroom assessment. EFL teachers can help enhance the students' performance by clearly defining the learning goals. When the students know that there will be some assessment to evaluate their work in the class, they'll take more responsibility for every activity involved, and they'll be more motivated to do the tasks better. Meanwhile, the students must know how the evaluations will be done in the classroom. This will reduce their anxiety and enhance their motivation. The interview results in this survey showed that 87% of the students confessed the role of assessment in motivation enhancement. They believed one important criterion behind their motivation was evaluations done in the class. They stated that they were more motivated to learn when they got informed of the way the evaluation was to be done in the classroom. Few explained that they didn't like to take tests of any kind and viewed assessment as ineffective in motivation enhancement.

The employment of the best ways to motivate students by EFL teachers

EFL teachers must have planned programs to perform in the best way that helps the students gain more motivation for learning another language. The application of the proposed ways to increase students' motivation demands the teacher's expertise in knowing how to behave in the class while applying them. The EFL teacher must know how to behave in the class to move up the students' motivation. He/she must be aware that their behavior has got an effect on the students' interest and desire to learn. Dornyei (2001: 120) believes that teacher's behavior is a powerful 'motivational tool'. Teachers' behavior can attract and involve the students in learning. Thus, they must create a mutual and respectful relation with the learners, according to Alison (1993). Meanwhile, the encouragement must be continuous to support the efforts students make while learning.

The effects of motivation increase on learning development

Motivation increases engagements in activities. Larson (2000) thinks learners are more likely to begin a task when they are interested in it. He also believes that learners possibly work on it till they can accomplish it even if they are interrupted or frustrated on some occasions. He thinks that motivation encourages the students to spend some times on the task and this is an important factor affecting their learning and achievement. Also, Pintrich and Schunk (2002) and Pugh and Bergin (2006) think motivation has an effect on learners' attention to the task. Hence, motivated learners try to understand the tasks, learn them and even extend them to their real life. The

motivation increasing ways applied by the researcher and proposed to EFL teachers proved to have positive influence on motivation enhancement. In all five simple ways mentioned above, the motivation increase led to English learning development as the methods used by the teacher made the students more and more interested in the class participation. The end result of such improvement was reflected not only in the interviews but in the final test as nearly all the students got interested in English learning by the end of the course. Even the students with low aptitude proved drastically in English and became able to pass the final test.

Conclusion

Some ways to increase the students' external motivation were experienced by the researcher during the survey he conducted in one academic year and proposed to other teachers in EFL settings. These ways proved motivation increase and language learning improvement all throughout one academic year. The researcher found that applying these simple ways can move up the students' motivation but it also requires the application of some teacher's art. Thus, an EFL teacher can be successful in fostering the students' motivation if he/she considers the students as human beings who are valued and are active and cooperative in the class. The EFL teacher should not be looked at as a teacher in the classroom. He/she must be a facilitator whose job is to help and support the students in order to increase their trust, interest, motivation and learning achievements.

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