

Motivation in learning englishl



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MOTIVATION IN LEARNING ENGLISH Argument Learners' motivation has become more commonly recognized as perhaps the major determining factor for successful learning in general, whether one is a high school student pushing one's way through the battery of required courses needed to graduate, or an adult learner taking distance education courses. In any learning setting, the dynamics of motivation will be different. What will help a high school student sustain motivation may not apply to an adult learner, for example. Similarly, what factors affect and enhance learner motivation in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting (in our case) will differ as well.

Furthermore, motivation for EFL learners in a middle school or high school class will differ from the experience of an EFL adult learner. It is important to grasp the key concepts of motivation as they are understood in the realm of education. Motivation is an unconscious, psychological process that varies by individual over time. It is a social process which can be affected by past experiences and environment. According to psychologists, intrinsic motivation refers to a source of motivation which emanates from within the learner.

Extrinsic motivation refers to motivation which is sourced by the expectation of a tangible reward. Ideally, the learner will have a healthy combination of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation working for themselves. The extrinsic element may help push the learner through tougher times by helping them keep their eye on the goal, such as a foreign language certificate, or a decent TOEFL score, for example. Instrumental motivation (which closely correlates to extrinsic motivation) applies to the language learner who holds

a specific, more isolated purpose for learning a foreign language, such as qualifying for a job, or achieving higher social status.

Taking into account the latest socio- political changes Romania has faced – the integration of our country into European Union, the opportunities Romanians have nowadays to study abroad or to get a work permit in different English speaking countries, or the increasing number of people applying for a ‘ green card’ to the United States of America or Canada- we may also speak of the integrative motivation, which is associated with the English learners’ orientation toward the target language and culture, and the presence of a desire to integrate into that culture. The following sections of my paper deal with motivational differences people (adults, children and adolescents) have, the reasons why they learn English and considerations on the degree of motivation students have in learning English, based on my personal ‘experience’ as a primary/secondary school teacher. I will dedicate more space to sections dealing with children and adolescents, since my teaching experience with adults has been occasional and collateral. Adults’ reasons/ goals: ‘ One should have English speaking skills nowadays...’This is what I have heard so often lately, on different occasions – while zapping through TV channels, seeing friends, making new acquaintances, meeting my students’ parents. All agree on ‘the necessity of speaking/learning English’ as a way to: push careers forward (to get a job abroad, to put ‘ good knowledge of English’ on CVs; to gain technical knowledge; to learn computer science or use computer more effectively), to communicate with people (to contact people all over the world, to travel more easily), to enjoy

art (American-British movies in original, great books, English-language music) so on.

A friend working in sales for a private company: ‘ The manager of the company had a talk with me some time ago. He reinforced his trust in my abilities as a sales-person, and he informed me that I have pretty good chances to get a promotion and start to work in a ‘ higher division’ of my company. My single worry now is that I need good English speaking skills, as my manager informed me. So, I must start taking English classes, ‘ update my knowledge’, because I don’t want to waste this chance of getting a ‘ dream’ job’. A new acquaintance: ‘ I want to emigrate to Canada, together with my husband, and we have already started the procedures. My husband has a cousin that lives in Toronto, and this will be our destination.

My husband speaks English fluently, but I studied only Russian and French in school, so, I do have worries about the interview with the immigration officer. Our success depends partly on me being able to prove I will easily integrate into the new country and that I can find a job as soon as possible. Our level of language will influence the amount of money we are asked as a ‘ fee’ A parent: ‘ I keep telling my daughter to learn English and I hope she does. She knows I have failed an interview for a job abroad in the constructions field, in Great Britain. Only those who had minimal English knowledge were admitted.

One should have English speaking skills nowadays...’ I cannot say I have experience in teaching adults, but I offered a ‘ helpful hand’ to some of my close friends eager to ‘ start to learn English’ and I could arrive at some conclusions: – Adults in some ways are easy to teach because they have a

high degree of extrinsic motivation. They make the choice of taking English classes and sometimes they make a financial commitment to their learning. In the case of adult beginners the goals (learning a certain piece of language, for example) are easy to perceive and relatively easy to achieve, since everything is new and anything learnt is a success. - With intermediate adult students, the primary goal is ' more advanced English'.

The best strategy in keeping them motivated is getting the level of challenge right. They might not perceive their progress all the time, because they already know a lot, and sometimes they might feel overwhelmed by the complexity of the language. Goals should be realistic and at the same time show that there is still a lot to learn. - Advanced students might have sometimes that ' stagnation' feeling.

The teacher has the responsibility to point that, at this level, much of the time students may not be learning anything ' new' but learning better how to use what they already know. Just because advanced students have difficulty in perceiving their progress and success they may well need the clarity that the setting of short-term goals, tasks etc. can give them. What my students sayI remember the first days of my teacher ' career', when I met my colleagues, school management and students.

Emotions and worries were overwhelming and the contact with ' the real job' made me turn back to the reasons I had had for choosing this profession and what had motivated me during the training years, and even the memory of my first contact with English. That is why during the first meetings with my students I asked them which are 'the most important school subjects' for

them, ' why do they learn English', ' what makes it easy/hard' so on. I used what they said to set a ' strategy' for my teaching, the way at that moment I thought it was appropriate. I periodically ask my students similar questions and the new opinions are taken into consideration and included in my teaching method. My observations are: keeping your students motivated to learn is one of the biggest challenges any teacher faces; there's nothing worse than going into a class full of people who don't really want to be there; a highly motivated group of students is generally a lot easier and more fun to teach.

Cora, 5th grade: ' All school subjects are important. Even if we don't really like some of them, we should learn because this is the only way to get good marks. " Matei, 6th grade: ' I started learning English before my school mates, because my parents wanted me to be the best and have more knowledge than my friends. ' Teo, 6th grade: ' I want to be an actress when I grow up and my family tells me that if I learn English I can be famous all around the world.

I could get to Hollywood one day. ' Mircea, 7th grade: ' The best computer games are in English. After my father bought me a computer and brought me games, I started to be more interested in English. He translated the games for me at the beginning but after that I had to figure out what the game was about So, I started to pay more attention during my English classes and now I really like it.

' Magda, 7th grade: ' I like music and my favorite singer is Madonna. I think I have all her songs. I found the lyrics of the songs on different music websites

and I tried to translate them. Once I could translate almost an entire song. English helps me to read gossips about VIPs and this makes me feel I have access to their lives.

Imagine...I even speak Madonna's language. " Andrei, 8th grade: ' I love movies. American movies are the coolest. My father has a favorite, ' The Godfather', and he even knows lines by heart. Once I surprised him when I started to tell him the same lines.

We even watch movies without subtitles and sometimes he asks me to translate. He speaks English fluently, he just checks on me, I guess, but he's also proud of my accent. ' These are some of my students' confessions about their ' relationship' with English, but I did receive from others answers like ' English is very difficult, I don't like it', ' I have no opinion', ' I don't like English and school' almost as many as those stating that ' English is compulsory in school, so I have no choice. I would like to learn Spanish', ' My parents want me to have only good marks', ' I want to have the best marks in my class'.

How I deal with this Teaching young learners requires knowledge of the developmental differences between children and teenagers and of the appropriate management skills. Differences include conceptual and cognitive variations, variations in attention spans and motor skills such as drawing and cutting, as well as social and emotional differences. I noticed some students are highly motivated and excited about learning a foreign language. My main aim is to maintain this initial motivation and sustain their curiosity and interest so that they develop a real desire to learn the language. Having in

mind what Jeremy Harmer stated about the factors affecting intrinsic motivation –physical conditions, method, the teacher and success-, I have tried to put in practice some of the ‘ teachings’ I got, and also to adjust them to the real conditions existing in my school, my personality and also my students’ age and level. Physical conditions I asked my students to help me create an ‘ English corner’ in each classroom.

I used the materials existing in school and also my own `archives’ of maps, posters, books and worksheets. Asking my students to bring/create what they think illustrates their relationship with English was for me another opportunity to get to know them better: what reasons they have for learning English, I discover parts of their personalities, their hobbies so on. The time we spent decorating classrooms was enjoyable, both parts having fun. My students keep surprising me with their contribution: posters, photos, song lyrics, cd-s with music etc. Method and contentI think it is important to consider how the learning takes place as well as what is being learnt.

This helps to cater for different types of learners. I often give students examples of what other classes have come up with by showing them a previous list. I also ask students to think of their previous learning experiences and activities and methods the teacher used which they enjoyed and found useful. Tips for teaching children – Plan what you are going to do in advance step by step and have clear aims, so you and your pupils know exactly where you are going throughout a lesson.

This is the only way you will be able to control up to 30 children in one class – and they will be the first to know if you haven’t prepared and respond by

becoming disruptive. – Start your year by being firm and be consistent in your own actions and behavior – children expect a disciplined, structured classroom environment and respond well to routines – Learn your pupils' names and address them directly. – Be mobile and walk round the class. – Have a clear signal for stopping activities or when you want children to be quiet.

Get silence and wait for their full attention before you start speaking and give clear instructions or demonstrations. Make sure children understand what they have to do. – Never, underestimate children's abilities or intelligence. They may have very limited English but they still have the same interests and aspirations as any other child of their age. Keep them interested by providing stimulating content and meaningful activities. – Always ensure that children have some English 'to take away' with them at the end of a lesson.

Children will feel proud and have a sense of achievement if they leave the classroom being able to ask, for example, a new question in English, say something about themselves, or sing a song. This means (see the first point above) that your aims will be clear to the children. – Avoid activities that over-excite – it is often difficult to return to a calm and controlled learning environment after a noisy game. Avoid activities that require a lot of movement as you will find that there is often very little space in a classroom for this type of activity. Also avoid activities that require a lot of cutting and pasting unless there is a clear linguistic outcome, as these can cut into valuable time, apart from creating a great deal of mess.

- Make positive comments about the children's work and efforts and let them see that you value their work. - Have additional material prepared to cope with faster and slower pupils' needs and don't let activities go on too long.

Tips for teaching teenagers - Using photos - Authenticity Teenage students can be very curious and inquisitive. Given half the chance, they want to know more about you and your life outside the classroom. It is a personal decision how much one wants to give away and share with students. I have always found that personalizing really helps to increase students' interest levels.

Using photos can really help to spark genuine interest and generate a lot of language. Topics that lend themselves to the use of photos are describing people, family, holidays or describing places. How much more interesting to describe a photo of the teacher's friend or sister than to describe a photo of a random unknown man in a book? How much more engaging to see holiday photos from the teacher's summer break rather than the typical desert island shots used in course books? Grammar lessons can also be supported with photos. To give a simple example, teaching 'used to' becomes much more memorable when sentences with a visual image can be formed. Eg. "my teacher used to have long hair".

- Journals - Empathy Journal writing can create wonderful opportunities to find out more about your students' lives. When introducing the idea of writing journals it is important to make the aims and general rules clear to students. Students should each have their own notebook to use as their journal. These should be kept by the teacher and it should be made clear that the teacher will not read anyone's writing out in the class. At the start of

a course, I ask students to begin their journals by telling me about themselves and their reasons for studying English. I collect the journals and try to reply individually to each one and ask a question or two.

Many students have really enjoyed the process of journal writing and have felt motivated to write in English on a regular basis. - Music-Acceptance Teenagers love listening to music! A sweeping generalization, but on the whole I have found it to be true. Due to the fact that so much popular music is in English it can be a source for highly motivating activities. Lyrics can be easily found on the internet and there are many opportunities to exploit language in songs. Students themselves can be involved in creating activities to use with their favorite songs.

Teenagers know a lot about music and will be willing to tell you all about it. Rather than ignoring the differences in taste between them and you, exploit them and use them as a real information gap! The Teacher Apart from trying to inspire confidence to students, to show sympathy and keep a fair attitude, I think a teacher should also: - Provide for activity changes - something not on the lesson plan; for example, scrabble. - Be somewhat unpredictable - Students will not know what comes next and thus I keep students in some suspense. - Variety -In teaching, variety provides for renewed interest in the subject matter.

I use variety in how students work together. I do not always pair the same ones together. . - Give eye-to-eye contact. Change teaching style for variety. - Change the pace - A change of pace is refreshing and helps students re-enter the learning process.

Success We shouldn't underestimate the importance of self-esteem and a sense of competence in language learning as crucial factors affecting motivation. For the failing student, in particular, it is important that we try to develop their sense of success and a feeling that they can do something, rather than a feeling that they can't. In practical terms, this means that we need to be sensitive to the psychology of language learning. When we plan a lesson, devise a test, or use a particular type of exercise, we need to ask ourselves a very important question how will the weaker students feel if they can't do this? E.

g. : One of the commonest exercises used in language classrooms is the gap-fill. This is a text with every 7th or so word missing, which the students have to supply. Confident, motivated students who have a history of success are likely to approach such exercises feeling that they have done these exercises before and, as they have usually done well, they will probably be able to do this one too. And, if they do complete the exercise successfully they will have in front of them confirmation of what they already knew, and their confidence and motivation are renewed again. Weaker students, however, may have exactly the opposite experience.

Previous failure may create a lack of confidence as they approach the task, and if they find that they can only complete one or two of the gaps correctly, then once again they are presented with a picture of what they can't do - and so the spiral relationship of motivation-ability takes another step downward. The basic point I wish to make is that there is a psychology involved in everything we do in the classroom, and that this is concerned with the students' feelings of success/failure, high/low self-esteem, high/low

confidence and this has a direct impact on motivation. Viewed in this way, we maybe able to understand some of the reasons why, over time, motivation may fail. Where we see students beginning to fail and beginning to lose motivation, one route to repairing the situation may lie in choosing tasks which we believe the students can do, in order to develop a sense of competence and confidence. It also suggests that all students need to feel a sense of progress and that their efforts actually lead to results. Conclusions - It is important to remember that students beyond beginner level have had both positive and possibly negative learning experiences, and they can draw on these to add to their current learning.

- Students can often bring fresh ideas to the class and add to the teacher's bank of resources. - The students then feel they are a part of the learning process in that class and really start to work together as a group helping each other and learning from each other. This process offers opportunities for peer teaching and demonstrates to the learners that the teacher is regarding them as individuals and trying to address their particular needs. - Teachers become more focused on the students' when selecting teaching points, as they become more aware of what students actually want and need.

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