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Exploring the Strategies of Raising Motivation among ESL students in a non-English speaking context

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Abstract

Motivation, undoubtedly, plays a very crucial role in any learning process including second and foreign language learning. Such cruciality positions the maintaining and motivation raising in the integral part of learning and more so in the currently growing and more technologically advanced learning environments. This paper conceptually discussed the motivation raising strategies which have been employed toward English as second language (ESL) learners in two different dimensions, which are those strategies which depend on the role of an ESL teacher (i.e. pedagogical and material selection) and those which do not (i.e. parents, school institutions, media, and gender difference). Despite the existence of other external factors, we argue that teacher plays the decisive role on ESL learners' motivation. From the critical review and more extended discussion, it is found that teacher's awareness toward the cruciality of students' motivation influences the strategies used by the teachers in order to raise motivation. The paper also re-emphasises the urgent needs for a more learner-centred learning as it is believed to have positive impact for learners' motivation. This paper concludes by highlighting the significant contributions of the insights discussed within this study, especially for ESL teaching practitioners.

Keywords: Motivation Strategies; English as Second Language; ESL Students; Learning Motivation

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1. Introduction

Raising motivation is very important in teaching English as a second language (ESL). Motivation is considered to be one of the main factors affecting second language (L2) teaching and learning (Gardner, 1985). "It provides the primary impetus to initiate L2 learning and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process" (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 65). It is motivation that differentiates second language learning from native language acquisition (Ushioda, 2015). Motivation has a strong influence on learners' academic performance and results in better language outcomes (Ushida, 2005). Moreover, modern technology-based education requires a higher level of learners' motivation (Illeris, 2017). Motivation in the online learning environment is necessary because e-learning requires strong self-

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discipline. Current students find it difficult to work on their own when they take online courses (Oliver, Kellogg, & Patel, 2012).

The issue about language motivation is even more important in situations with non-native speaking context. It is vital for teachers to know how they can raise the L2 learners' motivation in a non-English speaking context and, thus, help them achieve better language proficiency. The insufficient number of researches regarding the L2 learners' motivation in the Russian context as one of the examples of a non-English speaking context is another argument to show the importance of the research (Boo, Dörnyei, & Ryan, 2015; Kazantseva, Valiakhmetova, Minisheva, Anokhina, & Latypova, 2016).

Not only in a non-English speaking context, but also a number of other factors characterizing current teaching and learning ESL in Russia make this investigation urgent. Teaching ESL within the system of Russian higher education faces many challenges, for instance, a decreasing level of school-based English proficiency among first-year students and an insufficient amount of hours for ESL courses in curricula (Kazantseva, Valiakhmetova, Minisheva, Anokhina, & Latypova, 2016). Using such powerful motivational tools as creating deep interaction between ESL teachers and learners and offering students opportunities to choose an interesting learning material seem questionable in such circumstances.

Thus, the role of motivation in teaching and learning ESL is crucial. The necessity to increase ESL learners' motivation in a non-English speaking context is even more urgent. Therefore, the investigation question in this essay is "How can ESL students' motivation be raised in a non-English speaking context?"

In order to answer this question, in my essay we will argue that ESL teachers should be aware of the main L2 motivation theories and know basic practices how to raise ESL students' motivation in a non-English speaking context. Consequently, at the beginning of the essay we will briefly describe basic motivation theories. After that we will concern numerous practical implications of teaching strategies aimed at raising L2 motivation among students. At the end there will be some concluding comments and explanation of the significance and implementations of the work.

2. Brief review of L2 motivation theories

Motivation as a general concept is understood as "enthusiasm for doing something" or "the need or reason for doing something" (Motivation, 2018). In regards to language learning, one of its definitions says that it is "referring to 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" (Gardner, 1985, p. 10). Hence, motivation shows how eager language learners are to study a foreign language (Engin, 2009). Motivation is a complex phenomenon, and there are a number of theories which study its nature.

In history of L2 motivation studies one of the earliest famous theories was Gardner's concepts of integrative and instrumental motivations (Gardner, 1959, 1985, 2011). Integrative motivation is understood as a student's aspiration to learn more about the target language community, while instrumental motivation has a more practical purpose (Gardner, 1959). The type of motivation is significant in terms of language learners' academic performance: within large-scale research involving ESL

learners from six countries, students with integrative motivation showed better achievement in ESL (Gardner, 2011). Both integrative and instrumental motivations can help learners to overcome challenges in the learning process (Engin, 2009). This theory was criticized, but it gave a foundation for other research studies in the sphere of language motivation (Guerrera, 2014).

Another famous L2 motivation theory is known as Self-Determination theory (SDT) (Deci, & Ryan, 1985, 2012). It discusses the concepts of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation (Deci, & Ryan, 2012). Intrinsic motivation is associated with interest, enjoyment and excitement of language learners. Students with intrinsic motivation have a positive attitude to L2 learning; they are interested in the learning process and perceive it as valuable and pleasurable (Niemic, & Ryan, 2009). Extrinsic motivation is related to externally-motivated type of learning. It has three subtypes: external, introjected and identified regulation of language learning. External regulation is attributed to students who are affected by external factors such as obtaining good grades or marks. Introjected regulation characterizes students who maintain a self-worth state by such behavior as avoiding poor peer evaluation. Identified regulation promotes values that students can achieve in learning a foreign language. For example, students believe that learning English will help them in their future career (Deci, & Ryan, 1985). Amotivation is connected with students' negative perceptions of learning a foreign language. In this case, students regard ESL as difficult and useless (Deci, & Ryan, 1985). SDT emphasizes a more significant role of intrinsic motivation in learning. Extrinsic motivation can be internalized and, thus, become more valuable. Also intrinsic motivation and internalization of extrinsic motivation are stimulated through satisfaction of autonomy, competence and relatedness which are three basic psychological needs of learners (Deci, & Ryan, 2012). This theory has gained a wide recognition among motivation researchers. Many current studies on language motivation are based upon this approach (see, for instance, Busse, & Walter, 2013; Butler, & Le, 2017; Carreira, 2012; Chue, 2015; Munoz, & Ramirez, 2015; Reeve, 2009; Oga-Baldwyn, & Nakata, 2017; Tanaka, 2017; Zhou, 2011).

One of the most recent theories is the L2 Motivational Self-System (L2MSS) by Dörnyei (2005, 2009). It operates such notions as Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to-Self and the L2 Learning experience. Ideal L2 Self can substantially facilitate language learning, as it is the idea of who learners want to become. It is considered to be the most powerful type of motivation (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). Ought-to L2 Self is related to the attributes that are necessary to possess as it is the idea of who learners think they should become due to external factors. For instance, students learn a language because of their parents' expectations (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). The L2 Learning experience includes such constructs as teaching methodology, learning environment, and peers' influence (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).

In addition to Ideal L2 Self and Ought-to-Self, there is a concept of Anti-Ought-to-Self by Thompson (2017). Compared to Ought-to-Selves who follow external pressure to learn a foreign language, Anti-Ought-to-Self learners actively resist to external expectations. For example, they chose to study a language because someone told them they could not succeed in it (Thompson, 2017). Both Ideal L2 Selves and Anti-Ought-to-Selves are concepts where learners are dominant over

external factors, but motivation in case of Anti-Ought-to-Selves is in contrast to societal expectations (Thompson, 2017).

This is, however, not a full review of all L2 motivation theories. In spite of the fact that there are numerous L2 motivation theories, a single theory cannot span all the complexity of motivation. L2 motivation comprises a lot of variables and, consequently, is difficult to be explained as a whole within one approach. Nevertheless, there is one principle which underlies all those theories. Motivation is not regarded as something static; there are tools to raise students' motivation, and motivation can change depending on different factors.

3. Method

This paper applies conceptual research to address the main question mentioned in the introduction section. In so doing, several empirical and theoretical articles which explore the role and the importance of motivation in second language learning, common strategies used toward ESL learners to boost motivation, and some external factors which influence learning psychologically, have been collected and critically reviewed. By using conceptual research, the insights from these empirical and conceptual resources have allowed the generation of emerging themes and links about the studied issue within this paper to explore the strategies used to maintain and raise motivation for ESL students applicable to a non-English speaking context.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. Basic practices how to raise ESL students' motivation in a non-English speaking context

4.1.1. ESL teaching and learning in the Russian context

A foreign language course is a usual element in curricula of primary, secondary and higher educational institutions in many countries (see, for example, Busse, & Walter, 2013; Boo, Dörnyei, & Ryan, 2015; Kazantseva, Valiakhmetova, Minisheva, Anokhina, & Latypova, 2016; Khoo, 2016; Lee, & Lo, 2017; Oroujlou, & Vahedi, 2011; Shahbaz, & Liu, 2015). In Russia, studying a foreign language is mandatory for all students in primary, secondary and higher education with English being the most popular and sought-after among all the foreign languages taught (Abramova, Ananyina, & Shishmolina, 2013; Kazantseva, Valiakhmetova, Minisheva, Anokhina, & Latypova, 2016; Kozar, & Sweller, 2014; Rasskazova, Guzikova, & Green, 2017). Despite the mandatory character of learning English, the level of English proficiency of Russians is not satisfactory. According to the Russian Census of 2010, only 5.5 % of the Russian population admitted that they could speak English (Results of all-Russia population census, 2011). In 2017, Russia was ranked 38 among 80 countries regarding English proficiency index with the score of 52.19 which corresponds to a low level (Education First, 2018). ESL teachers at Russian universities often draw attention to a decreasing level of school-based English proficiency among first-year Bachelor degree students over recent years (Abramova, Ananyina, & Shishmolina, 2013; Kazantseva, Valiakhmetova, Minisheva, Anokhina, & Latypova, 2016; Rasskazova, Guzikova, & Green, 2017). This fact is closely related to the problem of low motivation or even its lack among Bachelor degree students to learning English. This is a typical situation for modern Russia's

universities (Abramova, Ananyina, & Shishmolina, 2013). Therefore, proper ways of raising students' motivation should be found and applied.

4.1.2. Variables of motivation

Motivation as a dynamic construct can change depending on different contexts. The role of a language teacher in developing their students' motivation is crucial (Dörnyei, 2005; Khoo, 2016). Hence, it is a language teacher who should be aimed at increasing students' motivation taking into account that motivation is a wide concept and includes a lot of variables.

Numerous practical implications of teaching strategies aimed at raising L2 motivation among students can be concerned in this regard. Such factors as gender, personality traits, selection of major, classroom language, learning environment, relationship with teachers, and peers, parents' social-economic status, contents of curricula and language policy in an educational institution are considered to have impact on students' motivation (see, for example, Butler, & Le, 2017; Chue, 2015; Lee, & Lo, 2017; Oroujlou, & Vahedi, 2011; Reeve, 2009; Shahbaz, & Liu, 2015). Also the ways of raising modern L2 students' motivation include the use of various information and communication technologies (ICT), online learning, and alternate reality games (see, for instance, Connolly, Stansfield, & Hainey, 2011; Kozar, & Sweller, 2014). It seems reasonable to divide teaching practices regarding this wide range of factors into two categories. The first group will include teaching practices taking into account factors which directly depend on ESL teachers. The second group will include teaching practices considering those factors which ESL teachers cannot change but should bear in mind while planning English courses.

4.2. Teaching practices taking into account factors depending on ESL teachers

One of the most vital things for ESL teachers to change is their teacher-centered approach. Modern education should be transformed into a student-centered one, as new technologies offer students opportunities to have more autonomy in their knowledge acquisition (Chue, 2015). According to SDT, autonomy is considered to be one of the three basic psychological needs for learners (Deci, & Ryan, 2012). Motivation is closely connected to autonomy (Carreira, 2012). When students are autonomous, they willingly spend their time and efforts on their studies (Munoz, & Ramirez, 2015). ESL teachers should know how to develop students' autonomy. Reeve (2009) suggested special autonomy supportive strategies. Those strategies were developed in further research studies (see, for example, Carreira, 2012; Chue, 2015; Munoz, & Ramirez, 2015).

Autonomy supported strategies include nurturing inner motivational resources, relying on informational and non-controlling language, providing explanatory rationale, allowing time for self-paced learning and acknowledging of students' expressions of negative affect (Reeve, 2009). Nurturing inner motivational resources involves, for example, using collaboration work with students, asking students about their preferences in the contents, methods, and performance outcomes, and enabling students to define goals for themselves (Reeve, 2009; Carreira, 2012). Relying on informational language implies avoiding controlling language. The examples of controlling language during a lesson are such phrases as "hurry up", "stop that", "you should..." or "you must..." (Chue, 2015). Providing explanatory rationale can be useful when potentially uninteresting activities are offered to students. In this case, a

teacher can give explanation why those activities are necessary and how important they are for their self-development or the learning process (Reeve, 2009; Munoz, & Ramirez, 2015). Allowing time for self-paced learning means that teachers need to be patient and give time to students to cope with challenges. For instance, in case of translating new words ESL teachers should allow some time for students to guess their meaning from the context instead of doing it themselves (Reeve, 2009). Acknowledging of students' expressions of negative affect is admitting that students have a right to have negative feelings about the learning process and trying to transform their negative attitude into a positive perception (Reeve, 2009).

Another teaching strategy is connected with competence. Competence makes students think that they are able to achieve their learning goals (Munoz, & Ramirez, 2015). It is very important for learners to understand that they can succeed. Teachers can support competence by providing students clear guidance and instructions, giving them positive feedback, using formative assessment and making them experience success (Carreira, 2012; Munoz, & Ramirez, 2015; Reeves, 2009).

One more teaching strategy is linked to relatedness. Relatedness is understood as the psychological need to feel support of authority people, for example, instructors and peers (Munoz, & Ramirez, 2015). Teacher-learner interaction can be enhanced by showing respect and empathy towards learners and using instructional style without insults, sarcasm and mockery (Munoz, & Ramirez, 2015). Teachers should promote peer support with different kinds of cooperation activities such as group work, pair work, and competition games (Carreira, 2012; Munoz, & Ramirez, 2015). Learning from peers with better language proficiency is also regarded as a strong motivation factor (Gedera, Williams, & Write, 2015). Peer-tutoring has a considerable potential in language learning, especially when it involves native speakers in a technology-based mode of instruction (Tolosa, East, & Villers, 2015).

Autonomy, competence and relatedness supportive strategies should be added by developing intrapersonal intelligence. The concept of intrapersonal intelligence applies to the Multiple Intelligence Theory by Gardner (1993) and is considered to be an ability to understand one's own strengths and weaknesses. The key role of intrapersonal intelligence among other kinds of intelligence makes it very important to develop in language learning. It has been proved that developing intrapersonal intelligence significantly influences their motivation (Del Mar Palenzuela Perez, & Ruz, 2014). The teaching strategies for evolving intrapersonal intelligence are suggesting students to reflex upon their own activity and results, consciously imparting self-efficacy, and encouraging self-evaluation (Del Mar Palenzuela Perez, & Ruz, 2014; Khoo, 2016).

Creating positive atmosphere in classroom is another strategy for ESL teachers to increase motivation. Motivation is contagious; students' positive attitude to the learning process depends on their positive relations to teachers and peers. Hence, it is crucial for language instructors to create a positive learning environment (Tanaka, 2017), to encourage students to set positive goals (MacIntyre, & Mercer, 2014) or to make learners experience positive emotions in the target language learning (MacIntyre, & Vincze, 2017). In order to reduce students' negative feelings such as anxiety and lack of confidence, non-native ESL teachers can switch to their first language in some cases. In particular, it is helpful for students with low language proficiency (Lee, & Lo, 2017). In addition, ESL teachers should encourage students

to speak fluently even with errors. This will make them feel confident and enjoy learning more (Klimova, 2011).

Besides changing teaching methodology, a greater attention should be paid to the significance and contents of a second language course in curricula. Insufficient amount of hours for ESL in curricula usually makes using such strong motivation tools as increasing teacher-learner interaction and giving students autonomy to choose the contents for ESL classes rather difficult (Abramova, Ananyina, & Shishmolina, 2013; Kazantseva, Valiakhmetova, Minisheva, Anokhina, & Latypova, 2016; Klimova, 2011; Rasskazova, Guzikova, & Green, 2017). In regards to the contents of ESL courses, it is recommended to combine language, culture and literature in integrated curricula (Busse, & Walter, 2013). Teaching strategies should include offering authentic materials that appeal to learners (Khoo, 2016), personalizing the contents by linking language learning to students' experience or interests (Oroujlou, & Vahedi, 2011), increasing opportunities to use the target language (Busse, & Walter, 2013), and improving assessment tasks (Gunn, 2015).

Thus, the most important modification in ESL teaching is the shift from teacher-oriented to student-oriented practices. In this process, ESL instructors should promote students' autonomy, competence, relatedness, intrapersonal intelligence, positive emotions and attitudes. In addition, suitable curricula with rich authentic contents and opportunities to interact with native speakers are necessary. The role of ESL teachers should be active and persistent.

4.3. Teaching practices taking into account factors which do not depend on ESL teachers

One of the most significant factors that do not depend on ESL teachers but influence students' motivation is gender. It is a global tendency that women speak English better than men regardless of country, wealth and an overall level of English proficiency (Education First, 2018). Male students show a more externally motivated learning style while female students feel greater enjoyment and interest in learning a foreign language and culture (Oga-Baldwyn, & Nakata, 2017). The difference between male and female students' motivation should be taken into account by ESL instructors while planning English classes. For example, various competition games can be more appealing to male learners' motivation.

Another factor that can be taken into consideration is parents' education and socio-economic status. Parents can play a great role in facilitating or lowering their children's motivation (Butler, & Le, 2017). In particular, parents with a low level of formal education and a socio-economic status can significantly decrease intrinsic motivation to study a foreign language (Butler, & Le, 2017; Iwaniec, 2018). On the contrary, parents with university education usually have high expectations about their children's proficiency in English (Iwaniec, 2018). ESL teachers can serve as a mediator between students and their parents. In this case, their role should involve providing parents with information about their children's achievement, analyzing the source of their students' underperformance, and proposing appropriate interventions (Butler, & Le, 2017).

In addition, students' motivation can be affected by school location. Students from rural schools tend to have lower L2 motivation and language proficiency than their urban peers (Iwaniec, 2018; Kazantseva, Valiakhmetova, Minisheva, Anokhina,

& Latypova, 2016). The possible reasons of that situation are insufficient self-efficacy beliefs and lower perception of English as useful and valuable for their future career (Iwaniec, 2018). The teaching strategy in this case should be aimed at eliminating those reasons. For instance, ESL teachers can organize meetings with authority people with a similar background and demonstrate the example of successful English learning. Also, ESL instructors can explain the necessity and benefits of learning English (Iwaniec, 2018).

All those strategies can be enhanced with using modern technologies. The opportunities of digital technologies in the sphere of L2 learning are impressive. Computer games, virtual and augmented reality, and mobile apps significantly influence language learning making it affordable regardless of geographical location, socio-economic status and other factors. They give students possibility to communicate with native speakers and even create an authentic context for using the target language (Chiang, Yang, Huang, & Liou, 2014; Colomar, & Guzman, 2009; Connolly, Stansfield, & Hainey, 2011; Kozar, & Sweller, 2014; Stewart, 2016). Not only those advanced technologies make language learning more interesting for students, but also such simple technologies as audio, video, e-libraries, videoconferencing, electronic dictionaries, and social networking can facilitate students' motivation (Fazal, Majoka, Khan, & Masood, 2017; Markova, Glazkova, & Zaborova, 2017; Yusimah, 2014). Many researchers recommend using music which can be useful in learning pronunciation, vocabulary, and culture, developing listening skills, as well as making learning more enjoyable (see, for example, Nader, 2015; Glas, 2015; Yusimah, 2014).

An ESL teacher plays an active and crucial role in developing students' motivation. In order to be aware of basic L2 motivation theories and take into consideration numerous motivation variables ESL instructors should make strong efforts, but the result can be beneficial for both teachers and learners. Raising students' motivation makes the learning process more interesting and pleasurable and leads to students' better language proficiency which is a final goal of any ESL teacher.

5. Conclusion

In this essay we argued that ESL teachers should be aware of the main L2 motivation theories and know basic practices how to raise ESL students' motivation in a non-English speaking context. A brief review of the most significant L2 motivation theories was given. Furthermore, some recommendations of how to apply those theories in practice were suggested. ESL teachers should take into account different factors which can influence their students' motivation.

The current investigation can be beneficial for teachers, students, parents, educational institution administration and policy makers. Being aware of the ways of raising students' motivation, teachers can improve the learning process; students can understand the reasons of their learning behavior and achieve better results; parents and peers can support the learners and strengthen their motivation; educational institution administration and policy makers can develop appropriate curricula and activities for proficient language learning. In addition, the investigation can be useful for research on L2 motivation, in particular, motivation variables as it discussed numerous factors affecting motivation. Education practitioners can also use this

investigation as it described teaching strategies to raise motivation taking into account different factors.

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