Relations and Conflicts Between Learner Motivation and Teaching Method in Second Language Learning

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Abstract

The relationships and conflicts in learner's motivation and teaching methodology depend on several important factors in teaching content. This paper first discusses the relationships and then the conflicts between the two in Second Language Learning. In the light of the research, done so far in this respect, it is, worthwhile to investigate in this paper to find out the relationships and the conflicts between learners' motivation and classroom situation especially the method of teaching, syllabus and learners' goals.

Introduction

There is increasing empirical evidence in the field of second language learning research which reflects various factors (inside and outside classroom) that prove to be the sources of learners' positive or negative motivation in the process of language learning. This paper focuses on a proposition that learners' motivation and the classroom learning situation are in correlation with each other. The assumption being that learners' intensity of perseverance to learn a target language and their willingness to attend to the given classroom tasks depend upon factors like syllabus design, long/short term goals and the practices and procedures used in teaching.

At the very outset, it is important to discuss briefly as to what is meant by motivation and methodology. Most researchers and methodologists believe that 'it is accepted for the most fields of learning that motivation is essential to success: that we have to want to do something to succeed at it. Without such motivation we will almost certainly fail to make the necessary effort' (Harmer, 2001:51). Lewis (1999:76) believes that lack of motivation drags people down in their language learning and high motivation pulls them up. The exact nature of motivation is not so clear but most methodologists agree that it has something to do with drive. Such as Harmer, J. has come to the view that 'motivation is some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something' (ibid). Brown points out that a cognitive view of motivation includes factors such as the need for exploration, activity, stimulation, new knowledge, and ego enhancement (Brown, 2000 cited in Harmer 2001:51). Again William and Burden suggest that motivation is a 'state of cognitive arousal' which provokes a 'decision to act' as a result of which there is 'sustained intellectual and /or physical effort' so that the person can achieve some 'previously set goal' (Williams and Burden, 1997 cited in

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Harmer 2001:51). As a result, the researchers have different perceptions of the term, but my concern here will be only to quote the ones referring to classroom situation. Harmer (ibid), keeping the behaviorist view in the process of learning defines motivation as 'some kind of internal drive that influences the learners to follow a course of action'. The internal drive could be learners' sense of achievement, a wish to attain a goal, making a decision to do something etc. Thus, one of the concepts of motivation is willingness or choice learners make as to what goals they will approach and the degree of effort they will exert in that respect.

Teaching and learning is a contract between two parties for which they both need to agree the terms. It is vital that both teacher and students have some confidence in the way teaching and learning take place. Both are comfortable with the method being used, success is much more likely (Harmer, 2001:95). In the words of David Nunan (1991:5), method of teaching is concerned with 'selection and sequencing of learning tasks and activities'. It consists of the procedures and practices of teaching used by the teacher. Since any method of teaching depends critically on teacher's role (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 28), it is believed that the teacher plays a powerful part in making any method a success by creating a feasible classroom environment for effective language learning. Again Alan Rogers points out, 'motivation….is as much a matter of concern for the teacher as it is for the learner; it depends as much on the attitudes of the teacher as on the attitudes of the learners'(Rogers, 1996 cited in Harmer, 2001:54).

Having been given to understand that motivation is a strong factor in language learning no matter what method of teaching the teacher uses, one ultimately thinks about several questions which demand reasonable answers. Is the experience of second language-learning likely to influence learners' attitude and involvement? Is it possible for a language teacher to control or influence learners' motivation in the process of language learning? One might, of course, say that less motivation in learning a second language poses key problems for a language teacher, but is it then the teacher's responsibility if a learner is not motivated? Can s/he bring about a change in learners' attitude to learning? To answer yes to these kinds of questions is demanding too much from a teacher and to answer with an emphatic no also is unreasonable. Those who tend to believe in motivation as a force operating from outside on which the teacher has no control (Allwright, 1977 cited in Harmer, 2001:53) do not hold him/her as wholly responsible in this connec-tion. In the past few years, however, it has been established that the teachers' attitude and his/her teaching techniques influence the learners' motivation.

However, fairly recently, in the wake of ever-changing methods of teaching, (for instance, the introduction of a communicative method in recent years), the focus is being given more on teaching as learner-centered. Consequently, learners' attitude is considered as of prime importance in the process of language learning. To quote Harmer (2001: 52) again who holds, if the learners find the method of teaching "boring they will probably become demotivated". Hence, it is believed that language teacher exerts considerable influence on the learners with her/his method of teaching, personality,

and knowledge of the subject which s/he shares with the learners. Supporting the idea that motivation can be strongly affected by what happens in the classroom, one can argue that the method of teaching must be one of the factors with positive and negative effects on learners to motivate or demotivate them.

The Following factors concerning the teaching method are strongly correlated with learners' motivation: the classroom activities e.g. pre-reading/listening tasks, teacher's insight into and prediction of expected difficulties, equal interest in all the learners, error correction, feedback, and getting the level of challenge right. All these factors are discussed one by one as follows:

The Classroom activities are backbone of teaching. The teacher's success or failure depends on the way s/he plans, organizes and controls the tasks. Take for example pair and group work. Much of the motivation of learning a second language comes when that language is needed to communicate. Only the teacher can foster this need by asking the learners to work in groups or pairs and do the designed tasks. Grouping within the classroom creates opportunity for learners to talk to each other. The idea behind the pair and group work is simply that since the language learnt is used by the learners, working together in pairs and groups, they become highly motivated to communicate and there by learn more. Such classroom activities designed to involve learners experience, knowledge, feeling and expectations, undoubtedly, arouse their interest and they willingly take part in language learning through the given tasks.

Effective learning takes place with the help of text and materi-als which the teacher designs/supplements and uses in a second language learning classroom. The learners demonstrate more motivation and interest if the lessons in the textbook are pleasurable and the content is interesting.

Relevance of the materials content to the learners' instrumental and personal motive needs is a powerful incentive for second language learning. Stern (l992: 55) emphasizes materials design according to the classroom teaching requirements with reference to the objectives, content and procedures. If the learners know about the well defined the objective of the syllabus, and if the teacher's plan of teaching is according to their needs, their degree of motivation may be heightened. Furthermore, the learners' degree of interest and motivation increases if the text is of a reasonable length and there are not too many difficult technical terms to read or listen. Hence, among the motivating factors one should not forget the text/material used, and the mode of presentation of materials, as these are important to a considerable degree in increasing the learners' motivation.

Before presenting the teaching material and involving the learners in to classroom activities, the teacher may engender learners' interest by his/her remarks about the forthcoming activities. His/her positive remarks could develop in the learners a sense of curiosity and fun. In consequence, high likelihood of success can be assured if the learners' expectations about the tasks are positive which generate in them positive motivation.

Teaching method requires that the teacher predict the learners' difficulties during classroom activities. The teacher also predicts some unexpected problems, which may emerge during teaching. In both the cases he has to use his pedagogical wisdom to be able to help the learners in difficulty and be flexible enough to cope with the problems. For instance, a teacher must temporarily depart from the set syllabus if she/he notices a certain dullness creeping into the class due to monotony or tiredness. Before rounding off the class in an unpleasant experi-ence, the teacher may introduce an activity to wake the learners up and they will become involved. If often left unattended in the state of lethargy, the learners gradually lose interest in learning and their motivation falls to lower level. In tackling monotony the teacher gains the learners' confidence. They will, thus, be ready for more intakes and become motivated to practice and produce the target language. Ignoring learners' difficulties and problems may also negatively affect their learning process.

It is quite natural for teachers to worry about learners' errors. To what extent should a. teacher correct learners' errors? Should she/he be more tolerant about error? While discussing "mistakes are not always a mistake", as one of the principles in language learning. An experience teacher regards errors as a natural part of learning. However, one should see that error correction in form of feedback is limited so that it does not create any misunderstandings rather than help learners learn from their error. In case, nagging over-correction persist successively then it often proves unproductive and the learners get extraordinarily demoralized and demotivated. In contrast, limited error correction is not only desirable, but most likely would trigger further the learners' motivation for learning.

Error correction should essentially be in form of a positive feedback. It is a factor strong enough to boost further learners' motivation. In this regard Brown (1991:143) remarks, that 'sincerely delivered positive feedback… can increase or maintain {learners} intrinsic motivation'. Feedback could be in form of inviting questions from the learners to check not only their language production, but to check whether they have got the information right. Since feedback encourages questioning, participating, engagement and involvement, it is vital contributing factor to the motivational domain in the process of language learning.

Creating positive feelings by orienting the learners toward the target language community is yet another factor which contributes to learners motivation. This involves generating learners' integrative motivation, which is only possible by arousing in learners a desire for traveling abroad, serving in English-speaking countries and their wish to integrate in target language culture. Many learners often show their eagerness to visit English-speaking countries and because of their future plans they learn second language with enthusiasm.

Harmer's (2001:53) study shows that the learners want a teacher who understands and motivates them through enjoyable and interesting classes. Now the remarkable fact, according to Harmer, is that a teacher's role becomes that of a catalyst. Once she/

he gains the learners confidence through professional abilities and by maintaining relations with them, a teacher can easily create positive feelings by orienting them toward target language.

The factor of judging learners' ability also plays a vital role in language learning and learner motivation. If the classroom tasks/activities do not coordinate with the learners' abilities, the result is rather discouraging. When a learner perceives the level of challenge higher than his/her level of ability the result is anxiety and frustration and if the learner perceives the level of challenge in the given task as lower than his/her ability, the result often is boredom and intellectual blockage. If this situation persists for a long period of time, the learners may get fed up and demotivated to the extent of creating a sense of apathy for second language learning. It is, therefore, required of a teacher to assess the learners' ability and give them tasks according to their level to save them from getting demotivated and frustrated.

While the teacher and his/her teaching method are discussed above as a justification for learners' motivation and success, there are factors inside and outside classroom which could prove to be negative influence in second language learning. These factors are discussed as follows:

The Social and Psychological Distance:

What if learners bring extrinsic motivation to classroom due to the social and psychological distance between them, their community and the target language community? Can such factors be controlled by the language teacher? AllWright (1977, cited in Harmer, 2001:53) argues that a language teacher cannot be exclusively responsible for all of learners' motivation: in the end that must be the learners' responsibility, he maintains. AllWright's argument seems reasonable as the teach-er can, in no possible way, integratively motivate the learners who identify strongly with their own culture and resist any attempts to integrate them into the target language culture. If the learners are involved in culture conflict, the optimum language learning may not take place in classroom, no matter what a teaching method is used by the teacher.

Conflict between Method of teaching and Learners:

In addition to what has been discussed above there are other possible underlying conflicts e.g. between a method of teaching and learners.

It is an acknowledged fact that learners do not easily adjust with the new teaching method and sometimes show their resistance to it. There is strong possibility that the learners do not accept, for instance, the communicative method of teaching in place of the lecture method. The reasons being:

i.   Learners being unaccustomed to the techniques of the new method.
ii.   Their nature, in that they may not be open to discussion with their teacher and the classmates.

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Short-term goals could prove to be another negative factor in this regard. In almost all the non-English-speaking countries English is introduce as a compulsory subject in the national curriculum. Whether the learners like it or not, they have to study it. Accordingly, they have short-term goals where they simply want to pass the examination rather than to learn the language. If they constantly fail to achieve the goal, the second language learning becomes boredom and the subject as an additional burden hard to carry more. Under these conditions, it seems rather difficult to the extent of impossibility for a language teacher to motivate such learners for learning a target language. Apart from it, following factors are also quite beyond the teachers' control e.g. learners' introvert nature, defensive attitude, unwillingness to interaction in the classroom, no conscious desire for achievement, total dependence on the teacher, and inability to develop learning strategies.

One cannot expect a language teacher to change learners' nature, nor can one hold a teacher responsible when learners are introvert, not open to class discussion, peer correction or group activities- the activities most vital for second language learning. Such learners leave a teacher far behind and helpless to make his teaching a success. In addition, dealing with more reluctant learners and personality of the teacher are equally important in dealing with this issue.

Learners Reluctance to Learning the Second Language:

As motivation is the concomitant language learning success, the initial experience of failure in learning second language might powerfully exert a negative influence on the learners. It can, therefore, be assumed that the failures experienced in the past could well act so strongly on the learners' attitudinal system that the teacher cannot, by any means, overcome such a situation. Even if the teacher takes responsibility for motivating such learners, one must realize that s/he should not be necessarily expected to succeed.

Personality of the Teacher:

It is not only learners' shyness or their introvert nature and the socio-cultural background which could play negative role in demotivating them, but the teacher's personality could also prove to be discouraging sometimes in their process of language learning. There are teachers adored by the learners and there are also ones who hardly can establish plausible relations with their students. The former can motivate the learners and give them great confidence, but one doubts if the later can possibly motivate them in the situation where the learners are shaky and less confidence. If a teacher, is not supportive, is hardly open to change and is more reserved, one is afraid to say that she/ he might exert a devastating effect on the learners' motivation. This is more true when there is only one teacher of such a kind of teaching almost all the learners of a School, College or a University.

Conclusion:

From the foregoing discussion one can draw conclusion that motivation in formal second language learning is very conspicuous and that motivation and the method of

teaching have strong correlation with each other. Furthermore, the teacher's personality, his/her way of exposing the learners to language data, and other classroom activities play a significant role in motivating the learners.

However, the learners' learning behaviour, on the other hand, is up with a wide range of psychological, social and cultural factors, which could play profound negative role in demotivating them. Under such conditions, the teacher's role to motivate the learners may become less effective.

Nevertheless, a language teacher's role can hardly be ignored in giving his/her learners confidence, courage and motivation in the area of second language learning. It is rather the teacher's method of teaching, which is more effective factor to reawaken the learners' sensitivity, receptivity and motivation to second language learning. So long the teacher's method of teaching does not mismatch with learners goals and needs, so long s/he is supportive and encouraging, the process of second language learn-ing becomes effective and successful. Undoubtedly, all these factors mentioned above play a considerable role and would prove to be a turning point in the career of those learners influenced by the cultural, social and community barriers.

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