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Motivation in Distance Learning

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Abstract

What is the importance of motivation in distance learning? The term motivation comes from the Latin word "movere" which means to move. It is the force that moves all our processes, physical or mental. What can we expect from unmotivated sportsmen or unmotivated workers? Can success be present if there is zero motivation? It is the driving force to all our activities. Motivation is crucial for something that requires a lot of effort and attention, especially a mental effort. Unlike traditional learning that is mostly regulated by the teacher, self-regulation and self-discipline are vital to the success of distance learning. Distance education entails students working via electronic media in the comfort of their home. It is also harder when students work on their own in asynchronous distance education courses compared to synchronous ones. However, in order to sit in front of the computer and opt for learning while being highly distracted in no classroom-alike environment, students need even higher motivation. In this paper we will consider the different aspects of motivation, the different types of motivation such as intrinsic, extrinsic or social motivation. We will take into consideration how these types influence the success in distance learning courses. Moreover, we will discuss the role of the Matthew effect i.e. how the greater motivation or the lack of motivation confirms the same results in terms of distance education. In the end, we will focus on motivation for English language acquisition in both forms of distance learning in higher education, synchronous and asynchronous forms.

Keywords: *motivation, Matthew effect, synchronous, asynchronous, language learning.*

1. Introduction

What is the importance of motivation in distance learning? If we consider what we previously stated about unmotivated sportsmen or if we compare distance learning to any other activity or scientific goal, we can conclude that the role is immense. What results would unmotivated sportsmen achieve? Why would they invest such an effort without a goal or motivation for a successful game? Motivation is crucial especially when it comes to including a substantial effort and dedicating a lot of attention, particularly a mental effort. For distance learning to make sense, to achieve the desired result, the motivation of the students is crucial, from the beginning of the course to the end. Motivated students improve more every day, while unmotivated will probably not reach the determined goal.

Yilmas & Yilmas (2020) speak about motivation in an online environment emphasizing the fact that student who haven't developed self-directed learning skills need external support and guidance. Learning analytics (LA) is defined as a measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their context, which can be used as a metacognitive tool in an online environment. The purpose of providing metacognitive support in online environment is to increase student's awareness of the learning process. As Yilmas and Yilmas (2020) suggest, with the LA reports, teachers can provide students with various advice and guidance and thus ensuring that problems such as not knowing what to do and disappearing in the learning environment will be eliminated. As a tool LA can be used in both forms of distance education (DE), especially in its asynchronous form, where the possibility of student's disappearance is even greater. Being able to self-regulate your learning, to think about your own acts, to be aware of yourself can significantly contribute to learning motivation.

Miller & Faircloth (2009) say that the word motivation comes from the Latin word "movere" which means to move. Hence we can conclude that it is the motivation that moves each process, physical or mental. This phenomenon has been transformed throughout the history by teachers, scientists, politicians (Miller & Faircloth, 2009, p. 311). Today, we can conclude that motivation is the moving force, especially in distance learning, which is in the center of our interest now. However, the lack of motivation can be responsible for the number

of dropouts, especially in DE courses, as Hartnett et al. (2011) conclude.

2. Types of Motivation

Motivation is defined as one of the most important factors affecting the speed, intensity, direction and persistence in any human behavior including learning as Firat et al. (2017) suggest. There different types of motivation, but we will consider three types in our paper. Those are intrinsic, extrinsic and social motivation. We will now go into detail about each type of motivation.

2.1. Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation, as the name suggests, is a personal driving force, internal, which makes us reach our goal. Guthrie & Wigfield (2000) explain that intrinsic motivation is concerned with personal enjoyment in the activities that are supported by excitement, stress and interest. It also contains the component of the soul, the will of the student to become part of the activities, which is the process of distance learning in our case. Hartnett et al. (2011) point out that most of the students in distance learning are intrinsically motivated.

The biggest motivation is the one that comes from inside. We are the greatest moving forces of our acts, our conscience and sub conscience are mostly responsible for the way we behave. If we are determined to complete a task, that is the sign that it will be completed. If we are personally motivated to take distance learning seriously, to learn what is necessary and to broaden our knowledge, the probability that we will complete the assignment is huge.

Guthrie & Wigfield, (1999) say that intrinsic motivation is related to the student and his own enjoyment in the learning material as well as his exposure to it for his own good. At the same time, these students have probably greater intrinsic motivation to learn more than others and they certainly have greater achievement and placement on assessments compared to other students.

Moreover, the truth is that those who learn more improve faster, especially when it comes to foreign language learning, they enrich the vocabulary since they study words from context, included directly in the lecture. There is no doubt that they will achieve better results in any testing organized by the school or other institutions.

According to Miller & Faircloth (2009), intrinsic motivation is central when it comes to long-term engagement. In order to obtain success, the personal dedication together with intrinsic motivation is crucial and the most powerful one. Firat et al. (2017) point out that intrinsic motivation triggers and sustains the interest of distance education students when it comes to learning on their own in the e-learning environment. Hence, motivation can increase, thus learning can be easier.

According to Guthrie & Wigfield (2000), intrinsic motivation has several aspects such as curiosity, inclusivity and challenge acceptance. Curiosity means that the students take part in the task in order to fulfill their goal and to learn and understand the world around them. Inclusiveness means enjoyment of the students and their deep engagement in the task. This also means “to get lost in the studying”. Challenge acceptance means a will to comprehend the more complicated material and the more complex ideas.

2.2. Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation, as the name suggests, is an outside stimulus to fulfill a certain goal. However, this motivation is short-term, because when we do not do something for us personally, we often do not do it for the right reasons. It is very common to give up before we reach the goal or to lose the interest if the stimulus is lost.

Guthrie & Wigfield (2000) speak about several authors who look on extrinsic motivation as a motive to obtain some recognition or award. There are a lot of motivating programs that mostly deal with extrinsic motivation because they include an award or some recognition. On the other hand, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are not completely opposite as they both have a goal of engaging learners as much as possible into the learning process.

However, the extrinsic motivation is more superficial, because it does not include real enjoyment but receiving a reward or appraisal, and as soon as that is achieved, the motivation is lost. The students actually become addicts of awards and appraisals, which is not the right way as the most important thing is to create a real wish for learning and not to give up without completing the goal. According to Firat et al. (2017), while intrinsic motivation is responsible for the quality of learning in distance education, the extrinsic motivation affects the amount of performance.

Turner (1995) speaks about motivation as well, especially about the fact that when intrinsic

motivation is considered, the fact that student do not learn isolated but in interaction with the classmates and the teacher is disregarded. Hence, the extrinsic motivation from the classmates and mostly from the teacher can play the crucial role in reaching the goal.

Finally, we can conclude that extrinsic motivation is also important, which can contribute a lot to learning and understanding. We, as teachers, should strengthen the intrinsic as well as extrinsic motivation of our students. The first one depends on the personality of the students. The second one depends a lot on us, as with various activities and different and interesting goals we can do a lot to optimize the learning process, especially in an online environment.

2.3. Social Motivation

The social environment is part of all activities, including the education of the students. Distance learning is a social activity as well. The students engaged in distance learning, especially those in the synchronous form of DE are part of a community. The human is not born to live alone, in isolation. He belongs to different communities in the life, so the community plays a crucial part in motivation of individual students, even though the physical contact is not present.

Guthrie & Wigfield (2000) have the opinion that social motivation connects the interpersonal activities and activities in the students' community. They say that there are students who share materials with peers and participate responsibly in completing the required assignments. Social motivation influences the scope of learning and assignment completion.

This type of motivation is very important, since we know that belonging to a community is crucial in certain spheres of life. It is even more important in distance education where physical contact is replaced with electronic media. Hence, social motivation should not be disregarded in the whole process of motivation.

3. Matthew Effect

What is the connection between distance learning and achievement? The response is that the second is the consequence of greater effort in the first one. The more the student learns, the more success he will have. Hence, the achievement is greater.

Guthrie & Wigfield (2000) speak about this topic, drawing attention to the point that, in accordance with the gospel of Matthew, those that achieve higher results in their learning advance faster than those which achieve lower results. Matthew said: "For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away" (XXV:29, cited by Stanovich, 1986 p. 381).

Hence, the origin of the Matthew effect is from this gospel. According to it, the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. The same applies for distance learning. Those who grasp the opportunity to learn disregarding the circumstance will become better in doing it, compared to those who do not like this form of learning, and they will become weaker and weaker.

There is a relationship between English language acquisition and distance learning. The more students engage in distance learning, the more motivated they are. Their English proficiency will improve as well, because the motivation is the driving force that motivates the learners to learn more and more and thus improve their language knowledge and skills.

Finally, we can conclude that language acquisition is a complex process. We cannot separate the skills since they all are part of the level of language knowledge. We explained the Matthew effect here, because we hold the opinion that the greater the motivation of students, intrinsic, extrinsic, social etc., the greater results will be achieved in English language acquisition via distance learning.

4. Motivation in Synchronous and Asynchronous Forms of DE

Synchronous form of DE, as the name suggests, is bound by time. The participants work in synchronization with other participants and the teacher. It is further said that in synchronous learning, learners are enabled to ask questions and receive answers on the spot and also that the learning takes place at real time and a group of learners are engaged in it simultaneously. This leaves an opportunity for learners to be motivated in different ways, considering the intrinsic, extrinsic and social type of motivation. If the person is not intrinsically motivated, personally, the learning cannot even begin. Especially distance learning, which involves a large amount of self-control. When the learning is in progress, a lot depends on the teacher. The teachers influence the extrinsic motivation the most. If students are offered different and interesting activities with a clear purpose, the learning progress will continue. If the class is monotonous, if the students are not motivated, the levels of dropouts can even be greater in DE. The synchronous form of

DE also gives the students the feeling of belonging to a group or community. Here the social motivation that comes from peers is important. If they are cooperative, willing to help, to share material, to work in group and to care for other classmates, then social motivation will contribute to the success of DE significantly.

Unlike synchronous form of DE, asynchronous form is not bound by time. It does not require for the participants to work together in real time with the teacher. It involves students working separately at different times, hence the interaction between the students and the teacher occurs intermittently with a time delay. Regarding the fact that students work on their own, at their own pace, the self-regulation and self-control are the most important. Intrinsic motivation should be the highest so as to avoid as much dropouts as possible. As Hartnett et al. (2011) confirm, learners in DE are above everything intrinsically motivated to engage in learning and to keep up with it.

Speaking about English language acquisition in synchronous and asynchronous forms of DE, the role of any motivation can by no means be disregarded. Intrinsic motivation is the most improtant for distance English language learning. The person should be determined and ready. As we know that the language cannot be learnt in isolation, extrinsic and social motivation also play a huge role in providing interaction, response and practice. This is very important in synchronous form of DE and one might wonder what asynchronous learner would benefit from it. However. There are discussion forums, e-learning platforms, emails and other tools that can be used to trigger the motivation of those students either by peers or the teacher. The world we live in nowadays entails connection of all aspects and not isolation. The outside world is one click apart. This new era is what enables the accomplishment of DE in any form.

Conclusion

In order to engage in the process of distance learning, the role of the motivation is crucial and primary. We can be sure that without it, the whole activity would not even begin. The learner will not be a learner at all, if he or she does not take up the first challenge and begin with distance learning. That is why we think motivation is important in the complex process of distance learning. Especially when it comes to English language acquisition in distance learning. Explaining the role of motivation is very important in this matter.

According to Amiryousefi & Geld (2019), the way English language teachers communicate in distance learning is very important as it can increase learners' motivation and learners' achievement in the same time. Motivation is everything. It comes from different parts, but the most important one is that it comes from inside. It is the moving force. If it does not exists, we cannot even speak about distance learning as a learning option. The importance of motivation is immense. From it begins the whole process of learning and with motivation it can be completed and give results.

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