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Literature Overview: Motivation in Second Language Learning

Introduction

At its essence, language learning is a long and often challenging journey. For students seeking to acquire a new language, be it for personal, academic, or professional reasons, maintaining the necessary commitment and perseverance is not an easy task. It is only when we embark on this language-learning journey that we come to understand how important motivation is and how it plays an important role in determining the ultimate success of this pursuit. Without motivation, learners are less likely to invest the necessary time and effort required for mastery of a foreign language. For many, language learning is much more than a hobby; it is an essential tool for achieving academic and professional success. In an increasingly globalized world, proficiency in the English language is often a requirement, and speaking multiple languages can open doors to a wide range of opportunities. Whether it is for students trying to pass their foreign language exams or for professionals looking to communicate effectively in a multicultural workplace, motivation plays a central role in achieving these goals. We should also not look at the motivation as just a superficial encouragement; it shapes the very learning experience. It can sustain curiosity and determination, and it can help learners stay persistent through moments of difficulty. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of motivation is essential to ensure that language learners do not only embark on a language learning journey but also arrive to a desired destination which is most often becoming a fluent language speaker. Furthermore, there is a strong link between motivation and language learning outcomes. Language learners who are intrinsically motivated, driven by a genuine interest in the language itself rather than external factors, are more likely to achieve higher levels of

proficiency. Therefore, understanding the mechanisms of motivation and how to enhance it is of crucial importance for both students and teachers trying to improve language education. Understanding motivation in language learning can also help teachers and other professionals design curricula and develop teaching methods that help students achieve their academic goals. As stated beforehand, motivation can significantly impact language learning outcomes, but learners at different proficiency levels may face distinct motivational challenges. This literature overview aims to examine the existing research on the motivational challenges experienced by second language learners in general as well as across various proficiency levels. Additionally, I will look into Reading Motivation specifically since its influence is one of the biggest predictors of learning a foreign language.

Motivation

The motivation can be influenced by a variety of factors, and two prominent theoretical frameworks have shed light on how it operates: Gardner's Socio-Educational Model and Dörnyei's Motivational Self System.

Gardner's model (1985) introduces two key orientations that drive motivation: integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation is rooted in the desire to become part of the target language community. Learners with this orientation are motivated by the prospect of connecting with the culture and people who speak the language. On the other hand, instrumental motivation is driven by tangible goals, like improving career prospects or passing an exam. This framework highlights the importance of attitudes, motivation, and integrativeness in shaping a learner's motivation.

Dörnyei's Motivational Self System (2005), on the other hand, emphasizes the role of self-concept and the ideal L2 self in motivating language learners. This theory suggests that

learners' self-identity and future self-concept play a significant role in language learning motivation because the existing gap between their current self and ideal L2 self can drive motivation.

Factors Influencing Motivation

Motivation in second language learning is influenced by various internal and external factors. Some of the factors are types of motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic); clear learning goals, feedback and recognition, Cultural factors, Teacher's influence, Peer Influence, and Autonomy.

Motivation in language learning can be classified into intrinsic and extrinsic forms. Intrinsic motivation, stemming from personal interest and enjoyment in the language, often drives learners to persist in their studies. For example, someone who has a strong fascination with the culture of a particular language may find intrinsic motivation in learning that language. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, comes from external factors like rewards, grades, or the desire for career advancement. Learners motivated extrinsically might study a language because it is required for their job or because they want to pass a language exam to earn a special certificate.

Setting clear and achievable learning goals is a motivating factor. When learners understand what they are working toward, it provides a sense of direction and purpose. For example, a language student who sets specific goals, such as passing a proficiency language exam or being able to hold a conversation with a native speaker, is more likely to stay motivated because their purpose is evident.

Feedback and recognition are powerful motivators in language learning as well. Learners value feedback that acknowledges their progress and provides guidance on improvement

(Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). For instance, receiving praise for mastering a challenging grammar rule or pronunciation can boost a learner's confidence and motivation to continue their language studies.

Cultural factors, such as individualism versus collectivism, can affect motivation. For example, learners from individualistic cultures may be more instrumentally motivated, while those from collectivist cultures may prioritize integrative motivation (Kim & Gudykunst, 1987).

The role of the teacher is critical in motivating language learners. Teachers who provide a supportive and encouraging learning environment can enhance students' motivation. The teaching style, enthusiasm, and interpersonal skills of instructors impact the motivational climate in the classroom. A passionate and engaging teacher can inspire students to invest more effort in their language studies (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998). For instance, a teacher who incorporates interactive activities, cultural elements, and provides constructive feedback creates a motivating classroom environment. One of the most interesting studies in this field was done in Hungary where they had over 200 teachers take a survey to rate the importance of various teaching strategies. Based on this survey, they created a list of practical ten commandments/strategies that can help teachers motivate their students. They are quite practical, and their usage and efficacy could result in differing outcomes depending on contextual, cultural, and even educational factors and settings surrounding the circumstances in which they are used (Henry et al., 2018). The commandments/strategies are (1) Setting a personal example with your own behaviour, (2) creating a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. (3) presenting the tasks properly, (4) developing a good relationship with the learners, (5) increasing the learners' linguistic self-confidence, making the language classes interesting, (7) promoting learner autonomy (8) personalizing the learning process, (9)

increasing the learners' goal-orientedness and (10) familiarizing learners with the target language culture.

Peers can also influence motivation. A positive classroom atmosphere, where students feel connected and supported by their peers, can boost motivation in significant ways. The presence of motivated peers can be contagious, encouraging others to stay motivated (Ushioda, 2001). Learners who collaborate, exchange ideas, and work together often find the learning process more engaging. When motivated peers share their language learning successes, others are inspired to stay committed to their language goals. We have all experienced first-hand that learning is easier in an environment where people feel comfortable around each other. Teacher plays a major role in creating the appropriate learning atmosphere so they should never underestimate their influence in the classroom.

Autonomy in learning allows learners to take control of their learning process, making decisions about goals, materials, and pace. Autonomous learners tend to be more motivated as they have a sense of ownership over their language learning (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Motivational Challenges across Proficiency Levels in Second Language Learning

The motivation of language learners is a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon that evolves as learner's progress through different proficiency levels in their second language acquisition journey. Understanding the motivational challenges that learners face at various stages of proficiency is crucial for educators and researchers alike.

At the beginner level, language learners often encounter distinct motivational challenges. One such challenge is related to task difficulty and self-confidence. Novice learners may struggle with the initial stages of language learning, as the language may seem unfamiliar and complex. They may find it daunting to grasp the basics, which can affect their motivation.

Additionally, the fear of making mistakes and experiencing embarrassment when using the language can be particularly demotivating for beginners (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) emphasize that beginner learners may have difficulty seeing the immediate practicality of the language they are learning, which can affect their motivation. They suggest that creating a meaningful context for beginners and focusing on achievable short-term goals can mitigate these challenges.

Intermediate language learners face their own set of challenges. A common challenge at this stage is the plateau in language skills. Learners may feel frustrated as they encounter a lack of significant progress in their language abilities. This can result in decreased motivation, as learners perceive a slowdown in their language development. The initial excitement of language learning may wane, making it harder to maintain enthusiasm (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). They also highlight the plateau experienced by intermediate learners and discuss the importance of setting intermediate-level goals to rekindle motivation. Additionally, they also emphasize the role of self-regulation strategies, self-efficacy, and self-determination in maintaining motivation at this stage.

Advanced learners face motivational challenges of a different nature. As learners approach near-native proficiency, they may struggle with a lack of clear goals for further language improvement. The practicality and utility of their language skills may become less evident, making it difficult to find motivation to continue honing their language abilities. Advanced learners may experience boredom and a perceived lack of progress, which can be demotivating. (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci (2000) also describe the concept of intrinsic motivation and the importance of fostering a sense of autonomy for advanced learners. They suggest that advanced learners should be given opportunities to explore their interests within the language, which can reignite their motivation.

Reading Motivation

Research shows that reading fluency, general language competency, vocabulary size, learning autonomy and motivation to continue learning can all be improved if students engage in extensive reading. However, motivating students or oneself to read can often be a challenge, especially in our fast paced digital environment where the average attention span seems to be decreasing every year.

After teaching Reading to Intermediate Level Learners I have noticed that one of the biggest predictors of how fast they were able to progress was how much they loved reading in their native language. Another thing I noticed is that students who had positive experiences with reading simply declared they have always loved it and it came easy to them, while students who said they disliked it, usually admitted their dislike was based on being forced to read boring materials. It is obvious that attitude towards reading develops very early and can be quite hard to change later.

Multiple studies also show the importance of reading to children and show the causal relationship between reading to children and their learning affinities in later life. Reading to children supports cognitive development, improves imagination, creativity and increases concentration and discipline among other things. If the reading motivation starts developing so early, it is obvious that parents have the biggest responsibility to expose their children to interesting materials in order to help them see that reading can be a reward in itself. However when teaching adult learners, teachers should also look for ways to help students further develop love of reading.

Perhaps one of the best lists of teaching principles for Reading Teachers was published in a research paper by Professors Day and Bamford in 2002. "*Top ten principles for teaching extensive reading*" research paper contains a list of 10 principles important for Reading

Teachers. The ten principles, are as follows: (1) The reading material is easy, (2) There must be a wide variety of reading material on a large range of topics, (3) Students choose what they want to read, (4) Learners read as much as possible, (5) The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding, (6) Reading is its own reward, (7) Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower, (8) Reading is individual and silent, (9) Teachers orient and guide their students, (10) The teacher is a role model of a reader.

Following these principles may not be able to completely compensate for the lack of reading in the childhood but it can help students gradually develop their reading skills and perhaps even discover that reading doesn't always have to be a chore.

Conclusion

Motivation in second language learning is a multifaceted and dynamic process influenced by various internal and external factors. Theoretical frameworks like Gardner's Socio-Educational Model and Dörnyei's Motivational Self System have provided insights into how motivation evolves and affects language learners at different proficiency levels. The challenges learners face at different stages of their language learning journey underline the importance of maintaining motivation and the need for tailored instructional strategies. Understanding these intricacies is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of language learning programs. Furthermore, understanding the dynamics of motivation in second language learning has practical implications for educators and learners alike. Effective language instruction should consider motivation as a central component. Teachers can create a motivating classroom environment, provide autonomy, and set clear learning goals. Learners can also employ self-regulation strategies to maintain motivation throughout their language-learning journey. On top of this, teachers should prioritize helping students develop

reading motivation since developed reading skills and the consistency of reading will greatly influence the development of all other language skills.

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