MOTIVATION STRATEGIES IN EFL CLASSROOMS

Ariatna
Fakultas Bahasa dan Seni
Universitas Negeri Medan

ABSTRACT

In countries where English is taught as a compulsory subject, students' lack of interest in schoolwork and participation has also become a major concern of many schools. Whether the decrease in student motivation is the result of unmotivated students or of school practices that fail to adequately interest and engage all students, it is frequently asserted that teachers play an important role in making a positive change towards student motivation in learning.

This paper would consider a number of explanations for student motivation as an important indicator of success for English language learning. Taking the definition of motivation as a point of departure, the paper proceeds to review the literature on second language motivation before finally suggesting three useful steps for lifting student motivation level in English language classrooms.

Key Words : *Motivation, Strategies, EFL, English Language*

A. INTRODUCTION

The topic of motivation has generated excitement and interest among researchers and educators for many years. While many experts are convinced that motivation is a powerful factor in any learning situation, studies on motivation have helped teaching practitioners to understand the role that motivation plays in their classroom. In this regard, high motivation is often associated with increased levels of student engagement in learning. However, keeping students engaged in the lesson has presented challenges to teachers at the level of implementation. Many teachers, especially those who have taught second language classrooms, would appreciate that motivating students to learn is probably one of the most problematic aspects of the profession (Brown, 2007b, p. 85).

In order to develop a better understanding of student motivation, it would be useful to look at some definitions of the word 'motivation'. According to Gardner and MacIntyre (1993; as cited in Mitchell & Myles, 2004, p. 26), motivation is described as having three important elements which include someone's desire, effort and satisfaction to accomplish a certain goal. In a similar vein, Nunan (1999) defines motivation within the framework of second language learning as the degree to which a language learner makes an effort to acquire a language as a manifestation of his/her desire and the satisfaction obtained from doing the task (p. 232). From the two definitions, it is clear that motivation naturally has to do with students' desire to participate in the learning process and concerns the expectations or goals that underlie their

involvement or non-involvement in learning activities.

Furthermore, the discussion of motivation would not be complete without reviewing the work of Gardner and Lambert (1972). In a series of studies on motivation for second language learning in some countries, these researchers have classified learners' purpose of learning a language into two orientations: integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation refers to the driving force to learn a language for cultural and social reasons, for example learning Spanish to be able to integrate into the Spanish culture and people. Instrumental motivation has to do with the impulse to acquire a language for practical purposes such as getting a job or passing a test (as cited in Brown, 2007a, pp. 170-171).

Following Gardner and Lambert's conception, Deci (1975) offers another perspective of motivation in regard to the intensity of someone's desire to learn. In Deci's view, a learner's motivation could be categorised into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. A learner could be described as being intrinsically motivated when he/she learns a language for the sake of achieving self-actualisation. On the other hand, a learner who is extrinsically motivated learns a language to obtain some reward or to avoid punishment (as cited in Brown, 2007a, p. 172). While any kind of motivation is important for second language learning and teaching, there is ample evidence to suggest that intrinsic motivators have more potential benefits than extrinsic rewards do. In fact, a number of studies (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dornyei & Csizer, 1998; Dornyei, 2001; Wu, 2003) show that students who are intrinsically motivated retain information and concepts longer than extrinsically motivated students do (as

cited in Brown, 2007a, p. 173). Despite the different meanings that orientation and motivation have, Brown (2007b) suggests that they could be seen as having complementary relationships. A person who is learning a second language for integrative purposes might be driven by a certain degree of motivation. Similarly, within the purpose of learning a second language for instrumental orientations people might have high or low motivation (p. 88).

Given the importance of motivation in second language learning and teaching, recent decades has reflected a growing number of studies on classroom dimension of motivation (Brown, 1990; Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Clément et al., 1994; as cited in Dornyei, 1998, p. 204). Despite the significant findings that these studies have yielded, most teaching professionals are faced with the problems of choosing which theories to adopt and how to implement them in the classroom. In this regard, Dornyei (1998) has formulated a framework of second language motivation which represents various views of motivation and offers a comprehensive list of motivational elements that are relevant to classroom application. This framework is divided into three classifications: the language level, the learner level and the learning situation level (pp. 205-207).

Based on this framework, Dornyei (2001, p. 2) has further developed a systematic set of thirty five strategies that teachers could use to help motivate language learners. While it seems impossible for teachers to manage all of those strategies, Dornyei encourages teachers to select the relevant strategies which might be of use to their particular teaching situation. In the following paragraphs, I would suggest and explain

three useful steps which teachers could use to promote the level of motivation in English language classrooms based on Dornyei's guidelines and other authors' point of view:

The first step that teachers should do is to *view themselves as agents of change who are willing to set personal examples and reflect on their own behaviour*. The literature on English pedagogy repeatedly mentions the significant role of teachers in teaching and learning process. Larsen-Freeman (2000, p. 83), for example, maintains that improvement in teaching and problem-solving in the classroom lie in the hands of a teacher who is willing to learn new concepts, explore current approaches and experiment with different strategies. As a central figure in the classroom, teachers have the power and responsibility to promote student learning. Given this role and the importance of student motivation in second language learning, it is imperative for teachers to maintain student motivation throughout the course so that they could see the connections between their practice and student outcomes throughout the course (Brown, 2007b, p. 95).

Along this line, teachers should keep in mind that whatever they do and say might affect students' behaviours, attitudes and orientations towards learning. Given that teacher behaviour has a direct effect on student motivation (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008, p. 387), it follows that teachers need to demonstrate motivational actions and emotions themselves to their students. As pointed out by Cambourne (1988, p. 34), demonstrations are the basic building blocks of all learning, including language learning. Just as potential drivers need demonstrations of how a car is driven before they could begin driving, potentially motivated students need to be shown a role model of motivational components before they could become highly motivated students. For example, teachers who exhibit the qualities of being enthusiastic, active, confident, and collaborative during their teaching practice are likely to 'produce' students with the same manners and vice versa (Brown, 2007b, p. 67).

With regard to teachers' role as the most influential model in the classroom, another important quality that teachers should possess is the ability to reflect on their own behaviour. Fullan (1991) posits that teachers who are inquiry-oriented and reflective are likely to succeed in leading continuous improvement in teaching and learning (as cited in Peery, 2004, p. 4). In this regard, teachers might benefit from conducting a self-assessment on their teaching behaviour. This could be done, for example, by asking students to evaluate or comment on teachers' performance using a teacher checklist or rubric (Graves, 2000, pp. 222-223). This kind of assessment should enable teachers to decide what would be taught and how it would be taught in consideration of students' affective and learning needs (Nunan, 1999, p. 11). By being a good 'listener', teachers might reflect on their practices and be prepared to base their classes on a better view of language pedagogy in order to create an environment which promotes student motivation.

The second step that might be useful in lifting student motivation is to *create a safe and supportive atmosphere in the classroom.* Classroom climate is another important aspect of learning process. If learners consider the classroom as a place where they feel comfortable and respected, they are likely to engage in learning. This is consistent with Nunan and

Lamb's (1996) research which shows that learners' attitudes towards the learning situation have an important effect on the process of second language learning (as cited in Erlenawati, 2002). On the other hand, a tense classroom atmosphere is negatively correlated with student motivation as it could increase student anxiety. In the context of second language learning where students are expected to communicate using a language which is different from their native ones, the level of anxiety could be high in some students as they develop a new language ego or a second identity in the target language (Brown, 2007b, p. 72). According to some language researchers (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991), this 'language anxiety' could be described as having three elements: communication apprehension, fear of negative social evaluation, and test anxiety. While communication apprehension results from students' inability to communicate their ideas in a sufficient way, fear of negative social evaluation stems from their need to make a positive impression on the class members and teacher. Test anxiety, on the other hand, refers to the type of anxiety experienced by learners about their academic result or valuation (as cited in Brown, 2007a, p. 162).

Given the affective role that anxiety plays in second laguage learning situation, it follows that teachers should treat students appropriately and positively to minimise their level of anxiety. For example, it is important that teachers should not correct students' speech mistakes in a judgmental way as this may affect their self-confidence and result in their hesitance to talk in the future (Lenters, 2004; as cited in Cohen & Cowen, 2008, p. 340). Instead of correcting grammatical errors directly, teachers could improve and enrich the content of the students' language by repeating their sentence in more complex way (expansion) or by supplying extra information on the topic being talked about (elaboration) (Hill, 2006, pp. 44-45). Responding to learners' errors by attending to their language with positive attitude is likely to maintain their willingness to communicate as they would not think that the teacher is correcting them in front of other students (Brown, 2007b, p. 74).

In addition to expansion and elaboration, teachers should be aware of the power that language has in increasing students' motivation in the classroom. Using language as an intrinsic motivator means referring to what students say as being important (Bos & Vaughn, 2005, p. 86). While teachers need to correct students appropriately when they produce systematic errors, it is important to remember that learners also need a feeling of recognition for something they have done well. In this regard, Seefeldt (2004) suggests that learners feel valued when the teacher respects and appreciates their opinions or comments in the classroom (as cited in Aldridge, 2005, p. 179).

However, Brown (2007b) warns us that rewards are most effective when they are used with highly unmotivated students for a short time only. In addition, rewards should only be given sparingly in a situation where students really deserve them. Learners who are excessively and continuously praised might not perform well when the praise is absent from the teacher. In fact, showing students the benefits of learning English as a long-term reward and encouraging students to compliment each other in a positive way might be equally useful to enhance

their motivation as well as create a supportive environment for the whole classroom (p. 67).

The last step that should be taken to engage students in learning is to *make learning enjoyable and present the tasks in a motivating way*. As discussed earlier, learners' belief and expectation towards the learning situation exert a significant influence on their involvement in learning. While creating a sense of safety and security in the classroom is important, making learning stimulating and enjoyable could also contribute to student engagement. According to Dornyei (2001), a low level of engagement often results from learners' boredom and dissatisfaction with classroom tasks and activities which are monotonous, unattractive and passive. To cope with these issues, Dornyei offers some suggestions that teachers can use to make their classroom more interesting. To break the monotony of learning, for example, teachers could make variations in the way they present or organise the classroom activities which include changing the linguistic focus of a lesson, moving from writing task to speaking activity, teaching with a variety of visual aids, assigning a pair work after a group work or using different seat arrangements for different activities. In the simplest terms, instead of serving students with exactly the same 'meal' everyday; teachers should think of providing necessary changes and modifications on the menu to whet students' appetite (p. 74).

Another important thing that teachers could do to create an enjoyable classroom is by increasing the attractiveness of the tasks. In Dornyei's (2001) view, a motivating task content should moderately challenge students' creativity, appeal to their interests and are related to their own lives (pp. 76-

77). Relatedly, Brown (2007) maintains that students learn best when the topic is meaningful or has connections with their personal experience and knowledge (p. 66). Along this line, Bos and Vaughn (2005) points out that language should be taught in purposeful contexts. Teaching language in context means engaging students in stimulating activities which connect the language content with its practical use (p. 81). In my experience as an EFL teacher, I have found that students understand certain ideas better when they can see actual connections between what they learn and how they use it. In teaching the concept of past tense, for example, instead of explaining the grammatical features of simple past tense at the beginning of the lesson, I ask my students to watch a movie extract about dinosaurs called *Jurassic Park* as a 'schema-building' activity (Nunan, 2004, p. 31). During this activity, students jot down key verbs they hear from the movie. After watching the film, we write and discuss about some dinosaur facts in past tense forms such as what dinosaurs looked like, where they lived, and what they ate. As the topic revolves around the lives of dinosaurs happening a long time ago, it allows students to understand that past actions or events should be expressed in past tense forms. Furthermore, adding an interesting element to teaching practice such as using videos could be fun and therefore help decrease boredom in the classroom (Dornyei, 2001, p. 76).

While it is true that the goals of a course should be focused on language content and activities, teachers should also consider learner involvement in the learning process as active participants (Nunan, 1999, p. 14). Motivation in language learning requires an extension of learner's experiences through their

interaction with other language users. As such, these experiences should develop from whole-class, small group and peer activities in which children are involved in working collaboratively, exchanging opinions and communicating their ideas to others. This collaborative learning would not only give some learning control to the students in terms of their autonomy (Brown, 2007b, p. 70), but also allow them to see that the task being taught is meaningful and owned by the classroom members as they are engaged in sharing information and helping each other. As put forward by Oxford (1999), collaborative learning enhances intrinsic motivation, decreases anxiety and builds a positive relationship among classmates (Brown, 2007b, p. 53).

In addition, another factor that may influence student motivation in the language classroom could be seen in the language-culture connection. In this sense, Brown (2007b) recommends that teachers explore the questions of how a language should be taught to students in consideration of their values and beliefs. Since an approach is a set of dynamic principles, language teachers may implement modified activities in the classroom according to what suits the students. If an activity seems to deter the students from taking part because it is culturally offensive, a teacher may think of doing another acceptable activity (pp. 74-75).

However, Dornyei (2001) reminds us that it is important for teachers to present the tasks in a motivating manner such as explaining the purpose of a task to students and providing them with the required strategies to complete the task. When explaining a task, for example, teachers could inform their students why the task is important and how it is related to their real life achievements. Students who understand what they are

doing and why they are doing it are likely to devote considerable effort to achieve the goals behind the task (p. 79). In addition, students' desire to participate in the process of learning would be enhanced if they feel that they are well-supported by the teacher (Dornyei, 2001, pp. 94-97). In this case, teachers should familiarise students with strategies that might be useful in approaching and finishing the task. These include learning strategies (e.g. taking notes, looking for main ideas, questioning, learning a new vocabulary, etc.) as well as communication strategies (e.g. approximation, use of fillers, asking for repetition, etc.). By knowing various strategies, students will become more aware of their learning styles and develop confidence in making use of their strategic investment for learning and using a second language (Brown, 2007b, pp. 68-70).

From the above descriptions and discussions, it could be concluded that as a powerful predictor of learning success; motivation has become a major focus of attention for many experts and teaching professionals. Within the context of second language learning, language researchers have conducted a myriad of studies to find ways for promoting learners' level of motivation in learning. While many authors agree that teachers play a vital role in enhancing second language motivation, eclectic teachers need to have motivational theories or approaches that underpin their teaching practice. An understanding of motivational components in language learning and teaching could serve as a guide for teachers in the making of classroom activities and teaching techniques which are relevant to their classroom application. In this sense, some specific factors like teacher behaviour, language

content and presentation, learners' affective needs, and the situation in which learning takes place should be taken into consideration if teachers are to lift the level of student motivation in the classroom.

B. REFERENCE LIST

Aldridge, J. (2005). The importance of oral language. *Childhood Education,* 81(1), 177-180.

Bernaus, M., & Gardner, R.C. (2008). Teacher motivation strategies, student perceptions, student motivation, and English achievement. *The Modern Language Journal*, 92(3), 387-399. Retrieved May 15, 2017, from Proquest Central database (1569173931).

Bos, C., & Vaughn, S. (2005). *Strategies for teaching students with learning and behavioural difficulties* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education

Brown, H.D. (2007a). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (5th ed.). New York: Pearson-Longman.

Brown, H.D. (2007b). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy* (3rd ed.). New York: Pearson-Longman.

Cambourne, B. (1988). *The whole story: Natural learning and the acquisition of literacy in the classroom.* Sydney: Ashton Scholastic.

Cohen, V.L., & Cowen, J.E. (2008). *Literacy for children in an information age*. Belmont, USA: Thomson Wadsworth.

Dörnyei, Z. (1998). Ten commandments for motivating language learners: Results of an empirical study. *Language Teaching Research*, 2(3), 203-229. Retrieved May 15, 2017, from Sage Journals database (136216889800200303).

Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Erlenawati, E. (2002). Beliefs about language learning: Indonesian's learners' perspectives, and some implications for classroom practices. *Australian Journal of Education*, 46(3), 323-337. Retrieved May 15, 2017, from Expanded Academic ASAP database (A96695275).

Graves, K. (2000). *Designing language courses: A guide for teachers*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Hill, S. (2006). *Developing early literacy: Assesment and teaching.* Prahran, VIC: Eleanor Curtain Publishing.

Larsen-Freeman, D. (2000). *Techniques and principles in language teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mitchell, R., & Myles, F. (2004). *Second language learning theories* (2nd ed.). London: Arnold

Nunan, D. (1999). *Second language teaching and learning*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching*. NY: Cambridge University Press.

Peery, A.B. (2004). *Deep change: Professional development from the inside out.* Maryland, USA: Scarecrow Education.

Sekilas tentang penulis : Ariatna, SS., M.A., adalah dosen pada Jurusan Bahasa dan Sastra Inggris FBS Unimed.