

Theoretical and Methodological Foundations of Motivation as a Basis to Make Foreign Language Teaching Effective

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Abstract

Acknowledging that English is the world global language of science and intercultural communication, the problem of studying it is very acute today. However, not all the students are motivated enough to gain knowledge while they do not realize the importance of English. Thus the purpose of this research is to introduce the concept of "motivational maintenance" we work at. To clarify, it is the sequence of teacher's actions together with the curriculum itself aimed at creating a stable motivation for studying the language. Creating a curriculum is not enough, yet based on the "motivational maintenance", it will provide a deep inside into the subject and consequently lead to better results. "Why do I have to be proficient in English if my major is mathematics?" is a fundamental question each student should have an answer. The aim of foreign language teaching is to bring up a student as a competent and proficient language user. The paper provides methodical examples of how to use special educational techniques or tricks to make students be interested in the subject. Motivation is the key concept in a process of teaching and learning that should not be underestimated. We are sure that to make students proficient a "motivational maintenance" has to be applied in a language-teaching context.

Keywords: foreign language teaching, English as a foreign language, motivation, language proficiency.

Introduction

Acknowledging that English is the world global language of science and intercultural communication, the problem of studying it is very acute today. It is obligatory to pass an English exam both at schools and at universities regardless their specialization. However, not all the students are motivated enough to gain knowledge while they do not fully realize the importance of English.

About twenty years ago language education in Russia was considered inaccessible for ordinary people, nowadays the situation is the opposite and everyone studies English. Nevertheless, on average teaching methods are not effective and as a result there is little language proficiency. At least half of the students neither speak English nor see the importance of studying it while some are only interested in passing the final exam. To make English lessons effective, we are working on designing a so-called "motivational maintenance", that is the sequence of teacher's actions together with the curriculum itself aimed at creating a stable motivation for studying the language.

Creating a curriculum is not enough, yet based on the “motivational maintenance”, it will provide a deep inside into the subject and consequently lead to better results. The aim of foreign language teaching is to bring up a student as a competent and proficient language user. Motivation is the key concept in a process of teaching and learning that should not be underestimated.

Literature Review

Most of the researchers who study motivation consider it to be a psychological issue explaining human behavior. Led by motives we take different decisions every day. The same happens with the language, the success depends on how interesting the process of learning is and how motivated the students are. A foreign language teacher should be an educator and a psychologist at the same time. He should lead the learning process along with setting clear goals to the students. That is why it is necessary for teachers to create a special curriculum based on effective and motivating tasks (Iliin, 2002).

While analyzing the problem of motivation we found some problematic parts in the Russian system of education. We should pay more attention to them when it comes to language teaching development in the country.

- There are different standards to language programs and curriculums during the final year at secondary school. Moreover, they do not fit the first year's university requirements;
- There is a need for knowledge and language proficiency in a modern society and the lack of students' motivation to study a foreign language;
- There is an importance of stable motivation to study a foreign language and the lack of theoretically grounded and approved teaching methods at schools and universities (Meletichev, 2011).

There is a fixed English as a foreign language curriculum at Russian Universities and it presupposes two stages in the course for non-linguistic majors. The first stage lasts one year. It is a general English course aimed at systemizing knowledge gained at school with the subsequent development of students' foreign language communicative competence including linguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic and discursive competence. At the end of this stage a student should be able to understand and analyze the situation and have a listening competence, choose an appropriate communicative style and be able to express his critical attitude towards the subject. Speech should be logical and coherent. Writing aspect is also very important. A student should be skilled enough to use proper grammar constructions and express his thoughts in a written form using variable vocabulary. The aim at this stage is to create a language competence for further language education.

The second stage is ESP teaching. ESP is normally taught at the second or third year of undergraduate and graduate courses. Materials vary dramatically from university to university. There are no standards for ESP in Russia and as a result, there is a lack of language proficiency. If a student speaks fluently enough, it gives him a chance to take part in different international conferences. However, for many students of non-linguistic majors English is an unnecessary subject that they have to pass.

Most of university students aged between 18 and 25 usually face difficulties in listening and understanding as well as in speaking and writing. The most problematic part seem to be the system of tenses and negative constructions that differ much from those in Russian. Translating negative sentences is often difficult to the students and leads to mistakes. Thus the teacher's task is not the easiest, he should not only be competent at explaining grammar, but also create a motivational ground for his students to be interested in the subject.

Research Method

The technique that we use to create this ground is very simple - setting covert goals. The only trick is that a goal should not be complicated, yet as short and informative as possible. If the goal is too complicated, it should be split into several short ones. I will give an example: instead of telling students that they would be able to differentiate between all the perfect aspects in a month it is better to tell them that by the end of the week they will know how to express an experience and a result. Gradually in a month they will easily use perfect tenses in their speech not even noticing it.

If we want to create a stable motivation for learning a foreign language, it is also essential to pay attention to individual peculiarities of the student, such as memory, way to think and perception. If they are not developed enough, include special exercises to make them better and more proficient. Teacher and his attitude to students also play a key role in the development of motivation to study. Talking about the motivation to learn a foreign language is necessary to take into account the age, gender, intellectual potential and abilities.

To be successful at learning a student should have:

- good memory, because memorizing foreign words requires a mechanical memory to be well trained. Logic, associations and emotions are also very important to be used while memorizing;
- logic that allows a student assimilate into the language that is to think nearly as a native speaker. Understanding the rules of a specific example makes student feel comfortable and as a result more motivated;
- auditory differential sensitivity. A student should be able to distinguish between sounds and their shades, to recognize them in the flow of speech. As a rule a lot of students are good at it (Leontiev, 1969).

When it comes to motivation to study the English language and teaching techniques that can be implemented at the lessons, let me begin with most common exercises but how I use them differently to make students more motivated.

The advantage of teaching adults is that their neural cells are responsible for higher-order linguistic processes such as understanding semantic relations. As for grammatical sensitivity, it also develops with age. In the areas of vocabulary and language structure adults are better language learners than young students. Since older learners have highly developed cognitive systems, they are able to make higher order associations and generalizations and can integrate new language input with their already substantial learning experience. They rely on long-term rather than on short-term memory function used by young learners for rote learning. Thus, exercises such as oral drills and memorization based on short-term memory are inappropriate to adult learners. Adults learn better not by rote, but by integrating new concepts and material into already existing cognitive structures.

In this environment we found the mind mapping technique to be one of the most effective. When students transfer their thoughts onto paper, it helps them associate one concept to another while trying to memorize a word or grammar structure. When it comes to memory, the mind mapping technique is the most effective. It helps a learner organize and simplify the information he gets. Mind mapping is a visual tool that helps activating creative and logical parts of the brain. When a student starts learning a second language one of the biggest challenges is getting vocabulary down, structure words according to topics and it seems almost impossible to add new expressions to a previously completed one. Mind maps provide practical approach for dealing with large quantities of vocabulary and can make memorizing easier.

Adults have already developed their personal learning strategies, functioning well in their brain and serving them well in other contexts. Effective adult language training programs are those based on activating a logical function in their brain and make all the information they have gained to be organized and be a certain structure. That is why when a student creates a mind map, the first thing he should start with is identifying the subject or a topic. When the main topic is identified, the student has to create a new sub map for each category, link back and forth between the sub map and the respective topic in the index map. A new topic should be added to each sub map. If we speak about long sentences or texts, we can activate the logical function of the brain by using mind mapping.

My teaching style is based on making students think in the target language without literal translation from their mother tongue. In order to improve students' communicative skills, I implement role-playing and speaking games, organize fake conferences, where students follow particular roles.

Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the work with texts and grammar constructions. However, that task normally seems very boring to students since it requires a lot of attention and thinking. What I suggest doing is dividing students into two groups, the first pretends to be native speakers (e.g. a delegation from abroad if we teach ESP), and the second group is ordinary students who make a lot of mistakes while speaking. The task is not difficult but in the end students are able to see the mistakes they normally do. After some practice they can listen and correct both themselves and even their group mates. The exercise has to be organized in the way that one of the students, who plays the role of a foreign representative, speaks his ideas along with a research (ESP teaching) out. The second, a Russian representative, present his speech making typical mistakes Russian people usually inherent. This exercise gives students the opportunity to see how it is incorrect to use the language structures and its components. Another task followed this exercise is to correct these sentences using completely different language models. If everyone agrees, this "fake" conference should be video recorded to watch afterwards and analyze the results. It may seem strange at first, but the result is amazing. Students learn to feel the language!

Another interesting exercise that can be implemented at English lessons is to find basic cultural concepts in the text and be able to explain them. The students should pay attention to grammar and lexical structures that are used to describe cultural concepts in the text. Here the transformation takes place. The sentences should be transformed using alternative grammar constructions, the meaning itself should remain the same. This exercise teaches students to understanding the cultural concepts along with better speaking.

Comparative analysis of two cultures made in a power point presentation format also motivates students since while making the task they learn about basic concepts of the culture where the studied language is spoken and at the same time work on their language.

Results and Discussion

I also see problem solving and communicative-based teaching highly stimulating for students' intellectual potential. I organize classes by incorporating active in-group discussions to make students interact with each other. Some of my lessons are based on authentic materials such as different adopted news articles and real magazine abstracts, all which give an insight concerning current situations and problems. I consider this method to be effective since it leaves students prepared to hold a discussion on common scientific or daily topics.

Conclusion

For the reasons mentioned above, I strongly believe that implementing motivational techniques to a language curriculum will create a ground for developing proper lessons that would lead to results that we are struggling for. I am working on creating a "motivation maintenance-based curriculum" to be utilized in Russia. My aim for the future is to see the young generation in my country motivated, determined, and most importantly, speak fluent English to achieve their goals. At the same time, I believe that this experience can be implemented in other language teaching organizations not only in Russia, but in other non-English speaking countries as well.

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