

MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract: The paper deals with the issue of motivation and teachers' motivational strategies used in foreign language classes, whose aim is to increase the learners' motivation to foreign language learning. Motivation is an important factor affecting the quality of education and can influence the life-long attitude of learners towards learning foreign languages and to the language itself. The aim of the study was to find motivational strategies that teachers consider most important in foreign language teaching and compare them with the real frequency of their use in foreign language classes.

Keywords: motivation, motivational strategies, foreign language teaching young learners, questionnaire survey.

1 Introduction

The question of learner motivation to foreign language learning is in spite of its importance still a field that needs to be studied in more detail (Alrabai, 2014; Oga-Baldwin et al., 2017; Guilloteaux, Dörnyei, 2008).

According to Kuruc (2017), learners are motivated to better achievements mainly by the fear of bad marks, or by knowing they do not master something. The results of his research studying 1,500 learners indicate that with 73% of the learners the extrinsic motivation was the dominant component. The issue of learner motivation to foreign language learning is being a topic for multiple discussions of all participants of the process of education. Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) claim that motivation is the most important factor determining the success in foreign language acquisition in primary education. In addition, motivation represents the driving force to persist in learning a foreign language. Within the present study, following questions were asked and the answers were being looked for: Which motivational strategies are the most important according to teachers? What is the relation between the importance of such strategies and the real frequency of their use?

The objective of the study was to find out which motivational strategies are perceived by the teachers as being the most important; which of the motivational strategies in question are used most often, and what the relation between the perceived importance and the actual use is.

2 Quality of education and motivation

Foreign language teaching in primary education should seek for the quality, not the quantity of the knowledge mastered. Various authors see quality of education in various ways. Janík (2010) describes the quality of education as something without absolute value which can be expressed only using other characteristics. In order to be able to measure the quality, these characteristics have to be measurable, as well. Průcha (1996) sees the quality as a set of individual areas which need to be described in order to be comparable. Nevertheless, most models of quality education contain motivation as one of the factors affecting the overall quality (Janík, 2010; Helmke, 2003; Walberg in Janík, 2010; TIMSS in Janík, 2010).

Learner motivation represents the key factor in foreign language teaching and learning, since it determines the learning process and affects indirectly the quality of foreign language knowledge (Jurišević, Pižorn, 2012). It has a great impact also on creating and the pace of creating the memory traces (Škoda, Doulik, 2011).

In order to assure the efficiency and quality of education, it is inevitable to excite learners' interest in foreign language learning. Young learners are inherently curious and if their curiosity is naturally maintained, it can be a source of the key factor for a successful learning process (Gadušová, 2004). In order to maintain the learners' curiosity, the teacher has to know how to motivate the learners appropriately and accordingly. In general, motivation answers the question, why people behave the way they behave. Motivation determines the direction and the intensity of human behaviour; in other words, it directs the selection of the specific activity, perseverance in the specific task and the effort (Dörnyei, 2013).

Learners' motivation in foreign language learning and identification of factors affecting the learning process was studied by the Canadian psychologist Gardner (2001). Within his studies, he proposed socio-pedagogical model of foreign language learning, which contained four main factors:

- Impact of the external environment
- Individual differences among learners
- Environment and context, where the foreign language learning takes place
- Achievements in foreign language learning.

Within this model, the teacher's motivational strategies can be perceived as the impact of the external environment, where the foreign language learning takes place. According to his studies, motivation to foreign language learning is understood as a specific type of motivation or the behaviour in foreign language classes. Later studies into motivation in foreign/second language learning have pointed at the insufficient nature of the above mentioned model (Dörnyei, 1994; Oxford, Shearin, 1994), since the Gardner's model emphasised the general components of motivation associated with the social environment, not with the environment where the foreign language learning takes place. In addition, Gardner's model missed more detailed specifications of the cognitive aspect of motivation to learning. Following studies into motivation in learning various foreign languages in various contexts and with various age categories, Dörnyei (1994) claimed that the specific character of social and paradigmatic dimension of motivation to foreign/second language learning depends on who learns, what language and where. Following this premise, he created a concept of motivation to foreign language learning containing three levels: language level, learner level and situation specific level.

Motivation (Guilloteaux, Dörnyei, 2008) as one of the most important psychological concepts is extremely important also in foreign language education. Motivation provides the initial impetus necessary for starting the learning process; furthermore it serves as the driving force to persist on the long and often tedious process of foreign language learning. Professional literature dealing with the motivational strategies in foreign language teaching presented such strategies at the theoretical level, however, the verification of their actual impact on the efficiency of the learning process was not studied thoroughly, since such verification requires experiments in designing the education process and/or extensive observations (Guilloteaux, Dörnyei, 2008).

Alrabai (2014), similarly as the above mentioned authors, claims that motivation is considered one of the most important conditions for succeeding in foreign language acquisition. Harmer (1991) sees learners' motivation as the highest and single factor affecting their success.

Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) characterise motivational strategies as teacher's interventions aimed at evoking and stimulating learners' motivation and self-regulatory strategies used by learners to control the level of their own motivation.

3 Results of the questionnaire survey

The questionnaire survey was focused on investigating the perceived importance of 50 motivational strategies and compare the results with the frequency of actual use of the same motivational strategies. The research sample contained 66 and 64 primary school teachers of the English language in Slovakia, who expressed their opinions on the importance and frequency of actual use of 50 motivational strategies, respectively. The reason for dividing the sample into two groups was to avoid the unwanted influence of the opinions. It could have happened that if a teacher labelled a strategy as important, they could label it also as often used also if that was not true.

Both questionnaires were administered electronically and included 50 motivational strategies proposed by Dörnyei and Csizér (1998). The strategies were translated into the Slovak language and checked and modified from the stylistic point of view. Both questionnaires were in the form of Likert scale with numbers 1-7 (importance questionnaire: 1 – not important, 7 – very important; frequency questionnaire: 1 – used hardly ever, 7 – used very often).

In the case of both questionnaires the average scores and standard deviations for individual strategies were calculated. The importance and frequency of the use of individual strategies were subsequently compared using the standardised score (*z*-score). In order to be able to compare the perceived importance and the frequency of actual use of the motivational strategies, we had to calculate the difference of the average frequency of use of each strategy and the average frequency of use of all strategies. This number indicated whether a specific strategy is used more often or less often regarding other strategies. Another indicator was the relative frequency, which was calculated as the difference of standardised importance and frequency score. This value shows, whether the relative frequency of an item is the same as its relative importance. A negative value shows that the perceived importance of a strategy is higher than the actual frequency of its use and vice versa.

Table 1 Comparison of the average importance score and average frequency score of individual strategies (*z*-diff – relative frequency, *x*-diff – difference between the overall average frequency of all items and average frequency of the specific item)

Strategy	<i>z</i> -diff	<i>x</i> -diff
Give clear instructions	-0.60	0.76
Develop a good relationship with your learners	-0.10	1.16
Create a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom	-0.19	1.12
Show a good example by being committed and motivated	-1.10	0.19
Bring in humour, laughter and smile	-0.50	1.14
Have games and fun in the class	-0.83	0.25
Vary the activities	-0.18	0.78
Constantly encourage your learners	-0.01	0.84
Prepare for the lessons properly	-0.07	0.75
Give positive feedback and appraisal	0.26	0.94
Encourage questions and other contributions from the learners	-0.21	0.50
Encourage creative and imaginative ideas	-0.24	0.34
Select interesting tasks	-0.18	0.34
Try to behave naturally and be yourself in the class	-0.07	0.44
Make sure that learners experience success regularly	0.07	0.56
Make tasks challenging to involve your learners	-0.36	0.16
Help learners realise that it is mainly effort that is needed for success	0.33	0.69
Help maintain the set of classroom rules that learners accepted	0.44	0.78

Be as sensitive and accepting as you can	-0.42	-0.03
Provide guidance about how to do the task	0.61	0.84
Choose interesting topics and supplementary materials	-0.06	0.19
Besides the grades, give the learners other rewards	-0.04	0.16
Help learners to get know each other	0.51	0.62
Avoid any comparison of learners to one another	0.51	0.62
Involve learners in creating their own classroom rules	-0.51	-0.28
State the purpose and the utility of every task	-0.16	-0.03
Use authentic materials	0.04	0.09
Have game-like competitions within class	0.33	0.25
Select tasks that do not exceed the learners' competence	0.64	0.34
Offer a variety of materials	0.62	0.28
Emphasise the usefulness of the language	0.67	0.28
Build on learners' interests rather than test or grades, as the main energizer for learning	0.55	0.00
Help the learners develop realistic expectations about their learning	0.07	-0.53
Include regular group work in your class	0.30	-0.34
Share as much responsibility to organise the learning process with your learners as possible	0.48	-0.19
Invite native speakers to some classes	-2.21	-2.50
Increase the group's goal orientedness	0.42	-0.28
Raise learners' curiosity by introducing unexpected or exotic elements	0.10	-0.59
Allow learners to create products that they can display or perform	0.70	-0.09
Set up several specific learning goals for the learners	0.30	-0.47
Demystify mistakes: they are a natural part of learning	0.82	-0.03
Be an ordinary member of the group as much as possible	0.35	-0.56
Regularly review the classroom rules with your learners	0.33	-0.63
Familiarise the learners with the cultural background of the language they are learning	0.66	-0.34
Help learners design their individual study plans	-0.77	-1.81
Do a needs analysis about the learners' language goals and needs	-0.33	-1.44
Try and fill the task with personal content that is relevant to the learners	1.15	-0.19
Encourage the learners to decorate the classroom	1.33	-0.13
Organise extracurricular activities	0.01	-1.50
Find penfriend for your learners	-0.30	-2.91

Following the data presented in Table 1, it can be stated that most strategies have a negative value indicating the lower frequency of their use in spite of a high importance attributed by the teachers. The lower the negative value, the underused the strategy is relative to its attributed importance. The least used strategy is the strategy *Invite native speakers to some classes* with the lowest relative frequency value -2.21, i.e. it is hardly ever used in spite of the attributed importance. This situation can be caused by the limited possibilities of Slovak schools. A visit of a native speaker represents a naturally motivating situation since it demonstrates the need and purpose of learning the English language. As this strategy is not often used in the Slovak environment, it is inevitable to compensate it with other strategies focused on culture that would emphasise the main aim of learning a foreign language, which is achieving a certain level of communicative competence by creating a natural situation in the given language and learn the culture through the language, as well.

Strategy with the second lowest score is the strategy *Show a good example by being committed and motivated* (-1.10). The result was alarming, since the teacher should be motivated to learning, working with the language and its presentation. Furthermore, the teacher poses a strong motivational factor for young learners and by showing their own enthusiasm for the language and culture they create the best conditions for learners to like the foreign language, too.

Significantly low score can be seen also in the case of the strategy *Find penfriend for your learners* (-0.30). The results of this strategy shows its underused potential, since writing in a foreign language is also a natural communication situation highlighting the usefulness of a foreign language in everyday life. The progress in communication technologies (various communication applications) makes it easier to implement this strategy into teaching practice. Considering the result, it is highly recommended to implement this strategy into teaching the English language in primary school classrooms.

From the area of *Culture* the most balanced score of importance and frequency of used is seen with the strategy *Familiarise the learners with the cultural background of the language they are learning* (0.66). This strategy is in practice used more often by the teachers than its attributed importance. It is a positive indicator, since foreign language teaching highlights the connection between the language and the target culture and learning about the target culture should be an inseparable part of the teaching and learning process (Lenčová, 2011). On the other hand, the study results indicate that many respondents did not reflect the need for implementing the cultural elements into the teaching process and the strategies focused on culture are underused, since almost all strategies from this field had a negative score.

On the contrary, a positive score of comparing the attributed importance and frequency of use was achieved by the strategies *Try and fill the task with personal content that is relevant to the learners* (1.15) and *Encourage the learners to decorate the classroom* (1.33). The former strategy is important as the education process should be learner oriented. The latter one is in wider context associated with the climate and thus the results is very satisfying mainly due to the fact that strategies focused on climate (e.g. *Create a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom; Bring in humour, laughter and smile; Have games and fun in the class*), all achieved a negative score, which means their attributed importance is much higher than the actual frequency of their use. A positive social climate and a friendly atmosphere in the classroom, both affect positively the emotions closely associated with motivation.

Another strategy with a positive final score of comparing the attributed importance and frequency of use is the strategy *Give positive feedback and appraisal*. It is absolutely important for the learners to realise their progress and experience success important for building a positive relationship towards the language. Success is one of the most significant impulses for motivation and demotivation in the school environment, and therefore the teacher should create such situations that would enable each learner to succeed (Elliot, 1999). The strategy *Demystify mistakes: they are a natural part of learning* achieved a highly positive value, which is very optimistic. The respondents realise that the mistakes can move the learners ahead and do not always have to be "punished". On the contrary, learners have to know that we all make mistakes and they help us improve and advance. The strategy *Emphasise the usefulness of the language* (0.67) was placed among the strategies whose actual frequency of use was higher than the importance attributed by the teachers – respondents. For the learners is important to know that they do not learn English because of their parents or to get good marks, but they will use and need it in their real lives.

It was surprising to find negative values in cases of important strategies *Give clear instructions* (-0.60); *Prepare for the lessons properly* (-0.07); *Be as sensitive and accepting as you can*

(-0.42); *Develop a good relationship with your learners* (-0.10); *Create a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom* (-0.19); *Bring in humour, laughter and smile* (-0.50); *Have games and fun in the class* (-0.83). All these strategies show huge deficits and it is important to improve the situation because all the areas mentioned represent natural motivational elements for evoking the learners' interest in increasing their motivation.

4 Conclusion

It can be concluded that in spite of high attributed importance many strategies are used rarely in the actual English language classrooms in primary education. These results provide space for improvements and further empirical research. Several strategies with significantly negative score of relative frequency should be given more attention and should be used more in the classroom (*Show a good example by being committed and motivated; Invite native speakers to some classes; Bring in humour, laughter and smile; Give clear instructions; Find penfriend for your learners*).

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