MINISTERUL EDUCAȚIEI
ROMÂNIA
UNIVERSITATEA DE MEDICINĂ, FARMACIE, ȘTIINȚE ȘI TEHNOLOGIE „GEORGE EMIL PALADE" DIN TÂRGU MUREȘ

FACULTATEA DE ȘTIINȚE ȘI LITERE „PETRU MAIOR"

Acta Marisiensis. Philologia
Volume 5, Issue 1/ September 2023
p-ISSN: 2668-9537, e-ISSN: 2668-9596

sciendo

10.2478/amph-2023-0091

MOTIVATING AND EMPOWERING STUDENTS

***Adrian Năznean*[1]**

[1]*Lecturer., PhD, 'G.E. Palade' University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Science and Technology of Târgu Mureș, Târgu Mureș, Mureș county, 540 142, Romania*

Abstract: *Learning a foreign language opens doors to new cultures, enhances cognitive function, and provides valuable communication skills. To motivate students in learning a foreign language, it is important to understand the multifaceted psychological notion of motivation. As Dörnyei argues, motivation plays a crucial role in driving learners to develop proficiency in a foreign language. There are as many reasons to learn as there are learners, but once priorities change, motivation and engagement may be put on the back burner. As such, without sufficient motivation, learners may lack the necessary desire and interest needed to advance their language proficiency, therefore, it is essential to cultivate high levels of motivation in students if they are to achieve their language learning objectives. This paper will examine student motivation as well as factors that enhance or decrease it, based on a set of research questions and the answers provided by literature.*

Keywords: *student motivation, foreign language learning, English language teaching, teacher's role*

Introduction

Learners are of various types, as are their reasons for learning. Their learning is sparkled by a plethora of factors, however, these can be grouped under some headings. Research has demonstrated that motivation is key to a successful language learning experience (Kafi and Motallebzadeh 2017). Without sufficient motivation, learners may lack the necessary desire and interest needed to advance their language proficiency. Therefore, it is essential to cultivate high levels of motivation in students if they are to achieve their language learning objectives (Yurtseven and Altun 2015). Contributing factors range from teacher enthusiasm to travel ambitions.

For this particular study, we delineated some research hypotheses in order to narrow down evidence from literature and to allow a summarising of the key determinants of student motivation. Motivation is a complex and crucial phenomenon in the acquisition of any skill, as such, we formulated some research questions pertaining to language learning in and outside the classroom setting. Following the drafting of our research hypotheses, we performed a literature review in order to find relevant answers that can provide solutions to the problems

we may encounter in our teaching practice. The research questions on which we build our literature review are:

RQ 1: What motivates students to learn a foreign language?

RQ 2: How can motivation be measured?

RQ 3: What are the differences between motivated and unmotivated students?

RQ 4: How can student motivation be increased?

RQ 5: What teaching materials are most motivating to language learners?

RQ 6: What role does the teacher play in motivating students?

Consequently, our paper will be structured as such in order to provide a clearer view on the evidence from literature.

RQ1: What motivates students to learn a foreign language?

Motivation to learn a foreign language can be influenced by various factors such as personal interest, career goals, cultural curiosity, travel opportunities, academic requirements, and social pressure. Positive attitudes towards the target language and its culture, as well as a sense of self-efficacy and autonomy in language learning can also enhance motivation. Additionally, exposure to the language through media, social networks, and authentic materials can increase learners' motivation and engagement. However, it is important to note that motivation is a complex and dynamic construct that can vary among individuals and change over time (Mihaljević Djigunović et al. 2008).

Furthermore, students are mainly motivated to learn a foreign language, such as English, for instrumental or utilitarian reasons, i.e., economic and practical purposes, including accessing global technology, worldwide social media, and communication with people from all around the world. Technological, sociological, and scientific aspects of globalisation, including the Internet, satellite television programmes, and immigration to English-speaking countries, are also significant sources of motivation for language learners. Moreover, some learners may be integratively motivated, meaning they are interested in learning more about a cultural community (Vojdani and González 2022; Albiladi et al. 2018).

Furthermore, intrinsic motivation, such as a desire to learn for the sake of learning, and extrinsic motivation, such as rewards or recognition, can also play a role in motivating students to learn a foreign language (Freiermuth and Ito 2022; Listyani 2022). The self-determination theory (SDT) emphasises that the satisfaction of learners' basic psychological needs is a prerequisite for their deliberate attention and meaningful involvement in learning activities. When students' psychological needs are satisfied, they tend to exhibit active, curious, and engaged learning behaviours. In contrast, when students' basic needs are frustrated, they typically show passive, indifferent, and chronically disengaged behaviours. Teachers' instructional practices can also impact students' motivation and engagement in language learning. Additionally, engagement is a necessary condition for student success in language learning, and strong learner engagement is related to many desirable learning features and outcomes, such as higher levels of attention and focus, and greater persistence, effort, and academic achievement (Zhou et al. 2023).

Other students may find motivation to learn a foreign language in new media tools such as Facebook, blogs, wikis, multimedia, English songs, PowerPoint presentations, colourful digital contents, oftentimes with the aid of smartphones. Some of these tools provide feedback, interactivity, and collaboration making the learning process more engaging and enjoyable. Additionally, audio-visual materials and the availability of attractive language content can also motivate learners. However, it is important to note that inappropriate digital materials floating in new media tools can demotivate or confuse learners (Hasan et al. 2020).

Language learning motivation has been examined in different types of learning contexts, and it has been found that motivation is linked to validation seeking. The interplay

between emotions and motivation has also been emphasised in second language acquisition research, with emotions acting as motives, energising and directing behaviour. Willingness to communicate is also relevant to language learning motivation, as communication in the target language can involve various emotions and can enhance or hinder learners' motivation (Pavelescu 2023).

RQ 2: How can motivation be measured?

Although measuring student motivation can be a rather difficult endeavour, there are multiple ways to do it. Listyani's (2022) findings can be grouped as follows:

1. self-report questionnaires: these are surveys that ask learners to rate their motivation levels and provide information about their attitudes towards language learning;
2. interviews: researchers can conduct interviews with learners to gain a deeper understanding of their motivation levels and the factors that influence their motivation;
3. observations: researchers can observe learners in the classroom or during language learning activities to assess their level of engagement and motivation;
4. achievement tests: researchers can use achievement tests to measure learners' progress and correlate it with their motivation levels;
5. behavioural measures: researchers can use behavioural measures, such as the frequency of language use or the amount of time spent studying, to assess learners' motivation levels.

Similarly, Vojdani and González (2022) used questionnaires to investigate the learners' attitudes towards learning the language, their reasons for learning it, and their level of interest and engagement in language learning activities, while Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) mention Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery.

RQ 3: What are the differences between motivated and unmotivated students?

Motivated students are more likely to engage in active and equitable learner participation, structure their learning experiences, and provide guidance that indicates to students both what they can do well and specific aspects of language performance that require further improvement. They are also more likely to involve students in the process of giving and receiving feedback, provide structured support and scaffolding that enables learners to experience genuine, enactive mastery, and use learning tasks that simultaneously provide a desirable level of cognitive and linguistic challenge and stimulate learners' curiosity and interest. On the other hand, unmotivated students are more likely to be disengaged, not participate actively in the learning process, and not invest the effort required to achieve their learning goals (Zhou et al. 2023).

Motivated students generally have a resilient need and a positive attitude to reach their desired learning goals. They make an effort to achieve their goals and possess a desire to learn. On the other hand, unmotivated students lack the need to learn, demonstrate negative attitudes towards the material, and exhibit little effort in accomplishing their goals. Motivated students tend to focus more on language input than those who are less motivated, and they are more capable and aware of grammatical errors. They also tend to recognise the pragmatic purposes of a language better and perform better in doing role-plays. In contrast, unmotivated students may struggle to achieve their language learning targets (Listyani 2022).

Motivated and unmotivated students can be differentiated based on their level of engagement, effort, and persistence in academic tasks. Motivated ones are more likely to be engaged in their studies, put in effort to complete tasks, and persist in the face of challenges. They may also have a positive attitude towards learning and a desire to achieve their goals. On the other hand, unmotivated students may lack engagement, put in minimal effort, and give up

easily when faced with challenges. They may also have a negative attitude towards learning and a lack of interest in language learning goals. Additionally, motivated students may exhibit behaviours such as asking questions, participating in class discussions, and seeking feedback, while unmotivated students may be disengaged and avoid participating in classroom activities.

Little motivated students can become engaged in a project-based language learning (PBLL) as a method to improve participant motivation and willingness to communicate. PBLL involves organising projects to create opportunities for learners to interact with native speakers in their target language. This approach has been shown to enhance social interaction, facilitate intercultural communication competence, improve student willingness to communicate and overall motivation. Additionally, creating a video-synchronous computer-mediated learning programme in which learners can communicate with native speakers has been shown to successfully create meaningful opportunities for learners, resulting in increased oral proficiency, increased learner motivation, and enhanced communication skills. However, providing such interactions and opportunities can be difficult for foreign language learners, especially if there are few speakers with more linguistic resources than themselves (Kato et al. 2023).

RQ 4: How can student motivation be increased?

There are many factors that contribute to the increase in students' motivation to learn a foreign language. A list which comprises research results of Dörnyei and Csizér (1998), Hussain (2018), Pavelescu (2023), Jang et al. (2015), Teravainen-Goff (2022) could be grouped as follows:

1. bringing the focus on interesting and relevant subject-matter content;
2. building self-concepts by providing specific feedback to students;
3. creating a pleasant and supportive atmosphere in the classroom;
4. developing a good relationship with the learners;
5. encouraging learner autonomy, group work, and student participation in class;
6. familiarising learners with the target language culture;
7. increasing the expectancy of success and the learners' linguistic self-confidence;
8. personalising the learning process;
9. promoting self-efficacy by offering/ explaining clear roles in text discussion;
10. providing positive feedback and rewards;
11. satisfying students' needs and interests;
12. setting realistic and achievable goals;
13. using audiovisual resources and new technologies, along with a variety of teaching methods and materials to cater to different learning styles and preferences;
14. using diagnostic assessments to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and provide targeted feedback and instruction.

Additionally, scaffolding and supportive teaching strategies are essential to help learners reach their Zone of Proximal Development (Hasan et al. 2020).

RQ 5: What teaching materials are most motivating to language learners?

There is no one size fits all approach to this matter because the effectiveness of teaching materials may vary depending on the learners' individual needs, interests, and learning styles. It is recommended for teachers to use a variety of materials and activities that cater to different learning preferences and to create a positive and supportive learning environment to increase learners' motivation (Listyani 2022). Materials that are relevant to learners' interests and needs, which are authentic and challenging can be highly motivating. For example, using materials

that reflect learners' cultural backgrounds or personal interests, such topics as hobbies, literary works, cooking, sports, outdoor activities, etc., can increase their engagement and motivation. Additionally, materials that provide opportunities for interaction and communication, such as group activities or discussions, can also be motivating. Materials that offer a sense of progress and achievement, for instance feedback and assessment, can also contribute to learners' motivation (Pavelescu 2023).

Movies and media are considered to be some of the most motivating teaching materials for language learners. They are seen as authentic, engaging, and enjoyable, which makes the learning process more appealing to language learners. Additionally, the use of such learning materials has become essential as they provide real-life exposure to language for learners. Authentic learning helps in decreasing the gap between real language used in the real world and classroom language, and that ensures more effective language learning. Furthermore, the use of movies and media in language classes makes the learning process more enjoyable and motivating (Albiladi et al. 2018).

Technology-based teaching materials such as computer software, social networking websites or applications, online videos, audio tools, smartphones, and tablet apps have a positive impact on students' motivation to learn English and improve their communication skills. The integration of technology into the classroom can also build up students' motivation for learning the subject matter. Furthermore, using different technologies allows students to have the information they need at their fingertips and makes the lesson more entertaining (Vojdani and González 2022).

RQ 6: What role does the teacher play in motivating students?

A one-word answer to this question would, obviously, be: crucial. However, we investigated research results to narrow down some attitudes, behaviours, etc. on the side of the teacher which motivate students. The Teravainen-Goff (2022) study highlights the importance of building a connection between the learners and the teacher, while some learners involved in the study suggested that they did not engage in class because their teacher did not inspire them. Teachers' teaching style was also identified as a factor that could prevent motivated learners from engaging in learning. The study found that disengaging classroom activities and tasks, the influence of peers and teacher might prevent motivated learners from engaging in learning. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to create a positive and appealing classroom environment, use effective teaching strategies, and build a connection with their students and to devise meaningful and interesting tasks and activities. Teachers who do not challenge advanced learners enough or who do not provide a balance between challenging and easy tasks can also demotivate students.

A motivated teacher in an EFL class brings about numerous benefits to the language learners, such as the transfer of teacher's energy to the students and optimisation of the language learning process. Conscious efforts are needed to bring effective, innovative, and involving activities which engage the students. A motivated teacher facilitates critical thinking, engages minds, listens to questions, supports their learning process, and cultivates dreams in students (Hussain 2018).

Teachers can provide goal-oriented feedback that helps learners understand that ability can be enhanced through effort and that failure and mistakes are part of the competence-building process. Teachers can also create a positive learning environment that encourages students to set goals and work towards achieving them. Additionally, teachers can provide specific guidelines for helping students to improve weak skills and address their needs for further improvement (Jang et al. 2015).

The teacher plays a vital role in shaping positive emotions towards the target language and language learning motivation by creating and nurturing an interactive, inclusive, and supportive classroom environment, where strong bonds can be built and cultivated. In such a

space, the learners feel that all their contributions are valued and valuable and that they are acknowledged and validated as individuals whose lives extend beyond the classroom. The teacher should also nurture the dimension of social enjoyment in language learning to boost the classroom learning experience. Moreover, teachers can bring what Vlaeva and Dörnyei refer to as vision interventions in the language classroom to support learners in building and strengthening their language self-images, which can boost long-term motivation (Pavelescu 2023).

A teacher holds a vital role in preparing quality instructional processes that motivate and encourage language learners to actively participate in the development of speaking skills both in the face-to-face teaching and out of classroom activities. Therefore, knowledge of effective instructional design is required by the language teachers. Instructional materials, methods, and teaching aids are three of the most dominant components in instructional design. It is believed that selection, gradation, and organisation of instructional materials hold an important role in effective teaching. The teacher should adjust the topic of instructional materials so that learners get a better understanding of them and, as a result, active participation is manifested. The teacher should also create activities and practices during the speaking class to build up speaking culture in the classroom (Manurung and Mashuri 2017).

Language instructors can help foreign language learners by providing meaningful interactions and enhancing opportunities for foreign language practice. The teacher's role is to create a learning environment in which learners can construct and gain knowledge of their target language and culture through active, direct, personal interactions, preferably with native speakers, whenever possible. The teacher can also use project-based language learning to improve participant motivation and willingness to communicate. However, motivating students to have such a willingness can be difficult, and there are still problems to be addressed when conducting internet-based programs using the online format (Kato et al. 2023).

Teachers who are aware of the wider social context and how their practices may relate to learning outcomes can benefit students' classroom behaviour. Additionally, the use of a communicative approach and exposure to authentic materials in class can increase motivation and proficiency levels. Teachers who offer language instruction in small groups for learners from an early age can also positively impact students' language learning (Mihaljević Djigunović et al. 2008).

The provision of feedback and support to help students overcome challenges and build their confidence in using the language is also essential in motivating students. Moreover, the teacher can help students to set goals and to track their progress, which also increases motivation and the sense of achievement (Freiermuth and Ito 2022).

In terms of minimising anxiety and its negative effects, the teachers' mission is paramount. Teachers control teaching content and progress, and the difficulty and form of classroom activities in the foreign language class. The different teaching methods and activities adopted by teachers may result in different levels of anxiety among students. Therefore, teachers should take a proactive approach to helping students reduce anxiety and tackle their difficulties in the classroom. Teachers can create a learning group that provides an environment for "best motivation" and a "cooperative atmosphere" to assist students in dispelling their fear of making mistakes (Tang 2022). Also, what is significant is that teachers have the potential to inspire learners to work hard on their language skills beyond the classroom, and successful learners often remember a teacher who inspired them to do so (Lamb and Wedell 2015).

Conclusion

Our literature review on student motivation was designed to answer naturally arising questions in language teaching to which we sought to find evidence in literature, rather than to construct statements based on our teaching experience. The problem of student motivation is by far one of the most complex issues in language teaching and learning because motivation is

driven by a plethora of reasons, and it fluctuates and differs between any two learners. While identifying the motivating goals of all the learners in a group is a utopic pursuit, some key and common elements can be traced, ranging from interest in the target culture, and, consequently, language, to job opportunities and better employment in the global world in which we currently live. It is not only reason that drives and motivates a learner, but also the method of content delivery, class atmosphere, positive attitudes, group cooperation, teacher-learner relationship, and the list may go on, although for some learners, some of these factors may be demotivating leading to undesired effects.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Albiladi, Waheeb S., et al. 'Learning English through Movies: Adult English Language Learners' Perceptions'. Theory and Practice in Language Studies, vol. 8, no. 12, Dec. 2018, p. 1567. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0812.01.

Dörnyei, Zoltán, and Kata Csizér. 'Ten Commandments for Motivating Language Learners: Results of an Empirical Study'. Language Teaching Research, vol. 2, no. 3, 1998, pp. 203–29.

Freiermuth, Mark R., and Michiyo Ito. 'Battling With Books: The Gamification of an EFL Extensive Reading Class'. Simulation & Gaming, vol. 53, no. 1, Feb. 2022, pp. 22–55. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1177/10468781211061858.

Hasan, Md. Mahadhi, et al. 'Effects of New Media on English Language Learning Motivation at Tertiary Level'. Advances in Language and Literary Studies, vol. 11, no. 5, Oct. 2020, p. 17. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.alls.v.11n.5p.17.

Hussain, Muhammad Sabboor. 'Motivating English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Adult Learners: Challenges to Prepare Them for Future and Job Market'. International Research Journal of Arts and Humanities, vol. 46, no. 46, 2018, pp. 121–47.

Jang, Eunice Eunhee, et al. 'How Do Young Students with Different Profiles of Reading Skill Mastery, Perceived Ability, and Goal Orientation Respond to Holistic Diagnostic Feedback?' Language Testing, vol. 32, no. 3, July 2015, pp. 359–83. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1177/0265532215570924.

Kafi, Zeinab, and Khalil Motallebzadeh. 'Effective Teaching and Language Learning Motivation: A Study on the Interconnection'. Indonesian EFL Journal, vol. 1, no. 2, Sept. 2017, p. 135. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.25134/ieflj.v1i2.622.

Kato, Fumie, et al. 'Incorporating Project-Based Language Learning into Distance Learning: Creating a Homepage during Computer-Mediated Learning Sessions'. Language Teaching Research, vol. 27, no. 3, 2023, pp. 621–41. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820954454.

Lamb, Martin, and Martin Wedell. 'Cultural Contrasts and Commonalities in Inspiring Language Teaching'. Language Teaching Research, vol. 19, no. 2, Mar. 2015, pp. 207–24. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168814541716.

Listyani, Listyani. 'Exploring Indonesian EFL Writing Students' Differences in Motivation: A Language Learning Journey to Success'. Journal of Language Teaching and Research, vol. 13, no. 2, Mar. 2022, pp. 406–16. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1302.23.

Manurung, Konder, and Mashuri Mashuri. 'Implementing Interest Based Instructional Materials to Minimize EFL Learners' Speaking Skills De-Motivating Factors'. Theory and Practice in Language Studies, vol. 7, no. 5, May 2017, p. 356. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0705.05.

Mihaljević Djigunović, Jelena, et al. ‘A Comparative Study of Croatian and Hungarian EFL Students’. Language Teaching Research, vol. 12, no. 3, July 2008, pp. 433–52. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168808089926.

Pavelescu, Liana Maria. ‘Emotion, Motivation and Willingness to Communicate in the Language Learning Experience: A Comparative Case Study of Two Adult ESOL Learners’. Language Teaching Research, Jan. 2023, p. 136216882211468. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221146884.

Tang, Mailing. ‘Constructing and Validating the Teaching Strategies for Alleviating Chinese EFL Graduate Students’ Foreign Language Anxiety’. Language Teaching Research, vol. 00, no. 0, Aug. 2022, pp. 1–30. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221115810.

Teravainen-Goff, Anne. ‘Why Motivated Learners Might Not Engage in Language Learning: An Exploratory Interview Study of Language Learners and Teachers’. Language Teaching Research, Nov. 2022, p. 136216882211353. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688221135399.

Vojdani, Mehdi, and Orlando Rafael González González. ‘A Comparative Study of Technology-Based Motivation for Learning English as a Foreign Language among Thai Learners at Wall Street English Bangkok According to Their Gender and English Language Proficiency’. Scholar: Human Sciences, vol. 14, no. 1, 2022, pp. 62–75.

Yurtseven, Nihal, and Sertel Altun. ‘Understanding by Design (UbD) in EFL Teaching: The Investigation of Students’ Foreign Language Learning Motivation and Views’. Journal of Education and Training Studies, vol. 4, no. 3, Dec. 2015, pp. 51–62. DOI.org (Crossref), https://doi.org/10.11114/jets.v4i3.1204.

Zhou, Shiyao Ashlee, et al. ‘Dynamic Engagement: A Longitudinal Dual-Process, Reciprocal-Effects Model of Teacher Motivational Practice and L2 Student Engagement’. Language Teaching Research, vol. 0, no. 0, https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688231158789.