



MOTIVATING YOUNG LEARNERS IN THE EFL CLASSROOM AT THE UNIVERSITY

Meyliyeva Shafolat Erali qizi

*Uzbekistan State World Languages University,
The Department of English Theoretical Aspects 2*

Abstract

Motivating EFL students to develop in the target language is very challenging. In many cases, these students face difficulties in learning English and are often demotivated to learn. Research in classroom motivation has found that exact strategies can help these students adopt more positive attitudes and become more motivated in the learning process. This study investigates the perceptions through interviewing students and surveying teachers' views in an EFL Program of the problems that hinder these students' learning in the English classes related to motivation. Findings show that learners are not motivated to learn English because of an over-focus on writing skills with very little new learning experiences, uninteresting materials, and unclear links between language courses and their majors or future careers. Results also indicate that teachers complain of unmotivated students and pre-structured syllabi leaving little room for communicative methods.

Keywords: *Language learning, Motivation, University EFL(English as a foreign language) students, UzSWLU*

1. Introduction

Motivating students in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom is often a complex and difficult task that involves a multiplicity of psycho-sociological and linguistic factors (Dornyei, 1998; 2010a), but most English teachers will attest to the important role motivation plays in the teaching/learning process. While motivation has been defined in many ways (Liuoliene & Metiuniene, 2006), in this paper it is simply used by the authors to refer to effective strategies that could help the learners develop their English language skills. How to go about this is a long story with many ups and downs shared by many teachers in staff rooms. This paper, quite unique in the view of the authors, attempts to tackle the problem of "motivation" in the EFL Program at the UzSWLU This is part of our story. First we give some background of the context and some main related research.

Uzbekistan is a pluralistic country where multilingualism and multiculturalism prevail. Although Uzbek, Russian and English are the three main languages used in the country, many more languages are heard and taught in the different educational institutions. The school systems at both the private and the public sectors teach a minimum of three languages. Uzbek, the native language, is only taught in Uzbek



language classes. English or Russian, depending on the school medium of instruction, is taught as a language and is used to teach all school subjects. Again either English or Russian is also taught as the third language. Despite the importance attached to the second/foreign language, when some students reach university, they still face difficulties coping with English for academic purposes. In this paper, we present the recurrent problems students face in these language classrooms. We elicited students and teachers' views of the problems that hinder students' progress in discussing engagingly, thinking critically, and writing academically in the target language and then suggest strategies to motivate them to use the target language effectively. This study is innovative as it seeks university students' views on motivation, a topic that is not rigorously studied on L1 Uzbek speakers in the Uzbek context and which could be applicable to other similar contexts.

Aim

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the aim of the study is to find out the views of the teachers and students of what hinders students' language learning in the English language classroom in discussing engagingly, critical thinking, and academic writing. The significance of the study is its value to the teachers at the university to improve the teaching/learning situation.

Methods

The study is conducted in the English language department at the Uzbek State World Languages University. Students take three obligatory language courses in communication and rhetoric skills, and each class meets three times a week for 50 minutes over a fifteen-week semester. The objectives of these classes fluctuate from teaching basic language skills and sub-skills, to paragraph, essay, and research paper writing from informative to argumentative writing, from reading for literal comprehension to critical reading, and finally to oral communication presentations (course syllabi). Learners go through all these language courses, but some are exempted based on their English entrance exam scores. They supposedly learn, hopefully improve, but usually complain about the repetition in objectives and learning outcomes from the remedial to the advanced courses, the essay being the most often repeated assignment. Teachers often complain about the learners' inadequacy in using the language appropriately and efficiently.

Results

The results of the student interviews and teacher questionnaires are given according to three thematic issues related to motivation as mentioned below.

Many students believed that the English language classes help them cope better with other courses at the university, but ten denied this. In fact, these ten students did not seem to really know what they needed. What is of concern is that these students



believe that the English language courses are mainly set to improve their writing skills since the assignments are mainly writing ones. Critical thinking, reading strategies, listening comprehension, and speaking were not mentioned by the students during the interviews. Though students complain about their English language courses, the majority agree that such courses should be obligatory; however, seven of those who were interviewed would rather have some of these courses offered as optional ones, and only one student would rather not have English courses at all. In fact, students have reiterated in their comments that they'd rather have fewer English language courses as in many cases there is redundancy. Teachers stated that their role is to help students cope with and improve their academic writing skills, follow process writing in all its steps; give them enough basic knowledge in the grammatical structure of the target language so that they can write better and choose interesting subjects and/or topics for students. They would rather encourage students to support their writing with resources, to learn how to be well organized, and be able to follow and examine models of different academic genres.

Discussion

Teachers and students seem disappointed with the language classes offered at the university. Learners are unhappy on the whole and find the English courses of no benefit. Motivation, then, seems to be an important point in our role in helping students to learn the language. Students want the classes to integrate all language skills and subskills, but unfortunately the main focus of the courses is on writing academic English as also found by the author who argues for focusing on all

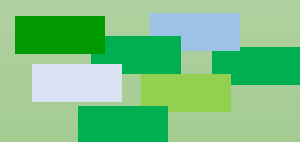
language skills. Then what is the importance of teaching academic writing to graduating students who will be seeking a career where their main concern will be to write technical reports, communicate with others efficiently, and present

their point of view critically among others. More attention should be given to students' diverse needs and to multiple methods of learning to facilitate expression and engagement. This is not denying the importance of writing but mainly to rethink the program in order to benefit learners.

One way is providing scaffolding to benefit language learners especially in writing. It seems that the courses do not take into consideration the background of the students: some come from Russian or Uzbek medium pre-university classes while others from different cultural environments and even different neighbor countries.

There is a clear need for selecting content that is more relevant to the learners' lives

and also on an international level. Furthermore, the main problem of some of these learners is the difficulty of expressing themselves in the target language. Thus, teachers should allow different ways of responding to the learned material. Data from this study also show that the speaking component is nearly non-existent in the



language classes.

Conclusion

This study has shown that there are issues that need to be addressed in the English language classes at the university. Teachers and students are aware of these and have responded that more emphasis be placed on the other skills as well as writing, incorporate interesting life related materials with a link to their university courses and their later professions. Teachers' complaints imply that students are not motivated and something must be done to create more positive attitudes to learning English as part of the EFL Program. Importantly, therefore, the university should rethink the English language classes. It should reorganize them with appropriate emphasis on the language skills. Also, at the same time workshops on topics such as multiple intelligences differentiating

instruction; teaching and integrating all language skills; using technology in the language classes; and teaching language across the curriculum would greatly, in the opinion of the authors, instill a positive attitude in the teachers and in so doing motivate the learners who will also have a change of attitude and self

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