The Literature Review of Motivation in Second Language Acquisition

Wenjing Ding
School of Foreign Language, Lanzhou Jiaotong University, Lanzhou, Gansu, China

Abstract: Motivation is an important factor in second language acquisition. Many studies have demonstrated the influence of motivation in second language acquisition. By analyzing the types of motivation, the development process and several important factors affecting motivation, this paper points out that teachers play an important role in the generation of students’ second language acquisition motivation. More attention should be paid to how foreign language teachers help students to cultivate and stimulate intrinsic motivation and transform learning motivation.

Keywords: Motivation, Factors, SLA, Teaching inspiration.

1. Introduction

Many linguists have documented the importance of motivation in SLA, and motivation in foreign language learning also affects students’ performance. According to Dian, Rosmayanti & Hilva Yaniurti (2018), the relationship between students’ motivation and their English learning achievement was significant and has medium correlation. Researchers identified different types of motivation that students have while learning foreign language. The researchers found different types of motivation for students in language learning. Integrative motivation includes learning a language with the aim of participating in target culture. Integrative motivated learners want to learn the target language for better understanding the people who speak the language and mingle with the people from the target culture. In addition, instrumental motivation refers to the learners’ desire to learn the language for future work. Students’ motivation for EFL learning and their performance are affected by a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic factors in different circumstances. (Ghanizade, A., Ghossooly, B. & Rostami, S.). Some of the intrinsic reasons to operate on EFL learning are interest, curiosity, independent mastery, and internal criteria for success. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation comes from influences outside of the individual and is described as the performance of an activity in order to access the desired outcome.

In the 1970s, the focus of foreign or second language learning has shifted from teachers and teaching to students and learning. This change indicates that much more attention is put on the individual instead of the group. In recent years, researchers begin to concentrate on the factors which affect SLA. Among these factors, motivation is no doubt a vital research field in Second Language Acquisition. This review will discuss the influence of motivation on second language acquisition and various factors affecting motivation. The author points out that teachers and the classroom are the most important factors affecting students’ motivation. What kind of teaching strategies should be adopted to promote students’ motivation in second language learning will be the key and difficult points in future research.

2. Literature Review of Motivation

2.1 The Definition of Motivation

Motivation was originally a psychological concept related to learning, which was later introduced into linguistics. Dörnyei, a Hungarian scholar, believes that different language learners have different learning motivations, attitudes, and efforts, which affect learners’ attention and internalization. Since the 1990s, R. C. Gardner (1992) has been the most influential researcher on L2 learning motivation. He believes that L2 learning motivation refers to the combination of the desire to achieve the goal of learning a certain language, the efforts made for this purpose, and a good attitude towards learning the language. Chinese scholar Wen Qifang (1996) defines English learning motivation as the cause and goal of learning.

Furthermore, motivation is a key aspect in learning a second language. Motivation is one of the key factors of second-language (L2) acquisition, according to Dörnyei (2012). As a result, a vast number of studies studying the nature of motivation and its function in second language learning have been conducted during the last three decades. Motivation can be separated into two categories in the realm of language learning: the urge to communicate and the attitude toward the language community. All of these definitions agree on one thing: motivation is a psychological reason beyond one’s behavior.

2.2 Categorizations of Motivation

Gardner (1985) distinguishes between two types of motivation: integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation is a sort of inherent drive that involves favorable views toward the language community as well as a desire to communicate with people who speak the target language. Instrumental motivation is a sort of external motivation that can be perceived as external stimulation, such as career chances, strong academic goals, and parental rewards.

According to Noels (2002), there are two sorts of motivation. The first is based on intrinsic interest in the action, whereas the second is based on incentives that are unrelated to the activity. Intrinsic motivation (IM) refers to the desire to engage in a particular activity because it is joyful and rewarding. The desire to better, the pleasure of accomplishing
the objective, and study interest are all examples of intrinsic motivation in L2 learning. Extrinsically motivated activities, as contrast to intrinsically motivated behaviors, are those that are carried out to attain a certain goal. Earning a reward, such as good grades, good employment possibilities, and praise from parents, or avoiding a punishment, are examples of extrinsic motivation (EM).

2.3 Studies on Motivation

Motivation is such a hot topic in applied linguistics that several scholars, like Grander, Lambert, Deci, and Maslow, have dedicated their careers to it.

Gardner and Lambert made a well-known distinction between integrative and instrumental orientation in motivation. Brown introduced another categorization of motivations i.e. intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Maslow(1962) proposed the most prominent model of personal psychological need. Maslow wanted to know what drives people to succeed, so he proposed that people have a motivational system that has nothing to do with rewards or unconscious desires. If people live in an environment that suits their personality and communicates properly with others, then individual psychological needs will be satisfied.

There are two primary divisions in the literature review on L2 motivation. The first group of studies is based on Gardner’s social education model, in which he emphasizes on the role of integrative motivation (including integrativeness, attitudes toward learning circumstances, and motivation) as SLA requirements. Another is more concerned with achieving the new objects provided in L2 motivation. (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991).

Since the 1980s, Chinese researchers have been studying motivation. Initially, these scholars focused on conveying the basic theory of motivation to people outside of the United States. China’s pioneers in this discipline are Wen Qifang, Wang Chunming, and Gui Shichun. Wang Chunming writes in The Foreign Language Learning Model of Chinese Students that instrumental motivation is the most common type of motivation among Chinese students in SLA. With the rise of motivational studies, Chinese academics’ focus shifted to practical issues in language education. As a result, they used motivation theory in their teaching.

2.4 Factors Affecting Motivation

Internal and external variables influence the motivation of language learners. Interest in learning content, perceived value in learning content, and attitude toward learning content are all internal aspects. Social support for learning from teachers, parents, and classmates, as well as the perception of the formal learning environment, are external elements that influence learning motivation. Teacher and peer support can have a profound impact on students’ success well-beings, and overall fitness at school. Interactions with teachers and peers play central roles in supporting young adolescents’ academic motivations, classroom engagement, and sense of school belonging. In a study by Cirik (2015), which investigated the relationship between the perceived social support, motivation and science achievement in a sample of 1375 (701 females, 674 males) middle school students. The findings demonstrated that enhancing students’ science achievement and motivation required cooperation from sources of support (parents, teachers, classmates, and close friends). Three variables are particularly important for EFL learners when it comes to motivation: attitudes toward L2 learning, social support from teachers, parents, and peers, and learning environments.

2.4.1 Attitudes affecting motivation

A positive attitude toward language acquisition has repeatedly been linked to increased motivation. Gardner(2002) claims that students’ opinions about foreign language speakers have an impact on their motivation and competency. Furthermore, according to the acculturation model for second language acquisition by Schumann(1978), attitude is an important social factor, which facilitates learning in a second language-learning context where learners and native speakers have positive attitudes toward each other. Moreover, Firdos Fidal & Ravindra K(2016) found that the primary motivation for students to learn English is that “English appears to be of great significance today”, that they “enjoy English speaking individuals,” that they “want to acquire a career,” or that they “want to pass tests.” “Everyone should study English,” “they love speaking English,” and “because English is an international language, everyone should learn English,” said the students who had a favourable attitude toward English learning. This also suggests that learners who have a good attitude toward learning a foreign language are more motivated.

There is a strong link between motivation and learning attitude. Respondents who have a favourable attitude about English are thought to be high-motivated learners. Similarly, those who express unfavourable attitudes about English learning are rated as low motivated, while those who expressed neutral attitudes were rated as moderately motivated.

2.4.2 Social factors affecting motivation

Studies have shown that supports from teachers, parents and peers affect students’ motivations in SLA. Bambirra, R. (2017) points out that not only that students’ motivations and teachers’ motivations are deeply interrelated, but also they interact organically and continually. Ghanizade, A., Ghonsooly, B., & Rostami, S. (2015) reported that teacher burnout negatively influenced learners’ criterion measure and their attitudes to learning English. They also indicated that families play a determinant role in students’ educational achievements and endeavors. When learners are supported by their teachers and peers, they tend to be more motivated to learn, but what kind of support is helpful in this regard? Sarah M. Kiefer, Kathleen M. Alley & Cheryl R. Ellerbrock (2015) argued that teacher and peer support have academic and social nature and unique impacts on supporting motivation, participation and belonging. By utilizing a mixed-methods design and adopting a multidimensional perspective of classroom-based support, the findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of teacher and peer support on student adjustment. These findings showed that learners felt more motivated when they perceived teachers as
approachable and concerned about their well-being and academic progress. Similarly, when they viewed their peers as supporting their academic goals and emotional well-being, they were more motivated. In short, these studies show that when learners perceive their parents, teachers, and peers to be supportive of their learning, they feel motivated to learn.

2.4.3 Learning context affecting motivation

Matching English learning motivation and learner preference with classroom activities is an inevitable requirement for effective language acquisition (Almasa Mulali & Nudžejma Obrali, 2016). Their study showed that the most preferred classroom practice and activity for IUS students are the Balanced approaches (M=13.15), and the least preferred is Direct Method (M=4.48). The balanced method considers the teacher to be a role model and facilitator in the classroom, ensuring that teaching and learning styles are met and that the curriculum’s aims and objectives are apparent. All skills are increased, and rather than being based on the curriculum itself, the curriculum is more focused.

Furthermore, students’ motivation to study foreign languages is aided by rich classroom content and the rise of computer-assisted learning. Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of computers as instruments for creating better educational settings in which students are driven to achieve their objectives. Adnan Yılmaz (2018) found that computers boost students’ motivations to improve their L2 reading and writing skills. The use of computers in language classrooms has a favorable influence on students’ motivation in L2 reading and writing skills, according to quantitative analysis. Particularly, the rapid and continuous developments in computer technologies provide various tools and means for teachers in language teaching. When songs are utilized in English lessons, students are motivated to participate and become more engaged in classroom activities, according to Aguirre, D., Bustinza, D., and Garvich, M. (2016). This is because songs help to create a positive atmosphere in the classroom and inspire pupils to participate more actively in class activities. Furthermore, kids like to engage in activities that use audio-visual resources (not just songs, but also videos, films, and audios). Azam Badrkoo祁 (2017) also contends that in order for teaching to be useful to visual learners, there must be several possibilities for visual items to be used in the classroom.

2.4.4 Other factors affecting motivation

Aside from elements that have been discovered to motivate pupils, there are also factors that are said to have a detrimental impact on motivation. Anxiety is frequently mentioned by researchers as one of the elements that impede second language acquisition. In his study, Alico, J. C. (2016) utilized a mixed design. Because the significance value of 0.001 is smaller than the 0.05 significance level, the findings show that there is a significant relationship between writing anxiety and language learning motivation. It means that as motivation increases, writing anxiety decreases. However, recent studies have found that motivation plays a positive role in foreign language learning to some extent. The hypothesis that facilitating anxiety is positively and significantly correlated with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (p<0.001) was confirmed by Luo, Subramaniam, and O’Steen (2020). Because “anxiety” is typically perceived as a negative feeling, the result could be surprising. Future research could use these data to investigate the causes of facilitating anxiety, a contributory factor of motivation, and then establish a link between anxiety and motivation for improved foreign language learning outcomes, according to the researchers.

3. Conclusion

Motivation in foreign language learning is a complex research subject with multiple aspects and complexity. There are also many other factors related to motivation and their relationships are complex. Through the review of the influence of motivation on the process of second language acquisition, as well as various internal and external factors that influence motivation. It is not difficult to see that teachers and classrooms are the main factors that promote the generation of motivation in second language acquisition, and more attention should be paid to how foreign language teachers help students to cultivate and stimulate intrinsic motivation and transform learning motivation. The revelation of motivation to EFL teaching mainly includes the following points:

First, motivation is individual behavior that points to certain goals. In turn, the setting of the goal is also a self-incentive mechanism that plays a role in individual motivation. Therefore, the establishment of suitable teaching goals in teaching will greatly stimulate students’ learning motivations.

Second, teachers can optimize the external conditions of learners’ learning by creating learning situations (such as educational games) to stimulate learners’ learning needs and interests and satisfy students’ individual and group psychology.

Third, learners need to understand the value of foreign language learning, which directly affects the motivation of learners in teaching practice.

References