

GENERAL CONSIDERATION TO LIFT THE STUDENTS' MOTIVATION LEVEL IN COUNTRIES WHERE ENGLISH IS A COMPULSORY SUBJECT

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Abstract. In countries where English is taught as a compulsory subject, many students have suffered from not sufficiently achieving the objectives of English learning because the curriculum that treated them in 'one size fits all' paradigm. At the other side, teachers seem to lack the creativity in crafting their teaching approach and methodology that add to the problem that already exist. In Indonesia, curriculum is centralized where the consideration for the archipelagic teaching is neglected. As Dornyei (2001a) points out that school curriculum in most cases failed to adjust with the English learners' preference to learn in fun and meaningful way. Probably, teachers are now left with the question how to lift the motivation of the students aside from the fact that curriculum plays particular role in their teaching and learning success.

Introduction

As a compulsory subject English is taught either as a second (ESL) or as a foreign language (EFL) depends on the context it is taught. I, henceforth, would primarily focus on EFL context for which it is best describe context I will be teaching. In many schools where English is a compulsory subject, factors such as inflexible curriculum, low qualified English teachers, material inappropriateness are among other factors affecting students' motivation in learning. Many linguists, researchers and language teachers have attempted to find ways or come up with particular approaches which is hoped to be instrumental to raise students' motivation. However, instead of a holistic approach in English language learning and teaching, '*treatment*' to lift students motivation, as found in many EFL context, tend to be partial and isolated. For example, if teachers are required to be inventive and creative they frequently hindered to do so due to inflexibility of curriculum and time constraints, while many of them were not '*clever*' enough to tackle such problems. In addition, most school's curricular topics are not based on student's preference (Dornyei, 2001a, p. 63). Thus a holistic approach covers a top-down and bottom-up orientation should be taken. From reshaping the curriculum to teacher's capacity building, from 'learners- preferred' pedagogic to authentic teaching and learning materials, from school to home environment, all are components by all means should be taken into account in order to increase student's motivation to learn English. This essay will discuss some motivation-

related problems commonly found among learners in EFL context. Then it goes on explaining steps taken within the boundaries of two major orientations which directly or indirectly affect student's motivation, namely bottom-up and top-down orientation. As the name suggests, the top-down approach considers government, education department, and curriculum, while bottom-up approach considers teachers, parents, teaching methods, and EFL learners.

Common motivation-related Problems found in the EFL context

Motivation of learners of English as a foreign language is affected in various ways during their learning. Factors from outside as well as from within the learners are significantly determine the success or failure in language learning in general, and affective to students' motivation in particular. EFL learners are subject to intrinsic and extrinsic factors which cause or motivate them to learn (or not to learn). Some are quite distant and some are closely related to EFL learners' motivation.

Curriculum. Curriculum has been recognized as guidelines which govern the schools. The clients or the end-users are students of which teachers are mediators to deliver curriculum content that specifically designed to meet the needs of these students. According to Brady and Kennedy (2003, p. 6), curriculum is inextricably linked with values, feelings, affection and love. If language learners cannot be brought to see value within a curriculum and become affectionate towards learning English, then the teaching of it would become something futile. Curriculum varies from country to country. In Indonesia for example, English curriculum is designed by government through its Education department. It is mandated to be implemented throughout the country irrespective so many differences of context and learner's variables.

In companion to the curriculum, learning materials are determined from above (centralized) and to some extent far from most students' interests. To exemplify, reading materials which learners in Jakarta might find interesting could become a daunting and demotivating to students in Papua for the texts are unfamiliar and considerably difficult for them. At the same time teachers exacerbate the problem by teaching in an unpleasant and incomprehensible fashion, and boring teaching method (Nunan, 1999; Dörnyei, 2001b). All they concern is to fulfil the curriculum requirement and neglecting the substantial essence of teaching and of course may likely to demotivate students in learning English. Our students future is really at stake if this happens continually.

Teachers. Teachers, to a great extent are affective factor towards students' success in English learning and teaching, and are important agent to help students raise and maintain high motivation in English learning and teaching. Many studies on all motivational dimensions have put teacher's own behaviour at the top because their role is crucial to students' motivation in language learning (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2001b; MacIntyre, 2002). Indeed, teacher's appearance, performance, competence and behaviour plays important role to energize English learners. Unfortunately, not all English teachers are qualified enough and more like a stumbling stone for English learners.

Teaching method and teaching materials. Students' preference on topics or material to be learned is important. This is an important requirement that frequently overlooked by curriculum designer, and in many cases by EFL teachers. As Nunan (1999, p. 81) points out that in many cases, teaching materials such as text books, are not specifically provided with interesting visuals and supporting materials, and rapidly become boring and uninteresting agents to learners. Too frequently EFL teachers present materials that far beyond students' interests, or materials that cannot cater each individual learner's need. For example, Harmer (2000, p.127) raised an issue of mixed-level language learners in language classroom. We are likely to have class of students with mixed-level of proficiency or other quality; and many '*unqualified*' EFL teachers have no idea what to do with such a situation. They merely provided materials that probably suit few students, for example suit only those with advanced level of proficiency and leave behind others students who '*suffered in silent*'. Furthermore, as Dornyei (2001a, p. 64) points out, if students have to learn something that they cannot see the point of because it has no seeming relevance whatsoever to their lives they are likely to be demotivated.

Misleading assumptions. A study conducted by Panggabean (2007) on Indonesian speaking EFL learners shows that frequently learners are inhibited in English learning by psychological burden. Put it simply, learners are seeing English as a '*scary*' subject in school. Panggabean cautioned EFL teachers and instructors to be careful in tackling this phenomenon. He argues that this inhibiting factor needs to be eradicated prior to commencement of any language program, lest failure would likely to happen.

Ways to lift students' motivation to learn English

Ranked at the top of learning teaching '*hierarchy*' curriculum determines whether or not EFL learners will be kept motivated through the implementation of activities contained in it. Reviewing and reshaping curriculum would be a necessary step to take if its current implementation cannot respond to what EFL learners actually need and far from motivating. Curricular topics should be selected primarily on the basis of what students would choose if given the opportunity to do so (Brophy, cited in Kinsella, 2001, p. 63). Similarly, Nunan (1999, pp. 16-17) contends that if view of learners is considered then learning would likely to occur because students are motivated to learn what they want to learn. Responding to what Nunan has mentioned, I would argue that as mediator of curriculum teachers need to conduct need analysis to relate content to students' interests and experiences. Then, from that point teachers may be able to teach English properly and appropriately.

Alongside with reshaping the curriculum to suit EFL learners, government should take other actual steps to accompany a proper implementation of the curriculum. Teachers need to be prepared, facilities to be provided, and motivating learning materials should be produced. Coordination among stake holders should be established and so on. To put it in another way, teachers training institution should work closely with teachers at schools by giving support,

training, and conducting regular monitoring mechanism to ensure the effectiveness of a particular teacher training program and to help teachers gaining a quality necessary for plunging in teaching activities. Additionally, prerequisite entrance for candidate English teachers is a must for producing qualified outcomes of English teachers. This will be discussed further later in another separate section.

Teachers. It is to say that a poor method in the hands of a good teacher produces better results than a good method in the hands of a poor teacher. Good teaching is always needed, but a good method in the hands of a good teacher is ideally wanted (Chall, 2002, p. 65). Considering the importance of teacher's quality on EFL learning, and on EFL learners' motivation, teachers therefore are required to build their capacity through workshops, trainings or the like. By attending capacity-building workshops or trainings teachers would broaden their horizon as well as widening network with other teachers, which later has impact on their quality that indirectly, benefit language learners at the end.

In language classroom. At the very bottom of EFL learning and teaching realm, what specific steps need to be taken to lift learners' motivation? The tasks become specific to teachers in term of raising learners' motivation in learning English. Supportive behaviors by teachers tend to benefit everybody in the classroom regardless the differences in linguistic and other social or cognitive background. Students' motivation, by many researchers, is proven to be greatly influenced by teachers' interpersonal behavior. Teachers' supportive behavior is closely related to student achievement and motivation in all subject areas (Brekelmans, Wubbels & den Brook, 2002; Fraser, 1998). For example, with only few simple and short sentences such as, "*Well done*", or "*I notice that you have made a lot of progress. That's good*" while addressing each student with their name can help raise EFL learners' motivation. While other studies found positive relationships between friendly and understanding behavior, pleasure, confidence, effort, and relevance with regard to other subjects such as EFL, Math, and Chemistry (Brekelmans *et al.*, 2002). As I have argued previously EFL learners' motivation will be strengthen when they see their teachers' poses such quality.

Furthermore, an English teacher should have a good command of English and non-discouraging behavior. Since teachers are to deal with learners of various '*kind*', Alatis (2005, pp. 31-32) suggests that (EFL) teachers need to be linguistically sophisticated, pedagogically sound, and culturally sensitive. It is important that learners need to know who are their teachers, so they will be motivated to learn for they know they are in a 'good hand'. Upon exposed such quality to EFL learners, teachers then need to find out who the students they are dealing with, what can be done to lift their motivation and henceforth, facilitate English acquisition.

Language learners bring with them diverse level of language mastery level into the learning process. They also brought with them various motivation for learning English. Some are intrinsically motivated, and some are extrinsically motivated, some are extroverted, some are introverted, and still many more characteristic to be mentioned. Therefore, as Aldridge (2005, p. 177) remarked, teachers face the challenge of meeting the individual needs of each language

learner, as well as discerning which methods work most effectively in enhancing language development, and specifically maintaining learners' motivation. However, if learning a language in school does not progress smoothly and students cannot draw satisfaction from their performance in it, they may develop a poor learning attitude in the subject (Marsh, Hau, & Kong, 2002) such as feeling bored with learning English, uninterested in English, scared of learning English, or self-destructive about their poor standards.

English learning should be fun in order to keep language learners up with good 'energy' and on high motivation necessary for language learning. Activities and materials provided by teachers should be meaningful, authentic and at the most motivating, and teachers need to be adaptive and adoptive for selection of materials to be taught to EFL learners. Learners' motivations are indeed could be stimulated and manipulated in various ways in EFL learning. Joyful and stimulating activities would greatly contribute to sustained learner involvement. We can prompt students' interests by bringing new objects into the classroom, perform an experiment, and give the students a problem to solve, as these activities would greatly motivate EFL learners. Panggabean (2002) provides some suggestions on how to motivate EFL learners; the learners' involvement in English speaking-club and English-speaking gatherings such as meeting, church sermons, and English speech competition are of major help. Besides, talking to tourists, listening to radio, television, and VCD programs as well as getting access to internet are very helpful mode for learning. The latter is in line with what Nunan (2007, pp. 81-82) implies that the technical encroachments of information technology convey impact on the English language learning as it seems to boost students' motivation, in addition to increasing their intercultural awareness and sensitivity.

Furthermore, our materials and tasks should be culturally and pedagogically appropriate and suitable for each level of students we teach. By this I mean that, materials and tasks should not be too easy, or too difficult but challenging enough and motivating. For example, learners are curious about information their colleague learners have, and conversely would please to share what information they have. On this premise, with slight teacher's intervention students might get motivated to talk in English about the information they have. In this way teachers might encourage risk taking behaviour in the classroom and utilize communicative activities to assist learners in feeling less anxious and lower their inhibitions. This may also lead to learners forming a positive identification with speakers of the target language. In addition, games, songs, and other activities that the students are supposed to enjoy in other contexts might be incorporated in English teaching in the hope that some transference of motivation will take place. And there are more approaches, involving the construction of a variety of activities and exercises aimed at tapping the affective variables of the ego (Lewis, 1982; 109).

Outside language classroom. An interesting study by Chall (2002) shows several non-school factors, including parent's role, as important elements influencing learners' motivation. However as she noted, many parents are not aware of their children development by paying less attention, if any, to what

teachers at schools suggested. For example, when children brought home their homework, many parents resent it. They say homework takes leisure time away from the child. And parents resent the time they are expected to give to their child's homework. They think teachers are putting an added burden on them (Chall, 2002, p. 155). While some parents who are fully aware of 'shared' responsibility with teachers would be willing to do almost anything to keep their children on high motivation towards learning.

The following is an interesting example of a parent, who coincidentally is a tour guide, which can be emulated by other parents. He usually likes to drive around with his son enjoying the view, explaining the name of places using English. Prior to that activity he usually would have had reviewed English lesson his son has got in the day. He would have noted down several new vocabularies from her son's notebook that could be linked to the days 'trip'. Later on when there is foreign tourist, he would allow his son to explain things as he modeled to him. This is a meaningful and authentic way for language learner to express their thoughts, ideas, and to activate their previous studied syntax and vocabulary. Activity like this, as argued by Brown, not only provide actual language learning but also a validation of learners self-fulfillment that can increase or maintain intrinsic motivation (2007, p. 89). This is only little example that both teachers at school and parents at home can collaborate to help language learners learning as well as maintaining their motivation in learning English. Activity like this is a very effective way to challenge students to put their language skills to use. Research has shown important implications for home-school relations as the restructuring of the school process to create a more supportive and nurturing environment for learning and teaching (Ming, 2009; Pintrich, 2004).

Safe atmosphere for language learning. Learners learn best when they feel secure, and will be motivated if learning is enjoyable and fun. Students often need a warm and supportive family and classroom environment to learn a second language (Gardner, 1985). Previous discussion on how and what kind of activities could be displayed in EFL classroom, only when the very basic psychological need of learners, i.e. feeling safe has been fulfilled. Further, students should be led to see (and feel) reward behind English language learning to motivate them in learning English. A convincing stockpile of studies on motivation strongly suggested that we should pay an extra attention on what is called intrinsic motivation, for it is better if learning is initiated by the learners themselves, as teachers we should try to increase this kind of motivation of the learners. In addition teachers may help their students to develop their intrinsic motivation; reminding them implicitly about the rewards for learning English; describe (or have the students look up) jobs that requires English; play down the final examination in favour of helping students to see reward for themselves beyond the final exam.

Conclusion

Motivation is one of the leading factors which believed to be influential on learners learning foreign languages, it has been observed by researchers for

decades. It is generally agreed that if learners' motivation can be cultivated, it can accelerate other factors to promote learners' ability. A holistic approach that involves reformation from the top to the bottom of English learning and teaching realm is necessary to enhance EFL learners' motivation. Centralized curriculum designed should be reshaped to suit various types and various needs of EFL learners. EFL Teachers must enhance their capacity in order to be able to cater the need of EFL learners. A high quality level of English teachers should be performed to gain trust from and motivate learners to learn English. While coordination among all concerned parties should be established; from government on top level, to educators, teachers, school administrators, and even parents have to play active role to boost student's motivation. Teaching method, tasks, and materials should be able to break monotonous traditional setting, and activities employed in language classroom should be authentic and related to learner's preference. They should be challenging, of interests of learners, exotic, and personalised. By personalised I mean that activities or materials can be made stimulating by personalising them, that is, by relating the content to the learner's own live. In addition physiologically and physically, learners must feel safe and comfortable during language learning process, they should never feel a burden for learning English; instead teachers should be able to persuade learners that learning English is fun and can bring certain rewards to learners, upon acquiring English competence. Initiating a holistic approach might take times and effort but there is a certain assurance that quality learning and quality outcome can be achieved in English learning as our students get higher and higher motivation in learning it, and we teacher, as well as EFL learners might derive maximum benefit out of it.

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