

Motivating Learners of English

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Abstract

Motivation is regarded as the essential element in every teaching-learning process. As English is a foreign language in Myanmar, learners of English usually face difficulties which can retard both willingness to learn and the successful learning process. If teachers of English know the important factors under the umbrella term of motivation that govern the teaching-learning process and if they are wise enough to handle the given situation as well as their learners, there may be less difficulties to teach their learners English.

Key words: motivation, demotivation, factor, culture-bound content, exposure, socio-educational community, tense classroom climate, steady encouragement, ample opportunities, motivational dimension

Introduction

Motivation plays the main role in teaching-learning process. Not only teachers but also learners really need motivation because without motivation, teaching-learning process will become a mere deadly boring one. Motivation can prompt learners to be actively involved in the process. So, it is very important for the teachers to have ability and wisdom to know ways of motivating learners.

Moreover, as English is not a subject, but a language – in particular, a foreign language for the learners of our country, learning English is not an easy task. Learners must have a strong desire to master it. Not only that, interest is also an important motivator for any learner. A teacher must take the role of the mediator who should help the learners in linking these two main things together to create the successful teaching-learning situation.

Most often, success in an endeavour may lead to more interest and a greater desire of a learner and it can further create a way towards a goal he has established.

Factors that affect motivation

Motivating the learners and using the most suitable way to motivate the learners in a particular situation are very important and they are inevitable jobs of teachers. For an enthusiastic teacher, the crying need in learning of the learners becomes a kind of encouragement for her. There are so many factors that affect motivation a lot. Among them, due to different constraints, four out of them will be presented in this paper. They are as follows.

1. Teacher factor
2. Student factor
3. Course factor
4. Classroom atmosphere

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Teacher factor

As an English teacher, she must have a good command of English and her pronunciation must be correct to become a good model for the learners. She must know the strengths and weaknesses of her learners also. Sometimes, when she finds some learners who try to dominate in the class, she needs to praise their attempts and efforts. But her words must not discourage other learners in the class. She must be an optimistic enough to see the good points of the learners. She may need to make complimentary remarks that are short. Nevertheless, echoes of the remarks are truly endless and it becomes an effective motivation.

The teacher must be a patient person while dealing with the learners who are slow absorbers. They usually are one or more than one step behind other learners. These kinds of learners are not confident in their abilities and capabilities. So, if the teacher scolds them or gives them punishment in front of others when the teacher finds out they commit mistakes, they may feel shy and depressed. Scolding and punishment may cognitively become a form of discouragement. The teacher should find out the problems and difficulties the learners have, and specify their real aims of learning. Another qualification of a teacher is being helpful. She must be ready to help her learners with kindness. The way she treats her learners will not only be a powerful motivational tool but also the cause to develop mutual trust between the teacher and the learners.

In order to create pleasant atmosphere in the language classroom, the teacher can tell funny stories when and where necessary. The theme of the story or the grammar that lies in the story should be relevant to the lesson the teacher is dealing with. In addition, the teacher must be wise enough to select stories suitable to the level of the learners.

Moreover, being a language teacher, the English teacher must be energetic and enthusiastic. Not only that, but also the teacher should be the model of the learners. She needs not to be beautiful but to be cheerful in appearance and personality to gain the impression that is really needed to influence the learners while teaching. She must dress neatly and tidily. Wearing a smile instead of turning a stunned face toward the learners is a desirable manner. According to the above mentioned facts, teacher factor is considered as an important factor.

Learner factor

The learner is one of the important factors that really affects learning. In a class there may be some students who have disruptive behaviours. But in reality they are secretly claiming for the teacher's attention. They want to be noticed by the teacher. Mostly they are the learners who are not outstanding in learning. They may get low grades and they are not able to compare with the outstanding students in the class. So they use inappropriate ways to seek for the teacher's attention. If the teacher is wise enough, she can change these learners into good ones by being involved in their personal lives and the behaviours of the learners are bearable to some extent, the teacher can change their negative behaviours into good ones by giving attention to them in correct ways – praising them when they get some achievement in learning, making good remarks when they have finished the tasks assigned, etc. In this way, their attitudes towards learning will change.

Sometimes the teacher may come across the learners who may say whispering words that can irritate the teacher during her lecture period. Sometimes while teaching, some learners do not pay any attention to the teacher and talk to each other. Moreover, there may be some learners who have negative attitude towards the teacher as well as the

lessons taught. For the teacher, these kinds of behaviour can be regarded as an insult. But the teacher should find out some suitable ways to deal with these learners. If not, these learners' future will not become a good one. Patience and kindness are the basic elements in dealing with them. The teacher should forgive their misbehaviour and try to understand them. But sometimes she must treat them wisely in correcting their misbehaviour and guide them skillfully.

Course factor

It is another important factor that should be considered. Some learners may think that the course they are taking is too difficult for them. It is quite beyond their knowledge. Sometimes, the course objectives do not match the learners' learning objectives. So, the learners may hold negative attitudes towards the course. They are reluctant to attend the classes. The teacher should explain the content and the objectives of the course beforehand and let them know the good advantages of the course and the benefits they will gain at the end of the whole course. She should also find out their expectation and feelings towards the course. She should try to find ways to meet the ends.

Most often, cultural aspects can be a real hindrance because they set up barriers to comprehension. Actually, language and culture are interrelated. For our learners, English is their foreign language so when reading some literary texts, they may face difficulties in comprehending because of the different cultures. The teacher should provide them with sufficient background information to help the learners understand the culture-bound content naturally present in the text. The teacher can also devise some follow-up activities that are related to the course content to make the learners more interested in the lessons and to let them get more exposure in culture-bound content. Activities must be devised according to "from the easier to the difficult ones" sequence.

Classroom atmosphere

Due to the classroom atmosphere, learners can be highly motivated or demotivated. The good and systematic arrangement of furniture, interior decoration of the classroom, etc. can motivate the learners. The classroom must have good ventilation. If possible, an air-conditioned room should be used as a language classroom. Instead of using benches, portable single chairs should be used. Pictures, illustrations or interesting diagrams or charts should be hung on the wall. The learners should be given chances to communicate with each other easily when they do some group activities or pair-work. The classroom must be rich with diversity among its learners. In this classroom, the learners can have a chance to build a pleasant atmosphere and a socio-educational community among them. Pleasant atmosphere can bear effective motivation in teaching-learning situation. Classroom atmosphere should be pleasant and supportive. It poses the reason that the tense classroom climate can undermine both learning process and learners. On the other hand, motivation will surely reach its peak in a safe classroom climate in which learners can freely express their opinions and feel that they do not need to take care of being ridiculed.

To be motivated to learn, the learners need both ample opportunities to learn and steady encouragement and support for their learning efforts. They must have opportunities to ask questions with comfort, to make mistakes freely and to learn on their own pace without worrying about being scolded or punished.

One of the ways to motivate the learners is to use visual aids that are suitable to the learners' level of education, age, interest, culture and the current lessons. One advantage

of using the visual aids is that the teacher does not need to give long explanation to reach the goal of the lesson.

There is no doubt that multimedia facilities can add a motivational dimension. Audio tapes, cassettes, language labs, computers, LCDs, OHPs and OHTs can bring good benefits to the language classrooms. Audio recordings can also be used to give the learners a great chance to check their own pronunciation as well as to improve their individual accents. If possible, the teacher can let them surf the Internet to find some information that is related to the lesson or the research.

Conclusion

A negative feedback is as powerful as a positive feedback because it can lead to a negative classroom atmosphere. Therefore, whenever the teacher notices a weakness in a learner, she must examine her teaching and her guidance. If she wants to point out the weakness of a learner, she must cushion her comments with a compliment about the aspects of the task that the student has succeeded performing. The teacher should be aware that both positive and negative comments influence motivation. She should let the weak learners know that she does not look down upon him and she definitely believes that he will one day achieve success. In a class, whenever motivation is existed, learning is facilitated and successful; but without it, difficulties will take place. Tactful motivation can convert the weak learners into strong learners. In brief, motivation is an essential tool in teaching-learning process, especially in English language teaching and learning.

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