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Language learning motivation: A look at the additional program

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Abstract

This article deals with the problem of foreign language learning at the university from a motivational angle. It is the motive that is essential for the conscious acquisition of foreign language competence. The motivation growth towards the target language learning is discussed on the example of the additional program "Translator for professional communication". Data is collected from empirical research, method of involved observation, interviews. The research confirms that there are several types of effective motivation in language learning process, such as professional aspiration, "example influence force", "engagement activity" and the immersion learning through the verbal environment. The above listed motives are fundamental to the success of the program "Translator for professional communication".

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1. Introduction

It has repeatedly been emphasized that foreign language learning faces severe challenges. One of them is motivation. We cannot state that little attention has been paid to exploring the foreign language learning at university from a motivation point of view; on the contrary this problem attracts many scholars' attention (Coleman, 2005; Cameron and Noels, 2004; Cheng, Y. 2002; Noels, Clément and Pelletier, 1999). Motivation to learn a foreign language is complex and may depend on different factors. It should be mentioned that in linguistics, sociolinguistics

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and second-language acquisition motivation models have been worked out by Dörnyei (1997), McIntyre P.D. & Noels K.A. (1996); Clément R., Dörnyei Z. & Noels, K. A. (1994), Usioda (1994), Gardner, R. C. (1991).

Besides the problem was scrutinized from different angles, e.g. self-determination, self-esteem theories or the concept of intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2008; Deci and Moller, 2005; K.A.Noels, L.G.Pelletier, R.Clement, Vallerand, 2002; J. D. Brown, K. A. Dutton, and K. E. Cook, 2001).

E. Ö. Öztürk (2012) in his article (Contemporary motivation theories in educational psychology and language learning: overview) presented a complete picture of the existing theories of motivation. He paid special attention to the consideration of a number of theories related to second language learning.

University education in Russia is becoming more mobile, it strives to meet the needs of social and economic development. Along with this, there are some shortfalls that hinder the process of integration into the world educational environment. And above all, they concern the study of foreign languages; lack of their knowledge makes it impossible to talk about the education in Russia from the viewpoint of international standards. It should be noted that we are witnessing a discrepancy between increasing requirements set by secondary school to foreign language learning and the reduction of the amount of hours for foreign language training at the university.

The development and implementation of the state educational standards at the university do not contribute to the formation of student's foreign-language skills. Learning goals and objectives are to achieve fluency in English language subject. But it seems to be unreal for teachers and students to do that during 2 years. Here we mean students who do not have sufficient language proficiency at the time of admission to the university. This is the central challenge as it is necessary to bring the students up to the desired level of knowledge over a short period of time. While making tremendous efforts, students lose interest in learning English. The practice shows that loss of interest leads to the lack of main incentive, motive (a motivation) for educational activities since it is the motive that is essential for the conscious acquisition of foreign language communicative competence.

2. Methods

The article involves such methods as generalization and evaluation of the original information from the primary sources. Analysis of the psychological and pedagogical literature includes systematization, classification and comparison. Data is collected from empirical research, method of involved observation mainly through focused observation supported by formal interviews and informal conversations is used. Method of involved observation is a tool for research that provides accurate representation over an extended period of time.

2.1. Discussion

It is well-known that motivation in language-learning plays a vital role. According to R.C. Gardner (2001) motivation, along with the language aptitude is a main element which determines success in learning another language in the classroom setting (Cited by E. Ö.Öztürk, 2012). Crookes and Schmidt (1991) describe motivation as the learner's orientation in relation to the goal of learning a second language (Cited by E. Ö.Öztürk, 2012). R.J. Sternberg (2006) considers that "motivation is not something inherent in a person: "One decides to be motivated by one thing or another." (R.J. Sternberg, 2006).

Another viewpoint is connected with achievement motivation. "Achievement motivation can, therefore, be defined as the striving to increase or to keep as high as possible, one's own capabilities in all activities in which a standard of excellence is thought to apply and where the execution of such activities can, therefore either succeed or fail" (H.Heckhausen, 1967).

We are impressed by the opinion of Makiko Ebata on the problem of motivation (M. Ebata, 2008). He believes that motivation is vital in language learning. M. Ebata emphasizes three factors: self-confidence, experiencing success and satisfaction, and good teacher-learner relationships as well as relationships between learners (M. Ebata, 2008). Summarizing the scholars' points of view concerning the motivation, we have come to the conclusion that motivation for the second language learning is characterized by several functions: to determine and experience success; to encourage one's interest or make anyone interested, to increase one's own capabilities, to make language learners positive about their own learning or make them enjoy the learning. As our experience shows motivation is

connected with student's intellectual abilities, creative and critical thinking through the language, with willingness to communicate in the language and, at last, achievement of academic success.

Moreover, motivation is the process of encouraging the person to certain activities with the help of external and intrapersonal factors, the latter may be subject to change depending on the social and economic situation. So, psychologist A. Leontiev allocates external and "uzkolichnye" motives (A. Leontiev, 1975). Our perennial experience shows that "uzkolichnye" or internal (intrinsic) motives are associated with cognitive activity, with future professional aspirations. Moreover, priority is given to those motivational factors that are inherent in each single individual: intellect, emotions, interests, personal experience. With regard to external reasons, we would like to give the example of a foreign language as an academic subject (English), in itself it has a motivating force due to the current external factors: the language of international communication, of business, the tool for confidence, self-determination, the possibility of acquiring higher status, the condition (stipulation) for competitiveness etc.

R. Gagné (1977), the American educational psychologist, described in detail the internal and external learning conditions for five kinds of learning outcomes and in his "five categories of learning" - intellectual skills that create individual competence are ranked one of the first places. Vygotsky also stressed intellectual function of language learning process. According to Vygotsky (Cited by J. V. Wertsch; M. G. Jones & L. Brader-Araje) language serves as a psychological tool that causes a fundamental change in mental functions. As for M. K. Kabilan (2000), he believes that learners can only become proficient language users if they, besides using the language and knowing the meaning, could display creative and critical thinking through the language (M. K. Kabilan, 2000).

Thus, we can note the special role of foreign language for the development of our students' intellectual potential and for the formation of their intellectual abilities. It should be mentioned that the process of cognition must be paired with high cognitive ability and deep interest. In this case, special attention should be given to the formation of intellectual capacity and emotional intelligence. Appeal to foreign scientific literature suggests that interest is directly linked with the mentality, with learning style, with intellectual and emotional manifestations and, on the whole, with success.

According to S. Hidi, K. A. Renninger (2006), "findings from studies of interest suggest that it impacts attention, goal setting, and learning strategies in ways that make it a particularly relevant variable for those focused on improving educational practice". V.V. Busato, F.J. Prins, J.J. Elshout, C. Hamaker (2000) came to conclusion that "consistent with the literature, intellectual ability and achievement motivation were associated positively with academic success". We fully agree with definition of a major goal of education given by A. Bandura (1993) who wrote that the latter "should be to equip students with the intellectual tools, self-beliefs, and self-regulatory capabilities to educate themselves throughout their lifetime. That's why we launched additional program to satisfy students' interests: "Translator for professional communication". Besides we consider that there is an interdependence between a major goal of education, achievement motivation, interest towards new knowledge for own sake and intellectual tools, intellectual abilities, creative and critical thinking through the language, learning strategies and in the long run with academic success.

This program "Translator for professional communication" is aimed at creating professional foreign language competence of students, it is based on the compatibility of this program content with basic education provided at the university. It is very time-consuming as for the amount of training hours. Requirements applicable to students are typical for the university departments of foreign languages. Since learning at the program is not mandatory for students, the training set is performed according to listener's desire and preference. It should be mentioned that it is fee-paid education. Therefore, in order to start classes which, as a rule, are in the evening after basic training, students must have a high degree of motivation. In connection with the foregoing, we suppose it appropriate to consider in more detail the problem of motivation for foreign language learning concerning the above mentioned program

3. Results

According to the author's research in the field of motivating of the first and second year university students towards learning English the following data were obtained (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparative table of the identified motives of the undergraduates and students of "Translator for professional communication" program

Students' motives to get bachelor degree (before studying at the Program "Translator for professional communication")	The respondents data (%)	Students' motives at the program "Translator for professional communication "	The respondents data (%)
be fluent in English	12%	be fluent in English, improve communication skills	65%
pass exam with good or excellent marks	67%	get diploma of the program "Translator in for professional communication" graduate	100%
pass exam	33%	finish the program without getting diploma	0,5%
pass test for career purpose	29%	pass test for career purpose	67%
improve the knowledge of English	57%	improve the knowledge of English	100%
get the knowledge of English for professional purposes	23%	improve the knowledge of English for professional purposes	92%
learn to translate literature in professional field	18%	improve written translation skills in professional field	82 %
enlarge professional terminology and lexis	39%	enlarge professional terminology and lexis	
improve knowledge of English grammar	84%	improve knowledge of English grammar	89 %

Analyses of the data, presented in the table, show that when studying for bachelor's degree, in learning English students are motivated first of all by the desire to get high marks in the subject in general and by the desire to improve basic knowledge of English. This is also proved by a high percentage of respondents who want to get a deeper knowledge of English language grammar as the most vulnerable part for the students. Along with this, there are students who are eager "to improve knowledge of English" (57%), "be fluent in English (12%)", "pass test for career purpose" (29%), "get the knowledge of English professional purposes" (23%), "enlarge professional terminology and lexis (39%)". Students are aware that the proposed 18-months university course of the English language "cannot fully meet their needs" (89%). In this regard, the only means of promoting the development of foreign language competence is an additional program of professional qualification -"Translator for professional communication".

According to the author's research, 57% of students just starting to receive additional training on the program "Translator for professional communication" experience a lack of grammar knowledge, 89 % - the absence of a professional terminology and lexis, 65% - lack of communication skills, 82 % - the absence of written translation skills. Most respondents believe that they need the knowledge of foreign language for professional purposes (92%).

Thus, we can say with confidence that there is a high demand for foreign language learning at the university. In this case the main incentive is professional aspiration which includes the following components: a good job in the labour market (69%), growth of international relations (18%), and self-estimation as a consequence (82%). The study showed that the best way to satisfy professional aspiration is teaching foreign language by means of additional professional program "Translator for professional communication". This program includes some subjects that contribute to the formation of professional foreign language conceptual apparatus. Besides this program helps develop skills to understand the problems of the future specialty on the basis of authentic literature, hold discussions and make presentations of projects on professional topics using foreign language.

As the second motive we have chosen the intellectual component according to A.Bandura (1993) and V.V.Busato, F.J.Prins, J.J.Elshout, C.Hamaker (2000) who mentioned intellectual ability, intellectual tools. According to these intellectual abilities and intellectual tools we divided students into two groups: students with group motives and the students with particular group motives (Table 2).

Table 2. Comparative table of the identified motives of the students of general and particular group

The general group motives	The respondents data (%)	The particular group motives	The respondents data (%)
the opportunity to participate in international grants	15%	write notes on a text	15%
training in an overseas master's program	12%	summarize	37%
take part in the process of academic mobility	24%	carry out business correspondence	82%
		deliver reports in foreign language	12%
		participate in Round-table discussions	37%
		hold negotiations	72%
		communicate easily in a business like atmosphere	100%

So we have assigned the students aspiring to the academic activities to general group, because they have such preferences as “to participate in international grants”, “to be trained in an overseas master’s programs”, “to take part in the process of academic mobility”. Students, who have chosen such skills as “write notes on a text”, “summarize”, “carry on business correspondence”, “deliver reports in foreign language” and so on belong to particular group. The data suggest that among intellectual components most of the students prefer those which can help them to communicate easily in a business like atmosphere, to carry out business correspondence and hold negotiations in their future work.

We have come to understanding the third motive through a domino effect. As our research shows some students have decided to join the program due to other students’ influence. We called their choice “example influence force”. It is based on Domino theory. Domino theory is a texture that helps us understand that despite the complexity of the learning language objectives they can be achieved by seeing the learners as a set of dominos. It is well-known that all of the dominos fall due to the energy passed (transferred) by each movement. Like first domino toppling, the rest can set into motion a great number of learners that join our program with enthusiasm following the example of their classmates (22%).

Another kind of motivation is achieved when the students are engaged in the activity itself. The more they plunge in the process of learning the deeper they are interested in the activities they participate. It is put into practice by means of the immersion learning through verbal environment. A great number of subjects – “Translation theory”, “Lexicology”, “Russian Language Stylistics and Culture of Speech”, “English Language Stylistics”, “Business Letter Writing”, “Speech Practice”, “Professionally oriented translation” and so on clear the way for creating verbal environment. Moreover interactive training methods, case method and other different teaching methods foster the process of learning. If in our case the classroom attendance is not compulsory, and cuts are sometimes allowed, class attendance may be considered as the index of student’s motivation. Research suggests that attendance of the first year learners is 65-70% on the average, of the second year learners – 85- 92%, of the last year learners – about 97%.

Method of involved observation enabled us to conclude that getting verbal encouragement from teachers helps learners overcome self-doubt and instead focus on achieving their objectives. According to the teachers of the program, more than 70% of students take notice of merit recognition. In our practice there were cases when students did not dare quit training after encouraging words. Moreover, they made amazing strides, even if initially they were considered to be weak students.

4. Conclusion

On the basis of the scholars’ viewpoints concerning the motivation, we can draw a conclusion that motivation for the second language learning is characterized by several functions: to determine and experience success; to encourage one’s interest or make anyone interested, to increase one’s own capabilities, to make language learners positive about their own learning or make them enjoy the learning. As our research shows, motivation is connected with student’s intellectual abilities, creative and critical thinking through the language, and with willingness. It is motivation that is related to the interest which, in its turn, is directly linked with the mentality, with learning style, with intellectual and emotional manifestations and with success on the whole. The results of interviews and informal

conversations show that the best way to satisfy students' interests and needs in language learning is through additional professional program "Translator for professional communication". The method of involved observation and our experience as a teacher allowed identifying the main driving forces of the language learning process: professional aspiration, intellectual component, example influence force, verbal environment and verbal encouragement.

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