

An Investigation of Motivational Strategies Used by L2 Language Teachers to Promote English Language Learning: A Case of Iranian High School Students

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Abstract-This study aims to investigate the strategies used by Iranian EFL teachers to promote motivation among their high school students. To achieve this purpose, a questionnaire including cognitive, affective, and social strategies based on Chastain's model (1988) was developed, piloted and validated. Two research questions were proposed: the first one to investigate whether our EFL teachers use motivational strategies in their classrooms and the second one to explore how the use of motivational strategies by teachers can motivate or demotivate Iranian high school students in approaching English as a foreign language. The questionnaire was administered to 50 different students selected randomly in different high schools in Asadabad, Hamedan. Taking the frequency of options and applying the chi-square statistics, the results revealed that teachers did not use motivational strategies to promote English language learning in their students. Then, using descriptive and qualitative analyses, it was discussed how the lack of motivational strategies by teachers in Iranian high schools can bear negative consequences on students' learning achievements. The findings of the present study bear significant implications and applications for second language instructors specifically those who teach in Iranian high schools.

Key words: Motivational Strategies, Cognitive Strategies, Affective Strategies, Social Strategies, Iranian EFL Context

1. Introduction

Language learners learn a language because they want to acquire, use, and communicate with native speakers of that language. To learn a language, a learner should be motivated. Brown (2000) said "motivation is probably the most frequently catch-all term for explaining the success or failure of virtually any complex task" (p. 160). Any experienced teacher knows that without the proper motivation for students to engage in a learning experience, the otherwise best designed experiences will be unsuccessful. Crooks and Schmidt (1991) stated that many instructors consider the motivation level of learners the most important factor in successful instruction. In the field of foreign/second language learning, motivation has long been recognized as one of the key factors that determine L2 achievement and attainment. Motivation serves as the initial engine to generate learning and later functions as an ongoing driving force that helps to sustain the long and usually laborious journey of acquiring a foreign language (Dornyei, 1994). Indeed, it is fair to say that without sufficient motivation even the

brightest learners are unlikely to persist long enough to attain any really useful language proficiency, whereas most learners with strong motivation can achieve a working knowledge of the L2, regardless of their language aptitude or any undesirable learning conditions (Gardner, 1968). Due to its great importance, L2 motivation has been the subject of a considerable amount of research in recent decades, exploring the nature of this complex construct and how it affects the L2 learning process. Until the early 1990s, this line of research had been strongly influenced by the seminal work of two Canadian scholars, Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1959, 1972), who conceptualized motivation from a social psychological perspective. They perceived the L2 as a mediator between different ethnolinguistic communities and therefore the motivation to acquire the language of the other L2 community was seen to play a powerful role in prompting or hindering intercultural communication. It needs to be noted here that Gardner's social psychological approach has never explicitly addressed the classroom implications of motivation theory and did not aim at providing language teachers

with direct help in prompting their teaching practices (Dornyei, 2005). Around the 1990s, there appeared a marked shift in the way many L2 researchers started to conceptualize motivation and this was reflected in the number of papers calling for a more education-oriented approach that was more in congruence with mainstream educational psychological research (e.g. Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dornyei, 1990, 1994; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Tremblay & Gardner, 1995; Williams & Burden, 1997). The new approach successfully expanded the L2 motivation paradigm by (1) prompting cognitive aspects of motivation, especially those related to the learner's self (e.g. need for achievement, self-confidence/efficiency, self-determination); (2) integrating various influential theories that were already prevalent in mainstream psychology (e.g. goal theories and attribution theory); and (3) focusing on situational factors relevant to classroom application (e.g. characteristics of the language course and language teacher). Accordingly, due to this shift of focus to emphasize the classroom applications of motivation, the current study has tried to check quantitatively if motivational strategies are used by Iranian teachers to promote learners' language acquisition and also to investigate qualitatively how the use of motivational strategies in Iranian high schools can motivate or demotivate students in their language learning practices.

2. Literature Review

It is universally accepted that motivation plays a vital role in academic learning in general, and in mastering a second language in particular. "Motivation is like food for brain" (Davis, cited in Shaaban, 2006). Crookes and Schmidt (1991) define it as "interest in and enthusiasm for the materials used in class; persistence with the learning task, as indicated by levels of attention or action for an extended duration; and levels of concentration and engagement." Gardner (1985, cited in Brown, 2000) defines motivation as "a combination of effort plus a desire to achieve the goal of language learning plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language." Teachers believe when the students are motivated to perform competently in academic tasks, they will learn in accordance with their academic abilities. For this reason, working to enhance students' motivation is worthwhile.

With motivation being one of the key factors that determine success in L2 learning, strategies in motivating language learners should be seen as an important aspect of the theoretical analysis of L2 motivation. However, looking at the literature we find that far more research has been conducted on identifying and analyzing various motives and validating motivational theories than on developing techniques to increase motivation. Interestingly, the past decade has witnessed an increasing number of L2 scholars designing and summarizing motivational techniques for classroom application (e.g. Alison & Halliwell, 2002; Brown, 2001; Chambers, 1999; Williams & Burden, 1997). In reflecting on the potential usefulness of motivational strategies, Gardner and Tremblay (1994) argued that although many of the practical recommendations and implications might be of

value, from a scientific point of view intuitive appeal without empirical evidence is not enough to justify strong claims in favor of the use of such strategies. Chastain (1988) stated that "Motivation in the classroom is called achievement motivation". To improve achievement motivation, the teachers should follow some strategies. Although not fixed and necessarily practical for all cases, these strategies are so much helpful to motivate the students. Improving achievement motivation has been the concern of many scholars. Keller (1987), Spaulding (1992), Williams and Burden (1997), Chastain (1988), and Dornyei (1994) are among those scholars who widely discussed motivation, its dichotomies and strategies to promote motivation.

Based on what Chastain (1988) has said, in order to improve motivation, teachers should be sensitive to individual differences in motivational influence and in the ways in which each student demonstrate motivation. Teachers should recognize that there are different variables for motivation strategies called cognitive, affective, and social. Some students are motivated by a *desire to know* (cognitive drive). For these students, learning is a goal in and of itself. No additional incentives are needed. They seek to understand and to acquire new information simply because it is there. Other students are motivated as a means of *enhancing their self-concepts* (ego enhancement). Thus, they strive to do well. Alternatively, ego-deflating failure is avoided just as vigorously. Other students are motivated by *social factors* (social affiliation). They are trying to please their parents, they are responding to peer group standards important to their social standing in the class, or they are working to attain a certain power status in the group. Students with different types of academic motivation respond in predictable ways to classes and teachers with different orientations. (Chastain, 1988)

The present study, based on the above model proposed by Chastain (1988), has been developed to follow two aims. First, applying quantitative analyses, it attempts to determine whether Iranian EFL teachers use motivational strategies to promote motivation among their high school students and, as a result, affect their language learning in a positive way. Second, the current paper, choosing a descriptive qualitative approach, aims to shed light on understanding how the use of motivational strategies by teachers can motivate or demotivate Iranian high school students in approaching English as a foreign language. Consequently, for the purpose of the current study, the following research questions and hypotheses are proposed.

2.1. Research Questions

In the present study, the two following research questions were proposed:

- 1- Do Iranian EFL teachers use strategies to motivate high school students learning English as a foreign language?
- 2- How can the use of motivational strategies by teachers motivate or demotivate Iranian high school students in approaching English as a foreign language?

2.2. Research Hypotheses

To find answers for the above-mentioned questions, the following null hypotheses were considered:

- 1- Iranian EFL teachers do not use strategies to motivate high school students learning English as a foreign language.
- 2- The use of motivational strategies by teachers doesn't motivate or demotivate Iranian high school students in approaching English as a foreign language.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

For the purpose of this study, 50 different high school students (23 males, and 27 females) ranging between 17-20 years old were chosen randomly from among the learners in different high schools in Asadabad, Hamedan. They were given the questionnaire to investigate the strategies used by their English teachers. The participants should choose the option most appropriate to what they believed.

3.2. Instrumentation

To collect data for this study, a fifteen-item Likert-scale questionnaire was utilized. This questionnaire which was developed based on Chastain's model (1988), consisted of three types of motivational strategies (Cognitive, Affective, and Social) called "achievement motivation strategies", necessary for motivating students in the classroom. For the ease of administration, the strategies were translated into Persian. After that, the questionnaire was piloted and validated and its reliability was computed to be 0.81. The questionnaire involved fifteen motivational strategies of which the first five strategies were cognitive, the second five ones consisted of affective strategies and the last set was devoted to social strategies. The aim of presenting the strategies in the above-mentioned order was to make the necessary frequency comparisons easier and more manageable. The questionnaire is displayed in appendix A.

3.3. Procedure

As said earlier, we used a random sampling strategy to choose the participants for the purpose of the present study from different high schools in Asadabad, Hamedan. The students were given essential information about the purpose of the work. Also, a set of instructions were given in Persian and piloted to minimize the risk of misunderstanding or confusion. No time limit was set and the students were given enough time to complete the questionnaire accurately.

3.4. Data analysis

As was previously mentioned, the main concern of this study was to determine whether Iranian EFL teachers use motivational strategies in their classrooms. To achieve this purpose, a motivation questionnaire based on Chastain's model (1988) was administered among 50 high school students. After administering the questionnaire, the obtained data was submitted to a number of initial statistical analyses to make the dataset more manageable. After obtaining the observed frequencies of all the options, chi-square test was applied in order to examine the frequency of the use of three types of motivational strategies. Then, descriptive statistics and qualitative interpretations were presented based on recorded oral interviews with some of the randomly selected participants in order to answer the second research question. Therefore, the present study has chosen a mixed method in its analysis of the data: there will be both quantitative analysis and qualitative interpretations.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Answering the first research question:

In order to use the one-way chi-square statistics, scores were assigned to the alternatives for all the fifteen items of the questionnaire and then they were treated as interval scores using SPSS program. To make the use of chi-square operation easier and more understandable, responses of much and very much were combined into a category labeled high strategy use, responses of never and very little on the 5-point likert-scale were termed low strategy use and responses for option number 3, that is, little were named medium strategy use.

Applying the statistical method of one-way ANOVA to the obtained frequencies, the following results were achieved. Based on table 2 below, the obtained value for the chi-square is 4.36. Because this value with 2 degrees of freedom is lower than the critical value at $P < 0.05$, we cannot reject the first null-hypothesis. Therefore, it can be claimed that language teachers do not use motivational strategies in their classrooms.

Table 2. Chi-square test: Frequency

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
1	2	6.7	- 4.7
2	14	6.7	- 2.7
3	34	6.7	7.3
Total	50	6.7	

Table 3. Test Statistics

	Motivational Strategy
Chi-Square	.360

Df	2
Asymp. Sig	.080

* $P < .05$

4.2. Answering the second research question:

Chi-square statistics revealed that Iranian EFL teachers do not use strategies to motivate high school students learning English as a foreign language. However, question number 2 aims to explore how this lack of strategy use can lead to demotivated language learners and hence lower rate of language learning. Therefore, the present study has tried to give logical interpretations based on students' preferences in answering the questionnaire items and based upon what they have expressed in the oral interviews conducted by the researcher.

Concerning the first five items which examine the cognitive dimension of the motivation strategies nearly all the students have demonstrated that the teacher rarely and occasionally used those cognitive strategies. For item number 1, almost all the students said that the teacher rarely starts from the known materials to the unknown materials. But, according to Ausubel's (1963) meaningful learning theory it is very difficult for the learner to comprehend and master something which is not related to his or her previously built cognitive structure and nearly all the learning theories reject the learning process from the unknown to the known. For item 2, it can be said that a summary of the previously learned or taught materials at the end of each class session can be a fruitful strategy which is not commonly used by Iranian language teachers in state high schools. As far as item 3 is concerned, longitudinal formative assessment is never or rarely used by the teacher. However, formative assessment is in fact the most motivating factor in a dynamic classroom situation, that is, the new theories of assessment hold that learning and assessment should be integrated. Because such kind of assessment according to Fulcher and Davidson (2007) has proved to be both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to learn a language. The teacher doesn't give the instructional objectives in the classroom according to the obtained results for item number 4. In this case, the students are confused and fill less motivated to classify the new learnt materials. Mager (1984) defined instructional objectives as unambiguously defined observable behavior within the described conditions which should live up to the criterion of expected performance. Bobbitt (1924, cited in Lawson, 1974) emphasizes that instructional goals should be unambiguously and operationally stated in order to reflect real time experiences of students. Again in item number 5, the lack of dynamic formative assessment was indicated by students which has got momentum as one of the theoretical issues in second language learning. It seems that high school teachers still make use of traditional summative ways of testing to check the achievement of their students. According to Garb (2008, cited in Xiaoxiao & Yan, 2010) traditional summative

assessment attempts to summarize students' learning at some point in time, say the end of a course, but cannot provide the immediate, contextualized feedback useful for helping teacher and students during the learning process. In DA the teacher acts as an improvement promoter and provides immediate and situated feedback during the whole procedure; moreover, the focus of DA is students' future development, not the outcome of the past development. (Cited in Birjandi & Najafi, 2012, p. 750)

The second set of strategies in the questionnaire is assigned to affective motivational strategies. In item number 6, the statistics showed that the students' ideas about the class are not paid attention to, that is the class is teacher-fronted providing a threatening less-motivating environment for language learning. Although modern theoretical advancements in SLA research all emphasize on the learning process and the learner variables, unfortunately English language teachers still refer to conventional teacher-centered methodologies. This is to a great extent due to the comfortability in administering the traditional methods which decrease the pressure on the teachers in managing their classrooms. However, based on humanistic education, as Lei (2007) remarks, students' needs and ideas have to be taken into account by teachers in order to make them responsible for their language learning. This also enhances learner autonomy which is emphasized in learner-centered classrooms. In the same token, in response to item 7, students indicated that classroom activities are not enjoyable for them. As it is clear, there is a direct robust relationship between pleasure of learning and motivation for further learning. Taking a look at early language teaching methodologies, in 1970s, Lazanov (1978) the originator of Suggestopedia emphasized that providing students with an enjoyable relaxing environment can diminish psychological barriers and lead to efficient language learning. Students severely demonstrated the lack of realia and audiovisual facilities in the classroom context. From the era of direct method till the communicative period which is currently the prevalent approach used in most EFL language learning classrooms, the use of realia in language classrooms has proved to be facilitative, attention-catching and an efficient learning instrument utilized by many language practitioners. Item 9 suggested that students were not satisfied with the variety of learning tasks. As a rule of thumb, the more various are the activities, the more motivated are the students and therefore the higher the learning. The last item in this category was reported by students to disregard the positive role of verbal reinforcement which is very promising and crucial for beginners and intermediate level students according to behavioristic accounts of language learning proposed by Skinner (1953).

Finally with regard to the social set of motivational strategies the following interpretations can be accounted for. For example, in item 11, students complained about the less emphasis given to cooperative learning. Teachers in their classrooms were reported to have students do the activities individually which is in opposition to all the unique and effective aspects of collaborating language learning. According to sociocultural theory of Vygotsky (1978) language is learned in cooperation with people in

a specific community. In fact, the role of cooperation in language learning has become that much important that some scholars propose it as a separate teaching methodology. In this learning method, small groups of students work together to achieve a common goal; it is designed to eliminate winner or loser competition which is a prevalent characteristic in traditional learning environments. In fact, cooperative learning is a successful teaching strategy in which small teams, each with students of different levels of ability, use a variety of learning activities to improve their understanding of a subject (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Jacob (1988) stated that cooperative interaction provides students with the skills needed for working with others outside classroom setting.

Concerning item 12, the students indicated that they were suffering from the teachers' disregard for the students' whole social person. Most of the teachers were reported to react negatively to students' desires to take part in classroom decision-making procedures and wanted to show that they are the mere authority in the classroom. This is in line with humanistic principles characterized by learner-centeredness in which the aim is not merely developing the cognitive and linguistic capabilities of the learners but also paying attention to the learners' emotions, feelings, and social tendencies (Maples, 1979). Furthermore, the teachers did not support healthy competition among individuals and learning groups which is reported for item 13. Based on students' answers for item 14, role-plays and instructional games were not practiced in language classrooms. As it is conformed in different methodologies derived from CLT, using role-plays and games are shown to be highly motivating and extremely effective in students' language development (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). At last, according to item 15, the classrooms were not optimal for creating a friendly social context in which students interact with their peers as well as the teacher.

5. Conclusion

Motivation, beside many individual cognitive and affective factors, is one of the effective elements influencing language proficiency as well as learning outcomes in second language development. Knowing the strategies which promote motivation can help teachers have a better understanding about the role of motivation in learning a foreign language. This study attempted to investigate the extent to which Iranian high school teachers make use of motivational strategies to promote second language learning among their students. Moreover, knowing to what extent, the teachers use motivational strategies and how these strategies could lead to higher or lower English language achievement was a second concern of the present research. Analyzing the obtained results through quantitative statistical procedures revealed that motivational strategies are not used sufficiently by teachers in Iranian high schools. Although motivation is considered as a vital component of language learning, its significance is not completely understood by Iranian high school teachers.

Unfortunately, Iranian teachers have developed the misconception that students attending language classrooms are precedingly motivated enough to take part in the learning process while the results of the current study oppose this taken for granted principle for teachers. Since Iran is an EFL country in which exposure to authentic language is very limited, the aim of language learning is not bringing up students who can use the language communicatively. Hence, it is seen that teachers do not allocate much time and effort for motivating students; instead they suffice to enhancing the mastery of limited language skills and components in students namely reading, grammar and vocabulary. It is, unfortunately, seen in Iranian high school contexts that students feel bored and passive to participate in learning practices. Most of their efforts have been limited to memorizing certain structures or lists of vocabularies to pass paper and pencil exams. This, in turn, affects teachers themselves negatively in that they feel frustrated and unmotivated to work efficiently in their classrooms.

Furthermore, teachers' unwillingness to utilize motivational strategies has some direct and indirect consequences for effective language learning among the high school students which was investigated in the second research question of the present study. These consequences can be classified under three subcategories of cognitive, affective and social motivational strategies. In Iranian high schools the teachers do not pay attention to the cognitive growth of the instructional materials, they do not set specific behavioral objectives for their classes, they don't encourage good language practices of their students and formative assessment during the course span is disregarded. With regard to the affective strategies, students' views about the what and how of teaching are not considered, classroom activities are not enjoyable, learning tasks have not variety and novelty, and audio-visual aids are completely absent from language pedagogy in Iranian high school context. Furthermore, the social aspects of language learning which are emphasized by the recent social interactionist theories of language learning such as group learning, cooperative learning, using role plays and instructional games, constructive competitions as well as whole-person treatments are altogether degraded or overlook in Iranian high schools as a result of disregard for motivational strategies.

This frequency difference in the use of different motivational strategies would be due to differences factors including the teachers' skills, the learners' conditions and the educational circumstances and facilities which, in itself, open up a new area of research. Such results reinforce the idea of language learner as a "whole person". According to Brown (2000), when a person's affective dimension is paid enough attention to it can lead to a higher motivation for learning. Also, such an interpretation is confirmed by Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis which claim that lower anxiety and lower affective barriers pave the way for higher motivation and hence for better learning particularly with regard to a foreign language. Teachers should be equipped with appropriate strategies and also include motivational factors in their teaching methodology in order to motivate their students. Among the limitations of

the present study we can refer to ignorance of the "sex" factor and also the fact that this study was done only in the intermediate level. Therefore, as suggestions for further research, it is recommended that other researchers consider the sex factor to investigate the motivational strategies more appropriately for each sex and also administer the study in other levels of language proficiency.

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Vitae

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