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The importance of student motivation

Majidova Gulrukh Kamaridinovna

Jizzakh State Pedagogical Institute

gulruxmajidova199@gmail.com

Abstract: The article discusses the role of motivation in teaching and learning and its importance to achieve their desired goals. Before teaching or learning first arising the students' interest is curtail for teachers to make the students go further in spite of the possible challenges and hard work in the process. The article also discusses two types of motivation and their role to make the students feel responsibility.

Key words. Motivation, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, decision-making, sustain, enroll, participation.

A variety of factors can create a desire to learn. Perhaps the learners love the subject they have chosen, or maybe they are simply interested in seeing what it is like. Perhaps, as with young children, they just happen to be curious about everything, including learning.

Some students have a practical reason for their study: they want to learn an instrument so they can play in an orchestra, learn English so they can watch American TV or understand manuals written in English, study T'ai Chi so that they can become fitter and more relaxed, or go to cookery classes so that they can prepare better meals.

This desire to achieve some goal is the bedrock of motivation and, if it is strong enough, it provokes a decision to act. For an adult this may involve enrolling in an English class. For a teenager it may be choosing one subject over another for special study. This kind of motivation - which comes from outside the classroom and may be influenced by a number of external factors such as the attitude of society, family and peers to the subject in question - is often referred to as extrinsic motivation, the motivation that students bring into the classroom from outside. Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is the kind of motivation that is generated by what happens inside the classroom; this could be the teacher's methods, the activities that students take part in, or their perception of their success or failure.

According to Melissa Hurst (2021), **motivation** is described as *a state that energizes, directs and sustains behavior*. Motivation involves goals and requires activity. Goals provide the impetus for and the direction of action, while action entails effort: persistence in order to sustain an activity for a long period of time.

There are several definitions of motivation. Motivation has been related to the amount of intellectual energy typically used in learning activities, and this led to a belief that motivation could be seen as a stable characteristic of the individual, on a par with personality. Motivation is what causes a person wants to know, act, understand, believe or gain particular skills. Motivation can also be defined as the drive to satisfy the individual's need e.g. a learner who wants to learn how to read and count so that he/she won't be cheated when s/he goes out shopping. Other scholars have also defined motivation in several ways. The existence of this variety of definitions shows the difficulty in describing motivation and its role in the process of learning (Motivation in Learning. 2020).

While it may be relatively easy to be extrinsically motivated (that is to have a desire to do something), sustaining that motivation can be more problematic. As students we can become bored, or we may find the subject more difficult than we thought it was going to be. One of the teacher's main aims should be to help students to sustain their motivation. We can do this in a number of ways. The activities we ask students to take part in will, if they involve the students or excite their curiosity - and provoke their participation - help them to stay interested in the subject. We need, as well, to select an appropriate level of challenge so that things are neither too difficult nor too easy. We need to display appropriate teacher qualities so that students can have confidence in our abilities and professionalism. We need to consider the issue of affect - that is, how the students feel about the learning process. Students need to feel that the teacher really cares about them; if students feel supported and valued, they are far more likely to be motivated to learn.

One way of helping students to sustain their motivation is to give them, as far as is feasible, some agency (a term borrowed from the social sciences) which means that students should take some responsibility for themselves, and that they should (like the agent of a passive sentence) be the 'doers' in class. This means that they will have some decision-making power, perhaps, over the choice of which activity to do next, or how they want to be corrected, for example. If students feel they have some influence over what is happening, rather than always being told exactly what to do, they are often more motivated to take part in the lesson. But however much we do to foster and sustain student motivation, we can

only, in the end, encourage by word and deed, offering our support and guidance. Real motivation comes from within each individual, from the students themselves.

Responsibility for learning

If giving students agency is seen as a key component in sustaining motivation, then such agency is not just about giving students more decision-making power. It is also about encouraging them to take more responsibility for their own learning. We need to tell them that unless they are prepared to take some of the strain, their learning is likely to be less successful than if they themselves become active learners (rather than passive recipients of teaching).

This message may be difficult for some students from certain educational backgrounds and cultures who have been led to believe that it is the teacher's job to provide learning. In such cases, teachers will not be successful if they merely try to impose a pattern of learner autonomy. Instead of imposing autonomy, therefore, we need to gradually extend the students' role in learning. At first we will expect them, for example, to make their own dialogues after they have listened to a model on an audio track. Such standard practice (getting students to try out new language) is one small way of encouraging student involvement in learning. We might go on to try to get individual students to investigate a grammar issue or solve a reading puzzle on their own, rather than having things explained to them by the teacher. We might get them to look for the meanings of words and how they are used in their dictionaries (see below) rather than telling them what the words mean. As students get used to working things out for themselves and/or doing work at home, so they can gradually start to become more autonomous.

Getting students to do various kinds of homework, such as written exercises, compositions or further study is one of the best ways to encourage student autonomy. What is important is that teachers should choose the right kind of task for the students. It should be within their grasp, and not take up too much of their time - or occupy too little of it by being trivial. Even more importantly than this, teachers should follow up homework when they say they are going to, imposing the same deadlines upon themselves as they do on their students. Other ways of promoting student self-reliance include having them read for pleasure in their own time and find their own resources for language practice (in books or on the Internet, for example).

Apart from homework, teachers will help students to become autonomous if they encourage them to use monolingual learners' dictionaries (dictionaries written only in English, but which are designed especially for learners) and then help them to understand how and when to use them. At earlier stages of learning, good bilingual dictionaries serve the same function and allow the students a large measure of independence from the teacher.

We will help students to be responsible for their learning if we show them where (either in books, in self-access centres or online) they can continue studying outside the classroom. For example, we can point them in the direction of suitable websites (if they have computer access), or recommend good CD or DVD resources. If students are lucky, their institution will have a self-access centre with a range of resources comprising books, newspapers, magazines, worksheets, listening material, videos and DVDs, and computers with access to the Internet. Students can decide if and when to visit such centres and what they want to do there. Self-access centres should help students to make appropriate choices by having good cataloguing systems and ensuring that people are on hand to help students find their way around. However, the object of a self-access centre is that students should themselves take responsibility for what they do and make their own decisions about what is most appropriate for them.

Of course, many schools do not have self-access centres, and even where they do, many students do not make full use of them. This is because not all students, as we have said, are equally capable of being (or wanting to be) autonomous learners. Despite this fact, we should do our best to encourage them to have agency without forcing it upon them.

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