

The influence of motivation on students' participation in English speaking activities.

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Abstract: *The writing presents the results of the study on students' motivation in learning English speaking skills at Tay Bac University. It can be seen through the study that the students' motivation towards learning English affects their learning process in general and their participation in speaking activities in particular. The writing is of great value in terms of both theoretical and practical aspects. From the theoretical angle, it provides us with the knowledge about the motivation affecting students' participation in speaking activities, and also the study can be an implication for teachers who want to improve learners' participation in their learning English speaking skills.*

Keywords: *Motivation, activities, participation, English speaking skills*

1. Introduction

It has been found that during our English teaching, the first year students are still quite passive in speaking English. They do not actively participate in speaking activities. Students' participation in classroom activities has been the centre of various TEFL research. In general, it can be affected by a variety of factors coming not only from teachers' side like teacher's teaching methods, teachers' characteristics, teachers' knowledge; but also from students' side such as motivation, attitudes, personality, learning styles, age, gender differences; and others including classroom environment, types and contents of activities, etc. In which students' motivation is considered one of the most important factors affecting students' participation in English speaking activities.

2. Content

2.1. Motivation

There has been a great deal of research on the role of motivation in second language learning. The overall findings show that positive motivation is related to success in the second language learning (Gardner, 1985).

It is a matter of common knowledge that motivation "is a very important, if not the most important factor in language learning", without which even 'gifted' individuals cannot accomplish long-term goals, whatever the curricula and whoever the teacher. Therefore, the concept of language learning motivation has become pivotal to a number of theories of L2 acquisition, and motivation has

been widely accepted by teachers and researchers as one of the key factors influencing the rate and success of second/foreign language learning, often compensating for deficiencies in language aptitude and learning.

Motivation is defined as emotions that constitute the source of the drive to expend effort required to learn a second or foreign language. It is also defined in terms of two factors: learners' communicative needs and their attitude towards the second language community. If learners need to speak the second language in a wide range of social situations or to fulfill professional ambitions, they will perceive the communicative value of the second language and will therefore be motivated to acquire proficiency in it. Likewise, if learners have favourable attitudes towards the speakers of the language, they will desire more contact with them. Gardner and Lambert (1972) identified motivation as integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Harmer divides motivation into extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is caused such outside factors as passing an exam, financial reward, good career, or the possibility for future travel, etc. In contrast, intrinsic motivation is caused by inside factors like the enjoyment of the learning process itself or by a desire to learn the target language.

With a view to helping teachers realize whether a learner is motivated or not, Ur (1996) points out some typical characteristics of a motivated learner which include:

- Positive task orientation: The learner is willing

to tackle tasks and challenges, and has confidence in his or her success.

- Ego-involvement: The learner finds it important to succeed in learning in order to maintain and promote his or her own positive self-image.

- Need for achievement: The learner has a need to achieve, to overcome difficulties and succeed in what he or she sets out to do.

- High aspiration: The learner is ambitious, goes for demanding challenges, high proficiency, top grades.

- Goal orientation: The learner is aware of the goals of learning, or of the specific learning activities, and tries his best to achieve them.

- Perseverance: The learner consistently invests a high level of effort in learning, and is not discouraged by setbacks or apparent lack of progress.

- Tolerance: The learner is not disturbed or frustrated by situations involving a temporary lack of understanding or confusion

Downs (2000) also points out some conditions that help increase students' motivation. He says that motivation increases when students feel acknowledged and understood, when students are confident they can succeed, when language has a communicative purpose, and when students take responsibility for their own learning.

To some up, integrative (or intrinsic) motivation has been shown to be strongly related to L2 achievement. It combines with instrumental (or extrinsic) motivation to serve as a powerful predictor of success in formal contexts. Learners with integrative motivation are more active in class and are less likely to drop out. However, integrativeness is not always the main motivational factor in L2 learning, some learners may be more influenced by other factors like self-confidence, friendship or attitudes. Therefore, we, teachers, must be responsible for sustaining their motivation otherwise it may be weak and die. When students are motivated either extrinsically or intrinsically as long as their motivation is enough sufficient intensity they will have in themselves a force that pushes them to participate more actively in classroom activities in general and oral activities in particular.

2.2. Learner motivation

It cannot be denied that motivation is closely related to success in second/foreign language learning. However, the success is a long term goal.

So in order to gain success in learning a foreign language, or in this case in order to improve speaking skills, learners must take part in speaking activities conducted in the classroom. Therefore, it can be said that motivation is also closely related to learner's participation in speaking activities.

As mentioned in the previous part, motivation can be divided into extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. The former kind of motivation refers to outside factors, language learning for immediate and practical goals, the later one refers to inside factors like the enjoyment of the learning process or the desire to learn the target language. Although both kinds of motivation are important, it is believed that intrinsic motivation is more important to success in language learning than extrinsic motivation. It is also said that students will learn better if they have in themselves some kind of motivation whether it is intrinsic or extrinsic.

Based on the data obtained through questionnaires, their purposes of learning can be summarized as follow: the first and the most important purpose was for their prospects for future job. 100% of the students think that speaking English well is important because it is useful for their career. They believed that if they were good at communicative skills they would get a job more easily. And their second important purpose was to get good mark. As can be seen from the study, 69.9 % of the students like to participate in speaking activities because it helps them to get good marks. Their answers to the open questions provide us with the same information: many students think that if the teacher gives them high marks they will enjoy speaking more, and when they want to get good mark from the teacher they will speak more. These findings show that most students have extrinsic motivation which is an outside push to force them to study English.

In addition, most students are aware of the importance of speaking skills, which is proved by the questionnaire result. It has been found that 87.3 % of the students disagree that speaking skill is less important than the other skills such as reading, writing and listening. Moreover, nearly all of them (97.3%) think that they would be very proud of themselves if they could speak English well, and 90.7 % of the students also think that they can't learn English well without speaking it, which means that to them speaking English is very important, even

more important than the other skills. Looking back to the theory about motivation, if the learner finds it important to succeed in learning in order to maintain and promote his or her own positive self-image, the learner will be motivated.

We may wonder whether students could be good at learning English with only extrinsic motivation. The answer will probably “yes” because the final goal in any of our training programs at higher education level is work - oriented.

However, looking at the information from the table we can see that although most students are highly extrinsically motivated, many of them are not really active in learning, 65.8 % of the students do not practise speaking English as much as they can. It means that they do not actively participate in speaking activities, they do not take opportunities to speak English, which is also proved by 82.6% of the students who do not often take every opportunity to speak English in the classroom. And 80.8% of them are still afraid of making mistakes while speaking English. This is also one of the reasons why they do not take part in speaking activities actively.

It is clear that although most students are extrinsically motivated, they do not really succeed in learning. Is it true that it would be much more difficult for them to succeed in something or achieve something without their interest in it? The answer will probably “yes” because more than half of the students (56.2%) disagree that they enjoy speaking English more than anything else in the classroom. This provide the evidence that many of them do not have real interest in learning English, they do not really like learning speaking English in the classroom, which may be the cause of their low level of participation in speaking activities in the classroom. In other words, if they learned English because they liked it but not because they were forced to do so or because they were pushed from outside, it would be much more likely that they would succeed.

It can be concluded with certainty that the lack of intrinsic motivation, the enjoyment of learning or a desire to learn had a considerable effect on their participation in classroom speaking activities. Therefore, it is suggested that the teacher should develop in them intrinsic motivation with a view to increasing their participation.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion. most students have extrinsic motivation, their purposes of learning are for their future jobs and for good marks during their learning process. Most of them do not really have interest in learning English, especially in speaking English. If the teacher gives them good marks they will enjoy speak more, and whenever they want to get good marks they will speak more so that the teacher may give them high marks. Clearly, it is difficult for us to succeed in doing something without our interest in it, and speaking English is not an exception. It can be concluded from the study that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are essential in language learning, and intrinsic motivation has been proved to be more important in acquiring communicative skills, which is illustrated by their low level of participation in speaking activities when they lack intrinsic motivation.

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