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Original Article

A Literature Review on Motivational Strategies to Elevate Engagement, Effective Communication, and Productivity in English as a Second Language (ESL) Classrooms

Karunananda D.G.A.I.

Department of Languages, KIU, Sri Lanka

Abstract

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*Corresponding author: anjaleechapa@kiu.ac.lk

Introduction: English as a Second Language (ESL) proficiency has become vital for global communication and essential in education. On the other hand, motivation, defined as the internal drive to engage with enthusiasm, plays a pivotal role in language acquisition. However, motivating ESL learners is a critical challenge for educators, as English is recognized as an international language with broad applications. Therefore, understanding the importance of motivation is crucial in ESL contexts.

Objective: The objective of this review is to examine motivational strategies in ESL classrooms and underscore their significance in enhancing students' enthusiasm, participation, language development, and overall success, with a specific focus on providing ESL educators with valuable tools and insights for effective implementation.

Methodology: This review follows a methodical approach including literature search and data extraction. Twenty articles published between 1975 and 2022 were reviewed, that focused on motivation strategies in ESL classrooms.

Results: Motivation in ESL classrooms can be categorized as internal or external: instrumental or integrative. Effective motivation strategies include setting clear goals, employing the incentive theory, using awards and rewards, role-plays, integrating technology, and activity-based methods. Additionally, creating a positive classroom climate and offering real-life language experiences also contribute to motivation.

Conclusion: Motivation is crucial for ESL learners' success; therefore, it is recommended that educators adopt innovative teaching approaches and deepen their understanding of motivation to inspire students, contributing to enhanced language proficiency.

Keywords: English language proficiency, ESL classrooms, Language acquisition, Motivation strategies, Student participation

Introduction

The pursuit of proficiency in English as a Second Language (ESL) is no longer confined to the realm of linguistic expertise; it has evolved into an essential skill for global connectivity and cross-cultural communication. ESL classrooms serve as crucibles where learners embark on a transformative journey towards language mastery, but this journey is not without challenges. One of the fundamental challenges educators face is fostering and sustaining learner motivation.

According to Altun and Khdir (2022), ESL is employed in classrooms to enhance students' performance on the global stage. English holds the status of being the international language, making it a dominant language across the world (Alfahad, 2021). It is widely comprehensible, readable, and writable, and serves as a means of communication on every continent. Over time, English has gained significant importance as it is utilized in national and international assessments and various recruitment processes, making it a vital consideration in many countries (Wei, 2019). As noted by Li (2020), the global influence of English in communication and usage underscores its necessity as a second language in the educational journey of students.

Statista's 2021 data demonstrates that English holds a prominent position as a global communication language. It ranks at the top of the list as a secondary language for worldwide communication. The key to improving learners' performance and helping them excel in new language courses lies in motivation. Learners should not underestimate the significance of embracing another language like English, as it can have a profound impact on their ability to attain new goals and derive various benefits (Cave et al., 2018). English has gradually expanded its reach across the globe, becoming one of the most influential languages in the contemporary era. As per Rao (2019), English has continually advanced across continents,

experiencing rapid growth and establishing itself as a Lingua Franca, predominantly spoken in nearly all continents. It has become a universal language for communication through reading, writing, and speaking in many countries, which is why ESL is the preferred choice for language learners in most parts of the world.

Motivation, a universally recognized practice within all types of classrooms, serves as an invaluable aid in encouraging learning and promoting healthy competition among students. It can be described as the inner drive that encourages individuals to actively engage in a specific task with enthusiasm and dedication (Dedo & Hashim, 2019). It is a positive quality that not only enhances work efficiency but also enables learners to derive greater benefits from their activities. Motivation serves as a means by which learners can expand their horizons and progress with a strong sense of enthusiasm and determination. In essence, motivation is a crucial factor for achieving success in any endeavour (Shakir, 2021). It has the potential to accelerate the learning process and improve the performance of learners significantly. When it comes to acquiring a new language such as English, motivation is a fundamental prerequisite for learners, particularly for those who consider English as a secondary language. Motivation plays a vital role in facilitating better language acquisition and performance by steering learners towards a focused approach rather than taking language learning for granted (Wei, 2019). It enhances the learning experience and underscores the value of mastering the language. Motivation empowers students to evaluate the significance of acquiring a new language and keeps their enthusiasm alive.

The international importance of English is undeniable, as highlighted by Wei in 2019. In this context, the tool motivation plays a pivotal role in supporting this endeavour. Moreover, as highlighted by Lai and Chang (2021), motivation plays a pivotal role in shaping policies and principles that aim to enhance student participation and overall learning outcomes as it holds immense significance in acquiring a new

language. Teachers and researchers must delve into the underlying factors that drive motivation in individuals while formulating strategies to foster growth within ESL classrooms.

Accordingly, the objective of this article is to explore and review various motivational strategies used in ESL classrooms. The article aims to highlight the importance of motivation in ESL learning and how it can impact students' enthusiasm, active participation, language development, and overall success. It also discusses different types of motivation, such as internal, external, instrumental, and integrative, and provides insights into effective strategies for enhancing motivation among ESL learners. The goal is to provide ESL educators with valuable tools and insights to inspire students, increase participation, facilitate interaction, and enhance language development in ESL classrooms in the context of the global significance of English language skills.

Methodology

This review article follows a methodical approach to explore the topic of motivation in ESL classrooms. It begins with a search of existing literature, aiming to provide an understanding of various motivation strategies in second language learning. The steps taken to review include literature searches, data extraction, analysis, and organization. Relevant studies were chosen based on specific inclusion criteria, such as being published in peer-reviewed journals, books, or conference proceedings. The literature search involved searching Google Scholar, Research Gate, and Academia using keywords like "ESL classroom motivation," "theories of motivation," and "second language learning motivation." Twenty articles published between 1975 and 2022 were considered to ensure a comprehensive examination of contemporary literature. Selected articles were reviewed, with essential information extracted including primary motivation strategies. This data was then organized to produce a coherent paper.

Discussion

Motivation in ESL Classrooms

Motivation can be categorized into two types: internal and external. According to Yacob and Yunus (2019), internal motivation is driven by factors that enhance language learning as a personal preference, motivated by the satisfaction of achieving internal targets and goals. In contrast, external motivation involves goals like obtaining a job or a scholarship upon mastering the English language by the end of the course (Devarajoo & Yamat, 2021). Motivation can also be further divided into instrumental and integration types (Weda, 2018). Instrumental and integration focuses on using the acquired language skills for specific purposes in the future. For instance, a motivated student might enroll in a course to secure a scholarship, but they may also view English as an instrumental motivation since it can improve their chances of getting a job in the future. In contrast, integrated motivation involves being motivated to use a single language for multiple purposes simultaneously (Htun, 2019). In all situations, it is recognized that motivation plays a crucial role in ESL classrooms.

Motivation Strategies for ESL

Motivation strategies, as described by Cave et al. (2018), are effective practices that can stimulate and boost motivation within the ESL classroom environment. Li (2018) evaluated some of these strategies, including methods to spark interest, encouraging active learning techniques, and promoting language experiences beyond the confines of the ESL classroom. Boosting productivity in ESL classrooms is essential to ensure that English Language Learners (ELL) are motivated and eager to acquire knowledge of the English Language. English is now considered highly valuable on the global stage (Shakir, 2021). However, since the English language is often considered non-compulsory for university students, their interest in acquiring it is limited (Htun, 2019). This lack of interest

and motivation can significantly diminish the effectiveness of English language courses, ultimately resulting in minimal or no learning in the classroom (Alghonaim, 2021). One effective approach to fostering productivity could involve considering the use of awards and rewards as motivational tools, aiming to engage and inspire students to focus on their productivity. Inside classrooms, it is common to observe both general and specific assessments of motor skills and planning, as suggested by Devarajoo and Yamat in 2021. In their 2019 study, Yacob and Yunus examined the incentive theory of learning, which revolves around the idea of aligning learning with anticipated outcomes. According to this theory, learners are highly motivated to remain engaged and apply their skills when they expect to receive rewards and attain positive performance levels. Essentially, it suggests that factors like rewards, awards, incentives, or any form of positive encouragement can significantly enhance a learner's concentration and commitment to completing tasks, whether it is within or even before the specified time frame. Elevated expectations and judiciously applied rewards serve as potent external motivators to inspire students in their English language learning, according to the theory of extrinsic motivation. Occasionally, as suggested by Freeman and Freeman in 1978, our preconceived notions about individuals prompt us to interact with them in a manner that elicits responses aligned with our initial expectations.

Setting clear goals is paramount when embarking on the journey of learning a second language. Without well-defined objectives, effective language acquisition becomes elusive (Dedo, & Hashim, 2019). Learners must align their efforts with specific targets, ensuring that their progress remains on track. Another theory of learning, known as expectancy theory, as discussed by Wei (2019), underscores the importance of step-by-step learning. It emphasizes that learners are aware that greater effort in learning will result in more support and gain (Dedo, & Hashim, 2019). For instance, when a teacher expresses, "I

believe each of you has the capability to tackle these challenges through effort. Now, let's begin, and I'll assist if you encounter difficulties," they not only convey emotional support but also exhibit confidence in their students' abilities (Altun & Khadir, 2022). Consequently, even the most introverted and reticent students are encouraged to confront challenges with determination, spurred on by these expectations. Nevertheless, this support is gained when learners achieve their goals, but it is crucial to recognize the limitations as well (Alghonaim, 2021). Khaydarova (2020) explored strategies for sparking students' interest both inside and outside the classroom. If students are more inclined towards using technology, the teacher can incorporate IT tools into English learning. Conversely, if drama and music appeal to the class, the teacher can emphasize these methods. Role-play activities are also valuable tools in language classrooms, as they improve learners' discourse and overall performance (Altun, 2015). The approach to sparking interest should align with the capabilities and comprehension levels of the class. Role plays, singing songs, and English camps are also effective methods as students' progress to higher grades, engaging in real-life discussions, and creativity are encouraged. Diversifying and making activities interesting encourages students to invest as much time and effort as possible, boosting their motivation and enhancing their learning experiences (Yacob & Yunus, 2019). According to Ng and Ng (2015), activity-based methods are effective in developing students' interest in ESL classrooms. These physical activities help break the ice and enable students to apply their learning tools and practical skills. Varied categories of activities enhance communication, boost confidence, and facilitate learning. Once interest is aroused, the motivation process naturally follows.

Games are motivating because they are both entertaining and challenging, and incorporate meaningful and practical language within real-life contexts. Well-selected games serve as valuable breaks for students while enabling them to practice language skills. They also foster

collaboration among students. Practical and captivating activities such as guessing games, gap-filling exercises, and chain story games are beneficial for English learning. While certain teaching techniques have already been put into practice, there exists a broader array of options and strategies available to educators for igniting students' innate drive to learn. These options encompass contemporary methods such as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), multimedia resources, internet utilization, and educational software. These techniques are pioneering, engaging, pragmatic, and productive, and incorporate vibrant visuals, captivating audio, abundant information, and effective interaction. Similarly, climate plays a crucial role as it sets the stage for fostering motivation and achievement (Richards & Theodore, 1988). When considering Maslow's hierarchy of needs in the context of English language learning, it becomes evident that creating a relaxed and positive learning environment is essential for students. Also, overly difficult tasks can discourage students, while overly simple tasks may lead to boredom and diminished feelings of competence and self-efficacy (Chundiao, 1990, p.460).

Motivation can also extend beyond the classroom through language experience practice. This method supports motivation by providing learners with opportunities to apply their language skills in real-life situations (Cave et al., 2018). To effectively implement these strategies, it is essential to provide suitable tools both within and outside the classroom, as emphasised by Yamat (2021). This approach not only enhances the classroom learning environment but also extends its impact beyond the classroom, contributing to a comprehensive ESL classroom planning process. Motivation directly influences the level of engagement and participation exhibited by students in ESL classrooms and as Rao (2019) acknowledges, is instrumental in fostering global communication and relevance. With 1.35 billion people worldwide speaking English, participation naturally increases because of motivation in ESL classes. There exists a clear

correlation between motivation and student engagement, with increased motivation leading to higher levels of participation, and conversely, decreased motivation resulting in reduced engagement (Alghonaim, 2001). However, it is important to note that motivation is not a one-size-fits-all concept and cannot be readily handed to students. Instead, educators need to utilize a diverse range of tools and approaches to nurture motivation within the classroom. The learner can attain high scores through proper and enthusiastic learning efforts (Cave et al., 2018). This achievement can distinguish the learner within their peer group and lead to superior performance. Competition can be a motivational instrument within the classroom, driving students to perform efficiently (Cave et al., 2018). Announcements of competition results can serve as effective motivation tools (Alghonaim, 2021). Competition plays a crucial role in this, ensuring higher participation and success rates (Devarajoo & Yamat, 2021). On the other hand, collaborative activities are highly effective in creating a secure environment for students, fostering their engagement, and promoting optimal learning. Research conducted by Hamachek (1972) consistently demonstrates that success tends to inspire students to set higher goals, while failure tends to discourage them. For example, teachers can allocate five minutes in each class for the "I am a teacher today" activity. During this time, students switch roles and become teachers, instructing their peers in English. This activity provides a sense of accomplishment as students have the autonomy to decide what they want to teach, whether it is reviewing previous lessons, introducing new vocabulary, or narrating a story. By taking these steps, the foundation is laid for a student community that is both empowered and driven, nurturing a constructive educational atmosphere that encourages ongoing progress and success.

Conclusion

The article emphasizes the critical importance of motivation in ESL classrooms, highlighting its role in facilitating English language learning, boosting confidence, encouraging participation, and enhancing production. The motivation of students is seen as a key driver of success, especially in the context of increased demand for English language proficiency in Sri Lanka due to the need for migration to a developed country

after the economic crisis. The article suggests that teachers play a role similar to “salespeople,” convincing and persuading students of the value of English learning. To attain this goal, educators are urged to enhance their comprehension of educational psychology, with a specific focus on motivation, and to utilize effective teaching techniques. Simultaneously, they are encouraged to innovate and develop fresh approaches aimed at motivating and sustaining students throughout their journey in learning the English language.

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