

Strategies of Stimulating High School Students' English Learning Motivation

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the definition, classification and models of students' learning motivation. However, the most important part is to explore the strategies of stimulating High School students' language (especially English) learning motivation. This part is made on the basis of educational knowledge, experts' former researches and personal teaching experience. Students nowadays have various learning features and habits, therefore, they are easily affected by environment and cultural differences, as well as personal experiences. It is the main idea for teachers to construct students and stimulate their learning motivation according to their personal characteristics. Teachers should explore various strategies for different students. This paper chooses four main differences of students and gives advice on them respectively to make sure that students maintain their enthusiasm of English and teachers have correct methods to cultivate students' English learning motivation. The result of this research will do some good to teaching practice in the future.

1. Introduction

This paper mainly discusses the strategies to motivate students to learn. The purpose is to grasp this factor to guide and help students learn English autonomously in future work.

1.1 The Background of the Study

As an English teacher, the author learnt knowledge about English pedagogy for many years. Her tutors have taught her great deal of theories and methods of how to teach students well. On the other hand, as a teacher who has studied in school since six years old, the author has much similar experience with students nowadays. She knows better about their learning conditions and learning needs. As a result, the author formed her idea to write a paper about how to stimulate High School students' English learning motivation at the very beginning. After this kind of thought has been formed, she asked help from her colleagues and friends in order to catch more useful information about this project. In addition, before graduation the author took part in numbers of part-time jobs which were relevant to High School students' English teaching, therefore she has some deeper awareness of their learning features and psychology. What is more, the author looked up several classical books and some other papers about motivation, so that she has already had some knowledge about it.

1.2 The Significance and Purpose of the Study

Teachers should clearly understand students' own learning conditions and adopt effective measures to improve the teaching skills and quality. Teachers should also update their teaching methods in time with the development of the society as well as educational needs, so it is crucial for them to know well about motivational strategies to guide students learn well. Besides, according to students' psychological characters, teachers had better take necessary measures to help students get learning skills and then have a better understanding of English. The acquisition of a foreign language is an active process, therefore students should not be passive recipients of information, but active involved to obtain knowledge well.

1.3 The Structure of the Paper

This paper is divided into five parts. The first part is an introduction about the whole paper, which mainly includes the background, the significance and the purpose of this study, as well as introduction of the network of this paper. Literature review comes to the second part, which contains definition, classification, researches about motivation both at home and abroad as well. Four main models of motivation are analyzed in the third part. Process-oriented model, extended motivation model, social-educational model, and neurobiological model are discussed in detail. And the most crucial section is about strategies to motivate students to learn English. The paper introduces four kinds of students who need to be motivated in their English learning, and some detailed methods are given for respective conditions and students. The key points occur when the readers are appreciating the fourth part of the paper. And as usual, the ending part is about conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition

Brophy (1998, p.3) gives a definition on motivation.

Motivation is a theoretical construct used to explain the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior, especially goal-directed behavior. In the classroom context, the concept of *student motivation* is used to explain the degree to which students invest attention and effort in various pursuits, which may or may not be the ones desired by their teachers. Motivation refers to students' subjective experiences, especially their willingness to engage in lessons and learning activities and their reasons for doing so.

According to his opinion, motivation is a matter about encouraging students themselves to work hard, to catch up with others and to make progress, and it is a tool as well as an important element for students to engage themselves to study hard and improve their horizons and knowledge. As a result, motivation is a thing which is formed only on the basis of students themselves. Teachers, parents, or even peers are all assistant factors for them to cultivate their learning motivation. On the whole, the level of learning motivation is decided mostly by students themselves. Therefore, the best way to stimulate them is to update their thinking patterns and ideas about their learning.

In addition, according to Jin (2006), she believes that motivation is a kind of intrinsic energy as well as a strong power (including personal desire and goal, psychological 5impulsion, and the willingness of being successful) to engage people's action^[8]. It is a thing which is about starting and maintaining a type of mental state. Motivation is like a kind of motor and steering wheel to transfer people's sorrows and upsets into interests. English learning motivation is a typical one among all kinds of human actions from motivation, and it is performed in a strong form of being eager for

knowledge. English learning motivation is an intrinsic energy as well as an active and dynamic psychology state which directly stimulates the process and steps of English study. As for this kind of conception, the most significant aspect it has stressed is that motivation is the basal driving force for stepping forward, both in learning knowledge and studying anything new.

Similarly, Liu (2014) also regards motivation as an intrinsic strength^[10]. He thinks that if students have high intrinsic motivation about study, they will be more interested in what they are learning and they will tend to be more concentrated on language study. Han (2007, p.123) also points out: “Motivation refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language.”^[7]

2.2 Classification

Gardner (1983) has divided motivation into Integrative Motivation, Instrument

Motivation; Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation from the view of cognitive psychology; and Close-range Motivation, Long-range Motivation from the time of taking effects^[6]. What is more, motivation is divided into three types as following: Global Motivation, Situational Motivation and Task Motivation (Li, 2013)^[9].

Combined with personal teaching experience, the author will classify “motivation” into only two kinds: Intrinsic motivation and extrinsic one. Students will have the most degree of interests on study if they themselves pay high attention to learning. Under this circumstance, they know exactly how significant it is to study hard. They put learning at a high position for their lives and they know clearly that study hard will benefit themselves and help them to step into a better field. Knowledge is the best investment for their living and with this kind of high self-reflection, it can on the opposite to stimulate students to catch the precious learning chance and make the biggest use of their learning time. Of course, there will also be some assistant elements which are called Extrinsic Motivation. These factors, such as parents’ expectation, teachers’ encouragement, and peers’ admiration, are also good to improve students’ learning enthusiasm.

3. Models to Stimulate Motivation

3.1 Process-oriented Model

According to Dornyei and Hadfield’s (2013) opinion, process-oriented model is a pattern which is formed by three aspects^[5]. The first one is about choice motivation, which means to get started and to set goals for students’ learning. And the second one is called executive motivation, which means to carry out the tasks for maintaining their language learning motivation. And the last type is named as motivation retrospection, which means to appraise and to give some reactions about their try.

Each process is a key to students’ final success. At the very beginning, students must set an appropriate goal as guidance for their later study. This is such a significant base for students to make it since their later efforts will all be made on the basis of these aspects of their goals. And it is also something theoretical which directs following actions. The second step is to carry out what is prepared before, and from this point of view, it not only can step forward to form their motivations, but also is a period to examine the correctness of former preparations and directory measures.

3.2 Extended Motivation Model

There are three levels about this model: “language level (or culture level), learner level (which is about personal characteristics),and learning situation(it is consist of three parts: course-specific,

group-specific and teacher-specific” (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991, p.492)^[4]. It is a model formed step by step. The differences of cultural background will have some degrees of effect on students’ choice about the type of motivation. Influenced by the cultural differences, some students may depend more on themselves, therefore their learning motivation will be influenced by their self-control or their own thinking patterns, self-efficacy and etc. While some others will depend more on circumstances, which means that objective elements such as parents’ encouragements, teachers’ praise or peers’ admirations will do much good to their progress making. That is a type of smooth continuity from the level of personal characteristics.

3.3 Social-educational Model

Social-educational model consists of four parts as following: the first one is about cultural and social circumstances, which means the place and environment that the language learners stay in. Cultural background is the typical basis of this model, and this is similar with the extended motivational model. Environment will affect learners the most degree on their learning situation, and the later development of this motivational model is all extended by the background, which is actually like a type of guidance for the following development. And the second part of this model is about outcome. In this model, there are two kinds of outcomes: linguistic outcomes with language knowledge and skills; non-linguistic outcomes with individual’s attitudes concerning cultural values and beliefs towards the target language community. People perceive these two outcomes respectively from both professional and unprofessional aspects, which mean different situations for different learners. The third part is about individual learner differences, which includes the variables of intelligence, language aptitude, situational anxiety and motivation. The fourth part is about context. Two contexts are included in this model: regular teaching in classrooms and random acquisition of language in natural environment. These two different contexts are decided by different individual attitudes or learning background. This is just a phenomenon of proving back towards the starting of this model (Woolfolk, Rosoff, & Hoy, 1990)^[11].

3.4 Neurobiological Model

Neurobiological model is something more about development from the aspect of emotion. Three points are included in this model. The first point is about environmental stimulation. Learning motivation is started by some degrees of stimulation, such as self-efficacy, comparison between classmates or good friends, teachers’ encouragements, parents’ expectations and etc. And the next point is about the emotional responses which are influenced by various characteristic of different persons. The responses can be both strong and weak. Some students may have an obvious reaction to the stimulation they have meet, on the other hand, some others will have their reactions in a way which is not so apparent. There should be differences between different learners about their responses of the stimulation, since not all learners are similar with various problems. What is more, the third part of the model is about responses of behaviors.

4. Strategies to Stimulate Motivation

4.1 Reconstructing Discouraged Students’ Confidence and Willingness to Learn

Four aspects are feasible for us to stimulate them, and each one has methods for teachers to reply. The first aspect is about stimulating students on the basis of their personal activities and tasks. As for this aspect, teachers should firstly decrease the difficulty level of their tasks, and then make sure that the tasks are all well arranged for and suitable for students’ learning levels. Except for this, the

tasks should also be short and brief, which means the starts should be easy enough for students to follow and to apply their own experience.

The second aspect is to provide introductions for students' tasks. Firstly, teachers ask students to repeat what they are required, in order to make sure whether they have already known clearly about what they will do. Besides, teachers give students demonstrations before they start to deal with their tasks, and encourage them to imitate what teachers have done. This is also a process of training students' thinking patterns and improving their learning methods. The most significant step is to help students work out an outline before they take practice. In addition, teachers should also make a deadline for students' work, but it can be little longer than that for ordinary students.

There comes the third strategy, which means to provide help and trainings for the tasks. Teachers can give some hints or help to analyze the key information, as well as let them know clearly that they can ask for help whenever they have problems. Teachers should praise them as much as possible when students have done something acceptable. It is also a good way to set up learning groups to do team work.

The last strategy is to maintain students' motivation efficiently. There are four ways for tutors to follow. Teachers can sign some encouraging words or positive comments on the papers of students who have low expectation about themselves. This is a good way to stimulate them to believe in themselves, and find out the interests of study. They will be more interested in it if they benefit more or less during the process. Teachers can also help them make personal learning goals respectively, and pay more attention to their accomplishments as well as give valuations in time. And more significant thing is to give positive and encouraging feedback to their parents even when have made a little progress.

4.2 Providing Extrinsic Incentives

“To be motivated to do something, we need good reasons for doing it, not just confidence that we can do it if we try” (Brophy, 1998, p.104). This is just the reason why the author researches strategies to stimulate this kind of students' learning motivation. Extrinsic stimulants are the simplest, most direct and most adaptable ways to do this. The purpose of this stimulating method is to connect students' accomplishments of the tasks with transmitting the values which have already been created by students, instead of improving students' valuation about the required tasks. The essential of this strategy is for behavior control instead of motivational learning. Extrinsic rewards can help teachers dig out students' internal learning interests, however, it will decrease their eagerness of continuing to finish the tasks if teachers begin to reward those students as soon as they start to deal with their work.

As for the results that are talked above, we should firstly consider more about the rewards themselves. For the teachers, the most significant two things they should pay attention to are: what is a reward, and in what way should they present it. The features of unnecessary and unpleasant rewards should be like as following: The rewards are so attractive that call too much attention from students. And another kind of rewards which are unacceptable is those not prepared for equal conditions. The rewards are given only for participation rather than special goals. The third one is those unnatural rewards given for controlled behaviors instead of natural reactions of actions (Brophy, 1996)^[2].

4.3 Socializing Uninterested or Alienated Students

As for the characteristics of this type of students, Ames (1992) has pointed out that if we regard motivation as a network which makes skills, values, capacity, and perspicacity connected, it will be helpful for us to stimulate students to understand the meanings to study language and to be

concentrated on their learning goals^[1]. Students who do not have this kind of network may tend to regard school tasks as a type of demands instead of learning opportunities, therefore, they prefer to pursue performance goals rather than learning goals, and the purpose of them to take part in lessons and activities is only to achieve some grades and stay away from troubles. They pay little attention to their learning goals, as well as their academic achievements. In a whole word, there are two right ways for teachers to stimulate students' learning motivation. The first one is about persuasive communication between teachers and students. And the second one is to train them according to attracting students to take part in the powerful learning experience.

As for teachers, they can make students who have low interests in learning imitate from others, and can also try to persuade them to work hard and to exemplify them with some peers' learning experiences. However, teachers cannot directly tell them what they should do and how they should work by using series of instructions, since in this way students can easily take their own emotional factors and personal valuations involved, which is not that good for stimulating their learning incentives well. Tutors could not compel students to change their values and opinions about learning. What is more, it is a much better way for teachers to decrease the frequency they force students, and tutors should try to set up a friendly and productive relationship between students and them.

Consequently, the best strategy for teachers is to help these students appreciate the empowerment and self-actualization outcomes, and these outcomes should result from consistently engagements in school learning activities and motivational tasks (Brophy, 1998)^[3].

4.4 Being Good With Different Patterns of Students' Motivation

Generally speaking, there are seven kinds of differences for different learners: differences between personal learning and group learning, differences for preferences, psychological differences, differences for learning styles, age differences, family and cultural differences, and differences from peers' pressure.

As for the differences between personal study and group learning, Brophy (1998) points out that during a long period, a great deal of views claim that teachers should be tolerate with the necessary differences among students^[3]. But few of them have pointed out that it is also of significance to understand the efforts which teachers would take to treat students' differences correctly, and it may also acquires teachers to take differentiated courses and teaching methods for different learning groups. The question to how to stimulate this kind of students is a project about satisfying students' needs of learning methods at that time. Teachers should provide choices for students about what they will do and how to do it. They as well should give more chances and room for students to do what they really like. That is to say, teachers had better depend less on students' little learning motivation.

The differences for learning styles are quite ordinary phenomena among students, therefore it also becomes an important matter for students to deal with. This kind of differences mostly lies in the questions asked by students themselves as following: do I like frequently short period of learning or a longer one? Do I need to study alone or to do it with others? Do I prefer to study in a quiet environment or to do with smooth music? According to some theorists, there are four kinds of common learning styles: Imaginative learners pay much attention to making their self-experience combined with their language learning. They get concrete information and are good at self-reflecting. Analytic learners are careful with details and ideas, and they value abstract information more than ordinary students. Commonsense learners prefer abstract information and are active to do with it. They are pragmatic learners to solve concrete problems according to experiments and discoveries. Dynamic learners are good at taking risks and are curious about new

things as well as new knowledge. They perceive concrete information and emphasize applications from what they have learnt (Brophy, 1998)^[3].

5. Conclusion

Generally speaking, the strategies should be changed depend on various conditions. Teachers should be careful and patient enough towards their students' development. According to this paper, the author has researched motivational strategies in four aspects. And each one is not the same as the others, but on the other hand, they also have some similarities for teaching. After all, the final goals of all the strategies are to make sure if students benefit from the actions taken by teachers and to help students study English with higher enthusiasm, confidence, interests, or even willingness. We have talked about several strategies for series of different students' learning behaviors, however, we cannot draw a conclusion that they are really fit for all teachers' teaching experience, therefore we also need more practice to examine and update them. In a word, the author does hope her research on strategies to stimulate High School students' learning motivation will benefit both teachers and students. Except for the purposes for teachers we talked above, students can also make self-reflection and self-updating according to locating themselves in right type we have analyzed. In a whole word, the best strategy to teach students is based on their natural abilities.

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