

Cultivation of Learner-Centered Intrinsic Motivation in the Japanese ELF Classroom

内発的動機付けの構築

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ABSTRACT

This paper will explore learner motivation, particularly with regards to the development of intrinsic motivation, the integrative aspect of motivation and building a broader vision as a language learner. It will explore some ways which may potentially be fruitful for the development of these motivational goals before offering some conclusions and directions for good practice in the Japanese ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) university classroom. The goal of this paper is to provide a platform upon which to base further research and empirical inquiry which can be used to develop the existing body of literature and improve classroom practice.

KEYWORDS: Motivation, ELF, Intrinsic, Integrative, Vision

1. INTRODUCTION

In my own personal opinion when learners are motivated and have a genuine and proactive desire to be in the classroom and engage with the material, the learning experience is enhanced and catalysed for all concerned. I feel the teacher-learner relationship is also improved and there can be more harmony between the two parties which can result in increased opportunities and desire for learner autonomy and input into the lessons themselves. I feel this also gives more room and curiosity to explore ad hoc learning opportunities during lessons. This article will discuss how intrinsic motivation on the learner's behalf can make the class more engaging and fun. In this paper I will explore learner motivation, particularly with regards to the development of intrinsic motivation, the integrative aspect of motivation and building a broader vision as a language learner. I will explore some ways which may potentially be fruitful for the development of these motivational goals before offering some conclusions and directions for good practice in the Japanese ELF university classroom. The main aim of this article is to form a foundation upon which to base further research and empirical inquiry which can be used to enhance the existing body of literature and improve classroom practice.

2. MOTIVATION

In this article I want to guard against the idea that motivation ‘is an easy catchword that gives teachers a simple answer to the mysteries of language learning’ (Brown, 2007, p. 84). As Dörnyei (1998) points out, motivation is a, ‘multifaceted rather than a uniform factor and no available theory has yet managed to represent it in its total complexity’ (p. 131). There are many types of motivation (which will be covered in more detail later in the paper) and, based on the quotation in the previous sentence, it is a concept which is often elusive, with regard to empirical investigation, and fluctuating and even fleeting within the confines of the classroom. However, it is a crucial element of English Language Teaching (ELT) which warrants our attention. As Dörnyei makes clear, ‘motivation has been widely accepted by both teachers and researchers as one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second/foreign language (L2) learning’ (1998, p. 117).

2.1 Intrinsic Motivation

There are two main forms of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic, however, it must be made clear that they do not exist in isolation to each other, but each action taken will contain some influence from the two forms. Extrinsic motivation is where the driving factor is external reward, achievement, praise or material gain, punishment avoidance also includes actions taken to avoid punishment (Brown, 2007). For example, studying hard to obtain a higher TOEIC score to participate in a study abroad program or working quickly on an in-class task to be the first to secure a reward or the pride of finishing first. Intrinsic motivation is considered to be where the rewards are not external, such as money or prestige, but where the pursuit in itself is the goal, often with an additional sense of competence or self-determination (Brown, 2007). For example, studying new vocabulary or actively maintaining a vocabulary book both inside and outside of class for the self-fulfilment of one’s Second Language Acquisition (SLA) goals, not necessarily because you have been explicitly instructed to by your teacher or because they will help you score more highly on a specific test. It is the latter form of motivation with which this paper is principally concerned, as, I think it is fair to say, having accrued a fair amount of experience in the tertiary education sector in Japan, this form of motivation is often sorely lacking. It is often the case that some learners do not only resist my advice to maintain a vocabulary book, but occasionally neglect even to bring paper when they attend class. Also, despite having attended English class for many years (between 6-9 years for a typical Japanese first year university student), many learners’ language and motivation levels are not what they could be. An explicit focus on the cultivation of intrinsic motivation and specific class time and tasks with this in mind will help strengthen the learners intrinsic motivation and help encourage an internalized desire to succeed. As Mitchell, Myles and Marsden point out, “over the years consistent relationships have been demonstrated between language attitudes, motivation and L2 achievement, with the strongest relationships obtaining between motivation and achievement” (2013, p. 23).

2.2 The Integrative Aspect of Motivation

Gardner's research on motivation has led SLA academics to explore the integrative aspect of his theory (Gardner, 1985, 2001). In his socio-educational model he identified two kinds of motivation, the integrative and the instrumental (Gardner, 1985). He placed a great emphasis on the former and highlighted the learners' desire to communicate with or even integrate or assimilate with members of the target language. As Dörnyei clarifies, 'in broad terms, an "integrative" motivational orientation concerns a positive interpersonal/affective disposition toward the L2 group and the desire to interact with and even become similar to valued members of that community' (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 5). Gardener's research took place in Canada where English and French speakers lived side-by-side and the interpretation of his theory by the academic community, was at least initially, quite literal. Dörnyei perceptively develops the idea and states that, "in the absence of a salient L2 group in the learners' environment...the identification [with the L2 language/culture] can be generalised to the cultural and intellectual values associated with the language, as well as to the actual L2 itself" (2003, p. 5). As Ellis (1985) makes clear, "learners who are interested in the social and cultural customs of native speakers of the language they are learning are likely to be successful" (p. 11). From my experience I feel Dörnyei's more malleable and ideologically driven conception of integrativeness is more powerful. I feel that the 'ideal self' one imagines becoming, whether that is to travel the world for business or pleasure, to engage with others through social media or simply to enjoy English-speaking films and television and never actually travelling or conversing with the people directly, is a powerful motivator. As Mitchell et al. elucidate, "integrativeness...in combination with motivation has consistently shown itself to be a powerful predictor of L2 learning success" (2013, p. 23). I feel Dörnyei is right when he asserts that,

while an L2 is a learnable school subject in that discrete elements of the communication code (e.g., grammatical rules and lexical items) can be taught explicitly, it is also socially and culturally bound, which makes language learning a deeply social event that requires the incorporation of a wide range of elements of the L2 culture. (2003, p. 4)

He and Csizer are also right when they include familiarising learners with the target language culture as part of their 'ten commandments of motivation' (1998). Once learners have been given the chance to explore the culture behind the language, this can act as a powerful driver for self-study, more personal investment may be applied to learning about the language and culture, the teachers job will be made easier and the learner's experience will be more enjoyable. I feel this can only have positive consequences for SLA.

2.3 Vision

It is also very important to acknowledge fluctuating motivation and how the concept of vision is a crucial factor in sustaining a broader, more persistent drive, which will lead to a higher chance of successful language attainment. It is important to understand that motivation does not remain constant, from day-to-day or even through the duration of one class, a learner's enthusiasm and commitment can wax and wane (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003). Learners are influenced by a plethora of factors and they may not only be immediate concerns such as wanting to go home or being tired but also deeper psychological concerns. Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) introduce the vital concept of vision which they define as the person the learner wants to become which will sustain them through troughs of inspiration and moments of self-doubt. Through my experience I have found it is so important to have a broader vision and a deeper, more personal commitment to language learning, or indeed any kind of learning, to be successful, as Dörnyei and Kubanyiova state, 'where there is a vision, there is a way' (2014, p. 2). A key responsibility of the teacher is the kindling of this vision. Whether it be through the schematic insight of learning about the culture of the L2, the eureka moment of imparting a consciousness-raising piece of knowledge or simply the passion and enthusiasm shown on a daily basis, the teacher has a responsibility to not just teach the class, but encourage a broader vision to stimulate self-learning and a desire to learn.

3. IDEAS TO CULTIVATE MOTIVATION IN THE JAPANESE ELF CLASSROOM

Having established the above aspects of motivation, intrinsic motivation, the integrative aspect of motivation and the development of a broader vision, the paper will now continue to introduce some potentially fruitful ways they can be introduced in the Japanese ELF university classroom.

3.1 The 'English Problem' in Japan and Steps to Overcome It

By the time Japanese learners enter university, they will have experienced a great deal of time in English language class (between 6-9 years for a typical Japanese first year university student), and spent many hours preparing for examinations. Perhaps for some learners, this time will have been fruitful and encouraged a genuine and proactive desire to learn and embrace English language education. However, for some, this process may have tainted their love of English and, while they will be acutely aware of how important their English and TOEIC score is to securing acceptance at a favourable university or full-time employment upon graduating, little time may have been spent in explicitly addressing how, or even if, English may be valuable in the outside world and throughout their life as a whole. As such, it could be said that, "classroom practices and examination pressures leave many students with an aversion to English, and the generally poor English communication skills among the Japanese have raised serious concern" (Sullivan & Schatz, 2009, p. 487). This has led experienced ELT professionals to question why this communicative 'English problem' exists in Japan, as Ng and Dodge remark,

“[F]ew students find it necessary to speak English well but rather, they need English to obtain good scores in standardized examinations” (2015, p. 53). As ELF teachers it must be our responsibility to arrest this and reinvigorate a more practical, relevant and accessible English. It is not our day-to-day job to dwell on the past or criticize or deconstruct why learners have not progressed in English class as perhaps they might, but to be positive, inspiring and look to foster a type of English education which will motivate them and be a part of their future. This must start with the important acceptance and acknowledgment that a university class is composed of adults who have the independence to choose to be there. I feel there is much to be said for explicitly acknowledging this simple fact and respecting this as the foundation of the class. This means not speaking down to learners or presupposing our role as teachers gives us an a priori power over them. Also, not simply stressing the virtues of the task in itself, for example, revising lexis to build their vocabulary or studying TOEIC at home to increase their score, etc. I feel it is important to strive to connect each lesson and activity with the learners’ lives and experiences and make it relevant and resonate. We must engage with the learners and attempt to see the class from their eyes if we are to communicate effectively, for if we merely extol the external virtues of passing the course, or learning English as a virtue in itself we risk keeping these ‘objective’ goals extrinsic and they may not be internalized or ‘taken to heart’ by the learners. A continual effort must also be made to strive to unearth and develop individual intrinsic motivation and cultivate a broader vision and desire for learning English.

While there is limited space in this paper to cover the many practical classroom tasks which may elicit such a goal, a key example would be the use of authentic role-play based tasks which are grounded in real-life scenarios the learners may encounter in their future. For example, these could include ordering in a restaurant, checking into a hotel or attending a job interview. It is also essential that relevant and accessible cultural and schematic information is provided and elicited before and during the tasks. For example, with regards to the restaurant role play, it is not enough to consider native or inner-circle countries, cities or cuisines as examples, but to make it clear that English in an ELF context will open a great many possibilities throughout the world. Making it explicit that having the confidence to order food, a task often done multiple times a day, will give rise to the possibility for learners to broaden their travel and employment horizons, empower them with the knowledge that their language is sufficient to do such a task and potentially unearth and strengthen the three types of motivation mentioned earlier in this paper. I also make them aware that this is not a task easily achieved by me in a second language, especially in Japanese during my day-to-day life living in Tokyo. The goal here is to raise their consciousness and boost their confidence in their existing English skills. Job interview role plays are also an excellent way to illustrate how the potential of living and working abroad could be a reality. I also use myself as an example and how I have travelled extensively and taken part in the working holiday programme to live and work in five different countries. This concretizes how these are not merely in-class activities, but a potential reality. It is

vital we make English accessible and real and attempt to connect it to our learners' own lives to try to ensure it permeates outside of the classroom and integrates into their life and future as a whole. I feel the tasks and examples briefly described in this paper are a rich source for future empirical enquiry and I hope to use this as the foundation for further research.

3.2 Steps Towards a Learner-centred English as a Lingua Franca

It is important for learners to be confident in their own English and to feel empowered by it rather than being continuously corrected and reminded of a 'Japanese English' deficiency. Being exposed to native speaker models and measured against these, usually North American, schematic and linguistic norms, has its merits, for example, if the learner wishes to live or work in that native speaker society or engage with media originating there. However, I feel, it is not enough to continuously expect learners to reach for this native-speaker goal without occasionally meeting them in the middle or acknowledging their own worth. As Ng and Dodge clarify, "American English is so prevalent in the Japanese educational context that a majority of our students tended to perceive English spoken only by Americans, and thus felt their own 'Japanese English' has no communicative viability" (2015, p. 54). It is important for us as ELF professionals to denounce this myth and encourage and breathe confidence into a learner-centred form of English which places communication and intelligibility at its heart. Japanese learners often have a great, and potentially untapped, existing English repertoire in their own 'Japanese English' (sometimes referred to as 'loan words' or 'borrowed words'). For example, *hanbāgu*/hamburger, *erebētā*/elevator, *hurai-pan* (*furaipan*)/frying pan, etc. (for a great many other examples see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_gairaigo_and_wasei-eigo_terms). I feel making this explicit during class raises the consciousness of learners to gain an increased sense of control over their own linguistic knowledge and how it relates to the wider world. To not view the different pronunciations as a mistake, or that one is superior while another inferior, but to teach that by altering their pronunciation a whole host of other words emerge at their disposal. This takes time, repetition and reassurance during the class, but exploring these, often ad hoc, learning opportunities gives a sense of empowerment and increases the relevance and learner-centred content of the class. It can also boost intrinsic motivation and the learners' desire to communicate and integrate with members of the ELF community when they realize that a great many words in their existing vocabulary share a similar etymology.

Another example of this is the promotion of simple, easy-to-understand language. In a recent class of mine, the learners were working in groups to describe their favourite movie (the characters/storyline, etc.) in a bid to have their group members guess the title. When eliciting examples from the class, a recent description springs to mind. A student, who was describing the movie 'Titanic', described it as a 'luxury liner'. This caused a breakdown in intelligibility, as not only was the majority of the class unfamiliar with the term, but the pronunciation was hesitant and it became clear the student had searched for it in their dictionary. While, otherwise an excellent example, with rich use of description and humour, I made an explicit point

to elicit the much more rudimentary term 'big boat'. While commending the learner on 'luxury liner' and recommending they add it to their vocabulary book, it was demonstrably not as effective as 'big boat' when it came to conveying their message to the class. It is important to raise the learners awareness of their audience and of being comfortable and confident in their 'own English'. It is not always necessary, or even helpful, to seek a more complicated or seemingly 'native-like' form of communication and it is important for learners not to automatically view this as something 'higher' or 'superior' to their, albeit linguistically limited, communication. I try to use many examples from an ELF environment in the class in a bid to make the language accessible and practical. For example, using this isolated example, I connected this to the potential, and recommended, real-life example of traveling in Vietnam and asking a local for directions to their cruise ship going to Hả Long Bay, a link to a previous class we did about travel. The example of 'big boat' over 'luxury liner' would almost certainly be more appropriate in this context, having travelled there myself. This was a rich learning opportunity to introduce vocabulary such as 'wonders of the world' and convey my love of traveling in a bid to develop an interest in other cultures and explore the development of a vision that connects how English may practically enhance their worldview and travel possibilities in the future. It also shows the value of what they already know and, while learning new vocabulary and experimenting with new words and phrases is an important skill, they should also be proud and confident of their existing vocabulary and linguistic talents.

It is important to make an explicit connection between my suggested teaching practices and the three types of motivation I have discussed in this paper. As such, I will briefly explain the restaurant role play touched upon earlier in the paper to illustrate how developing a learner-centred ELF can aid learner motivation. However, it would form the body of a whole separate paper if I were to explain the appropriate execution of this task in its entirety, and, as stated previously, the goal of this paper is to provide the platform and imperative upon which to base further research and empirical inquiry, not to focus solely on a specific teaching method or technique. During the pre-task phase of the restaurant role-play it is crucial to elicit ideas from the class and to encourage authentic ELF examples. For example, to have learners work in groups to brainstorm and decide on a location, setting and types of food together, e.g., a tapas bar in Madrid, Pho restaurant in Ho Chi Minh City, curry house in Delhi, etc. It is then important that learners play a lead role in bolstering the task by eliciting natural, real-world language and logically anticipating the structure before I confirm it. It is important to structure the task with a concrete goal, i.e., the accurate recording on a meal order and acceptance of payment. To be effectively achieved, this needs to be built up gradually and allow for sufficient time for each student in a group to perform the task in the role of the waitress/waiter. By the end, it is satisfying to see a student standing over a table of three or four others, notepad and pencil in hand, take the order of multiple three course meals including drinks, repeat each order back to the diner for confirmation and then attempt to estimate the total cost of the order in their head before processing the payment. If they have never previously worked in the service sector, this provides a real insight into the short-term memory

skills and mental dexterity required for taking an order for a large group of people. This is, of course, made all the more challenging as it is done in their L2.

Whether a learner's vision includes using English merely to order a nice meal in various different countries around the world, or actually spend time living, working and assimilating abroad while studying or embarking on a working holiday, this task can impress the realities of these situations, and hopefully broaden horizons and open eyes to future possibilities. This is a clear example of how I use in-class tasks to promote global cultural awareness in a bid to boost learners' desire to communicate and hopefully integrate with members of ELF L2 community. Through tasks such as this, I feel it is crucial to not only teach the target language, but include authentic, and hopefully inspirational, insight into the great spectrum of ELF cultures lived throughout the world. By utilizing tasks such as this on a regular and consistent basis, it is my goal to place the learner at the centre of the ELF classroom. By granting the learner increased independence and creativity throughout their course, the goal is to stimulate intrinsic motivation which will remain and continue to empower their learner autonomy once the course has ended. The use of tasks which are based in authentic and learner-centred ELF environments act as a constant reminder of the real-world applicability of the class and, through teacher stimulus and peer-support, help to drive a broader vision to self-motivate students, not only throughout their time in university, but long into the future.

4. CONCLUSION

Motivation is a complex and inherently subjective concept which differs from person to person, fluctuates over the course of a semester, or even the duration of a single class, and can wax and wane over a longer period of time and one's life as a whole. This should be viewed as a positive and uplifting message for teachers and learners alike. For if motivation is not based on certain fixed definable variables, then, as Mitchell et al. neatly clarify, 'L2 motivation is dynamic and alterable and has a close relationship with learner identity' (2013, p. 23). This paper has explored three crucial aspects of motivation and elucidated some practical steps to how they can be unearthed and encouraged in the Japanese ELF university classroom. As Hatano points out, "the purpose of learning English in Japan has been positioned in the abstract concept of 'globalization', and students are given no opportunities to consider specific purposes for learning the language in relation to their life" (2012, p. 128-129). As ELF teachers we must go further than this. We must constantly seek to connect classroom practice with real-world applicability and adapt our approach and tasks to the classroom realities of our learners. As Kubota explains, "foreign language education that aims to foster cross-cultural understanding among global citizens must explore ways to expose the politics of cultural difference and seek non essentialist understandings of culture" (2003, p. 85). To this end, I try to use many real examples and tasks, give learners a lot of freedom to choose writing and presentation topics and allow them to vote on class activities and, consequently, preferred learning styles often multiple times during the course of a class in a bid to increase their

criticality, consciousness and learner autonomy. The more we can take responsibility for learners' motivation, appreciate everyone is motivated in different ways and that this can alter from lesson to lesson, the more fruitful, empowering and enjoyable the language learning experience will be. As such, I hope this paper will form the basis for further practical and empirical investigation in a bid to shed light on future research and improve teaching practice. It is not for research to identify cause-effect relationships, but to focus on change rather than variables (Dörnyei, 2009). It is our job to motivate and inspire this change and encourage a form of English which is accessible, practical and plays a proactive part in our learners' futures.

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