



**INVESTIGATING THE REAONS BEHIND THE LACK OF MOTIVATION
FOR THE FIRST SEMESTER STUDENTS WHEN LEARNING GRAMMAR
AT THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT AT SEBHA UNIVERSITY**

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Abstract

This study investigates the reasons behind the lack of motivation for the first semester students when learning grammar at the English department at Sebha University. It focuses on its effect on the teaching and learning process and the roles both teachers and learners play in the presence or lack of motivation. The data of the research is collected through observation, interview and questionnaire. Grammar classes are observed and the existence of the problem is confirmed, then teachers are interviewed and students are given the questionnaire to fill. The investigation results show that students lack motivation to learn grammar, and that is the responsibility of both teachers and students. The 50% of the teachers say that students are demotivated because their level is lower than what they are learning while 50% say that the reason behind their motivation is the weakness of the syllabus and general unsuitability of the teaching environment. 60 % of the students mention in the questionnaire that teachers are not motivating them and that is the reason behind their lack of motivation while 40% say that they cannot keep up with the teachers' explanation.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Overview

This research discusses the problem of the lack of motivation when learning grammar of the first semester students in the English language department at Sebha University. The term motivation is usually defined by psychologists as the set of processes which involve the arousal, direction, and sustaining of behavior. It is closely related to teaching and learning because it is considered the drive for the students and teachers to make the educational process successful.

Dornyei (2001) believes that the complexity of the idea of motivation lies in its attempts to elaborate person's actions on behavior which cannot be explained by just one approach. The difficulty as Dornyei (1996) states is not the lack of theories to explain motivation but the plenty of theories and models. Fortunately, there is now a lot of research literature available on the role of motivation in language learning.

Motivation refers to the combination of attempt plus desire to obtain the objective of learning the language plus desirable attitudes towards learning the language. That is, motivation to learn a second language refers to the extent to which the individual works or tries to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the contentment experienced in this task. Effort alone does not indicate motivation. The motivated person spends effort towards the aim, but the person expending effort is not inevitably motivated (Gardner, 1985).

However, motivation provides learners with an aim and direction to follow. Therefore, it has a key role in language learning. Due to the lack of enough motivation, some difficulties may happen for learners. Without desire to learn, it is

very difficult for learners to gain effective learning. As Huitt (2001) stated that paying attention to the importance of language will help learners improve their motivation to learn even if they do not have enough intrinsic motivation. It can be stated that teachers should be aware of significance of motivation in learners' language learning and through some changes they can help learners increase their motivation.

1.2 Research Problem

First semester students in the department of English at Sebha University experience lack motivation to learn grammar and face problems in the simplest grammatical rules such as the construction of the simple sentence. That results in problems in their academic achievement and it affects their performance.

1.3 Research Question

Is motivation important to learn grammar?

In order to answer this question, need to answer another question:

Do first semester students experience lack of motivation when learning grammar?

1.4 Research Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that first semester students experience lack of motivation when learning grammar due to a number of reasons: students do not understand the teachers' explanation because of their unpleasant history of learning grammar and the common misbelief among students that grammar is difficult. Following a teaching method that the teachers provide students with incentives and rewards, it can help the learners be motivated.

1.5 Research Aim

This research aims at investigating the reasons behind the lack of motivation for the first semester students in the English department to learn grammar.

1.6 Scope of Research

This research focuses on investigating the reasons behind the lack of motivation for the first semester students at the English department at Sebha University in Sebha, Libya when learning grammar.

1.7 Research Outline

This research begins with an introduction about the topic, then it presents the problem, question, aim, hypothesis, scope and outline of the study. After that comes chapter two where the relevant literature is provided. In chapter three we can find the methodology of the data collection, sample and instruments. In chapter four we find the analysis of the data and the recommendations and conclusion in chapter five; the references are provided at the end.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Overview

This chapter views the previous literature with topics that are related to this study.

2.2 What is motivation?

Motivation is an important factor in specifying the readiness of learners to communicate. Motivation refers to the combination of attempt plus desire to obtain the objective of learning the language plus desirable attitudes towards learning the language. Motivation is an important factor in specifying the readiness of learners to communicate. Motivation refers to the combination of attempt plus desire to obtain the objective of learning the language plus desirable attitudes towards learning the language (Gardner, 1985).

Oxford and Shearin (1994) define motivation as a desire to gain an objective, combined with the energy to work towards that objective. Narayanan (2006) stated that motivation is the reason or reasons behind one's actions or behaviors.

Motivation is the reasons underlying behavior (Guay et al., 2010). Broussard and Garrison (2004) defined motivation as the attribute that moves us to do or not to do something.

2.3 Motivation in EFL

A study by (John 2000) describes a classroom research project to investigate whether authentic materials increase the classroom motivation of learners, a claim often made but rarely, if ever, tested. A definition of motivation relevant to teachers was adopted- learner interest, persistence, attention, action, and enjoyment. Two beginner-level

EFL classes participated, and both used authentic and artificial materials alternately. Results from two observation sheets and a self-report questionnaire indicate that while on-task behavior and observed motivation increased significantly when authentic materials were used, self-reported motivation only increased over the last 12 of the 20 days of the study. However, learners also reported authentic materials to be significantly less interesting than artificial materials.

2.4 Teachers and Motivation

A teacher's motivation is basically the character of the teacher's personal enthusiasm and commitment towards teaching and is influenced by the working environment that consist of students, and colleagues. Although researchers have argued that the factors that motivate teachers are the same factors that motivate students, the fact that teacher motivation is an area that is frequently overlooked in the domain of second language learning still remains. It also appears that few studies that have been done on teacher motivation in the Malaysian context especially in the context of English language centers. Similarly, (John, 2000) study draws on a quantitative approach in which fifteen 30-item-questionnaires are distributed to the teachers in the English language center. The findings indicated that the teachers were motivated and strongly motivated because of work autonomy, good work relationships, support from colleagues, superiors and students and also their own intrinsic motivations.

2.5 Students and Motivation

One of the most difficult aspects of becoming a teacher is learning how to motivate your students. It is also one of the most important aspects. Students who are not motivated will not learn effectively. They will not retain information, they will not participate and some of them may even become disruptive. A student may be

unmotivated for a variety of reasons: They may feel that they have no interest in the subject, find the teacher's methods un-engaging or be distracted by external forces. It may even come to light that a student who appeared unmotivated actually has difficulty learning and is need of special attention (Root, 1999).

While motivating students can be a difficult task, the rewards are more than worth it. Motivated students are more excited to learn and participate. Simply put: Teaching a class full of motivated students is enjoyable for teacher and student alike. Some students are self-motivated, with a natural love of learning. But even with the students who do not have this natural drive, a great teacher can make learning fun and inspire them to reach their full potential (Alizadeh, 2016).

According to Gardner and Lambert (1972), learners are motivated to learn when they think of themselves as competent persons, deal with materials arranged to their level, see goal in their activities, see their studies as significant, are given difficult work, live in a safe environment, have the chance to express psychological needs for success, recognition, and acceptance, think that the learning is for them and not for their teachers, work with interesting materials, have opportunity to make decisions and feel responsibility for participating, and experience more success than failure.

2.6 The Relationship between Grammar and Motivation

When the term "motivation" is employed, one should be aware of its limitations and problems (Madrid, 1999). One cannot directly observe a person's motivation; all it can be observed that a person's behavior and the environment in which (s)he acts.

Motivation is something inside the individual, and it acts reciprocally with the environment. In general, it should be considered that it stimulates, directs, and sustains behavior. However, Brown (2007) argues that motivation is at the heart of any learning process in general and, consequently, he sees the need to investigate “how to create, foster, and maintain motivation?” (p.168). In addition to that, Thornbury (1999) considers motivation one of the basic principles for learning grammar, and believes that learning grammar cannot take place under any conditions if there is a lack of motivation. For Thornbury (1999), it all depends on the teacher’s role since “it’s the teacher’s job to choose tasks and materials that engage learners.” Consequently, to integrate grammar in Communicative Approach, some issues need to be taken into consideration, first, the different ways that can be used to introduce different types of knowledge depending on many external factors like students’ levels, teachers’ objectives. Secondly, the activities that would be done should be interesting and involve students into these new methods of teaching grammar. Thus, implementing grammar in communicative approaches should regard the affective aspect of the learners, especially motivation (Athmani 2010).

2.7 Difficulties in Learning Grammar and Motivation

Since the 1970s, attention has shifted from ways of teaching grammar to ways of getting learners to communicate, but grammar has been seen to be a powerful undermining and demotivating force among L2 learners. In terms of motivation and learner success with languages, grammar has been seen to be a problem and to stand in the way of helping learners to communicate fluently. The hard fact that most teachers face is that learners often find it difficult to make flexible use of the rules of grammar taught in the classroom. They may know the rules perfectly, but are

incapable of applying them in their own use of the language (Al-Mekhlafi&Nagaratnam, 2011).

According to Alizadeh(2016), motivation to learn an EFL grammar is attributed to three main factors: attitude, enjoyment and external pressure.

1- Positive Attitude towards FL Community

Attitude towards the FL community is very important in learning the FL. Gardner and Lambert (1980 as cited in Pae, 2008) expressed that to learn an FL, one must have an attitude towards that community. According to Gardner and Lambert (1959), motivation to learn an FL depends on the attitude toward the FL community and the desire to become a member of that community. These opinions suggest that motivation to learn an FL depends on the attitudes towards such community.

2- The Enjoyment of Learning

If learners wish to be motivated they should enjoy learning the FL. Intrinsically motivated learners are more likely to continue their studies than extrinsically motivated learners and simply participate in an activity for the pleasure of learning the FL. Correspondingly, integratively motivated students enjoy learning the FL and the culture of that community. There should be some sort of enjoyment while learning in order to be motivated to continue studying the FL (Wu, 2003).

3- External Pressures

There are external pressures that motivate learners to learn an FL. Whether it is to please parents, receive a reward, or fulfill some pragmatic

aims, learners are motivated to satisfy some external pressures. Noels et al. connect extrinsic and instrumental motivation by stating that they both refer to the desire to learn a second/foreign language because of some pressures or rewards from the social environment, internalized reasons for learning an FL, and/or personal decisions to do so and their value for the selected goals (2001, as cited in Liu, 2007).

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter discusses the methodology used to collect the data of this research.

3.2 Research Design

This study uses a mixed method approach due to the different instruments used to collect the data and the analysis followed. A mixed method is a data collection and analysis approach that uses both qualitative and quantitative methods.

3.3 Participants of the Study

10 first semester students and 4 teachers in the English department, Sebha University participated in the study. Students are 19 – 21 years old, 1 male and 10 females. They have been learning as a specialty for 9 year. Teachers are aged 30 – 55, 1 male and 3 females. They have been teaching English for 8 to 20 years.

3.4 Instruments

This research uses the following instruments to collect the data:

- 1- Observation: The grammar classes of the first semester were observed in order to obtain a concrete data for the study.
- 2- Interview: Grammar teachers were interviewed in order to obtain an insight to the teachers' perspectives of the role of motivation in their classes.
- 3- Questionnaire: Students of first and second semesters were handed questionnaire sheets to investigate their input on the problem of the research experience lack of motivation to learn grammar and face problems in the simplest grammatical rules such as the construction of the simple sentence.

Analysis

4.1 Overview

This chapter discusses the data analysis obtained through the instruments for this study.

4.2 Analysis

4.2.1 Interviews

Four grammar teachers were interviewed for this study. Those teachers teach or have taught grammar in the English Department, Sebha University. The interview consists of seven questions, each of these 4 teachers represents a percentage of 25% of the sample (a quarter). The statistics mentioned below are based on the following calculations.

Question 1 Gender, males or females: 75% of the teachers are females, 25% are males.

Question 2; Do you teach grammar ?

100% of teachers teach grammar to first semester students.

Question 3 Do think students are demotivated to learn grammar?

100% of the teachers think that the majority of the students are not motivated to learn grammar, however, some of them are.

Question 4 Why do you think students are demotivated to learn grammar ?

50% of the teachers say that students are demotivated because their level is lower than what they are studying. 50% of the teachers say that the reason behind their

demotivation is the weakness of the syllabus and the general unsuitable teaching environment.

Question 5; Do you think the reason is the teacher or students?

25% of the teachers refused to answer this question.

Question 6; What teaching approach/method are you using ?

50% of the teachers say they use communicative approach, 25% say they use real examples of life brought alive example, or draw pictures. 25% of the teachers use data show slides to have their attention.

Question 7; How do you think students can be motivated?

25% of the teachers say use by keeping encouraging them. 75% of the teachers say students could be motivated supporting them to using language and not afraid of committing mistakes.

4.2.2 Observation

The observation focuses on certain aspects in the class. They include:

1. Number of students
2. Participation of students
3. Interaction between students and the teacher.
4. Use of I1 in class.
5. Use of stimuli/incentive by the teacher to motivate students.

Based on these aspects, the following points are observed:

- Grammar classes are at the English Department Sebha University.

- The class contains 37, 33 females and 4 males.
- Only few students were participating in class.
- The teacher asked questions most of the time, students answered in L1 and the teacher accepted the answers in L1. The teacher used L1 too.
- The teacher did not use any kind of stimuli/reward to motivate the students.

4.2.3 Questionnaire:

The questionnaire is given to first and second semester students and retrieved at the same time. Students are 10 and each one of them represents 10% of the total percentage. The questions and analysis of the answers are below:

1. Did you face difficulties in grammar when you were at the first semester?

30% of the students did not face difficulties whereas 70% did face difficulties.

2. What were the teaching techniques used by your grammar teacher?

80% of the students say that their teacher uses the whiteboard and sheets to explain the grammar rules. 20 % say their teacher uses the projector and PowerPoint in the classroom.

What do you think was the reason of these difficulties?

- The teacher : 20% think that the teacher is the reason.
- The subject: 60% think that the subject itself is difficult.
- Other: 10% report that they cannot learn fast and that is slowing them.

10% report that they do not pay attention in the classroom.

3. What are the learning strategies that you are following to overcome these difficulties?

60% report that they study at home and prepare for the lectures.

20% report that they study online.

10% report that they take private grammar lessons.

10% report that they memorize and practice the rules until they get it right.

4. As an English student, are you motivated to learn grammar?

90% of the students report that they are motivated to learn grammar.

10% report that they are not motivated.

5. Did your grammar teacher motivate you to learn grammar?

90% of the students report that they are motivated to learn grammar.

10% of the students report that their teacher motivates them to learn grammar.

6. What do think is the best way to motivate students to learn grammar?

10% of the students report that linking the use of grammar to their real life helps.\

50% of the students report that the teacher should give them group work and use the board in the explanation.

10% of the students think that the teacher should use PowerPoint in the classroom.

10% believe that the teacher should make the lecture more interesting and stimulating.

10% think that the teacher should focus on their needs as students and as the center of the learning process.

10% believe that translation into L1 helps motivate them and facilitate the learning process.

4.3 Findings:

1. Grammar is taught in the English Department starting from the first semester.
2. Teachers are not using any kind of incentives/stimuli to motivate students.
3. Teachers claim to be using the communicative approach while in fact, the observation shows the opposite.
4. Both teachers and learners play a role in the presence of motivation in the classroom.
5. Students report that they are motivated whereas the observation shows the opposite.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

5.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the recommendation provided by the researchers and the conclusion of the study.

5.2 Conclusion

This research investigates the reasons behind the lack of motivation of first semester students when learning grammar. Grammar teachers were interviewed and students were asked to fill a questionnaire. Grammar classes are observed in order to obtain the results of this research. Students are not motivated to learn grammar and the cause is shared between students and the teachers. Teachers play an important role in motivating students. They must use certain techniques that work best with their students after analyzing their needs.

5.3 Recommendations

1. Teachers need to plan their lessons in a way that keeps students engaged and active in the classroom.
2. Using various activities such as, group work, pair work and quizzes with the help of visual aids and realia should be of great benefit for the students.
3. Students need to pay more attention to the teacher in the classroom and since it is related to their psychology, they need to be passionate about studying in the first place so that the learning process becomes balanced; both teachers and students need to play their parts collaboratively.

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