Studies of Teacher Motivation in TEFL/TESL Contexts; Review of Iraqi Kurdistan Context

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Abstract

This paper outlines the studies on motivation in TESL/TEFL contexts and motivational strategies for teachers. Also the definition on motivation and development of motivation will be discussed. It aims to shed light on a study which was conducted on the teacher motivation and the use of motivational strategies by English as foreign language teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan as an example. In the last part of the paper appropriate suggestions and recommendations will be given.

Key words: EFL teacher motivation; Motivational strategies; Iraqi kurdistan

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Motivation is regarded as an essential component of language learning; therefore, its importance ought to be fully understood by teachers. Students need to be motivated in order to achieve their goals. Even the brightest students need motivation. As Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) note, ―motivation generates learning and works as an ongoing driving force for acquiring a second language (p.153).

Inadequate use of motivational strategies by teachers can have negative impact on students' learning achievement. Dörnyei (2001) argues that ―99 per cent of language learners who really want to learn a foreign language will be able to master a reasonable working knowledge of it as a minimum, regardless of their language aptitude" (p. 2). Motivation serves as a power source to generate learning and later works as an on-going driving force that helps to sustain the long and usually laborious journey of acquiring a foreign language. Therefore, motivation is and should be a highly significant concern of both teachers and learners (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007).

According to Dörnyei and Ottó (1998), motivation is ―the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritized, operationalized, and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out" (p. 64).

Dörnyei (2001) argues that ―motivation is an abstract, hypothetical concept that we use to explain why people think and behave as they do" (p. 1). Jones and Jones (2004) believe that ―students will not be motivated unless three components are present – that is, they (1) expect they can accomplish a task, (2) find value in the task, and (3) complete the task in an environment supportive of their basic personal needs" (p. 193).

According to Dörnyei (2001), motivational strategies are "techniques that promote the individual's goal-related behaviour" (p. 28). He uses several ways to organize these techniques into separate _themes'. He also rightly points out that ―motivational strategies cannot be employed successfully in a _motivational vacuum' – certain preconditions must be in place before any attempts to generate motivation can be effective" (p. 31).

To learn the first language, a child does not need to be motivated. He is internally motivated as he acquires the first language (Jain & Patel, 2008). Whereas, motivation is very important in learning second/foreign languages since

it gives the necessary incentive for learning. Students cannot learn second/foreign languages without motivation. Therefore, teachers have to try to motivate their students to learn the second/foreign language.

Motivation has a great role in encouraging students to learn, making them active and creative since most students may have the desire to do something new. It is also important to inspire students to become active in their work, begin their work and to improve their goal and objectives. Harmer (2007) as cited in (Qadir, 2014) asserts that __nothing motivates like success. Nothing demotivates like continual failure. It is part of teacher's art, therefore, to try to ensure that students are successful, because the longer their success continues, the more likely they are to stay motivated to learn" (p. 101).

According to Dörnyei (2014), motivation is __a word that both teachers and learners use widely when they speak about language learning success or failure" (p. 518) He also believes that motivation __is responsible for why people decide to do something, how long they are willing to sustain the activity, and how hard they are going to pursue it" (p. 519).

It must be remembered that although most of the motivational strategies recommended by Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) have a sound theoretical basis, these strategies were derived from Western educational contexts, and as the authors themselves confess, __we cannot say with certainty that the ten commandments are valid in every cultural, ethnolinguistic and institutional setting. There is clearly much room for further research in this respect" (p. 224). To address this issue, the present paper aims at findings and investigations of studies were conducted on the motivational strategies used by Kurdish English teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan.

2. THE STATUS OF ENGLISH IN IRAQI KURDISTAN

English Language learning as an obligatory skill in Iraqi Kurdistan (an autonomous region in north of Iraq) dates back to the period of its fast opening to the outside world and undergoing great development. The regional government started to reconstruct and reform the educational system of English Language Teaching and Learning in the Kurdistan Region. This movement offered using a newly introduced English Language course book, namely Sunrise. (Amin, 2017)

These days English language is regarded as an international language and hundred-millions of people on the world are using it as a means of communication (Amin, 2017; Amin, 2019). Regarding this fast-growing use, Asian and Middle East countries are seeking the ways to the improve peoples' communicative ability in English as their foreign language (Zughoul, 2003: 111, Amin, 2020). In the educational system of Iraqi Kurdistan Region,

there are still serious problems for students in using English language for communication at secondary and high schools. In Kurdistan Region students are required to learn English language integrated skills especially speaking to encourage them in having communications and interactions with international residents. Therefore, Iraqi Kurdistan government in (2007) concluded to offer a new program of English language which is (Sunrise) for basic schools that considered four integrated skills.

Since 2007 that KRG has taken significant policy of improving educational standards, English language is being presented to early stages of learning and creative thinking styles of learning is considered and incorporated into school curricula. (Amin, 2017; Amin, 2018; Amin, 2019). This new curriculum was officially introduced on the website of (Sunrise for Kurdistan) and it was introduced as a complete English written course especially for primary and secondary school students. (Amin, 2020)

3. MOTIVATION AND TEACHER MOTIVATION

Motivation refers to "the reasons underlying behavior" (Guay et al., 2010, p. 712). Broussard and Garrison (2004) broadly define motivation as "the attribute that moves us to do or not to do something" (p. 106). Intrinsic motivation is motivation that is animated by personal enjoyment, interest, or pleasure.

As Deci et al. (1999) observe, "intrinsic motivation energizes and sustains activities through the spontaneous satisfactions inherent in effective volitional action. It is manifest in behaviors such as play, exploration, and challenge seeking that people often do for external rewards" (p. 658). Researchers often contrast intrinsic motivation with extrinsic motivation, which is motivation governed by reinforcement contingencies. Traditionally, educators consider intrinsic motivation to be more desirable and to result in better learning outcomes than extrinsic motivation (Deci et al., 1999).

Motivation involves a constellation of beliefs, perceptions, values, interests, and actions that are all closely related. As a result, various approaches to motivation can focus on cognitive behaviors (such as monitoring and strategy use), non-cognitive aspects (such as perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes), or both.

For example, Gottfried (1990) defines academic motivation as "enjoyment of school learning characterized by a mastery orientation; curiosity; persistence; task-endogeny; and the learning of challenging, difficult, and novel tasks" (p. 525). On the other hand, Turner (1995) considers motivation to be synonymous with cognitive engagement, which he defines as "voluntary uses of high-level self-regulated learning strategies, such as paying attention, connection, planning, and monitoring" (p. 413).

4. DEVELOPMENT OF MOTIVATION

This section reviews the empirical literature on the motivation levels of elementary-age children, followed by an investigation of how motivation develops and fluctuates over time with age. Conducting research in 1990, Gottfried concluded that little was yet known about the intrinsic motivation of elementary-age children. Subsequent research has uncovered a few insights concerning the development of motivation over time. First, researchers generally appear to agree that intrinsic motivation in children is initially quite high. For example, Entwisle et al. (1986) found that first-grade children have very positive self-concept and high academic expectations for themselves. However, research suggests that motivation tends to decline over time once children leave elementary school. Miller & Meece (1997) observe that students' interest in reading and writing for pleasure declines with age. There are a few apparent exceptions to this line of thought. First, Guthrie (2000) found no differences in terms of intrinsic motivation between third and fifth graders. Second, Gottfried (1990) found that students' preference for difficult tasks (an indicator of motivation) appears to increase between 7 and 8 years of age, and domain-general motivation increases between third and fourth grade.

5. TYPES OF MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES

Researchers did not pay much attention to motivational strategies as an important element of L2 motivation research until the beginning of 1990s, which is regarded as a marked shift on L2 motivation (Cheng & Dörnyei 2007). Dörnyei (2001) states that "motivational strategies refer to the motivational influences that are consciously exerted to achieve some systematic and enduring positive effect" (p. 28). According to Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008), motivational strategies refer to "(a) instructional interventions applied by the teacher to elicit and stimulate student motivation and (b) self-regulating strategies that are used purposefully by individual students to manage the level of their own motivation" (p. 57). As Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) say, ''motivating language learners has been a neglected area in L2 motivation research'' (p. 203). To fill in this L2 research gap, Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) did an empirical survey to collect data on motivational strategies. For this purpose, 200 Hungarian English teachers who were teaching in different educational settings participated in the study. The participants were given a questionnaire of 51 strategies and asked to rate them according to their importance and how often these strategies are employed in their teaching practices. Based on teachers' responses, Dörnyei and Csizér produced a list of ten motivational macro-strategies that they called ' the ten commandments for motivating language learners'. The ten macro- strategies were:

• Set a personal example with your own behaviour.
• Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.
• Present the tasks properly.
• Develop a good relationship with the learners.
• Increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence.
• Make the language classes interesting.
• Promote learner autonomy.
• Personalize the learning process.
• Increase the learners' goal-orientedness.
• Familiarize learners with the target language culture.

Almost all of the strategies proposed by Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) and Dörnyei (2001) were derived from western educational contexts. Thus, to compensate for this drawback.

Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) did a study in a non-western context, which was a modified replication of Dörnyei and Csizér' (1998) study. The participants in this study were 387 teachers of English in Taiwan, teaching in a wide range of institutional contexts, to see if there were any similarities or differences in rating the micro and macro motivational strategies. Their study confirms that several motivational strategies can be used in various educational contexts. Their results proved that some macro-strategies that related to teacher behavior, encouraging students self-confidence, making the classroom climate enjoyable and introducing the tasks in a proper way were the most important ones in both studies. Their results revealed that certain motivational macro strategies used in Western educational settings were ranked lower by Taiwanese English teachers. The macro strategies were 1- stimulating the learning tasks, 2- familiarizing students with the cultural background of English, 3-encouraging group cohesiveness, and 4- motivating students autonomy.

Also, Kumaravadivelu (2006) produced ten microstrategies, which are (a) maximize learning opportunities, (b) facilitate negotiated interaction, (c) minimize perceptual mismatches, (d) activate intuitive heuristics, (e) foster language awareness, (f) contextualize linguistic input, (g) integrate language skills, (h) promote learner autonomy, (i) ensure social relevance, and (j) raise cultural consciousness.

Kumaravadivelu (2006) states that -using these macrostrategies as guidelines, practicing teachers can design their own microstrategies or classroom activities. In other words, macrostrategies are made operational in the classroom through microstrategies". He emphasis that, "by exploring and extending macrostrategies to meet the challenges of changing contexts of teaching, by designing appropriate microstrategies to maximize learning potential in the classroom, and by monitoring their teaching acts, teachers will eventually be able to devise for themselves a systematic, coherent, and relevant theory of practice".

6. USING MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES BY EFL TEACHERS IN IRAQI KURDISTAN

The scarcity of research on second language motivation in Iraqi Kurdistan is perhaps due to the fact that most universities and colleges are generally interested in pure linguistics and literature in Kurdish or English rather than English language teaching. There few studies conducted on the use of motivational strategies in Kurdish EFL settings; here I outline one of those studies, regarding its significant and findings.

The present paper focuses on the kinds and frequencies of motivational strategies that teachers employ to motivate their students in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Qadir (2014), conducted a study on the use of motivational strategies by Iraqi Kurdish teacher, He attempts to provide qualitative information concerning the importance of these strategies. This study carried out by interviewing several Kurdish EFL teachers, holding BA and associate degrees. The study also discovered the strategies that Kurdish EFL teachers choose as the most and the least significant ones to encourage students' L2 motivation. To reach the general aim of his research, his study examined the following research questions:

• What strategies are employed by Kurdish EFL teachers to motivate their students?

• Is there any significant difference between teachers' gender and types of motivational strategies they use in EFL classes?

• Is there any difference between graduates of two-year TEFL programs and BA holders in Translation and Literature and types of motivational strategies they employ in EFL classes?

• Is there any difference between teachers' teaching experience (number of years they have taught) and types of motivational strategies they use in EFL classes?

Most classes in Kurdistan consist of students of both genders with different proficiency levels and interests. Hence finding motivational strategies suitable for all students is really difficult for the teacher. The results of the ten motivational macrostrategy showed that 'Proper teacher behaviour' was the most important motivational macrostrategy employed by the participants. This macrostrategy was also ranked first by (Al-Mahrooqi et al 2012; Alrabai 2010; Cheng and Dörnyei, 2007; He, 2009). Such similarity in the findings of his study and other related studies indicates that 'proper teacher behavior' is viewed important regardless of the background of teachers. On the other hand 'Familiarise learners with L2-related values' was the least important motivational macrostrategy for Kurdish EFL teachers. This macrostrategy was also ranked the lowest in studies conducted by (Alrabai, 2010; Cheng and Dörnyei, 2007; He, 2009; Hsu, 2009). This shows that teachers across different cultures share the view that familiarizing learners with L2-related values is not an important factor in L2 teaching.

Qadir (2014) emphasized that, he results of his study indicated that teachers who have 1-5 years of experience may not have much examples of success to share with their students through past successful students, but teachers with 6-10 years of experience have more examples of success to share with their students. And teachers with 1-5 years of experience introduce various interesting content and topics which students are likely to find interesting. The results also revealed that teachers who have 6-10 years of experience might be able to distribute grades among students easily according to what they have done that grades reflect their efforts and achievements better than teachers 1-5 years of experience.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS ON THE TEACHER MOTIVATION IN IRAQI KURDISTAN:

Based on the findings of these studies and my experience about the teacher education in Iraqi Kurdistan, the following recommendations can be made.

Teachers should promote students' curiosity and encourage them to learn English by creating a welcome and pleasant classroom climate in their EFL classrooms, building up student's self-confidence, diminishing their anxiety and trying not to embarrass them in front of their classmates.

Students' levels of proficiency and their ages should be taken into account by Kurdish EFL teachers while using motivational strategies.

In order to use more motivational strategies by EFL Kurdish teachers in Iraqi Kurdistan, curriculum designers should pay particular attention to the quality of the curriculum rather than the quantity by reducing the amount of the curriculum content for each grade, so as to diminish teachers' fears that they will not be able to finish the whole content on time.

Kurdish EFL curriculum designers ought to investigate students' interests, goals and needs and try to include them in the curriculum.

The Ministry of Education should hold workshops, seminars and conferences for Kurdish EFL teachers about how to motivate their students to learn English more effectively in their EFL setting.

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