Motivation

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Introduction

Motivation is widely acknowledged, among both teachers and researchers, as one of the key issues in language education. Dörnyei (2001: 2), for example, suggests that “99 per cent of language learners who really want to learn a foreign language (i.e. who are really motivated) will be able to master a reasonable working knowledge of it as a minimum, regardless of their language aptitude.” Yet everyone involved in language education also knows that the proportion of school pupils who do achieve “a reasonable working knowledge” of a foreign language falls far short of 99 per cent – in fact, it is probably a small minority. This state of affairs would suggest, then, that motivation is frequently a problem in ELT and the teaching of other foreign languages.

Before considering why this might be so, it is necessary to establish what the term ‘motivation’ refers to. A succinct definition in educational psychology is: “the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained” (Pintrich and Schunk, 2007: 5). As a process internal to the person, it cannot be directly observed but only inferred from what they do or say. A number of different human attributes are implicated in this process, and when describing or measuring the motivation of English language learners, researchers have sought to identify some of the following:

- The person’s motives or reasons for learning English (traditionally called ‘orientations’ in L2 motivation research)
- Their personal or academic goals, in the short or long term
- The strength of their desire to achieve those goals
- Their attitudes towards English, English-speaking peoples and Anglophone cultures
- Their interest in the subject and enjoyment of the learning process
- The effort they put into learning, in both formal and informal settings
- How they self-regulate their learning effort over time, in the face of distractions and competing goals

In the last two attributes, motivation overlaps with, and is sometimes considered a prerequisite of, learner autonomy (see Benson, this volume).

Motivation is most commonly thought of as an individual attribute, something that differentiates one learner from another and their likelihood of success (see MacIntyre, Gregersen and Clément, this volume). However, it is important to recognise that it is also a social construction;
that is, we come to strive for certain things in life as a result of our socialisation in a particular community or society, and the extent to which we can act on our desires is also constrained by our social environment. Some researchers therefore prefer to use terms like investment (Norton, 2000) or agency (Deters et al., 2015) to emphasise how people depend upon certain resources (psychological and material) being available to them and need to feel empowered to act on their desires.

When thinking about motivation and English language learning, a broad distinction can be made between the motivation that learners bring to the task of learning and the motivational effects of the learning itself, both in or outside class. Clearly, these two elements interact with each other, and where both are strong, we may expect an optimal level of motivation that will produce sustained effort. Success along the way may feed back into motivation, producing a positive cycle of reinforcement that leads ultimately to mastery of the language, as portrayed in Figure 23.1.

In fact, statistical studies typically find that the correlation between learners’ degree of motivation and their actual achievement is relatively modest (e.g. Masgoret and Gardner, 2003; Vandergrift, 2005; Lasagabaster, 2011), the reason being that many other factors will mediate this relationship, such as the learners’ aptitude for languages, the efficiency of their learning strategies, the quality of instruction and the inherent difficulty of the language for a particular L1 speaker. Indeed, recognition of the complexity of motivational processes has encouraged researchers to look beyond linear ‘cause and effect’ models (e.g. the expectation that having a goal will result in the learner actively and persistently pursuing that goal) towards a dynamic systems perspective which focuses on the ongoing interactions between different contextual and temporal factors (see later in this chapter; also Mercer, this volume, for further discussion of complexity and language teaching).

Acknowledging these caveats, I will use the two circles in Figure 23.1 as an organizing principle for this chapter, as they represent two distinct areas of research, as well as perhaps reflecting how many teachers conceive of language learning motivation. In the final part of the chapter, I will highlight promising avenues of contemporary motivation research which should bring important new insights in the coming decade.

**Competing perspectives on individual learner motivation**

As in other areas of the social sciences, scholars interested in understanding L2 motivation have generally taken one of two approaches: either they have studied large groups of learners and sought to characterise their motivation in the terms of one or more psychological theories in order to identify the factors which seem most important for that population (e.g. Chen et al., 2005), or they have taken a few individual cases and tried to gain a more detailed and holistic understanding of their motivation in the belief that this can give us essential insights into how
people think, feel and act in contexts of interest (e.g. Lamb, 2013). It is fair to say that the former approach has dominated the field, but that in the last decade more qualitative and mixed-method approaches have gained traction (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011).

**Psychological theories**

A wide range of psychological theories and concepts have been brought to bear on the issue of what motivates people to learn English. I will first deal with those that have been most influential and then more briefly review other theories that have potential relevance.

**Social-psychological perspectives on L2 motivation**

Systematic research into the motivation to learn a foreign language was initiated by Gardner and associates in Canada in the 1960s as part of a broader impetus in the post-war years to understand and promote better intercultural communication and relations between communities and nations. Gardner and Lambert (1972) argued that a person’s attitudes towards the people who spoke a foreign language were likely to influence their desire to learn that language; this distinguishes language from other subjects on the academic curriculum, since “the learning of a second language involves taking on features of another cultural community” (Gardner, 2010: 2). Gardner (1985) elaborated this notion in his “socio-educational model of second language acquisition”, which posited two main orientations (or motives) for learning an L2, the integrative – having positive attitudes towards the L2 group and desiring to interact with them – and the instrumental – seeing pragmatic benefits in the L2, such as passing exams and enhancing one’s career potential. In interaction with other important factors, such as the individuals’ attitude to the learning situation and their aptitude for language study, these orientations were predicted to affect learners’ ultimate success in gaining proficiency in the language. Other researchers suggested further possible orientations to learning an L2, such as ‘knowledge’, ‘travel’ and ‘friendship’ (Clément and Kruidenier, 1983). Reviewing the many research studies based on the socio-educational model, Masgoret and Gardner (2003) concluded that there was strong evidence that ‘integrativeness’ was an important element in the motivation of learners of many different foreign languages, and Gardner (2010) continues to assert that motivation is “supported by a willingness and ability to take on the features of another cultural community” (p. 175).

While these ideas may well have relevance for the learning of certain languages by certain groups of learners – not least, perhaps, the learning of other languages by Anglophones – there is a growing consensus among ELT motivation researchers that intense globalisation over the past 30 years has lessened their usefulness for understanding why people would want to learn English. As it has gained a status as the world’s lingua franca, English is gradually losing its association with Anglophone countries and cultures (see Seargeant, and Kramsch and Zhu, this volume), so it is difficult to see how individuals’ attitudes towards Anglophone people or culture could be relevant to their desire to learn or use English. Moreover, in school curricula worldwide, English is not so much a foreign language as a basic skill like numeracy and L1 literacy (Graddol, 2006), a foundation on which higher level knowledge of other academic subjects is built, and thus a pre-requisite for many jobs and professions. Listening to the voices of diverse English language learners, whether Indonesian villagers (Lamb, 2013), South African multilinguals (Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2006) or the middle-class clients of British Council language centres (Borg, 2009), it is difficult to distinguish integrative from instrumental motives; their reasons for wanting to
achieve mastery of English relate more to their perception of its general significance in their present lives and to the wider horizons it may open up for them in the future.

The implications of intense globalisation for ELT motivation theory are profound, for, as Ushioda has asked,

[s]ince we are referring to a global community of English language users, does it make sense to conceptualise it as an ‘external’ reference group, or should we think of it more as part of one’s internal representation of oneself as a de facto [or potential] member of this global community?

(2013: 3)

The key to understanding people’s motivation to learn English, therefore, seems to lie within their own self-conceptions.

The L2 motivational self-system

Dörnyei’s L2 motivational self-system (2009) reconceptualises L2 motivation to take these new conditions into account, while building on what was already known to be important. It has three components:

- **The ideal L2 self** – this is our vision of ourselves as future L2 users, e.g. as an international traveller, a student abroad or a jet-setting businessperson. The clearer and more powerfully ‘felt’ the vision, the more likely it is to engender effort to learn, as we constantly compare our actual self with this future self and work to overcome the discrepancy we notice between the two. Dörnyei (2009) claims that this captures the motives formerly labelled ‘integrative’, with the ‘integration’ being more with a future version of the self rather than with any external body of L2 speakers. It can also capture the more internalised instrumental motives, i.e. those aspirations which one truly desires for oneself in the future.

- **The ought-to L2 self** – this is our sense of what significant others would like us to become; it engenders a feeling of duty and obligation, which may translate into effortful learning but may also lead learners to avoid negative outcomes rather than strive towards the positive. It may capture too those instrumental motives which are felt to be more externally imposed (e.g. getting good results in the end-of-term exam because our parents and the teacher demand it).

- **The L2 learning experience** – this relates to the motives engendered by the process of actually learning the language, recognised as important in almost all previous studies of L2 motivation and, indeed, general academic motivation. Relevant factors might include the teaching methods and available materials, the attitudes of peers and the experience of success or failure in the course of learning.

In recent years a number of researchers have found this framework valuable in portraying the pattern of learners’ motivation for English (other languages have been far less studied) (see, for example, chapters in Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009; Apple et al., 2013). Typically the ideal L2 self and the L2 learning experience are found to be the most powerful influences on people’s intended learning effort. There is some evidence that the ideal L2 self has the most influence in later secondary and in tertiary levels of education (Kormos and Csizér, 2008) and is less
influential on the motivation of older learners or those in early adolescence, whose future visions may still be vague or fantastical (Lamb, 2013). There is also likely to be interaction between the ideal L2 self and the L2 learning experience; learners with a vivid ideal L2 self, for instance, may draw satisfaction from their English classes even if they are not intrinsically enjoyable; equally, inspiring lessons may help the learners develop ideal L2 selves.

The role of the ought-to L2 self is more doubtful; most studies suggest it has less motivational power than the other two components of the self-system, as Dörnyei’s framework would predict. However, there is also evidence that it has a larger role to play in the supposedly collectivist cultures of the ‘East’ than the individualist cultures of the ‘West’, that is, where individuals’ personal motives may be more easily influenced by parents and other prominent figures in the milieu or even subordinated to relational motives, like those of the family or nation (Chen et al., 2005; Islam et al., 2013). On the other hand, proponents of self-determination theory have long argued that it is a universal human characteristic to act on motives that are internalised, whether these originate in one’s own aspirations or those of significant others, and therefore the key to understanding learner motivation is to measure the degree of internalisation (Ryan and Deci, 2000). It is to this influential theory of motivation that I now turn.

**Self-determination theory**

Self-determination theory (SDT) has so far had more influence on general academic motivation research than on L2 motivation research, perhaps due to the perception that languages are different from other curriculum subjects. However, its main precepts are well-known to language teaching methodologists, who have long emphasised the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (e.g. Harmer, 2007). Intrinsically motivated learners are said to study a language because they like it; that is, they are stimulated by new knowledge, enjoy the challenge of learning tasks or gain satisfaction from their increasing mastery of the subject. Extrinsically motivated learners do it in order to gain some other kind of benefit distinct from the process of learning. The key insight of SDT, however, is that this is a continuum – our goals may be externally imposed by circumstances or other people and we feel compelled to pursue them, or they may be more aligned with our personal goals, in other words, ‘self-determined’ and internalised, and “with increasing internalization (and its associated sense of personal commitment) come greater persistence, more positive self-perceptions, and better quality of engagement” (Ryan and Deci, 2000: 60–61).

Importantly for educators (and parents), the theory also proposes how learner motives can become internalised – by having their basic human need for autonomy, competence and relatedness satisfied in their learning activity. Learners who are given choices about what and how to learn, for example, may come to feel that they are learning English autonomously, for their own purposes (see Benson, this volume, for further discussion of learner autonomy). Those who are set appropriate challenges in their courses and given helpful feedback on their performance are likely to gain a sense of competence and thus feel confident to persist in learning. Those who are made to feel they ‘belong’ in a learning community and have warm relationships with teachers and peers are likely to stretch themselves further and take more risks (Noels, 2013). Conversely, as Ushioda (e.g. 2012) has consistently argued, teachers who attempt to motivate learners through traditional ‘carrot and stick’ approaches will likely produce a form of controlled extrinsic motivation that might have short-term benefits (e.g. learners will make an extra effort to do their homework tasks, in order to please the teacher) but will not produce the autonomous motivation necessary to sustain learners’ efforts over the long term.
Motivation

Other psychological concepts

While the theories outlined above have tended to dominate L2 motivation research, other psychological concepts have also been shown to influence individual learners’ motivation. Here is a brief selection:

- How learners interpret their past success or failures, in particular whether they attribute them to factors under their control (see Williams et al., 2001)
- Learners’ linguistic self-confidence, usually derived from their past success in L2 communication, and self-efficacy, their feeling of mastery over particular learning tasks (see Iwaniec, 2014)
- Learners’ ‘mindsets’, i.e. their beliefs about the malleability of intelligence and talent, which may be particularly important for L2 motivation given the common perception that some people are born with a ‘gift’ for languages (see Mercer and Ryan, 2010)
- The distinction between one’s private and public self, especially for adolescents learning English in school, who may be wary of evincing a strong motivation to study for fear of ridicule from peers (see Taylor, 2013).

Holistic perspectives on learner motivation

The danger in all such theoretical approaches is that they oversimplify human motivation, giving precedence to whatever cognitive or affective factors the theory presupposes are most important. Based usually on questionnaire data, published results are almost always averages and so may disguise the extent of individual variation. Conducted at one point in time, they cannot measure changes in motivation over a long period or its fluctuations over the short term. Such studies also often hypothesise a cause–effect relationship between the selected variables, which may give a false impression of their predictability in actual contexts of learning, where a complex array of internal and situational factors will interact with each other, potentially affecting the willingness and ability of learners to study or use the L2.

In response to these shortcomings, Ushioda (2009) has called for a complementary approach to be taken, wherein a language learner is viewed not as a theoretical abstraction with a set of identified characteristics but as a “thinking, feeling human being” living “in a fluid and complex system of social relations, activities, experiences and multiple micro- and macro-contexts” (p. 220). Such an approach is in tune with a wider social turn in SLA (Block, 2003) which has foregrounded the sociocultural and socio-historical nature of language learning rather than cognitive and psycholinguistic processes and adopted a range of “socially and contextually grounded theoretical frameworks” (Ushioda, 2009) and qualitative research methods such as interviews, classroom observations and discourse analysis. In fact, there are already several studies in this emerging paradigm which have provided real insights into the nature of EFL motivation, even though motivation may not have been a central focus of the research.

Perhaps the best known of these is Norton’s (2000) longitudinal study of immigrant women in Canada learning English as an additional language. Although in conventional terms all the women were highly motivated, she shows how they did not always take up opportunities to use and learn the language; and although they were all striving to gain a ‘voice’ in English so they could participate in their new communities (both real and imagined), their actual investment in L2 learning and use was mediated by ongoing identity issues and, for some, the day-to-day struggle to survive. Like those researchers working with the ‘self’ psychology outlined earlier in
the chapter, then, Norton sees individuals’ ‘visions of the future’ as central to their motivation to learn English, but her case study approach enabled her to show that the “real world is messy and contradictory” (Kramsch, 2013: 198), that individuals’ desires were often ambivalent and changeable, their agency in constant tension with the structuring forces of powerful institutions, discourses and people. As Kramsch puts it, in many twenty-first century contexts, “the dream of renewed identities is clouded by the ruthless realities of economic and cultural globalization” (ibid; see also Kramsch and Zhu, this volume).

One line of enquiry of particular interest to language educators is exploring the way that learners’ identities – both how they see themselves and how they are positioned by others – may affect their motivation to participate in language classrooms. Language is our primary means of self-expression. Thus, learning a new language potentially expands our repertoire of symbolic resources for communication, but, in the process of learning, we may also feel as if we are being deprived of these resources or that our existing resources are no longer valued. To take two examples, Canagarajah (1999) and Skilton-Sylvester (2002) describe Sri Lankan school pupils and Cambodian women immigrants respectively resisting participation in English classes, despite being ostensibly motivated to learn, because they felt important aspects of their identities were not being recognised in classroom processes. In contrast, Lamb and Budiyanto (2013) describe young teenagers in Indonesian state schools reacting with excitement to the cultural challenges of English, tentatively performing new cosmopolitan identities in the language while struggling to reconcile them with more traditional, local identities. Focussing on the discourse of the communicative language classroom, Luk (2005) and Richards (2006) demonstrate how subtle differences in the way teachers position learners in class may encourage or discourage their engagement; broadly speaking, treating learners as more than just pupils, for example by recognising their aspirant identities beyond the classroom, is likely to promote engagement, if done with sympathy and humour.

The motivational effects of English teaching

We have already moved here into the second circle in Figure 23.1, above, the ‘motivating learning experience’. The question of what should happen in language classrooms cannot and should not be separated entirely from what the learner brings to the classroom (see MacIntyre, Gregersen and Clément, this volume, for discussion of learners’ individual differences), but this section will focus explicitly on what is known about the motivational dimension of language teaching, starting with what, arguably, is the most common learner experience – demotivation – and then looking at the burgeoning collection of research studies on motivational teaching strategies.

Demotivation

As Pintrich (2003: 680) notes, “Over the course of the school years student motivation on the average declines or becomes less adaptive, with a large drop as students enter the junior high school or middle school years.” A certain loss of motivation may be inevitable in almost any long-term course of learning, as Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) point out; novelty wears off, other interests develop. Nevertheless, it seems “there is something about the very organization of teaching and learning that, for many learners, systematically kills their motivation to learn” (Littlejohn, 2008: 216, original italics). Recent research has highlighted these ‘external’ demotivators as prominent in certain educational contexts:

- Boring teaching methods, such as the monotonous provision of grammar exercises, rote memorisation of vocabulary and translation (e.g. Falout and Maruyama, 2004). However,
Motivation

it is important to note that a ‘grammar-translation’ approach is not always demotivating – Lamb and Wedell (2015) found Chinese school classrooms where this approach, practised effectively and with enthusiasm, appeared to inspire learners.

• Lack of opportunities to practise the language, both inside and outside the classroom, which may also prevent learners feeling any sense of progress (especially a problem in rural areas; see, for example, Hu, 2003, on China).

• Relentless exam pressure during secondary school, which may promote anxiety and have more subtle effects on learners’ motivation, displacing intrinsic motives with short-term extrinsic goals (see, for example, the studies of test washback in Cheng et al., 2004).

• Poor teacher-student relations, especially where teachers are ‘distant’, perhaps because they lack motivation or self-confidence themselves (e.g. in Korean primary schools, Kim and Seo, 2011).

• A dissonance between the frequent creative use of English in leisure pursuits outside the classroom, such as digital gaming, and the grammatical/lexical knowledge orientation of the classroom – particularly felt by relatively advanced-level European secondary school students (Henry, 2013).

It is too early to say whether the general trend of starting to learn English earlier, in primary school, will have the beneficial motivational effect that some proponents assert, or whether inappropriate teaching methods may even exacerbate the problem (see Enever, this volume, for further discussion of primary-level ELT).

Motivational strategies

The good news is that many of these demotivating factors can be overcome by skilful teaching. Not surprisingly, teachers who are identified as highly competent tend to have motivated learners (Brosh, 1996), and the ability to develop positive attitudes in learners is accepted as an essential skill that teachers need to develop. A primary rationale for the introduction of a new teaching methodology is its capacity to motivate, or re-motivate, learners; most recently, for instance, advocates of content and language integrated learning (CLIL) argue precisely this – that it can avoid the common pattern of demotivation that afflicts regular language-focussed instruction (see Lasagabaster, 2011; also Morton, this volume, for further discussion of CLIL).

There is an emerging body of research which aims at identifying teaching practices which boost the motivation of language learners. Some of the theoretical approaches to learner motivation described above offer their own implications for pedagogy. Hadfield and Dörnyei (2013), for example, offer teachers a variety of techniques and materials based on the notion that learners need to develop rich and vivid ideal L2 selves as well as detailed plans for realising them, and Magid and Chan (2012) provide some empirical support for the value of this approach when used with Chinese university students. Self-determination theory has also inspired researchers to design interventions to boost language learner motivation. For example, Wu (2003) found that Chinese primary school teachers who deliberately tried to boost their pupils’ perception of competence (e.g. by presenting tasks with the right level of challenge) and perceived autonomy (e.g. by offering choices of activity) did help improve their learners’ intrinsic motivation.

Other research studies are not so theory-based but instead attempt to find empirical support for the effectiveness of particular motivational strategies. The stimulus for this research was Dörnyei’s (2001) taxonomy of 35 ‘macrostrategies’ based on the stated preferences of Hungarian
teachers of English and organised into four groups to reflect the different stages of the language learning process:

1. To provide fertile ground for motivation to grow, teachers and institutions need to establish a pleasant learning environment and create positive group dynamics (see Dörnyei, 2007, for especially valuable advice on this).

2. To help generate initial motivation, teachers should help learners form ideal L2 selves, set realistic personal goals and become confident about their ultimate success.

3. Once a learner has gained motivation, it needs to be carefully nurtured, for example through the provision of stimulating tasks, the encouragement of autonomous learning and the setting of achievable targets that lend a sense of progress.

4. The teacher needs to anticipate learners’ motivational needs once a course is over, for instance by providing constructive feedback and promoting healthy motivational attributions (see earlier in the chapter).

Recognising that such a full and detailed list could be intimidating to teachers, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) emphasise that a reasonable professional aim is to be a “good enough motivator” using “a few well-chosen strategies that suit both the teacher and the learners” (p. 134).

Since Dörnyei produced his taxonomy, a number of research studies have been carried out to discover whether the strategies do actually motivate learners. Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008), for example, found that Korean school pupils with teachers who used motivational strategies, such as connecting lesson content to pupils’ lives and using pair or groupwork, tended to have more positive attitudes and to engage more fully in class activities. Papi and Abdollahzadeh (2012) obtained similar results in Iranian classrooms. Moskovsky et al. (2012) went further by directly comparing the classroom motivation and attitudes of Saudi learners studying with teachers who did and did not use a set of selected motivational strategies. Over an eight-week period, they were able to demonstrate a causal link between strategy use and learners’ motivation.

While it is encouraging to know that teachers can positively influence learner motivation, it is unlikely that the same set of techniques will motivate all learners in all contexts. Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) found that while Taiwanese and Hungarian teachers agreed on the value of some strategies, such as boosting learner self-confidence and creating a pleasant classroom climate, they gave different priority to other methods: the Europeans, for example, emphasised the importance of promoting learner autonomy, the Asians the need to recognise and praise students’ efforts. Meanwhile, Guilloteaux (2013) found that Korean secondary school teachers attached much less importance to creating a pleasant classroom climate or fostering positive group dynamics, instead prioritising the development of learners’ self-discipline and moral values.

In short, at the moment, the research evidence is too partial to validate any particular motivational strategy as universally applicable; and while a set of macro-strategies (as in Dörnyei, 2001) can be useful for beginning teachers, experienced teachers will know that they must always be adapted to the needs and preferences of each unique set of learners.

One further caveat regarding the ‘motivational strategies’ approach concerns the possible assumption that stimulating classroom experiences have long-term effects on pupils’ motivation. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011: 136) note that there is a critical difference between “motivating” students and “developing their motivation”, defining the latter as “socializing and generating healthy forms of internally driven motivation”; students who are motivated by a teacher in a relatively short-term course may lose that motivation once they part company. Lamb and Wedell (2015) investigated whether there might be particular teacher behaviours that generate longer-term motivation by asking Chinese and Indonesian learners to recall inspiring teachers
Motivation

of English they had had in the past. Though their results suggested that inspiring teachers do deploy a range of motivational strategies in class, the common feature among them was that they themselves were highly committed to the profession and cared deeply about their learners, and it was possibly this that led them to be remembered so fondly by their former pupils.

Future directions for ELT motivation theory and research

The academic study of ELT motivation is thriving, and here I outline some of the key areas which will command the attention of researchers and practitioners in the coming decade.

Understanding the dynamism and complexity of learner motivation

As noted earlier, researchers are becoming increasingly aware of the complexity of internal and contextual factors that affect an individual’s motivation to learn a language and how these factors interact and change in often unpredictable ways. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011: 69) argue that L2 motivation research is entering a ‘socio-dynamic’ phase, and one of the most exciting developments has been the application of dynamic systems theory (or complexity theory; see Mercer, this volume) to the investigation of motivational issues. For example, Waninge et al. (2014) use experience sampling methods to chart the rise and fall of individual learners’ motivation over a sequence of lessons, showing how these fluctuations may be responses to events within the lesson interacting with aspects of the learner’s own personality and predilections. MacIntyre and Serroul (2015) employ an even more microscopic lens, finding quite dramatic fluctuations in individuals’ motivation while engaged on various communicative tasks, with basic factors like ‘topic’ being hugely influential. Another promising theoretical concept is directed motivational current (DMC) (Muir and Dörnyei, 2013; Dörnyei et al., 2016), which is hypothesised to be a period of intense motivation during which individuals have a strong vision of how they want to be (e.g. getting fit, or achieving top grades in an exam), plan a sequence of action and sub-goals, and channel their energies towards these goals in such a way that their life changes significantly for that limited duration (typically a few weeks or months). Understanding the nature of DMCs in education may mean that, in the future, we can plan teaching interventions to initiate their operation simultaneously within a group of learners, for instance through a carefully-designed class project.

More focused contextual studies of L2 motivation

As the complexity of motivation becomes clearer and the number of English learners continues to grow, we may find more systematic variations among regions and nations and between ages, genders and other social groupings. Two recent edited volumes have purposefully examined learner motivation in particular global contexts. Ushioda (2013) looks at motivational challenges facing teachers and policy makers in 11 different countries, in both the developed ‘North’ and the developing ‘South’, whilst Apple et al. (2013) focuses on motivational issues in Japanese ELT; and we can expect to see more such contextually focused publications, as they are of value not only to readers from the same settings but to theorists and practitioners from elsewhere who are inevitably prompted to compare their own learning conditions and motivational practices. Learners of different ages have distinct characteristics (see chapters by Enever, and Pinter, this volume, for discussion of primary and secondary ELT), and as ministries grapple with the dilemmas of introducing English into earlier stages of the national curriculum, we need more longitudinal studies like those of Heinzmann (2013) in Switzerland, which charted changes in
young learners’ attitudes over several school years, and Carreira (2011) in Japan, which focused on children’s language learning preferences in years 3–6.

Similarly, it is well-known that girls tend to do better in foreign language than boys. Some research has already implicated motivation in this gender achievement gap; for instance, Williams et al. (2002) showed how teenage boys perceived French as a ‘feminine’ language and preferred the more ‘manly’ sounding German, while Jones (2009) found that language teachers have strong expectations about the superior motivation and aptitude of girls and suggested that this itself may be a factor in perpetuating the gender gap. This issue is of more than academic interest, as the shortage of male students studying English at advanced levels is a matter of national concern in some countries. Another problem in many developing countries is the urban-rural divide, which some recent research (Islam et al., 2013; Lamb, 2013) suggests is not just due to inequitable educational opportunities but also to a possible motivational deficit: village children may lack the role models of competent English-speaking compatriots from which to form ideal L2 selves and also miss the support of parents and other family members who could help sustain motivation over the school years. Given that rural (and marginal urban) learners in developing countries make up the majority of English language learners worldwide, and that access to the global lingua franca may dramatically enhance their life prospects, their plight is worthy of much more research attention than they currently receive.

**Recognising the importance of English teacher motivation**

As noted above, inspiring teachers are very often those who, as Csikszentmihalyi (1997: 79) puts it, “showed by their dedication and their passion that there was nothing else on earth they would rather be doing”. But it is also apparent that there is a teacher motivation crisis in many parts of the developing world (Bennell and Akyeampong, 2007). How can we expect children to be motivated to learn English if their teachers have to work in hot and crowded classrooms with minimal resources, managerial support and material reward? Of course, teacher stress and burnout is not limited to the developing world, and the problem is beginning to receive attention in general education research, but it is largely unexplored in ELT. Extrinsic factors like salary and accountability cannot be ignored, but it is probably the more intrinsic components which directly affect learners’ motivation – that is, teachers’ enthusiasm for their job and for their subject, their sense of competence (self-efficacy) and their sense of autonomy, all of which may be undermined by continual curriculum reform or overbearing assessment pressures (Wedell and Malderez, 2013). The rapid development of educational technologies impinges on teachers’ motivation too – as an opportunity, where embraced to make their teaching more appealing, or as a threat, when teachers feel that their position as the ‘language authority’ is undermined by pupils’ easy access to online resources that they themselves are not familiar with.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, L2 motivation has been presented as the product of two distinct but interconnected elements: the individual’s attitudes, goals and self-concepts, and the experience of learning. Mediating the connection is, among other important people, the teacher. It therefore seems appropriate to conclude the chapter with an endorsement of Ushioda’s (forthcoming) proposal that teachers and learners research motivation together, carrying out small-scale localised research that focuses on the issues and challenges that they feel warrant attention: such projects may produce results of immediate relevance and boost the motivation of both parties in the process.
Discussion questions

- How far do you think the preeminence of English as a global language is affecting young people’s motivation to learn other languages, in Anglophone countries and elsewhere?
- Reflecting on your life so far, do you think a strong ‘ideal self’ or ‘ought-to self’ was a major factor in motivating you to strive towards your main achievements? How have your ideal selves changed during your lifetime? As a teacher, do you think your learners have ideal English-speaking selves? If not, how might they be promoted?
- Is it true, as most theorists argue, that the most powerful motivators ‘come from within’? Or are they underestimating the motivational power of external factors like class tests and national exams, for example?
- Can you think of teachers who inspired you to learn a subject at school? Did they use certain motivational strategies in class? If so, which ones? Or did their influence on you derive from some other aspect of their behaviour or presence?
- If you are a teacher of English, have you noticed any systematic fluctuations in your pupils’ motivation to learn? Or in your own motivation to teach?

Related topics

Appropriate methodology; Complexity and language teaching; Individual differences; Learner autonomy.

Further reading


References


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