EXPLORING STRATEGIES TO FOSTER LEARNING IN BUSINESS SCHOOLS: EVIDENCE FROM PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Substantial research on motivation has been done previously but the types of strategies that can be developed in order to find the root cause of learner’s motivation can help further strengthen the role of teachers in the field of successful language teaching. This study will help improve the English Language teaching with the positive attitude of the teacher, at the same time making the course objectives clear to the students that will help achieve better results not only from the examination point of view, but also outside the domain of classroom learning. The study will also investigate students’ motivation for learning at the beginning and at the end of the English Course and calculate whether there is any change in students’ motivation for learning English after they take the English course at the university. Dornyei’s (1994) framework of L2 motivation is used as a backbone for this study.

Keywords: Business school, undergraduate business students, strategies, foster learning

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Introduction

It is generally observed in Pakistani universities that students lack interest in studying English as a subject, more specifically when English is taught as a pre-requisite to other Business communication courses. Students treat the subject as a passing grade, showing no motivation to learn. As an Academic subject specialist, my own views on teaching Academic English to undergraduate students of public and private universities hold the same problem.

One of the most important factors in Language learning is ‘Motivation’ (Van Lier 1996). No long term objectives of language learning process can be maintained nor achieved without motivation. The past decade has seen many research studies conducted by research scholars in which theories of motivation and models have been discussed. Of all these theories the most important theory of motivation was advocated by Gardner (1985) and his colleagues. For any instructor the motivation of learners remain a great challenge as they do not have much control over external circumstances which impacts students’ behavior, yet they play a crucial role in shaping the learning that takes place in their classes. Various instructional options do make a meaningful impact on the motivation of the students. As motivation remains one of the most challenging tasks for educators, hence some of them throw up their hands in dissatisfaction or annoyance proclaiming that the universities or institutions can do little to motivate a student in the learning process. Most of the time the past experiences of the students help them in the process of motivation in classrooms.

Keeping in mind the above situation, it is obvious that the level of motivation varies from individuals to individuals in the same class. Skehan (1989) is of the view that for any instructor, the motivation of students is a great challenge, but the types of strategies that can be developed in order to find out the root cause of learner’s motivation can help further strengthen the role of teacher in the field of successful Language teaching. This study will help improve the English Language teaching with the positive attitude of the teacher, at the same time making the course objectives clear to the students that will help achieve better results not only from the examination point of view, but also outside the domain of classroom learning. The study will also
investigate students’ motivation for learning at the beginning and end at the end of the English Course and analyze the change in students’ motivation for learning English after they take the English course at university. For this purpose, Dornyei’s (1994) framework of L2 motivation is used as a backbone for this study.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to find out the cause that de-motivate the students and come up with strategies that will motivate them.

**Research Question**

1. Do teaching strategies in higher education cause a major concern to the undergraduate students who show less interest in the Academic English course?
2. Is there a significant difference between classroom teaching strategy and student motivation in higher education?
3. Can motivation help in seeing the difference in learning at the start and at the end of the course?

**Literature Review**

Pakistan is a multilingual and multicultural country with six major and over fifty-nine minor languages in 180 million populations (Rahman, 2002). Mainly, the languages to be used in the domains of power and prestige (such as government sector, corporate sector, education and media) are Urdu (at indigenous level) and English (at higher level). Pakistan’s national language is Urdu which is the mother tongue of only 7.57% population in Pakistan (Rahman, 2002).

English was implemented as a compulsory subject from class 1 in all government schools during Benazir Bhutto’s government (1988-1990). Although the government tried to bring the quality of English education at its schools at par with the elitist school which were already English medium schools, the government failed in its endeavor due to the fact that the teachers were untrained and not competent (Mahboob, 2002).
The Higher Education Commission along with the Government of Pakistan endeavored to train teachers through a newly constituted committee, the National Committee on English, under the ELTR project. This was done in order to augment English language teaching departments in universities and colleges. At present there is strong emphasis on English language learning in Pakistan as English has now been internationally acknowledged as the key to higher learning especially in the realm of science, medicine, technology, and today every step is being taken to enhance the quality of English education and bring it at par with the advanced nations.

The challenge with motivation is that it is a psychological and abstract term, which is not directly observable (Dörnyei, 2001). According to Ellis (1997) there has been no agreement on a definition of motivation and it has been used as a general term, which includes a number of possible concepts. Spolsky (2000) explains motivation in behavioral term as ‘the amount of time a learner was prepared to spend on learning tasks’. On the other hand, Motivation is not a concept that can be used as a singular expansion of behavior, but it results from the multiple interaction of a large number of other variables, among them are: (a) the need or drive level, (b) the incentive value of the goal, (c) the individual’s expectation, (d) the availability of appropriateness responses, (e) the possible presence of conflicting or contradictory motives and, (f) unconscious factors (Hunt, 1993).

Dörnyei (2001) is of the view that most researchers agree on definitions of motivation which concern the direction and magnitude of human behavior. In other words, (1) the choice of a particular action, (2) the persistence with it, and (3) the effort expended on it (ibid, 2001a).

The study of students’ opinion about their learning English is complex because language learning takes place in the social and classroom context. There are various influences on students when they decide to learn English. These range from their own perceptions of the reasons of learning English, past English learning experience and their parents and teachers. The current paper focuses on Dörnyei’s three stage model on learning situation level with regard to English course and teachers whether the change in students’ learning at the
beginning and at the end of the English course is affected in the Pakistan context.

A comprehensive framework by Williams and Burden (1997) presented the factors, both internal and external, which have a role to play in influencing motivation. Components of expectancy, valence, casual attributions and goal setting were brought forward by Gardner (1985). Theories of motivation was later attempted by many scholars who added various components of educational, industrial, cognitive psychology so that the factors related to motivation are better explained with their context (Gao, 2004). Certain new elements of need theories, reinforcement of equity and social cognition theories were given by Oxford and Shearin (1994), including the cognitive development theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, they also recommended norms of practical connotation for teachers to help motivate the students (Gao, 2004). Dornyei (2010) is of the view that motivational strategies refer to the influences that are consciously exerted to achieve some systematic and enduring positive effect.

Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB)

This multicomponent test for motivation contains 130 items which gives effective psychometric characteristics along with construct and prognostic validity (Dörnyei, 2001, 2005). Gardner theory’s constituents is operationalized by it while it contains measures of anxiety in language too (L2 class anxiety) and includes parental motivation (Dornyei, 2001).

There has been a link between perceptions of teachers’ behavior in classrooms using AMTB. At course level O’Sullivan (1991) did a study to explore course books in motivating language learners. More than 500 students completed the questionnaire. The findings showed that students were motivated by interactive exercises, everyday situations and presentation of real life.

Williams and Burden (2002) explored secondary students’ motivation for foreign language learning. Data were collected from a sample of more than 200 participants, both males and females, through questionnaires and interviews. The results reported that there is a higher level of integrative motivation in females in comparison to
males. In another study, Shaaban and Ghaith’s (2000), reported that over one hundred participants, females were more likely to exert effort in comparison to males. Dörnyei and Clément (2001) studied motivational characteristics of learning different languages of four thousand and seven hundred students completing an attitude and motivation survey. The study found out that females scored higher on attitudinal/motivational measures.

There are indications in literature that motivation is influenced by the cultural and social context where language is learned. Kyriacou and Benmansour (1997) explored students’ motivation to learn English as a foreign language was more intrinsic and it was argued that motivation is varied in different contexts and cultures. And at this place it is argued that Gardner’s model is not generalizable to other contexts and cultures.

In various studies parental encouragement has been an important contributor of motivation for learning second language. Gardner (1994) did his study on 190 students to see relationship between home background and characteristics of second language learning. The findings suggest that parental encouraged correlated significantly with attitudes towards the learning situation which suggest that parents’ influence or help develops students’ attitudes towards a learning situation. Zhu (2007) in his study on over 600 participants found out that parents play an important role in motivating students for second language learning.

Dörnyei’s (1990) study on Hungarian adult students reported that instrumental motivation was more relevant to foreign language learners and the integrative motivation was relevant for second language learners so that they could learn to live in target culture and talk comfortably in that language. Warden and Liu (2000) investigated Taiwanese students’ motivation for learning English as foreign language, 442 students reported that they have instrumental reasons for learning English. However, Integrative motivation was an important construct in affecting students’ motivation as in studies conducted by Dörnyei and Clément, 2001; Dörnyei and Csizer, 2001).

Students are motivated to learn in the right conditions that could be provided in the classroom. Unfortunately, this assumption
may not be true in every case such as in the Pakistan context where students are not motivated and are reluctant to study the Academic subject. The five key ingredients impacting student motivation could be: student, teacher, content, method/process, and environment. The focus of this study is to provide the educator with suggestions from Teacher Subject knowledge and motivational level, Teacher skills, Teacher qualifications, Reach out to students, Know your students and build on their strengths, value and build relationship that can be used to motivate the students.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This research was survey based using the quantitative approach to explore strategies in identifying the factors which hinder in learners’ motivation in Pakistan’s context.

According to Cohen and Manion (1985), surveys are commonly used for descriptive method in the educational research, and may fall under the large-scale of study to a small-scale study obtaining a snapshot of conditions, attitudes and events at a single point in time. The survey also shows trends in data, not explanations. Survey studies aims to quantify a particular phenomenon within a set of parameters.

Sample collection and size

The population of this study consisted of students from public and private universities of Karachi, enrolled in the first semester of Academic English. Purposive sampling design was adopted from 10 public and private universities. 5 universities were from public sector; while, 5 from private sector. These business schools were recognized and ran different business programs recognized by HEC in Karachi, Pakistan. The overall sample size was 100; 8 students and 2 teachers were selected as part of the study.

Techniques used for data collection

Data was collected through a questionnaire and a tailor-made interview protocol. The interview comprised of five broad
questions related to the impact of teaching strategies on the motivational level of the students.

The questionnaire was designed into 2 Sections. Section 1 was related to particulars of the respondents while section 2 contained lists of items that worked for analyses and strategies of student’s motivation. Generally, items were drawn to identify strategies to foster learning in business schools with respect to Students, Teachers, Contents and Environment.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire and interview consisted of close ended questions related to the impact of teaching strategies on the motivational level of the students. The close ended questions were quantified and presented with the help of pie chart and were analyzed and interpreted using a table.

Results (Content Analysis)

The purpose of the study was to find out the cause of de-motivated students who took less interest in the Academic English course and come up with strategies that would motivate them and help foster learning at the university level.

The interview helped identified the lack of motivation and discipline amongst the university students; moreover, it gave a clear picture of the needs of students’ interest in Academic English.

The findings of the questionnaire were based on the following questions.

What is your opinion regarding the student’s motives for taking English as their compulsory subject at University with respect to Learning Orientation?

69% (38+31) students mentioned that they studied English as a subject due to better prospects in job, whereas, 20% students opposed this statement. Furthermore, 55% (25+30) students agreed
that they studied English as their compulsory subject due to the policy of the University, whereas, 30% said it was not applicable. Why is English an important need for Academic Purpose?

76% (45+31) students found that the need for English as academic purpose was to understand lectures, whereas, 14% students said that it was not applicable. Moreover, 40% (29+11) students agreed that the need for English as academic purpose was essential for writing term papers, essays or reports. Whereas 39% (24+15) students said that it was not applicable.

What role does motivation play in improving academic English for the students?

70% (35+35) students agreed that motivation helped in improving their English for academic purpose but while 59% (39+20) students also agreed as being motivated in studying academic English, 34% students said that it was not applicable.

How do you see teachers as an important factor for improving students’ motivation at higher Education?

70% (26+44) students vouched for teachers as being the main factor behind improving students’ motivation in learning English at a higher Education, whereas 25% students said that it was not applicable.

How much impact does content have in Academic English for improving student motivation at a higher Education?

40% (29+11) students agreed with regards for improving student motivation (Content). Whereas 39% (15+24) students said that it is not important at all.

Do you agree with method/process to be an important element for improving student motivation at higher Education?

77% (28+49) students agreed that method/process was important in improving student motivation in higher Education, whereas 20% students said that it was not applicable.
Does environment play an integral role for improving Student Motivation in the classrooms?

40% (29+11) students agreed to the point that environment had an impact in improving student motivation, whereas 39% (15+24) students said that it was not important at all.

Discussion

According to Dornyei’ (1994), motivation is an important subject in the realm of second language acquisition (SLA). The results through the measurement scale showed that the term ‘motivation’ is generally seen as an important factor for general, academic and job needs for the students. The strategies required for reading, understanding, conversing for various purposes is one of the motives behind taking English at the higher Education.

The opinion regarding the student’s interest for taking English as their compulsory subject were manifold for their learning orientation such as: getting a better job, opportunity to travel or study abroad, mandatory under the University policy, and enabling students to broaden their knowledge through taking academic English. William and Burden (1997), are of the view that in order to achieve a set goal, deliberate actions are acquired to initiate motivation and sustaining it for the tasks to be achieved.

The relationship between improving student motivation and teachers were highly connected as observed by the statistics. The motivating process is a long- term investment of gaining trust and caring at the same time (Scheidecker and Freeman 1999:126). According to the student’s perception in this study, their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, study time, study habits, their lecture attendance and long- term educational plans depended on their classroom context learning. Students felt motivated to learn under right conditions which included teachers’ subject knowledge, their teaching skills, qualification and their enthusiasm as a facilitator. This further led the students to familiarize themselves with the teaching methodology carried out by the researcher and the learners’ motivational factors in terms of learning before taking the course drastically changed end of the semester.
Omar (2016) found that the students feel motivated if the course objectives are aligned with the students’ style of learning.

The data also showed that the best motivational intervention was simply to improve the quality of teaching through the content, method and to bring about a positive learning environment into the classroom. Mc Combs and Pope (1994), suggests that the strategies and techniques which teachers bring about in their classrooms are considered valuable so long the teachers can mould these strategies according to their learners needs. The statistics also showed that students felt their achievement, success, creativity, critical thinking and having a positive connection with the teacher had to do with the teacher’s appropriate behavior and a good relationship with their students.

An important aspect of the study was also related with the method and environment of the classroom. The data showed that the methods that were implemented in the classroom were more important than the environment, although, a pleasant and a supportive classroom atmosphere were equally considered interrelated namely because almost everything that a teacher does in the classroom has a motivational impact on the students. The types of incentives, encouragement and praise, interesting lectures, collaborative quizzes to creating an effective environment by empowering students to have a ‘voice’ in class encompasses various components of motivational levels for the University Business students in Karachi.

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

The purpose of the study was to find out the cause of lack of interest among the de-motivated university students and develop strategies that would motivate them. The scope of this study was limited to the students of Karachi and more specifically to those interested in studying at a Business private or public sector.

It can be concluded that university students need to improve their confidence in order to achieve success. Moreover, these students need to look for programs that provide learning opportunities in order to achieve competence once they join University for the English Course. On the other hand, Universities need to ensure that the
learning experience is formed from the integration of knowledge, skills and values (attitudes) in the subjects taught. Lastly, the university teachers should take up the responsibility for instilling motivation amongst students and promote themselves as a role model for their students.

In addition, the parents form an integral part of students learning particularly English in Pakistan society is seen as the choice of their parents in selecting subjects for students’ career. Likewise, students ethnic and language background have varied patterns of learning English. Students who come from a private set-up will expect a different way of learning that takes place in the classroom than those from the public sector.

The responsibility of motivating students is directly connected with teachers that can help push the button to bring about a change in their classroom teaching. These can start from simple instructional clarity to improve motivational factors in students. Even if a teacher is competent but lacks straightforward instructions, the learners will not follow the intended rules set for the particular task, resulting in a failure of motivating students to achieve their tasks.

Overall, if teachers choose a few basic well-constructed strategies that suit both the teacher and the students, it may take the teacher beyond the threshold of a ‘good enough motivator’, creating a positive motivational atmosphere in the classroom.
References


