

What Motivates Language Teachers: Investigating Work Satisfaction and Second Language Pedagogy

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Abstract

One of the most often overlooked areas of second language acquisition is the motivation level of the teacher. Although there is an abundance of research on learner motivation, data and material on language *teacher* motivation is rather scarce. Language teachers often find it difficult to maintain their intrinsic motivation to teach due to numerous external factors, such as the work environment and student response to instruction. Especially important to this issue of EFL/ESL teacher motivation, is the recognition and appreciation of the teacher's home culture and value for her or his skill as a teacher. In this study, the authors will first define and discuss intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as well as identify direct obstacles to motivation affecting the field today. Next, the more indirect internal and external motivating factors will be further discussed in the form of autonomy, self-realization, institutional support, and relationships. The authors will then consider the factors that not only motivate teachers through their ideal levels but also their perceived levels of job satisfaction. Finally, based on the writings discussed, the authors will suggest a number of general guidelines that institutions and employers can use to motivate their teachers and increase pedagogical quality.

Key terms: Motivation, pedagogy, EFL/ESL, efficacy, autonomy

Introduction

Motivation is thought to be responsible for “why people decide to do what they do, how long they are willing to sustain the activity and how hard they are going to pursue it” (Dörnyei, 2001a:8). In contrast to people who have lost drive and inspiration to act; motivated people are eager and engaged until the task is complete. This idea of motivation applies not only to language learners but also to language teachers, too. Several researchers (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995; New National Center for Education Statistics, 1997; Ushioda, 2003) have contended that the factors that motivate teachers are the same as those that motivate students. These authors argued that learners want group development processes, opportunities for continuing individual learning, dialogic interaction with others, common goals, freedom to experiment, value as a member of the group, and appropriate levels of work and responsibility. These are all factors that a good work environment offers the teacher, and it is these significant factors that help to provide teachers with the necessary motivation to work and do their jobs effectively.

We believe that a language teacher who is motivated will conduct a lesson with inspiration and an honest dedication to the students and more effectively help students to understand the target language. Such traits as passion, interest, inspiration, drive, and dedication are arguably necessary traits in most motivated people, however one must realize that “only arousing interest is not enough to be motivated” (Williams and Burden, 1997:111). Teachers that are motivated will work harder, put more effort in to trying new techniques and activities, and in general do more for the sake of the students, all of which contribute to smoother classes and

more efficient learning. We believe that as a teacher, it is not just important but rather imperative to be both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated and satisfied in order to maintain the motivation to teach over the course of one's career.

Review of the literature

Pennington (1995) presented a set of important motivating factors for teachers. The author suggested that in an employee-centered environment, teacher efficacy could stem from skill variety, task identity, task significance, freedom, and feedback. According to this perspective, the ideal teaching situation would be one where teachers are able to use and acquire a variety of new professional skills. They would then be able to understand how their teaching is meaningful, have the freedom to choose how to best utilize their skills as teachers, and get direct feedback from their colleagues, superiors, and students as to the effectiveness of their methods.

Therefore, in considering what motivates a teacher, we will look at several factors with a heavy influence on job satisfaction. The factors, loosely based on the work of Kassabgy, Boraie, and Schmidt (2001), are **intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, autonomy, relationships, self-realization, and institutional support**.

Intrinsic Motivation

Speaking in general terms, Dörnyei (2001b: 47) has defined intrinsic motivation as “performing a behavior for its own sake in order to experience pleasure and satisfaction such as the joy of doing a particular activity or satisfying one's curiosity.” Anecdotally, there is certainly a strong relationship between intrinsic motivation and skilled language teaching. Internal desire to educate people in a language, to pass on linguistic as well as cultural knowledge to help learners to communicate is at the heart of the profession. Successful transmission of knowledge is the intrinsic reward that many teachers crave. The educational process itself where the teacher is positively affected by working with students and watching them grow and improve, could possibly be the intrinsic rewards that make teachers forgo high salaries and social recognition.

The intrinsic rewards provided by teaching are documented in a study by Tardy and Snyder (2004). Teachers who feel a strong connection and sense of accomplishment in their English lessons reported feeling a greater desire to teach in order to feel the same kind of success. These authors offer insight into ways in which teachers find the teaching environment motivating through the fact that their students are able to achieve a great deal of success, communication, and real interactions through close connection and dialogue. According to these researchers, highly positive moments in teaching can encourage teachers to explore and reflect on their teaching practices. Positive interaction and connection with learners leads teachers to better work with their students' needs individually, and thereby create better teacher efficacy and improved teacher motivation (Coladarci, 1992).

The teacher's ostensible intrinsic motivation can also have a significant effect on student perception and desire to learn. One study of student assessments of teachers conducted by Wild, Enzle, and Hawkins, (1992) found that teachers who were perceived to be more intrinsically motivated were more willing to experiment and explore their fields of study. Piano students were informed that their teacher was either paid or a volunteer, while the teacher in question was not informed of this condition. Students reported that the “volunteer” teacher appeared more enthusiastic, and these students enjoyed the lesson more. Teachers who are perceived to be more motivated seem to be more able to engage students with the learning material.

Extrinsic Motivation

Positive extrinsic motivators include such factors as salary, pension, insurance, and other benefits that we

believe to heavily contribute to job satisfaction and the motivation to teach.

Appropriate financial rewards for teachers are an extremely sensitive, yet also very important issue when discussing job satisfaction and teacher motivation. The importance of remuneration can be summed up best in this quote from Poppleton and Riseborough (1990):

Pay does not have absolute importance in relation to job satisfaction but, if it is perceived to be good...all other aspects appear to have relatively less significance. If, on the other hand, it is perceived to be poor...then it is seen as a symptom as much as a cause and associated with other symptoms such as lack of respect in the community (219).

Appropriate compensation is certainly an important factor in the motivation of teachers; low pay has been cited as a prominent reason for leaving the teaching profession (Coladarci, 1992, citing Metropolitan Life, 1985).

External factors including lack of job stability, stress levels, heavy workloads, and disagreement with teaching methods are also potentially demotivating factors. Pennington (1995) said that in order to improve teacher motivation, employers need to address and eliminate the demotivating factors in teaching environments. Ostensibly, by removing unsatisfactory elements from the work environment, teacher motivation and classroom efficacy should increase. Doyle and Kim (1999) offered a list of factors that create dissatisfaction among ESL and EFL teachers:

- Lack of respect from administration
- Lack of advancement opportunities
- Lack of long term employment and job security
- Overly heavy work loads
- Separation and alienation of teachers
- Lack of rewards for creativity
- The malfunctioning of the education system
- Lack of funding for projects
- Lack of autonomy in the teaching and evaluation process
- Lack of autonomy due to mandated curricula and tests
- Lack of appropriate teaching environments
- Over-commercialization of textbooks
- Discrepancies in teaching philosophies
- Lack of teacher training
- Institution of team teaching and foreign assistant teachers

These factors represent a significant barrier to effective teaching and teachers' classroom efficacy beliefs.

Teachers working in these environments will likely have low expectations for success, and therefore be less able and less motivated to teach effectively.

Autonomy

Autonomy is one of the most important factors for many educators. (Hall and Bazerman, 1997) Being able to plan their own lessons, create their own syllabi, and pick their own texts is all part of why many people choose to be teachers. In other words, having academic freedom and the power to choose is deeply connected to many people's decisions to become teachers.

Ushioda (2003) also suggested that motivation often comes down to a matter of choice. The more choice and

freedom a person is given, the more willing and ready he or she will be to work. An individual who is able to decide what and how he or she wants to study is more able to set his or her own goals, work cooperatively, and show more internal motivation and self-actualization. An increased freedom to create goals will give teachers greater motivation to do what they want and achieve these goals in the classroom.

In a 2000 study of teacher empowerment behaviors employed by different school principals, Davis and Wilson found that teachers were more motivated in schools that allowed more choices. Principals who gave more decision making power to the teachers were found to be more motivating. While the added autonomy did not improve satisfaction or alleviate stress, it did improve teacher's motivation scores in what the study described as impact, meaningfulness, competence, and choice.

Relationships

Another factor that is pertinent to job satisfaction is the aspect of working relationships among teachers in the educational institution. The nature of relationships among the adults within a school has a greater influence on the character and quality of that school and on student and teacher accomplishment, than anything else (Barth, 2006). The author said "if, on the other hand, relationships between teachers are fearful, competitive, suspicious, and corrosive, then these qualities will disseminate throughout the school community, and likely be very detrimental to job satisfaction." If the relationships between teachers are trustful, generous, helpful, and cooperative, then the relationships between teachers and students, students and students, and teachers and parents are also likely to have the same qualities.

Schools can be thriving with adult relationships that are interactive and positive. These relationships can be highly motivating and create a wonderful sense of job satisfaction. Brunetti (2005) found that according to the subjects in his study, "positive relationships with colleagues were very important concerning job satisfaction and helped them provide and receive both personal and professional support from their peers, including goal setting, sharing of materials, and designing curriculum." The teachers also reported that they shared a common concern for the well being of the students and school.

Positive relationships and evidence of what Barth (2006) calls "congeniality" in schools can be found in a variety of places. For example, one teacher makes the coffee and pours it for a colleague, or the principal gives a teacher a ride home so she can care for her sick child. These congenial relationships are personal and friendly and shouldn't be taken lightly. However, congenial relationships represent a precondition for another kind of adult relationship that Barth claims is "highly prized by school reformers yet highly elusive: 'collegiality.'" Examples of collegiality are: educators talking with one another about practice, educators sharing their craft knowledge, educators observing one another while they are engaged in practice, and educators rooting for one another's success. Barth sums up the importance of positive relationships in educational institutions by saying "when the alarm rings in the morning, the enthusiasm with which an educator jumps out of bed and prepares for school is directly related to the adults with whom he or she will interact that day." In other words, the promise of congenial and collegial relationships has an impact on one's overall job satisfaction. Ducharme (2000) agreed and stated "workgroup interactions, especially social support received from coworkers, may significantly contribute to job satisfaction and motivation among teachers." Coworker support and positive relationships at an educational institution seem to have an immense effect on teacher motivation. It is implied that promoting positive communicative ties among teachers may ultimately improve job performance as well as enhance job satisfaction.

Self-realization

Self-realization includes efficacy and personal growth leading to the intrinsic rewards that many teachers find in teaching. Professional effectiveness comes from being aware of one's strengths and limitations (Kottler and Zehn, 2000:3). In addition to autonomy where the teacher is given control of what, how, and when work is done, he or she replaces the idea of "competence" with that of "efficacy." Wheatley (2000:14) stated "teacher efficacy refers to teachers' beliefs about their ability to influence student outcomes." Teachers who feel their methods are successful can build a sense of efficacy leading to improved intrinsic motivation.

The idea of motivation in an educational environment has been defined by McKeachie (1997) as being based on a cognitive expectancy-value theory. A teacher's goals and rewards from his or her job are covered by values, where ideas like self-efficacy and probability of success are covered by expectancies. As is often discussed in student motivation, teacher motivation relies on, among other things, a teacher's expectation of success in the classroom as well as the aforementioned intrinsic and extrinsic rewards that he or she gains from doing the job (Deci and Ryan, 1985; 1997). McKeachie also stated that perception of success, the value of teaching, and a teacher's personal goals can all play a large part in increasing or decreasing a teacher's motivation.

Considering how a person's goals become more important at different times, and how this effects their work; the example borrowed from McKeachie (1997) stated that this would look at whether a person "focuses on doing the task well or on competing with others" (p.26). This theory also proposed that focusing on one's own abilities in relation to a colleague's abilities can be threatening and harmful to overall achievement. While this can mean that positively reviewed teachers get a boost to their motivation, this can also result in possible discouragement when someone finds that they are behind their colleagues.

An important factor that has been documented in faculty motivation is the presence of personal and institutional goals. Goal-setting theory has been well documented to increase motivation in a number of fields, and education is no exception. (Urda and Maehr, 1995; Latham, Daghighi, and Locke, 1997) By creating concrete, difficult, but achievable goals, teachers can increase their motivation and effectiveness in the classroom. In order for personal goals to be meaningful and intrinsically motivating, if possible, the teacher rather than the institution should set them. This is not to say that the institution should not set goals for the teacher; on the contrary, this can create a yardstick by which teachers are being measured, especially if the goals are clear. In order for institutions to improve faculty motivation to teach, personal motivational goals should be encouraged and perhaps requested for submission, but should be subject to the discretion of the teacher.

Institutional Support

Looking next at the idea of institutional support, we can gain perspective on motivation through the help language teachers receive from their schools. Institutional support plays a vital role when looking at the importance of expectations of success. Mowday and Nam (1997) stated that people in general tend to do the least amount of work necessary in order to get what they want. This being the case, if individuals believe that their efforts will lead to success and that the results of success will be positive, they will be more motivated and work harder. In their words "people are more likely to engage in behaviors when they see a high probability that effort will lead to high performance" (117). This suggests not that teachers should get greater rewards, but rather that institutions should give teachers classes not only for which they feel qualified, but classes which they feel they can teach to a high degree of success in order to gain greater rewards for good performance.

Furthermore, in order for teachers to feel that they can adequately succeed with a class, they must have the proper materials in order to teach the way they need to teach. Without time and proper physical materials needed

to prepare or perform classroom tasks, teachers often “become frustrated because they believe their efforts will not be translated into good teaching performance” (Mowday and Nam, 1997:118). Olsen (1993) demonstrated that many teachers feel that better teaching materials and support will positively influence their teaching, while Philips and Freedman (1984) indicated that many teachers blame too little institutional support and too many restrictions, and thereby lose motivation. In short, if teachers do not believe they are getting adequate institutional support, they will be less likely to believe in the possibility of success, and thereby become demotivated.

Finally, in order to promote strategies of success in teachers and keep motivation high, institutions must look at ways to further teacher development, especially early in the teacher’s career. Many new teachers are very unsure of themselves during their first few years and are often given heavy teaching loads and can be treated with indifference by more senior faculty (Olsen, 1993). If new teachers are given guidance from their institution, seniors, and peers, teaching performance is likely to improve, but it is important that this become a part of a new faculty member’s career earlier rather than later.

Discussion

This paper stems from the statement by Dörnyei (2003) that a list of “ways to motivate language teachers” has not been forthcoming or empirically validated. Teachers are highly likely to suffer from a lack of motivation across the board, more so than any other profession (de Jesus and Lens, 2005). Additionally, many of the studies cited in this paper have not been as recent as one would like in order to discuss the state of the art. The lack of current data on the profession of teaching in general also represents a need for more current research on modern educational institutions. Key issues when discussing ways to motivate language teachers are the factors that are important to language teachers and that keep these teachers over an extended period of time. Especially when considering a foreign language environment, teaching language is difficult, fraught with obstacles such as low student motivation and societal differences. It is our hope to contribute a list of factors based on the above research that may help motivate teachers for both short and long term success in the classroom. We believe that the above writings demonstrate that the pertinent factors to job satisfaction, and thereby teacher motivation are as follows:

- **Intrinsic motivation** is influenced heavily by an internal desire to teach, a dialogic connection between teachers and students, a high feeling of efficacy in the classroom, a sense of accomplishment, and the fact that high teacher intrinsic motivation is motivating for students.
- **Extrinsic motivation** is governed by working conditions such as stress and workload, the necessity of appropriate compensation, and long-term job stability or lack thereof.
- Vital to **autonomy** is the freedom of methods, materials, and choices in the classroom.
- Positive working **relationships**, good communication and community, and strong collegiality among faculty members are all crucial to a motivating work environment.
- **Self-realization** for teachers requires a high expectation of success in the classroom and the setting of personally achievable goals.
- **Institutional support** that builds motivation among faculty gives teachers classes where they have the requisite ability for and expectation of success, proper materials for teaching, and proper assistance and training for new teachers.

Conclusion

It is our sincere hope that this paper will shed some light on how language teachers feel, think, and what they ultimately hope to achieve. By understanding the fundamentals, it may be possible through further research to offer advice that could lead to better effectiveness in language teaching. In order to properly gain the greatest possible learning in the classroom, motivation to work in this environment must come from both teachers and students.

Finally, by investigating and understanding what it is that motivates teachers, it is the belief of these authors that that knowledge can be put to use by improving student motivation and student learning. Teachers who are motivated will be more likely to work hard and spend more time refining their skills, thus better managing their students, leading to better learning and having a positive impact on the learning environment. This paper will hopefully inspire language teachers to reflect on their own motivations and thereby bring about positive change for both themselves and the language students in an improved classroom environment.

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