

# การสร้างและการรักษาแรงจูงใจของผู้เรียน Building and Sustaining Learners' Motivation

ปิยวรรณ รุ่งวรพงศ์<sup>1</sup>

Piyawan Rungwaraphong<sup>1</sup>

\*Corresponding Author : Tel. 08-7923-5704 and E-mail : bewjah@hotmail.com

## บทคัดย่อ

ในห้องเรียนภาษา ผู้สอนต้องเผชิญสิ่งท้าทายมากมายนับไม่ถ้วน แต่สิ่งหนึ่งที่ทำทนายผู้สอนยิ่งนัก ไม่ใช่แค่การสร้างแรงจูงใจและการกระตุ้นให้ผู้เรียนกล้าแสดงออก ตลอดจนร่วมทำกิจกรรมต่าง ๆ ในกระบวนการเรียนการสอนอย่างกระตือรือร้นเท่านั้น หากแต่ยังหมายรวมถึงการจะท้ออย่างไรที่จะคงไว้ซึ่งแรงจูงใจ และการมีส่วนร่วมของผู้เรียนในทุกงานทุกกิจกรรม เพื่อก่อให้เกิดกระบวนการเรียนรู้ที่สมบูรณ์ตามเป้าหมาย การสร้างแรงจูงใจและความกระตือรือร้นในกระบวนการเรียนการสอนอาจเป็นคำถามที่หาคำตอบได้ยาก แต่แท้จริงแล้ว จากการศึกษาพบว่า “การสร้าง” กลับไม่ยากเท่า “การรักษา” สิ่งจูงใจจำนวนมากถูกนำมาใช้เพื่อสร้างแรงจูงใจและกระตุ้นให้ผู้เรียนเข้าร่วมกิจกรรมไม่ว่าจะเป็นการให้ของรางวัล การให้คะแนน คำชม เสี่ยงปรบมือ หรือแม้แต่การให้สิทธิพิเศษในการทำกิจกรรมบางอย่าง เป็นต้น สิ่งเหล่านี้เป็นเครื่องมือที่ทรงประสิทธิภาพอย่างยิ่งยวดใน “การสร้าง” หากแต่หน้าที่ใน “การรักษา” นั้น สิ่งเหล่านี้กลับเป็นเครื่องมือที่มีประสิทธิภาพแตกต่างกันไปตามกาลกรรมและสถานที่ หรืออาจขาดความสามารถในการทำหน้าที่โดยสิ้นเชิง บทความนี้นำเสนอปัจจัยที่ซ่อนอยู่ใต้สิ่งที่ป็นรูปธรรม ที่มีผลต่อการรักษาแรงจูงใจและความกระตือรือร้นของผู้เรียน เป็นต้นว่า ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างผู้เรียนและผู้สอน หรือระดับความยากง่ายของงานหรือ กิจกรรมต่าง ๆ เป็นต้น ซึ่งปัจจัยเหล่านี้ล้วนมีผลต่อแรงจูงใจและการเข้าร่วมกิจกรรมของผู้เรียนทั้งสิ้น และสิ่งที่ใกล้ตัวที่สุดที่ผู้สอนมองไม่เห็นหรือละเลยมองข้ามอาจเป็นตัวแปรสำคัญต่อความสนใจในการเรียนรู้ของผู้เรียน

**คำสำคัญ :** การมีส่วนร่วมในชั้นเรียน แรงจูงใจของผู้เรียน ผู้เรียนที่มีแรงจูงใจ

<sup>1</sup>อาจารย์ คณะพาณิชยศาสตร์และการจัดการ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตการศึกษาตรง  
อ.เมือง จ.ตรัง 92000

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Commerce and Management, Prince of Songkhla University (Trang Campus)  
Mueng District, Trang, Thailand 92000

## Abstract

Challenges in the language classrooms facing teachers are countless. One of the greatest challenges teachers encounters is not only how to motivate and elicit students' engagement in learning process, but also how to maintain their motivation and active engagement in classroom tasks and language activities throughout the whole process of learning. There are positive ways to motivate students, meanwhile to sustain their motivation and active involvement is one of the teacher's learning goals. This burden is more difficult than building up learners' motivation. This article presents variables in a language classroom that not only activate learners' motivation, but also enable teachers to keep their learners motivated and actively engaged throughout the whole process of learning.

**Key Words** : learning engagement, learner motivation, motivated learner,

## Introduction

Factors influencing learners' academic performance and achievement are innumerable. Motivation is one of those, which is considered as an internal factor, but it can be affected by some external variables. This article shows a profound correlation between students' motivation and their academic achievement. Some teachers have designed activities and invented teaching materials and tools for stimulating students' initiatives and learning motivation. They, however, have found out that the students lose their motivation somewhere along the way. This paper will discuss the elements that lie beneath the tangible factors which have powerful effects on students' motivation.

## Texts

### Healthy Teacher-Student Rapport

One primary element in a language classroom that can demotivate and hamper students' participation is their relationship with the teacher. A healthy rapport between students and teachers will give a positive learning atmosphere in which students feel secured and comfortable to ask and answer questions, to discuss a given topic, to deliver a presentation, and to participate in any classroom activities. Students' motivation in learning, in contrast, is diminished when they are treated badly by teachers.

Although teachers cannot be friends with students, nobody denies that they can make a healthy, friendly relationship with students. To foster a healthy teacher-student rapport, teachers first needs to establish a trust. In Social Psychology, Michener and Delamater (1999) pay much attention on the importance of trust in the development of a relationship. When a

person trusts someone, that person believes the other person will be both honest and benign and have positive intentions toward him or her. This is also true with teachers and students. Once students have a trust on their teachers, they realize that all questions their teachers ask, all activities and assignments their teachers give, and all lessons their teachers teach are from the teachers' best intention to help them to intellectually grow and for their sake, not the teachers'. The establishment of trust is likely to occur when teachers reveal some of their personal information and feelings. But this disclosure must be done with care. That is to say, it is to be in the extent that is considered professionally appropriate. In doing so teachers should simultaneously encourage students to share their own. With an appropriate self-disclosure, teachers are portrayed as someone students can trust and turn to whenever they need.

A good teacher-student rapport can also be established by teachers expressing care and concern for students. Students need to be ensured that teachers are there to help and facilitate their academic achievements, and that teachers care about their life both inside and outside school. If a student, for example, misses school because of diarrhea, the teacher should not just ask him or her for a medical certificate, but ask him or her whether he or she has gone to the doctor and what the doctor suggested. Communication of care and concern for students, though easily done verbally, will be more effective and impressive when it is done nonverbally. Teachers may strengthen the verbal expressions of care and concern for the students by speaking in a calm voice, using eye contact and facial expressions to say, 'I know how you suffer from that illness' and nodding occasionally while the student speaking. Teachers must keep in mind that eyes and face are means of disclosing an individual's hidden emotions. (Hamilton, & Parker, 2005, pp.135-136)

A good rapport between teachers and students that has been firmly established will lead to an accepting atmosphere in which the students are confident when they try or guess and they are secured when making a mistake. This kind of positive feeling will thereby make students enthusiastic and willing to participate or engage in classroom activities.

### **Constructive Feedbacks and Rewards**

Constructive feedback is a desirable approach to deal with students' academic mistakes especially in a language classroom where students suffer from the presumption that mistakes can occur easily. In classroom, feedback is a verbal or visual response by teachers to students' performance. Teachers give students a chance to self-monitoring on their academic competence. Responses from teachers, if positive, help students maintain their efforts in performing classroom activities and language tasks. (Crown, Kaminsky, & Podell, 1997, p. 245)

Feedbacks need to be directed toward behaviors rather than toward the person. Students will receive feedback much more positively if they are told what action or behavior is needed to be corrected or is unacceptable as well as what they should do to make it in the following lessons. Telling a student, 'You are a bad presenter' not only is an attack on the student but can also cause his or her self-esteem and self-confidence to be deteriorated. It, in addition, will hinder that student from engaging in any academic activities in the class next times. In contrast, a teacher who says 'Your presentation needs more cohesion and unity,' is referring to the student's action - the presentation- not the student. In addition, teachers need to be very careful with the wording when giving the feedbacks. Harshly worded feedbacks, for example 'Because of your terrible pronunciation, you completely failed to get your message across to the audience', or 'That is the most stupid answer I've ever heard', besides hurting students' self-esteem and self-confidence, can result in their totally withdrawing from the whole learning process and lead them to associate classroom activities with such negative perceptions as embarrassment, victimization and the like. Feedback that is well worded will minimize students' fear of criticism and embarrassment when making a mistake. Students can learn from their mistakes and resolve to do better later especially if they still have their self-esteem and self-confidence.

In addition to the constructive feedback, rewards are another effective tool for sustaining students' motivation in learning and encouraging their active involvement. Reinforcement is the key to motivate students' learning. Students are more likely to answer, express their opinions and perform a task when they know that their action can to a reward. More points, free times, attendance and participation scores, teen magazines for adult students and stars for children are a few examples of external rewards that can extrinsically activate students' motivation and enthusiasm. To some extent these tangible rewards may cause some teachers fear that eventually external rewards will undermine the intrinsic motivation and intrinsic value of learning. Tangible rewards, however, can do what intrinsic rewards cannot : sustain all activities. Teachers cannot deny that extrinsic rewards are an important part in students' persistence. Usually, an intrinsic reward is not concrete or intangible, in other word it is hard to perceive. It is based on long-term run which sometimes is too far to reach. As a result, students lose motivation and withdraw from learning activities before reaching those ideal-like intrinsic rewards. Therefore, teachers must be very careful when dealing with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. A good way is to balance between intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. Teachers must be ensured that students know that prizes and treats are immediate rewards while competence and knowledge last long and benefit them on long-term basis.

## Appropriate Tasks

Classroom activities or language tasks play an essential role in classroom. The difficulty level of a task given to students is a powerful arousal factor which has more to do with their motivation. According to the "arousal theory" of motivation (Weiner, 1980, 1992), different individuals have different optimum levels of arousal that varies from one situation to another. Each individual strives to maintain at his or her optimal level. One finding with respect to arousal is The Yerkes-Dodson law. This law was originally developed by developed by psychologists, Robert M. Yerkes and J. D. Dodson in 1908. It explains a relationship between the level of arousal and the efficiency of performance. Either too much or too little arousal results in inefficient performance (Yerkes, & Dodson, 1908, pp.459-482). Thus, tasks in language classroom must be neither too easy nor too difficult. On one hand, too simple tasks not only result in students' boredom but also require so little attention that students may engage in other irrelevant acts such as daydreaming or conversing with peers, assuming that the tasks at hand are not challenging and can be easily achieved without much concentration. Academic tasks that are too complex, on the other hand, may cause students to become so anxious, stressed and feared that they are unable to learn or cope with. Teachers, therefore, need to make sure that tasks presented to students are the ones whose level of difficulty matches students' competence, or, in other word, the ones with an optimal level of arousal.

Besides appropriate level of task complexity, a high portion of attention needs to be paid to the variety of tasks given to students. Human beings are likely to get bored when they are forced to do some things repeatedly for a long period of time. Routines, though to some extent is easy to operate, can result in a great boredom of the performer. This is also true for students who spend most of their lives at school. The monotony of doing things with which the students are too familiar can demolish their motivation and enthusiasm in learning. The routine vocabulary dictation, for example, at the first ten minutes of the class may good for widening students' vocabulary index; however, on long-term basis students may perform the dictation activity like a robot: memorize the ten words the teacher has requested, go to bed, wake up in the morning, go to class, get ready for dictation, and write down the words memorized, even without listening to the teacher. The beginning of this class would be robot-like if the teacher does not change the teaching techniques for improving students' vocabulary competence. A task that is considered interesting at one time may lose its appealing power if it is repeatedly performed. A dictation that once can be used to arouse students at the beginning of the class may turn out to be something the students feel less enthusiastic and do not pay much attention to do it.

## Student Autonomy

Autonomy can be defined as the freedom and the ability to manage one's own affairs, which involves the right to make decisions. The term was originally used to refer to the property of a state to be self-ruling and self-governing. When applied to an individual, the autonomy signifies the capacity of the individual to act as an autonomous state; that is to be independent and not governed by others. The autonomous individual is, in Roger's words (cited in Benson, & Voller, 1997, P. 4) is 'a fully functioning person'. Autonomy also apparently interrelates with responsibility, implying the state of one's being in charge of something and having to deal with the consequences of one's own actions. According to Scharle and Szab? (2000), autonomy is the freedom that comes with increased responsibility and requires active involvement.

Tasks and activities that take place in classroom must promote the climates that foster autonomous learners. The rationale behind a persistent need for promoting autonomy in learners is that learning can only happen when learners are willing to learn (Scharle, & Szab?, 2000, p.4). Learning process will never occur if students coming to class with no willingness to participate in classroom activities. Physical presence with passive mind will not suffice for the process of learning. Therefore, it is one of teachers' roles in creating an atmosphere that encourages students' active involvement, both physically and psychologically. As Benson (2001) suggests, teachers, in the first place, need to help students recognize the importance of being autonomous in learning and accept the fact that their academic success depends as much on themselves as on teachers. That is, students "take charge of their own learning" (Scharle & Szab?, 2000, p.80). This is especially true in language learning classroom, where learners can not be successful without actively involving and practicing on their own.

In autonomous learning, teachers no longer take charge of everything that happens in the classroom. Students will be provided with opportunities to find their own pathway to learn. Self-access learning center is the best model of autonomous-learning classroom. In the center, students are offered a wide range of learning materials - audiotapes, videos, DVDs, CD Rom, and so on. Students, then, have to make their own decisions on the selection of those materials, weighing by their own among numbers of materials what will best match both their own interest and the language skills they want or need to practice. In language classroom, materials as well as tasks should be selected and, if possible, designed by students themselves. Teachers in courses that required external reading, for example, may either allow students to choose their own books, or provide them with options of books so that they can make their own decision. A list of books are helpful for teachers as it narrows the scope of topics and books that, according to the teachers' consideration, are appropriate for the level of

their students. However, the teacher should not forget that all options must still be within the students' range of interests. Songs provided on the shelf in language laboratory need to match with students' interests and enjoyment. In other words, they are songs that students, not the teachers, want to listen to. Doing this will prevent the boredom that usually comes along with doing tasks they don't like. It, furthermore, will maximize students' willingness to actively involve in the task. Students' enjoyment that result from doing things that match their own interest is more likely to keep students motivated and committed to learning than being forced to do things that are designed and decided by teachers only.

## Conclusions

In classroom, teachers' duty is not only to teach but also to motivate and keep learners focused. In doing so, four elements need to be in teachers' consideration. The relationship between teachers and learners is the first element that plays an essential role. A healthy relationship provides students with a secured and comfortable leaning atmosphere, which in turn induces students' willingness to participate in learning activities. Positive responses and rewards from teachers is the second motivator for students' engagement in learning. Feedbacks from teachers need to be directed toward behaviors and conducive to learners' academic improvement. Another factor is the complexity of tasks. Tasks that are either too complicated or simple will diminish learners' attention. Finally, learners' motivation and active involvement is determined by the extent to which learners receive autonomy in the classroom. Learners that are allowed to make their own decision and take charge of their own learning, that is to say to become independent or autonomous, will be more active and willing to learn than those who are told or dictated what to do and to follow.

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