

Motivation Theory and its Application of Using Stories to Teach Vocabulary in EFL Classroom

Xinlu Mao^{1, a}, Jin Zhang^{2, b}, Kejia Zhang^{3, c}

¹The University of Sydney, NSW 2006, Sydney, Australia

^amxl0502@outlook.com, ^b172814600@qq.com, ^ckzha1198@163.com

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the effect of motivation on vocabulary instruction and to suggest feasible teaching strategies. By analyzing three empirical studies related to motivation strategies, it can be concluded that using motivation strategies in the classroom can effectively increase students' motivation and consequently facilitate their English acquisition. Based on the literature review and research analysis, this paper proposes a story-based teaching method for vocabulary instruction. In the Chinese teaching context, the story teaching method provides teachers with a teaching direction that can improve students' motivation.

Keywords

Motivational strategies; Vocabulary learning; Story teaching method; Language teaching.

1. Introduction

Motivation has always been an essential factor in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). Scholars have studied many ways to improve learners' motivation. While stories are often used as interesting teaching materials for reading, few people use stories specifically to teach vocabulary in the classroom (Hernawati, 2015). In Elley's (1989) study, young learners acquired twice as much vocabulary from funny stories as from general materials with high motivation, and they could remember those vocabularies for a long time. Therefore, this paper would focus on raising learners' motivation in second language (L2) learning, especially vocabulary learning, and applying stories in classroom teaching. Theories related to motivation would be reviewed, especially Dörnyei's (1994, 2001, 2008, 2014) theory. Three empirical studies related to motivational strategies would be discussed. Furthermore, a proposed teaching plan designed by the author would be shown. Meanwhile, the author would talk about its benefits and evaluation.

2. Theories Associated with Motivation in SLA

The relevant theory that can support raising learners' motivation in L2 is motivation theory (Elley, 1989). Motivation, as one of the important individual difference factors, is used more frequently than we can imagine, both in our daily life and in L2 learning. Motivation is the effort that learners would willing to or have a wish to be active and to maintain that activity toward a particular goal in foreign language learning (Ellis, 1994). During the past half century, research on L2 motivation could be composed of four stages: the social-psychological stage, the cognitive-situated stage the process-oriented stage, and the social-dynamic stage (Dörnyei, 2001).

In the social-psychological stage, Gardner's (1985) theory is most influential that emphasizes the effect of the social macroenvironment on motivation to learn L2. Nevertheless, it ignores the fact that the classroom environment can also have an impact on motivation. (Dörnyei, 2001).

In the cognitive-situated stage, most theories focus on the impact of motivation on learners in the actual learning environment in a micro-perspective based on cognitive theory (Dörnyei, 2014). In the process-oriented stage, Dörnyei (2014) concerns that motivation is not a static concept, but a dynamic process that is constantly changing. This stage focuses on the dynamic characteristics and temporal changes of motivation (Dörnyei, 2014). In the social-dynamic stage, motivational transformation and the interplay of motivation with individual identity, society, and environment for SLA are of interest to academics (Clement & Kruidenier, 1983; Dörnyei, 2014; Irie, 2003; McClelland, 2000; Yashima, 2000).

Dörnyei (2001) argues that motivation theory should become more applicable to the classroom. Dörnyei (1994) proposes three levels of motivation based on cognitive theory: the language level (different elements linked to the target language), the learner level (certain personal factors that learners encounter during learning), and the learning situation level (curriculum, teacher, and collective). The three degrees of motivation identified by Dörnyei (1994) correspond to the three components of SLA (L2, L2 learner, and L2 learning conditions) and represent the three characteristics of language acquisition (social aspect, personal aspect, and educational subject aspect). Based on the three levels, Dörnyei (2014) proposed a framework of motivational strategies that include four dimensions: provide basic conditions with motivation, stimulate learners' original learning motivation, sustaining and guarding learners' motivation and encouraging learners to appraise themselves positively. According to Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008), motivational strategies can be applied to the teacher's aspect and student's aspect in the L2 classroom: (1) Teachers stimulate learner motivation through a variety of methods, including classroom material selection, classroom activity design, and classroom language organization; (2) Students promote their learning motivation through self-regulation. Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) confirm the positive relationship between the utilization of motivational strategies by teachers and the motivation of learner to learn.

In conclusion, motivation is a richly embedded, influenced complex factor and its impact on teaching has important implications for classroom teaching practice.

3. Current Empirical Research

Research on motivational strategies and L2 learning is reflected in many countries. In this paper, three articles that shed light on teaching are discussed.

3.1. Study 1: Teachers' Efficacy, Identity, And Motivational Strategies and Their Effects on L2 Learners' Achievement (Karimi & Nikbakht, 2019)

Karimi and Nikbakht (2019) looked at how teachers' efficacy, institutional identity, and motivational strategies reflect in learners' achievement in English. They found 120 teachers and 2045 students to examine by questionnaires and L2 achievement tests (Karimi & Nikbakht, 2019). The results showed that there were positive relationships between the achievement of L2 learners and teachers' efficacy, institutional identity and motivational strategies (Karimi & Nikbakht, 2019). This means that these three factors can promote learning about L2. Additionally, Karimi and Nikbakht (2019) also found that the group with the greatest improvement in learning was the group in which teachers used motivational strategies, which greatly affirms the benefits of motivational strategies for L2.

This great number of data-driven study shows the importance of motivational strategies for L2 learners. We may infer from the results of this research that if we want to increase the L2 achievement of EFL learners, we must also improve teachers' teaching tactics.

3.2. Study 2: An Analysis Of Motivational Strategies in Teaching English as Foreign Language: A Case Study in Junior High School 7 Kuningan (Nugroho & Mayda, 2015)

This research used a mixed approach including observation, interviews and questionnaires to examine students' attitudes toward teaching and their English abilities (Nugroho & Mayda, 2015). The population is 123 students in the seventh grade in the Kuningan high school in Indonesia and they are divided into three groups to be taught by three different teachers (Nugroho & Mayda, 2015). The results of classroom observations and interviews showed that teacher 1 and teacher 3 who used each stage of motivational strategies received positive feedback from students, while the students taught by teacher 2 who used only selected stages of motivational strategies did not perform as positively as other groups in class (Nugroho & Mayda, 2015). Additionally, the results of the questionnaire showed that the students had active attitudes toward the classes taught by all three teachers and thought that their English skills were better than before (Nugroho & Mayda, 2015).

Thus, the way of applying motivational strategies in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) by teachers can increase students' motivation and facilitate their English learning (Nugroho & Mayda, 2015). The more complete the use of the four stages of motivational strategies, the more effective the promotion of student motivation (Nugroho & Mayda, 2015). However, in this study, the progress in English was obtained through their perceptions of the questionnaire, rather than relying on skill tests. Student perceptions may be biased, leading to lower reliability of the experiment.

3.3. Study 3: Increasing the Effectiveness of Teaching L2 Formulaic Sequences Through Motivational Strategies And Mental Imagery: A Classroom Experiment (Le-Thi et al., 2020)

This study focused on the efficacy of using motivational strategies and mental imagery (visionary technique) to promote L2 vocabulary learning by using a mixed-method quasi-experimental approach (Le-Thi et al., 2020). 150 students were split into three groups (motivational group, visionary group, and control group) and took lessons during six weeks (Le-Thi et al., 2020). The result was examined by a multichoice vocabulary test which showed post-test results were much better than pre-test results in the motivational group and visionary group (Le-Thi et al., 2020). Compared with three sets of data, this study found that both motivational strategies and visionary technique could increase learners' vocabulary and mental imagery worked better (Le-Thi et al., 2020). After interviewing and observing learners, they also found that learners had affirmative attitudes toward both motivational strategies and mental imagery, and vocabulary acquisition to be effective (Le-Thi et al., 2020).

Unlike study 1 and study 2, this study included a delayed post-test. They found that the group that adopted motivational strategies and mental imagery retained the vocabulary longer (Le-Thi et al., 2020). That coincides with Elley's (1989) finding that students with high motivation could acquire vocabulary more and keep them longer.

4. Relationship Between 3 Studies

These three studies discussed the relationship between motivational strategies and L2 learning in the ELF classroom and all three studies revealed that motivational strategies could effectively increase the motivation (Karimi & Nikbakht, 2019; Le-Thi et al., 2020; Nugroho & Mayda, 2015). Karimi and Nikbakht (2019) collectively explain the impact of motivational strategies on learning from the perspective of both teachers and students. Nugroho and Mayda (2015) examined each of the four components of motivational strategies that should be used to their full potential in classroom instruction. If the classroom lacks a motivational atmosphere at the

beginning, then subsequent maintenance loses its meaning. Similarly, even if students are initially motivated, without the help to maintain, they will gradually lose motivation. Le-Thi et al (2020) validated the impact of motivational strategies in long-term teaching. These three studies are consistent with Guilloteaux and Dörnyei's (2008) finding that motivational strategies have an affirmative influence on both student motivation and language learning. Study 1 discussed the effectiveness of motivational strategies, Study 2 examined the importance of each stage of motivational strategies, whereas Study 3 included a delayed post-test, which better illustrates the effectiveness and retention in vocabulary learning of motivational strategies (Karimi & Nikbakht, 2019; Le-Thi et al., 2020; Nugroho & Mayda, 2015).

5. Proposed Application

Based on the above studies and motivation theory, I designed a vocabulary lesson for third graders in a public elementary school in China. The lesson (30 minutes) is designed to teach body parts to 40 Grade 3 students who are beginners in English by using a short story with pictures (See Appendix). The age of learners is around 9 to 10 years old. They are very new to English.

6. A Proposed Teaching Plan

Before the lesson, the teacher will search and modify the teaching material to be fit for younger learners. All students will be asked to learn about puppets and draw a part of a puppet before class. During the lesson, students will bring the materials they have made. The lesson includes 5 steps. Step 1 is the lead-in. The teacher will greet them warmly and show them the rabbit puppet image (see Appendix) to them and tell the story. In Step 2, students will read the story and find body parts in the story. Step 3 is the practice part. Students will act in roles in the story as a team. In Step 4, students will use the material they bring to class to make a whole puppet with their classmates. Step 5 is sharing part. The students will show their puppets and introduce each part of the body to the class. In each step, the teacher will encourage and reward the students for their performance with words and actions.

7. General Implications

Based on three empirical research and motivation theory, the implications for future vocabulary teaching are in the following four areas.

Firstly, as Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) argued that teachers could improve their teaching process by creating a more inspiring environment in the classroom when using motivational practices, using stories as input materials is a great choice to create a relaxed environment. Secondly, to stimulate the internal motivation of learners throughout the classroom, teaching materials and classroom activities should be set up to follow the psychology of learners (Brown & Lee, 2015). Modification of story materials should be appropriate for the age and ability of the students so that it could maximize and maintain motivation. According to Dörnyei (2001) and Hernawati (2015), if the story contains too much vocabulary that is unfamiliar to the learners, they may be less motivated to learn because of the difficulty, therefore the difficulty of the story should be kept within the acceptable range for learners. Thirdly, for increasing the participation of young learners in the classroom and maintaining their motivation, teachers may achieve it through role-play and group work (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). Moreover, using language to stimulate and reward students by teachers is in line with Guilloteaux and Dörnyei's (2008) proposal that to give positive feedback for encouraging students.

8. Why and How Would Students Benefit From This Practice

Using stories to teach vocabulary would be beneficial to EFL learners in 4 aspects. First, making materials before class would provide students with an awareness of the class content in advance, making them curious and interested in the course, and keeping them motivated at the beginning of the class. Second, the story is interesting and suitable for students and it creates motivational conditions for students (Dörnyei, 2014). Thirdly, learners' motivation is raised by story acting and group work in Steps 3 and 4 (Dörnyei, 2014). Furthermore, their motivation would be kept and protected by creating their story characters with classmates (Dörnyei, 2014). Moreover, in Step 5, my students will introduce their designs to the class. This could help them reinforce the vocabulary of body parts and help them build confidence. In addition, my students will gain confidence from my encouragement and praise, as Guilloteaux and Dörnyei's (2008) consider that it is beneficial for self-evaluation.

9. Evaluation of Proposed Teaching Practice

The validity of Dörnyei's (2014) motivating strategies has been investigated using two different approaches: (1) by using a questionnaire survey to compare teachers' perceptions of and actual application of methods; (2) by assessing their tangible impact through data from student surveys and classroom observations (Le-Thi et al., 2020). The following measures can be used to assess the effectiveness of teaching practice.

First, learners will be given a pretest, a post-test, and a delayed post-test of vocabulary in this lesson. The delayed post-test will be taken two weeks later. These tests will be given as multi-choice questions to more accurately test the true levels of proficiency of students. By comparing the difference between three sets of data, it was possible to test whether motivational strategies applied by story teaching promote vocabulary learning and whether it promotes long-term memory.

In addition, the teacher observation method and questionnaire survey to target learners can also be used. The teacher will observe the participation, correctness, and fluency of the expression throughout the whole class to evaluate the motivation and effectiveness of the story teaching lesson. A questionnaire survey will be provided to the students that assess their motivation for the vocabulary lesson by investigating whether they enjoy the lesson, rating their performance in the lesson, and investigating whether they would like to take such a vocabulary lesson in the future.

10. Conclusions

Motivation is one of the fundamental aspects that distinguish success from failure in L2 acquisition; as a result, utilizing motivational strategies may be regarded a vital characteristic of language education and learning (Dörnyei, 2001). Considered the classroom teaching environment, teachers play an important role in the EFL classroom by affecting learners' motivation. Motivational strategies are effective in engaging L2 learners' motivation in the classroom, which teachers could take advantage of.

Stories are often used as instructional materials that provide teaching contexts that interest learners, especially young learners in primary school. Story teaching not only enhances learners' motivation but is also a good way to teach vocabulary in an efficient way. When teachers adopt this approach to their lessons, they need to pay attention to the preprocessing of stories. That means teachers attach importance to designing the presentation ways and adjusting story difficulty to better promote vocabulary learning and increase the motivation of target learners in the EFL classroom.

In China, a high number of students learn for the sake of grades. Teachers focus more on knowledge and skills than on interests. For Chinese students, vocabulary lessons are always boring and students are not motivated to learn words. For better teaching vocabulary, teachers should pay attention to students' motivational needs in the teaching process and try to use various methods to improve the motivation of students. Teachers could use the stories as threads to the lessons and bridge each part of the vocabulary classroom. Teachers should create classroom environments where students can be motivated, and use language and classroom activities design to maintain students' high motivational states. Furthermore, teachers should understand the meaning of the stories and select the educational parts from them to enlighten students.

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