Exploring the Impact of Motivation on Second Language Acquisition Through An Interview with An EFL Learner

-- Three Levels of Dörnyei Motivation Theory as A Perspective

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Abstract

There are many factors influencing second language learning, and motivation is the most important one. This paper focuses on Dornyei's three-level theory of motivation and interviews an EFL learner. Through the interview with Demi, this paper focuses on the following two questions: What factors affect second language learning motivation? What are the different influences of different motivational factors on English learners' learning?

Keywords

1. Introduction

Many factors influence second language learning, and motivation is essential. Motivation is a significant emotional factor that sustains the interest of language learners and allows them to persist in their learning (Dörnyei, 2001). Motivation is the psychological tendency to desire knowledge and understanding, and it motivates students to be active and maintain that activity towards a particular goal. Students' motivation is crucial to language learning. Dörnyei's three-level theory of motivation is the most influential theoretical model of foreign language learning for second language acquisition after Gardner's classical socio-educational model. This paper uses Dörnyei's three-level theory of motivation as a lens to analyse interviewer Demi's motivation for learning a second language at three levels: language, learner and learning situation.

2. Summary of Relevant Theories

The term motivation has its origins in psychology and is a drive such as internal human emotions or desires that can cause a person to strive to achieve a specific goal (Brown, 2007). Gardner (1985) said motivation is how a person strives to learn a language because he or she has the desire to do so and is fulfilled in this learning activity. After a period of mental and physical effort, the set goal is eventually reached. Dörnyei (1998) also proposes a definition of motivation. He sees motivation as the cumulative awakening of a person's dynamic changes, including initiation, guidance, coordination, amplification, termination, evaluation, cognition and dynamic processes. In this process, initial aspirations are selected, prioritised, operationalised and put into practice. Motivation is the driving force behind the beginning of second language acquisition. It is the main driver for continuing the long and tedious process of second language acquisition. Therefore, motivation is a critical factor in the speed and success of second language acquisition (Gardner, 2001). Although some researchers have proposed different learning strategies that can be used to improve students' learning efficiency

in foreign language learning, research has shown that EFL's learning motivation still plays a prominent role in the learning of the target language (García-Sánchez & Luján-García, 2016). Due to the importance of motivation in second language acquisition, motivation research has been a significant component of second language acquisition research and has produced many significant findings.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) divided foreign language motivation into integrative and instrumental motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000) divided motivation into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Since the 1990s, researchers have further investigated motivation. Dörnyei (1994) proposed a three-dimensional model of foreign language motivation based on previous research. It includes.

2.1. Language Level

The language level includes Integrative Motivational Subsystem and Instrumental Motivational Subsystem.

2.2. Learner Level

The learner level covers many factors of the individual learner. The main ones are achievement needs, self-confidence, language use anxiety, perceived second language competence, causal attributions and self-efficacy.

2.3. Situational Learning Level

The situational level dimension outlines three specific motivational factors: the curriculum, the teacher, and the learning community.

Dörnyei's three-level theory of motivation shows that motivation is related to the learning subject, object, and situation. It is also the first time that the study of motivation has been closely linked to schooling, thus providing theoretical support for foreign language teachers to motivate their students(Dörnyei, 1994).

3. Aim of the Interview and Research Questions

This interview uses Dörnyei's three-level theory of motivation as a lens to interview and analyse the interviewees' second language learning experiences and motivational factors. To explore what factors influence second language learners' motivation to learn a language. This paper mainly studies the following problems:

1. What factors influence motivation to learn a second language?

2. How do different motivational factors affect English language learners' learning differently?

4. The Participant Information

Demi, a female, is from China and her first language is Chinese, her second language is English. Demi started learning English in her first year of junior high school when she was 12 years old. After graduating from university in 2015, Demi went to work as a Chinese teacher at the Confucius Institute at Kennesaw State University in Atlanta, GA, for two years. Since then, she returned to China in 2017 and worked as a primary school English teacher at an international school.

5. Interview Analysis and Key Findings

The interview process was conducted via video interviews, the video recordings were transcribed into text and analysed after the interviews. The interview questions and analysis were based on Dörnyei's three-level theory of motivation for second language acquisition. The interviews revealed four stages of Demi's English learning background: secondary school,

university, teaching Chinese at the Confucius Institute in the USA and teaching English back in China.

5.1.   Language Level

The linguistic dimension of Dörnyei's three-level theory of motivation includes both integrative and instrumental motivation. Demi talks about learning English during her middle school years to meet the expectations of her parents and teachers and do well in English exams (appendix, lines 29-31). Demi is using language to achieve her goal of doing well in English exams at this stage and is instrumentally motivated. Then as she is learning the language to qualify to teach at the Confucius Institute in the USA (appendix, lines 73-75), her motivation is instrumental. However, Demi describes a strong interest in learning English at university due to her influence learning environment (appendix, lines 67-72). Demi's motivation for learning English changed from instrumental to integrative. The motivation that lacks integrative motivation is not very effective in the learning process. Demi's motivation to learn English after arriving in the US to integrate into the English-speaking culture is integrative motivation (appendix, lines 135-138). Demi studied English non-stop to improve her English language skills after returning to her home country to set a good example for her students and be recognised by the student's parents (appendix, lines 157-159). Instrumental motives are embodied here.

5.2.   Learner Level

The learner level of Dörnyei's motivation theory encompasses some factors for the individual learner; Demi talks about learning English during her junior and senior high school years because of the expectations of her parents and teachers, who wanted her to do well in exams (appendix, lines 35-36, lines 51-53). It reflects the element of learner-level attribution. Demi also mentions that she is stressed and often feels anxious about learning English (appendix, lines 36-38). Demi finds that she feels satisfied and happy when her English language skills improve during her time at university (appendix, lines 81-82); this reflects the learner-level element of achievement. A sense of achievement is a positive emotional experience, a feeling of self-worth and recognition, and Demi's increased satisfaction with learning English during her time at university led to an increase in self-confidence in learning English (appendix, lines 83-84). Learning satisfaction plays a crucial role in promoting students' language learning performance (Zhonggen et al., 2019). Demi believed that she could enhance her effectiveness in the Chinese teaching classroom by learning and understanding English culture while teaching at the Confucius Institute in the US (appendix, lines 141-145). Reflecting on self-efficacy factors, when Demi returned to China to teach primary school English, she worked hard to improve her English skills to set an excellent example for her students and gain students' parental approval (appendix, lines 157-159). Self-efficacy theory is also reflected here.

5.3.   Learning Situation Level

Dörnyei motivation theory outlines three specific motivational factors: curriculum, teacher and learning community.

5.3.1. Motivation and Curriculum

Demi said she had a single curriculum at Middle school levels. The curriculum was mostly based on grammar and vocabulary, which was rather dull (appendix, lines 42-46). However, at university, Demi says that the English curriculum was varied. Demi also mentions the addition of multimedia and modern internet technology to the English classroom during the university years, making the class more interesting (appendix, lines 92-93). Multimedia is the presentation of different kinds of digital environments to learners, such as cartoons, digital stories, PowerPoint, mp3 and other technological presentations (Moos & Marroquin, 2010). Many studies have shown the effectiveness of multimedia learning on students' learning outcomes (Arslan-Ari, 2018). The university English course enhances Demi's interest in

learning English and makes Demi feel happy and fulfilled in the English course activities. It shows that the course as a factor also influences Demi's motivation to learn English.

5.3.2. Motivation and Teacher Behaviour

Demi started learning English in her first year of junior high school, but she became interested in English after university. Talking about the influence of teachers on Demi's motivation to learn English, Demi mentioned that in Middle school, teachers were strict and expected students to study hard to improve their English grades (appendix, lines 100-104). Demi felt pressured by the strict attitude of the teachers and their demands on the students' performance at this stage. On the contrary, after Demi went to university, the teachers' attitude became kinder and friendlier as there was no pressure to progress to higher education. Demi also said that her English teachers were all Chinese teachers during her Middle school years. Demi's interest in learning English differed between Middle school and after university due to the different attitudes of her teachers.

5.3.3. Motivation and Group Influence

Demi studied for exams before he went to university, and so did his classmates (appendix, lines 116-117). In the collaborative learning environment of junior and senior high school, students generally have the achievement of good grades as their primary goal. Students are easily influenced by their peers. Because everyone's goal is to take exams, Demi is influenced by her classmates. She wants to do well on exams with evident instrumental motivation. After Demi goes to university, students' group activities increase, and classmates often cooperate (appendix, lines 118-124). It strengthened Demi's initiative to learn and enhanced Demi's desire to learn English. From a social constructivist perspective, this is where learners construct knowledge through interaction with their learning environment or peers and by experiencing the environment in which they live (Fu et al., 2019). Demi was in an all-English environment after arriving in the USA. Being influenced by the language environment of the group around her, her interest in learning English was more substantial. The influence of the collective language environment made Demi want to fit in with the group. However, she mentioned that she rarely used English except in class when she was in China. Because everyone speaks Mandarin in China, there is a lack of an environment for learning English (appendix, lines 128-132). The group environment has an important influence on motivation for language learning. Contextual learning plays a vital role in foreign language learning because the learning experience in foreign language learning is highly related to the experience in the virtual learning environment (Jang & Lee, 2019).

6. Insights

The interview with Demi revealed that motivation significantly impacts language learning. Although many factors influence second language learning, motivation is an important one. Motivation influences learners' motivation and interest in learning and has an essential impact on the effectiveness of second language acquisition. Dörnyei's theory of three motivation levels is an essential guide to motivation. In the interview, Demi talks about how she did not become interested in learning English before university. During Demi's secondary school years, she studied English mainly for exams(appendix, lines 22-23), which was instrumental motivation. When Demi arrived at university, she wanted to apply for opportunities in the US through English proficiency tests with instrumental motivation. However, due to the change in the collaborative learning environment, Demi has developed a strong interest in English and has an integrative motivation. If proficiency in a foreign language is what the learner dreams of achieving, they will have a strong motivational desire for the language they are learning (Dörnyei, 2009). At this point, Demi is not only integrally motivated but also instrumentally motivated, and the two types of motivation reinforce each other. The slow shift from

instrumental to integrative motivation greatly enhanced Demi's effectiveness in learning English. The analysis of Demi's interview suggests that both types of motivation may affect the speed and quality of second language learning. However, a lacking motivation integration is not very effective in the learning process. Therefore, to maintain a good language acquisition style. It is recommended that foreign language learners frequently renew their learning purpose orientation, combine short term orientation with long term orientation, transform instrumental motivation into integrative motivation, and improve the learning of the target language.

A Learners' self-confidence is strongly related to their ability to learn. The development of self-confidence in second language learners is essential. Demi's stress and anxiety in learning English in middle school made her feel dissatisfied (appendix, lines 36-38), which affected the effectiveness of her English learning. Demi's English learning efficiency increased after her self-confidence increased during university (appendix, lines 83-84). Dörnyei (2005) said those who feel they perform well when speaking the target language do not perform the same way every time, so one's sense of self-learning is not stable. Norman and Aron (2003) found that the strength of individual motivation was related to at least three aspects of the possible self: effectiveness, accessibility and controllability. The learner's factors have a strong influence on motivation.

The second language learning experience is a developmental process, so it is essential to develop learners' self-confidence. Confidence can inspire learners' enthusiasm and interest in learning a second language and improve their language learning skills.

The learning environment strongly influences students' motivation at the learning situation level. Dörnyei (2001) adds that motivation is a dynamic system, not a static one and that it will undergo different changes as it develops. Even within the same foreign language course, learners' motivation can change. Therefore, for language learners, motivation will change at different stages of their learning. Therefore, the study of motivation should be integrated with specific learning behaviours and processes. Demi's learning environment changed significantly at two different stages: middle school and university. There were also different levels of impact on Demi's motivation to learn English. Changes in the curriculum, teacher behaviour and changes in the student attitude directly influenced Demi's interest in learning English and the effectiveness of her learning. Potential development, expectations of others, the effectiveness of methods, opportunities, environment, and unexpected events all influence possible self-realisation or transformation and affect motivation to learn (King & Hicks, 2007). Therefore, cohesion among students, good teacher-student relationships and a language environment is essential in English language learning.

7. Personal Reflection

The three levels of motivational factors in Dörnyei's motivation framework have different effects on motivation to learn. However, motivation plays a vital role in the learning of English learners regardless of their level of learning, and Demi's analysis of the interviews amply illustrates the importance of motivation. Learning a foreign language is a daunting task and complex process. As EFL learners, we need to maintain our confidence and enthusiasm for learning. As an English teacher, motivation informing and promoting students' learning initiatives in foreign language teaching should not be overlooked. We need to carefully analyse the factors that influence students' motivation and adopt positive, compelling and varied methods to improve their motivation levels. We need to stimulate students' curiosity from multiple levels, such as language, learners, and learning situations, enhance students' motivation to learn.

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