

One factor which often affects motivation is the social dynamic or power relationship between the languages. That is, members of a minority group learning the language of a majority group may have different attitudes and motivation from those of majority group members learning a minority language. Even though it is impossible to predict the exact effect of such societal factors on second language learning, the fact that languages exist in social contexts cannot be overlooked when we seek to understand the variables which affect success in learning. Children as well as adults are sensitive to social dynamics and power relationships.

Motivation in the classroom setting

In a teacher's mind, motivated students are usually those who participate actively in class, express interest in the subject-matter, and study a great deal. Teachers can easily recognize characteristics such as these. They also have more opportunity to influence these characteristics than students' reasons for studying the second language or their attitudes toward the language and its speakers. If we can make our classrooms places where students enjoy coming because the content is interesting and relevant to their age and level of ability, where the learning goals are challenging yet manageable and clear, and where the atmosphere is supportive and non-threatening, we can make a positive contribution to students' motivation to learn.

Although little research has been done to investigate how pedagogy interacts with motivation in second language classrooms, considerable work has been done within the field of educational psychology. In a review of some of this work, Graham Crookes and Richard Schmidt (1991) point to several areas where educational research has reported increased levels of motivation for students in relation to pedagogical practices. Included among these are:

Motivating students into the lesson At the opening stages of lessons (and within transitions), it has been observed that remarks teachers make about forthcoming activities can lead to higher levels of interest on the part of the students.

Varying the activities, tasks, and materials Students are reassured by the existence of classroom routines which they can depend on. However, lessons which always consist of the same routines, patterns, and formats have been shown to lead to a decrease in attention and an increase in boredom. Varying the activities, tasks, and materials can help to avoid this and increase students' interest levels.

Using co-operative rather than competitive goals Co-operative learning activities are those in which students must work together in order to complete a task or solve a problem. These techniques have been found to increase the self-confidence of students, including weaker ones, because every participant

in a co-operative task has an important role to play. Knowing that their teammates are counting on them can increase students' motivation.

Clearly, cultural and age differences will determine the most appropriate way for teachers to motivate students. In some classrooms, students may thrive on competitive interaction, while in others, co-operative activities will be more successful.

Learner preferences

Learners have clear preferences for how they go about learning new material. The term 'learning style' has been used to describe an individual's natural, habitual, and preferred way of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills (Reid 1995). We have all heard people say that they cannot learn something until they have seen it. Such learners would fall into the group called 'visual' learners. Other people, who may be called 'aural' learners, seem to need only to hear something once or twice before they know it. For others, who are referred to as 'kinaesthetic' learners, there is a need to add a physical action to the learning process. In contrast to these perceptually based learning styles, considerable research has focused on a cognitive learning style distinction between *field independent* and *field dependent* learners. This refers to whether an individual tends to separate details from the general background or to see things more holistically. Another category of learning styles is based on the individual's temperament or personality.

While recent years have seen the development of many learning style assessment instruments, very little research has examined the interaction between different learning styles and success in second language acquisition. At present, the only learning style that has been extensively investigated is the field independence/dependence distinction. The results from this research have shown that while field independence is related to some degree to performance on certain kinds of tasks, it is not a good predictor of performance on others.

Although there is a need for considerably more research on learning styles, when learners express a preference for seeing something written or for memorizing material which we feel should be learned in a less formal way, we should not assume that their ways of working are wrong. Instead, we should encourage them to use all means available to them as they work to learn another language. At a minimum, research on learning styles should make us sceptical of claims that a particular teaching method or textbook will suit the needs of all learners.



Learner beliefs

Second language learners are not always conscious of their individual learning styles, but virtually all learners, particularly older learners, have strong beliefs and opinions about how their instruction should be delivered. These beliefs are usually based on previous learning experiences and the assumption (right or wrong) that a particular type of instruction is the best way for them to learn. This is another area where little work has been done. However, the available research indicates that learner beliefs can be strong mediating factors in their experience in the classroom. For example, in a survey of international students learning ESL in a highly communicative program at an English-speaking university, Carlos Yorio (1986) found high levels of dissatisfaction among the students. The type of communicative instruction they received focused exclusively on meaning and spontaneous communication in group-work interaction. In their responses to a questionnaire, the majority of students expressed concerns about several aspects of their instruction, most notably, the absence of attention to language form, corrective feedback, or teacher-centred instruction. Although this study did not directly examine learners' progress in relation to their opinions about the instruction they received, several of them were convinced that their progress was negatively affected by an instructional approach which was not consistent with their beliefs about the best ways for them to learn.

Learners' preferences for learning, whether due to their learning style or to their beliefs about how languages are learned, will influence the kinds of strategies they choose in order to learn new material. Teachers can use this information to help learners expand their repertoire of learning strategies and thus develop greater flexibility in their ways of approaching language learning.