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Situated Motivation: A Framework for how EFL Learners are Motivated in the Classroom

[PP: 120-129]

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Abstract

In arguing, that defining and categorizing motivation are less practical and applicable to language teaching than examining how learners are motivated in their class, this study investigated sources of motivation of 10 learners studying English as a compulsory subject at IUH University in Vietnam in 2013. The study aimed at answering the two main research questions- a) how are the EFL learners motivated in class? and b) what is the most applicable framework of motivation to classroom language teaching? *Classroom Observation* and *Stimulated Interview* were adopted as data collection techniques. Twelve different lessons were video-taped in about 21 hours in total and over 30 hours of interviews were recorded. *Content Analysis* procedure was used to code motivational sources. The five groups of coded motivational sources included- *the teacher, the classmates, the syllabus, classroom activities, and mood or tone of each lesson*. It was observed that the learners' motivation is closely situated in the classroom context, and therefore, *Situated Motivation* should be adopted as a framework to bridge the gap between motive frameworks and motivational strategies in language teaching, and for teachers to consider while planning and executing their lessons.

Keywords: Language Teaching, Situated Motivation, Framework for Motivation, learning beliefs, learning preferences

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1. Introduction

Gardner (1985) defines L2 motivation as 'the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity'(P.10). Motivation has been widely accepted, by both teachers and researchers, as one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second/foreign language learning. A lot of studies (Gardner, 1985, 1995; Laine, 1995; Oxford and Shearin, 1994; Clement *et al.*, 1994; Schumann, 1998) have categorized motivation of language learners. However, the extent to which results of these studies can be applied to practice must be questioned as teachers seem to worry more about how to motivate their learners. Moreover, a number of motivational strategies have been identified and suggested (Dornyei and Csizer, 1998; Marie and Dörnyei, 2008; Sugita and Takeuchi, 2010), especially strategies to use with low-motivated and "hard-to-teach" learners. Unfortunately, it leaves no conclusion on whether these strategies work with different learners with different motivational tendencies. As a result, the aims of this study are to fill this gap in the literature and to assist language teachers in considering how their learners would be motivated.

2. Literature Review

According to Dornyei's (1998), no available theory has yet managed to represent motivation in its total complexity. He notes that conceptualising and assessing motivation variables need to be conducted in careful attention, and researchers should be "well aware of the fact that the specific motivation measure or concept they are focusing on is likely to represent only a segment of a more intricate psychological construct" (p 131). Based Gardner's theory, motivation is conceptualized to contain three components, motivational intensity, desire to learn the language, and an attitude towards the act of learning the language. It refers to a kind of central mental 'engine' or 'energy-centre' that subsumes effort, want/will (cognition), and task enjoyment (affect). Motivation is recently seen as not being permanent inner forces and static mental or emotional state; rather motivation is the individual's thoughts and beliefs, emotions that are transformed into the way learners behave and act in their learning process. In Pintrich and Schunk's (1996) view, motivation involves various mental processes that lead to the initiation and maintenance of actions. Dornyei (1998) also notes that in line with the saying *the proof of the pudding is in the eating*, the proof of motivation is in displaying it in action. Hence, to know how learners are motivated in class, it is necessary to examine the underlying reasons for their attitudes, emotions, and actions while learning.

In 1994, Dornyei proposed a motivation framework that included three independent levels: language level (integrative/instrumental), learner level (need for achievement, self-confidence in terms of anxiety and self-awareness), and learning situation level (course-specific components, teacher specific components, and group specific components). The most elaborate part of the framework is the learning situation level, which is associated with situation-specific motivation rooted in various aspects of language learning in a classroom setting. *Course-specific* motivational components are related to the syllabus, the teaching materials, the teaching method and the learning tasks. *Teacher-specific* motivational components concern the teacher's behaviour, personality, teaching style, authority type, etc. *Group-specific motivational components* include goal-orientedness, the norm and reward system, and classroom goal structure (competitive, cooperative, or individualistic).

After reviewing a wide range of relevant motivational theories, Williams and Burden (1997) draw them together in a highly detailed framework of motivational factors that includes a variety of internal and external factors. The internal factors were intrinsic interest of activity, perceived value of activity, sense of agency (locus of causality-perception of the cause of success and failure, locus of control, ability to set goals), language-mastery feeling,

self-concept, attitudes towards the language and language learning, affective states such as confidence, anxiety, fear, developmental age and stage, and gender. The external factors included significant others (parents, teacher, peers), the nature of interaction with significant others (feedback, reward, praise, punishments), learning environment, and social and educational contexts.

Unfortunately, the previous studies have not concluded on issues such as: which framework of motivation is more applicable, teachers should or should not help learners to change their motivation, should or should not teach learners with 'instrumental', 'integrative', 'intrinsic', and 'extrinsic' motivation differently. Besides, it has not been clear whether different learners are motivated in the same ways, by the same activities in class? Intuitive appeal, without empirical evidence, is not enough to justify strong claims in favour of the use of motivational strategies from a scientific point of view. Therefore, lists of motivations and theories underlying motivation themselves are not readily applicable. What teachers usually want to know is how they can intervene, that is, what they can actually do to motivate their learners. Hence, it is important to note that defining and categorizing motivation are less practical and applicable to language teaching and learning than examining how learners are motivated in class. It is necessary as L2 motivation is a complex, multifaceted construct (Dornyei, 1998). Besides, in practice, most EFL learners are learning English as a compulsory subject at school regardless of any issues related to their motivation, thus, classroom situation thus accounts a significant part in motivating learners. In addition, in a number of previous studies (Coleman, 1995, 1996; Laine, 1995; Dornyei *et al.*, 1996), motivation was viewed as being stable and was treated as a product. In contrast to these, this empirical study examines motivation from a process perspective and on-going practice. While attempting to bridge the gap between motive frameworks and motivational strategies recommended in language teaching literature, the investigated questions in this study were-

- How are EFL learners motivated in class?
- What is the most applicable framework of motivation to classroom language teaching?

3. Methodology

3.1 Samples

Samples of this study were 10 learners (5 males, 5 females). They were chosen randomly in 3 General English (AV2) classes at Ho Chi Minh University of Industry in Vietnam in 2013. Ten samples was a relevant number to satisfy both in-depth investigation and variation of data. The participants came from different fields of study in the university, had different English learning experience, and were different in terms of competence as well. At IUH (Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh) University, learning English is compulsory for all students to save credits for graduation. The AV2 syllabus is designed with 60 periods (45 hours) in 10 weeks to complete 6 units in the New American Headway 2A course-book. The teachers of the classes selected for the study all held an M.A. in Teaching English and their experience in teaching this course were 2, 5, and 7 years respectively.

3.2 Instruments

Due to the complexity and action-guidance nature of motivation and the purpose of this study, *stimulated interview method* was adopted. Stimulated recall interview is an introspective method that represents "a means of eliciting data through the process involved in carrying out a task or activity" (Gass & Mackey, 2000, p. 1) by inviting subjects to recall their concurrent cognitive activity when that event was going on (Gass & Mackey, 2000; Norman, 1983). Stimulated recall interview, thus, is a valuable source of gaining insight into learners' motivation. The focus of the interview was signals of confidence, concentration, willingness, eagerness, and reluctance in collective, interactive, and individual activities in

class. Then, adopting the *content analysis* method (Brown *et al.* 2002; Glaser & Strauss 2009), the tape-recorded interview data were analysed and coded inductively through a process starting from line-by-line analysis (open coding) to relating the open-codes to build themes/categories of motivational sources based on valid inference, interpretation, and inductive reasoning.

3.3 Data collection and analysis procedures

The data collection and analysis procedures followed the 3 following main steps.

- Videotaping the flow of 12 different lessons, 4 lessons for each class, in about 21 hours with a focus on the attitudes, actions, and behaviors of the learners while learning. Note taking strategy was also adopted.
- Conducting stimulated recall interviews with individual participant, making use of the recorded lessons and the notes.
- Transcribing, coding, and analyzing the interview data using content analysis technique in qualitative research.

With the help of a video recorder, the researcher recorded the classroom events and learning activities of the participants. While recording, the researcher also took notes on the behaviours which he predicted would be interesting and significant to ask about to examine the learners' motivation. At the recall stage, the individual participants were invited to watch the video. While watching, the researcher paused at pre-chosen episodes and asked them to give reasons for their on-going actions. The participants were also encouraged to stop and give comments at any episodes they wanted to.

All of the interviews with the learners were carried out in their mother tongue, then transcribed for analysis and the chosen excerpts to be used as examples were translated into English. To render interview excerpts into a more readable text, where it is not essential to have the exact linguistic form, all hesitations, pauses, restarts, and asides were dropped from the excerpts. Thus, 'Hum...', 'erm...', 'you know' have been eliminated from the quotes used in this article and false starts and unnecessary repetitions of any utterance were usually edited as well. However, no word was added, changed, or substituted except to make the sentences less redundant.

The data analysis started with reading all data repeatedly to achieve immersion and obtain a sense of the whole. Then, the data was read word by word to derive free codes by first highlighting the exact words from the text that appeared to capture key thoughts or concepts. To do this, the researcher approached the text by making notes of my first impressions, thoughts, and initial analysis. As this process continued, labels for codes emerged; these codes came directly from the text in considering the focus of my study and the literature, and were used as an initial coding scheme. Codes were then sent back to the participants for them to check again with me whether these codes represented their ideas/reasons/arguments. When the participants had agreed with all of the codes, the codes were sorted into categories based on how they were related and linked. These emergent categories were used to organize and group codes into meaningful clusters.

4. Findings and discussion

As predicted by the literature of motivation, the participants in this study were motivated by a variety of factors. After coding the interviewed data inductively with content analysis strategy as discussed in *section 3.2*, the results showed that the 5 following categories were sources of motivation of the learners.

Table:1 Sources of motivation situated in a foreign language classroom

Sources of motivation	Characteristics
Teacher	friendly, helpful, enthusiastic, and professional
Mood of the class	funny, un-stressful, and positive

Content of each lesson	There are declarative knowledge (grammar, vocabulary) and/or procedural knowledge (4 macro-skills)
Classroom activity	doable (not to be easy or difficult) and productive. There are opportunities to practice skills and/or memorize grammar/vocabulary and signals of achieving outcomes after each activity/lesson.
Classmates	cooperative and not diverse to much in competence

4.1 Teacher: *friendly, helpful, enthusiastic, and professional.*

Riding and Rayner (2000) noted that the *instructional preferences* affect strongly on how learners learn. Students in this study attributed their motivation to not only teachers' feedback and friendliness but also teacher's professionalism in terms of knowledge and teaching methods. All of them highly appreciate learning with a friendly teacher. A friendly teacher, in their argument, can help them feel learning is safe and comfortable, and there is a "close" mood while learning. The excerpts below are two among numerous repeated statements of them to highlight the role of a friendly teacher of English.

"I need a friendly teacher, my ex-teacher was too strict and not friendly, and so I did not feel happy to sit in her class. The teacher this class is quite friendly, she often smiles with her students" (S3)

"She is friendly, she sometimes comes to sit with us when we are working in group, and I feel confident to ask her questions when she sits near me, I like that way" (S4)

They thought that teachers' enthusiasm in giving feedback helped them see their "progress" and "weaknesses", thereby causing them to feel more motivated. They needed all of their answers and writing papers to be evaluated and corrected. For example, one participant stated:

"I want to write if the teacher corrects me, if she does not, I will not know whether I write it right or wrong" (S4).

In the beliefs of the participants, the role of a helpful teacher was crucial in learning foreign language. They saw teachers as a special and reliable resource for them. When asked about showing a turn-off when a classroom activity was going on, he explained:

"we practicing a conversation, I do not know how to say 'How often do you have a hair cut?' in English, I can ask the teacher and she tells me how. This is very important because I am learning a foreign language, I have my ideas but how can I know the way to express them? If the teacher does not help me, the ideas are useless" (S2).

In another situation, another learner also stated:

"I do not know the meaning of the words in this reading but the teachers does not tell us the meaning, she asks us to guess, I couldn't guess it myself. My English is poor so I give up" (S9).

Importantly, their motivation to participate also depends a lot on the extent to which they inferred the extent of enthusiasm the teachers while teaching. This finding is worth noting as in practice, while many teachers claim that their learners are low-motivated or "hard-to-teach", at the same time they do not pay much awareness to show off their own motivation in teaching. For instance, one learner reported:

"this is the 5th period in the morning, I want to get home and I'm tired but I still do the task because I know the teacher is also tired but she is still teaching, she wants us to learn the lesson. She is working hard for us to learn and improve; I just want to show my cooperation, that is" (S5).

According to Elbaum *et al.* (1993) and Kern (1995), as teachers are likely to be viewed as "experts" by students. In this regard, teacher's professionalism can influence students' attitude, beliefs, and knowledge about the subject. In this study, the participants also showed that

teacher's professionalism in terms of skills and knowledge of English language, teaching methods, and experience were crucial in teaching and learning. As stated earlier, teacher is the immediate resource for them in class, and in most of the cases of EFL learning, teacher is the only resource of language that they are exposed to. As a result, from their view, a reliable and good resource for them was extremely important in motivating them to get along with the teacher and the class. The examples below reflect how the learners perceived the role of professionalism of a teacher of English.

"... her way of teaching is easy to follow, I like such a teacher. I come to the class to learn, if I can understand English lessons myself at home, I will not waste time to go to class" (S5)

"... her English is so beautiful, I like her voice, it sounds like native speakers in the CD, I like to listen to whatever she says in English in class" (S7)

"... she is young, perhaps she is not very experienced, because she is still young. When a teacher is experienced, he/she can answer my questions; teach me the easy but most effective way to remember vocabulary and structures. I want to know such ways of learning, there must be somewhere but no one teaches me so far." (S7)

4.2 Mood: funny, low-stress, enjoyable

A funny and low-stress class is an important source of motivation. Although these are often typical characteristics of classes run by friendly, helpful, and professional teachers, motivational sources in this category focus on the mood and tone of the lessons and the classroom activities. According to the participants, they needed to learn in an enjoyable atmosphere as this factor could help maintaining their concentration span and "re-charge" their energy to learn in the class. They felt it most motivated when there were games and game-like activities, watching video clips, role-play in their classes. In such a context of learning, they felt more confident to ask questions, give answers, and participate. In their argument, it could be inferred that regardless of level of competence or purpose of learning, he/she wanted to expose to learning English and the English class with a positive attitude and mood. For instance, two of the participants noted this by saying that:

"not only English but also the other subjects, if it is stressful it is discouraged and hard for me to learn" (S10)

"my major is economics management, English is a side subject anyway, although I know it is important in work but my major is still not English. I just want to study English in a funny class, I do not know why, maybe it is easier to learn... This activity is fun, I do not know much English to join in with the others but I am shouting to support my team, if we can more game in class, I think this class will be better" (S6).

Horwitz (1996) and Falout *et al.* (2009) argued that anxiety would impact negatively on learning process. Sources of motivation in this category were in line with the role of affective aspects of classroom in motivating learners in the literature. Hence, it is recommended that it is extremely necessary for teachers to create a funny, comfortable, and enjoyable language learning class.

4.3 Content: four language skills, grammar and vocabulary

This category of motivational source related closely with the participants' beliefs about what should be learned to be a competent language learner. Lightbown and Spada (2006) notes that *declarative* knowledge is 'knowing that' and *procedural* knowledge is 'knowing how'. The former term describes vocabulary and grammar and the latter one refers to the four-macro skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English. The participants in this study seemed to believe that both declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge were important for mastering a language, but vocabulary and grammar were the foundation. Speaking and listening were the most practical skills. As a result, it was likely that they were highly motivated with activities in which there were inputs of lexis and grammar structures.

Interestingly, they often predicted the frequentness, commonness, and helpfulness of vocabularies or structures in reality and exams, if they found the inputs common, useful, and interesting, their motivation to add them to their repertoire was even higher.

“... in this lesson, there are a lot of interesting vocabularies, I learn them because I will use them in the future or if somebody uses I can understand” (S10)

“... in the exams, I often see the structure ‘if’, I remember that I was taught this structure several times in the past but I am still confused. I copy what the teacher writes on the board and learn again” (S2)

In their perception, reading and writing skills were likely less important as macro language skills to communicate than as activities for them to check their own ability in understanding and remembering English and to add more input of lexis and structures. Thus, they often undervalued the role of writing and reading compared to speaking and listening in terms of their usefulness in practice. As a result, they felt a little bit more motivated with speaking and listening tasks in class. Although they often noted quickly and carefully “new” vocabularies and structures in class, they said that they would learn them at home, and in class they would prefer if there were more speaking and listening practices. Nguyen (2013), in book discussing Vietnamese EFL learners’ language learning beliefs, argues that EFL learners strongly believed in the role of both *declarative* knowledge and *procedural* knowledge in each lesson. It is, therefore, suggested that the class would be more motivated if the content matches with the learners’ beliefs about what should be included in the lesson.

4.4 Activity: doable, comprehensible, and productive

Participants in this study often got discouraged and bored quickly with too easy or too challenging tasks. In their argument, because they were LEARNING, it was a waste of time to learn again what they had mastered, but if the activity was too difficult, they would not understand and thus would learn nothing as well. Before they started a task, they needed a feeling of curiosity but confidence and of a higher possibility of success not failure, if this feeling was ensured, they would be more likely to participate and try. When asked why she did not do the writing task as the other learners were doing in the class, a female participant explained that:

“I like to write but to describe a place is too difficult. I think I just can write some separate short sentences, I know what I write is wrong most of the time. This task is too difficult, I am waiting for my friends to write on the board and I will see how they write” (S10).

This finding is compatible with the Comprehensible input hypothesis in Krashen’s (1987) theory of Second language acquisition; teachers should take this motivational factor into consideration when designing classroom requirements, instruction, and tasks. Beside this, the learners also felt more motivated with the class if after the classroom tasks they could see how these tasks were useful to them. In other words, they wanted to know what lexis or structures they had learned, what sentences they could use in the future after each lesson, activity or task. For example, a participant highlighted this point in saying that:

“I have just learned the adverbs such as unfortunately, luckily, admittedly, generally, etc. now this activity requires me to make sentences to create a short story with the adverbs, this will help me to remember them and I can use them in the future. It’s interesting” (S3).

In addition to these characteristics of learning tasks, most participants shared that when allowed to integrate personal experience into a particular activity, they did feel more “energetic” to take part in. This was especially when teachers used eliciting questions, free writing tasks, and un-controlled speaking activities. All of the participants from the three classes suggested that such activities and ways of teaching should be used more in their classes.

The participants' motivation related to classroom activity seemed to be unstable and was affected strongly by the extent to which they found how different activities were curious, useful, and/or comprehensible to them. This finding supported the recent perspective on the changeable nature of motivation, so it contrasted with views on motivation as a stable product in the literature such as that of Coleman's (1995, 1996) and Laine's (1995).

4.5 Classmate: cooperative, acceptable level of competence

The extent to which the class is multilevel and the cooperation among classmates in completing classroom task also had strong influence on motivation of the participants. It was likely that more competent learners felt less motivated while working with less competent ones and lower learners seemed to prefer to work with better counterparts although they often felt unconfident in such situations. To explain why she chose to sit with a partner in the class, the participant noted:

"today I sit here today with this guy, I also sat here last week and I saw that working with him is more productive, his English is not too good compared to the other classmates, so when working with him I can share my idea with him, and I can understand when he says as well. I want to sit with such a partner" (S 8).

This learner felt less motivated when she had to work with more passive, uncooperative, or quiet partners. In such cases she reported that she could not practice much English and when she had any query a lower partner could not help her. She was also afraid that she would be affected by the lower partner's mistakes. In contrast, a learner with lower linguistic ability shared her idea differently:

"I'm afraid my English is too bad for her to follow me, I do not know how to say long sentences, and she might prefer a better partner as well. When she says, I cannot know what she means, but I like working with her because I can learn from her" (S 10).

Therefore, if multi-level is inevitable, it is suggested that a class with a low extent of diversity in learners' competence would solve this partner-preference issue and thus, would motivate them more. However, all of the participants shared that a willing to cooperate and help each other was more important than level of competence. They all claimed that working with uncooperative partners and partners having individualism tendency were one of the best ways to demotivate them. Thus, once again, it is the role of the teacher to predict and deal with such a demotivative factor in class.

5. Conclusion

The study was carried out to investigate the factors which motivated Vietnamese EFL learners of IUH in their classroom. The findings obtained from the data analysis and discussion revealed that all the factors, which motivated them for learning were situated in the classroom. The participants sometimes also mentioned physical aspects of the class such as the size of the room, the surrounding noise, the number of learners in the class, the classroom layout etc. as sources that encouraged or discouraged them to participate. However, these aspects were not mentioned frequently and significantly enough to be added into the list. If there had been more participants and the study was carried out in different contexts, these sources would have been more significant. Thus, the findings confirmed that motivation of the learners was highly situated in the learning context. Besides, to be motivated, the keys learning and teaching factors and events in that context- such as the teacher, the syllabus, the activities, and the other; the learners should be matched with their beliefs about how English language should be taught and learned. Studies have pointed out that learners have their own ways of dealing with different classroom contexts (Allwright, 1998; Breen, 1998, Cimermanová, 2013). In relating results of this study to the motivation frameworks of Dornyei (1994) and Williams and Burden (1997), this study suggests a *Situated Motivation* framework with 5 categories of motivational sources discussed in section

4 as the most useful framework for teachers of English to apply to their classroom practices. The framework is compatible with other frameworks and appears to be a bridge, linking different theories and categories of motivation to motivational strategies in language teaching and learning literature. Moreover, it has been drawn from an empirical study to answer how different language learners would be motivated.

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