

## Intrinsic Motivation in English Language Teaching

### İngilizce Öğretiminde İçsel GÜdülenme

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#### Abstract

Human beings are born with an intense need to explore, interact with, and make sense of their environment. However, with formal schooling, they seem to lose their enthusiasm and passion for learning. This fact implies that the school and its elements such as teachers, subjects, materials, have an important responsibility for increasing student motivation to learn. The aim of this article is to stress the importance of having an intrinsic motivation in English language teaching (ELT). Hence, this article attempts to define motivation, discuss its sources, display its criteria, present ways of increasing motivation and finally suggest some activities.

*Key Words:* Motivation, intrinsic motivation, English language teaching.

#### Öz

Bireyler, keşfetmek, iletişim kurmak ve çevrelerini anlamak için yoğun bir istek ve ihtiyaçla doğarlar. Ancak, okuldaki eğitimleri başladığında öğrenmeye karşı duydukları bu istek ve arzuyu kaybederler. Bu, okulun ve okuldaki öğelerin (öğretmenler, dersler, materyaller) öğrenmeye karşı duyulan güdünün korunmasında hatta artırılmasında büyük sorumluluklar taşıdığını göstermektedir. Bu makalenin amacı, içsel güdülenmenin İngilizce öğrenimindeki önemini vurgulamaktır. Bu nedenle, bu makale güdüyü tanımlamayı, güdünün kaynaklarını belirtmeyi, kriterlerini açıklamayı, güdüyü artırma yollarını sunmayı ve son olarak da İngilizce öğretiminde güdüyü artırıcı bazı örnek alıştırmalar önermeyi hedeflemektedir.

*Anahtar Sözcükler:* Güdü, içsel güdü, İngilizce öğretimi.

#### Introduction

Our efforts as teachers to employ only extrinsic incentives to promote effective teaching have turned out to be vain for several reasons. Despite our efforts, our students do not achieve what we want them to achieve, simply because they are not motivated to do so. Clearly, student motivation is crucial to learning. Most motivation theorists (see Dörnyei, 2001a, b) assume that motivation is involved in all kinds of learning; that is, a learned behavior will not occur unless it is energized. In other words, you cannot teach a person what he does not want to learn or more than what he wants to learn.

Students who attend English classes just because, together with traditional subject areas such as Turkish, math, science, and social studies, it is part of the core curriculum imposed by the Ministry of Education usually have weak motivation. Unfortunately, there are other factors that challenge this small amount of motivation (Heining-Boynton, 1990; Lipton, 1992). These can be listed as:

- English teachers who do not have sufficient language skills and/or the necessary qualifications,
- English programs which do not have coordination and articulation across levels of instruction,
- Programs which are inadequate in design and do not have the necessary funding,
- A national English teaching curriculum which has inappropriate or unrealistic goals,

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- c) Teaching materials which are inadequate and insufficient,
- f) Evaluation procedures which are used only for rewards and punishments.

Hence, as language teachers, our major responsibility is to discover the springs of this weak motivation and increase it in order to channel it in the direction of further learning.

### Motivation

Student motivation can be defined as the student's desire to participate in the learning process (Dörnyei, 2001b; Rivers, 1997; Guthrie and Alao, 1997; Brown, 2002; Lewis, 2002). It can be characterized by interest in and enthusiasm for the materials used in class; persistence with the learning task, as indicated by levels of attention or action for an extended duration, and levels of concentration and enjoyment. Lumsden (1994) states that infants and young children appear to be propelled by curiosity, driven by an intense need to explore, interact with, and make sense of their environment. Hence, the motivation for learning is an inborn property of human beings. Unfortunately, as they grow, they seem to lose their passion and enthusiasm for learning. A large number of students lose their interest in school subjects. They study just to pass classes; they participate just to please the teacher. As Lumsden (1994) says many more are physically present in the classroom but largely mentally absent; they fail to invest themselves fully in the experience of learning.

### The sources of motivation

An *intrinsic motivator* is something that motivates the person to engage in an activity for its own sake without any external reward. Satisfaction comes from doing the activity and/or from the feeling of accomplishment. An *extrinsic motivator* on the other hand is something that motivates the person to engage in an activity for some external consequence, i.e. to obtain some reward or avoid some punishment.

In intrinsic motivation, rewards naturally follow from doing the task. Examples are: achievement, autonomy, responsibility, feedback, challenge. In extrinsic

motivation, on the other hand, rewards are external to performing the task and are administered by someone else- usually the teacher in our case. The rewards can be recognition, praise, and high grades. Some other rewards can be bonus points, candies, compliments, money or test scores. These rewards are externally administered and may inhibit learning in the long run, although seeming to be effective in the short run. One problem is that they are addictive. Researchers generally agree that *intrinsic motivation* is better for long term learning (Ames, 1992; Brophy, 1987; Hill, 2001; Maehr and Midgley, 1991; Stipek, 1988; Thanasoulas, 2002).

Lepper and Hodell (cited in Guthrie and Alao, 1997) claim that when intrinsically motivated, students tend to employ strategies that demand more effort and that enable them to process information more deeply. Therefore, it is possible to claim that intrinsic motivation leads to greater learning and achievement. Because students who are intrinsically motivated are more involved in learning and they use strategies to promote deeper understanding and future application of that learning. Furthermore, learners, regardless of their age group, perform more creatively when they do a task that they find inherently interesting.

Lepper and Hodell (cited in Guthrie and Alao, 1997) add that extrinsic incentives should be avoided because they make the students feel controlled or manipulated into behaviors they may not choose. Moreover, when extrinsically motivated, learners perform far less creatively. When they do a task to earn a reward or avoid a punishment, they complete the task according to the standards of others. But this gets in the way of creative performance and also reduces the inherent interest of the activity. Extrinsic constraints such as evaluation, rewards and punishments all *depress* creative performance and reduce student interest in the task at hand.

### Criteria for Intrinsic Motivation

The style of a teacher can have a powerful effect on a student. In the case of teacher control, students' intrinsic motivation is often related to the control orientation of the teacher. Teachers who allow more student autonomy

are more likely to have higher intrinsic motivation. Students with higher motivation will also perceive themselves as more competent and more self-confident which will eventually lead to having higher achievement scores. Although the focus of much of a student's motivation is beyond our control, there is much that we, as language teachers, can do to enhance the motivation of our students. Having appropriate teacher behaviors and holding a good student-teacher rapport are very important. Expected teacher behavior can be shown as:

T : Tolerance (Acceptance – accept your students as they are)

E : Enthusiasm (Show how much you like teaching)

A : Availability ( Spare some extra time for your students outside the classroom)

C : Commitment to the students' learning (show that you care for them)

H : Humor (Make use of humor in your classes)

E : Encouragement (Adopt an encouraging attitude)

R : Relevance (Make use of texts and tasks that are relevant to your students' needs and interests)

In addition to appropriate teacher behaviors, to increase intrinsic motivation, we should

*a) foster student autonomy through*

- providing choices and providing a variety of duties and tasks to have each and every student participate,
- minimizing pressure and giving the right amount of control and freedom to the student,
- allowing alternative solutions and encouraging originality,
- using exploration and not robbing the student of the joy of discovery,
- encouraging the student to use his imagination and creativity,
- arousing the student's curiosity by a reasonable amount of disequilibrium so that he can easily 'fill in the details himself' if he actively participates. In order to be able to arouse curiosity, we should use lessons that offer fragmented or contradictory information, which enables learners to take an active role in solving the unknown.

- encouraging deeper cognitive processing by making use of analysis and synthesis,
- equipping the student with the necessary problem solving skills rather than solving the problems for him. If we want to develop success, we should clearly define what it is, value it in the classroom, and help our learners see how they can attain it.

*b) understand our learners through*

- being aware of their areas of interest, beliefs, concerns, educational backgrounds, and expectations,
- finding out and helping them to find out their own learning styles and strategies,
- encouraging the student to learn from his own mistakes and to try new things, encouraging critical thinking,
- observing their progress,
- concentrating on raising self-esteem. In order to do this, we should encourage our learners to be independent thinkers and be responsible for their own learning.

*c) use an engaging syllabus in*

- making lessons stimulating,
- creating meaningful lessons in which you aim to develop skills which can be applied to the real world,
- focusing on learning,
- defining tasks in terms of specific, short-term goals,
- employing challenging but achievable tasks to promote success. Learning occurs when the challenge (or challenges) is at the right level for the person's abilities. If it is above the ability of that person, stress occurs. If it is below the ability of that person, boredom takes place.

*d) create a supportive group by*

- developing ground rules together,
- allowing rituals and celebrations,
- using positive feedback,
- encouraging lateral thinking, multiple options and divergent viewpoints; developing empathy,

- creating a caring and supportive classroom climate. When learners feel safe, the need for extrinsic rewards will be eliminated. They will focus their attention on contributing to the group of which they are a member and on maintaining the harmony in the classroom.
- avoiding sarcasm. Rather than sending sarcastic messages, every member of the group should be encouraged to express what they think and how they feel openly and honestly. Members should learn not to laugh at others but to laugh with the others.

### Suggested Activities to Increase Intrinsic Motivation

#### a) *Fostering Student Autonomy*

- 1) If you are to give a reading activity, choose three or four different texts about different topics (computers, fashion, sports, etc.). Design parallel activities to develop similar micro-skills. Announce the topics and let your learners choose whichever text they want to study. You can then form groups from those students who have selected the same topic. First a group work where peer correction takes place can be done, then you can check the answers. A similar activity can be done with the extensive reading material.
- 2) If you assign a project, give learners several options for completing it. For example, if you are studying HOLIDAYS, allow students to do research reports, prepare leaflets, write poems, design posters, or compose songs.
- 3) If you assign a series of tasks, allow students to determine in what order they would like to complete them in. Do not prescribe the steps or stages that they need to follow to complete the task.

#### b) *Understanding Our Learners*

- 1) In the first few weeks of school, you should have students and parents fill out learning styles and strategies inventory checklists, and surveys that indicate the learner's interests, goals, and hobbies.

- 2) You should spend some time just observing your students. At the beginning of the school year, you can give tasks that they should complete individually. Meanwhile, you can really watch how each learner behaves: their patterns, preferences, likes, and dislikes.
- 3) Work with each learner to create a portfolio that they feel reflects their best work. Focus on progress and demonstrated learning in their work.

#### c) *Using an Engaging Syllabus*

- 1) You can choose a story or tale that all of your students know, for instance, The Little Red Riding Hood, or Cinderella. Then you can ask them to re-write the story from the wolf's perspective, or want them to write a new end for the story imagining that Cinderella and the Prince are married. This is stimulating because it has novelty, i.e., different ways of looking at the same subject. Moreover, such a task involves fantasy which inspires creativity.
- 2) You can ask your learners to solve a mystery. The mystery makes the work and the reward of solving the problem meaningful as it involves challenge.
- 3) If your aim is to teach structures and patterns used for shopping, you can ask your learners to bring whatever they want to sell into the class. You can tell them the highest allowed price. Then you can have them create a mall in the classroom where they have to actually use currency to buy and sell different things that they have brought to the class.
- 4) If you are doing a punctuation activity, you can use a paragraph in which there are no punctuation marks. You can read it aloud without making any pauses or using any intonation. Then you can ask your learners whether they have understood anything. You can ask your learners to use the necessary punctuation marks so that you can take breath when you are reading and you can use the correct pitch. In this activity, you focus on learning because you emphasize the value in the lesson.

#### d) Creating a Supportive Group

- 1) On the first day of school, you can sit down with the whole class and shape up the rules after bargaining and negotiating with them. You can also ask them to discuss why those rules are important and what can happen if the members of the group break those rules. You can even decide on what to do if someone breaks the rules together with the group. This will make your learners feel more responsible for their behavior since they are also a part of the decision-making and rule-making mechanisms.
- 2) You can assign group projects. For instance, you can offer a list of topics. Then you can ask your learners to form groups of four and choose a topic. You should state that one learner will be responsible for oral presentation, another for preparing visuals (such as posters, pictures, drawings, plans, etc.) related to the topic, another for finding poems and/or songs related to the issue, and the last one for finding a game related to the topic. You need to give them some time to let them prepare their project. Then, they can be asked to present their projects to the class. Such a task is a wonderful way of increasing cooperation and sharing the responsibility.
- 3) You may want to use games. Games are highly motivating because they are amusing and interesting. They encourage and increase cooperation. Especially competitive games increase group-consciousness.

#### Summary and Conclusion

It should be borne in mind that our students are human beings and they can never be completely unmotivated. As teachers, we should be aware of the fact that motivation is there and we can increase it so that learning continues in and out of the classroom. Whenever creativity is our objective, we must endeavor to reduce the salience of extrinsic constraints and highlight the intrinsically interesting aspects of the task. We can tap into intrinsic motivation when we build a positive learning context rather than controlling the people in our classrooms - MANAGE THE CONTEXT, NOT THE PEOPLE.

"It is nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry; for this delicate little plant, aside from stimulation, stands mainly in need of freedom; without this it goes to wreck and ruin without fail. It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty."

Albert Einstein

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