Developing the Motivation of Iranian EFL Young Learners via Intelligent Classrooms

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Abstract

Learners are successful when they have motivation and enthusiasm to learn. Therefore, this study explored whether intelligent classrooms bring significant improvements in motivation of EFL young learners. 44 students of junior secondary school in Birjand (South Khorasan province), Iran were selected to participate in this study as two intact groups. The experimental group (n=22) was held in an intelligent classroom for three months. But, the control group (n=22) was held in a traditional classroom. There were technologies like computers, data projections, overheads, intelligent boards, internet access, etc. in intelligent classes. The results of the statistical analysis, which were calculated by SPSS software, revealed that Iranian EFL young learners’ motivation is significantly enhanced when English language learning happens in an intelligent classroom including new technologies. Therefore, national educational programmers should make classes intelligent and prepare new technologies. Also, teachers should become trained to use these technologies in the best way.

Key words: Motivation, Intelligent Classroom, Technology, Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Introduction

Researches on Motivation:

In the literature on motivation, very rarely is one single, integrated definition of motivation included. Instead, the focus is what specific factors work together to create motivation. Ellis (1994), in an overview of research on motivation, simply asserted that motivation affects the extent to which language learners persevere in learning, what kinds of behavior they exert, and their actual achievement. Wlodwoski explained motivation as “the processes that can (a) arouse and instigate behavior, (b) give direction or purpose to behavior, (c) continue to allow behavior to persist, and (d) lead to choosing or preferring a particular behavior” (1985, p. 2).

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 (L2) learning. Motivation provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the L2 and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process; indeed, all the other factors involved in L2 acquisition presuppose motivation to some extent.

Without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals, and neither are appropriate curricula and good teaching enough on their own to ensure student achievement. On the other hand, high motivation can make up for considerable deficiencies both in one's language aptitude and learning conditions. In their seminal work, Gardner and Lambert (1972) emphasize that, although language aptitude accounts for a considerable proportion

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of individual variability in language learning achievement, motivational factors can override the aptitude effect. In certain language environments, as Gardner and Lambert point out, where the social setting demands it (e.g. when the LI is a local vernacular and the L2 is the national language), many people seem to master an L2, regardless of their aptitude differences.

Although 'motivation' is a term frequently used in both educational and research contexts, it is rather surprising how little agreement there is in the literature with regard to the exact meaning of this concept. Researchers seem to agree that motivation is responsible for determining human behavior by energizing it and giving it direction, but the great variety of accounts put forward in the literature of how this happens may surprise even the seasoned researcher. This diversity is, of course, no accident; as Dornyei (1996a) points out, motivation theories in general seek to explain no less than the fundamental question of why humans behave as they do, and therefore it would be naive to assume any simple and straightforward answer; indeed, every different psychological perspective on human behavior is associated with a different theory of motivation and, thus, in general psychology it is not the lack but rather the abundance of motivation theories which confuses the scene.

**Intelligent classrooms**

Education manifests far beyond the four walls that constitute a traditional classroom; outside those walls, learning, teaching and administrative tasks continue and have been increasingly supported by various information technologies in recent years. Global and local computer networks enable the exchange of material such as email communications, lecture notes, instructional video, advice, timetabling, etc. This is leading to a world in which education is not only supported outside the classroom, but also active outside the classroom - available anywhere at any time (and in some cases, accessible by anyone). One example of an enriched teaching environment is the “Intelligent Classroom” project. This project addresses three main teaching and learning concerns: facilitating professors’ use of a variety of presentation modes in class by creating a transparent interface for managing the environment; enabling students to review lecture content and materials critically and to interact asynchronously with their professor; and enabling alternative means of student evaluation (namely presentations) to be implemented.

Tele-education systems promise wider access to education and support for lifelong learning. Most current courseware is simply textbook material transferred to HTML; instead of reading the book, students read the screen. In most cases, live instruction catches students’ attention and interest much more effectively than static materials. Real-time interactive virtual classrooms therefore play an indispensable role in distance learning. In this type, multimedia communication systems let teachers and students in different locations participate in the class synchronously. Most systems are desktop based, however, so the teacher must remain at the computer, using the keyboard and mouse to operate the class—an awkward experience for a teacher. By applying smart space technologies in a real classroom, the Smart Classroom project bridges the gap between tele-education and traditional classroom activities in terms of the teacher’s experience and seamlessly integrates these two currently separate educational practices.

Intelligent classrooms combine the capabilities of multimedia classrooms, computer laboratory facilities, network infrastructure, and an instructional activity control software system. Multimedia classrooms have the capability to display on a screen at the front of the classroom what the instructor is doing on his or her computer, as well as to display material from a VCR and from a drawing pad. Computer laboratory facilities provide a computer for every student and the appropriate furniture to house the computers and monitors. Network infrastructure provides interconnection, remote printing capability and access to the Internet. This requires cabling in the classroom and switching hardware that is linked to the campus backbone Internet connection. With an interconnected computer for every student, the software activity control system allows for automated interaction between teacher and students, online training, computerized interaction between students, presentation capability from the instructor's console or any student machine and a host of other learning and teaching enhancements. Over the years, technology has been used to improve the quality of instruction. However, effective use of technology to enhance the quality of teaching is a very challenging problem. The use of technology in its myriad forms is having a significant impact on the nature of the physical and pedagogical learning environment in which students are operating. For example, it can improve the interactions between the instructor and the students, or in-group collaboration among the students. Also The effectiveness
of the intelligent classroom may manifest itself in (1) concepts and material learned in greater depth; (2) concepts and material learned in the same depth but in a shorter period of time; and (3) a reduction in the number of students who "simply don't get it". Preliminary results based on student surveys and teacher reactions indicate that more than 95% of the students and 100% of the instructors regard the intelligent classroom facilities as contributing to deeper understanding of the subject matter and to faster coverage of the material. Instructor observations and grades indicate that instruction in the intelligent classroom also achieves a decrease in the number of students who simply cannot grasp the material.

Research question:

The following question was raised in this study:

Q. Do intelligent classrooms develop the motivation of Iranian EFL young learners?

The following null hypothesis was also implied:

H0. Intelligent classrooms do not develop the motivation of Iranian EFL young learners.

Method

Participants

Our participants were 44 male EFL junior secondary school students (13-15 years old) from Shahid Motahhari junior secondary School in Birjand city, South Khorasan province, Iran. They were divided into two groups, experimental group (n=22) and control group (n=22).

Instrumentation

The motivation questionnaire was used to collect data on the students’ motivation to learn English. Thirty statements were designed and used as stimulus items in the questionnaire. Subjects responded to each item based on an expanded Likert scale of seven points, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The original Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) was modified to suit the objectives of the study and the context of EFL learning in Yemen (see Appendix A). Firstly, statements were rephrased to tap information on the students’ motivation, and their attitudes towards the TL group. Secondly, to obtain information on their general attitudes towards language learning, the original AMTB statements were adapted. Thirdly, certain constructs, such as the component in Integrative Motivation, which measure micro-contextual variables, were excluded to focus on the concern of the study that is the macro-contextual dimension of motivation. Following Gardner’s model, the items were grouped under the three major components of Integrativeness, Motivation and Orientations.

There were also technologies like computers, data projections, overheads, intelligent boards, internet access, etc. in intelligent classes.
Procedure

First of all, two classes with students in the same level of proficiency were chosen as participants of the study. Then, the teacher of experimental group held the class in a special class equipped by new technologies like computers, data projection, overheads, internet, etc. He had used those technologies in all parts of teaching process. On the other hand, the control group was held conventionally. After three months the students answered the questions of the motivation questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

Pearson correlation test was applied in order to analyze the correlation between student’s motivation level in before the study (pretest) and after the study (posttest). The statistical representation of analyzed data is given in the following tables:

Control Group

Table 1. Correlation test between students’ motivation scores (between pretest and posttest) in control group (CG)

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>CG pretest</th>
<th>CG posttest</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CG Pretest</td>
<td>Pearson correlation amount</td>
<td>1.192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>level of meaningfulness</td>
<td>.019</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>44</td>
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<tr>
<td>CG posttest</td>
<td>Pearson correlation amount</td>
<td>.192</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>level of meaningfulness</td>
<td>.019</td>
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<td>Number</td>
<td>44</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Considering the above table, the amount of meaningfulness of Pearson correlation test is 0.019 (sig=0.019), at level 0.05 the null hypothesis suggesting that there is no relationship between student’s motivation level before the study (pretest) and after the study (posttest) is rejected (H0: P=0). Worth mentioning that the amount of coefficient of Pearson correlation between the variables is 0.192 which suggests a weak relationship between them but the positive coefficient proves a slight relationship between variables, in other words, without using intelligent classrooms, the students’ motivation level will not be increased considerably.

Experimental Group

Table 1. Correlation test between students’ motivation scores (between pretest and posttest) in experimental group (EG)

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<tr>
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<th>EG pretest</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EG Pretest</td>
<td>Pearson correlation amount</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>level of meaningfulness</td>
<td>.027</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
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<tr>
<td>EG posttest</td>
<td>Pearson correlation amount</td>
<td>.392</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>level of meaningfulness</td>
<td>.027</td>
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<td>Number</td>
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Considering the above table, the amount of meaningfulness of Pearson correlation test is 0/027 (sig=0/027), at level 0/5 the null hypothesis suggesting that there is no relationship between student’s motivation level before the study (pretest) and after the study (posttest) is rejected (H0:P=0). It is worth mentioning that the amount of coefficient of Pearson correlation between the variables is 0/392 which suggests a higher relationship than those of control group. Better to say, the positive coefficient proves the direct relationship between variables, in other words, by using intelligent classrooms, the students’ motivation level will be increased as well.

Conclusions

As the findings of this study demonstrate, the technique of using new technology and intelligent classrooms can enhance the learners’ motivation level. The results also proved that being exposed to the foreign language intentionally or unintentionally has a significant effect on EFL learners’ motivation. It showed that learners’ motivation in a second or foreign language can depend on their amount of exposure to that language through new technologies and facilities. Meanwhile, the results of the present study indicated that the participants’ experience of using technologies can decrease the stress and fear of using technologies for those who were not familiar with such facilities.

The students were happy for finding the right path to language learning even on their own and in absence of teacher. So, they were very motivated to learn the language.

Besides, the findings of this study may have some hints for English language teachers, educators and also the learners. It can be beneficial for teachers who are searching for effective ways of improving the learners’ motivation level. They can apply this technique to teach, practice, and enhance such abilities of their learners and learning process. It is also helpful for learners who are seeking for techniques of improving their language knowledge. The instructors and officials should just prepare the technologies for the first time. They will be useful forever.

References


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