

On Stimulating Middle School Students' Motivation of English Reading

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Abstract

Motivation is of vital importance in learning and can even lead a person to the top of some certain fields. Especially for language learners, stimulating the motivation of reading can bring them lots of benefits. However, there are some difficulties such as problems in vocabulary, grammar and culture can absolutely influence the procession of students' English reading. In this paper, the author analyzes problems which hinder the middle school students' motivation of English reading and then give some suggestions corresponding to these problems to solve this motivation problem so that most of the students can be interested in reading.

Key words: motivation, middle school student, English reading

1. Introduction

1.1. The significance of the research

The affective domain includes many factors, such as empathy, motivation, self-esteem, inhibition. Some adverse affective factors may greatly reduce students' English learning capacity and limit the whole development of them. While other positive aspects can improve the English learning outcomes of middle school students. Motivation, one of these affective factors, can be of vital importance in accordance with some situations. Because, especially for students, if they don't have a desire to learn, they are not able to learn it well. Besides, the acquisition and learning of a second language is an active participating process rather than a passive receptive action. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to motivate students' motivation. For this reason, the present paper is to analyze this motivation factor in English learning process and find out some solutions for teachers to stimulate student's motivation.

1.2. Organization of this paper

This article can be separated into three parts, including: first, present the definition and major types of motivation which aims to give a more detailed understanding for readers; second, list some essential functions of motivation found out by educators; last but not least, combine teaching practice with some teaching methods or strategies, and then give some suggestions for teachers about how to motivate their English learning. The last part is a summary. It restates the necessity of arousing learning motivation. If teachers want to motivate students to learn English, they must develop their interest, lead to right values. The first and most important thing is that teachers should give them something interesting and necessary. In this way, students will form an effective motivation and eventually learn English better and better. And at last, realize all their potentials. This is where the significance and aims of this thesis lies.

2. The definition of motivation and some types of motivation

2.1. Definition

As for the definition of the motivation of second language learning, different researchers have different answers due to perspectives they have. Wen Qiufang agrees that motivation is thought of as an inner drive impulse emotion or desire that moves one to a particular action. Keller apprehended that: motivation is “the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid, and the degree of effort they will exert in that respect”. This paper tends to be illustrated with Keller’s point of view as for definition of motivation.

2.2. Major types:

The same as different definitions given by educators who belong to distinct schools, the classifications of motivation also have different ideas. Although there exist lots of divergences, some same agreements have also been reached. In a widely noted concurring opinion, there are two major groups of classification of motivation. In line with aims and sources, motivation can be classified into instrumental and integrative motivation, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Some details are presented as follows:

2.2.1. Integrative and instrumental motivation

According to aims, learners divided learning motivation into two major types: instrumental and integrative motivation. The former is the desire to attain instrumental goals such as getting a job, furthering a career, reading or translating technical materials in target language. A learner with instrumental motivation may not have real interest in the target language culture and people. Thus it reflects a practical value and advantages of learning a new language. An instrumental motivation is generally temporary, because once the instrumental goal is reached, the motivation ceases to function. For example, an English learner who wants to improve English to get some certificates may give up learning right after pass the examinations. However, the latter is the desire to know about the culture so that he can integrate himself with the culture of the second language group, to identify himself with and become a part of that society. It reflects a sincere and personal interest in the people and the culture represented by the community. Many studies show that integrative motivation may indeed be an important requirement or perhaps absolutely essential for successful learning. Learners with integrative motivation may well achieve high scores on proficiency tests

in a foreign language. An integrative motivation is generally lasting. (*An Analysis of English Teaching and Learning*, p34)

2.2.2. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

According to the sources, motivations can be classified into extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. The extrinsic one is comparatively temporary that learners are more likely to cease to function after a particular goal reached, while the intrinsic one concerns about personal interest in culture and environment of a target language. For example, extrinsic motivation reflects the learner's intention to get outside reward, such as money, prizes, grades and even certain types of positive feedback. While the intrinsically motivated activities based on a strong inner drive. In conclusion, extrinsic and functional motivation can be short-term drive. However, intrinsic and integrative motivation may last long and be an inner need for a person to continue second language study.

3. Some findings of motivation effecting students' English learning

After years of tough experiments and research, educators have found some new outcomes of influence of motivation on language learning. Even though it seemed that intrinsic and integrative motivation is superior to extrinsic and functional one, counterevidence still exists. People with extrinsic and functional motivation can also achieve great success. Some middle school students can acquire high proficiency in English learning as well. Therefore, it seems that it is the level instead of the type of motivation which accounts for better second language learning. By study, Ellis (1999) summarizes the findings in the field of motivation, and the pattern shows:

3.1. Motivation does not influence route, but the rate and final success.

3.2. Motivation is an important factor, which help determine the level of proficiency achieved by different learners.

3.3. In certain situations, an integrative motivation may be more powerful in stimulating successful second language, but in other situation, instrumentally motivated activities may be more essential. Where the second language functions as a foreign language, an integrative motivation helps; but where the second functions as a second language, an instrumental motivation is more effective.

3.4. The level and type of motivation is strongly influenced by the social context in which learning takes place.

4. The strategies helping with the motivation in English learning

According to the analysis of motivation, there are also some strategies to apply in English study for teachers in order to help students build up high level of motivation with their interest, personal values, teaching methods and environment. Motivation should be of vital importance in language teaching and both the second language teachers and students should be sufficiently aware of the above factors of motivation in English study. There are some suggestions of strategies teachers can apply with according to reality and students' personal factors.

4.1. Changes of Mind

According to the research of some psychologists, middle school students' cognitive is not so mature. They do not understand the real benefit of learning English in personal development. From this point of view, English teacher must think of some ways to make students understand that learning English can effect their future development in that it can not only help them get access to university but also can give them the chance to contact with foreigners, culture and customs , thus can have a global culture awareness. It is helpful for widening their horizon, making them informative and inspiring their creative thoughts. Furthermore, teachers had better help students gain learning confidence in this process of language learning. Therefore, not only functional and extrinsic motivation should be involved, but integrative and intrinsic motivation should be emphasized in order to make a better future for students.

4.2. Cultivating students' interest

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe had a famous word :”Mere curiosity adds wings to every step.”The sentence shows how significant curiosity and interest is in the road of a person’s development and success. Interest is a trend of emotion which motivates a person to be actively involved in some activities. It is an inner drive making people forget fatigue and completely immerse in activities that they are doing. If a student has a strong interest motivation, he or she is more likely to exert efforts in learning, thus may acquire more knowledge and have a better understanding and ability in this field. Cultivation of interest should start from the early childhood, but middle school students are in the critical time of this period. They tend to use both concrete and abstract cognitive thinking patterns, thus teachers’ tasks should be making teaching materials and activities more comprehensible and interesting. They’d better make all the teaching components verified, use all the accessible sources to help them develop their interest.

4.3. Creating sense of achievement

The sense of achievements can be an important source for middle school students’ perseverance in language learning, which can be a life long emotional drive. Persons with the high level of this kind of sense may be proud of their success, but not upset toward fail. They have a positive attitude toward the future. However, people with weak sense of achievements are the opposite example. They don’t have so many expectations for success, but fear much of fails. Therefore, they often bear too much burden on their minds with high level of anxiety. Although both perusing success and avoiding failures are two effective emotional situations to stimulate learning, they may result in completely distinctive physiological outcomes. The former can encourage people be active and have optimism so that they are willing to proceed in learning and surely have a better results. On the contrary, the latter can be pessimistic which results in the fear of study. At the same time, the sense of achievement makes people hardworking and increases the willingness of student’s learning. Hence, teachers should help build up students’ sense of achievement. In this process, teachers should create opportunities for students to give them successful experiences. Positive feedback can be effective. For example, teachers can praise and encourage them to give them confidence.

4.4. Classroom Activities

According to new standard curriculum, it is not the teachers but the students that are the core of English class. Thus, new teaching ideas should be used by teachers to operate classroom. Teacher should be a guider, not a controller. What's more, only some advanced thought be absorbed is not enough, teaching strategies and methods should also be used in classroom teaching.

In order to cultivate the students' integrated language skills and autonomous learning study habits, teachers are necessary to develop students' consciousness of active learning. Based on the ideas that students are the center of English teaching, teachers should then, design some interesting situations, give students various materials, and apply appropriate teaching methods. Some methods such as communicative teaching method, situational teaching method and task-based teaching method can play their own role in different kinds of English class.

In traditional pedagogy, listening and speaking activities include: listen to texts and repeat what is heard. It's clear these activities involve use of language in a completely different way from how language is used in reality. So, listening and speaking skills need to be redefined in terms of the communicative use. They should have the chance to listen to and produce what is meaningful, authentic and unpredictable. Thus teachers must spend a great deal of time on managing, learning, setting up activities, organizing resources, guiding students to stimulate their motivation. Then, they can have a better understanding of English, stronger willingness of learning, and can master English in a relaxed atmosphere, which is beneficial to their future development.

Firstly, a warming-up activity is a must. At the beginning of English class, making students become active is very important. Failing to do so, teachers must easily fall into the passive situation immediately. Generally speaking, a successful warming-up activity can help students understand the content of this lesson. Besides, it can also activate students' psychology and arouse their interest. "This warming-up activity is just as an 'appetizer' for the classroom learning". (Knud 2010.3.9)

Secondly, active teaching can be achieved through games. Amina (2005.1) thinks every teacher knows that it is crucial to choose methods of teaching suitable for the class, number of students, age and level difference. Finding a right method is half job in the teaching process. Different, captivating, unordinary activities in the classroom will help motivate the students and improve the effectiveness of the language learning process. Game is a means to activate the lexical and grammatical material, development of skills and knowledge of all activities. Game develops creative, intellectual capacity of a student. It involves three factors: what to do, what to say, how to win.

4.5. Properly Competition

Competition is an important method to stimulate the students' enthusiasm. The influence of competition behaved most strongly in middle school students. Sometimes competition can arouse their enthusiasm towards English learning and can improve the learning effect. In order to overcome the negative influence of competition, teachers must the train correct attitudes of students. Of course, individual competition and group competition can be combined. No matter what competition is taken, the purpose is to stimulate students' English learning.

4.6. Modern Education Means

According to the different teaching content, we can choose appropriate computer aid instrument (CAI) in English class. The teaching aids are not only pictures but also tapes, songs, videos or even English movies, which can help students to have a clear visual impression (Sharon 2006). It is essential to form a vivid and active classroom atmosphere. In the relaxed environment, students can capture the content of the lesson easily and quickly.

4. Experimental Design and Results

5. Conclusion

In short, learning motivation plays a decisive role in English learning. But the factor which can influence students' English learning motivation is very complex, involving students' age character, personality, family background, growing environment, social background and class teaching art, etc. Therefore, stimulating the students' English learning motivation is not easy. But the basic need of a person is consistent. As long as we can meet students' needs, develop their interests and lead active values, we can stimulate their learning motives. Personal values and motivation all have effects on English learning of students, the function of motivation in English learning is crucial. If we want to motivate students to learn English, we must develop their interest, lead to right values. It is helpful for students' active learning.

English teachers should fully understand the learning motivation and find the reason why students' learning motivation is low. The most important thing is taking measures and making plan to form a vivid classroom atmosphere. Based on the analysis of low learning motivation, we can take advantage of the strategies above to stimulate their motivation. That is to say, teachers should adopt new teaching ideas and modern teaching instruments and give students something interesting and necessary. In this way, students will form an effective motivation and eventually learn English better and realize all their potentials.

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