Enhancing intrinsic motivation of upper graders

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It is often said that lower graders seem to participate in English lessons actively, but upper graders tend not to enjoy playing games and singing songs. Based on psychological theory, this paper discusses what causes and what can be done about developmental declines in intrinsic motivation and then applies this to EFL situation in Japanese elementary school. By stressing meaningful aspects of learning tasks, encouraging pupils to have clear and specific goals, promoting perceptions of autonomy, and giving activities that are challenging but within their competence, upper graders might be more intrinsically motivated.

　低学年は英語の授業に活発に参加するが、高学年になるとゲームを楽しまなくなり、歌も歌わなくなるというのはよく言われることである。この論文では年齢が上がるにつれて何が原因で内発的動機が低下するのか、またそのような内発的動機の発達的な低下にはどのように対処すべきなのかを心理学の文献を参考にし、それらを日本の初等英語教育にどのように応用できるかを議論していく。意味のあるタスクを行い、生徒に明確で特定な目標を持たせ、自律性を促進するようにし、また、彼らの能力の範囲内で挑戦しがいのあるアクティビティを与えることによって、高学年の内発的動機を高めてあげることができるかも知れない。

It is very important for children to have *intrinsic motivation*, referring to "motivation to engage in an activity for its own sake" (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002, p. 245). Harter (1981), Lepper, Sethi, Dialdin, and Drake (1997), and Sakurai and Takano (1985) however found that elementary school pupils decrease in intrinsic motivation for general learning with age, although with slight differences among them. In English lessons, it is often said that lower graders seem to participate in English lessons actively, but upper graders tend not to enjoy playing games and singing songs. Carreira (2004) found a fairly significant developmental decline in motivation for learning English. Based on psychological theory, this paper discusses what causes and what can be done about developmental declines in intrinsic motivation and then applies this to EFL situation in Japanese elementary school.

Sources of intrinsic motivation

Lepper and Hodell (1989) suggested four major sources of intrinsic motivation related to tasks: *challenge, curiosity, control,* and *fantasy*. The most important source of intrinsic motivation is challenge. Optimally challenging activities are ones in which goals are of intermediate difficulty and attainment is uncertain. A second potential source of intrinsic motivation is curiosity. Curiosity is elicited by activities that are surprising, incongruous, or discrepant with their existing beliefs and ideas. A third source of intrinsic motivation includes control. Intrinsic motivation derives from students feeling a sense of control over their learning environments and activities. Finally, activities that involve students in make-believe and fantasy enhance intrinsic motivation.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde (1993) stated most motivation theories had focused on the theories that look to the individual's past and future sources of motivation. Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde suggested that motivational theory should focus on present sources, or *flow*. Flow refers to a subjective state of being completely involved in something, forgetting time, fatigue and everything else but the activity itself (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993). Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde set two conditions that make flow experience possible. First, flow experience happens when there are clear goals that the individual tries to reach, and when immediate and unambiguous feedback is given. Second, when an appropriate balance between skills and challenges is achieved, flow experience happens.

Developmental trends in intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

Some researchers have focused on developmental trends in intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Harter (1981) found a decline in intrinsic motivation through grades three to nine. Harter investigated five subscales: challenge, curiosity, mastery, judgment, and criteria. The challenge, curiosity and mastery subscales changed from intrinsic to extrinsic motivation with age. In contrast, there was a shift from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation on the judgment and criteria subscales.

In Japan, Sakurai and Takano (1985) conducted a questionnaire on 486 second through seventh grade pupils, based on Harter (1981). Six factors were extracted as follows: curiosity, causality, enjoyment, mastery, challenge and attribution. Sakurai and Takano found three types of developmental trends. First, the curiosity, causality, and enjoyment subscales declined gradually from the second through fifth grades, but increased in the sixth grade and decreased in the seventh grade again. Second, with age, the mastery and challenge subscales decreased. Third, with age, the attribution subscale increased.

In English education, Carreira (2004) investigated how Japanese elementary school pupils' motivation for learning EFL changes with age. As Harter (1981) and Sakurai and Takano (1985) found intrinsic motivation declined gradually with age, Carreira found a fairly significant developmental decline in motivation for learning English. It can be said that elementary school pupils' motivation for learning English decreases with age. Then, how can upper graders be more intrinsically-motivated in learning English? How can

teachers create an intrinsically motivating climate in English lessons for upper grades?

What can be done about developmental declines in intrinsic motivation?

A first potential response to the developmental decline in motivation is to stress meaningful aspects of learning tasks (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Pintrich and Schunk (2002) said that authentic tasks which have meaning in the real world should be stressed in the classroom. When it comes to English lessons, it is important to connect the activities that are conducted in the classroom to communication in the real world. In addition, pupils should be given opportunities to use English with foreigners, especially foreign pupils of a similar age. In order to learn "living English", pupils should be given some opportunities to communicate with foreigners regularly: communication with Assistant Language Teachers (ALT) who are employed at local schools and whose main duties relate to teaching, communication with foreign pupils abroad through E-mail, internet, mail, regular classroom meetings, and activities with foreign pupils who live in Japan. Learning English embedded in meaningful and natural contexts may enhance pupils' intrinsic motivation.

A second potential response to the developmental decrease in motivation is to encourage pupils to have clear and specific goals in the classroom. Flow experience usually happens when there are clear goals one can reach (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1993). Clear and specific goals promote self-efficacy, referring to an individual's belief in the capability to perform a specific action, and motivation better than vague general goals such as "Do your best"

(Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Pintrich and Schunk also (2002) said that proximal or close-at-hand goals enhance self-efficacy and motivation better than distant goals, because individuals can judge progress toward the former. It is essential to provide clear and concrete goals to pupils in each English lesson. When they achieve the goals each time, they may be able to feel a sense of mastery.

Furthermore, it is important to show future goals to pupils. Teachers should demonstrate not only the short-term but also the long-term goals of learning English. Pupils do not need to be extremely conscious of entrance examinations to high school and university, but it is necessary to recognize the importance of English as an international language.

A third approach for combating the developmental decline in motivation involves promoting perceptions of autonomy. Children who are not initially motivated to perform can be gradually motivated. Intrinsic motivation derives from students feeling a sense of control over their learning environments and activities (Lepper & Hodell, 1989). It is important to create an autonomous climate in the classroom. One of the ways to enhance perception of autonomy is to provide opportunities for pupils to control and choose different activities within a range of activities that fit into the curriculum.

Paul (2003) suggested a child-centered lesson. In a traditional teacher-centered lesson, teachers first introduce new words and patterns using techniques such as "repeat after me", bringing a model pair to the front of the class and demonstrating an activity (Paul, 2003). After this, pupils practice, do role-play, and afterwards play games. Why are they asking and answering the question during the practice?

Why are they role-playing? There seems to be little meaning for pupils. In order to enhance English ability, pupils need to repeat patterns a number of times, but this should be done in a meaningful way, not in a dry classroom drill (Paul, 2003). In a child-centered lesson, games play a central role. Playing games creates a need to listen to and speak English actively. Paul (2003) related this to language targets:

> In fact, if we introduce new language targets very clearly, the children are not likely to learn very deeply since we are doing most of the thinking for them. Instead of being clear, we should create deliberate confusion within a positive atmosphere. This can happen when the children encounter new language targets both in activities where the children are playing by themselves and in those where we are more involved. (p. 16)

Paul (2003) pointed out that inserting the new targets into games elicits a genuine and meaningful desire and need to learn, giving some space for pupils to think. He goes on to say that pupils are likely to feel a sense of ownership of those new words and patterns, which may play a meaningful and active role in the personal mental model of English. It can be said that what Paul suggested is one of the ways to enhance perception of autonomy.

A fourth potential response to the developmental decrease in motivation is to provide activities that are challenging but reasonable in terms of students' capabilities. Some researchers (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1985) have suggested that pupils should be given activities that are difficult and challenging, but not outside the range of competence. Because there are pupils with various levels of competence, it may be difficult to devise such activities. A variety of activities designed to meet the individual level and interest allows for challenge and active involvement. Activities involving diversity tend to facilitate an interest in learning because individual differences are respected. In English lessons, the teacher should provide eclectic activities including games that all the pupils in the classroom can join and individualized learning.

Conclusion

Motivation may be influenced by various external factors including education, teachers, parents, peers, and classroom, which can enhance or lower pupils' motivation. In other words, it is possible to enhance pupils' motivation by creating an appropriate environment and using proper teaching methods and materials. It is important to create an intrinsically motivating climate in English lessons.

This paper has discussed several possible explanations for developmental trends in intrinsic motivation and considered their implications for English education in elementary school. By stressing meaningful aspects of learning tasks, encouraging pupils to have clear and specific goals, promoting perceptions of autonomy, and presenting activities that are challenging but within their competence level, upper graders might be more intrinsically motivated.

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