

Motivating Higher education students to read literary texts: Practical strategies and Techniques

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Abstract

One of the main difficulties EFL teachers encounter is inspiring students in the classroom, according to some arguments. This challenge is associated with numerous internal and external factors that impact the interests and behaviors of the students. This indicates that teachers have a critical role to play in influencing the classroom environment and how they teach, both of which have a positive impact on students' motivation. The purpose of this study is to identify how motivation, psychology, and critical thinking relate to one another in order to provide EFL teachers, in particular, with some teaching strategies and techniques that can result in successful instruction.

Keywords: Motivation, literary texts, higher education, external factors, internal factors, Strategies, Techniques.

Introduction

Because of its authenticity, literature becomes a motivator for students to read literature. According to Van (2009), the authentic and meaningful context of literary texts motivates students. Furthermore, Duff and Maley (1990) emphasize the role of literature in motivating students by involving them in topics of interest, allowing them to generate knowledge from a written text. Focusing on the students' interests when selecting a material increases their eagerness to read; this suggests that allowing students to select their own materials that suit their personal interests will increase their average motivation. Motivating students to read allows them to demonstrate their abilities and skills, such as critical thinking skills.

1. Defining Motivation

Motivation, broadly speaking, refers to the reasons behind the performance of a task or activity. As noted on page 106 by Broussard and Garrison (2004), "motivation is the attribute that moves us to do or not to do something." Guay et al. (2010) assert that motivation is the constellation of "reasons underlying behaviors," which means that motivation can also refer to any behavior that takes place for any reason (p.712). Theoretically, there are numerous methods from diverse viewpoints that define motivation. A few of these methods define motivation in terms of cognitive behaviors such as planning, monitoring, self-control, and so on. Turner (1995) establishes a connection between motivation and cognitive behaviors, such as the deliberate application of high-level self-regulated learning strategies like planning, monitoring, and paying attention (p. 413). Other definitions of motivation place more emphasis on the non-cognitive dimensions. These non-cognitive traits include convictions, dispositions, behaviors, persistence, and perceptions. Afterwards, other methods define motivation by combining non-cognitive and cognitive elements. Motivation is defined as "enjoyment of school learning characterized by a mastery orientation, curiosity, persistence, challenging and novel tasks" (p.152) by Gottfried (1990).

2. Motivation in the Higher Education Context

The higher education level seems to be the deviation phase during any students' academic career in terms of some specific changes that may occur after getting the Baccalaureate Certificate. Thus, it is a necessity to reconsider the state of motivation in the higher education context. Within the target context, students' academic performance is predicted by their degree of motivation (Bustao, Pins, Elshout and Hamaker, 2000). This latter is almost related to the students' age according to Gottfried (1990), Eccles and Wigfield (2002), Guay et al (2010). For them, old students' motivation is completely differentiate from

that of young students. This indicates that students of higher education are under the exposure of many surrounding challenging situations. In this respect, Ames (1992) points out that “self-worth, attributions, related metacognitive beliefs and achievement goals” contribute in making changes in both the students’ performance and the classroom context. Therefore, moving students to learn is closely related to the value of classroom context and to the students’ willingness to succeed using certain reasonable learning efforts.

Purposes of Motivation in Higher Education

Higher education students are considered the future citizens of any society because they are in the last phase of being ready to be engaged in the social life. In other words, University is described as the factory of effective citizens who work for the benefit of their societies. As visualized, motivated students are those who:

- Solve problems in a reasonable way
- Are cognitively self-regulated: According to Covington (2000a), students are cognitively self-regulated when they demonstrate their active learning style, their convenient analysis of a given learning task, and their ability of accomplishing a challenging practices.
- Use the cognitive and the metacognitive skills appropriately because the “one’s achievement goals are thought to influence the quality, timing, and appropriateness of cognitive strategies that, in turn, control the quality of one’s accomplishments” (Covington, 2000b)
- Control their behaviors in contingencies situations.
- Design their learning strategies in the development of the academic achievement because motivation is the only one power to fail or succeed in school, as Martin (2008) points out.
- Recognize their intrinsic/extrinsic motivational factors.

In a word, the more students are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated, the more their learning behaviors are purposeful in the learning process.

3. The Relationship of Motivation with other Academic Concepts

With reference to most definitions of some other concepts, it becomes clear that the notion of motivation is covered through implicitly or explicitly. Within this literature, it is necessary to highlight the relationship of motivation to the following concepts:

✓ Metacognition

Metacognition is defined by “thinking about thinking”. Also, it is known by “the cognition about cognition” (Flavell, 1979) or by “a model of cognition” (Nelson, 1996). More precisely, metacognition is mainly linked to “one’s control of thoughts” (Martinez, 2006). In the context of motivation, metacognition appears in the students’ ability to monitor and to control their thinking to accomplish a challenging task inside and outside the classroom. In this respect, Cross and Paris (1988) point out that “metacognitive strategies can improve persistence at challenging tasks”; moreover, using those metacognitive strategies can be developed through the use of the surrounding motivational factors in order to interact and to perform a target task in an effective way. More importantly, the more students tend to succeed in their personal and social life, the more they become confident to overcome the future difficulties.

✓ Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is mainly related to the extent an individual believes that he/she is able to perform a given task and to exercise self-control in order to achieve certain outcome. In the educational context, self-efficacy makes students able to fulfill a challenging task and able to control its results. In other words, self-efficacy provides students with situations to be motivated to use their own learning style, (Zimmerman (1998); Boekaerts (1999); Pintrich (2000); Winne (2004)). According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy is connected to the development of self-subjective experience, awareness of the physiological status and affect. On the one hand, self-efficacy influences the students’ ability to choose tasks to engage in, the expended efforts for each activity and the needed help to be accomplished. In the

other hand, self-efficacy has an influential power on the students' motivation, feelings, thoughts and perseverance.

✓ Self-Regulation

Self-regulation refers to the one's achievement of some planned personal goals using some practical strategies, actions, feelings and thoughts. Educationally speaking, self-regulation is mainly referred to the academic and motivational skills that are used to attain certain educational goals, as Zimmerman (2001) elaborates. As far as motivation is concerned, self-regulated students are those who are motivated to attain their intended specific goals. Considering academic achievement as a principle goal, it has been observed through a study done by Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons(1990) that self-regulated students use some specific learning strategies to achieve the academic success. Those learning strategies include "reviewing texts, environmental structure, seeking information and setting goals".

Amalgamating the three concepts together in relation with motivation, it is apparent that self-regulation embodies metacognition, self-efficacy and motivation. In other words, self-regulated students are highly motivated, are able to control their thinking and strongly confident about their abilities to succeed. In this context, Pintrich et al (1993) clarify that motivation in relation with self-regulation aspects and the usage of the metacognitive strategies and achievement are all interrelated with each other. This relationship can be illustrated in the following diagram:

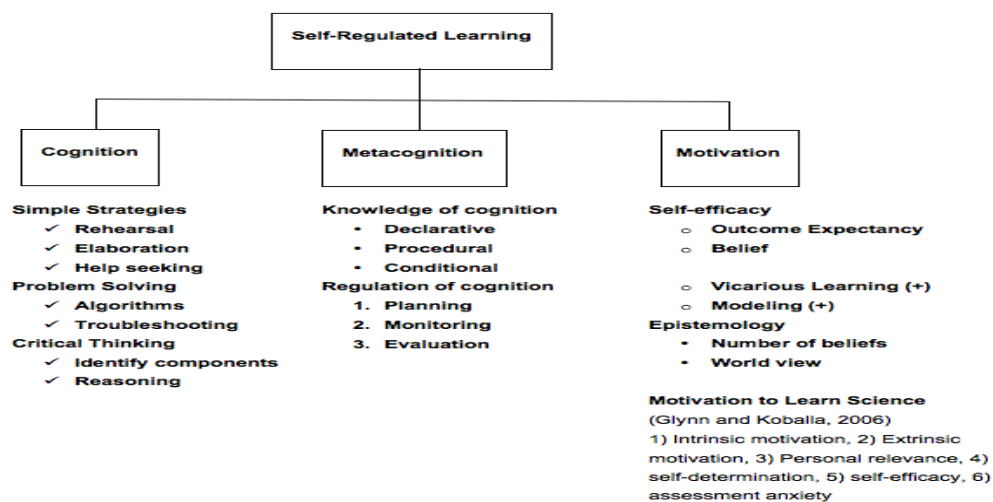


Figure 04: The Interrelationship between Motivation, Metacognition and Self- Regulation

Consequently, students' motivation is closely tied to the self-learning process and the personal beliefs about abilities of performance; that is why motivation seems to be an important factor in the learning/teaching process in every level.

4. Suggested Strategies And Techniques To Motivate Students' Reading Literary Texts

Motivating higher education students to read a literary text becomes as the miracle achievement because of the technology invasion, the new way of thinking, the challenges of the real world in which they live and many other obstacles. Moreover, Hobson's study (2004) concludes that there are some reasons behind the students' refuse to accomplish a literary task. For him, such reasons are a) the students' misunderstanding of motivational behavior, b) the students' weak relationship with the reading materials and c) the students' negative belief towards the reading activity. From the angle of connecting reading to motivation, Guthrie(2004) points out that being skillful in reading has no sense without the willing to read. In other words, it is not enough to teach students how to read but also teaching how to become able to read. Under this aim, many studies are conducted to examine the reasons of the students' reluctance to read on the one hand and to find some strategies to motivate higher education students to be engaged in

reading literary works, on the other hand. In this respect, it is necessary to mention the studies of Sever(1990), Alderson(2000), Mori (2002), Trieman(2003), Guthrie & Wigfield (2005) and Guthrie (2006).

Regarding the aim of motivating students to read, numerous programs, strategies and techniques have been suggested in this context. For instance, Guthrie(2004) emphasizes three motivational aspects to engage students in reading. For him, a student is motivated depending on his/her:

- **Interest:** it is the fundamental issue when dealing with motivation. Students are motivated because they are enjoying their desire and interests.
- **Dedication:** students are motivated to read because they recognize the importance of reading, so they believe that they are able to read any assignment reading.
- **Confidence:** students are motivated to read because they believe in their abilities in achieving success. Then, they read because they want to build their self-confidence.

Other studies confirm that there is a relationship between academic achievement and intrinsic motivation (Gottfried, 1985) .Also, the way students read can be a very important motive (Guthrie, 2006) and the students' views towards practicing reading is another motive to students to read (Edmunds and Bauserman, 2006). Practically, Gambrell (1996a) in her article “Creating Classroom Cultures that Foster Reading Motivation” mentions six research basically factors that contribute in fostering the students' motivation to read literary works. These basic factors include:

- **“The teacher as an explicit reading model”:** according to Cambrell, the successful teacher is the one who is able to share the love of reading with students. Also, teachers should teach students the importance of reading in their lives.
- **“The reading environment”:** for Krashen (2004) the reading environment is “to encourage free reading” in the suitable, comfortable and quiet places in the appropriate time.
- **“Reading aloud”:** this technique has an effective impact on the students reading experience because they will develop their reading competence and pleasure. For this aim, teachers can demonstrate their personal reading experiences through reading aloud, focusing on the interesting characters, themes or passages in the literary work.
- **“Free voluntary reading”:** in this sense Krashen(2011) emphasizes the three following points: a)effective reading comes through the book language acquisition, b) language development appears in the effortless reading and c) the focus should be on the content rather than checking comprehension.

Furthermore, most of the researchers try to make students involved in reading by fostering their motivational habits. In this respect, Gambrell (1996b) suggests the “Engaged Reader” technique which focuses mainly on creating readers who are highly motivated, knowledgeable, socially interactive and strategic behaving. This technique is illustrated as follows:

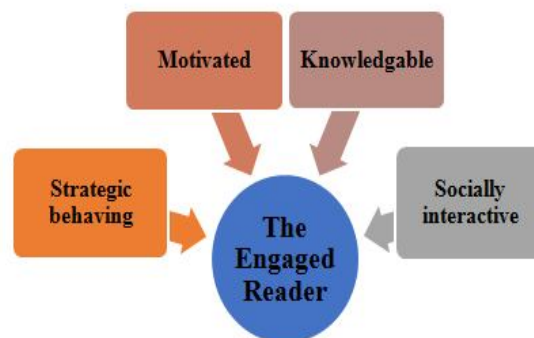


Figure 05: The Engaged Reader (Gambrell, 1996)

In the whole, the source of motivation in higher education context is the students' own self. Since they are mature, they are able to recognize the surrounding world to which they belong. This evidence is demonstrated in Knowels (1994) words: "when a person becomes older, his motivation to learn comes from his own self" (p.12).

Conclusion

There are numerous factors that have great impact on the students' motivation, the teacher factor is the most potent which effects the students' motivation "in ways that either facilitates or impedes learning" (Svincki, 2005, p.1). The teacher plays a vital role in the teaching /learning process; s/he is the source of change in the students' motivation degree either positively or negatively. It is very necessary to make teachers aware of two crucial themes in teaching critical thinking: modeling and flexibility. The former refers to the teachers' ability to design the appropriate teaching curriculum for students supported with project-based activities, problem-solving tasks and the questioning classroom practices. Teachers can choose many ways to motivate students to explore their critical thinking skills. Teachers may allow students to choose the materials used in the course, involve students in setting the teaching goals for the language learning, engage students in practical academic activities to use the language inside and outside the learning environment and provide students with challenging situations that allow using critical thinking skills. For these aims, teachers should rethink about the program of higher education teaching critical thinking in order to be more effective. In general, teachers are expected to prompt high-quality teaching in terms of active meaningful content, purposeful acquiring knowledge, developed and effective way of teaching.

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