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Modern technologies (google classroom) as a means of boosting learners' motivation

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Abstract

The acquisition of higher education is one of the most important activities that any professional undertakes in one's life. However, very often teachers have to face the problem of decline or absence of learners' motivation to learn. The aim of the given article is to analyze the problem of learners' motivation decline and to suggest certain methods for boosting it by means of the teacher's model and correct attitude, the choice of learning materials and methods as well as a favorable learning environment. The article also analyses the use and productivity of modern technologies and Google Classroom in particular, in the process of improving learners' motivation. The analysis is based on the results of a survey conducted among 950 students at Kh.Abovian Armenian State Pedagogical University.

Keywords: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, teacher's role, learning environment, Google Classroom, interactive teaching, video materials, survey.

Аннотация

Получение высшего образования является одним из самых важных действий в жизни любого профессионала, однако очень часто преподаватели сталкиваются с проблемой снижения или отсутствия мотивации у обучающихся. Цель статьи проанализировать проблему снижения мотивации студентов и пути ее повышения в образовательном процессе с помощью правильного подхода преподавателя, выбора учебных материалов, методов и среды обучения. Статья так же анализирует использование и продуктивность современных технологий (в частности платформы Google Classroom), в повышении мотивации обучающихся на основе опроса касательно эффективности использования данной платформы в образовательном процессе, проведенного среди 950 студентов Армянского Государственного Педагогического Университета им. Х.Абовяна.

Ключевые слова: внешняя и внутренняя мотивация, роль преподавателя, среда обучения, платформа Google Classroom, интерактивное обучение, видеоматериалы, опрос.

What forces us to get out of bed in the morning and get started with our daily routine? Obligation, habit, desire to achieve success, genuine pleasure in being involved in something, certain tangible and intangible expectations. The answers may vary depending on the person and on the activity one undertakes. People tend to call these reasons "my motivation", implying the latter to be some sort of a moving force which fuels our everyday life. This is not necessarily wrong. However, the answer is not that simple.

The aim of the given article is to analyze the problem of learners' motivation decline and to suggest certain methods for boosting it by means of the teacher's model and correct attitude, the choice of learning materials and methods as well as a favorable learning environment. The article also analyses the use and productivity of modern technologies and Google Classroom in particular, in the process of improving learners' motivation.

The concept of motivation is the subject matter of both psychology and pedagogy and the two disciplines are connected in an intricate manner. Due to the complexity of this concept there is still no unanimously accepted understanding of "motivation". However, a great number of scholars (E.Deci, R.Ryan, A.Maslow, B.F.Skinner, J.Watson, Robert C. Gardner, H.Douglas Brown) have studied this topic and perhaps the dichotomy of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is the most commonly accepted categorization.

The beginning of the 20th century was marked by the development of the behaviorism theory in psychology, introduced by John B. Watson, Ivan Pavlov, B.F. Skinner, E. L. Thorndike and Albert Bandura. It gave us the concept of a learner as a clean slate (i.e. *tabula rasa*), whose behavior can be controlled and directed with the help of positive and negative external stimuli. [8]

Later on, American psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan became the authors of one of the most influential theories on motivation - the theory of self-determination. The latter puts emphasis on internal motivation and diminishes the role of external rewards. Edward Deci himself defines intrinsic motivation in the following manner: “Intrinsically motivated activities are ones for which there is no apparent reward except the activity itself. People seem to engage in the activities for their own sake and not because they lead to an extrinsic reward. Intrinsically motivated behaviors are aimed at bringing about certain internally rewarding consequences, namely feelings of competence and self-determination”. [3, p. 35].

The theory of self-determination is closely connected to Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. The latter is essentially a pyramid, which has the basic physiological and safety needs as food, water, warmth, air, rest, security and safety on the lower two levels. The essence of the theory is that once a person fulfils the afore mentioned basic needs he/she moves up to the psychological needs of intimate relationships, friends and accomplishment. The top of the pyramid is the need of self-actualization. [7]

In order to reach self-actualization one needs knowledge of the sphere where he/she is trying to achieve full potential. A higher education institution has been and remains the only authorized place for gaining professional education. The authors of the given article have different lengths of teaching experience. However, no matter for how many years one has been teaching, it is impossible not to notice that not all learners are willing to use their potential in classroom and reach a certain level of self-actualization.

Lack of motivation is a serious problem and an obstacle in the teaching/learning process. Learners are reluctant to attend classes, let alone be an active participant of the activities organized during the lesson. The surveys and analyses conducted at Kh.Abovian Armenian State Pedagogical University, as well as the annual course evaluations conducted within learners, show that a great number of learners only attend University because they have to. The reasons behind this obligation may vary – parents’ enforcement, fear of being expelled from University, the utter desire of having a diploma, not knowing what else to do in life. However, these external motivations do not necessarily have to be so negative and bleak. Learners’ external motivations may include the desire to get good marks in order to be able to apply for student loans, the aspiration of getting a praise from the teacher. However, a question arises: how effective and long lasting can this external motivation be and what happens when a learner gets all of the desired short-term rewards? As professor H.Douglas Brown says: “One of the principal weaknesses of extrinsically driven behavior is its addictive nature. Once captivated, as it were, by the lure of an immediate prize or praise, our dependency on those tangible rewards increases, even to the point that their withdrawal can then extinguish the desire to learn”. [2, p.39] Therefore, we may assume that external motivation may serve for merely achieving short-term goals and for giving certain external rewards that in no way contribute to the formation of a learner’s certain level of conscious approach towards the significance and the never ending nature of education.

The three key factors affecting the formation of this approach are the teacher, the learning environment and materials and the use of appropriate teaching/learning methods. All of these should serve only one purpose: making the learners realize that the choice of attending a higher education institution should be a conscious one and that no one can or is forcing them to attend classes.

A teacher’s role in the overall teaching/learning process cannot be overestimated. As improbable as it sounds, but even a person who has studied only two subjects in one’s life, will

agree that he/she likes one of the teachers and the way he/she conducts the lesson better than the other. So what are the intangible factors that affect this choice? The answer to this question lays in the teacher's overall personality and professional skills and the manner in which he/she treats the learners. A teacher should be a role model for the learners not only from a professional perspective, but also as a person. The mastery of the discipline that he/she teaches is crucial, but it is not enough for getting the learners involved in the lesson. A teacher should become a role model for one's learners via his/her constant self-education, desire to achieve more and know more. He/she should be self-confident but never arrogant and condescending, since 21st century learners like being treated as adults and equals and very often may resent to negative and patronizing attitude, which may result in verbal skirmish or, what is worse, decline of motivation and absence of desire to attend the classes in the first place. Setting the boundaries is the key in this situation – being friendly and approachable but at the same time remaining the authority in class. We, as teachers, may achieve this balance by means of showing learners that we can answer any questions regarding our subject and have general knowledge background to tackle topics, which are out of the realm of our profession. Moreover, it is important to realize that one cannot answer every single question and it is beneficial and better to show learners that you do not know the answer than pretend as if you do and, if possible, look it up immediately or give them the answer during the next lesson. This way you can show them that a person needs constant improvement. As they say, there is no shame in not knowing, but it is shameful not to want to know. Therefore, a teacher should always be involved in certain professional trainings, workshops, international programs, keep track of the developments in his/her sphere, as well as be familiar with the latest trends in cinematography, theatre, music, art and modern technologies. A well-educated teacher, who keeps his /her knowledge up-to-date and follows the developments of the modern world, will never fail to gain one's learners' respect, love and awe.

A learner-centered approach – this is the general term for education nowadays. This approach implies that the learner should be the core of the education process and everything should revolve around involving a learner in the organization and the general course of the lesson. The key here is to take into account the learners' needs and interests in choosing the material and the methods used during the lesson. Of course, each teacher has a course description to comply to and it is impossible to neglect it and deviate from the required topics that need to be covered. Nevertheless, a teacher should be flexible enough to make time during the lesson for the learners to discuss topics that they are interested in and that motivate them to learn more than is required. The choice of appropriate methods is also of great importance here. A teacher should be able to distinguish what type of learners he/she has in the given group: visual, aural, physical, logical or verbal and adjust the methods accordingly. [9] A healthy and motivating learning environment can greatly contribute to the general outcome of the teaching/learning process. A teacher may refresh the classroom environment by means of a simple joke, a nice musical or funny video, a light story – anything that will make the classroom a nice place, where learners will be eager to come back to. They should not be resented for not attending classes, it should be their choice and our duty as teachers should be to masterfully lure them into classroom without them even realizing it.

The way the lesson is organized and the choice of appropriate methods and teaching materials are also essential aspects in motivating learners. A teacher should take into consideration the fact that in the 21st century year after year pretty much everything, including information and teaching methods, is becoming obsolete. Therefore, it is important to incorporate these changes in the teaching/learning process by means of choosing up-to-date teaching/learning materials and methods. As 21st century is an era of technology it is quite natural that students are used to modern technologies in their daily life and the learning environment should be adjusted to the requirements of the 21st century learners. [5 p.30-33] So the technological changes that have taken place over the last decades have supported and contributed to not only teachers in the field of education but students as well. [1, p.32-33] The

dynamic growth of the Internet technologies contributes to the development of diversity of virtual platforms in the field of modern learning.

One of the latest achievements in this area is Google Classroom which is one of the Google for Education's newest products and it has received rave reviews from many educators. It is a learning management system that allows you to digitally create and manage assignments as well as to provide feedback to your students. Google Classroom works particularly with Google Apps for Education. [10] It must be noted that this application/service is beneficial for both novice and advanced users. It has a simple, easy-to-navigate interface that is suitable to many teachers. It is comfortable for using with all types of learners, since a teacher can provide them with audio, video, text and logical materials to meet the needs of all types of learners. [4, p. 3-5]

The main purpose of Google Classroom is to assist paperless communication between teachers and students and streamline instructional workflow. Classroom allows teachers to

1. Create classes
2. Create announcements
3. Create questions
4. Post assignments

One of the best features to be mentioned is that Classroom is fully integrated with all other Google apps. This means that the students and teachers can share information with one another online instead of having to need to pass through various hurdles to submit an assignment. A rather motivational point is that students can begin their work with just one click, by viewing the assignment and then opening it in a Google Doc. When they do this, teachers have a real-time view into students' progress and can give some feedback along the way. Each student has his/her own Google Drive folder which allows students and teachers perpetual access to previous work, and another effective point is that educators can even assign grades within Classroom. [6, p 3-5]

Thus we can note that Google Classroom suggests a unique domain for facilitating workflow, digital production, and communication between the students and the teachers. As the other Google apps, it is available for free to universities, it has no ads, and it also never uses student or teacher personal content for advertising purposes. This application is both student and teacher oriented as it organizes everything by putting all assignments and works in one place. Creating assignments, making copies, supervising, collecting data and grading as well as recording, and returning work to students is a process which really requires a lot of time. Google Classroom simplifies these actions as it combines, or organizes them. [6, p 5-10]

It is worth mentioning that Classroom is also designed for teachers and students to communicate with each other, share resources, ideas, links, images with one another. They can also create and participate in online Classroom discussions.

Google Classroom has several peculiar features which make it one of the best educational apps to work with students. To bring some features we must note that it is first of all

1. user friendly,
2. provides constant feedback with the students,
3. is easy to use
4. has a wide range of possibilities
5. reduces the demand for paper assignments
6. gives an unlimited amount of virtual space for Google Drive to keep educational content.

Since 2008, the Government of Armenia has approved the concept of Information Technology Development, which outlines the conceptual framework and timetable for the formation of an electronic society in the Republic of Armenia, based on the analysis and coordination of the best international practice.

The importance of speaking English is one of the most important requirements of the modern labor market. In order for a professional to be competitive and competent, he/she needs to have mastered English to a certain extent and a higher education institution is one of the best places for acquiring the necessary professional vocabulary and skills.

Taking into consideration both the need and the attention of the government to the formation of an electronic society and the importance of learning English, Kh. Abovian Armenian State Pedagogical University outlined the introduction of the e-learning system in its educational process.

From 2016 to 2020, the key vision, goals and objectives of the Strategic Development of the university is to introduce and apply an innovative educational process, by providing highly-qualified pedagogical staff based on the extensive use of online e-learning technologies, and thus applying educational information technologies in all educational courses and teaching forms of the University.

From November 2015, ASPU signed a contract with Google and started applying Google for Education, thus bachelor and master's degree students and the whole staff was involved in the process. As a part of this process the Chair of Foreign Language teaching was also involved.

The staff is always trying to use the modern technologies to motivate students in their learning process, as a matter of fact we can note that Google classroom is an ideal tool for language learning. It allows the teacher to use all the possible interactive tools to motivate students and create a rather interesting teaching-learning atmosphere which gives a potential for deeper learning. In order to understand the advantages and disadvantages of Google Classroom in the English language teaching process, an online survey via Google forms was suggested to students. The participants of this research survey were 950 ASPU students from its all 10 faculties (EPS-132, PE -114, Culture-112, Special Education-85, Art Education-89, Philology-43, BCG-34, History and Law -32, FL-13, MPI-33, 263 students decided to pass this question without answering). All the participants were between the ages 17-22 who were enrolled in the university's full time learning process. As a method for the research the quantitative method is taken into account. The survey consisted of 5 questions.

39.3 % of students have mentioned that Google Classroom is more effective for English language teaching, 32.3% of students mentioned that it is effective for their academic subjects, 17.3 % have mentioned university subjects. The results are illustrated in a pie chart 1

Pie chart 1

The effectiveness of classroom for subjects

To the question “Which subject's materials are more interesting in Google Classroom” students gave the following answers. 42.3% think that English language and academic subject materials are more interesting, 15.4 % think that all the materials shared in Classroom are interesting. The results are illustrated in chart 2

Pie Chart 2

The most interesting materials in Google Classroom

According to the results 48.7% students think that the most active subject via Google Classroom is English Language, 30 % think that academic subjects are, 15% think that all the university chairs' subjects are active, and 6.3% think that all the subjects are active. The results are shown in pie chart 3.

Pie chart 3

The most active subjects in Google Classroom

To the question whether Classroom helps in the English language learning 70.8% of students think that it really helps in the English language process, 29.1 % gave negative answer. The results are illustrated in Pie chart 4.

Pie chart 4

The effect of Classroom in English language learning

According to 59.4 % the most interesting materials for students are all the materials shared via Classroom (case studies, round table discussions, imitation, simulation and stimulation games, video materials, show and tells, Power Point and poster presentations, group, pair or individual projects , movies, songs, listening exercises) , 17.3% think that video materials are the most interesting, 6 % think that movies are interesting, 5% power point presentations,

5% images, 4 % think that listening materials are the most interesting and finally 3.4 % think that songs are interesting. The results are illustrated in Pie chart 5.

Pie chart 5

The most interesting materials shared in Classroom

Thus the given survey shows that the use of case studies, round table discussions, imitation, simulation and stimulation games, video materials, show and tells, Power Point and poster presentations, group, pair or individual projects, discussions are all viable methods that can be used to provide both a learner centered and motivating environment not only in class but also via Google Classroom. To conclude, Google Classroom is not a production tool, but it is a management tool which can motivate a student to learn and study with ease, as it creates an interesting atmosphere which leads to the wish to discover more and more.

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