

Visual Thinking Strategies Improve Intrinsic Motivation of English Learners – A Study

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Abstract: In language learning and teaching, the present modern world has provided variety of chances to use technology blended learning and in past few years, people have noticed the use of visual literacy and motivational factors of learners to improve their English language acquisition. This study explores the use of visual literacy through 'Visual Thinking Strategies' that affect the motivational factors in the acquisition of English language learners.

Index Terms: Visual literacy, Visual Thinking Strategy, Motivation, Cognitive skills, Technology

INTRODUCTION

The English learners of the present generation are those who grow up in a world of technology, they are to be involved in active learning where rote memorization is slowly losing its place to motivate learners. Educators now emphasize on authentic learning experience. This authentic learning experience include motivational environment as a key component. Though there are other components that affect language learning like personality traits, aptitude, attitude, emotional intelligence of the learners, motivational factors of learners are the key component for learning, acquiring language more effectively in short span of time. The current study explores the use of technology integrated classrooms with VTS which affects the motivation of the techno-generation to acquire English language productively.

TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATED LEARNING

Technology is utilized in language learning as it is likely to tap both the auditory and visual senses of a learner. A paper presented by Solanki (2012) on the "Use of Technology in English Language Teaching and Learning: an Analysis" meditates on the use and over use of technology in learning language. The author states that the use of technology "... can fully improve students' ideation and practical language skills, which is helpful and useful to ensure and fulfill an effective result of teaching and learning" (155). Technologies improve teaching effect which in turn improves the motivation of learners who are exposed to different environment of learning apart from their normal rote classroom learning experience. It also enables a well constructed communication and interaction between learners and instructors. It also cultivates students' interest in learning which motivate the learners to acquire language with attractive interface. As the students of 21st century are acquainted with technology like smart phones, laptops, and other electronic gadgets which play a part in their everyday life, using these electronic gadgets to learn and acquire language would motivate learners both intrinsically and extrinsically.

MOTIVATION IN L2 LEARNERS

Motivation is one of the important elements to successfully acquire a second language. It is a stimulant that makes a learner to pursue in learning the target language persistently. There are a number of language learner motivation models developed by linguists among which R. C. Gardner's (1985) "Social Psychology and Language Learning: The Role of Attitudes and Motivation" presents an explicit model and theories of motivation. According to Gardner's theory, motivation could be referred to a kind of central mental engine that urges the learners to acquire language. Without this sufficient motivation, a learner may lack interest and could be remarked as having difficulties in acquiring that target language.

An article by Mark (2012) on "Investigation of Motivation to Transfer Second Language Learning" explores motivation and its effect on learning experiences. Their study perceives the effect of motivation in classrooms and it believes that a learner should be sufficiently motivated with less anxiety and stressful learning environment. Psychologists suggest that when learners are motivated, they could endure hardworking and equip themselves with strategies to achieve their target.

TYPES OF MOTIVATION

According to Rod (2013) there are four important types of motivation which he mentioned in his work, "Second Language Acquisition":

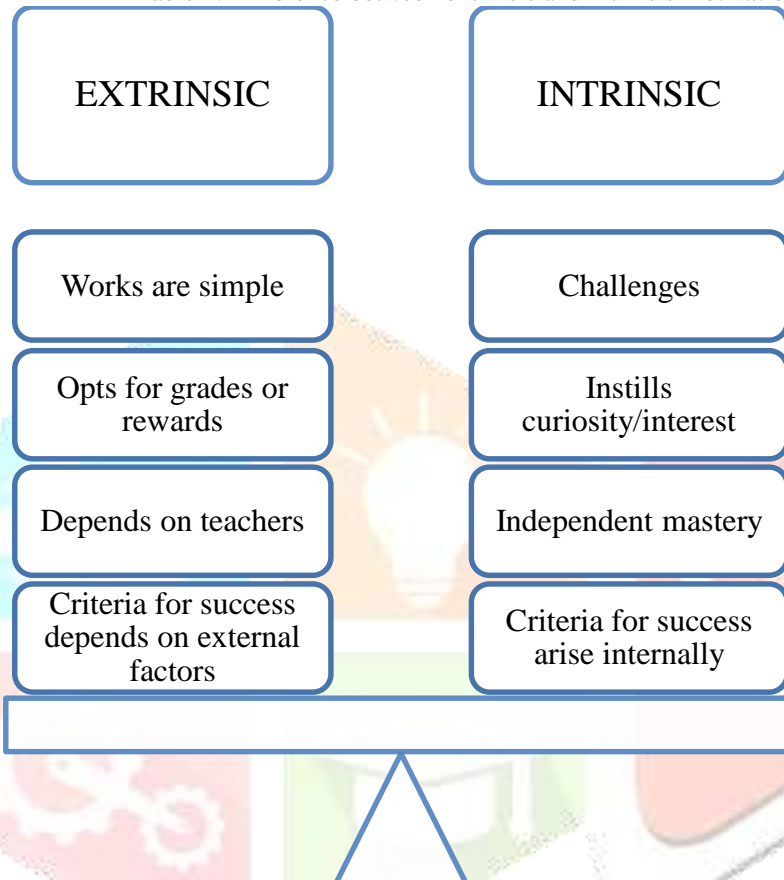
- Instrumental motivation – where learners acquire language for functional reasons. Example: to pass examinations, to get better job etc.
- Integrative motivation – where learners acquire language since they are interested in those people and culture. Example: many English speaking Canadians have integrative motivation to learn French.
- Resultative motivation – where learners have a sense of achievement in the results pertaining to language learning. Example: a learner getting high scores in a language being learned.
- Intrinsic Motivation – the arousal and maintenance of curiosity that instills interest and the extent to which learners feel personally involved in learning activities.

The current study aims at exploring this intrinsic motivation which creates an effect in learners by using a teaching methodology called 'Visual Thinking Strategies'.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Motivation is dynamic in nature. The two significant motivation types analysed by linguists and psychologists pertaining to language acquisition and second language learning are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The difference between these two kinds of motivation has been studied by Spolsky (1989) who borrowed his model from Harter (1982). A graphic representation of their model is given below,

Table 1: Difference between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation



A study by Chiew and Poh (2015) on "A Review of Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivation of ESL Learners" enumerates the significance and influence of intrinsic motivation that is likely to last longer and give better performance than the extrinsically motivated learners. The authors of the study state few implications to improve intrinsic motivation of the learners. They are as follows,

- ❖ Learners should be involved
- ❖ A sense of community and belonging should be developed enthusiastically
- ❖ Language learning should be made enjoyable and interesting
- ❖ Teaching materials should be relevant to the learners
- ❖ Encouraging learners to set their own goals
- ❖ Challenging tasks that scaffold them to success
- ❖ Helping learners to create realistic beliefs

These are considered as important components to accelerate intrinsic motivation of the L2 learners. These components could be strategically evolved in technology integrated classroom with VTS methodology.

Another study entitled as "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation for Learning English as a Foreign Language" by Oletić and Nina (2014) explain intrinsic motivation with the concept of flow which represents "... feeling of complete absorption in activities which we enjoy" (25). The experimental research conducted by them show that school and university students have low level of intrinsic motivation which correspondingly affects the L2 acquisition of the learners. Learners could be motivated externally (extrinsically) for a period of time but without internal interest and motivation learners may feel detached to what they learn. They observe learning as a mere responsibility to pass and could choose selective learning instead of thorough learning which would only fetch them their rewards. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are equally important to learn a language; however reduced ratio of

intrinsic motivation would not enable students in proper learning of language. Thus, there is a need for a method which would accelerate both the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of the learners.

The recent research studies of interdisciplinary learning have gained popular attention among English language teachers and learners. Using media, art, photography and other disciplinary into language teaching have excited students learning where “Visual Thinking Strategies” is one among them which motivates learners and improve their cognitive skills as well.

VISUAL THINKING STRATEGIES (VTS)

The term ‘Visual Literacy’ is associated to John Debes, co-founder of the International Visual Literacy Association. Visual literacy implies the ability to interpret and construct meaning from an image. The foundation of visual literacy is laid on the idea that pictures could be read – a picture is worth a thousand words.

Visual Thinking Strategy is the evolution from visual literacy; it is a research-based education. This was found by the collaborative work of Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine both of them were also the co-founder of Visual Understanding in Education. Housen, professor Art Education at Massachusetts College of Art researched into the stages of aesthetic development provided the theoretical basis for VTS. Philip Yenawine, Director of Education at the Museum of Modern Art, has been developing curricula and professional development that is used in hundreds of schools and institutions around the world since the early 1990s.

Visual thinking Strategies is a learner centered method. Working of VTS starts with displaying a picture or an art form in a projected screen and the teacher who acts as a facilitator and guide in this method onsets open ended questions beginning with,

- What’s going on in this picture?
- What do you see that makes you say that?
- What more can we find?

Thereby, with these set guided questions the teacher facilitates students thinking, arranges discussion forum which involve them in active learning and encourages their intrinsic motivation.

✓ **VTS and English Language Learning**

Many studies have shown the positive outcomes of VTS in students English language learning. VTS enables students to communicate with the instructor and fellow students. Under Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) VTS proves to be more productive, it also signifies considerable increase in the vocabulary gallery of the students where they unconsciously acquire new words, sentence structures and communicative skills. Along with these positive reflections VTS has been proved to improve cognitive skills and motivation in learners in the act of acquiring English Language.

“Visual Thinking Strategies = Creative and Critical Thinking” by Moller, Kay, Dave and Lisa (2013) identifies that “VTS shapes new ways of teaching, while the students shape new ways of thinking” (59). An experiment conducted by them proves that VTS has increased critical thinking of students with significant improvement in their creativity and motivational factors.

✓ **Developing Intrinsic Motivation**

This learner centered method demands the active participation and attention of the learners. This method works under the principle of constructivism theory which stimulates the intrinsic motivation of the learners. The visual projection of art works, pictures through the technologies create a new learning experience that kindle learners’ interest and sustains *enjoyable learning environment*. Using pictures, art works and photographs intensify the cognitive skills of the students, helping them construct meaning and promote problem solving ability which *involves the learners*. When teachers facilitate discussions, students work individually, in pairs and in groups taking into account others ideas, suggestions and point of view thus giving them a *sense of community* to work together. Viewing and talking about pictures and arts assist learners by relating it to their personal experience and *create realistic beliefs*. Training with this methodology would help them set their *own goals and challenging tasks* that scaffold them to success.

CONCLUSION

The importance of English language as a medium of communication cannot be denied. Acquisition of language could not be forced on learners unless they are self determined and motivated in learning second language. This onsets an essential need for ELT practioners to introduce learners with a new learning environment, where they are intrinsically motivated to learn and acquire language effectively. Lottie Baker (2015) suggests in his article, “we must put images at the forefront of instruction, embracing the possibilities that visual media offers for language learning” (11). VTS advances such an environment that motivates learners intrinsically in eliciting English language learning.

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