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Preparing the Macedonian Higher Education for Blended Learning - Student Motivation Strategies for Online Teaching Business English¹

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ABSTRACT

Underneath the tension of technological innovation in all areas and youths self-belief in its advantages, conventional teaching methods are losing support to pursue more effective techniques. Therefore, if we want to successfully transform and prepare the Macedonian education system for the future blended education, we must change and adapt the teaching methods. Motivating students is a crucial factor for success in the classroom, making student motivation a challenging task for teachers. This paper aims to propose motivation techniques for e-learners of Business English. In addition, the expected results from utilising the proposed techniques shall be discussed. The results vary from improved performance to better student-teacher relationship, ultimately leading to higher quality and improved teaching-learning process at the Macedonian education institutions. Although the research concentrates on Business English, these strategies are not limited to Business English only; thus, they should be taken into consideration and applied into practice for different courses.

Keywords: E-learning, business English, student motivation, teaching strategies

INTRODUCTION

Encouraging all learners, regardless of their language level, aspirations, or experience with learning a foreign language, are essential to assist them in developing their language skills. Learning Business English is a complex

¹ review scientific paper

process altogether, and online learning complicates this process even further; hence student motivation plays a crucial role in student success and performance. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, online teaching at the Macedonian educational institutions was introduced in the 2019-2020 academic year. Although it is believed, and hoped, that the 2021-2022 academic year shall be taught in the traditional face-to-face format, we have to understand that online learning is here to stay. Moreover, it is becoming a trend that is going to shape the future development of the educational systems throughout the world. That trend has to be followed by the Macedonian educational system as well.

The biggest challenge for anyone learning is performance. For any teacher, the main aim is to ensure that the students perform excellently—different aspects prompt excellence. Knowing the best way to make sure the students perform exceedingly is something that can be appreciated by not just the teachers but also the students. The issue is that even after knowing the techniques, one has to go deep in the thigh and come up with the best suggestions and techniques to utilise to ensure that the students perform well. For many years, the model for enabling has been the topic of research studies, with teachers and psychiatrists attempting to uncover the instructional tactics that best ignite learners' enthusiasm and dedication to study. The issue is particularly dominant in foreign language learners, like business English, who take the lessons online. The teaching technique adopted to improve students' knowledge has to consider their intelligence, volition, and persistence. In teaching, one of the critical aspects to improve the performance and understanding of the students is to motivate and catch their interests. Other areas of management, such as businesses and other corporate bodies, have been experimenting with efficiency- which is the main word in the business perspective- by using different motivational aspects. Much research has been carried out in as far as the 19th century on the importance of motivation to any group of people. To better understand how best to motivate the students who are taking business English classes through online learning, the paper analyses the effective motivation strategies and why those techniques are the best.

There are various means by which the students' knowledge can be improved. One then wonders why motivation is a crucial factor, given the fact that other techniques can be more reliable. It is commonly assumed that motivation is more straightforward if the students are present and guided by the teacher face-to-face. With online learning, motivation may seem even more far-fetched. The challenge even goes beyond the e-learning aspect because teaching business English is a challenging task on its own, and motivating the students is not easy. Students move at their own pace hence,

it is a battle between the speed at which the content is changing on the one hand and the scope of the skills in language and communication on the other. Therefore, the business teacher has to be on the constant lookout for ways to get new materials and keep the students at par, interested, and performing. Motivation plays a crucial aspect in learning and understanding a new language. The question of why motivation, and not some other element, is based on the knowledge and the force to retain the information that motivation gives the students. In their study, Watt and Richardson (2015) associated the learning ability of the students to motivation. Their findings were supported by Dornyei and Ushioda (2011) in their research, where they also showed that motivation is an instrumental aspect in students' learning. Motivation, hence, has to be considered in the learning process, especially of foreign languages, as it can be crucial to a student's success. If students feel that studying the language is not relevant to them, they may not have the needed motivation to study the language. Thus, teachers have the responsibility to maintain the interest that students build to learn the language. For e-learning especially, motivation is crucial as the students are going through an alone journey. According to Jones (2013), three primary variables influence e-learners' experiences and influence how effective they are in their attempts: independence, competency, and connectedness. The teacher, therefore, has the task of knowing how to utilise the three skills and come up with the best way to motivate the students.

Taking the example of Malaysia, the students do not see the need-to-know English or use it out of the context of their classrooms despite the language being the second official language of the country. The authors of the Roadmap (2015-2025), a plan for English language reform in Malaysia, state that the majority of the students in Malaysia learn the language but have no motivation to use it as they do not even know why they are doing it. The Roadmap further explains that the motivation teachers give to the students is crucial in understanding a new dialect. The sentiments are supported by Dornyei (1998), who argues that teachers are the main manner by which learners feel motivated positively or negatively. Different studies by Balanescu (2015), Botnariuc (2013) on students in Romania showed that the students' learning and their level of motivation depend on the technique that has been used in teaching. The teacher's actions are hence the ones that affect the students in a motivational kind of way.

There are various ways of motivating students. According to Dornyei and Csizer (1998), in a study conducted on teaching foreign languages, was revealed what the teachers saw as the most critical and crucial plans of motivating students. The analysis formed is known as the ten rules or

“commandments” for encouraging students by teachers. The rules were as shown in no particular order:

- The teacher needs to be an example to the students by their behavior and motivation;
- The teacher needs to create an environment that is excellent for the learning if the students;
- The teacher needs to develop proper ways of presenting any task to the students;
- The tutor needs to build a good rapport and relationship with the learners;
- The teacher needs to improve the confidence of the learners by helping them develop their linguistic ability;
- The teacher needs to ensure the classes are interesting;
- The teacher needs to enhance the autonomy of learning of the student;
- The teacher needs to make the learning process personal for the students;
- The teacher is required to ensure that the students have a goal that they have set in their language learning;
- The teacher needs to ensure that students are familiar with the culture of the language that they are learning.

Adoption of the strategies is likely to bring in positive results. However, there is an issue that arises. Should the business English teacher adopt all the techniques? Are they all crucial, or are there some that are more crucial? Do they all apply to e-learning? Sugita and Takeuchi (2008) researched in Japan to see the relationship between the teachers’ motivation and the students’ motivation and if all the rules were as important. The study revealed that the most important aspects were the climate in the study area and the motivation by improving the students’ self-confidence. In a different survey by Alqathani (2016) in Saudi Arabia, the results showed that the top factors promoted the students’ self-confidence and the satisfaction that the learners got from the experience. With the findings, the direction of the study hence focuses on the most practical ways to motivate the studies. Furthermore, the adopted basis has to be in line with the fact that the students are taking online classes.

Since this paper concerns motivating students that are taking the classes online, several factors make the case different and exigent. E-learning challenges students to be more responsible and self-motivated. Their time management is different; they have varied time management and priorities. Their efforts are comprehensive, with some being more confident and putting in more effort while others are not. The type of students also varies from swift learners to those that are slightly on the slower side. The most significant difference with the students taking the classes physically is the study habits. With online studying, the students create time for studying and

revisions differently. The priority given to studies may be different, with some pushing in their work at the last minute and not performing well. The type of technology adopted by the students is also different, as is the internet connections in different areas. Teachers need to consider these factors before embarking on finding out the best technique that will work for their online students. The reason is that the utilised techniques have to be applicable to all the students without exemptions.

STUDENT MOTIVATION STRATEGIES

Higher Education, just like all the other areas of endeavour, is a dynamic field that strives to meet all participants' changing needs and aspirations. Teachers are frequently confronted with issues connected to the class members' prior experience. Many students believe that they already know sufficient English because they have studied the language for many years and do not need to devote time to their business English lessons. On the other side, others have decided not to study it because of painful experiences or unsuccessful tries and have grown even more discouraged when confronted with their classmates' far superior ability. Another significant concern is students' increasing dependency on technology. Most learners are more informed of the importance and methods of technology use than some of their university lecturers are when they start schooling. They anticipate the latter to include e-learning into their course preparation, and the teachers are encouraged to take the considerations into practice. Hence, the primary issue that arises is how to ensure that students are motivated and willing to do better. Below, different strategies are being analysed, discussed, and offered to all teachers in student motivation while teaching business English.

Improving students' self-esteem

The teacher's techniques in teaching the students should be reliable and applicable in an online setting. One of the significant ways in which that can be done is by enhancing the students' self-esteem. The primary way in which to do so is by checking on their performance and giving them feedback. Giving the students the necessary feedback is essential in making them more interested in their studies and feel inspired. Therefore, the teacher needs to keep checking on the students' progress in their learning. The advantage of doing this is that the teacher will be able to identify the students' strengths and weaknesses. In knowing their areas that need working on, the teacher can reliably guide the students. Hence, the students will not be afraid of seeking help when they know that the teacher is willing to help and provide feedback. The students' self-esteem will also be boosted

when the teacher encourages and compliments them on their improvements and efforts. This communication can be performed by using emails, forum posts or other online teaching media used.

On the other hand, the teacher must ensure that new tasks are not given out before the old ones are given feedback for efficiency. The reason is to make sure that the students have motivation for any subsequent endeavours given out, as they know that the teacher will take his/her time to go through them. According to Gomez (2016), the teacher should make the students feel essential by using materials that intrigue them. The primary way that the aspect can be done is by involving them in designing and creating some of the material, which will be discussed later in the paper. The involvement will also make the students feel important, and their self-esteem will improve. Redenbach (1991) shows that self-esteem directly influences one's performance in academics, personality, and social responsibility. With better esteem, one has more positive results in those aspects, according to Rubie et al. (2004). Therefore, it is safe to say that raised self-esteem will motivate students and ensure better performance when motivated.

Plan the lectures with the students

Some students lack the motivation to study due to how the teachers have planned and structured the lessons. Thus, it is proposed that teachers involve the students in co-creating the material used in teaching business English. The result is that there will be less passive learning among the students. Based on information from the Swedish National Agency of Education (2019), teachers must engage their students in designing the learning material. The significant advantage is that there is a very high chance of the students being stimulated to be more interested in the Business English course. In addition, the students end up feeling more comfortable around the teacher and are free to express themselves and participate freely in the lessons. The major challenge for the teacher at this point is making sure that the students are not making choices that are out of context. In addition, the teacher needs to break down the teaching material into more minor elements that will not overwhelm the learners.

Eventually, the students will feel like they are in charge of their education, and their sense of responsibility will be enhanced. The close working of the teacher and the students will also foster a more positive relationship between the teacher and the students leading to improved motivation for both. There is a less likely hood of the students having a negative attitude towards the Business English course, or for that matter, any other online classes in they are involved in planning the lectures. By improving the cooperation between the teacher and the students, the interest in the tools used in the learning

process will also significantly improve. The students will be more motivated to be on their laptops or wait for the beginning of the lesson, knowing they are learning a study plan they helped design.

Utilisation of a range of teaching techniques

The interest of the students can be drawn away from a lecture that often follows the same pattern. The teacher needs to utilise different technological aspects to hold the interests of the learners. Tools and assets like the use of videos, films, text, audio, and other visual and audio materials are essential. Considering the technical aspects that are favourite among the students, the teacher may base their learning on those preferences. The teacher can ask the students the technical aspects the students prefer to work with it. She/he also needs to ensure that most of the materials used in teaching, especially the technological ones are available to all the students to avoid making some feel segregated. The teacher needs to ensure that the teaching and techniques utilised are not being delivered differently for everyone. There should be smooth delivery of information and quick access to it.

Among the significant methods, most teachers use in traditional learning is the use of group work. In the aspect of online learning, this may present a problem. If the teacher's teaching method predominantly engages in a one-on-one technique, it may be even more challenging. For students close by, the teacher can encourage them to interact and engage outside the class to enhance their learning. For the students who are far or physical interaction is not possible, the teacher can create the same board using whiteboard software. The learners may collaborate in an accurate schedule and work according to their own time following the class. The teacher can also motivate the students to participate in activities outside the classroom such as business writing and sharing the work on communities into Business English Learning via a shared Cloud Storage or Facebook directory.

Finally, the teacher also needs to make use of the bridging materials. Those are the materials in which the teacher connects the new language, in this case, business English, to what the student knows for their environment and their native language, but in this case, their knowledge of general English as well. The significant advantage is that the students feel familiar and more confident about the topic, and the information they are learning seems to be more relevant this way. In other words, once the students are familiar with the business and economics concepts in their native language, it will be much easier for them to comprehend the new vocabulary in business English. Hence, students are much more motivated in learning the course, which is essential in achieving the teaching goals. In addition, the use of digital tools in the bridging technique can further support both the teacher

and the learner in bridging the gap between the native language, general English and business English. However, the teacher may face challenges in adopting the bridging technique, especially if she/he is not well familiar with the technique or with the digital tools available. Therefore, it is crucial that the teacher is knowledgeable in the use of the technical aspects used in teaching and the different teaching methods. The teacher, however, needs to be very careful in using the technique to ensure that it does not replace the English language, as it is the one that is being taught.

Use of different interaction avenues

In managing to keep the students interested, there is the need to ensure that the avenues used are interesting enough. The courses that the teacher chooses have to be current and engaging. The same may be said about teacher-student online communication. The teacher needs to use a range of systems and styles to keep the conversation engaging. Fortunately, online learning gives the teacher various options for connecting with students, such as class email, online classrooms and conversation forums. Still, one may also use integrated voice messages, chat rooms or video conferencing, broadcasting Facebook messenger, and prominent website notifications. The teacher may also join the movement of socialising education. Many teachers worldwide use social networks to spice things up in their classes and interest their pupils in relevant learning. It is exciting and engaging to consider including a Twitter hashtag on the section of the course website or creating a private Group on Facebook for the students. If utilised correctly, social media sites may help develop a feeling of community in the class, which will keep the current learners engaged.

The teacher should also ask the students for suggestions on the best interactive platforms that are in existence. Since the students are learners, they will have reliable ways to think and feel that they can be motivated by the use of various avenues. The teacher can then use the suggestions by using the avenues that will inspire and encourage the students. The teacher can also read and stay up to date on the current technological advancements and ways of studying and ask the students for their opinions and utilise new ways to learn. As a result, the students will be more motivated, and their performance will improve.

Use of incentive system

For each linguistic level and age bracket, performance appraisals may be built and tweaked. Performance appraisals pique transactional leadership, and they may assist students in developing interest and motivation. Motivational factors are the forces that propel a human onward. The aim of

the teacher is to ensure that the students have a purpose, a goal, and that goal in their studies drives them. The objective is to see that the students become more involved in the class tasks to increase their level of engagement. Therefore, students' goals and motivation will determine how they balance their online programs and their other activities and obligations. The teacher needs to talk to all the students and know what motivates them to take their Business English class. The teacher also has to make sure that the new skills are essential and applicable for their use in the world. The teacher needs to discuss how this new knowledge benefits or contributes to their firm, business, or career and how it affects their consumers or customers. Awards and electronic tokens are examples of extrinsic motivating factors that inform the students of what they understand and achieve. They boost self-esteem and courage. The teacher should hence tap on rewarding the students. Furthermore, awarding students with these incentives, particularly young people, encourages them to perceive studying as a competition and keeps them engaged. The teacher may include gaming features into the online courses in various ways, but introducing medals to the course is a simple and popular approach to acknowledge the learners' progress and keep them interested and ready to continue studying.

Setting expectations

One of the main factors that may make students uninterested in learning a new language is the teacher's attitude and motivation level. The student can see the enthusiasm or lack of it in the teacher's mannerisms and voice and can decide if the course is worth it or not. One of the ways that the teacher can show motivation is by setting expectations for the course. Therefore, the teacher needs to create the course content and the activities and goals of the course. By laying out the goals clearly, the students will determine if they feel the course is important or not. The teacher also needs to inform the students of the course and lesson expectations and goals before starting the lesson. Videos are the best in this scenario. Finally, the teacher has to work on the student's interest and motivation in the business English class and show that he is determined and motivated.

The teacher should make a detailed syllabus, which should include information on the assignments, the type and format of the class, the course materials, and any other advice for the students. The arrangement will make the work easier for the students and show the teacher's motivation in doing her/his work and hence create motivation for the students. The teacher also needs to keep the online information about the course updated constantly. The advantage is that the students will be aware of the topic planned for the particular day and be ready physically and psychologically.

To show more passion, the teacher should create some short videos for the initiation of new activities. The videos will ensure that the introduction to any work in the class is personalised.

Further, one method to motivate online students is to pull them away from the computer and into the learning process. Hands-on education is one description of the learning process. Research papers, team projects, and collecting and evaluating local data are just a few examples of operating teaching that the teacher can utilise. Consequently, the students will be motivated by noticing the teacher's motivation, which is the intended goal.

Empowering students to be self-reliant

The teacher should give numerous opportunities and encourage student self-reliance after or during the sessions to further involve the learners in learning activities. It is crucial that the teacher allows the students to take self-directed learning. Self-directed learning, according to Knowles (1975; p. 18), "is a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of other, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes". In practically every teaching area, supporting the learners' independence and responsibility will boost their motivation to engage and stay focused on the topic. Learners can utilise a semester e-portfolio to create their own customised learning goals while also defining their choices for various evaluation techniques since evaluation is part of the learning process. Integrated evaluation, in which instructors check whether students understand what has already been given, can improve student success when implemented correctly—proactive inquiry or observing when in an event are examples of this type of casual evaluation. Once students learn to become self-reliant, they will become more successful and independent in their studies and will use their self-reliance in their life and their workplace.

CONCLUSION

There are many ways of making sure that the performance of students is improved. Among the majority of utilised techniques, motivation is a very crucial one. The analysis shows that the use of motivation brings on positive results in the performance and understanding of the students. Teaching Business English is demanding, and that combined with teaching it online, makes the matter direr. Therefore, the aspect of motivation presents a challenge here. However, many ways have been proven necessary,

beneficial, and workable in motivating students to take Business English online.

Among the many factors, the teacher needs to consider that the students are studying online, and the techniques utilised have to be applicable in this setting. The teacher also needs to consider other methods that have been beneficial to other students to know which ones to utilise, as it is impossible to use all available techniques. Among the most beneficial techniques is the need to boost the esteem of the students. The teacher can make the students feel more appreciated and raise their esteem by checking the submitted work and giving them feedback. Another crucial aspect is planning the lecture with the students. The advantage is that the relationship between the teacher and the students will be improved, leading to a healthy schooling environment and hence more motivation.

The teacher should use various teaching techniques to ensure that the student's interest is maintained throughout the learning process. One of the ways is by use of videos and audio. As a technique, the teacher can also use different avenues of interaction to ensure that the students do not get bored of one way of teaching. For example, the teacher can make use of Facebook and other social media sites to make the learning more exciting. Another technique that the teacher can utilise is the use of incentives. By gifting the students, they will be motivated to learn more, leading to better performance. The technique of setting expectations is essential as it shows the students that the teacher is motivated and committed to the learning process, which ultimately is a tremendous motivation for the students themselves. Another method that can be employed is the use of self-reliance in students through empowerment. The teacher can empower the students by participating in their activities independently and even creating activities themselves, making them more motivated.

With the vast array of motivation techniques, there should be a visible improvement in the online teaching and learning process. The teachers should see the positive pattern that is expected of students who are taking their lessons seriously. The rate of failure is also expected to decline. By utilising these techniques, both the students and the teachers will be better and happier in learning and teaching Business English. Educational institutions or individuals that teach Business English online should consider the suggestions. The result will be motivated students, which will significantly boost their performance.

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