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Inspiring Teachers, Inspiring Learners: Impact of Teacher Professional Identity on Learner Motivation in EFL Classrooms

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Student success in learning a second or a foreign language and its link to motivation have been widely acknowledged (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994). However, in contrast, the association between student learning and teacher motivation has received significantly less attention from the research community.

In order to better understand this relationship from a socio-cultural perspective, this article focuses on the intrinsic link between teacher identity and beliefs about self and learners' motivation in those contexts where English is taught as a second language (L2). To achieve this, this study draws upon research into teacher professional identity, which identifies the interrelationship between teaching practices and learner motivation.

Our starting point is the work of Dörnyei (1998), who has long argued that the link between teacher and learner motivation has been neglected and under-developed as a research topic.

Consequently, the focus of our article is not on motivation in general terms; rather it focuses on the nature of teacher and learner motivation with respect to learning within socio-cultural settings such as L2 classrooms.

According to Dörnyei's (2009) theory of L2 Motivational Self System, there are three main sources of motivation in second language learning. These are: the Ideal L2 Self, or learners' image of themselves as effective learners; the Ought-to L2 Self, such as learner desires and social environment satisfaction; and the positive L2 Learning Experience (Hadfield & Dörnyei, 2013, p.2-3). This 'motivational Self' System defines the L2 learner self through three reflective 'visions', which are:

- What we might become
 - What we would like to become
 - What we are afraid of becoming
- (Hadfield & Dörnyei, 2013, p. 2)

All three 'vision' statements relate to an individual's identity, and it is this aspect which provides the link to our work on the development of teacher identity and teachers' envisioned present and future selves. These selves, which are seen crucial in the formation and development of teacher identity (Kelchtermans, 1993), enable the exploration of teacher's self-image, and through that, its relationship with both teacher and learner motivation.

Factors Influencing the Development of Teacher's Professional Identity

The development of teacher identity is an on-going and dynamic process, affected by both internal and external factors (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). For the purposes of this article, the definition of teacher professional identity that we will use is that of Flores and Day (2006, p.220), define its key characteristic as being "an ongoing and dynamic process which entails the making sense and (re)interpretation of one's own values and experiences".

Flores and Day (2006) go on to suggest that teacher's biographies, their personal experiences as learners themselves, and their pre-service teacher education appear to influence their professional identity. Extrinsically, the context in which teachers work and the materials they deal with on a day-to-day basis appear to also influence the development of their professional identity. In combination with these extrinsic factors, intrinsic factors, such as teacher's beliefs, values, self-perception, emotional characteristics and their views about teaching and learning, also appear to be highly influential in shaping identity (Golombek & Johnson, 2004).

For L2 teachers of English in particular, academic competency also appears to be a factor that influences their professional identity (Cheung, Said, & Park, 2014). Additionally, for these teachers, motivation, self-esteem, perceptions about their jobs, job satisfaction level, and future plans are factors which influence their professional identity (Day, Kington, Stobart, and Sammons, 2006). There appears to be some general level of consensus around many of these common factors which shape professional identity. For example, Canrinus, Helms- Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink, and Hofman, (2011) also connected teacher's level of motivation, job satisfaction, occupational commitment and self-efficacy with the development of teacher's professional identity.

Having considered the factors which influence the development of professional identity, we now go on to explore the relationship between professional identity and teacher motivation.

Relationship Between Teacher Identity and Motivation

As we have seen in the previous section, the factors which appear to determine teacher professional identity can be divided broadly into those factors which are internal to the self, i.e. the intrinsic, and those which remain outside the self, i.e. extrinsic. Teacher motivation can also be divided into intrinsic and extrinsic factors. There is a third type of factor on teacher motivation described as 'altruistic' by Claeys (2011) (as cited in Salifu & Agbenyega, 2013). This is a motivating factor which is unique to educational and caring contexts, since it is concerned with deep-seated emotions and the desire to work with and educate children in order to benefit society as a whole.

For those factors which provide extrinsic and intrinsic motivation for teachers, Salifu and Agbenyega (2013) group extrinsic motivating factors into a number of broad categories. The first of these are remunerative elements of the role, such as salary and other work-related benefits, for example, a perceived generous holiday entitlement.

The behaviour of learners and their attitude towards study is a further extrinsic factor in the motivation of teachers – it is clearly a more rewarding experience to teach students who are themselves respectful of authority and motivated to learn rather than those who may be disengaged or indifferent to the experience of learning. Extrinsic factors are associated with the availability of resources, such as a well-maintained learning environment and the availability of adequate learning resources, or associated factors such as class size or the physical space available for learning.

Most work carried out by teachers takes place within a school setting, and therefore organisational factors, such as supportive leadership, well-developed policy and a degree of teacher autonomy are elements which help to establish a high level of self-esteem for teachers, and beyond that externally, their recognition and status as valued professionals within society.

Combined with these extrinsic elements, intrinsic and altruistic factors that affect teacher motivation include their regard for teaching as a vocation or ‘calling’, their desire for personal development and professional advancement, and their positive disposition towards learners. Having established the factors which provide motivation for teachers in broad terms and shape their evolving professional identity, we now go on to consider this within the specific context of English language teaching.

Development of L2 Teachers’ Professional Identity

The sense of self can have a significant impact on the motivation L2 teachers of English sense of self according to Cheung, Said, and Park (2014), and this is manifested through their understanding of the roles that can accordingly affect their classroom performance (Goh, Zhang, Hong, & Hua, 2005). Consequently, as might be anticipated, highly motivated teachers are associated with high levels of learner achievement of educational outcomes.

In terms of motivating factors, the ranking of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) of the results for the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) for the year 2009 suggests that in wealthier countries where language teacher salaries are generally higher, student achievement also appears to be higher (Salifu & Agbenyega, 2013). Although there may be an initially attractive rationale, implying a neat and causal relationship between the extrinsic motivation of teachers and the academic success of learners, which suggests that higher salaries may attract the better language teachers from other countries to work for higher salaries within a better resourced learning environment, this cannot, however, provide a complete explanation of circumstances. Based on our experiences, there are also many highly successful language teachers working for relatively low salaries and conducting their teaching in environments which are less conducive to learning, and such a rationale would not explain the motivations of these teachers.

As we have suggested earlier in this article, intrinsic motivation also has a vital role to play for many individuals in terms of teacher motivation and the development of professional identity. In the next sections, we explore some of these intrinsic motivating factors which are, by definition, personal, often hidden, and therefore less easily quantifiable than extrinsic motivational factors such as the level of remuneration or promotion prospects.

Prior Experiences of L2 Teachers of English

Language teachers are no different from other individuals, in that we are all products of our individual histories, which serve to filter and make sense of our subsequent experiences. For L2 teachers of English, this seems likely to be through their personal experiences when they were English language learners themselves, either in their schooling and/or during their pre-service teacher education. Lortie (1975) expresses this

concept rather pithily as an “Apprenticeship of Observation,” which can help establish and embed teachers’ beliefs about how languages are, or indeed should be, taught.

Whilst this may have positive aspects linked to good practice, it may also involve adherence to outdated or outmoded beliefs and pedagogy, and therefore commentators such as Malderez (2004) and Borg (2003) have stressed the importance of bringing these issues to the surface and subjecting them to challenge as part of the pre-service education process.

In summary, teacher’s beliefs originating in their own experiences as learners can be highly influential, and it is important that these experiences and associated beliefs be subject to scrutiny, perhaps through a reflective process of self-evaluation.

Impact of Personality on the Professional Identity of L2 Teachers of English

Dörnyei (1994) relates the impact of the teacher to the affiliative drive, which is an intrinsic drive in which learners are motivated to achieve in order to gain a positive response from their teachers and other individuals of importance. L2 teachers of English who are enthusiastic, learner-centred and task-focussed seem more likely to elicit that type of emotional investment and attachment from learners. One potential issue encountered by L2 teachers of English who might be regarded as ‘charismatic’ and/or ‘inspiring’ is that a student’s attachment may be to an individual teacher and an associated drive to please that teacher, rather than to the task itself, which may become a problematic issue once that teacher is no longer accessible to that learner.

Teaching Styles, Pedagogy and Teacher Feedback

The teaching style and pedagogical approach that teachers use in their English language teaching classrooms has the potential to reduce learner anxiety and motivate learners more (Hu, 2011), and thus teachers need to carefully consider approaches that are in accordance with their learners’ needs, interests and age. For example, the use of role play and active learner engagement may be empowering and engaging for some learners, providing a loosely-structured forum within which they can explore their developing linguistic written and oral skills. In contrast, for other learners of a different age or cultural background, such an approach might be a deeply uncomfortable experience. However, a didactic and highly structured and regimented pedagogical approach, based on practice drills, routine and repetition, may accelerate the acquisition of English language skills for that group.

The real challenge for many L2 teachers of English seems likely to be that contemporary classrooms frequently contain students from both of these groups as well as several shades of preference between these two polar opposites. Therefore, in order to meet the learning needs of all of the learners in the room, teachers might consider the variety, sequence and duration of learning tasks and teaching style that they employ in order to satisfy the wide range of pedagogical preferences.

In further exploring motivational strategies in the classroom, according to Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008), these can be divided into two categories. The first of these is the type of instruction used by the teacher in order to stimulate learning, and the second is the purposeful self-regulation and management strategies used by learners to determine their own level of motivation.

For the first category, L2 teachers of English teaching behaviours have been observed to be an important and critical factor for learner motivation (Moskovsky et al. 2012), based on observational data gathered in a comparative study between controlled and experimental Saudi EFL learner groups. The analysis of the data

for the two groups indicated that there was a significant rise in the experimental group's motivation over time as a result of teacher's use of strategies specifically aimed at motivating their learners in the L2 classroom. By contrast, Hu (2011) suggests that motivational strategies which rely heavily on punitive measures as part of a classroom management strategy, whilst giving the appearance of being efficacious in the short term, may have a negative impact on language learning in the longer term and have the potential to fundamentally undermine the teacher-learner relationship.

Putting the Theory to the Test

What Insight Can L2 Teachers of English Provide About Their Motivation and the Development of Their Professional Identity?

Having explored some of the theoretical issues associated with the motivation of L2 teachers, in this section we draw upon the findings of empirical qualitative research carried out in the Sultanate of Oman between the years 2014 and 2015 to explore the impact of curriculum prescription on the development of teacher professional identity.

The data from this interpretative study was collected through focus group interviews conducted with participating teachers, semi-structured interviews with authorities from the Ministry of Education, and through qualitative document analysis of national level policy and curriculum specification documents. The sample of twenty-one teachers participating in the study included both genders, and all participating teachers teach in state schools within the governorate of Muscat. The spectrum of teaching represented within the sample covered primary, intermediate and high school levels, and these are referred to locally in Oman as Cycle One, Cycle Two and Post-Basic Education schools, respectively.

Focus group interviewees were grouped into balanced focus groups according to (i) years of teaching experience years and (ii) gender, so as to, insofar as possible, ensure that the interviews conducted in each type of setting were broadly representative of the type of school setting where the data was gathered. Data was analysed using qualitative content analysis (Newby, 2014), and on the basis of an initial analysis of the data using this approach, a number of key themes emerging from the data were identified.

So What Did Teachers of English Say About What Motivates Them in the L2 Classroom?

Drawing on our research in the Omani context with L2 teachers of English, teacher's self-images were quite positive and indicated that generally they enjoyed and derived satisfaction from their roles. In their comments, teachers' often described themselves in terms associated with care 'about' (Day, 2009) learners, openness and they often made reference to the importance of professional integrity in their role:

I love teaching, I am interested in teaching when I enter my lesson I feel that I am doing something important...

(Female: 15+ years of experience)

Although care about learners appeared to be a fundamental principle that appeared in most teacher's responses to questions related to the development of their professional identity, few teachers in the interview sample made any direct or explicit reference to their role as motivators of student learning. Of those that did

make direct reference to that aspect, the comments of one teacher were...

Yes, in fact I feel I am a motivator, ... I want to give them training and help ... and guide them properly and train them properly.

(Male: 15+ years of experience)

Yet some other teachers made reference to that aspect of their role without actually using the term. For example, the comments of one teacher were that as follows.

I am the teacher who cares a lot about my students. ... in the beginning of every year talking friendly with my students. I tell them, you are my brothers, I mean I want you to improve yourself in English.... because your future is in your education.

(Male: between 6 and 14 years of experience)

From these comments, it is evident that teachers use certain motivational strategies with their learners, such as clearly showing students that they care about their future in order to motivate them to learn English.

In addition to showing care and concern in order to motivate their learners, data from our research also suggest that for teachers, the experience of having a role model to look up to and to perhaps emulate at a point earlier in their own lives helped inspire them to go on to motivate other learners.

This links to Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self model two factors being the creation of an 'Ideal Self' and 'Ought-to be Self', based on the classroom experiences of teachers during their own education when they were themselves inspired and motivated by a positive role model. For some teachers, this role model was a pre-service teacher educator whose own values and beliefs associated with their care about their learners and the importance of motivating students was passed on to the trainee teachers, as these examples below illustrate.

I was inspired by my class teacher who taught me in class one ... she was a British lady and I had in my mind, even in that level, that I wanted to be an English teacher.

(Male: 15+ years of experience)

Teachers in our research highlighted classroom practices that they use in motivating their learners. When asked, "What type of teacher are you?" typical responses were:

I feel I am the type of teacher who tries to understand the needs of my students and to create a good learning environment...

(Male: 15+ years of experience)

I am the type of teacher who give responsibility to students...they have to prepare before they are coming to the class.

(Female: between 6 and 14 years of experience)

This is a particularly important point because this highlights the importance that some teachers place in the learner's role within the co-construction of knowledge and the move from dependence to a measure of learner autonomy within the L2 classroom.

A study of Saudi teachers by Moskovsky et al. (2012) identified ten motivational strategies that are, in many respects, similar to those used by teachers in our research. Some of these were related to breaking the routine of the classroom, showing care to learners and their progress, recognition of learner achievements and

being there for students. L2 teachers of English in our study often expressed sentiments towards their learners which seemed either parental in nature or like that of an older sibling offering advice. For example, one teacher commented that:

Actually I am the type of teacher that communicates with a student like a father or like a brother, a big brother advisor at the same time...

(Male: between 6 and 14 years of experience)

Conclusions on Teacher Motivation and Their Implications for Teacher Education and Training

As it is difficult to separate between the internal and external factors that may affect L2 teachers of English motivation, we have identified a number of key factors that we think help to clarify the link between teacher and learner motivation. These are teacher's beliefs about themselves, as manifested in our study through their self-image, their core values and their 'apprenticeship through observation', as represented by their past experiences as school children themselves, and during their pre-service teacher education.

The findings of our study imply that the development of teacher professional identity is strongly linked to teacher self-image, and as Goh et al. (2005) have suggested, this image impacts both teacher motivation and confidence. One implication of this finding would be that attention is given to the development of teacher self-image as part of their training; that is, allowing space in training programmes to explore how L2 trainee teachers regard themselves in terms of their developing role, their values and their beliefs. As other commentators such as Malderez (2004) have also suggested, this could be usefully unpacked during teacher education programmes, and in doing so, could help to raise teacher trainees' awareness of the importance of motivation, both their own and that of learners, in the process of successful teaching. Since teacher's past experiences also appear to play a crucial role in providing them with role models and positive experiences, then sustaining teacher motivation through in-service continuing professional development programmes, which make use of reflective analysis and the deconstruction of teacher's experiences in the classroom, might prove useful additions to current practice in the training of L2 teachers of English.

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