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Motivational Characteristics of Foreign Language Teachers*

Arif Sarıçoban**, Güven Mengü***

Abstract

The present study explores the issue of teacher motivation as an essential factor for classroom effectiveness and improvement. Teacher motivation has to do with teachers' desire to participate in the education process. 133 foreign language teachers at the department of service English in the school of foreign languages at Hacettepe University participated in the study. Data was collected by using a questionnaire designed and developed by the researchers and validated by a team of the field experts. The reliability level was found .82 (Cronbach Alpha). Analysis of data revealed that the participating teachers differ in four issues: (a) teaching profession, (b) research, (c) physical conditions, and (d) social facilities. At the end of the study some recommendations were made on these issues.

Key Words: Motivation, Teacher Motivation, Foreign Language Teachers, Years of Experience

1.0. INTRODUCTION

Motivation can, in fact, be termed as some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to get something. Motivation can also be considered the essential element for success or the failure of any kind of complex duty (Harmer, 2001:51 and Brown, 1994:152). According to Dörnyei (2001:8), motivation is

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considered to be the basic factor which is responsible for the decision making process and the length of enthusiasm for the activity. Moreover, Steers and Porter (1991:6) take three items into account when clarifying the concept of motivation: what invigorates human behavior, what guides that kind of behavior and how this behavior is continued. In short motivation can be defined as strong desire of teaching (for teachers) which leads to a fruitful outcome: the successful teaching process (achievement) at the end.

Beyond a doubt, motivation has a significant role in the job of teaching and therefore, being motivated increases job satisfaction. There are two sources of motivation: (1) *Intrinsic* and (2) *Extrinsic*. Ellis (1984) defines intrinsic motivation as emotional, personal, self-respect of accomplishment and personal growth. Ryan and Deci (2000) state that feedback, communication, rewards which cause feelings of competence foster intrinsic motivation “Without having intrinsic motivation, lack of success is inevitable. If there are not any factors motivating teachers, the productivity will decrease dramatically. It is obvious that intrinsic rewards outweigh extrinsic ones in educator motivation and job satisfaction” (Suslu, 2006). On the other hand, salary, fringe benefits, job security, physical conditions, the amount of work and the facilities available for carrying out one’s job, etc. are known as extrinsic motivational characteristics.

It is inevitable that dealing the difficult situation in and outside the class makes teachers tired and weak, which obstructs the success of teachers. Lack of motivation, as one might expect, may bring about teachers to be unsuccessful in teaching a foreign language. The factors that affect teacher motivation in school environment can be listed as follows: the school’s general climate and the present school standards, the class sizes, the school’s sources and facilities, the regular activity arrangement in the organization, cooperative relations and reactions, general expectancy pertaining to the student potential, the school’s reward policy, the school’s leadership and administrative framework (Williams and Burden 1997).

According to Ofoegbu (2004)

“Teacher motivation naturally has to do with teachers’ attitude to work. It has to do with teachers desire to participate in the pedagogical processes within the school environment. It has to do with teachers’ interest in student discipline and control particularly in the classroom. Therefore it could underlie their involvement or non-involvement in academic and non-academic activities, which operate in schools. The teacher is the one that translates educational philosophy and objective into knowledge and skill and transfers them to students in the classroom.”

Johnson (1986) puts forward teacher motivation is based on three theories of motivation and productivity. These are

- **Expectancy theory:** An expected reward such a bonus or a promotion is worth working.
- **Equity theory:** Unfair treatment for their efforts and achievements makes individuals unhappy.
- **Job enrichment theory.** The more varied and challenging their work is, the more productive and ‘creative’ employees become.

However, Thanasoulas (2002) reports that “motivational strategies cannot work in a vacuum. There are certain preconditions to be met before any attempts to generate ‘teacher’ motivation can be effective.” Some of these conditions are the following (Thanasoulas, 2002):

a) Appropriate teacher behavior and good teacher-student rapport

A key element is to establish a relationship of mutual trust and respect with the learners, by means of talking with them on a personal level. This mutual trust could lead to enthusiasm (Alison, 1993),

b) A pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere

Learner motivation will reach its peak in a safe classroom climate in which students can express their opinions and feel that they do not run the risk of being ridiculed (Thanasoulas, 2002), and

c) A cohesive learner group characterized by appropriate group norms.

“Learning about each other, interaction, intergroup competition, common threat, and active presence of the leader” (Thanasoulas, 2002) leads to cooperativeness in the learning process.

As Dörnyei and Csizér’s (1998) suggest, a motivated teacher should

- a) set a personal example with his own behavior,
- b) prepare for lessons,
- c) be committed to his work,
- d) behave naturally,
- e) be sensitive and accepting,
- f) create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom,
- g) bring in humor, laughter and smiles,
- h) do fun things in class,
- i) have game-like competitions,

- j) present tasks properly,
- k) give clear directions,
- l) provide guidance about how to do the task, and state the purpose and utility of every task,
- m) develop a good relationship with the learners,
- n) increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence and motivation (Chamber, 1999),
- o) make the language classes interesting,
- p) select interesting, challenging, and a variety of tasks and supplementary materials, vary the tasks; build on students' interests rather than tests or grades as the learning impetus, and raise curiosity by introducing unexpected or exotic elements.
- q) promote learner autonomy,
- r) encourage creative and imaginative ideas, encourage questions, and share responsibility by having students help organize the learning,
- s) involve students in choosing the materials,
- t) personalize the learning process,
- u) try to fill the tasks with personal content that is relevant to students,
- v) increase the learners' goal-orientedness,
- w) help students develop realistic expectations about their learning and by helping them to set up several specific learning goals.
- y) do a needs analysis with students, and help them to design individual study plans,
- z) familiarize learners with the target language culture by using authentic materials, occasionally invite native speakers to the classroom, and help establish pen pals for the learners.

Strangely enough almost all the characteristics listed above from a to z are approximately the same in the foreign language classes that are subject to this research.

2.0. METHOD

In this study, it is aimed at scrutinizing the differences among the motivational characteristics of foreign language teachers at School of Foreign Languages, Department of Basic English and Post-preparatory English Courses at Hacettepe University, according to their professional experience in relation to their motivational characteristics.

2.1 Subjects

133 foreign language teachers (108 English Language, 18 German Language, and 7 French Language) participated in the present study. 92 teachers were female and the rest 16 were male, ranging in age from 24 to 53. They have been working at both preparatory and freshman level in the school of foreign languages at Hacettepe University. Of 108 English language teachers, 49 have their B.A. degree in English Language and Literature (ELL), 10 have a B.A. degree in American Culture Literature (ACL), 7 have a B.A. degree in English Linguistics (EL), 36 have their B.A. degree in English Language Teaching (ELT), one has an M.A. degree in ELL, one has an M.A. degree in EL, two have an M.A. degree in EL, and two have a PhD degree in ELL. Of 18 German Language teachers, 10 have a B.A. in German Language Teaching and the rest 8 have their B.A. degree in German Language and Literature. All of the French Language teachers have their B.A. degree in French Language and Literature.

2.2 Instruments

The teachers were given a questionnaire containing 46 questions in total in the light of nine sub categories. The questionnaire was designed and developed by the researchers and received opinions of ELT experts for validation. Favorable and unfavorable attitude statements were designed in 5-point Likert Scale [**ALWAYS, USUALLY, SOMETIMES, RARELY, NEVER**].

The questionnaire was administered in Turkish for clarity since the teachers who participated in the study were from different language departments. A pilot test was conducted for reliability and Cronbach Alpha was found .82.

Foreign language teachers who took part in the study were analyzed in three groups in consonance with their experiences of between 1 – 5 years, 6 and 10 years, and 11 years and over. Nine headings in the questionnaire can be listed as follows:

- a. Viewpoints in terms of the occupation (5 questions)
- b. Opinions on the research (3 questions)
- c. Impressions about the administration (16 questions)
- d. Inclinations in relation to promotion (3 questions)
- e. Opinions about guidance (3 questions)
- f. Believes regarding their colleagues (4 questions)
- g. Physical conditions of the workplace (5 questions)
- h. Notions on Social facilities (4 questions)
- i. Views concerning students (3 questions)

2.3. Limitations

This study is limited only to the foreign language teachers who were teaching in the School of Foreign Languages, Department of Basic English and Post-preparatory English Courses at Hacettepe University. The differences in age, gender, and the department they were working between the foreign language teachers were not taken into consideration in this study. Besides, we had to exclude the correlation of the students' achievement grades with the findings of the questionnaire due to the fact that it appeared difficult for us to gain requested grades of students at the time of the conference before the end of the fall term. Therefore, the present study is framed within the motivational characteristics of these foreign language teachers according to their years of experience.

3.0. DATA ANALYSIS

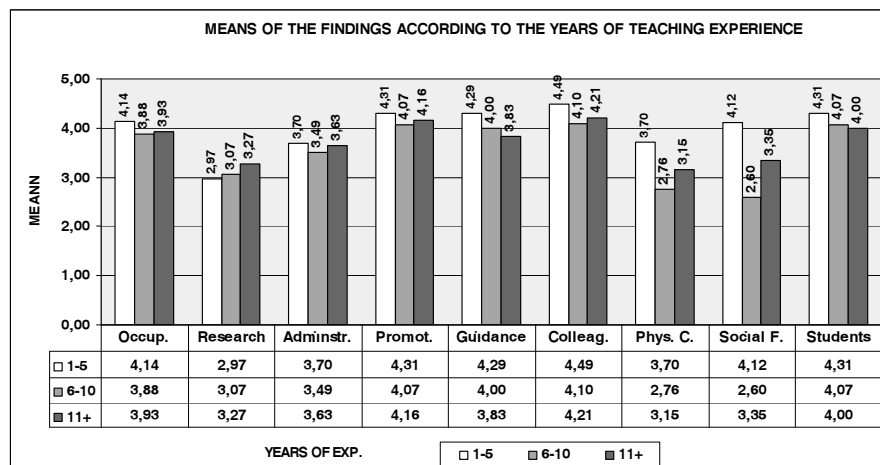
In order to unearth the importance of the mean differences of the answers given to the questions “**independent samples t-test**,” which gives the significant difference between two groups, was implemented.

“Independent samples t test” was preferred due to the variant numbers of years of experience.

There were

- 78 teachers who had experience of years between 1 – 5,
- 17 teachers who had experience of years between 6 – 10,
- 38 teachers who had experience of 11 years and over.

Table 1: Means of the answers given in the light of each sub-heading by the foreign language teachers



[Probability level the level of the reliability is at 90% ($p > 0.10$).]

As to the motivational density on *administration, promotion, guidance, colleague, and students*, the three groups almost hardly differ from each other as is seen in Table 1. According to the motivational characteristics for *administration*, the teachers with 6-10 years of experience (the second group) seem to have the lowest mean in the group ($m=3.49$), whereas the mean for the one with 11+ years of experience (the third group) is 3.63 and it is 3.70 for the first group with 1-5 years of experience. The means for *promotion* is 4.07 for the second group, 4.16 for the third group, and 4.31 for the first group. As to the *guidance* it is 3.83 for the third group, 4.00 for the second group, and 4.29 for the first group. Another striking result indicates that the three group do not display any significant difference for *colleague* ($m=4.49$, $m=4.10$, and 4.21 respectively). Lastly, we can observe no difference between these mentioned groups for *students* ($m=4.31$, $m=4.07$, and $m=4.00$ respectively). However, there are four striking characteristics that indicate significant differences. These are;

A. TEACHING PROFESSION

As to the interpretation of the findings it can be said that those teachers with 1-5 years of experience ($m=4.14$) report that they usually (a) think that teaching profession is their ideal and their only concern is generally their profession, (b) take pleasure when they teach something new for their students, and (c) assert that any failure generally affects their profession negatively, whereas those teachers with 6-10 years of experience ($m=3.88$) report that they (a) hardly worry about their work out of their official hours, and (b) have some other things to do after work. As to the answers obtained from the ones with 11-over years of experience ($m=3.93$), they almost agree with the second groups' answers.

B. RESEARCH

The inexperienced teachers state that their professional knowledge is enough to teach but our education system does not provide teachers with the necessary facilities to carry out research in the classroom (Action Research) and they assert that the ways to present information to the students do not generally change through the years ($m=3.27$). At that point there is no significant difference between this group and the rest two groups ($m=2.97$ and $m=3.07$, respectively).

C. PHYSICAL CONDITIONS

The inexperienced teachers display positive attitudes to the physical conditions they are involved in ($m=3.70$), while average experienced teachers report that the school does not provide them with a nice place to rest during breaks and their classrooms are

not equipped with the necessary technical devices such as OHP, VCD, TV, COMPUTER, etc. ($m=2.76$). On the other hand the experienced teachers ($m=3.15$) have mild favorable attitudes towards the issue.

D. SOCIAL FACILITIES

The inexperienced teachers ($m=4.12$) report that they usually have opportunity to get rid of their tension and stress after work, whereas the average experienced ones generally find this kind of facility ($m=2.60$).

The latter group states that they never find good educational facilities due to the low level of salaries they get from the government ($m=2.60$). Besides, this group says that they are not able to follow literature and attend conferences because of their limited budget.

Another striking point is that the experienced teachers almost agree with the first group ($m=3.35$). This may be the case that this group may find part-time teaching positions at private institutions to keep up with the changing life standard due to their more teaching experience in their professional life. As a result they reported that this financial comfort provides them with the opportunity to lessen their stress.

4.0. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teacher motivation would improve quality and standard of education. It is the secret of effective classrooms and school improvement. Of course, motivation encourages any teachers to make learning more interesting, enjoyable, and meaningful. Hargreaves (1998) suggests that government and other reformers should work together for the sake of the emotional dimensions of teaching and learning into learning standards or curriculum targets for students and into professional standards or competencies for teachers and administrators regarding the content of educational reform.

In line with the total values of the items in the questionnaire, it was found that there were significant differences between the teachers who had 1-5 and 6-10 years of experience, and who had 1-5 and 11-over years of experience. The difference is insignificant between teachers who had 6-10 and 11-over years of experience. In short, less experienced (1-5 years) teachers had more different opinions when compared to the other groups of teachers.

In the light of the above findings, there seems to be significant differences between the viewpoints of the teachers who participated in the study on the following issues which carry extrinsic motivational connections:

- (a) teaching profession,
- (b) research,
- (c) physical conditions, and
- (d) social facilities.

As a result, it can be recommended that firstly, foreign language teachers should be able to follow literature, attend seminars, conferences and attend in-service teacher training programs to accommodate themselves to the changing conditions of their professions if they really want to take pleasure when they teach something new to their students. However, it should be kept in mind that these teachers receive too low salaries to follow literature, attend seminars, conferences and in-service teacher training programs organized by either national or international organizations. Therefore, the ministry of national education should take this unbearable fact into account and urgently do something for it since foreign language teachers also have both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in their professional lives. An intrinsically motivated teacher is believed to “undertake a task for its own sake, for the satisfaction it provides or for the feeling of accomplishment and self-actualization, whereas an extrinsically motivated instructor is said to perform the activity/duty in order to obtain some reward such as salary (Ofoegbu, 2004). As we all know extrinsic motivation has a crucial role in one’s life because it affects a person’s behavior. Therefore, our sole aim should be to build on and enhance not only the intrinsic motivation but also the extrinsic motivation for these teachers for their professional, social, personal, and psychological improvement.

Secondly, it is a fact that classroom climate plays an important role in teacher motivation. The education system should provide these teachers with the necessary facilities to carry out research in the classroom (Action Research) in order to create an effective teaching/learning environment. A foreign language teacher should be exposed to a safe, healthy, happy classroom with supportive resources and facilities to become more active not only in the teaching/learning process but also in orderliness, discipline and control. If these teachers become happy, satisfied, dedicated and committed to their jobs, only then the parents and the society will greatly benefit from them as well as their students.

Thirdly, the social facilities of foreign language teachers should be improved and they should be given the opportunity to make use of those social facilities to get rid of their tension and stress. It must be kept in mind that social facilities like recreation centers, multi-purpose libraries, refreshment centers and the like in the environment motivate the foreign language teachers positively towards their professions and improve their group togetherness and group work.

Lastly, the physical conditions of the classroom should be made effective. The foreign language classrooms should be equipped with the necessary modern technical devices such as OHP, VCD, TV, COMPUTER, INTERNET, etc. to enhance the foreign language teachers' performance, career advancement, and motivation.

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