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Exploring an English Learner's Motivation

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Abstract

Regarding the success in EFL learning, most of learners in the Indonesian context are still considered as unsuccessful and tend to be low motivated. In related to this problem this study is aimed at finding out how motivation in EFL learning come out from a good learner and at reveal the aspects that can drive motivation from a good learner. A case study on an individual student was used in this study. The participant was purposefully and theoretically selected because she was considered as the best learner in the site. Student's interview and classroom observation were used as the data collecting techniques. Iterative data collection and analysis using the concept of grounded theory were conducted continuously till theoretical pattern of concepts and categories were achieved. The findings of this research stated that the external factors were found more than the internal factors. It is concluded, then, external factors are dominating the source of the participant's motivation. These findings suggest that teachers are expected to take the factors influencing motivation as stated in the findings as the consideration in improving students' motivation in EFL learning.

Keywords: *motivation, good language learners, English learners*

BACKGROUND

In the context EFL learning, it has been widely acknowledged that motivation is an integral predetermination that can drives learners into successful learning. Theorists view motivation as the driver of human action for a special purpose (Csizer & Dornyei, 2005; Dornyei, 2001; McDonough, 2007). To be

successful language learners, there must be encouragements that push learners in such a way they desire to learn the target language. Rubin (1975) states that language learning success will be determined by three important variables, among of which is motivation. Though motivation in language learning might be different from that of in other contexts,

without motivation, it is believed that success in learning is hard to achieve (Ushioda, 2008).

Motivation is a component to achieve the goal. Both students and teacher should have the motivation in language learning process. Lightbown & Spada (1997) in their book say that positive motivation is associated with the willingness to keep learning. Moreover, Brewer & Burgess (2005) states that motivation is a basic and essential part of learning. Gardner (1985), believes that with the intention of being motivated, the learner necessitates, requires, and needs to have something to anticipate, foresee, expect and long for, a reason, principle, or rationale having to do with aim or target. Concerning second/foreign language acquisition, this intention would be learning a foreign language. In fact, there must be something that the learner desires to achieve or do, being the target language the vehicle to attain it.

Gardner & Lambert (1972); and Schumann (1978)) pointed out that integrative, instrumental, and work avoidance motivation help second language learners to learn the target language more easily. Dornyei (1998) says that motivation is one of the key factors that influences the rate and success of second or foreign language learning. Gardner & Lambert (1972) speculated that learners' underlying attitudes to the target language culture and people would have a significant influence on their motivation and thus their success in learning the language.

Intrinsically motivated students experience school success because they display behaviors such as choosing challenging activities and spending more time on task (Baranek, 1996). In contrast, extrinsically motivated students are likely to display much higher levels of involvement in learning, engage in more efficient and creative thinking processes,

use a wider range of problem solving strategies, and interact with and retain material more effectively (Condry & Chambers, 1978).

Engin (2009) states that the motivation of the learners determines how ready and eager they are to get more information and to increase their ability to understand, write, and speak the second language. If the students are integratively and instrumentally motivated, it may be easier for teachers because the students will be aware of the importance of acquiring a foreign language. It is, therefore, very important for foreign language teachers to provide their students with enough integrative and instrumental motivation.

Report analyses the impact of motivation on English language learning researched by (Othman & Shuqair, 2013). The result of this study pointed out that motivation is one of the most essential aspects determining success in learning the English language. Motivation can affect proficiency in a particular language, but this connection is characterized by mutual causation because unfavorable and favorable learning attitudes and experiences can affect the learners' motivation. A motivated learner may boost his efforts to become proficient in a particular language, but a learner who is consistently incapable of fulfilling his/her learning goals may become less motivated.

Dornyei & Otto (1998) provided a summary of the previous theoretical and empirical studies of factors of influence on L2 learners' motivation:

1. Expectancy value theories assume that motivation to perform various tasks is the product of two key factors: the individual's expectancy of success at a given task and the value the individual attaches in the task.

2. Attribution theory places the emphasis on how one processes past achievement experiences (successes or failures).
3. Self-efficacy theory refers to the individual's judgment of their capabilities to carry out certain specific tasks.
4. Self-worth theory claims that the highest human value is the need for self-acceptance and to maintain a positive face
5. Goal theories propose that human action is spurred by purpose and key concern with various goal properties.
6. Self-determination theory, and the accompanying intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivational paradigm, is that the desire to be self-initiating and self-regulating is a prerequisite for any human behavior to be intrinsically rewarding and, therefore, the essence of motivated action is a sense of autonomy.
7. Social psychology theory assumes that it is attitudes that exert a directive influence on people's behavior since one's attitude towards a target influences the overall pattern of the person's responses to the target.
8. Some other factors: inner forces such as instincts, volition, and psychical energy; stimulus and reinforcement contingencies; basic human needs, etc.

(Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, & Todesco, 1978) through a study on good learners' characteristics found some facts as follows:

1. Active learner participation. The better learners did appear

to be making positive efforts to create opportunities to use the language.

2. The better learners realized that they did have to come to grips with language as system. They showed willingness to learn grammar.
3. But at the same time the good learners saw it is necessary to view language as communication, realizing to go and seek opportunities to talk to real people. The learner who was about the best of the adults studied claimed to have a girlfriend in every language.
4. Good learners do appear to monitor their own interlanguage, constantly correcting themselves.
5. Good learners realize that learning a language involves affective problems, which they have to come to terms with. They know that you have to be prepared to appear foolish while they are learning.

According to Ellis (1994) earlier studies on good language learners showed five major aspects of successful language learning: (1) a concern for language form, (2) a concern for communication (functional practice), (3) an active task approach, (4) an awareness of the learning process, and (5) a capacity to use strategies flexibly in accordance with task requirements.

Whereas Rubin (1975) found seven strategies associated with good language learning as follows:

1. The good language learner is a willing and accurate guesser.
2. The good language learner has a strong drive to communicate, or to learn from a communication.

3. The good language learner is often not inhibited.
4. In addition to focusing on communication, the good language learner is prepared to attend to form. The good language learner is constantly looking for patterns in the language.
5. The good language learner practices.
6. The good language learner monitors his own and the speech of others.
7. The good language learner attends to meaning.

The important thing to realize about this list or other more recent lists is that good language learners do not necessarily use the same language strategies. Even if they use the same strategies, they may not use them for the same purposes nor in the same way. For example, one learner focuses on form only while reading and writing, while another does so while listening and speaking as well. While the first learner focuses on form in a global way, the second learner is far more analytical and pays attention to minute details associated with the forms and rules associated with their use.

Further question after seeing the findings on characteristics of good language learners is the “do learners need to be motivated to behave like in the above lists? If so, how do we as teachers make students motivated so that they can behave so?”

Study carried out by (Hsu, 2011) seeks to provide some comprehensive information on EFL students’ learned helplessness when learning English, by exploring the causal relationship between three variables: failure to learn English, personality traits and intrinsic/extrinsic motivation. The research results revealed that students with various personality traits

do perceive learning failure differently. Learners with neuroticism are greatly affected by their failure to learn English, so their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation diminishes accordingly. Once their motivation intensity wanes, it is very difficult to regain. Students with conscientiousness are not as sensitive about failure as are learners with neuroticism and attribute their failure to a lack of effort. They tend to preserve their motivation because of their goal achievement characteristics. For extroverted learners, failures do not significantly affect their extrinsic or intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, their motivation can be retained or reactivated by external incentives. Students with an openness trait are similar to extroverted participants in regard to their perceptions of failures and their causal relationship with motivation. Agreeableness learners tend to be influenced by the environment in which they are immersed, and by the people around them.

Research report is conducted by Mahadi & Jafari (2010) who are conduct a study about motivation impact in language learning. The result show that motivation is a very important and effective factor in the field of learning language. Thus, the language teachers and lecturers should discover, realize, and pay attention to the personality of their students. Moreover, they should be aware of motivation, its high importance, and its types. They should also realize and get familiar with the character as well as the personality of each student. Afterwards, according to that specific personality type, they should identify and recognize the form of motivation relating to that and perform it in their teaching process.

(Ghavamnia, Kassaian, & Dabaghi, 2011), in their study, explore about the relationship between strategy use on the one hand and three other variables (motivation, proficiency, and

learners' beliefs) on the other hand. The findings of this research indicate that Persian students do use a number of language learning strategies, but that they show distinct preferences for particular types of strategies. The findings also reveal a positive relationship between strategy use and motivation, proficiency, and language learning beliefs.

Regarding the success of EFL learning, most of learners in the Indonesian context are still considered as unsuccessful. It is proven by the common phenomenon that majority of learners still have difficulties to use English. One of the factors that is believed to determine that problem is that learners tend to be low motivated (Astuti, 2013). Most of them come into the class merely to fulfil their attendance list and are just passive during the teaching and learning process (Mattarima & Hamdan, 2011).

Concerning the role of motivation in shaping good language learners, there are some researches which concern in this issue. Griffiths (2010) on his research finding claimed that although students may vary in a number of respects, those who succeed are motivated and they take charge of their own learning by means of strategies which suit their own individual characteristics, situations, and goals. Moreover, Norton & Toohey (2001) argued that the proficiencies of the good language learners in our studies were bound up not only in what they did individually but also in the possibilities their various communities offered them.

What theories and researches have revealed regarding the role of motivation on language learning shows on how motivation is inevitably influential in leading learners to success in learning language. It also makes the claim that good learners are those who are motivated invulnerable to challenge. Most of the theories and research reports revealed common results of the positive effect of

motivation in leading learners to reach success in language learning with various types of motivation.

Some research shows different results which indicate that the debate on which motivation which is more effective in driving students to successful language learning. Considering the research results, it shows that all types of motivation can give influence to shape good and successful learners. However, the question about which type motivation is more effective can't still be strictly claimed because it depends really in the context and characteristic of the students.

The claim given by Griffiths (2010) which try to convince us that the most important think to talk about motivation is the regulator need still supporting research results in different contexts. The claim that self-regulated motivation can give longer term compared to outsider-regulated motivation cannot be automatically justified. The fact that there some institution such as military, schools and companies which are successful in making the human resources proficient in English by imposing the use of English shows that there is still possibility of imposition to lead to successful language learning. Consequently, this claim needs to be supported by research in wider context of learners

Most of the theories and research reports revealed in common results of the positive effect of motivation in leading learners to reach success in language learning with various types of motivation. However, *what aspects drive motivation from good learners, especially in the Indonesian context?* Considering this matter, this investigation goes some way towards providing the answer to this question.

Theoretically, the findings of this research will contribute to the literature of EFL teaching, especially regarding the features of good language learners'

motivation and *how* it can emerge. Practically, this finding will provide the descriptions of the factors that can enhance the students' motivation. Consequently, it gives reference to teachers who have difficult problem in improving their students' motivation in learning language.

To limit the scope, this study was intended to explore the factors triggering motivation on a single case of learner. Thus, the findings are only true to the respondent involved in it. There is no attempt of generalization; therefore, there might be other interpretation to the issues raise in this study.

METHODOLOGY

This research employed a case study method which focused on the case of an individual student. The rationale of choosing this design is due to the fact that the intention of this study is to get deep understanding on what aspects that drive a good learner's motivation instead of gaining wide description from a number of participants. Therefore, the investigation was targeted only to R (false name), a considerably good student of a senior high school in Banyumas regency due to some good achievements by her during her school years, specifically from first and second school year. R is the best speaker of her school team in NSDC (National Students Debate Competition) in Banyumas Regency level. Not only that, she also the 3rd best speaker of NSDC as the representative of Banyumas regency team in Province level. Because of that she become one of the speaker of the province team and compete in National level. Furthermore, she also is an Al-qur'an reciter. Those reasons were enough to justify her as the good language learner.

To disclose how the participant becomes motivated in learning English and the factors influencing her motivation, student's interview and classroom

observation were used as the data collecting techniques in this case study.

In an attempt to have a useful insight of what is happening in the English learning activities of the participant, this research used classroom observation, almost viewed as one of the acceptable tools to gather authentic data about day-to-day activities faced the participant in learning English. The context that became the main focus of the observation was the situation when the courses took place and what the participant was doing during classroom activities. It mainly focused on participant enthusiast, motivation, problem and problem solving did by the participant in English class activities. Classroom observation was conducted ten times and the researcher acted as a participant observer.

The interview was used to get deeper understanding and detailed information of the participant. The interview was in the form of semi-structured with open-ended questions. The interview questions were constructed from the classroom observation note. Moreover, the interview was carried out in Bahasa Indonesia to get more detailed data from the participant respondent. The participant's interview questions were around; learning strategies, time management in studying, teacher strategies in teaching, hobbies, learning environment (both in school and in house), and her dream. The formal interview were conduct 2 times.

In analyzing the data from observation, the researcher used a coding, categorizing and interpreting the findings. Moreover, the video-recorded interviews were transcribed into verbatim and meticulously analyzed after the interviews done. After the data were transcribed, all the data were analyzed by coding process.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research is guided by a research question of "*What are the aspects*

that can drive motivation from a good learner?” Iterative data collection and analysis yielded a data-driven theory showing aspects that can increase the student’s motivation and those which can decrease the motivation.

The data analysis results indicated some aspects that can increase the student’s motivation. Those aspects were then subcategorized into those which externally increase the student’s motivation and those which internally do.

1. External Factors

Extrinsic motivation appears on the participant because some external factors (Harmer, 2007). The data indicated that the aspects that externally influence the participant motivation are environment, teachers’ performance, attitude towards the target language, attitude towards the target language countries, and attitude towards the target language culture.

a. Environment

Several factors from the participant’s surroundings were considered affecting the participant’s desire in learning English. The first factor that that triggers her motivation is *the performance of public figures on the TV* The participant explained:

When I see public figures speaking on the TV using English I am always amazed. That makes me think that I must be able to speak English like them.

Her statement shows on how public figures hold very important influence in driving an inspiration that make the participant interested in learning English. Their performance on TV while they are speaking English

fluently has indirectly told the participant that English is an important language to learn. The implication of the finding in this aspect is that teachers should consider exposing students to public figures who tend to use English.

Another environmental factor indicating its influence on the participant’s motivation is *media*. Media in this case means mass media. The participant explained:

I learn English a lot from news, film, magazines and other media written or spoken in English.

That explanation that her exposure towards English media has given big chance for her, firstly, to realize that English is part of her life so that it is a vital language to learn. At the same time, it also provides much more sources from which the participant can learn. This finding is line with the attribution theory proposed by Dornyei & Otto (1998). This implies that it an important thing for teacher to expose learners to the English media as an effort of triggering students’ awareness of learning English and of providing students with lots of sources.

b. Teachers’ performance

Another essential fact which was gained from the data is the participant’ high tendency of considering teachers’ performance as one of the important factors of her motivation. The participant explained some criteria seen from the *teachers’ personality* which

can make her motivated in learning:

I like a teacher who are not too autocratic, but it does not mean that teachers just let students do what they want. An autocrat teacher will make me feel depressed and hinder the teaching objectives attainment. To me, teachers must be communicative who can handle the class well and in certain occasion they are humorist.

Her statement indicates that she does not like teachers who create depressing atmosphere in the teaching and learning process. However, she also considers that teachers' control in the class is still necessary to create a conducive situation. This fact suggests that creating enjoyable learning activities is an essential factor that trigger students' motivation. On the other hand, creating a depressing atmosphere by being autocratic in front of the teachers will only hamper the teaching and learning objectives attainment.

Regarding the teachers' professionalism and pedagogical competence, the participant suggests:

I never consider teachers' physical appearance. As long as they can teach well, I like them. Besides, they should have good pronunciation and accent, especially American accent. I like American accent because it is easy for me to understand. Furthermore, I also like

teachers with a wide knowledge because they will tend to give more contextual explanation and examples.

That statements indicates on how a good learner expects teacher with good professionalism especially in their subject. She demands teacher with a good English proficiency and broadened knowledge. This suggests that though the role of teachers is not the best knowers in the class, the role of teachers as the model of good language users and educated individuals are still demanded by students. Consequently, always trying to upgrade the competence is obviously necessary for every individual teacher to fulfil the students' demand on role model.

c. *Attitude toward the target language*

The results of the data analysis indicated that the participant's attitude towards the target language has a role in affecting her motivation. In her statement she explained that:

As we know that English is an international language which is very important to be mastered. For me, mastering English is a pride, because through English I can express my idea in front of the international society.

Her statements show how important English to be learnt. English is an important media to express her experience and knowledge. She added that it was a special language because it was internationally used. She believed

that the only way to express her idea in front of the international society was by using English as the medium.

Her view on the importance and the specialty of English indicates that to be motivated. This is line with Gardner & Lambert (1972) who state that it is important for learners to realize how significant the thing they are learning is. This means that another thing that must be ensured by teachers is whether or not their students are really aware and care about the importance of English in daily life. Once students do not understand that they have to put English as a priority in their lives, every effort done by teachers to teach it will be in vain.

d. Attitude towards target language culture

There is only one indication that can be driven from the participant's statement on the attitude towards target language culture. She states that:

One thing which makes me little bit not like them is their liberalism. But, that doesn't drive me away to know them more through learning their language

In her explanation above, she wanted to learn English because she was interested in knowing more about the people in English speaking countries like UK and USA. Her statement suggests that it is very important for teachers to expose students to the information about people in English speaking countries. The more the students know the bigger

the desire to interact with them. Consequently, this fact corresponds the notion stated by Dornyei & Otto (1998) that the knowledge of target language speakers can enhance the students' motivation as they the consequence that knowing the language is a must when they want to get closer with the people in English speaking countries.

e. Attitude toward target language countries

Regarding to the attitude towards target language countries, she states:

In my opinion, educational institutions in the English speaking countries have better quality than those of in our countries. Educational institutions in there are supported by good facilities and also competent scientists who better than Indonesian right now. If I study there, my abilities will improve. So, not only practicing what I have learnt in here, but I also practicing it in real life. I will meet native speaker there. So, I can practice my English directly with them. Besides, English speaking countries also have high quality of human resources.

From the excerpt it is indicated that the participant has a high interest in English speaking countries. She explained that the countries like USA and UK had competent scientists. Moreover, quality educational institution in English speaking countries are better than in our country. Further,

she explained that she can learn more in those countries so her abilities will be improved. She added, the quality of human resource in those countries also better than Indonesia.

Furthermore, she added:

Then, if I have company or for my profession later on, I will cooperate with them so I will improve my skill and knowledge.

Those facts have attracted the participant to study there and to have cooperation in term of business in the future. She declared that studying there and being cooperated with the people of those countries would improve her knowledge and skills significantly because the facilities were very supportive.

Her amazement and interest on the countries like US and UK suggests that to be motivated students have to realize the benefits of having networking with those two countries. This is in line with the Norton & Toohey's (2001) idea of the role of networking with target language speakers in improving motivation. It is, therefore, suggested that teachers tell students the potentials of the English speaking countries in providing enormous benefits for those who interact with them.

2. Internal Factors

The data indicated that the aspects that internally influence the participant motivation are self-awareness and teaching and learning process.

a. Self-awareness

Another important aspects dealing with the internal factors of language learning motivation is self-awareness. Regarding this matter, the participant states:

My motivation to learn English firstly occur because of my dream from the young age to master English. I am always amazed when I see public figures who speak English on TV. Then, I think that I must be like them. I should speak English fluently in front of public. When I came to this school I felt very inferior, because my educational background was not like other people. I followed English debate competition then I won. Since then, I think English is my aptitude so I should improve it. I hope after graduate later on, I can join to organization which can help me to improve my English especially for public speaking

The data indicated that the big flow of interest that comes from the inside part of the participant is influenced by the awareness that she has a potential aptitude to acquire English proficiency. She explained on her statement that once she realized that she had a good mastery of English from the very young age, she then declared to herself that she would improve her English aptitude. Despite the fact that language the role of aptitude in language learning still becomes the debatable issue, her way of viewing her own language aptitude

revealed that her awareness on it takes an integral role in initiating her motivation. This finding in line with the theory about characteristics of good language learner proposed by (Ellis, 1994; Naiman et al., 1978; Rubin, 1975). This, then, suggests that it is crucial for teachers to ensure and motivate students to believe that everyone has aptitude and ability in learning new language.

b. *Teaching and Learning Process*

During the teaching and learning process, there are some conditions which are indicated to have impacts on triggering the participant's internal motivation. Teaching and learning activities are the first crucial factor. The participant says:

In my opinion, vocabulary mastery is very important than grammar. I like teachers who provide activity to improve our vocabulary mastery. I believe that although my grammar is not good, but when I can speak fluently I feel confident. If I have much vocabulary, I will speak easily. It will motivate me to learn the grammar. So, I think vocabulary first, then grammar.

In her statement, the participant explained that she would be motivated when the teaching and learning provides an activity that is focused on improving vocabulary mastery. She claimed that vocabulary was important as it was related to what to say. She stated that she felt confident in speaking when she

knows the words that she was supposed to use in her utterance. This suggests that it is important for teachers to provide activities that can accommodate the students' lack of vocabulary.

Another important activity which is also important to be provided in the teaching activity is individual performance.

I prefer to individual performance. Because teacher can be easier to measure my performance and give feedback to me. Usually, in discussion activity high students will dominate the section or low students will less contribution.

The participants explained that she liked individual performance better than group performance because in such activity teacher could find it easier to measure her performance. Therefore, the feedback given to her would be more constructive. This is in line with self-efficacy theory from Dornyei & Otto (1998) that explain about the individual judgment of their capabilities to carry out certain specific tasks. This suggests that good learners tend to have desire to get more constructive feedback. Thus, activities which can really measure every individual student must be taken into account by teachers. It relates to the idea of (Ellis, 1994; Naiman et al., 1978; Rubin, 1975) about characteristics of good language learners.

CONCLUSION

This current research is conducted in respect to burning questions on how motivation in EFL learning come out from a good learner and the factors influencing the initiation of the motivation. The findings of this research suggest that the aspects that externally influence the participant motivation are environment, teachers' performance, attitude towards the target language, attitude towards the target language countries, and attitude towards the target language culture. On the other hand, motivation is also driven by the internal factor such as self-awareness and teaching and learning process.

In regard to the findings of this research it recommended that teachers expose their students to some aspects in the environment which can influence the students' motivation in learning English such mass media. Moreover, teachers should also be eager to always upgrade their competence as they are demanded to be the role model by their own students. Apart from those aspects, exposing students to the information about the English speaking countries and their people is also integral action to make students realize that they will get benefits of acquiring the language used by the people in those countries. Lastly, it is crucial for teachers to ensure and motivate students to believe that everyone has aptitude and ability in learning new language and to include individual performance in the teaching activities which can provide students with accurate constructive feedback.

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