Influence of In-school and Out-of-school Factors on Language Development

Summary

This issue of the ELIS Research Digest looks at the factors in and out of school that affect a child's motivation in developing language skills in school. (In Singapore schools, the focus is on English as it is the instructional language.) Over the years, studies of motivational factors have produced a range of overlapping terms and theories. This may be for two reasons: first, motivation cannot be seen or measured directly but can only be recognized indirectly by observation of a child's behaviour; second, the motivational factors involved do not seem to work independently of each other but are interrelated. In this issue, the ideas of Dörnyei (2003) are used to sort possible factors under the headings he used, grouping them into three main sections that represent three stages: preactional when learners develop a learning goal; actional when learners turn their goal into action; and postactional when learners evaluate the action in terms of goal achievement and then move on to a new preactional stage. The issue ends with some suggestions as to how teachers can help motivate their students to develop their language skills.

Introduction

In many ways, the learning of languages in school can be likened to that of any other subject in that there is, first and foremost, a need to learn the 'content' – from pronunciation, grammar and, vocabulary to the form and types of texts used in the language. This is particularly true when the language is learnt in school. However, as Dörnyei (2003) has argued, there is a difference in that language is socially and culturally bound and learning a language inevitably involves incorporating social and cultural elements into the learning process. As a result, many constructs of language learning motivation include social elements such as multiculturalism, group identity and language contact. This review of motivational factors inside and outside school will cover these areas.

Much of the literature presented here discusses the learning of a second or foreign language. However, as has already been mentioned and will be seen in the examples below, many of the motivational factors are the same across languages, including the learning of the formal aspects and varieties of a first language that are associated with school. In Singapore, there are English language users among students for whom the home language is English (45.88% of Primary and Secondary students according to the Census of Population 2010 – Singapore Department of Statistics, 2011) and others who have little contact with English until they enter the school system. However, while there are differences, all will have to study certain aspects of the language that they will not have met outside school.

Tremblay and Gardner (1995) indicated that motivation had three components: the expenditure of effort, the desire to learn and the enjoyment of the task. However, Gardner (2007) later suggested that it was not easy to define and measure motivation and that there were many characteristics that helped identify a person who was motivated such as being persistent and being attentive. The motivated learner had goals, made an effort, listened, was positive and interested, was confident and had reasons for the learning. These characteristics included some that were cognitive, some that were affective, and some that were behavioural. Consequently, it was difficult to measure motivation on any one scale or even on several.

Gardner (2007) believed that, for language learning in schools, there were two main types of motivation to be considered – language learning motivation and classroom learning motivation. The first was a fairly general type of motivation that

could be applied to language learning in any situation. Gardner considered it to be fairly stable although it could be changed under certain conditions. The second, classroom learning motivation, was a specific form of a more generalized motivation regarding learning in classrooms across the curriculum. This latter was affected by a range of factors, including the teacher's approach, the class atmosphere and the teaching materials. As a result, it could change over time. (See also Wong, Chai, Chen, & Chin, 2013, who felt it was important to look at classroom aspects.)

Gardner (2007) emphasized that motivation was necessary in language learning. When children learned their first language (or languages in a bilingual situation), it was part of their growth and development. The need to communicate was motivation enough in itself. He felt the situation could be quite different when learning a subsequent language, especially in school. There, the need to learn the language might not be so obvious. Motivation and ability were then important factors to consider. As language learning required a sustained effort over long periods of time (MacIntyre, MacMaster, & Baker, 2001), motivation in language learning was of prime importance.

Pintrich (2003) suggested that there were two types of interest that could affect motivation. A personal interest was more likely to be stable and related to an individual's disposition to the activity such as language learning. A situational interest related more to a particular task or activity. He suggested that high levels of both could motivate the learner (see also Hardré, Davis, & Sullivan, 2008).

Gardner (2007) also hypothesized that there were various stages in learning another language. He suggested four – elemental, consolidation, conscious expression and, finally, automaticity and thought. The first stage, elemental, involved learning the basic elements of the language such as the vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation while the second, consolidation was a stage in which the learner began to understand how the elements worked in the language and how some combinations made sense while others did not. In

the third stage, the learner could use the language but needed to think carefully first. In first language situations, a child in the first stage might insert a lot of fillers while second language learners often appeared to be looking to their first language for help. In the final stage, automaticity and thought, the learner 'thinks in the language'. These stages, Gardner believed, could be seen in both first and second language learning. Studies, he indicated, had shown that motivation affected all these stages. His model thus had stages and incorporated time in much the same way as the model by Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) did. However, his focus was more on language learning steps rather than the differing influences during the process, the focus of the work by Dörnyei and Ottó (1998).

Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) similarly believed that the influences on motivation were many and the interrelationships were complex. However, they also emphasized that motivation frequently changed over time (even within a single lesson) and, to account for this, they proposed a dynamic view of motivation, a process model of motivation (see also Dörnyei, 2000, 2003). They felt they could not use earlier models of motivation for three reasons:

1. They did not provide sufficiently comprehensive lists of motivational influences.
2. The focus of such models was generally on the motivations behind people's choices of a course of action but they failed to also take into account factors involved in executing those choices. These, they felt, were particularly important in areas like language learning that demanded sustained effort.
3. Such models did not include a temporal axis that allowed for changes that might take place over time in response to a variety of influences.

Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) suggested that different factors could affect motivation across three stages of an individual's development of goals (such as the decision to learn a language) and the individual's attempts to meet those goals. They named the three stages preactional (when the goals were first set), actional (when attempts

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were made to meet those goals) and postactional (when hopefully the goals had already been met). These stages could be cyclical, i.e. the postactional stage could lead into a new preactional stage. (It is worth noting that, especially in the case of students, the goals might be set by someone other than the person who was doing the learning.) Other writers have adopted a similar three stage (or phase) approach but use different terms. For example, Zhang, Zhang, Zeng, Gong, and Ang-Tay (2012) used the terms, forethought phase, performance phase and self-reflection phase.

At these three stages, different factors, inside and outside school, affected the learners' motivation to learn the language in question – whether the language be a foreign language or a prestige version of their first language. For example, in the first preactional stage, the factors that might affect the learner's motivation could include attitudes to the speakers of that language, the expectancy of success and the learner's coping ability (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 19).

The above brief discussion of the complexities indicates how difficult it is to be certain of covering all the motivational factors involved in language learning. Moreover, it is difficult to measure motivation except through monitoring the behaviour of learners, i.e. indirectly. This is made more complex by the claim by Good (2014) that no individual variable had a predictable relationship with student achievement. It was the combination of variables that was important.

In an effort to take this situation into account and because the work by Dörnyei (2003) allowed for variation in motivation over time for individuals and also attempted to give a full list of the types of influences that can be expected to affect different learners' motivation, this issue will use the same list of factors he did in the hope of covering as much of the ground as possible. These are listed under the three stages he described – preactional, actional and postactional (see also Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998). As appropriate, other writers' ideas (such as those of Gardner, 2007) will be added to the list.

Preactional stage

In the first preactional stage, learners form the goal to learn (or this decision might be made for

them). It involves, Dörnyei (2003) explained, choice motivation. It is at this stage that learners set their goals, form intentions and launch the action or begin the learning process. This is not done in isolation but is influenced by a number of things (Dörnyei, 2003). Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) talked, for example, of the distinction between action and state orientations. Those with a state orientation were more likely to avoid making changes and would thus be slow to take action and might never go on to the actional stage. Those with an action orientation tended to want to act immediately.

MacIntyre et al. (2001) argued that while external factors could affect motivation, external forces could not create something out of nothing. In other words, there had to be some internal motivation in the first place. If this was true, then this preactional stage was of prime importance. They also pointed out that a person could value a language without being motivated to develop their skill. For that, they would need to activate effort. Language learning demanded effort.

Dörnyei (2003) suggested six motivational factors in the preactional stage. The following sections look at these six factors, combining the views of different writers to explain each.

Goal properties

Dörnyei (2003) bemoaned that not enough attention had been paid to goal-orientation theory in looking at language learning. He welcomed the work of Tremblay and Gardner (1995) regarding goal strategies. In their study based in a francophone school in Canada, Tremblay and Gardner (1995) included measures of goal specificity and of goal frequency, that is, whether learners setting very specific goals on a frequent basis had an effect on their subsequent French language proficiency. Their results suggested goal specificity and goal frequency together led to increased levels of motivational behaviour. Thus, Tremblay and Gardner (1995) speculated that it might be possible to improve learners' achievement by training them in the formation of specific goals that were then regularly reformulated as the learners advanced in proficiency.

Magid (2013) reported on a project he did with a small group of Singaporean Primary 5 students.

He helped them set distant and near goals for themselves in the development of their English language skills. His results suggested that, after a relatively short time, the students were more confident of their own abilities and were more willing to participate in class and do assignments outside class.

Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) noted that each person had a multitude of wishes, hopes and desires. Many of these were not acted on. The question then became what translated those acted on into set goals. They suggested considerations such as some intrinsic value or interest in the activity, some evaluation of the importance of the final goal, a recognition of its extrinsic value or, finally, the cost of not accepting the goal.

Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) reported that easy goals were not always the most motivating. While the goal had to be seen as attainable, learners were often more motivated by demanding goals that were nevertheless attainable (see also Good, 2014). Moreover, the goals needed to be specific and not couched in very general terms. In addition, goals that were more immediate were usually more motivating than distant goals. The latter could be postponed whereas the former needed to be dealt with immediately. Also, progress towards immediate goals was generally easier to judge. Any step forward could be seen as a step to the ultimate goal (Fernández-Toro & Hurd, 2014).

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Goh, Zhang, Ng, and Koh (2005) found that, in their study, students in Singapore's secondary schools were motivated to work on the language skills out of a desire to get good grades in the national examinations, grades that would then lead onto further studies and better jobs. However, grades were less of a motivating factor in primary schools.

Learning process values

Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) suggested that enhanced motivation was related to the control learners had over their own learning and their perception that successes and failures were things under their control and not dependent on factors outside their control.

Another factor in the development of a plan for action was the learner's beliefs about language learning and their understanding of learning strategies. For example, if the learner believed that developing language skills involved the rote learning of word lists, motivation to learn might be difficult to develop.

Dörnyei (2003) felt that focusing the studies of motivation on learning processes had great potential for the development of motivational strategies that could be used to motivate learners. It could also lead to the development of self-motivating strategies that would allow the learners to take control of affective experiences and factors that might affect their motivation to learn.

It could also be important to the learner to consider the costs and consequences of taking up the learning process. How much time would be used up? How would it impinge on other possible activities?

Attitudes to the language and its speakers

Dörnyei (2003) pointed out that the most developed facet of Gardner's theory was the integrative aspect, an aspect that did not appear in mainstream psychology and that had proved difficult to define clearly. Integrativeness encompassed various factors associated with the cultural context of language. It was described initially as a favourable orientation towards learning a language in order to interact with members of the valued community (see, for example, Tremblay & Gardner, 1995), but Gardner (2007) referred to it as an 'Openness to Cultural Identification' to reflect the wider notion of 'an open interest in other communities in general' (p. 15). Despite the difficulty in defining the concept, according to Dörnyei (2003), an integrative component had consistently been shown to explain a good portion of the variation in motivation when it came to language learning.

Gardner (2007) believed that the culture of each individual could influence their own beliefs and

attitudes towards language learning in general or towards learning a particular language variety. Thus, the cultural and educational contexts affected how open the individual might be to learning the language variety in question, their motivation and their behaviour in the classroom, their persistence in learning and their retention of what had been learnt. In the research on English language learners in Spain that Gardner reported on, openness, an adaptation of the original concept of integrativeness, to other people and cultures correlated the second highest (after language anxiety) with actual grades in English suggesting that being open to other cultures in general was an important factor in language learning.

Dörnyei (2003) suggested that the integrative aspect related to having a positive attitude to members of the language community associated with the target language. In its most extreme form, it might involve a form of 'identification', in which the learners identified themselves as potential members of the target community and disassociated themselves from their own community. In less extreme forms, the learners simply had positive views of the people or culture associated with the target language. Dörnyei (2003) went on to propose that, while the importance of this aspect was undeniable, it might be more useful to consider it in terms of an identification process involving self-image, related to the ideas of possible and ideal selves in social psychology. In this form, the integrative aspect might not involve any actual move to integrate with the target community.

The idea that a language variety can be related to an individual's or a group's identity can lead to that variety being retained even when a more formal variety is used for other purposes. Norton and Toohey (2011) reported on a study in which learners of a new language or a new language variety felt ambivalent about the new language/variety and sought to maintain their membership of their own culture and community through the use of the vernacular.

Alsagoff (2010) described how, in Singapore, English assumed two separate roles. First, it was the language through which Singapore connected to the rest of the world and the use of an internationally accepted form gave Singapore and individual citizens economic advantage. At the same time, it provided a language through which Sin-

gaporeans of different ethnic backgrounds could express their combined identity of being Singaporean. By using a distinctly Singaporean variety of the language among themselves, Singaporean speakers of English identified themselves as truly Singaporean. As a result, Singaporeans who were perfectly capable of speaking an internationally accepted form of English in formal situations might switch to the Singaporean variety when socially appropriate.

Fernández-Toro and Hurd (2014) highlighted that it was possible that a learner might be motivated to develop certain language skills, not for the sense of achievement that this might give but from a desire to be seen as an insider by a particular group. In their case, the learner was learning a separate language but it could also apply to different varieties of the same language as illustrated by the work of Alsagoff (2010).

An example of this is perhaps found in the intervention carried out by Ferst (1999), who was asked to advise a British teacher trainee who had failed his teaching practice because he spoke a local version of English in class that was considered inappropriate. Prior to the intervention, the trainee was reluctant to change his language use as he felt that the language was part of his identity and marked him as being a local. It therefore, he felt, enabled him to establish a bond with the students in the class he taught. The trainee's language not only included local (i.e. nonstandard) pronunciation but also dialect grammatical forms that might be seen as signs of incompetence to speakers of standard forms.

As part of the intervention, Ferst (1999) asked the trainee to attend an English class for foreign students. As a result of attending the class and talking to the foreign students, the trainee became more aware of the need to take the needs of an audience into account and to speak in ways that they could understand. Moreover, it became clear to him that this was a skill he needed to teach his own students so that they would not be disadvantaged in formal situations, where using standard language might not only help communication but might also prevent them from being judged as language deficient. While speaking the local dialect could be utilized to mark them as part of the local community, an ability in the standard forms would help them to communicate with those out-

side that community on an equal footing. Ferst (1999) concluded that developing the individual's language skills had to be treated with sensitivity as it involved the person's identity. It was important for the individual to see this as the development of a further resource rather than the imposition of a constraint.

In Singapore, a study reported by Rubdy (2007) noted in a similar way to Alsagoff (2010) that the same individual might use Singapore Colloquial English (SCE) or Singapore Standard English (SSE) depending on the context and purpose. In the study, the views of students and teachers were sought regarding the use of SCE in schools. The students expressed a strong belief in their teachers providing a model of SSE so that they (the students) could get better grades and better jobs. An analysis of the students' speech and writing, however, indicated that they were already well aware of the different roles of the two varieties even if they had not yet managed full control of SSE. The teachers, on the other hand, tended to believe that there were times when the use of SCE was appropriate. For example, they might use it to establish rapport. On occasions, they might switch to SCE to explain a point the students were having difficulty understanding.

The more students are convinced that they will not succeed, the greater the likelihood that they will not even make the attempt. Students who feel they cannot succeed have been known to sabotage their own chances so that they can blame failure on something other than their ability.

Rubdy (2007) went on to suggest that the possible appropriate use of SCE in class should be considered, quoting studies on the use of African American English in American classrooms and Cantonese in Hong Kong classrooms that had shown that greater progress could be made when this was done. As well as providing an avenue for expressing rapport, it could give teachers the opportunity to contrast the formal differences of the two forms and to establish clearly the appropriate use of each.

In a study in Thornwood, Canada, Cummins, Chow, and Schecter (2006) reported that the school, by giving recognition to the language skills that the children brought to the school, motivated the students to read more. Rather than asking children to leave non-school language at the school door, teachers encouraged students to share their language with their classes, comparing and contrasting their own language with those of the school and other students through the creation of dual language texts, both spoken (recorded) and written. In this way, they were led to be proud of their own language skills while learning the school language. This gave them a positive view of themselves and the school, making the school a more positive learning environment for the students. Reading texts related to their own backgrounds motivated students to read more. Moreover, according to Cummins et al. (2006), research has overwhelmingly shown that literacy in the mother tongue (i.e. the language most commonly used with the child by caregivers) and literacy in the language of school are additive and mutually support each other.

Expectancy of success and coping potential

While individuals might have doubts about their likelihood to succeed at learning, it is still possible they will attempt the learning if they feel there is a chance. However, the more they are convinced that they will not succeed, the greater the likelihood that they will not even make the attempt. Students who feel they cannot succeed have been known to sabotage their own chances so that they can blame failure on something other than their ability.

Again, Gardner (2007) related this factor to culture. He talked of the example of North Americans' belief that they were less successful at learning languages than their European counterparts. Whether true or not, this belief could lead to American learners expecting to do less well and, as a result, they would be less likely to do well.

On the other hand, as noted by Pintrich (2003), when learners expected to do well, they tended to try harder, persist and thus perform better (see also Grenfell & Harris, 2013). Moreover they were more engaged in learning than the less confident students. It was engagement that was important, as claimed by Good (2014). Without engagement, time spent on learning would not have the optimum effect.

Attitudes to reading seemed to play an important role in readers' motivation in the study by Curdt-Christiansen (2009). She noted in her evaluation of the KidsREAD programme in Singapore that poor readers tended to read less. As they found reading difficult and, often, had less access to suitable materials, they tended to avoid reading. This, in turn, made them less likely to develop strong reading skills. She suggested that positive attitudes to reading were influenced by a number of factors, including by ready access to materials and the students' self-efficacy, i.e. their belief in their own ability. In her study, Curdt-Christiansen (2009) used 'reading attitude' made up of three components: a positive self-concept, a desire to read and enjoyment in reading. She pointed out that students with a negative self-concept were less likely to enjoy the reading process and had less intrinsic motivation.

The small study that Curdt-Christiansen (2009) reported on focused on extensive reading and on making reading enjoyable. The results of the study showed an increase in students' self-reported enjoyment of reading and the students were found to be borrowing more books from the libraries. One interesting finding was that, while a greater proportion of students reported that they felt 'good' about the reading they did in school after being in the reading club for a few months, the proportion who found reading in school 'not good' also went up. The number of students in the middle group who found school reading 'okay' went down. Curdt-Christiansen (2009) suggested this contrasting finding might have been because while reading had generally become more meaningful to the students, some types of school reading were probably seen as too mechanical.

Fernández-Toro and Hurd (2014) believed learners needed to have a belief in their own ability in order to be prepared to work on closing any gap between current actual ability and desired performance. Learners were more ready to tackle tasks that they believed they could deal with. To support that belief, they needed knowledge of what closing the gap entailed. Without such knowledge, they were likely to feel frustrated and helpless.

Learner beliefs and strategies

As already indicated in previous sections, Gardner (2007) noted that an individual learner would have various beliefs about language learning, including its value, meaningfulness and implications. There would also be expectations about how much could be achieved. These would all affect the starting motivation of the individual. These factors then combined with attitudes to the language and the people associated with the language to affect classroom behaviour, persistence in learning, subsequent cultural contact and retention of what had been learnt.

Pintrich (2003) noted that learners were more motivated if they could see the importance and purpose of an activity. They had to believe in its value. Beliefs in the value of an activity were associated with learners taking it up.

A study by Grenfell and Harris (2013) showed that teaching reading and learning strategies (both top-down and bottom-up) proved beneficial to their underperforming students. Speaking and writing strategies were not included in the study because of lack of time but they believed that strategy instruction could be an important contribution to student learning.

Wolters and Pintrich (1998) believed, however, that learnt strategies were not likely to transfer across tasks or domains. This would mean that strategies learnt for reading, for example, might have to be practised again in the listening context before they could be applied.

Environmental support or hindrance

Saracho and Spodek (2007) emphasized the importance of the environment in the development of a young child's oracy and subsequent literacy development. The number of words very young children were exposed to had a significant effect on their literacy skills at the age of nine. When young children were engaged in conversation, they were motivated to respond and, as a result, developed their language skills. This process of dialogue was essential to the children's making sense of the decontextualized learning that was necessary for later school learning. This was the important role of play with adults (including parents) and other children.

Grenfell and Harris (2013) reported that social class was still the best predictor of educational level in England despite government attempts to improve the situation. Hartas (2011) commented that the investment by parents in terms of money, time and energy, such as buying their children toys and joining them in their activities, was thought to have the potential to help the children's cognitive and language development. As a result, the children of parents with less income and less to give would inevitably be disadvantaged. There was also a strong known relationship between the education of the parents and the child's literacy competence with parents with reading difficulties being unable to help their child at home. However, in her study involving 15,600 children studied at ages three and five years, she found only a moderate relationship between family income and the child's literacy development. Moreover, she found that parental involvement with the child was not related to socio-economic status. However, she did find a strong relationship between the mother's education and the child's development. Children with parents with a degree-level education were found to be some six months ahead of children of parents with no formal educational qualification. Hartas (2011) surmised that the difference was due to the less qualified parents not having the knowledge of the support and services that they could call on for the child's education. She also reported that the one thing which less educated parents tended to do less frequently was reading to their child.

Curdt-Christiansen (2009) also noted that studies in the USA had shown the important impact of socio-economic status (SES) on children's literacy development. Children from low SES homes tended to have fewer resources (e.g. books, newspapers and magazines) at home that would give them the opportunities to develop a reading habit. As a result, they might not see reading as something that they would do for enjoyment. At the same time, Kramer-Dahl and Kwek (2011) pointed out that it was important for teachers and educationists to avoid a deficit view of such children that saw their problem to be an innate lack of intelligence or motivation. This last point is discussed further below when looking at the effect teachers can have on students.

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In the study by Goh et al. (2005) of the implementation of the English syllabus in Singapore schools, the teachers reported that external factors often had a negative impact on the students' learning of Singapore Standard English. Among these external influences, they listed the home, the media and peer interaction, all of which, they felt, exposed the students to either their mother tongue (in Singapore's context, the language associated with a person's ethnicity) or non-standard forms of English.

As Goh et al. (2005) explained, the background of a student could have important effects on the likelihood of 'academic success' to the extent that this might be defined by eventual entry into university, for example. Students from independent and government-aided schools were more likely than those from government schools to be proficient English speakers because it was used at home. Moreover, they were more likely to be familiar with the language variety used in school texts. As a result, it was often assumed that students from these schools would go on to university.

Actional stage

For Dörnyei and Ottó (1998), at the actional stage, learners began the process of trying to achieve their goals, which involved executive motivation. This would, suggested Dörnyei (2003), involve setting up and carrying out subtasks, a system of ongoing appraisal of the developing success and self-regulation. As a result, a different set of factors would influence motivation at this stage.

Dörnyei (2003) pointed out that in the 1990's there had been a big growth in researchers' interest in looking at motivation in the classroom. They started to look at motivation related to the different aspects of the learning context. These aspects included course-specific components such as the relevance of the teaching materials, student interest in the tasks, and the teaching method used. There were also teacher-related components such

as the teacher's personality, behaviour and teaching style. Another important area was the effect of characteristics of the learner group, including cohesiveness, goal-orientedness, and group norms. These factors are discussed below using the headings suggested by Dörnyei (2003).

Quality of the learning experience

The results of a study in Spain by Gardner (2007) seemed to indicate that the learning experience had little impact on grades compared to language anxiety, openness to other cultures and people, and instrumental orientation. However, Gardner argued, the multiple factors involved in motivation affected each other so that the impact of such factors as the learning experience could be hidden by the influence of other factors.

In a discussion regarding the situation in Singapore, Goh et al. (2005) emphasized that there were two important ways the teacher could affect the English language syllabus implementation. One was the teacher's pedagogical content knowledge, i.e. the knowledge of language features relevant to their teaching and the second was their beliefs about teaching and learning. In affecting the syllabus implementation in their classrooms, they directly affected their students' experience. Included in this knowledge that teachers required was an understanding of students' needs and motivation.

Teachers in the study by Goh et al. (2005) noted that some students were affected by negative emotions such as fear of making mistakes in front of others that resulted in them not having the confidence to participate in class. Primary school teachers in particular emphasized the importance of a good learning environment with interactive and challenging learning activities. Secondary school teachers brought in supplementary reading materials and used IT-related activities as ways of motivating their students. They used group work and interactive activities to involve otherwise passive students.

A further way of involving students in the activities at school is to relate them to other experiences the students have had, recognizing that school language activities can relate to those the students have had outside school including at home. Shegar and Weninger (2010) studied five preschool Singaporean boys who were bilingual in English and Tamil. Their data indicated that the boys' literacy experiences were not isolated events but were linked to each other so that past experiences were related to current ones. Through these experiences, the boys built up interest in specific things, an interest that motivated them to read related materials. Shegar and Weninger (2010) argued from this that schools should link literacy programmes to the kind of literature that students might well see outside school so that reading in school did not become an isolated activity involving school texts that were devoid of interest to the children.

Chandrasegaran and Kong (2006) made a similar point in their study of student argumentation online. They found the most sophisticated discussion was carried out by a group of boys discussing the choice of warplanes for Singapore. Because of their deep interest and, thus, background knowledge, they were able to present arguments, prepare for counterarguments and draw well supported conclusions. Thus, given a topic of interest, even one outside the normal school curriculum, students were motivated to perform well. Similarly, Good (2014) also noted that studies had shown that students responded to teaching when they felt the class was productive and was not for them a waste of time.

Norton and Toohey (2011) quoted studies that indicated that even motivated students might not always accept the teaching approach being used in class. As a result, they might not participate in the lesson and, over time, might be judged to be weak students by the teacher and fellow students. Students needed to believe in the usefulness of any given activities in order to learn from them.

Sense of autonomy

In discussing self-determination theory, Dörnyei (2003) noted that a sense of autonomy among learners and its effect on motivation had become an important area of study in the previous decade.

Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) reported that when learners were involved in a creative activity that incorporated a challenge that matched the capabilities of the learners, they felt a sense of control

and achievement and were intrinsically motivated. It satisfied the need to be self-initiating and self-regulating.

Pintrich (2003) also reported that autonomy was among the three basic needs (competence, autonomy and relatedness) recognized by self-determination theory. However, he suggested that it was necessary to draw a balance between too much choice and allowing for a reasonable amount of learner autonomy.

Fernández-Toro and Hurd (2014) suggested that learners could vary in their need for autonomy depending on what they saw as their role in the learning process. Those with an external locus of control were likely to look to the instructor to tell them what to do and where they had gone wrong. Those with an internal locus of control were more likely to feel that they should be in charge of these areas.

Teachers' and parents' influence

Hardré et al. (2008) described how the influence of parents was particularly important during the early years of education. This was somewhat reduced over the years as the teacher's influence on student motivation increased in proportion.

One of the important areas of the influence of both teachers and parents related to the learners' sense of autonomy discussed in the previous section. Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) reported that the practices of teachers and parents were on a continuum of autonomy-supporting versus controlling. Too much control could undermine the sense of autonomy. However, Pintrich (2003) warned that there had to be a balance and handing too much control to the students could leave them confused.

Another source of motivation was the learners' desire to do well in order to please their parents and teachers. Pintrich (2003) noted that the need for relatedness meant that it was important for students to have an involved caring parent or teacher.

Teachers in the study by Goh et al. (2005) dis-

cussed earlier reported that, when teaching, their main concerns related to what they believed would motivate their students and to the pedagogical values they held. They were less concerned about the details of delivery prescribed in the syllabus.

Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) noted that teachers affected learners through their modelling, their task presentation and feedback. Where teachers focused on comparative grading, standardized scores and the one correct answer, learners were less interested in learning. On the other hand, a focus on cooperation increased the learners' interest in learning.

Dörnyei (2003) pointed to the motivational impact of the teacher's personality, behaviour and teaching style or practice. Kramer-Dahl and Kwek (2011) suggested that the beliefs of teachers could be added to this list. They noted that, for example, these beliefs could be in regard to the capabilities and needs of students from certain backgrounds. Students in the Normal (Technical) stream in Singapore schools (the 'slow' stream) generally came from homes of a low socio-economic grouping and homes where the dominant language was not English. As a result, they could be viewed as disadvantaged. Kramer-Dahl and Kwek (2011) warned that, while it might be true that the students were disadvantaged, teachers needed to be careful not to build up a deficit view of the students – that their lack of progress was due to such things as a lack of intelligence, a lack of motivation or poor genes. Such views could be passed on to the students who would then perform accordingly. Kramer-Dahl and Kwek (2011) reported on the approach of two teachers. One of the teachers felt strongly that the students lacked the cognitive and linguistic skills and would thus ask only factual questions for the reading comprehension passages she gave. The second teacher saw the students as products of 'problematic' family backgrounds and felt they needed moral support so that her English lessons tended to move away from the text being studied to questions of morality. Neither teacher felt it possible for the students to do better as a result of their backgrounds and the students performed accord-

> *Another source of motivation was the learners' desire to do well in order to please their parents and teachers. The need for relatedness meant that it was important to students to have an involved caring parent or teacher.*

ingly.

Good (2014) similarly reported that studies showed that teachers' beliefs about students affected the way they worked with them. Students who were seen to be more capable were given more time to respond to questions and were given more help when they had difficulty in responding. Students who were seen as less capable were asked fewer questions, were given less choice and were more likely to be criticized when they failed to answer. In this way, teachers could pass on their expectations to their students.

Dörnyei (2003) emphasized that teacher motivation could not be forgotten when looking at student motivation as inevitably they were related. A motivated teacher was more likely to motivate learners than one who had lost interest in the subject or in teaching. Goh et al. (2005) pointed out in their discussion of the adoption of a new English language syllabus in Singapore that it was crucial to the success of the syllabus that teachers believed in the syllabus and were motivated to make it successful. They had to feel that they had the skills required by the new syllabus and that they had a stake in it.

Darling-Hammond (1998) felt that working in isolation militated against teachers' success in supporting student learning. New teachers in particular needed the support of their colleagues. This could be done through the sharing of ideas, experiences and materials. Observation of and discussion regarding each other's lessons could also help. A more confident teacher would then be in a better position to support student learning. In this connection, Good (2014) suggested that people outside the teaching profession failed to see the complexity of the teacher's job and tended to view the teacher's work as easy when, in fact, it involved a great deal of professional knowledge combined with the requirement to balance the needs of individual students and the group as a whole.

A study in the USA by Johnson, Kraft, and Papay (2012) found that teachers leaving the profession did so because of the conditions in their schools. It was not because the schools had poor facilities or because the buildings were poorly maintained. It was also not because of the low ability of the students or the type of students in the school.

The best predictors of the likelihood of teachers leaving were the social conditions in the school – the school culture, the principal's type of leadership and relations between colleagues. They also found that an environment that supported the teachers resulted in student improvement irrespective of the type of school. The high teacher dropout rates that had been associated with schools with students from low income backgrounds were due to those schools being more likely to be schools with poor social conditions.

In a discussion of social class and its relationship to education in England, Bernstein (1975) suggested that working class parents understood the need for the basic skills of the three R's (Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic) and thus were able to relate to the early stages of schooling. However, they felt alienated from the later stages of education that, under the influence of the new middle class, had adopted a liberal education based less on the traditional transmission of fixed knowledge and more on the child exploring the environment, i.e. away from the education system favoured by the old middle class, a system of knowledge transmission more easily understood by the working class. As a result, working class parents were not in a position to support their children's schooling and thus help motivate them in their school work.

Classroom social structure

Various aspects of the classroom social structure could affect the motivation of students according to Dörnyei (2003). For example, social goals could be important motivators in the classroom rather than the distractions that they were sometimes assumed to be (Pintrich, 2003). Peer groups and interactions with fellow learners could be important motivational factors.

Gardner (2007) also emphasized the importance of the classroom context. Areas that could affect the motivation of learners included what the education system expected and the quality of the programme and materials. The teacher's enthusiasm and skills would also have an effect as would the general classroom atmosphere, as it would in any school subject.

In discussing the results of studies carried out in Spain, Gardner (2007) noted that the high correla-

tion figures found between openness to other cultures and other cultural measures, on the one hand, and language learning, on the other, were not found for educational factors. This, he pointed out, mirrored the data he had collected from other countries. On the face of it, this would seem to suggest the relative unimportance of educational factors but Gardner pointed out the learners' reaction to materials and other aspects of the classroom was interrelated with their openness to other cultures and thus the effect could be hidden in the studies.

Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) noted influence on student motivation was not restricted to that of the classroom. The general situation in the school affected the learning of students. For example, if a school emphasized school-level management, accomplishment and grades, this would affect learner motivation particularly at the higher grades.

At the same time, Pintrich (2003) pointed to the strong evidence that student motivation for learning in general fell off as the students progressed through the school system. This decline was found across the different motivational factors and might be attributable to maturational factors as well as to classroom and school factors.

Influence of the learner group

Dörnyei (2003) suggested that different aspects of the learner groups could affect the motivation of individual members. These included the cohesiveness of the learning group, their goal orientedness and the group norms that had been established.

In some groups, there could be learners who performed to show others how good they were compared to others. Others might avoid performance as they feared they might fail and thus look foolish in front of the group (Pintrich, 2003).

Good (2014) reported that the composition of a class in terms of such things as the mix of student ability could have a marked effect on the performance of individuals and the group as a whole. This could also be seen in terms of the teacher's performance from year to year. As the composition of the class varied from year to year so did the success of the teacher. The classroom context was important for the teacher as well as the students and this was bound to vary from year to year, leading to apparent variation in teacher performance.

Ability to use self-regulatory strategies

Dörnyei (2003) claimed that learners might go through three steps in dealing with learning tasks in the actional stage: first, executing the task, second, appraising their own performance and, third, if they saw some lack of progress, activating an action control system to correct the lack of progress.

Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) noted that research had shown that adolescents found schoolwork in general the least rewarding activity. Whether in school or doing homework, adolescents reported feelings of sadness, loneliness and boredom. Students tended to find most academic activities unenjoyable and uninteresting and were easily distracted. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that most adolescents did not choose to be in school. As a result, self-regulatory strategies were important, particularly in language studies where results might not be immediate. Dörnyei (2003) divided self-regulatory strategies into five main classes:

1. Commitment control strategies that helped to keep the original goal in mind;
2. Metacognitive control strategies that helped to control concentration on the task and avoid procrastination;
3. Satiation control strategies that helped avoid boredom with a task by adding interest to the task with a new twist to what was being done such as adding a little fantasy;
4. Emotion control strategies that avoided disruptive emotional states interfering with progress on the task; and
5. Environmental control strategies that removed negative environmental conditions and enhanced positive ones.

One possible strategy when the learning timeline was a long one was to have sets of subgoals (short-term objectives) that learners could work towards. These could be little quizzes or tests or

One possible strategy when the learning timeline was a long one was to have sets of subgoals (short-term objectives) that learners could work towards.

small projects that could mark progress and provide feedback (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998).

Wolters and Pintrich (1998) had believed that an individual might not apply self-regulatory strategies across all situations consistently. However, in their study in an American junior high school, they found that the use of strategies did not appear to vary across subjects. They also found no gender effect, indicating that boys and girls were equally likely to use self-regulatory strategies. Instead, they found that the most important variable affecting self-regulatory strategy use was task value – the value of a task from a learner's point of view in terms of interest or usefulness. The higher the task value, the more likely it was that students would use self-regulatory strategies.

Zhang et al. (2012) emphasized the particular importance of students developing self-regulated learning strategies in bilingual situations such as that in Singapore, where students have the added task of being literate in two languages. The aim of the education system was to develop self-regulated individuals who could continue to learn after they had left school. This was in consonance with Singapore's 'Teach Less, Learn More' educational policy that sought to develop individuals who were not only motivated to learn but knew how to learn. Self-regulated learners were defined as those who monitored and used appropriate strategies to manage their own learning. This use of strategies was particularly important with regard to literacy as language skills take time and effort to develop (MacIntyre et al., 2001).

The study by Zhang et al. (2012) consisted of two parts. The first part looked at 612 Primary 3 students from two schools and surveyed the strategies they used in reading and writing. The results indicated that students tended not to use strategies very much. For reading, the most commonly used strategy was Attention Management and, for writing, the most commonly used was Quality Control, with the authors suspecting that the latter was popular because of teachers' general emphasis on students checking their work for language accuracy before handing it in. There did not appear to be any differences by ethnic group but girls tended to use more strategies than boys particularly in reference to writing. More frequent use of strategies was associated with higher rates of self-efficacy and reported interest in reading.

The second part of the study consisted of an intervention study on the 321 Chinese/English bilingual students divided into intervention and control groups. The students in the intervention group were introduced to a range of strategies for reading and writing in both languages. The results showed improved performance for the intervention group compared to the control group indicating the benefits of teaching self-regulated learning strategies to students.

Postactional stage

In the final, postactional stage, motivational retrospection was involved, with the learners looking back to decide how successful the learning had been. The learners looked for the causes of their success (or lack of it) based on the standards they had adopted and decided on whether to end the learning process. Among the influences, Dörnyei (2003) listed a number of factors that might affect this process.

Attributional factors

Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) reported that attribution theory suggested that if learners ascribed failure on a task to their low ability, they were unlikely to attempt the same task again. However, if they ascribed it to poor preparation or inappropriate learning strategies, they were more likely to be willing to try again with the intention of improving the preparation or strategies.

Attributions varied widely from attributing results to the learners' own behaviour, to ability, to luck (or lack of it), to help from others or to sabotage by others. In their study, Fernández-Toro and Hurd (2014) found that learners felt better about poor performance when they believed it was due to their own errors and were prepared to try again.

Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) suggested that there were different attributional styles where the 'internals' saw a link between their behaviour and results and the 'externals' who did not see this link. One example of the latter was the 'learned helplessness', a resigned, pessimistic state of mind that was very difficult to reverse. Pintrich (2003) noted the same phenomenon.

Self-concept beliefs

Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) reported that learners with high self-perceptions handled occasional failures better than those with low self-perceptions in that they were ready to try again and could adopt new strategies to deal with the problem and not indulge in unhelpful self-analysis. Such self-perceptions were likely to be based on past performance. However, Pintrich (2003) warned that learners who consistently overestimated their abilities might not change their behaviour in response to feedback that pointed to their weaknesses.

Tremblay and Gardner (1995) suggested that it might be possible to change a learner's self-efficacy, i.e. the learner's belief in their own ability. Learners could be retrained to see that failure might not be due to their low ability but to, for example, insufficient effort. As a result, learners could be led to increase persistence and thus performance. In the same way, a reduction in learner anxiety could also lead to improved performance.

In their study in a junior high school in the USA, Wolters and Pintrich (1998) found that the students' self-efficacy was generally higher for English than Maths and Social Studies. However, this varied by gender with girls generally more confident of their skills when it came to English. They also found that self-efficacy was also a good predictor of actual performance, i.e. if students were confident in their ability, they were likely to perform well. It also correlated well with the use of self-regulatory strategies.

Another area identified by Dörnyei (2003) as being of interest was the idea of *Willingness to Communicate* (or WTC). People varied in their willingness to communicate in their first language. This was further complicated in the use of a second language as the speaker's achieved proficiency could also affect their willingness to communicate. However, there was no perfect correlation. Some people with low proficiency were still keen to speak while others, who might be proficient, nevertheless preferred to avoid the need to use the language.

Received feedback

Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) reported the negative effects of some forms of feedback. A reaction of pity rather than anger, the offering of praise on success (especially when the task was easy) and the offer of help that involved simply giving the correct answer could all dampen a learner's motivation. Criticism, on the other hand, could be seen as an indication of the teacher's high expectations of the learner and result in greater effort on the part of the learner. When praise was given too easily, it might be seen by the learner as an indication of the teacher's low estimation of the learner's abilities and was likely to result in the learner working towards those low expectations. (See also Pintrich, 2003.)

Fernández-Toro and Hurd (2014) found, when looking at learners' reactions to language feedback online, that a number of motivational factors were involved and that the complexity increased as a result of the interrelationships between the factors. As a result, they pointed out, instructors needed to be very careful of the wording of feedback so as to maintain motivation among their students.

Fernández-Toro and Hurd (2014) also noted that unearned praise lacked motivational force. Learners were not made to feel any better by being told, 'Well done' when they knew they had not done well.

Cultural Concerns

A proportion of the literature reviewed in this issue is from countries such as the USA, Canada and the UK although some of the studies took place in Singapore (e.g. Curdt-Christiansen, 2009). This inevitably leads to the question whether the studies done elsewhere are relevant to the situation in Singapore. Pintrich (2003), for example, noted that there was likely to be differences in different classrooms in different contexts. Zhu and Leung (2011) researched possible differences in motivational influences between cultures. They used eighth grade Mathematics data from Trends in International Mathematics and Science Studies 2003. While the data used did not relate to language (the topic of this Digest), the results can be used as an indication of possible cultural differences to be aware of.

Zhu and Leung (2011) contrasted the results of a survey given to the students from five East Asian territories (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, South Ko-

rea and Singapore) with those from four 'typically Western' countries (the USA, the UK, the Netherlands and Australia). Unfortunately, the authors did not define what they meant by 'typically Western' and sometimes slipped into talking about an 'Asian culture', implying that there was one culture across the whole of Asia from Turkey to Japan. However, these issues do not invalidate the point being made here.

The data examined by Zhu and Leung (2011) appeared to show that there were differences between countries in the relative importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and their effect on performance. Although Zhu and Leung (2011) focused on demonstrating differences between the two broad groups they had defined, often there appeared to be more differences and similarities between individual countries within the groupings. For example, the Netherlands was quite different from the other 'typically Western' countries. On the other hand, Singapore stood out as being quite different from the other East Asian territories in terms of extrinsic motivation and was more similar to the USA in this area than the other three 'typically Western' countries.

Perhaps most importantly for teachers is the knowledge that the teacher is an important influence on students. How the teacher models and how the teacher treats his or her students has an enormous effect.

The important lesson from this study was that there were quite likely to be differences between the relative importance of different motivational factors even between cultural groups that might appear superficially similar. This indicates the importance of doing studies in Singapore on motivation issues even if studies from overseas are used as a guide to what areas may be useful to investigate. Perhaps the other possible conclusion is that the strength of various motivational factors could vary from individual to individual. This could, for example, explain the relatively small (but statistically significant) size of the effects by country on actual performance in the study. If individual variation was the more important factor, this would reduce any cultural significance and would be an important result for research and, perhaps, more so for the individual teacher and classroom.

One thing that all nine territories had in common was that intrinsic motivation had a stronger average influence on performance than extrinsic mo-

tivation in every case. Again, this could be seen as an important finding.

Conclusion

As suggested by Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) and Dörnyei (2003), the influences on motivation are many and affect each other and motivation in complex ways. Many, such as the educational disadvantages associated with a low socioeconomic background, are, of course, outside the influence of the schools and teachers. However, it is useful for teachers to be aware of these outside influences as they need to understand how the disadvantages can affect the learning of their students.

It is instructive to look through the literature on motivation from wherever it might come. However, it is important to remember that there may be cultural factors that affect how far student motivation can be related to particular influences. In the long run, it would be useful to carry out further studies so as to establish what is important in the Singapore context. For example, is the finding that primary children are differently motivated than secondary children (Goh et al., 2005) peculiar to Singapore or is it shared with other countries? Is the survey finding that a bilingual student's motivation for learning English is very similar to that for Chinese (Wong et al., 2013) true for other language combinations in Singapore? Is it true in other cultural contexts?

One factor that could be focused on is helping students to set salient goals, goals that are demanding but attainable (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998; Fernández-Toro & Hurd, 2014; Magid, 2013). Teachers could also perhaps give students some control over their own learning (Dörnyei, 2003; Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998).

It might also be useful to look into the policy regarding the use of Singapore Colloquial English in the classroom. It might help students to look more positively on the learning of the standard forms if they understood that this would not cut them off from being Singaporean and a member of the Singapore community. They can retain this identity while developing an extension to their language repertoire (Alsagoff, 2010; Cummins et

al., 2006; Dörnyei, 2003; Ferst, 1999; Rubdy, 2007).

Teachers need to be aware of the academic disadvantages that certain students come to school with so that they can help them work towards overcoming those disadvantages. However, they must take care that this does not lead to a deficit view of their students that leads them to believe that the students are incapable of achieving good results, remembering that students tend to perform to the image held of them (Curdt-Christiansen, 2009; Kramer-Dahl & Kwek, 2011).

Perhaps most importantly for teachers is the knowledge that the teacher is an important influence on students. How the teacher models and how the teacher treats his or her students has an enormous effect. It is entangled with other factors in complex ways so that the effect can be hidden (Gardner, 2007; Good, 2014) but undoubtedly the effect is there with teachers affecting students through modelling, clear task presentations and appropriate feedback (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998).

While teachers have immediate contact with students and thus have great influence, the school has both indirect (through the teachers) and direct influence (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998). Schools that emphasize grades above all else may not be doing their teachers and students any favours.

Finally, listed below are design principles from Pintrich (2003) that may be useful for teachers in classrooms anywhere, including Singapore.

- Provide tasks that are doable but that challenge the students and then offer them clear and accurate feedback that focuses on the development of competence.
- Encourage the formation of a supportive classroom community that allows for a balance of student choice and teacher control, supported by feedback on the nature of learning, the importance of effort and the potential for self-control of learning.

- Provide activities and materials that are interesting, perhaps novel, and related to the students. Show interest in the content and activities.
- Give tasks and materials that are relevant to the students' lives and allow for opportunities to talk about their importance and usefulness.
- Organize class structures that encourage personal responsibility in a safe environment. Encourage cooperative groupings and focus on the mastery of course content. Give rewards that emphasize individual mastery rather than comparisons and norm-referenced standards.

Pintrich (2003) noted that there was overlap between many motivational factors and the implementation of one design principle from the list above might facilitate a number of factors. He emphasized that the list contains general principles related to motivational factors. However, their interpretation for particular classrooms and students is in the hands of the individual teachers in those classrooms. It is important that they are aware of all the different factors that can affect their students' motivation to learn. Where these are under their control (for example, in terms of relating content to students' lives), it is part of their professional duty to do their best. Where these are outside their control (such as the home background of their students), they should do their best to support their students' learning while avoiding labelling them negatively even subconsciously as lowered expectations on the part of others are likely to lead to lower performance by the students.

Good (2014) emphasized that it was not enough for teachers to improve their content knowledge. Teachers also needed support in looking at what they did in the classroom to help students learn. As Darling-Hammond (1998) noted, motivating students requires knowing what individual students believe about themselves, what motivates them and what tasks they will respond to. A tough task but one that is important to work at.

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