

TEACHER-LEARNER RAPPORT IMPACT ON EFL LEARNERS' MOTIVATION

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Abstract

This study investigated secondary school teachers and pupils' perceptions of the teacher characteristics and its impact on learners' motivation. The investigation explored 8 teaching elements grouped under one major section about teacher learner rapport. Participants for the study were selected through random sampling from four secondary schools in -Algeria- at the end of the academic year 2012-2013. A total number of 200 participants was surveyed. The same questionnaire was administered to 21 secondary school teachers. The questionnaire has elicited the opinions of both pupils and teachers to find out which teaching practices both groups believe foster learners' motivation in the foreign language classroom. From the analysis, it was clear that pupils find some teaching practices related to the teacher's rapport motivating. Although teachers recognize rapport as a crucial factor, they differed from pupils in the ranking of their characteristics. This therefore implies that motivating learners requires a teacher to strike a good balance between his teaching methodology and his/her rapport with learners.

Keywords: Teacher-learner rapport, perception, motivation, foreign language classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Previous research has identified motivation as a determinant factor in learning a second or a foreign language. Motivation is a desire to achieve a goal, combined with the energy to work towards that goal. Many researchers consider motivation as one of the main elements that determine success in developing a second or a foreign language; "it determines the extent of active, personal involvement in L2 learning." (Oxford & Shearin, 1994:12).

It is currently assumed that the success or failure in learning a foreign language depends on some fundamental factors such as: The learner's social context, the learner's personal characteristics, the learning process and conditions under which learning takes place. However, teaching English as a foreign language and as a compulsory curriculum subject in a non-supportive environment seems to depend very much on the didactic treatment applied by the teacher and the strategies and techniques employed in the classroom. Moreover, not only the didactic treatment in itself is important, the personal characteristics and personality traits of the person who applies that treatment in the classroom, his/her teaching style, attitudes and personal qualities are also of crucial importance.

Finocchiaro (1988, cited in Madrid, D., Robinson, B., Hidalgo, E. Gomis, A. Verdejo, M. J., Ortega, J. L., 1993:12) has identified twenty-four hallmarks of superior teachers, some of which are related to personal and affective factors: "Making learners feel loved, respected and secure and that they can achieve success by concentrating on the teacher's comprehensible input and tasks. Keeping motivation of students at a high level. Offering a relaxing atmosphere for learning."

Research on the relationship between teachers' characteristics and teachers' effectiveness has recently gained ground among various educators and researchers. Yet, huge efforts have been made in linking teacher quality with factors related to his or her rapport with learners.

Dörnyei & Csizér (1998) investigated teachers' interpretation of their own impact on learner motivation and carried out a nation-wide survey study among 200 Hungarian teachers of English from diverse contexts to learn about their attitudes toward various motivational techniques and the frequency with which they implemented them in their own teaching practice. The results revealed that the participants considered the teacher's own behavior to be the most important motivational factor. At the same time, the study also showed that it is one of the most underused motivational resources in their classroom practice.

Additionally, Patricia, Lori, and Glenda. (2011) stated "The conclusion that individual teachers can have profound influence on student learning even in schools that are relatively ineffective, was first noticed in the 1970's, researchers Jere Brophy and Thomas Good (1986) commented: "The myth that teachers do not make a difference in student learning has been refuted" (P: 3).

Put another way, factors affecting the learning of students are cumbersome and complex. However, the teacher stands as one of the most crucial factors influencing the learning of students. "Teachers have a powerful, long-lasting influence on their students. They directly affect how students learn, what they learn, how much they learn, and the ways they interact with one another and the world around them. Considering the degree of teacher's influence, we must understand what teachers should do to promote positive results in the lives of students with regard to school achievement, positive attitudes towards school, interest in learning, and other desirable outcomes. (William & Burden, 1997: ix)

1. DEFINING TEACHER LEARNER RAPPORT/RELATIONSHIP

Recent research has highlighted the establishment and the importance of the teacher-student relationship in educational practice (Freire, 2003; Shor, 1992; Purpel & McLaurin, 2004 cited in Giles, D. L., 2008). While an increasing concern for the centrality of the teacher-student relationship is apparent, how this relationship is viewed varies considerably. For some researchers, the critical aspect of the relationship is what happens 'between' the teacher and student (Hartrick Doane, 2002 cited in Giles, D. L., 2008). The relationship is described as 'inter-personal', in that the relationship involves people, and exists 'between' those involved (Buber, 1996 cited in Giles, D.L., 2008). What lies between those relating is variously described as a space, a gap, or a dialectical opening. Inter-personal relating occurs 'in' the between and 'across' to the other person (Avnon, 1998; Metcalfe & Game, 2006 cited in Giles, D.L., 2008). These inter-actions occur as transactions exchanged from one person to the other 'as' relating. The relationship is experienced in the form of a "two dimensional, secularized" inter-action (Palmer, 1999, cited in Giles, D.L., 2008). In some cases these exchanges have been likened to a transmission, indicative of the directionality and nature of the exchange (Metcalfe & Game, 2006 cited in Giles, 2008).

M.T., Claridge and T. Lewis (2005) have stated "The relationship you have with your learner is fundamental to the success of teaching. A good relationship will increase the learning your client gets, as well as making it much more enjoyable for you as a teacher. Designing the alliance you have with your learner is part of making this successful."(P: 15). Kathy Paterson. (2005) has expressed "Rapport is that wonderful bond that allows teacher and students to work and learn well together. The powerful teacher creates this relationship early in the year and works to maintain it. When good rapport has been established, students and teachers enjoy one another and the class, and students feel more motivated to do well."(P: 69).

2. TEACHER LEARNER RAPPORT AS A FACTOR AFFECTING LEARNERS' MOTIVATION.

In reviewing literature and previous studies, many researchers have conducted studies to investigate the characteristics of effective teachers and their influence on learners' motivation. In line with this, William and Burden (1997) have pointed out "In recent years, as the field of education has moved toward a stronger focus on accountability and on a careful analysis of variables that affect educational outcomes, the teacher has proven time and again to be the most influential school-related force in student achievement. Consequently, to develop an understanding of what teachers do to cause significant student learning, researchers have begun to focus on the specific characteristics and processes used by the most effective teachers."(P: x).

In the same respect, Dörnyei (2005) has stated that "The increased shift toward examining classroom-based motivation in the 1990s drew attention to a rather overlooked motivational area, the motivational characteristics of the language teacher." He added, "There is no doubt that teacher motivation is an important factor in understanding the affective basis of instructed SLA, since the teacher's motivation has significant bearings on the students' motivational disposition and, more generally, on their learning achievement."(P: 115).

Characteristics reported in previous studies can be synthesized into three categories: instructional competence, personality and teacher-student relationship. "It was argued by several researchers (e.g., Julkunen 1989; Brown 1990; Crookes and Schmidt 1991; Dörnyei 1994a; Oxford and Shearin 1994) that the classroom environment had a much stronger motivational impact than had been proposed before, highlighting the significance of motives associated with the L2 course, teacher and learner group." Shoib, A. & Dörnyei, Z. (2005:23).

According to Dörnyei (2001) the following three motivational conditions in particular are indispensable for motivational strategies or techniques to be employed successfully: appropriate teacher behaviors and a good relationship with the students; a pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere, and a cohesive learner group with appropriate group norms.

In the same direction, Dörnyei (2001) made it clear "I don't think it requires much justification to claim that it is important for a motivating teacher to have a positive relationship with the students on a personal and not just on an academic level" (P: 36). He further added "Teachers who share warm, personal interactions with their students, who respond to their concerns in an empathic manner and who succeed in establishing relationships of mutual trust and respect with the learners, are more likely to inspire them in academic matters than those who have no personal ties with the learners." (P: 36).

Indeed, many researchers have emphasized teacher relationship with learners as a salient factor to establish solid foundations for the teaching and learning process and boost learners' motivation to take an active role in the classroom to demonstrate teacher caring and creating a positive learning environment to support student learning. As a matter of fact, many researchers have noted that establishing a good relationship with students is important for effective teaching atmosphere. In line with this, Lowman (2000, cited in Daniel Rogers, 2009:4) stated that "Rapport is established when teachers convey to students, through various means, that are interested in and care about them, and that this concern translates into a desire to help them learn." Equally important, Aysha Fleming and Clare Hiller (2009) stated "Relationships in the classroom involve complex, dynamic processes of rapport, learning and power which are never fixed or unidirectional." (P: 92).

Zhou and He (2005, cited in Yang, 2008:98) have investigated the learning of English in almost 100 secondary schools in China. They found that 'teacher-student rapport' was one of the most important factors which affected the learning of English in the eyes of students. In a similar respect, Tickle-Degnen and Rosenthal (1990, cited in Wenying and Guy, 2005:48) emphasized that "the presence of a high degree of rapport between individuals has been thought to create powerful interpersonal influence and responsiveness." Significantly enough, Ehrman (1998, cited in Wenying and Guy, 2005) has quoted a number of learners' comments from evaluations of language training programs to emphasize the importance of the role of learner-teacher rapport in language learning. Although learners do mention well-designed textbooks and a suitable curriculum as positive forces, their true enthusiasm is reserved for their teachers and the relationships the teacher establishes with them.

"Teachers, either inside the classroom or outside the classroom, exert a great deal of influence on establishing a good quality of teacher-student relationship." (Barry, 1999 cited in Suxian and Thao, 2004:5). "In such an emotional climate the most important ingredients of effective teaching' for teachers to build up, are to maintain and improve a positive relationship with students and provide respective materials to cater for students' needs and interests" (Jones, 2004 cited in Suxian and Thao, 2004:5).

According to Barry (1999, cited in Suxian and Thao, 2004:5), "students are humans first and learners second". Therefore, teachers need to attune to the feeling of any classroom as a social place where students are individuals and mix with teachers like their peers. They compete against each other, yet are longing to be appreciated and valued as human beings. Since human beings are social beings each student's sense of well-being depends to a greater extent on interpersonal relationships. In the same vein, Haslett (1987: 196) stated that "Establishing close relationship with others is essential for well-being and happiness. Through our interpersonal relationships, we establish our personal identity, express our thoughts and feelings, engage in collaborative activities with others and satisfy our needs for affiliation with others".

Barry(1999 cited in Suxian and Thao, 2004) added that teaching is fundamentally a person to person activity— a social happening during which the teacher and student are involved in teaching learning process....only by interpersonal interactions and group interaction can a teacher fulfil the necessary job of teaching. ... teaching involves a great deal of person to person contact, and this enables us to be human. Furthermore, in the opinion of Barry (1999, cited in Suxian and Thao, 2004), how good the teacher's relationship with students is largely decided by the quantity and quality of contact made with each student as

an individual. According to Jones (2004, cited Suxian and Thao, 2004), a significant body of research shows that academic achievement and students' behaviors are greatly influenced by the quality of the teacher-student relationship.

In the eyes of Hamre and Pianta (2006) "Student teacher relationships provide a unique entry point for educators and others working to improve the social and learning environments of schools and classrooms." (P: 49). In the same sense, Jones (2004, cited Suxian and Thao, 2004:7), states that "a teacher-student relationship is characterized by almost complete openness, in which we share a wide range of personal concerns and values with students; openness related to our reactions to and feelings about the school environment, with limited sharing of aspects reflecting our out of school life; an almost exclusive focus on a role-bound relationship that is, we share no personal feelings or reaction, but merely perform our instructional duties."

What can be inferred from all what has been cited so far is that both teachers and students will pay the price if teachers neglect to form emotionally warm, supportive relationships with and among their students. Teachers have a crucial role in effective teaching and learning process and can serve as motivators for learners so as to improve students' chances for academic success.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The primary concern of this research is to investigate and elicit the opinions of both teachers and learners about the influence of some teacher practices which are related to the teacher's external factors namely: rapport with pupils. In attempting to probe the latter, this study raises several interrelated research questions.

- a. Which teaching practices are perceived as the most motivating ones by learners?
- b. Which teaching practices are seen as the least motivating ones by learners?
- c. What teachers' characteristics are perceived as the most motivating ones by teachers?
- d. What teachers' characteristics are perceived as the least motivating ones?
- e. How do teachers and pupils' perception of the teachers' most important characteristics compare?
- f. How do teachers and pupils' perception of the teachers' least important characteristics compare?

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Participants

The focus of the present study is to better understand the opinions of students and teachers about the role of external factors such as: the teacher's rapport with pupils and its impact on learners' motivation. The participants are Secondary school pupils who are chosen randomly from four Secondary schools. A number of 50 students was surveyed from each school. The student participants in this study were enrolled in the same level.

4.2. Questionnaire Presentation and Administration

A close end questionnaire consisting of 8 statements was developed to collect data and conduct the investigation. The questionnaire included one crucial factor as the indicator for the enhancement of motivation among the students organized in one section 'Teacher-Learner Rapport'. A 5-point likert type was used in the scale: 5= strongly agree, 4= agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 2= disagree, 1=strongly disagree) to measure the extent of agreement or disagreement. This factor was chosen from findings in educational research because of its direct relevance to students' learning and teacher's teaching situation.

The questionnaire also included a part about personal information and was distributed to all the respondents selected for the data by hand. Before distributing the questionnaire among the students the nature and purpose of the survey was explained to them, moreover they were assured strongly that their responses will be kept confidential in order to relieve them from any kind of fear and pressure. Respondents were asked to read the questionnaire carefully and if they find any statement ambiguous or difficult they can ask freely for help. Students were asked to put a cross next to each statement according to the degree of their agreement or disagreement with that statement. Similar procedure was followed in each school, in each class and for all the students to minimize the missing data.

Similarly, teacher questionnaire consisted of 8 statements grouped under the section that has been

mentioned previously and consisted of the same statements and distributed to them by hand. Teachers' ages ranged from 24 to 53 and their experience in teaching ranged from 01 to 31 years; both male and female teachers participated in the study. Secondary School teachers were asked to complete the questionnaire. The total number of teachers who were surveyed was 21.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the study. The first research question was: what teacher's characteristics are the most influencing ones on learners' motivation?

Table 1 shows teacher's characteristics that are viewed as the most important ones by all secondary school learners.

Schools Teacher's Characteristics	Four Secondary Schools Mean
-Your teacher is a respectful person.	4.52
- Your teacher calls pupils by their names.	4.31

The arithmetic mean in table 1 above indicates that being a respectful teacher towards learners is a motivating characteristic for them since it received the highest mean (M=4.52). This means that learners want to be regarded as important individuals to be respected by their teachers to attract them since respect is an abstract element that learners feel and which influences on them without spending any efforts. In line with this, Lumsden (1994) has stated that classroom climate is important and if students experience the classroom as a caring, supportive place where there is a sense of belonging and everyone is valued and respected, they will tend to participate more fully in the process of learning. In the same vein, Ramsden (1992, cited in Omo Aregbeyen, 2010:63) has identified six principles of effective teaching that can promote effective learning and stated that "good teaching means that teachers show great concern and respect for students and students' learning".

In a similar respect, Dörnyei (2001) stated "Teachers who share warm, personal interactions with their students, who respond to their concerns in an empathic manner and who succeed in establishing relationships of mutual trust and respect with the learners, are more likely to inspire them in academic matters than those who have no personalities with the learners." (P: 36). Significantly enough, Susan Thompson, John G. Greer, Bonnie B. Greer (2004) have expressed that displaying fairness, having a positive outlook, being prepared, using a personal touch, possessing a sense of humor, possessing creativity, admitting mistakes, being forgiving, respecting students, maintaining high expectations, showing compassion, and developing a sense of belonging for students, when demonstrated by classroom teachers, they increase students' achievement. Calling pupils' names by their names is receiving high importance and ranking second. That is pupils are searching to be valued and catered for by their teacher.

The second research question was: Which teacher's characteristics are seen as the least motivating ones by learners?

Table 2 on this page shows which teacher's characteristics are the least important ones in the learners' eyes.

Schools Teacher's Characteristics	Four Secondary Schools Mean
- Your teacher has a close contact with you and understands your needs.	3.92
- Your teacher develops a good relationship with pupils.	4.00

As table 2 illustrates, being in a close contact with learners does not always mean that we understand our learners' needs and make them more motivated to learn the English language. This teacher characteristic is receiving the lowest mean in the section of teacher's rapport with learners (M=3.92). We can also infer from this finding that teachers are not sufficiently close to their learners and they don't really cater for their needs which portrays the idea that learners didn't experience such teacher practice. In this vein, Y. K., Singh & R. Nath. (2005) have stated "Motivation is best carried out if it is based on the existing needs and motives of the learner. You as a teacher better know that some of the needs your students may bring to the

classroom are the needs to learn something in order to complete a particular task or activity, the need to seek new experiences, the need to perfect skills, the need to overcome challenges, the need to become competent, the need to succeed and do well, the need to feel involved and to interact with other people etc. Satisfying such needs is rewarding in itself and such rewards bring more motivation than do grades or prizes.”(P: 91). The table indicates as well that teachers don't actually develop good relationships and establish positive ties with their pupils though it does not necessitate from them to spend much effort. Yet, learners feel demotivated.

Our third research question is the following: What teachers' characteristics are perceived as the most motivating ones by teachers?

Table 3: Teacher Characteristics that are perceived as the most important ones by teachers.

Schools Teacher's Characteristics	Secondary School Teachers Mean
-Calling pupils by their names.	4.66
-I create a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.	4.62

From table 3 cited above, we can clearly remark that teachers emphasize on calling their pupils' names as a motivating practice. It is widely used to raise their learners' motivation. As a matter of fact this practice is receiving the highest arithmetic mean ($M=4.66$) which indicates that teachers depend heavily on learning pupils' names to use them while delivering their English lessons to familiarize them with the classroom atmosphere, break the ice and make learners feel more confident to participate in the lesson. Calling pupils' names urge learners to take part in the lesson to make their names first known to the teacher and second to their classmates because this makes them feel that they occupy a high position and esteem in their teachers' view. They feel as well that teachers are taking care of them and giving value to every pupil's identity to establish good relationships with them. In this sense, Megan Downs (2001, cited in Wang Jun-kai, 2008:33) stated that "knowing a student's name can be a powerful motivator". Moreover, Dale Carnegie in his book 'How to Win Friends and Influence People' pointed out "We should be aware of the *magic* contained in a name and realize that this single item is wholly and completely owned by the person with whom we are dealing and nobody else. Remember that a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language" (1981: 83). Bernaus (2010) said "Teachers, who address learners by name, talk about personal topics in the class, etc., will form closer relationships, and consequently help to create a cohesive learner group, and enhance learners' classroom motivation." (P: 185).

In the same direction, college research indicates that "addressing students by name" is a classroom teaching behavior that correlates positively and significantly with students' overall evaluation of the instructor (Murray, 1985). In contrast, research on "uncomfortable courses". That is to say, courses that most likely to cause "classroom communication apprehension" among students reveals that such courses are more likely to be taught by instructors who are perceived by their students as being unfriendly and who did not address students by their first name (Bowers, 1986). Significantly enough, Dörnyei (2001) indicates that "If students can sense that the teacher doesn't care...this perception is the fastest way to undermine their motivation. The spiritual (and sometimes physical) absence of the teachers ends such a powerful message of 'It doesn't matter!' to the students, that everybody, even the most dedicated ones, are likely to be affected and become demoralized". (P: 34). The table reveals also that teachers do their best to create a pleasant and comfortable working atmosphere so as to operate smoothly and progress with learners.

The fourth research question is: What teachers' characteristics are perceived as the least motivating ones?

Table 4: Teacher Characteristics that are perceived as the least important ones by teachers.

Schools Teacher's Characteristics	Secondary School Teachers Mean
-Having a very close contact with pupils to know their needs. -I encourage interest between them.	3.57 4.10

The teacher's characteristics that are perceived as the least motivating ones by teachers are shown in table 4 on this page. Secondary school teachers believe that having a close contact with their learners and knowing their needs are not sufficient to make them raise their learners' motivation. This demonstrates as well that teachers don't have very close contacts with their learners which enable them to know what their learners need. This teacher characteristic has the lowest mean (M=3.57). Encouraging interest between learners is regarded as a least motivating practice in the eyes of teachers as it requires from them huge efforts to make learners draw attention to their learning and get profit from one another.

The fifth research question is how do teachers' and pupils' perception of the teachers' most important characteristics compare?

Table 5: Teacher Characteristics that are perceived as the most important ones by teachers and learners.

Teacher's Characteristics	Secondary School Teachers Mean	Secondary School Learners Mean
-Calling pupils by their names. - Being a respectful teacher.	4.66 /	/ 4.42

Our fifth table reveals that there is a slight difference in the way both teachers and learners perceive the most motivating teacher practices. Teachers relied heavily on calling pupils' names as a motivating practice with a significant high arithmetic mean (M=4.66) while learners placed emphasis on being respected by the teacher with an arithmetic mean (M=4.42) in the section of teacher learner rapport. Indeed, teachers seem to be more practical by considering pupils' names as a motivating practice since it draws pupils' attention and keeps them alert. Pupils want to be valued and respected to engage in the learning process. The extent, to which a student feels respected, trusted, and treated fairly by others is a strong determinant of long-term social and academic outcomes (Bishop, 1995; Gettinger, 2003). Though we have to notice that pupils recognize the practice of calling their names by the teacher as a motivating characteristic and rank it second right after the teacher's respect with an arithmetic mean (M=4.31,table:1). In the same vein, Susan et al (2004) have stated that teachers who convey a personal touch with their students call their students by name, smile often, ask about students' feelings and opinions, and accept students for who they are make them interested.

The last research question is as follows: How do teachers' and pupils' perception of the teachers' least important characteristics compare?

Table 6: Teacher Characteristics that are perceived as the least important ones by teachers and learners.

Teacher's Characteristics	Secondary School Teachers Mean	Secondary School Learners Mean
- Your teacher has a close contact with you and knows your needs.	3.57	/

- Your teacher has a close contact with you and knows your needs.	/	3.92
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From table 6 mentioned on the previous page, we can clearly see that both teachers and learners agree that the teacher practice of having a close contact with learners and knowing their needs is not seen as a motivational practice by receiving the lowest means in the teacher rapport section (M=3.57) and (M=3.92) respectively. This means one clear point, teachers are not really close to their learners to make them feel it and their needs are not known to their teachers since they are not catered for. In fact, this finding runs in the opposite direction of what educators, researchers and the literature suggest.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, in our study we have addressed several research questions and we have attempted to bring them adequate answers from the gathered data. The findings of this study indicate that students and teachers seem to have slight differences in their perceptions of what teacher practices are more influential than others on their motivation to learn the English language in the classroom context. There was little difference between the rankings of the students and those of the teachers. This suggests that both students and teachers view the teaching practices that will increase their motivation to learn from a different angle. This indicates as well that it would be better and more effective for teachers to see the learning process from the learners' eye to have a full and precise picture of what they really need in terms of teaching practices which enhance their motivation and boost it. In line with this, Carnegie (1981) has stated "If there is any one secret of success, it lies in the ability to get the other person's point of view and see things from that person's angle as well as from your own." (P: 49)

After all, our understanding of motivation leaves room for intervention and is therefore interesting for educators and practitioners trying to help teachers to boost their students' motivation and hence improve their learning behavior.

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