



Critical Period Hypothesis and Motivation in Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract: *There have been several debates regarding at what age language learners should start learning second language. Moreover, I wanted to clarify if there is a connection between age and motivation while learning foreign languages, Motivation is considered as one of the key aspects and many researchers have been conducted so far. It is well known that motivation in language learners tidily connected with their attitude and psychology. We can define motivation as eagerness to learn and discover new capabilities in order to achieve certain goals. Teachers are suggested to identify their students motivation, their psychological state, so that it would be an easy task to direct them and inspire them during their studies. Teachers also responsible to create friendly and suitable environment to make classes interesting.*

Keywords: *critical period, motivation, language acquisition, types of motivation.*

In my case study I have chosen a student which I have been teaching for some period of time. I wanted to indicate the reason why he became unmotivated in the process of language learning. I needed to identify the exact age when he started learning English and the stages of his language acquisition. During my case study I conducted several lessons with my student to indicate his motivation type. Whether it is intrinsic or extrinsic, motivation urges students to learn language with enthusiasm. During observations he showed a sign of motivation which affected to overall result in his studies. During my research I also interviewed participant and asked about his goals and motivations which helped him to learn the language. By asking several questions I came in conclusion that he was motivated at the beginning then due to some factors his interest in language learning started decline. Participant started learning the language from an early age and had to pause his learning at some point. The main reason for that was that school which he was studying located in rural area. Many teachers have been changed during his studies and that affected negatively to his will of learning a second language.

Literature review. As I mentioned above motivation in language learning is crucial and many factors affect language learner to succeed or fail in language acquisition. Many scholars researched and published findings of their studies. The impact of motivation and types of motivation categorized which reflected in the articles by researchers. In order to be successful in language learning, it is not sufficient enough studying harder or being clever, motivation is believed one of the key aspects in learning process (Gardner & Lambert, 1972 cited in Xu 2008). It is worth mentioning that motivation encourages learners and in that term they experience smooth transition in understanding the language, pronunciation, writing and reading. As Gardner (1985) stated motivation is a result of combination effort and desire. Motivation is considered second major factor after aptitude in the way of success (Saville-Troike 2006). She also claims that highly motivated learners show great contribution and responsibility during language learning.

Integrative and instrumental motivation. Gardner and Lambert (1972) specified two kinds of motivation: integrative and instrumental. In integrative motivation type learner has a tendency to integrate with the target community and act like target community. Whether in instrumental type



learner wants to learn the language with a specific goal. The purpose of learning second language might be for business or education and etc. Every each of this motivation types can be beneficial and can lead to a favorable outcome. All researches in the field of motivation indicated a strong connection between language learning and successful outcome.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation based on factors which deal within the learner and influence of outside factors. As Rotter (1966, cited in Chalak & Kassaian 2010) states both types of motivation refers to the term locus of control. He also mentioned that all kinds of motivation is crucial and if learner feels unmotivated, it can have affect. There has been numerous researches in critical period hypothesis for second language acquisition. Long (1990) claims that the ability to attain native-like speech and phonological abilities starts to decrease by the age of 6, it does not matter how well motivated learner can be. The reason for that lies under the losses of brain plasticity. After 15 years old it is unlikely that language learner can gain native-like syntax and morphology.

Participant Profile. The subject for this case study is a high school teenager studying on 10th grade in my class. He is one of the active male student in the class. He is seventeen years and the school where he studies located far from the center of Karshi city. He has been learning English language for almost seven years. His target language is English and he also has basic knowledge of Russian language. Uzbek is his native language. As he refers all teachers who teach in this class used grammar translation method. One of the main motivation in language learning he gets from his brother. Watching English cartoons and movies also motivated him to learn the language. Not many teachers willingly come to this school to work as an English teacher because they have to commute more than two hours. I guess that was the reason why five teachers have changed during my students education. About two years ago I conducted in the same class and that time he was very motivated and active during the lessons. I even created an English club only for the students of that class so they could improve their language proficiency. When he started engaged in the lessons he showed a sign of intrinsic motivation. Later when he faced some difficulties he could easily skip some lessons and that caused quite misunderstandings during the conversation with him. During the interview he explained me the reason how learning English language will assist him in his future endeavors where he wanted to visit foreign countries. He has a brother abroad working and studying in Turkey. He also dreams that someday he will be studying abroad like his brother.

Research Design. With all the data collected I decided to take pre-test and post-test to evaluate participant's basic grammatical knowledge. I wanted to know about his motivation so tests were not that hard to solve. At first I wanted him to write an essay to check his writing skills, but then I found out that he was having difficulties to perform his ideas in written format. For that reason I conducted an interview and asked him about his motivation in language to draw a bigger picture in my case study. First we revise some basic grammar rules which include present and past tenses. Pre-test questions were designed to identify whether he improve his knowledge in grammar or not. Ten questions were given in this tests with increasing difficulties. Although, he made some mistakes during the pre-test but showed good performance during other activities. Pre-test revealed his weak points and I gave some instructions for further improvement. On a second day I decided to start the lesson with short video dedicated about motivation and studying abroad. I specifically pointed out the importance of language learning and provide some facts from the video. All in all, students became motivated immerse themselves into the lessons. The last day of my observation I conducted post-test to evaluate any improvements during three days of sessions. Surprisingly, the test results did not show any improvements. The post-test consisted of ten grammar questions.



Data collection and findings. After conducting pre-test and post with the participant, my case study findings have shown how motivation affects learners. After conducting an interview I realized that instrumental motivation can be more beneficial rather than integrated motivation. Although, participant relied on integrated motivation, even if he tried to convince that he was learning the second language for specific purposes. His test score once again demonstrated lack of motivation and clear goal. Tests were designed based on syllabus and grammar rules which was introduced during my first lessons. I gave him couple of exercises on present and past tenses. In pre-test he made three mistakes out of ten. And with that data collected I change the process of the lesson so he could gain more progress and improvement in given tasks. However, post-test results were also lower showing his lack of motivation caused him once again miss some important points in classes.

To illustrate my findings more deeply, I have confirmed that motivated students can easily improve their knowledge if teachers use appropriate approaches. For instance, the subject of my case study initially was distracted and he did not have any idea how to achieve progress in language learning. Even though, he was confident and determined to gain a knowledge, some outer factors affected his studies. As mentioned above I conducted classes in this very group three years ago. At that time he was very active and had shown high interest during classes. He was fourteen years old and language acquisition was pretty well. After three years he has shown decline which once again proved the theory about critical period hypothesis. No matter how motivated he can be, it is almost impossible to attain higher level of knowledge in any foreign languages. Nevertheless, one should consider effectiveness of motivation and the role it plays in acquiring second language. Data findings indicated that all language learners can form some strategies to overcome barriers to become successful language learner.

Conclusion/Implications. Before conducting my case I was not paying enough attention on how motivation could have affect in learners' overall achievement. The types of motivation and methods I used by implementing those variables in the process, suggested necessity for further researches. During this short period of time I discovered many implications proving previous findings. In the process of interview my student explained how his brother influenced him to study and he chose his brother as a role model. In addition, I realized that teachers also played a key role in students overall achievement. Further implications can be drawn from my case study. It is necessary for teachers create friendly atmosphere and reward students frequently. If students show any signs of unwillingness or demotivation, teachers should guide and assist them to regain their motivation.

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