

Explaining Motivation in Language Learning: A Framework for Evaluation and Research

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Abstract : Evaluating and researching motivation in language learning is a complex and multi-faceted activity. Various models for investigating learner motivation have been proposed in the literature, but no one model supplies a complex and coherent model for investigating a range of motivational characteristics. Here, such a methodological framework, which includes exemplification of sources of evidence and potential methods of investigation, is proposed. The process model for the investigation of motivation within language learning settings proposed is based on a complex dynamic systems perspective that takes account of cognition and affects. It focuses on three overarching aspects of motivation: the learning environment, learner engagement and learner identities. Within these categories subsets are defined: the learning environment incorporates teacher, course and group specific aspects of motivation; learner engagement addresses the principal characteristics of learners' perceived value of activities, their attitudes towards language learning, their perceptions of their learning and engagement in learning tasks; and within learner identities, principal characteristics of self-concept and mastery of the language are explored. Exemplifications of potential sources of evidence in the model reflect the multiple influences within and between learner and environmental factors and the possible changes in both that may emerge over time. The model was initially developed as a framework for investigating different models of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in contrasting contexts in secondary schools in England. The study, from which examples are drawn to exemplify the model, aimed to address the following three research questions: (1) in what ways does CLIL impact on learner motivation? (2) what are the main elements of CLIL that enhance motivation? and (3) to what extent might these be transferable to other contexts? This new model has been tried and tested in three locations in England and reported as case studies. Following an initial visit to each institution to discuss the qualitative research, instruments were developed according to the proposed model. A questionnaire was drawn up and completed by one group prior to a 3-day data collection visit to each institution, during which interviews were held with academic leaders, the head of the department, the CLIL teacher(s), and two learner focus groups of six-eight learners. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. 2-4 naturalistic observations of lessons were undertaken in each setting, as appropriate to the context, to provide colour and thereby a richer picture. Findings were subjected to an interpretive analysis by the themes derived from the process model and are reported elsewhere. The model proved to be an effective and coherent framework for planning the research, instrument design, data collection and interpretive analysis of data in these three contrasting settings, in which different models of language learning were in place. It is hoped that the proposed model, reported here together with exemplification and commentary, will enable teachers and researchers in a wide range of language learning contexts to investigate learner motivation in a systematic and in-depth manner.

Keywords : investigate, language-learning, learner motivation model, dynamic systems perspective

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