

Beyond “Face to Face”: A Discussion on Intrinsic Motivation in Online Courses

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Abstract: Based on a case study on a Chinese university that need to finish the compulsory course Chinese to English Translation online due to Covid-19, the research aims to determine the challenges and measures in an online course in China during the pandemic. In this paper, the author is trying to find how to improve students' learning motivation in post-epidemic era. The author points out that, due to the Covid-19, online teaching and learning have become the prevalent form of education. Besides, the rapid development of Internet and technology contributes to the adopting of online learning. In a case study, the author found that students' intrinsic motivation would be negatively influenced because the traditional strategies for improving intrinsic motivation are valid. For example, students in the online course lack interaction with teachers and their peers, which will influence students' learning and production process. Meanwhile, weakened self-regulation also calls for improvement of students' intrinsic motivation. In order to stimulate intrinsic motivation in the online learning context, the author proposed some active measures: first, presenting teachers' enthusiasm; second, providing more interaction opportunities, for example, imported workshop into Chinese class; third, developing subject-related interest in the classroom, such as, a) pre-lecture "hands-on" tasks, and b) utilising videos and pictures.

1. Introduction

Learners' motivation has long been a widely discussed topic for psychologists and sociologists. Many scholars have conducted researches on that. According to Daskalovska, Koleva, Gudeva and Ivanovska (2012), there are many different factors influencing the process of second language learning, but motivation plays the most crucial role in the success of language learning [1]. In the book of Dörnyei (2007), there are three periods of motivation theory development: the social psychological period, the cognitive situated period, the process-oriented period, and now, the socio-dynamic period [2].

Due to the pandemic, a large number of schools and universities turn their previously face-to-face teaching modes online. According to a report by Chou (2020), one famous Chinese online meeting platform providing live-video communication, more than 140,000 schools and 120 million students in China resumed classes through DingTalk during Covid-19 pandemic [3].

Despite the ongoing urgency, online learning is also a trend in today's technological

environment. According to Holmes and Gardner (2006), online learning is now a vital element of education[4]. Thus, how to improve students' motivation in an online-learning course, is of great importance, no matter considering the present pandemic or the education tendency.

This essay would focus on the context that twenty-one English majors in a Chinese university that need to finish the compulsory course Chinese to English Translation online due to Covid-19 this year. This essay is trying to find how to improve their learning motivation in the present situation. This essay will use the definition of online learning by Dempsey and Van Eck (2012), which is "uses the Internet to deliver some form of instruction to learners separated by time, distance, or both. (p.283)"[5], and for the definition of motivation, this essay will follow the definition by Williams and Burden (1997): "...a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, which leads to a conscious decision to act and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to attain a previously set goal. (p.23)"[6].

2. Challenges for Online Learning and Teaching

2.1. Traditional Strategies for Improving Intrinsic Motivation are Valid

According to Deci and Ryan (2010), intrinsic motivation refers to the type of motivation derived from internal reward or interest, which has no connection with external rewards or benefits[7]. Intrinsic motivation has a strong effect on students' learning process. How to improve students' intrinsic motivation is also a hot topic for teachers. Traditionally, creating a supportive learning environment and using creative teaching pedagogies are two significant ways to encourage intrinsic motivation (Valerio, 2012)[8]. However, in online learning and teaching context, some strategies which are used in traditional face to face class, may now be invalid. For example, for a traditional class, students can engage in a real experience to collect data and observe directly; students can also dress up as a cartoon character when they are learning-related topics. However, now, due to the online learning mode, this kind of practice cannot work.

For the context this essay stressed in, twenty-one English majors in a Chinese university attend their compulsory course totally online. Like how MSc Tesol students in University of Edinburgh have their lectures, these students have their lectures only in pre-recorded version, which means there are few opportunities to interact with their teachers and classmates. Also, because of the asynchronous class mode, students lack opportunities to produce or use the language.

Furthermore, the learning content itself is also of low interest for the student. For the course Chinese to English Translation, teachers usually ask students to memorise some formulaic translation of traditional Chinese adage. Doing this is like learning English grammar, which is also a "boring" for students.

2.2. Students' Self-Regulation Can be Weakened

Successful learners have strong self-regulation skills. The skill helps them consciously direct, sustain, and shift their attention when necessary, and help them monitor their thoughts, behaviour and emotions. According to Meece and Prinrich (2014, p.158), "self-regulation is the process whereby students activate and sustain cognitions, behaviours, and effects that are systematically oriented toward the attainment of their goals." [9]However, in the online learning process, students' sense of self-regulation can be weakened.

According to Hartnett, George, and Dron (2010, p.23), "(although) external regulation is the type of extrinsic motivation, (it) most often contrasted with intrinsic motivation, where individuals are responsive to threats of punishment or the offer of rewards and tend to be compliant as a result." [10]Because the teacher's external regulation is missing in online courses, students who have

difficulties developing their self-regulation may find it more difficult without teachers' support. Meanwhile, students in China usually take an online course in their home, in which the atmosphere is not suitable for studying. Students learning at home are facing several distractions. Furthermore, because online learning heavily relies on the Internet, website congestion may negatively influence students' self-regulation because other things disrupt their learning plan.

In this context, students have a translation course all over the nation by watching the pre-recorded video. When doing so, teachers are unable to monitor the class. Thus, students who are difficult with self-regulation now have no external regulations. Their sense of self-regulation is reduced for other students because of the atmosphere at home and some potential technical problems. According to Cho and Shen (2012), intrinsic motivation influence students' self-regulation positively [11]. Additionally, in the research by Bennett and Monds in 2008, it suggests that "intrinsic motivation can play a key role in online student success. (p. 1)"[12] Thus, in order to reduce the negative impact of reduced self-regulation, it is important to stimulate students' intrinsic motivation.

3. Negative Impact on Language Learning and Using

Under the influence of lack of intrinsic motivation and reduced self-regulation, students' language learning and use are also impeded. When students handle tasks that are not accounted into their final marks, the external rewards are of weak reinforcement. For example, some students may skip the prereading and post-reading if they do not check it. So, low intrinsic motivation may impede students' language production. In other words, they say only when they have to. Besides, according to Dumford and Miller (2018), online courses provide more opportunities for students to cheat in the assessment, damaging students' learning process [13].

4. Measures to Improve Students' Intrinsic Motivation in Online Class

4.1. Presenting Teacher's Enthusiasm

According to the research by Patrick, Hisley and Kempler in 2000, students' intrinsic motivation has close relation with teacher's enthusiasm[14]. And according to Collins (1978) there are six indicators of teachers' enthusiasm: (1) Vocal delivery with variation in pace, volume, and intonation; (2) Eyes that open wide and "light up"; (3) Demonstrative gesturing; (4) Frequent large body movements; (5) Facial expression of emotion; and (6) A high level of overall energy and vitality[15].

Consequently, for online class, in order to improve students' intrinsic motivation, teachers can make a video instead of providing students a radio. Then, when recording the lecture, teachers can use energetic tone, "exaggerative facial expression", as well as body language. In this context, it would be better if teacher introduce translation theories in a more enthusiastic style. For example, when introducing some "boring" translation philosophy, teachers are supposed not to just simply read what have shown in the PowerPoint or textbook, instead, teachers can do in a more active way.

4.2. Providing More Interaction Opportunities

Online learning and teaching may have fewer opportunities for interaction, especially when the class is asynchronous or pre-recorded. However, technology can provide more ways for interaction. To begin with, it would be better if the course is delivered synchronously. It can provide students with effective and instant feedback. If synchronous lesson is not possible for some reasons, there are also some ways to make the online course more interactive.

There are no tutorial or workshop in Chinese undergraduate programs. Lectures contribute to all the teaching time for them. The main reason is that the large number of students make small group discussion difficult. However, in this context, there are only twenty-one students in the class, so that workshop or tutorial can be accessible. So, for the course Chinese to English Translation, teachers can add one or two online workshop sections for tutorial, adding more time for students' learning. Except providing more opportunities for interactions between students and teachers, online workshop can also provide more time for students to interact with each other. During the online workshop, students can work with each other, and build a learning community which has positive impact on the development of students' intrinsic motivation.

4.3. Developing Subject-Related Interest in Classroom

According to Bergin (1999), although improving the interest of class may have no relation with students' learning, it can promote students' intrinsic motivation in some extent, thus it can enhance the process of learning[16]. Similarly, in a Blog which can be taken as a "self-ethnography", the author shared some real experience of the language communication. Below is part of her Blog:

Q2: What factors would help / encourage your production of the target language in interactions?

From my own experience, I think the topic or theme of communication or interactive activities should be carefully selected. When I was taking my first IELTS speaking test, I picked up the subject which I was interested in and familiar with. I felt comfortable, and I wanted to express. Just about one month later, I took another IELTS test, the speaking issue I picked this time is strange and new to me. Thus, I performed poorly. Also made some simple mistakes due to the lack of confidence. So, I think, when we are organising an interactive class, and aiming to motivate students' engagement, the topic we select should be connected to students' context, their real life, and meets their interest.

Instead of the familiar and interesting topic, there are also some other triggers. For example, feedback from teachers can also motivate interaction. When the class, unfortunately, goes into an "awkward silence" stage, a hint can be helpful to break it. It can make a task easier for students and provide opportunities for them to create or product.

This Blog shows that, choosing interesting topics or theme for communicative interaction plays as a trigger for students to produce the target language. Consequently, in order to enhance students' intrinsic motivation, increasing the subject-related interest is an effective way.

Although, as what mentioned before, some traditional ways of improving interest cannot work now, teachers can do other alternative activities online. According to Bergin, "hands-on" activities can attract people's interest effectively, in which students engage in the classroom and learning process in a physical way. For online course, teachers can make pre-class tasks before the lecture so that students can firstly engage in a "hands-one" activity by themselves.

Secondly, media can also be involved in the classroom. Researches by Wilson (2000)[17], and Cakir and Ismail (2006) have indicated that in a foreign language class, the use of pictures, music and videos can improve students' comprehension and interpretations[18]. These materials can be a visualization for implicit language. In addition, these vivid triggers can create a situational environment for students, which can also stimulate their intrinsic interest, because this new form of input is quite different from the traditional inputs, for example, textbooks.

For the context we discussed, teachers can show students movies of some classic literature. For example, when teaching the translation of *Gone with the Wind*, the movie based on the novel can be presented for better understanding of the novel as well as enhance students' intrinsic motivation. Besides, how to interpret the same words in different dialogues is difficult but important for translation training, so teachers can also provide some segments of TV shows or situation comedies

to directly show the nuance of language to students. Providing media materials would be more convenient in online course, because teachers can simply post the links to students, and students can also simply pause the lecture to see the video without arranging another time.

5. Conclusion

This essay discusses the concept: motivation, especially the intrinsic motivation of learners, and aims to determine the challenges and measures in an online course in China during the pandemic.

Due to the Covid-19, online teaching and learning have become the prevalent form of education. Besides, the rapid development of Internet and technology contributes to the adopting of online learning. Thus, study the impact of online learning is of great importance.

For motivation, this essay believes that students' intrinsic motivation would be negatively influenced because the traditional strategies for improving intrinsic motivation are valid. For example, students in the online course lack interaction with teachers and their peers, which will influence students' learning and production process. Meanwhile, weakened self-regulation also calls for improvement of students' intrinsic motivation.

In order to stimulate intrinsic motivation in the online learning context, this essay proposed some measures: (1) Presenting teachers' enthusiasm; (2) Providing more interaction opportunities, for example, imported workshop into Chinese class; (3) Developing subject-related interest in the classroom, for example, a. Pre-lecture "hands-on" tasks, b. Utilising videos and pictures.

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