

UDC 37

DOI: 10.17748/2075-9908-2016-8-2/1-109-113

DOHNAL Josef,
Masaryk University,
Brno, Czech Republic,
University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius,
Brno, Slovak Republic
josef-dohnal@volny.cz

DOHNAL Josef,
Университет имени Масарика,
г. Брно, Чешская Республика,
Университет имени св. Кирилла и Мефодия,
г. Брно, Чешская Республика
josef-dohnal@volny.cz

STUDENTS' MOTIVATION AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL (AN ESSAY BASED ON EXPERIENCE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING)

МОТИВАЦИЯ УНИВЕРСИТЕТСКИХ СТУДЕНТОВ (ЭССЕ, ОСНОВАННОЕ НА ОПЫТЕ ОБУЧЕНИЯ ИНОСТРАННЫМ ЯЗЫКАМ)

The essay is based on the personal experience of the author. The theme of motivation of university students is explored on the example of Czech universities. The important role of motivation in the teaching/learning process is stressed and a decline of students' motivation to get excellent results is stated. The author speaks about three factors which play in this process a decisive role. Factor No. 1: The students do not believe that the knowledge is the main precondition for a successful career. Secondly it is the system "student-is-client" which transfers the responsibility for the results of the teaching/learning process to the teacher who turns into provider. Finally, it is the too high number of universities which are pressed to compete in collecting money by raising the number of students as high as possible. This fact changes the position of students in the system substantially, too. A role play also ceaseless "innovative" changes and various projects going on all the time and bringing some times rather disturbances than an improvement of the system. All these factors contribute to a decline of motivation on both sides – teachers and students begin to mistrust each other to a certain extent, and the results of the teaching/learning process get worse.

Эссе, основанное на личном опыте автора, касается вопроса мотивации студентов университетов на примере Чешской Республики. Подчеркивается основополагающая роль мотивации студентов в учебном процессе и факт, что мотивация студентов добиваться отличных результатов падает. Автор пытается дать характеристику трем факторам, которые, по его мнению, играют в этом процессе важную роль. Во-первых, это факт, что студенты не считают знания основной предпосылкой для успешной карьеры. Во-вторых, это внедрение убеждения, что студент = заказчик, и с ним связанной тенденции переносить ответственность за результаты процесса обучения больше на преподавателя, который становится «поставщиком». В-третьих, это постоянное слишком большое количество университетов и вузов, которые по экономическим соображениям вступают в «гонку за средствами», то есть пытаются привлечь по возможности больше студентов, понимающих, что это меняет их положение в системе. Свою роль играют и постоянные изменения, связанные с тенденцией работать все время над «инновационными проектами», которые иногда вместо систематической работы вносят в процесс обучения скорее нарушения. Результатом является падение мотивации и преподавателей, и студентов и связанная с ними определенная мера недоверия обеих сторон и ухудшение результатов процесса обучения.

Keywords: motivation, stimulation, teaching/learning process, foreign languages, knowledge, precondition for a successful career, system "student-is-client", number of universities

Ключевые слова: мотивация, стимуляция, процесс обучения иностранным языкам, знания, предпосылки успешной карьеры, система «студент = заказчик», количество университетов.

Motivation is the real basis of any self-imposed activity the human being does. Motivation means that the individual invests his/her own resources, i.e. energy, time, knowledge, talent, ... so as to achieve a (desired) goal.

There is no doubt – motivation is a key precondition for an effective teaching/learning process concerning all the subjects taught in the schools and universities. If one speaks with the teachers, motivation is also one of the most frequent themes of their conversations and complaints. What is the reason of it? The teachers rely on the high motivation of the students – they believe that the students are keen to learn as much as possible – and they are disappointed by the reality because of lack of motivation which show their students in day-by-day teaching/learning activities. On the other hand, the students are not satisfied with the ability of teachers to teach them – they complain that the teachers are not able to transfer the necessary knowledge and skills to them. What is the result? Both sides of the process are unhappy and feel that the other side does not understand the needs of them.

If the key precondition for the desired effective teaching/learning does not function then it is necessary to look into the complex process, to organize relevant research, to try to understand the reasons of misunderstanding between the teachers and the students. What a pity – there is quite a lack of such a relevant analyses but at our disposal is a lot of general essays bringing only some common and to all known information that motivation is needed. Let us also try to explain our (incomplete) point of view based on a more than 30 years long praxis of teaching foreign languages at university level.

For a closer look at the question of "delivering" motivation into the teaching/learning process it is essential to understand the difference between motivation and stimulation. Motivation is an inner phenomenon based on motives, which can be understood as impulses urging the respective person to

struggle, to effort, urging the bearer of the motives to energise oneself so as to achieve the motives defined/expressed as goals or needs. Thus motivation – having inner roots – cannot be “delivered” from outside, by another person. We can say that the responsibility for the motivation lies in the respective person oneself (sometimes it is called intrinsic motivation). The others can stimulate – this means they can “deliver” impulses, which may induce motivation (some sources call it “extrinsic motivation”).

Any person is in any moment of his/her life in touch with the complex outside environment being a part of the whole dissipative structure including all the parts of it – people, animals, nature, technology, politics, economy, culture, ... so all the processes, which have any direct or indirect impact on one's life. These elements influence one's motivation by so called stimulation. The stimulation awakes the motives in one's mind (either unconscious or conscious). If the motive is strong enough, that means if the respective person assesses the particular motive as enough necessary or enough attractive, the motivation “appears” bringing an increase in energy which the person is willing to spend on the way of reaching the motivating goal. This is only the very beginning of a real activity – the will (influencing the quantum of energy given to the particular motive) has to be strong enough so as to bring the behaviour of the person to a chain of activities targeted on the desired achievement. On this way the energy is not “secured” for the chain of activities – the motive can lose its attractiveness for the individual, some other motives stronger as the earlier one may appear, some insurmountable barriers may prevent the person from reaching the goal, the time or any other resource may be supposed inadequate – quite a lot of other influences may cause that the energy “dries out”.

That implies that all these three factors – motivation, stimulation and factors influencing both of them should be taken into account when speaking about the process of teaching/learning any subject taught in the contemporary schools and universities, e.g. foreign languages. If only one or two of them are considered weak the result is not adequate and may not work in the practice. It seems that the difference between the two notions – motivation and stimulation – are not clearly defined and understood during the last two decades. Speaking about “motivation” means mostly – at least in the Czech milieu – to deliver some reflections on stimulation; very often we read about the motivation the teacher has/shall to transfer to his/her students; the teacher is the motivator, it is his/her duty to motivate others. It is forgotten that the teacher (as an outside person) can students only stimulate, but not motivate, that it is not a direct and short way from stimulation to motivation (which is an intrinsic factor).

Let us concern with the university students' motivation to learn. What are as a matter of fact their motives which brought them to the university? Is this a diploma which shall be an evidence of their ability to pass a chain of exams at a university during the rest of their life? Is this a sum of theoretical knowledge and the ability to transform them into practical skills in their occupation? Is this a sort of privileged status connected with a university degree? Is this a chance to earn more money in their post-university life? One may consider many more motives which can move the students to come to a university and to study there. Not every time may be the knowledge and the skills the main resource of the motivation of these students. On the other hand – the teacher's task is to show and bring the knowledge and the skills to the students – neither a diploma, nor money, ... So the teacher takes into account only a part of the potential motives of the students – and only this part becomes (mostly) the content of the package of his stimulation instruments. The teacher could not be responsible for the other goals which the student wants to achieve. When the knowledge and the skills are not a goal but only a means how to reach another goal how the teacher can know about it and how he/she shall use it in his/her stimulation? Moreover if the student becomes aware of the fact, that not only the knowledge and the skills taught at the university but another factors (connections, favouritism, loyalty, stroke of luck, ...) may lead to the same goal why should he/she trust the teacher and why should he/she accept his stimulation impulses and react positively on them? It means that even if the teacher fulfils his obligation and stimulates his/her students the results of his/her activity depend on the inner reaction of the student himself/herself. To differentiate between various goals of the students and to react in the stimulation and in the teaching activities (which should be adapted to the goals) so that any student feels activated in his/her motives is quite impossible for the teacher. Thus student's own will and activity are necessary so as to respond to the teacher's stimulation.

Here we come to the crucial point of our reflection: it is the question which side is more responsible for the results of the teaching process? Is it the teacher or the student? Again it is not an easy question but the answer is even more difficult. According to our conviction it is necessary to differentiate: the teacher who shall act using a plan of studies, i.e. fulfil his/her tasks in preparing lectures and seminars in that way that the students come into particular system, information, skills and concepts offers all these to the students pointing out what is compulsory (subject of exams) and what not. Student's obligation is to accept this compulsory sum of information, to prepare for the exams and according to his/her motivation to choose other impulses hidden in the teacher's influence. Students also

have the choice to ask the teacher to add some more information, if they show own interest in it. Thus the responsibility is divided – both sides of the teaching/learning process are responsible for the results. It seems to be self-evident in such an extent that it could be taken as superfluous to speak about it.

The problem is that the contemporary education system does not take the above mentioned facts into account sufficiently. More and more often we meet the conviction that the student is a customer, the teacher a provider in the teaching/learning process. Such an attitude implies the idea that it is the teacher who shall fulfil the needs of the student. Student is the person who consumes, uses the delivered goods although the goods have an abstract character. This basic idea of the provider-customer relationship brings quite a lot of other consequences. The most part of the responsibility for the results of the teaching/learning process bears the teacher in such a concept. He/she is not only responsible for the organisation of the teaching/learning process, for the methods used, for choosing the textbooks and teaching aids, but also for the results – for the “delivered” knowledge and skills. Therefore innovations of the teaching methods, continuous re-qualification of all teachers, always new (“innovative”, “upgrading”, ...) projects are required steadily, responsibility for which lies on teachers. This is typical for all the subjects – and the following abundance of various projects in which it is necessary to involve the students, too, results in the feeling of instability on the one hand, and in the feeling of incompetence of teachers who have to improve their (unsatisfactory?) teaching skills on the other hand. The consequence is that students resist to being involved in too much project activities which as the matter of fact took their attention away from the systematic procedures of the teaching/learning process and, which is more problematic, they mistrust their teachers who are supposed under qualified. As customers students tend to regard the complex teaching/learning process as unsatisfactory.

Some other factors contribute to the mistrust. Students hear quite often that the teaching/learning process has to be amusing – they have the right to enjoy it. They are the customers – so they should be in a position in which they have the right to decide whether the teacher prepares the classes amusing enough or not. The teacher as provider is obliged to do his/her best for reaching this goal. If the teaching/learning process includes according the students’ view too much (what is “too much”?) stronger discipline, too much information, too much exercises, too much new words, too much grammar etc. they do not enjoy it. Even if such a process leads to the planned results the opinion of the students is that the teaching/learning process is unsatisfactory. The teacher is guilty, because he/she uses inappropriate methods, he/she does not entertain – students do not enjoy the classes.

Sometimes the students are right – the teacher had not spoken with them about the goals, about the possible methods and their advantages, about the conditions in the framework of which the goals shall be reached. We regard such conversation as necessary at the very beginning of the teaching/learning process so as to clearly define how the process will be organised and why just in that way. Then it is necessary to prove whether the goals are really reached during the process. The both sides shall be aware of the results – if they are satisfactory, the motivation may arise.

Another factor is the specific characteristic of foreign languages teaching/learning process is that it should be really continuous – students should train the skills connected with the foreign language every day. That means that they have to do their homework not because of their teacher but because of themselves. If they do not train every day, the results (=the skills) are poor. The customer-provider philosophy contradicts to this practice – the customer shall consume what the provider delivers; here the customer becomes a self-providing being. He/she uses a tool (information, procedure, shown skill, ...) training himself/herself. Similar to any tool – if it is not used, it cannot bring the results. If the results (i.e. knowledge or skills in a foreign language) do not appear, the teacher is mostly blamed because “he/she did not teach me to know/to do it”. Without results does not come motivation.

Again, at the very beginning must be clearly said what is the role of the teacher and what is the role of the student who has to work hardly even at home. It is not an easy task – in the last 2-3 years we are confronted with the conviction that as few homework as possible shall be imposed on the students. Why? Firstly, students have the right to have enough leisure time – and the home work “steals” it from them. Secondly, the homework accentuates the social differences between the students: these ones from “less social stimulating” families are disadvantaged in comparison to those ones whose parents help them to work at home or at least stress the use of homework and prepare suitable conditions for it. The tendency to eliminate homework brings a risk of quite poor skills – a reason for lower motivation: it is mostly so that the better the results the higher the motivation.

The third reason of motivation problems is the administrative one. According to the European Union policy the percentage of university graduates shall reach utmost 40 % of the population. The intention is that the higher percentage of university graduates the higher the economic potential of the

respective country that means of the E.U. taken as a whole. We can see a run like struggle to reach this goal. The authorities responsible for education tend to evaluate the whole education system and the respective university according to the percentage of successful students – the higher number of successful students, the better the university. There are not given obligatory criteria which the student has to fulfil at any university of the respective type. This results in a mass-chase on university degrees (but not on knowledge and skills).

This mass-chase begins at the secondary schools already. In Czech Republic the capacity of secondary schools overcomes the number of children in a year of birth by about 1,3 to 1,5. What are the consequences? The schools fight for students promising better conditions for studies, arguing with the percentage of successful students. To reach the suitable percentage, the requirements are lowered quite often. Students seeing that not their efforts but the efforts of teachers are important for passing lose any reason for being active, struggling for more knowledge, trying to overcome the results of others. No competition on one side, the necessity to lower the requirements so as to make it possible for poor students to pass on the other side – all these factors have a bad impact on motivation: students have not to make efforts because the teachers have to secure good results. The lower number of students in the school the lower the requirements. After four years in such a milieu there remains very little motivation for active (motivated) attitude toward the teaching/learning process on the students' side.

Bringing the same lax attitude towards study efforts from secondary schools to universities is quite easy. Even the number of universities grew rapidly in the past two decades. In some of them occurs the same as in the secondary schools – the universities need students at any cost and lower the requirements. The university can change it hardly being sometimes in the same position as a secondary school; if there are not enough students, there the university does not exist more. It is really very hard for the teacher to arouse real motivation in the situation in which the student knows very well that the job of the teacher depends on him/her. He/she is one of the main sources for the teacher's salary – the teacher has to deliver him/her his/her degree, because his/her teacher is funded for that. Only the strongest universities can afford to stand by a high level of knowledge/skills required.

No doubt – such a situation influences the motivation of the students; they are not pressed to work hardly enough, they know that the university needs them and that the path to a degree is an easy one. And it is the teacher who becomes a prisoner of the economic criteria in this way and who is put in a complicated position. If he/she really wants to work with the students, he/she uses a lot of his/her time for the lectures and educational work (consultations, tutorials, textbooks, ...). But then he/she is not able to take part in international exchange programmes, him/her lacks time for writing and publishing intensively, for preparing and fulfilling various programmes innovating already twice innovated programmes of study. Many of the teachers feel overworked, robbed of respect and of their chance to educate students in an exacting way thus demotivated. A danger of a circle comes into existence – in which extend could demotivated teachers motivate students?

It seems one of the ways to a higher level of students' motivation includes higher motivation of the teaching staff. If the teachers become the real organisers of the teaching process, if they are not pressed by the economic and administrative criteria to activities which do not contribute to a higher level of teaching/learning process they will feel more free to search for teaching methods with more respect to students' needs and talents which could arise their stimulation of the students' motivation to work hardly, to get the results anticipated in the study programmes and to exclude those who do not copy with the requirements of the study programmes from the teaching/learning process. In that way the saying of the "teacher of nations" Jan Ámos Komenský could be taken as a basis of the touch of both sides of the teaching/learning process: Come here, child, and learn how to be wise.

REFERENCES

1. Kroupová M.; Budíková M. Analýza neúspěšnosti bakalářského studia matematiky. In: 14th International Conference on Applied Mathematics APLIMAT, 2015 February 3-5, 2015, Bratislava, материалы международ. конф. Bratislava: Slovenská technická univerzita 2015, с. 525-532.
2. Čihounková J.; Šustrová M. Analýza obtíží při průchodu studiem a její konsekvence ve vysokoškolském poradenství. In: Vysokoškolské poradenství versus vysokoškolská pedagogika. сб. науч. тр. Praha: ČZU v Praze 2009. с. 120-125.
3. Phillips Spurling T. A Study of Motivation and Self-Efficacy in University Students <http://www.campbellsville.edu/a-study-of-motivation-and-self-efficacy-in-university-students> Motivation and Goals. <https://student.unsw.edu.au/motivation-and-goals>. Дата обращения 14. 01. 2016.
4. Motivation: Lost Or Just Mislaced? <http://www.brown.edu/campus-life/support/counseling-and-psychological-services/motivation-lost-or-just-mislaced>. Дата обращения 14. 01. 2016.

5. *Afzal H.; Ali I.; Khan M. A.; Hamid K.* A Study of University Students' Motivation and Its Relationship with Their Academic Performance; статья в науч. журнале. International Journal of Business and Management Vol 5, No 4 (2010), <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ijbm/article/view/5691/4612>. Дата обращения 14. 01. 2016.
6. *Florian H.; Müller J. L.* Conditions of university students' motivation and study interest <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00003572.htm>. Дата обращения 14. 01. 2016.
7. *Blašková M.; Blaško R.* Motivation Of University Teachers And Its Connections Human Resources Management & Ergonomics Volume VII 2/2013; статья в науч. журнале. http://frcatel.fri.uniza.sk/hrme/files/2013/2013_2_01.pdf. Дата обращения 14. 01. 2016.

Information about the author

Dohnal Josef, Candidate of Philological Sciences, PhD, Associate Professor, Institute of Slavic Studies, Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic, Associate Professor, Department of Russian Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Brno, Slovak Republic
josef-dohnal@volny.cz

Информация об авторе

Dohnal Josef , кандидат филологических наук, доктор философии, доцент философского факультета, Институт славистики, Университет им. Масарика, г. Брно, Чешская Республика; доцент кафедры русистики философского факультета, Университет им. св. Кирилла и Мефодия, г Брно, Чешская Республика

josef-dohnal@volny.cz

Received: 14th January 2016

Получена: 14 января 2016

For article citation: Dohnal J. Students' motivation at the university level (an essay based on experience of foreign language teaching). Krasnodar. Istoricheskaya i sotsial'no-obrazovatel'naya mysl'= Historical and Social Educational Ideas. 2016. Tom 8. № 2. Vol. 1. Pp. 109-113.
doi: 10.17748/2075-9908-2016-8-2/1-109-113.
[en]

Для цитирования статьи: Dohnal J. Students' motivation at the university level (an essay based on experience of foreign language teaching). Krasnodar. Istoricheskaya i sotsial'no-obrazovatel'naya mysl'= Historical and Social Educational Ideas. 2016. Tom 8. № 2. Vol. 1. Pp. 109-113.
doi: 10.17748/2075-9908-2016-8-2/1-109-113.
[en]