Sharing Learning Targets and Assessment Criteria with Students as Motivating Factors in Second Language Acquisition

Anita Muho and Klodiana Leka

ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify the importance of sharing the learning targets and assessment criteria with students to foster their motivation. Firstly, we have chosen to deal with learning targets and assessment criteria as concepts, highlighting their importance in the learning and assessment process. The literature review will help us to identify the theoretical background of this study, which will identify the relevant variables of learning targets, assessment criteria, and motivation to learn. Secondly, the methodology which consists in quantitative methods of research will try to answer the research questions of this study: 1) How does sharing the learning targets with students influence their motivation to learn? 2) How does sharing the assessment criteria with students influence their motivation to learn? 3) How to foster student motivation to learn? Finally, the last part will give recommendations regarding the results of this study, which will help second language teachers in their teaching process.

Keywords: Assessment Criteria, Sharing Targets, Student Motivation

I. INTRODUCTION

Fostering motivation to learn is a matter of concern for teachers and researchers. In Albania, teachers face a low level of student motivation every day. Students show decreased interest and consequently learning difficulties.

This study will address sharing the learning targets and assessment criteria as factors that promote student motivation during the acquisition of a second language. Collaboration in criterion development, according to Gregory et al. (1997), aids students and teachers in achieving a common understanding of the criteria by which performance will be rated. Teachers assist students in deepening their understanding of success by incorporating them directly in the establishment of criteria.

When students understand the criteria by which their work will be evaluated, they also have it under control and are willing to be strategic self-regulators of learning, but students need to simultaneously understand the learning targets and assessment criteria to promote learning self-efficacy and self-regulation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Sharing Learning Targets with Students

Assessment is most effective when students have a clear idea of what teachers expect of them. Stiggins (2005, 2007), notes that when students have clear learning targets and good or poor performance patterns, when feedback is ongoing, they have a basis that helps them understand what they are learning, how they set goals and how they evaluate themselves. These formative assessment practices encourage students and give them a greater sense of responsibility in learning activities. Students can set their own standards or expectation of a good job (Bruce, 2001).

Teachers can help students understand learning targets by showing them samples of poor-quality work (Sadler 1989; Chappuis, 2005; Stiggins, 2008). Students benefit from samples because they help them comprehend where they need to go and why teachers give them criticism. From a goal-mastery perspective, learning targets enable students to define the targets of their work, which focus on achieving learning standards, as opposed to the performance goal, which focuses on how they are compared to other students. Identifying learning targets improves students’ intrinsic motivation, which when combined with other formative assessment practices, also supports mastery of targets. The learning process is easier when students understand what goal they are trying to achieve, the reason for achieving the goal, and the specific attributes of success (Chappuis & Stiggins, 2002).

Many teachers who have tried to develop students' self-assessment skills have found that the first and most difficult task is to enable students to think about their work in terms of targets (Black et al., 2004).

Students need to know their learning targets and success criteria to be successful. Three leading questions are proposed by Hattie and Timperley (2007):

- Where should I go?
- How are you doing?
- Where will I go next?
B. Sharing Assessment Criteria with Students

Assessment criteria are characteristics or attributes of student work that indicate the degree to which he has achieved expectation. Success criteria describe characteristics or attributes in a way that students can understand. In assessing the quality of students 'work or performance, teachers should possess a concept of appropriate quality for the task and judge the students' work in relation to this concept (Sadler, 1989).

First when students participate in the development of criteria, they better understand what is expected of them to perform the task successfully. Second, if students can use the criteria to self-assess and improve the learning process, they must clearly understand the criteria. In fact, the more they share a common understanding of the criteria with the teacher, the greater their ability to monitor and direct learning (Gregory et al., 1997).

According to Arter and Spandel (1992), defining criteria allows students to share their initial ideas and understanding of what constitutes successful performance. Continuously, teachers instruct students to explore and refine their understanding of the criteria and to continuously reflect and apply the criteria as part of their learning activities. As a result, students can distinguish quality performance, identify problems in poor performance and use criteria to change and improve performance.

Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick (2006) argue that students need to be helped to understand what the learning targets are, to understand the criteria used to evaluate their work. Thus, good practice in assessment criteria means clear assessment criteria and understandable by students. In addition, Sadler (2005) argues that clear and unchanging criteria need to be negotiated for students to understand them.

Students who have a clear picture of learning targets and criteria for success, understand quite well what they need to do to achieve these targets and criteria. Clear learning targets directly guide both teachers and students towards their specific targets. Students can only meet their targets if they work towards them, but they cannot work towards them if they do not understand the learning targets.

When students understand where they need to go, they are more likely to feel successful and achieve the goal. Students' belief that they can be successful in a task is called self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Students who have self-efficacy continue their work and face challenges (Pujares, 1996).

C. Understanding the Importance of Motivation to Learn

The term motivation comes from the root of the word motive, which means "something that motivates someone to act". Using this root, we can define motivation as something that directs and orients behavior toward a goal. Another way to express this is that motivation is a goal-directed behavior, combined with striving to work toward a goal. In a very realistic way, motivation orients students' learning, puts them in the right direction and keeps them engaged.

Williams and Burden (1997) classify motivational components into two categories: internal and external effects with various subcomponents. Motivation is a complex and multifaceted construct having both internal and external impacts.

D. Internal and External Motivation

Internal and external motivation are key conditions to better understand the psychological dimension of motivation. Definitions and their use are related to many other elements of motivation which we will address below. "Internal" means something existing within us that does not come from outside. Nolen and Nicholls (1993) defined motivation as “an internal push to engage or perform.” (Nolen & Nicholls, 1993); cited in Murphy & Alexander, 2000, p.10).

Artelt (2005) identified two forms of intrinsic motivation, which focus on the individual and action, proving that “students can study mainly because they want to gain certain knowledge, or because they are interested in a topic of special” (pp. 233-234). Deci and Ryan (1985) also argue that "intrinsic motivation will be action when action is experienced as autonomous, and the supportive context of learning and self-confidence provide the conditions for the development of intrinsic motivation” (p.29).

"External" motivation means something that comes from outside. According to Artelt (2005), external motivation refers to external learning stimuli, based on the behavioral notion of reinforcement. If students have external motivation, they engage in a certain behavior as the predicted responses satisfy their needs (primary needs) or are a modified social form to satisfy primary needs (e.g., prestige = secondary need). (p. 233).

Maehr and Stallings (1972) have studied students who perform easy or difficult tasks under the influence of internal and external motivation. They found that students who had worked under conditions of internal motivation continued to be interested in working on difficult tasks, while students who had worked under conditions of external motivation had lost interest in striving towards difficult tasks, preferring to make only the easier ones (Hughes et al., 1985).

Condry and Chambers (1978) found that students in the external motivation group were more oriented to give desired answers, while students in the internal motivation group were more inclined to use more meaningful approaches to understanding tasks.

Artelt (2005) also emphasizes the importance of external forces such as rewards or punishments. This means influencing others in the school context. For example, teachers are usually the ones who give rewards and punishments when classmates study and compare with them. Harter and Jackson (1992) confirm the importance of influence from others, especially from teachers, according to them external motivation is “orientation when the student is motivated by the desire to get high grades, to gain the approval of teachers, i.e., for meet the external requirements of the school system” (Harter & Jackson, 1992; cited in Murphy & Alexander, 2000, p.13).

Pintrich (2003) divides external motivation into four categories: (a) external, which is controlled by others or by external constraints such as rewards; (b) the influence of others, control is perceived as external as the individual seeks the approval of others; (c) identifiers, where there is more internal control and self-support of values and goals; (d) integrative, which reflects high internal control and harmony between self, values, and goals” (p.673).
Pintrich (2003) has introduced an important notion of the idea of “continuity” in terms of internal and external motivation arguing that these types of external motivation form a continuum from external control to internal control or self-confidence.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Location and Participants

This study was conducted in four high schools in Durrës, Albania and the participants were 400 students randomly selected from the four selected schools

B. Instrument for Data Collection

The method chosen for this study are quantitative methods and respectively the questionnaire, which consists of four main sections: (a) General data section, (b) sharing learning targets section, (c) criteria assessment section and (d) the section of motivation components. The sections of the targets and assessment criteria are constructed based on different theories about sharing learning targets and assessment criteria, using dichotomous questions and the Linkert scale of measurement, while the section of motivation is taken from the MSLQ motivation questionnaire, developed by Pintrich and Garcia (1991).

C. Data Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaire were processed using the statistical program SPSS 16 to answer the research questions.

How does the sharing of learning targets affect students' motivation?

The analysis of the data in relation to the relevant section items of the impact of sharing learning targets with students on their self-confidence and regulation showed that 40% of students fully agreed with the statement that knowing learning targets makes them autonomous (independent) and self-regulators of learning, 22% agreed, 18% were undecided, while 10% partially agreed, while 6% disagreed at all.

How does the assessment criteria affect student motivation?

Regarding the second research question, which coincides with the third section of the questionnaire and the motivation section, the data analysis showed that 52% of students fully agreed with the statement that familiarity with the assessment criteria makes them autonomous and self-learning regulators, 32% agreed, 10% were undecided, while 4% partially agreed, and 2% strongly disagreed.

How to boost student motivation to learn?

In terms of stimulating motivation in students, students had to answer questions about some ways of assessment that motivate them the most. Data analysis of this section showed that 40% of students thought that teacher feedback encourages them to learning, 24% felt that self-esteem encourages them, 20% felt that one other assessment encouraged them to learn more, while 10% answered that the teacher’s strategy during the oral questions exhorted them more, while 6 % answered sharing learning targets at the beginning of the lesson was a motivating factor for them.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Sharing learning targets with students engages and empowers them during the learning process. They can understand where they are and where they need to go, organize their work to achieve learning targets, choose effective strategies to achieve those targets, and evaluate and adjust what they are doing to get where they need to go.

Students who master their learning attribute their success to their decisions and their work. These factors not only increase students' ability to evaluate and regulate their learning but also increase their motivation to learn, as they consider themselves more confident and more competent.

When students understand the criteria by which their work will be evaluated, they also have it under control and are willing to be strategic self-regulators. But students need to simultaneously understand the learning targets and assessment criteria to promote self-efficacy and self-regulation. If students understand the learning targets but do not know the assessment criteria, they are more likely to be discouraged.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Teacher questions are a strategy for communicating learning targets. Strategies can be simple or elaborate, depending on the students and the content. Sometimes it is important that the teacher ask students if they have any questions about the lesson. The questions provide the teacher with information about what the students have learned.

A variation of simple questions as a strategy to communicate learning targets is the teacher describing the learning targets and a task or activity that illustrates it and then asking students to repeat what the teacher said in their own words. their words are a classic activity of understanding. Students will show that by understanding what the teacher wants them to achieve.

A slightly more complex version of this strategy is a peer-student task. The teacher divides the students into groups of two and asks them, (1) to explain in their own words what they think they will learn, (2) to argue why they think it is important, and (3) to relate the learning targets to a previous lesson topic. In the discussion with the whole class, the parties share their answers and reach a consensus on the three questions (What will you learn? Why is it important? What previous lesson is this learning target related to? The purpose of the third question is to help students see that they are building knowledge and skills based on previous knowledge.

CONFICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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