

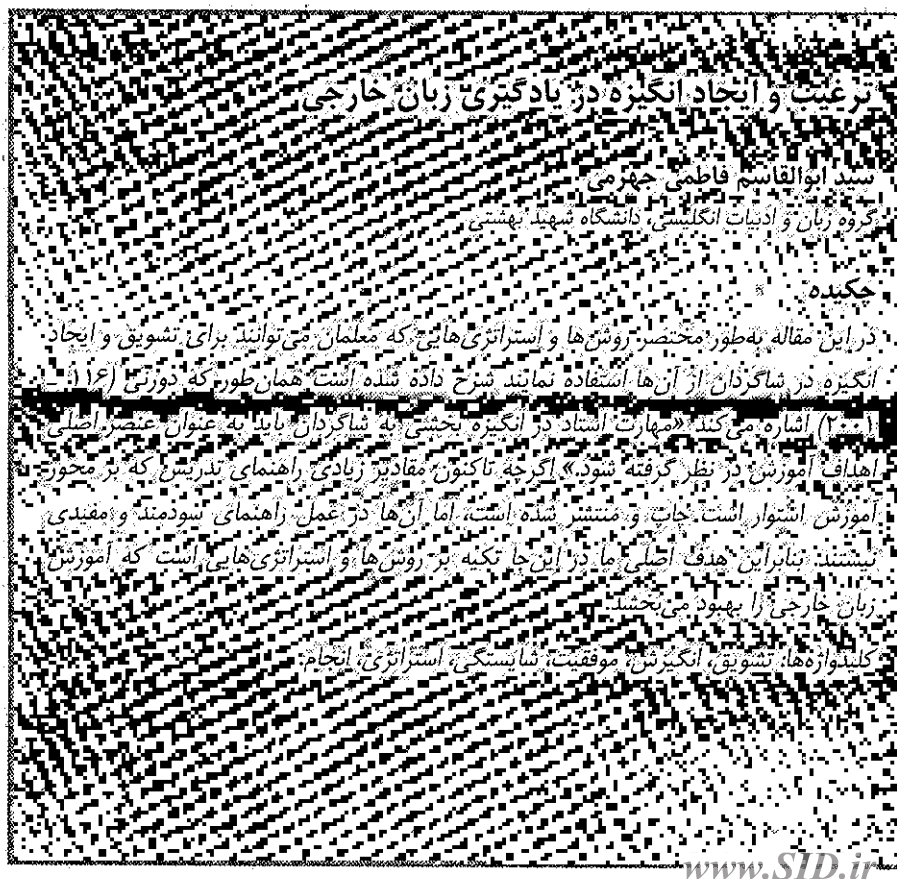
Persuasion and Motivation in Foreign Language Learning

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Abstract

In this paper I will briefly examine a variety of techniques and strategies which teachers can employ in order to persuade and motivate their students. As Dornyei (2001: 116) notes, "teacher skills in motivating learners should be seen as central to teaching effectiveness". Even though there have been a lot of education-oriented publications guidelines, they do not offer an efficient guide to practitioners. Thus, our main goal is to focus on a set of techniques and strategies to enhance foreign language learning.

Keywords: Persuasion, motivation, achievement, competence, strategy, accomplishment.



There is a strong belief that motivation is the key to success in learning a foreign or second language (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). First language acquisition seems easy and Painless, but for many, the road to acquisition of the second language means hours spent in a classroom environment learning a complex topic; and that is seldom easy. Especially for those who are trying to master material not for its own sake, but as means to another end such as conducting business in a second language, English proficiency courses can seem a burden.

Teachers and students may find themselves locked in a duel, endlessly preparing for tests, stuck in outmoded paradigms of teacher/student roles and looking for relevance in materials not suited for achieving the expected outcomes. It is not that students want to be demotivated, but they may simply want to hurry the process so they can get on with what they perceive as important, not the study of language. In cases such as this, action research can be a partial solution. By cooperatively discovering the perceptions and feelings of both students and teachers and using acknowledged positive aspects to choose methods and materials, including assessment, the quest for motivation can be a rewarding experience for all. Through a process of exploring ideas and then planning, collecting and analyzing data and reflecting on what that means for a group of students, teacher-researchers can intervene (Burns 1999). But because each situation, each combination of time, place, students and teachers can vary, there are different answers to the question of how to motivate students. Perhaps the closest answer is to have teachers who are: open and flexible enough, armed with the tools they need to find out what their students need and want, and willing and able to embrace change.

Motivating students is seen by teachers as one of the most serious sources of difficulty (Dornyei 2001) in the classroom. Student's Motivation depends on a variety of factors, among them how they perceive their own achievement (Masgoret & Gardner 2003). Another factor relates to materials and what tasks they do in and out of the classroom. Other factors include: how autonomous students feel and how important it is to be autonomous; classroom methodology, especially fun and engaging methods; students' relationship to the classroom group as well as to the society at large; how they view their teacher and power relationships with the educational institution; and their own anxiety, especially in classroom activities such as speaking and test taking.

Although motivation is a difficult construct to isolate from other factors, Masgoret and Gardner (2003: 205) said that "motivation is more highly related to second language achievement" than other factors. The more the student sees him or herself as doing well, the more he or she wants to do even better.

Perceptions of failure demotivate. Tasks and materials are motivating factors for demotivated students in order for them to see their progress and so presenting quality activities can "make an enormous difference in students' attitudes toward learning" (Dornyei 2003: 14).

Language learning is not an easy task. Learners do not only reflect on their learning in terms of the language input to which they are exposed, or the optimal strategies they need in order to achieve the goals they set. Rather, the success of a learning activity is, to some extent, contingent upon learners' stance towards the world and the learning activity in particular, their sense of self, and their desire to learn. As Candy (1991: 295 – 296) says, 'the *how* and the *what* of learning are intimately interwoven. The overall approach a learner adopts will significantly influence the shape of his or her learning outcomes. In other words, language learning as well as learning, in general, has also an affective component. "Meeting and interiorising the grammar of a foreign language is not simply an intelligent, cognitive act. It is a highly affective one too" (Rinvolucri 1984 – 5; cited in James & Garrett 1991: 13). Gardner and Macintyre (1993: 1, Cited in Graham 1997: 92) define "affective variables" as the "emotionally relevant characteristics of the individual that influence how she/he will respond to any situation". Other scholars, such as Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) attach less importance to learners' emotions, claiming that "social and psychological factors" give a more suitable description for students' reactions to the learning process. Amongst the social and affective variables at work, self-esteem and desire to learn are deemed to be the most crucial factors "in the learner's ability to overcome occasional setback or minor mistakes in the process of learning a second or foreign language" (Tarone & Yule 1989: 139). In this light, it is necessary to shed some light on learner attitudes and motivation.

Wenden (1998: 52) defines attitudes as 'learned motivations, valued beliefs, evaluations, what one believes is acceptable, or responses oriented towards approaching or avoiding'. For her, two kinds of attitudes are crucial: attitudes learners hold about their role in the learning process, and their capability as learners (ibid: 53). In a sense, attitudes are a form of metacognitive knowledge. At any rate, 'learner beliefs about their role and capability as learners will be shaped and maintained by other beliefs they hold about themselves as learners' (ibid: 54). For example, if learners believe that certain personality types cannot learn a foreign language and they believe that they are that type of person, then they will think that they are fighting a "losing battle," as far as learning the foreign language is concerned. Furthermore, if learners labour under the misconception that learning is

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successful only within the context of the "traditional classroom," where the teacher directs, instructs, and manages the learning activity, and students must follow in the teacher's footsteps, they are likely to be impervious or resistant to learner-centred strategies aiming at autonomy, and success is likely to be undermined.

Although the term 'motivation' is frequently used in educational contexts, there is little agreement among experts as to its exact meaning. What most scholars seem to agree on, though, is that motivation is 'one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second or foreign language (L2) learning. Motivation provides the primary impetus to initiate learning the L2 and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process' (Dornyei 1998: 117).

Closely related to attitudes and motivation is the concept of self-esteem, that is, the evaluation the learner makes of herself with regard to the target language or learning in general. Self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes that the individual holds towards himself. If the learner has a robust sense of self, his relationship to himself as a learner is unlikely to be marred by any negative assessments by the teacher. Conversely, a lack of self-esteem is likely to lead to negative attitudes towards his capability as a learner, and to 'a deterioration in cognitive performance', thus confirming his view of himself as incapable of learning.

Inasmuch as the success of learning and the extent to which learners tap into their potential resources in order to overcome difficulties and achieve autonomy are determined by such factors as learners' motivation, their desire to learn, and the beliefs they hold about themselves as learners and learning per se, it is manifest that changing some negative beliefs and attitudes is bound to facilitate learning. Attitude change is assumed to be brought about through exposure to a persuasive communication between the teacher and the learners.

A persuasive communication is a discussion presenting information and arguments to change a learner's evaluation of a topic, situation, task, and so on. These arguments could be either explicit or implicit, especially when the topic is deemed of importance. If, for instance, a deeply ingrained fear or belief precludes the learner from engaging in the learning process, persuasive communication purports to help bring these facts to light and identify the causes that underlie them. It should be noted, though, that no arguments to influence students' views are given. Rather, the communication comprises facts that show what learners can do to attain autonomy and that learners who do so are successful (see wenden 1998:

126). This approach is based on the assumption that when learners are faced with convincing information about a situation, 'they can be led to re-examine existing evaluations they hold about it and revise or change them completely' (ibid: 127).

Beliefs are also a central construct in every discipline that deals with human behavior and learning. In one sense, beliefs- or personal "myths" about learning – do not differ from the majority of myths about the human race, nor do they differ from those of the majority of psychologists and educators. Bruner, Piaget, Rogers and Socrates, hold myths about learning, and the controversy about the relative merits of their myths has hidden the more interesting congruence that each student constructs a viable myth of their own (Harri-Augstein 1985).

In the classroom context, the perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and metacognitive knowledge that students bring with them to the learning situation have been recognized as a significant contributory factor in the learning process and ultimate success. For example, second or foreign language students may hold strong beliefs about the nature of the language under study, its difficulty, the process of its acquisition, the success of certain learning strategies, the existence of aptitude, their own expectations about achievement and teaching methodologies. Identification of these beliefs and reflection on their potential impact on language learning and teaching in general, as well as in more specific areas such as the learners' expectations and strategies used, can inform future syllabus design and teacher practice in the course. Pedagogy has the capacity to provide the opportunities and conditions within which these learner contributions are found to have a positive effect upon learning and may be more fully engaged (Breen 2001).

In cognitive psychology, learner beliefs about the nature of knowledge and learning, or epistemological beliefs, have been investigated with the idea that they are part of the underlying mechanisms of metacognition from the building blocks of epistemology (Goldman 1968), and are a driving force in intellectual performance. Psychologists have begun to acknowledge the pervasive influence of personal and social epistemologies on academic learning, thinking, reasoning, and problem solving.

From this perspective, beliefs about language learning are viewed as a component of metacognitive knowledge, which include all that individuals understand about themselves as learners and thinkers, including their goals and

needs. Flavell (1979, 1981) emphasizes the study of meta-cognitive knowledge in second language learning and focuses on the person. He calls this "person knowledge". Person knowledge is knowledge learners have acquired about how cognitive and affective factors such as learner aptitude, personality, and motivation may influence learning. In addition, it includes specific knowledge about how the above factors apply in their experience. For example, is it the learners' belief that they do, or do not, have an aptitude for learning another language or, that their particular type of personality will inhibit or facilitate language.

To expand an understanding of the function of metacognitive knowledge in language learning, Goh (1997) investigated forty ESL learners' metacognitive awareness about listening. She accessed to this knowledge by asking learners to keep a 'listening diary' where they described the way they listen, react to, and perceive the information. In her study, Goh applied in her study: person knowledge, task knowledge and strategic knowledge. She also developed subcategories for each of these three main groups. The study revealed that the learners had a high degree of metacognitive awareness and were conscious of their learning strategies in listening. The students were able to both observe their cognitive processes as well as articulate their beliefs about learning to listen in English. One of the strengths of this research is that learners become aware of their learning styles, strategies and beliefs that could lead to improve their own learning processes in other contexts.

Ehrman and Oxford (1990) cited 9 major style dimensions relevant to L2 learning, although many more style aspects might also prove to be influential.

This paper discusses four dimensions of learning style that are likely to be among those most strongly associated with L2 learning: sensory preferences, personality types, desired degree of generality, and biological differences.

Learning styles are not dichotomous (black or, white, present or absent). Learning styles generally operate on a continuum or on multiple, interesting, continua. For example a person might be more extroverted than introverted, or more closure-oriented than open, or equally visual and auditory but with lesser kinesthetic and tactile involvement.

Sensory preferences can be broken down into four main areas: visual, auditory, kinesthetic (movement oriented), and tactile (touch oriented). Sensory preferences refer to the physical, perceptual learning channels with which the student is the most comfortable. Visual students like to read and

obtain a great deal from visual stimulation. For them, lectures, conversations, and oral directions without any visual backup can be very confusing. In contrast, auditory students are comfortable without any visual input and therefore enjoy and profit from unembellished lectures, conversations, and oral directions. They are excited by classroom interactions in role-plays and similar activities. They sometimes, however have difficulty with written work. Kinesthetic and tactile students like lots of movement and enjoy working with tangible objects and collages. Sitting at a desk for very long is not for them; they prefer to have frequent breaks and move around the room.

Another style aspect that is important for L2 education is that of personality type, which consists of four strands: extroverted vs. introverted, intuitive – random vs. sensing -sequential; thinking vs. feeling; closure-oriented /judging vs. open/perceiving. Personality type, (often called psychological type) is a construct based on the work of physiologists Carl Jung. Ehrman and Oxford (1989, 1990) found a number of significant relationships between personality type and L2 proficiency in native English speaking learners of foreign languages.

Extroverted vs. Introverted By definition. Extroverts gain their greatest energy from the external world. They want interaction with people and have many friendships, some deep and some not. In contrast, introverts derive their energy from their internal world, seeking solitude and tending to have just a few friendships, which are often very deep. Extroverts and introverts can learn to work together with the help of the teacher.

Intuitive-Random vs. Sensing-Sequential. Intuitive-random students think in abstract futuristic, large scale, and nonsequential ways. They like to create theories and new possibilities, often have sudden insights, and prefer to guide their own learning. In contrast, sensing-sequential learners are grounded in the here and now. They like facts rather than theories, want guidance and specific instruction from the teacher, and look for consistency. The key to teaching both intuitive-random and sensing-sequential learners is to offer variety and choice; sometimes a highly organized structure for sensing-sequential learners and at other times multiple options and enrichment activities for intuitive-random students.

Thinking vs. Feeling. Thinking learners are oriented toward the stark truth, even if it hurts some people's feelings. They want to be viewed as competent and do not tend to offer praise easily – even though they might secretly desire to be praised themselves. Sometimes they seem detached. In comparison, feeling learners value other people in every personal way. They show empathy

and compassion through words, not just behaviors, and say whatever is needed to smooth over difficult situations.

Closure-oriented/ judging vs. Open Perceiving. Closure – oriented students want to reach judgments or completion quickly and want clarity as soon as possible. These students are serious, hard working learners who like to be give written information and enjoy specific tasks with deadlines. Sometimes their desire for closure hampers the development of fluency (Ehrman and Oxford 1989). In contrast, open learners want to stay available for continuously new perceptions and are therefore sometimes called "perceiving". They take L2 learning less seriously, treating it like a game to be enjoyed rather than a set of tasks to be completed. Open learners dislike deadlines: they want to have a good time and seem to soak up L2 information by osmosis rather than hard effort. Open learners sometimes do better than closure-oriented learners in developing fluency (Ehrman and Oxford 1989), but they are at a disadvantage in a traditional classroom setting. Closure-oriented and open learners provide a good balance for each other in the L2 classroom.

L2 learners clearly need to make the most of their style preferences. However, occasionally they must also extend themselves beyond their style preferences. By providing a wide range of classroom activities that cater to different learning styles, teachers can help L2 students develop beyond the comfort zone dictated by their natural style preferences. The key is systematically offering a great variety of activities within a learner-centered, communicative approach.

L2 learning strategies are specific behaviors or thoughts processes that students use to enhance their own L2 learning.

A given strategy is neither good nor bad; it is essentially neutral until the context of its use is thoroughly considered. What makes a strategy positive and helpful for a given learner? A strategy is useful if the following conditions are present: (a) the strategy relates well to the L2 task at hand, (b) the strategy fits the particular student's learning style preferences to one degree or another, and (c) the student employs the strategy effectively and links it with other relevant strategies. Strategies that fulfill these conditions "make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford 1990: 8).

Yet students are not always aware of the power of consciously using L2 learning strategies for making learning quicker and more effective. Skilled teachers help their students develop an awareness of learning strategies and enable them to use a wider range of appropriate strategies.

Six major groups of L2 learning strategies have been identified by Oxford (1990)

Cognitive strategy enable the learner to manipulate the language material in direct ways, e.g., through reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining.

Metacognitive strategies are employed for managing the learning process overall.

Memory-related strategies help learners link one L2 item or concept with another but do not necessarily involve deep understanding.

Compensatory strategies help the learner make up for missing knowledge.

Affective strategies, such as identifying one's mood and anxiety level talking about feelings, rewarding oneself for good performance are related to L2 proficiency.

Styles and strategies help determine a particular learner's ability and willingness to work within the framework of various instructional methodologies. It is foolhardy to think that a single L2 methodology could possibly fit an entire class filled with students who have a range of stylistic and strategic performances. Instead of choosing a specific instructional methodology, L2 teachers would do better to employ a broad instructional approach, notably the best version of the communicative approach that contains a combined focus on form and fluency. Such an approach allows for deliberate, creative variety to meet the needs of all students in the class.

L2 teachers should consider various ways to prepare to conduct strategy instruction in their classes. Helpful preparatory steps include taking teacher development courses, finding relevant information in print or on the internet and making contacts with specialists.

Although we do not yet know all we wish to know about optimal strategy instruction, there is growing evidence that L2 teachers can and should conduct strategy instruction in their classrooms. For some teachers it might be better to start with small strategy interventions, such as helping L2 readers learn to analyze words and guess meaning from the context, rather than with full-scale strategies-based instruction involving a vast array of learning strategies and the four language skills, i.e., reading, writing, speaking and listening. (Oxford: 1990).

Other teachers might want to move rapidly into strategies-based instruction. Strategies-based instruction is not so much a separate "instructional method" as it is sound strategy instruction interwoven with the general communicative language teaching approach. In evaluating the success of any strategy instruction, teachers should look for individuals'

progress toward L2 proficiency and for signs of increased self-efficacy or motivation.

It would now be relevant to say a few things about the teacher/learner relationship which is associated with power and status. The rights and duties of teachers and learners are related to power. For example, some teachers might assert that they have the right to punish learners who misbehave. In any social encounter involving two or more people, there are certain power relationships "which are almost always asymmetrical" (Wright 1987: 17). Social psychologists distinguish between three types of power-coercive reward-based and referent (Ibid). The basis of coercive power is punishment. Some individuals or institutions have the authority to punish others. The basis of the second type of power is reward. Some individuals or institutions have the power to reward what they deem the appropriate behavior. For example, business organizations reward employees with a salary, a bonus etc. The basis of the third type of power is encouragement. In this case, individuals appeal to the commitment and interest of others. In view of this three-fold paradigm, it is important to concern ourselves with the fostering of learner encouragement, as it is considered to be the most effective power relationship.

A discussion of encouragement and motivational strategies would not be complete without a consideration of group process, inasmuch as there is usually a group of people that we as teachers are called on to motivate and encourage (Argyle 1969). established that a group went through four stages from its formation, which has important implications for the study of the classroom and the use of group activities during teaching.

Stage 1 Forming: At first there is some anxiety among the members of the group, as they are dependent on the leader (that is, the teacher) and they have to find out what behavior is acceptable.

Stage 2 Storming: There is conflict between sub-groups and rebellion against the leader. Members of the group resist their leader and the role relations attending the function of the group are questioned.

Stage 3 Norming: The group begins to develop a set of cohesion. Members of the group begin to support each other. At this stage,

there is cooperation and open exchange of views and feelings about their roles and each other.

Stage 4 Performing: Most problems are resolved and there is a great deal of inter personal activity. Everyone is devoted to completing the tasks they have been assigned.

Experience shows that almost every group goes through these four stages until it reaches balance. In reality, students' misbehaviors and underachievement in the classroom are considered to be basic hindrances to effective teaching and learning (Daniels 1994).

Therefore, persuading and motivating students to learn is of prime importance. Rewards and punishment may be the backbone of the teaching-learning process, but they are not the only tools teacher's arsenal (Dornyei 2001: 119) believes that "the spectrum of other potentially more effective motivation strategies is so broad that it is hard to imagine that none of them would work".

The central question designing a frame work of relevant strategies is to decide how to organize them into separate theme. The following classification around which our main discussion will resolve is based on the process/oriented model by Dornyei and Otto (1998). The key units in this classification are as follows:

- 1 - Creating the basic persuasive conditions which involve setting the scene for the use of persuasive strategies.
- 2 - Encouraging positive self evaluation.
- 3 - Generating and maintaining students' motivation.

There are certain preconditions to be met before any attempts to generate motivation can be effective. Some of these conditions are the following:

- 1 - Appropriate teacher behavior and good teacher/student relationship.
- 2 - A pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere.
- 3 - A cohesive learner group characterized by appropriate group norms.

Whatever is done by a teacher has a thorough and formative influence in students. In other words, teacher's behavior is a powerful "motivational"
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tool" (Dornyei 2001: 120). Teacher's influences are highly noticeable. A key element is to establish a relationship of mutual trust and respect with the learners by means of talking with them on a personal level. This mutual trust could lead to enthusiasm. At any rate, enthusiastic teachers impart a sense of commitment to, and interest in the subject matter, not only verbally but also non-verbally; cues that students take from them about how to behave.

A tense classroom climate can undermine learning and demotivate learners (see Maclintyre 1999; Young 1999; for further details). On the other hand, learner's willingness will reach its peak in a safe classroom climate in which students can express their opinions and feel that they do not run the risk of being ridiculed.

In this respect, students need both ample opportunities to learn and steady encouragement and support of their learning efforts. Because such motivation is unlikely to develop in a chaotic classroom, it is important that the teacher organize and manage the classroom as an effective learning environment. Furthermore, because anxious or alienated students are unlikely to be motivated to learn, it is important that learning occur within a relaxed and supportive atmosphere (Good and Brophy 1994: 215).

There are several factors that promote group cohesiveness, such as time spent together and shared group history, interaction, intergroup competition, active presence of the leader (Dornyei 1998: 142). As for the group norms, they should be adapted by members in order to be constructive and faster learning in a relaxed atmosphere.

Many students in healthy atmosphere engage in all sorts of learning activities even when a subject is not interesting. In order to inspire learners to concern themselves with most learning activities, we should find out their goals and the topics they want to learn and try to incorporate them into the curriculum. According to Chambers (1999: 37), "if the teacher is to motivate learners, then relevance has to be the red thread permeating activities".

It is also important to help learners get rid of their preconceived notions that are likely to hinder the progress. To this end, learners need to develop an understanding of the nature of the second language learning, and should be aware of the fact that mastery of L2 can be achieved in different ways using a diversity of strategies, and a key factor is for learners to discover for themselves the optimal methods and techniques.

There are five approaches that help students to be motivated and encouraged:

- 1 - Teachers can foster the belief that competence is a changeable aspect of development.
- 2 - Favorable self conceptions of L2 competence can be promoted by regular experiences of success.
- 3 - Everyone is more interested in a task if they feel that they make a contribution.
- 4 - A small personal word of encouragement is sufficient.
- 5 - Teachers can reduce classroom anxiety by making the learning context less stressful.

Research has shown that the way learners feel about their accomplishments and the amount of their satisfaction will determine how teachers approach and tackle subsequent learning tasks. By employing appropriate strategies, the latter can help learners to evaluate themselves in a positive light, encouraging them to take credit for their advances. Dornye (2001: 134) presents three areas of such strategies:

- 1 - Promoting attributions to effort rather than to ability.
- 2 - Providing motivational feedback.
- 3 - Increasing learning satisfaction and the question of rewards and grades.

Conclusion

In general, motivation and persuasion are the heart of designing instruction. Many teachers believe that by sticking to the language materials and trying to discipline their students, they will manage to create a classroom environment that will be conducive to learning. Nevertheless, these teachers seem to lose sight of the fact that unless they accept their students' personalities and work on those minute details that constitute their social and psychological make-up, they will fail to persuade them. What is more, they will not be able to form a cohesive and coherent group unless they succeed in turning "curriculum goals" into group goals. Learning a foreign language is different from learning other subjects. Therefore, language teaching should take account of a variety of factors that are likely to promote, or hinder success. Language is part of one's identity and is used to convey this identity to others. As a

language learning has a significant impact on the social being of the learner, since it involves the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors and ways of thinking.

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