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**FEEDBACK AS A MEANS OF MOTIVATION IN FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE TEACHING**

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**Abstract**

The paper presents the results of an analytical review on the problems of keeping and advancing academic motivation. It has explored the issues of general academic motivation and those for FL learning comprising Motivation for Communicative Competence, Cognitive Linguistic Motivation, Instrumental Motivation. The study has as its purpose to find out the correlation between subtypes of educational feedback and different varieties of motivation specific to FL learning and to define its influence on students' performance in FL learning while advancing further development. A mixed-methods research approach allows surveying how educational feedback made by teachers affects students' performance in FL learning. The study encompasses the responses from 300 students from the Universities of Novosibirsk, Russia. The paper focuses on those factors that students consider the gravest when advancing motivation for FL learning. The study explores the role of an FL teacher and his/her professional communication style in maintaining and developing subject study motivation.

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## 1. Introduction

There is a growing number of research papers in most fields of science that recognises the key role of motivation in achieving success while completing a certain task. It is now well established from a variety of studies (Alderman, 2008; Ellis, 2009; Harmer, 2005; Kalyar et al., 2018; Melekhina, 2014) that motivation is essential in the practice of foreign language (FL) teaching and learning. Many researchers have analysed different FL teaching approaches, methods, techniques, procedures, strategies, models to discover the most effective ways to advance student motivation for FL learning at all stages of language education – from school to university and even further. There are various factors that influence motivation to learning. One of them is feedback, which motivational potential is in the focus of this study.

### 1.1. Subject study motivation

In the educational context, scientists (Alderman, 2008; Ellis, 2009; Nunan, 1991; Rogova, 1991) distinguish between two kinds of academic motivation: general academic motivation and subject study motivation. As a rule, the following kinds of motivation are referred to as general motivation when learning: extrinsic (broad social and personal motives), intrinsic, positive, negative, delayed, and actual motivation (Barabasheva, 2015). The varieties of subject study motivation in terms of FL learning are subtypes of intrinsic motivation. Russian scientist Rogova (1991, pp. 6-19) distinguishes between Motivation for Communicative Competence (a conscious need to communicate in a foreign language), Cognitive Linguistic Motivation (a positive attitude of students to the Linguistics as a subject study, to the basics of Linguistics as a sign system, to the language structure), Instrumental Motivation (peculiarities of performing activities specific for a particular profession presented, for example, in the ESP learning).

Kolker (2000, p. 23) identifies the following conditions which contribute to keeping the general academic motivation of students at a proper level: agreement of the educational content with the students' personal goals and motives; a comfortable psychological climate in the classroom; the opportunity for students to track their progress in the subject study; comprehensive support provided by the teacher, etc.

Many research papers on developing subject study motivation dwell upon the importance of encouraging and supporting students' confidence in achieving success (Alderman, 2008; Harmer, 2005; Kolker, 2000; Nunan, 1991). Thus Alderman (2008) describes study motivation from two perspectives that affect academic performance: efforts and abilities, as well as motivational inequality. When speaking about the motivation for FL learning, the trouble is that many students, being able to perform excellently, consider it useless to spend time studying foreign languages, mastering grammar skills, replenishing vocabulary, and others, due to the highly developed information technologies, free access to electronic dictionaries, and translation tools (Kalyar et al., 2018). Touching upon motivational inequality, Kitaygorodskaya (1986) notes both the positive and negative influence of the students' emotional state on study motivation development in the framework of fixed educational activities. The author emphasizes students' moral discomfort and nervous tension arose when waiting for the assessment results and the coming feedback of the teacher, which affect subject motivation development dramatically.

## 1.2. Feedback as an assessment technique

Many research works (Ellis, 2009; Harmer, 2005; Passov, 2010; Ur, 2009) emphasize a close relationship between subject study motivation and assessment in terms of FL teaching and learning. When speaking about teaching in general, assessment involves marks and grades, reports, and comments (oral and written), with *feedback* playing a crucial role in subject study motivation development. Thus, feedback comprises both correction and assessment and provides a learner with some information on his/her academic performance to improve specific points or help plan further learning.

Assessment in FL teaching involves approval and disapproval of the students' answers, along with marks and scores. Correction results in identifying grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary errors and mistakes, discussing completed assignments, clarifying issues that cause difficulties, highlighting strong and weak points of performed tasks, recommendations to improve / correct work, and others (Ur, 2009, p. 242). But some methodologists consider it pivotal to monitor the level of language learning acquisition while giving feedback. They advocate the necessity to assess learners' academic successes and failures rather than help them regulate both verbal and non-verbal behaviour in the classroom environment (Azimov, 2009; Min'yar-Beloruhev, 1996).

According to researchers (Ellis, 2009; Harmer, 2005; Sharipov, 2014), the following feedback issues have a decisive role in maintaining and advancing the required level of student motivation for FL learning:

- appropriate forms and methods of presentation in the classroom environment (the teacher's professionalism, his/her communicative skills, contributing to a high level of professional and pedagogical communication (equity, accuracy, benevolent and polite attitude, the ability to create a friendly and confiding environment in the classroom, etc.) (Sharipov, 2014, pp. 147-148);

- educational content (in the modern methodology of foreign language teaching to save strong positive motivation, it is recommended not to correct every single mistake made by the student, the teacher should concentrate only on those points that reflect the goals of performing a specific work: for example, if the work aims at checking the acquisition of some grammar rules, the teacher is not to pay attention to spelling errors, they can be marked, but not taken into account in the assessment of the work; if the task aims at practicing some communication skills, then the teacher is recommended in his/her feedback focus on errors that prevent successful communication, such as phonetic errors, stress, incorrect selection of vocabulary, and others, rather than emphasize minor grammar errors (Ellis, 2009, pp. 3-18);

- though being immediate or delayed, the feedback must be up-to-date, i.e. follow immediately after completing the assignment as long as the level of general academic motivation and interest in the performed work is still high (Harmer, 2005, pp. 99-100).

## 2. Problem Statement

The paper addresses the problem of student motivation for FL learning advancement and states several reasons for it.

- First of all, many students consider it useless to spend time studying foreign languages as they have free access to electronic tools which help not to waste time learning new vocabulary and mastering grammar (Kalyar et al., 2018).
- The second reason delivers an understanding of the correlation between subject study motivation decrease and inappropriate feedback on academic performance presented by the teacher (Ellis, 2009; Harmer, 2005; Passov, 2010; Ur, 2009).
- The third issue touches upon different views on the essence of feedback declared in Russian and foreign FL teaching methodology (Harmer, 2005; Kolesnikova, 2001).

Thus, addressing the problem of motivation for FL learning, Passov emphasizes the supervising function of feedback specific for Russian FL teaching concepts. Disagreeing with the fact, the scientist advocates his position by saying that in terms of subject study motivation, it “is not only unproductive but also brings more harm than good” (Passov, 2010, p. 314). The scientists claim that feedback must be positive (Kolesnikova, 2001, p. 184), and while being presented, must consider the category of students it is addressed to (age, social status, language level, and others) (Harmer, 2005, pp. 59-60).

### **3. Research Questions**

Understanding that student motivation for FL learning mostly depends on different types of educational feedback received from the teacher, we set the following research questions:

- How do the subtypes of educational feedback correlate with distinguished kinds of motivation specific to FL learning?
- What aspects of educational feedback do students consider the gravest when advancing motivation for FL learning?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to find out the correlation between subtypes of educational feedback and different varieties of motivation specific to FL learning and to define its influence on students' performance in FL learning to advance further development.

### **5. Research Methods**

A mixed-methods research approach was used: a survey questionnaire with closed-, multiple-choice and open-end questions, quantitative and qualitative data analysis, statistical and mathematical methods (Cohen, 2007).

The survey questionnaire encompasses responds from 300 students (under-graduates and graduates) from the Universities of Novosibirsk, Russia (Novosibirsk State Technical University, Novosibirsk State Agrarian University, Siberian Institute of Management RANEP). The survey was held in 2019-2020.

## 6. Findings

### 6.1. Educational Feedback and Motivation for FL Learning Correlation

Table 1 presents the results obtained from the analytical survey on the correlation between subtypes of educational feedback and distinguished kinds of motivation specific to FL learning.

**Table 1.** The correlation between subtypes of educational feedback and distinguished kinds of motivation specific to FL learning

	Motivation for Communicative Competence	Cognitive Linguistic Motivation	Instrumental Motivation
Individual Feedback	✓	✓	✓
Group Feedback	✓	✓	✓
Positive Feedback	✓	✓	✓
Negative Feedback	✗	✓	✓
Non-verbal Feedback	✓	✗	✗
Verbal Oral Feedback			
<i>Implicit</i>	✓	✗	✗
<i>Explicit</i>	✓	✗	✗
<i>Metalinguistic</i>	✓	✓	✓
Verbal Written Feedback	✓	✓	✓

The study distinguishes between *individual* ("teacher → learner" or "learner → teacher" type) and *group* (exchanged views on the performed task between students alone or between students and the teacher) *educational feedback* given in the classroom environment. It confirms conspicuous positive or negative contributions to keeping and advancing all kinds of motivation for FL learning.

The research proves that both *positive* and *negative feedback* affect student motivation dramatically. The survey displays how positive feedback on academic performance contributes to advancing motivation and how negative feedback demotivates FL learners significantly. The most surprising finding presents the possible negative impact of positive feedback on Motivation for Communicative Competence for learners may shift educational goals from successful communication performance to gaining teacher's approval when completing the task.

*Non-verbal feedback* manifests itself in the teacher's facial expressions and gestures, expressing approval or disapproval of student's educational activities. Non-verbal feedback proves to be effective for developing Motivation for Communicative Competence.

The study demonstrates a close correlation between motivation for FL learning and *verbal feedback* and advocates that it must be in the target language following students' language level. *Verbal oral feedback* (*implicit* and *explicit* forms) prove to foster Motivation for Communicative Competence. *Metalinguistic feedback* (detailed analysis of errors based on grammatical and lexical analysis) despite its regular use in the classroom environment is considered the least effective.

The study confirms that *written feedback* contributes to the development of motivation for FL learning if it is purely personal and not vocalized in the presence of other students. Written feedback provides students with the opportunity to track foreign language study progress if it presents an individual

recommendation aimed at correcting recent shortcomings, as well as developing the relevant skills and abilities. The study finds out sufficient growth of all kinds of subject study motivation when not all the mistakes are marked, but those directly related to the objectives of the educational task.

## **6.2. Factors Affecting Motivation for FL learning**

The importance of the research is confirmed not only by the results of the theoretical analysis on both general academic motivation issues and those for FL learning but also by the results of a questionnaire survey held among undergraduate and graduate students of Novosibirsk universities. The survey target was to identify aspects of educational feedback students consider the gravest when advancing their motivation for FL learning. The participants of the survey were asked to analyze challenges they face while learning foreign languages and focus on the most motivating and demotivating ones. The survey results, presented in Table 2, reveal the pivotal role of a teacher and his/her professional communication style for maintaining and developing motivation for FL learning, indicated by 76% of respondents.

**Table 2.** Factors affecting student motivation for FL learning

<b>Motivating factors for FL learning</b>	<b>Respondents %</b>
Teachers' exacting attitude to students' academic performance	56
Educational discipline guidelines and regulations	51
Teachers' engagement in subject study	47
<b>Demotivating factors for FL learning</b>	<b>Respondents %</b>
Lack of transparency in the evaluative criteria	48
Systematic poor marks/grades and low scores	42
Teachers' negative reaction to mistakes and errors of students	37
Teachers' subjective attitude in academic performance assessment	31
Teachers' ironic and sarcastic tone	27
Teachers' biased attitude	23
Vocalizing mistakes and errors	19

The survey participants highlighted both positive and negative factors affecting student motivation for FL learning. Apart from motivating factors such as demanding attitude towards students' academic performance (56%), teachers' deep interest both in the subject study (47%), and educational discipline support (51%), respondents dwell upon those, promoting sufficient decrease of motivation for FL learning. They address the problems of non-transparent evaluative criteria (48%), touch upon the negative role of systematic poor marks and low scores (42%). A sufficient number of participants underline teachers' critical reaction to mistakes and errors (37%) and subjectivity in students' academic performance assessment (31%). Some interviewees clearly show a negative effect on their motivation for FL learning produced by teachers' ironic and sarcastic tone (27%), their "biased" attitude (23%), and vocalizing mistakes in the classroom environment (19%). The survey results make the urgency to explore the most appropriate and efficient solutions to the problem of keeping and advancing student motivation for FL learning obvious, thus defining further research prospects.

## 7. Conclusion

The article presents the analytical review of research on the problems of building and advancing student motivation. It has explored the issues of general academic motivation and those for FL learning. The results indicate a close correlation between subtypes and varieties of educational feedback and distinguished kinds of motivation specific to FL learning (Motivation for Communicative Competence, Cognitive Linguistic Motivation, Instrumental Motivation). The survey reveals the dramatic influence of educational feedback made by teachers on students' performance in FL learning, covers aspects students consider the gravest when advancing motivation for FL learning, and clearly defines its crucial role in mastering their language skills. The study revealed the pivotal role of a teacher and his/her professional communication style in maintaining and developing both positive and negative subject study motivation, thus defining prospects for further research focused on exploring the most appropriate and efficient solutions to the problem.

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