

Success in language learning

Why are some students successful at language learning whilst others are not? If we knew the answer to that question the job of teaching and learning a language would be easy. We do not, of course, but we can point to a number of factors which seem to have a strong effect on students' success or failure. People involved in language teaching often say that students who really want to learn will succeed whatever the circumstances in which they study. All teachers can think of situations in which certain 'motivated' students do significantly better than their peers; students frequently succeed in what appear to be unfavorable conditions. In the face of such phenomena it seems reasonable to suggest that the motivation that students bring to class is the biggest single factor affecting their success. Motivation is some kind of *internal drive* that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action.

Language learners who are motivated perceive goals of various kinds. We can make a useful distinction between *short-term* goals and *long-term* goals. Long-term goals might have something to do with a wish to get a better job at some future date, or a desire to be able to communicate with members of a target language community. Short-term goals might include such things as a wish to pass an end-of-semester test or a desire to finish a unit in a book.

What kind of motivation do students have? Is it always the same? We will distinguish two main categories: *extrinsic motivation*, which is concerned with factors outside the classroom, and *intrinsic motivation*, which is concerned with what takes place inside the classroom. Extrinsic motivation has two main types: *integrative* and *instrumental motivation*. Instrumental motivation describes a situation in which students believe that mastery of the target language will be instrumental in getting them a better job, position or status. The language is an instrument in their attainment of such a goal. Factors affecting intrinsic motivation: *physical conditions, method, the teacher* and *success*. The students' success or failure is in their own hands, but the teacher can influence the course of events in the students' favor.