

# MOTIVATIONAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE BUSINESS FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** *The present student-centred paradigm in education aims at developing the motivational dimension of the stakeholders within the educational process, i.e. the teacher and the student. Considering the dynamics of the system of needs in the present highly technologized consumer society, motivation allows the understanding of a series of psycho-social phenomena within which it establishes a functional cycle together with the activity and the conduct. It is worth considering the motivational and cognitive education of teachers who teach foreign languages to economics students, as well as the informative side of their training, because all their linguistic, cultural and pedagogical competences attend on economics students. The humanistic, cultural and ludic components of the foreign language class may constitute predominantly intrinsic motivation for economics students. The didactic strategy, the need for feedback, the inter-determination relationship between teacher and student, issues related to the organizational and social culture are solutions for decoding motivational issues. The final aim of the formative-motivational elements is represented by the preparation of individuals for self-learning and continuous learning throughout their entire life.*

**Key words:** *motivation, foreign language class, higher education, feedback, self-learning.*

## 1. Introduction

In Romania, there is no public or private educational institution which should not include the study of at least one foreign language in the curriculum, irrespective of the level considered. At least one foreign language is taught for a longer period, sometimes intensively or simultaneously with another one. In addition, foreign language assessment is part of the high school graduation exam, testing competences at B2 level. It is also worth

mentioning that many schools or high schools in Romania have complex bilingual programmes and that there are academic programmes of study which are taught in a foreign language. During the communist times, the main foreign languages taught in schools were Russian and German. At present, the curriculum includes many and diverse possibilities. According to the findings of the study “Key Data on Teaching Languages at School in Europe” conducted in 2008 under the coordination of EACEA (The

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Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency within the European Commission), the most frequently taught foreign language in Romania is English (sometimes since kindergarten or starting with the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade). The second most popular foreign language is French, while the third is German, as the aforementioned study emphasizes. Italian and Spanish come next, but there can also be exceptions. As all changes at social level lead to a change in vision, major changes can be encountered in the education process as well. Today there is no problem in asking young people in Romania questions in English, while with more senior people, the chances to get an answer are higher if English is replaced by German or Russian.

The motivators which have an influence on the young generation as regards the study of a foreign language in higher education represent the object of research performed by numerous sociologists, psychologists, pedagogues and didacticians. Some of the significant issues in these studies will also be considered in what follows.

Student-centred education is a concept which has been encountered more and more often in the academic environment over the recent period. The paradigm of the “teacher as encyclopaedia” has long been surpassed. This is mostly due to the Internet, which facilitates access to a huge amount of information. For any topic considered, there are books, courses, video tutorials etc., which undoubtedly exceed someone’s storing capacity. At present people talk about the teacher-trainer, the teacher whose primary role would be to teach students how to learn, how to navigate in the information ocean, how to filter information, integrate and connect it, but especially how to put it into practice. Critical and creative thinking techniques become indispensable tools for acquiring

and producing knowledge. But the essential element in this equation is represented by the motivation of the two stakeholders, the teacher and the student. The pleasure which should underlie this learning process, this affective engine represented by motivation, is the key to the problem. Both for teachers and for students, managing motivation raises questions such as: Which are the factors influencing motivation?, Which is the determination relationship between teacher and student in the light of motivation?, What exactly in the teacher’s behaviour can motivate/ demotivate students?, Which aspects of the organizational culture can motivate/ demotivate the teacher? etc. Ideally, students and teachers should motivate themselves, the former assuming their own education, the latter loving their jobs and, most of all, not wasting energy on purely formal things, without any stake, as the tendency is at present, because of the bureaucratization of the system.

Didactic communication in teaching foreign languages to economics students in higher education supposes the adaptation of the message and of the style both to the students’ vocabulary and mental structures, as well as to the peculiarity of the economic language, with a view to materializing the learning activity by means of a cognitive style, of a set of procedural and strategic elements, which students should use on their own. Teachers are not confined to providing information to students, as they are also preoccupied by their motivational and cognitive training through learning strategies. In the didactic learning setting, the efficient exchange of intelligible and persuasive messages supposes a conscious interaction between the educated subjects, who have different statuses and roles. Foreign language teachers, empathizing with the groups of students and creating an affective climate, offer all their linguistic, cultural and

pedagogical competences to students, thus being animators, experts, creators of situations specific to daily life, generally speaking, and to the economic field in particular.

## 2. Motivation

A fundamental concept in psychology and, generally, in sciences having at their core the human being, motivation expresses the fact that the basis of human behaviour is represented by an array of motives – needs, tendencies, emotions, interests, intentions, ideals – which support the accomplishment of certain actions, facts, attitudes. The motives mediate, require and maintain one behaviour or another. Motivation is continuously restructured and adjusted, in accordance with the psychical function it serves, comprising a wide range of physiological, psychological and socio-cultural variables. Taking them into account, motivation appears as an integrating and explicative factor for very diverse psycho-social phenomena - statuses and roles, aspirations and performances, interpersonal relations, for different group phenomena (cohesion, conformism, authority, influence, prestige etc.) [6].

Motivation, through the word motive (the impulse to act), is the extension of the Latin word *movere*, to move. Traditionally divided into two groups, inner motives (ambitions, needs, desires, interests, future projects) and external motives (requirements, pressures, family, teacher's personality), motives give the energy necessary for work, learning, understanding etc. The concept of motivation represents the hypothetical construct used for describing the inner and/or external drives which trigger the direction, intensity and persistence of the behaviour. Other definitions of motivation underline its relationship with action:

group of factors, impulses, desires which make people take a course of action. If motivation is considered a drive, any behaviour is motivated. This can be supported by conscious or unconscious mental processes and is manifest through signs such as: attention, which connects behaviour to will, effort, representing the energy devoted to accomplishing the objective, persistence, which indicates the intensity of the effort in a given time. Dörnyei [1] approaches motivation from a dynamic view, which is built while tasks are performed. According to the same author, there are three mechanisms which form the system of motivation: accomplishing the task according to an action plan (within the system of education, it is assigned by the teacher), the evaluation through the confirmation of the hopes seen in action (the results that students have), self-regulation in learning, i.e. decisions made with a view to accomplishing the task. Several motivational theories attempt at explaining the observation of behaviours in a coherent way. They approach this issue from different perspectives, exploiting and completing previously created concepts. Dörnyei [1] emphasizes three motivational theories which are important from the point of view of foreign language learning: the theory of self-determination, that of setting the purpose and that of attribution. The feeling of self-determination is kept as long as pressures have an inner character. Free will or the possibility to value one's own competences contributes to strengthening the students' inner motivation. For this purpose, evaluation should have an informational orientation rather than a controlling one. Thus, inner motivation will be strong when feedback is provided in an informational context, even if the feedback is negative. Conversely, in a controlling context, the same information can be perceived as an attack. The

students' self-determination feeling and satisfaction are proportional with the emphasis put on this autonomy and the amount of informative feedback provided during the learning process. In actual fact, it seems that there is an interaction between the self-determination feeling and the sensation of competence [3]. The students' involvement in the activities carried on during the foreign language class can be supported either through improvement, aimed at mastering a task, or through the identification with the task, which thus receives an attached value, but never through external regulation, which makes students feel obliged to act contrary to their will. The motivational theories based on specifying the aim emphasize the fact that students, who have in view a learning objective whose level of difficulty is estimated as low or high, tend to maintain or improve their strategy. In the attribution theory, Dörnyei [1] postulates that motives subjectively attributed to personal successes or failures make up the motivational disposition. One way to motivate students would be to assist them in attributing successes themselves, but also in making them responsible, so as to make them consider their failures as results of the insufficiency of their own efforts. Promoting the way towards performance by giving grades, the present educational system has inoculated students the mechanism through which they have preferred to attribute success to their ability rather than to their efforts. As students, they need to be supported to succeed in making this difference. According to [3], when performance is envisaged, effort is inversely proportional with the perceived competence. Thus, being awarded a good grade, obtained with maximum effort, brings about the decrease in the perceived competence. With respect to competence, the author reaches the following conclusion: the students' best

strategy consists in valorizing the absence of learning. But this cannot be an educational ideal in any way. Due to neurobiological research, motivation and emotion can be connected, as they are both related to action. Motivation would have the role to include them, because it encompasses the cognitive factors. It should not be forgotten that cerebral activity is not limited to devising strategies for reaching a goal. Neuronal mechanisms, linked to emotional moods, need significant energy in order for the realities that disturb the aim envisaged to be processed and thus reconsidered in an optimistic key, or in order for the unpleasant information to have a slowed effect. It can be therefore concluded that emotions underlie motivation.

In the case of education, the issue of motivation is raised in connection with the meaning and motive attributed by stakeholders (teacher and students) to each one's role. Depending on the way the social effort to learn is valued (the way in which academic education is regarded, understood and practised) and to the social context, the learner's motivation is accomplished. With respect to the economic higher education, an essential motive for performance, and, subsidiarily, for mastering a foreign language, is represented by professional insertion in the specialty field chosen. If the highest form of motivation is inner motivation, then students need to be sure that, by learning, their success will bear fruit and that they will be well assimilated in society. In other words, a strong inner motivation synthesizes the subject's need for activity, his/ her positive social valorization and the awareness of the social importance of the activity performed. Taking into account this dynamics of the system of needs, motivation allows the understanding of a series of highly significant psycho-social phenomena from the practical point of

view, such as: choosing one's profession, work integration, the individual's social and professional progress. There is a functional cycle between motivation, activity and conduct, which, for the aforementioned cases, would comprise: choosing one's profession according to the strongest unsatisfied need in that context; following the profession chosen; satisfying the initial need which, progressively, ceases to motivate the individual; the occurrence of new needs, which are either created as the profession is performed, or, having a prior existence, are now brought up-to-date. The process is a continuous one, ending with the individuals' becoming more and more closely connected to his/her profession; but there is also the possibility for them to stagnate or regress motivationally, which triggers opposite effects: dissatisfaction, weak integration, propensity for abandonment.

Economics students' motivation to learn a foreign language can be divided into two main categories: integrative and instrumental. The former refers to the students' desire to be bilingual, the latter, given an unprecedented opening of the European labour market, refers to the utilitarian side: work place, salary, social status. The teachers' didactic experiences have proven that there is a visible correlation between students' motivation for learning and their preoccupation for the specialty training, to which linguistic competences are added, which are a corollary, the significant interest in studying and perfecting the foreign language in the curriculum. Students surpass the status of "captive" pupil, obliged to learn a foreign language. They go from an extrinsic motivation, based on the desire to acquire knowledge in order to get better marks, to an intrinsic motivation (the desire to learn consciously, the joy and pleasure to learn from others and together with others). In this respect, the self-

assessment tests of the learning activity may prove relevant. The fact that economics students are given the possibility to choose between studying a foreign language at A1 level or developing language skills acquired in high school (starting from B2 level) and specializing in language for business contributes to their motivation, to the attraction, necessity and satisfaction that the foreign language class can create. Furthermore, the humanistic, cultural and ludic components of the foreign language class may be predominantly connected to intrinsic motivation, even if it is about economics students, not philology ones. The activities for studying the specialized language of the field can be organized in a non-conformist manner, with visual and audio elements prevailing, from exercises of the type "crosswords", to authentic musical, advertising or cinematographic documents. An essential extra element for strengthening the students' motivational and creative side can be given by the drawing up, application and interpretation of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews addressed to students by the teacher. Permanently checking the "pulse" of the class by considering how students react can bring about both the change of the methods and their improvement, as well as the teacher's degree of satisfaction.

### **3. The didactic strategy and the teacher's role**

An external element, tightly connected to motivation is represented by the teacher's didactic strategy. As a unifying, integrating term, reuniting learning assignments with learning situations, representing a complex and coherent system of means, methods, materials and other educational resources, didactic strategy aims at reaching precise objectives. Since strategy is necessary to any pedagogical process, the teacher's

importance is also emphasized in the light of the fact that the design and organization of the class is accomplished in accordance with the teacher's strategic decision, his/her competences and motivation. Thus, the strategy foreshadows the most appropriate, logical and efficient methodical path for approaching a concrete teaching and learning situation. The didactic strategy is an important component for developing the motivation for learning a foreign language in higher education. Aiming at optimizing education, it depends on the teacher's pedagogical view, the educational objectives, the teaching content and the type of learning which is necessary, the teacher's teaching style, the psycho-social features of the learning group, the ergonomics of the educational space and even on the horizon of the teaching time [4]. Even though related to methods or to didactic methodology, strategy is not to be confused with them, because they focus on a teaching-learning-evaluation activity, whereas strategy gives emphasis to the educational process, on the whole, and not just to a segment within education. From this perspective, the main components of the didactic strategy (the four systems: of the organization and progress forms of the educational activity, of the didactic methods and processes, of the resources used and of the operational objectives, as well as of the building of a strategy appropriate for students' interests and their preparation level) represent a continuous challenge and a permanent effort of didactic creativity on the side of the teacher. The evolution of society dictates the teacher's permanent preoccupation for improving the didactic methodology, simultaneously complying with didactic principles. Individualization and differentiation, activation and conscious participation/ involvement in learning (which needs to become self-learning) are criteria which cannot be eluded. These

actions aim at: stimulating and cultivating interest for knowledge, the learners' purposeful use of their intelligence (and also the use of the other psychological functions involved in learning), through their own efforts, the development and practice of the capacity to acquire knowledge, the development and practice of the abilities of self-orientation in practical cases, the cultivation of the inquiring spirit. The re-evaluation of "traditional" methods, which are criticized for the students' passive role in the teaching-learning process, is a direction of the new trend, resuming especially the discussion on expository methods. There are a few procedures which could enhance the modernization of expositions, regardless of the subject taught, but with emphasis on foreign languages: the use of applications, scaffolding the topic in the realities of the time or in the economic field studied, relying on the teacher's personal research, notifying students of the plans and objectives envisaged from the beginning, problematization, the use of drama, taking stands, drawing up questionnaires, expressing value judgements, exemplifying by means of modern media, of the computer, expositions and debates etc. In addition, another solution would be to resort to various questions (convergent, divergent, evaluation, problem and rhetorical questions etc.), as well as to valuing the students' personal experience, the permanent use of feedback modalities or of reversed conversations or in groups. The use of active-participative strategies characterizes a superior level in the spiral of modernizing didactic strategies for foreign language teaching in the case of non-philology students. The active-participative methods comprise all the situations which turn the students involved into active subjects, co-participants in their own education.

Cognitive psychology has highlighted the importance of the mechanisms for the intellectual processing of the information received (considering their formative and educational capabilities), which supposes an active involvement of the structures of the intellect. In addition to the meaningful use of the students' intellectual capacities, the teacher should not forget each one's capacity to feel excited, try to touch their heart strings or captivate the entire group. The Romanian system of education also has to face its predominantly theoretical side, with a tendency towards information overload. In the field of foreign language teaching, theory must represent the background for performing language. Furthermore, with reference to the particular case we considered, the effort of foreign language teachers should be directed towards the students' interest in and motivation for studying economic sciences, with a view to having an optimum preparation for integrating in social life. Computer-assisted learning does not ensure the entire replacement of the two main stakeholders of the educational process (including open and distance learning, and the teaching-learning process offered by educational software). The acquisition of a new method and technique of intellectual work would represent a direction towards the modernization of the didactic strategies that the foreign language teacher should consider, with important formative implications, focusing on the individual's preparation for self-learning and continuous education in life.

From a European perspective, the foreign language class benefits from the theoretical support of the documents devised by the Council of Europe, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and the European Language Portfolio [5]. These two documents are inseparable from the pedagogical point of view, perfectly

completing one another: the former addresses teachers, curricula designers and trainers, while the latter is a work and self-evaluation tool for language users. The general aim of the CEFR is to offer a common European basis for describing learning objectives, contents and methods for second language learning, so as to facilitate international cooperation and international recognition of degrees. Romania has assimilated the objectives of the European language policy, introducing references to CEFR in official documents. The progressive integration of the sources offered by CEFR and ELP into the didactic practices supposes a constant emphasis put on communicative tasks by teachers. The "plurilinguistic" and "pluricultural" competence referred to in CEFR represents the linguistic communication and cultural interaction competence of a social actor who masters one or several foreign languages to different degrees, implicitly having experience of several cultures. All this supposes a re-consideration of the foreign language teachers' status, role and responsibilities, as well as of their pedagogical activities.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In the light of the aforementioned facts, it is imperiously necessary that the new paradigm from the educational environment be situated under the sign of motivation-centred education. Although at present the model of social success has hardly to do with education, and the teachers' status in society has lost glamour (the times of the teachers' central position in the Romanian village are far behind, just like the teachers' importance in city life during the inter-war period), it is necessary to have new approaches and actions for an education in which quality should be synonymous with the capacity to improve, to enrich, to train, to prepare the

generations to come for the world and for life. The new technologies and the alert development rhythm of any field should not place the deeply human cultural and affective side second (it is here that foreign languages could fructify their multiple motivational possibilities). Following the principle of mirror manipulation, foreign language teachers can turn into real models for their students, irrespective of the programme of study they are enrolled in, by complying with some of the seven dimensions of motivation that Dörnyei introduces [2]: the affective-integrative dimension (the interest and pleasure to learn a foreign language), the dimension linked to the macro-context (multicultural, ethno-linguistic relations), rapport with close people (parents, teachers, mates or colleagues), but also the dimension connected to raising self-awareness (personality features, expectations, the need to succeed etc.). At any educational level, regardless of the subject taught and of the students, the teachers' extrinsic motivation should be definitely accompanied by their vocation to be teachers, their psycho-pedagogical education, their capacity to transfer information quantitatively and qualitatively, to educate, to be a model, to open the world. The family role in the motivational dimension to learn is

paramount, and society should provide for its future by interconnecting generations not only through information transfer, but also emotionally and affectively (not to mention the genetic contribution). In most cases, not only the transfer is essential, but also the provision of the password.

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