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Pupils' approach to teachers' role as motivating factor in foreign language classes

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Summary

The article researches the pupils' attitude towards the role of the teacher in the educational process which is revealed through the students-teacher relationships. The study showed that the students appreciate the professional pedagogical and special pedagogical competencies of the foreign language teachers the highest talking of learning and training objectives formulation, the interpretation of training material, the incentive of improvement. Also, students usually appreciate teachers' personal characteristics positively, emphasizing tactful teacher' behaviour, patience, objectivity, sense of humour and appropriate speaking tone. Moreover, it turned out that the schoolchildren feel less secure talking of interaction with teachers: they usually turn to the teachers only for subject matters; they do not always feel free in the classroom. Because of a fear to make a mistake the students do not want to express their views openly as they are not always sure that their opinion is important for their teachers.

Keywords: teachers' competencies, pupils' approach, teacher-student relationships, foreign language

Introduction

Successful language teaching/learning in the modern world gives people the opportunity to be a fully-fledged member of society, to be able to participate in cultural, social life, to integrate into the labour market and in any country. Today's students are much more different than before in terms of their needs and opportunities. They are more open and seek to communicate with citizens from different parts of the world, also they understand the perspectives of foreign languages. Therefore, the teaching/learning of languages should be a continuous process to all age groups. It is possible that in the rapidly changing information age, the relevant teaching material contents could help learn the language. Also, the improvement of approach to the teaching/learning change, the environment, which would encourage and allow learning effectively, helps study the languages. It is clear that foreign language learning is a complex process, and there is no one who would be encouraged to learn only by the one factor. All factors are individual and relevant to each learner personally.

Creating effective teaching and learning environment each participant is involved in the educational process and the teacher as a specialist plays a unique role. He needs not only to plan, organize, manage, evaluate and analyze the process, but also to get students involved in these activities, e.g. (1) to provide knowledge of purposeful and effective self-learning characteristics, (2) to assist in the formation of these activities, skills and abilities, (3) to understand the significance and personal importance of that activity.

Students approach to the teacher's role is revealed through the relationship between students and teachers, their communication peculiarities of educational process. This question was always relevant and it remains significant in this rapid information and communication technology development times. Its importance is confirmed by the fact that this issue is discoursed, written and discussed in all spheres of public life: everyday life, various media sources and scientific works. This relationship is explored in various aspects of science such as Education, Psychology, Sociology, etc. The relevance of this theme is emphasized by New Zealand professor and a researcher in education John Hattie's (2008, 2011) study-guides for teachers. The author summed up the more than 900 research results, by the synthesis of over 800 meta-studies of various parts of the world. He suggested the possibilities to ensure maximum impact on learning outcomes and revealed the role of teachers and professional activities competences in the lessons. The study attracted attention and critical approach, therefore it is particularly useful to compare the obtained results, as the scientist has been collecting data for more than 15 years in English-speaking countries.

Thus, as it has already been mentioned, the pupil-teacher relationship is an important theme of the various sciences and professionals. There are many scientists who are interested in different aspects of this phenomenon. Some authors explore teachers' competencies (Allemann-Ghionda, Terhart 2006; Martišauskienė 2009; Galkienė 2011) and try to clarify what a term "good teacher" means (Terhart 2007; Dubs 2009; Helmke 2012; Köller, Meyer 2013), other analyze the features of "good lessons", try to perceive lessons quality issues or seek for opportunities to improve the quality of teaching and learning process (Giesecke 2001; Meyer 2004; Schmitt 2011; Praetorius 2014; Martišauskienė 2014). In recent years, scientists reveal the importance of pupil-teacher relationship in their studies, which discuss the learning environment, classroom climate problems (Drössler et al. 2007a; Schweer 2008; Brandišauskienė 2014). In addition, it is important for scientists who reveal this subject in the self-learning (Bräu 2006; Drössler et al. 2007b; Herger 2013) or in the education of learning to learn competencies (Hoidn 2010; Pukevičiūtė 2014) context.

Students' and teachers' interrelationships issues are closely related to learning motivation researches. As this article discusses the students' approach to the role of the teacher as a motivating factor in foreign language classes, in this case it is appropriate to discuss the sources which investigate the motivation of foreign language learning or factors that promote foreign language learning. Dörnyei (1994: 280), investigating the issues related to the motivation of foreign language learning, focuses his attention on three main dimensions three main dimensions: (1) *Language* level, showing the relationship of the indi-

vidual with the language they are learning, and its wider context, i.e. the interest in culture and people who speak that language, the opportunity to go to a country whose language they are learning. Therefore, the factors that are attributed to this component might be related to instrumental and integrative orientations (Gardner, Lambert 1972). (2) *Learner* level, which includes an individual's cognitive, metacognitive skills, emotional senses and reveals the learner's attitude towards himself. (3) *Learning situation* component, which is associated with the organization of the class work, the teacher's personality, and relationships in teaching (learning) group, i.e. it expresses the individual's relationship with the teaching (learning) environment that surrounds the learners. Thus, the second level includes the motives, which are related to internal motivation, and the first and third layers connect external factors.

Some foreign language didactic (Reisener 1989; Chambers 1999; Dörnyei 2003, Pukevičiūtė 2008), understanding the importance of motivation, consider that learners' motivation is strengthened by the impact of external factors, therefore, they focus on teaching activities, teaching resources development and modern technologies. Deci, Ryan (1993: 226) consider that the internal motivation makes a greater impact on learning, but the strong external motivation can reduce the internal.

The methods and the organization of the research

In this study, we have concentrated on the senior students' and foreign language teachers' relations analysis. Particularly this theme is significant for Lithuania, because the authors have managed to find probably one relevant scientific study (Galkienė 2011), analyzing the pupils' perception to the image of modern teacher. Therefore, the authors of this article aim to answer the following problematic issues: (1) what kind of foreign language competencies of teachers have the greatest impact on foreign language learning and well-being during the lessons, and (2) how the research variables correlate mutually. The study aim was to identify the expression tendencies of teachers' competencies that influence the senior students' learning of foreign languages. To fulfil the aim, the following tasks have been defined: 1) to identify teachers' competencies affecting foreign language learning; 2) to describe the students' approach to teaching activity as a motivational phenomenon; 3) to establish correlations between the components of teachers' competencies that influence the senior students' learning of foreign languages.

In order to determine the students' views on the role of teachers as a motivating factor in learning foreign languages were used the following methods: (1) education documents and scientific literature comparative analysis, interpretation, formulation of conclusions. (2) *Closed type questionnaire*. According to the "Mokytojo profesijos kompetencijos aprašas" (*Teaching profession competence description*) (2007) the authors prepared an original methodology for the study – a written questionnaire to disclose and analyze schoolchildren attitude towards their competencies to evaluate their external learning environment. In order to investigate the theme of this article there were sampled 3 survey instrument

study sections (in total 43 closed-ended questions, set up by Likert ordinal scale with 5 options (5 = very often, 4 = often, 3 = sometimes /not often, 2 = seldom, 1 = never) to determine the students approach to the teacher's competence. (3) *Statistical analysis methods*: percentage frequencies of descriptive statistics; Spearman's rank correlation coefficient ρ (rho) between two variables to define statistically significant correlations between them and their strength, p-value. To describe the percentage frequencies of research data they are divided into three levels: high – options "very often" and "often", average – option "sometimes/not often", low – options "seldom" and "never". The research data was processed using IBM SPSS 20 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The research sample consisted of 320 higher-grade schoolchildren (146 male, 174 female), there were pupils of ninth (n = 152) and tenth (n = 168) grades from secondary schools and gymnasiums surveyed and there was a cluster sampling method used in the study.

The research data were classified into three groups according to competencies: students' attitude towards (1) teachers' personal characteristics, (2) teachers' communications/ interpersonal skills, and (3) the teachers' professional pedagogical and special pedagogical competencies.

Pupils' perception of teacher's personal characteristics

Personal characteristics as one of the competencies components play a very important role in the teaching and learning process. According to scientists (Doda, Knowles 2008: 27–28; Galkienė 2011: 89; Steinberg, McCray 2012: 6) students usually appreciate the teachers' personal traits. Also, the students mention that it is easy to study when their teacher understands them, is fair, charismatic, and has a good sense of humour. In accordance with Giesecke (2001: 109), this is a special opportunity for the successful teaching and learning process. Thus, it is necessary to take this into account thinking about future teachers' education. Therefore, our research results will be discussed below.

The data are divided into three levels: high – students' positive attitude towards teacher's personal characteristics; average – students think that not all the teachers' personal characteristics make a positive impact on their learning; low – students' attitude towards teachers' characteristics is mostly negative (Table 1).

In accordance with the data, the teacher's personal characteristics are important motivational factor of learning the foreign languages. Students think that the teachers of foreign languages are usually tactful and set a good example (94.5%), the teachers are fair and objective (87.5%), also the teachers explain the new teaching materials patiently (86.6%) and they always smile and greet their students politely (85.0%). The results show that for students it is important the teacher's sense of humour (92.5%), the teacher's voice tone (86.9%) as well as the teacher should be an understanding and flexible person (86.9%). This fact is as significant as the teachers' professional competence.

According to the data, more than one-third of the students (35.9%) have doubts whether the teacher has to be principled and strict. Their opinion is strengthened by the fact that

Table 1. Pupils' perception of teacher's personal characteristics

Criteria	High %	Average %	Low %
1. The teacher always demonstrates good behaviour, he is tactful and cultured.	94.5	6.3	1.2
2. It essential the teacher's a good sense of humour.	92.5	6.5	1.0
3. The teacher is always fair and objective.	87.5	10.9	1.6
4. The teacher should be not only a good subject teacher, but also an understanding and flexible person.	86.9	10.0	3.1
5. It is very important the teacher's voice tone.	86.9	10.6	2.5
6. The teacher explains the subject patiently.	86.6	10.9	2.5
7. The teacher always smiles and greets politely.	85.0	12.5	2.5
8. I concentrate on the subject better when I like my teacher.	76.9	15.3	7.8
9. The teacher never shouts or offends.	72.6	20.6	6.8
10. Students like when their teacher talks calmly but not too loudly.	72.2	17.5	10.3
11. The teacher should be elegant.	71.0	25.3	3.7
12. I would like to be taught by the teacher who is good-looking.	55.3	27.5	17.2
13. It is important not only the teacher's set good example, also the teacher should be dressed in beautiful and fashionable clothes.	47.8	30.9	21.3
14. The teacher must be strict and principled.	34.3	35.9	29.7

this variable does not show any correlation relationship with other variables. With regard to the teacher's appearance, there is a clear tendency that it is more important for students to have the elegant teacher (71.0%) than the fashionably dressed teacher (47.8%). Only about half of the respondents state that they would like to be taught by the good-looking teacher. Thus, the appearance is quite important, but not such a significant factor that motivates foreign languages learning. Furthermore, there are any significant relations to other variables.

It can be concluded that the majority of foreign language teachers behave tactfully and set a good example in the classroom, they usually explain the teaching materials patiently, and in students' opinion, the teachers should not be too strict and principled. Moreover, the teacher's sense of humour, voice tone and elegant appearance are very important factors as well.

The correlation analysis revealed that these variables, which are highly appreciated by the students, show statistically significant relations. The students think that teachers who are tactful and demonstrate good behaviour, also they are objective and fair (ρ = ,486, p = ,000). These teachers are in a better mood (ρ = ,389, p = ,000) and explain the new educational material patiently (ρ = ,425, p = ,000). The teacher's ability to be flexible and understanding correlates clearly with the teacher's voice tone (ρ = ,477, p = ,000) and charisma (ρ = ,371, p = ,000).

In accordance with the received data, it is clear that teachers' personal characteristics are highly valued by their students. The percentage of high-valued variables also often shows a strong correlation.

Pupils' perception of teachers' communications/interpersonal skills

The teaching and learning process as a social phenomenon (Giesecke 2001: A 22) is closely related to interaction. According to Galkienė research (2011: 86–87), the schoolchildren appreciate teachers' social and communicative skills high and positively, because they think that a good teacher speaks clearly, interacts with all students willingly, listens to them, solves conflict situations successfully. Therefore, our research results will be discussed below.

The data are divided into three levels: high – students' positive attitude towards the relationship with the teacher; average – students' attitude towards the relationship with the teachers is middling, students do not always feel free in the classroom; low – students' attitude towards the relationship with the teacher is mostly negative, students do not feel free in the lessons, they seldom express their opinion (Table 2).

Table 2. Pupils' perception of teacher – student relationships and well-being in the classroom

Criteria	High %	Average %	Low %
1. The teacher addresses student with his first name.	92.5	6.6	0.9
2. Students show respect towards their teacher.	89.1	7.8	3.1
3. Students can ask their teacher for help to perform the task.	87.2	10.9	1.9
4. Students perceive the teacher's bad mood or sadness.	77.8	17.8	4.4
5. Students cooperate friendly with their foreign language teacher.	75.0	19.7	5.3
6. Students express their opinion, because they know that the teacher will not criticize.	67.8	25.3	6.9
7. The teacher praises and encourages students for their even little progress	67.1	26.9	6.0
8. Students fell free during the lesson, because they are not afraid of making mistakes.	65.9	30.3	3.8
9. Student's opinion is important to teacher.	63.8	30.6	5.6
10. Students can communicate freely with their teacher without feeling tension.	61.9	29.4	8.8
11. The teacher takes into account the student's opinion.	59.0	32.8	8.2
12. Students like talking with their teacher.	51.9	36.6	11.5
13. Students can ask their teachers to give them personal advice.	42.9	30.9	26.3

According to the data, the students usually describe their relations with the foreign language teacher as positive. Most students show respect towards their teacher (89.1%)

and can ask for help if it is necessary (87.2%). It is very important for the respondents to be addressed with their first name by the teachers (92.5%), in their opinion, it reveals the immediacy of the relationship, although this variable did not show any correlation relationship with other variables. It is obvious that more than half of senior students freely express their opinion, because they know that they will not be criticized (67.8%), they are not afraid of making mistakes during the lessons (65.9%) and can communicate with their teachers without tension (61.9%).

With reference to the data of the illustration, the respondents often socialize with their teacher but it is not the usual thing to communicate personally with their schoolteacher. Less than half of the students (42.9%) ask for personal advice, other students have doubts or do not know whether they dare to ask for help their teacher. Thus, the student-teacher relationship is mostly associated with the subject teaching and learning. Apparently, the students feel that the teacher of the subject is not a person with whom they can talk about personal problems, although the teachers are respected.

Data correlation analysis has shown that students are often free to interact with the teachers who respect the student's opinions ($\rho = ,504$, $p = ,000$), then the student are not afraid of making mistakes ($\rho = ,529$, $p = ,000$) and do not feel the tension ($\rho = ,499$, $p = ,000$). If students know that their teacher will not criticize, then they feel free to state their opinion or be wrong ($\rho = ,530$, $p = ,000$). Thus, the students appreciate the respect for their opinion, also it is important that some errors or inaccuracies would be mentioned personally.

The survey showed that students like to communicate with the teachers with whom they do not feel the tension and are not afraid of making mistakes. These teachers are approached not only with the subject teaching and learning matters but even with personal or emotional problems.

Pupils' perception of teacher professional pedagogical and special pedagogical competencies

There are a lot of research works where scientists analyze peculiarities of teachers professional pedagogical and special educational competencies and in higher education almost the greatest consideration is paid to them. With reference to Galkienė (2011: 88), schoolchildren find these competencies not so important, although another study (Kriaučiūnienė 2011: 132) showed that the future teachers prefer precisely these competencies. Therefore, our research results will be discussed below.

The data are divided into three levels: high – students think that teachers are always properly plan, organize the learning process, encourage and motivate their students in the classroom; average – students think that teachers do not always manage to plan and organize class work; low – students think that lessons are usually boring and lack of variety, also teachers do not motivate their students efficiently and effectively (Table 3).

Table 3. Pupils' perception of teacher professional pedagogical and special pedagogical competencies

Criteria	High %	Average %	Low %
1. The teacher formulates clear teaching–learning objectives	89.4	8.8	1.8
2. The teacher engages his/her students in interesting lesson	87.8	9.7	2.5
3. The teacher's explanation of content is clear, coherent and illustrated by examples	87.2	10.9	1.9
4. Students say that visual materials are very important in teaching	83.7	11.6	4.7
5. The teacher explains complicated material in a way that students can understand	83.0	14.1	2.9
6. The teacher assists and helps all students	82.4	16.3	1.3
7. The teacher explains the incomprehensible words or phrases	81.9	15.3	2.8
8. The teacher uses the visual materials	76.8	20.0	3.2
9. The teacher advises on the subject matters after classes	74.6	18.8	6.6
10. The teacher uses various teaching-learning strategies	71.0	20.5	8.5
11. The teacher mentions some errors or inaccuracies personally	70.6	17.8	11.6
12. An interesting teaching material promotes active work	70.6	24.4	5.0
13. The teacher perceives and appreciates students' efforts	69.4	25.6	5.0
14. The teacher displays students' project works or essays and enjoys their achievements	69.0	25.0	6.0
15. The teacher motivates students to try and improve their knowledge	54.3	34.1	11.6
16. The teacher encourages participations in various competitions and Olympiads	47.2	26.6	26.2

The analysis of pupils' perception of teacher professional pedagogical and special pedagogical competencies showed that the students appreciate teachers who motivate students to progress and are able to present teaching materials clearly and visually.

According to the data, teachers almost always (89.4%) explain the incomprehensible words or phrases and encourage further efforts and improvement (87.8%). Students like when teachers use a lot of visual materials (83.7%), then they work actively (83.0%). The research data show that teachers rarely display students' achievements (47.2%) and make individual comments on students' mistakes or errors (54.3%). It is noticed that there is a lack of variety, consistency and visualization in lessons. A little more than half (67.1%) of participants indicate that lessons are interesting and they are not bored, the teachers plan the lesson properly, work consistently (69.0%) and use a lot of visual materials (69.4%).

Thus, students almost always get help when they have problems with vocabulary or use of grammar, also teachers often encourage students to achieve better results and improve their knowledge. Students acknowledge that teachers give thoughtful attention to each student. Furthermore, the students would like that teachers would appreciate their achievements and display their project works or essays in class. It is important that teachers would mention students' errors or inaccuracies personally. Also, students would like to be praised and encouraged for their even little progress. Moreover, students think that more various teaching – learning strategies and visual materials could be applied by their teachers.

Correlation analysis showed that the most significant parameters are students' praise by their teachers, students' efforts appreciation. In addition, it is very important teachers' clear and coherent explanation of content and the use of visual materials.

According to the survey, teachers' ability to explain teaching materials consistently quite strongly correlate with the use of visual materials ($\rho = ,611$, $p = ,000$) and with the ability to present information in an interesting way ($\rho = ,494$, $p = ,000$). It appears that the teachers who often praise the students for their achievements at the same time are able to assess the progress properly ($\rho = ,501$, $p = ,000$) explain subject material in more interesting way ($\rho = ,419$, $p = ,000$), and more often use visual materials ($\rho = ,430$, $p = ,000$). It is also a strong correlation among teachers' abilities to organize interesting lesson activities, to use visual materials ($\rho = ,504$, $p = ,000$) and the efforts to take into account the needs of the students ($\rho = ,471$, $p = ,000$).

It is important that the variables for which the students gave the highest percentage assessments do not show strong, statistically significant relations.

Conclusions

There are many scientific works, which describe and analyze the image of "good teacher" and these criteria are known probably for all professionals, but in the teaching and learning process all participating individuals – both students and teachers – have their own individual knowledge, skills, personal characteristics, needs and expectations. Therefore, the teaching and learning situation cannot always be the same, steady and clear or predictable.

The teacher's behaviour can increase or reduce the motivation of pupils, even if they have a strong inner motivation. In this case, it is very important the teacher's motivation, as students perceive whether their teacher is interested in his subject or he is promoted to work only by external factors. The teacher has to be a good specialist, also he should be able to create harmonious, humanistic relations and know how to create a positive, confidence-based class atmosphere.

With reference to the research data, it is important for students when teachers encourage them to improve and are able to present teaching material clearly and visually. This encourages students' activity and willingness to learn, however, they often feel the lack of variety, consistency and visualization. In addition, the emotional factor is very significant. The students want that their teachers would praise them and enjoy their students' achievements.

According to the research, students usually describe their relationships with foreign language teachers as positive. The survey showed that students like to communicate with the teachers with whom they do not feel the tension and are not afraid of making mistakes. These teachers are approached not only with the subject teaching and learning matters but even with personal or emotional problems.

Students think that most foreign language teachers are tactful and patient when explain incomprehensible or new subject matters. However, the teachers should not be very strict and principled. It appeared that the students pay attention to the teacher's sense of humour, voice tone and elegant appearance.

It is significant that factors such as age, gender or school type did not show any statistically significant differences.

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