

MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR LOW-PERFORMANCE STUDENTS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Introduction

Motivation is widely recognized as a decisive factor in successful second and foreign language learning. While cognitive ability, learning strategies, and exposure to the target language play important roles, motivation often determines whether learners persist despite difficulties or disengage from the learning process. Low-performance students, in particular, frequently experience anxiety, low self-esteem, and repeated academic failure, which negatively affect their motivation and overall achievement. In language classrooms, these learners may demonstrate limited participation, avoidance of speaking tasks, and negative attitudes toward learning. Addressing their motivational needs is therefore not only a pedagogical responsibility but also a prerequisite for effective language instruction. This article examines motivational strategies that can be applied to support low-performance students in language learning contexts. Drawing on theories of motivation and classroom-based research, the study explores practical, teacher-centered strategies that enhance engagement, build confidence, and promote sustained learning. The article aims to bridge theory and practice by offering evidence-based approaches that can be implemented in real classroom settings.

Annotation

This article explores motivational strategies aimed at improving the engagement and achievement of low-performance students in language learning contexts. It discusses theoretical perspectives on motivation, including intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, self-determination theory, and expectancy-value theory, and relates them to classroom practice. The paper emphasizes the role of teachers in creating supportive learning environments that foster confidence, autonomy, and positive attitudes toward language learning. Practical strategies such as goal-setting, differentiated instruction, positive feedback, cooperative learning, and the integration of technology are examined in detail. By synthesizing research findings and pedagogical approaches, the article highlights how motivation can be enhanced among learners who struggle academically. The study concludes that sustained motivational support can lead to improved performance, increased learner autonomy, and long-term success in language acquisition.

Keywords

Motivation, low-performance students, language learning, EFL teaching, learner engagement



Motivation has long been considered a central construct in second language acquisition research. Scholars argue that even learners with limited aptitude can achieve success if they are sufficiently motivated (Dörnyei, 2001). For low-performance students, however, motivation is often fragile due to repeated experiences of failure and negative feedback. These learners may perceive language learning as unattainable, which leads to disengagement and resistance to classroom activities. Understanding the nature of motivation and its role in language learning is therefore essential for designing effective instructional strategies.

One of the most influential distinctions in motivation research is between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity for its inherent enjoyment or interest, whereas extrinsic motivation is driven by external rewards or pressures (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Low-performance students are often extrinsically motivated, focusing on grades or teacher approval rather than genuine interest in the language. While extrinsic motivation can initiate learning, it is insufficient for sustained engagement. Teachers must therefore aim to gradually foster intrinsic motivation by making learning meaningful, enjoyable, and relevant to students' lives.

Self-determination theory provides a useful framework for understanding how motivation can be enhanced in educational settings. According to this theory, learners are more motivated when their basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are satisfied (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Low-performance students frequently feel incompetent and lack control over their learning, which undermines motivation. Teachers can address this by offering choices in tasks, setting achievable goals, and creating opportunities for success. When students experience progress, their sense of competence increases, leading to greater motivation and persistence.

Expectancy-value theory also sheds light on motivational challenges faced by low-performance learners. This theory suggests that motivation is influenced by learners' expectations of success and the value they attach to a task (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Students who expect failure are unlikely to invest effort, regardless of the task's importance. Teachers can improve expectancy beliefs by breaking tasks into manageable steps and providing scaffolding. At the same time, highlighting the practical value of language skills, such as communication, career opportunities, or cultural understanding, can enhance task value.

A supportive classroom environment plays a crucial role in motivating low-performance students. Research indicates that students are more engaged when they feel emotionally safe and respected (Oxford, 2016). Teachers who demonstrate empathy, patience, and encouragement can reduce anxiety and build trust. This is particularly important in speaking activities, where low-performance learners may fear making mistakes. By normalizing errors as part of the learning process and emphasizing effort over accuracy, teachers can foster a growth-oriented mindset.

Positive feedback is another powerful motivational strategy. For low-performance students, feedback should focus on improvement and effort rather than solely on outcomes. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), effective feedback provides information about what learners are doing well and how they can improve. Praising specific behaviors, such as participation or strategy use, reinforces positive learning habits. Over time, this helps students develop self-efficacy, which is closely linked to motivation and achievement.

Goal-setting is a practical strategy that can enhance motivation among struggling learners. Clear, realistic goals provide direction and a sense of purpose. When goals are too ambitious, low-performance students may feel overwhelmed; therefore, short-term, attainable goals are



more effective. Teachers can involve students in setting personal learning goals, which increases ownership and accountability. Achieving these goals can boost confidence and encourage learners to take on more challenging tasks.

Differentiated instruction is particularly beneficial for motivating low-performance students. Learners differ in their proficiency levels, learning styles, and interests, and uniform instruction may disadvantage those who struggle. By adapting tasks, materials, and assessment methods, teachers can ensure that all students experience success (Tomlinson, 2014). For example, offering simplified texts, visual aids, or additional practice opportunities allows low-performance learners to participate meaningfully without feeling inferior.

Cooperative learning has been shown to improve motivation and achievement in language classrooms. Working in pairs or small groups allows low-performance students to learn from peers and receive immediate support. Cooperative tasks also reduce the pressure associated with individual performance, making participation less intimidating. According to Johnson and Johnson (2009), positive interdependence and individual accountability are key features of effective cooperative learning. When structured appropriately, group work can enhance motivation, social interaction, and language practice.

The integration of technology can further motivate low-performance students by providing interactive and personalized learning experiences. Digital tools such as language learning applications, online games, and multimedia resources can make learning more engaging and accessible. Technology also allows learners to practice at their own pace, which is particularly beneficial for those who require more time to process information. Studies suggest that technology-enhanced instruction can increase motivation and learner autonomy when aligned with pedagogical goals (Chapelle, 2017).

Teacher expectations significantly influence student motivation and performance. Low-performance students are often affected by negative labeling or low expectations, which can become self-fulfilling prophecies. Teachers who maintain high but realistic expectations communicate belief in students' potential, which can motivate learners to improve. Research by Rubie-Davies (2014) highlights that positive teacher expectations are associated with higher student achievement and engagement.

Another important motivational strategy involves fostering learner autonomy. Autonomous learners take responsibility for their learning and are more motivated to engage in language practice beyond the classroom. Teachers can promote autonomy by teaching learning strategies, encouraging self-reflection, and providing opportunities for independent learning. Although low-performance students may initially struggle with autonomy, gradual support and guidance can help them develop confidence and self-regulation skills.

Cultural and contextual factors should also be considered when addressing motivation. Learners' attitudes toward language learning are shaped by societal values, educational systems, and family expectations. In some contexts, language learning is primarily exam-oriented, which may demotivate low-performance students who struggle with testing. Teachers can counteract this by emphasizing communicative competence and real-life language use, thereby broadening learners' perspectives on success.

Assessment practices have a strong impact on motivation. Traditional assessments often highlight deficiencies rather than progress, which can discourage low-performance learners. Alternative assessment methods, such as portfolios, self-assessment, and formative assessment,



provide a more comprehensive picture of learning and emphasize growth. Black and Wiliam (2009) argue that formative assessment supports motivation by involving learners in the evaluation process and providing constructive feedback.

Motivation is not a static trait but a dynamic process that fluctuates over time. Therefore, motivational strategies must be sustained and adapted to learners' evolving needs. Teachers should regularly reflect on their practices and seek professional development opportunities to enhance their understanding of motivation. Collaborative discussions with colleagues can also provide insights into effective strategies for supporting low-performance students.

In summary, motivating low-performance students requires a multifaceted approach that addresses psychological, pedagogical, and contextual factors. No single strategy is sufficient on its own; rather, a combination of supportive relationships, effective instruction, and meaningful assessment is necessary. By prioritizing motivation, teachers can create inclusive learning environments that empower all students to succeed in language learning.

Conclusion

Motivation is a decisive factor in determining the success of low-performance students in language learning. This article has shown that motivational challenges are often rooted in learners' negative experiences, low self-confidence, and limited expectations of success. By applying theory-informed and practical motivational strategies, teachers can significantly influence learners' engagement and achievement. Supportive classroom environments, meaningful feedback, realistic goal-setting, differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, and technology integration collectively contribute to sustaining learner motivation. Importantly, motivation should be viewed as a dynamic process that requires continuous attention rather than a one-time intervention. When teachers demonstrate belief in learners' potential and provide consistent encouragement, low-performance students are more likely to develop autonomy and persistence. Ultimately, enhancing motivation not only improves language performance but also empowers learners to become confident and lifelong language users.

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