

## Enhancing Students' Effectiveness through Motivational Strategies

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### Abstract

The present qualitative study aims to explore teachers' and students' perceptions of some teaching motivational strategies impact on university students' effectiveness based on Dörnyei & Csizér (1998) landmark study. The research has involved individual in-depth semi-structured interviews with six English Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and six students to further explore key issues from their viewpoints. The main findings have unveiled that both teachers and students recognise the motivating potential of all the examined scales. Many similarities and some dissimilarities related to specific motivational themes have emerged. In terms of dissimilarity, students accorded importance to group work scale, however teachers minimised its role by justifying that it needed certain conditions. Another area of mismatch can be noticed in the way students and teachers regarded tasks in motivating students. Teachers stressed on providing clear instruction and explanation while students pointed to the content of tasks. Furthermore, another instance of difference in participants' views towards the same scale in terms of the motivational strategies to be used was in teacher behaviour scale. Both participants agreed to place value on it, but students appeared to emphasise on the social aspects as feeling relaxed and enjoying the class in order to participate fully, while teachers stressed on academic achievement.

*Keywords:* Academic achievement, EFL teachers, group work, motivational strategies, perceptions, students, tasks, teacher behavior

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## Introduction

Motivation plays a crucial role in enhancing students' motivation in English Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. It is considered as a prominent factor in language learning (Dörnyei, 2001a; Oxford, 1994; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). More importantly, research on motivation in second (L2) or foreign language (FL) learning has widened its scope and shifted emphasis from describing the composition of students' motivation to a detailed list of practical strategies to assisting teachers to boost their students' motivation (e.g., Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007; Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Dörnyei, 2001a; Williams & Burden, 1997).

## Literature Review

There is a growing agreement among teachers and researchers that motivation plays a key role in the success of the L2/FL learning process (Dörnyei, 1998). FL/L2 motivation is needed to help learners expend and persist in their effort in a FL/L2 learning process which might extend over a long study period of time. It is highlighted as well that "without motivation even the brightest students who possess remarkable abilities cannot resist in the face of difficulties and attain any really useful language" (Dörnyei, 2010, p.74).

As it is assumed in the present study, EFL teachers are more interested in finding ways of increasing students' involvement and engagement in learning activities in the FL classroom. A FL classroom influenced by the teacher as a prime source of the new language has a major impact on students' motivation and attitude towards learning. Thus, teachers should be aware of motivational strategies and how they are central to students' motivation and interest in learning the English language.

A look at the published literature unearthed that the previous research findings and even the proposed motivational teaching strategies may not be adequate or valid for all EFL teaching contexts and learning situations. In this context, it has been cited that "very little research has been done to answer a crucial question: Are the proposed techniques actually effective in language classrooms?" (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008, p.56). Yet, the study at hand endeavours to address students' motivation as a central issue so as to provide some insights into how university students and teachers perceive the most important teacher motivational strategies that are derived from Western educational contexts and evaluate their relevance to the Algerian EFL classroom context.

## Aim of the Study

EFL teachers have always attempted to find new approaches or strategies that introduce practical uses of English as a Foreign Language in the classroom. With this in mind, the primary concern of the undertaken study is to foster more effective implementation of a set of motivational strategies through a better understanding of their perceived importance of use in the FL classroom from teachers' and students' perspectives and ultimately make students learn the English language.

## Research Questions

The current study has addressed the following interrelated research questions:

- a. Which motivational strategies do students and teachers identify as most important?
- b. How do students' and teachers' beliefs compare?

## Methodology

### Participants

The participants were six EFL university teachers and six students from Souk-Ahras University, Algeria. The students were enrolled in the first year Human Sciences. The technique used for sampling was 'convenience sampling'. That is our sample was conveniently selected. It is a non-random sampling method and is defined as "the selection of individuals who happen to be available for study" (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 122).

### Instruments

To collect qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were used to explore teachers' and students' experiences, perceptions, and views. Interviews may be conducted in various modes: face-to-face, by telephone, videophone but face-to face is probably the best one. In our case, interviews were conducted individually in the university; they were face-to-face, they were conducted in English and recorded. Additionally, the interviewees were provided with a short summary about motivational strategies that could also be used in the language classroom to make them voice out their opinions around this specific area.

### Data Analysis

Dörnyei & Csizér (1998) conceptualisation of motivational strategies was used as a framework when analysing the motivational strategies which were discussed during the interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. In order to describe these ideas, codes are generated from the data which are then classified into relevant themes. Dörnyei (2007b) suggests several stages to be taken in order to interpret qualitative data. Generally, these stages include transcribing the data, initial coding, grouping initial coding, searching for themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report. As a matter of fact, all the interviews were transcribed then coded. Besides, the data were thematically analysed, and the themes related to the motivational strategies used in the language classroom were grouped and then classified.

## Results and Discussion

The main findings uncover that both teachers and students recognise the motivating potential of all the examined scales. Many similarities and some dissimilarities in terms of their perceptions related to specific motivational themes have emerged. In terms of dissimilarity, students accord importance to group work scale; however, teachers minimise its role by justifying that it needs certain conditions. Hereafter are some teachers' and students' quotations.

Teacher C said:

*Group work needs more than a mere application, how are they [the students] going to work? You [the teacher] have to set rules during group work activities. Then, she added: I do not want to have chaos and disagreements that make the group work goes wrong. (Teacher C)*

Teacher B said:

*A group is made up of different members who cannot get profit from one another simply because we [the teachers] will have a kind of monopoly within the group. He added: Different members form a small learner community, we [the teachers] do not have the conditions or the means to make the members profit from one another...always someone somehow is dominating. (Teacher B)*

From the above quotes, we can clearly notice that the deficiency is not in the group work per se but in the way how it is organised and according to which conditions. This leads us to think as well that teachers themselves need to have a clear idea about setting group work norms in order to make it successful and make learners get profit from one another. Teacher B's perception conveys the idea that group work does not have a positive effect and is not promoting cooperation among learners during group work activities.

Teacher A stated clearly:

*I do not include group work in my classes since they [the students] do not realise the meaning of learning a foreign language ...they do not realise the responsibility of learning a foreign language in a group. (Teacher A)*

From her quotation, teacher A, is stressing two elements which are related to the students. According to her, the students themselves ignore the positive and effective side of group work and need to be responsible learners so as to promote their learning within a group.

Teacher D appears to agree with teacher A. She said:

*Group work is not really important to me for the outcome is not interesting, group learners are not always manageable and over years it proved to be not efficient enough... at least for me! (Teacher D)*

In fact, teacher (D) is playing down the role of group work because it is not that easy to be managed and at the same time she makes a personal judgement about its inefficiency. It seems obvious, from her quote that she attempted to operate with group work but it did not yield her the desired outcome. But it is still useful to say that the problem is not in the group work but in how to set it. Teacher E seemed to agree with all of them in minimising group work role and introduced a new element which is associated with the use of the mother tongue among students to deviate from the task assigned to them and start a discussion.

Teacher E placed too much emphasis on the teacher in organising group work to promote learning. He stated:

*In group work, most students are passive and only one or two students are speaking. Sometimes students avoid the task assigned to them and start a discussion, using the mother tongue, about their daily actions. (Teacher E)*

Teacher (E) further added:

*So, group work is not actually useful, it needs a lot of effort from teachers and students seem to ignore its advantages. (Teacher E)*

Teacher F did not give more details on group work. In her own words, she stated:

*When programming group work, teachers help less advanced learners, encourage their interests, and engage them. (Teacher F)*

Teacher F spoke about teachers' help and encouragement for less advanced learners' interests and engagement, but she did not include any information on how to afford this help to learners, or how to encourage their interests, or engage them. In fact, her quote portrays the idea that organising group work and managing it constitutes a difficult task for teachers.

As we have seen, all the teachers talked about group work from different perspectives but all of them agreed to down play its role in increasing learners' effectiveness. Yet, the teachers appear to hold group work in low regard, as they believe that it does not contribute to increasing students' effectiveness, but rather leads to the opposite impact causing disagreements and clashes among the group members themselves.

Additionally, we have to recognise the fact they stated about its implementation which requires more effort from the teacher and its organisation needs certain conditions to make it achieve positive impacts in the students' lives.

The attitudes of students towards creating group work were quite common. Most of them seem to stress on the social aspect of getting to know each other. Students stated that working in a group help them knit relationships and share the information. Exceptionally, only one student (L) expressed her dissatisfaction. In her own words, she said:

*Not a very good idea if we see the noise that students make. Students are always in disagreement and even when we work in group, there is always one who is working more than the others. (Student L)*

Conversely, the other interviewed students talked about group work positively. For instance, student G said:

*...To have a good relationship between the learners because if there is no good relationship between them they will face problems also to share the ideas. (Student G)*

Student K said:

*...To share the information and the knowledge. Discover the other... Make the students closer and strong relation between the students. ...Creates a climate of confidence and more than that solidarity. (Student K)*

From her quotation, it seems that she is adding other benefits as a consequence of setting group work. She stated that when students work within a group, there will be a climate of confidence and solidarity. Students help each other and feel confident to express themselves. Indeed, some students feel confident to express themselves in front of a limited number of their classmates.

In addition to sharing information and competition, other students are in favour of group work and see it as an occasion to discuss and seek support from their fellow students and learn from them something new in terms of ideas and information. These students appear to highlight the social aspect of learning together and by ways of interaction.

Student I said:

*It [Group work] is a good strategy, we share ideas to avoid the miss lead. A dynamic member will push the other members. Group work creates more competition. (Student I)*

Student L said:

*Group work helps to make a discussion in the group. (Student L)*

Student H said:

*Group work will give students the opportunity to share their information and learn from the others and get new information. (Student H)*

Another area of mismatch can be noticed in the way students and teachers regard tasks in motivating students. Teachers stress on providing clear instruction and explanation while students pointed to the content of tasks. They stated tasks should be interesting and varied. The teachers and the students believe that strategies related to tasks have a key role in motivating students and increasing their effectiveness. One student amongst the others appears to stress the importance of breaking up the routine to prevent boredom and maintain student interest.

The result of this scale may also suggest an area of mismatch in the views of teachers and students about the motivating factors of using tasks in enhancing students' effectiveness. Students go into more detail about how the tasks and their content can be motivating. In their views, tasks should involve relevant topics to interaction and participation. It can reveal that students give much more importance to the social aspects surrounding language learning. However, teachers accord more importance to presenting tasks properly, providing clear instruction and including more explanation. Teacher C said:

*Tasks are in the heart of our job. If you [the teacher] do not explain to students, they will not understand. So, they will not be motivated to do the task. (Teacher C)*

Teacher B said:

*Teachers must prepare before hand, you [the teacher] can't ad-lib, make instruction clear, make all students learn. (Teacher B)*

Teacher A is raising another point about tasks. She said:

*I [the teacher] hate assigning too much tasks to students, you [the teacher] psychologically block them [the students]. They have to feel free. Too much tasks make them [the students] bored and fed up. (Teacher A)*

Her quotation portrays the idea that students' effectiveness decreases because of the quantity of tasks in the class. According to her, students feel rather bored and psychologically blocked and consequently it would be preferable to assign them few tasks instead.

As for teacher F, presenting tasks properly is required with more emphasis on the oral ones. Teacher F seems to give priority to oral tasks over the written ones without providing any justification whatsoever.

She said:

*Students like the teacher who presents tasks properly and who is fluent, who has deep knowledge of the subject.*

She added:

*Teachers should give and present tasks in a motivating way.*

Later, she came up with another precision saying:

*They [the teachers] should give more oral tasks than written ones (Teacher F)*

Teacher E agrees with teacher A in terms of presenting tasks properly without supplying any further details.

He cited:

*Presenting tasks properly is highly important and recommended to assure a better response from your learners. (Teacher E)*

Teacher A once again expressed:

*I [the teacher] always stress on the responsibility to learn. There is something missing in their [students] motivation there is a kind of lack! I [the teacher] stress on intrinsic motivation. Even though you [the teacher] explain a task properly and you expect them [the students] to work it they do not do it in a good way. There will be always some kind of shortage! (Teacher A)*

Albeit the teacher cited a very crucial element namely 'Intrinsic Motivation', she did not make any linkages with the task. In fact, it is not only the way a task is presented that matters. Many factors that none of the interviewed teachers hinted at as: variety, diversity, personal challenge, sense of control over the process or the product, and students' interest should be embedded in the structure and design of the learning task itself in order to create an intrinsic motivation or purpose to increase students' effectiveness and yet their learning.

As for students, they appear to believe in the motivational effects of using strategies related to tasks used in the FL class. They mainly spoke about three teaching practices: presenting tasks in different ways to shackle off the classroom routine, including tasks and topics relating to competition and involving students in the class to encourage participation.

Student I evoked the idea that teachers should vary the ways they deliver lessons and create competition in order to avoid boredom. She also highlighted a central element that relates to the practice of changing roles that differs from the old 'show-and-tell' practices where students sit as bunch bound listeners and the teacher is lecturing as the main source of knowledge.

She said:

*...Using a variety of ways to present lessons... create competition between students. Get out of the classroom routine, change roles teacher and student. (Student I)*

Student L appears to agree with student I on the element of using tasks that encourage students to compete with one another and raise their curiosity to make them discover and learn by themselves.

She said:

*...Tasks which encourage competition and challenge between students. Develop the desire to study. Encourage students to discover, to know more. (Student L)*

Student L seems to agree with student I in terms of variety and diversity of tasks and more importantly she exemplified with task contents. She also valued interactive practices and lessons in which students express themselves. She voiced:

*The diversity of exercises is very important... phonetics, comprehension and written expression. Asking students and hearing their opinions as a very good practice. The lesson is more interesting when the lesson is about personal opinions. (Student L)*

To the mind of student H, teachers are required to design tasks that rather facilitate the learning and encourage students to participate in a stress free atmosphere. This may suggest that when students find tasks difficult to do, they cannot participate and learn and yet they feel a sort of stressful study atmosphere imposing itself on them and hinder their learning.

Student H said:

*We need tasks to make the learning easy. Make all students participate in relaxed atmosphere. (Student G)*

Student G and K are no exception, they responded respectively:

*To make the students understand the point and better understand the lesson and push them to participate in the classroom and get the information from their inside. (Student G)*

Student K said:

*Make students participate and create an atmosphere of competition. (Student K)*

As has been mentioned previously, when addressing tasks, the students value a varied presentation style suggesting that their classes are ordinary and could be boring. The task content was also an important aspect for the students who state that the inclusion of useful and interesting topics is important to maintain their interest and encourage participation. Participation also featured highly in the views of the students who appear to view the motivation factors of presenting a task as the process of learning.

This process of learning should allow students to be effective through interaction, speaking and participating in the class, regardless of the task structure. In short, we can see that the students will not feel motivated and effective by breaking up the routine only, but also need to be inspired by relevant topics and fully involved in the class.

Additionally, another instance of difference in participants' views towards the same scale in terms of the motivational strategies to be used is in teacher behaviour scale. Both participants agree to place value on it, but students appear to emphasise on the social aspects as feeling relaxed and enjoying the class in order to participate fully, while teachers stress on academic achievement.

Teacher C said:

*When you [the teacher] are fair! You communicate and behave the same way with all of them [the students] according to the situation. This gives them [the students] relaxation and safety! This [being fair] makes them [the students] motivated and have the courage to work and get involved. (Teacher C)*

Teacher B simply said:

*You [the teacher] have to consider them [the students] all the same. He further added: We [the teachers] try to provide them [the students] with the possibility to learn especially shy learners and stir up latent knowledge embedded inside them. (Teacher B)*

Teacher C emphasised on the way the teacher behaves in the class and said:

*They [the students] learn something other than information. They [the students] like the way you [the teacher] work with them, they will be motivated. When you*

*work hard and set rules, this will help them improve and make them understand the lesson. (Teacher C)*

Students on their part voiced out the quotations that follow underneath.

Student I said:

*The behaviour of the teacher reflects the personality of the teacher. For example, when the teacher is strict, the students will respect him and become afraid of his reactions so they will be strict but if the teacher is not strict the students also will not be strict and he will lose the control on them. (Student I)*

Her quote conveys the idea that ultimately students mirror their teacher in terms of behaviour. Student L seems to slightly agree with student I when she indicates that the teacher's behaviour as being serious impacts the students' lives in the classroom. However, student L stresses that the impact can be either positive as making students love the language and yet accord it importance or negative and result in making them hate to study it .

Student L said:

*The behaviour of the teacher can make the student love or hate the language, to give it importance. If teacher is good for example ...serious, the students give importance to the language. (Student L)*

Student J as well recognises the importance of the teacher's behaviour and considers the norms of teacher tolerance and gentleness as motivational characteristics but within the limits and in the right time. She underlines the fact that students may get advantage of the situation in the wrong direction and yet they may end up with bothering the teacher.

Student J said:

*The teacher behaviour is very important. The teacher must be gentle and tolerant but not too much and all the time because there are always gentle students and others not. (Student J)*

Student K is of the opinion that students love the language owing to the teacher's good treatment, though she did not include any details on what or how could be this treatment in addition to varying topics and encouraging student competition. In her opinion:

*The teacher makes us love English by good treatment, doing activities to encourage competition between students. Studying topics related to education, others to social to make students free and not limited. (Student K)*

The strategies mentioned by the students in relation to teacher behaviour involve the teacher responding and caring about them as individuals and creating a good mood in the classroom, which appears to contribute to the social aspect of the process of FL learning. They mention the teachers' role in terms of enjoyment, tolerance, seriousness, and mood. It seems that the students are aware of how the teacher is feeling and this affects them directly.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The undertaken study as it seems does not cover all possible researchable features regarding the issue of motivational strategies since one of its limitations was its limited context. Yet, further research could investigate the use of motivational strategies in a significant number of contexts with participants from different educational contexts, for example primary, intermediate and secondary, in order to obtain valid data which could contribute to our understanding of FL/L2 motivation. Future research could include additional institutions and larger numbers of students and teachers. By expanding the number of participants, analyses could also take into consideration variables such as language of instruction and language level.

Further investigations are needed as well to examine the motivational effects of using strategies related to group work, task, and Learner autonomy from the perspectives of both EFL teachers and students. In terms of group work, future study needs to examine whether group work is considered, as was found in this study, less motivational for teachers and why this may be the case. Future research could examine the discrepancy between teacher and student beliefs towards the motivational power of using strategies related to task and Learner autonomy.

### **Conclusions**

EFL teachers should have a balanced view about what motivates their students. They could adapt the activities to create more interaction and promote participation whilst working towards the learning outcome. Teacher should include a wide range of information on what motivates students to learn, and how students learn languages through interaction.

In this global age, students are clearly focussing on social interaction, travel and the use of English in real life situations of communication. Therefore, teachers should pay attention to how this motivates students more than academic achievement and make them effective learners.

Teachers seem to deliver the course, focussing on their own behaviour and the organisation within the classroom, but giving less thought to the idea of the students as individuals within a social context with needs and preferences relating to learning process, interaction with their teachers and other class members, and social interactions outside the classroom. The findings also suggest that teachers need to be aware that their own views on what is motivating and effective for the students are not necessarily the same as the students' views.

In terms of 'Group work', teachers should be aware that simply grouping students together to work on a given task does not necessarily promote the kind of interaction the students are motivated by. They should first set up the ground rules for the group, give clear guidelines about the roles of group members and train students in how to work together and collaborate. The task itself should also be addressed so that teachers use group work with the outcomes being that of social interaction through language use, as well as the completion of a learning based task.

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