

# Motivating Reluctant EFL Students to Talk in Class: Strategies and Tactics

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**Abstract**—This research paper deals with a variety of strategies and tactics employed by teachers in the classroom to motivate reluctant students to converse and participate. Various scholarly articles are critically reviewed, taking into account fundamental motivational strategies such as enhancing communication, minimizing negative factors (including anxiety, apprehension and stress), teaching through games, as well as other co-curricular activities. In addition to these strategies, the role of teachers, parents and students is also considered. Finally, the paper presents some essential recommendations for the improvement of the current practices of classroom motivation.

**Index Terms**—motivation, knowledge, cognition, language acquisition, self-assessment, feedback

## I. INTRODUCTION

Mastering the art of teaching and learning is always dependent on the progress of students and the way students are influenced by the effectiveness of every positive attitude regarding their education. There are a lot of factors, such as, classroom's structure, lessons, various kinds of assessments, strategies, etc that play a very important role in deciding the progress and effectiveness of teacher-student learning and teaching. However, attaining mastery in the profession of teaching requires more than the traditional practices of a classroom. This allows every teacher to enhance the motivation skills in their students from the basic level (Jackson, 2011).

Motivating students especially the ones who are reluctant to participate, speak or engage in a classroom is one of the principles for attaining mastery in teaching (Weimer, 2009). There is a great deal of background behind why students need to get motivated in order to participate, speak and engage in classroom learning activities. This research paper is focused on the background behind motivating students to engage in classroom and some of the major strategies, which can be utilized by teachers to catalyze this process.

## II. OVERVIEW

In a survey conducted by Ofsted between September 2007 and February 2008, problems of differed students in an academy were highlighted to bring the issue of student engagement and motivation on board. This survey was aimed at identifying those actions that can be very beneficial for students to start enjoying their curriculum learning again. According to this survey, students who displayed de-motivation showed some similar kind of characteristics. These characteristics were that they were regularly non-compliant without being threatening or aggressive and caused continuous low-level disruptions. Their behavior was quite challenging, which resulted in repeated fixed-term exclusions or entries in school's incident logs (House, 2008).

According to Mahdi (2015), the greater part of the students longing to figure out how to communicate in English well and are willing to interface with others in oral English language classrooms. Nonetheless, because of different reasons, for example, absence of practice, low English capability, absence of certainty, tension, timidity, identity, trepidation of losing face, and apprehension of committing errors, more than 66% of the students stay hesitant to react to the instructor and stay silent until singled out to answer questions.

Students are motivated when they have firm belief in their job and career prospects, while the students, who are doubtful about it, are less motivated. Chances, such as, service, expeditionary learning and other similar kinds of learning are considered by such students in order to engage in schoolwork. Extracurricular activities also provide motivation to such students. Thus, it can be said that these students view academic learning from a different lens or perspective compared to those who do not. These are some of the most significant factors that differentiate motivated students from others (CEP, 2012).

In the paper "An Exploration of Causes of Saudi Students' Reluctance to Participate in the English Language Classroom" the writer Hamouda (2012) demonstrated some techniques utilized by understudies to take an interest as a part of the class, for example, practicing what they say and setting up the thoughts and inquiries. As per him these procedures help in improving the showing and learning of communicated in English in remote dialect connections.

The author Mahdi (2014) believed that the learning power of the student depends on the willingness of the students. He thinks that students who are more enthusiastic and eager to learn grasp things quickly as compared to those who are apathetic. He believes that some students are naturally enthusiastic about learning while others expect and need their

teachers to challenge, inspire and stimulate them. Effective learning environment is maintained only through teacher's ability. However, there is no single formula that miraculously makes students stay motivated in a classroom. Interest in the content of the subject, general desire to achieve self-esteem, perception of its usefulness, self-confidence, persistence and patience are some of the necessary factors, which are essential for student motivation. In addition, every student cannot be motivated through similar wants, desires, values and needs.

Some students get inspired through challenges while other students require teacher's approval to motivate them. This distinction is homogeneous in a classroom consisting of many different students (Davis, 2011). Considering the example, of English language learning for foreign learners, students feel reluctant to speak in an English language learning classroom because they are not motivated to speak. This happens due to many reasons, such as, lack of confidence in speaking and the fear of making errors in language while speaking. This lack of conversation also limits their opportunities for learning new things in a classroom. Lack of motivation gives way to further lack of motivation (Hue, 2010).

Some students are satisfied with just getting by in a class and so they do not complete their tasks and avoid challenges. Such students can also be regarded as reluctant learners. These students do not necessarily lack the potential to achieve in school but they lack the will to be successful and admired at school. Unfortunately students who lack motivation receive messages of their poor conduct, which in return makes them inadequate, frustrated, confused and ashamed. All these factors constitute to make them even more disturbed and de-motivated. Constant negative feedback from parents and teachers make students feel even less-motivated to excel (ERS, 2004).

Lack of relevance is another factor that makes students feel less motivated. When a student starts to believe that the schoolwork is less important and does not have any relation with his life or interest, he tends to become less motivated towards doing it. Fear of failure is the second characteristic that makes a student de-motivated. When a student feels that it is safer not to try a specific task rather than to try and take the risk of failing and embarrassment, he loses motivation to do that task. (Mahdi, 2015). Peer concern is also responsible for making student less motivated (Kuramoto, 2002).

There are apprehension issues connected to student psychology. Sometimes, students want to show off just by avoiding those assignments, which they fear they would fail. When students are facing difficulty in learning new terminologies and concepts, they are confronted with the problem of lack of motivation. When a student has to struggle a lot in order to maintain his pace according to his other classmates, he eventually gives up in frustration. Lack of challenges also makes students feel less motivated towards their learning process. When they feel apathetic towards school assignments, which are below their capability level, they tend to become less motivated towards attempting those schools tasks (ERS, 2004).

Most of the times, students often try to portray themselves as less motivated just to gain attention from their teachers so that they perceive them as helpless. Personal problems at home often make students stressed, anxious and depressed. All these factors constitute to make them feel less motivated towards their school assignments. On the other hand, student de-motivation is often an expression of anger. Students often make themselves de-motivated to perform poorly at exams due to parental pressure of achieving excellence in academics (ERS, 2004). Lack of motivation amongst some students is also caused due to overly motivated or overly participating students in a classroom, who inhibit other's chances to speak or act (Weimer, 2009).

It is a well-known fact among language acquisition specialists that there is a discrepancy between what classroom second/foreign language learners are taught, what they learn/acquire and what they can actually produce. This inconsistency has prompted second/foreign language researchers to investigate the role of explicit grammar instruction and whether, when and how focus on form benefits classroom second/foreign language learners (Ramirez, 2010). Krashen (2003) argued that focusing on linguistic form was of limited value because it can only contribute to 'learning' and never to 'acquisition'. Therefore, the learners should likewise acquire the information of how native speakers utilize the dialect in the setting of social interactions (Wright, 2012).



Figure 1: Motivating Students

### III. DISCUSSION

#### A. *Self-assessment*

In order to motivate reluctant students to talk and participate in a classroom, students should be asked first to do their self-assessment. Teachers can always distribute a questionnaire or any other kind of written activity that enables students to access their abilities and their weaknesses. Students can always highlight whether they are shy, reluctant, and confident or scared to speak up in a classroom. Students can also share their learning and studying routines through such activities, which can enable a teacher to understand different learning style of every student. In addition, this will also motivate students to express their weaknesses and strengths in a manner that will not make them feel embarrassed or ashamed (Jackson, 2011).

Knowledge is one factor, which motivates students in such a manner that it is not evident. Students are usually assessed on what they already know. However, they should not completely be assessed on what they already know. There is background knowledge and other kinds of cultural literacy forms that every student may not be able to comprehend until taught. Students should be given this knowledge and competency so that they do not gain demotivation in speaking or participating in a particular classroom that has a particular cultural or social background. Moreover, guiding students regarding the soft skills they use to access classroom content and interpret school also motivates them (Jackson, 2011).

Study skills, time management, organizational skills, etc are some of the most basic soft skills that make students learning easier and interactive in a classroom. Learning cannot occur in a vacuum. Every other student learns with other students and so learning is socially mediated. Social skills are required by every student to maintain and forge relationships to connect and given them a sense of belonging. These social skills also make students think of communicating with others who can help them. Social skills involve the ability to read a particular social context, along the knowledge of whom to say, what to say, when to say and how to say it (Jackson, 2011).

#### B. *Intrinsic Motivation*

According to Weiner (2009), human beings or students are machines. They have specific parts that form their structure and every part functions in one specific way. In the light of this statement, if human beings are given energy, each and every part of their body seems to perform well because it is getting the desired amount of energy. A teacher needs to develop a self-perception for every student. When students have cognitive and behavioral beliefs regarding the fact that hard work is the key to success, they build intrinsic motivation for themselves. Such students do not depend on luck or chance factors to attain success in their academics (Anonymous, n.d).

Intrinsic motivation can be build up in students through encouragement, which is displayed in actions, words and behaviors of teachers. If teachers encourage their students on speaking, even giving wrong answers by saying something like "your answers show thought". Statements like these make students believe that they have really improved and they have the ability to improve further. Similarly, intrinsic motivation can also be given by commenting students that their work/handwriting/drawing show improvement and the effort they are putting into school work rather giving student smiley or stars on good or improved performances. Positive and clear remarks make students build intrinsic motivation (Anonymous, n.d).

One of the reason is that as children build up their aptitudes, they meet diverse challenges which may occupy them from different scholarly activities. These challenges join absence of parental involvement, companion weight and others. There are similarly various movements in their emotional state and physical bodies. These movements may involve them from scholastic performance and consequently diminishing of intrinsic motivation. Another factor, which may reduce intrinsic motivation as children create, is the presence of extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation has been seen to reduce intrinsic motivation since it urges understudies to expect rewards for better scholarly performance. Exactly when such rewards are not display, this may reduce their motivation levels and hence their intrinsic motivation (Anonymous, n.d).

#### C. *Communication*

With the rising value of communication in the modern era, people tend to focus on the ability to speak a foreign language fluently instead of just reading or writing it. Yet, fluency in a foreign language requires more than learning grammatical and semantic rules. This is especially difficult for EFL learners because of the minimal use of the target language and contact with native speakers. Consequently, EFL learners, generally, are relatively poor at spoken English, in particular regarding fluency and control of idiomatic expressions. However, in practice, it is too often assumed that learner's communicative proficiency can be developed simply by assigning students' topics to discuss and encouraging them to participate in various speaking tasks (Mahdi, 2014; Anonymous, n.d).

However, getting students to participate in speaking tasks in conversation classes is a problem that most EFL teachers face. Success in a conversation class may be defined as a setting in which students are able to communicate effectively in English. Therefore, enhancing students' communicative competence is the ultimate aim for English majors at Saudi colleges and universities. However, a problem that most EFL students confront in discussion classes is viable utilization of the essential language rules they have learned. Indeed, even advanced students who have comprehended structure and vocabulary can frequently read and compose better than they can talk in an outside language.

#### D. *Cognition and Motivation*

According to majority of cognitive scientists, everything human beings do is done with a purpose to gain something in return (Jackson, 2011). Likewise, students perform well, do their homework, study for exams and participate in academic activities because they want good grades. Similarly, students may perform bad in order to gain attention. No matter the behavior is good or bad, it does have a purpose. In a same manner, student believes in investing for a classroom only if it has some purpose. Students who are willing to invest in a classroom want to do so to gain something in return (Jackson, 2011).

Communication in a brief moment/remote language requires some guessing in addition to contending. Various learners fear to take the risk and answer any inquiry unless they are totally certain it is right. They decide to stay silent all the time to abstain from making errors or fear of looking strange. Such fear of attempting or being subject to making errors makes students lose a few opportunities to practice the target language. The quiet understudy in the classroom is one why should unwilling seem foolish when errors are made. Confidence is by all accounts nearly joined with a risk-taking viewpoint: when those foolish errors are made, an individual by method for high worldwide confidence is not plagued by the conceivable outcomes of being laughed at. In any case, EFL learners must be active and ready to make forecasts, guess and take the risk of being off-base (Jackson, 2011; Mahdi, 2014).

Reticence is an emotional viewpoint which is obviously connected with confidence. People add to an arrangement of guards to protect themselves starting either outer or inside criticism. Reticence anticipates individuals as of conveying everything that needs to be conveyed openly and agreeably. Learning a second or foreign language requires making errors and learning habitually happen through making errors. However in the event that a learner fears of making errors and in addition considers errors as an unsafe impact on his sense of self, he will fall into inner (one's self) and also outside (others') threats. Both are barriers to learning. In fact, the non-debilitating and loose environment can drop understudy's reticence to the most reduced degree (Jackson, 2011).

Motivation has different meanings for every other person. These meanings give an ambiguous structure to the overall definition of motivation. In order to motivate students, first, this ambiguous meaning should be translated into a concrete definition for students to understand. Instead of asking vague questions, teachers should be specific and clear while asking reluctant students to do something. For example, teachers can ask "okay, so will you try to complete your homework next time?" moreover, instead of saying that "students should pay attention in class", teachers should be clear that what exactly they mean by saying "keep your head up", "keep your eyes and ears open", etc (Jackson, 2011).

#### E. *Math Talk*

Teachers can motivate students effectively through math talk. Subjects like mathematics and others that concern numbers can be effectively taught if they are discussed by the teachers in a game style. Giving answers in numbers and figures makes students take interest in answering and understanding how things can be talked about in math language. This strategy is one of the most effective one when it comes to foreign language students. Young students often associate words with one another. Math language makes students and teachers talk about a particular subject without confusing words and meanings with one another (Chapin, Connor & Anderson, 2009).

#### F. *Game Theory*

Similar to influencing decision-making factors in politics, business, economic and social interactions, game theory effect motivation factor for students as well. Usually, teachers treat a particular subject in a very formal or an abstract way that makes students lose interest in that particular subject. Thus, making students understand introductory or theoretical subjects through classroom games and activities is a very appropriate way to make students take interest in subjects, which may not interest them if taught formally. Teaching through games also motivates students to take their understanding to the higher level of their courses. Game theory is very beneficial for economics and math students (Becker, Becker & Watts, 2006).

Mixed strategy of equilibrium can be taught to students by using different mind games like chess that really effect and enhance human mind capability. When students play games in class and watch others play them as well, they learn concepts like backward induction, Nash equilibrium, formal statement, strategy and problem-set drill. Similarly, a Nim-like game, which is also called a Sequential-Move game help students learn major concepts (Becker, Becker & Watts, 2006).

#### G. *Writing and Motivation*

Writing itself is one kind of learning. It can help students motivate and gain the confidence to excel. Teachers can make students write about their achievements and good experiences from past and then prepare them to read out aloud what they have written. Many reluctant students feel more comfortable with writing than speaking. When students are asked to write about their experiences and achievements, they gain the confidence to share those with their classmates. This practice often makes students happy and ponders on the thought of achieving again (Buis, 2007).

Confidence is an essential need in human life. It comprises of efficiency and self-respect. Confidence has multi-dimensions which are: global confidence which means general assessment an individual makes of one's self, situational confidence which implies a particular situation, for example, foreign language framework in addition to task confidence that implies a specific task inside a circumstances e.g., writing in an EFL framework. In addition, confidence

contributes to all features of one's life. To live mentally healthy, confidence is fundamental. It is the basically basic highlight of the touching perspectives for the reason that all are related or created by confidence (Buis, 2007).

Students can also be asked to record any live event that is occurring in their present time. This makes students keep themselves motivated on recording things on the right time. Often students do not realize the importance of keeping their mind present to record a particular event. This strategy motivates students to take notes while they are sitting in a class lecture. Through the activity of taking notes, students can memorize lectures and important points for long. Teachers can also ask students to read aloud so that they learn how to pronounce and identify words through correct sounds (Buis, 2007).

#### *H. Parental Engagement*

According to the attribution theory, both teachers and parents should have realistic goals for their students. Teachers should always update parent on their child's ability, strength and progress. Thus, parents should always design goals, which are realistic. Unrealistic goals de-motivate students because they make them believe that they will be able to achieve something, which is not humanly possible. Parents should also keep in mind that very big change in progress of their children cannot occur in a day or a week. Improvement requires time and students should be assigned realistic goals in this time (Davis, 2011). They should not be asked to rush into things (Anonymous, n.d).

#### *I. Extracurricular Activities*

Extracurricular activities motivate students to learn through fun. Teachers and educational practitioners cannot make their students learn through extremely formal way. Teachers can design extracurricular activities that catalyze student learning. Group presentations and class presentations are one way to do this. In groups and role-plays students learn many things through acting and playing. Similarly, science teachers can practically demonstrate or take students to ecological places where they can see what they are studying. Parents can also do similar activities at home. Mothers can engage their young children in learning in-door games, such as, scrabble. Teenagers can be asked to demonstrate their general knowledge skills in family quiz (Kuramoto, 2002).

#### *J. Technology and Motivation*

Technology has motivated students through cooperative learning techniques. Increased use of computer technology has made students gain intrinsic motivation to do the task on their own through the help of internet. Students are motivated to do school assignments because they have access to internet to obtain the primary and secondary resources for their research work. Students feel lazy in going to library and searching through heavy catalogues. Giving them internet access makes them feel motivated to write assignments while sitting on computer for several hours. Moreover, course management software, such as, Blackboard, WebCT, etc can enable teachers to give virtual spaces to their students (Becker, Becker & Watts, 2006).

Teachers can encourage their students to maintain their academic e-mail IDs that can make them be available for readily accessible communications. Teachers can also give the option of submitting assignments through e-mails because it will save student's time and effort to motivate him to spend more time on researching. Students can be motivated to display simulations, experiments and demonstration by giving them the option of virtual classrooms. Classrooms equipped with personalized computers can also help students to communicate and work together with other peers. Group computer stations can also make students perform adequately in group presentations and tasks (Becker, Becker & Watts, 2006). Schools and other educational institutions should hire computer and information technology specialists, whose jobs are to make faculty use technology into their teaching (Becker, Becker & Watts, 2006).

#### *K. Curriculum and Motivation*

Schools should design curriculums that support and engage students in learning activities. All the books in the curriculum should be latest and in modern language. Pictures and illustrations play a very important role in making students feel good about a particular subject and feel motivated towards it. If the school curriculum is engaging, teachers plan their strategies accordingly. Schools should have educational research departments that specially discuss the planning of curriculum to make students admire their course even before beginning to study it (House, 2008).

The design of the curriculum ought to comprise of general core courses and a focus in an order of individual interest. General education courses would make sure that students have satisfied essential learning requirements of reading, math and English. These courses are important to guarantee that the students have the essential information expected to succeed in his or her picked field of study or control. This interest ought to be a subject that the understudy has a craving to take in more about. Students would figure out how to focus upon the relationship between great academic readiness and upward versatility in the work environment. The substance of learning would include numerous hands-on learning activities. Learning activities, for example, field practicum, perception, and evaluations toward oneself are every single learning instrument that would be utilized to support the understudy in mastering his or her field of study (Ramirez, 2010).

Various countries have higher education accrediting organizations that secure learning standards and outcomes. These standards and outcomes are utilized to ensure that students in higher education get the required educational chances to wind up productive citizens in society Accordingly, the principle explanation behind students to get a college

education is to set him up or her for an professional career. A curriculum must be developed and executed to accommodate the students' necessities. (House, 2008).

#### L. Reading and Motivation

In the past, teachers and researchers acknowledge the significance of reading resoundingly, yet the recurrence of read-emphatically is reducing because of time constraints. Teachers today confront the challenge of educating a continually expanding number of linguistically diverse students. Since children have distinctive preschool and social encounters, no single literacy program or set of instructional activities can address the issues of each youngster. The challenge of arranging literacy guideline intended for a very diverse gathering of language learners' packs direction time hard with phonics, phonemic mindfulness, reading gatherings, and vocabulary work. Making time for various instructor read-resoundingly during every day is an essential requirement, which can't be sensibly, disregarded (Buis, 2007).

Social language needs must be incorporated with educator read-resoundingly to guarantee that diverse language learners are propelled by substance. The messages, both visual and verbal, that children assimilate as writings are read, abandon them with deep impressions they could call their own cultural worth. Authentic books for students at this level show that in spite of the fact that individuals are distinctive in the way they show up these distinctions are something worth being thankful for and ought to be commended. All characters ought to be completely and empathetically portrayed. Literacy direction that expressly expands upon the cultural information, methods for making significance, and former learning that all children convey with them to the classroom will urge children to feel that their way of life is imperative and esteemed in schools (Davis, 2011).

Students must feel a feeling of having a place with the literacy group and discover motivation to practice the abilities required for learning. Using the cognitive apprenticeship methodology of writer's workshop, teachers may platform students in reading with the basic eye on the art of the writer. As in any authentic assignment, the understudy tries to find exactly what it is the writer does. By dissecting tutor writings for subtle elements, for example, line length, word decision, rehashing lines, similar sounding word usage, and allegory, students come to see how experts build books. They apply their making "revelations" to their own written work. In the authentic undertaking, they discover the identity and it offers assurance to the reading and composing that takes after. In discovering this identity, they get to be genuine individuals from the literacy club (CEP, 2012).

Students merit book rich classrooms in which regular read emphatically of amazing content are incorporated into direction. Vocabulary and techniques for comprehension ought to be unequivocally taught then framework during different readings of all around created content that happen over the educational program. Students admire the requirement for reading as they perform authentic tasks in cross-curricular inquiry learning open doors. Reading emphatically permits all to perform tasks as writers, commentators of literature, attorneys, artists, sponsors, artists, travelers, researchers, and politicians. Instructor read resoundingly are more imperative than any other time in recent memory, in light of the fact that our classrooms are so linguistically diverse (Davis, 2011).



Figure 2: Motivating Students

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The research conducted highlighted how students can be motivated through using different strategies by their teachers and parents. Similarly, every student has different level of understanding with respect to a particular environment. All the cognitive and psychological reasoning discussed above portrayed that how every classroom has different human minds with different psychological mechanism. Likewise, a single strategy can be effective for one student but it may be ineffective with other types of mind personalities. To cater students with their individual motivation requirements, role of a teacher is the crucial one. Time and effort cannot be measured to give desired results; hence, efforts should not be measured based on time spent on every student. Thus, strategies discussed above can be molded and amended with time.

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