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HOW CAN I INCREASE L2 LEARNER MOTIVATION IN ENGLISH CLASSES

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Abstract

L2 learner motivation is a critical predictor of success and persistence in English language acquisition. This article explores practical, classroom-oriented strategies to enhance student motivation, moving beyond the view of motivation as a fixed trait toward a dynamic construct shaped by instructional environment. Drawing on contemporary frameworks such as the **L2 Motivational Self System** and **Self-Determination Theory**, the study identifies five key pedagogical pillars: making learning personally relevant, implementing active and communicative tasks, fostering a positive and low-anxiety classroom climate, utilizing constructive feedback and goal-setting, and integrating authentic cultural immersion. The discussion emphasizes the role of teacher-student rapport, the "ideal L2 self," and the integration of technology in creating a learner-centered environment. Ultimately, the article argues that by aligning classroom practices with students' personal identities and future aspirations, educators can sustain engagement and promote long-term linguistic competence.

Keywords

L2 motivation, English Language Teaching (ELT), L2 Motivational Self System, learner autonomy, communicative language teaching, classroom climate, authentic materials, goal setting, pedagogical strategies.

Increasing L2 learner motivation in English classes is a complex yet essential goal, as motivation has been consistently identified as one of the strongest predictors of second language achievement and persistence. In modern language pedagogy, motivation is no longer viewed as a fixed learner trait, but rather as a dynamic construct shaped by the interplay of individual, contextual, and instructional factors. In other words, what teachers do inside the classroom can significantly influence how much effort and engagement students invest in learning English. This article discusses how English teachers can increase L2 learner motivation by making learning personal and relevant, implementing active and engaging activities, creating a positive learning environment, providing effective feedback and goal setting, and integrating cultural immersion and real-life contexts into instruction. The focus is on practical, classroom-oriented strategies grounded in current theoretical perspectives on L2 motivation, such as the L2 Motivational Self System and socioconstructivist views of learning.

A central starting point for increasing motivation is making English learning personally meaningful and relevant for students. Research shows that learners are more motivated when tasks connect with their interests, values, and goals, because they perceive a clear reason for investing effort. One effective approach is to design lessons around topics that resonate with learners' everyday lives, such as current films, music, social media, technology, or global issues that they already discuss in their first language. When classroom input and activities reflect students' own preferences and experiences, English becomes a tool for self-expression rather than just a school subject. In addition, giving learners choices—such as selecting topics for presentations, deciding whether to work individually or in pairs, or choosing between different project formats—supports their sense of autonomy, which is a key component of intrinsic motivation. Autonomy-supportive teaching encourages students to see themselves as active agents in their own learning process rather than passive recipients of knowledge, which in turn enhances persistence and engagement.

The concept of the “ideal L2 self” further highlights the importance of personal relevance and future orientation in motivating learners. According to this perspective, motivation is strengthened when learners develop a vivid, attractive image of themselves as competent English users in the future, for example as professionals communicating internationally, travelers interacting with people from other cultures, or academics accessing global research. Teachers can actively foster this vision by integrating reflective tasks, such as writing letters to one’s future self in English, creating vision boards about future careers involving English, or discussing concrete scenarios in which English proficiency will be advantageous. These activities help learners link present classroom efforts with longterm personal aspirations. Moreover, when teachers explicitly show how specific classroom tasks (e.g., practicing presentations, reading authentic articles) are connected to students’ imagined futures, learners are more likely to experience a sense of purpose and direction in their learning.

Alongside personal relevance, active and engaging classroom activities play a pivotal role in sustaining learner motivation over time. Traditional, teacherfronted lessons that rely heavily on mechanical exercises and oneway explanation risk reducing engagement, especially in mixedability classrooms where some learners quickly lose interest. In contrast, gamelike activities and communicative tasks can transform the classroom into a more dynamic environment where learners interact, experiment with language, and experience immediate enjoyment. Gamification techniques—such as using Charades, Pictionary, Hot Seat, board races, or vocabulary bingo—add elements of challenge, competition, and fun, which have been shown to enhance both attention and willingness to participate. When game design carefully integrates meaningful language use rather than mere guessing or repetition, learners engage cognitively and emotionally, which deepens learning while simultaneously increasing motivation.

Pair and group work represent another cornerstone of motivational classroom practice in L2 English teaching. Activities such as roleplays, debates, informationgap tasks, and jigsaw readings encourage learners to negotiate meaning, share perspectives, and coconstruct knowledge in the target language. This interaction not only develops communicative competence but also supports motivation by creating a sense of community and peer support. Learners often feel more comfortable speaking in smaller groups than in front of the whole class, which reduces anxiety and promotes risktaking in using new vocabulary and structures. When group tasks are designed with clear roles, achievable outcomes, and meaningful content, students experience a sense of accomplishment and social belonging, both of which are linked to higher motivation. Furthermore, collaborative tasks that require interdependence—where each student has unique information or responsibilities—encourage active participation from all group members, including more reserved learners. The integration of technology into English classes further enhances engagement and motivation when used thoughtfully rather than as mere decoration. Digital tools such as online quizzes, educational apps, interactive videos, and learning platforms can provide immediate feedback, variety, and multimodal input that cater to different learning styles. For instance, teachers can employ online quiz platforms for formative assessment games, use short video clips as prompts for discussion or writing, or integrate languagelearning applications that offer personalized practice beyond the classroom. Technology can also support authentic communication, for example through email exchanges, online forums, or collaborative documents where students interact with peers in English. Such uses of technology help students perceive English as a living language used in real communication rather than as an abstract school subject, thereby reinforcing their motivation to improve.

Creating a positive learning environment is another fundamental factor in motivating L2 learners in English classes, as classroom climate strongly influences learners' willingness to take risks and persist in the face of difficulty. Building rapport

with students is central to this process: when learners feel that their teacher respects them, believes in their potential, and genuinely cares about their progress, they are more inclined to invest effort and engage actively. Simple behaviors—such as learning and using students' names, showing interest in their lives, listening attentively, and responding empathetically—contribute to a classroom atmosphere where students feel valued and safe. Such an atmosphere is particularly important for language learning, where speaking involves exposure to possible mistakes and public evaluation. When learners trust their teacher, they are more willing to volunteer, ask questions, and sustain effort over the long term.

Encouraging a constructive attitude toward mistakes is another key element of a positive learning environment. In many educational cultures, errors are associated with failure and may carry emotional consequences like shame or embarrassment, which can seriously undermine motivation in language classes where mistakes are unavoidable. Teachers can counteract this by explicitly framing errors as a natural and necessary part of the learning process and by modeling a nonjudgmental response to mistakes. For example, instead of simply marking errors, teachers can use them as learning opportunities, guiding students to notice patterns and selfcorrect, or praising effort even when answers are not fully correct. When learners understand that mistakes are steps toward improvement rather than evidence of inability, their anxiety decreases and their willingness to participate increases. Celebrating small wins—such as successfully using a new expression in conversation or showing improvement on a quiz—further reinforces the message that progress is incremental and attainable.

Feedback and goal setting are closely related to the emotional and cognitive aspects of motivation in English language learning. Feedback that focuses only on errors and deficits can lead learners to develop a fixed mindset about their language ability, whereas feedback that highlights growth, strategies, and effort supports a growth mindset and intrinsic motivation. Effective feedback in L2 classrooms

emphasizes what students did well, points out areas for improvement in a constructive tone, and offers concrete suggestions for how to improve. For instance, a teacher might acknowledge a student's successful use of linking phrases in a presentation before gently suggesting ways to improve pronunciation or expand vocabulary. Such feedback helps learners see themselves as capable of progress and gives them clear direction for further effort. Moreover, timely feedback—delivered soon after performance—strengthens the connection between effort and outcome, which is vital for sustaining motivation.

Goal setting complements feedback by giving learners a clear sense of purpose and a way to monitor their development. When teachers involve students in setting realistic, shortterm goals—such as learning a specific number of new words per week, improving listening comprehension for a particular type of audio, or participating a certain number of times in class discussions—students can experience frequent success experiences that build selfefficacy. These small, attainable goals are more motivating than vague aims such as "improve English," which can feel distant and unattainable. Selfassessment activities, such as reflective journals, checklists, or progress charts, further encourage learners to take ownership of their learning and recognize their own improvement over time. When students are encouraged to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses honestly and to adjust their goals accordingly, they develop metacognitive awareness and a stronger sense of responsibility, both of which are associated with higher levels of motivation. Finally, cultural immersion and meaningful context play a vital role in making English learning authentic, engaging, and motivational. Limiting instruction to textbook dialogues and decontextualized exercises can lead learners to perceive English as artificial and disconnected from realworld use. To counter this, teachers can bring authentic materials into the classroom, such as news articles, podcasts, songs, film clips, social media posts, and advertisements, which expose students to natural language use and contemporary

cultural content. Authentic materials help learners see how English operates in real contexts, including informal speech, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references, which increases both their linguistic awareness and their curiosity. When learners recognize that what they study in class reflects how English is actually used across the world, they are more likely to view learning as meaningful and worth the effort. At the same time, cultural immersion should not be a oneway process in which targetlanguage cultures dominate and learners' own identities are neglected. Allowing and encouraging students to share aspects of their own culture, traditions, and languages in English can significantly enhance motivation by validating their backgrounds and positioning them as knowledgeable contributors. For example, learners can prepare presentations about local holidays, customs, or social issues, or compare cultural practices between their home context and Englishspeaking countries using English as the medium of discussion. Such activities create a twoway exchange in which the classroom becomes a space for intercultural dialogue rather than simple cultural transmission. Moreover, this approach aligns with contemporary perspectives on multilingual education, which emphasize the value of students' full linguistic repertoires and the importance of building on their existing knowledge and identities. When learners perceive English not as a threat to their local language and culture but as an additional resource for expressing who they are, their motivation to engage with the language is likely to increase.

In sum, increasing L2 learner motivation in English classes requires a holistic, learnercentered approach that integrates personal relevance, active engagement, positive classroom climate, supportive feedback and goal setting, and rich cultural and contextual input. Teachers can enhance motivation by designing tasks that connect with learners' interests and future selves, incorporating interactive and gamelike activities, building trusting relationships and a tolerant attitude toward mistakes, systematically using constructive feedback and collaborative goal setting, and situating

language learning within authentic cultural and communicative contexts. These elements mutually reinforce one another: for example, a positive climate makes learners more receptive to challenging tasks, while meaningful goals help them perceive the value of authentic materials and collaborative work. While motivation will always fluctuate over time, sustained attention to these dimensions allows teachers to create English classes in which learners not only develop linguistic competence but also maintain a strong desire to continue learning.

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