

TEACHER'S CORNER – NOVEMBER 2015

FOSTERING STUDENT MOTIVATION

Second language acquisition researchers have identified **motivation** as one of the most important factors in language learning success. In the November Teacher's Corner, we will explore motivation and how EFL teachers can positively affect this psychological aspect of English language learning.

What is Motivation?

Motivation is what ignites our desire to begin a task, and it helps us sustain the effort required to work toward and achieve our goals. While several models have been developed to describe motivation and its components, motivation is often classified as *extrinsic* and *intrinsic*. **Extrinsic motivation** comes from external sources such as receiving a reward or avoiding a punishment. Student grades are examples of extrinsic motivation in the classroom. In contrast, **intrinsic motivation** originates from within; intrinsic motivation leads people to do things because they find them enjoyable, interesting, or exciting. For instance, many language learners find activities related to popular culture (music, news, sports, etc.) or games intrinsically motivating. As we will see this month, EFL teachers can use classroom strategies that incorporate both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

Motivation and the EFL Classroom

Motivation is critical to English language learners' success due to the length of time and amount of effort required to become proficient. Initially, motivation leads students to apply themselves during language learning activities. Ideally, students will then see positive effects from their efforts, such as enjoying the learning process, receiving constructive feedback and good grades, and improving their language abilities. Any of these positive outcomes may further motivate students to continue working toward the long-term goal of developing English language proficiency.

Fostering motivation can be a challenge for all teachers, but it can be especially difficult in EFL settings because EFL learners often have fewer opportunities than ESL students to use the language in a meaningful way. This relative lack of language input and output in EFL settings can be caused by limited chances to interact with proficient English speakers, limited availability of language learning resources, limited instructional time, and large class sizes. Also, in some cases, EFL is a mandatory subject that is taught with a rigid curriculum. Students in these contexts may not think that English language learning is interesting or relevant to their needs.

The good news is that by becoming more aware of factors that affect student motivation, EFL teachers can increase motivation levels through:

- using motivation-building instructional and classroom management approaches
- raising students' awareness of what personally motivates them
- encouraging students to develop and apply self-motivation techniques

While we can't address every topic associated with student motivation this month, we will:

1. Reflect on what motivates us as language learners, increase our awareness of factors that affect student motivation, and consider how this information relates to our classroom practices. In the Week 1 teacher reflection exercise, motivation-related factors are grouped into these four categories:
 - [Instructional design](#)
 - [Promoting learner autonomy](#)
 - [Creating a positive classroom environment and culture](#)
 - [Teacher behavior and knowledge](#)
2. Explore three motivation-building teaching tips in Weeks 2-4 related to:
 - [Goal setting, student interests, and self-awareness](#)
 - [Student reflection and self-assessment](#)
 - [Using healthy competition, student choice, and rewards to extend learning beyond class time](#)

Let's get ready to motivate!