

## **Effects of Teacher Strategies on Students' Motivation Levels in English Language Classrooms**

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A number of theoretically-oriented articles on language learning motivation have been written during the 1990s (e.g., Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dornyei, 1994a; Oxford, 1994). These writings are symptomatic of our need to understand this motivation and ways that we might increase it. The evolving concept of student motivation in the language classroom is at an exciting moment in its history.

To put the present article in context, it is necessary to briefly summarize the evolution of researchers' understanding of student motivation in the language classroom. For over three decades, Gardner and his associates (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) have performed numerous studies that culminated in the Socio-educational Model of second language learning (Gardner, 1988). In this model, motivation was defined in terms of two orientations: integrative and instrumental. Integratively motivated students are characterized as those having a desire to become like members of the target language culture. Instrumentally motivated students, on the other hand, chose to study a second language for social or economic gain.

In 1990, Crookes & Schmidt's call to reopen the research agenda on language learning motivation urged members of the English language teaching (ELT) field to broaden the perspective on how this construct had been construed by Gardner up to that time. First, they recommended that researchers examine findings on motivation to learn from the fields of psychology and education. Secondly, Crookes & Schmidt suggested that motivation be defined in terms of the teacher's classroom experience, and not only in terms of a socio-psychological construct, that is, the integrative and instrumental orientations.

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Since then, several investigators have responded to that call. Oxford & Shearin (1994) and Dornyei (1994) have attempted to expand the theoretical framework of this construct by surveying the findings of psychological and educational research, and indicating what the practical implications might be for L2 teaching professionals. For example, Oxford and Shearin stressed the value of goal-setting in the language class to mobilize and direct students' attention. It is important to add that as these researchers as well as Gardner & Tremblay (1994) have reported that there is no value in theoretical frameworks "in the absence of pertinent empirical research" (p. 366).

The purpose of the present study is to respond to this need for empirical research regarding how to enhance language learning motivation. In their research agenda, Crookes & Schmidt (1991) included the following questions: Are there conditions under which motivation for SL learning increases, or decreases? and, also, Can situations be set up so as to cause SL motivation to increase?

Although research on student motivation in the field of SL learning has been limited, educators and psychologists have shown a growing interest in this topic in recent years. Lucas (1990) discussed five psychological models of student motivation and encouraged teachers to be more active in fomenting it. In a synthesis of the work of educational researchers, Brophy (1987) compiled a list of thirty-three strategies teachers can use to enhance student motivation. Second language theorists and practitioners could benefit from strides made in understanding this topic in related fields.

The following research question based on the findings of researchers in the fields of education (Brophy, 1987) and psychology (Pintrich, 1988; Lucas, 1990) was developed and guided the research that is reported in this article:

Is there any difference between the motivation of students whose teachers have been trained to use motivational strategies and students whose teachers have not received such training?

It was hypothesized that SL students whose teachers were trained to use certain strategies would report higher levels of motivation to learn than students would whose teachers had not received such training. This was based on the fact that the work of both Brophy (1987) and Lucas (1990) suggested that levels of student motivation to learn can be enhanced through the use of teacher strategies.

Answers to the research questions posed above not only respond to the call outlined by those who are working to expand the theoretical framework (Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Dornyei, 1994), but also to teachers' in-class needs. Nunan (1993), for example, found that teachers in foreign language settings identified the lack of student

motivation as the single greatest classroom challenge. Day (1990) reported that although SL research has yet to establish a causal relationship between teacher behaviors and student motivation, teacher educators should still cover this topic in teacher preparation programs.

For the purpose of this study, the following terms were defined:

Teacher strategy: An approach or technique the teacher incorporates into the lesson to achieve a specific goal (Reiss, 1985, cited in Gardner, 1992).

Motivation: A psychological construct that energizes and directs behavior (Petri, 1990).

Extrinsic/Intrinsic goal orientation: Goal orientation refers to the student's perception of the reasons for engaging in a learning task. Intrinsic orientation concerns the degree to which the student perceives participation in a task for reasons such as challenge, curiosity, and mastery. Extrinsic orientation concerns the degree to which the student perceives participation in a task for reasons such as grades, rewards, performance, evaluation by others, and competition (Pintrich et al., 1991)

Self-efficacy: The judgments about one's ability to accomplish a task as well as one's confidence in one's skills to perform that task (Pintrich et al., 1991).

Student motivation to learn: An enduring disposition to strive for content knowledge and skill mastery in learning situations. It has three components: the task value, wherein the task is perceived as useful, interesting, and rewarding; the expectation for successfully completing the task; and an affective element related to test anxiety (Pintrich et al., 1991).

## **Method**

Five of the eight Mexico City branches of Institution X were selected to participate based on similarity in socio-economic level, which was judged as upper middle class. This was determined by considering geographic location, cost of courses, occupations of the subjects, and a survey of branch directors.

Institution X's academic program focuses on developing aural and oral skills. It consists of 10 thirty-hour courses. Classes are one hour and 20 minutes long and are held Monday through Friday. This pace permits students to progress at one course per month, requiring a total of ten months to complete the program. There is an average of ten students in a class, with a maximum of twelve.

Classes at Institution X usually begin with the teacher exposing the students to a new grammar structure and vocabulary through the use of posters and reading a story out loud. Then there is a five-minute grammar presentation followed by audio-lingual type drills supported by the use of posters. During the second half of each class, the teacher guides students in their use of the structures and vocabulary in more personalized ways through freer communicative activities. Oral and written screening procedures used to place students generally result in homogeneous groups in each course.

### Subjects

One-hundred and forty-six subjects participated in the study. All subjects were in course two at "Institution X", an institution dedicated to EFL teaching in Mexico City. Table 1 indicates characteristics of subjects in terms of sex, age, occupation, educational level, and reason for studying English.

**Table 1**

#### **Characteristics of Subjects**

	<u>Experimental</u>	<u>Control A</u>	<u>Control B</u>
Sex			
Male	48%	42%	39%
Female	52	58	61
Age			
Under 18	8	13	3
18 to 24	38	38	37
25 to 39	52	46	60
Over 39	3	4	0
Occupation			
Student	28	33	21
Accountant	10	8	16
Office per.	18	8	26
Administrator	5	8	7
Comp. analyst	15	4	4
Business	8	17	11
Other	16	14	15
Education <sup>a</sup>			
Junior H.S.	10	17	6

High School	45	38	34
Bachelor's	38	46	49
Master's	3	0	0
Vocational	5	0	11
Reason			
Instrumental	67	71	67
Integrative	33	29	33

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**note:** a Refers to the highest level subjects had completed.

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### Procedures

Each of the five participant branches was randomly assigned to one of the three conditions.

1. Experimental group. Teachers from two branches participated in two workshops of one and a half hours each one month prior to initiating the experiment. The sessions focused on five teaching strategies designed to enhance student motivation for second language learning.

2. Control group A. Teachers from a third branch participated in two workshops of one and a half hours each on the history of English language teaching the month prior to initiating the experiment. No reference was made to motivation.

3. Control group B. Teachers from the fourth and fifth branches received no training and served as the placebo group.

In the first experimental group workshop, the researcher modeled and explained the first three strategies. Teachers were asked to imitate each one. The researcher commented on the teacher presentations for the purpose of highlighting the key points of each strategy. In the second workshop, the same steps were followed for the fourth and fifth strategies. Also in the second workshop, the researcher distributed a calendar of when each strategy was to be implemented, and a checklist for them to record that each strategy was in fact carried out. Completed checklists were returned to the researcher when the course was over.

The Experimental Treatment: Five Teacher Strategies

The strategies, which come from a list developed by Jones & Jones (1990), were adapted for use within an English as a foreign language program. The teachers' use of five strategies designed to increase student motivation served as the experimental treatment in the study. The selection of which strategies to use was made arbitrarily based

on an examination of the nature of Institution X's academic program by the researcher, who then discussed the conclusions with each of the five branch directors. The five strategies that experimental group teachers were trained to use were operationally defined as described below.

**Strategy One.** Make learning goals clear to students. This strategy required the teacher to state and write on the board the learning goal(s) for each class. For example, the teacher said and wrote, "Our goal for today is to express habits. We can say, John usually studies on Saturdays. Remember, we use the verb plus 's' for he, she, and it." This took 30 seconds of class time. On the first day of class and halfway through the course, the teacher also stated and wrote on the board the goals for each half of the course. This took approximately two minutes of class time.

**Strategy Two.** Offer students feedback that enhances self-efficacy. This strategy required the teacher to elicit from students and write on the board the goals of the course. The goals are included in the teacher's lesson plan. Then, the teacher briefly met (1 to 2 minutes) with each student individually and gave specific feedback on that student's progress toward the course goals. For example, the teacher first asked the student if he or she could remember the learning goals of the course that had been seen so far. Then, the teacher specified those areas that the student was strong, saying "You do these well". Next, the teacher informed the student of areas where improvement was needed, saying, for example, "You confuse this the -ing ending with the verb plus 's'." Or, "You forget the auxiliary 'to be' when you try to express actions happening now." Finally, the teacher gave the student ideas on how to improve. This strategy was carried out during the second, third, and last week of the four-week course.

**Strategy Three.** Help students understand the learning process. This strategy required the teacher to say in the students' L1 (Spanish) that taking risks and guessing in class can help them learn better. The teacher added that students who are willing to take risks usually learn more from the activities. These comments were made in class at six different times during the course.

**Strategy Four.** Model learning as a rewarding activity. This strategy required the teacher to give a five-minute demonstration about a personal situation that involved learning. Each teacher's presentation included a description of the activity, including a representative artifact. The teacher added a comment about having enjoyed the learning situation. For example, many teachers brought in their first English textbook and spoke about the challenges and joys that they had experienced when they learned English as a foreign language.

Strategy Five. Give students time to integrate learning. This strategy required the teacher to institute a one-minute silent period into the class immediately following the grammar presentation. Students were asked to refrain from copying for this minute and to study the information on the blackboard. Teachers said, "Please study this." while pointing to the board. Then the teacher moved to the back of the room so as not to distract the students. This was done on six different days of the course.

The Observation Instrument: Motivation Questionnaire

Thirty-one Likert-type items that could be marked on a seven-point scale from Pintrich's et al (1991) Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) served as the observation instrument. The questionnaire is based on the Expectancy-Value Theory of motivation and consists of six subscales: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, task value, expectancy for success, learning control beliefs, and test anxiety (Pintrich et al., 1991). A seven on the scale indicates a component that is highly motivating for students; a one indicates the item is strongly demotivating. The English version, administered to more than 5000 university level students in the United States, revealed Cronbach Alpha ratings of between .62 and .93 for the different scales. These ratings form a statistical manner to determine if a learner would consistently respond the same way if he or she answered the questionnaire a several of times.

For this study, three bilingual individuals translated the 31 items from English to Spanish. Two of the translators were native Spanish speakers, and the third was a native English speaker. Each translator holds a graduate degree in education. The same translators, who analyzed linguistic, semantic and cultural differences, then compared the three resulting versions. The final pilot version was then administered to 55 course two students at two branches in a month prior to the study. For those readers interested in statistics, the resulting Cronbach Alpha calculations of the six subscales ranged from .50 to .79. According to Gardner & Smythe (1981), this range suggests acceptable levels of internal reliability of the Spanish version of the MSLQ. Again, reliability means that a person would respond to the questionnaire in a consistent manner if he or she completed the questionnaire several times.

In the present study, the Spanish version of the MSLQ was administered twice to the students at each school: during the second hour as a pretest, and again during the 29th hour as a posttest of the 30-hour course. Thus, there was approximately 27 hours of class time between each administration. An academic coordinator at each branch was responsible for visiting each class, going over the instructions with students, and giving them the necessary time to complete the tests. In-class time needed for this was eight to ten minutes. Coordinators then returned the completed question-

naires to the researcher.

### Follow-up Meetings with Experimental Group Teachers

During the week after the study, the researcher met with the experimental group teachers to get their feedback on the strategies. First, teachers completed a questionnaire consisting of 15 Likert-type items. Each item consisted of a five-point scale. Five indicated a positive evaluation, a one indicate a negative evaluation. For example, five questions sought to determine the teachers' opinion concerning how well they had understood each strategy. The remaining ten questions referred to how comfortable teachers felt with each strategy and how effective they believed each strategy was at motivating students. This was followed by an informal discussion on the same topics.

### Results

Descriptive statistics for the three groups ( $n = 146$ ) are presented in Table 2. Included are the means for each of the MSLQ subscales for the pretest and posttest administrations of the MSLQ. The largest increase between the pretest and the posttest scores was found in the intrinsic goal orientation of the experimental group (+.23). The largest decrease between the pretest and the posttest scores was found in the extrinsic goal orientation of the control group A (-.62).

**Table 2**

Means and standard deviations for the pretest and posttest scores of the MSLQ for the three groups.

MSLQ Subscale	Pretest		Posttest	
	M	SD	M	SD
<b>Experimental Group (n = 40)</b>				
Intr Goal	6.11	1.40	6.34	.99
Con Learn	6.05	1.49	5.95	1.43
Extr Goal	5.25	2.17	5.00	2.01
Self-eff 6.11	1.24	6.18	.94	
Task Val	6.58	.88	6.53	.82
Test Anx	3.55	2.31	3.44	2.18
<b>Control Group A (n = 24)</b>				
Intr Goal	6.24	1.07	6.13	1.47
Con Learn	6.29	1.56	6.02	1.59
Extr Goal	5.42	2.29	4.80	2.28



Self-eff 6.26	1.03	5.76	1.68	
Task Val	6.64	.85	6.24	1.42
Test Anx	3.96	2.32	3.94	2.32

**Control Group B (n = 79)**

Intr Goal	6.34	1.23	6.39	.87
Con Learn	6.27	1.27	6.11	1.34
Extr Goal	5.16	2.22	4.81	2.16
Self-eff 6.17	1.03	6.04	1.03	
Task Val	6.69	.69	6.64	.66
Test Anx	3.41	2.40	3.51	2.39

Intr Goal = Intrinsic Goal Orientation; Con Learn = Control of learning; Extr Goal = Extrinsic Goal Orientation; Self-eff = Self-efficacy; Task Val = Task Value; Test Anx = Test anxiety

The Cronbach Alpha ratings, which indicate the reliability of the questionnaire items for the six subscales, were as follows: intrinsic goal orientation, .58; control of learning, .48; extrinsic goal orientation, .72; self-efficacy, .83; task value, .77; and test anxiety, .67. Gardner & Smythe (1981) report that this range indicates acceptable levels of internal reliability.

**Data Analysis.** A statistical test named the Wilcoxon matched pairs test was used to determine if the differences between the before and after scores were significantly different, or that they were different just by chance. Hatch & Lazarson (1994) recommend this test when the same students participate in a before and after questionnaire such as the one used in this study.

**Principal Findings.** Pretest/posttest differences that were calculated for each group are presented in Table 3. Five significant differences were found. In the experimental group, the level of intrinsic goal orientation increased (+.23). Subjects in Control group A reported a decrease in levels of extrinsic goal orientation and self-efficacy decreased (-.62 and -.50). Control group B subjects showed a decrease in levels of control of learning and extrinsic goal orientation (-.16 and -.35).

**Table 3**

**Wilcoxon matched-pairs test for differences in pretest/posttest scores within each group.**

MSLQ	Pre-/Posttest
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Subscale	n	Dif	T	z <sup>a</sup>
<b>Experimental Group</b>				
Intr Goal	29	+.23	121.5	-2.086 *
Cont Learn	33	-.10	223.5	-1.018
Extr Goal	34	-.25	193.0	-1.787
Self-eff 37	+.07	295.0	-.852	
Task Val	30	-.05	231.5	-.020
Test Anx	36	-.11	298.5	-.542
Total Dif		+.01		
<b>Control Group A</b>				
Intr Goal	15	-.11	42.0	-
Con Learn	22	-.27	120.0	-
Extr Goal	18	-.62	37.5 *	-
Self-eff 24	-.50	80.0 *	-	
Task Val	16	-.40	56.0	-
Test Anx	21	-.02	87.5	-
Total Dif		-1.88		
<b>Control Group B</b>				
Intr Goal	49	+.05	553.0	-.591
Con Learn	62	-.16	651.0	-2.236 *
Extr Goal	65	-.35	754.5	-2.078 *
Self-eff 70	-.13	972.0	-1.583	
Task Val	38	-.05	300.5	-1.015
Test Anx	70	+.10	1139.0	-.606
Total Dif		-.74		

\*p < .05 Note. z<sup>a</sup> No z score is calculated if n < 26.

Total differences in pretest and posttest scores for each group are also found in Table 2. Although no significant difference was found, students that experienced the strategies showed a minimal increase of .01. Students in the control groups decreased 1.88 and .74, respectively.

Follow-up Meetings with Teachers. Eleven of the fourteen teachers that implemented the strategies completed a questionnaire designed to survey their reactions toward the five strategies. A compilation of responses to three questions on a five-point, Likert-type scale is presented in Table 4. Teachers reported that they best understood, and considered the most comfortable to implement, strategy five, i.e., giving students

seems to respond to several researchers' calls for experimental, classroom-based research into how student motivation can be enhanced (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Ames, 1992). Materials writers, teacher educators, and teachers should capitalize on the growing knowledge base regarding this topic to create an environment more conducive to effective language learning.

The use of Pintrich's (1988) expectancy-value theory to define motivation in the language classroom responded to Crookes & Schmidt's (1991) view that the integrative-instrumental dichotomy is limited in light of the advances made by educational and psychological researchers. Further research in this area should be directed at not only replicating these results, but also identifying which strategy, or combination of strategies, was responsible for the increased intrinsic goal orientation. The adaptation of other psychological and educational perspectives of motivation to the language teaching and learning environment may also be helpful. Furthermore, looking at the topic of language learning motivation more broadly, what is needed is a large-scale, experimentally-based approach to the identification of effective teacher strategies for enhancing student motivation.

Significant decreases in control of learning, extrinsic goal orientation and self-efficacy, as well as overall motivation, in both control groups echo a conclusion made by Stipek & Daniels (1988) that children's beliefs about competency diminish over time. These researchers suggested that classroom constructs such as evaluation based on social comparisons, rather than information-based feedback presented in an individual manner, undermined feelings of self-efficacy. The decrease in motivation in the control groups also supports Brophy's (1987) call for teachers to take concrete steps to enhance student motivation. Researchers could serve as a primary support in such a process by supplying educators with experimentally tested strategies.

Teachers reported preferences regarding the strategies. Encouraging risk-taking and giving students time to integrate learning were rated as being easier to implement, as well as more effective at motivating students. Modeling learning was viewed most negatively. The teachers' favorable view of certain strategies serves to reinforce their potential value as additions to second language learning programs.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to respond to this need for empirical research regarding how to enhance language learning motivation. As much as we teachers talk about motivation, a review of the literature by this author revealed no studies that attempted to measure motivation before and after implementing strategies designed to increase motivation. Although this study revealed little impact of the strategies implemented, a model of how to measure before and after differences was designed and

implemented. The model involves first checking the level of student motivation, then implementing strategies in class that are designed to increase motivation, and finally checking the level of motivation again to determine if an increase occurred. Readers are encouraged to carry out action research of this sort to increase our understanding of how motivation can be increased in our students.

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