

## Student Motivation and English Language Learning in Schools

### Summary

*This issue of the ELIS Research Digest reviews empirical studies that focus on how the motivation of students learning English as a first language is affected by different aspects of their lives in school. The studies reviewed found that instructional design, teacher and learner characteristics as well as classroom and school learning environments have an impact on students' motivation to learn English. To help teachers adopt practices that help motivate students, school leaders could create a school learning environment that promotes a more mastery-oriented approach to learning and encourage teachers to design challenging and meaningful tasks and learning activities that take into account students' interests and their developmental needs. Teachers could also create a positive learning environment in their classroom by connecting with students and helping them connect with one another. Students feel motivated when their teachers display empathy, warmth, and encouragement. Teachers should also consider the gender, age, and ability of the students whom they teach because different groups of students need different kinds of motivational support. A positive social and cognitive classroom environment will provide a favourable context in which students can engage in deep learning and master English language competencies.*

### Introduction

Many students have trouble staying engaged in the classroom. Some find school boring because they are not challenged while others are frustrated with tasks that are too difficult for them to perform. If more educators had a better understanding of how to motivate students, they would probably be better able to create a classroom or school culture that would promote better attitudes towards learning. Knowledge about motivation is fundamental to understanding what drives humans in the same way that knowledge of botany leads to a better understanding of how plants thrive.

Tan (2015) defined motivation as the desire to learn and the drive to succeed and asserted that motivation influences student engagement which manifests itself in learning and performance. The role of motivation in student achievement and learning has been recognised as critical to school success. Of all the factors that affect student learning, motivation is one of the most important. Students can be motivated in a variety of ways (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). In this digest, we

will examine the different aspects of a student's life in school that can affect his or her motivation for learning English (We will only be looking at studies that are related to English language learning as a first language). These aspects include learning activities (known as 'learning experiences' in the Singapore context), classroom environments, teacher characteristics, learner characteristics, and school learning environments. We will also discuss the professional development of teachers that can help them with motivating their students.

### Learning activities

Instructional activities that are designed to make learning meaningful, experiential, and collaborative have been shown to greatly increase student engagement in learning (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Frey & Fisher, 2010; Schmakel, 2008; Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2003). Research in the English language classroom illustrates that to motivate their students, teachers need to create challenging and meaningful tasks for their students as well as design structures and support that will help them accomplish them at

both the primary school level (Perry, Donohue, & Weinstein, 2007) and at the secondary school level (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Frey & Fisher, 2010). Lesson content and tasks that are meaningful to students are those that take into account their lived experiences and cultural backgrounds (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). In their study of 220 American high school students in the Midwest, Greene, Miller, Crowson, Duke, and Akey (2004) suggested that English teachers could begin by describing their learning activities in terms of how they were relevant and meaningful to students' interests, needs, and goals. Tay (2015) also suggested that to engage students, novice English teachers could customise their instruction according to the abilities, interests, experiences, and developmental needs of their students.

In their study of 257 American first-grade students in 14 classrooms, Perry et al. (2007) found that classrooms that supported both the social as well as the cognitive development of the children (e.g., providing challenging learning activities and attending to students' interests) resulted in the students developing a wide range of competencies during the first grade. These competencies included academic achievements such as high levels of reading and mathematics based on standardised measures, and socio-emotional gains such as better peer relations, and a better ability to engage in work and play with other children. Perry et al. (2007) found that children in such classrooms were able to meet academic standards in reading as well as mathematics because teachers offered instructional support in terms of attending to students' interests and initiatives and of providing appropriately challenging learning activities. Perry et al. (2007) also found that students demonstrated lower levels of behavioural problems such as distractibility and fighting or quarrelling, socialised more with their peers, and perceived their academic competence more positively.

At the secondary school level, Frey and Fisher (2010) claimed that a task should be complex enough for students to find it motivating. For them, the task had to be grade-appropriate but it

should require a novel application of the concepts that the students had learnt. The task also needed to be designed in such a way that the outcome was not guaranteed. However, Frey and Fisher (2010) underscored that students would only welcome complex tasks if they were supported by their peers and teachers, and if their mistakes were viewed as a necessary part of learning.

Not only must the tasks be complex enough, they should also be challenging to students. Indeed, Adkins-Coleman (2010) pointed out that the teachers in her study, teaching in two American high schools, assigned challenging material that left students little time for off-task behaviour. Adkins-Coleman (2010) found that these students were engaged when they were assigned challenging material. They followed directions and participated actively. She asserted that they knew that their teachers had high academic expectations of

them and provided the necessary support to help them complete their demanding tasks successfully.

The reason why students are able to complete demanding tasks could also be that, when they are ab-

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sorbed and challenged by the task that they are given, they enter a state of *flow*, a concept introduced by Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1998). *Flow* describes the state a person is in when he or she is deeply absorbed in an activity that is intrinsically enjoyable. Having a task that is neither too difficult nor too easy for a particular individual helps to get him or her in a state of *flow*. Shernoff et al. (2003) conducted a study, using a longitudinal sample of 526 students from 13 American high schools across subjects, including English, to examine the conditions under which students experienced *flow*. They found that when students perceived learning activities to be highly challenging, they were more engaged. Students also reported being more engaged during individual work and group work than listening to a lecture or taking a test. Shernoff et al. (2003) suggested that it would take educators with a great deal of skill, training, and experience to implement classroom activities that engaged students and allowed them to enter a state of *flow*.

Schmakel (2008), in her study of seventh-grade

students from four American schools in the Midwest, found that students became less motivated in middle school compared to elementary school as the activities offered in the middle school classroom were less fun, interesting, and challenging than in elementary school. These students longed for the educational fun and games, and hands-on activities that they used to have. They asked for more group work, more projects and more individual help from their peers and teachers.

Schamkel (2008) also suggested that instruction and instructional resources that were more fun, interesting, and challenging could have an impact on early adolescents' engagement and motivation. She recommended that teachers should look at their current curriculum guides and resources to see whether they could create lesson plans that had the fun element. She defined the construct *fun* as making schoolwork, instruction, or school environment more enjoyable, providing activities that are fun, and including games in learning and study sessions. Teachers could thus include activities such as quizzes, class discussions and debates, projects, and computer resources that students found fun. Students also asked for more learning games and competitive exercises for memorizing, understanding, and studying.

Schmakel (2008) suggested that teachers and curriculum specialists could improve the educational resources and methods so that they were more varied, attractive, and appealing to early adolescents. These instructional materials should focus on the interests and developmental needs of these students.

To motivate students, teachers could design tasks that take into account students' needs and interests as it is important that students are actively involved in their learning (Casey, 2008; Daniels, 2010). Daniels (2010) discussed how active learning in the form of students constructing meaning as they went about their tasks such as creating three-dimensional models of a legend or story, participating in discussions or writing an essay helped students stay engaged and motivated in the classroom. Daniels (2010) also suggested that

teachers needed to think about students' experiences and make sure that their lesson plans connected with what students did in their own lives. Daniels (2010) also pointed out that spreading out major homework assignments kept students motivated.

Casey (2008) recommended that having struggling students actively involved in book clubs could help them engage with texts. This is because in these small-group reading experiences, students could make choices about the books that they would like to read, and they actively listened and responded to one another. Moreover, the teacher could act as a facilitator of student communication and comprehension as students went about decoding the text and reacting to it. These experiences allowed students to be actively involved in literacy events that kept them engaged in learning and also helped them participate in learning to read and write in a collaborative fashion.

Another way of motivating students might be the use of visualization techniques. Magid (2014) used these techniques to help Grade 5 students in Singapore to imagine their ideal self in speaking and writing in English.

Initially, these students, who were placed subsequently in experimental and control groups, lacked confidence and motivation to study English. During the intervention that comprised a series of eight two-hour workshops, Magid (2014) used scripted imagery situations to enhance the students' vision of their ideal self. He also helped them develop clear and specific goals to attain this ideal outcome. For the control group, he also gave workshops of the same number of hours. However, he did not use visualization techniques nor did he help students plan their goals. As a result, students in the experimental group became more motivated to study English compared to those in the control group. Their speaking and listening skills improved as well as their vocabulary. During focus group interviews, students reported that they had learnt more new and difficult words and had better oral skills. Their English teacher reported that the students had more confidence in speaking and answering questions as a result of the intervention. The students also re-

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ported in a survey that their imagination improved. Students said that writing action plans to improve their English competence made them more interested in learning English and put more effort into the learning of the language.

In summary, as underscored by Perry et al. (2007), when teachers are more aware of what their students are interested in as individuals and the skills that they have and then use this information to deliver instruction that is more suited to students' needs, more growth is possible for these students. The research reviewed supports that these learning activities should be challenging, interesting, and appropriate to the group of students involved.

## Classroom environments

Teachers are instrumental in fostering a positive classroom environment in which students feel a sense of belonging and are connected to their teachers. Research has shown that teachers who have a positive relationship with their students create classroom environments that help students learn (e.g., Donohue, Perry, & Weinstein, 2003). They do so by improving their relationships with each student and also the relationships among their students (Donohue et al., 2003). Donohue et al. (2003) examined the pedagogical practices of teachers teaching reading and mathematical skills in 14 first-grade classrooms in California. They observed that teachers who adopted more learner-centred practices created a classroom environment that fostered good relationships among children. Learner-centred teaching practices involved customising instruction to individual needs, responding to students' initiatives, using experiential approaches to learning, and developing a positive social classroom climate. Specific practices included showing students that they are appreciated as individuals, helping students feel they belong in class, and providing activities that are personally challenging to each student. Students in learner-centred classrooms were observed to be given choice and responsibility while, in less

learner-centred classrooms, choice was limited, tasks were uniform, and conversations about instructional and personal topics were circumscribed. Less positive relations were found among the children in less learner-centred classrooms. Donohue et al. (2003) showed that there was a link between teachers' practices and peer relationships. It appears that a more learner-centred classroom context might be an important factor in promoting students' non-rejection of their classmates. They hypothesized that learner-centred practices might increase children's tolerance of deviance in their classmates or that teachers might help reduce deviance because such teachers helped promote high levels of achievement for more children, thereby indirectly reducing the likelihood of peer rejection. Thus, it might be worthwhile adopting a more child-centred approach to teaching, especially in the early years of education, rather than a more

teacher-directed one that is associated with basic-skills instruction, rote learning, and whole-class instruction. Such an approach would make it less likely for children to be rejected by their peers. As pointed out by Donohue et al. (2003), early rejection by peers appeared to predict numerous problems in adolescence and adulthood.

Indeed, in a meta-analysis of 119 studies, a more learner-centred teacher-student relationship has also been associated with large increases in student participation, satisfaction, and motivation to learn across all subjects including English and reading (Cornelius-White, 2007). The quality of teacher-student relationships was found to have a higher impact on student engagement and achievement for at-risk students in learner-centred classrooms (Cornelius-White, 2007). These at-risk students included those from low-income families, or with learning difficulties. A learner-centred teacher-student relationship appeared to be associated with lower drop-out rates, fewer absences, and less disruptive behaviour. Cornelius-White (2007) concluded that the teacher practice of fostering positive learner-centred teacher-student relationships had above-average associations with positive student

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outcomes. Specifically, compared with other educational innovations, he found that higher scores of positive teacher-student relationships, empathy, warmth, and the encouragement of thinking and learning had above-average associations with better student outcomes that included more participation, higher motivation levels, more satisfaction, higher verbal achievement, higher mathematics achievement, higher grades, higher perceived achievement, better attendance, and less disruptive behaviour.

Even at the kindergarten level, Stipek, Feiler, Daniels, and Milbum (1995) found that students in more learner-centred classrooms were more motivated. In their study, it was found that American kindergarten children from both middle-class and economically-disadvantaged backgrounds had higher scores in most motivation measures when their teachers used more child-centred approaches in the classroom compared to children enrolled in more didactic programmes. Children in more child-centred programmes rated their own abilities significantly higher, had higher expectations of success in academic tasks, showed more pride in their accomplishments, claimed to worry less about school, and showed less dependency on adults for permission and approval. Although, the researchers found that the children in the more didactic programmes scored higher in reading-related skills such as letter recognition, those in more content-oriented reading programmes, i.e., reading programmes where students explored interesting content and engaged in language-dependent activities, had better conversational skills.

Having a classroom environment where students feel connected to teachers who listen to their worries helps students cast aside their fears and anxieties to focus on lesson content (Daniels, 2010). Creating a nurturing classroom environment can take the form of helping students write their homework in their planners, helping them prioritize their assignments along with their home responsibilities, and breaking up their assignment into smaller parts. Daniels (2010) found that all these helped increase student motivation. She found that teachers who motivated students were those who shared their lives and coping strategies with them as these teachers demonstrated that although they had faced stress, conflict, and uncertainties in their lives, they had

overcome their difficulties. For example, teachers could model how students could write assignments in planners. They could teach students coping strategies such as prioritizing certain assignments over others. Another way teachers could motivate students was by acknowledging students' fears and anxieties.

Students themselves can also contribute to a nurturing classroom environment by the language that they use in the classroom because the language used can motivate their peers. For example, Frey and Fisher (2010) suggested that teachers could train their students to use language to motivate each other during group work. They noted that it was particularly true for teenage students who often turned to their peers for validation and support. The students in their study adopted a respectful tone vis-à-vis the positions taken by their peers. They were able to challenge each other's claims while listening and considering those claims respectfully. This was helped by the sentence and paragraph frames provided by the teachers that were recommended for use during group discussions. Moreover, the teachers modelled these frames so that students could hear first-hand how discussions could be conducted productively.

In summary, creating a positive learning environment is an important factor in motivating students. By focusing on students, connecting with them, and helping students connect with one another, teachers foster a social climate that minimises interpersonal behaviour problems among students, increases social acceptance, and increases student outcomes (Cornelius-White, 2007; Donohue et al., 2003; Stipek et al., 1995).

## **Teacher characteristics**

Prior research has shown that the personal qualities of teachers have an effect on student motivation and learning (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; O'Connor & McCartney, 2007; Schmakel, 2008; Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Teachers who display encouraging behaviour can help engage students and motivate them. When students experience their teachers as providing warmth and affection, students seem to feel happier and more enthusiastic in the classroom (Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

One of the essential qualities of a motivating

teacher is empathy: the ability to bond with her students, to understand their feelings, and resonate with them (e.g., Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Schmakel, 2008). By demonstrating their empathy through words and actions, teachers can build substantive relationships with their students. In both American high schools (Adkins-Coleman, 2010) as well as American junior high schools (Schmakel, 2008), teacher empathy was a key motivational support construct. Many students felt that teacher empathy was particularly motivating for them (Adkins-Coleman, 2010; Schmakel, 2008). One of the teachers in Adkins-Coleman's (2010) study demonstrated her concern for one of her students by stopping her activity and moving towards the student when the latter shared her sentiments about her personal issues. Adkins-Coleman (2010) remarked that often the non-verbal communication was more salient to students than verbal communication. She gave an example of another teacher in the same study, who showed her empathy by moving around the class and sitting at her students' desk. Through their non-verbal messages, she pointed out that teachers could demonstrate their empathy with their everyday interactions with their students.

Having teachers display encouraging behaviour also motivates students. American students in Schmakel's (2008) study always found it motivating when their teachers encouraged them for their efforts. Schmakel (2008) noted that students used terms such as 'encouragement', 'understanding', and 'patience' to describe how they would like their teachers to treat them. They even gave examples of how their teachers encouraged them and how that helped their learning process. Unfortunately, they described their teachers as 'unhappy, mean, and even depressed' (Schmakel, 2008, p. 742). However, they hoped that their teachers would 'listen, talk to them more, and have more fun with them' (p. 741) as they would then feel more motivated.

In Singapore, besides student internal regulation factors such as effort, interest, and study skills, Luo, Hogan, Yeung, Sheng, and Aye (2014) found that 1,496 secondary school students from 104 schools attributed their success in English to

teachers' support. Teachers' support scored 7.46 on a 10-point scale. This shows that Singapore students found that the support from their teachers motivated them to do well in English.

Indeed, support from teachers has been highlighted as crucial to helping students develop their writing skills by Pajares (2003) who suggested that teachers could help develop students' confidence in their own writing or self-efficacy in writing by providing students with challenging tasks and meaningful activities that can be mastered and by providing support and encouragement in the process. He pointed out that 'teachers should also pay as much attention to students' perceptions of competence as to actual competence for it is the perceptions that may more accurately predict students' motivation and future academic choices' (p. 153). He warned that many students lose interest in school, avoid courses and careers, and perform badly due to unwarranted low confidence, rather than lack of competence. Therefore, he stressed that in writing pro-

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grammes, teachers should build their students' sense of confidence in writing based on the belief that confidence is an essential component to the devel-

opment of students' writing skills.

O'Connor and McCartney (2007) who examined the effects of the quality of teacher-child relationships on the language and mathematical academic achievement of 880 third-grade American children found positive associations between relationship quality and achievement. At third grade, the findings of the study demonstrated that the teacher-child relationship was more important than maternal attachment and peer relationships. O'Connor and McCartney (2007) suggested that interventions for third-grade students focusing on improving achievement through relationships should focus on the relationship students have with their teachers as higher quality teacher-child relationships were associated with higher academic achievement.

In summary, teachers' qualities play a very important role in motivating students. Students are motivated when their teachers show empathy, warmth, affection, and encouragement and help them develop confidence in their abilities. The

quality of the relationship that teachers establish with their students has an impact on their academic achievement.

## Learner characteristics

### Boys vs. girls

Prior research has shown that there are gender differences in the ways students are motivated to learn (e.g., Luo, Hogan, & Paris, 2011; Marsh, Martin, & Cheng, 2008; Yeung, Lau, & Nie, 2011). In Singapore, boys seemed to be more motivated to study English when adopting performance goals, i.e., when learning English, boys were concerned about how well they fared compared with their peers (Luo et al., 2011). On the other hand, girls studying English were more inclined to adopt mastery goals, i.e., girls were more interested in increasing their competence and achieving mastery (Luo et al., 2011).

Ames (1992) pointed out that mastery and performance goals represent different conceptions of success and different reasons for engaging in a task, and different ways of thinking about oneself, one's task, and its outcomes. Students with a performance goal tend to focus on how their ability is compared to others and their sense of self-worth is connected to how they perform in relation to their peers. Such students value public recognition that they have performed better than others and direct their attention to achieving success as defined by norms. In contrast, students with a mastery goal focus on developing new skills, trying to understand their work, and improving their level of competence. They have their own achievement standards that they themselves wish to achieve, not standards imposed by others. Drawing on previous research, Ames (1992) underscored that those with mastery goals tended to have the belief that effort leads to success, a preference for challenging work, an intrinsic interest in learning activities as well as positive attitudes towards learning such as persisting in the face of difficulty. That is, students having a mastery goal orientation would display a motivational pattern that is likely to result in long-term and high-quality involvement in learning.

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In Singapore, Yeung et al. (2011) reported boys were less engaged in learning English, less interested in schoolwork, had a lower sense of competence, and were less mastery-oriented than girls. Boys also tended to have higher tendencies of avoidance coping and effort withdrawal than girls. In other words, boys tended to give up when the work was boring or difficult and they tended to expend minimal effort in their academic work compared to girls.

In Australia, high school girls were found to be generally more motivated than boys across the subjects of English, mathematics, and science (Marsh et al., 2008). Gender differences in motivation favouring girls were just as large for mathematics and science as they were for English. Interestingly, boys had higher resilience scores (i.e., they coped better with schoolwork pressures) while girls had higher scores for enjoyment, participation, and student-teacher relationships. Contrary to popular belief, boys did not perform better when they were taught by male teachers. In

fact, both boys and girls had better teacher-student relationships with female teachers.

Baker and Wigfield (1999), in a large-scale study of American fifth- and sixth-graders from six elementary schools, reported that there were gender differences in reading motivation. Girls in the middle grades seemed to be more extrinsically motivated than boys and adults' feedback influenced them more easily. Also, boys seemed less motivated to put in the effort required by more challenging tasks. Girls had more positive views towards reading than boys.

Drawing on the qualitative analysis of his data, Martin (2003) outlined 10 characteristics that were identified by Australian high school boys as being the reasons why some teachers were better able than others to motivate boys in English and content area classrooms. They were:

1. The relationship between teacher and students;
2. The teacher's enjoyment of teaching and working with young people;
3. The striking of a balance between authority and a relaxed classroom atmosphere;

4. The striking of a balance between serious schoolwork and fun;
5. The teacher's sense of humour;
6. The making of schoolwork interesting and fun where possible and appropriate;
7. The provision of choices to the boys;
8. Clear and effective explanation of work and the aiming for mastery by all students;
9. Broad assessment practices; and
10. Variety in teaching material and teaching methods.

Martin (2003) also found that unlike girls, boys' motivation levels did not rise later in high school. Boys tended to engage more in self-sabotage than girls. That is, they did things that reduced their chances of doing well at school. For example, they might put off doing homework or studying for tests and exams, agreeing to the survey's self-sabotage statement 'I sometimes don't study very hard before exams so I have an excuse if I don't do as well as I hoped'. Girls scored higher than boys in anxiety, their belief in the value of school, learning focus, planning, study management, and persistence. To help students, teachers could thus focus on reducing anxiety for girls while helping boys to value school, focus, plan, and manage their study schedule as well as persist when faced with challenging problems.

### *Low achievers vs. high achievers*

Both high and low achievers reported that incentives, rewards, and positive recognition were valuable to their engagement during English lessons (Schmakel, 2008). However, there are differences between them. Many low achievers spoke of not being challenged in seventh grade while some low achievers could not keep up with the rest of the class. These reasons caused them to lose interest, give up, lose the discipline to complete their assignments, thereby ending up with low English grades. For low achievers, motivational support constructs such as teacher empathy, respectful control, and parental push helped them in their developmental needs of early adolescence. Low achievers also felt that group work was a good way to satisfy adolescents' social needs.

In a large-scale study involving 1,496 students from thirty secondary schools in Singapore comparing low and high achievers in English, although students as a whole perceived effort as the most

important cause for their achievement, high achievers in English attributed their academic achievement to effort, interest, study skills and support from teachers and parents while low achievers ascribed their performance to out-of-school tuition classes (Luo et al., 2014).

Evertson, Anderson, Anderson, and Brophy (1980) found that English teachers of lower ability classes in the United States that were more academically successful with their students seemed to encourage their students to express themselves, even to the extent of tolerating relatively high rates of called-out questions and comments. These teachers also tended to be friendlier, accepted more social contacts from their students, and were tolerant of personal requests. However, at the same time, they were also relatively strict disciplinarians, reprimanding students who misbehaved and ready to criticize or punish students when the need arose.

Guthrie and Davis (2003) noted that struggling readers in middle school were not motivated to read. One of the factors was that reading instruction was not connected to content and that made reading tedious. Another factor was students were expected to respond critically to texts in the textbooks and outline main points instead of just giving personal reactions. Middle school teachers also did not support them as much socially in the classroom. That is, the teachers did not make the students feel that they belonged to the classroom. Students thus felt disrespected and uncomfortable. The teachers often increased control over students' activities. Thus, students felt that they did not have much autonomy and were not given much choice in the classroom. All these factors contributed to students' disengagement with reading. Guthrie and Davis (2003) proposed that to support engaged reading, teachers could use the following classroom practices:

1. Construct rich knowledge goals as the basis of reading instruction;
2. Use real-world interactions to connect reading to student experiences;
3. Afford students an abundance in interesting books and materials;
4. Provide some choice of material to read;
5. Give direct instruction for important reading strategies; and
6. Encourage collaboration in many aspects of



learning.

Employing the above classroom practices would help motivate struggling readers to gain much-needed literacy skills and confidence in themselves as readers. In this way, they could then learn the complex content found in texts that they had initially found difficult.

### *Younger learners vs. older learners*

Frey and Fisher (2010) stated that teenagers liked to turn to their peers for support and validation and that English teachers should capitalise on this and design group activities that allowed students to engage in productive group work that resulted in meaningful learning.

Yeung et al. (2011) found some interaction effects for grade and gender differences among Singaporean students in a large-scale study. Although both boys and girls had lower levels of motivation for learning English in secondary school compared to primary school, the level dropped more sharply for girls who had much higher levels in primary school. In secondary school, no discernible differences were found in the motivation levels of boys and girls.

In sum, teachers should consider the gender, age, and ability of the students that they teach as these are the factors that affect students' motivation. Lower-ability students might need more motivational support from teachers than higher-ability students while boys seemed to need more help in planning and organising their schedule to help them focus on schoolwork. Older students might need more activities involving group work than younger students.

### **School learning environments**

Prior research in North America found that students who have a more mastery approach to learning, i.e., those who are concerned with how well they have mastered what they have learnt, tend to be interested in learning the skill or content competence, and are more likely to adopt

deep learning strategies such as thinking critically, elaborating ideas, and synthesizing concepts while those adopting performance goals, i.e., those more interested in outperforming their peers, tend to adopt surface learning strategies such as memorization and reproduction of materials (e.g., Dwek & Leggett, 1988; Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Greene et al., 2004; Seifert, 2004). Students with mastery-oriented goals are willing to perform difficult tasks, and view mistakes as learning opportunities. Those with performance-oriented goals are interested in appearing competent or better than others regardless of the level they have achieved. They tend to stick to familiar tasks. They view mistakes as evidence of a lack of competence and thus they try to avoid mistakes.

Deep learning strategies are typically associated with higher student achievement while surface

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learning strategies are linked to lower levels of academic outcomes. Contrary to what has been found in North America, research on what motivated students to learn English in Singapore indicated that both performance and mastery goals predicted deep learning. In addition, students adopting mastery goals also engaged

in surface learning strategies (Liem, Lau, & Nie, 2008). Liem et al. (2008) explained that, being bilingual, students in Singapore might have adopted surface learning strategies to learn new vocabulary, sentence structures, and other grammatical rules, in English. However, it should be noted that Singaporean students adopting mastery goals were more likely to remain engaged in the task compared to those adopting performance goals. Liem et al. (2008) recommended that schools should adopt a mastery goal supplemented with a small proportion of a performance goal.

What then determines whether students adopt mastery goals or performance goals? Luo et al. (2011) found that in Singapore, English classrooms with a mastery goal structure encouraged the adoption of mastery goals while classrooms with a more performance goal structure promoted the adoption of performance goals. Therefore, the

classroom goal structure seemed to predict the goal orientations of the average student.

In schools that promote a mastery orientation, Ames (1992) noted that the tasks involved variety and diversity and that students tended to perceive that engaging in the activity was personally relevant and meaningful. The variety and diversity of the task structure also provided students fewer opportunities to engage in social comparison (e.g., streaming or tracking, honour rolls, contests) and the students were less likely to compare their performance. To motivate students, Ames (1992) suggested that a more non-normative way of assessment is needed. Teachers and school leaders should recognise students' effort, encourage the view of mistakes as part of learning, make evaluation private rather than public, and focus on individual progress.

Having a school-wide programme has been found to help student engagement in reading (Daniels & Steres, 2011; Harrison, 2012).

For example, Daniels and Steres (2011) reported that having a school-wide reading programme in a middle school in California encouraged student engagement.

The principal of the school wanted to create a culture of reading and thus set the agenda in the school to motivate children to read. The results from the analysis of interviews with both teachers and students indicated that the following conditions were necessary to motivate students to read: (a) making reading a top priority; (b) modelling by and support from the adults in the school; and (c) the creation of motivating learning environments.

What did the school personnel do to motivate the students to read? Firstly, to create a reading culture, the principal went to the classes and talked about the books that he had been reading. Other administrators in the school also started engaging in conversations with students about books. Secondly, professional development was provided to teachers during faculty meetings to help teachers become more knowledgeable about young adult literature so that they could recommend books to their students and also show them how to choose and interact with books. As teachers started talking about books with their colleagues and stu-

dents, and modelling active reading, both teachers and students became more engaged in reading. Thirdly, the school committed resources, in terms of time and money, to ensure that all teachers had comprehensive classroom libraries and that they knew how to manage them effectively. The principal expected content area teachers to have books related to their subject area in their classrooms and to talk to students about their reading too. By providing students the books and the time to read them every day, the school demonstrated its commitment to reading. Having classroom libraries of between 500 and 1,000 books meant that the students could read books that their friends were reading because there were multiple copies of the books. Reading became a social activity as students talked about reading with their friends and school personnel. Students could also choose the books that they wished to read and stop reading them if they chose to do so. Having this feeling of autonomy made students feel more motivated to read.

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*As teachers started talking about books with their colleagues and students, and modelling active reading, both teachers and students became more engaged in reading.*

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To motivate students to read, Harrison (2012) suggested that schools needed to create library periods for students so that they could have protected time to bor-

row books and read them regularly. She also suggested that schools could acknowledge online reading as the results of her study showed that boys spent significant amounts of time reading online. Encouraging students to do multiple readings of the same text might also help engage them. In New Zealand, she implemented two activities for the experimental group consisting of 13-year-old boys: speed-booking and the buying of books by students followed by discussion. The first activity, speed-booking, required students to choose books displayed on a table within five minutes before moving to another table where they could retain the book they had selected or exchange the book if they found another that they liked better. The second activity involved students selecting the books for purchase for the school library, explaining their choices to their classmates, and encouraging them to read the books they had selected. These two activities resulted in more books being borrowed from the library by students in the experimental group compared to those in the control group. Harrison

(2012) believed that schools needed to be more pro-active in planning literacy policies that provided more time for reading. She also concluded that students needed to be involved directly in classroom activities that promoted reading.

In Singapore, Bokhorst-Heng and Pereira (2008) reported that secondary school students found some school policies on reading demotivating. The students in one secondary school found keeping a daily log of reading activity and materials cumbersome and demotivating. They were also not allowed to read books that were deemed not suitable by the school. Bokhorst-Heng and Pereira (2008) concluded that the school's outcome orientation and its priority on assessable learning might have worked against extensive reading goals of creating a lifelong passion for reading. They recommended that educators should take into account the attitudes and values that students bring to their reading when they design reading pedagogy programmes and reading programmes for adolescents. Schools should focus more on creating a love for reading rather than on focusing whether reading would have an effect on examination scores.

The key point is that school leaders and administrators play an important role in engaging and motivating students in schools. To a large extent, they influence the type of goals that teachers and students set in the classroom. They are also responsible for creating a motivating school climate.

## Implications and conclusion

Based on the findings of the research reviewed in this digest, the professional development that could be offered to educators concerning motivation might involve many levels. At the cognitive level, teachers could learn to structure learning activities in the classroom that are challenging to students and relevant to their lives. Teachers could take into account the ability levels and the gender of the students when they design learning activities. They could give students a choice in the cognitive tasks that have been prepared for them to help the students complete the tasks and stay engaged. They could give students a chance to assess their classmates' work and also train them to use language that is motivating to one another during group work.

At the socio-emotional level, teachers could create a positive learning environment by displaying traits such as empathy, friendliness, tolerance, and respectfulness. Helping students in their stress and time management, acknowledging their anxiety and fears and yet remaining a strict disciplinarian are also teacher qualities that motivate students.

At the school level, school leaders and administrators could support teachers by modelling behaviour that signals to students that certain issues are a priority. For example, in Daniels and Steres' (2011) study, there was school-wide support for teachers in the reading programme. Both the principal and school administrators gave book talks in classrooms.

During professional development courses, teacher educators could use case studies of teachers who motivate their students to help pre-service and in-service teachers to imagine how teachers who motivate students operate. For example, in a study (Adkins-Coleman, 2010) described earlier, the writer suggested that teacher educators could use the case study of the two teachers described in her study to help pre-service teachers to experience second-hand how effective teachers motivated their students and to understand the kind of practices that they needed to adopt to successfully support their students' learning. Adkins-Coleman (2010) underlined that the detailed strategies and practices would provide concrete examples to prospective teachers and teacher educators of what facilitating engagement looked like.

In conclusion, to help keep students engaged in the classroom and for deep learning to take place, educators should promote a more mastery-oriented approach to learning. From a mastery-oriented goal classroom, teachers could then design classroom structures that value effort over ability. Implementing strategies based on effort will then enhance student motivation. Emphasis on the practice of creating and maintaining more positive learner-centred teacher-student relationships will also help students achieve better engagement in learning activities and outcomes. Teacher-student relationships might be particularly important for children who have serious problems in school. In sum, classrooms that offer a positive social environment as well as a cognitive-

ly rich environment, provide a more favourable context for helping children engage in deep learning and master the competencies required in English literacy. Educators and policymakers should consider how best to support teachers and school

leaders to adapt and individualise instruction so that students can stay motivated and achieve better outcomes from kindergarten years through secondary school.

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