

# Motivational Strategies to Develop L2 Student Engagement on Online Platforms

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Online learning often becomes debatable with the question of how it could create motivation among disadvantaged learners or learners with low language proficiency levels. A classroom with mixed abilities is the biggest challenge for teachers to handle. But finding a one-size-fits-all solution will not be a viable option. Instead, providing a free space for students, using motivational stories in mother tongue, giving immediate feedback, posing reflective questions on different online platforms to engage students can act as a good motivational strategy to create a positive outlook among students regarding second language learning. The present research considers a sample of 114 students from various degree colleges in Telangana, India- who participated in a survey related to their perspectives on online Interaction, a story-based discussion conducted on WhatsApp, and a reflective discussion conducted on easyclass discussion board, an online tool. Students feel motivated when they were connected to the theme of the discussion or connected to the reflective questions posed in the discussion. Immediate feedback also motivates them instantly. It is observed that story-based discussion motivated students' participation compared to the discussion on easyclass discussion board where questions related to personal experiences were asked. This implies teachers' consideration of learner's preferences of technological platform, motivational strategies, personal choices, time provided for students to interact and types of questions posed.

## INTRODUCTION

Introduction With the recent changes in educational setup, L2 teachers and L2 learners together need to develop and practice a range of skills apart from learning language skills (Listening, speaking, Reading and Writing). These include: Awareness of the online platform (ICT) and Awareness of 21st century skills (collaboration, communication, critical thinking, creativity). Roll & Wylie (2016) mentions 'motivation' is required in 21st century education. Only with continuous

development of understanding coupled with practice sounds meaningful in the present scenario. Teachers and learners together are seen as part of a dynamic world. With these changes it is obvious that learning becomes complicated for the disadvantaged learners as well as learners with low language proficiency levels. The present research considered a simple yet significant aspect of 21st century language learning or post COVID language learning that is 'Motivation in online learning mode'.

Hartnett (2016) confirms that motivation fosters a sense of community and also triggers learning in online education. Harmer (2007) makes a mention of need of the support that the teacher extends to the students in the classroom which helps in motivating them irrespective of the physical aspects of the classroom. Dörnyei (2008) states that encouraging of learners will impact their learning in a positive way. Alrabai (2014) mentions one of the reasons for demotivation of learners in classroom activities is due to lack of their involvement or inclusion in those activities. Brophy (1987) states that both a difficult task and an easy task will fail to motivate students.

Gall (1984) recommends that higher order questions can engage learners in a better way only when students are prepared on the ways to answer. Harbour et al., (2015) mentions that 'opportunities to respond' is one of the ways to engage students in the classroom. Hew & Cheung (2012) mention that a topic can be 'relevant or controversial' to engage students in online discussions. Loewen & Sato (2017) mentions that arousing student's interest and providing feedback are some of the motivational strategies to be implemented (kata Csizer, 423). Ur (1996) lists stories which can be used by teacher to arouse interest of students. Teachers can adopt motivational strategies suitable for their classroom environment, learner's needs, and learner's proficiency levels. The present research is guided by the research questions:

1. What motivates learners to interact in target language on online platforms?
2. What are the perspectives of learners on online Interaction?

## **METHOD(S)**

A sample of 114 undergraduate learners from various Degree colleges of Telangana, India was selected. The learners were formed into seven WhatsApp groups representing different colleges. They were asked to listen to a story which was narrated in Telugu, the first language for all the learners. The audio link was posted in all the groups with two yes/no questions seeking justification and one question seeking opinion. The student responses were collected in second language that is in target language.

Students were also enrolled in an online class named easyclass. A discussion board was created for all learners to pose questions and to participate in discussion. As part of the initiative a self-reflection question was posed. Along with it the learners were allowed to respond on the story on discussion forum also.

Around 114 students responded for a short survey on 'Interaction on online platforms' which offers their perspectives.

The tools used for this research are:

1. WhatsApp groups
2. Easyclass discussion board
3. Learner Questionnaire

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Perspectives of learners on online Interaction***

The survey questionnaire included questions which gauge the learner’s views on online Interaction. Likert scale was used to measure the responses of learners. The learners (114 participants) are of undergraduate level and 50% of learners are from rural areas, 13.2% are from semi-urban areas, and 36.8% are from urban areas. The responses are tabulated as below:

*Table 1: Perspectives of learners on online Interaction*

No.	Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Values
1	I need motivation from teacher to sustain my interest in the topic	1.8%	3.5%	13.2%	55.3%	26.3%	4.00
2	I like to participate in an audio-based discussion	0.9%	8.8%	13.2%	45.6%	31.6%	3.98
3	I expect feedback from the teacher on my performance on a given task	0.9%	0.9%	6.1%	50.9%	41.2%	4.35
4	I like to ask my classmates questions on what they said or written in online discussions	3.5%	5.3%	21.1%	53.5%	16.7%	3.74
5	I like to share my opinions on the messages posted by my classmates in online discussion	1.8%	2.6%	16.7%	57%	21.9%	3.94
6	I spend time to go through messages posted by my fellow classmates on a given topic for online discussion	8.8%	9.6%	24.6%	48.2%	8.8%	3.42

7	I like to participate in discussions on known topics rather than unknown topics	9.6%	11.4%	11.4%	50.9%	16.7%	3.57
8	I find it difficult to interact on online platforms	16.7%	33.3%	21.1%	21.9%	7%	2.71
9	I will express my views about any inconvenience which I face on the online platform (Audio clarity, Video clarity, submission of responses)	0.9%	2.6%	3.5%	54.4%	38.6%	4.24

The present research has found the following aspects of online language learning to discuss:

It is noticed that learners would like to access their native tongue on online platforms to share their views in target language. This is observed when an audio link containing a motivational story was shared with learners in seven WhatsApp groups. The story was narrated in mother tongue followed with yes/no questions seeking justification and an opinion seeking question. This helped learners to interact well. The students were allowed to respond for three days on the same story. Immediate appreciative feedback was provided for learners to encourage them by using some expressions such as, ‘Well done’, ‘Good Job’, ‘Good try’, ‘Good analysis’, ‘Good effort’, ‘Good explanation’, ‘well justified’, ‘Keep up your active participation’. Among seven groups, 48 participants from six groups gave their responses. Around 8 students posted their responses in the discussion forum on easyclass. Students were encouraged to ask questions on the replies posted by their peers. But this did not lead to learner to learner interaction. Learners did not even appreciate their peers which highlights another issue of language learning to be incorporated that is ‘peer support’. But a few learners requested the facilitator to review their posts which shows learner’s belief of ‘teacher as the only language resource in the classroom’. These notions need to be addressed in the modern language classrooms in India. Apart from providing appreciation students were encouraged to improve on their responses by relating the story with their real life experiences. This did not draw any response from students which states the fact that students need enough exposure to such type of relating the available information in the classroom with the life outside the classroom. The reason for selecting motivational stories and posing self-reflective questions is that they boost the morale of under confident learners (Magid & Chan, 2012).

A self-reflective question was posed on discussion forum on easyclass which did not receive much participation as it received in the case of WhatsApp. The reason for selecting motivational stories and posing self-reflective questions is that they boost the morale of under confident learners. This reveals that students exhibit different comfort levels to express their views on different online platforms, they respond based on their learning style (auditory, kinesthetic, visual, verbal).

The survey shows that learners are more inclined to teacher and learner interaction and also interacting with peers. But in the study it was found that learners did not show interest in sharing their views or appreciation or questions on what their peers have posted. Students expected feedback from the teacher in the form of appreciation or correction on what they have posted. This point correlates with the survey. The response to the audio-based discussion reveals the fact that learners want to discuss on a known topic or a topic in their own language which correlates with the survey responses.

## CONCLUSIONS

It is observed that learners' learning style, type of questions, technological platform, type of feedback, use of learner's own language play a key role in motivating them to interact in target language.

## Implications

The important implications of the study are:

1. Teachers need to adapt to the contexts of the learners' learning.
2. Motivational aspects of learning should be given due preference while teaching.
3. Teacher's use of learner's own language to motivate low proficiency level learners or to create interaction in classrooms should be considered.
4. Teacher should be given practical training related to the best use of easily accessible online tools.
5. Teachers should be given adequate training related to online pedagogy by taking constructive theory into consideration.
6. Teachers need to understand the importance of mother tongue for motivational purposes.
7. Teachers need to use positive feedback in language classrooms.

## Limitations and scope for further study

The study offers only a minute yet significant aspect of learner motivation and engagement in online language classrooms. The study can be extended to get a better understanding of learner motivation. Teachers can study the impact of video-based discussion on learners' motivation. It is need of the hour to focus on less motivated learners, disadvantaged learners, learners of low proficiency levels, learners with disabilities as well as learners with language disabilities. Future study can be encouraged from this perspective.

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