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STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINING STUDENT MOTIVATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AMID UNCERTAINTY

Abstract

In the current context of uncertainty, particularly in Ukraine, at the time of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, maintaining students' motivation to learn English has become a significant challenge. Factors such as psychological stress, social changes, and economic instability negatively impact student engagement. This article explores strategies for sustaining interest in English learning, focusing on the practical relevance of the language, creating a positive learning environment, and leveraging modern technologies. By applying these approaches, educators can help students stay motivated, ensuring that they continue to develop their English proficiency and use it effectively in both personal and professional contexts.

Key words: student motivation, uncertainty, English language learning, practical relevance, modern technologies.

Introduction

In today's world, uncertainty has become a defining characteristic of many aspects of life, and Ukraine is no exception. The ongoing social, political, and economic challenges, exacerbated by the current wartime conditions, have created an environment where predictability is scarce. For students, this high level of uncertainty not only disrupts daily routines but also hinders their focus and commitment to long-term goals, including education. Among the many academic disciplines, language learning, particularly English, has been significantly affected.

English language proficiency is undeniably crucial in the modern world, serving as a key tool for communication, access to global information, and professional development. However, the lack of stability students face in their lives often diminishes [1] their motivation to engage with the language learning process. This decline in motivation presents a serious challenge for educators, as maintaining students' interest and encouraging consistent practice in English becomes more difficult under such conditions.

Given the undeniable importance [2] of mastering English, finding effective strategies to sustain students' motivation in learning and using the language remains highly relevant. This paper seeks to explore and propose practical strategies to counteract the negative impact of uncertainty on student motivation, ensuring that learners remain engaged and recognize the value of their English language skills, both in the present and for their future prospects.

Main part

In the context of uncertainty, numerous factors contribute to the decline in students' motivation to learn, particularly in learning English. These factors can be broadly categorized into psychological, social, and economic influences, all of which play a significant role in shaping student engagement and enthusiasm for language acquisition.

1. Psychological factors

Uncertainty often manifests in various psychological challenges that directly affect a student's ability to focus on their studies. These include

- ✓ **stress and anxiety.** The ongoing instability, whether related to personal safety or national events, causes elevated levels of stress and anxiety. This emotional burden distracts students from their educational goals, including language learning.
- ✓ **lack of a sense of security.** In environments marked by conflict or instability, students may struggle with feelings of insecurity, which diminishes their capacity to commit to long-term learning endeavours.
- ✓ **loss of control over one's life.** The unpredictable nature of external events can lead to a perceived loss of control over personal decisions and future prospects, further reducing motivation to invest in academic pursuits like learning English.

2. Social factors

Social dynamics, which are typically foundational to a student's learning experience, are also disrupted by uncertainty. Some of the key social factors include:

- ✓ **changes in the usual social environment.** The shift from in-person to online or hybrid learning environments, or even the disruption of school systems entirely, can result in a breakdown of the supportive social structures that previously motivated students to learn.

- ✓ **limited access to resources.** Restricted access [3] to educational materials, internet, and language practice opportunities, particularly in areas affected by conflict, hinders students' ability to maintain progress in English learning.
- ✓ **uncertainty about the future.** When students are unsure about their future, whether in terms of educational continuity or job opportunities, the perceived value of learning English diminishes. This uncertainty often results in a lack of motivation to invest effort in language proficiency.

3. **Economic factors**

Economic instability further exacerbates the decline in motivation, as financial pressures force students and their families to prioritize survival over education. The main economic factors include:

- ✓ **financial instability.** For many students, personal or family financial hardships create stress that competes with their ability to focus on academic goals.
- ✓ **job loss.** The reduction in employment opportunities and the increased likelihood of job loss due to economic disruptions contribute to a sense of hopelessness, making it difficult for students to see the practical benefits of learning English.
- ✓ **reduced employment opportunities.** In uncertain times, the perception that there are fewer professional prospects – both domestically and internationally – can reduce the perceived importance of learning English as a tool for future career success.

These factors collectively shape the context in which students approach their studies, underscoring the need for targeted strategies to help them maintain motivation in the face of these challenges.

Strategies for maintaining interest in learning English

To address the challenges posed by uncertainty and declining student motivation, it is essential to implement strategies that highlight the practical relevance of English and create a positive, engaging learning environment. The following approaches focus on maintaining students' interest in learning English and fostering long-term commitment.

1. **Actualizing practical relevance**

One of the most effective ways to motivate students is by demonstrating the real-world benefits of learning English. These strategies include:

- ✓ **emphasising the importance of English for career success.** Highlighting how proficiency in English opens doors [4] to better career opportunities, both within Ukraine and abroad, can inspire students to view language learning as an investment in their future.
- ✓ **demonstrating everyday uses of English.** Showing students how English can be useful in day-to-day activities – such as international communication, travel, and access to global information – reinforces the practical value of language skills beyond academic purposes.
- ✓ **involving students in English-based projects.** Engaging students in projects that require [5] the use of English, such as volunteering, internships, or participation in international programs,

provides hands-on experience and makes learning more meaningful. These opportunities can demonstrate how English serves as a bridge to global connections and experiences.

2. **Creating a positive learning environment**

A supportive and stimulating learning environment can help students stay motivated, even in uncertain times. Strategies include:

- ✓ **interactive teaching methods.** Incorporating interactive methods, such as group discussions, role-playing, and problem-solving activities, fosters active participation and keeps students engaged in the learning process [6].
- ✓ **individualized approach.** Tailoring lessons to the individual needs, interests, and abilities of each student helps to create a more personalized and motivating learning experience. This approach ensures that students feel supported and understood, increasing their sense of belonging and interest.
- ✓ **comfortable psychological climate.** Creating a psychologically safe and supportive classroom environment is crucial for student well-being. Encouraging open communication, empathy, and positive reinforcement can reduce anxiety and make the learning process more enjoyable.

3. **Utilizing modern technologies**

Incorporating technology into the learning process can enhance engagement and provide students with flexible, accessible ways to improve their language skills. These strategies include:

- ✓ **online platforms and mobile applications.** The use of online platforms (such as *Duolingo*, *Quizlet*, or *Kahoot*) and mobile applications offers [7] convenient, interactive ways for students to practice English outside of the classroom, making learning more flexible and accessible.
- ✓ **gamification of learning.** Integrating game elements, such as rewards, levels, and challenges, into lessons can make the learning process more engaging and fun, while also reinforcing language concepts through repetition and play.
- ✓ **use of authentic materials.** Incorporating authentic materials, such as films, music, and articles that reflect modern realities, can make learning more relatable and enjoyable. These materials expose students to real-life English usage, helping them understand [8] the cultural context and contemporary relevance of the language.

By applying these strategies, educators can help students recognize the practical benefits of learning English and create an environment that fosters sustained motivation, even in the face of uncertainty. In doing so, students are more likely to see English not just as an academic requirement but as a valuable skill that enhances their personal and professional opportunities. This shift in perspective can inspire greater commitment to their studies, even when external circumstances are challenging. Ultimately, a well-structured approach that addresses both the emotional and practical aspects of learning can significantly improve student outcomes and long-term language retention.

Conclusions

Maintaining students' motivation to learn English in the face of uncertainty is a critical task for teachers. Given the challenges posed by psychological, social, and economic factors, educators must implement thoughtful and adaptive strategies to keep students engaged. By focusing on the practical relevance of English, creating a positive and supportive learning environment, and incorporating modern technologies, teachers can help students retain their interest in language learning.

These approaches not only make English more relevant to students' personal and professional goals but also provide [9] them with the tools they need to succeed in an ever-changing world. Through these strategies, students will be better equipped to continue their English language education and apply it effectively in their future endeavours.

So, the key findings are as follows.

1. **Maintaining motivation in uncertainty.** It is essential for teachers to address the psychological, social, and economic factors that hinder students' motivation to learn English.
2. **Practical relevance of English.** Emphasizing the real-world benefits of English in personal and professional contexts helps students understand its value beyond the classroom.
3. **Creating a positive learning environment.** A supportive and engaging learning atmosphere promotes student participation, reduces anxiety, and encourages long-term commitment.
4. **Use of modern technologies.** Integrating online platforms, mobile apps, and gamification can make learning more accessible, flexible, and enjoyable for students.
5. **Encouraging resilience and self-direction.** Fostering self-directed learning and goal-setting empowers students to take control of their progress, boosting their motivation.
6. **Collaborative learning and feedback.** Peer-to-peer interactions and consistent positive feedback strengthen student engagement and build confidence in language learning.
7. **Addressing both emotional and practical needs.** A balanced approach that considers emotional well-being and practical applications of English enhances student success and language retention.

Students in Ukraine face significant challenges in staying motivated to learn during Russia's military aggression. The constant threat to personal safety and the instability caused by the conflict create a high level of psychological stress, which diminishes focus and commitment to education. Many students have experienced displacement, losing their homes and access to stable learning environments, further compounding their difficulties in concentrating on academic pursuits. Economic hardships brought about by the war, such as family financial struggles or the need to support relatives, often force education to take a back seat. Moreover, the uncertainty about the future and job prospects in such a volatile context makes it difficult for students to see the long-term value of learning English, even though it remains an essential skill for global communication and opportunities.

Additionally, fostering resilience in students is a key to helping them navigate the challenges of uncertainty. Encouraging self-directed learning and goal-setting can empower students to take control of their own progress, further enhancing their engagement with English. Collaborative learning activities, such as group projects or peer-to-peer interactions, also play a vital role in maintaining motivation, as they create a sense of community and shared purpose. Regular feedback and positive reinforcement can build students' confidence and sustain their commitment to learning. Ultimately, by providing a stable and encouraging learning environment, teachers can mitigate the negative effects of uncertainty and support students in achieving long-term success in English language acquisition.

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