

Challenges Faced by Students in Learning English: Psychological, Pedagogical, and Motivational Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

English language proficiency is increasingly important for academic success, employability, and global communication. However, many learners continue to face difficulties in developing communicative competence despite years of formal instruction. This review article examines the major challenges faced by students in learning English, focusing on psychological, pedagogical, motivational, and technological factors. Drawing on second language acquisition theory and educational psychology, the article analyzes the influence of foreign language anxiety, low self-confidence, limited opportunities for authentic communication, teacher-centered instruction, weak motivation, unclear goals, and digital learning challenges. The review shows that English learning difficulties cannot be explained by linguistic ability alone; they emerge from the interaction of emotional, social, instructional, and environmental factors. The article argues that learner-centered pedagogy, psychologically supportive classrooms, meaningful communication, constructive feedback, clear goal setting, and responsible use of technology can improve language learning outcomes. The article concludes with recommendations for teachers, institutions, students, and families to support more effective and sustainable English language development.

Keywords

communicative competence; English language learning; learner-centered pedagogy; second language acquisition; foreign language anxiety; learner motivation; digital learning



INTRODUCTION

English has become a major language of international communication, higher education, scientific research, business, and digital media. Students who develop English proficiency often gain access to broader academic and professional opportunities. For this reason, English language education has received strong attention in many countries where English is learned as a foreign language.

Despite its importance, many students experience persistent difficulty in learning English. Some learners understand grammar rules and vocabulary but hesitate to speak. Others struggle with pronunciation, listening comprehension, academic writing, motivation, or confidence. These difficulties show that successful language learning depends on more than memorizing grammar or passing examinations. It involves psychological readiness, meaningful practice, supportive instruction, and regular exposure to authentic communication.

The expansion of digital technologies has created additional opportunities for English learning through online platforms, mobile applications, videos, artificial intelligence tools, and social media. However, digital learning also brings challenges such as distraction, unequal access, information overload, and overdependence on translation or writing tools. This article examines the major challenges faced by students in learning English and proposes practical recommendations for improving language learning outcomes.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

This article follows a qualitative literature review approach. Research in second language acquisition, educational psychology, foreign language anxiety, learner motivation, and digital learning was reviewed to identify common challenges affecting English language development. The analysis is organized around psychological, pedagogical, motivational, and technological factors.



Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis provides an important framework for understanding the emotional barriers learners face (Krashen, 1982). According to this view, anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and low self-confidence can reduce learners' ability to process language input and participate actively. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) further explain that foreign language classroom anxiety can affect speaking, listening, and classroom participation.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory emphasizes that language develops through interaction, collaboration, and guided support (Vygotsky, 1978). This perspective highlights the importance of meaningful communication and teacher support. Bandura's concept of self-efficacy explains how learners' beliefs about their ability influence persistence and performance (Bandura, 1997). Locke and Latham's goal-setting theory also shows that clear and measurable goals can increase motivation and effort (Locke & Latham, 2002). Together, these theories show that English language learning challenges are multidimensional.

PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS

Psychological barriers are among the most common difficulties in English language learning. Many students feel anxious when speaking English because they fear making mistakes, being judged by classmates, or receiving negative feedback from teachers. This anxiety can reduce participation even when students have sufficient vocabulary or grammar knowledge. As a result, learners may remain silent in class, avoid presentations, or depend on memorized answers instead of spontaneous communication. Low self-confidence also affects language learning. Students who believe they are poor at English may avoid practice, and lack of practice further weakens performance. This cycle can continue unless teachers create supportive conditions. Encouragement, constructive feedback, pair work, small-group discussions, and gradual speaking tasks can help learners build confidence. Errors should be treated as part of learning rather than as signs of failure.

Pedagogical challenges also play a major role. In some classrooms, English teaching remains dominated by grammar translation, memorization, and examination preparation. While grammar knowledge is important, students need opportunities to use English for meaningful communication. Limited speaking practice, overcrowded classrooms, delayed feedback, and lack of learner-centered tasks can reduce communicative competence. Effective instruction should include speaking activities, listening tasks, collaborative projects, reading strategies, writing practice, and feedback that helps students improve.

Motivation is another important factor. Students may lose interest when they do not see the relevance of English to their personal, academic, or professional goals. Dörnyei (2001) emphasizes that motivation can be strengthened through meaningful tasks, achievable goals, supportive classroom climate, and recognition of progress. Students who set clear short-term goals, such as learning new vocabulary each week or practicing speaking regularly, are more likely to continue learning consistently.

Self-regulated learning is also necessary. Many students depend entirely on classroom instruction and do not develop independent study habits. Successful learners review regularly, use dictionaries carefully, listen to English content, read graded materials, practice writing, and monitor their progress. Without such habits, language learning remains limited to classroom hours.

Technological challenges have become increasingly visible. Online resources can support English learning, but they can also distract students. Social media, entertainment platforms, and frequent notifications may reduce concentration. AI writing tools and translation applications can help learners understand and revise language, but overdependence may weaken independent production. Unequal access to reliable devices and internet connectivity can also limit opportunities for some learners. Therefore, digital tools should be used responsibly and with clear learning purposes.

Addressing these challenges requires cooperation among teachers, institutions, students, and families. Teachers should create safe classroom environments and provide meaningful communication practice. Institutions should support teacher training and provide learning resources. Students should take responsibility for regular practice and goal setting. Families can encourage learners and provide emotional support. When these elements work together, students are more likely to develop confidence and communicative competence.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The challenges faced by students in learning English arise from the interaction of psychological, pedagogical, motivational, and technological factors. Foreign language anxiety, low self-confidence, limited communicative practice, teacher-centered instruction, weak motivation, unclear goals, and digital distractions can all reduce language development. These barriers show that English proficiency cannot be achieved through grammar instruction alone.

Educational institutions should promote learner-centered and communicative approaches while providing supportive classroom environments. Teachers should use interactive tasks, constructive feedback, and gradual speaking opportunities to reduce anxiety and build confidence. Students should set realistic goals, practice English regularly, and develop self-regulated learning habits. Families should encourage learners and support consistent study. Future research may examine these challenges through empirical studies across different educational levels and contexts. A comprehensive approach that combines effective pedagogy, emotional support, motivation, and responsible technology use can improve English language learning outcomes.

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