

**KEY FEATURES AND CHALLENGES OF WORKING WITH PASSIVE  
LEARNERS IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

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**Abstract.** *There are several difficulties when teaching a foreign language to passive learners, and in order to increase engagement and enhance learning results, specific techniques are needed. The main characteristics of passive learners are examined in this article, such as their lack of motivation, hesitancy to engage, and desire for less contact. It also looks at the difficulties teachers encounter, like maintaining students' interest, breaking down barriers to communication, and modifying teaching strategies to suit various learning preferences. The article also covers successful strategies for instructing passive learners, such as gamification, interactive exercises, and individualized learning methods. Teachers can establish a more dynamic and successful foreign language learning environment by tackling these issues and putting specific techniques into practice.*

**Key words:** *passive learners, TBLT, gamification, scaffolding, communicative competence, anxiety, peer-cooperation, effective strategies*

### **Introduction**

Teaching a foreign language to passive learners presents significant pedagogical challenges, requiring a nuanced understanding of both cognitive and affective factors. Passive learners, often reluctant to participate actively in speaking or interactive tasks, tend to absorb language input without producing output. Linguists and researchers in second language acquisition (SLA) have broadly studied this phenomenon, offering various theoretical perspectives on how to engage and support such learners effectively.

Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) suggests that passive learners benefit most from exposure to comprehensible input, arguing that forced production may hinder rather than facilitate language acquisition. However, Merrill Swain's Output Hypothesis (1995) challenges this view, emphasizing that meaningful language production is essential for cognitive processing and internalizing linguistic structures. While Krashen's theory provides a strong foundation for reducing learner anxiety and building comprehension skills, relying solely on input may not be sufficient. Swain's perspective highlights an essential aspect of language learning—without output, learners may struggle to assimilate structures efficiently. A balanced approach that integrates both understandable input and meaningful production opportunities appears to be the most effective strategy.

From a socio-cultural perspective, Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978) underscores the importance of social interaction and scaffolding,

suggesting that passive learners may struggle due to a lack of guided support and meaningful peer interactions. Meanwhile, Zoltán Dörnyei's *Motivational Strategies in the Language Classroom* (2001) highlights how psychological barriers, such as anxiety and low self-esteem, contribute to passive learning behaviors. His research suggests that promoting motivation through personalized, low-pressure learning environments can help learners transition from passive to active engagement. Vygotsky's theory is particularly relevant, as it emphasizes the role of structured support in learning. Dörnyei's work further reinforces the idea that passive learners are not simply unmotivated but may lack confidence or the right environmental conditions to thrive. Addressing these psychological factors is just as important as providing the right linguistic input.

In foreign language classes, passive learners are distinguished from active learners by a number of unique traits. Their hesitation to engage in verbal communication is one of the most noticeable characteristics. Instead of actively participating in conversations or interactive activities, they frequently prefer to listen and watch. This can be caused by a number of things, such as anxiety related to speaking in a foreign language, poor self-confidence, or fear of making mistakes.

Dependency on the teacher is another important characteristic of passive learners. They avoid taking the effort to learn and instead wait for clear directions. Teachers may find it challenging to create a self-directed learning environment where students take ownership of their development as a result of this passivity. Furthermore, passive learners frequently lack intrinsic motivation, which means they don't pursue language acquisition out of curiosity or personal interest. Rather, other forces like parental pressure or academic obligations could motivate their involvement.

Teaching passive learners presents a number of pedagogical difficulties that call for careful lesson planning. Maintaining student interest throughout the learning process is a significant task. Teachers must figure out how to promote involvement without making passive learners feel uncomfortable or anxious because they are less inclined to engage voluntarily. This difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that conventional instructional techniques, including lectures and rote memorization, sometimes fall flat with them. Breaking down barriers to communication is another challenge. Because of their limited vocabulary, fear of making grammatical mistakes, or lack of confidence in their speaking abilities, passive learners may find it difficult to articulate their ideas in a foreign language.

Since language acquisition is most successful when students actively utilize the language in authentic situations, this hesitancy may impede their progress.

Additionally, it might be challenging to differentiate training to meet the needs of passive learners. Teachers must modify their approaches to include both scheduled instruction and chances for individual study because these kids may react differently to different teaching philosophies. It can be especially difficult to strike a balance between both strategies since too much control can encourage inactivity while too much freedom can cause disengagement.

Effective Strategies for Engaging Passive Learners

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Teachers can use a variety of tactics intended to encourage motivation and active engagement in order to solve these issues. Gamification is a successful strategy that uses interactive challenges, prizes, and competition to make learning more interesting. Role-playing exercises, classroom games, and digital language learning applications can all make passive learners feel more at ease engaging in low-stress situations. Scaffolded learning is another helpful tactic that is based on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Teachers can assist passive learners in gaining confidence and developing critical communication skills by offering organized support and progressively increasing the complexity of activities. In addition to providing opportunities for meaningful contact, peer cooperation, group talks, and guided dialogues can give kids a safe environment in which to practice producing language.

Furthermore, the unique requirements of passive learners can be effectively met by individualized learning strategies. To increase motivation and engagement, educators can use self-paced assignments, interest-based materials, and personalized feedback. Active engagement can also be promoted by using task-based learning (TBL), in which students perform meaningful tasks as opposed to only learning grammar and vocabulary. Lastly, encouraging engagement in the classroom requires establishing a low-anxiety atmosphere.

### Conclusion

Although there are particular difficulties in teaching passive learners in foreign language classes, teachers can assist students in making the shift from passive observers to active participants by using effective teaching techniques. By being aware of their traits—such as low motivation, reliance on the teacher, and unwillingness to speak—teachers can adjust their methods. Teachers can establish a more stimulating and encouraging learning environment by incorporating interactive techniques like task-based education, scaffolded learning, and gamification. Furthermore, treating psychological issues like worry and insecurity is equally as important as offering language instruction. Teachers can assist passive learners to actively participate in their language development by providing them with individualized instruction, supportive activities, and encouragement. In the end, a blend of successful teaching methods and motivation-boosting tactics can turn passive learners into assured, involved language users.

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