

The Pedagogical Needs of Low Achievers

Abstract: This paper focuses on the problem of failure and underachievement in foreign language learning and associates it with negative attitudes and poor motivation rather than a lack of aptitude. The discussion draws upon the results of a questionnaire administered to a group of low achievers in EFL at the University of Bahrain, the purpose of which was to gain some understanding not only of what might encourage low achievers to persevere in their attempts to learn a foreign language but also of what is likely to discourage them from learning. Some suggestions are offered that might assist practitioners to remove certain common impediments to learning in the foreign language classroom and to foster a stronger desire to learn in students who are neither instrumentally nor integratively driven to learn a foreign language. These suggestions are supported by some empirical evidence which shows that by attending to the wants and preferences of low achievers and by rewarding productive effort and subject matter learning through the medium of the foreign language, considerable improvement can be achieved in their standard of proficiency.

Résumé: Cet exposé se concentre sur le problème de l'échec et des sous-performances dans l'apprentissage des langues étrangères, et l'associe à une absence de motivation et à une attitude de rejet plutôt qu'à un manque d'aptitude. Le débat s'inspire des résultats d'une enquête réalisée auprès d'un groupe d'apprenants de faible niveau en Anglais Langue Étrangère de l'Université de Bahrein, dont l'objectif était de parvenir à une meilleure compréhension non seulement de ce qui pourrait encourager des étudiants sous-performants à persévérer dans leurs efforts pour acquérir une langue étrangère, mais également de ce qui pourrait les en dissuader. Sont proposées ici des suggestions susceptibles d'aider les enseignants à supprimer certains obstacles fréquents lors du processus d'apprentissage en langue étrangère ainsi qu'à susciter un désir d'apprendre plus vif chez des apprenants qui ne sont amenés à l'étude d'une langue étrangère ni pour des raisons professionnelles ni à des fins d'intégration sociale. Ces remarques sont fondées sur des observations pratiques qui indiquent qu'une amélioration considérable peut être atteinte concernant le niveau de performance d'étudiants en difficulté si l'on répond à leur attente et à leurs aspirations et si l'on récompense les efforts concrets et l'étude de la matière apprise par le canal de la langue étrangère.

The Problem of Underachievement in Foreign and Second Language Learning

The growth of English as a world language since the end of World War II has helped to focus attention on the problem of wastage and low productivity in foreign language courses. This problem has long been a cause for concern in a number of developed countries (see, for example, Pimsleur et al., 1966, and H.M.I., 1977), but in many parts of the developing world it has reached alarming proportions and threatens to undermine the foundations of the entire educational process (cf. Brimer & Pauli, 1971; Gumbel et al., 1983). Although considerable successes can be claimed for Canadian-type immersion programmes (for a review, see Swain, 1984), it needs to be borne in mind that these successes were generally achieved in highly favourable learning environments and with students who, for the most part, were under strong integrative pressure to acquire the second language. Immersion techniques have generally proved much less successful in those countries in Africa and Asia where a second language is the medium of instruction in all subjects from an early stage in the school system. In many cases, early total immersion has not only failed to produce adequate levels of literacy in the second language but has also had a serious retarding effect on basic concept formation in all areas of the curriculum, not least in mathematics, which seems, paradoxically, to require a higher level of linguistic competence in the early stages of learning than the social sciences (for further discussion, see Wigzell, 1983).

To some extent, what might appear to be a high level of failure or underachievement on a national scale may be merely a reflection of the distribution of natural aptitude or verbal intelligence among the school population as a whole: If the opportunity is opened up to every child to learn a foreign or second language, it is reasonable to expect that many will fail. The high failure or drop-out rates recorded in certain countries, however, cannot be explained in terms of aptitude alone. Attitude and motivation also have a role to play. The importance of attitude and motivation in foreign and second language learning has long been recognised (see, for example, Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Burstall et al., 1974; Gardner, 1975; Gardner & Smythe, 1975; Gardner et al., 1976; Hermann, 1980; Al-Ansari, 1985), but despite the considerable research effort that has gone into investigating the relevant motivational and attitudinal variables, surprisingly little is known about the pedagogical factors that affect the desire to learn in students who are not driven by any external integrative or instrumental pressures.

In an effort to gain a better understanding of what motivates, and perhaps more importantly, what demotivates low achievers who have no compelling reason to learn a foreign language, a self-report questionnaire was designed and administered to 55 students at the University of Bahrain majoring in either Arabic or Islamic Studies and taking an EFL course, together with students from other

degree programmes, as part of their college requirements. This particular group of students was selected partly because Arabic and Islamic Studies majors consistently perform worse than any other group of majors in English proficiency tests and partly because they could be expected to feel less affinity with the culture of English-speaking people and consequently to have largely negative or at best neutral attitudes towards the language. The questionnaire included items relating to a number of different variables: the students' perceptions of their communicative needs in English; their perceptions of their relative linguistic and functional competence in the language and of their ability to meet their communicative needs; their attitudes to the language and its culture; their views concerning the pedagogic approach, teaching style and attitude of their language instructors, especially in relation to their own pedagogical needs; the intelligibility of the teacher's classroom language; the use of Arabic in the English classroom; the appropriateness of their instructional materials in relation to both their needs and their level of proficiency; their likes and dislikes regarding the subject matter of reading material; the kind of language skills they would like to develop irrespective of their immediate needs. The ensuing discussion draws heavily on the results of this questionnaire.

Some Possible Pedagogical Solutions to the Problem

Alleviating the Sense of Failure and Alienation

Underachievement, of course, is a relative, not an absolute condition. It is also often more a matter of perception than of reality. A high proportion of the students who responded to the questionnaire (78%) perceived themselves as being below average in English, while 67% considered their level of functional competence in the language inadequate for their limited communicative needs. The greater the perception of underachievement or failure on the part of the student, the greater the demotivating effect is likely to be. One obvious way of alleviating the sense of failure is by streaming the learners on the basis of their performance. If the low achievers are separated from the high achievers, the majority of the low achievers will no longer view themselves as such in relation to their peers. Of course, some individual students will still underachieve relatively to the rest of the group but their sense of underachievement will be less acutely felt and consequently less demotivating than it would be in a mixed ability class.

The need to separate the low achievers from the high achievers is particularly strong when the foreign language is used as the medium of instruction in the foreign language classroom. The success of immersion programmes in Canada and the United States is due at least in part to the fact that they provide the students with a sheltered linguistic environment. Normally, immersion students

are not mixed in with native speakers and the instructor is thus free to simplify his or her classroom language to whatever extent is necessary in order to get the intended message across without offending the students' sense of linguistic propriety. In mixed ability foreign language classes, however, it may be extremely difficult for the instructor to provide adequate shelter for the weakest students while at the same time catering to the linguistic needs of the high achievers. Of the students who responded to the questionnaire, 72% reported that they experience either some difficulty or considerable difficulty in understanding what their instructor is saying. There can be nothing more frustrating and demoralising for a student in a foreign language class than being linguistically shut out from much of what is being said during a lesson. The natural inclination of most language teachers, however, is to speak to the class at a level that can be understood by most of the students most of the time. By simplifying their speech to the extent that it becomes almost fully comprehensible to all members of the group all the time, teachers of mixed ability classes run the risk of alienating the better students by seeming to insult their linguistic intelligence.

For the weaker students in a foreign language environment, however, the language teacher is likely to be the main, if not the only source of comprehensible speech input (on the importance of teacher-talk in the acquisition process, see Krashen 1982, p. 57ff and the relevant articles in Gass & Madden, 1985). Although there are ample sources of English language input in Bahrain both from within the large English-speaking expatriate community and through the local English language TV and radio channels, such sources are for the most part linguistically inaccessible to the low achievers among the undergraduate population. The majority of the students who responded to the questionnaire, furthermore, are very monoculturally oriented and show little interest in mixing socially with foreigners or in having access to what they consider to be culturally alien viewing or listening material. Comprehensible input from the teacher inside the classroom is thus much more important to the low achievers than it is to the high achievers, and yet it is the low achievers who are more likely to be deprived of this input in a mixed ability class. A lack of comprehensible input, however, may be less damaging in the long run than an excess of incomprehensible input in the foreign-language-medium classroom. We do not wish to suggest that the solution is to entirely abandon the use of the foreign language as the medium of instruction, but in mixed ability classes a bilingual approach may serve the interests of the low achievers better than a monolingual approach.

Relaxing the Demand for Precision and Formal Accuracy

Although streaming is highly desirable both as a means of ensuring comprehensible input and in order to avoid reinforcing any latent sense of alienation, it should not be based solely upon, or serve exclusively the interests of performance on standardised proficiency tests. Proficiency tests tend to give

much more weight to formal accuracy, especially formal accuracy in writing, than to fluency or creativity. This tendency can be explained in terms of the need, especially in standardised tests, to maintain a high level of objectivity and reliability, but there is always a danger in objective tests that reliability will be bought at the cost of some sacrifice of validity. Since proficiency tests generally reward accuracy more than pragmatic competence, students who perform badly in proficiency tests usually do so primarily because their standard of accuracy does not meet the level of adequacy set by the test. In practice, low levels of accuracy usually go together with low levels of fluency but this may well be because too much insistence on formal accuracy inside the classroom may inhibit the functional use of the language outside the classroom (for some case histories, see Picket, 1978, p. 99ff). There is no empirical evidence, however, to suggest that formal accuracy is more highly valued than fluency in ordinary conversational exchanges. As a general rule, the importance of formal accuracy depends upon the degree of precision required in the message one wishes to convey. It is easy to see that precision is much more important in scientific or business communication than it is in everyday social interaction; yet it is primarily for social rather than academic or professional purposes that many college students, especially in the humanities and social sciences, need English. Their communicative needs can be met with a much lower level of linguistic precision in the various forms of the language than those of students majoring in scientific, technical or commercial disciplines.

Adapting the Learning Environment to the Needs and Capabilities of Low Achievers

The streams of a multilevel course should not differ, however, solely in respect of aims and objectives. The learning environment associated with a low-level stream should differ in quite significant ways from that associated with a high-level stream. Generally speaking, the environment of a low-achievement class should be much less competitive, with much greater emphasis being placed on cooperative effort and mutual assistance than on individual achievement. The role, teaching style and classroom persona of the teacher should also be noticeably different. A high proportion of the students responding to the questionnaire expressed the feeling that their instructor was unaware of them as individuals and unsympathetic to their learning difficulties. Perhaps for this reason, a majority of the respondents declared a preference for a bilingual instructor. Surprisingly, however, most of those who expressed such a preference did not favour the use of Arabic as the primary medium of instruction for English courses. The inference we are invited to draw is that the majority of the low achievers felt that a bilingual instructor would be more sympathetic to, and have a better understanding of their learning difficulties, presumably because he could be assumed to have experienced much the same difficulties himself.

It would be pedagogically unwise, however, for the instructor to adopt a strongly interventionist approach with low achievers. Paradoxically, underachievers need to be taught less, not more than high achievers. With the lower streams, much greater emphasis needs to be placed on "picking up" the language than on conscious learning. This being so, the primary task of the teacher should be not to instruct in any formal sense but to manage the environment of the classroom in such a way as to make it as "acquisition rich" as possible (cf. Krashen, 1982). A good deal of preparation time needs to be devoted to providing the learners with ample sources of comprehensible input, especially in the form of appropriate reading and listening material. A point that emerges very clearly from the questionnaire is that the majority of the respondents felt that much of the reading material they were exposed to was much too difficult for them to read without assistance from the teacher. Krashen has expressed the view (1982, p. 58) that for the adult learner controlled exposure to the language in a sheltered classroom environment can be more effective than raw exposure in an unsheltered, real-world environment. This may well be so, but if shelter is provided simply by helping the students to get through difficult reading passages by continual paraphrasing or translation, this can have the effect of retarding the development of comprehension strategies. The primary role of the teacher in a low-achievement class should be to ensure that the class is exposed to material that is roughly within their range of comprehension, not to alleviate their frustration by assisting them to comprehend material which they could not otherwise understand.

Rewarding Subject Matter Learning

Few foreign language teachers today would consider subject matter learning an appropriate aim in a foreign language course (but see Krashen, 1982, pp. 67-175). This was not always the case, however. In the classical tradition of foreign language pedagogy, Greek and Latin were taught not primarily for their own sake but as a means of acquiring knowledge from classical texts about the ancient civilisations of Greece and Rome. Foreign language learning, in other words, was inextricably bound up with subject matter learning. Perhaps the most generalisable lesson to be learnt from the Canadian immersion experience is that second language acquisition can be facilitated by treating the second language as a functional tool to gain access to subject matter that the students want to learn. The target language itself is not a subject of interest for most learners, least of all for low achievers with negative attitudes towards the language and the culture of the people who speak it, nor, judging by the responses to the questionnaire, are most of the topics commonly dealt with in the reading passages of foreign language course books (pollution, education, the media, travel, health, etc.). If the students want to read about such topics, they would prefer to read about them in their own language. It would be different, of course, if subject matter learning

were a primary aim of the course, as it normally is under immersion programmes. If immersion programmes work, it is because the students are given credit for the knowledge they have acquired through the medium of the second language. This very rarely happens in the context of a conventional foreign language course. Indeed, standard pedagogic doctrine holds that it is entirely improper for foreign language tests to be geared to any specific subject matter. Experience at the University of Bahrain, however, suggests that considerable improvement can be achieved, not least as far as the low achievers are concerned, by adopting a system of assessment that allows some credit to be given for nonlinguistic knowledge acquired during the course. We shall have more to say on this matter presently.

Meeting the Communicative Needs of Low Achievers

The questionnaire reports suggest that in real life the majority of the respondents use English productively in only a very narrow range of well-defined contexts and situations. For all but a small proportion of the students, the context of use is limited to Bahrain and the situations normally involve either buying and selling in local shops and stores run by English-speaking expatriates or (much less frequently) asking for personal details from casual acquaintances and giving some personal details about themselves in return. In most cases, the actual communicative needs of the low achievers can be met by getting them to practise a few routines in classroom simulations. Far too often, however, low achievers are required to engage in role-play activities which simulate culturally alien situations and which bear no relation to their actual communicative needs or, indeed, to any real-life experiences they have ever had. Such activities may serve only to make them feel ridiculous in front of their peers and thus to further demotivate them.

Another point that emerges from our inquiry is that the majority of the respondents very rarely need to write English outside the classroom and yet, according to their reports, written work or preparation for written work takes up on average between a third and a half of the scheduled lesson time in their English courses and over seventy-five percent of the time they themselves spend on homework assignments. Such heavy emphasis on written work is very difficult to justify in terms of their communicative needs. Writing, furthermore, tends to be the weakest skill of the majority of the low achievers in this part of the world and by devoting so much time to it, the teacher continually draws attention to their shortcomings. The desire to learn is much more likely to be fostered by emphasising those skills in which the students perform relatively well than by emphasising those skills in which they perform badly.

The Problem of Meeting the Individual Needs of Low Achievers in Mixed Ability Classes

So far in our discussion, we have been assuming that the low achievers can be separated from the high achievers. If the student enrollment for a course is sufficient to justify the setting up of more than one group and if the low achievers constitute a fairly homogeneous group (e.g., in respect of their field of specialisation), streaming should not present any serious practical difficulties. If these conditions are not met, however, streaming will simply not be a viable option. It is obviously much more difficult to cater to the needs and wants of low achievers in a mixed ability group than it is in a relatively homogeneous group. During the seventies, there was a good deal of discussion in the pedagogic literature on the individualisation of learning, but by the beginning of the eighties it was becoming increasingly apparent that individualisation in a conventional classroom setting creates management problems that may well be beyond the capability of the average teacher to resolve efficiently (cf. Disick, 1975, p. 71ff; Strevens, 1980; Stern, 1983, p. 387). To be successful, individualisation has to involve flexible time-frames, content options, exemptions, remediation, alternative learning experiences, and so on. Without the provision of special learning facilities (e.g., a multimedia self-access centre), individualisation is likely to create more problems than it solves.

The Importance of Assessment as a Factor Influencing Motivation

How, then, is the problem of underachievement in mixed ability classes to be overcome? A strategy that has proved highly successful with low achievers in mixed ability groups at the University of Bahrain is one that relies heavily on the grading system and rewards productive effort and subject matter learning as much as proficiency. Under this strategy, a student's final grade is determined in part by his or her performance in a final proficiency examination and in part by the amount of work accomplished during the course at a level of linguistic difficulty judged to be appropriate for the student concerned. A fixed number of achievement points is awarded for each piece of work satisfactorily completed irrespective of its level of difficulty, the number of points being determined by the amount of time that students at the appropriate level can be expected to take to complete the assignment. Students are allowed a good deal of freedom to choose the kind of assignment they wish to do but not the level of the assignment, this being determined by the student's performance on a pretest. Provision is made, however, for upgrading or downgrading students during the course according to their progress. The qualifying assignments fall into various categories: supplementary readers, reading cards, audio cassettes, video cassettes, and various

kinds of grammar and composition exercises on computer. The readers, cards, cassettes and diskettes can all be borrowed for use at home or in a multimedia self-access laboratory at the University. A copying facility is also made available to students who wish to purchase their own copy of a cassette or diskette.

A system is in place to enable the instructor to ensure in the most efficient way possible that each assignment is properly completed. The results of each computerised assignment are automatically available to the instructor on a print-out and the task of checking the amount of work done does not, therefore, present any serious problems. As far as the reading, listening or viewing assignments are concerned, effective control is achieved by means of a computerised system of book/video reviews and short oral interviews focusing exclusively on learnt content. These checks and controls are a crucial part of the instructional design and serve the dual purpose of ensuring that the student has been exposed to the language in some meaningful form and of testing whether or not he or she has learnt anything from it. Although subject matter learning is an essential goal, the nature of the subject matter covered is irrelevant for the purpose of assessment. It has been our experience that the low achievers come to rely heavily on the accumulation of achievement points as a means of compensating for what they anticipate will be a relatively poor performance in the final proficiency test. However, by working hard to gain achievement points, they generally manage to improve their proficiency rating quite considerably—more so in most cases than the high achievers.

Some Empirical Evidence

Empirical support for this system of assessment comes from the results of an experiment carried out in the College of Arts at the University of Bahrain. The purpose of the experiment was to determine the effect on learning outcomes, especially with respect to low achievers, of adopting the system of continuous assessment outlined above, coupled with some mechanism that allows the learners some degree of freedom to guide their own learning. The experiment was carried out within the framework of a one-semester, first-year level English language course providing three hours of instruction per week and designed to develop all-round proficiency in reading, writing, speaking and listening. In order to ensure a sufficient degree of confidence in the findings, the experiment was replicated with different groups over two successive semesters.

Method

Sample

The subjects were 60 students randomly selected from the regular intake into

the course, all of whom were taking the course as a college requirement, not an elective. Although drawn from a number of different degree programmes, the available population was highly homogeneous in respect of age, mother tongue, cultural background and previous learning experience, but not in respect of attained level of proficiency in English. The TOEFL range of students enrolling for the course is normally 350-550.

Procedure

The subjects were randomly assigned to one of two equal sized groups: a control group and an experimental group. Both groups were taught by the same instructor and, as far as class work was concerned, followed exactly the same syllabus, using exactly the same instructional materials. However, whereas the members of the control group were all set a common weekly homework assignment selected by the instructor, the members of the experimental group were allowed to choose their own assignments from a wide range of learning material available in the departmental resource units. All the resource materials were graded according to their level of difficulty and students in the experimental group were required to work at a level appropriate to their attained level of proficiency as indicated by their pretest scores. Each assignment was allocated a certain number of achievement points (normally 5 or 10 points per assignment). With regard to assessment, the final grades of the students in the control group were based solely on their performance in the posttest. With the experimental group, however, 50% of the total marks were allocated for performance on the posttest and 50% for the number of achievement points accumulated. No upper or lower limit was placed on the number of assignments that each student could complete, but the maximum number of points that could be accumulated for the purpose of continuous assessment was 100 (this being reduced to 50 in the computation of the final grades). The instrument developed for the pretest and posttest consisted of a grammar and usage test (20 marks), a reading comprehension test (20 marks), a listening comprehension test (20 marks), a guided composition test (20 marks), and an oral interview (20 marks), the last two being double marked by two independent examiners. Since the two observations were to be made at a relatively short interval of time, two different versions of the test were used. The same two versions, however, were used in both semesters.

Results

For both groups, a table was drawn up showing the percentage improvement in performance of each student, this being calculated by subtracting the pretest score from the posttest score and expressing the result as a percentage of the pretest score. The mean percentage gain achieved by the control group was +14.37%, whereas that achieved by the experimental was +19.65%. A t-test was applied to

the two sets of scores and the difference between the means was found to be statistically significant ($t = 3.8$; $p < .01$).

Having achieved significantly different sets of scores for the two groups, each group was divided into low achievers and high achievers, those scoring above the mean on the posttest being considered high achievers and those scoring below the mean being considered low achievers. The mean percentage change in performance was then calculated for each group of low achievers separately. The mean change in performance of the low achievers in the control group worked out at +13.19% (i.e., below the overall mean), while that of the low achievers in the experimental group worked out at +21.32% (i.e. above the overall mean). Very similar results were obtained from the second run of the experiment. In the re-run, the overall mean percentage change in performance of the control group was +15.58% and that of the experimental group was +20.28%, the difference being again statistically significant ($t = 4.1$; $p < .01$). The mean for the low achievers in the control group remained below the overall mean at +14.94% and that for the low achievers in the experimental group remained above the mean at +22.64%.

Discussion

By calculating the change in performance in percentage rather than simple numerical terms, we may be giving a significant computational advantage to the low achievers. A simple numerical gain of, say, 10 points represents a 25% improvement for someone who scored 40 points on the pretest but only a 12.5% gain for someone who scored 80 points. The low achievers in both groups, however, enjoyed the same advantage and yet those in the experimental groups did significantly better than those in the control group. It might also be argued that, since they were starting from a lower base, it was easier for the low achievers than for high achievers to raise their level of proficiency in the relatively short time-frame of the course. This may be so, but the fact remains that the low achievers operating under the conventional system in the control group did less well than the group as a whole, while those in the experimental group did better.

We may conclude that the system adopted with the experimental group, which caters to the personal preferences of the learners and rewards productive effort and subject matter learning, is more successful, especially for the low achievers, than the more conventional system adopted with the control group. There is no reason to doubt that the better performance of the low achievers in the experimental groups was due primarily to the motivating effect of the system of assessment adopted and to the emphasis placed on subject matter learning through the medium of the foreign language. The average number of achievement points gained by low achievers in the two experimental groups were 84 and 87

respectively (out of a maximum of 100), which indicates a very high level of commitment to learning. It is doubtful that this level of commitment would have existed in the low achievers if they had not been rewarded for their efforts.

One obvious drawback of the system of assessment used is that it may result in less proficient students being awarded higher final grades than more proficient students by virtue of having put in more effort. The evidence that emerges from the present study, however, suggests that the danger of this happening is minimal. In both semesters, the high achievers in the experimental group accumulated on average only slightly fewer achievement points than the low achievers (79 and 83 respectively). The risk of misplacing students on the grading scale would seem to be more than compensated for by the improved performance of the group as a whole.

Concluding Remarks

Historically, academic and professional debate in the field of foreign language pedagogy has tended to focus on instructional methods and techniques (cf. Stern, 1983, p. 477ff) for further discussion on what he calls the "method concept" of foreign language teaching). With the shift in emphasis during the past decade away from teacher-centred education towards more learner-centred education, the preoccupation with methods has given way to a preoccupation with learning styles and learning strategies. Motivation, however, although a major factor in determining learning outcomes, continues to be largely neglected in the practice of foreign language teaching. High achievers are usually driven by a strong inner desire to learn and generally learn successfully in any kind of learning environment. Low achievers, however, tend to be much more sensitive to variables in their learning environment, in particular to the attitude and teaching style of the instructor, the instructional materials and facilities, and the design of the instructional system, including (in our view quite critically) the form of assessment. If the problem of underachievement is to be overcome, practitioners need to devote much more time and effort than they have done in the past to the task of managing the learning environment in such a way as to foster a desire to learn in their weaker and less motivated students. This cannot be done by methods alone or by encouraging each individual learner to develop his or her own learning style but requires a sympathetic understanding of the factors that motivate and, above all, those that demotivate students for whom the foreign language is not an indispensable means of communication but merely a curriculum requirement.

This paper has drawn attention to certain strategies and techniques that have proved to be effective with low achievers in one particular context. It is entirely possible, of course, that the results of the experiment reported here are to some

extent culturally conditioned and that substantially different data would have been obtained if the experiment had been carried out in a different cultural setting. There is clearly a need for further experimentation to determine whether or not the practical suggestions that have been put forward would work equally well with students with different cultural backgrounds, different learning experiences and different communicative needs. There may well be other avenues, furthermore, that are worth exploring and which might lead to more effective or more efficient ways of dealing with the problem of underachievement. The important thing is that the pedagogical needs of low achievers be dealt with in an informed and systematic way, otherwise essential educational aims and objectives may be threatened and, in certain cases, the entire educational process undermined.

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