AJMAL
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The Learner as an Individual

ATTENTION & INTEREST



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Attention: Meaning and definitions

In simple terms

Attention is the focusing of mental activity on a particular object, idea or task so that we can perceive it clearly and respond effectively.

William James (1890)

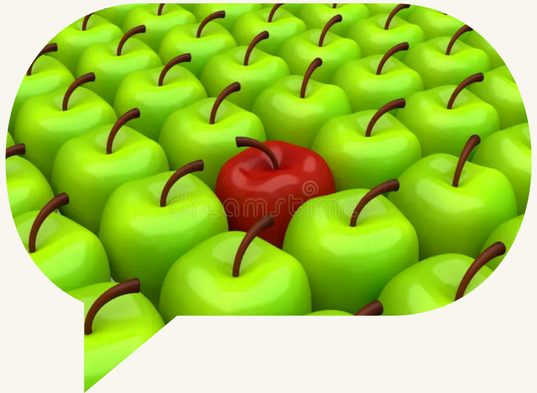
Attention is the mind's clear and vivid focus on one among several possible objects or trains of thought.

Sharma (1967)

Attention involves selecting particular stimuli from many stimuli in the environment, influenced by interest and attitude.

Titchener

Attention is a state of sensory clearness or consciousness.



Nature of Attention

Cognitive process

A mental activity that helps us focus on selected information.

Continuous, but variable

It continues, although its intensity may rise or fall.

Selective

We focus on one stimulus while other stimuli remain in the background.

Fluctuating

The focus of attention may shift with needs, interests and situations.

State of consciousness

It makes selected information clearer to the learner.

Personal and motivational

It differs across individuals and is strengthened by motivation.

Factors affecting Attention

Internal factors:

Internal factors are related to the individual; therefore, they are also called subjective factors.

- **Interest:** A learner notices what they find engaging. Example: a cricket enthusiast quickly notices cricket-related news.
- **Desire:** A need or wish directs attention. Example: a learner looking for a scholarship notices scholarship announcements.
- **Motives:** Basic motives such as hunger, thirst and safety guide attention. Example: a thirsty person looks for water.
- **Aim / Goal:** A goal gives direction to attention.
- **Habit:** Repeated behaviour shapes what a person notices. Example: a regular reader notices new books and reading spaces.
- **Past experience:** Earlier experiences influence present attention and expectations.

External factors:

External factors arise from features of the environment; they are also called objective factors.

- **Size:** Unusually large or small objects may attract attention.
- **Intensity:** A loud sound, bright light or strong colour can attract attention.
- **Movement:** A moving object is often noticed before a stationary one.
- **Repetition:** Repeated words, sounds or messages can draw attention.
- **Duration:** A stimulus that continues for some time may hold attention.
- **Abrupt change:** A sudden change in sound, light or activity can attract attention.
- **Novelty:** Something new or unfamiliar may attract attention.

Educational Implications of Attention

- **Create a conducive environment:** Keep the classroom comfortable, organised and free from avoidable distractions.
- **Motivate learners:** Connect the lesson with learners' needs, goals and prior knowledge.
- **Use teaching-learning materials:** Use relevant diagrams, pictures, models and audio-visual aids.
- **Vary presentation:** Use gestures, posture, demonstration, questioning and changes in voice appropriately.
- **Ensure participation:** Involve learners through discussion, tasks, pair work and activities.
- **Build a respectful classroom:** Avoid fear, humiliation and rude behaviour; treat learners fairly.

How can a secondary school teacher secure and sustain learners' attention during a lesson?



- **Begin with a stimulus:** Use a short question, object, picture, demonstration or real-life problem.
- **State the learning purpose:** Tell learners what they will understand or be able to do.
- **Use varied methods:** Combine explanation with discussion, demonstration, visuals and short tasks.
- **Manage distractions:** Arrange seating and materials so learners can see, hear and participate.
- **Check attention through interaction:** Ask questions, invite responses and give learners meaningful roles.
- **Respond supportively:** Use encouragement and fair treatment rather than fear or punishment.

From Attention to Interest

ATTENTION

"I am focusing on this."

The learner directs mental activity towards a stimulus or task.

INTEREST

"I want to know more."

The learner feels attracted, curious or involved in the subject or activity.

Attention may be brief; interest can help sustain engagement.

Interest: Meaning and definitions

Origin

The term is traced to the Latin interesse, meaning “to be concerned with”.

In psychology, interest is a positive mental state that directs attention, motivation and learning towards a particular object, activity or idea.

Crow and Crow

Interest is an attitude towards an object or activity that a person likes and attends to.

Ross

Interest is a feeling that accompanies special attention to a particular content or object.

Drever

Interest is a mental condition in which an object or idea arouses curiosity, attention or emotional involvement.

In simple terms: Interest is the feeling of attraction and involvement that makes an activity meaningful to us.

Characteristics of Interest

1. Dynamic in nature

Interest changes with age, experience and circumstances.

2. Related to attention

Interest naturally directs attention; attention may also sustain interest.

3. Emotional component

Pleasure, excitement or satisfaction keeps a learner engaged.

4. Selective nature

A person notices and remembers information related to their interests.

5. Based on needs and desires

Personal needs and goals can shape interest; for example, an aspiring doctor may be drawn to Biology.

6. Developed through experience

Exposure, practice and guidance can cultivate or modify interest.

7. A motivating force

Interest encourages participation, effort and persistence.

8. Individual difference

Learners differ: what excites one learner may not attract another.

Determinants / Factors influencing Interest

- **Innate tendencies:** Natural curiosity and individual aptitudes.
- **Home environment:** Family background, encouragement and exposure.
- **School environment:** Teacher personality, teaching methods and curriculum relevance.
- **Peer influence:** Friends and social groups.
- **Previous experience:** Positive experiences may strengthen interest; negative ones may weaken it.
- **Age and maturity:** Interests change as learners develop.
- **Socio-cultural factors:** Cultural values, traditions and social expectations.
- **Success and achievement:** Success can build interest; repeated failure may reduce it.

Types of Interest

Based on origin / source

- Native or innate interest: arises from natural tendencies or basic needs.
- Acquired or learned interest: develops through experience, environment and education.

Based on motivation

- Intrinsic / direct interest: the activity itself is satisfying (e.g., reading for enjoyment).
- Extrinsic / indirect interest: driven by an external goal (e.g., studying for grades).

Remember

Intrinsic interest = satisfaction in the activity.
Extrinsic interest = an external outcome or reward.

Educational Implications of Interest

- **Improves attention and concentration:** Interested learners are more likely to focus on the lesson.
- **Increases motivation:** Interest encourages learning beyond mere compulsion.
- **Enhances memory and retention:** Meaningful engagement can support remembering.
- **Promotes active learning:** Learners participate, question and explore.
- **Supports career guidance:** Recognising interests can help learners consider suitable pathways.
- **Reduces classroom boredom:** Relevant and varied learning experiences improve engagement.
- **Encourages creativity and critical thinking:** Deep interest can lead learners to explore ideas and generate solutions.

Role of the Teacher in Developing Interest

- **Use variety:** Combine discussion, demonstration, projects, stories and digital resources.
- **Connect with real life:** Relate concepts to learners' experiences, needs and goals.
- **Provide activity-based learning:** Use experiments, field tasks, problem-solving and collaborative work.
- **Recognise individual strengths:** Appreciate diverse talents without labelling learners.
- **Encourage exploration:** Offer choices, questions, reading and independent inquiry.
- **Create a positive climate:** Make the classroom safe, inclusive and curiosity-friendly.

How can a secondary school teacher identify, develop and sustain learners' interest in a subject?



- **Identify interests:** Observe participation, talk with learners and use simple interest inventories or choice-based tasks.
- **Make learning relevant:** Use local examples, real-life problems and connections with learners' goals.
- **Offer varied experiences:** Include practical work, projects, stories, games, discussion and digital tools.
- **Provide choice and autonomy:** Allow learners to select topics, roles or ways to present learning where possible.
- **Build confidence:** Set achievable tasks, give constructive feedback and recognise effort.
- **Respect diversity:** Avoid assuming that all learners share the same interests; provide multiple entry points.

Attention and Interest: A Comparison

Basis	Attention	Interest
Meaning	Focusing mental activity on a stimulus.	A feeling of attraction or involvement.
Nature	A selective focus of consciousness.	A psychological, emotional and motivational state.
Main question	What am I focusing on?	What attracts me and makes me want to continue?
Duration	May fluctuate and shift.	May sustain engagement over time.
Relationship	Can be directed by interest.	Often guides and strengthens attention.

In short: Interest often invites attention; attention helps the learner engage with the object of interest.

Bringing both together in a secondary classroom

1. Capture attention

Begin with a surprising question, image, object or short demonstration.

2. Build interest

Connect the topic to real life, learner choice, curiosity and meaningful activity.

3. Sustain learning

Invite participation, feedback, reflection and application.

Example: Teaching water conservation

Show a local water-use image → ask learners to investigate household water use → let groups propose conservation measures.

The goal is not entertainment alone; it is meaningful engagement with learning.

Thank You

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