Why are students not motivated?

Four possible classes of reasons for students' amotivation:

1. Ability beliefs
    - Poor belief in academic ability (Patrick, Skinner, & Connell, 1993).
    - Attributing their academic difficulties to low perceived competence (Wigfield, 1988).
2. Effort beliefs
    - Not believing that they are capable to initiate or maintain the effort required to do well academically.
3. Value placed on academic tasks
    - Do not sense the importance of the task to one's values.
4. Characteristics of academic tasks
    - Task is boring, routine, tedious, arduous, or irrelevant.
    - Activity does not engage the knowledge, ability or stimulation of students.

The above reasons for amotivation have been found to stem from inadequate social support from teachers, parents and friends in terms of (autonomy, competence and relatedness).

- Autonomy support from teachers has been found to lead to more self-determined motivation in students (e.g., (Hamm & Reeve, 2002; J. Reeve, 2002; J. Reeve, Bolt, & Cai, 1999).

- Lack of competence support especially from teachers is associated with low-ability beliefs which in turn lead to poor performance.

- Lack of relatedness especially with parents would lead to devaluing of school and in turn predict maladaptive academic behaviours like insufficient time spent studying, skipping class, tardiness and intention to drop out.

- Peers also display their influence strongly through relatedness. Students at this age generally spend more time with their friends than with parents and teachers. Students' beliefs about their friends' academic values influence their sense of school belongingness, academic motivation, valuing of school work, and investment of effort (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). Academic peer support groups have a positive impact on school morale and engagement (Blair-Mcevoy, 1998; Thompson, 1996; Wassef, Masson, Collins, Vanhaalen, & Ingham, 1998).

Implications:

- It is important that teachers provide autonomy support to students with choices and the terms they use as well as competence support with rationale and feedback.

- It is vital that parents provide support for relatedness by showing establishing positive interpersonal climate with their kids.

- Both parents and teachers can play a part in changing the mindset of students with regards to their ability and effort beliefs with the feedback that they give. Students need to know from their teachers and parents that they fail due to their lack of effort and not because of innate inability. They need to be encouraged that they are able to put in the effort to improve and succeed.

- Peers play an important role in relatedness as well. Students who lack friends, or who lack supportive friends, may be less likely to succeed in school (Legault, Green-Demers, & Pelletier, 2006). Schools could organise peer support groups, either academically or in the form of co-curricular activity (CCA) to prevent students from dropping out.

Written by Chua, L.L.

Key Definitions:

Ability beliefs	Represent students' self-appraisal of their ability to carry out the required academic tasks (Legault et al., 2006).
Amotivation	Refers to a perception that no worthwhile reasons for pursuing an activity exist and hence a complete absence of self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2002).
Autonomy	The degree of volition one feels in pursuing the activity and the need to feel congruence between an activity and one's values (Deci & Ryan, 2000). E.g. "I feel like I can make a lot of inputs in deciding how my job gets done."
Competence	Experiencing one-self as capable and competent in controlling the environment of the activity. The need for competence (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Koestner & McClelland, 1990) is the need to experience satisfaction in exercising and extending one's capabilities. Naturally, people seem to seek out challenges that are optimal for their level of development (Harter, 1978; White, 1959).
Effort beliefs	Depict the student's desire and capacity to invest the energy or effort demanded by a given behaviour.
Perceived competence	Extent that pupils perceive that their teachers allow them to feel capable in controlling the environment or the activity.
Relatedness	The desire to feel connected to significant others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). E.g., "I get along with people at work."

References:

Blair-Mcevoy, E. A. (1998). Peer support groups and rural elementary schools. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Walden University.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behaviour*: New York: Plenum Press.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry, 11*, 227-268.

Elliot, A. J., & Thrash, T. M. (2002). Approach-avoidance motivation in personality: Approach and avoidance temperaments and goals. . *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82*, 804-818.

Goodenow, C., & Grady, K. E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *Journal of Experimental Education, 62*, 60-71.

Hamm, D., & Reeve, J. (2002). Teachers as resources and obstacles to students' intrinsic motivation. Unpublished manuscript. Michigan State University.

Harter, S. (1978). Effectance motivation reconsidered: Toward a developmental model. *Human Development, 1*, 661-669.

Koestner, R., & McClelland, D. C. (1990). Perspectives on competence motivation. In *L. A. Pervin (Ed.), Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (pp. 527-548). New York: Guilford Press.

Legault, L, Green-Demers, I., & Pelletier, L. (2006). Why do high school students lack motivation in the classroom? Toward an understanding of academic amotivation and the role of social support. . *Journal of Educational Psychology, 98*, 567-582.

Patrick, B. C., Skinner, E. A., & Connell, J. P. (1993). What motivates children's behavior and emotion? Joint effects of perceived control and autonomy in the academic domain. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 65, 781-791.*

Reeve, J. (2002). Self-determination theory applied to educational settings. In E. L. Deci & R. M. Ryan (Eds.), *Handbook of self-determination research* (pp. 183-203). Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.

Reeve, J., Bolt, E., & Cai, Y. (1999). Autonomy-supportive teachers: How they teach and motivate students. . *Journal of Educational Psychology, 91*, 537–548.

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2002). An overview of self-determination theory: An organismic dialectical perspective. In E. L. Deci & R. M. Ryan (Eds.), *Handbook of self-determination research* (pp. 3-33). Rochester, NY: University of Rochester.

Thompson, S. M. (1996). Peer mediation: A peaceful solution. *School Counselor, 44*, 151-154.

Wassef, A., Masson, G., Collins, M. L., Vanhaalen, J., & Ingham, D. (1998). Effectiveness of one-year participation in school-based volunteer-facilitated peer support groups. *Adolescence, 33*, 91-97.

White, R. W. (1959). Motivation reconsidered: The concept of competence. *Psychological Review, 66*, 297-333.

Wigfield, A. (1988). Children's attributions for success and failure: Effects of age and attentional focus. . *Journal of Educational Psychology, 80*, 76–81.