# LANGUAGE MOTIVATIONAL THEORY AND ITS IMPLICATION TO THE CLASSROOM

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**Abstract**. *The researchers believe that language motivation is a crucial factor in L2 learning. Motivation is a multi-facet concept that different researchers have studied at different times. The presented study overviews students' English learning orientation from the perspective of various important L2 motivation concepts (from Gardner's integrativeness/instrumentality to Dörnyei's L2 motivational self system) and the notion of English as an international language. When looking through the history of language motivation research, language motivational research stages, namely a social-psychological research stage, a cognitive-situated stage, and the current stage, introduced by Al-Hoorie, are applied as the primary classification. The first stage covers the period between the 1970s and the 1980s with Gardner's and Lambert's theory exploring the elements of students' motivation and their achievements, while the second stage overviews the late 1980s – the early 2010s with Curran's communicative language learning, Lozanov's suggestopedia, Asher's total physical response, Gattegno's silent way, and Krashen's natural way introduced worldwide. The grammar approach was replaced by communicative language, where the teacher was viewed as a facilitator, activities manager, advisor, or co-communicator rather than a sole authority in the classroom. During this period, Dörnyei developed his conception of the L2 Motivational Self System, as well as the ideal L2 self was introduced. Such conceptual domains as L2 speaker, L2 language and L2 self were defined. The current stage, which started in the 2010s, does not highlight the leading topic in the issue under question. However, the relationship between teacher and student motivation remains relevant as well as the challenging reality of a classroom with multilingual and multicultural language learners is considered.*

*Keywords: cognitive–situated stage, language learning, motivation, social-psychological stage.*

## Introduction

Contemporary language motivation theory and research have entered the seventh decade, yet the implications that this research brought to teaching are still a work in progress in many classrooms around the world. The Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001) strives to improve L2 learning to meet the needs of the 21st century. Both documents strongly encourage project-based learning as one of the essential components to student motivation. Through project work, teachers are invited to promote multiculturalism, cooperation, and social responsibility. The purpose of this article is to provide a brief history and directions of language motivational research with a focus on practical implications for the classroom. A valuable classification of language motivational research has been suggested by Al-Hoorie (2017), who proposed three clear stages in development – a social-psychological research stage, a cognitive-situated stage, and the current stage. Practical implications in the classroom will be discussed based on the classification suggested by Al-Hoorie.

## The Social-Psychological Research Stage

The first stage of the research (the 1970s – the early 1980s) was dominated by Gardner and Lambert. In their book Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning (1972), a socio-psychological theory of second language learning (L2) motivation explored the ingredients of students' motivation and their achievements. L2 language learning was situated as different from learning other subjects because of the unique social, psychological, behavioural and cultural aspects associated with language learning. Namely, the research focused on the cultural aspect of learning, individual language learner differences, the purpose of learning (formal vs informal context), and the importance of nonlinguistic clues. According to Dörnyei and Ryan (2015), this research stage focused mainly on the interrelationship between social groups and contextual variables.

The language motivation theory proposed by Gardner was revolutionary for its time. According to Oxford (2019), Gardner's ideas were part of the Zeitgeist spirit of the times (a tremendous temporal concept). Languages for many centuries were taught through the grammar translational method, which was designed to teach Latin, a dead language. This method was based on translating, memorizing vocabulary, and study of grammar without much consideration that most languages are dynamic and social. However, due to the scientific and linguistically complex style of writing followed by deep analysis of psychology, the classroom implications were not so easily attainable for the teachers, especially non-English speaking teachers.

Besides the strong call for a more communicative way of teaching, the motivational aspects were of utmost importance. The most integral part of the theory was the focus on the integrative motive, suggesting that language anxiety is the biggest obstacle to language learning and that motivation and aptitude are the essential elements for successful language acquisition. To make Gardner's research more accessible, decades later, Oxford (2019) simplified and put forth five important teaching implications that Gardner initiated: a) openness and positivity toward other cultures; (b) interest in the language; (c) positive attitudes toward and strong motivation for language learning; (d) low anxiety; and (e) contentment in the classroom. As can be seen, the central focus was on the affective domain and the comfortable classroom environment, along with the positivity about oneself, the other, and the language. These affective domain concepts are a pillar of successful teaching today and are clearly emphasized

in the Common Framework of References. However, since the language and research were overly complex, the classroom implications were minimal, especially for young teachers (Oxford 2019). It is reasonable to look at the implications for the classroom in the second stage, and those elements were introduced in second language teaching methodologies and practical work.

## The Cognitive-Situated stage

The second stage of research (the late 1980s – the early 2010s) proposed by AL-Hoorie (2017) is the cognitive-situated stage or educational stage because there was a significant attempt to make these findings attainable to all. The beginning of the second stage of motivational research is marked by heavy criticism not only of Gardner's complexity in writing but also of conceptual ambiguity and the dynamic nature of language. The changing times called for spontaneous and unrehearsed communicative competence in various social contexts – not linguistic or grammatical but purposeful, cohesive, and coherent. The grammar approach to language was replaced by communicative language teaching, which addressed how language, teachers and students were viewed and how the purpose of learning a second language evolved. The teacher was viewed as a facilitator, activities manager, advisor, or co-communicator rather than a sole authority in the classroom. The students were not just empty vessels to be filled but active communicators, negotiators of meaning, responsible managers of learning. The learning process changed from passive memorization and translation to more active ways of learning – games, simulations, group work, role-plays, problem-solving, and feedback.

The educational stage may also be justified by the abundance of language teaching methods that the research inspired. Curran's communicative language learning, Lozanov's suggestopedia. Asher's total physical response, Gattegno's silent way, and Krashen's natural way were actively introduced in language classrooms worldwide. These methods heavily relied on the above-discussed concepts of motivational research and dominated most classrooms by the late 1980s.

Motivational research in this stage covered many aspects of motivation, including ingredients of student and teacher motivation and analysis of how different points affect learning of a second language. Gardner's influence in this stage continued to be vital as he built on his most elaborate aspect of motivational theory – the concept of the integrative motive, which is defined as a "motivation to learn a second language because of positive feelings toward the community that speaks that language" (Gardner, 1985, pp. 82-83). It is also one of the most challenging concepts to study as globalization and dominance of English refocus the identification model with the Anglophone native speaker. Gardner (1985) and later Dörnyei and Csizér (2002) pointed to three conceptual domains of identification that may affect L2 motivation: identification with (1) L2 speakers; (2) the L2 culture and (3) the L2 itself. The most influential research in this stage was carried out by Dörnyei and his conception of the L2 Motivational Self System.

One significant contribution to the practical application of the self-motivational theory is seen in the work of Dörnyei (2001), who summarized practical knowledge on motivating language learners and presented a comprehensible framework of a motivational teaching practice consisting of 4 components; each component further divided into subcategories:

1. Creating the primary motivational conditions (creating appropriate teacher behaviour, supportive classroom atmosphere, cohesive learner groups)

2. Generating initial student motivation (enhancing learners' attitudes and values (goal-orientedness, success), creating realistic beliefs, relevant teaching materials)

3. Maintaining and protecting motivation (making learning and tasks motivating and engaging, setting specific goals, protecting learner self-esteem, confidence and self-image, creating learner autonomy, self-motivating strategies and cooperative spirit)

4. Encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation (promoting motivational attributions, providing motivational feedback, increasing learner satisfaction, and offering rewards and grades in a motivating manner).

From the point of view of a practitioner, many of the concepts above are desirable but not easily attainable practically. Furthermore, the whole burden of increasing student motivation lies on the shoulders of the teacher. A more specific analysis of the four essential elements only deepens understanding of how much is required from a teacher.

1. Teachers want to create a supportive classroom environment, yet old-fashioned norms from educational ministries continue to hinder the application of newer theories. The overcrowded curriculum, standardized testing, constantly growing classrooms, ambitious workload are just a few factors that teachers face. Additionally, outside factors like COVID-19 pandemic (learning new technologies, creating, and adapting curriculum) or war refugees (integrating students who do not speak the language and deal with psychological trauma) threaten a creation of a comfortable and cohesive classroom.

2. Regarding student motivation, creating realistic beliefs may be attainable by the teacher, yet many other factors also hinder the complete delivery of this concept. For one, creating relevant teaching materials from the abundance of bad materials on the internet is time-consuming, and the official teaching materials are not always updated or fit the institution's curriculum. Again, there is hope that the teacher will do all the work and make it relevant.

3. Maintaining and protecting motivation concepts asks teachers to be superheroes. It is possible to set specific goals to encourage cooperation and autonomy, but it is tough to be interesting when you work with the old textbooks, disconnected from reality standardized tests and evaluation system that kills the confidence of those who fall below the norm.

4. Regarding the positive retrospective self-evaluation, teachers face problems as well. Motivational and personal feedback requires a lot of time, and while the massive reward system may be motivational once, the students often understand the superficiality of it. Therefore, to increase learners' satisfaction, a teacher needs one-on-one time, an unrealistic concept. Many superb teachers provide personal feedback to multiple students sacrificing their families, leisure, or sleep.

Motivational language research draws on a somewhat idealistic classroom creation that is not easily attainable due to the bureaucratic educational systems in many countries. On the other hand, this research rather inspires teachers to be agents of change. Even if in small steps, it is crucial to make the educational system more student-centered, more project-based, and more multicultural.

Earlier it was assumed that the intrinsic teacher motivation is enough to forego teaching difficulties. Teaching as a vocational goal was often associated with the internal desire (pure joy) to educate people, share knowledge and impart values, and advance a community or a whole nation. The intrinsic value of teaching and the desire to make a social contribution, shape the future and work with children and young adults emerged among the highest-rated motivations for choosing teaching as a career. Even rewards that typically motivate people to do a good job do not apply in teaching as this profession forgoes high salaries and social recognition.

The researchers in the 1990s looked deeper into teacher's intrinsic motivation and how this motivation could affect teaching. Two concepts were coined: Teaching efficacy, referring to teachers' general beliefs about the possibility of producing student learning in the face of multiple obstacles (unsupportive home environment); and Personal efficacy, referring to the teacher's personal appraisal of his or her effectiveness as a pedagogue. Several research has shown that teachers with high levels of self-efficacy experience higher levels of satisfaction, less job-related stress, and fewer difficulties in dealing with students' misbehaviours (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; Caprara et al., 2003). Hoy (2000) observed that teachers with a low sense of self-efficacy see students as unmotivated, disregard student's diversity, and apply old-fashioned teaching methodologies.

Therefore, a popular trend in research looked at teacher training, suggesting that teachers who are trained to use new teaching methodologies would gain better self-efficacy and motivate students to learn. Teachers' self-efficacy has been viewed as a powerful predictor of teachers' behaviour and success in the classroom. Bernaus and Gardner (2008) contrasted teachers' motivation and classroom strategy use to learners' attitudes and motivation. 31 teachers and 694 ESL learners in Catalonia (Spain) rated 26 language learning strategies used in their classrooms. A mini AMTB (Attitude/Motivation Test Battery) was used to assess learners' attitudes, motivation and language anxiety. The results demonstrated that the teacher's motivation and not the strategy used had the most significant influence on the learners. The researchers concluded that research into improving teacher motivation is desperately needed in order to naturally increase student motivation and learning.

The research, therefore, creates a vicious circle. While teacher's motivation increases student motivation, the strategies for motivating a teacher remain unclear. Further research into student motivation and the search for the ideal self-put even more pressure on teachers. Two large-scale studies by Ryan et al. (2008) and Taguchi et al. (2009) supported the idea that student efforts to learn English are directly connected to the Ideal L2 Self. These studies further help to support the finding that attaining the Ideal L2 Self is a motivating factor which pushes students to put more effort into acquiring language. Even though other role models may inspire students, a teacher's role here is incredibly significant. Dörnyei (2009, p. 33), in his study, remarked that "having a powerful role model can 'ignite the vision' and activate motivation for learning a language via creation or enhancement of an ideal L2 self." Again, the burden to motivate students is placed on the shoulders of the teachers, who are overhauled today, and consequently lose their motivation to teach, therefore, to motivate students. In addition, it is important to understand that the ideal self of today may not be the language of Shakespeare or Dante. The ideal role model of today may be a native speaker of very poor grammar and vocabulary. The grammar textbooks with the idealistic answer key may not reflect the reality of the millions of real native speakers, and a strong push towards ideal grammar may demotivate students as they may want to identify with someone less perfect yet still very respectable in that community of native speakers. This starts another dilemma as how to deal with the real changes that are happening with every language of the world.

Ushioda (2011) also doubts the practicality of self-motivation research. She concludes that the research focused too much on generalized types of learner motivation, behaviour, and attitude rather than individuals. Furthermore, she claims that effective teachers had long known the importance of motivating the individual rather than an abstract learner and did so despite the motivational literature. The teacher's role emerged as one of the essential elements of student motivation, and yet the study did not reveal the strategies that would take care of the people who are essential in inspiring learning.

**The current stage**

The final stage in language motivation research started with the 2010s and, according to Al-Hoorie (2017), is called the current stage since there is no clear trend, leading topic or approach taken by the scholars in the field. In fact, the research scope of the current research concerns many different areas, including dynamic motivation, unconscious motivation, language acquisition of languages other than English, motivation in varied cultural contexts, technology influence on motivation, long-term motivation and others (Kubanyiova 2014). As a result, we can identify new practical suggestions on how language teachers can increase L2 motivation by following such research as Magid and Chan (2012), Hadfield and Dörnyei (2013) or Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014). Arguably, the novel techniques would have been impossible to invent without theoretical insights that emerged from interpreting new research data (for example, see Dörnyei and Ushioda 2009, Henry 2010 or Papi and Abdollahzadeh 2012).

Current studies (such as Claro 2016) seem to confirm that the Ideal L2 Self is "a most welcome and valuable addition to our current understanding of L2 motivation." However, many pedagogical questions are raised regarding the creation of role models. While it is a motivating factor to provide access to role models who are living proof that an ideal L2 self is attainable and that with enough effort, they too can acquire the level of L2, what is that role model for each student? A native speaker, non-native speakers, students living abroad, students living locally? Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) encouraged breaking the stereotype that a role model may only be a student living abroad and using English at work; instead, students may aspire to location-free role models who may use English not only for work but for one as a representation of personal liberation. No more straightforward practical guidelines can be offered as there are many aspects and possibilities for the ideal L2 self, the ideal L2 self is ever-changing, nor there is a precise scale to measure it.

Another set of studies is focused on the changing realities in the classroom. For example, the attention to the multicultural self is drawn in the study by Garcia and Sylvan (2011), who encourage teachers to build teacher-student relationships by recognizing multilingual and multicultural language practices and experiences while emphasizing the singularity of the individual experience. Furthermore, Komorowska (2019) argued that learners should be taught tolerance and openness to other languages and cultures. Therefore students' home language should not be underestimated in the classroom as it may be a powerful tool in motivating to learn other languages. She also draws attention to the fact that teachers often teach the way they were taught themselves, and the teacher training programs first need to work on teacher motivation, self-reflection strategies, and independent decision-making strategies.

To further complicate the practicality of the research, is that over 70% of the motivational research carried out in this stage is based on learning English (Ushioda and Dörnyei 2017). Researchers from languages other than English who join the dialogue on language motivation research argue that it is not universal and each country or even context brings different outcomes. This means that multiple factors in the L2 learners' surroundings are making an impact on their motivation. Since the environment can be very different depending on available resources, culture, historical legacies, etc., we cannot claim that language motivation can be improved for every L2 learner and at any place or time by using the same exact approaches. This arguably makes language motivational research more complicated because teachers must deal with more variables and determine how they are interconnected. Furthermore, as presented

by Joe et al. (2017), Larsen-Freeman (2017), Dörnyei (2017) and others, variables can be dynamic and form a complex system where it becomes difficult to determine how L2 learners' motivation will be affected by their surrounding context.

The English dominance in the world is calling for proficient language learners. Furlong and Bernaus (2017) in their research propose "innovative sites of collaboration" that would help to transform language learners into language users. They aspire to create classrooms of change where learners become social agents and learn through engagement and communication with others. Similarly, Swain (2013) also insists on the social aspect of learning, where activities help learners "understand and appropriate the social and cultural conventions of emotional expressions".

The current trends in motivational research continue to analyze relations between student and teacher motivation, and teachers are provided even more suggestions on how to improve students' well-being and motivation in the classroom through project work and content-based teaching. For example, Bernaus (2020) reexamined the link between teacher and student motivation and discovered that a satisfied and happy teacher focused on humanism was an essential motivator for a happy and motivated learner. At the same time, Caruso (2019) brought awareness to the crisis in many educational institutions around the world that teachers experience burnout and display high rates of attrition and absenteeism. One practical suggestion to prevent teacher burnout and increase teacher motivation is implementing a Post method emotion-focused pedagogical framework.

Yet, parallel to these developments, there is a growing understanding that transforming classrooms into engaging environments for language learning demands more than a repertoire of innovative principles and techniques; it requires teachers who will be motivated to put the knowledge into practice. However, such research as Borg (2009) or Marsden and Kasprowicz (2017) showed that considering the number of ideas already proposed and the lack of time and interest among the teachers, very few of the insights made in the LM research are actually applied in practice. Furthermore, as illustrated by Hiver et al. (2019), teachers have to dynamically assess the situation and make quick decisions suitable for the particular moment. This requires not only a lot of knowledge but also experience, self-reflection and mental capabilities. Teachers, who are constantly evaluating the process of L2 acquisition, might even be less reliant on LM research because they might be capable of "developing their theories of practice informed by their teaching experience and responding with effective classroom decisions at the appropriate time and place" (Hiver et al. 2019).

Another major group of current research is comprised of studies that question existing assumptions and counter entrenched arguments. Three examples of that can be provided. First, Al-Hoorie et al. (2020) argue that LM often relies on the field of psychology even though few LM researchers have a strong background in studying psychology or conducting psychology-focused research. As a result, LM scholarship lacks in-depth use of the leading findings of psychology or rigorous applications of its methodology. The second example is related to the statement that language learning is unique compared to other subjects. Therefore, LM deserves special treatment because it has peculiar characteristics. It is contested by such authors as VanPatten et al. (2019) or Al-Hoorie and Hiver (2020) as a very questionable self-imposed limitation preventing further innovative research of LM. Finally, the third example is the criticism expressed about the lack of variety in methodological approaches in LM studies, especially stressing the inability to break away from self-reporting tools such as surveys, questionnaires or interviews. Dissatisfaction with that was expressed by Ushioda (2016), Hiver

and Al-Hoorie (2020) and others, although it is worth mentioning that an equally good defence of the survey as a method was provided by Csizer and Simon (2022).

To sum up, thinking about implications for the classroom, the following findings still lead to the essential findings that come from the student motivational research: positive classroom environment and teacher student-relationships. Both of these factors can be achieved by respecting and treating students as individuals, each having a unique identity and contributing towards creating diversity. Acknowledging diversity as a norm rather than a limitation is key to increasing student motivation.

Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie (2017) claim that instructors will be most persistent when they have clear goals and teaching strategies. It makes sense since in the case of such a complex process as teaching, one needs standards to keep one's behaviour on track. Combining this performance feedback with intrinsic factors, it could be stated that work will be more motivating when: 1. It is meaningful (requires a multiplicity of skills, is a whole unit and is vital to others); 2. It allows autonomy (the person is given control of what, how, and when the work is done); 3. It provides feedback (the person has knowledge of the results).

The more current articles on motivational research look at the practicality of this research and call it overrated. The researchers overview some angry observations in their literature review who describe academic researchers as "parasitical", unethical, disconnected from practice, the phrase "further research is needed" has long left teachers uninterested in the research as there are no conclusive and practical results. Sadly, the abundance of practical research in a specific context provides pedagogical implications that do not "logically and unambiguously follow from the results of the research – a classic case of misapplied linguistics." The authors draw attention to the fact that teachers often misleadingly take the strategies and techniques as "recipies" of successful motivation rather than hypothesis that needs further investigation. (Al-Hoorie, et.al., 2021, pp. 137-140)

## Conclusions

Literature review revealed the key elements in creating a motivating L2 learning experience: the curriculum, the L2 teacher, the peer group, and the teaching materials (Dornyei, 2016); Ushioda, E. (2011). The results in this study confirm the importance of these elements as well as that for L2 learning experience such motivating L2 key elements as syllabus, peer group, teaching materials, teaching strategies and innovative methods have an important effect on learning. While earlier studies suggested teacher preference to move from discreet grammar points to communicative teaching approach before their students were ready to do so (Csizer, K., Simon, D. 2022), the literature analysis today reveal a similar direction. The teachers are pioneers in moving teaching beyond simple communication towards English for specific purposes, social, legal, cultural, and academic English issues. Consequently, teachers seem to be the role models for the constantly changing trends in L2 research in the current stage. As a matter of fact, teachers are more aware of the demands of English today needed to participate in the global world. Thus, one significant implication is to continue to raise awareness to the more academic demands of English through project work, library research, authentic reading, listening and writing tasks on social media. The study results revealed another important finding that the English language teaching is made practical and communicative as the students tend to be more motivated when learning practical English. Therefore, it is necessary to point out that the relationship between teacher and student motivation is significant to meet the reality for today's needs. The multilingual, multicultural and dynamic classroom challenges the

traditional L2 learning. Due to more cultural diversities and innovative techniques that are used in classrooms, it could be stated that language motivation in L2 learning has some space for the development at universities. Moreover, it is important to note that both teachers and students must have more theoretical and practical information about language motivation in L2 learning, with the focus that the teacher's motivation, but not the strategy used has the most significant impact on learners.

Based on literature analysis there are some recommendations, too. First, by eliminating the use of unfamiliar communication to provide a trustworthy and user-friendly motivational L2 learning strategy. Second, to build motivational capacity as a developmental issue. Third, to identify teacher and student's relationship as a source of motivation power. Fourth, to raise teachers' voices talking about the motivational importance for L2 learning because the improvement of teacher motivation is urgent in order to foster student motivation in learning. Finally, universities must be more willing to invest in the development of teachers and students' motivation in L2 learning.

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