

Motivation as an affective factor: A conceptual and theoretical exploration in second or foreign language acquisition

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Abstract

This narrative literature review takes a closer look at how motivation shapes the language learning journey. It explores how motivation influences learner engagement, performance, and persistence in language learning. The review synthesizes conceptual and theoretical perspectives, highlighting both internal and external sources of motivation and their impact on learning outcomes. It also discusses how motivation interacts with emotional factors such as anxiety, attitude, and self-confidence, and how supportive learning environments can lower affective barriers. The findings aim to inform more effective teaching practices that foster sustained motivation and language proficiency.

Keywords: Affective Filter Hypothesis; Affective filter; Motivation; English Language Teaching (ELT); Pedagogical implications

1. Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, language is a vital tool in globalization, facilitating communication across regions while being shaped by global influences. The growing need for cross-cultural interactions has led to a rise in second or foreign language learning, enabling effective communication across different countries and cultures (Zhang, 2022). Building meaningful connections has become more significant as globalization continues to grow and evolve. Proficiency in a foreign language remains valuable, providing a competitive advantage in various academic, professional, and social contexts.

The goal has now become a multilingual, multicultural communicator who knows how to explore, navigate, and function between languages and various cultures (MLA, 2007). The trend is to learn an additional language, whether a second or foreign language. As technology continues to advance rapidly, the way people connect on both personal and societal levels is constantly changing, making learning foreign languages more important than ever for bridging cultural gaps and enhancing communication in a digital world (Yildiz, 2021).

Proficiency in a foreign language fosters cultural awareness and provides a broader perspective on global issues while also creating opportunities for international education (Celik & Yildiz, 2019; Stein-Smith, 2018). Additionally, language learning deepens an individual's understanding of diverse cultures, promoting curiosity and meaningful social connections across different backgrounds.

Second or foreign language skills and competence demonstrated to have cognitive, neurological, and social benefits such as having better memory, sound decision-making, problem-solving, delaying cognitive decline, metalinguistic awareness, creativity, and cultural exploration and awareness (Athanasopoulos et al., 2015; Bialystok et al., 2012; Craik et al., 2010; Jasim, 2021; Schroeder & Marian, 2012; Marian & Shook, 2012). Multilingual people employ more brains than monolinguals and outperform monolinguals in creativity (Amelia, 2016). Individuals proficient in a foreign

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language tend to have stronger analytical skills (Ellis et al., 2018). Even without complete fluency, exposure to foreign languages can offer valuable benefits. It helps build awareness, fosters acceptance and deepens understanding of the challenges people experience when learning a new language while adjusting to a different culture and environment (Kinzler, 2016; Reagan, 2004).

Employers place great importance on strong communication, social skills, and the ability to interact effectively with others in the job market. Proficiency in a foreign language is especially valued, as it can significantly improve an applicant's chances of being hired in a competitive recruitment process (Carvalho et al., 2021). Job seekers looking for better job opportunities must compete with a pool of talents and potentials; thus, speaking a second or foreign language is an advantage. Similarly, those who want to keep their current job must prove to their superiors that they deserve their current position. Hence, individuals with second language skills and competencies have an edge in these situations (Raewf & Mahmood, 2021; Sari & Aminatun, 2021). This is because many organizations want to be global in their business scope, requiring employees to interact across linguistic boundaries, which appears to require multilingual employees (Lauring, 2008; Stein-Smith, 2017).

In language education, one key advantage of bilingual learning lies in concentrating on a new language while minimizing distractions from the languages already known (Bartolotti & Marian, 2012). This skill enables bilingual and multilingual individuals to recall recently acquired words more quickly, often resulting in enhanced vocabulary growth compared to monolingual learners, who may find it more challenging to filter out opposing linguistic data.

Despite the advantages, benefits, and promises of mastering or having knowledge of or competence in other languages, many people still consider learning a second or foreign language a daunting and taxing endeavor because setbacks and perceived failures are often considered part and parcel of the learning experience (Horwitz, 2001). These challenges and shortcomings are deeply rooted in several factors and transmitted to their learning environment, affecting the learners, teachers, and the whole learning process.

For instance, on the students' side, in English language classes, learners may feel anxious about making mistakes in front of their classmates, leading to reluctance to participate in class discussions or answer questions. They may feel intimidated by classmates who are more proficient or by the teacher, especially if they are a native speaker, increasing stress and reducing their willingness to speak. Learners with low self-esteem or confidence in their language abilities may be less likely to engage actively in learning activities. Additionally, learners from different cultural backgrounds may feel uncomfortable or misunderstood in the classroom, leading to higher anxiety levels.

The English teachers may face disruptive behavior or lack of engagement from learners who may feel stressed, affecting their ability to create a positive learning environment. Teachers under pressure to meet curriculum standards or achieve high test scores may feel anxious, which can be transmitted to students, raising their affective filters. Non-native English-speaking teachers may feel self-conscious about their language abilities, which can affect their confidence and classroom dynamics, contributing to the affective filter for themselves and their students. Similarly, managing a classroom with students of varying proficiency levels and learning styles can be overwhelming, too, leading to teacher stress and further impacting their effectiveness, thus increasing the overall affective filter of the class and hindering language acquisition and learning.

English, the worldwide language of communication and bridge for information dissemination in the twenty-first century, is used almost in every single civilized corner of the globe through diplomacy, trade, education, media, cultural exchange, and so on (Amelia et al., 2022; Novanti & Suprayogi, 2021; Pustika, 2021; Septiyana et al., 2021; Simanjuntak, 2019). The English language is now considered a global language and, by default, the lingua franca of the world and now used in almost all aspects and domains of life (Mandasari & Wahyudin, 2021; Nakamura, 2016; Rao, 2019; Smokotin et al., 2014).

Analyzing trends in foreign language education shows that English remains the most popular foreign language taught in most universities across the globe (Doiz et al., 2013). This means that English as a foreign or second language dominates academia through teaching and learning. English becomes an essential skill as the world becomes more connected (Gustanti & Ayu, 2021). With a greater focus on communication, more people are working to improve their English (Mahmoodzadeh, 2013). In many countries, especially where English is the primary language of instruction, it has become a key part of education (Ahmed et al., 2017).

When people think about learning a language, they usually focus on grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. While those are important, research has increasingly shown that emotions play a massive role in whether someone succeeds or struggles with a second language. Learning is not just about knowing the rules. It is also about how a person feels

during the process. Motivation, anxiety, confidence, and attitude shape how well someone absorbs and retains new words and concepts (Chen, 2020; Dewaele, 2019; Liu, 2022; Waninge et al., 2014).

This plays out in different ways in a classroom. Some students hesitate to speak because they worry about making mistakes, while others completely disengage when they feel like they are not improving fast enough. These emotional barriers, often called affective filters, can either help or hinder progress. Students who feel anxious or frustrated are less likely to participate, which slows down their learning. However, they take risks, practice more, and develop stronger communication skills when they feel confident and motivated.

The idea that emotions impact language learning is not new. Researchers have studied this for decades. In the 1970s, Dulay and Burt (1977) introduced the concept of the affective filter, which was later expanded by Krashen (1982) in his Input Hypothesis. The theory suggests that when someone has a high affective filter, meaning they are anxious, unmotivated, or insecure, they process less language input. On the other hand, when the affective filter is low, the brain is more open to receiving and using new language.

Indeed, not everyone agrees with Krashen's ideas. Some researchers, such as White (1987), have argued that comprehensible input is not the only factor in language learning. However, most scholars acknowledge that emotions shape how students absorb and use a second language. It is why modern language teaching has shifted from rigid memorization to communicative approaches that encourage interaction and confidence-building.

For second or foreign language learners, success is not just about intelligence or effort. Motivation plays an equally important role. A student who believes they can improve and enjoy the learning process will likely progress faster than someone who constantly doubts themselves. Educators should also focus on creating low-stress, supportive environments where students feel safe making mistakes and engaging with the language.

This narrative literature review explores how motivation influences the experience of learning a second or foreign language. The goal is to better understand why motivation matters, how it shapes the way learners engage with language, the choices they make along the way, and the outcomes they achieve. By gathering and analyzing key studies and perspectives, this review looks for common threads and meaningful insights that can help explain what drives language learners forward. The aim is not just to summarize what has already been established, but to organize it in a way that supports future research and helps teachers see motivation as a core part of effective language teaching.

2. Conceptual Dimensions of Motivation

Motivation is key to language acquisition theory (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). It is widely recognized that motivation plays a crucial role in students' academic success and their ability to continue learning throughout their lives well beyond their school years (Guo, 2020; Mega et al., 2014; Zimmerman, 2013). In the context of language acquisition and learning, motivation is commonly and generally defined as the efforts learners put into learning a second or foreign language due to their desire or need to learn it. It refers to the desire and impetus of the acquirers and learners and the outside driving force for them to continue on their language learning journey.

There are various perspectives on motivation, depending on the field in which it is applied. Motivation has long been a key topic in psychology, with many theories and concepts developed to explain what drives human behavior. It is widely recognized as a crucial factor in the cognitive process. In simple terms, motivation refers to the internal drive that pushes people to act to satisfy their needs. Like aptitude, intelligence, and attitudes, motivation plays an important role in determining how well learners succeed in acquiring a foreign language.

From a behavioral standpoint, motivation is about expecting a reward, while from a constructivist perspective, it focuses more on the social environment and personal choice (Brown, 2014). However, most researchers and educators agree that motivation is critical to language learning. Without it, even the most skilled learners may struggle to reach their long-term goals, no matter the curriculum or the teacher (Du, 2009).

Numerous scholars and researchers have also provided some definitions of motivation. According to Santrock (2004), motivation is the process that activates, directs, and sustains behavior. It means that motivation is like a force pushing students to do something and continuously keep doing the activity. Alizadeh (2016) defines motivation as the drive behind behaviors, influencing whether a person repeats an action. Lai (2011) describes motivation as the underlying reason for behavior characterized by willingness and volition. Schunk et al. (2012) also states that motivation is the process whereby goal-directed activity is suggested and continued. It means that motivation can direct someone's

behavior to achieve their goals. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) describe motivation as the desire to achieve, the likelihood of success, the rewards for completing a task, and the drive to avoid failure.

Moreover, Gardner (2010) argues that motivation is crucial to language learning success. A complex psychological factor influences a person's drive to learn a second language (Dörnyei, 2005). Motivation comes from internal and external sources, pushing individuals to invest effort, maintain a positive attitude, and stay engaged in learning (Gardner, 2006). Without these motivating factors, learners are less likely to engage or succeed in their language-learning journey fully. It simply means that without motivation, language learners do not have any aspiration or determination to learn a second or foreign language.

Motivation is often what helps someone keep going while learning a new language. It usually does not come from just one place. It can come from wanting to understand more, from putting in the effort, or from having a reason that feels real and personal. Sometimes it shows up as a quiet interest, or the small feeling of pride when something finally makes sense. Other times, it comes from wanting to feel closer to people, or from doing something that others expect. Wherever it starts, motivation has a big effect on how much someone is willing to try and how they handle the tough days. Even with kind teachers and good materials, it is hard to keep moving forward without that inner push. However, when motivation is there, it becomes easier to stay with it, to get back up after a hard moment, and to find something meaningful in the learning.

2.1. Motivation and Affective Factors in Language Learning

Second or foreign language acquisition is not just a cognitive endeavor. It is powerfully shaped by affective or emotional factors like motivation, anxiety, attitude, and self-confidence (Du, 2009; Dulay et al., 1977). These interrelated factors can act as filters that either facilitate or hinder learning (Gonzales, 2020; Khan, 2023; Krashen, 1982). Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) famously highlights motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety, along with related factors such as attitudes, as key variables influencing *L2* acquisition.

In simple terms, when learners feel anxious, fearful, or unmotivated, an "*affective filter*" can rise up, like an emotional wall that blocks language input from being fully processed. By contrast, when learners feel safe, confident, and motivated, this filter lowers, allowing more input to get in and be acquired. Classic research in second language acquisition or *SLA* has long echoed this idea. For example, negative attitudes, low self-image, high anxiety, and low motivation have all been identified as barriers to language learning (Bandura, 1986; Cohen & Norst, 1989; Ellis, 1994; Lambert, 1972; Littlewood, 1984). Conversely, a positive emotional state can make students more receptive to learning (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). In order for learners to succeed, they must feel comfortable and secure in the learning environment, as these affective conditions enable them to take in and absorb the new language. Thus, motivation does not operate in isolation. It continuously interacts with anxiety, attitudes, and confidence in the learner's mind.

2.2. Motivation and Language Anxiety

One of the most widely documented affective influences on language learning is foreign language anxiety. It is the nervousness or fear experienced when learning or using a new language, often manifesting as communication apprehension or fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Martos, 2004). Anxiety can have a profoundly negative effect on motivation and performance (Alrabai, 2014; Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019). Highly anxious learners often participate less, avoid challenging tasks, and may even lose interest in learning the language. Studies consistently show that anxiety is inversely related to language achievement and engagement. For example, a recent meta-analysis of 105 samples (over 20,000 learners) found a moderate negative correlation ($r \approx -0.36$) between language anxiety and language achievement (Teimouri et al., 2019).

In other words, learners with higher anxiety tend to have lower language attainment on average. This makes sense because anxiety distracts attention and undermines the willingness to communicate, which can in turn stall progress. Horwitz et al. (1986) identified foreign language anxiety as a distinct construct that can seriously impede learners' engagement and oral participation. When anxiety is high, even otherwise motivated students might struggle to speak up or may study just enough to get by rather than truly pushing themselves. Over time, this can create a vicious cycle in which anxiety leads to poorer performance, which then discourages the learner and diminishes motivation.

On the other hand, strong motivation can sometimes help learners persevere despite feeling anxious. For instance, a student with a clear personal goal, such as studying abroad, might push through moderate anxiety. Alleviating excessive anxiety is crucial because it frees learners to fully apply their motivation. As MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) noted, anxiety has both academic and social repercussions for second language or *L2* learners, affecting their confidence and

willingness to use the language. A relaxed and positive mind is much more conducive to motivated learning. Thus, minimizing language anxiety is a key step in sustaining learners' motivational drive.

2.3. Attitudes, Motivation, and Language Learning

Another important affective factor intertwined with motivation is the learner's attitude toward the target language, its speakers, and the learning process itself. Learners who hold positive attitude, for example, an interest in the culture tied to the language, or enjoyment of the learning experience, tend to be more intrinsically motivated and persistent in studying the language. In Gardner's socio-educational model, a positive attitude towards the *L2* community and culture fosters integrative motivation, which has been linked to higher success in language acquisition (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

In fact, a large meta-analysis of Gardner's studies concluded that attitudes and motivation together accounted for a moderate proportion of variance in language achievement (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Simply put, students who want to connect with the language and its people typically put in more effort and show greater resilience in the face of difficulties. By contrast, negative or apathetic attitudes can dampen motivation. If a learner feels indifferent toward the language or believes, for example, that the language is not useful or that the people who speak it do not like them, the drive to learn can diminish.

Research has long shown that negative attitudes towards the *L2* can be an affective barrier just like anxiety, contributing to what Krashen would call a high affective filter. For example, studies have identified lack of interest in the target culture as one factor that correlates with poor progress and disengagement (Chinambu & Murillo, 2014; Watts, 2003). On the flip side, fostering more positive attitudes can boost motivation. When learners develop an interest or appreciation for the language, perhaps through cultural projects, interactions with native speakers, or enjoyable content in the language, their motivation often surges. They begin to see the language as meaningful and rewarding, not just an academic requirement.

In classroom settings, teachers who cultivate a positive class attitude toward the language, for instance, by sharing intriguing aspects of the culture or showing enthusiasm for the language, can help students open up to the experience. Overall, attitude and motivation reinforce each other: a positive attitude fuels motivation, and success driven by motivation can further improve the learner's attitude. For this reason, many scholars view attitudes as a core component of motivation in language learning (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Keeping attitudes positive and interest levels high is therefore essential to maintaining learners' motivational momentum.

2.4. Self-Confidence and Motivation

Closely related to both anxiety and attitude is self-confidence in using the language. Self-confidence in this context refers to a learner's belief in their ability to learn and communicate in the second language, often overlapping with the concept of self-efficacy or linguistic self-esteem. A robust sense of *L2* confidence can energize motivation. When learners believe "*I can do this*," they are more willing to engage with the language, speak out in class, and tackle challenging material. In contrast, low confidence, for example, the belief that one is "*terrible at languages*", can become a self-fulfilling prophecy that saps motivation and causes learners to shy away from opportunities to practice.

Research evidence supports this interplay. Clément et al. (1994) found that learners' self-confidence in using the *L2* was strongly associated with their willingness to communicate and their overall motivation to learn. In situations where learners had more frequent success or positive experiences using the language, their self-confidence grew, which in turn led them to participate even more, creating a virtuous cycle. By comparison, learners who experienced embarrassment or frequent failure often saw their confidence drop and, with it, their motivation. In Krashen's terms, self-confidence is one of the affective variables that can lower the filter. High confidence means the learner's filter is open, allowing more input to be acquired. One study noted that when a learner has high anxiety and low confidence, their brain is essentially blocking out input; but if confidence is high and anxiety low, far more input gets through for acquisition (Hui, 2012).

In practical terms, a student who feels confident is more likely to raise their hand to ask a question or try to converse with a classmate in the target language, thereby getting valuable practice that further improves their skills and confidence. Self-confidence can come from many sources, such as prior achievement, encouragement from others, or a sense of progress. Notably, teacher feedback and peer support can play a big role here. Constructive, positive feedback tends to boost learners' confidence, such as when they think, "*I'm improving at this!*" whereas harsh correction or ridicule can severely undermine it. This is why modern language pedagogies emphasize creating a supportive atmosphere where mistakes are treated as a normal part of learning.

As learners build confidence, they often become more self-motivated. They develop an internal desire to use the language because they expect success rather than failure. Over time, what begins as fragile motivation can solidify into a more stable, confident commitment to mastering the language. In short, confidence and motivation reinforce each other much like attitude and motivation do. Each successful, confidence-building experience feeds motivation, which in turn leads the learner to seek out more opportunities that further enhance confidence.

2.5. Supportive Learning Environments and Lowering Affective Barriers

Given the strong connections between motivation, anxiety, attitudes, and self-confidence, an important question is how teachers and learners can manage these affective factors to optimize learning. A key takeaway from the literature is that supportive, low-stress learning environments can substantially lower affective barriers. In educational psychology terms, a positive environment can lower the affective filter, enabling students' motivation to flourish and reducing debilitating anxiety. Even highly motivated students may struggle if the classroom atmosphere is tense or punitive. Conversely, a moderately motivated student might become highly engaged in a welcoming and encouraging classroom. Creating such an environment is largely in the hands of teachers and curriculum designers.

Research by Young (1991) argued that teachers should actively strive to create a low-anxiety classroom climate to help students succeed. Similarly, Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) list creating a pleasant, supportive atmosphere as one of the top commandments for motivating language learners. Studies and practitioner literature describe some common features. For one, it is a place where students feel safe to make mistakes. Errors are treated as a natural part of learning rather than as failures. When students feel supported, they worry less about being judged or making mistakes. That fear, often called language anxiety, starts to fade, and speaking up feels a little less scary. In a space where they feel safe, students are more likely to take risks and use the language. In classrooms where students are given some say in how they learn, they often feel a sense of freedom, and that can spark a deeper, more personal kind of motivation (Noels et al., 2000).

When students get to make choices in their learning, like picking a topic they actually care about or sharing their own thoughts during class, it changes how they feel. Suddenly, learning is not just something that happens to them. It becomes something they are part of, something they can shape. That feeling of being involved can make a huge difference. It lifts their energy, their interest, and their motivation. The teacher makes all the difference too. A kind, patient, and supportive teacher can turn a classroom into a place where students feel safe to try, even if they are not sure they will get it right. In that kind of space, students are not as afraid to speak up or make mistakes. They know they will not be judged. Instead, they feel encouraged, and that makes learning feel lighter, more enjoyable, and a lot less stressful (Dewaele et al., 2019; Jin & Zhang, 2018). In fact, one study found that when students feel connected to their teachers and classmates, and when they believe they can handle what they are learning, their anxiety goes down (Alamer & Almulhim, 2021). Feeling seen, supported, and capable really matters. It is what helps students relax, open up, and grow. In contrast, those who were only driven by pressure from outside felt more stress. This really shows how much it matters to build a classroom where students feel supported, challenged in the right way, and truly valued for who they are.

A supportive environment and motivation go hand in hand. It grows out of students' motivation, but it also helps keep that motivation alive and strong. When students walk into a classroom that feels welcoming, positive, and engaging, they are much more likely to feel motivated and ready to take part. For example, consider the contrast between two scenarios: In one class, the teacher dictates every move, students feel on edge about being punished for mistakes, and communication is discouraged. This scenario is likely to raise anxiety and lower motivation. In another class, students collaborate in groups, share their ideas freely, and are encouraged to take risks without fear of humiliation. This environment sparks motivation to learn and helps build students' confidence in using the language. In the second scenario, the teacher has effectively lowered the affective filter for students, making it easier for their effort and positive attitude to translate into real language development. If teachers want their learners to bloom, they must provide a nurturing climate that attends to their emotional needs as well as their cognitive ones.

3. Theoretical Paradigms and Types of Motivation

For as long as people have been learning languages, experts have been trying to determine what motivates them. Over the years, some theories have proven timeless, shaping how people understand why learners stay committed to the process. One of the most widely recognized ideas comes from Gardner and Lambert (1972), who categorize motivation into two main types: instrumental and integrative.

Instrumental motivation comes down to practicality, and it is all about getting things done. People learn a language because it opens doors of opportunities, whether landing a better job, doing well in school, traveling without stress, or

simply navigating daily conversations more easily. In this case, language is less about passion or deep connection and more about functionality. It is a means to an end, a skill that makes life easier rather than something to be cherished. The main focus is not on the language itself but on what it allows them to achieve: new opportunities, smoother interactions, and a more confident way of moving through the world.

Integrative motivation often comes from something deeper than the goal of learning how to speak or write in another language. It often starts with the desire to connect with others, to learn about the culture, to form real relationships, and to feel at home in a place that once felt unknown. For many people, learning a language is not just about building a skill. It means much more than that. It becomes a way of seeing the world differently and experiencing life through a new perspective. It is about being part of traditions, learning what matters to others, and finding a place within a community. While some learners are motivated by practical reasons such as passing exams or advancing in their careers, which are completely valid, integrative motivation is often more personal. It reflects the hope that the language will become part of daily life, not only as a tool for communication but also as a way to feel connected, understood, and included.

People learn languages for various reasons, some because it is necessary, others because they are drawn to the culture, but regardless of the reason, the journey is hardly ever a straight path. Some start with a clear goal, to get a job, pass an exam, or travel more easily, only to develop a real passion for the language and the culture behind it. Others need a balance of instrumental and integrative types of motivation, the practical benefits of learning, and a genuine curiosity about the people and traditions woven into words to stay engaged. That balance is what keeps them engaged. When all is said and done, motivation is what pushes learners forward. It is what takes language learning from being just another task to something exciting, meaningful, and even life-changing.

Gardner and Lambert (2000) viewed motivation through practicality and cultural connection, but Ryan and Deci (2000) took a different path with their *Self-Determination Theory*. Instead of focusing only on external goals, they explored what truly drives someone to learn a language. Their theory breaks motivation into two key types: intrinsic, which comes from genuine enjoyment and a sense of personal fulfillment, and extrinsic, which is fueled by outside rewards and expectations.

Intrinsic motivation is all about learning for the love of it. Intrinsically motivated people do not study a language because they must do so. They do it because they enjoy the process. They are thrilled by picking up new words, piecing together sentences, and using language in real conversations. Whether chatting with native speakers, watching foreign films, or reading in another language, the experience is fulfilling, not just a means to an end.

Extrinsic motivation, by contrast, is tied to external rewards. Some learners push to master a language to earn higher grades, secure a promotion, or meet professional and academic expectations. While these external incentives can drive effort and progress, they do not always create a long-term commitment. Once the reward disappears, so does the motivation. Without a personal connection to the language, learning can feel like a duty rather than something meaningful.

Motivation can make or break a language learner's journey. Ryan and Deci also introduced the concept of amotivation, which occurs when learners lose their sense of purpose. When progress feels too slow or impossible to reach, frustration builds, confidence fades, and motivation disappears. This situation often happens when students feel the language is too difficult to grasp, they do not have the support they need, or they are weighed down by too much external pressure. If these challenges go unaddressed, motivation can slowly fade, making students disengage, put in less effort, and, in the worst case, abandon learning the language entirely.

Expanding on Ryan and Deci's *Self-Determination Theory*, Dörnyei's (2009) *L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS)* looks more personally at what keeps language learners motivated. While intrinsic and extrinsic motivation explains why someone begins learning a language, L2MSS focuses on how a person's sense of identity and future goals influence their determination to keep going. It is not just about studying for the sake of it. It is about how learners see themselves in the future and how language becomes part of that bigger picture.

L2MSS is based on two main ideas: the ideal self and the ought self. The ideal self is the person a learner wants to be: someone who speaks fluently, connects with different cultures, and uses language to create new opportunities in life, whether for personal, academic, or professional reasons. On the other hand, the ought self is shaped by outside expectations, such as the pressure to pass exams, meet academic standards, or gain language skills for career advancement. Both shape motivation, balancing personal dreams and external demands, ultimately influencing how committed a learner stays to the language learning process.

How learners see themselves significantly impacts their motivation to succeed (Al-Hoorie, 2018). When someone can picture themselves as a confident speaker, they are more likely to stay engaged, push through struggles, and keep improving. What makes L2MSS influential is how personal it is. It highlights that learning a language is not just about gaining a skill. It is about shaping who a person wants to become and building a future that reflects their dreams and ambitions.

Building on the idea that internal and external factors shape motivation, Bandura's (2001) *Social Cognitive Theory* emphasizes the crucial role of the learning environment. Learning a language is never just a solo effort. It is shaped by the people, places, and experiences surrounding the learner. Social interactions, classroom atmosphere, and cultural exposure play a massive role in building confidence and keeping learners engaged. Motivation thrives when students feel supported, encouraged, and challenged correctly. However, staying engaged and making real progress becomes much more difficult without these key elements.

Motivation is not something people are just born with. It grows in the right environment. Bandura's theory emphasizes how much a supportive classroom can shape a learner's confidence. When students feel encouraged, see mistakes as learning moments, and experience language as a tool for authentic communication rather than just another subject, they become more engaged and willing to take risks. Language learning is about more than just memorizing words and grammar. It is about connecting with people, experiencing different cultures, and expressing thoughts meaningfully. When students feel valued and inspired, learning no longer feels like a burden; it becomes something natural, exciting, and gratifying.

Bandura looks at how external influences shape motivation, but Maslow (1943) takes a bigger-picture approach, showing that real learning cannot happen unless students feel emotionally and psychologically secure. Language learning is not just about memorizing words or correcting grammar. It is deeply tied to feeling safe, valued, and supported in the learning environment. When students feel encouraged, they take risks. They speak up, make mistakes, and keep going. However, when they feel alone, anxious, or overlooked, progress stalls, not because they are incapable, but because they lack the support they need to grow.

For motivation to truly last, learners need to feel they belong and that someone believes in them. If they constantly doubt themselves, feel isolated, or struggle with anxiety, even the best teaching methods will not be enough to keep them going. When those emotional needs are unmet, frustration creeps in, and learning starts to feel like an uphill battle that is not worth the effort. However, in a supportive, encouraging environment, everything changes. Mistakes stop feeling like failures, challenges become opportunities, and language learning turns into something that feels natural, exciting, and deeply personal.

Maslow's theory shows that motivation goes beyond rewards or pressure. It grows in an environment where learners feel safe, supported, and capable. When there is a sense that every voice matters, risk-taking is encouraged, and progress is recognized, the focus shifts away from fear of mistakes and toward genuine expression. In a supportive classroom, motivation does not need to be forced. It develops naturally. Language learning becomes more than memorization or test preparation. It becomes something meaningful, something that learners begin to use with ease and carry into real-life situations.

4. Insights and Recommendations for English Language Education

For many English language learners, learning English is not just about studying, it is a personal journey. It means stepping into something unfamiliar and doing something that can feel scary. Speaking in a new language takes real bravery, especially when it is easy to make mistakes. That first time saying something out loud can feel huge, even intimidating, but it is often the moment where real progress begins. Growth happens when there is space to try, to stumble, and to keep going. It is not about being perfect. It is about feeling safe enough to keep showing up. In a classroom filled with patience, encouragement, and care, confidence starts to grow. That is where real, meaningful learning begins.

In any classroom, the range of student responses is easy to spot. Some speak up, even if they are unsure. Others stay quiet, watching closely but holding back. That hesitation does not always come from a lack of knowledge. More often, it comes from fear of being wrong, of being corrected in front of others, or of not sounding good enough. Usually, it has less to do with skill and more to do with how students feel in the room. If the classroom feels safe, they are more likely to take those first steps. If it feels tense or critical, many would rather stay silent. The emotional tone of the classroom carries more weight than is often acknowledged. It can either foster the confidence to speak or gradually reinforce the fear of remaining silent.

Teachers have a big role in creating that kind of space. It does not come from one big decision; it comes from small, daily choices. It comes from looking students in the eye, remembering their names, and noticing when someone makes an effort, even if they do not get it exactly right. These little moments build trust. Trust, over time, is what helps students show up, speak up, and keep trying, even when it is difficult.

How teachers respond to mistakes can shape the whole learning experience. Language learners will make errors, as it is part of the process. What matters is how those moments are handled. If a student hears laughter or impatience when they slip up, they may stop trying altogether. If they hear calm encouragement, they learn that mistakes are not something to avoid. They are part of how students get better. A thoughtful response from a teacher in one of those moments can stay with a student for a long time.

Letting students have some say in their learning really does make a difference. It does not have to be anything big. Sometimes it is just letting them choose what they want to write about or asking them what they think about a topic before exploring it further. Other times, it involves giving them a chance to bring in something from their own life, such as an interest, a story, or a question that has been on their mind. When students see that their ideas matter, they begin to feel that they belong in the learning process. When something in the lesson connects to who they are, they are far more likely to lean in and pay attention.

Feedback works in much the same way. Students need to know where they are growing, not just where they are falling short. A quiet word such as *"you explained that clearly today"* or *"your phrasing is getting stronger"* can mean more than a grade on a paper. They remember those comments, and they carry them forward. At the same time, too much feedback, or feedback that sounds harsh even when meant to be helpful, can cause a student to withdraw. Sometimes a small note in the margin or a nod at the end of class is enough to let them know that someone sees the effort they are making. These moments often stay with students longer than expected.

This connection between emotional support and learning is well established in educational research. Motivation is shaped by context. Dörnyei (2001) emphasizes that classroom climate has a strong influence on how willing students are to engage. When learners feel safe and encouraged, they are more likely to speak, ask questions, and stay committed to the process. Several studies have shown that positive relationships in the classroom can reduce anxiety and support stronger learning outcomes (Li et al., 2018; Roorda et al., 2011; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2021; Wang & Eccles, 2013).

Students' beliefs about their own abilities also matter. When learners assume that difficulty means they are not capable, they often pull back. However, when they understand that struggle is part of learning, they tend to continue. Teachers can help by being honest about the challenges of learning a language and by reminding students that progress often comes slowly, but it does come. Encouraging effort, rather than just results, reinforces this mindset.

Certain teaching strategies can make these ideas more visible in the classroom. Group work, pair activities, and informal conversations give students a chance to practice in a less pressured way. These interactions help students hear different perspectives and realize that everyone is working through the same kinds of problems. Learning becomes something they do together, not just on their own.

Bringing real-world topics into lessons can also improve engagement. Students are more likely to participate when the content reflects their lives or interests. Songs, short articles, news stories, or personal writing tasks help students see the relevance of what they are learning. When language feels useful and connected to everyday experience, motivation often follows.

Technology can play a helpful role, especially when it gives students more opportunities to review, repeat, or receive feedback. Language learning apps, online tools, or even simple digital exercises can give students the freedom to practice at their own pace. These tools are not a replacement for teaching but can support students who need extra time or want to revisit earlier lessons without pressure.

Even classroom routines can support a positive learning environment. Starting class with a short check-in, a warm-up activity, or a few minutes of quiet focus can help students feel settled and ready to learn. These small practices often make a difference in how students approach the rest of the lesson.

Finally, using a variety of teaching methods allows more students to find their way into the learning. Some students are visual learners. Others respond more to movement, listening, or discussion. When teachers include a mix of approaches, more students stay engaged. Variety also helps reduce frustration by showing that there are different ways to learn and

express understanding.

In the end, effective language teaching is not only about methods or materials. It is about relationships. Students do not learn well when they feel anxious, invisible, or stuck. Real learning tends to happen when students feel respected, encouraged, and genuinely supported. When teachers create that kind of environment, students gain more than just language skills. They leave with a sense of confidence that stays with them, long after the course has ended.

5. Conclusion and Synthesis

Learning a new language is not just about memorizing words or getting grammar right. What really keeps a student going is how motivated they feel. Motivation is what helps students push through the tough parts, stay focused, and keep trying even when it gets frustrating. It is not something that works all by itself. How a student feels, confident or unsure, relaxed or anxious, can make a big difference. When students feel nervous or uncomfortable, they often hold back. However, when they feel safe, supported, and encouraged, they are much more likely to speak up, take chances, and actually enjoy the process.

Students find motivation in different places. Some want to pass an exam or get a better job after graduation. Others are interested in the culture, the people, or the way of life connected to the language. These are often called instrumental and integrative motivation. There is also a useful idea called *Self-Determination Theory*. It explains that sometimes motivation comes from inside (intrinsic), like curiosity or the joy of learning. Other times, it comes from outside (extrinsic), like rewards or what others expect. Both kinds shape the way someone experiences learning.

Other ways of looking at motivation, like the *L2 Motivational Self System*, *Social Cognitive Theory*, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, show how motivation connects to identity, emotions, and feeling close to others. When students feel respected, understood, and capable, they are more likely to stay motivated. Teachers play a huge part in making that happen. If a teacher makes the classroom a place where students are not afraid to make mistakes, where they feel heard and supported, students are more likely to open up and stay involved.

When that kind of support is in place, motivation becomes something deeper. It is not just what gets someone started. It becomes what keeps them going. It helps them not only learn the language but also feel a sense of purpose and connection through it.

Compliance with ethical standards

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The author is a licensed professional English teacher from the Philippines and is currently working in Japan as a lecturer. He is an alumnus of the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, where he was assigned to Kagawa, Japan. Before his work in Japan, he taught English at both basic and higher education institutions in the Philippines. He holds two doctoral degrees: a Doctor of Education in English Language Teaching and a Doctor of Arts in Literature and Communication. In addition, he earned a Master of Arts in Communication and a Bachelor of Arts in Communication (Magna Cum Laude). He also holds English language teaching certifications, including a Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and a certificate in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Currently, in addition to being a lecturer, he serves as a peer reviewer and a member of the editorial board for a research journal. He is also a research fellow at Shinawatra University in Thailand. His research interests include English Language Teaching, Applied Linguistics, Literature in English, Literary Studies, Communication and Media Studies, and Technology in Education.

