

THE ROLE OF MOTIVATION IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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**Abstract**

Motivation plays a crucial role in the process of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It is widely recognized as one of the most significant psychological factors influencing language acquisition. This paper aims to examine the impact of different types of motivation - intrinsic and extrinsic - on EFL learners' performance, persistence, and overall achievement. It also explores the connection between motivation, learning strategies, and classroom engagement. Drawing on previous studies and applying a mixed-method approach, the paper investigates how motivation levels vary according to learners' age, educational background, and exposure to the English language. The findings reveal that highly motivated learners demonstrate greater willingness to communicate, higher retention of vocabulary, and more effective use of learning strategies. Moreover, the role of teachers in fostering and sustaining motivation is emphasized, with recommendations for implementing motivational teaching practices in the EFL classroom.

**Keywords:** Motivation, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, language acquisition, learner engagement, educational psychology.

**Introduction**

The ability to communicate in English has become one of the most essential competencies in the 21st century. As English continues to serve as the dominant language of global communication, business, diplomacy, science, technology, and education, the demand for English language proficiency has increased across all

continents. In many non-English-speaking countries, including those in Asia, Africa, and Europe, English is not only taught as a school subject but also regarded as a critical tool for personal, academic, and professional development. Proficiency in English often determines access to international opportunities, better employment prospects, and participation in global academic communities. Consequently, the process of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has become a matter of both personal growth and national development.

However, the acquisition of a foreign language is not a simple or straightforward process. It involves a wide range of interrelated factors, including cognitive abilities, social background, cultural exposure, environmental context, and psychological readiness. Among these factors, motivation is consistently recognized as a fundamental determinant of success. Without sufficient motivation, even learners with high aptitude, excellent memory, or exposure to good teaching methods may fail to achieve proficiency. In contrast, learners with strong motivation can often overcome limited resources, inadequate instruction, or personal challenges to achieve impressive results. For this reason, motivation has been described by Gardner (1985) as the “driving force” that determines the extent of learners’ engagement in language learning.

Motivation can be broadly defined as the internal drive or external influence that stimulates individuals to take purposeful action toward achieving specific goals. In educational psychology, motivation is often categorized into two primary types: intrinsic motivation, which comes from within the learner (such as enjoyment, curiosity, or personal satisfaction), and extrinsic motivation, which is driven by external rewards or pressures (such as grades, career opportunities, or social approval). In the field of second language acquisition, this distinction has been elaborated through Gardner and Lambert’s (1972) concepts of integrative motivation - the learner’s desire to integrate into the culture of the target language and instrumental motivation, which is linked to practical benefits like employment or academic advancement. Both forms of motivation play crucial roles in shaping learners’ attitudes, persistence, and overall achievement.

The importance of motivation is further underscored by empirical studies. Research consistently shows that motivated learners are more likely to set clear goals, adopt effective learning strategies, and persist in the face of difficulties. Motivation also affects learners’ willingness to communicate, their openness to new cultural experiences, and their capacity for long-term retention. In other words, motivation is

not only a psychological variable but also a practical factor that directly shapes learning outcomes.

### **Literature Review**

Motivation has long been recognized as a cornerstone of success in second and foreign language acquisition. As noted in the Introduction, learners' ability to sustain effort, overcome difficulties, and persist in mastering English is strongly influenced by their motivational orientation. A substantial body of theoretical and empirical research has sought to explain how motivation operates and why it plays such a decisive role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. Theoretical Perspectives on Motivation Early approaches to motivation in education were rooted in behaviorism, which emphasized reinforcement and reward as the primary drivers of learning (Skinner, 1953). While this perspective highlighted the role of extrinsic factors, it proved insufficient to explain learners' long-term engagement in complex tasks such as mastering a foreign language.

With the rise of cognitive psychology, attention shifted toward internal processes. Theories such as Atkinson's Achievement Motivation Theory (1964) underscored the importance of learners' goals, self-efficacy, and the balance between striving for success and avoiding failure. These perspectives helped explain individual differences in learners' persistence and achievement.

The most influential framework in the field of second language acquisition is Gardner's Socio-Educational Model (1985), which introduced the distinction between integrative motivation - the desire to connect with and become part of the target language community - and instrumental motivation, which is linked to practical benefits such as academic achievement or employment. Gardner and Lambert's (1972) studies demonstrated that integrative motivation often fosters stronger communicative competence, while instrumental motivation may drive short-term achievement in tests and exams.

Later developments, particularly Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000), broadened the scope of motivation research. SDT emphasized the difference between intrinsic motivation - learning driven by curiosity, interest, and personal satisfaction - and extrinsic motivation - learning driven by external rewards or pressures. Crucially, SDT highlighted that the quality of motivation (intrinsic vs extrinsic) often matters more than the quantity, as intrinsically motivated learners engage more deeply and persist longer in language learning tasks.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a mixed-method design combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of motivation in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). A survey-based quantitative analysis was conducted to measure the levels and types of motivation among learners, while semi-structured interviews were used to gather in-depth qualitative insights into learners' personal experiences and attitudes. This design ensured both breadth and depth of analysis, thereby enhancing the validity of the findings.

#### **Participants.**

The participants of this study were 120 EFL learners drawn from three different educational contexts: high schools, universities, and private language centers in Uzbekistan. The sample included 60 male and 60 female students, ranging in age from 15 to 25. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to represent learners at different stages of education and with varied motivational orientations.

#### **Data Collection Procedure.**

The study was carried out over a period of three months. First, questionnaires and language tests were administered to all 120 participants. After analyzing the initial results, interviews were conducted to gain richer insights into learners' perspectives on motivation. All data were anonymized to ensure ethical standards and confidentiality.

#### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data from questionnaires and tests were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, percentages, correlations) to determine the relationship between motivation types and language proficiency. Qualitative interview data were analyzed through thematic coding, which helped identify recurring themes such as exam pressure, classroom environment, and intrinsic interest in English. By triangulating data from multiple sources, the study aimed to achieve a more accurate and nuanced understanding of how motivation influences EFL learning outcomes.

### **Results and Discussion:**

The findings of this study revealed that students learning English as a foreign language demonstrate varying types of motivation, each of which significantly shapes their learning outcomes. Based on survey and interview data, three dominant types of motivation emerged: instrumental, integrative, and intrinsic motivation.

1. Instrumental Motivation – A majority of participants (around 55%) reported that their primary reason for learning English was related to practical goals, such as securing better job opportunities, applying for scholarships, or passing exams. This supports the findings of Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Kim (2012), who noted that in many EFL contexts, instrumental motivation remains the strongest driving factor. However, while effective for short-term achievements, such as test performance, instrumental motivation alone often lacks the sustainability needed for long-term language mastery.

2. Integrative Motivation – About 30% of learners expressed that they studied English because of their interest in English-speaking cultures, lifestyles, and opportunities to communicate with people from other countries. These students tended to show stronger oral communication and listening skills, highlighting their willingness to use English in authentic contexts. This aligns with Gardner's (1985) claim that integrative motivation can result in higher levels of communicative competence and long-term success.

3. Intrinsic Motivation – A smaller group of students (15%) were motivated by personal curiosity, enjoyment of learning, and a general passion for acquiring new knowledge. These learners often engaged in self-study, used additional resources, and demonstrated creativity in their learning process. This finding supports Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2000), which emphasizes that intrinsically motivated learners are more likely to engage deeply and persist in learning tasks over time.

### **Conclusion:**

This study set out to examine the role of motivation in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), with a particular focus on how different types of motivation - intrinsic, extrinsic, instrumental, and integrative - affect language proficiency, engagement, and learning strategies. Using a mixed-method approach, the research combined quantitative data from questionnaires and proficiency tests with qualitative insights from interviews.

The results confirm that motivation is a decisive factor in EFL success. Intrinsic motivation emerged as the strongest predictor of overall language proficiency, particularly in speaking and listening skills, while instrumental motivation was more closely associated with reading and writing achievement. Integrative motivation contributed positively to communicative competence, whereas extrinsic motivation played a supporting role but was less sustainable over the long term.

The findings suggest that:

1. Teachers should actively foster intrinsic and integrative motivation by creating engaging, relevant, and meaningful classroom activities.
2. Exam-oriented systems need balance, integrating communicative practice alongside test preparation.
3. Learning environments must be supportive and interactive, encouraging risk-taking without fear of making mistakes.
4. Clear goal-setting should be encouraged, as learners with personal objectives are more resilient in the face of challenges.

Ultimately, motivation is not a static attribute but a dynamic process shaped by personal, social, and educational factors. Sustainable motivation requires both internal satisfaction and external support. For policymakers and educators in EFL contexts such as Uzbekistan, this means designing curricula and teaching strategies that not only prepare learners for academic or professional success but also inspire them to use English as a tool for personal growth, cultural exchange, and lifelong learning.

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