

UNIT 7: Motivation and Affective Factors in Language Learning

Introduction

Success in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) does not depend only on grammar, vocabulary, or teaching methods. It is also strongly influenced by learners' emotions, attitudes, beliefs, and motivation. A highly motivated learner with confidence and low anxiety often progresses faster than a learner with strong cognitive ability but low motivation and high emotional barriers (Brown, 2007).

This lecture focuses on two major psychological dimensions of language learning:

1. Motivation
2. Affective Factors

Understanding these dimensions helps teachers create better learning environments and improve student achievement.

Part I: Motivation in Language Learning

1. Definition of Motivation

Motivation refers to the internal drive or external force that encourages learners to engage in learning and persist despite difficulties (Dörnyei, 2001).

It answers the question:

“Why do students learn?”

In EFL classrooms, motivation determines:

- learners' participation
- effort and persistence
- willingness to communicate
- long-term achievement

According to Gardner (1985), motivation is one of the strongest predictors of success in second language acquisition.

2. Major Theories of Motivation

Several scholars have explained motivation in language learning. The most practical classification for EFL teaching is:

- **Intrinsic Motivation**

- **Extrinsic Motivation**

2.1 Intrinsic Motivation

Definition

Intrinsic motivation comes from within the learner. Learners engage in activities because they find them enjoyable, interesting, or personally satisfying (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Students learn because they want to, not because they have to.

Examples

Students may be intrinsically motivated because they:

- enjoy speaking English
- love English songs, films, and books
- want to communicate with international people
- feel satisfaction when they improve
- enjoy solving language challenges

Characteristics of Intrinsically Motivated Learners

They usually:

- participate actively
- take risks without fear
- show curiosity
- continue learning outside class
- maintain motivation for a long time

Intrinsic motivation is considered more powerful and sustainable (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

2.2 Extrinsic Motivation

Definition

Extrinsic motivation comes from outside the learner. Students learn because of external rewards or pressures such as grades, praise, or social expectations (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Examples

Students may be extrinsically motivated because they want:

- good grades

- exam success
- parental approval
- scholarships
- better job opportunities
- teacher praise
- avoidance of punishment

Characteristics of Extrinsically Motivated Learners

They may:

- work hard temporarily
- focus mainly on grades
- stop effort when rewards disappear
- depend heavily on teacher control

Extrinsic motivation can be useful, but it may not last long without intrinsic interest (Dörnyei, 2001).

2.3 Integrative and Instrumental Motivation

Gardner and Lambert (1972) distinguished between:

Integrative Motivation

The desire to connect with the target language community and culture.

Example:

“I want to speak English to communicate with native speakers.”

Instrumental Motivation

Learning a language for practical purposes.

Example:

“I need English to pass IELTS or get a job.”

Both types are important in EFL contexts (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

Part II: Techniques to Increase Student Motivation in the EFL Classroom

Teachers play a major role in shaping motivation. Motivation is not fixed; it can be developed (Dörnyei, 2001).

1. Set Clear and Achievable Goals

Students need to know:

- what they are learning
- why they are learning it
- how success can be achieved

Goal-setting improves learner engagement and persistence (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Example

Instead of:

“Learn vocabulary”

Use:

“Learn 10 words to describe your daily routine”

Clear goals increase confidence and engagement.

2. Use Meaningful and Relevant Materials

Students are more motivated when lessons connect to:

- their lives
- interests
- future careers
- real-world communication

Relevance increases learner investment and personal involvement (Harmer, 2007).

3. Encourage Student Autonomy

Learners become more motivated when they have choices. Autonomy is strongly linked to intrinsic motivation (Little, 1991).

Teachers can allow:

- topic selection
- project choice
- presentation format choice
- peer collaboration options

4. Provide Positive Feedback

Feedback should:

- recognize effort
- focus on improvement
- guide future progress

Constructive feedback supports motivation and reduces fear of failure (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

5. Use Cooperative Learning

Group work and pair work:

- reduce fear
- increase participation
- create peer support
- improve communication practice

Social interaction enhances motivation and lowers anxiety (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

6. Vary Teaching Methods

Monotony reduces motivation. Teachers should vary:

- discussions
- games
- role plays
- debates
- storytelling
- projects
- videos
- songs
- technology-based tasks

Variety helps maintain attention and classroom energy (Ur, 1996).

7. Create Opportunities for Success

Students need small successes. Success increases:

- confidence
- self-belief
- willingness to continue

Tasks should be challenging but achievable, reflecting Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Part III: Affective Factors in Language Learning

Definition

Affective factors are emotional and psychological conditions that influence learning.

They include:

- anxiety
- self-esteem
- self-confidence
- attitude
- empathy
- motivation

Krashen's (1982) **Affective Filter Hypothesis** explains that negative emotions create a "filter" that blocks language acquisition.

When anxiety is high, learning decreases. When confidence is high, learning improves.

1. Anxiety in Language Learning

Definition

Language anxiety is the fear or nervousness learners feel when using English. It is especially common in speaking, oral presentations, and testing situations (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986).

Causes of Anxiety

- fear of making mistakes
- fear of negative evaluation
- strict teacher behavior
- classroom competition
- lack of preparation
- previous negative experiences

Effects of Anxiety

High anxiety can cause:

- silence in class
- avoidance of participation
- forgetting known material
- poor performance
- low confidence

Even good students may perform badly because of anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

2. Self-Esteem

Definition

Self-esteem is how learners evaluate their own worth and ability (Brown, 2007).

Students ask themselves:

“Am I capable?”
 “Am I good at English?”

High Self-Esteem Learners

They tend to:

- participate more
- accept correction positively
- take risks
- persist after failure

Low Self-Esteem Learners

They may:

- avoid speaking
- fear mistakes
- give up easily
- depend too much on teacher support

Teachers strongly influence learner self-esteem.

3. Self-Confidence

Definition

Self-confidence is the belief in one’s ability to perform successfully. In EFL, it often means:

“I believe I can communicate in English.”

Confidence grows through successful experience and supportive interaction (Bandura, 1997).

How Confidence Develops

Through:

- practice
- encouragement
- successful communication
- supportive correction
- repeated achievement

Confidence leads to more participation, which leads to more improvement.

This creates a positive cycle.

Part IV: Building a Positive and Supportive Classroom Atmosphere

The emotional climate of the classroom is essential. Students learn better where they feel:

- safe
- respected
- valued
- supported
- encouraged

A positive classroom climate improves both motivation and academic achievement (Marzano, 2003).

1. Establish Trust and Respect

Teachers should:

- listen actively
- respect student opinions
- avoid humiliation
- treat mistakes as part of learning

Students must feel psychologically safe.

2. Normalize Mistakes

Mistakes are natural in language learning. Teachers should present errors as evidence of learning, not failure (Harmer, 2007).

This reduces fear and promotes risk-taking.

3. Use Encouraging Teacher Language

Teacher language shapes emotional climate.

Use expressions like:

- “Excellent idea”
- “Try again—you are close”
- “Good progress”
- “Thank you for sharing”

Avoid harsh criticism.

4. Promote Inclusion

All students should feel included, not only strong learners.

Teachers should involve:

- shy students
- weak learners
- quiet learners

Participation should be balanced.

5. Foster Peer Support

Students should help, not judge, each other.

Teachers can promote:

- peer feedback
- collaborative tasks
- respectful discussion norms

Positive peer relationships reduce anxiety.

6. Teacher as Motivator

The teacher is not only an instructor but also:

- facilitator
- encourager
- emotional supporter
- role model

Teacher enthusiasm is contagious. A motivated teacher often creates motivated learners (Dörnyei, 2001).

Conclusion

Motivation and affective factors are central to successful EFL learning. Students do not learn effectively when they are anxious, discouraged, or emotionally disconnected.

Teachers must therefore address not only language content but also emotional needs.

A successful EFL classroom is one where students feel:

- motivated to learn
- safe to make mistakes
- confident to participate
- supported in their progress

Teaching language means teaching people, not only grammar.

And people learn best when they feel valued.

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