

Factors Influencing Kurdish EFL Undergraduate Students' Motivation

Rezhan H. Abdalla¹, Mohammed R. Hama Tawfeeq²

¹Department of English Language, College of Basic Education, University of Halabja, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

² Independent Researcher, Not Affiliated with any Institution, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

ABSTRACT

Research indicates that motivation greatly influences EFL learning outcomes and students' learning performance. Hence, the more research is done on this subject, the better it became for both teachers and students to sharpen their performances in EFL teaching and learning. This research aims to find out what the main factors are that influence the motivation of Kurdish undergraduate students positively. This study mainly focuses on the effect of external factors that affect undergraduate EFL students' motivation. To some extent, the study also focuses on the internal factors that may have a correlation with undergraduate EFL students' motivation. 70 undergraduate EFL students were chosen from the College of Basic Education/Department of English Language as participants for this study, alongside 10 of their teachers. The study employs a quantitative research method, depending on two sets of questionnaires to collect data. The results show that the majority of the students have a positive outlook on learning English. The results also showed that among the many factors affecting the EFL learning process by the students are: teachers' themselves and the way they manage their classrooms, and then the learning experience. Moreover, the perspective of the teachers was also positive because they want their learners to learn English in the best way possible.

KEYWORDS: EFL, EFL Learning, Motivation, Internal Factors, External Factors

1. INTRODUCTION

Many studies were conducted on the positive correlation between motivation and EFL learners' learning outcomes. For example, Dornyei (1997) emphasizes the significance of motivation when it comes to learning a foreign language. To be precise, he believes that motivation is the main factor in positively influencing the proves of learning a foreign language. Moreover, Dornyei (1997) explains that motivation acts as a driving force for starting a long and difficult learning process and to sustain that attitude along the time required to learn the language.

Moreover, according to Al Othman and Shuqair "motivation is one of the most essential aspects determining success in learning the English language" (2013, p. 128). Based on this, the study aims to answer one basic question, which is: What are the main factors that influence Kurdish EFL college learners' motivation?

According to Harmer (2007), the only activities that students were interested in were those that had interesting tasks and game-like communication. Thus, it is necessary for both EFL teachers and administrators to work together in order to increase the level of motivation by EFL learners, which will ultimately have a positive effect on the learners' learning outcomes.

This study aims at uncovering the main reasons affecting the level of motivation in the context of Kurdish EFL college learners. The factors include human factors, methods of learning, teaching curriculum, etc.

1.1 Significance of The Study

This study examines the factors that have a great influence on Kurdish EFL learners' motivation. It aims to fill gaps in the literature and provide valuable insights for students and teachers. The finding of this study can be utilized by both teachers and administrators for the purpose of adjusting teaching methodologies or

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Corresponding author's e-mail: rezhan.abdulla@uoh.edu.iq

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administration rules in order to increase Kurdish EFL learners' motivation. Moreover, even students can benefit from this study as they will gain some insight on what may motivate them to learn the English language as a foreign language.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theory utilized in this study is Gardner's Socio-Educational Model (1979): The theory explains that socio-educational contexts have a great influence on motivation. It also describes four variables influencing motivation which were social milieu, individual differences, second language acquisition contexts, and outcomes. (Lovato, 2011)

As it was mentioned earlier that motivation positively affects the L2 learning process (Wood, 1998). Moreover, Crookes and Schmidt (1991) believe, particularly at schools, that motivation plays a key role in students' learning. In addition, Harmer (1991) clarifies that when we compare students who are motivated with students who are less motivated, it becomes clear that the students who are motivated tend to do much better than those who are less motivated. This was true despite the fact that sometimes students experienced less than standard teaching methods and unfavorable teaching conditions. On the other hand, students who were less motivated tended to do worse no matter how improved the teaching methods or teaching conditions were.

Moreover, Similar research conducted in the related field indicates the fact that motivation affects language learning positively. For example, Solak (2012) conducted a study on the role of motivation on academic achievement; among the academic fields is the field of language learning. They found out that motivation indeed positively affects language acquisition.

Moreover, a review paper by Alizadeh (2016) confirms that the role of motivation in teaching English is indispensable due to its positive role in the field.

2.1 What is Motivation

There is an abundance of information when it comes to defining or explaining motivation. To be specific, Dornyei (1998) believes that it is difficult to clarify the concept of motivation because there are a lot of theories that try to explain it. Moreover, various scientific fields have their own definitions for the concept of motivation, such as in the field of psychology, where Ausubel (1968) emphasized the needs necessary for creating motivation in learners, which include stimuli needs and learning needs. In addition, Gardner and Lambert (1972) categorize motivation into instrumental and integrative motivation. Harmer (1991) categorizes motivation into intrinsic and extrinsic. One interesting definition is the one given by Gardner, stating that motivation "refers to

the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language and favorable attitudes towards learning the language." (1985, p. 10)

2.2 Types of Motivation

As mentioned earlier, the categorization of the main types of motivation is extrinsic and intrinsic. No matter the categorization of the types of motivation, one commonality seems to persist in such subjects: that motivation is of utmost importance in learning a language. To illustrate more, Noels et al. (2001) believe that if in a learning context the learner is neither intrinsically nor integratively motivated, he/she will completely withdraw from the learning.

2.3 Intrinsic Motivation

According to Alshenqeeti, intrinsic motivation can be recognized as being "used to refer to doing a task because it is interesting to a person or that a person finds it enjoyable" (2018, P. 2). This means the motivation comes within the student himself/herself rather than external factors. In this case, the act of learning the language itself is motivation enough; the more the student learns the language, the more motivated he/she will be to learn.

2.4 Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation "involves performing a behaviour as a means to an end, that is, to receive some extrinsic reward (e.g., good grades) or to avoid punishment." (Vallerand, 1997, as cited in Dorney, 1998, p. 121). This brief definition encompasses what extrinsic motivation actually is. Moreover, in the EFL classroom context, it can be further explained. According to Gilakjani et al. (2012), "In extrinsic motives, courses are related to the syllabus, the teaching materials, the teaching method and learning tasks." (p.10)

3. METHODOLOGY

The research method employed in this research paper is the quantitative research method, which involves developing and adapting questionnaires from research by Tuan (2012). The questionnaires consist of two separate questionnaires designed to elicit answers from the participants about motivation. One questionnaire was dedicated for students, and the other was dedicated to be answered by their EFL teachers. The student participants numbered 70 students at the college of basic education, department of English language in the University of Halabja. They ranged from first-year students to fourth-year students; both male and female students participated as samples for the study. All four stages were chosen because the sample needed to be as inclusive as possible. The same reason why male and female students participated in the study was not to exclude one gender

from the sample. Google Forms were used to send the questionnaires to the students. 70 participants answered the questionnaire; only 69 responses were correctly returned. The type of sample was simple random sampling for ease of availability; the population is 250 students. Another questionnaire was designed for the EFL teachers to answer. It was decided that it was better for teachers to participate in this research because they are a main source for students' motivation. Moreover, 10 teachers participated in answering the teachers' questionnaire in a population of 17 teachers at the aforementioned department.

To ensure the reliability of the questionnaires, the questionnaires were forwarded to the following members of the experts: Lecturer. Atta Mostafa Hamamrad, head of the scientific committee at the English department; Lecturer: Hedayat Mohammed Ahmed, head of the English department; Lecturer. Hemn Mohammed Ali; and Lecturer. Ikhlās Mahdi Hassan. After their recommendations, necessary adjustments were made to the questionnaires.

The questions were organized to elicit answers related to the student's motivation in learning English. Item one was about what factor in general affected a student's learning motivation. Item two was about the human factor contributing to students' motivation, such as parents, teachers, and classmates. Other items were dedicated to non-human factors affecting students' learning motivation, such as schools' facilities and teaching methodology. The teachers' questionnaire asked about teachers' beliefs about students' motivation. Items included the relation between motivation and learning, teachers positive feedback, learning activities, etc.

Both questionnaires are based on the Likert scale and numbered from 1 representing strongly disagree to 5 representing strongly agree. The students' questionnaire consisted of 11 items: items 1–5 were designed to elicit answers about the teacher's role in increasing students' motivation. On the other hand, questions 6–11 were designed to elicit answers about various teaching methods and their impact on students' motivation.

For the collection of the data, two methods were used: students filled out a printed form of the questionnaire by hand during their resting time, and for the teachers, they were sent a Google Forms link in order to fill it out.

Results were analyzed using the descriptive analysis method and compared with similar study findings. Also, where necessary, results from both the students' answers and teachers' answers were compared and analyzed.

2.5 Factors Affecting Motivation

According to Harmer (1991), there are three major factors that affect students' motivation. These factors are: the teacher, the teaching methods, and physical conditions.

The physical conditions refer to the overall layout of the class where learning takes place; these conditions include furniture arrangement, the atmosphere, heating, teaching materials...etc. Harmer (1991) believes that if a class was poorly lit and had too many students in it, then this would negatively affect students' motivation.

Among the various factors affecting students' motivation, another factor is the teachers themselves and their methods of teaching. A study by Pranawengtias (2022), which explored factors affecting the motivation level of undergraduate students in Indonesia, found out that the level of motivation by the students was affected by the environment of the school, quality of the teachers, and other learning facilities. However, the teachers seem to be the biggest factor that influenced the motivation of the students. A good reason behind this is because of what Davies and Pearse (2000) noted, which is that teacher feedback affects student motivation because they have a clearer idea of the progress of their students. Moreover, students are more drawn towards teachers who foster their motivation as well as teachers who have an interesting methodology.

Another factor affecting L2 learning motivation is integrativeness. This term was mentioned by Gardner and MacIntyre, which describes the willingness of an EFL learner to communicate with members of the target language. (1993). Moreover, according to Gardner, there is a positive correlation between integrativeness and motivation to learn a foreign language. (1985)

Another variable that is linked to motivation in EFL language learning is the use of authentic material for the aforementioned purpose. Authentic materials, according to Nunan (2001), are whatever material is created for purposes other than language teaching. These materials may include video clips, podcasts, newspaper articles, etc. Moreover, according to Guariento and Morley, "They [authentic materials] give the learner the feeling that he or she is learning the 'real' language; that they are in touch with a living entity, the target language as it is used by the community that speaks it." (2001, p.347)

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, the results from the students' questionnaire shall be discussed.

Table 1
Factors positively influencing students' English learning motivation

What factor positively influences your English learning?	Number of students	Percentage
Methods of learning	29	42%
The teachers	21	30.4%
Learning Environment	16	23.1%
The learning materials and curriculum	3	4.3%
Total	69	100%

The results from the first question to the students show that the majority of the students chose option number one, a total of 29 students, which makes up (42%) of the participants. This indicates that methods of learning are the most influential factor in students' English learning motivation. Osigwe and Muogbo (2022) believe learning strategies can be taught and will have a positive effect on learning. Thus, it becomes clear that educators need to constantly develop their methods of teaching, as it is a major factor positively influencing students' language learning. On the other hand, only 3 students (4.3%) believed the learning material and curriculum were positively influential in learning English. This result shows that the students believe both methods of learning and the teachers are the most influential factors affecting their learning motivation.

Moreover, the second most important factor positively influencing students' English learning was the teachers' factor. 30.4% of the students chose teachers as a positive influence on their English learning.

This result goes hand in hand with the results of a similar study by Alhodiry which was conducted on the role of teachers on students' motivation in Libya. The study states that among factors affecting students' motivation; one of the most effective factors is the EFL English teacher. (2016)

Another positive influencer of students' English learning was the learning environment. 23.1% of students chose this factor as having a positive influence on their English learning. According to Mørk et al. (2020), learning environments do have a correlation with learning motivation. We can deduce that the students were mostly influenced by internal factors of the learners, such as methods of learning, rather than external factors such as curriculum.

Table 2.
The human factor positively influences students' English learning motivation

What human factor positively influences your English learning?	Number of students	Percent age
Parents	15	21.7%
English teachers	35	50.7%
Classmates	19	27.5%
Total	69	100%

The particular above item was dedicated to the human factor. As it is obvious from Table 2, English teachers had the utmost influence on the students' English learning. Out of 69 students, 35 said English teachers had the most influence on their English learning. This figure amounts to 50.7 % of all the participants. According to Schuitema, Peetsma and van der Veen (2016), "Teachers play an important role in providing a learning environment that supports students' basic needs to become motivated." The other influential factor on students' English learning was classmates. According to the survey, 27.5% is the second most chosen answer. The last human factor positively influencing students' English learning was parents. Only 15 students chose this option, which is about 21% of the total number of participants. According to the participants, this factor has the lowest impact on students' motivation among the other aforementioned factors.

Table 3.
Factors that positively influenced your English learning

Choose the factor that positively influenced your English learning	Number of students	Percentage
School Facilities	4	5.7%
Textbooks	16	23%
Teaching Methods	17	24.6%
Learning Experiences	32	46.3%
Total	69	100%

According to Table 3, the most influential factor on English learning is the learning experience. 32 students out of 69 deemed this factor as the most influential, which amounts to 46.3% of the participants. Next on the table of the most influential factors in English learning was teaching methods. 24.6% of the participants agreed that teaching methods have a positive influence on the English learning of students. According to Harmer (1991), one of the factors affecting students' motivation is the teaching method used by teachers. The third most influential factor in English learning in Table 3 was textbooks. 16 students believed textbooks had a positive influence on

their English learning, which amounts to 23% of the participants. This shows that appropriate textbooks could have a positive effect on students' English learning. On the other hand, ineffective textbooks can have a negative effect on students' English learning. The least influential

factor affecting students' English learning was school facilities. Only 4 students out of 69 agreed that school facilities had a positive influence on their English learning. It is important for both teachers and administrators and all parties involved in the educational process to create a positive learning experience for the students.

Table 4.
Characteristics of a good teacher

What are the characteristics of a good teacher? Who is a good teacher?	Number of students	Percentage
They use good teaching methods	27	39%
They have good personalities	9	13%
They have good relationships with students	28	40.5%
They manage the class effectively	5	7%

As it is clear from Table 4, the most influential positive characteristic of a teacher, according to the students, is the existence of a good relationship between the teacher and the students. 28 students out of 69 agreed with this, which makes up 40.5% of the participants. This result, in particular, shows us the significance of having a good relationship between the teacher and the students in order for students' motivation to be positively affected. Moreover, and according to the results, the second most influential factor was the use of good teaching methods; 39% of all participants, which makes up 27 participants out of 69, believed this to be true. The next most influential factor affecting students' learning motivation was that teachers have a good personality. Only 9 participants, which makes up 13% of them, believed this to be true. The last factor affecting students' motivation about teachers was whether they manage the class effectively or not. Only 5 students out of 69 believed this option to be true, which makes up 7% of the participants. Thus, it can be deduced that EFL teachers need to build a professional and, all in all, good relationship with the students. If this relationship is built, then there will be a positive influence on the students' motivation.

Table 5
Tasks and exercises in the textbook

What do you think about the exercises and tasks in the textbook?	Number of students	Percentage
They are very difficult	8	11.5%
They are difficult	23	33.3%
They are easy	35	50.7%
They are very easy	3	4.3%

According to these results in Table 5, most of the participants believed that the exercises were easy. 35 participants, which makes up about 50% of the participants, agreed with this option. On the other hand, 23 students believed the exercises to be difficult, which is 33.3% of the participants. Moreover, only 8 students believed the exercises to be very difficult, which is 11.5% of the participants. And only 3 students believed the exercises to be very easy. Relating to this subject is the research of Littlejohn (2008) on one of the major responsibilities of the teacher is the motivation of students. The way that the teacher can use to do this is by creating activities to stimulate motivation. They can also tell students the value of the activities they are supposed to conduct. This has been shown to increase students' motivation about the exercises.

Table 6
The importance of motivational activities for learning English

Do you think motivational activities are important for learning English?	Number of students	Percentage
They are very necessary	42	60.8%
They are necessary	22	31.8%
They are not necessary	5	7.2%
They are not very necessary	0	0%

According to the results from table 6, which contains the answers to an item asking students about the importance or unimportance of motivational activities, the answers are as follows: 60 % said they were very necessary and 31 % said they are necessary which means over 80% of them agree that motivational activities are important for learning the English language.

Next, the results from the teacher's questionnaire shall be looked at:

To simplify the main factors affecting and influencing Kurdish EFL college students' motivation from the viewpoint of the teachers, the results from their questionnaire were categorized based on similar factors. The main categories were factors related to students and class and factors related to teachers themselves. The following table clarifies the results along with the mean and percentage of answers.

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Table 7
Results from teachers' questionnaire

Items	Strongly disagree (1)		Disagree (2)		Neutral (3)		Agree (4)		Strongly agree (5)		mean
1. Motivation has a positive influence on students' learning efficiency.	0	%0	0	%0	0	%0	1	%10	9	%90	4.9
2. Involving students in making decisions concerning the choice of textbook and class activities will increase their motivation.	0	%0	0	%0	1	%10	9	%90	0	%0	3.9
3. Anti-traditional class activities like role play, language games can better motivate students to learn EFL.	0	%0	0	%0	1	%10	6	%60	3	%30	4.2
4. Exposing students to authentic material in English (e.g., movies, dramas, TV programs, etc.) can increase students' motivation.	0	%0	0	%0	0	%0	8	%80	2	%20	4.2
5. Giving students the opportunity to meet native speakers of English can positively influence students' motivation.	0	%0	0	%0	0	%0	7	%70	3	%30	4.3
6. Giving the students morale (e.g., praising), or simple material rewards (e.g., clapping) will improve their learning motivation.	0	%0	0	%0	1	%10	9	%90	0	%0	3.9
7. Teachers play a major role in positively affecting students' motivation.	0	%0	0	%0	0	%0	6	%60	4	%40	4.4
8. To increase students' motivation, Teachers should teach students strategies of self-learning.	0	%0	0	%0	2	%20	8	%80	0	%0	3.8
9. Teachers should focus on areas where students have a low learning performance in order to increase students' motivation.	0	%0	0	%0	1	%10	8	%80	1	%10	4.0
10. If teachers understood the mechanisms of motivation, they can better motivate their students.	0	%0	0	%0	0	%0	7	%70	3	%30	4.3
11. Involving students in class competitions or races can motivate students.	0	%0	0	%0	0	%0	9	%90	1	%10	4.1
12. Publishing the profiles of superior students on class or school websites can motivate other students to perform better.	0	%0	0	%0	5	%50	3	%30	2	%20	3.7

Concerning the first category related to class management and class activities, the results show a clear correlation between the effect of motivation of learning via techniques such as student-centered decision-making; learning games, the use of authentic materials, interaction with native speakers, and the promotion of healthy competition. The result's Mean ranges from 3.9 to 4.9. more specifically, teachers believed that using authentic material such as TV shows and movies can have an immense positive influence on the level of EFL students' motivation.; 80 percent of teachers said they strongly agree with such a statement with a Mean of 4.2.

Moreover, the results related to teachers themselves show us teachers have a great effect on motivation students. The results ranged from 3.9 to 4.1. to be precise, when teachers were asked whether they had a major role in positively affecting EFL learners' motivation, all the teachers said they agreed or strongly agreed with a Mean of 4.4.

Item 12 of the questionnaire results was different because the respondents answered neutral by 50% and the other half divided between agree and strongly agree with a Mean of 3.7. thus, we can state that according to

the teachers publishing the profiles of superior students on class or school websites does not motivate students to perform better as much as other ways of motivating students.

5. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the factors influencing the motivation of Kurdish undergraduate students who learn English as a foreign language (EFL). The results indicated that factors such as: human factors (the teachers), learning environment, and type of activities influence the motivation of the students, to a great extent. To be concise, EFL learners believed that the teacher had the most influence on their level of motivation among other human factors such as parents or classmates. These findings underscore the need for motivation in order to increase EFL motivation in learning. These insights suggest that the teachers should consider these factors when they design the teaching method and class activities to increase learning outcomes. Future research should explore the detail and procedure of the motivation

factors.

On the other hand, the results from the teacher's questionnaire, to be precise, indicated that similar to the EFL learners, the teachers themselves also believe that they play a key role in motivating their EFL learners, hence, prompting a better learning output. Moreover, teachers also believe they need to understand the mechanisms of motivation in order to be able to utilize it in their teaching practices. Another belief teachers have about motivation is that giving praise to students, i.e. motivating them extrinsically by simple encouraging words, has a great influence on the level of the student's motivation.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the results, the following suggestions can be put forward for both teachers and educational administrators:

1- Methods of teaching need to be updated in a way that takes motivational effects into consideration by the students. Of course, the methods of teaching should be designed in a way that increases the level of students' motivation to its optimum level.

2- The teachers are one of the most influential factors affecting the motivation level of EFL students. Thus, teachers need to reflect on the way they manage classes, and teachers can also ask for feedback from both students and administrators to see whether the way they manage their classes is productive towards the increase of EFL learner motivation or not. After that, they can take corrective actions to get the required result.

3- Another way teachers can improve students' motivation is by improving the class environment. This can be done by creating an atmosphere where teachers and students have an open environment for teaching and learning. This also implies that necessary school facilities and class equipment need to be available.

4- Learning material and curriculum, although in this study seems to be less important than other factors influencing Kurdish EFL learners' motivation, that still have their value. Thus, teachers and administrators need to revise their curriculum, design it and implement it in a way that meets the needs of students' motivation.

5- Besides teachers, Other human factors influence EFL learners' motivation. One factor is the parents; parents need to keep a close eye on their students to see whether they are motivated or not and try to solve any problems their students may have. Moreover, classmates have some effect among each other on their learning motivation. Both teachers and administrators can have a positive influence to create solidarity and a conducive atmosphere among classmates.

6- Motivational activities need to be taken into account when designing class activities and then

implementing them during class time.

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