

Friends' Impact on Learners' Motivation to Learn the English Language: Kurdish EFL Learners' Attitudes

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ABSTRACT

Motivation is vital in specifying learners' willingness and eagerness to communicate. Also, can be a blend of effort, longing to gain the goal of acquiring the language, and positive perceptions of learning the language. This study aims to investigate the impact of friends on Kurdish EFL learners' motivation to learn the English language and to understand the extent to which they improve their language proficiency through friends. To achieve this, a questionnaire was utilized to collect the necessary data from 80 students in college of Education/ English Language Department/Knowledge University. The questionnaire contained 25 items aimed to explore their attitudes regarding their friends' role in motivating them to learn English. The data was analyzed through Microsoft Excel to provide in-depth results. The findings of the study revealed that friends have a role in motivating their peers to learn and improve their English language proficiency. Moreover, the results showed that learners can acquire the language better when they speak English with their friends. Concerning improving learners' language skills, the findings also indicated that friends could create a friendly environment for practicing the language. Additionally, the study demonstrated that students prefer learning and practicing the English language with the support of their peers rather than teachers.

Keywords: Motivation, EFL learners, Friends, English language, language skills.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Motivation is a crucial factor in language learning (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011). Learning the language outside the classroom from different sources such as family or friends has an impact on improving your language (Palfreyman, 2011). According to Dornyei and Csizer (2012), motivation is a key factor in language acquisition, and learners who are motivated are more likely to engage in language learning activities and

persist in their efforts. Moreover, a study by Yang and Guo (2018) found that support, particularly from friends, can significantly impact learners' motivation in language acquisition. Many students face issues in improving their language; motivation is believed to be one of the elements that affect the language-learning process. Consequently, learners attend to ask or practice language skills with their friends, and when they see bright results, they become more motivated to improve their language. In a general sense, learners seem to face difficulties or lack opportunities to practice or improve their language with their teachers; therefore, classmates are seen as an option to practice their language with. The importance of the current study lies mainly in its significant area of research where it contributes to local context literature and explores a significant issue of how to improve language. The results of the study will provide valuable insights for language educators, helping them design interventions that leverage the power of peer support to enhance learning outcomes

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and create a sense of community and belonging for language learners. There have been a few studies conducted on the role of motivation in English language learning in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq but none of them, to the researcher's best knowledge, are about peers' role in motivating their friends inside the classroom in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. The study aims to investigate a better understanding of the impact of friends on EFL learners' motivation and inform language teaching practices. This research is guided by the below research questions:

1. What are Kurdish EFL learners' attitudes towards friends' impact on motivation to learn the English language?
2. To what extent friends can impact EFL learners' improvement of the English language?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of EFL learners

English foreign learners (EFL), is a term that refers to those learners who are learning English in non-English countries. EFL learners encounter distinctive obstacles in developing their language proficiency due to limited opportunities to use the language beyond the classroom, especially in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Omar & Barzani, 2022). These difficulties can make it hard for learners to attain communicative competence and affect their motivation to continue learning the language. Furthermore, EFL instruction can differ significantly depending on the learners' context and objectives, which can impact their language development (Leung & Street, 2017).

2.2 Motivation in Language Learning

Crookes and Schmidt (1991) define motivation as a learner's orientation toward learning a second language. Elliot (1999) suggests that motivation is what drives people's actions, desires, and needs. Furthermore, Pardee (1990) defines a motive as something that encourages a person to act in a certain way. Gardner (1985) describes motivation as a combination of attempt, desire, and favorable attitudes toward learning a language. Oxford and Shearin (1994) define motivation as a desire to achieve an objective, combined with the energy to work towards it. Narayanan (2006) states that motivation is the reason behind one's actions or behaviors. Guay et al. (2010) suggest that motivation is the underlying reason for the behavior. Broussard and Garrison (2004) define motivation as an attribute that either compels or discourages us from acting. Dörnyei

(1998) added to this by defining intrinsic motivation as engaging in an activity because it is enjoyable, and extrinsic motivation as performing actions to achieve instrumental aims. Brown (2000) and Gardner (1985) identified two main types of motivation in language learning: integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation involves learning a language for personal growth and cultural enrichment, while instrumental motivation involves learning a language for functional or external reasons such as passing exams or financial rewards. Furthermore, it is significant to note that these types of motivation are not mutually exclusive, and learners may have a mixture of integrative and instrumental motivations. Furthermore, intrinsic motivation can also be integrative or instrumental depending on the learner's goals. The success of language learning cannot be attributed solely to one type of motivation, as different contexts may require different types of motivation for success (Dörnyei, 1998). Moreover, Deci (1975) also discussed the degree to which learners are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. Intrinsic motivation involves engaging in tasks for their own sake, while extrinsic motivation involves anticipating rewards or avoiding punishment. It is possible for punishment avoidance to also be viewed as a challenge that can lead to feelings of proficiency and self-determination. English learners are required to improve their language proficiency which includes, reading, writing, listening, and speaking in order to utilize them in various contexts and situations.

2.3 Friends' Role in Learning the English Language

Peer pressure from friends can lead to a positive effect on language learning if friends encourage and motivate each other to improve their language skills. A study by Hu et al. (2017) found that peer support can lead to significant improvements. In English language proficiency, additionally, language exposure from friends who are fluent in English is crucial to language learning outcomes. Ellis and Shintani (2013) suggest that exposure to authentic language use in social settings can lead to better language learning outcomes. Moreover, friends can also influence social identity and language use. If an individual's friends identify strongly with the English language and culture, they may encourage and promote the use of English in social situations, leading to increased motivation and engagement in language learning (Kim & Elder, 2020). However, social norms related to language use can also be influenced by friends. Trofimovich et al. (2018) found that social norms and expectations influenced second language pronunciation, indicating that friends who use non-

standard English can negatively impact language learning.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

To collect the required data, a quantitative method was utilized as the primary means of answering the research questions. The use of a quantitative method was chosen because it allows for the collection of numerical data from many participants within a short period of time. Additionally, the data analysis process for a quantitative method is more effective. In this study, data was gathered from 80 learners, and the analysis is presented directly. To obtain data through a quantitative method, the researchers employed a survey.

3.2 Participants and Setting

The purpose of this research is to explore university students' attitudes towards the impact of friends on learners' motivation to learn English language at university. To achieve this goal, a survey was conducted among English Department students at Knowledge University on how students' motivation can be a factor in assisting students in improving their language. A total of 80 students from different stages and genders participated in the survey who were asked to answer questions based on their experience with their instructors and to choose from the provided answers.

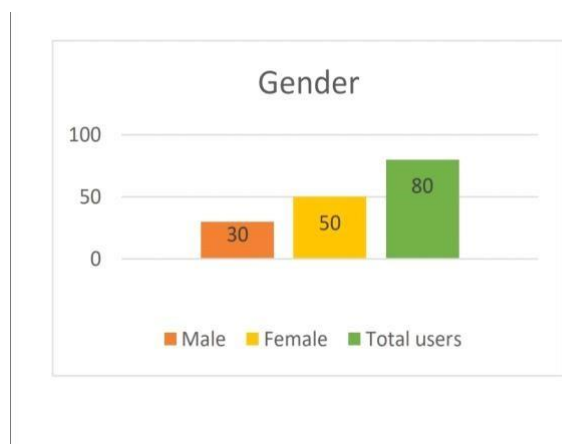


Figure 1: Gender

As shown in Figure 1, 80 learners took part in this study; 50 of them were females who constituted (62.5%) of the total participants. On the other hand, 30 learners were males which, in their turn, constituted (37.5%) of the total participants.

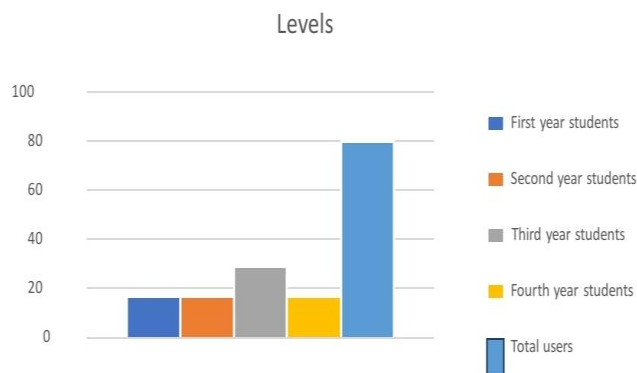


Figure 2: Stages of Students

The 80 participants of the survey were from different levels of Knowledge University students/English Department, based on the data provided, most participants (36.25%) are in level three, followed by levels one, two, and four (each with 21.25% of participants).

3.3 Research Instrument

A survey consists of three pages was distributed to students for completion. The initial page focused on a consonant format that provided a short introduction to the research and its objectives. Subsequently, the second page of the survey required students to select their gender and educational level. The third page comprised the survey questions. It should be noted that the only personal inquiry posed to the students was regarding their gender. In addition, the survey consisted of 25 questions that focused on various aspects to determine the influence of friends on learners' motivation to acquire proficiency in the English language. Each question had a specific objective, and students were asked to rate their agreement or disagreement on a five-point scale, where 1 indicates "strongly disagree," 2 represents "disagree," 3 is "neutral," 4 denotes "agree," and 5 indicates "strongly agree". The questions were about various aspects of friends' influence on motivating their peers to learn the English language. For instance, items (1-5) pertained to how students could enhance their English proficiency with their friends' assistance. Furthermore, items (6-10) aimed to determine whether communicating with friends had a greater impact than communicating with others and how instructors could make learning English easier for students. Following that, items (11-19) asked how a friend's motivation could improve a student's English language proficiency,

categorized by the student’s academic levels, ranging from high to low. Finally, items (21-25) examined how friends could help students in developing their language skills and enhance their English proficiency.

3. Data Collection Procedures

Regarding the procedure, it took approximately ten days to collect the required data from 80 participants as they were from various stages (UG1, UG2, UG3, and UG4) at Knowledge University. Additionally, the survey was designed so that students would not be confused when answering the survey. First, it began with a consonant form to conform to research study guidelines and provide an introduction that clearly articulated the research questions. Furthermore, the survey questions were straightforward and could be completed within ten minutes.

3.5 Data Analysis

To ensure the reliability of the results, Microsoft Excel (version 23) were used for statistical analysis. The software tools were beneficial in organizing and visualizing the data, creating charts and graphs, and drafting the final report. The use of these old-fashioned tools highlights the researchers’ commitment to using technology in their research and contributes to the accurate and dependable results obtained through the quantitative research method.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

To check the validity of the instrument items, the instrument was given to three college teachers holding Ph.D. degrees. The first test was Cronbach’s Alpha in order to figure out whether the questionnaire items were reliable or not. Moreover, the results must show 0.7 or above to indicate the reliability of your items.

Table 1: Reliability Test

<i>Reliability Statistics</i>	
Cronbach's Alpha	0.933
N of Items	25

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4. RESULTS

4.1 Kurdish EFL learners’ attitudes towards friends’ impact on their motivation to learn English

In the following tables, researchers divided the survey into several categories based on their relation to each other. To begin with, the first category is devoted to explaining students’ attitudes toward learning English with friends. The second category is set to talk about attitudes toward practicing English with friends among the learners. Furthermore, in the third category, we demonstrated the results regarding the role of friends’ support in language learning. Finally, the last category shows the friends’ role in developing language skills.

Table 2: Students’ attitudes towards learning English with friends

1- I really like learning English.	1.25%	1.25%	6.25%	43.75%	47.50%
2- I don't like to communicate in English with my friends because they are not aware of my language needs and difficulties.	16.88%	49.35%	14.29%	16.88%	2.60%
3- A friend could be more helpful in improving the English language.	0.00%	2.50%	10.00%	55.00%	32.50%
4- Speaking English language with my friends is inspiring.	1.25%	3.75%	20.00%	63.75%	11.25%
5- I would be more motivated to learn if my friends always spoke English with me.	0.00%	8.75%	6.25%	38.75%	46.25%

The above table shows the results of five items in the questionnaire that are related to students' attitudes regarding learning English with friends. "For the first statement, "I really like learning English," most respondents (91.25%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. This suggests that the group has a positive attitude toward learning English.

For the second statement, "I don't like to communicate in English with my friends because they are not aware of my language needs and difficulties," almost two-thirds (65.23%) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. This suggests that the group is generally comfortable communicating in English with their friends. The third statement, "A friend could be more helpful in improving the English language," was agreed or strongly agreed with by a majority (87.50%) of respondents. This suggests that the group believes

that friends can play a role in helping them improve their English. The fourth statement, "Speaking English languages with my friends is inspiring," was agreed or strongly agreed with by a large majority (75%) of respondents. This suggests that the group finds speaking English with their friends to be a positive and motivating experience. Finally, the fifth statement, "I would be more motivated to learn if my friends always spoke English with me," was agreed or strongly agreed with by almost half (85%) of respondents. This suggests that the group believes that their friends speaking English with them would be a strong motivator for their language learning. The data provide insights into attitudes towards learning and communicating in English, as well as the role of friends in language learning.

Table 3: Attitudes towards practicing English with friends

Results in Percentage					
Row Labels	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
6- My friends cannot give me feedback because they are not Experienced.	5.00%	32.50%	27.50%	31.25%	3.75%
7- I like to practice more with my friends because the environment is more friendly.	0.00%	6.42%	7.34%	43.12%	43.12%
8- I can learn better English if I speak more with my friends.	1.25%	3.75%	10.00%	50.00%	35.00%
9- I can express myself better in English when speaking with my friends.	1.25%	8.75%	18.75%	50.00%	21.25%
10- I prefer to practice English with my friends because they know more about my interests.	3.75%	13.75%	18.75%	53.75%	10.00%

The data presented in the above table represents the attitudes of individuals towards practicing English with their friends. The overall results show that many respondents hold positive attitudes towards practicing English with their friends. In response to the statement "My friends cannot give me feedback because they are not experienced," the results show that a relatively low percentage of respondents strongly disagreed (5.00%), while most respondents either agreed (31.25%) or were neutral (27.50%). This suggests that while some individuals may prioritize

feedback from experienced sources, on the other side, some are open to receiving feedback from their friends, even if they may not be experienced.

The statement "I like to practice more with my friends because the environment is more friendly" received overwhelmingly positive responses, with (43.12%) of respondents agreeing and (43.12%) strongly agreeing. This suggests that individuals feel more comfortable practicing English with their friends, possibly due to a sense of familiarity and support that encourages individuals to take risks and make mistakes without fear of judgment. Furthermore, to the statement "I can

learn better English if I speak more with my friends," most respondents agreed (50.00%) or strongly agreed (35.00%), indicating that many individuals believe practicing English with friends is an effective way to improve their language skills. Similarly, in response to the statement "I can express myself better in English when speaking with my friends," the majority of respondents agreed (50.00%) or strongly agreed (21.25%), suggesting that practicing English with friends may be a beneficial way for individuals to gain confidence in expressing themselves in English.

Finally, in response to the statement "I prefer to practice English with my friends because they know more about my interests," many respondents agreed (53.75%), indicating that individuals may feel more engaged in practicing English with their friends if the conversations are related to their interests. Overall, these results suggest that individuals hold positive attitudes towards practicing English with their friends and believe it to be an effective way to improve their language skills and gain confidence in expressing themselves.

Table 4: The Role of Peer Support in Language Learning

Results in Percentage					
Row Labels	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
11- Hearing a classmate speak English well motivates me to speak the language more.	0.00%	3.75%	7.50%	55.00%	33.75%
12- I wish I could have many English-speaking friends.	0.00%	7.50%	8.75%	55.00%	28.75%
13- Friends cannot be motivated to improve my language.	17.50%	52.50%	10.00%	15.00%	5.00%
14- Honestly, I have little interest in speaking English with my friends.	7.50%	35.00%	12.50%	37.50%	7.50%
15- I feel more confident when speaking with my friends in English.	2.50%	7.50%	20.00%	55.00%	15.00%
16- Speaking English with my friends encourages me to Communicate in English.	1.25%	6.25%	12.50%	63.75%	16.25%
17- I feel anxious whenever I have to speak with my friends in English.	11.25%	32.50%	17.50%	35.00%	3.75%
18- I feel embarrassed to speak English in front of my friends.	18.75%	35.00%	15.00%	22.50%	8.75%
19- I sometimes face cultural difficulties when speaking English with my friends.	8.75%	20.00%	22.50%	43.75%	5.00%

Table 3 shows the responses to the category of friends' role in language learning. The item 'Hearing a classmate speak English well motivates me to speak the language more' shows that most respondents

(88.75%) either agreed or strongly agreed. However, a small percentage of respondents (3.75%) disagreed. Additionally, the following item, 'I wish I could have many English-speaking friends' demonstrates that 80% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed.

However, 7.5% of respondents disagreed. In the point 'Friends cannot be motivated to improve my language' a significant percentage of respondents (70%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. However, a sizable minority (32.5%) agreed or strongly agreed. However, the responses to item 14 'Honestly, I have little interest in speaking English with my friends' were relatively evenly split. While 37.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had little interest in speaking English with their friends, an almost equal percentage (42.5%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Furthermore, in the items, 'I feel more confident when speaking with my friends in English' most respondents (70%) either agreed or strongly agreed that they feel more confident when speaking with their friends in English. However, 10% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. In the point 'Speaking English with my friends encourages me to communicate in English', over three-quarters of respondents (80%) agreed or strongly agreed that speaking English with their friends encourages them to communicate in English more. However, a small percentage (7.5%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Moreover, in the next item 'I feel anxious whenever I have to speak with my friends in English' the responses to this question were

more evenly split than some of the others. While 38.75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they feel anxious when speaking with their friends in English, 38.75% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. In the point 'I feel embarrassed to speak English in front of my friends', over half of the respondents (53.75%) agreed or strongly agreed that they feel embarrassed to speak English in front of their friends. This is a relatively high percentage and suggests that embarrassment is a common barrier to speaking English with friends. However, it is worth noting that almost a third of respondents (31.25%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. In addition, the item 'I sometimes face cultural difficulties when speaking English with my friends' shows that over 65% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they sometimes face cultural difficulties when speaking English with their friends. However, it is worth noting that almost a quarter of respondents (22.5%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

4.2 EFL learners' English language improvement by their friends

Table 5: The Role of Friends in Developing Language Skills

Results in Percentage					
Row Labels	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
20- A friend can increase engagement in speaking skills.	0.00%	6.25%	21.25%	68.75%	3.75%
21- A friend can encourage listening skills.	5.00%	8.75%	12.50%	68.75%	5.00%
22- A friend can build interest to learn grammar Better.	3.75%	20.00%	18.75%	53.75%	3.75%
23- A friend can contribute to learning vocabulary.	0.00%	8.75%	26.25%	56.25%	8.75%
24- A friend can assist in learning writing skills.	1.25%	23.75%	12.50%	50.00%	12.50%
25- A friend can enhance learning reading skills.	1.25%	12.50%	26.25%	52.50%	7.50%

The data provided in the above table presents the percentage of responses for each level of agreement with six items related to the impact of

a friend on English language learning skills. The highest percentage of agreement was observed for the statement "A friend can increase engagement in speaking skills" with 68.75% of respondents agreeing. Similarly, the statement "A friend can encourage listening skills" was also well-received with 68.75% of respondents agreeing. This indicates that friends can play a crucial role in helping learners develop their listening skills. In addition, 56.25% of learners agreed with this item "A friend can contribute to learning vocabulary". However, the statement "A friend can assist in learning writing skills" received a relatively lower percentage of agreement (50%), indicating that friends may be as effective in improving writing skills compared to other language skills. Overall, the data suggests that friends can have a positive impact on language learning, particularly in improving speaking and listening skills and expanding vocabulary.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Role of friends in learning the English language

The presented results indicate that friends have a significant role in learning the English language. According to the data from the survey, the majority of respondents had a positive attitude toward learning and communicating in English with their friends. For instance, most participants (91.25%) agreed or strongly agreed that they like learning English. Moreover, a majority (87.50%) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that friends can be more helpful in improving their English language skills. The study also found that practicing English with friends is inspiring for many individuals. For example, 75% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that speaking English with their friends is inspiring, while 85% agreed or strongly agreed that they would be more motivated to learn if their friends spoke English with them. These findings are consistent with a similar study conducted by Huang (2018) that investigated the impact of peer feedback on English writing proficiency. The study found that peer feedback had a significant positive effect on students' writing proficiency. Similarly, the study by Widyastuti et al. (2019) found that social support, including support from friends, had a significant positive impact on English language learning among Indonesian students. The results of the survey suggest that friends have a crucial role in learning the English language and practicing English with friends can

be inspiring and motivating for many individuals. These findings are consistent with previous research on the importance of social support and peer feedback in language learning.

5.2 Friends' impact on improving EFL learners' English language

The data presented here shows that friends can have a positive impact on language learning, particularly when it comes to improving motivation and providing a friendly environment for practicing the language. These findings suggest that friends can be a valuable resource for language learners and can contribute to a more positive attitude toward learning and practicing the language. It means that learners can improve their English by practicing it with their friends and not be afraid of making mistakes, and it also shows that during speaking and practicing English with their friends they will be motivated to learn the English language. A similar study conducted by Liu and Littlewood (1997) investigated the role of social factors, including friends, in language learning motivation among Chinese students studying English in the UK. The study found that friendships played an important role in language learning motivation, particularly in terms of providing emotional support and creating opportunities for language practice. Similarly, the current data suggest that friends can have a positive impact on language learning motivation and provide a supportive environment for practicing the language. However, the current data focus specifically on attitudes towards learning and practicing English with friends, while Liu and Littlewood's study explores a broader range of social factors that contribute to language learning motivation.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is important to note that the findings of this study are consistent with previous research on the importance of social support and peer feedback in language learning. This study showed that learners who are motivated and supported by friends are more likely to engage in language learning activities and persist in their efforts. Also, friends can provide language practice, feedback, and reinforcement opportunities, act as role models, and create a sense of community and belongingness. Furthermore, the study's results suggest that practicing English with friends can inspire learners and improve their attitudes towards

learning. This finding is particularly significant because attitude and motivation are critical factors in language learning success. Learners who are motivated and have a positive attitude towards language learning are more likely to persist in their efforts and achieve higher levels of proficiency. The study also has implications for language educators. Language educators can use the findings of this research to enhance learning results by creating a sense of community among themselves that help language learners develop their English language skills. For example, language educators can encourage learners to form study groups and practice their language skills with their peers. Educators can also incorporate group projects, discussions, and activities into their language learning curriculum to encourage social interaction and peer feedback. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on the role of friends in language learning. The findings highlight the importance of incorporating support into language learning programs and practices to enhance learners' overall language learning experience. By creating a supportive environment for language learners, friends can help learners develop positive attitudes towards language learning and achieve higher levels of proficiency.

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