

# The Motivating Factors of EFL Young Learners in North Cyprus

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## Abstract

Motivation plays a very effective role in teaching foreign languages. It has been suggested that the use of motivation can help in facilitating learning English. This study investigated the motivating factors for young learners in North Cyprus. The researcher aimed to find out the most motivating factor(s) for learning English for grade five pupils at a primary school in North Cyprus. The results show that there are many motivating factors that positively affect the learners' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language. Learners are motivated with many different factors: intrinsically, extrinsically, instrumentally, or integratively.

**Keywords:** young learners, EFL, motivation, English learning, games

## 1. Introduction

Learning foreign languages has been a very important issue since the middle of the twentieth century with the emergence of new methodologies that have concentrated on what the learner needs and how he/she acquires the language (Richards, 2017). As the research process in foreign languages has gone on, a critical issue arose about learners' motivation. Dornyei (2009) suggests that there is a strong relationship between motivation and Second Language Acquisition. Melendy (2008) suggests that motivation plays a vital role in helping learners of L2 succeed and improve. According to Hall (2011) "It is difficult to imagine anyone learning a language without some degree of motivation" (p. 134)

## 2. Literature Review

The field of foreign language learning has been widely studied, and the literature considers that beside the variables of the learners' ability to learn, there are other variables that affect the language learning; these variables include the social and cultural contexts, curriculums and learning goals, learners styles, learning activities, teacher's role, and others (Dörnyei, 2006;

Jantscher and Landsiedler, 2000; Lightbown and Spada, 2003; Singleton and Ryan, 2004). One of these variables is motivation, which determines the way the learner learns (Alexander & Murphy, 1998; Boekaerts, 2001; Dörnyei and Otto, 1998; Figueiredo and Silva, 2008; Gardner, 2001; Jarvela, 2003; Jurišević, 2013; Weinstein, 1998).

Loewen and Reinders (2011) define motivation as "a psychological construct that refers to the desire and incentive that an individual has to engage in a specific activity" (p. 119). Dornyei (2006), however, suggests that motivation is more related to language learning; "it provides the primary impetus to initiate L2 learning and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process". Therefore, motivation is a key factor at the beginning of learning L2, and it continues to develop the language till it achieves its goals.

Motivation is divided into two main types, intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic motivation is when there is no apparent reward except the activity itself (Deci, 1975). The learner feels that the activity itself is a good reason to learn. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation refers to the activity where money, prizes, grades, etc. are expected (Brown, 2007). Dornyei's Foreign Language Motivation Model (2001) has suggested that there are two other kinds of motivation: instrumental and integrative motivation. The model consists of three components, which are: the language, learner, and learning situation (p. 113).

Two other types of motivation are integrative and instrumental motivation, which were identified by Lambert (1974). The integrative motivation refers to a language learner who has "a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other language group" (Lambert, 1974; p. 98). The instrumental motivation, on the other hand, makes the learner have a "practical value and advantages of learning a new language". (Lambert, 1974; p. 98).

Teaching foreign languages to young learners is becoming a frequent addition to the educational curricula worldwide, as students are embarking on the journey "at younger and younger ages" (Shin & Crandall, 2014). Young learners in non-speaking communities might

lack the intrinsic motivation for learning a foreign language.

"..... Since young learners do not have direct contact with native speakers of the target-language culture nor do they have the urgency of getting a good job or entering higher education. Hence their attitudes and motivation towards target-language learning are mainly dominated by learning situations." (Huang, 2011)

According to Richards (2001), "for many young learners, learning English for use in the classroom becomes the primary goal, and the activities and experiences provided in the classroom serve as both means and ends of learning." Therefore, the extrinsic motivation should be a key factor when teaching young learners a foreign language. Language learners need to be motivated to a certain extent for their motivated behaviors to occur. They also need to be confirmed that teachers' motivational practices are linked to learners' motivated behaviors (Cheng & Dornyei, 2007). Young learners have no direct reason to learn a foreign language; they don't need it for communication or even getting a job. However, Cameron (2001) found that "children who have an early start develop and maintain advantages in some, but not all, areas of language skills.... Listening comprehension benefits the most ... pronunciation also benefits in the longer term."

Jurišević and Pižorn (2013) found in their study over children in Slovenia that young learners were motivated intrinsically, rather than extrinsically, to learn foreign languages; learners wanted to learn the language because they want to understand it (to speak the language, read stories in the language, etc.) rather than because they all learn it in the class. Furthermore, half of the young learners in the study expressed their relaxation in learning foreign languages in general, no matter what the tasks and strategies are, while only 25% of the population of the study said that they like to learn foreign languages when they play.

It can be clearly noticed that the young participants of Jurišević & Pižorn have an integrative motivation as the main source of power to learn foreign languages, rather than the extrinsic motivation. However, integrative motivation is more related to adults rather than kids.

In a post-colonial country such as Northern Cyprus, there might be a kind of social interpretation for learning English as a foreign language, which is considered to be one of the aspects of integrative motivation (Dornyei & Schimidt, 2001; p. 2).

### **3. Data Collection**

This study aimed to examine the way the young learners in North Cyprus are motivated to learn English as a foreign language. The study adapted a questionnaire designed by Jurisevic and Pizorn's study (2013). The questionnaire was translated in Turkish using the translation and back translation method to ensure the reliability of the survey.

This study was conducted in 'Gazi Primary School' in Famagusta, Northern Cyprus. It is a public school that contains learners from many different socio-economic backgrounds. Some of the learners are poor and have low-educated parents. 42 pupils in grade 5, between the age of 11 and 12, responded to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was given to the pupils, and the English teacher helped those who needed more clarification about their answers.

As the learners are under 18, a consent form was sent to their parents to get their permission for the data collection process. After the data collection, the researcher used the SPSS

program to analyze the data. The author used SPSS to calculate the results of the questionnaires. The researcher used SPSS 22nd edition and used the descriptive analysis to get the frequencies of the answers.

#### 4. Results

The study focused on investigating the motivating factors of learning English in public primary schools. The motivation was analyzed through investigating the preference of learning English by the learners and their feelings about the English lessons, the difficulty and interestingness of English, their goal of learning English, and their self-evaluation of their level of English.

The pupils answered the first question “Do you like learning English?”, and the result shows that 76.2% of the students like English, 21.4% quite like it, while only 2.4% don’t like it. (Table 1)

Table 1. Interest in English language

	Percent
Yes	76.2
Quite	21.4
No	2.4

Table 2 shows the learners’ perceptions about the best way they learn English. The results show that 4.9% like English lessons when they talk, 26.8% when they read and write, 14.6 % when they sing and dance, and 9.8 % when they play. 41.5 % of the pupils say that they like English all the time, no matter what the exercise is.

On the other hand, the pupils’ expressed their opinion about the activity where they feel worst about learning English (Table 3). The results show that 28.6% felt worst when talking, 11.9% when reading and writing, 9.5 when singing and dancing, 21.4% when playing, 16.7% all the time.

Table 2. Favorite activity in learning English

	Percent
When we talk.	4.9
When we read and write.	26.8
When we sing and dance.	14.6
When we play.	9.8
It is always nice.	41.5
Something else	2.4

Table 3. Not favored activity in learning English

	Percent
When we talk.	28.6
When we read and write.	11.9
When we sing and dance.	9.5
When we play.	21.4
It is always nice.	16.7
Something else	11.9

In table 4, the pupils express their reasons behind learning English. 15% learn it because it is a school subject, 42.5% because they would like to understand English (e.g. to understand cartoons, books, songs, films, etc.), 20% because they like English, 15% because they want to satisfy their parents, and 7.2 % because of something else.

Table 4. Reasons for learning English

	Percent
Because we all learn it at school.	15.0
Because I'd like to understand English (e.g. to understand cartoons, books, songs, films etc.).	42.5
Because I like English.	20.0
To make my parents happy/satisfied.	15.0
Something else.	7.5

## 5. Findings

The participants in this study are mainly interested in learning English. This is proved by the results of table 1 that shows the majority of the learners do like English. In this respect, English represents a positive subject to be learnt at school despite all the anxiety it represents while learning. Furthermore, learning English is preferred for 41.5% of the learners no matter what the way they learn through. This proves that the learners are really interested in learning English.

Comparing the factor “When we talk” as a favored vs. not favored activity, the results shows that the majority of the learners still have the stress of talking. Reading and writing factor represents a good way of learning for around one-fourth of the learners.

Another result comes from the view of the participants about learning through singing and dancing. In this factor, a small proportion considers they learn English better when they sing and dance, with 14.6%. Nevertheless, this factor is not considered as the less favored for the majority of the participants. Rather, only 9.5% were not in favor of learning through dancing and singing.

A surprising result comes from the playing factor. Here, only 9.8% of the participants preferred learning while playing while 21.4% considered that learning English is not a good thing to be done through playing. This opposes the desire of children to play.

In responding to the last part of the questionnaire about the reason for learning English, the

learners considered that understanding English is the most favored option for them followed by “because I like English”, 42.5% and 20% respectively. This makes learning English for the sake of English is the response of the majority of the learners.

## 6. Discussion

The main finding of this study is that the way the young learners learn English. Richards (2001) suggests that “learning English for the use in the classroom is the main goal”. Nevertheless, this study opposes his view. The majority of the participants like to learn English for the sake of English rather than anything else, which opposes Richards’ view. Furthermore, this result shows that the young learners are motivated intrinsically, rather than extrinsically; it is not the classroom that makes them learn the language. Rather, there is something inside them, which urges them to learn without waiting for any rewards.

The results of this study show that the learners are motivated to learn English. As learners don’t have any near goal to learn a foreign language, the researcher supposes that the motivational activities, such as games, songs, etc. affect the learners’ attitudes towards learning English. However, the results showed these activities have a minor role in motivating the English classes. This agrees with Jurišević and Pižorn (2013) results and opposes Richards (2001).

The results show that the motivational activities, such as dancing and playing, do affect making the learners’ attitudes towards English lessons positive. Yet, they cannot be considered as a main source of motivation. Rather, they have a minor role; the learners feel secured when they have reading and writing lessons as they have the feeling that they are doing something rather than just playing or dancing. Therefore, the teachers are expected to use songs and games to motivate the young learners and break the routine. However, much concentration should be focused on the traditional way of teaching.

## 6. Conclusion

Learners are motivated towards learning English. This motivation is a mixture between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The effect of the motivational activities (games, songs, etc.) cannot be avoided. At the same time, the learners preferred to have good amount of reading and writing lessons, which means they are even motivated intrinsically as well. In respect to the situation of Cyprus as an English post-colonial country, young learners can be considered as interactively motivated. Unlike Richard’s view (2001), which says that the main goal of the young learners to learn a foreign language is ‘learning at school’, this study shows that the learners learn because of many different reasons. Therefore, Richard’s suggestion that learning English in classroom is the primary goal is not applied in this study’s context. The learners want to learn English for the sake of using it in their own context, cartoons, stories, communication, etc. This study even shows that the learners were motivated with multi-motivational factors. In other words, the learners were motivated intrinsically, extrinsically, and instrumentally. Further research is suggested about this new trend of motivation to find out how many motivational kinds can be integrated in teaching a foreign language.



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