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Language, Identity and Motivation: Investigating Sociocultural Influences on Pakistani ESL Learners

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ABSTRACT

The current research studies the relationship between socio-cultural identity and English language learning motivation at university level. This research draws on the theories proposed by Dörnyei regarding the L2 Motivational Self System, Gardner on the socio-educational model, and Norton on the identity-based approach. It involves the quantitative method in which a structured questionnaire is used for the data collection process from 50 undergraduate students. It has been discovered that participants were predominantly motivated to learn English instrumentally. English was viewed as necessary for educational achievement (84%), growth in future career (72%), and social progression (82%). As far as social context is concerned, it has played a powerful role as a supporting environment: motivation provided by the family (78%), positive influence of the classmates (66%), and high levels of motivation from the teachers (78%) proved significant for learning English language. Unlike previous studies that pointed to cultural conflict, results demonstrated that there is a harmonious interaction between identity and language learning. The respondents reported the lack of identity conflict with learning English (68% disagreement with conflict). The results indicate that pedagogic approaches should exploit this enabling social network and encourage English learning as a supplementary means of identity expression. Some limitations include sample size and an unequal distribution of gender.

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning the English language as a second language has many advantages in the contemporary era of connectivity. Learning the English language improves various cognitive skills such as memory and attention, in addition to improving various executive functions, such as cognitive flexibility (Ibrahim &



Hashim, 2021; Haufiku et al., 2022; Poerwandari, 2021). Learning the English language not only helps develop the cognitive skills of learners but also offers many other benefits to them in life. In his theory of social interaction, Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the important role played by social interaction in language learning. Another important aspect explained by Vygotsky about learning a second language involves facilitating interactions between people of different cultures. It means that learning enables learners to gain various perspectives, cultures, and viewpoints from others. English has become an international language used in communication, learning, technology, and even job opportunities. Learning the English language is quite important in Pakistan because it offers many academic and professional opportunities for people. Therefore, it is increasingly necessary for Pakistani youth to learn the English language well. Learning the English language is not only dependent on school but also depends a lot on social context and personal identity. The process of learning involves more than cognitive factors, but also emotions, psychology, and social components. Motivation compels students to interact with learning materials and overcome obstacles, while identity enables them to relate to the educational environment. Such interrelation of these variables has much influence on the endurance, self-confidence, and success of learners. This paper analyzes the influence of these aspects on learning and ways to stimulate motivation and learner identity development. The Importance of Identity in Learning. Identity determines how the person views his/her learning abilities and opportunities for success. "Academic identity is the self-concept of a learner in terms of personal experience of being a learner in relation to social interaction and culture" (Gee, 2000). Social context refers to the attitudes of relatives, classmates, teachers, and society toward English learning, while identity reflects cultural, social, and personal perceptions of the learner. These aspects can become either stimulating or discouraging in regard to learning. Social identity refers to the affiliation with some particular social groups like male, female, some ethnicity, etc. The positive affiliation with any learning community positively influences motivation and self-confidence. While English is widely spoken and valued in Pakistan, there are few studies on how social and psychological aspects affect the development of motivation among Pakistani young learners.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing significance of the English language in Pakistan, students seem to have trouble remaining motivated to learn English. Several reasons, such as parental and peer pressure, academic environment, and attitudes towards English in society, have tended to hamper the process of students' learning by making them unwilling to invest adequate time and effort in English learning. On the other hand, social identity could play either a positive or negative role in the development of motivational tendencies among learners. However, surprisingly little empirical work has been done on the subject in Pakistan, with no study focusing specifically on the relation between social identity and motivation for learning English.

1.2. Research Objectives

Following are the objectives of the current study are to:

- i) Examine impact of social factors on motivation for English language learning
- ii) Study how identity shapes L2 learning motivation
- iii) Understand the connection between society, identity and motivation in English language learning

1.3. Research Questions

Following research questions have been formulated for the conduct of the present study:

- i) What is the role of social context in developing motivation for L2 learning?
- ii) How does identity impact motivation in L2 learning?
- iii) Do culture and identity have positive or negative effect in developing L2 learning motivation?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Background of study



Language learning is widely influenced by motivation, though some researchers do not believe in the role of motivation in L2 learning (Clement & Kruidenier, 1983), there were also those who believed that no one could be unmotivated to learn a second language with sufficient exposure to the language (Corder, 1967). After realizing this fact, the necessity of L2 motivation emerged, mainly after the emergence of the theories by Gardner (Rubrecht & Ishikawa, 2012), which paved the way for Gardner's concepts to gain more recognition. The first principle of this framework is integration in the learning process, and according to Gardner & Lambert (1972), this refers to “a genuine and personal interest in the other group and its people and culture” (p.132). To elaborate, when a student’s motivation stems from integrative learning, the student will be interested in becoming accepted into the society in which the language is natively spoken. The second principle is the requirement for “the second language learner to be prepared to identify himself with individuals belonging to another ethnolinguistic group and adopt a range of subtle behavior characteristics of his own” (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, p.135). On the other hand, the use of integrative motivation in L2 teaching after the globalization of English has been a point of discussion (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). Although none of them may be native speakers of English, the number of individuals who make use of English as a means of communication has considerably risen due to its global status as lingua franca (Graddol, 2006). Thus, the question arises on whether the concept of integrative motivation can be applied despite the lack of target group (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). Motivation towards language learning has always been an important subject within educational psychology and applied linguistics. There is unanimous agreement among scholars that one of the most effective measures of measuring success in SLA is the learner’s motivation. Apart from personal factors such as personal goals and interests, motivation is also influenced by extrinsic factors such as social setting and identity. Considering the significance of English in Pakistan, it is necessary to understand the factors involved.

2.2. Motivation in Language Learning:

There are two types of motivation commonly known as instrumental Motivation and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation symbolises the motivation for practical purposes for example learning a second language in order to get a job or find educational achievement (Gardner, 1985) whereas integrative motivation means to stimulus behind learning a language in case of being an integratal part of second language community (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

2.3. Social Context and motivation

Social context includes all the social influences surrounding a learner, such as family, peers, teachers, and societal expectations. Vygotsky’s (1978) Sociocultural Theory emphasizes that learning occurs in a social context through interaction. According to this theory, learners internalize knowledge and skills from social interactions. In the sociocultural perspective, the concept of learning refers to a complicated social phenomenon that takes place in relation to the social and physical environment and is therefore affected by many factors including people, actions, and objects (Johnson, 2009). The sociocultural theory (SCT) suggests that the social dimension is the basis of the development of higher-order human cognition and therefore differs from behaviorism in its approach to learning. In addition, sociocultural theory stimulates researchers to investigate relationships among the functioning of the human mind, culture, institutions, and history. The individual, actions, and learner identity arise during the learning process according to the sociocultural theory. The learner and his or her environment contribute significantly to the process of learning. As indicated by Johnson (2009), previous experiences of the learner, the sociocultural context in which the learner learns, and what the learner does with the knowledge gained through learning would greatly affect the way of learning, what is learned, and the utilization of the knowledge learned.

In reference to the views of Johnson (2009), it can be concluded that L2 identity and motivation could serve as a powerful approach in studying language acquisition and power discourse, as well as the sociocultural context of the learners. This research aims to explore L2 identity to understand the link between motivation, negotiation of learner identity, and second language learning despite the existence of many other concepts regarding identity and its importance, including social identity, ethnic identity, and

cultural identity, among others. In Pakistan, social context affects English learning motivation in multiple ways:

- Pressure from the family might push learners towards acquiring English for career advancement purposes. Peer group pressure could be positive in cases where English is viewed as prestigious or negative when peers ridicule those who know English.
- School setting, teacher attitudes, and curricular design may facilitate or obstruct motivation.

Role of Identity in Language Learning:

The concept of identity pertains to the sense of self of learners. As stated by Norton (2000), language learning is interlinked with identity since it involves negotiation of oneself relative to the second language.

2.4. Key points about identity

The motivation of students can be increased by ensuring that English supports their idealized identity (e.g., being professional or a global citizen). There is likely to be conflict between identity and culture if students perceive learning English to be against their native culture.

2.5. Models/Theories related to identity and motivation

Following models and theories lay the critical framework for the current study:

- Gardner's Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition (1985)
- Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (2005)
- Norton's Identity Negotiation Theory (2000)

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Population of the Study

The subjects used in this research comprised of Pakistani youths attending bachelor's degree courses. The rationale for selecting such subjects was attributed to the importance attached to the process of learning, in which the English language was held in high esteem.

3.2 Sample of the Study

A total of 50 participants were used for the research. These included both males and females whose socio-economic and education status was not the same. The sampling method used was simple random sampling in which each participant had an equal chance of being selected for the study.

3.3 Research Instrument

Questionnaire was administered to elicit data for the current study. The questionnaire mainly collected information on emergence of motivation for L2 due to social and identity based factors.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Questionnaire was administered to the university students who were assured of the confidentiality of their personal identities for the sake of maintain ethical consideration for this study.

3.5 Data Analysis Technique

Data was coded, analysed and presented in percentage form.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4. Participants' Demography

The participants ranged had exposure to English language from below 5 years of to above 10 years. By selecting the participants from this much of exposure to English language could provide a broader perspective about the impact of identity and motivation could be extracted.

Table 4.1 Participants' Demography

Less than 5 years	5 to 10 years	More than 10 years
25%	28%	47%

4.2 Various social factors as sources of motivation to learn English

Table 4.2.1 'Betterment of skill-set' as motivation for learning English

Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral
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27%	55%	4%	8%	6%
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According to 27% respondents who strongly agreed and 55% who agreed that the motivation behind learning English was the betterment to their linguistic skills whereas those who strongly disagreed and disagreed were 4% and 8% respectively which shows that the motivation behind learning English was an improvement to the linguistic skills.

Table 4.2.2 ‘Social progression’ as motivation for learning English

Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral
30%	52%	12%	10%	9%

Table 4.2.2 illustrates the data for the respondents who believed that the motivation behind learning English for them was social progression. Majority of the respondents either responded with strongly agree (30%) or agree (49%) whereas 12% of the respondents strongly disagreed and 10% of them disagreed with his concept and 9% respondednt stayed neutral. The data goes to show that English is being learnt by them because it motivates them in social progression.

4.2.3. ‘Growth in Future Career’ as motivation for learning English

Table 4.2.3 ‘Growth in Furture Career’ as motivation for learning English

Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral
35%	37%	10%	8%	10%

Table 4.3.2 illsutares that data for respondents’ responses whether or not help in future career was the motivation for learning English language. 35% of the respondents strongly agreed and similarly 37% agreed with the idea that the motivation behind learning English language for them was because it will help them in the growth in future career whereas only 18 % of the respondents (10% with strong disagreement and 8% with disagreement) showed that motivation behind learning English was not the idea that they would get help with this language in career growth in future.

4.2.4. ‘Educational Achievement’ as motivation for learning English

Table 4.2.4 ‘Educational Achievement’ as motivation for learning English

Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral
22%	62%	8%	4%	4%

According to 22% who strongly agreed and likewise 62% who agreed that the motivation for learning English was to attain educational achievement whereas only a small percentage of the respondents either strongly disagreed (8%) or disagreed (4%) with this statement whereas only 4% respodents stayed neutral to this statement. The data shows that for majority of the respondents English was the source of educational achievement.

4.2.4. ‘Family’ as a source of motivation for learning English

Table 4.2.4 ‘Family’ as a source of motivation for learning English

Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral
52%	26%	6%	6%	10%

Table 4.2.4 illutrates that motivation source for learning English comes from the family as 78% of the respondents (with 52% who strongly agreed and 26% who agreed) were in favour of this while a meagre percentage that is 12% in total disfavoured that family was the source of motivation for learning English.

4.2.5 ‘Classmates’ as source of motivation for learning English

Table 4.2.5 ‘Classmates’ as source of motivation for learning English

Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral
36%	30%	10%	12%	12%

According to the majority of the respondents i.e. 36% for strongly agree and 30% for agree the source of motivation for learning English were their classmates. 22% of the students out of which 10% strongly disagreed and 12% disagreed that their classmates were the source of motivation for them while 12% of the respodets did not respond tho this statement.

4.2.6 'Teachers' as source of motivation for learning English

Table 4.2.6 'Teachers' as source of motivation for learning English

Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral
32%	46%	12%	6%	4%

For majority of the respondents the source of motivation to learn English for them were their teachers as 78% (32% with strong agreement and 46% with agreement) of them considered their teachers as a source of motivation for them to learn English. Only 18% (12% with strong disagreement and 6% with disagreement) did not agree that their teachers were the main source of motivation for them to learn English.

4.2.7. 'Academic Setting' as a source of motivation for learning English

Table 4.2.7 'Academic Setting' as a source of motivation for learning English

Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral
36%	30%	14%	4%	16%

According to most of the respondents i.e. 66% (36% with strong agreement and 30% with agreement) academic setting in their institutes was a designed in such a way that supported learning English and proved as a motivation source for them while only 18% respondents (14% with strongly disagreement and 4% with disagreement) did not believe that their institutes proved as any source of motivation for learning English.

4.3. The role of cultural identity as motivation to learn English

4.3.1 'Cultural identity' as a source of motivation to learn English

Table 4.3.1 'Cultural identity' as a source of motivation to learn English

Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral
26%	46%	12%	10%	6%

Positive correlation between cultural identity and motivation was observed as 26% respondents strongly agreed and another 46% agreed that cultural identity was a strong motivational force to learn English language while only 22% (with 12% with strong disagreement and 10% with disagreement) did not consider cultural identity to be a source of learning English language.

4.3.2 'Self perception' of ESL learners

Table 4.3.2 'Self-perception' of ESL learners

Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral
52%	32%	4%	8%	4%

Majority of the respondents were observed to be very confident about their self perception as 52% strong agreement and 32% with agreement whereas only a very small percentage of them that is 12% were not confident about their self-perception for learning English.

4.3.3 Perceived threat to identity due to English language learning

Table 4.3.3 Perceived threat to identity due to English language learning

Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral
4%	8%	48%	20%	20%

According to most of the respondents that 48% for strongly disagree and 20% for disagree making a total of 68% of the respondents who did not consider learning English as a threat to their native linguistic and regional affiliation while only 12% respondents considered that learning English language may have a negative impact to their native linguistic and regional identity.

5. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The objective of the present study was to explore the impact of the social and identity-based factors on English language learning motivation in Pakistani university students. It can be concluded from the results obtained that the participants are strongly motivated, as there is strong instrumental motivation among learners, supportive social environment, and the learners' identity is such that English is perceived as a

means of development, rather than a competing element. In this section, the interpretation of the results will be provided, based on the theories of Gardner (1985), Dörnyei (2005), and Norton (2000).

5.1. The Primacy of Instrumental Motivation and the "Ought-to L2 Self"

The most salient finding relates to the highly instrumental orientation of the participants. Tables 4.2.2, 4.2.3 and 4.2.4 symbolise that the students regard English as an important skill in terms of academic achievement, career growth prospects, and social mobility. These findings clearly correspond to Gardner's (1985) instrumental motivation, according to which languages are acquired due to their utilitarian value. These findings seem quite obvious in the specific context of learning English in Pakistan, since knowledge of English is the key factor that helps to gain access to higher education, lucrative jobs, and social mobility. These findings support the claims made by Rehman & Ali (2019), according to whom English acts as an important tool for social mobility in Pakistan.

5.2. Social Context and motivation for English language learning

The social environment seems to be extremely encouraging. The results reflect the implementation of sociocultural theory proposed by Vygotsky (1978), in which learning is mediated and supported via social interaction. As far the family as a source of motivation for English language learning, majority i.e. 78% of participants found their families as a source of motivation in meaning English. Ahmed's (2018) research on the significance of family for English language learning also found the same kind of findings were students noted the significant role of their families as a source of motivation in learning English. Similarly, most of the respondents's response that their classmates as a source of motivation shows the role peers play in motivating the second language learners as Dörnyei (2005) noted that peer collaboration proves as a motivational factor in mastering the new language. Moreover, there are highly favorable views about the influence of teachers and environment of the institution which suggests that teachers and conducive environment play a favourable role in providing motivation for English language learning.

5.3. Identity and English language learning

The data suggests that the famous most of the respondents did not agree with the notion that speaking a lingua franca like English may have negative impact on native linguistic and regional identity. Data in the tables 4.3.1, 4.3.2 and 4.3.3 suggest that students view themselves successful and confident persons with by equipping themselves with English language which proves that the concept of ideal L2 Self is an important intrinsic factor driving learners to continue using the language (Dörnyei, 2005). More importantly, Majority of the respondents rejected the statement that learning English would be against their cultural and/or social identity which suggests that learning English language is not about replacing their Pakistani identity, it rather means gaining an extra set of skills which allows them to operate in the globalized world and at home at the same time, i.e. to maintain a sense of pride in being Pakistani while also being proficient speakers of English.

5.5. Limitations and Implications

Limitations: The findings of this study have certain limitations. The small sample size (N=50) reduces the validity of the study. Besides, self-reporting methods, which are easy to implement, do not necessarily indicate the real situation.

Implications for Theory: In terms of theory, the results of this study enhance the application of the L2 Motivational Self System proposed by Dörnyei in the context of Pakistan. Moreover, it also adds evidence to the work of Norton on identity and illustrates an excellent example of identity investment in EFL students in a post-colonial context.

Practical Significance: The results are favorable for teachers and lawmakers in Pakistan, yet they also point to concrete measures:

- i) Curricula and counseling should keep expressly relating English fluency to actual academic and professional paths.
- ii) Encourage good peer networks by formalizing and maximizing the already-good peer impact via group projects and conversation clubs.

- iii). Assist teachers in their development: Training should center on inspirational techniques and inclusive classroom design to help the minority who experience a lack of support, given the important role teachers play.
- iv). Encourage Identity-Affirming Pedagogy: Consciously portraying English as an ability that supplements local linguistic and cultural identities helps to close the gap for the minority who might feel conflict in teaching materials and classroom conversations.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The present research emphasizes the fundamental role of social setting and identity in Pakistani university students' motivation to learn English. Reflecting not just cultural norms but also individual aspirations, motivation seems to be mostly founded on great instrumental goals, that is, academic achievement, professional advancement, and social mobility. Significantly, the students in the research show a great degree of motivation because of a solid social network, including inspiring teachers, driven peers, and encouraging parents. The lack of any evidence that acquiring English presents an existential danger to Pakistani cultural identity merits particular notice. This study actually reveals that pupils acquire a strong sense of English learner identity that may be seen as supplementing their Pakistani identity. English is therefore a tool that can empower the pupils rather than a threat. Future research could be carried out on several ethnic groups. A better grasp of the problems under consideration in this research could come from using mixed methodology. For Pakistani decision-makers and educators, the significance of these results is rather clear. Under the umbrella of national culture, creating conditions that encourage teamwork among students, honing teachers' skills to inspire their pupils, and treating English as an extra skill rather than a danger become the major processes in using motivational capabilities.

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