

Navigating Motivation and Anxiety in Second Language Learning: The Impact of Directed Motivational Currents on EFL and ESL Learners

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Abstract This study examines the relationship between Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs) and English Language Classroom Anxiety (ELCA) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. DMCs, defined by sustained, goal-driven motivation, are essential for long-term language learning, whereas ELCA, characterized by anxiety in classroom settings, can impede progress. Employing an explanatory mixed-methods approach, the study collected quantitative data from 140 participants and qualitative insights from 20 in-depth interviews with learners experiencing varying levels of DMCs. Findings revealed a significant negative correlation between DMCs and ELCA, with ESL learners reporting higher motivation and lower anxiety due to greater language exposure and integrative motivation. Qualitative findings emphasized the role of teacher support, learner goals, and contextual factors in shaping motivation and anxiety. These insights highlight the importance of goal-oriented learning environments that enhance motivation while reducing anxiety, offering practical implications for educators and curriculum designers.

Keywords: *Directed Motivational Currents, English Language Classroom Anxiety, Vision-Driven Motivation, Goal-Oriented Learning, Educational Strategies*

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1. Introduction

The study of second language acquisition (SLA) has long been concerned with understanding the factors that facilitate and hinder language learning. Among these factors, motivation and anxiety are two of the most influential psychological variables, often exerting opposing effects on learners' success ([Dörnyei, 2009](#); [Dörnyei et al., 2015a](#); [Horwitz et al., 1986](#)). While motivation is widely recognized as a driving force that sustains long-term commitment to language learning, anxiety can significantly disrupt the learning process, leading to reduced participation and lower achievement ([Horwitz et al., 1986](#)). Understanding the interaction between these two constructs is particularly critical in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, where learners' experiences are shaped by their exposure to authentic language environments, instructional methods, and personal learning goals ([Zhou et al., 2024](#)).

A relatively recent development in SLA motivation research is the concept of Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs), introduced by [Dörnyei et al. \(2015b\)](#). DMCs describe intense, goal-driven motivational surges that enable learners to sustain high levels of engagement and commitment over extended periods. Unlike short-term bursts of enthusiasm, DMCs are characterized by a self-sustaining momentum, where learners experience intrinsic enjoyment and heightened focus while working toward meaningful language-learning goals ([Bui, 2023](#)). These motivational currents can be transformative, pushing learners beyond their typical performance levels and creating enduring positive attitudes toward language learning. However, despite the potential benefits of DMCs, research suggests that various psychological barriers, particularly English Language Classroom Anxiety (ELCA), can interfere with their activation and sustainability ([Al-Hoorie & Jahedizadeh, 2021](#)).

ELCA is a situation-specific form of anxiety that arises in language-learning contexts, often linked to fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety ([Horwitz et al., 1986](#); [Tanveer, 2007](#)). Studies indicate that high levels of ELCA can lead to avoidance behaviors, reduced self-confidence, and negative attitudes toward language learning, all of which undermine learners' motivation and progress ([ShayesteFar, 2021](#); [Yamashiro](#)

& McLaughlin, 2001). Given the inherently social and interactive nature of language learning, students who experience high ELCA may hesitate to participate in speaking activities, limit their exposure to real-life language use, and struggle with overall proficiency development (Hassan et al., 2020). This anxiety can be particularly detrimental in EFL settings, where students often have fewer opportunities for authentic communication and rely heavily on structured classroom instruction (Zulkifli, 2007).

Conversely, research suggests that stronger DMCs are associated with lower ELCA levels, as learners who are deeply engaged in meaningful language-learning goals tend to experience a state of psychological flow where anxiety is minimized, and motivation is heightened (Sak, 2019). ESL learners who are immersed in environments where English is actively spoken often report higher levels of motivation and lower levels of anxiety compared to their EFL counterparts (Tanveer, 2007). This difference is likely due to greater exposure to real-life language use, integrative motivation, and a higher perceived need for English proficiency (Hassan et al., 2020). However, despite these insights, there is a gap in the literature regarding the direct interplay between DMCs and ELCA across different instructional contexts. Most existing studies have focused on these constructs separately, leaving open questions about how they interact to influence learners' experiences and progress (Archambault et al., 2009; Ellis & Helaire, 2018; Oga-Baldwin & Nakata, 2017; Reeve & Lee, 2014; Saito et al., 2025).

This study addresses this gap by investigating the relationship between DMCs and ELCA in EFL and ESL settings. Specifically, it explores how these constructs interact within different instructional environments, providing insights into their combined impact on learners' success. By examining these relationships, this research aims to contribute to the broader understanding of motivation and anxiety in SLA and offer practical recommendations for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers. To achieve these objectives, the study focuses on the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant relationship between Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs) and English Language Classroom Anxiety (ELCA) among EFL and ESL learners?

2. How do EFL and ESL learners perceive the role of DMCs in their language-learning experiences?

Based on the above-mentioned research questions, the following hypothesis has been proposed: There is no significant relationship between DMCs and English language classroom anxiety between EFL and ESL learners.

By systematically examining these dynamics, this study aims to inform the development of teaching strategies and instructional practices that enhance motivation while alleviating anxiety, thereby supporting learners in achieving their language-learning goals. Given the increasing emphasis on learner-centered approaches in language education, these findings may provide actionable insights for improving curriculum design, classroom interactions, and learner support mechanisms.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Motivation and anxiety in second language acquisition: Theoretical perspectives

Motivation and anxiety have been extensively studied in SLA research due to their substantial influence on learners' success. Early conceptualizations, such as Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model, categorized motivation into integrative and instrumental types. Integrative motivation reflects a learner's aspiration to become part of the target language community, whereas instrumental motivation arises from practical considerations, including academic or professional advancement. However, this classification fails to capture the dynamic nature of motivation, which fluctuates based on learners' experiences, external influences, and self-perception. In response, [Dörnyei \(2009\)](#) developed the L2 Motivational Self System, which consists of three components: the Ideal L2 Self (the learner's desired future self as a proficient speaker), the Ought-to L2 Self (external pressures and expectations), and L2 Learning Experience (the impact of past learning experiences on motivation). This model highlights the evolving nature of motivation in response to learners' goals and learning environments.

A more recent development in SLA motivation research is the concept of DMCs, introduced by [Dörnyei et al. \(2015b\)](#). DMCs represent intense and self-sustaining motivational surges that drive learners toward a well-defined,

personally meaningful language-learning goal. Unlike conventional motivation, which fluctuates over time, DMCs involve high levels of engagement, intrinsic enjoyment, and goal-oriented persistence (Al-Hoorie & Jahedizadeh, 2021). Research suggests that learners who experience DMCs maintain motivation despite obstacles and often achieve significant progress in their language proficiency (Bui, 2023). However, DMCs are not universally experienced by all learners and require favorable environmental conditions, such as a tangible vision and an attainable goal, a facilitative structure consisting of behavioral routines and feedback, and a continuous sense of progress toward the end goal (Dörnyei et al., 2015b).

In contrast, ELCA, a subcategory of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), represents a significant psychological barrier to language acquisition. Horwitz et al. (1986) defined FLA as situation-specific anxiety that arises from the challenges of communicating in a non-native language, including fear of making mistakes, communication apprehension, and test anxiety. Studies have consistently shown that high levels of ELCA negatively correlate with speaking fluency, participation, and overall language performance (Fathi & Mohammaddokht, 2021; Mohammadi & Ahmadpour Kasgari, 2024; Tanveer, 2007). Learners experiencing high ELCA often avoid speaking tasks, hesitate to engage in classroom discussions, and struggle with self-confidence (Zulkifli, 2007). While some scholars argue that moderate anxiety can enhance motivation by increasing focus and preparation (Al-Shboul et al., 2013; Dordinejad & Ahmadabad, 2014; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), excessive anxiety typically results in long-term stagnation in language learning (Hassan et al., 2020; Horwitz et al., 1986).

Dordinejad and Ahmadabad (2014) found that higher anxiety levels significantly correlated with lower English achievement, emphasizing that anxiety hinders rather than facilitates learning. Their study challenges the claim that moderate anxiety is beneficial, reinforcing the need for anxiety-reducing strategies in language instruction.

The relationship between motivation and anxiety remains complex, as motivation can either counteract or be undermined by anxiety. Some learners with strong motivational currents successfully manage their anxiety, whereas others, particularly those with low self-efficacy and high fear of failure, experience anxiety as a demotivating factor (Al-Hoorie & Jahedizadeh,

2021). Despite substantial research on both constructs, there remains limited empirical investigation into how DMCs and ELCA interact in different language-learning environments.

2.2. Motivation and anxiety in EFL and ESL learners

The distinction between EFL and ESL learning environments significantly influences how motivation and anxiety shape learners' experiences. EFL learners typically study English in formal classroom settings, with limited real-world exposure to authentic language use. As a result, their motivation is often extrinsically driven, focusing on academic success, standardized exams, or career aspirations rather than communicative fluency (Yamashiro & McLaughlin, 2001; Goodarzi & Namaziandost, 2025). Due to the lack of frequent practice opportunities, EFL learners often develop higher levels of ELCA, particularly when engaging in speaking activities (Horwitz, 2010; Tanveer, 2007). Studies indicate that EFL students frequently experience performance-related anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and discomfort with spontaneous language use (Sohrabi & Ahmadi Safa, 2020; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

Conversely, ESL learners are immersed in environments where English is the primary language of communication, leading to higher integrative motivation (Hassan et al., 2020). A meta-analysis by Zhou et al. (2024) confirms that motivation in second-language learners is closely linked to their exposure to authentic language use, with ESL learners displaying stronger integrative motivation compared to EFL learners. However, while ESL learners generally report lower anxiety levels, they are not entirely free from language-related stress. Situational anxiety in academic presentations, workplace interactions, or high-stakes assessments can still hinder language performance (Zulkifli, 2007).

A crucial research question is whether greater exposure to English in ESL settings naturally reduces anxiety and enhances motivation or whether other factors, such as personal goal-setting and learning strategies, play a more significant role. Some scholars argue that immersion alone is not sufficient to lower anxiety, as learners still need structured support, feedback, and confidence-building activities (Al-Hoorie & Jahedizadeh, 2021). Others suggest that strong personal goals, as seen in DMCs, are a more crucial factor in overcoming anxiety than mere exposure to the language (Sak, 2019).

In addition, teaching methodologies, assessment practices, and classroom environments shape how motivation and anxiety interact. Studies have found that learners who experience highly interactive, communicative, and supportive classroom settings report lower anxiety and higher motivation levels compared to those in rigid, test-driven environments ([Gunawardana, 2024](#)). Similarly, peer support and collaborative learning structures have been shown to enhance motivation while reducing anxiety in both EFL and ESL learners ([Namaziandost et al., 2024](#)). These findings emphasize the need for instructional approaches that promote confidence, goal-setting, and real-world engagement to balance motivation and anxiety in language acquisition.

2.3. Addressing the research gap

Despite significant advancements in understanding motivation and anxiety in language learning, there remains a lack of research examining how these factors interact in both EFL and ESL contexts. While studies have explored motivation and anxiety separately, few have directly investigated their reciprocal influence and how they shape learners' experiences across different learning environments. [Bai et al. \(2025\)](#) provide empirical evidence that motivation and anxiety in ESL/EFL learners fluctuate over time based on learning conditions rather than remaining fixed traits. Similarly, [Duyen et al. \(2024\)](#) highlight that transitions between classroom-based and autonomous learning environments significantly influence learners' motivation and anxiety levels over time. While immersion in an English-speaking setting offers advantages, it does not guarantee higher motivation or lower anxiety. Some ESL learners still experience anxiety due to high proficiency expectations and social pressure, particularly in academic and workplace settings ([Usop, 2024](#)). Conversely, some EFL learners develop strong motivation and confidence despite limited exposure to English, especially when engaged in goal-driven learning experiences and structured extensive listening activities ([Jantasode & Ruangjaroon, 2025](#)). These findings challenge the notion that mere language exposure determines motivation and anxiety levels, highlighting the role of individual goal-setting, learning strategies, and contextual support in shaping language-learning experiences.

To address these gaps, this study aims to provide a comparative analysis of DMCs and ELCA in EFL and ESL learners, investigating how these psychological factors interact and influence learners' progress. By examining

the role of goal-setting, exposure to English, and instructional support, this research will offer practical insights for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers. Understanding how motivation can mitigate anxiety, and vice versa, will contribute to more effective teaching approaches that enhance engagement and reduce language-learning stress.

3. Method

This section outlines the methodology employed in the current research study and provides a detailed description of the participants, the instruments used, and the study's overall design and procedures. The section also explains the process of estimating reliability indices during the pilot study, followed by a comprehensive account of the data analysis methods employed.

3.1. Participants

This study adopted a cross-cultural, explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. A total of 140 participants were selected from a larger pool of 228 language learners, aged between 17 and 42 years, using convenience sampling. Participants were not randomly assigned, making this quantitative phase quasi-experimental in design, but were categorized into two naturally occurring groups based on their language learning contexts (i.e., EFL and ESL). The first group consisted of 70 Iranian English as a Foreign Language learners, including 42 males and 28 females, who were enrolled in English language institutions located in Gorgan, Golestan, Iran. These learners were native Persian speakers and represented proficiency levels ranging from lower intermediate to advanced. Their English proficiency was assessed prior to data collection to confirm group comparability. They were engaged in English courses to enhance their academic, professional, or personal language skills. The second group comprised 70 international English as a Second Language learners, including 38 males and 32 females. These participants attended English courses at a Canadian institution in British Columbia. They represented diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and used English as their second language while pursuing higher education. Their proficiency was also assessed to ensure alignment across both groups. To gain a deeper understanding of how students perceive directed motivational currents, a

semi-structured interview phase was conducted. Twenty participants were selected from those who experienced directed motivational currents based on their questionnaire scores from DMCs scale developed by Muir (2016). These participants were divided equally between the English as a Foreign Language and English as a Second Language groups, with ten from each. The interviews aimed to explore students' experiences with directed motivational currents, their motivational patterns, and the factors influencing their engagement in language learning. Participation in the qualitative phase was voluntary, and all participants were informed about the confidentiality of their responses. The smaller sample size for the qualitative phase ensured that rich and detailed insights complemented the broader quantitative findings.

3.2. Instruments

A range of validated instruments was utilized to collect data on language proficiency, motivation, and anxiety, as well as to gather qualitative insights. The Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT), a widely recognized tool developed by Oxford University Press and Cambridge ESOL, was used to assess participants' English proficiency levels. The test consists of 60 multiple-choice questions and categorizes proficiency into lower-intermediate, upper-intermediate, advanced, and very advanced levels (see [Appendix A](#)).

Table 1. ALTE level

	Level description	Score
1	Lower-intermediate	24 – 30
2	Upper-intermediate	31 – 40
3	Advanced	48-54
4	Very advanced	55–60

The DMC Disposition Questionnaire, developed and validated by [Muir \(2016\)](#), measured the intensity and characteristics of participants' DMCs. This instrument explores demographic information, frequency, and intensity of DMC experiences, and self-perceived English proficiency during motivational episodes. The instrument demonstrated a high-reliability index, with a Cronbach's alpha of .803, confirming its internal consistency (see [Appendix B](#)).

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), designed by [Horwitz et al. \(1986\)](#), was employed to assess participants' levels of classroom anxiety. Although the FLCAS was developed in 1986, it remains the most widely used and validated instrument for assessing foreign language classroom anxiety, with extensive evidence supporting its reliability and construct validity across diverse contexts. This 33-item instrument evaluates three dimensions of anxiety: fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety. Using a five-point Likert scale, the FLCAS demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of .93, indicating strong reliability (see [Appendix C](#)).

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data, providing a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions of DMCs. The interview protocol, adapted from [Zarrinabadi et al. \(2019\)](#), included 12 open-ended questions validated by experts in the field for content and face validity. These interviews allowed participants to share nuanced insights into their experiences, complementing the quantitative findings (see [Appendix D](#)).

3.3. Validity and reliability

To ensure validity and reliability, a pilot study was conducted with participants similar to those in the main study. Content validity was established through expert review, with three doctoral-level specialists evaluating the instruments. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to refine the scales, ensuring their appropriateness for the study's context. Reliability indices for the DMC Disposition Questionnaire and FLCAS were calculated using SPSS (version 24), yielding results of .803 and .93, respectively, which confirm their consistency and reliability.

Table 2. Reliability statistics for DMC disposition questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.803	.809	22

Table 3. Reliability statistics of FLCAS

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.930	.933	33

For qualitative data, validity was enhanced through member checking and peer review. Member checking involved sharing findings with participants to confirm the accuracy of their responses, while peer review engaged experts to evaluate coding and thematic analysis results. These strategies ensured the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative findings.

3.4. Data collection

Data collection followed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach, beginning with the quantitative phase followed by the qualitative phase. Ethical approval was obtained from relevant authorities in both Iran and Canada prior to data collection. Consent forms were distributed to all participants, ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity.

In the quantitative phase, participants first completed the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) to determine their English proficiency levels. They then responded to the Directed Motivational Currents (DMC) Disposition Questionnaire and the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to assess their motivation and anxiety levels, respectively.

Following the analysis of the quantitative data, the qualitative phase involved semi-structured interviews with 20 volunteers, selected from those who experienced moderate to strong DMCs based on their questionnaire scores. Participants were categorized based on their total scores from the DMC questionnaire, where scores between 100 and 80 indicated a strong DMC experience, and scores between 79 and 60 indicated a moderate DMC experience. Those who scored below 60 were not considered for the qualitative phase.

Interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis. This approach provided in-depth insights into participants' experiences with DMCs and ELCA, uncovering key themes and patterns related to their language learning motivation and anxiety.

3.4. Data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, with SPSS (version 24) as the primary analytical tool. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to explore the relationship between DMCs and ELCA, while independent t-tests examined differences across EFL and ESL contexts.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. The process involved open coding to identify key themes, axial coding to group related themes into broader categories, and selective coding to interpret the relationships among categories. This analysis provided rich, contextual insights that complemented the quantitative findings, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the research questions.

This methodological framework provided a rigorous and integrated approach to exploring the interplay between motivation and anxiety in language learning contexts, offering valuable implications for educators, researchers, and policymakers.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive statistics

This study used two scales for comparing the EFL and ESL learners' English language classroom anxiety and DMCs. The overall scores of the learners on each scale were used as the criterion to do the analysis. Before running the statistical tests for the results of the scales used, the normality of the data was checked. [Table 4](#) shows the descriptive statistics related to the results of the two questionnaires used in this study.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for the scales used in the study

Scale	N	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	Shapiro-Wilk
DMC	140	45	39.02	12.55	.061	.0589
Anxiety	140	122	77.57	33.72	.052	.063

[Table 4](#) indicates that the significance value for the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests for all the scales is more than .05 which shows the scores were normally distributed. Therefore, the assumption of normality has been satisfied. Consequently, we could use the mean as an indicator of central tendency index, besides using the parametric statistics models.

4.2. Differences in the relationship between DMCs and ELCA between EFL and ESL learners

The first research question probed the association between the DMCs and English language classroom anxiety of the EFL and ESL learners. For this

purpose, Pearson correlation coefficients were used, the results of which are indicated in Table 5. The results showed that there was a significant negative relationship between the two variables, suggesting that as the learners' DMCs increased, their language classroom anxiety decreased. For the EFL group, the correlation was statistically significant ($r = -.876, p < .001$), indicating that English language classroom anxiety was the result of lower DMCs. Similarly, for the ESL learners, there was a statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -.889, p < .001$), suggesting that more DMCs resulted in less anxiety. Overall, the results rejected the first null hypothesis, predicting no significant difference in the relationship between DMCs and English language classroom anxiety between EFL and ESL learners.

Table 5. The correlations between directed motivational currents and language learning anxiety for EFL and ESL learners

Group		Anxiety	
DMC	EFL	Correlation coefficient	-.876***
		Sig.	.000
		N	70
	ESL	Correlation coefficient	-.889***
		Sig.	.000
		N	70

*** correlation is significant at $p < .001$.

4.3. Perceptions of EFL and ESL learners towards directed motivational currents

The second research question of this study was qualitative and had no hypothesis. It aimed at providing qualitative data to explore the perceptions of both EFL and ESL learners regarding directed motivational currents. For this purpose, a sample of 20 learners (10 EFL and 10 ESL) was selected from those who experienced directed motivational currents based on their questionnaire DMCs score and was interviewed, and the responses were coded using thematic analysis. The coding analysis for the perceptions of the EFL learners is presented in Table 6. The findings revealed main themes extracted from codes used in the learners' responses. EFL learners perceived that their directed motivational currents were shaped by teacher-related factors (such as teachers' knowledge, behavior, and mindset), learner-related

factors (including their goals, personal characteristics, and mood), and context-related factors (such as facilities, engagement in learning activities, and the availability of support).

Table 6. Perceptions of EFL learners towards directed motivational currents

Main theme	Codes	Sample quotation
Teacher-related issues	Knowledge	I think my teacher's proficiency would affect my motivation significantly.
	Behavior	How could I pursue my goal when my teachers act like they do not like this field?
	Mindset	My professor is very fixed and strict and will not allow us to express ideas.
learner-related issues	Goal	When I do have a goal to accomplish, I will try harder, and my motivation will be influenced.
	Characteristic	Most learners are introverted in my class, so they don't like to talk to their peers about what could help them to do more.
	Mood	You know, I can't have a fixed feeling every day – it seems that daily emotions may affect my efforts and long-term goals.
Context-related issues	Facilities	The video projectors and labs in our university are sometimes out of service. We even lack internet access, which is now vital for learning.
	Boredom	The online classes and no interaction could make use bored and lazy most of the time. I think communication inside and outside the class is the key to learning and high motivation.
	Support	It's funny but sometimes the learners are deprived of very simple support from their teachers, supervisors, or even the college officials. I mean how could we reach our goals without some kind of help from the outside?

The analysis of the ESL learners' perceptions, however, showed slightly different results, as shown in [Table 7](#). This suggests that contextual issues are not their concern, and the learners mostly worry about technical issues and their own efforts. Also, they think the teacher's methodology could be influential as well. It is thus clear that the learners in the two contexts have different perceptions, which could be context-related or even culture-related.

Table 7. Perceptions of ESL learners towards directed motivational currents

Main theme	codes	Sample quotation
Teacher-related issues	Support	My professor's attention to my goals and concerns means a lot to me.
	Method	I think teaching methodology is of high importance as it could really facilitate the learning gains which could affect our motivation.
learner-related issues	Goal	I personally believe in my own purposes in my studies and try to look for some internal forces to help me keep going.
	Effort	When I do my best to achieve my goals, I feel like I have done my duty and even a failure won't let me down.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present study provide strong evidence supporting the negative correlation between DMCs and ELCA, aligning with much of the existing research in SLA (Alrabai, 2014; Dörnyei et al., 2015b; Muir, 2016; Saito et al., 2025). However, they also reveal nuanced variations in how motivation and anxiety interact across EFL and ESL learning contexts, shedding light on the contextual dependencies of these psychological constructs.

5.1. The relationship between DMCs and anxiety in EFL and ESL learners

Quantitative findings from the present study indicate that learners with strong DMCs experience lower levels of ELCA, aligning with prior findings. Studies confirm that motivation acts as an emotional regulator in SLA (Dörnyei et al., 2015b; Henry et al., 2015) and that goal-oriented, engaged learners exhibit greater resilience against classroom anxiety (Al-Hoorie & Jahedizadeh, 2021). The self-propelling nature of DMCs, which involves high engagement, perseverance, and emotional investment, functions as a psychological buffer that reduces fear of failure and performance-related anxiety (Xodabande & Babaii, 2021).

Findings also support Piniel and Csizér (2013), who demonstrated that learners with a strong motivational self-image and clearly defined goals

reported lower anxiety and higher willingness to communicate. However, some researchers argue that motivation alone is not always sufficient to counteract anxiety, particularly in learners with low self-perceived competence (Teimouri et al., 2019).

Despite the inverse relationship between motivation and anxiety, some scholars suggest that their interaction is more complex. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) argue that motivation and anxiety can coexist, especially among perfectionist learners or those facing high external expectations. Highly motivated learners may experience heightened anxiety due to fear of not meeting their own high standards, leading to self-induced pressure (Papi, 2010). This suggests that motivation generally mitigates anxiety but can also intensify it in high-stakes learning environments.

5.2. Contextual differences in learners' perceptions of DMCs

Qualitative findings reveal notable differences in how EFL and ESL learners experience DMCs, with contextual factors playing a significant role in shaping motivational strength and anxiety levels. EFL learners reported that their motivation depended heavily on external reinforcements, such as teacher support, classroom structure, and assessment-driven goals. These findings align with Sohrabi and Ahmadi Safa (2020), who found that EFL learners in test-oriented education systems experience heightened anxiety due to performance pressure and lack of real-world communication opportunities.

Conversely, ESL learners described their motivation as more internally driven, citing social integration, career aspirations, and daily language use as their primary motivators. This supports Gardner's (1985) theory of integrative motivation, which argues that learners immersed in authentic language environments develop stronger intrinsic motivation and experience lower anxiety.

A key divergence between EFL and ESL learners was their perception of external influences. While EFL learners frequently attributed their anxiety to factors such as lack of classroom support and test-related stress, ESL learners, despite being less anxious overall, still reported situational anxiety in high-pressure communication settings such as academic presentations or professional interactions (Hassan et al., 2020). These findings align with Tanveer (2007), who observed that EFL learners experience more anxiety due to fear of public evaluation and lack of communicative practice, whereas ESL

learners' anxiety is often tied to performance-related expectations in formal settings.

Additionally, past learning experiences emerged as a crucial determinant of anxiety levels. EFL learners who had previously encountered rigid, grammar-focused instruction reported higher anxiety, whereas those with interactive, communicative learning experiences exhibited lower anxiety and stronger DMC activation. This aligns with [Xodabande and Babaii \(2021\)](#), who found that structured learning environments play a crucial role in shaping motivational resilience, which may also contribute to reduced anxiety in language learners.

5.3. Contradictory findings and alternative perspectives

While this study's findings largely support the dominant view that strong motivation reduces anxiety, some alternative perspectives exist. [Teimouri et al. \(2019\)](#) argue that motivation and anxiety do not always function in opposition, particularly when external factors such as social expectations, personality traits, or cultural influences mediate their interaction. Their meta-analysis found that while motivation generally reduces anxiety, it can increase anxiety in highly self-critical or perfectionist learners.

Moreover, [Uzun \(2016\)](#) discovered that self-directed learning readiness exhibits a non-linear relationship with anxiety, meaning that while motivation plays a protective role, it does not fully dictate a learner's emotional experience in the classroom. Similarly, [Yamashiro and McLaughlin \(2001\)](#) found that some learners exhibit high motivation but still experience anxiety due to social and linguistic insecurities, particularly in cultures where mistakes are viewed negatively.

A central debate in second language acquisition research is whether motivation and anxiety are primarily shaped by the learning environment (EFL vs. ESL) or by individual learner characteristics such as personality, self-efficacy, and cognitive style. While this study suggests clear differences between EFL and ESL learners, some researchers argue that individual differences, such as personality, self-efficacy, and cognitive style, play a more critical role ([Noprianto, 2017](#)). [Dewaele \(2013\)](#) found that extroverted EFL learners often exhibit lower anxiety despite limited exposure to English, whereas some ESL learners still experience persistent anxiety despite immersion in an English-speaking environment. These findings suggest that

the interaction between motivation, anxiety, and learning environment is more individualized than previously assumed.

The findings of this study indicated that there was a significant negative correlation between DMCs and classroom anxiety, suggesting that higher DMCs could reduce the anxiety of the learners in the class. Therefore, DMC is negatively correlated with anxiety, as the former could result in the reduction of the latter. The results of this study also showed that the ESL learners had more DMCs than their EFL counterparts. This significant difference could be the consequence of contextual factors like the presence of native speakers outside the class who could assist the learners in adopting a vision that could contribute to their willingness and motivation to pursue long-term goals in learning a new language. The findings showed that ESL learners were less anxious in their classes compared to EFL learners. This could be justified with reference to the meaningful negative correlation that was found between DMCs and English language classroom anxiety. Further, qualitative data revealed that whereas the EFL learners were concerned with contextual factors like the presence of facilities, external support, and teachers' behavior, the ESL learners were mostly worried about technical issues like teaching methodology. This is related to the context of learning as the presence of native speakers could contribute to integrative motivation, while the EFL setting could result in more instrumental motivation.

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Appendix A. Oxford Placement Test

Where can you see these notices?

For questions 1 to 5, mark one letter A, B, or C on your answer sheet.

1.

please leave your
key at a Reception

- A) in a shop
- B) in a hotel
- C) in a taxi

2.

Foreign money
changed here

- A) in a library
- B) in a bank
- C) in a taxi

3.

The afternoon show
begins at 2 PM

- A) outside a theater
- B) outside a supermarket
- C) outside a restaurant

4.

CLOSED FOR
HOLIDAYS, Lessons
start again on the 8th
January

- A) at travel agents
- B) at a music school
- C) at a restaurant

5.

Price per night: £10 a
tent £5 a person

- A) at a cinema
- B) in a hotel
- C) on a camp-site

Questions 6-10

In this section you must choose the word which best fits each space in the text below.

For questions 6 to 10, mark one letter A, B or C on your Answer Sheet.

Scotland

Scotland is the north part of the island of Great Britain. The Atlantic ocean is on the west and the North Sea on the east. Some people (6)..... Scotland speak a different language called Gaelic. There are (7) five million people in Scotland, and Edinburgh (8)..... most famous city.

Scotland has many mountains; the highest one is called 'Ben Nevis'. In the south of Scotland, there are a lot of sheep. A long time ago, there (9) many forests, but now there are only a (10) Scotland is only a small country, but it is quite beautiful.

- | | | | |
|-----|---------|-----------|---------|
| 6. | A on | B in | C at |
| 7. | A about | B between | C among |
| 8. | A his | B your | C its |
| 9. | A is | B were | C was |
| 10. | A few | B little | C lot |

Questions 11-20

In this section you must choose the word which best fits each space in the text below.

For questions 11 to 20, mark one letter **A**, **B** or **C** on your Answer Sheet.

Alice Guy Blache

Alice Guy Blache was the first female film director. She first became involved in cinema while working for the Gaumont Film Company in the late 1890s. this was a period of great changes in the cinema and Alice was the first to use many new inventions, **(11)** sound and color.

In 1907 Alice **(12)**..... to New York where she started her own film company. She was **(13)**..... Successful, but, when Hollywood became the centre of the film world, the best days of the independent New York film companies were **(14)**..... . when Alice died in 1968, hardly nobody **(15)**..... her name.

- | | | | | |
|-------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------|
| 11. | A bringing | B including | C containing | D |
| supporting | | | | |
| 12. | A moved | B ran | C entered | D |
| transported | | | | |
| 13. | A next | B once | C immediately | D |
| recently | | | | |
| 14. | A after | B down | C behind | D |
| over | | | | |
| 15. | A remembered | B realized | C reminded | D |
| repeated | | | | |

UFOs- do they exist?

UFO is short for ' unidentified flying object'. UFOs are popularly known as flying saucers, (16) That is often the (17) they are reported to be. The (18) "flying saucers" were seen in 1947 by an American pilot, but experts who studied his claim decided it had been a trick of the light.

Even people experienced at watching the sky, (19) as pilots, report seeing UFOs. In 1978 a pilot reported a collection of UFOs off the coast of New Zealand. A television (20) went up with the pilot and filmed the UFOs. Scientists studying this phenomenon later discovered that in this case they were simply lights on boats out fishing.

- | | | | | |
|-----|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| 16. | A because | B therefore | C although | D so |
| 17. | A look | B shape | C size | D type |
| 18. | A last | B next | C first | D oldest |
| 19. | A like | B that | C so | D such |
| 20. | A cameraman | B director | C actor | D announcer |

Questions 21-40

In this section you must choose the word or phrase which best completes each sentence.

For questions 21 to 40, mark **one** letter **A, B, C** or **D** on your Answer Sheet.

21.The teacher encouraged her learners to an English pen-friend.

A should write B write C wrote D to write

22. They spent a lot of time at the pictures in the museum.

A looking B for looking C to look D to looking

23.Shirley enjoys science lessons, but all her experiments seem to wrong.

A turn B come C end D go

24..... from Michael, all the group arrived on time.

A Except B Other C Besides D Apart

25.She her neighbor's children for the broken window.

A accused B complained C blamed D denied

26.As I had missed the history lesson, my friend went the homework with me.

A by **B** after **C** over **D** on

27. Whether she's a good actress or not is a of opinion.

A matter **B** subject **C** point **D** case

28. The decorated roof of the ancient palace was up by four thin columns.

A built **B** carried **C** held **D** supported

29. Would it you if we came on Thursday?

A agree **B** suit **C** like **D** fit

30. This form be handed in until the end of the week.

A doesn't need **B** doesn't have **C** needn't **D** hasn't got

31. If you make a mistake when you are writing, just it out with your pen.

A cross **B** clear **C** do **D** wipe

32. Although our opinion on many things, we're good friends.

A differ **B** oppose **C** disagree **D** divide

33. This product must be eaten two days of purchase.

A by **B** before **C** within **D** under

34. The newspaper report contained important information.

A many **B** another **C** an **D** a lot of

35. Have you considered to London?

A move **B** to move **C** to be moving **D** moving

36. It can be a good idea for people who lead an active life to increase their of vitamins.

A upturn **B** input **C** upkeep **D** intake

37. I thought there was a of jealousy in his reaction to my good fortune.

A piece **B** part **C** shadow **D** touch

38. Why didn't you that you were feeling ill?

A advice **B** mention **C** remark **D** tell

39. James was not sure exactly where his best interests

A stood **B** rested **C** lay **D** centred

40. He's still getting the shock of losing his job.

A across **B** by **C** over **D** through

Questions 41 – 50

In this section you must choose the word or phrase which best fits each space in the texts.

For questions 41 to 50, mark one letter A, B, C or D on your Answer Sheet

The tallest buildings - SKYSCRAPERS

Nowadays, skyscrapers can be found in most major cities of the world. A building which was many (41) high was first called a skyscraper in the United States at the end of the 19th century, and New York has perhaps the (42) skyscraper of them all, the Empire State Building. The (43) beneath the streets of New York is rock, (44) enough to take the heaviest load without sinking, and is therefore well-suited to bearing the (45) of tall buildings.

- | | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| 41 A stages | B steps | C storeys | D levels |
| 42 A first-rate | B top-class | C well-built | D best-known |
| 43 A dirt | B field | C ground | D soil |
| 44 A hard | B stiff | C forceful | D powerful |
| 45 A weight | B height | C size | D scale |

SCRABBLE

Scrabble is the world's most popular word game. For its origins, we have to go back to the 1930s in the USA, when Alfred Butts, an architect, found himself out of (46) He decided that there was a (47) for a board game based on words and (48) To design one. Eventually he made a (49) from it, in spite of the fact that his original (50) was only three cents a game.

- | | | | |
|--------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| 46 A earning | B work | C income | D job |
| 47 A market | B purchase | C commerce | D sale |
| 48 A took up | B set out | C made for | D got round |
| 49 A wealth | B fund | C cash | D fortune |
| 50 A receipt | B benefit | C profit | D allowance |

Questions 51 – 60

In this section, you must choose the word or phrase which best completes each sentence.

For questions 51 to 60, mark one letter A, B, C, or D on your Answer Sheet.

51 Roger's manager to make him stay late if he hadn't finished the work.

A Insisted B warned C threatened D announced

52 By the time he has finished his week's work, John has hardly energy left for the weekend.

A Any B much C no D same

53 As the game to a close, disappointed spectators started to leave.

A Led B neared C approached D drew

54 I don't remember the front door when I left home this morning.

A to lock B locking C locked D to have locked

55 I to other people borrowing my books: they always forget to return them.

A Disagree B avoid C dislike D object

56 Andrew's attempts to get into the swimming team have not with much success.

A Associated B concluded C joined D met

57 Although Harry had obviously read the newspaper article carefully, he didn't seem to have..... the main point.

A Grasped B clutched C clasped D gripped

58 A lot of the views put forward in the documentary were open to

A Enquiry B query C question D wonder

59 The new college for the needs of learners with a variety of learning backgrounds.

A Deals B supplies C furnishes D caters

60 I find the times of English meals very strange – I'm not used dinner at 6pm.

A to have B to having C having D have

Appendix B. DMC Disposition Questionnaire by Muir (2016)

Dear learners:

Hello!

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this questionnaire. The purpose of our survey is to understand your motivation for English learning. The questionnaire is anonymous. The results are for academic purposes only and promise absolute confidentiality, so there is no need to worry about it. Thank you for your participation and cooperation! Enjoy your study and life!

Part 1: Your basic information

1. Gender: A) male B) female
2. Age: _____
3. Your grade: A) freshman B) sophomore C) junior D) senior
4. Your major : _____
5. English scores (please fill in your according to your personal situation).....
6. Hometown: A) countryside B) town C) City.....
7. Self-assessment of English proficiency: A) advanced B) intermediate C) low

Part 2:

We find accounts on the Internet of people being totally absorbed in VERY INTENSE PROJECTS, which motivate them for weeks or even months at a time.

These people say things like:

- “I think about this project day and night. I feel like it’s taken over my life!”
- “I’m amazed I’ve been able to stay so focused for so long, I’m so enjoying it that putting in all the work feels easy!”
- “I never thought I could achieve so much!”
- “My friends can definitely see that something special is happening to me, they say they’ve never seen me so motivated!”
- “I wish I could experience this type of motivation while working towards all my goals!”

Please answer the following questions by marking the appropriate answer.

Item 1 2 3 4 5

1. I recognize this type of intense motivation

2. I have personally experienced this type of intense motivation while doing a project

3. I have personally experienced this type of intense motivation, specifically while learning English

*1= Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

4. How often do you think you have experienced a project of this kind of motivational intensity?

1) ☐ I have NEVER experienced this type of motivation

2) ☐ I have experienced this type of motivation ONCE, but NOT QUITE AS INTENSE as above

3) ☐ I have experienced this type of motivation SEVERAL TIMES, but NOT QUITE AS INTENSE as above

4) ☐ I have experienced this type of motivation ONCE to a SIMILAR LEVEL OF INTENSITY as above

5) ☐ I have experienced this type of motivation SEVERAL TIMES to a SIMILAR LEVEL OF INTENSITY as above

About your experience of this kind of intense motivation, if you have experienced this more than once, please choose the most memorable time. This can be from ANY context (not only language learning).

5. How long did this experience last?

1) ☐ Less than 1 month 2) ☐ 1-2 months 3) ☐ 2-4 months

4) ☐ 4~6 months 5) ☐ Longer than 6 months

6. Please mark on the scale below how intense your motivation felt throughout this period

1 2 3 4 5

Not very intense ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ , Very intense

Part 3 : About your intense motivation project

Item 1 2 3 4 5

7. When looking back now, I have very good memories of this time

8. During this time, I was able to work more productively than I usually can

9. I surprised myself with how much I was able to do

10. Many times, it felt like a real struggle to keep going

11. This experience helped me to achieve all I had wanted to and more

12. I think something special happened to me during this experience - it was an amazing time

*1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3= Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

13. Would you like to experience this type of intense motivation again?

1. ☐ Yes 2. ☐ No

A little more about your intensive project experience.

Item 1 2 3 4 5

14. At the time, this project became a central part of my life

15. The people around me could see that I was experiencing something special

16. It didn't feel like hard work at the time - I was just caught up in the flow!

17. I remember thinking about my goal all the time

18. I often imagined myself achieving my final goal

19. It was a really enjoyable experience

*1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither agree nor disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly agree

Please answer the following two questions ONLY if you have experienced this type of intense motivation in the context of English learning

20. How would you rate your English proficiency level at the time you experienced this intense period of motivation?

1) ☐ Beginner 2) ☐ Pre- intermediate 3) ☐ Intermediate
4) ☐ Upper- intermediate 5) ☐ Advanced

21. Please tick the below statement which was most appropriate to you at the time you experienced this

1) ☐ I was studying the language at school
2) ☐ I was studying the language at university
3) ☐ I was studying the language at a private language school
4) ☐ I was studying the language on my own

Part 4:

22. Have you seen this type of motivation in people around you?

1. ☐ Yes 2. ☐ No 3. ☐ Not sure

Appendix C. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986)

The following section of the questionnaire aims at finding out about your degree of the language anxiety. We would like to ask you to answer the following questions by simply giving marks from 1 to 5.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

For example, consider the following item. If you strongly disagree with the statement, write “5” in the blank in front of the question: () I don’t worry about making mistakes in language class.

Please write one (and only one) whole number in front of each question and don’t leave out any of them. Thanks.

1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in a foreign language class.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

2. I don’t worry about making mistakes in language class.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

3. I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in language class.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

4. It frightens me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

5. It wouldn’t bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

7. I keep thinking that the other learners are better at languages than I am.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

10. I worry about the consequences of my failing my foreign language class.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

17. I often feel like not going to my language class.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

21. The more I study for language test, the more confused I get.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

23. I always feel that the other learners speak the foreign language better than I do.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other learners.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

28. When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak a foreign language.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

31. I am afraid that the other learners will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.

1= strongly agree 2= agree 3= neutral 4= disagree 5= strongly disagree

Appendix D. DMCs Interview Protocol by Zarrinabadi et al. (2019)

1. Can you tell me about your motivational experience?
2. How did you feel about it?
3. How was your daily schedule?
4. What was particularly interesting about your experience?
5. What was your goal? Did you achieve it?
6. Was there any change in your daily routines or study plan?
7. How did others influence your motivation in that time?
8. Do you remember when it started?
9. Do you remember what triggered your motivation?
10. When did it start to lessen?

11. What do you feel after that experience?

12. Do you like to have such a motivational experience again?

About the authors

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