

## RESEARCHARTICLE

# THE STUDY OF SOME MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING PROCESS: EVIDENCE FROM IRANIAN ENGLISH LEARNERS

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### ABSTRACT

Since the work of Gardner and his associates in the 1950s, the role of motivation in learning a second language has continued to interest researchers. Previous studies on L2 motivation were largely based on product oriented models of motivation, which tends to view motivation as a static phenomenon. Recently, however, there has been a shift in emphasis from a study of L2 motivation as a product to its study as a process. The methodological framework of this study was based on Dörnyei and Otto's (1998) Process Model of L2 Motivation. This model proposed that the construct of motivation is not static and changing in nature and influenced by many internal and external factors during learning process. The previous studies that analyzed the motivational variables in the Iran EFL settings have not investigated the temporal nature of motivation in L2 learning. Using qualitative methodology, the current study aimed to investigate the motivational factors in English learning for Iranian students. The participants were ten Iranian students at Payame Noor University in Bushehr, Iran. The participants were interviewed on an individual basis using a semi structured interview format. They also completed a language history questionnaire. Specifically, the participants' oral narratives were analyzed for emerging themes and patterns relating to the development of their motivation for English language learning. The results of this study revealed the temporal and changing nature of motivation in learning English for Iranian students. The emerging themes/patterns related to motivational fluctuations included the learning environment, the role of teacher, economic factor, and the role of an effective person in enhancing or ceasing the motivational abilities of students learning English. The thesis concluded by discussing implications for future work in this interesting area of research.

**Key Words:** Motivation, Instrumental Motivation, Integrative Motivation.

### INTRODUCTION

Motivation is regarded as an influential element in the success of any activity. It is a major factor that contributes positively to the learning process in any educational context. In the learning process, motivation plays a crucial role in giving a specific activity the meaning and energy for continuation and achieving the desired goals. Therefore, initiating any goal needs first to be preceded by desire or wish that provides this action with the necessary means for implementation and accomplishment. Foreign language learning motivation research has not lost its prominence in the literature of foreign language acquisition since it was initiated by Gardner and his associates in the 1950s. This period of research is what (Dörnyei, 2009) called "the social psychological period". Gardner and his associates sought to investigate how the language learners' attitudes towards the foreign speaking community affect their desire to learn the foreign. They also made popular distinction between two kinds of motivation. The first one is "integrative motivation" which means that one learns a given language to achieve a high level of integration and assimilation into the target language community. The second kind of motivation proposed by Gardner and Lambert (1972) is the instrumental motivation where a student learns a language to achieve some kind of benefit. The interest in this case is centered on the product of the language and not on the language itself. The second phase of motivation research began in the 1990s and it

has been based on "cognitive theories imported from educational psychology, mainly conducted outside Canada" (Dörnyei 2009, p 16). Many concepts have been associated with this phase as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, attributions, and self- confidence/efficacy and situation-specific motives related to the learning environment, e.g. motives related to the L2 course, teachers, peers (Dörnyei, 2009).

The third phase of motivation research has been marked by its interest in conceptualization of motivation in terms of the temporal aspect of it. This trend has been based on a process oriented approach to motivation that pays more attention to the dynamic nature of motivation, making it as a moving concept that goes through many stages. As a matter of fact, Dörnyei's work has given more importance to the temporal nature of motivation, by seeking to investigate the complicated processes of motivation and how motivation works, starting from intention formation and ending with executing the goal (Dörnyei and Otto, 1998).

The present study aimed to investigate the factors that contributed to English learning for Iranian students. In Iran's current educational context, English is predominantly considered to be the first foreign language. English is taught at different levels in the Iranian national educational system, ranging from primary schools to institutions of higher education as well as in private language institutes. English is the medium of instruction in some programs at the university level.

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It is offered as foreign language (FL) courses in secondary schools and as a language for specific purposes (LSP). It is also the language of some of the conferences in Iran. The demand in educational institutions and learning environments grow increasingly and it requires good planning and decision making to help learners and students to prosecute their studies and fulfill their goals. On the other hand, due to economic, educational or political reasons, people in their search for better work and better educational opportunities have become increasingly mobile and have started to migrate to different English speaking countries. These reasons alongside with the other reasons such as ever-growing interest in learning English as a prestigious language encourage the people to learn it. It means that people and particularly young generations usually have some kind of positive feelings towards English. Therefore, knowing and learning English has progressively become more prestigious and more popular, particularly among high school and university students.

Some researchers have examined the type of motivation and its orientation along with the attitudes of the learners towards learning English and found different results. For example, Moivaziri (2008) claimed that students in her study were highly motivated in both instrumental and integrative orientations. On the other hand, studies such as Vaezi (2008) claimed that students had very high motivation and positive attitudes towards learning English and they were more instrumentally motivated. These contradictory results encouraged the researcher to conduct a survey with different participants and at different setting. The main purpose of this study was to investigate how motivation factors affect English Language Learning process of Iranian EFL learners over time. Based on this purpose the researcher used the Theme based analysis to show the impact of these motivational factors. Due to the intensity of motivational factors the researcher chooses the four most important Motivational factors to study in this research. These motivational factors include: 1) The Learning environment; 2) Teacher Influence; 3) Economic Factors; 4) An Effective Person as a Motivator in the learning Process.

### Review of the Literature

There has been a great disagreement among motivation theorists in determining the exact nature of motivation. Dörnyei (1999) has indicated that "although it (motivation) is typically seen as a key factor in any learning process and the term is frequently used both by researchers and practicing teachers for explaining learner success or failure, the task of providing a precise definition of what exactly motivation entails turns out to be somewhat of a challenge" (p.525-526). This can be attributed to the fact that human beings think and behave in a complex way. Such complexities affect the way people behave and think, thus creating many motivational sources that direct an individual's decisions and choices. Due to the variety of meanings of motivation, the American Psychological Association replaced the term 'motivation' as a search term in the main psychological database. This action was justified as the concept of motivation "had too much meaning and therefore was not very useful" (Walker and Symons, 1997. cited in Dörnyei, 2001, p. 3). Beck (2004) acknowledged the difficulty of finding a definition of motivation and this is due to the fact that different theorists approach motivation differently and this results in various definitions of motivation. Beck (2004) has proposed that

motivation is derived from the Latin verb *movere* that means "to move". Motivation is then responsible for our movements, our actions and the way we behave. Any action an individual performs is not done in a vacuum. Rather, there is a forcing factor that plays a crucial role in initiating this action until it is accomplished. Brown (2007) presents the definitions of motivation based on the three historical schools of thought. Behaviorism regards motivation as the anticipation of a reward. Driven to acquire positive reinforcement and based on our prior experience, we repeat the action to get rewards. The social psychological approach to the study of L2 motivation was initiated by the pioneering work of the Canadian psychologist Robert Gardner and his colleagues, Wallace Lambert and Richard Clement (Dörnyei, 1999). They conducted many studies to examine how the attitudes of the learner towards the community and culture of that language can influence the acquisition process of that language. Gardner and Lambert (1972) stated that "success in mastering a foreign language does not only depend on intellectual capacity and language aptitude but also on the learner's perceptions of the other ethno linguistic group" (p.27).

There are many kinds of L2 motivation that contribute substantially to the learning process. Each individual has his/her own reasons to carry out a given task. For example, some learn a specific skill in order to get some benefits either financially or socially. On the other hand, some prefer to learn in order to get the full of recognition from a given society, to be a part of that society. According to Gardner and Lambert (1959), Integrative motivation has been conceptualized as one's "willingness to be like valued members of the language community" (Gardener, 1985 p. 64). Ellis (1997) explains that some learners prefer to learn a particular L2 because they are interested in the people and culture represented by the target language. An example he provides is that of English speaking Canadians learn French due to their interest in French people and their culture. Instrumental motivation refers to the learning L2 for some functional reasons, such as passing exams or getting a prestigious job (Ellis, 1997). Therefore, the interest and focus of the learners in this process is placed too heavily on the expected outcomes of learning process. Gardner and MacIntyre (1991) conducted a study to investigate the effects of integrative motivation and instrumental motivation on the learning of French/English vocabulary. They found that instrumentally motivated students studied longer than students who were not instrumentally motivated.

Resultative Motivation, refer to motivation which occurs as a result of learning. That is, the learners who achieve a high degree of success and accomplishment become more motivated to learn. Conversely, the learner who experiences failure in the learning process tends to be less motivated to learn. According to intrinsic motivation, the learner may not have attitudes, either positive or negative, towards the target language group. Rather, the learner's motivation "involves the arousal and maintenance of curiosity and can ebb and flow as a result of such factors as learners' particular interests and the extent to which they feel personally involved in learning activities" (Ellis, 1997 p.76). According to Ryan and Deci (2000), extrinsic motivation is "a construct that is involved whenever an activity is done in order to attain some separable outcome" (p.7). Therefore, extrinsic motivation is different from intrinsic motivation in that the latter refers to carrying out an activity for the enjoyment of the activity itself. For example, the student,

who does his/her homework because he /she fears from the parental sanctions for not doing homework, is extrinsically motivated as the student does homework in order to get a given outcome, that is in this case, avoiding the sanctions.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Participants**

In all, 10 Iranian students (5 were males and 5 were females) were enrolled through personal contact to participate in the study. All of the participants in this study were students at Payame Noor university of Bushehr, Iran. The selection process was made based upon many factors. One factor that was taken into account was the English proficiency level of the participants. Accordingly, attempts were made to recruit participants at different academic levels as well as different disciplines. The motivational changes may vary depending on the academic and linguistic level of the student. Another factor in recruiting process was the dialectal variation in relation to the students' Persian. As such, variation could have an influential impact on the findings of the study. Because in this study the researcher had been trying to show the motivational changes of two different groups of students namely those who took part in English Language institutes in addition to their regular English course at their secondary and high schools and those students who only studied English at their secondary and high schools, one another important criteria for selection of our participants was that if they took part in English language institute or not. Among the participants, 4 participants took part in English Language institutes in addition to their regular English course at their secondary and high schools and 6 participants only studied English at their secondary and high schools. In order to present a reliable study, the students recruited to participate in this study represented different regions of Iran.

### **Instruments**

#### **Semi- Structured Interview**

According to Dörnyei (2001), the interview method of data gathering consists of four main kinds: a) a structural interview in which the researcher follows strictly pre-prepared questions to be covered with every interviewee; b) unstructured interview in which the interviewee is asked to speak without prior preparation; c) semi-structural interview in which there is set of prepared questions but the interviewee is not forced to follow directly the questions and he/she can elaborate on certain issues and make interesting developments; d) focus group interview that refers to collective discussion that is made with the interviewer by a group of people. In order to lead an effective interview, an interview guide was adopted in semi-structured interviews. An interview guide is a list of questions that are prepared in advance to be explored during an interview. The main purpose of this guide was to draw the attention of the interviewee to the topics and issues that should be discussed and explored. In the current study, the participants (i.e. the interviewees) were free to talk about whatever issues they liked to address, but with focus on the main topic that was predetermined before the interviewing process began.

#### **Questionnaire**

The other instrument used in this study to collect data was a written questionnaire. Generally speaking, questionnaires are

conducted in order to get data that is classified into three types; factual, behavioral and attitudinal. Factual questions refer to a type of questions used to figure out who the participants are. They usually include questions that have to do with demographic features (e.g., age, race, and gender), religion, marital status as well as occupation and level of education. Behavioral questions are administered to find out what the respondents are doing or have done in their past life. These questions usually ask people about their habits, lifestyle and personal history. The questionnaire was in a paper pencil format. It contained closed items requesting participants' language background characteristics, such as age, gender, marital status, and the languages they knew in chronological order language acquisition history, perceived levels of proficiency in each language, language dominance, and code-switching patterns.

### **Procedure**

A 60-minute semi-structured interview was conducted with each of the Iranian students who participated in the study. The interviews were conducted by the researcher in the participant's home or at a location that was convenient for the participant. Each participant was given a cover letter about the study to read and an informed consent form to sign before to conducting the interview. The informed consent form indicated that the purpose of the study was to investigate the role of motivation in foreign language learning and how motivation of learning English for Iranian students changes over time. It also provided a detailed explanation about post-interview contact for member-check. At the end of the interview, each participant completed a background questionnaire.

### **Semi-Structured Interview Procedures**

Interviews were semi-structured in order to give the interviewee the freedom and flexibility to talk about his experiences in learning English. Semi-Structured interview questions were adapted, with minor modifications, from Ching (2009). An interview protocol was developed to provide guidelines for introduction and closing, questions that were related to the English learning experiences and also potential investigations for in-depth responses. The participants spoke in Persian throughout the interview process. The interviewer also used Persian language which the interviewee was comfortable with. The questions used in the interview were divided into two phases. The first phase contained questions that were meant to elicit data in relation to student's experiences in learning English before the student came to university. The other phase of questions targeted the student's experiences in learning English at university.

### **Background information questionnaire**

A background information questionnaire was administered to the participants at the end of the interview. This questionnaire was adapted, with minor modifications, from many studies. (Pang, 2009; Chong, 2011). The questionnaire was developed to collect basic demographic information and linguistic characteristics of each Iranian student, which was important for understanding of the contextual variables in relation to the students' motivational changes. The questionnaire was in a paper pencil format. It contained closed items requesting participants' language background characteristics, such as age, gender, marital status, and the languages they know in

chronological order, language acquisition history, perceived levels of proficiency in each language, language dominance, and code-switching patterns.

### Data Analysis

After completion of the data collection process, the data was processed through the analysis of textual data that was undertaken based on the thematic analysis process. Following is a description of transcription and thematic analysis procedures.

### Thematic Analysis

Patton (1990) stated that the purpose of qualitative research is to present findings and the results. He adds that the analytical approach used depend on the qualitative study conducted. This is attributed to that the fact that "each qualitative study is unique". This results in a unique analytical approach. This means that the selection of a given analytical approach is primarily dependent on the study. Once this study focused on patterns and themes related to motivational changes of Iranian students learning English, thematic analysis process was adopted to analyze the students' oral explanations. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is "a method for identifying as" a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. The main purpose of thematic analysis is to look for the themes that emerge from the explanations of the participants. Boyatzis (1998) stated that "a theme is a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes possible observations or at the minimum interprets aspects of phenomenon. Therefore, thematic analysis is used to look for patterns and themes that are centered on a given phenomenon.

## RESULTS

First, a detailed description of the participants in the current study is presented (Table 1). Second, themes and sub-themes of the interview data are explained. These themes and sub-themes are presented in response to the research question of the study: How are the impact of the four motivational factors, 1) The Learning Environment; 2) Teacher Influence; 3) Economic Factors; 4) An Effective Person as a Motivator on the Process of English language learning of Iranian EFL?

learning environment refers basically to an educational setting where learners learn a language as second language, but the dominant language used is their mother tongue. This is exactly the case with the participants of this study. Participant (1) started the interview with a critical outlook into the learning environment as a demotivating factor. He argues: "The educational environment in Iran has a bad reputation. Actually, during my learning English period that started since secondary till the end of high school level, I can say that I learnt nothing. Moreover, based on these I got a negative attitude toward English in terms of its difficulty and thus this affected my motivation negatively to learn it." When he was asked to list the factors that led to his critical view of the English learning environment in his country, he replied: "Teaching English in Iran has been mainly focusing on basics of English such as grammar... It was forgotten as soon as the students finished the test.... The students' focus was on how to pass the course".

Participant (2) held the learning environment responsible for his decreased motivation beginning until the end of the High school level. He explained: "My experiences in learning English were so simple and it mainly depended on basics of English. This was in the Secondary and high school levels... when I joined these levels; I took intensive courses of English. But it lacked clarity and effectiveness.... Actually I was taught grammar but in real life communication I couldn't speak a single correct sentence."

Participant (3) said that the learning environment in Iran is so diverse and thus it is highly difficult to judge it based on experiences of some students coming from cities in Iran where the educational movement was still in its infancy. She stated that on the other hand, there are major cities, especially in the Central part of Iran as Tehran, where the population consists of educated professionals. She clarified that she came from rural community where the teaching English was very weak and unproductive. This is illustrated by the following excerpt: "For me. I came from rural place where I studied.... The level of teaching was not good as it should be ...there was not enough interest on the part of officials there to introduce a professional teaching practices and this really influenced my motivation.... I really hoped to learn English in the big cities of Iran where there is more improved teaching materials and newer teaching methods".

Table 1. Participants' details

participants	Age	Gender	Marital status	From	First language	Percent of mother tongue using	Percent of English language using	Studying field
1	29	Male	Married	Bandar Abbas	Farsi	%95	%5	Business Management
2	25	Male	Single	Fars	Farsi	%98	%2	Accounting
3	22	Female	Married	Zahedan	Farsi	%95	%5	Computer
4	30	Male	Married	Kordestan	Kurdish	%80	%20	Computer
5	29	Male	Married	Ahvaz	Arabic	%30	%5	Law
6	25	Female	Single	Tehran	Farsi	%90	%10	Physical education
7	22	Female	Single	Tabriz	Turkish	80		Theological
8	24	Female	Married	Mashhad	Farsi	75%	%25	Psychology
9	26	Male	Married	Kashan	Farsi	70%	%30	Computer science
10	29	Female	Married	Borazjon	Farsi	85%	%15	Tourism management

### Regular Themes of Motivation

#### Theme (1) Learning Environment

The learning environment constitutes one of the critical factors for the success of any educational goals. Foreign language

The four students that took part at language institutes in addition to regular secondary and high school courses (participants 7, 8, 9, and 10) said that their motivation changes after they took part in language institutes because of different factors that among them are teachers' knowledge of English language teaching methods. The effects of teaching

environment and the behavior of teachers. Participant (8) stressed that learning English in Language institute was the only motivational factor that created her passion to learn English. She explained: "For the first time, I felt that I had learnt English..... English learning was no longer memorization of words and rules of grammar, but it became a daily habit that I had to do, exactly just like eating and drinking". Participant (10) clarified that her motivation rose after she came to English language institute, but it was not a continuous process. She illustrated that there were some events that influenced her motivation. She said: "Actually, my motivation to learn English increased considerably when I came to the English language institute ...but the institute I used to study in had a very high score to pass in the exam as the minimum required obtaining a passing grade. Every time I failed to achieve the required score in spite of the effort I used to make, this, no doubt, weakened my motivation".

### **Theme (2) the Role of Teacher**

Participant (4) compared the role of the teacher in learning English, when he was in language institute and when he studied English language at governmental school. He explained:

"I am not exaggerating if I say that I learnt nothing at school.... This was because of the short time allocated to teach English in schools. More importantly, the shortage of qualified teachers was a main reason behind my falling motivation. In case of the presence of qualified teacher, an incorrect pronunciation of some words undermined the ability of teaching correctly". Participant (9) held the view that learning English could be achieved in English Language institute. He justified that saying: "This was due to the presence of the qualified teachers... the process of English learning was accomplished without first language interference ..... I was dealing with the English language only".

### **Theme (3) Economic Factor**

Some participants raised the issue of financial ability as a vital factor in English learning motivation. This refers to students' ability to access or avail of alternative opportunities for learning English outside the public school domain by enrolling in English intensive courses at their own expense at English language institutes. These courses are usually costly. In this case, the economic factor can make the difference in terms of increasing or decreasing the motivational energy for learners. Participant (5) discussed this point in detail, pointing out that his financial status was not good and this restricted his choices of learning English.

He added that by learning English in public schools, one can't achieve a high level of competence in the language and one should join intensive courses to develop his/her English language skills. The following excerpt illustrates his point very well: "My financial status was not good and this really influenced my motivational learning considerably.... A friend of mine was financially good and used to take part in language institutes regularly.... I was so amazed at his performance in speaking skill as well as his writing style.... Then I was convinced that learning English outside school was the ideal solution if I wanted to develop my English.... Due to costly fees of those institutions I couldn't stand it ... this really created a great weakness in my motivational learning".

### **Theme (4) an Effective Person as a Motivator in the Learning Process**

Four participants (7, 8, 9, and 10) in this study pointed out that their motivation in learning English was formed because of an effective person they had met in his life. Actually, this theme is consistent with Dörnyei and Shoaib's motivational influences that contained what they called "relationship with a significant other". Specifically, this refers to another person who contributes positively in increasing the motivational energy for specific learners. This person could be a friend, teacher or relative. Participant (7) stated that there were two people who affected her attitude and motivation towards learning English; her brother and teacher. Her brother worked in a language institute and used to speak English on a daily basis due to the nature of his work that required interacting in English with learners. She illustrated that by saying: "my brother used to using English as a medium of interaction... his speaking skill was really excellent and I tried to imitate him... I wanted to speak English exactly as he did"

She further explained that one of her teachers at English language institute created her high motivation for learning English. The teacher's fluency in speaking represented a great example on how the real learner of English should be. She commented: "the teacher was speaking English fluently ... I really liked her classes and used to go to her during her office hours to correct my errors in relation to pronunciation. This teacher made a great stride in increasing my motivation level to learn English". Participant (9) stressed the role of the teacher in creating motivational energy, which was a significant factor affecting student performance. This surely affected the students' performances. After the participants went to English language institutes, the English teachers played a crucial role in the motivational satisfaction on the part of the participants. The following quote illustrates well: "When I first went to English language institute, the teaching staff was a qualified teacher of English... that gave me some kind of confidence and motivation to learn English".

## **DISCUSSION**

A thematic analysis approach was implemented to show the motivational influences of English language institute On 4 Iranian undergraduate students who took part in English language institute in addition to learning English language at secondary and high schools and those 6 students who studied English language only at their regular secondary and high schools. The participants completed a language background questionnaire and were interviewed on an individual basis. During the interviews, the 10participants shared their experiences in learning English both at secondary and high school and at English language institute.

Four major themes emerged from the interview data: 1) The Learning Environment; 2) Teacher Influence; 3) Economic Factors; 4) An Effective Person as a Motivator in the Learning Process. In order to make these themes clearer, I present each one with relevant excerpts based on the participants' explanations in English. The results of this study present further evidence in support of the temporal nature of motivation. Motivation is no longer regarded as a static and unchanging attribute but has a dynamic nature that fluctuates rapidly.

These emerged themes indicate that foreign language learning is like a journey where one passes through many steps during one's life, which could contribute negatively or positively in the learning process.

### Conclusion

Based on the explanations of the participants, those participants that studied English language at both school and language institute had a more positive attitude toward English language and had more motivation to learn this language in compare to those participants that studied English language only at governmental schools. The findings of this study also support those in the literature on L2 motivation (Dörnyei and Ottó's, 1998) that regards motivation as a dynamic and fluctuated attribute.

The learner passes through stages and phases during the learning process that leave a mark on the motivational profile. The participants of this study stated in their explanations that motivation for them wasn't a static concept that they were born with and stayed with them. Rather, their motivational energies were influenced by a variety of factors, such as learning environment, the role of the teacher, as well as economic determiners. Through thematic analysis of the explanations of the participants it is found that learning environment is a very important factor that can affect the learners' motivation positively or negatively.

Those 6 participants that studied English language only at their school environment believed that the situation had a very negative effect on their motivation toward learning English language, while those 4 participants that studied at language institute considered institute environment as positive factor. In relation to the participants attitudes toward the role of teachers on students motivation, all of them said considered teacher as the most important motivational factor. Again the 4 participants that studied at language institute in addition to their regular school saw teacher as positive motivating factor while the 6 participants that studied only at school saw teacher as demotivating factor because of his/her teaching methodology and lack of fluency.

### Implication of the study

This study provided interesting suggestions that could contribute in increasing the motivational level of the Iranian students learning English. As indicated earlier, all the participants had agreed that the availability of a qualified and fluent teacher brought about a considerable and positive change in their motivation.

Critically speaking, the concept of the so-called qualified teacher is an undeniable concept. Therefore, the Ministry of Education should implement a national plan in which teaching jobs should be granted to the qualified teachers. Also based on the explanations of the participants in this study, the material designers and teachers should provide teaching materials and class situation in a way that motivate students toward learning English language.

### Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

This study provided findings in relation to motivational changes in learning English. However, it must be admitted that this study is a human endeavor that must have shortcomings that can be addressed in other studies. First the numbers of participants were small sample of students learning English. To come up with more representative results, the sample size should be bigger than the current one with emphasis on diversifying the participants engaged in the study on the terms of their academic major and the states in which they live. Second, further research should try to explore the implications discussed earlier empirically to ensure the effectiveness of suggestions for increasing motivational level.

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