

## A REVIEW ON ATTITUDE AND MOTIVATION IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR TAHFIZ STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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<b>Abstract</b>	<p><i>This article explores the pivotal roles of attitude and motivation in English language learning, focusing on the unique context of Tahfiz students. Drawing upon scholarly literature, the article explores the definitions, interactions, and influences of these two key factors on language acquisition. By analysing existing studies within the field, the article aims to provide educators and stakeholders with a deeper understanding of the importance of attitude and motivation in supporting students' language learning journeys. The study's novelty lies in its focus on the Tahfiz setting, a context often overlooked in language learning research. Positive attitudes and motivation are crucial for Tahfiz students, as indifference can hinder their efforts and learning progress. By effectively cultivating these factors, educators can significantly impact the success of Tahfiz students in acquiring English as a second language (L2), enabling them to become global Islamic scholars.</i></p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Attitudes, Motivation, English, Tahfiz Student, Malaysia.</p>
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### INTRODUCTION

Students' success in language learning centres on two key factors namely attitude and motivation. Attitude, a long-lasting disposition that shapes our behaviour (as defined traditionally), plays a crucial role. Researchers like Cakici (2007) emphasises the importance of a positive attitude towards the language and its culture, linking it to easier learning. Similarly, studies by Kudo (1999) and Klausmeier (1985) suggest that attitude influences both learning success and overall behaviour. Gardner (1985) even argues that a positive attitude towards the target language itself is more important for proficiency than general interest in the language or its speakers. Cakici (2007) further reinforces this by highlighting how a positive attitude smooths the learning process, while a negative one hinders it.

Liu (2007) identifies two main types of motivation for learning a second language. Integrative motivation stems from a desire to connect and become part of the target language community. This is seen as a stronger driver for language learning because it focuses on personal connection. Conversely, instrumental motivation is driven by practical goals like better job prospects or higher income. Dornyei (1994) emphasises that both types of motivation play a role, as they can lead to specific learning goals. These goals can be focused on building relationships (integrative) or achieving practical benefits (instrumental).

More research on language learning motivation reveals some interesting findings. First, Dornyei (1994) showed that wanting to connect with the language community (integrative motivation) and wanting practical benefits (instrumental motivation) are not necessarily opposing goals. In fact, they can coexist and even reinforce each other, leading to well-defined learning objectives. Furthermore, Dornyei suggests that increased proficiency can further motivate learners. Second, Clement et al. (1994) highlight that students' learning goals can vary depending on their social and cultural background. Building on this, Ryan and Deci (2000) propose a new framework with intrinsic motivation (doing something for enjoyment) and extrinsic motivation (doing something for external rewards). They argue that lacking both types of motivation leads to demotivation, or a lack of desire to learn (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Within this framework, Liu (2007) emphasises the importance of intrinsic motivation for successful language learning.

The path to language learning success is paved with a variety of motivation. Both the desire to connect with the language community (integrative) and the desire for practical benefits (instrumental) can play a role. Similarly, learners can be driven by the inherent enjoyment of learning (intrinsic) or external rewards (extrinsic). The key factor, however, is that the relative importance of each type of motivation can vary depending on the individual and the learning environment. This complexity highlights the need for further research to understand how different contexts influence the types of motivation that drive students' language learning journeys. Thus, this paper delves into three key areas: the historical development of English in Malaysia, theoretical frameworks for understanding student attitudes and motivation, and a review of existing research on these attitudes and motivations as they relate to English language learning.

Despite numerous studies exploring student attitudes and motivation globally, research specifically focussed on Malaysian students learning English, especially those from the Islamic religious education background, remains limited. Accordingly, this paper aims to address the gap by examining the factors within the unique Malaysian context. By capturing the Malaysian experience, this conceptual paper offers a valuable contribution. It can indirectly inform future strategies and improve the understanding of relevant parties to address the ongoing challenges of teaching and learning English in Malaysia.

## **MALAYSIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM**

The arrival of the British in the early 18th century marked a significant shift in Malaysian education. Prior to colonisation, the native population spoke Bahasa Malaysia, a Southeast Asian language (Thompson, 2017). Initially drawn to the Malay Peninsula for missionary work, the British ultimately decided to colonise the region, fuelled by the potential for trade (Pillai & Ong, 2018). Effective communication being vital for business success, the British implemented a policy to spread their own language, English (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012). This policy also served their 'divide and rule' strategy, establishing a segregated education system for different ethnicities (Khoo, 1996; Sheppard, 1959; Wahid, 1970). In 1812, they opened the first school in Penang, replicating the British educational model and using English as the primary language of instruction (Omar, 2012). This marked the beginning of English's gradual integration into the Malaysian education system.

Gaining independence in 1957 brought many challenges, including choosing Malaysia's official language. While both Malay and English were designated for government use (Liu & Ricks, 2012), this decision was not universally accepted (Omar, 2012). Malaysia's diverse ethnicities could not agree on a single national language. The Malay population advocated for Bahasa Malaysia as the sole official language, while the Chinese and Indian communities showed little support for a monolingual nation (Omar, 2012). As a compromise, the government implemented a temporary dual-language policy, granting equal weight to both Bahasa Malaysia and English (Omar, 2012). However, this solution was not intended to be permanent, with plans for re-evaluation after a decade (Omar, 2012).

Malaysia's education system presents a fascinating paradox. English use is booming in private institutions like international schools and universities (Pillai & Ong, 2018).

Reflecting this trend, the government has designated English as the official second language, alongside the national language, Bahasa Malaysia (Hashim & Low, 2012). However, this does not hold true for everyone. Students focussed on Islamic religious studies prioritise Arabic as their second language, likely due to its deep connection with Islam itself (Melor & Ranjeeta, 2011). This could also influence their attitudes and motivation towards learning the English language.

### **TAHFIZ INSTITUTIONS IN MALAYSIA**

Malaysia has witnessed a surge in Islamic education, particularly in Tahfiz institutions. These institutions, dedicated to memorising the Quran, have become increasingly popular among parents who see them as fostering strong moral character in their children. Recent research highlights this growing public interest in Tahfiz education (Bakar et al., 2015).

Getting into a Tahfiz institution is not straightforward. Selection processes are in place to ensure students can handle the rigorous curriculum (Che Hassan et al., 2015). Memorising the Quran requires dedication, so administrators interview and assess potential students to confirm their suitability and maintain the institution's reputation. Only students with the right attitude and aptitude are admitted. 'Tahfiz' itself is Arabic for 'memorisation', and students learn the Quran through a cycle of reading, listening, and memorisation. Since the entire Quran needs to be memorised, institutions prioritise selecting capable students. Upon successful completion, students earn the titles of 'Hafiz' (male) or 'Hafizah' (female), gaining a respected position within Islam and society. The Quran itself emphasises the blessings bestowed upon those who memorise it (Surah Fatir, verse 32), further contributing to their respect within the Muslim community.

Malaysia's Islamic education system boasts a rich history, flourishing since the arrival of Islam and gaining further momentum after independence. This growth is exemplified by the establishment of the first Tahfiz institution, Maahad Tahfiz al-Quran wa al-Qiraat at the National Mosque, in 1966. With only eight initial students (Azmil, 2012), these institutions have become a popular choice for parents across Malaysia, both urban and rural. The driving force behind this popularity is the widespread belief that Tahfiz education fosters strong moral character in children.

As mentioned earlier, Tahfiz institutions specialise in training students to memorise and recite the entire Quran. These centres are seen as having an accountability in educating students for this specific purpose. Their popularity is evident in the rapid growth of Tahfiz institutions in Malaysia, with numbers rising from just 58 in 1999 to 278 by 2011 (Bani et al., 2014). Interestingly, over 91% of these institutions are privately owned. However, memorising the Quran is no small feat. Research suggests that a significant portion, around 60%, of students struggle to complete memorisation within six semesters (Nik Abdullah, 2019). Che Hassan et al. (2015) echo this sentiment, highlighting the demanding nature of Quran memorisation. Success in this programme hinges on a student's passion, attitude, and personal qualities, along with their overall preparedness (Blank & Alas, 2009). This is reflected in the selection process, where Tahfiz institutions ensure potential students meet specific requirements.

Researchers like Mohd Anuar and Norshahril (2011) emphasise the critical role of a student's environment in shaping their character. Recognising this, many Tahfiz institutions establish structured routines for students, including memorisation schedules and other mandatory activities (Murihah Abdullah et al., 2016). These routines aim to cultivate a positive and supportive environment for future 'huffaz' (memorisers of the Quran). This environment fosters Quran memorisation while safeguarding students from negative influences. Ultimately, the success of Tahfiz education hinges on students' attitudes and motivation, factors nurtured by a well-structured environment. This has made Tahfiz education a growing popular option among Muslim parents for their children. Nevertheless, yet again, those within this education background generally have poor grasp of the English language, which somehow may limit their global function as future Islamic scholars.

## THEORIES ON ATTITUDE AND MOTIVATION IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

The concept of attitude has been approached from various angles. The Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching (2002) focusses on language attitudes, defining them as how speakers view their own language or languages spoken by different communities. Baker (1992) takes a broader view, suggesting attitudes explain the underlying reasons behind human behaviour within a theoretical framework. Gardner (1980) defines attitudes as our beliefs about a particular thing or person, essentially an inference based on those beliefs. Wenden (1991) delves deeper, proposing that attitudes have three key components: affective (emotions), behavioural (actions), and cognitive (thoughts/beliefs). According to Wenden, these components combine to form our overall attitude towards something.

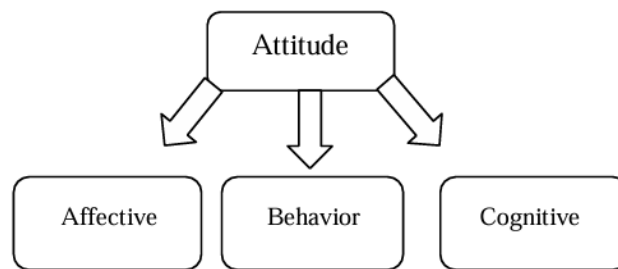


Figure 1: Attitude and Its Components

Figure 1 depicts a model of student attitudes, highlighting three key aspects: affective (emotions), behavioural (actions), and cognitive (thoughts). These components interact, influencing a student's overall attitude towards learning. This model is particularly relevant for Tahfiz students as the researcher aims to understand their attitudes towards learning English. While Tahfiz students are generally known for their positive attitudes due to their Islamic background, concerns exist regarding their English language proficiency. The researcher hypothesizes that a positive attitude towards English can also influence how well Tahfiz students learn the language.

## MOTIVATION

Motivation is a multifaceted concept. Oxford Dictionaries Online (2014) defines it simply as the reason behind someone's actions. Brown (2000) offers a more nuanced view, focusing on how motivation shapes our choices regarding goals and the effort we invest in achieving them. While Hanin et al. (2011) emphasise the role of spiritual self-encouragement (citing Najati, 1985), Gardner (1985) takes a broader perspective, viewing motivation as a complex interplay of effort, desire to achieve language learning goals, and positive attitudes towards the learning process itself. This concept formed the foundation of Gardner's groundbreaking socio-educational model in 1985, recognised as one of the most influential models in second language acquisition according to MacIntyre (2007). The core idea of this model, as proposed by Gardner & Lalonde (1985), is that second language learning involves both an individual's ability and their motivation, with the latter being heavily influenced by social-psychological factors. The following section will delve deeper into the details of Gardner's socio-educational model.

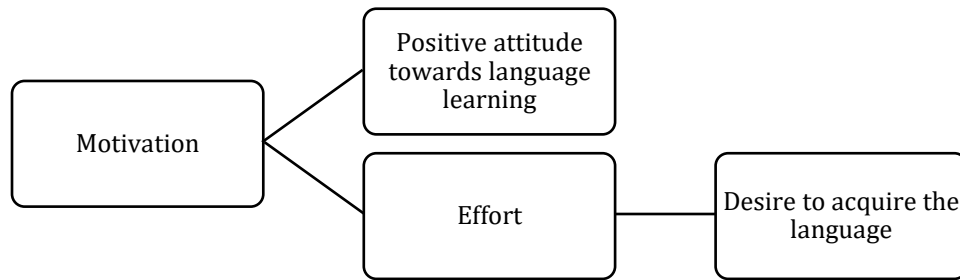


Figure 2: Motivation and Its Components

Figure 2 depicts a model of motivation for learning English, comprised of three key elements: a positive attitude towards learning a language, effort and desire to acquire the language. These factors interact to influence a Tahfiz student's overall motivation to learn English. Recognising this interconnectedness, it is imperative to study both the attitudes and motivation of Tahfiz students towards English language learning.

### **SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL MODEL**

Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model sheds light on the complexities of motivation in second language (L2) learning. This model introduces the concept of integrative motivation, which falls under the umbrella of individual differences. Integrative motivation is further broken down into two key components: a student's attitude towards the learning situation itself, and their level of integrativeness, or desire to connect with the target language community (Gardner & Lambert, 1959). The classic socio-educational model recognises two main types of L2 learning motivation, namely (1) Integrativeness - refers to a student's willingness to connect with and become part of the target language community (Gardner & Lambert, 1959: 271), and (2) Instrumentality - focuses on the practical benefits of learning the language, such as career advancement or travel opportunities (Gardner, 1985: 133).

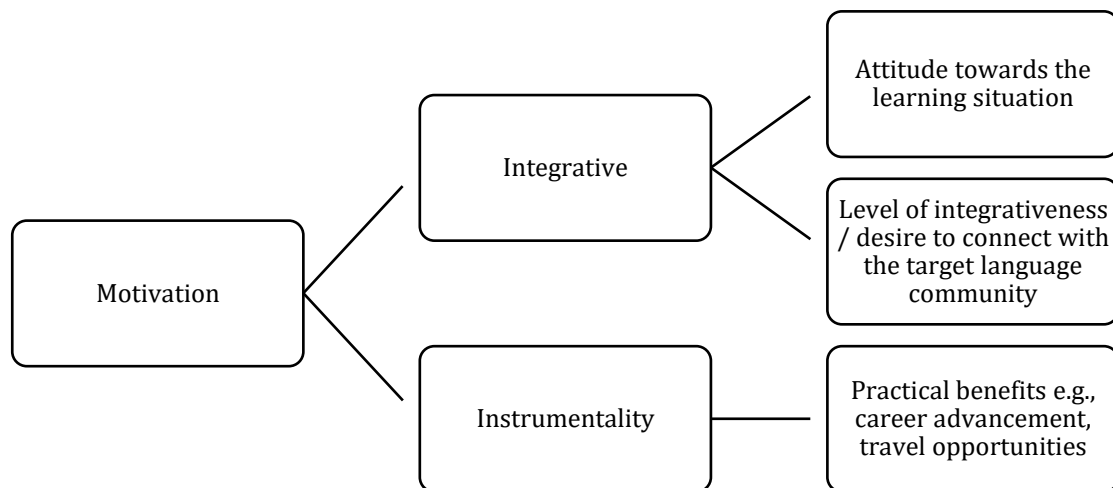


Figure 3: Socio-educational Model

For several decades, Gardner and Lambert's (1959) concepts of integrative motivation (desire to connect with the target language community) and instrumental motivation (focus on practical benefits) dominated the field of L2 learning motivation (Qin, 2012). However, limitations in Gardner's classic model have led to a shift towards understanding motivation in a more dynamic context. Researchers now recognise that motivation is not static, but rather evolves over time (Dornyei, 2005). This perspective is

reflected in Dornyei's (2005) L2 motivational self-system (L2MSS) model, which proposes three key components, which include:

1. Ideal L2 Self: This refers to the learner's aspirations for their future L2 abilities and identity.
2. Ought-to L2 Self: This reflects the learner's perceived obligations or pressures to learn the L2.
3. L2 Learning Experience: This component focuses on the learner's present experiences within the L2 learning environment, including factors like teachers, curriculum, peers, and the sense of achievement.

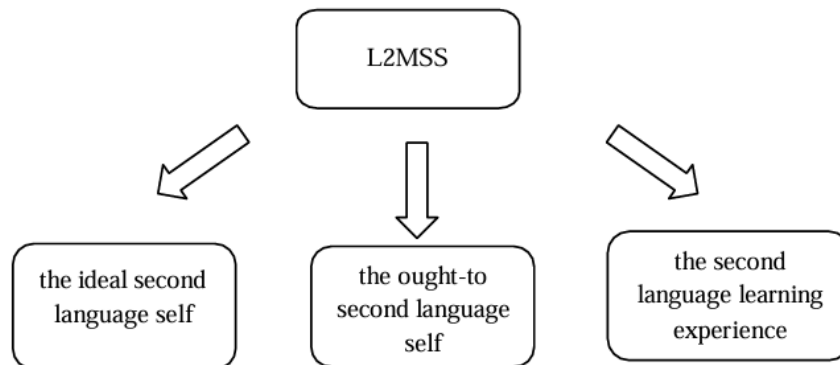


Figure 4: Second Language Motivational Self-system

This paper commends the motivational frameworks developed by Gardner and Dornyei. Both Dornyei (2002) and Gardner (1985) categorise motivation into two main types: integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation describes a student's desire to learn a language in order to connect with the people who speak it (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). This type of motivation is often linked to a positive attitude towards the target language culture (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). On the other hand, instrumental motivation focusses on practical reasons for learning a language, such as career advancement. Students driven by instrumental motivation are primarily interested in the functional benefits of language acquisition (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

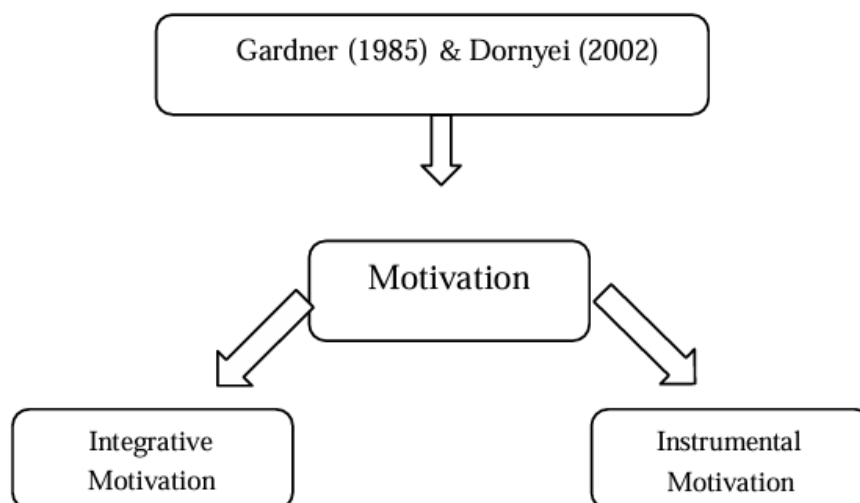


Figure 5: Categories of Motivation

## **PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON ATTITUDES AND MOTIVATION TOWARDS LEARNING ENGLISH**

Asmali (2017) investigated the factors influencing young learners' attitudes and motivation towards English learning. The study, which employed a mixed methods approach with 192 participants, identified several key influences, including parental and teacher support, positive learning environments, and engaging classroom activities. These factors were found to contribute to improved learning outcomes. However, the study's scope could be broadened in two ways. Firstly, increasing the participant pool would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of young learners' perspectives on their own attitudes and motivations. Secondly, conducting cross-cultural studies could provide valuable insights by comparing learners from different educational backgrounds.

Similar to Asmali (2017), Thang et al. (2011) explored the link between motivation and English proficiency in Malaysian secondary students. Their study, which included 143 male students from diverse ethnicities (Chinese, Malay, and Iban), employed both qualitative and questionnaire methods. The research found a positive correlation, suggesting that higher motivation and a positive attitude towards English can lead to improved proficiency. This finding aligns with the notion that a lack of intrinsic motivation might contribute to lower English proficiency. However, further studies are needed to solidify this connection.

Building on this concept, Ganapathy (2016) investigated the influence of learning environment and teaching approaches on student motivation and attitude towards English. The research suggests that both positive and negative student attitudes and motivation can be linked to the quality of the learning environment and the teaching methods employed.

## **ATTITUDE AND MOTIVATION TOWARDS LEARNING ENGLISH**

In this paper, as established earlier, the authors view attitude and motivation as interconnected concepts that are frequently examined together. Research confirms this close relationship between motivation and language learning attitudes (Ellis, 1997). Several other scholars also support this notion. Abdul Aziz (2007) emphasises that a learner's attitude towards a language is a key driver of motivation to learn it. Similarly, Mirjana and Ana (2017) suggest that motivation stems from attitude. Gardner (1985) further reinforces this idea, arguing that both motivation and a positive attitude are essential for a successful language learning experience.

Beyond its connection to attitude, motivation itself is widely recognised as crucial for learning success in any domain, including L2 acquisition (Nasser Oroujlou & Majid Vahedi, 2011). Research by Ismail et al. (2014) and Bidin et al. (2009) identify attitude and motivation as key factors contributing to successful L2 learning.

Motivation is a fundamental driving force in language acquisition (McDonough, 1983; Ellis, 1994). It ignites the initial spark for learning a new language (Dornyei, 2018) and fuels perseverance throughout the demanding process (Zimmerman, 2000, as cited in Schunk et al., 2008). Motivated students actively participate in class activities, follow instructions, and contribute to discussions.

In the context of language learning, motivation can be defined as the combination of a learner's desire to learn and the satisfaction gained from the process (Gardner, 1985; Dornyei, 1994). Extensive research underlines the crucial role of motivation in achieving success in L2 learning.

Learning a foreign language is a challenging journey that requires both a positive attitude and a high level of motivation. In essence, attitude reflects a person's general outlook, either positive or negative, towards something (e.g., learning English). Motivation, on the other hand, delves deeper, representing the driving force behind a person's actions and their pursuit of specific goals (Malini & Gooi, 2016; Mahadi & Jafari, 2012). This desire to achieve one's goals fuels the effort and perseverance required for successful language learning. Studies even suggest that strong motivation can lead to a more positive attitude

towards learning (Musa et al., 2012). Therefore, motivation stands as a critical factor for success in language acquisition.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, high ability alone is not enough for long-term success – strong motivation is essential. This principle applies to education in general, and specifically in language learning, where excellent instruction requires student motivation to flourish. While concerns about student motivation are longstanding, this area has received limited investigation within the context of Tahfiz education. For Tahfiz students, a positive attitude is crucial. Indifference can lead to a lack of effort, hindering learning. Therefore, both attitude and motivation play a significant role in how effectively these students learn, including their ability to acquire English as a second language (L2).

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