



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia

Corso di Laurea magistrale
in
Scienze del Linguaggio

Tesi di Laurea

The teacher's role in motivating preschool children to learn
English as a FL in a classroom environment:
An Exploratory Study

Relatore

Ch. Prof. Graziano Serragiotto

Correlatrice

Ch.ma Prof.ssa Monica Banzato

Laureanda

Alice Covelli

Matricola 875840

Anno Accademico

2023 / 2024

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Abstract Italiano

I giovanissimi studenti, specialmente quelli in età prescolare, mostrano spesso una curiosità innata e un entusiasmo spontaneo verso le nuove esperienze. Sebbene la motivazione intrinseca possa rappresentare una forza potente nell'acquisizione linguistica, essa non risulta sempre sufficiente per garantire un apprendimento efficace. Fondamentale risulta essere la capacità dell'insegnante di creare un ambiente didattico favorevole, capace di incentivare una forte motivazione negli studenti. Le ricerche precedenti hanno costantemente messo in luce il ruolo centrale della motivazione nel successo dell'educazione linguistica. Il presente studio esplorativo, che impiega il mixed method QUAL-QUAN, ha esaminato i fattori che influenzano la motivazione e la demotivazione in sette giovani studenti, di età compresa tra i 5 e i 7 anni. Questi giovani studenti hanno partecipato ad un progetto di inglese come lingua straniera (EFL) presso una scuola dell'infanzia privata situata nel nord-est Italia. L'indagine ha esplorato, in primo luogo, l'impatto dell'atteggiamento dell'insegnante e, in secondo luogo, l'influenza dell'ambiente della classe sulla motivazione e demotivazione degli alunni, attraverso una combinazione di metodo qualitativo e quantitativo, tra cui video registrazioni, note di osservazione seguentemente riportate in tabelle e un questionario. I risultati hanno evidenziato che un atteggiamento positivo e coinvolgente da parte dell'insegnante, caratterizzato da calore, entusiasmo e sostegno, è cruciale per favorire la motivazione degli studenti. Inoltre, un ambiente didattico stimolante, caratterizzato da attività interattive, attenzione ai bisogni individuali e un forte senso di comunità, si è dimostrato essenziale per mantenere l'impegno degli alunni. Al contrario, un insegnante disinteressato, un'atmosfera di classe stressante e attività poco stimolanti hanno dimostrato di essere fattori di demotivazione e disimpegno. Lo studio ha inoltre analizzato la relazione tra motivazione, percezione e partecipazione degli studenti alle attività. I risultati hanno indicato che gli studenti maggiormente motivati tendevano a percepire le attività come piacevoli, partecipavano attivamente e collaboravano con i compagni. Al contrario, gli studenti demotivati manifestavano disinteresse, atteggiamenti negativi e una ridotta partecipazione. Questi risultati evidenziano l'importanza cruciale del ruolo dell'insegnante nella creazione di un ambiente di apprendimento favorevole e motivante per i giovanissimi studenti di EFL. Promuovendo una relazione positiva tra insegnante e alunno, offrendo attività coinvolgenti e creando un'atmosfera stimolante in classe, gli insegnanti

possono migliorare in modo significativo la motivazione degli studenti e l'esperienza complessiva di apprendimento linguistico.

English Abstract

Very young learners, especially preschoolers, often display an innate curiosity and spontaneous enthusiasm for new experiences. Although intrinsic motivation can be powerful in language acquisition, more is needed to ensure effective learning. Fundamental is the teacher's ability to create a favorable learning environment that fosters strong student motivation. Previous research has consistently highlighted the central role of motivation in the success of language education. The present exploratory study, employing the mixed method QUAL-QUAN, examined the factors influencing motivation and demotivation in seven young learners aged between 5 and 7 years. These young learners participated in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) project at a private preschool located in northeastern Italy. The investigation explored, firstly, the impact of the teacher's attitude and, secondly, the influence of the classroom environment on the pupils' motivation and demotivation through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, including video recordings, tabulated observation notes, and a questionnaire. The results showed that a positive and engaging teacher's attitude, characterized by warmth, enthusiasm, and support, is crucial in fostering pupils' motivation.

Furthermore, a stimulating learning environment, characterized by interactive activities, attention to individual needs, and a strong sense of community, proved essential for maintaining pupils' engagement. In contrast, a disinterested teacher, a stressful classroom atmosphere, and uninspiring activities proved to be factors implementing demotivation and disengagement. The study also analyzed the relationship between pupils' motivation, perception, and activity participation. The results indicated that the most motivated students perceived activities as enjoyable participated actively, and collaborated with classmates. In contrast, unmotivated students showed disinterest, negative attitudes, and reduced participation. These results highlight the crucial importance of the teacher's role in creating a favorable and motivating learning environment for young EFL learners. By fostering a positive teacher-pupil relationship, offering engaging activities, and creating a stimulating atmosphere in the classroom, teachers can significantly improve student motivation and the overall language learning experience.

1.0 The importance of motivation and intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

Scholars have thoroughly examined the role of motivation in acquiring the English language. While much has been written on the subject, there is unanimous consensus that motivation compels learners to exert effort and engage more profoundly with the learning process. It is, therefore, regarded as a fundamental ingredient for effective language learning. This section delves into the existing research on motivation in young learners, alongside relevant conceptual frameworks, to establish a robust theoretical foundation for comprehending this complex issue.

Defining “motivation” has proven to be a complex and intellectually stimulating task, given the various perspectives surrounding it. Chambers (1999) adopts a particularly experiential approach, reflecting on the inherent difficulty in articulating a precise definition:

“Have you ever tried to describe 'motivation'? I had learned that establishing and articulating a concise, clear, and accurate definition of motivation was more of a challenge than I had expected” (Chambers, 1999, p. 13).

This sentiment resonates with many scholars in the field, acknowledging the challenges all researchers face in understanding this complex concept.

Dörnyei echoes this sentiment, asserting that:

“Motivation' is an abstract, hypothetical concept that explains why people think and behave as they do. (...) Thus, 'motivation' is best seen as a broad umbrella term covering various meanings. Why do we use 'motivation' if its meaning is so vague? My guess is simply because it is a very convenient way of referring to a rather complex issue” (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 1).

Some scholars suggest that motivation is akin to a finite resource, much like energy, that must be judiciously allocated between tasks and external distractions. It is nearly impossible to excel in multiple areas simultaneously, as concentrating on one inevitably diminishes focus on another. This implies that motivation is an internal guide, directing a child's attention toward language learning and shielding them from competing distractions (Wlodkowski-Jaynes, 1991).

More recent theories define motivation as the force that governs behavior initiation, maintenance, and intensity, particularly in goal-oriented actions. According to this understanding, a motivated student is actively engaged, driven by either intrinsic or extrinsic factors, in pursuit of a specific goal. Yet, the intensity and persistence of this motivation can fluctuate. These variations influence the degree of effort students exert and the duration they remain motivated. Each student possesses distinct motivations, shaped by their emotional and cognitive states—calmness or anxiety, positive or negative associations with teachers or subjects, and personal interests—ultimately impacting language acquisition.

As Dörnyei eloquently states, motivation is *“the primary impetus to initiate L2 learning and later the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process”* (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 65).

The intensity of motivation can also be shaped by external circumstances, including the specific language being studied. For instance, given the former's widespread utility and opportunities, students may be more motivated to learn English than French. Persistence, an essential component of motivation, enables learners to persevere through challenges—a necessity in language learning. However, persistence can be swayed by pedagogical methods; engaging and dynamic teaching strategies can mitigate natural dips in student motivation.

In the classroom, motivation manifests in students' attention and effort to various activities, even those unrelated to the teacher's objectives. It reflects their internal drive and willingness to participate in lessons (Brophy, 1998). Motivation also explains the disparity between a student's performance and potential, highlighting the environmental factors that shape behavior (Sloane, 1932).

Steers and Porter (1991) present a broader view, asserting that motivation consists of three fundamental elements:

- what energizes human behavior;
- what directs or channels this behavior;
- and how this behavior is sustained.

Dörnyei (2001) approaches this multifaceted concept with a comprehensive definition, encapsulating the critical dimensions of motivation. He posits that motivation dictates why individuals undertake a task, how long they persist, and the effort they are willing to invest. Educational psychologists frequently identify three primary sources of motivation in learning (Fisher, 1990):

- 1- The learner's natural curiosity: Intrinsic satisfaction arises when students autonomously discover interest, desire, and pleasure in learning.
- 2- External incentives: Extrinsic rewards, conversely, are derived from external forces, such as teacher approval or other forms of recognition. Deci elaborates on extrinsic motivation, stating it involves any situation in which actions are motivated by separable consequences—whether externally administered (praise, rewards) or self-imposed (self-praise or rewards) (Deci et al., 1997, p. 161). Conversely, intrinsically motivated individuals engage in activities for the sheer pleasure and satisfaction derived from the experience, whether engagement, excitement or a sense of accomplishment (Deci et al., 1997, p. 161).
- 3- Success in tasks: Littlejohn (2001) identifies success as a critical yet often underutilized source of motivation. He suggests a cyclical relationship between competence and motivation, whereby students who experience success are more likely to remain motivated, leading to more significant effort and subsequent improvement. This cycle reinforces the importance of self-esteem, confidence, and competence in language learning.

McCombs and Pope assert that human beings are naturally inclined to learn, mainly when they are free from anxiety, perceive the subject matter as personally meaningful, and enjoy a positive, supportive relationship with their teachers. Students are more motivated to learn when given opportunities for autonomy and control over their learning processes (McCombs, B.; Pope, J.E. 1996, p. 17-18).

McDonough (2007) emphasizes four pivotal components of motivation: 1—the reasons for wanting to learn, 2—the strength of this desire, 3—the learner's personality and the nature of

the task, and 4—the perceived demands of the task. The desire to learn is the cornerstone; the other components cannot flourish without this initial spark.

Motivation is often misperceived as an inherent trait some individuals possess while others lack. However, it is not a static quality but a dynamic force that shapes behavior in varying circumstances. Chambers (1999) identifies several vital elements influencing motivation, including individual needs, teacher influence, instructional methodologies, the learning environment, and the support of family and peers.

Motivation emerges as a vital driving force in language learning, fueling learners forward and sustaining their engagement and perseverance. Without a firm motivational foundation, even the most effective teaching methods may falter in achieving their intended outcomes. Therefore, fostering intrinsic motivation remains paramount, enabling students to derive genuine joy and satisfaction from language acquisition. Teachers, in turn, play a pivotal role in cultivating a supportive, stimulating environment that nurtures individual needs and preferences.

1.1 Theoretical frameworks

A myriad of forces governs students' motivation, and the theories underpinning these motivations enable educators to navigate the diverse landscape of language acquisition adeptly. To truly comprehend this diversity, one must first grasp the sheer magnitude of factors that can influence human behavior. Motivation theories provide educators with the tools necessary to understand and shape student engagement, whether consciously or unconsciously, throughout the learning process. For instance, a teacher may question why students fail to fully participate in classroom activities. Educators can delve into the root causes of such behavior by employing motivational theories and crafting strategies to enhance student involvement (Stipek, 2002). These theories endow teachers with a fundamental understanding of human behavior, equipping them with the expertise required to excel in their profession.

1.1.1 Behaviour reinforcement theories

Often labeled as 'mechanistic,' this theory centers on observable actions rather than internal psychological states such as thoughts or feelings. In this context, motivation is not seen as an inherent personality trait but rather as a pattern of specific behavior repeated over time. It is conceptualized entirely through observable actions, whereby a student engages in behavior as a direct response to prior reinforcement (Stipek, 2002). Consider, for instance, a student who actively participates in class discussions due to past experiences of being praised for doing so. Proponents of behaviorism emphasize reinforcement as the primary mechanism by which behavior is established and sustained, focusing on the interplay between stimuli and responses to explain habit formation. In this sense, a reinforcer increases or sustains the frequency of a particular behavior (Brophy, 1998). Although many early findings in this area stemmed from experiments involving animals—such as Pavlov's work with dogs or Skinner's studies with rats—the insights gleaned remain highly relevant to understanding learning processes such as practice, positive and negative reinforcement, and the role of praise. By mastering the principles of reinforcement, educators play a crucial role in shaping desirable behavior, fostering constructive learning habits, and ultimately bolstering student motivation.

1.1.2 Need theories

Need theories introduced significant advancements, partly emerging as a counterreaction to the mechanistic worldview of behaviorism. Humanistic psychologists argue that the fulfillment of inherent needs drives behavior. Maslow (1962), in his renowned *Hierarchy of Needs*, delineated five fundamental categories (Brophy, 1998, p.5):

1. *Physiological needs (e.g., hunger, thirst, sleep)*
2. *Safety needs (e.g., freedom from danger, security, protection from fear)*
3. *Love and belonging needs (e.g., affection, acceptance from peers and authority figures)*
4. *Esteem needs (e.g., recognition, competence, self-confidence)*
5. *Self-actualization needs (e.g., self-expression and realizing one's potential)*

Maslow's theory posits that these needs operate in a hierarchy, whereby individuals must first satisfy their more basic, physiological needs before striving for higher levels of fulfillment. In the context of education, students grappling with hunger or exhaustion may struggle to engage meaningfully in classroom activities. However, the linearity of Maslow's hierarchy has been contested by scholars such as Wahba and Bridgwell (1976), who argue that learners can sometimes prioritize academic pursuits even when basic needs remain unmet. Their research suggests that students can become so deeply immersed in learning that they momentarily disregard their immediate physiological or emotional challenges. This underscores the complex interplay between internal states and motivation, a dynamic that needs theories to illuminate in stark contrast to the external focus of behaviorism. While Maslow's hierarchy offers a framework for understanding how needs shape behavior, Wahba and Bridgwell's findings highlight the nuanced and sometimes contradictory relationship between human needs and motivation in the educational sphere. Educators can draw valuable insights from both perspectives, fostering environments that nurture students' intrinsic motivation by addressing their diverse needs.

1.1.3 Goal Theories

Whereas behavior reinforcement and need theories focus on learners' responses to external or internal forces, goal theories focus on learners' objectives. According to Thorkildsen (2002), goals infuse actions with purpose, direction, and meaning. In this framework, learners are viewed as purposeful, goal-driven individuals who constantly balance personal desires and ambitions within the context of their perceived competencies and external support. Martin Fold (1992) proposed a comprehensive motivational framework, categorizing goals into six types:

1. *Affective goals*: the pursuit of happiness and positive emotions.
2. *Cognitive goals*: fulfillment of curiosity and intellectual exploration.
3. *Subjective/Organizational goals*: a quest for coherence and self-unity.
4. *Self-assertive social relationship goals*: expression of individuality within social contexts.

5. *Integrative social relationship goals*: commitment to social responsibility and interpersonal connections.
6. *Task goals*: focus on task completion and management (Brophy, 1998).

According to Fold's theory, learners are driven to engage in tasks due to the pre-existing goals that guide their behavior. This emphasis on goal-oriented action highlights the intrinsic nature of motivation, whereby students strive to achieve objectives that resonate with their personal ambitions and social circumstances. Understanding these multifaceted goal categories enables educators to craft learning experiences that align with learners' internal motivations, fostering deeper engagement and achievement.

1.1.4 Gardner's Socio-educational Model: Integrative and Instrumental Motivation

Gardner's (1982) socio-educational model has long held a central position in second language acquisition, offering a comprehensive exploration of how affective variables influence language learning. This model has enjoyed widespread acceptance within language education, although some critics contend that its dominance has inadvertently stifled the exploration of alternative motivational frameworks. Gardner's extensive research into the role of motivation in foreign language learning culminated in a model that seeks to interrelate the myriad factors at play in second language acquisition (Norris-Holt, 2001).

One of the model's most appealing features is its emphasis on the pivotal role of motivation, particularly within the broader social context. Gardner asserts that the cultural setting in which a learner resides significantly impacts their motivation to acquire another language. In his model, motivation comprises three key components: *effort*, *desire*, and *affect*. *Effort* refers to the time and energy that a student devotes to studying the language, *desire* reflects the degree to which a student wishes to achieve fluency, and *affect* encompasses the learner's emotional response to the process of language acquisition (Gardner, 1982).

Gardner’s model further posits that individual differences in language learning are primarily influenced by two factors: *ability and motivation*. Those with higher levels of *ability*—comprising intelligence and language aptitude—are naturally more likely to succeed, but *motivation* can significantly enhance or hinder a student’s progress. A student with high ability but low motivation may underperform, just as a highly motivated student of lesser ability may excel through persistence and dedication. Furthermore, the model distinguishes between *formal* and *informal* learning contexts, positing that ability and motivation contribute equally to success in formal settings, such as the classroom, while motivation plays a more substantial role in informal settings, where language exposure is less structured (e.g., listening to radio broadcasts or engaging in conversations).

Finally, the model underscores that while *educational settings* and *cultural backgrounds* can shape a learner's motivation, they do not inherently determine their capacity to succeed. This nuanced understanding of the interplay between motivation, ability, and context provides a robust framework for educators seeking to cultivate motivation and language proficiency in diverse student populations.

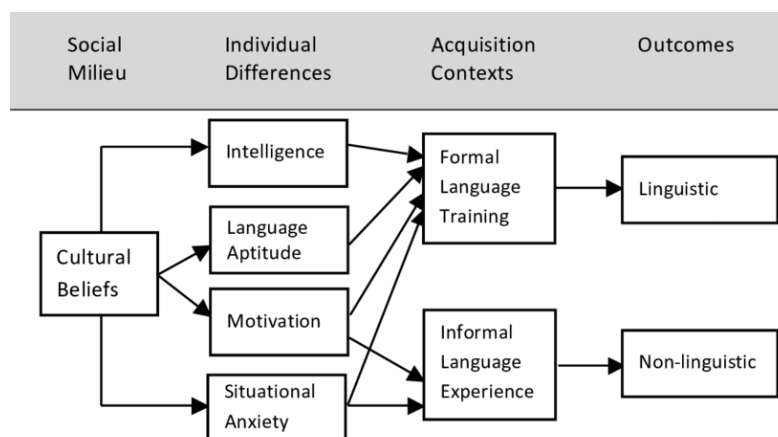


Fig. 1 Socio-educational model of second language acquisition (Gardner, 2010, p.8)

Gardner and Lambert’s seminal work on language acquisition identified two primary motivations that drive learners: the *integrative motive* and *instrumental orientation*. The integrative motive arises from a desire to connect with a community different from one’s own, fostering a sense of interchange between one’s self-concept, attitudes, and motivations.

This motivation embodies a more profound aspiration to assimilate or relate to a foreign culture and language. On the other hand, instrumental orientation is driven by practical considerations, such as securing employment or advancing one's educational prospects. Gardner emphasizes that these two orientations are not mutually exclusive or antagonistic; they often coexist harmoniously, enhancing the learner's ability to acquire a second language. This notion was further reinforced by Clément, Dornyei, and Noels (1994), whose study of 301 Hungarian students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) confirmed that Gardner's integrative motive was closely intertwined with instrumental reasons in their pursuit of language proficiency.

1.1.4.1 Integrative motivation

Integrative motivation is characterized by an innate desire to engage with the target language speakers and to integrate into their cultural community. This orientation involves a positive attitude toward the second language (L2) group and a genuine interest in interacting with its members or becoming more like them. Learners motivated integratively are naturally inclined to immerse themselves in the learning process, finding satisfaction in acquiring the language (Stipek, 2002). External reinforcement is unnecessary for such learners, as the learning process provides intrinsic rewards. Falk (1978) posits that successful language learners often exhibit an openness and admiration toward the people and culture associated with the language, demonstrating a willingness to familiarize themselves with its social and cultural context. This internal drive, motivated by personal interest and appreciation, forms the core of integrative motivation (Norris-Holt, 2001).

1.1.4.2 Instrumental motivation

Conversely, instrumental motivation is primarily rooted in language proficiency's practical advantages. Students driven by this motivation may not have a strong personal connection to the language or culture. However, they are motivated by the tangible benefits it can bring, such as achieving academic goals, advancing in a career, or meeting societal expectations (Lile, 2002). This type of motivation often focuses on external outcomes, where learners view the language

as a tool to achieve specific goals, such as passing an exam or fulfilling school requirements (Norris-Holt, 2001). In this case, performance is often linked to external rewards or avoiding negative consequences.

Both integrative and instrumental motivations play pivotal roles in the language acquisition process. Learners with integrative motivation will likely maintain long-term interest in the language, enjoying the nuances and cultural depth of mastering it. Meanwhile, instrumental motivation provides the external push needed to grasp the foundational elements, mainly when there is no immediate communicative need for the language, such as in academic testing contexts. The delicate balance between these two motivations can significantly influence a learner's success, with integrative motivation fostering a deeper, more enduring connection to the language and instrumental motivation providing the necessary drive in the early stages of learning or when specific goals are in sight.

1.2 Who is a “motivated learner”?

Brown (1987) posits that a motivated learner is one *“who seeks to attain a goal and is prepared to dedicate time and effort toward its achievement”* (Brown, 1987, p. 114). This intrinsic motivation, deeply rooted in the learner's internal desires, is pivotal in attaining successful learning outcomes across any field, particularly in foreign language acquisition (Ushioda, 2010). It is essential to recognize that the effectiveness of foreign language instruction and the resultant learning outcomes are inextricably linked to the degree of motivation present in the learner.

Several characteristics typify a motivated preschool learner, and these are often readily observable. Such learners approach tasks enthusiastically, frequently exhibiting excitement and smiles throughout the lessons (Stipek, 2002). Driven by an innate curiosity, they pose insightful questions, actively engage in classroom activities, and often seek challenges beyond the prescribed curriculum (Harackiewicz et al., 2008). These motivated students may be the first to volunteer responses, eagerly immerse themselves in new projects, and use their free time to further explore topics that have captivated their interest (Wang, MC & Gottfried, 2002).

Moreover, these preschoolers demonstrate remarkable persistence. When faced with challenges, they do not easily succumb to frustration. Instead, they persevere, actively seek assistance, and experiment with various strategies to grasp more complex concepts (Gresham, 2008). Such behavior is often witnessed in the day-to-day classroom environment. Teachers play a vital role in shaping motivation. Upon entering the classroom, some students may immediately rush toward the teacher, eager to inquire about the day's lesson. These learners display motivation from the outset, attentively following instructions to complete assigned tasks successfully. Their natural inclination toward learning is evident, as they are keen to learn swiftly, outpacing their peers and proudly applying the newly acquired knowledge. Their happiness upon achieving these goals further reinforces the permanence of their learning, which can be observed when they apply their newfound skills in diverse contexts. These are intrinsically motivated learners, manifesting such motivation in everyday classroom interactions.

In this vein, Lile (2002, p. 1) offers an illustrative example of an intrinsically motivated learner:

“An intrinsically motivated student studies for the sheer joy of learning. The material itself is engaging, challenging, and rewarding, and the student derives satisfaction from learning. I have one such student—a senior at my high school—who never misses a homework assignment and is always consulting her dictionary when encountering an unfamiliar word. These habits lead to her consistent success on exams. On one occasion, when I simply checked whether students had completed their homework, she sought me out after class to inquire if she had made any mistakes. She relishes moderately challenging tasks and holds herself to high standards, seeking deeper understanding. To have an intrinsically motivated student is, indeed, the aspiration of all who endeavor to foster motivation.”

It is also worth noting that some learners, while still motivated, exhibit this drive in a different form—extrinsic motivation. For instance, upon seeing the teacher, some may ask, “Do you have any stickers or surprises for us today?” when assigned tasks, it becomes clear that they complete these activities with the anticipation of a reward. Extrinsic motivation, however, is not inherently harmful. When used judiciously, it can engage learners and foster positive learning habits.

Nevertheless, it is essential to balance extrinsic motivators so that they complement, rather than replace, intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Overall, a motivated preschool learner embodies a harmonious blend of curiosity, concentration, and perseverance, constantly striving to explore new frontiers of knowledge. Effective pedagogical strategies should primarily aim to cultivate intrinsic motivation, likely engender sustained engagement and long-term learning. However, extrinsic motivation can also play a supportive role when appropriately integrated. By discerning the various forms of motivation and understanding their impact on the learning process, educators can design learning environments that are more engaging and effective for all learners.

1.2.1 Who is a “demotivated learner”?

Just as motivated learners exhibit distinctive behavior, demotivated preschoolers display recognizable characteristics that signal disengagement. Such tendencies often arise from external factors, such as the perceived difficulty or irrelevance of the material (Dişlen, 2013), internal issues, including low self-esteem (Huitt, 2005), poor concentration, and an overall lack of effort in learning. These learners may distract their peers, exhibit disruptive behavior, or fail to bring the necessary materials to class (Chambers, 1999). Chambers (1999, p. 6) identifies several traits associated with these disengaged learners:

- **Minimal effort and participation:** Demotivated learners contribute little to classroom activities or withdraw entirely from participation.
- **Disruptive behavior:** They may call out or display inappropriate behavior to garner attention.
- **Incomplete work:** These learners may leave assignments unfinished or struggle to complete them, demonstrating a lack of perseverance.
- **Learned helplessness:** They are prone to giving up quickly on new tasks, anticipating failure due to low self-efficacy (Wright, 2011).

- **Negative emotions:** Such learners often exhibit signs of anxiety, frustration, or defensiveness.

The learning environment itself plays a critical role in motivation:

- **Irrelevance of material:** A primary factor in demotivation is the learner's perception of the material's relevance. Children who fail to see the connection between their learning and their lives are less likely to be motivated (Dörnyei, 2001). As Dörnyei (2001, p. 63) notes, *"Indeed, one of the most demotivating factors for learners is when they have to learn something they cannot see the point of because it has no apparent relevance to their lives. (...) Students will not be motivated to learn unless they consider the material they are taught worth learning."*
- **Unengaging lessons:** Lessons that lack engagement or are overly complex without sufficient explanation can further diminish motivation and hinder academic performance (Dişlen, 2013).

Additionally, the teacher-student relationship can profoundly affect motivation:

- **Poor communication:** A strained relationship or ineffective communication between the teacher and the learner can also negatively impact motivation (Wright, 2011). Wright (2011) emphasizes that low motivation often stems from students' inability to understand the tasks, a lack of confidence, and poor relationships with instructors.

In conclusion, preschool learners' demotivation arises from internal and external factors. By identifying these traits and understanding their origins, educators can play a pivotal role in creating learning environments that foster a sense of purpose and enhance self-confidence, ultimately leading to greater motivation and improved academic performance for all children (Huitt, 2005).

1.2.2 Who is an "unmotivated learner"?

Unmotivated preschool learners present a unique challenge for educators. However, with the right strategies and support, these learners can find the initial spark to ignite their engagement

with the learning process (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). This potential for improvement should be a source of hope and optimism for educators. This lack of enthusiasm manifests in various ways:

- **Passivity:** These learners may appear withdrawn and reluctant to participate in discussions or activities.
- **Lack of focus:** They are easily distracted, struggle to remain on task, and often fail to complete assignments.
- **Minimal effort:** unmotivated learners display little interest in improving their work or mastering concepts.
- **Negative attitude:** boredom, frustration, or defiance towards learning activities are common.

There are many potential reasons for this lack of motivation, including:

- **Learning difficulties:** Unidentified learning challenges can make the learning process overwhelming and frustrating.
- **Lack of engagement:** The materials or teaching methods may fail to engage students' interests or cater to their learning styles.
- **Emotional factors** such as stress, anxiety, or social challenges at school can dampen a child's motivation.
- **Lack of confidence:** Previous experiences of failure or a fear of making mistakes can deter a child from attempting new tasks.

The effects of unmotivation can persist beyond preschool, with potential long-term consequences. Research suggests that learners who lack motivation are more likely to engage in harmful behavior as they grow older. Angus et al. (2009) found that disengaged students tend to withdraw from participation, struggle academically, and often fall behind their peers. Alter et al. (2013) further noted that these students are more prone to disruptive behavior, absenteeism, and even anti-social conduct, increasing the risk of school dropout (Ainsworth et al., 2011).

Educators play a crucial role in creating a supportive environment for preschool children. They can make a significant impact by identifying the underlying causes of unmotivating behavior and employing strategies to reignite the child's interest in learning. This entails cultivating curiosity, boosting self-confidence, and tailoring activities to suit individual learning styles. In doing so, teachers can nurture a renewed love for learning and lay the foundation for future academic success.

1.3 Identifying and Understanding Students' Motivation Problems in Preschool

Identifying and comprehending motivation issues among preschool children is paramount to creating an environment conducive to joy and academic success. This process allows educators to craft a personalized pedagogical approach, rekindle the innate curiosity of learning, and ultimately improve educational outcomes. This section delves into four fundamental aspects of understanding and addressing motivation challenges within the preschool context.

1.3.1 Observing behavior: Unveiling the telltale signs

Effective identification of motivational difficulties begins with carefully and systematically observing children's behavior, as articulated by Pianta et al. (2009). This process transcends superficial monitoring, encompassing emotional expressions, engagement levels, peer interactions, and educational materials. These observations provide indispensable insights into the underlying state of a child's motivation.

- **Engagement and participation:** Nothing to the extent to which children immerse themselves in classroom activities—whether they take the initiative or respond solely to external prompts—can reveal much about their motivational state.
- **Emotional expressions:** Facial expressions, gestures, and verbal cues are windows into a child's emotional world (Cameron, 2003). A child who consistently appears withdrawn,

frustrated, or indifferent during classroom tasks may grapple with motivation issues (McClelland et al., 2003).

- **Interactions with peers and materials:** Children's behavior during play or independent exploration, including interactions with peers and the materials at hand, provide vital clues about their socio-emotional development and motivational engagement (Dodge et al., 2003). A child withdrawing from peer interaction or avoiding engaging with educational tools may signal diminished motivation.

Educators can gain profound insights into a child's inner emotional landscape and potential motivational hurdles through detailed behavioral observation.

1.3.2 Looking beyond the student: the role of the learning environment

It is a common yet myopic tendency to attribute motivational problems solely to the student. However, as Cameron (2003) observes, the learning environment exerts a substantial influence. Frequently, what appears to be a student's lack of motivation may be rooted in inadequacies within the curriculum, teaching methods, or classroom dynamics. By wielding their influence over these elements, educators possess the capacity to inspire motivation or inadvertently stifle it.

The curriculum, for instance, may inadvertently disengage students if tasks are excessively complex, instructions lack clarity, or content is not aligned with the child's innate interests (Wentzel, 1999). A thoughtfully designed curriculum that caters to diverse learning styles and fosters curiosity is integral to maintaining high motivation levels.

Equally significant is the role of pedagogy. Employing play-based, hands-on activities and differentiated instruction can significantly enhance student engagement (Cameron, 2003). By aligning teaching methodologies with individual learning styles and developmental needs, educators can create a more engaging and positive educational experience.

Classroom dynamics also play an indelible role. A supportive, nurturing atmosphere where children feel valued and respected (Pianta et al., 2009) fosters a sense of belonging, motivating students to engage actively and wholeheartedly in their learning.

By critically examining the learning environment, educators can identify and rectify elements that might inadvertently suppress student motivation, paving the way for a more enriching and motivating educational experience.

1.3.3 From identifying to explaining: delving into the root causes

While recognizing motivational challenges constitutes an essential first step, delving into the root causes offers a more profound understanding (Cameron, 2003). This task is intricate, for the origins of demotivation often lie in the unseen realms of thought and emotion, such as a child's self-confidence, emotional regulation, or even undiagnosed learning difficulties (Denham et al., 2003). Understanding these hidden causes is critical for devising effective strategies to reignite motivation.

- **Unveiling the hidden:** A child's self-confidence profoundly influences motivation. Those with low self-esteem may shy away from participation, fearing failure or judgment. Nurturing self-worth through positive reinforcement and consistent encouragement can serve as a potent catalyst for restoring motivation (Wentzel, 1999).
- **Emotional regulation and engagement:** Children who struggle to manage their emotions may experience frustration and quickly disengage from tasks. However, teaching self-regulation strategies—such as deep breathing or mindfulness techniques—can empower them to navigate these emotions and maintain motivation, instilling a sense of hope and optimism (Denham et al., 2003).
- **Learning difficulties and hidden frustrations:** Unrecognized learning challenges, such as dyslexia or processing disorders, may render learning a daunting experience, resulting in deep-seated frustration. Early identification and tailored support can significantly

alleviate these struggles, enabling a resurgence of motivation and an appreciation for learning.

Initially designed for older students, Cameron's (2003) checklist provides a valuable framework to assess preschoolers' motivation, focusing on observable behavior. Adapted for younger learners, this checklist includes:

1. *Pay attention to the teacher.*
2. *Begin tasks without delay.*
3. *Complete assigned work.*
4. *Persist in the face of difficulty.*
5. *Volunteer answer in class.*
6. *Seek help when needed.*
7. *Do not get upset by initial errors.*
8. *Enjoy challenging work.*
9. *Reluctant to stop when deeply engaged.*
10. *Appearing happy, proud, enthusiastic, and eager.*

By integrating such structured observations with deeper emotional insights, educators can comprehend the roots of motivational problems and design effective interventions that reignite engagement and foster a passion for learning.

1.3.4 Addressing motivation problems: strategies for success

With an understanding of the multifaceted factors contributing to motivational challenges, educators can adopt various strategies to nurture and sustain a love of learning among preschoolers (Cameron & Pierce, 2009). These approaches, grounded in empirical research, have proven efficacy in fostering motivation:

- **Personalized learning:** tailoring activities to each child's unique interests, learning styles, and developmental levels is of inestimable value. Research by Konopczynski et al. (2013) highlights that children with a sense of autonomy and control over their learning exhibit heightened engagement and motivation, inspiring educators to implement this approach.
- **Creating a supportive environment:** The significance of a positive and inclusive classroom atmosphere cannot be overstated. Studies by Pianta et al. (2009) underscore that children who feel safe, respected, and valued are likelier to take academic risks, bolstering confidence and intrinsic motivation.
- **Incorporating playful learning:** Play is a cornerstone of early childhood development and an essential motivator (Gopnik et al., 2016). Integrating playful, hands-on activities into the curriculum makes learning more enjoyable and stimulates curiosity and a desire for exploration.
- **Encouraging self-expression:** Offering children opportunities to express their thoughts, emotions, and creativity through mediums like art, music, and storytelling can be immensely motivating (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2013). Such outlets allow children to connect more deeply with the learning process, fostering a sense of ownership and personal investment in their educational journey.
- **Celebrating achievements:** Recognition and celebration of children's efforts and progress, irrespective of skill level, are vital (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Positive reinforcement builds confidence and nurtures intrinsic motivation, encouraging continued learning and perseverance.

Educators can create an invigorating and nurturing learning environment by applying these evidence-based strategies. This personalized approach addresses the root causes of motivational difficulties, empowering preschoolers to flourish academically and instilling a lifelong love for learning.

1.4 Who is considered a “very young learner”?

The term “very young learners” (VYLs) refers to children in the early stages of their journey into English language acquisition, typically between the ages of three and seven (Cameron, 2003; Genesee & Dodson, 2004). Often described as “absolute beginners,” this group primarily includes 5/6-year-old learners who have not yet commenced formal education (Barratt-Copestake & Beard, 2010). Consequently, these learners have not been introduced to structured reading instruction and have had limited or no previous exposure to English outside of their immediate environment. These VYLs stand at the threshold of an extraordinary linguistic journey marked by distinct learning needs and characteristics that educators and researchers must carefully examine and address.

“Children begin preschool at the age of 4-5 before transitioning to primary school in countries such as Turkey, the United States, and many others. At this age, they are naturally inquisitive and eager to explore the world around them. Most children are enthusiastic about acquiring new experiences, including learning a new language. Their energy and desire for activity make preschool an ideal time to incorporate physical engagement into language learning” (Nuriye et al., 2015, p.19).

1.4.1 Characteristics of Very Young Learners (VYL)

Young English learners embark on an enriching intellectual and social development journey, where their natural curiosity and excitement for discovery shape how they engage with the world. Educators must recognize these distinctive characteristics to create effective learning environments that foster their growth. By doing so, teachers can nurture these learners' curiosity and guide them in acquiring a new language.

A critical factor in understanding young learners is their social and emotional landscape. As Levine (2005) notes, young learners are sensitive to others' opinions and crave individual attention and teacher approval. This age group often balances a desire to please with an emerging sense of independence, striving to assert themselves. While they are highly

competitive, this can enhance learning by adding a playful dynamic to classroom activities. Over time, as Philips (2001) suggests, learners develop a stronger self-concept and become more cooperative. However, this maturation period can also make them more vulnerable to criticism, potentially affecting their self-esteem (Parker, 1999).

Equally important is understanding how young learners construct knowledge. Piaget (1970) highlights their innate curiosity, which drives them to explore and engage with their surroundings. Vygotsky's (1962) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) underscores the importance of tasks that children can accomplish with guidance, while Bruner (1983) emphasizes scaffolding, where adults or more knowledgeable peers support learners within their ZPD. Regarding language acquisition, concrete experiences—such as using physical objects—are particularly effective for young learners (Donaldson, 1978; Hughes, 1986; Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). For example, teaching the word “apple” through tactile engagement with an actual apple makes the learning experience more tangible and meaningful.

Attention span and activity levels also significantly influence young learners' engagement with new material. They are energetic, yet their concentration spans are short (Scott & Ytreberg, 1990). Therefore, lessons should include activities lasting between five and ten minutes, incorporating movement to maintain focus (Halliwell, 1992). Techniques such as games, songs, and puzzles make learning fun while tapping into their creativity and energy (Halliwell, 1992). Total Physical Response (TPR), advocated by Asher (1977), is particularly effective. By involving physical actions—such as touching their heads while saying “head” or jumping while saying “jump”—TPR turns learning into a kinaesthetic experience, making language acquisition more memorable.

The process of language acquisition itself warrants special attention. Although there are some developmental differences between boys and girls in areas such as motor skills and attention (Khan, 1998; Biddulph, 1998; McIlvain, 2003), all young learners benefit from exposure to authentic language (Cameron, 2001). Using visual and contextual cues, storytelling is an excellent tool for helping children comprehend meaning (Slatterly & Willis, 2001; Cameron, 2001). A story accompanied by pictures or objects allows children to understand the narrative even if they are not fully proficient in the language. However, while they may grasp the overall

meaning, their ability to produce language is still developing (Pinter, 2008). Therefore, lessons must balance input-focused activities, such as storytelling, and opportunities for language production, such as role-playing or simple conversations.

Educators are pivotal in creating supportive, engaging, and dynamic learning environments. Recognizing and addressing young English learners' social, emotional, and cognitive needs can foster an environment where children can confidently and enthusiastically explore and embrace the new language. Short, interactive lessons rich in visuals, movement, and meaningful experiences enable children to develop a love of learning and lay the foundation for a lifelong journey with the English language.

1.5 The Piagetian lens on early English language Acquisition (ELA)

Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development greatly enhances understanding of how young children (ages 3-7) acquire a second language (L2) like English. According to Piaget, intellectual growth is characterized by distinct stages, each marked by qualitative changes in thought processes (Piaget, 1970). Children are not passive recipients of information but active participants in constructing their understanding of the world, including language learning, through interaction with their environment. This dynamic involvement extends to language acquisition, where children strive to make sense of the new linguistic structures they encounter (Piaget, 1970).

One of Piaget's most relevant insights for early English language acquisition (ELA) is the cognitive limitations associated with pre-operational thought, which spans ages 2-6 (Cameron, 2003). Children find abstract concepts and formal logic challenging during this stage, making explicit grammar instruction less effective (Bialystok, 2009). Research indicates that attempting to teach young learners complex grammatical rules can exceed their cognitive capacities, leading to frustration rather than comprehension (Bialystok, 2009). Moreover, Cheung's (2001) studies reveal that children, even in their first language, have not fully mastered grammatical intricacies at this age. Therefore, the key takeaway for educators and language instructors is the importance of an empathetic and developmentally appropriate approach to L2 instruction.

However, Piaget also highlights children's natural drive to make sense of their environment, which plays a crucial role in language learning (Piaget, 1970). This intrinsic motivation leads children to actively seek meaning in their interactions with the world, including language. In the context of L2 acquisition, this often manifests in a focus on how language functions in everyday life rather than an emphasis on abstract grammatical rules. Cameron (2003) describes this as an “inside-out” approach, where young learners understand language through its use in meaningful situations. For instance, a child might learn “apple” by picking and eating an apple during playtime rather than memorizing the word in isolation. This approach aligns with Long’s (1981) theory that comprehensible input—language children can understand through context—is crucial for successful language learning.

Teaching strategies that harness children's natural curiosity and focus on meaning-based activities, such as games, songs, and interactive stories, are particularly effective for early language acquisition (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). By integrating language with physical actions and real-world experiences, teachers can create engaging and developmentally appropriate lessons that align with children's cognitive abilities. These activities allow young learners to construct meaning and develop language skills in a fun and interactive way.

As children enter the concrete operational stage (ages 7-11), their ability to handle abstract concepts improves, enabling them to adopt a more analytical perspective toward language (Cameron, 2003). At this stage, explicit grammar instruction may become more effective as children begin to understand the underlying structures of language. However, even during this period, learners remain active constructors of meaning, and a balanced approach that includes meaning-based activities and formal instruction is likely to yield the best results. By recognizing the developmental stages outlined in Piaget's theory, educators can tailor their teaching methods to support young learners' cognitive growth and foster successful language acquisition.

1.5.1 The Age Factor

The debate surrounding the optimal age to commence foreign language learning, often referred to as the “age factor,” has gained increasing traction in recent years, particularly in light of the mounting pressure from parents to introduce English as a second language in early childhood, notably as early as kindergarten. This discourse, however, is far from settled, as various schools of thought contribute distinct perspectives on when children are most receptive to second language acquisition.

One prominent view asserts that the developmental period between birth and seven years is critical for acquiring a second language, particularly in phonetics and morphosyntax. Advocates of the critical period hypothesis argue that language learning during this stage unfolds uniquely. However, this notion does not rule out the possibility of successful language acquisition at more advanced stages of development. Numerous studies have shown that while younger learners often excel in achieving native-like pronunciation and intonation, older learners tend to make swifter progress in grammatical mastery due to their more advanced cognitive abilities and broader knowledge base.

The focus on age in second language acquisition (SLA) research has been motivated by observations of the apparent advantages younger learners exhibit in achieving higher proficiency levels. The adage “the younger, the better” has been supported by many studies documenting the superior outcomes often observed in younger language learners (Oyama, 1976; Patkowski, 1980; Krashen et al., 1982; Felix, 1985). Long's (1990) extensive review of SLA underscores the potential benefits of early language acquisition, particularly in phonology, where attaining near-native proficiency becomes increasingly challenging beyond the age of six. Similar difficulties arise in acquiring morphology and syntax after age twelve (Long, 1990). Such findings suggest that distinct sensitive periods exist to master various language skills essential for achieving complete linguistic fluency (Haznedar & Uysal, 2010). However, Long's perspective also acknowledges that this decline is gradual, indicating that the window of opportunity narrows rather than closes abruptly, allowing for the possibility of achieving proficiency at older ages (Long, 1990). Pinker (1994) concurs, proposing that while language acquisition is nearly “guaranteed” until the age of six, the efficacy of learning diminishes after that (Pinker, 1994).

Though these theories are particularly compelling in the context of first language acquisition, their direct applicability to SLA remains a subject of ongoing scholarly debate.

Empirical evidence highlights specific benefits associated with early language exposure. Notably, listening comprehension and pronunciation are domains where younger learners exhibit long-term advantages when introduced to a second language at an early age. However, this should not suggest that early introduction guarantees success across all linguistic domains. Research by Harley et al. (1995) indicates that despite early exposure, young children often acquire the grammatical structures of an L2 more slowly than older learners. This phenomenon implies that language acquisition is not solely dependent on the age of onset but is influenced by other factors, such as cognitive development and instructional context (Harley et al., 1995). Cameron (2001) emphasizes the primacy of receptive skills, such as listening and comprehension, over productive skills, like speaking and writing, in the early stages of L2 acquisition. She suggests that grammar development is contingent upon cognitive readiness, reinforcing that an early start does not necessarily correlate with expedited progress in all aspects of language learning (Cameron, 2001).

Furthermore, the relationship between grammatical knowledge and cognitive development must be carefully considered. Given their stage in Piaget's preoperational phase, younger learners rely heavily on concrete experiences for learning. Abstract grammatical concepts can be particularly challenging during this phase, encompassing preschool years. As Piaget's theory suggests, learning during this period can be optimized through tangible objects, pictures, stories, and videos, allowing children to anchor new linguistic information in concrete experiences (Morrison, 2003). Conversely, older learners, who possess greater cognitive maturity, may demonstrate more rapid initial progress in acquiring L2 grammar and vocabulary (Harley & Wang, 1997). However, Long (1990) cautions that these early advantages may prove short-lived as younger learners catch up over time (Long, 1990).

Therefore, the nuanced dynamics of language acquisition demand a careful balancing of instructional strategies that cater to learners' cognitive and developmental stages. The choice of methods, whether for younger children or older learners, must account for their respective cognitive readiness and learning styles. Research indicates that younger learners may benefit

most from meaning-based, context-rich language activities that align with their developmental needs. Older learners may engage more effectively with structured, grammar-focused instruction.

In conclusion, while age undoubtedly plays a significant role in language acquisition, it is not the sole determinant of success in learning English as a foreign language. Both younger and older learners possess distinctive strengths and face particular challenges. Early exposure to a second language confers notable advantages in pronunciation and listening comprehension, whereas older learners may better grasp grammatical structures and vocabulary. Ultimately, the most effective approach to language learning integrates a variety of factors, including age-appropriate teaching methods, cognitive development, and individual learning styles. Such a comprehensive approach can maximize the potential for successful second language acquisition at any age.

1.5.2 Critical periods and brain plasticity: the foundations of early English language learning in preschoolers

Exploring critical periods in language acquisition remains a pivotal area of study, offering profound insights into how children acquire foreign languages. The seminal theory of a critical period, first advanced by Penfield and Roberts (1959), posits that the capacity for language acquisition is optimally robust during the early years of life, with a gradual diminution in linguistic aptitude as individuals age. Lenneberg's (1967) influential research significantly reinforced this foundational hypothesis, highlighting brain plasticity's integral role in language development. Lenneberg's work elucidated how the brain exhibits an extraordinary capacity for adaptation and reorganization in response to linguistic experiences, particularly evident in the lateralization process where the cerebral hemispheres assume specialized functions. In this regard, the left hemisphere emerges as the predominant center for language processing (Lenneberg, 1967).

However, the concept of a rigid critical period has evolved, yielding a more sophisticated understanding of sensitive periods within a broader developmental framework (Abello-

Contesse et al., 2006). This nuanced perspective acknowledges that certain developmental windows are characterized by heightened susceptibility to specific facets of language acquisition, such as phonetics or grammatical structure. Particularly notable are the preschool years, ages 3 to 7, which align with a sensitive period for acquiring native-like pronunciation (Kuhl, 2004). During this stage, the auditory system is exquisitely attuned to discerning subtle phonetic distinctions, rendering early exposure to a foreign language (FL) particularly advantageous for achieving near-native pronunciation—a feat that is notoriously challenging to attain later in life.

The elevated plasticity of the preschool brain, especially within the left hemisphere, underpins this enhanced capacity for language learning. Empirical studies employing electroencephalography (EEG) have demonstrated increased left hemisphere activity during language processing in preschoolers relative to older children (e.g., Neville et al., 1993). Such findings suggest that the left hemisphere is more dynamically engaged in language acquisition during this formative period, thereby laying a robust foundation for subsequent linguistic proficiency.

Moreover, research indicates that the specialization of the left hemisphere for language is not fully consolidated until the onset of puberty (Pirozzini & Sestito, 2014). This extended period of plasticity affords preschoolers unique opportunities to cultivate language skills within a relatively unbounded environment. As the brain matures and lateralization becomes more pronounced, the left hemisphere's dominance in language processing intensifies, further entrenching the linguistic competencies established during early childhood. The unique nature of this extended plasticity period offers a compelling argument for early language interventions, highlighting the preschool years as an optimal phase for language development.

In summation, the constructs of critical periods and brain plasticity offer a compelling framework for understanding preschoolers' exceptional language learning capabilities. These early years represent a sensitive period crucial for acquiring native-like pronunciation and establishing a solid linguistic foundation. The heightened plasticity of the brain, particularly within the left hemisphere, enables preschoolers to assimilate and process linguistic information with remarkable efficacy. Early exposure to a foreign language during this critical

window can profoundly influence long-term language proficiency, thereby underscoring the imperative of early intervention. This insight accentuates the importance of educators' roles in fostering early childhood language education and harnessing the innate developmental advantages of young learners.

1.5.3 Individual attention in preschool English language learning

In the vibrant and dynamic milieu of preschool English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, individual attention is a cornerstone in nurturing language development and the overall well-being of young learners. While confident children may actively seek the teacher's attention through overt gestures or verbal cues, others may require more nuanced and intentional strategies to ensure they feel acknowledged, heard, and valued.

One practical approach to delivering individual attention involves engaging with children during drawing or coloring activities. These creative moments allow teachers to forge personal connections with each child, fostering language development and enhancing rapport. As children immerse themselves in artistic expression, teachers can initiate dialogues centered around the artwork, utilizing simple, age-appropriate language. This personalized interaction promotes vocabulary acquisition and provides a safe space for children to articulate their thoughts and emotions, further enriching their linguistic experience.

The research underscores the profound significance of individual attention in early childhood education. Reilly and Ward (2002) affirm that such attention enables children to feel esteemed and respected, cultivating a robust sense of security and belonging in the classroom. This sense of validation, in turn, contributes to heightened engagement, increased motivation, and overall well-being. Furthermore, individual attention allows educators to identify and address potential concerns or challenges children may encounter, ensuring their unique needs are effectively met.

In essence, individual attention transcends being merely a beneficial aspect of effective preschool EFL practices; it is, in fact, a crucial component. By actively engaging with children during creative activities such as drawing or coloring, teachers can significantly enhance language development, strengthen interpersonal connections, and foster a nurturing learning

environment that caters to each child's distinct needs and strengths. This approach highlights educators' indispensable role in meeting young learners' diverse requirements.

1.5.4 Attention span and engagement in preschool EFL classrooms

Preschoolers naturally exhibit shorter attention spans than their older counterparts, endowed with boundless curiosity and exuberance. This developmental characteristic presents a notable challenge for educators accustomed to working with more mature age groups. While it may appear disruptive when a five-year-old momentarily loses focus during a song or story, research suggests that such behavior often stems from motivations other than disinterest (Reilly & Ward, 2002). For example, a child may be drawn to a toy recently used by another, reflecting their intrinsic desire for exploration and immediate gratification. Understanding these developmental nuances is crucial for creating a positive and engaging EFL learning environment.

Expert recommendations stress the need to tailor activities to preschoolers' shorter attention spans. Dynamic lessons with frequent transitions every five to ten minutes are beneficial, allowing children to channel their energy constructively. However, it is essential to be flexible. If an activity captures genuine interest and absorption, it is beneficial to extend its duration slightly.

In addition to frequent transitions, integrating diverse and engaging activities is paramount. Preschoolers, as inherently kinaesthetic learners, benefit significantly from movement and hands-on experiences (Diamond, 2000). Lessons incorporating singing, games, and physical activity (as will be discussed in Chapter 1.8.3) can significantly bolster focus and attention (Gleitman et al., 2005). Furthermore, visual stimuli play a critical role in capturing and sustaining the attention of young learners. Colorful illustrations, flashcards, and real-world objects can enrich the learning experience, rendering abstract concepts more tangible.

In conclusion, shorter attention spans may pose challenges but are a natural aspect of preschool development. By understanding and embracing these developmental characteristics and implementing engaging, activity-based instruction, educators can create an EFL classroom

environment that not only overcomes these challenges but also fosters language acquisition and a love for learning among young students.

1.5.5 The silent period: A Time for unconscious language absorption in Preschool EFL Learners

The “silent period” concept is relevant for educators working with preschoolers in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings. This phase, characterized by a noticeable absence of verbal output despite ongoing exposure to the target language, can be a source of concern for those unfamiliar with this developmental stage. However, research suggests that the silent period does not indicate inactivity but rather represents a critical phase of unconscious language acquisition (Krashen, 1985).

Preschoolers actively absorb the target language's sounds, structures, and vocabulary during the silent period. Although they may not immediately produce spoken language, their cognitive processes are busily at work, assimilating and internalizing the new linguistic environment. As Reilly and Ward (1997) aptly note, *“Young children may spend a long time absorbing language before they produce anything”* (Reilly & Ward, 1997, p. 7). This observation underscores the importance of creating a rich and stimulating language environment wherein children can immerse themselves in English through various means, such as songs, stories, games, and everyday interactions.

The emphasis on fostering a relaxed and pressure-free learning environment during the silent period is rooted in understanding language acquisition as an inherent human capability. Building upon Chomsky's (1967) theory of the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), researchers such as Krashen (1985) argue that children are biologically predisposed to learn language. This LAD functions as a filter, enabling children to subconsciously process and make sense of the language they are exposed to. Forcing verbal production before children are developmentally prepared can induce anxiety and impede their natural learning trajectory.

The silent period in preschool EFL learning bears striking similarities to first language acquisition. Infants, for example, spend several months absorbing the sounds and structures of their native language before uttering their first words. This process mirrors the silent period observed in EFL learners, where children build a foundation of comprehension and internalize language rules before attempting spoken output. As Krashen, Dulay, and Burt (1982) assert, language acquisition is a “creative construction” process driven by the interplay between a child's innate language-learning capacity and the language environment provided.

The silent period represents a natural and essential stage in preschoolers' EFL learning journey. By recognizing and embracing this phase, educators can foster environments that support unconscious language acquisition, laying the groundwork for future confident and proficient use of English.

1.6 Advantageous Characteristics of the Preschool Age Group for English Language Learning

The preschool age group, from approximately three to six years, represents an exceptionally opportune period for introducing a second language, such as English. This developmental stage is marked by a constellation of advantageous characteristics that make young learners particularly receptive to new linguistic experiences.

Among these advantages are the innate curiosity and boundless enthusiasm for discovery that typify young children. This age group exhibits a natural proclivity for exploration and a deep-seated desire to engage with their surroundings. As Cameron (2003) eloquently observes, the imaginative capacities of preschoolers create fertile ground for linguistic development as they eagerly assimilate new sounds and concepts. This enthusiasm vividly manifests in their imaginative play, where children craft elaborate and fantastical scenarios. While these scenarios may appear whimsical to adults, they underscore the children's burgeoning creative potential in language use.

Another significant advantage of this developmental stage is the absence of self-consciousness. Unlike their older counterparts, who may be hindered by fears of making mistakes or concerns

about linguistic precision, young children are remarkably uninhibited in their attempts to communicate. Freed from the constraints of grammatical exactitude and the pressure for logical coherence, preschoolers are more inclined to experiment with language. This fearless exploration facilitates rapid acquisition and fosters a more organic developmental process (Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978).

Additionally, the preschool teaching environment typically affords greater flexibility compared to later educational stages. The curriculum for this age group tends to be less rigid, with a diminished focus on formal assessment and a greater emphasis on creating a stimulating and enjoyable learning experience. Reilly and Ward (1997) highlight that this flexibility enables educators to leverage activities that resonate with the children, repeating them as necessary without the constraints of a fixed syllabus or preparatory testing. Such an environment cultivates a positive and engaging atmosphere for educators and learners, enhancing the educational experience. The role of the educator in crafting this nurturing environment is paramount, as emphasized by Reilly and Ward (1997), who stress the importance of making the learning process as enjoyable as possible for the children.

The preschool age group's intrinsic curiosity, lack of inhibition, and adaptable learning environment create a potent combination for effective second language acquisition. By capitalizing on these advantages, educators can successfully introduce English to young learners, fostering an enriching and impactful learning experience.

1.6.1 Regulation of foreign language learning at the preschool level in Italy

The 1990s marked a significant phase in the evolution of preschool education in Italy, as the sector began to embrace the principles outlined in *Orientamenti '91*, and the European directives focused on expanding educational opportunities, including exposure to multiple Community languages. This period saw the initiation of various projects funded by the European

Union aimed at enhancing teachers' linguistic competencies and incorporating foreign language instruction into preschool settings.

The Ministry of Public Education, through its Nursery School Service, conducted a preliminary survey in 1995 to assess existing practices in foreign language instruction across the country. This led to the activation of the inaugural NATIONAL PROJECT from 1995 to 1997, which included in-service training for educators in forty schools. The subsequent project, based on the Hocus&Lotus method derived from a European research initiative, ran from 1997 to 2000, involving a hundred and twenty teachers from fifteen Italian regions. This initiative significantly expanded Italy's experimental framework for foreign language teaching.

Several notable regional and interregional projects followed, showcasing the collaborative efforts of educational institutions and universities. For instance:

- i. **LESI PROJECT** (European Languages in Preschools): Developed between 1998 and 2001 by the Provincial Federation of Preschools of Trento, this project aimed to introduce European languages into preschool curricula.
- ii. **IRRSAE PROJECT '6 IRRSAE'**: conducted from 1999 to 2001 by IRRSAE in Lombardia, Piemonte, Marche, Liguria, Friuli Venezia Giulia, and Sardegna, this project focused on pedagogical-didactical strategies for foreign language integration in preschools.
- iii. **APPLE PROJECT** (Apprendimento Precoce Lingue Straniere—Early Language Learning): Organized by ten IRRE regions from 2001 to 2005, this project emphasized research, experimentation, and teacher training for including foreign languages in preschool education.
- iv. **LiReMar PROJECT** (Lingua inglese in Rete nelle Marche): From 1999 to 2005, the University of Urbino and IRRSAE Marche collaborated on this initiative, which established a network of twenty-seven schools to experiment with English language instruction.

The era of experimentation continued to thrive with the Progetto Lingue 2000 until 2005. However, it was only with the passage of Law 8 November 2013, n. 128: Urgent Measures Regarding Education, Universities, and Research that a more formal approach to foreign language instruction emerged. Article 5 of this legislation introduced the concept of promoting

multilingualism by acquiring essential elements of English, reflecting a shift towards more structured foreign language education.

The 2012 National Indications did not mandate foreign language instruction in preschools but underscored the importance of recognizing and valuing each child's linguistic heritage. The guidelines suggested that preschools should foster proficiency in Italian while also acknowledging the potential for familiarization with a second language in natural, everyday contexts (Monitoraggio esperienze di insegnamento in lingua straniera nella scuola dell'infanzia, 2014, p. 17).

Looking forward, the potential formalization of foreign language instruction in Italian preschools underscores the need for highly motivated, well-trained educators equipped with the necessary tools for effective language teaching. The aim should be to provide children with substantial exposure to high-quality linguistic input. Teacher training must encompass the principles of language acquisition and glottodidactic methodologies specific to preschool education, enhancing educators' linguistic competence, particularly in oral communication.

By drawing from successful practices in other European countries, Italy stands poised to make significant strides in early language acquisition, leveraging this particularly receptive developmental stage to lay a strong foundation for future multilingual proficiency.

1.7 Disadvantageous characteristics of the Preschool age group for English Language learning

While promising in many ways, teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to preschoolers presents a series of distinct challenges due to the developmental characteristics inherent in this age group. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing effective teaching strategies and creating a supportive learning environment that can help overcome these obstacles.

i. Self-Centeredness and Limited Social Skills

One of the fundamental characteristics of preschool-aged children is their egocentrism, a developmental stage where they predominantly focus on their own needs and desires (Piaget, 1965). This self-centeredness can manifest in challenging behavior for educators, particularly in group settings. Young learners may find it difficult to cooperate with peers or share resources, which can disrupt group activities and collaborative learning tasks. Their social skills are still developing, which means they may struggle with the nuances of interaction, empathy, and conflict resolution. This limited social capability can lead to conflicts among peers. It can make it difficult for teachers to manage the classroom effectively, complicating integrating EFL activities into the daily routine (Erickson, 2000).

ii. Short attention spans and limited cognitive control

Preschoolers are known for their short attention spans, a trait that can make sustaining engagement in EFL activities particularly challenging. Their ability to focus on a task is often limited to just a few minutes before they become distracted by external stimuli or internal impulses (Diamond, 2002). This brief concentration span can hinder their ability to participate in activities that require sustained attention or involve complex instructions. Moreover, their cognitive control, which encompasses their ability to regulate emotions and manage impulses, is still in the developmental stage. This lack of cognitive control can lead to difficulties in managing frustration, anxiety, or excitement, potentially resulting in disruptive behavior or a diminished capacity to engage effectively with the learning material (Diamond, 2013).

iii. Concrete thinking and limited language proficiency

Children primarily engage in concrete thinking at preschool age, which means they have difficulty grasping abstract concepts and hypothetical situations (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). This cognitive limitation can pose challenges when learning English, often involving understanding abstract grammatical rules, vocabulary nuances, and syntactic structures. The ability to use language symbolically and abstractly is crucial for mastering a new language, and preschoolers' struggle with these concepts can impede their progress. Additionally, their limited proficiency in native and target languages can further complicate their comprehension and expression.

Young learners may find it difficult to follow instructions, participate in discussions, or articulate their thoughts clearly, which can slow down their overall language acquisition process (Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1978).

iv. *Emotional sensitivity and vulnerability to external factors*

Emotional sensitivity is a significant characteristic of preschool-aged children. They are highly receptive to the emotional climates around them, including the moods and behavior of adults and peers (Cole, 2002). This heightened sensitivity can make them particularly vulnerable to feelings of frustration or anxiety when faced with challenges in the EFL classroom. Their emotional regulation skills are still developing, so they may have difficulty managing their emotions effectively, potentially leading to outbursts, tantrums, or withdrawal. Such emotional reactions can disrupt the learning environment and affect their ability to focus on and engage with the EFL activities (Thompson, 2019).

v. *Harnessing strengths and overcoming challenges*

Despite these challenges, it is crucial to recognize that preschoolers possess inherent strengths that can be leveraged to enhance EFL learning. Their natural curiosity, exuberant playfulness, and enthusiastic approach to exploration are powerful assets that can be harnessed to create an engaging and stimulating learning environment. Educators can design activities that tap into their innate sense of wonder and enjoyment, making the learning process practical and enjoyable. Effective teaching strategies might include incorporating games, songs, and interactive activities that align with the children's developmental stages and interests. Additionally, creating a supportive and nurturing classroom atmosphere can help mitigate the effects of emotional sensitivity and encourage positive engagement with the language learning process.

While preschoolers' developmental characteristics pose particular challenges to English language learning, these challenges can be effectively managed through thoughtful planning and implementation of teaching strategies. By addressing the unique needs of young learners and capitalizing on their strengths, educators can facilitate a successful and enjoyable journey toward English language acquisition.

1.8 Fostering motivation in young English learners: a multifaceted approach

Young English learners, mainly those aged 3-6, present unique challenges for educators due to their shorter attention spans and high energy levels. Traditional teaching methods, which often rely on extended lectures or passive activities, may not be effective for this age group. To maintain their interest and engagement, it is crucial to employ strategies that cater to their specific developmental needs and learning styles. This section delves into various methods and approaches educators can use to foster motivation and create a stimulating learning environment for young English learners (VYLs).

1.8.1 The Power of Positive teacher-student Relationships

A fundamental element in motivating young learners is the quality of the relationship between teachers and students. Research consistently underscores the significance of building a strong, positive relationship in fostering a motivating learning environment. According to Thanasoulas (2002), establishing a foundation of mutual trust and respect between the teacher and students is essential for creating a supportive atmosphere that encourages enthusiasm for learning.

Preschoolers are particularly sensitive to emotional cues and view their teachers as surrogate parental figures. This makes it crucial for educators to project warmth, encouragement, and support. Dörnyei (2001) highlights that fostering a growth mindset—where success is attributed to effort rather than innate ability—is vital for boosting motivation. By celebrating effort and perseverance, teachers can help students develop resilience and a positive attitude toward learning.

1.8.1.1 Teacher as a motivational catalyst: enthusiasm and encouragement

Teachers' enthusiasm plays a pivotal role in motivating young learners. Sedlakova (2007) points out that a teacher's lively and energetic demeanor can significantly impact student engagement. Young learners thrive in playful and interactive environments and are naturally

inclined to experiment with language through imitation and playful sound production (Shin, 2002). Teachers can harness these natural tendencies to enhance learning by incorporating creative activities and humor into lessons.

Consistent encouragement is another critical component in sustaining motivation. When students show signs of discouragement, timely and sincere words of affirmation can reignite their enthusiasm. Dörnyei (2001) suggests three essential strategies for providing practical encouragement:

- i. **Promoting effort over ability:** Emphasize the importance of hard work and perseverance rather than innate talent.
- ii. **Motivational feedback:** Offer constructive and positive feedback that acknowledges progress and celebrates achievements.
- iii. **Learner satisfaction and rewards:** Design lessons that provide a sense of accomplishment and consider incorporating age-appropriate reward systems to recognize participation and effort.

While feedback is crucial, it is equally important to maintain engagement through a balanced approach. Ineçay (2010) emphasizes that excessive positive reinforcement can lead to complacency, and thus, a balance between encouragement and constructive criticism is essential for maintaining motivation.

1.8.1.2 Building relationships: A caring and supportive environment

Creating a caring and supportive classroom environment is integral to motivating young learners. Lile (2002) demonstrates that a teacher's genuine care for students' well-being and learning can significantly enhance their motivation. A nurturing environment where students feel secure and valued encourages active participation. Physical expressions of affection, such as hugs or comforting touches (within culturally appropriate boundaries), can also contribute to a positive classroom atmosphere.

Moreover, Bantjes (1994) highlights the importance of involving parents in the educational process. Open communication and collaboration with parents can reinforce students' motivation and create a consistent support system outside the classroom.

1.8.1.3 Clear communication: Scaffolding understanding

Effective communication is essential for engaging young learners, who may still develop their native language skills. Providing clear and understandable instructions is crucial, as complex explanations in English may be beyond their comprehension. Leal (2003) advocates strategically using students' native language to clarify complex instructions and concepts. This approach helps bridge linguistic gaps and ensures students can follow the lesson.

Inceçay (2010) introduces the “repair” concept, which involves the teacher intervening and providing missing language to support understanding. Combining native language with essential English terms helps students recall previously learned concepts and facilitates comprehension. Shin (2002) further emphasizes that translating complicated instructions into the students' native language can prevent confusion and frustration, allowing for more effective engagement with the learning material.

1.8.1.4 Avoiding information overload: keeping activities engaging

Young learners are characterized by their limited attention spans. Stocker (2005) underscores the importance of keeping explanations brief and to the point. Preschoolers are kinesthetic learners who benefit from active participation and exploration rather than lengthy verbal instructions. Activities should be designed to allow students to “learn by doing,” which enhances their engagement and enjoyment.

Variety is also crucial in maintaining interest. Incorporating a mix of activities that include quiet and noisy elements and group and individual tasks can help keep learners motivated. Shin (2002) recommends limiting activity durations to 5-10 minutes to match the young learners' attention spans and using bright visuals, toys, puppets, and other engaging materials to sustain motivation.

1.8.2 Fostering a positive and supportive learning environment

A positive classroom environment is paramount for effective language learning. Thanasoulas (2002) underscores the detrimental effects of a tense or hostile atmosphere on student participation and motivation. Creating a safe and supportive space where students feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of judgment is essential for fostering a motivating environment.

Dörnyei (2001) emphasizes cultivating a relaxed and confident classroom atmosphere. This entails avoiding competitive environments, which can induce anxiety and inhibit students' willingness to participate. Instead, promoting a cooperative and collaborative classroom culture helps students feel part of a collective effort, fostering unity and shared purpose (Whisler, 1997).

Incorporating various instructional techniques and activities is crucial to maintaining student engagement. Levine (2005) stresses the need to move away from passive learning styles and to engage students as active "language processors." Learning activities should be meaningful and connected to real-world contexts, ensuring that students understand the practical application of language.

Indeed, a positive learning environment is essential for fostering student motivation and success. Dörnyei (2001) outlines several critical aspects of a motivating classroom atmosphere: establishing a safe and welcoming space, promoting positive relationships, incorporating humor and fun, celebrating successes, and providing encouragement and support. By implementing these strategies, teachers can create a conducive environment for language learning and help students develop a positive attitude towards the subject.

1.8.3 Engaging young learners: methods, activities, and materials

To effectively engage young learners, a range of methods, activities, and materials can be employed:

- 1 **Total physical response (TPR):** Developed by James Asher, TPR is a method that integrates physical actions with language learning. Nagaraj (1996) highlights that TPR promotes understanding through physical demonstrations and enhances learning by doing. Freeman (2000) and Reilly and Ward (1997) further support the effectiveness of TPR for young learners, noting its alignment with their natural learning tendencies.
- 2 Another practical approach to engaging young learners is **multi-sensory learning and differentiated instruction**. Recognizing that learners have diverse learning styles, Revell and Norman (2000) introduce the concept of “preferred primary representational systems” (VAKOG) from Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). Dunn (2002) and Westwood and Arnold (2004) advocate for differentiated instruction that accommodates sensory preferences—visual, auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory, and gustatory. This approach enhances engagement and learning outcomes and ensures that all students, regardless of their learning style, can benefit from the instruction.
- 3 **Playful learning:** Embracing the joy of games, which are highly effective for young learners, can make learning enjoyable and incidental. Vernon (2002) and Shin (2002) emphasize that play-based activities naturally allow children to acquire vocabulary and language skills without explicit memorization, sparking excitement in educators about implementing these strategies.
- 4 **Animated Adventures:** Utilizing cartoons and animated media provides valuable aural and visual input, helping students connect language with context (Arıkan, 2010). These resources are not just engaging but also effective in introducing natural language usage and instilling confidence in educators about using these resources.
- 5 **Hands-on experiences:** Engaging students in hands-on activities allows them to interact meaningfully with the language. Stocker (2005) and Westwood and Arnold (2004) stress the importance of active participation in fostering language development.

- 6 **Musical magic:** Songs, rhymes, and chants enhance memory and motivation through rhythm and repetition (Çakır, 1999; Shin, 2002). Establishing routines that incorporate music can provide structure and make learning enjoyable.
- 7 **Choosing appropriate age- and engaging materials: Selecting** appropriate materials is crucial for effective language learning. Lile (2002) emphasizes that materials should be relevant and match the lesson's content. The difficulty level of tasks must be carefully calibrated to avoid frustration or boredom. Teachers can maintain motivation and facilitate successful language acquisition by choosing materials that align with students' developmental stages and interests.

Motivation in young English learners requires a multifaceted approach that includes building positive teacher-student relationships, employing enthusiastic and encouraging teaching methods, ensuring clear communication, and creating engaging activities. By implementing these strategies, educators can cultivate a supportive and stimulating learning environment that encourages young learners to develop a love for the English language and succeed in their language acquisition journey.

2.0 Background of the Study

Early childhood, particularly preschool years, is a pivotal stage for language acquisition. The research underscores that young children possess an exceptional capacity for learning languages, a trait that diminishes as they age. Paradis et al. (2013) emphasize this natural ability, which allows preschoolers to acquire new languages more quickly than adults. Kuhl (2004) stresses the importance of leveraging this critical period to introduce English as a Foreign Language (EFL), positioning the preschool years as an optimal time for fostering language skills.

In our globalized society, communicating across cultural boundaries is increasingly vital. As a dominant global language, English is a crucial tool for future generations. Thus, the role of EFL education at the preschool level is crucial. However, merely exposing young learners to English is insufficient; motivation significantly impacts the acquisition process and affects not only the pace of learning but also the child's engagement and attitude towards language activities.

Dörnyei (2003) highlights that understanding the dynamics of motivation and demotivation is essential for creating effective language learning environments. Preschoolers' intrinsic curiosity drives their initial interest in learning, but this curiosity needs to be maintained through effective pedagogical strategies. Without appropriate support, a lack of foundational understanding of English vocabulary and grammar can lead to frustration, as Pintrich and Zusho (2002) noted. This frustration can diminish motivation and enthusiasm for learning.

The teacher's role in motivating young EFL learners is critical. According to Dörnyei (2001), teacher effectiveness is closely linked to students' motivation levels. A proficient teacher can craft an environment that aligns with the child's natural curiosity and supports experimentation with the new language. This nurturing environment helps develop a sense of self-efficacy, a concept Bandura (1997) identified as vital for overcoming challenges and persisting in language learning.

Effective motivational strategies for preschool EFL learners must consider their developmental and cognitive characteristics. Berk and Winsler (2018) note that preschoolers depend heavily on concrete experiences and favor play-based learning. Strategies that work for older learners

may not be as effective for preschoolers due to their limited capacity for self-regulation and preference for immediate, tangible experiences.

Despite extensive research on motivation in language learning, there is a significant gap in understanding how these factors specifically impact very young EFL learners aged 3-7. Most studies address broader age groups, potentially neglecting preschoolers' unique developmental needs and characteristics. Existing literature often fails to address preschoolers' specific challenges in the EFL context, including their limited attention spans and the need for age-appropriate motivational techniques (Dörnyei, 2003).

Furthermore, while Dörnyei (2001) emphasizes the importance of teacher skills in motivating learners, there is insufficient research on translating these skills into effective, age-appropriate strategies for preschool EFL learners. The effectiveness of established motivational techniques in this context remains unclear, indicating a need for further investigation.

Understanding the factors influencing motivation and demotivation in preschool EFL classrooms is essential for developing effective teaching strategies. Educators must create environments that foster a positive and engaging language-learning experience tailored to the developmental stages of young learners. Addressing the specific needs and characteristics of preschoolers can enhance the effectiveness of EFL education, making the language-learning journey more successful and enjoyable for young children.

2.1 Theoretical framework

Roger Ascham, a 16th-century English scholar, famously stated, *“As a hawk flieth not high with one wing, even so a man reacheth not to excellence with one tongue”* (Ascham, 1550, p. 27). This notion is echoed by various historical figures, such as Ukrainian poet Pavlo Tychyna, who remarked, *“The more languages you know, the more times you are a person”* (Tychyna, 1965, p. 14), and Johann Wolfgang Goethe, who observed, *“He who does not know foreign languages knows nothing of his own”* (Goethe, 1827, p. 53). Geoffrey Willans also contributed, saying, *“You can never understand one language until you understand at least two”* (Willans, 1954, p. 12). Ludwig Wittgenstein profoundly noted, *“The limits of my language are the limits of my world”*

(Wittgenstein, 1921, p. 50). These perspectives illustrate the long-standing recognition of the importance of multilingualism.

In today's context, this awareness has grown even more crucial due to the shrinking of global distances and the increasing interconnectivity between cultures and languages. Over the past century, English has played a significant role in this process, making it essential to educate new generations on its use. This education extends beyond fulfilling legal obligations; it is a moral duty to prepare individuals to engage fully with the world and maximize their opportunities.

Early language learning is beneficial but requires moving beyond superficial exposure to a new language. Effective teaching involves engaging students actively in the learning process. This includes choosing between deductive and inductive approaches—teaching grammar explicitly or allowing students to reflect on language implicitly. The choice of methodology impacts the effectiveness of language acquisition.

Several scientific domains inform the choice of teaching models:

1. **Neurolinguistics:** Clinical studies demonstrate that the brain's hemispheres have complementary functions, with the right hemisphere handling global aspects and the left focusing on analytical tasks (Danesi, 2006, p. 75).
2. **Psychology of Learning:** Motivation is fundamental to the acquisition process, with engaging and rewarding efforts fostering a positive cycle of new motivation (Titone, 1992, p. 88).
3. **Psycholinguistics:** Effective language acquisition requires minimizing anxiety and progressively presenting comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982, p. 45).
4. **Cognitive Psychology:** The activation of the affective filter is subjective and influenced by the learner's personality and cognitive style (Gardner, 1983, p. 112).
5. **Acquisition Psycholinguistics:** The Language Acquisition Device (Chomsky, 1965, p. 25) explains the innate predisposition for language learning, with early exposure facilitating easier acquisition of additional languages.

Additionally, the Language Acquisition Support System (LASS) proposed by Bruner (1983, p. 60) emphasizes the role of external support in language learning.

Anthropology and Sociology also play critical roles:

- **Anthropology:** The environmental and Sapir-Whorf Hypotheses illustrate the relationship between language, culture, and worldview (Whorf, 1956, p. 77).
- **Sociology:** Understanding the social context of language use is crucial. Differences between teaching a language as a foreign language (FL) versus a second language (L2) highlight varying needs and approaches (Webb, 2002, p. 31).

Given the complexity of the factors influencing English language teaching, selecting appropriate pedagogical models is of utmost importance. These models vary widely, catering to aspects of language acquisition and usage. For instance, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) models traditionally emphasize the acquisition of native-speaker cultures, focusing on teaching English in a way that aligns with the cultural norms and practices of native English-speaking countries. This approach often involves integrating elements of British or American culture into the language learning process, which can provide students with a deeper understanding of the cultural contexts in which English is used. However, this model may not fully address the needs of learners who use English primarily in international or non-native contexts. On the other hand, English as a Second Language (ESL) models strongly emphasize the historical and social contexts of language acquisition, particularly for learners living in English-speaking countries. ESL approaches often incorporate elements of assimilation, where the goal is for learners to integrate into the local community and adopt cultural norms alongside language skills. This model can be highly effective for learners immersed in an English-speaking environment, as it supports both language development and cultural adaptation.

2.2 Overview of research applying observation and questionnaires with preschool-aged children

Research into early childhood education, particularly in the context of language acquisition, has increasingly leveraged observational and questionnaire methods to gain insights into the motivational constructs that influence learning outcomes. These methodologies offer complementary perspectives, illuminating how young children engage with educational practices and respond to various teaching strategies.

Observation is a cornerstone of educational research, allowing for the collection of direct, real-time data on children's behavior and interactions within learning environments. As McCollum and Yates (2001) exemplified, structured observational methods involve systematically coding and analyzing the behavior of teachers and students to assess their impact on motivation and engagement. For instance, observational studies have meticulously documented how teacher behavior, such as verbal reinforcement, non-verbal cues, and instructional clarity, affect preschoolers' enthusiasm and participation in language learning activities. These observations reveal critical insights into the effectiveness of different pedagogical approaches, highlighting the significance of creating an engaging and supportive learning atmosphere.

In addition to observational methods, questionnaires have become essential for capturing preschoolers' perceptions and attitudes toward their educational experiences. The development of age-appropriate questionnaires, as demonstrated by Birick (2011), involves tailoring questions to be comprehensible and relatable for young children. This often includes using visual aids and simplified language to ensure that responses accurately reflect the children's views and experiences. For example, questionnaires designed for preschoolers may use pictorial representations to assess their preferences for different teaching behaviors and classroom environments. These tools allow researchers to quantify aspects of motivation and engagement that might otherwise be difficult to measure through observation alone.

Integrating observational data with questionnaire responses provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the factors influencing preschoolers' motivation in learning contexts. Triangulating these data sources enhances the validity of research findings by

corroborating observations with self-reported data from the children. Studies that combine these methods, such as those by Hirsch-Pasek et al. (2009), have illustrated how specific teacher actions—such as providing clear instructions and fostering a supportive classroom environment—are linked to increased motivation and positive attitudes towards learning. This combined approach helps to identify which pedagogical practices are most effective in maintaining young learners' interest and engagement.

Recent advancements in observational techniques and questionnaire design have further refined the accuracy and reliability of these research methods. Video recording technology has enabled more detailed and longitudinal observations of classroom interactions (Cohen & Mannarino, 2008). This technology allows for the thorough analysis of teacher-student interactions over time, providing deeper insights into the dynamics of classroom motivation. Concurrently, modern questionnaires have evolved to include visual and interactive elements that better align with the developmental stages of young children (McCormick & McPherson, 2011). These innovations help researchers obtain more reliable data on preschoolers' perceptions and responses to different educational stimuli.

In summary, using observation and questionnaires in research with preschool-aged children offers valuable insights into the motivational constructs that impact early language learning. These methodologies comprehensively understand how various teaching strategies and classroom environments influence young learners' motivation and engagement. By combining direct behavioral observations with children's self-reported data, researchers can develop more effective educational practices that cater to the developmental needs of preschoolers. This approach creates more engaging and supportive learning experiences that enhance language acquisition's success and enjoyment in early childhood education.

The following table summarizes critical studies that have employed these methods to explore motivational constructs in preschool-aged children. It includes author details, study titles, age ranges, and critical findings. This compilation highlights the range of research approaches and insights from observational and questionnaire-based studies, underscoring their importance in understanding and enhancing early childhood education.

Author and year	Title	Results
McCollum & Yates, (2001).	<i>"Observing Teacher and Child Interactions in Preschool Settings"</i>	Documented the impact of verbal reinforcement, non-verbal cues, and instructional clarity on preschoolers' enthusiasm and participation in language activities.
Birick, (2011).	<i>"Developing Age-Appropriate Questionnaires for Preschoolers"</i>	Showed how visual aids and simplified language in questionnaires can accurately capture preschoolers' preferences for teaching behavior and classroom environments.
Hirsch-Pasek et al., 2009	<i>"The Role of Teacher Actions in Preschool Motivation"</i>	Identified that explicit instruction and a supportive environment are linked to increased motivation and positive attitudes toward learning.
Cohen & Mannarino, 2008	<i>"Advancements in Classroom Observation Techniques: A Focus on Preschool"</i>	Utilized video recording technology to analyze longitudinal teacher-student interactions, providing detailed insights into classroom motivation dynamics.
McCormick & McPherson, (2011).	<i>"Enhancing Questionnaire Design for Young Children"</i>	Demonstrated that interactive and visual elements in questionnaires improve data reliability on preschoolers' perceptions and responses to educational stimuli.
Ginsburg et al., 2009	<i>"Assessing the Impact of Teacher Interactions on Preschool Motivation and Engagement"</i>	Found that positive teacher-child interactions significantly boost motivation and engagement, emphasizing the need for supportive and responsive teaching methods.

Vygotsky, 1978	<i>"Interaction Between Children and Teachers: Analysing Developmental Trends"</i>	Highlighted the importance of social interactions in cognitive development and motivation, showing how teacher responsiveness enhances preschool learning.
Rubie-Davies et al., 2011	<i>"Motivational Strategies in Early Childhood Education: Evidence from Observations"</i>	Examined various motivational strategies and their effects on children's engagement, concluding that tailored, context-specific strategies are most effective.
Anderson & Aarnoutse, 1998	<i>"Teacher Strategies and Preschool Learning: A Focus on Observational Techniques"</i>	Investigated the impact of specific teaching strategies observed in preschool settings, noting that engaging and interactive methods foster better learning outcomes.
Whitebread et al., 2012	<i>"The Role of Play in Preschool Learning and Motivation: An Observational Study"</i>	Play-based learning significantly enhances motivation and engagement, underlining the importance of incorporating play into educational practices.
Justice & Pence, 2005	<i>"Assessing Young Children's Attitudes Towards Learning Through Questionnaires"</i>	Developed age-appropriate questionnaires that effectively measure children's attitudes towards learning, revealing correlations between positive attitudes and improved learning outcomes.
DeWitt & Garrison, 2012	<i>"Impact of Teacher Feedback on Preschoolers' Motivation: A Mixed-Methods Study"</i>	Analysed how different types of teacher feedback impact preschoolers' motivation, finding that constructive and encouraging feedback leads to higher engagement and persistence.

Table 1. Review previous studies that used observation and questionnaires to explore motivational constructs in preschool-aged children.

2.3 Expected results

The anticipated outcomes of this study are centered around gaining a nuanced understanding of the factors that influence motivation and demotivation among preschool-aged English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Combining observational and questionnaire data will provide a comprehensive view of how teacher behavior impacts young learners' engagement and attitudes toward language learning.

Firstly, the observational data are anticipated to reveal specific teacher behavior that significantly contributes to or detracts from student motivation. Given the emphasis on behavior such as kindness, humor, encouragement, and effective teaching methods, the study is expected to identify which actions and teachers' attitudes are most influential in fostering a positive learning environment. For example, it is hypothesized that teachers who consistently exhibit warmth and enthusiasm will be observed to have a more substantial impact on maintaining high levels of student engagement and motivation. Additionally, effective use of humour and playful interactions is expected to be associated with increased student enjoyment/motivation and a more positive attitude toward learning English.

The qualitative observations will likely uncover how different teaching strategies affect the classroom climate and student responses. This includes identifying instructional practices supporting or hindering young learners' motivation.

The questionnaire data are expected to complement the observational findings by providing insight into students' perceptions of their learning environment, the teacher's attitude, and their self-reported levels of motivation and demotivation. The responses are anticipated to reveal students' preferences for teacher behaviour that align with their observations. For instance, students are likely to prefer supportive teachers who provide consistent encouragement, reflecting the impact of these behaviours on their motivation.

Combining the results from both the observational and questionnaire data is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the factors that influence preschool EFL learners' motivation. The study aims to validate and enhance the understanding of how specific teacher behavior and classroom practices affect young learners by triangulating data sources: video

recordings, observational, and questionnaire data. The integration of these findings is expected to lead to actionable recommendations for educators, such as adopting particular teaching strategies and behaviors that are most effective in motivating preschoolers.

Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to developing more effective pedagogical practices tailored to the developmental needs of young EFL learners. By identifying and understanding the key motivational drivers, educators will be better equipped to create engaging and supportive learning environments that enhance language acquisition and foster a positive attitude toward learning English in a preschool context. This, in turn, will support the broader goal of optimizing educational experiences for preschool-aged children and laying a solid foundation for their future language-learning endeavors.

3.0 Methodology

This study employs a comprehensive methodology centered on a detailed analysis of observations, utilizing tables derived from notes taken during video recordings of classroom lessons. This approach provides a clear and structured representation of teacher behavior and student responses, facilitating a deeper and more systematic understanding of the classroom environment.

Throughout the observation process, comprehensive notes were made on various aspects of teacher behavior, including enthusiasm, patience, positive reinforcement, and student reactions. The video recordings effectively captured these interactions, while the observation notes and related tables offered additional context and guidance for subsequent analysis. These notes were systematically organized into tables, facilitating the categorization and quantification of observed behaviors and their correlations with students' levels of motivation and demotivation.

The tabular methodology aids in identifying patterns and trends within the qualitative data, rendering the relationships between teacher actions and student responses more evident. These tables systematically compare behaviors and their effects, establishing a solid foundation for quantitative analysis and integration with questionnaire data.

Key moments from the video recordings were meticulously selected to ensure focused and insightful analysis. These pivotal moments include significant instances of teacher behavior and notable student reactions while deliberately excluding moments of confusion or unrelated activities to maintain clarity and relevance. By concentrating on these central interactions, the study aims to provide a meaningful portrayal of how specific teacher actions influence student engagement.

Three core activities were chosen for detailed examination based on their illustrative value regarding teacher behavior and student responses. The first, an interactive storytelling activity, involves the teacher reading a story and engaging students with questions and prompts. Observations focus on how the teacher's enthusiasm and interactive techniques affect student interest and participation. This aligns with prior observations indicating that sensory-rich

activities significantly enhance engagement, demonstrating that storytelling can captivate students' imaginations and encourage active participation.

The second activity, vocabulary games, reinforces new vocabulary through engaging and playful methods. Observations center on the effectiveness of positive reinforcement and the teacher's strategies for sustaining student motivation. Previous observations suggested incorporating interactive games and varied instructional methods can mitigate boredom and disengagement, improving motivation and participation.

The third activity, art, and expression, allows students to demonstrate their understanding of a topic through drawing and discussion. The analysis examines how the teacher's patience and support during the art session influence students' willingness to participate and enthusiasm. This activity is particularly relevant given that earlier observations indicated that creative tasks could effectively promote student engagement by allowing self-expression and individual interpretation of concepts.

The observation notes, organized into analytical tables, provide a comprehensive overview of teacher behavior and student reactions. This tabular approach enhances the identification of patterns and trends, making it easier to discern relationships between teacher actions and student responses. These tables also serve as a basis for quantitative analysis and triangulation with questionnaire data.

In the subsequent section (Chapter 4), the narrative will build on the criteria established here, focusing on significant teacher behaviors and their impact on student motivation. The detailed examination of the selected activities will thoroughly explain how specific interactions influence student engagement and motivation. By combining insights from video recordings and observation notes with related tables and questionnaire data, this methodology offers a holistic view of classroom dynamics, enhancing the accuracy of conclusions and providing actionable recommendations for improving the learning experience for young English language learners. This comprehensive approach highlights effective teaching strategies and underscores the importance of adapting instructional methods to meet young learners' diverse needs and preferences, fostering a more engaging and supportive learning environment.

3.1 Study context

The study was conducted at a private preschool located in northeast Italy. The school serves children aged two to eight, with approximately 35 students divided into three age-based classes: "Piccoli" (little ones, ages 2-3), "Medi" (middle ones, ages 4-5), and "Grandi" (big ones, ages 6-7). The teaching staff includes two full-time and one part-time teacher, providing a supportive environment for learning.

Notably, the school is a private institution that attracts students from families with relatively high socio-economic backgrounds. This is reflected in the school's well-maintained facilities and rich resources, including educational materials and equipment, contributing to a positive learning experience. Although not a regular classroom teacher, the researcher has led the school's English language project for the past two years. This leadership role, coupled with familiarity with the school environment and students, is crucial for the successful execution of the study and interpretation of its findings.

3.1.1 Statement of the problem

The early childhood years constitute a crucial period for language acquisition. Paradis et al. (2013) underscore the exceptional ability of young children to assimilate new languages, a capability that tends to diminish with advancing age (Kuhl, 2004). This presents a unique opportunity for educators to introduce English as a Foreign Language (EFL) during preschool.

However, effectively motivating preschoolers in the EFL classroom poses a significant challenge. Unlike their native language, preschoolers do not possess a robust foundation in English vocabulary and grammar. Combined with their naturally limited attention spans, this can result in frustration and reduced motivation (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002).

Although extensive research has examined the factors influencing motivation and demotivation among young learners (Dörnyei, 2003), there remains a notable gap in understanding how these factors specifically impact very young EFL learners (ages 3-6). Existing studies often encompass broader age ranges, potentially neglecting preschoolers' distinctive developmental and cognitive characteristics. These characteristics include a reliance on concrete experiences, a

preference for play-based learning, and a limited capacity for self-regulation (Berk & Winsler, 2018). Consequently, effective motivational strategies with older learners may not be as successful with preschoolers.

Moreover, the effectiveness of established motivational techniques in preschool EFL education remains underexplored. Dörnyei (2001) emphasizes the critical role of teacher competence in motivating learners, noting a direct correlation between motivation levels and the effectiveness of the teaching process. However, translating these competencies into age-appropriate strategies tailored explicitly for preschool EFL learners requires further investigation.

This lack of clarity represents a significant barrier to developing effective EFL learning environments for preschoolers. Educators must gain a deeper understanding of the factors influencing motivation and demotivation in this age group. With this insight, teachers can devise age-appropriate strategies that promote a positive and engaging learning experience, ultimately contributing to a more prosperous and enjoyable language-learning journey for young EFL learners.

3.1.2 Purpose of the study and research questions

This research focuses on the critical role of motivation in promoting English language acquisition among very young learners (ages 5-7) in a preschool setting. While acknowledging various factors influencing student engagement, the study emphasizes the teacher's attitude as a pivotal driver of motivation. Building upon the work of scholars such as Jayne and Wlodkowski (1990), who highlighted the link between "pleasure in work" and learning outcomes, this study investigates how a teacher's behavior—through positive reinforcement, enthusiasm, and patience—can significantly impact a child's motivation in the classroom. The aim is to uncover how these behaviors help create a learning environment that fosters a love for the English language.

The study is structured around *four key research questions*:

1. *What factors lead to preschool children's motivation in the EFL classroom?*
2. *What factors lead to preschool children's demotivation in the EFL classroom?*
3. *How does motivation affect learners' perception of and involvement in classroom activities?*
4. *How does demotivation affect learners' perception of and involvement in classroom activities?*

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to fill a gap in existing research on motivation among very young EFL learners. The findings will inform strategies for enhancing motivation, ultimately creating a more enjoyable language learning experience for preschoolers. Furthermore, this research contributes to the limited body of work on EFL motivation at the preschool level, particularly in contexts where English is not a compulsory language of instruction. The study aims to establish a foundation for future research and improve educational practices for Very Young Learners (VYL) by providing a deeper understanding of motivation in this age group.

3.2 Participants

This study is focused on a cohort of seven young learners, aged 5-7, enrolled in the "Grandi" (big ones) class at a private preschool in northeast Italy. The institution serves children primarily from "middle-class" families residing in the town center or its surrounding suburbs. Due to the existing class structure, a convenience sampling approach was employed, and the readily available group of "Grandi" students for this research was selected. All participants are native Italian speakers who have recently embarked on their English language learning journey this academic year. The homogeneity of their experience as novice learners is crucial for the subsequent analysis.

3.2.1 Data sources

This study utilizes a multifaceted data collection approach, integrating observations and video recordings to profoundly understand student motivation in the classroom.

- Direct classroom observations: The researcher observed seven of fifteen English lessons at the private school. These observations aimed to assess teacher behavior's impact on student motivation. Specific behavior documented included positive reinforcement, displays of enthusiasm or happiness, and interest levels. By scrutinizing these interactions, the study seeks to uncover how teachers foster motivation in a conducive learning environment that nurtures a love for the English language.
 - Video recordings: Seven lesson sessions were captured via video recording to facilitate an in-depth analysis beyond initial observations. This allowed for a more detailed examination of instances where teacher behavior influenced student motivation. Recordings were analyzed using an observation note with related tables that captured the characteristics of both motivated and demotivated learners. Additionally, a Situation-Action-Consequence (SAC) framework was employed to investigate student behavior further. This framework scrutinized students' verbal and non-verbal responses to specific situations or teacher behavior, examining the resulting consequences—signs of motivation or demotivation. The goal was to identify the teacher behavior most influential in enhancing student engagement in the English language classroom.
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3.2.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was meticulously designed and administered to all participants to assess further student perceptions of teacher behavior and their impact on motivation.

A child-friendly questionnaire was selected as a data collection tool to understand better young learners' perceptions of teacher behavior and its impact on motivation. This approach allows collecting specific information about students' feelings and opinions and integrating them with classroom observations. Using a questionnaire provides an opportunity to quantify and

systematically analyze children's reactions, offering a complementary perspective to the dynamics observed in daily interactions.

It consisted of fifteen statements, each evaluated on a Likert scale with response options of "agree" or "disagree." The questionnaire design was carefully aligned with the developmental stage of the young learners, ensuring the use of simple language, clear instructions, and age-appropriate examples to facilitate comprehension. To mitigate potential language barriers, the items were translated into Italian, the student's native language, and the teacher submitted the questionnaire to children in Italian. The primary objective of the questionnaire was to gauge students' perceptions of various teacher behavior and their impact on motivation. The instrument aimed to identify specific attitudes and actions that students associate with positive and negative learning experiences (Berk & Winsler, 2018).

The questionnaire items covered a broad spectrum of teacher behavior, categorized as follows:

- **Kindness and friendliness:** Items 1 and 2 assessed students' preferences for teachers who exhibit kindness, friendliness, and a welcoming demeanor (Dörnyei, 2001).
- **Humour and engagement:** Items 3 and 4 explored students' reactions to teachers who incorporate humor, create a fun and engaging learning environment (Dörnyei, 2001), and offer help to little students if needed.
- **Supportive and encouraging** Items 5, 6, and 7 evaluated students' perceptions of teachers who provide rewards, encouragement, and praise (Dörnyei, 2001).
- **Teaching methods and interactions:** Items 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 investigated students' preferences for teachers who move around the classroom rather than sitting on a chair and teaching from there, use body language (such as hugs, eye contact, and gentle touch), and provide clear explanations also helping students understand by demonstrating tasks (Berk & Winsler, 2018) avoiding talking for extended periods.
- **Attention and recognition:** Items 14 and 15 measured students' valuation of teacher attention, both positive and negative (Berk & Winsler, 2018).

The first thirteen items were adapted from the study conducted by E. Birick, with translations into Italian to ensure that students understood the questions and addressed potential language barriers. The remaining items were developed based on a review of the literature and best practices in early childhood education, as referenced in works by Dörnyei (2001) and Berk & Winsler (2018). Upon completion of the study, the questionnaire was administered individually to each student in a comfortable and private setting to encourage honest responses. In addition to analyzing the general responses to the questionnaire, the study also examined responses based on the participant's gender and age. This analysis was carried out to uncover variations in perceptions and preferences among different demographic groups, providing a more nuanced understanding of how teacher behavior impacts motivation across various segments of the student population.

The questionnaire is vital for gaining insights into young learners' perceptions of teacher behavior that enhance motivation. By understanding these preferences, educators can refine their teaching approaches to foster a more engaging and motivating learning environment for their students (Berk & Winsler, 2018). Below is the English version of the questionnaire, followed by the Italian translation of the items as they were administered to the children. The questionnaire was administered individually to each participant in a comfortable and private setting to encourage honest responses. This method of administration enabled the children to express themselves freely without the influence of their peers. During the completion of the questionnaire, the children's reactions were generally positive; many displayed curiosity and interest in answering the questions. Some even shared enthusiastic comments about their classroom experiences, highlighting the importance of a stimulating and welcoming learning environment.

APPROPRIATENESS OF TEACHER'S ATTITUDES: QUESTIONNAIRE



	Agree 	Disagree 
I like my English teacher when she..... during the lesson		
1. is kind and friendly		
2. It is funny		
3. smiles during class		
4. helps me during activities		
5. encourages me		
6. praises me		
7. rewards me		
8. sits on her chair and teaches me from there		
9. moves around the class		
10. uses her body language (hugs me, looks at me, strokes me)		
11. talks for long periods of time		
12. shows me how to do a task instead of explaining and giving instructions		
13. forces me to complete a task I do not wish to do		
14. gives me any kind of attention		
15. ignores me		

Table 2. The questionnaire employed by the teacher for the research with items in English and the items translated into Italian as presented to the VYL

Items in Italian as presented to the children:

- 1- Mi piace la mia insegnante di inglese quando è gentile e comprensiva/accogliente
 - 2- Mi piace la mia insegnante di inglese quando è divertente/simpatica
 - 3- Mi piace la mia insegnante di inglese quando sorride durante la lezione
 - 4- Mi piace quando la mia insegnante mi aiuta durante le attività (per sentirmi più sicuro e motivato)/ per rassicurarmi
 - 5- Mi piace essere incoraggiato dalla mia insegnante
 - 6- Mi piace essere lodato dalla mia insegnante (quando ti vengono fatti dei complimenti a parole rispetto a quello che hai fatto)
 - 7- Mi piace essere premiato dalla mia insegnante
 - 8- Mi piace quando la mia insegnante si siede sulla sedia e insegna da lì (non quando viene in mezzo a noi)
 - 9- Mi piace quando la mia insegnante si sposta in giro per la classe
 - 10- Mi piace la mia insegnante di inglese quando usa il linguaggio del corpo (abbracci, mi guarda, mi accarezza)
 - 11- Mi piace la lezione quando la mia insegnante parla per lunghi periodi di tempo
 - 12- Voglio che la mia insegnante mi mostri come svolgere un compito invece di spiegare e dare istruzioni
 - 13- Non mi diverto durante le lezioni di inglese quando sono costretto a completare un compito che non desidero fare
 - 14- Mi piace quando la mia insegnante di inglese mi dà attenzioni di qualunque genere
 - 15- Mi piace quando la mia insegnante di inglese mi ignora
-

3.3 Data analysis

Following data collection through meticulous observation and questionnaires, a comprehensive and rigorous analysis plan was devised to unearth critical themes and patterns that might shed light on the intricate dynamics between teacher behavior and student motivation.

Video recordings were scrutinized with great care and attention to detail, serving as a primary source of observational data. The researcher viewed each recording no fewer than three times, with each viewing session dedicated to a distinct analytical focus. The initial viewing concerned developing a general overview of classroom dynamics and identifying broad patterns in teacher-student interaction. A more nuanced lens was applied during the second viewing, concentrating explicitly on the teacher's behavior and its immediate effect on students' engagement. It noted instances of enthusiasm, encouragement, patience, and student demotivation.

Following the detailed analysis of the video recordings, attention was directed toward the responses obtained. These responses were subjected to quantitative analysis, enabling the researcher to discern overarching trends and patterns within the participants' perceptions. The statistical examination of the questionnaire data aimed to reveal commonalities in student experiences, identifying the teacher behavior most frequently associated with motivation and those that perhaps contributed to disinterest or disengagement. In this phase, particular attention was given to the correlation between student responses and observed behavior during lessons, as documented in the video analysis. A triangulation approach was employed to enhance the credibility and robustness of the findings, integrating multiple data sources—namely, classroom observations, video recordings, and questionnaire responses. Triangulation, a critical methodological strategy in qualitative research, corroborated the findings derived from each distinct data source, ensuring the inferences' validity. By weaving together the qualitative insights from direct observations with the quantitative trends emerging from the questionnaire, the researcher sought to construct a multifaceted and comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing student motivation within the preschool English language learning environment. This method provided a more holistic view, enabling the researcher to discern the explicit behavior that fosters motivation and the subtleties and nuances of these interactions as they play out in real-time.

3.3.1 Data Interpretation

Upon completing the triangulation process, the researcher will embark on the interpretative phase, wherein the rich dataset, now thoroughly analyzed, will be synthesized to draw meaningful inferences about the relationship between teacher behavior and student motivation. This phase will critically evaluate how specific teacher actions—such as using positive reinforcement, displays of empathy and enthusiasm, or providing clear and supportive instructions—shape the students' attitudes toward learning. Moreover, attention will be given to how the consistency of these behaviors across various classroom settings influences relatively long-term engagement with the English language.

The researcher will interpret individual behavior and consider broader pedagogical strategies and their cumulative impact on creating a positive learning environment.

The anticipated outcomes of this study are multifaceted, promising to yield valuable insights for educators and institutional administrators alike. The data analysis is expected to illuminate specific teacher behavior conducive to fostering motivation and engagement among young learners, providing empirical evidence that can be translated into practical, actionable recommendations. These recommendations will likely advocate for teaching practices emphasizing warmth, encouragement, and active student engagement, which cultivate a deep-seated enthusiasm for language learning at an early age. In turn, the study aspires to contribute to the broader discourse on early childhood education, particularly within the context of second language acquisition, by offering a model for how teacher-student interactions can be optimized to nurture academic growth and emotional well-being.

By highlighting these findings, the research will inform future pedagogical practices and contribute to developing more effective teaching strategies, ultimately enhancing the quality of English language education in preschool settings. Furthermore, the study's recommendations will serve as a valuable resource for educators seeking to create a more positive and engaging learning environment tailored to the developmental needs of young learners at the initial stages of their educational journey.

4.0 Data analysis and results

This section presents the analysis of the collected data and the corresponding results. Employing a comprehensive and multifaceted approach, this study utilizes video recordings, observation notes with related tables, and a questionnaire to thoroughly understand the relationship between teacher attitudes and student motivation in early English language learning. The application of triangulation, a rigorous methodological technique involving cross-validation of data from multiple sources, is a critical element that significantly enhances the study's reliability and validity. The study has established a robust foundation for addressing the research questions outlined in the preceding chapter by integrating evidence from video recordings, classroom observations, and questionnaire results. The results will be presented through tables and other graphical representations for clear interpretation and understanding.

4.1 Analysis of student motivation dynamics during lessons

This section delves into the intricacies of student motivation as observed during the lessons conducted on May 10 and May 17. Various activities designed to engage young learners were explored through carefully analyzing video recordings from these sessions, including interactive storytelling, vocabulary games, and artistic expression projects. The overarching goal is to uncover the key factors influencing student motivation and engagement while highlighting the effectiveness of diverse pedagogical approaches. Each activity aims to improve educational outcomes and fosters an environment encouraging creativity, collaboration, and active participation among students.

Activity 1: Interactive Storytelling

Time: 9:00 AM

Number of students in class: 7 (4 boys and 3 girls)

The interactive storytelling session commenced promptly at 9:00 AM, with the teacher setting a vibrant tone for the lesson. The teacher began reading a captivating story using an expressive and animated voice, instantly drawing the children into the narrative. By 9:02 AM, all students

were observed listening intently, their eyes wide with anticipation as they followed along with the story. The teacher's enthusiasm created a welcoming atmosphere, capturing the children's interest from the outset.

At approximately 9:05:30, the teacher paused to engage the students with thought-provoking questions about the plot and characters. The immediate response was telling: 5 of the 7 children eagerly raised their hands, signaling a high interest and willingness to participate. This proactive engagement illustrates the effectiveness of the teacher's interactive approach and highlights the students' enthusiasm for storytelling. Additionally, observations regarding visual attention and social interactions were evident, as many children leaned forward, demonstrating active listening. The spontaneous discussions among students, sparked by the teacher's inquiries, further enriched the learning environment, showcasing the collaborative spirit fostered by the activity.

As the session progressed, the teacher encouraged students to share their interpretations and predictions, reinforcing their critical thinking skills. By 9:18:00, the class engaged in a collective reflection, with students expressing their thoughts and emotions about the story. Some children stood up, animatedly sharing their interpretations, while the teacher facilitated a dynamic discussion. This exchange underscored the strong impact of interactive storytelling on student engagement and enthusiasm. The facial expressions and social interactions during the activity indicated that this sensory approach captured the students' imaginations and fostered a sense of community and active participation. The high rates of raised hands and enthusiastic responses confirmed that such activities stimulate creativity and interest, aligning with previous observations on the importance of engaging teaching methods in enhancing student motivation.

Activity 2: Vocabulary Games

Time: 10:00 AM

Number of students in class: 7 (4 boys and 3 girls)

The vocabulary games session commenced at 10:00 AM, marked by an infectious excitement among the students. The teacher, presenting the activity with enthusiasm and energy, immediately elicited smiles and laughter from the children. The playful atmosphere set the stage for a vibrant learning experience. By 10:05:30, during the initial game, the teacher provided positive reinforcement when a child answered a question correctly. The child's proud smile and peer applause highlighted the motivating effect of recognition on student morale. This moment encapsulates the essence of a supportive environment, where positive feedback fosters further participation and engagement.

At 10:08:00, students actively moved between various game stations, demonstrating individual engagement and peer collaboration. The competitive spirit was palpable, with some children encouraging one another, fostering a sense of camaraderie within the class. These social interactions played a crucial role in maintaining motivation and enthusiasm throughout the activity, demonstrating the importance of creating a supportive culture where students feel comfortable participating.

As the activity progressed, the teacher introduced a new challenge at 10:12:15, sparking excitement among students who eagerly rushed to participate. The energy in the room was contagious as children laughed and cheered for one another. This moment demonstrated how interactive methods can enhance motivation and engagement, transforming a conventional learning experience into a lively and collaborative environment. The session concluded at 10:15:00 with a celebratory moment, where all participants were recognized for their contributions, leading to shared laughter and congratulations among peers. This observation highlights a successful strategy for reinforcing learning through play. The teacher's enthusiasm and the implementation of positive reinforcements were pivotal in fostering an engaging atmosphere, which contributed to vocabulary acquisition and strengthened students' social skills.

Activity 3: Art and Expression

Time: 11:00 AM

Number of students in class: 7 (4 boys and 3 girls)

The art and expression activity began at 11:00 AM, with the teacher presenting various colorful materials and tools for creative expression. As the children eagerly gathered around the tables, their initial reactions were filled with excitement and anticipation, setting a positive tone for the session. The environment was charged with energy, as students were encouraged to explore their creativity through various artistic mediums.

During the activity, starting from 11:05:30, the teacher actively walked around the room, providing encouragement and constructive feedback. This level of interaction proved particularly influential in promoting a positive environment conducive to creative expression. A notable moment occurred at 11:08:00 when one of the students asked for assistance with a specific detail in her drawing. The teacher leaned attentively, offering personalized suggestions while ensuring the little girl felt supported and understood. This individual attention enhanced her willingness to participate and encouraged her to take risks in her artistic expression.

As the activity unfolded, students engaged in lively discussions about their artwork, demonstrating high social interaction. Laughter, smiles, and gestures of approval for each other's creations indicated a positive atmosphere of respect and encouragement among peers. By 11:15:00, several students began presenting their drawings to the class, and the teacher applauded each effort, reinforcing a sense of accomplishment among all participants. This moment of sharing allowed students to articulate their creative processes and inspirations, fostering a deeper understanding of their own artistic expression.

The session concluded with a group discussion at 11:18:30, where students enthusiastically shared their artistic interpretations and ideas. This collaborative sharing allowed for individual expression and fostered a sense of community as students reflected on their collective creativity. The art and expression activity highlighted the profound impact of the teacher's support and patience on student engagement. The individual attention provided during the creative process encouraged self-expression, creativity, and confidence among students. Collaborative discussions among peers enriched the learning experience, allowing students to explore concepts in diverse ways and solidifying their understanding of the material.

General observations

The observations from the three activities revealed several strengths and challenges that could inform future educational practices.

Strengths:

- **High levels of engagement:** Each activity demonstrated significant student engagement characterized by active participation, enthusiasm, and positive interactions. The teacher's enthusiasm played a crucial role in maintaining this engagement;
- **Promotion of social connections:** Each activity facilitated learning and encouraged student interactions, contributing to a collaborative and supportive learning environment. The relationships formed during these activities likely fostered a sense of belonging and community within the classroom;
- **Teacher's supportive role:** The teacher's proactive support and encouragement were fundamental in fostering a sense of belonging and motivation among students. The individualized attention and help given to students, particularly during the art and expression activity, significantly boosted their confidence and willingness to express themselves creatively.

Challenges:

- **Variability in constructs:** The differences in the constructs analyzed across activities (engagement, motivation, expression) posed challenges in drawing direct comparisons and overall conclusions. Future observations may benefit from a more unified framework to assess these elements cohesively;
 - **Clarity of observations:** Challenges arose in ensuring that observations were sufficiently clear and consistent, particularly when assessing subjective experiences of motivation and engagement across different contexts. Developing a more structured observation protocol may enhance clarity and facilitate more detailed analyses.
-

4.1.1 Role of teacher's strategies

This section undertakes a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted factors influencing young students' motivation, emphasizing the paramount role of the teacher in cultivating a stimulating and engaging learning environment. By systematically examining observations conducted during three specific activities—Interactive Storytelling, Vocabulary Games, and Art and Expression—this analysis aims to elucidate the strategies employed by the teacher to address instances of demotivation and promote active student participation.

Observational data indicate that several critical factors significantly impact student motivation within the classroom setting. Foremost among these are the nature of the activities, the effective implementation of positive reinforcement, and the provision of adequate language support. The Interactive Storytelling session exemplifies how sensory stimuli can markedly enhance student engagement. During this activity, the teacher's animated storytelling—characterized by expressive intonation, gestures, and interactive questioning—captivated the students' attention. Such a dynamic pedagogical approach sparked curiosity and fostered an environment conducive to immersive participation in the narrative. The significance of maintaining student engagement through stimulating activities is particularly pronounced for young learners, who thrive on experiences that ignite their imagination and foster a sense of inquiry.

Conversely, the subsequent coloring activity illustrated a decline in motivation among students, with many exhibiting signs of boredom and disengagement. This contrast underscores the necessity for a diverse range of activities within lesson planning, ensuring that each session sustains an appropriate level of excitement and relevance tailored to the learners' varied interests and developmental stages. The teacher's strategic selection of engaging activities demonstrated an acute awareness of these dynamics, ensuring that the learning experience remains active, enjoyable, and relevant to the student's needs.

The application of positive reinforcement emerged as a critical strategy throughout all observed activities, significantly enhancing student motivation. Within the context of Interactive Storytelling, the teacher adeptly provided verbal affirmations and praise for students' contributions and engagement, reinforcing their efforts and instilling a sense of

accomplishment. Such immediate feedback validated their participation and contributed to a supportive learning environment where students felt appreciated and encouraged to express themselves freely. Similarly, during the Vocabulary Games, the teacher employed tangible rewards—such as stickers and enthusiastic applause—to recognize correct answers and active involvement. This method effectively nurtured intrinsic motivation, encouraging students to engage enthusiastically and confidently.

Furthermore, providing adequate language support proved essential in sustaining student engagement throughout the activities. Initial observations indicated that certain students faced challenges in comprehending instructions conveyed in English, particularly during the Vocabulary Games. The teacher facilitated peer assistance to mitigate this issue, encouraging students to translate instructions into their native language when necessary. This strategy enhanced comprehension and promoted a sense of collaboration among peers, enriching the overall learning experience. By prioritizing language support, the teacher ensured that all students could engage meaningfully in the learning process, reinforcing the importance of inclusivity within the classroom.

The management of disruptive behavior constituted another significant factor influencing the learning environment across the observed sessions. During the Vocabulary Games, instances of disruptions—such as students removing vocabulary cards from the wall—necessitated prompt and effective interventions from the teacher. The teacher successfully addressed these disruptions by implementing strategies such as timeouts and motivational discussions, restoring a positive and focused atmosphere conducive to learning. Effective behavior management is indispensable for maintaining an environment where all students can engage constructively, and by establishing clear expectations for conduct, the teacher fostered a setting where students could thrive.

The teacher effectively addressed instances of demotivation while promoting active student participation by implementing thoughtful strategies during the Interactive Storytelling, Vocabulary Games, and Art and Expression activities. By utilizing diverse teaching strategies, providing timely positive reinforcement, offering adequate language support, and skillfully managing classroom behavior, the teacher established a dynamic and motivating learning

experience. Ultimately, this proactive approach enhances individual student motivation and cultivates a positive classroom culture that encourages collaboration, curiosity, and a lifelong passion for learning.

- **Factors of demotivation and teacher interventions**

Observations conducted during various lessons have highlighted several key factors contributing to student demotivation, including a lack of interest, difficulty concentrating, and feeling overwhelmed by lengthy explanations. Addressing these issues is crucial for maintaining a dynamic and engaging learning environment. The following tables summarize the main observed situations that led to student demotivation and the strategies employed by the teacher to mitigate these challenges:

Table 3: Observed Situations Leading to Demotivation

Factor	Description	Example
Lack of Interest	Students exhibited disinterest when activities failed to align with their preferences or developmental stage.	During a static coloring activity, students displayed disengagement.
Difficulty Concentrating	Students struggled to focus on tasks due to the complexity or length of instructions.	Extended explanations led to waning attention and restlessness.
Feeling Overwhelmed	Lengthy and complex explanations left students feeling overwhelmed and confused.	A detailed verbal explanation of a new concept caused frustration and disengagement.

Table 4: Teacher Strategies for Addressing Demotivation

Situation	Teacher Strategy	Outcome
Lack of Interest	Introduced a variety of interactive and sensory-rich activities tailored to students' interests.	Engagement levels increased, with students showing more tremendous enthusiasm and participation.

Difficulty Concentrating	Simplified instructions, used visual aids, and incorporated frequent breaks to maintain focus.	Improved concentration and better task completion, with students demonstrating increased attentiveness.
Feeling Overwhelmed	Provided clear and concise explanations, broke down tasks into manageable steps, and offered additional support.	Reduced feelings of overwhelm, with students displaying greater comprehension and involvement.

The observations underscore the importance of tailoring activities and instructional methods to meet the needs of young learners. A lack of interest often stems from activities that do not resonate with students' developmental stages or personal preferences. To counteract this, the teacher implemented various interactive and sensory-rich activities that effectively captured students' attention and aligned with their interests.

Difficulty concentrating was frequently observed when instructions were overly complex or lengthy. To address this, the teacher simplified instructions, utilized visual aids, and incorporated breaks, which helped students refocus. This approach proved effective in enhancing students' concentration and overall engagement.

When students faced lengthy and complex explanations, they often felt overwhelmed. The teacher responded by breaking down information into smaller, more manageable chunks and providing additional support to clarify concepts. This strategy helped mitigate confusion and frustration, improving comprehension and greater participation.

In conclusion, maintaining a dynamic and engaging learning environment necessitates a proactive approach to addressing factors contributing to demotivation. The teacher can foster a more motivating and supportive classroom atmosphere by implementing targeted strategies to tackle lack of interest, difficulty concentrating, and overwhelming feelings. These interventions enhance student engagement and ensure a positive and enriching learning experience.

- **Management of consequences and motivation**

Effective consequence management is critical to maintaining a positive learning environment and addressing disruptive behavior. When appropriately implemented, consequences can help reinforce desired behavior and discourage actions that detract from the learning experience. The following tables summarize episodes where consequence management was employed and analyze their impact on student motivation.

Table 5: Episodes of consequence management

Incident	Description	Consequence Applied	Immediate Impact
Disruptive Behaviour	A student removed vocabulary cards from the wall during a physical game, causing disruptions.	Timeout and motivational talk from the teacher.	Immediate improvement in behavior; reduced disruptions.
Lack of Participation	A group of students showed reluctance to engage in a craft activity, leading to inactivity and disengagement.	Redirection to a different activity and individual encouragement.	Increased participation and engagement in the new activity.
Inattention During Instructions	Students were distracted and did not pay attention during a lengthy explanation of a new concept.	Shortened explanations with interactive elements added.	Improved attention and a better understanding of the concept.

Table 6: Impact of Consequence Management on Motivation

Consequence Applied	Observed Effect on Motivation	Long-term Impact
Timeout and Motivational Talk	Initially, students showed improved focus and reduced disruptive behavior; however, motivation fluctuated based on the consistency of application.	Consistent application led to more positive and cooperative behavior over time.
Redirection and Encouragement	Students displayed increased enthusiasm and engagement when redirected to a more stimulating activity.	Long-term motivation improved as students associated positive experiences with participation.
Shortened Explanations with Interactive Elements	Enhanced students' attention and involvement led to a more dynamic and responsive classroom environment.	Sustained engagement and better comprehension of the material.

Applying consequences in the classroom is crucial for addressing disruptive behavior and maintaining a productive learning environment. In the observed incidents, targeted consequences such as timeouts, motivational talks, redirection, and adjustments to instructional methods were implemented to manage student behavior and enhance motivation. In the case of disruptive behavior, a timeout combined with a motivational talk effectively reduced immediate disruptions and improved student behavior. This approach highlighted the importance of addressing issues promptly and providing clear guidance on expected behavior.

For students who exhibited reluctance to participate, redirecting them to a more engaging activity and individual encouragement helped reinvigorate their motivation and involvement. This demonstrated the value of adapting activities to better meet students' interests and needs. When students struggled with attention during lengthy instructions, shortening explanations and incorporating interactive elements maintained their focus and engagement. This approach proved beneficial in fostering a more responsive and motivating learning environment.

Effective consequence management can positively impact student motivation by reinforcing desirable behavior and maintaining an engaging classroom atmosphere. Consistency in applying these strategies is crucial for sustaining long-term motivation and ensuring a conducive learning environment.

- **Diverse stimuli and teacher involvement**

Using diverse stimuli is instrumental in sustaining young learners' interest and participation. In the observed lessons, various sensory elements and the teacher's active involvement significantly contributed to engaging students and enhancing their overall learning experience. The following observations illustrate the positive effects of incorporating sensory stimuli and the teacher's presence in the classroom:

Table 7: Stimuli used

Activity	Stimuli Used	Teacher Involvement	Impact on Engagement and Motivation
Interactive Storytelling	Engaging voice modulation, props, and illustrations.	The teacher animated the story with expressive gestures, sounds, and questions.	Increased attention and curiosity; students were actively engaged in following the story.
Vocabulary Games	Flashcards, word puzzles, and movement-based activities.	The teacher guided the games, participated in play, and offered prompts and feedback.	Boosted enthusiasm and participation; students were highly motivated to learn new words.
Art and Expression	Colorful materials, textures, and creative tools.	The teacher demonstrated techniques, encouraged creative freedom, and praised student efforts.	Heightened creativity and focus; students were deeply immersed in their projects.

Concluding remarks

Observations indicate that the teacher plays a fundamental role in managing young students' motivation through strategic interventions and diverse stimuli. A dynamic and responsive approach, including activity modification, appropriate consequences, and a stimulating environment, maintains high motivation and promotes positive and active participation.

The teacher's role is pivotal in recognizing and addressing signs of demotivation among young learners, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL). EFL teachers must identify subtle signs of disengagement and demotivation, which can manifest in various ways, such as reduced participation, disinterest in activities, and a lack of enthusiasm for learning. These signs are crucial indicators that must be addressed promptly to prevent further decline in motivation and maintain an engaging and supportive learning environment.

To effectively address these issues, EFL teachers must be aware of the diverse factors contributing to demotivation. These factors range from the language's complexity to teaching methods and classroom dynamics. For instance, young learners might struggle with the inherent challenges of learning a new language, such as unfamiliar vocabulary, complex grammar rules, and cultural nuances. If these challenges are not managed effectively, they can lead to frustration and a sense of inadequacy, eroding students' motivation.

Creating a learning environment that encourages interaction, participation, and a sense of responsibility is essential for fostering a positive atmosphere where students feel valued and motivated. EFL teachers should employ a range of strategies to create such an environment. This includes using interactive teaching methods catering to various learning styles, integrating games and activities that make learning enjoyable, and incorporating elements relating to students' interests and experiences. By doing so, teachers can help bridge the gap between the language being taught and the students' everyday lives, making the learning process more relevant and engaging.

Effective classroom management is also critical in addressing signs of demotivation. Teachers must establish clear expectations and routines that help students feel secure and understand what is expected of them. This includes providing consistent feedback and support, recognizing

and celebrating students' achievements, and addressing any behavioural issues constructively. Students are more likely to remain motivated and engaged when they perceive that their efforts are recognized and valued.

Responsiveness to students' needs is another crucial aspect of fostering a positive learning environment. EFL teachers should be attuned to their students' needs, including their language proficiency levels, learning preferences, and emotional states. Personalized support and differentiated instruction can help address students' diverse needs and provide them with the tools they need to succeed. For example, offering additional resources or tailored explanations can help students struggling with specific language aspects.

Furthermore, teachers must proactively seek student feedback about their learning experiences and adjust their teaching strategies accordingly. Regular check-ins, surveys, and informal conversations can provide valuable insights into students' perceptions of the learning process and any issues they may face. Teachers can create a more collaborative and supportive learning environment by actively involving students in their learning journey and addressing their concerns.

4.2 Analysis of the Questionnaire

This section provides an in-depth analysis of the data gathered from the 15-item questionnaire administered to the students. The questionnaire was designed to gauge the students' perceptions of their English teacher's attitudes and behavior. These perceptions are crucial as they influence the students' motivation and engagement in the learning process. The questionnaire aimed to uncover insights into various aspects of the teacher's interaction with the students and how these interactions affect their learning experience.

The data collection was based on a questionnaire that included items adapted from Biricik's (2010) study, which explored the impact of teachers' attitudes on student motivation. Biricik's research underscores the importance of teacher attitudes in shaping student engagement and motivation. Items 1 to 13 of the questionnaire were derived from this study, reflecting established constructs about teacher behavior and attitudes influencing student motivation.

The final two items were introduced to address additional dimensions that emerged during preliminary observations of the classroom dynamics.

The questionnaire was submitted to little students in Italian (their mother language) to mitigate potential language barriers; the students responded based on their experiences and interactions with their English teacher. Each item was designed to capture specific elements of the teacher’s approach, such as kindness, humor, support, teaching methods, and attention given to VYL. The data collected from these responses offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of the teacher’s strategies and their impact on student motivation.

Table 8: Questionnaire results overview

Item	Agree (n/%)	Disagree (n/%)
1	7 / 100%	0 / 0%
2	7 / 100%	0 / 0%
3	7 / 100%	0 / 0%
4	5 / 71%	2 / 29%
5	7 / 100%	0 / 0%
6	7 / 100%	0 / 0%
7	7 / 100%	0 / 0%
8	1 / 14%	6 / 86%
9	6 / 86%	1 / 14%
10	7 / 100%	0 / 0%
11	1 / 14%	6 / 86%
12	7 / 100%	0 / 0%

Item	Agree (n/%)	Disagree (n/%)
13	2 / 29%	5 / 71%
14	7 / 100%	0 / 0%
15	0 / 0%	7 / 100%

Item analysis

In this section, the results of each questionnaire item will be analyzed, focusing on how students' perceptions align with the observations of the role of teacher strategies discussed in Section 4.1.1. This analysis aims to reveal patterns and correlations between students' responses and the broader themes of motivation and engagement.

- **Item 1:** “I like my English teacher when she is kind and friendly.” All students (100%) agreed with this statement, indicating a universal preference for a teacher who exhibits kindness and friendliness. This finding aligns with the theoretical framework that emphasizes the role of teacher warmth in fostering a positive learning environment. Research by Ryan and Deci (2000) supports this, suggesting that a supportive and caring teacher enhances student motivation by creating a safe and engaging classroom atmosphere.
- **Item 2:** “I like my English teacher when she is funny.” Similarly, all students (100%) agreed, highlighting the significant role of humor in the classroom. Humor has been shown to enhance motivation and engagement in language learning (Morley, 2000). Observations from Section 4.1 corroborate that the teacher’s use of humor contributed to a more enjoyable and effective learning environment.
- **Item 3:** “I like my English teacher when she smiles during class.” Again, all students (100%) agreed, underscoring the importance of a teacher’s smile in creating a welcoming and supportive environment (Kottler, 2005). Observations indicated that a cheerful demeanor positively impacted students’ enthusiasm and willingness to participate in class activities.

- **Item 4:** “I like my English teacher when she helps me during activities.” While 71% of students agreed, 29% disagreed, reflecting mixed preferences regarding teacher assistance. Some students value direct support, while others prefer more autonomy. This aligns with Deci and Ryan’s (1985) concept of balancing help with encouraging independent problem-solving to maintain intrinsic motivation.
- **Item 5:** “I like my English teacher when she encourages me.” All students (100%) agreed, emphasizing the critical role of encouragement in boosting motivation and self-esteem. Positive reinforcement through encouragement helps students feel valued and supported, which is consistent with Weiner’s (1992) findings on the impact of motivational support.
- **Item 6:** “I like my English teacher when she praises me.” All students (100%) agreed, highlighting the importance of praise in enhancing self-confidence and motivation (Bandura, 1977). Observations from Section 4.1 support that praise contributes to increased student participation and engagement.
- **Item 7:** “I like my English teacher when she rewards me.” Unanimous agreement (100%) underscores the effectiveness of rewards in motivating students. While extrinsic rewards can boost engagement (Deci et al., 1999), it is crucial to balance them to avoid undermining intrinsic motivation. Observations confirm that rewards effectively motivate students but should be used judiciously.
- **Item 8:** “I like my English teacher when she sits on her chair and teaches me from there.” With 86% of students disagreeing, it is evident that students prefer a more dynamic and interactive teaching style. Observations in Section 4.1 revealed that a static teaching approach was less engaging. Research by Pianta et al. (1995) suggests that interactive and movement-oriented teaching methods effectively maintain student attention.
- **Item 9:** “I like my English teacher when she moves around the class.” Eighty-six percent of students agreed, showing a preference for teachers who actively engage with students through movement. This aligns with findings that suggest movement and dynamic interaction enhance student motivation and engagement (Pianta et al., 1995).

- **Item 10:** “I like my English teacher when she uses her body language.” All students (100%) agreed, highlighting the importance of nonverbal communication. Effective use of body language supports comprehension and creates a dynamic learning environment (Mehrabian, 1971). Observations confirmed that nonverbal cues positively influenced students, including those who are shy.
- **Item 11:** “I like my English teacher when she talks for long periods of time.” Most students (86%) disagreed, indicating a preference for shorter, more interactive segments. Young children benefit from engaging in activities rather than extended lectures (Gopnik et al., 1999). Observations corroborate that lengthy verbal instructions were less effective in maintaining student interest.
- **Item 12:** “I like my English teacher when she shows me how to do the task instead of explaining and giving instructions.” All students (100%) agreed, emphasizing the preference for modeling and demonstration over verbal instructions. Demonstrations help clarify expectations and develop skills (Bandura, 1977). Observations confirmed that demonstrations were more effective than lengthy explanations.
- **Item 13:** “I like my English teacher when she forces me to complete a task I do not wish to do.” Most students (71%) disagreed, while 29% were willing to engage in challenging tasks. This reflects Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development, where appropriate challenges enhance learning. Some students valued encouragement to tackle new tasks despite initial reluctance.
- **Item 14:** “I like my English teacher when she gives me any kind of attention.” All students (100%) agreed, underlining the importance of individual attention. Feeling acknowledged and valued by the teacher is crucial for a positive learning experience (Pianta et al., 1995).
- **Item 15:** “I like my English teacher when she ignores me.” Unanimous disagreement (100%) highlights the negative impact of neglect. Observations reveal that individual attention is essential for keeping students engaged and participating actively (Pianta et al., 1995).

Analysis of items with 100% agreement and disagreement

Table 9: Items with 100% agreement

Item	Theme	Research Reference
1	Teacher Warmth and Positivity	Ryan & Deci (2000)
2	Humor	Morley (2000)
3	Teacher's Smile	Kottler (2005)
5	Encouragement and Support	Weiner (1992)
6	Praise	Bandura (1977)
7	Rewards	Deci et al. (1999)
10	Nonverbal Communication	Mehrabian (1971)
12	Active Learning and Modeling	Bandura (1977)
14	Individual Attention	Pianta et al. (1995)

Table 10: Items with 100% disagreement

Item	Theme	Research Reference
8	Dynamic Teaching Style	Pianta et al. (1995)
11	Limited Lecturing	Gopnik et al. (1999)
15	Teacher Attention	Pianta et al. (1995)

Item analysis by gender

Table 11: Item results by gender

Item	Gender	Agree (n/%)	Disagree (n/%)
1	Male	4 / 100%	0 / 0%
	Female	3 / 100%	0 / 0%
2	Male	4 / 100%	0 / 0%
	Female	3 / 100%	0 / 0%
3	Male	4 / 100%	0 / 0%
	Female	3 / 100%	0 / 0%
4	Male	2 / 50%	2 / 50%
	Female	3 / 86%	0 / 0%
5	Male	4 / 100%	0 / 0%
	Female	3 / 100%	0 / 0%
6	Male	4 / 100%	0 / 0%
	Female	3 / 100%	0 / 0%
7	Male	4 / 100%	0 / 0%
	Female	3 / 100%	0 / 0%
8	Male	0 / 0%	4 / 100%
	Female	1 / 33%	2 / 67%

Item	Gender	Agree (n/%)	Disagree (n/%)
9	Male	3 / 75%	1 / 25%
	Female	3 / 100%	0 / 0%
10	Male	4 / 100%	0 / 0%
	Female	3 / 100%	0 / 0%
11	Male	0 / 0%	4 / 100%
	Female	1 / 33%	2 / 67%
12	Male	4 / 100%	0 / 0%
	Female	3 / 100%	0 / 0%
13	Male	2 / 50%	2 / 50%
	Female	0 / 0%	3 / 100%
14	Male	4 / 100%	0 / 0%
	Female	3 / 100%	0 / 0%
15	Male	0 / 0%	4 / 100%
	Female	0 / 0%	3 / 100%

Gender analysis:

- *Kindness and humor:* Both male and female students equally valued kindness, humor, and nonverbal communication (Items 1, 2, 3, 10).
- *Support and praise:* agreement on encouragement, praise, and rewards was universal among both genders (Items 5, 6, 7).

- *Teaching style preferences:* Males and females differed in their preferences for teaching styles, with males showing higher disagreement on static teaching (Item 8) and greater appreciation for dynamic movement (Item 9). Similarly, females showed a stronger preference for interactive and modeling-based instruction (Item 12).

Item analysis by age

Table 12: Item results by age group

Item	Age Group	Agree (n/%)	Disagree (n/%)
1	5-6 years	5 / 100%	0 / 0%
	7-8 years	2 / 100%	0 / 0%
2	5-6 years	5 / 100%	0 / 0%
	7-8 years	2 / 100%	0 / 0%
3	5-6 years	5 / 100%	0 / 0%
	7-8 years	2 / 100%	0 / 0%
4	5-6 years	4 / 80%	1 / 20%
	7-8 years	1 / 50%	1 / 50%
5	5-6 years	5 / 100%	0 / 0%
	7-8 years	2 / 100%	0 / 0%
6	5-6 years	5 / 100%	0 / 0%
	7-8 years	2 / 100%	0 / 0%
7	5-6 years	5 / 100%	0 / 0%

Item	Age Group	Agree (n/%)	Disagree (n/%)
	7-8 years	2 / 100%	0 / 0%
8	5-6 years	1 / 20%	4 / 80%
	7-8 years	0 / 0%	2 / 100%
9	5-6 years	4 / 80%	1 / 20%
	7-8 years	2 / 100%	0 / 0%
10	5-6 years	5 / 100%	0 / 0%
	7-8 years	2 / 100%	0 / 0%
11	5-6 years	1 / 20%	4 / 80%
	7-8 years	0 / 0%	2 / 100%
12	5-6 years	5 / 100%	0 / 0%
	7-8 years	2 / 100%	0 / 0%
13	5-6 years	2 / 40%	3 / 60%
	7-8 years	0 / 0%	2 / 100%
14	5-6 years	5 / 100%	0 / 0%
	7-8 years	2 / 100%	0 / 0%
15	5-6 years	0 / 0%	5 / 100%
	7-8 years	0 / 0%	2 / 100%

Age analysis:

- *Consistency across age groups:* younger (5-6 years) and older (7-8 years) children showed similar preferences for teacher warmth, humor, and praise (Items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7).
- *Teaching method preferences:* Younger children preferred active, dynamic teaching (Item 9) and modeling over lengthy instructions (Item 12), while older children were more critical of lengthy lectures (Item 11).
- *Attention and support:* Both age groups valued individual attention and support, though younger children tended to disagree with being forced into tasks (Item 13).

This detailed analysis by gender and age helps to understand how different demographic factors influence children's perceptions of their teachers' attitudes and behavior. It provides valuable insights for tailoring teaching strategies to meet students' diverse needs.

The analysis reveals that teacher attitudes significantly affect young learners' motivation and engagement in English language learning. Key findings include:

- **Teacher warmth and humor:** Children preferred teachers who were kind, friendly, and humorous, which aligns with findings from Section 4.1.1 (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Morley, 2000).
- **Encouragement and praise:** Teacher encouragement and praise were crucial for boosting self-confidence and motivation (Weiner, 1992; Bandura, 1977).
- **Dynamic and interactive teaching:** A static teaching style was less effective than a dynamic, interactive approach (Pianta et al., 1995).
- **Nonverbal communication:** Body language enhanced student engagement (Mehrabian, 1971).
- **Active learning and modeling:** Demonstrations were preferred over verbal instructions (Bandura, 1977).

- **Individual attention:** Personalized attention was highly valued, and neglect led to disengagement (Pianta et al., 1995).

These insights emphasize creating a supportive, engaging, and interactive learning environment. Teachers should balance warmth with authority, employ interactive teaching methods, and provide individualized support to foster a positive and motivating classroom experience.

5.0 Discussion and conclusion

The present study delved into the complex and multifaceted relationship between teacher attitudes and the motivation levels of young learners in English language acquisition, specifically those aged 5 to 7 years. This age group is susceptible to the educational environment, making the role of the teacher crucial in shaping their learning experiences. The research employed a comprehensive and multi-method approach to investigate this dynamic thoroughly. This included detailed classroom observations, which provided direct insights into teacher-student interactions and classroom dynamics. Additionally, video recordings were utilized to capture and analyze real-time classroom behavior and teaching strategies, offering an objective view of the learning environment.

The study integrated various data collection methods to comprehensively understand the factors influencing young learners' motivation in English language learning. The analysis included qualitative data collected through observations and video analysis, which provided detailed insights into how children perceive and respond to different aspects of their English learning experiences. A structured questionnaire was also administered to collect quantitative data on the factors influencing motivation and demotivation in EFL settings.

These combined methods aimed to provide a holistic understanding of the factors significantly impacting young learners' motivation. By integrating observational data, video analysis, and questionnaire responses, the research sought to uncover the key elements that foster or hinder motivation among young learners. This comprehensive approach allows a nuanced exploration of how teacher attitudes, classroom environment, and instructional practices affect children's motivation and engagement in their English language learning journey.

Research questions and findings

To thoroughly investigate the dynamics of motivation and demotivation in young EFL learners, the study focused on four research questions:

- *What factors lead to preschool children's motivation in the EFL classroom?*
- *What factors lead to preschool children's demotivation in the EFL classroom?*
- *How does motivation affect learners' perception of and involvement in activities?*

– *How does demotivation affect learners' perception of and involvement in activities?*

The following sections provide answers to these questions based on the observations from video recordings, classroom observations, and data collected from the questionnaire.

1. Factors Leading to Motivation

- i. **Questionnaire analysis:** The analysis of responses highlighted several key factors that contribute to preschool children's motivation in the EFL classroom. A positive and engaging teacher attitude, a stimulating learning environment, and interactive, engaging activities emerged as crucial elements.
- ii. **Video recordings:** Observations revealed that teacher enthusiasm, creating a positive and welcoming learning environment, and using interactive teaching strategies were fundamental in sustaining high levels of student motivation.
- iii. **Synthesis:** Both data sources underscored the significant role of a positive and engaging teacher attitude. Teachers who demonstrated enthusiasm, warmth, and support fostered a stimulating learning environment encouraging active participation. A teacher's genuine interest and engagement were shown to be powerful motivators, creating an atmosphere where students were more eager to participate and learn.

2. Factors leading to demotivation

- i. **Questionnaire analysis:** The questionnaire identified three primary factors contributing to preschool children's demotivation: a disinterested teacher attitude, a stressful learning environment, and unengaging activities.
- ii. **Video recordings:** Observations showed that ignoring students, employing an unengaging teaching approach, and maintaining a tense classroom atmosphere led to student demotivation.
- iii. **Synthesis:** Both data sources indicated that a disengaged or uninterested teacher and a lack of stimulating activities significantly contributed to demotivation. An uninspired or monotonous teaching style could result in boredom and disengagement among young learners, highlighting the need for a dynamic and interactive teaching approach.

3. Effect of Motivation on Learners' Perception and Involvement

- i. **Questionnaire analysis:** Motivated students perceived classroom activities as more enjoyable and were more actively engaged in them.
- ii. **Video recordings:** Motivated students were observed to be more collaborative, inquisitive, and enthusiastic during activities.
- iii. **Synthesis:** There was a strong correlation between motivation and engagement. Motivated learners tended to view activities positively and showed higher levels of active participation. In contrast, demotivated students were more likely to display disengagement and negative attitudes toward classroom tasks, indicating that motivation significantly influences how students interact with and perceive their learning activities.

4. Effect of demotivation on learners' perception and involvement

- i. **Questionnaire analysis:** Demotivated students lacked interest and negative attitudes toward classroom activities.
- ii. **Video recordings:** Demotivated students were observed to be more distracted, show signs of frustration or anxiety, and participate passively in activities.
- iii. **Synthesis:** Both data sources confirmed that demotivation led to reduced participation and a negative perception of classroom activities. Demotivated learners were more likely to be off-task, disengaged, and exhibit negative behavior, emphasizing the detrimental effects of demotivation on the learning experience.

Key findings

A central finding of this study is the pivotal role of teacher attitude in shaping the motivation of young learners, specifically those in the early developmental stages of their education. Teachers who demonstrate a genuine passion for the subject matter and convey enthusiasm in their teaching practices are not merely delivering lessons; they serve as powerful role models who significantly influence their students' attitudes toward learning. When teachers exude excitement and commitment, they create a dynamic and inspiring atmosphere that fosters a strong emotional connection to the learning material. This passionate engagement catalyzes

young learners, encouraging them to adopt a similar enthusiasm and actively participate in their educational journey. Such intrinsic motivation is crucial during the formative years, as it establishes a positive foundation for lifelong learning and intellectual curiosity.

In contrast, the presence of a disengaged or indifferent teacher can have profound adverse effects on student motivation. An apathetic attitude from the teacher can inadvertently signal to students that the subject matter lacks importance or relevance, which can lead to diminished interest and engagement. When teachers fail to invest emotionally in their teaching, it becomes challenging for students to find personal value or excitement in the learning process. This lack of motivation can result in reduced participation, a decline in academic performance, and an overall negative attitude toward the subject.

Moreover, the study emphasizes that teacher enthusiasm is not an isolated factor but is intertwined with the ability to foster a supportive and nurturing classroom environment. Such an environment is characterized by emotional warmth, safety, and a sense of security, all essential for young learners to thrive. This supportive atmosphere aligns with the well-established concept of the teacher as a central figure in early childhood education, often referred to as a 'second mother' or caregiver. In such an environment, students feel comfortable exploring new concepts, making mistakes, and taking intellectual risks. This emotional security and encouragement are fundamental for cultivating a positive attitude toward learning and ensuring students remain engaged and motivated.

The study also highlights the critical importance of selecting and implementing teaching materials and activities that are engaging and developmentally appropriate. Young learners require activities that match their developmental stages and learning needs, which means that the materials and methods used should be interactive, stimulating, and aligned with their cognitive and emotional capacities. Activities that incorporate physical movement, hands-on experiences, and opportunities for active participation are particularly effective in sustaining motivation. These activities cater to young children's energetic and exploratory nature, making learning more enjoyable and relevant. Students are more likely to remain interested and motivated when actively involved in learning.

Furthermore, the classroom atmosphere itself is a significant determinant of motivation. A positive and stimulating learning environment enhances engagement and enthusiasm among young learners. This atmosphere is characterized by positive reinforcement, encouragement, and supportive interaction between the teacher and students. In contrast, a classroom environment marked by tension, stress, or negativity can hinder motivation and impede learning progress. Such an environment can lead to anxiety, distraction, and disengagement, which ultimately affects students' ability to learn effectively.

The findings of this study underscore that the teacher's attitude, the quality of the classroom environment, and the appropriateness of teaching materials are all integral components that influence young learners' motivation. Teachers who actively demonstrate enthusiasm and create a supportive classroom climate can inspire and engage their students more effectively. By understanding and addressing these factors, educators can foster a learning environment that enhances motivation and supports young learners' holistic development and academic success. The interplay between these elements is crucial for creating an educational experience that is both enriching and motivating for young children.

5.1 Implications for Practice

The findings of this study underscore several critical implications for effectively teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to very young learners, specifically those aged 3-6. These implications highlight the importance of a multifaceted approach that addresses both the learning environment and the pedagogical strategies employed.

- Cultivating a supportive learning environment: Teachers must establish a nurturing and supportive classroom environment to optimize the learning experience for very young learners. This involves creating an atmosphere where students feel a profound sense of belonging, security, and encouragement. Teachers can achieve this by building positive and trusting relationships with their students, which helps foster a safe learning space. Establishing strong

rapport involves showing care and empathy and actively listening to students' needs and concerns.

- Providing constructive feedback is another essential aspect of creating a supportive learning environment. Feedback should be specific, encouraging, and aimed at guiding students toward improvement rather than merely pointing out errors. This approach helps students build confidence and understand their progress constructively. Additionally, celebrating successes, no matter how small, can significantly enhance students' motivation and reinforce their favorable experiences with learning. Acknowledging achievements fosters a sense of accomplishment and encourages continued effort and enthusiasm.
- Employing engaging pedagogical approaches: The effectiveness of teaching strategies and materials is paramount in engaging young learners and aligning with their developmental needs. Teachers should employ pedagogical approaches that are both stimulating and developmentally appropriate. This includes incorporating various interactive activities, such as games, role-playing, and hands-on projects, which cater to young children's active and exploratory nature.
- Multi-sensory experiences play a significant role in maintaining students' interest and facilitating learning. Integrating visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic elements into lessons helps address different learning styles and keeps students engaged. For instance, colorful visual aids, interactive storytelling, and physical movement activities can make learning more dynamic and enjoyable. Tailoring activities to the developmental stages of young learners ensures that they are neither too challenging nor too simplistic, thus maintaining an optimal balance that promotes effective learning.
- Prioritizing teacher development: Educators must engage in continuous professional development to foster an environment that supports and inspires young learners. Investing in ongoing training opportunities allows teachers to refine their skills and stay updated with the latest pedagogical strategies and educational research. Professional development should encompass a range of

areas, including classroom management, instructional design, and understanding child development.

Classroom management training equips teachers with techniques to create a structured and positive learning environment, manage behavior effectively, and address classroom dynamics that may impact motivation. Instructional design training focuses on developing engaging and effective lesson plans, incorporating diverse teaching methods, and adapting materials to meet students' needs. Understanding child development gives teachers insights into young learners' cognitive, emotional, and social growth, enabling them to tailor their teaching approaches accordingly.

By implementing these strategies—cultivating a supportive learning environment, employing engaging pedagogical approaches, and prioritizing teacher development—educators can significantly enhance the learning experience for very young learners. Such an approach positively influences students' attitudes towards learning English and improves their academic outcomes. A supportive and stimulating classroom environment, effective teaching methods, and ongoing teacher development create a foundation for successful language acquisition and foster a lifelong love for learning.

5.2 Limitations of the study

While this study has provided valuable insights into the intricate relationship between teacher attitudes and young learners' motivation in English language acquisition, several limitations must be acknowledged. Addressing these limitations and exploring potential avenues for future research can contribute to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of this complex field.

1. Sample size and specificity: One of this study's primary limitations is the relatively small and specific sample size, which was confined to a single preschool setting. This limitation restricts the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts and populations. The specific characteristics of the preschool environment, including its pedagogical practices and socio-cultural context, may not be representative of other settings. To enhance the external validity

of the research, future studies should aim to include more extensive and more diverse samples. This could involve examining a range of preschool settings with varying demographic, geographic, and socio-economic backgrounds. A broader sample would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how teacher attitudes influence young learners' motivation across different contexts and contribute to more generalized conclusions.

2. Cross-sectional design: The study employed a cross-sectional design, which offers a snapshot of the relationship between teacher attitudes and young learners' motivation at a single point in time. This design limits the ability to make causal inferences about the long-term effects of early motivational experiences on language acquisition outcomes. To address this limitation, future research should consider employing longitudinal study designs. Longitudinal studies track participants over extended periods, allowing researchers to examine how early motivational factors influence long-term academic achievement and language proficiency. Such studies can provide insights into how motivational dynamics evolve and the enduring impact of early experiences on students' educational trajectories.

3. Focus on teacher attitude and classroom environment: This study primarily concentrated on teacher attitudes and the classroom environment as crucial factors influencing motivation. While these aspects are undoubtedly significant, other potential factors were not explicitly examined. Individual differences, such as variations in learning styles, personality traits, and socioeconomic status, can also play a crucial role in shaping motivation. Future research should explore the interplay of these individual differences with teacher attitudes and classroom environment to gain a more nuanced understanding of motivational dynamics. Investigating how these factors interact and influence each other could reveal additional insights into young learners' motivation complexities and help develop more targeted interventions.

4. Reliance on self-report measures: The study relied heavily on self-report measures, including a questionnaire, to gather data on teacher attitudes and students' motivational experiences. While these methods provide valuable subjective insights, they are inherently susceptible to social desirability bias. Participants may present themselves in a more favorable light or provide responses that align with perceived expectations rather than their true feelings and behavior. To address this limitation, future research could incorporate various data collection methods,

including observational techniques, physiological measures, and behavioral assessments. Multiple methods can triangulate findings and provide a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of motivational factors and their underlying mechanisms.

5.3 Avenues for Future Research

The findings of this study provide a solid foundation for several promising avenues of future research, each aimed at deepening the understanding of the factors influencing young learners' motivation in English language acquisition. These research directions can help build upon the insights gained and address the study's limitations, ultimately contributing to more effective educational practices and interventions.

Cultural and Contextual Factors

Investigating how cultural factors and contextual variations influence motivation is crucial for understanding how different environments shape learners' attitudes and engagement. Cross-cultural studies could provide valuable insights into how cultural beliefs, values, and educational practices affect motivational dynamics. For instance, research could explore how cultural attitudes toward education and language learning influence students' motivation and responses to various teaching methods. Additionally, examining contextual variations, such as the impact of different educational settings (urban vs. rural, public vs. private) on motivation, could reveal significant differences in how motivation is fostered and maintained. Such studies could help educators develop culturally responsive teaching strategies and adapt their approaches to diverse learner populations.

Individual Differences

A deeper exploration of how individual differences—such as learning styles, personality traits, and prior experiences—influence motivation would provide a more nuanced understanding of motivational factors. Research could focus on how varying learning styles (e.g., visual, auditory, kinesthetic) affect students' engagement and motivation in language learning. Similarly, examining personality traits, such as extroversion or introversion, could shed light on how these

traits influence students' classroom behavior and motivation. Additionally, investigating the role of prior experiences, including previous educational experiences and exposure to language, could reveal how these factors impact current motivation levels. Understanding these differences can help educators tailor their teaching approaches to better meet their students' diverse needs and foster a more inclusive and motivating learning environment.

Neurocognitive Mechanisms

Exploring the neurocognitive mechanisms underlying motivation and engagement offers a promising avenue for understanding the brain processes involved in language learning. Research in this area could focus on how different motivational states (e.g., intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation) affect cognitive processes related to language acquisition, such as attention, memory, and executive function. Neuroimaging techniques, such as fMRI or EEG, could provide insights into the brain activity associated with different levels of motivation and engagement. This understanding could inform the development of interventions and teaching strategies that align with the cognitive processes involved in language learning, ultimately enhancing students' motivation and learning outcomes.

Technology Integration

In the digital age, investigating the role of technology in fostering motivation and engagement is essential. Research could examine the effectiveness of various technology-based tools and platforms, such as educational apps, interactive software, and online resources, in promoting motivation and supporting language learning. Studies could explore how different types of technology (e.g., gamified learning platforms and virtual reality environments) impact students' motivation and engagement levels. Additionally, research could investigate how technology can be integrated into traditional classroom settings to enhance motivation and create more interactive and dynamic learning experiences. Understanding the role of technology in motivation can help educators leverage digital tools to create engaging and effective language learning environments.

Longitudinal Studies

Conducting longitudinal research would allow researchers to track the development of motivation over time and examine the long-term effects of early motivational experiences on language learning outcomes. Longitudinal studies can provide valuable insights into how motivation evolves from early childhood through later stages of education and how early experiences influence long-term academic achievement and language proficiency. Such studies could also explore the impact of sustained motivational factors on students' educational trajectories and career aspirations. By tracking participants over extended periods, researchers can understand the enduring effects of motivational experiences and identify factors contributing to sustained engagement and success in language learning.

Future studies can contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the factors influencing young learners' motivation by addressing these limitations and pursuing these research directions. This expanded knowledge base will provide evidence-based recommendations for enhancing language teaching and learning, ultimately supporting the development of more effective pedagogical practices and interventions. Continued research in these areas will be instrumental in improving educational outcomes and fostering a positive and motivating learning environment for young learners.

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Acknowledgments

I want to thank my Thesis Advisor, Professor Graziano Serragiotto, and Co-Advisor, Professor Monica Banzato, for all their help and advice that allowed me to improve my thesis; their passion and preparation will always inspire me. To all the professors at Ca' Foscari University, I dedicate a big “thank you” for the profound impact of their knowledge and passion on my curiosity and education in various fields during the past five years. Their teachings have been enlightening and have shaped my academic journey in ways I could never have imagined.

I want to give special thanks to the teachers, especially the children in the kindergarten I have had the pleasure of teaching. You are lovely and give me enormous satisfaction. I hope you will continue to love English and learn it with the same joy in the future. I love you all so much, your “teacher Alis.”

I am incredibly grateful to my family for their encouragement and support throughout my studies.

A special thank goes to my mum for her unwavering belief in me, especially when I did not even think I would make it. Thank you for supporting me in the most complicated moments. Your presence and comforting words always calmed me and made me stick to the right path.

Thank you to my “nonna Serena” for always being there to listen to my frustrations and for never abandoning me. Dear Granny, you always found a sweet word for me, and it would never have been the same without our long phone calls.

Additionally, I would like to thank my friends for supporting me emotionally, being there whenever I need them, and the cherished time we spent together. Special thanks to Giorgia (my amazing best friend), Beatrice, Arianna S., and especially Arianna D. C. for contributing to the teaching opportunity that is the subject of this thesis.

My appreciation also goes out to my partner, Davide. Without his understanding and encouragement over the past few years, I would not have completed my studies. You have witnessed all my mood swings and difficult moments and shown infinite patience and support.

You have seen the best and the worst in me, and you have chosen both, and I am infinitely grateful.

I would also like to thank Matilde. You are a wonderful child, and I love you infinitely. "So che continuerai a splendere", and I will always be there for you.

Last but not least, to myself: You have succeeded this time, too, and you must be proud of yourself. I hope that today's success is the first of many, and I look forward to the future with optimism and determination.