



**Yakubu Ishaku Maaji**

General studies department, Federal polytechnic Bali, Taraba State.

## **Investigating the Interplay Between Motivation and Anxiety in English Language Acquisition Among L2 Learners at Serti Army Day Secondary School, Gashaka LGA, Taraba State**

### **Abstract:**

This study investigates the relationship between English language learning motivation and anxiety among second language (L2) learners at Serti Army Day Secondary School, located in the Army Barracks, Gashaka Local Government Area, Taraba State. The research identifies the motivational factors influencing English language learning and the levels of anxiety associated with the process. Through a mixed-methods approach, the study seeks to explore how these factors impact students' language proficiency. The findings suggest that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations significantly affect students' learning behaviours', while high levels of anxiety pose challenges in achieving proficiency in English. The study also recommends that both government and teachers should do everything possible to motivate learners so that learning objectives can be achieved, and learners' anxiety can be reduced to the bearest minimum.

**Keywords:** English Language Learning, Motivation, Anxiety, Second Language Learners, Taraba State, L2 Learners

**Received:** 15/04/2025 **Accepted:** 20/04/2025 **GSM:** +2348068739333

**Corresponding Author:** Maaji, Y. I. **Email:** [maajigangumi2@gmail.com](mailto:maajigangumi2@gmail.com)

**Article Citation:** Maaji, Y. I. (2025). **Investigating the Interplay Between Motivation and Anxiety in English Language Acquisition Among L2 Learners at Serti Army Day Secondary School, Gashaka LGA, Taraba State.** *Jalingo Journal of Languages and Literary Studies (JAJOLLS)*. 9 (1) pp. 145-152.

**Publishers:** Department of Languages and Linguistics, Taraba State University, Jalingo.

### **1.0 Introduction**

The importance of English as a global lingua franca and its role in the educational system has led to a growing interest in understanding the dynamics surrounding second language (L2) acquisition. In Nigeria, English is a major medium of instruction in schools, despite being a foreign language to the majority of the population (Akinbode & Olaniran, 2019). Consequently, many learners experience both motivations to learn the language and anxiety due to its complexity and perceived difficulty. According to Adebajo and Ojomo (2004) "English language in Nigeria is the second language to all Nigerians. It is a second language because Nigerians had their First Language (L1) or Mother Tongue (MT) before the incursion of this foreign language called 'English' into the country. In this instance, a foreign language (English) left its native environment and met with another language or languages (Nigerian indigenous languages)". English language did not come to Nigeria just on its own. Its incursion into Nigeria was caused by lots of factors like trading, slavery, colonization and

missionary activities. Adebajo and Ojomo (ibid) observed further that “the advent of English in Nigeria can be classified into three periods, namely; the period before the missionary activities, the period during the missionary activities and the period after the amalgamation of southern and northern protectorates”. It is pertinent to note that the use of English as a language of education, employment, legislation, media and admission into schools led to the infiltration of English and European literature in the Nigerian intelligentsia. Jowitt (1991) is of the opinion that English language has been the only official and generally acceptable language in Nigeria. It is the only language that has spread aggressively breaking every ethnic and language barrier. There is hardly anywhere in Nigeria that you will not find someone who can speak English, at least the pidgin or broken English. English in Nigeria is not an exclusive preserve of any ethnic group, society or culture; it is a language for almost everybody.

The crux of this study is to explore the interaction between motivation and anxiety among students’ learners of English language in Government Day Secondary school Serti with a view to identifying how these two variables (motivation and anxiety) can influence students effective learning of English language.

### **1.1 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

In the context of Serti Army Day Secondary School, located in Gashaka Local Government Area of Taraba State, this study examines the interaction between motivation and anxiety among students learning English as a second language. The study aims to identify the motivational factors influencing these learners and to explore how language anxiety impacts their learning outcomes.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Status of English and Situations of Nigerian Languages**

English, according to OLBI (2015) belongs to the Indo-European language family, like most languages spoken in Europe and Northern India, as well as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. Within the Indo-European family, English belongs to the Germanic language group together with German, Dutch, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Faroese, Icelandic, etc. More particularly, English belongs to the Western Germanic languages sub-group and bears particular affinity to Frisian, spoken in the Netherlands. It differs from the Germano-Dutch sub-group including German and its dialects, as well as Dutch (OLBI, ibid).

English is the mother language of an estimated 341 million people and the second language of 508 million people in over sixty countries and states where it enjoys the status of official or co-official language, including American Samoa, Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Botswana, the British Virgin Islands, Cameroon, Canada, the Cayman Islands, the Cook Islands, Dominica, the Falkland Islands, Fiji, Gambia, Ghana, Gibraltar, Grenada, Guam, Guyana, Independent State of Samoa, India, Ireland, Jamaica, Kenya, Kiribati, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Malta, the Mariana Islands, the Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Micronesia, Montserrat, Namibia, Nauru, New Zealand, Nigeria, Niue, Norfolk Island, Pakistan, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Pitcairn Island, Puerto Rico, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, the Solomon Islands, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Tokelau, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, the Turks and Caicos Islands, Uganda, the United Kingdom, the United States, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Vanuatu, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (OLBI, ibid).

The exact date that English language usage started in Nigeria is not certain. However, it is believed that the first intimate contact between the British and some ethnic groupings in

Nigeria was in Southern Nigeria. This must have been at some period before the Atlantic slave trade. It is on records that as from 1553 English men paid frequent visits to the Nigerian shores, especially the ports of Ancient Benin and old Calabar, and the type of communication which evolved between the English men and the Nigerians was a simplified kind of communication in English called Pidgin. Note, however that Portuguese and not English was probably the earliest European language to come to the hinterland of Nigeria. According to Oyebade (1998), a certain Oba in Benin was reported to have spoken Portuguese. The language was in use for economic interest and it was the language of commerce and diplomacy in the ancient Benin kingdom. Actually, the advent of English in Nigeria can be classified into three major periods, namely: the period before the missionary activities, the period during missionary activities and the period after the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates. It is important to add that there is no clear-cut demarcation between these periods as each period shades into another period.

Nigeria is a multilingual country comprises different tribes occupies geographically, a complicated landscape covering about 356,669 square miles, bordering the Gulf of Guinea, Niger Republic in the North-West and North-East, Republic of Chad in the North-East, Republic of Cameroun in the North-East and South-South and Benin Republic in the South-West and North-West all in West Africa except Cameroun from Central Africa. It is a country populated by approximately 200 million people, with more than 400 languages of which 29 per cent are Hausa speaking people located in the northern region, 21 per cent are Yoruba who live in the western region, and 18 per cent are Igbo people located in the eastern part of the country. It is appropriate to state that Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are the three main languages in Nigeria, and each is widely spoken in their various regions. While the over 400 other languages are spoken in their individual communities throughout the country, and are seen as minority languages (Daily Almanac, 2009). Politically, Nigeria is a creation of ideology, framed or fixed together, which means a 'perfect strangers' unified for the specific interest of the imperialists.

Socially, the socio-linguistic situation in Nigeria has often seen the possibility of conducting other activities in English. In a nutshell, English is widely practiced and occupies a prominent function both at the work place, the media and as a medium of instruction in schools. The multiplicity of languages in Nigeria is so obvious and egregious that languages of people living within 25-kilometre radius are massively different and incomprehensible to one another. The implication of this complex language situation is the absence of established effective communication between the ethnic groups, which becomes the basis not only for bigotry and hatred, but for resorting to the use of English as predominantly official language. It also implies that the choice of any of the three major indigenous languages as a national language will certainly deteriorate to disintegration or unpleasant feelings.

According to Adebajo and Ojomo (2004) "English language in Nigeria is the second language to all Nigerians. It is a second language because Nigerians had their First Language (L1) or Mother Tongue (MT) before the incursion of this foreign language called 'English' into the country. In this instance, a foreign language (English) left its native environment and met with another language or languages (Nigerian indigenous languages)". English language did not come to Nigeria just on its own. Its incursion into Nigeria was caused by lots of factors like trading, slavery, colonization and missionary activities. Adebajo and Ojomo (ibid) observed further that "the advent of English in Nigeria can be classified into three periods, namely; the period before the missionary activities, the period during the missionary activities and the period after the amalgamation of southern and northern protectorates". It is pertinent to note that the use of English as a language of education, employment, legislation,

media and admission into schools led to the infiltration of English and European literature in the Nigerian intelligentsia. Jowitt (1991) is of the opinion that English language has been the only official and generally acceptable language in Nigeria. It is the only language that has spread aggressively breaking every ethnic and language barrier. There is hardly anywhere in Nigeria that you will not find someone who can speak English, at least the pidgin or broken English. English in Nigeria is not an exclusive preserve of any ethnic group, society or culture; it is a language for almost everybody.

These languages are assigned different roles or functions depending on the domains and occasions. Therefore, language use situation in Nigeria is different from what obtains in other bilingual and monolingual countries like Canada where there are two languages: French and English, and Japan where a single language is used for all activities. There is the government policy concerning domains of language use in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1979), and the National Policy on Education (1977, 1985, 2004). It is obvious that government understands the importance of clear allocation of roles to languages (both indigenous and foreign languages). Government also recognizes that in Nigeria, language is a means of promoting social interaction, national cohesion and cultures; hence every child is mandated to learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the national interest, it is expedient that every child is required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Furthermore, it is stated that: For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria, and it shall be compulsory in primary and Junior Secondary Schools but as a non-vocational Elective at the Senior School (cf. NPE, Revised, 2004). However, despite government and individual efforts to plan and allocate distinct roles to each of these languages in well-stated domains, the phenomena of borrowing, interference, code-switching, code-mixing, domestication or nativization of foreign languages, particularly, the English language are still a hindrance. These phenomena are products of language contact, co-existence of both foreign and indigenous in the Nigerian multilingual environment. Speakers of English or other foreign languages (Arabic, French) and indigenous languages tend to switch from one to the other because of the existence of these languages in their linguistic repertoires. Multilingualism relates to speaking or using several languages; so, it is possible for an individual or a society to be multilingual. The Nigerian society is multilingual considering the number of languages existing in the country and the nature of her multilingualism represents a case of linguistic and cultural diversity par excellence more complex and intricate than multilingual European countries like Belgium, Switzerland, or Sweden and other countries like South Africa, Singapore, India and Pakistan where there are just few languages. It has been realized that, the more the number of diverse languages and cultures, the more intricate and the more complex language planning decisions are likely to be.

In the same vein, Akindele and Adegbite (1999), submit that due to the existence of various ethnic groups in Nigeria with over 400 languages, Nigeria is therefore a multilingual and multicultural speech community where diverse languages and cultures compete. It is also a speech community with not only the indigenous languages but also foreign languages which compete with the indigenous languages and cultures. English is used to perform official and national functions, while the various indigenous languages are used for interaction in their respective domains. It is also observed that contacts between indigenous languages and cultures have greater potential for enhancing harmonious inter-language and inter-cultural communication. Such contacts also result in increase in the level of multilingualism and multiculturalism.

## **2.2. English Language Learning Motivation**

Motivation plays a critical role in the success of L2 learners. According to Gardner (1985), motivation in language learning can be broadly categorized into integrative and instrumental types. Integrative motivation refers to the desire to integrate into a language community, whereas instrumental motivation involves practical benefits such as career advancement and educational achievement. In the Nigerian context, extrinsic factors such as academic and career opportunities often drive learners, but intrinsic motivation, such as personal interest in the language, also plays a significant role (Akindele & Salami, 2017).

## **2.3. Language Learning Anxiety**

Language learning anxiety has been identified as a significant barrier to language acquisition. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), anxiety manifests in a variety of ways, including fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety. These feelings can hinder learners' confidence, participation, and overall language performance. In Nigeria, the pressure to succeed academically and fear of making mistakes in English can exacerbate anxiety levels (Akinbode & Olaniran, 2019).

## **2.3. Motivation and Anxiety: A Dual Relationship**

Studies have shown that motivation and anxiety are interconnected in the language learning process. Highly motivated learners tend to have lower anxiety levels, while those with high anxiety are often less motivated to participate (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). This reciprocal relationship underscores the need to consider both factors in the design of language instruction programs.

## **3.0 Methodology**

### **3.1. Research Design**

A mixed-methods approach was employed in this study, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the motivational and anxiety factors experienced by students in the English language learning process.

### **3.2. Participants**

The participants of this study were 120 students from Serti Army Day Secondary School. These students were selected through stratified random sampling from a population of L2 learners. The participants were from various grades within the school, aged between 14 and 18 years, with an equal representation of male and female students.

### **3.3. Data Collection Tools**

**Questionnaire:** A structured questionnaire was developed, based on the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) by Gardner (1985), to assess both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Additionally, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) was used to assess levels of anxiety among the learners.

**Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 20 students to gain qualitative insights into the students' personal experiences and perceptions of motivation and anxiety in learning English.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data from interviews were coded thematically to identify common patterns and trends.

## **4.0 Results**

### **4.1. Motivation**

The majority of students reported high levels of extrinsic motivation, with 68% citing the importance of English for future career prospects and academic success. Intrinsic motivation was also present, with 42% of students expressing a personal interest in the English language and culture. However, a small proportion (15%) indicated low motivation, which could be attributed to a lack of perceived relevance of the language to their everyday lives.

#### **4.1.1 Anxiety:**

The data revealed moderately to high levels of language anxiety among the students. Approximately 56% of participants reported feeling nervous or anxious when speaking English in front of others. Students frequently expressed fear of making mistakes and being judged by their peers or teachers, which aligned with findings from Horwitz et al. (1986). Notably, students with high anxiety levels also reported lower motivation to engage in language learning activities, suggesting a negative cycle of disengagement.

#### **4.1.2 Relationship between Motivation and Anxiety**

A significant inverse relationship was found between motivation and anxiety. Students with higher motivation scores tended to report lower levels of anxiety, which is consistent with previous studies by MacIntyre and Gardner (1991). However, students with high anxiety often exhibited avoidance behaviors, such as not volunteering to speak in class or avoiding English-related tasks, which hindered their language learning process.

### **4.2 Discussion:**

The findings of this study confirm that motivation plays a crucial role in determining the success of L2 learners, particularly in the context of English language acquisition. While extrinsic factors like career and academic goals were primary motivators, intrinsic factors also contributed positively to the learning process. However, language anxiety emerged as a major challenge, with high levels of fear and nervousness hindering learners' engagement and performance in English.

These results align with the findings of Akinbode and Olaniran (2019), who noted that learners' lack of confidence often prevents them from making the necessary effort to improve their language skills. Furthermore, the inverse relationship between motivation and anxiety supports the findings of MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), indicating that interventions aimed at reducing anxiety could, in turn, enhance motivation.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

This study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of motivation and anxiety in English language learning among L2 learners at Serti Army Day Secondary School. The findings suggest that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are significant, but high anxiety levels can undermine students' ability to learn effectively. To improve language learning outcomes, it is recommended that teachers and administrators design programs that reduce anxiety and foster both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

## **5.1 Recommendations**

The study recommends that both teachers and students should be motivated accordingly; teachers should be motivated by the government and members of the society through incentives, gifts and awards which would encourage them to put in more efforts in teaching their students. While students can be motivated by teachers in form of rewards such as clapping, gift and other concessional prices. This would invariably assist in achieving stated objectives.

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