



## **Unveiling the Passive Aspect of Motivation: Insights from English Language Teachers' Habitus**

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### **Abstract**

Digging into the history of motivation research, we deduced that, the investigations have targeted individuals' performance as the overt indication of this invisible drive. Yet, it is hypothesized that there exists a variation of motivation which does not lead to a certain action and is only confined to one's mental engagement with a concept or activity. To further explicate, we put forward a dual continuum model of motivation, under the term *immersion*, and named this so-far-hidden aspect as *passive motivation*, standing against active motivation. To provide empirical evidence, a total of 54 English language teachers were recruited and interviewed about the four proposed conditions of motivation (i.e., *active motivation*, *active demotivation*, *passive motivation*, and *passive demotivation*). The extracted themes revealed that teachers' habitus may largely account for this lack of willingness and passivity. Analyzing the themes, we made reference to *sensory motivation*, which relies on sensory experiences as one of the major triggers of de/motivation.

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## 1. Introduction

The contemporary theories of motivation have witnessed developmental changes in the study of motivation, advocating the maturation of the field (Ackerman & Humphreys, 1990). Following the introduction of motivational theories by the Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist Sigmund Freud (1914), and some proponents of experimental psychology (e.g., McDougall, 1923) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, motivation has been brought to the fore, stirring up a lot of controversies. Studies were then extended by some pioneers of behavioral psychology (e.g., Hull, 1943; Pavlov, 1927; Skinner, 1957) rendering motivation mainly as an instinct rooted in extrinsic reinforcement. This view lost popularity due to multiple shortcomings of behaviorism, and theories shifted toward a more cognitive-based perspective characterized by the belief that behavior is affected by cognition rather than being the consequence one's actions (Stipek, 1996). Far ahead, from the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several theories including social learning theory (Rotter, 1954) and achievement motivation theory (Atkinson, 1957) put additional flesh on the bones of motivation.

One drawback of the extensive research on motivation is that despite substantial development and proliferation of theories and models, individuals' actionless motivations have been mainly overlooked. This type of motivation involves constant thinking about certain concepts or activities (i.e., spending time on doing an activity well) with no serious attempt to put them into practice. What we intend to do in the current study is to highlight this neglected aspect of motivation, coined as *passive motivation*, and discover the reasons behind this passivity. Presumably, this hidden impetus has its roots in not only individual differences but the inequalities structured by Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus, encompassing the habits and dispositions formed by daily life experiences.

To address the major aim of the study, a dual continuum model of motivation is devised using the variables of *action* and *cognition* subsumed under the rubric of *immersion*. Motivated action is absolutely not a new concept to the rich history of motivation; yet, the element of cognition calls for in-depth

investigations. To verify the element of action, we relied on *sensory involvement* descended from the emotioncy model which is a new emotion-based categorization for the integration of senses (Pishghadam, Adamson, & Shayesteh, 2013). The term *engagement* was further employed to account for the element of cognition. The interplay of involvement and engagement gave rise to the emergence of four different sub-constructs of motivation, namely *active motivation*, *active demotivation*, *passive motivation*, and *passive demotivation*, each reflecting an exclusive condition. To provide palpable evidence for the application of the model along with each of its four conditions, we interviewed a community of English language teachers as the key actors who encourage motivation in learners. The results were then interpreted by considering the habitus of the community as the main triggers of teachers' motivation.

In what follows, we initially go through the history of motivation and review the significance of immersion and its features in brief. Eventually, we put forth our proposed model and reinforce its applicability through practicing it among a group of language teachers.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Motivation

Theories of motivation are diverse based on their degree of stress on human's behavior, cognition, affection, and social influences. Early approaches to the study of motivation, which have their roots in Behaviorism (Staddon, 2001), deal with observable and measurable aspects of motivation reflected in people's behaviors. Unlike behaviorists who gave prominence to external rewards, humanists placed extra emphasis on internal desires of human beings. Within this approach, Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) serves as the cornerstone of understanding human motivation. Maslow (1943) introduced five categories of human's basic needs, which are required to be fulfilled successively. This categorization is depicted in the form of a pyramid with basic needs being at the foundation of the pyramid and the self-actualization need at the topmost. Closely related to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the *acquired needs theory* was proposed by

McClelland (1961), which focused on three motivational needs of achievement, affiliation, and power. McClelland (1961) suggested that people's life experiences determine their needs and motivation over time.

The substantial limitations of the mentioned views led to the development of a cognitive-based approach to motivation during the late 1960s and 1970s, accentuating individuals' beliefs and judgments about their own abilities. One of the critical theorists whose ideas acted as a bridge between behaviorism and cognitivism was Albert Bandura. His *social-cognitive theory* (1986) suggests that there are reciprocal connections among the influences of environment, behavior, and personal features. According to him, self-efficacy is the major determinant of effort, persistence, and goal setting. Another theory of motivation which directly relates behavior and effort to cognition is the *attribution theory* (Weiner, 1985) which concerns the way people understand the reasons for their success and failure and interpret their locus of control. Attribution theory was built upon Heider's ideas (1958) that people are naive psychologists trying to interpret their environment by making cause and effect relationships. In this respect, motivation is determined by the causal links people believe in along the three dimensions of locus of control, stability, and controllability.

A separate body of research on the cognitive theories of motivation captures the mental processes individuals are engaged in while performing an action. A distinguished theory in this realm is Vroom's (1964) *expectancy theory*, assuming that motivation depends on the attractiveness of the outcome. The concept relies on the theory of Peak (1955), who hypothesized that people's attitude towards an outcome are linked to their perceptions of its consequences. Grounded in Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory of motivation, Porter and Lawler (1968) presented the dichotomy of intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, which later culminated in *self-determination theory* (Deci & Ryan, 1985). As a sophisticated cognitive theory of motivation, self-determination theory argues that any context providing the opportunities for people to fulfill their three basic needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness) reinforces motivation. Furthermore, this theory divided motivation into autonomous

and controlled depending on the degree a behavior and the value associated with it have been internalized. The *goal-setting theory* (1990), as a further widely-recognized cognitive theory, proposed three key features of goals including difficulty, specificity, and commitment responsible for increasing individuals' motivation. In this regard, goals that are both difficult and specific lead to the highest performance. Moreover, important and attainable goals yield more significant commitment (Locke, 1996; Locke & Latham, 1990).

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, interest in the social nature of motivation pioneered by Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1978), dramatically grew. For instance, McCaslin (McCaslin 2009, McCaslin & Hickey, 2001) and Walker (Arnold & Walker, 2008; Walker, Pressick-Kilborn, Arnold, & Sainsbury, 2004) conducted several sociocultural studies explicating motivation as the result of social processes. Accordingly, motivation is no longer a mere psychological trait, but rather embedded in the cultural and social milieu. As an instance, Pierre Bourdieu's theories on cultural reproduction and habitus (1977, 1986, 1993) have been reported to be closely associated with motivation. Broadly speaking, Bourdieu (1986) discussed that individuals' collective class-based habits orchestrate their motivation, attitude, expectation, and actions. In effect, habitus is a physical embodiment of cultural capital that is acquired through family, friends, educators, and social class positions. According to Bourdieu, habitus is one of the reasons behind social inequality and injustice which inevitably manipulates motivation.

In addition to multiple factors which create motivational hooks, we actually believe that to stay motivated it is important to immerse in a particular topic. The upcoming section unfolds the concept to help maintain a more vivid view of our proposed model of motivation.

### 2.1. Immersion

The concept of immersion fundamentally embodies variables of action (body) and cognition (mind). A brief, yet inclusive definition of immersion has been provided by Dede (2009) who attributed this concept to individuals' full participation in a realistic experience or a digital one through multimedia technology. Immersion is mostly recognized as a multi-

faceted construct in organizational settings and the computer-game industry. Studying video and computer games, Jennett et al. (2008) illustrated a full-fledged image of the concept, rendering three different hierarchical levels of engagement, engrossment, and total immersion through overcoming barriers. According to them, while an individual is at the ultimate level of total immersion, s/he is the least aware of what is happening around in the surrounding environment.

In the present study, we adopted a different approach toward the concept and employed it as a stepping stone to provide a new model of motivation. In order to represent the two features of immersion, we made use of engagement to account for the mental aspect, and involvement to explain its physical aspect. The following sections provide a review of the two concepts.

### 2.1.1. Engagement

Engagement is associated with large amounts of energy, identification, efficacy, and absorption while doing a task (Leiter & Maslach, 2017). Accordingly, the people who are actively engaged in an activity are probably more vigorous and motivated. The first comprehensive definition of engagement was proposed by Kahn (1990), associating the concept to physical, cognitive, and emotional participation of individuals at the time of activity performance. Following Kahn (1990, 1992), Rothbard (2001) considered engagement as a construct, including full attention and concentration. Casting more light on the definition of engagement, a number of studies have already claimed that engagement

counteracts burnout (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011; Demerouti, Mostert, & Bakker, 2010; Havens, Gittell, & Vasey, 2018). Brown and Cairns (2004) defined engagement as the lowest level of immersion before “engrossment” and “total immersion”. In psychology, engagement is regarded as an approach relevant to intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Calder & Malthouse, 2008). Within the realm of education, engagement accounts for positive emotions, boosting hope, motivation, and optimism in students (Pekrun, Goetz, Frenzel, Barchfeld, & Perry, 2011). As a result, they become more engaged in studying and general education (Ouweneel, Leblanc, & Schaufeli, 2011).

### 2.1.2. Involvement

Involvement is closely associated with behavioral engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008). However, as Pishghadam (2015) suggests, engagement may be different in nature depending on the number of senses which are put into play. From this standpoint, involvement, with its sensory nature, rests upon the psycho-linguistic concept of emotioncy, which is believed to exert considerable influence on motivation. Emotioncy (a blend of emotion and frequency), is directed to the emotions evoked by the senses which can shape one's understanding of the world (referred to as sensory relativism by Pishghadam, Jajarmi, and Shayesteh (2016)). To shed more light on the new concept of emotioncy, Pishghadam (2015) introduced a hierarchical model to identify individuals' level of emotioncy toward a particular concept/item. Table 1 explains the levels under different *types* and *kinds* of emotioncy.

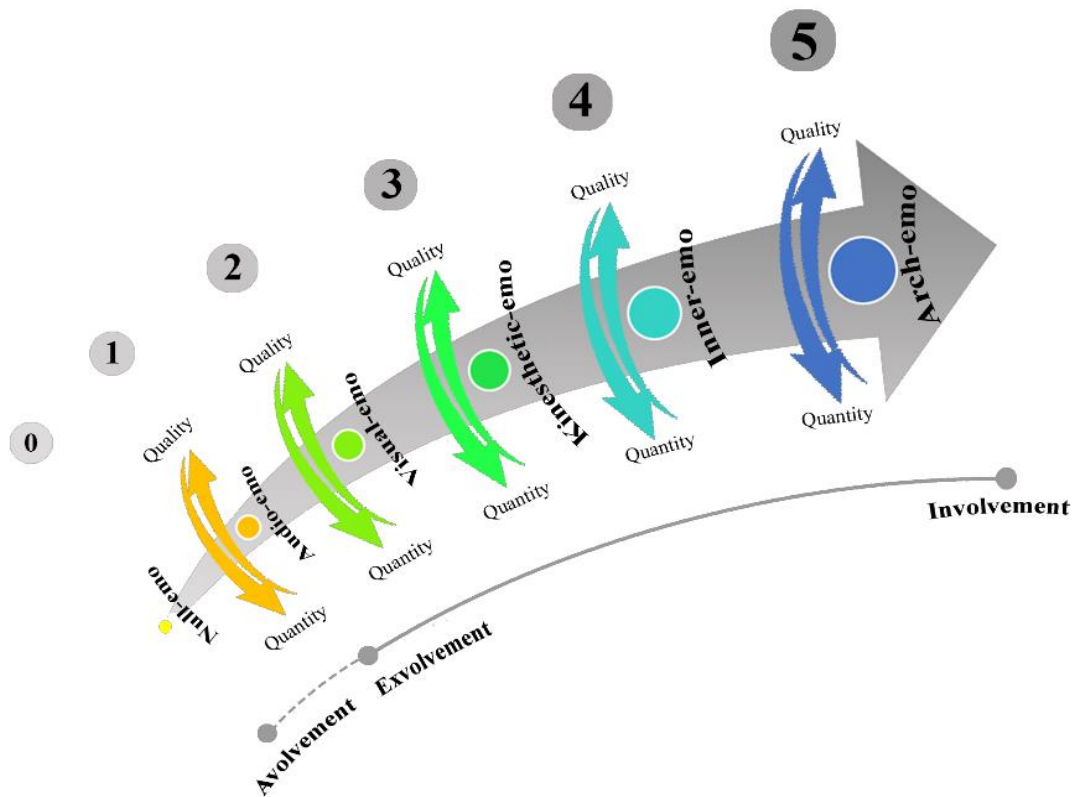
**Table 1**  
*Emotioncy Types and Kinds*

Type	Kind	Experience
Avolvement	Null emotioncy	When an individual has not heard about, seen, or experienced an object or a concept.
Exvolvement	Auditory emotioncy	When an individual has merely heard about a word/concept.
	Visual emotioncy	When an individual has both heard about and seen the item.
	Kinesthetic emotioncy	When an individual has touched, worked, or played with the real object.
Involvement	Inner emotioncy	When an individual has directly experienced the word/concept.
	Arch emotioncy	When an individual has done research to get additional information.

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As demonstrated in Figure 1, the incremental design of the model ranges from avolvement to exvolvement and involvement. The level of avolvement indicates no degree of knowledge or experience. In exvolvement, individuals

have a limited or indirect experience of a concept/item, whereas, during involvement, they get directly involved in a process to fully internalize the concept.



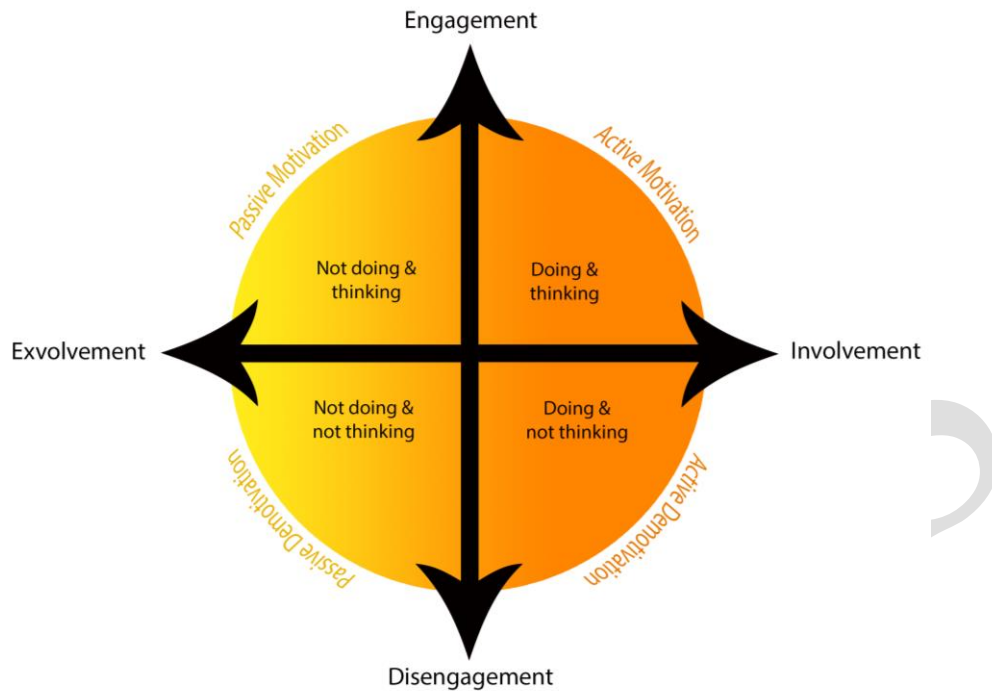
**Figure 1**

Emotioncy Levels (Reprinted with permission from "Emotioncy in Language Education: From Exvolvement to Involvement", by R. Pishghadam, 2015, October, Paper presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference of Interdisciplinary Approaches to Language Teaching, Literature, and Translation Studies. Iran, Mashhad). Copyright 2015 by Ferdowsi University of Mashhad.

#### 2.4. The Dual Continuum Model of Motivation

In order to develop a more comprehensive view of motivation on the basis of immersion (i.e., action and cognition) and to address its active and passive dimensions, we proposed a dual continuum model with engagement as one continuum, and involvement as a separate one (Figure 2). Engagement and involvement are two interrelated, yet distinct, constructs which have been tied to thinking (mental activity) and doing (physical activity), respectively. Presence or absence of engagement (i.e., engagement and disengagement) interacted with various degrees of sensory involvement (i.e., exvolvement and involvement) divides the model into two halves

(i.e., active and passive) and four slices (comprising active motivation, active demotivation, passive motivation, and passive demotivation). As its ideal form, active motivation is when an individual is fully engaged and involved in performing a task. Lack of adequate mental engagement, however, alters this optimal performance to a mechanical behavior (active demotivation). Passive motivation explains the condition in which individuals do not get the opportunity of turning thoughts or motivational preferences into action, yet keep pondering over the issue constantly. Passive demotivation, as the least active condition, represents no specific cognitive or physical activity.



**Figure 2**  
The Dual Continuum Model of Motivation

In order to verify the mentioned principles and provide evidence for the current model, a group of English language teachers were recruited to respond to a number of job-related questions.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Participants

A total of 54 English language teachers from variegated institutes in Mashhad, a city in Iran, were recruited to participate in the semi-structured interviews on different types of motivation. They were 28 females and 26 males aged between 20 to 42 ( $M = 27$ ), holding Bachelor's ( $N = 22$ ), Master's ( $N = 24$ ), and Ph.D. degrees ( $N = 8$ ) mostly in teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). The teachers were from all sorts of backgrounds with no knowledge of the proposed model of motivation in the present study. They voluntarily took part in the study and were ensured that all recordings would be kept confidential. The data collection was based on purposive sampling and continued until saturation was attained.

#### 3.2. Instruments

The interviewees were asked to respond to the following questions and pass their comments

on the different motivation types. They could mention more than one activity or concept for each type of motivation.

1. What are some activities that you both think about and do? (active motivation)
2. What are some activities that you merely do without thinking about? (active demotivation)
3. What are some activities about which you merely think? (passive motivation)
4. What are some activities that you neither do nor think about? (passive demotivation)

An interview guide was prepared to ensure the flexibility and systematization of this qualitative body of research (Dörnyei, 2007). As a result, the comparability of the results was facilitated and the interviewees' focus was mainly shifted to the target topic. Besides, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) model of validity and reliability for qualitative studies was employed to fulfill all four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In the present study, the interviews were structured to meet the credibility criterion. The participants consisted of both males and females teaching English at different language schools to contribute to the

generalizability of the findings and, therefore, to substantiate the transferability. Furthermore, the interview was peer-checked to satisfy the dependability criterion. Finally, the researchers tried to be neutral during the interviews to check out the confirmability of the results.

### 3.3. Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in the participants' mother tongue (Persian). It took around 15 minutes for the interviewees to respond to the interviewer's questions. Their responses were recorded and thereafter transcribed. Individual extracts were coded, grouped, and categorized, and major themes were extracted. To minimize researcher subjectivity and ensure the validity of the results, two experts in the field verified the extracted themes.

## 4. Findings

The interviews initiated by enquiring the participants about the activities they had done for different types of motivation, namely, active motivation, active demotivation, passive motivation, and passive demotivation. They were also asked to explain the reasons for their choice/s. To address the four research questions (the interview questions), their responses and explanations were scrutinized, and major themes were extracted for each type of motivation. In what follows, the variety of elicited activities along with the recurrent themes for each category of motivation will be elaborated.

Responses to the first research question demonstrated that the majority of the English teachers who were identified as actively motivated individuals both thought about (engagement) and did a wide variety of English-related activities (involvement) such as teaching advanced levels, story writing, paper editing, establishing an institute, getting international certificates such as IELTS or TOEFL, and even watching English movies. These teachers, even the less professional ones, were optimistic and determined about their career prospects. Their comments indicated that they were acutely aware of their career ladder since their goals were achievable, clear, and exact. The marked tendency among the teachers with a high level of active motivation was towards those activities which evoke emotions,

including painting and playing music. The juxtaposition of the two concepts of engagement and involvement, as the principal components of active motivation, lead to their high level of immersion in the activities.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that gender bears a significant relationship with this type of motivation. That is to say, males and females had various sources of motivation for their engagement/involvement in different activities in which the English language plays a role. For males, individual choices and economic benefits were the primary sources of motivation for using and teaching English. They were strongly motivated to teach English to earn more money, seek fame, and widen their social connections. However, for females, activities associated with certain emotions (such as keeping a diary, reading a novel, and teaching kids) and also social reasons were the major sources of motivation for using English.

In response to the second research question addressing active demotivation, the findings indicated that English teachers were too disappointed to continue further education and many of them were suffering from study burnout. They were actually inclined to teach English at private language institutes without taking part in formal education programs. According to the participants' responses, the major reason for lack of interest in obtaining a pertinent university degree was the limited job opportunities they would be provided after. A further reason was the feeling of disappointment caused by the irrelevant courses they had to pass in their BA program. Moreover, the participants, especially the MA students, were reluctant to continue into higher education since they believed no fundamental change was observable in their knowledge during the MA program. Some even believed that they were more proficient before taking the MA courses. Therefore, they would rather not waste their time receiving formal education and instead enhance the required skills which contribute to their career as a teacher. Our findings were rather in line with those of Bakker et al. (2011) and Havens et al. (2018), indicating that burnout stems from disengagement. Regardless of the participants' disengagement with further education, a number of them had intended to continue their education for some purely non-academic

reasons, and there was a clear-cut distinction between the males and females' justifications. The male participants continued education intending to postpone the military service and spend more time with their friends, whereas the female participants tried to meet the demands of their family by getting a university degree. However, the truth is that they were doing their academic tasks as they would habitually and unwillingly do most of their routine chores.

The participants' responses to the third research question revealed that the passively motivated teachers were engaged with professionalism in teaching; however, they were not literally involved in achieving the goal. They had the tendency to merely think about developing teaching skills and becoming more sophisticated in teaching English without striving to put their thoughts into practice. In other words, the element of thinking was present while physical activity was missing. Quite similar to the actively demotivated teachers, these teachers were reluctant to be engaged in further education and preferred to gain the required expertise in teaching English

in general. Besides the job-related motivations, two of the recurring and overriding themes with this type of motivation were getting married for the male participants -which could be attributed to the economic recession in Iran- and doing sports for their female counterparts.

Considering the last research question addressing passive demotivation, it was found that the majority of the English teachers were neither involved nor engaged in practices which have something to do with math, engineering, and astronomy. Given that the majority of English teachers preferred to be involved in emotion-related activities, it seems justifiable for them to stay away from being involved in hard science topics which mainly deal with logic and reasoning. The participants' inability to go on international trips was another frequent theme of this type of motivation. Probably due to their low income, English teachers could not afford to travel to foreign countries; therefore, they did not waste their time daydreaming about traveling internationally. Besides, there were no gender-related differences between males and females in this regard.

**Table 2**  
*Themes Extracted from the Interviews*

	Active	Passive
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>teaching advanced levels</li> <li>editing papers</li> <li>getting international certificates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>passing teacher training courses</li> <li>doing research into professionalism in teaching</li> <li>asking expert teachers about their ways to achieve success</li> </ul>
Demotivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>getting prepared for the MA or PhD exams</li> <li>participating in university classes and other academic activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>dealing with mathematics and engineering which require a considerable mastery of numbers</li> </ul>

## 5. Concluding Remarks

To uncover a so-far-hidden side of motivation, we put forward a dual continuum model, including the sub-constructs of active motivation, active demotivation, passive

motivation, and passive demotivation. To provide real-life examples for each of the four conditions, a number of English language teachers were interviewed and based on their responses some major themes were extracted.



Discussion of the extracted themes extended the passive dimension of motivation, more than its conventional active side, to encompass individuals' degree of mental willingness to be ex/involved in certain concepts or activities. Digging into the teachers' responses, we corroborated that moderated by individual differences, they tended to move toward or away from various cognitive, affective, and socio-cultural issues (Makiabadi, Pishghadam,

Naji Meidani, & Khajavi, 2019). Beside these idiosyncratic discrepancies, de-emotionalization incentives, including the inhibitive role of teachers, government, or Hollywood might account for their passivity. As such, these covert forces might form and reform ones' self-concepts and habitus and, quite gradually, change their identity accordingly. Table 3 encapsulates the varieties of passive de/motivation from the willingness perspective.

**Table 3**

*The Passive Dimension of Motivation and Individuals' Willingness to be Ex/involved*

	Willingness	Definition
Passive Motivation	Willingness to be involved	When one is interested in a concept but for any reason (such as money, time, etc.) is not able to get directly involved in practicing that (e.g., not affording international trips)
	Willingness to be exvolved	When one is interested in a concept but is reluctant to get directly involved in that (e.g., political issues).
Passive Demotivation	Unwillingness to be involved	When one has been (previously) involved in a concept but does not like to get directly involved in that (anymore) (e.g., reluctance to continue into higher education).
	Unwillingness to be exvolved	When one has been (previously) ex/involved in a concept but does not like to get even exvolved in that (anymore) (e.g., death of the loved ones).

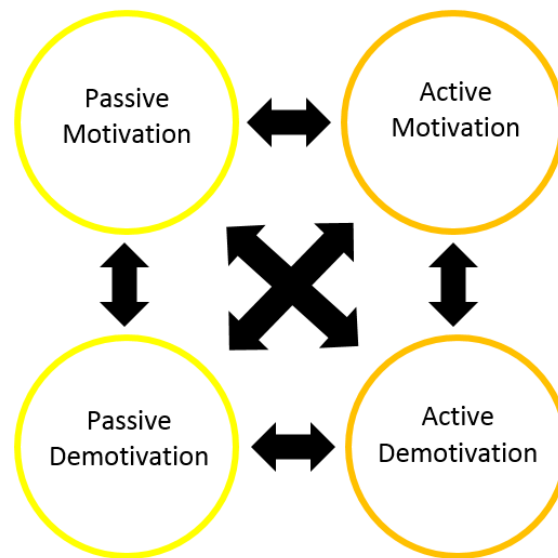
One possible implication of the above classification could be that it is not at times motivating to involve learners in the concepts or activities that they prefer to exvolve or opt out. While transcending from exvolved to involvement might allow for increased passion in learners, it may also contradict their embodied habitus and decrease their motivation. Therefore, our prescription for implementing a different degree of sensory involvement is not a one-size-fits-all policy and varies according to distinctive characteristics of learners. What we believe is that world sensory experiences do not only motivate but demotivate individuals in the same way. This type of motivation, which Pishghadam (2016) technically refers to as sensory motivation, draws upon sensory inputs, which principally help us build different representations of the external world (Rouby, Fournel, & Bensafi, 2016). In order to come up with the right amount of sensory involvement and touch the right senses to motivate each learner, teachers need to appreciate the weight of senses (either in isolation or in combination) and have a

sufficient, if not high, level of emo-sensory intelligence (ESQ). According to Pishghadam and Shayesteh (2017), ESQ deals with the ability to "recognize, label, monitor, and manage sense-induced emotions to guide one's behavior" (p. 24). Although the definition of the term targets one's ability to modify his/her own behavior, we actually assume that this ability could be likewise developed to involve others and control their behavior. It is otherwise important to keep in view that learners with high levels of sensory capital (Pishghadam, Shakebaee, & Shayesteh, 2018) may be less reluctant toward sensory motivation, since they have already been involved in distinct sensory experiences.

An alternative interpretation made on the extracted themes is that, the nature of motivation, being *primary* or *secondary* (Figure 3), is determined by the uniformity of its origin. When individuals experience only one of the four conditions of motivation for a given concept on a continuous basis (shown by the circles in Figure 3), it indicates the primary nature of motivation. As an instance a teacher

may always wish to improve his/her teaching skills and thus takes part in teacher training courses regularly (active motivation). However, when individuals experience multiple shifts in their condition (depicted by the arrows in Figure 3) under the influence of various factors,

it marks the secondary nature of motivation. The same teacher who used to go for different training courses may, after a while, find it hard to do so due to financial problems (a shift from active motivation to passive motivation).



**Figure 3**  
*Primary and Secondary Motivation*

Taken together, unveiling the passive aspect of motivation and conceptualizing sensory motivation, this study strived to broaden the literature of motivation, leaving experts to ponder over the intricacies of the proposed concepts. After all, the readers should bear in mind that the overall findings of the study could perhaps be strengthened through a couple of suggestions. Given that, our sample comprised only 54 teachers teaching English at different language schools in Mashhad, future studies can be conducted using a larger sample of individuals with different occupations. Moreover, the researchers are of the view that the outcomes would be further substantiated through a quantitative body of research as well.

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