

**Sri Lanka International Journal of Buddhist Studies (SIJBS)**

**Volume V (2019), ISSN- 20128878**

**Applying Motivational Strategies Used by the Buddha in  
Teaching English as a Second Language**

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## **Applying Motivational Strategies used by the Buddha in Teaching English as a Second Language**

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### **Abstract**

Motivation is a predominant factor that decides the effectiveness of second language learning. The psychological hold that motivation possesses increases its significance in second language learning. Because of this vital impact of motivation as a factor that variously affects other affecting factors too, the linguists and scholars perpetually study the various aspects of motivation and its effects on second language learning. They have introduced various motivational strategies, yet owing to the diminishing nature of motivation with time and age, it is a field that should be continuously updated. It is partly the teachers' responsibility to utilize innovative motivational strategies in the teaching process. The Buddha, who was undoubtedly the greatest teacher ever, has used various motivational strategies to inspire people who were absolutely blind and ignorant of spirituality due to being fully engrossed in worldly pleasures. Accordingly, the current study examines the motivational strategies used by the Buddha and studies the possibility of applying them in teaching English. In spite of the contradictory objectives that the two disciplines have, motivation being a psychological factor can be commonly applied in any context.

**Keywords:** Motivation, Motivational Strategies, the Buddha, Teaching English

### **Introduction**

Motivation is a principal contributing factor in second language learning. Motivation, in addition to providing primary drive for second language (L2) learning, props up the learning process without being affected by other external factors<sup>1</sup>. Not only that, the other factors like attitudes towards L2, learner beliefs, and learner preferences are also affected by motivation to a certain extent and even with the provision of a favourable learning environment, appropriate curriculum, and learning situation, when lacking learner motivation the goals of L2 learning cannot be achieved.<sup>2</sup> Language aptitude dominates in creating differences in language learning but motivation supersedes aptitude.<sup>3</sup> Because of this central importance of motivation in L2 learning it has become a predominant focus of researchers and scholars. Further, being a psychological construct, motivation is a complex factor compared to the other factors, and this complexity has also necessitated widening the body of research related to it. And despite being widely researched and theorized about, the fast-developing nature of the field of L2 constantly creates research vacuums in the field urging the teachers and researchers to undertake further research. Motivation needs to be researched in further depth, updating and broadening its avenues, especially because motivation diminishes as the learner ages.<sup>4</sup> Even though Buddhism and language learning are distinct

disciplines, the Buddha as the world's foremost teacher, has used various motivational techniques to impart his extremely profound philosophy to various categories of people and to attract them to his philosophy. With regard to the heterogeneity of the two disciplines, the motivational strategies employed by the Buddha could be used effectively in teaching English.

### **Research Problem**

The research problem is to study whether the motivational strategies used by the Buddha can be applied in teaching English as a second language.

### **Objectives**

The objectives of the study are to;

- study motivational strategies used by the Buddha in teaching the Dhamma
- examine their applicability in teaching English as a second language

### **Methodology**

This study was conducted as a library research collecting data from various sutras in the Buddhist canon. In analyzing data, qualitative research methods have been used, and as for the procedure of the research, first the motivational methods used by the Buddha were collected referring to Tripitaka, PTS and other related books. After analyzing the collected data, they were further considered in order to look for the applicability of them in teaching English.

### **What is Motivation in L2 Learning?**

Motivation lies in the bottom of any work in which people engage, giving them energy to complete the work effectively. Motivation in daily life differs from motivation in language learning. In Gardner's terms motivation in L2 learning is; "The extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity."<sup>5</sup> While Gardner basically defines motivation showing its major function in learning an L2, Dörnyei and Ottó capture its complexity in their definition of motivation as, "the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritized, operationalized and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out."<sup>6</sup> The changing nature of motivation and its fluctuating effects relative to the output of language learning shows the fundamental significance of motivation on learning. It shows that motivation is the key factor that decides the effectiveness of learning a language. In Gardner's terms a "motivated learner" in the Socio-educational model of Gardner is defined as one who is: (a) eager to learn the language, (b) willing to expend effort on the learning activity, and (c) willing to sustain the learning activity.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, the important emphasis is that motivation is more than simply arousing interest but it is also involved in sustaining that interest and investing time and energy into putting the necessary effort to achieve certain goals.<sup>8</sup> It is clear that sustaining motivation is

important to the learning process and the learner should dedicate some time and labour in line with motivation in achieving the goals of learning. These definitions of motivation encapsulate its subtlety as well as its vital importance in effective language learning.

The expectancy theory of motivation also identifies motivation in terms of the learner's expectancy of success and the value the individual attaches to success in that task. The theory emphasizes that motivation is inherent in people and what is important is the factors and impetus that the learners gain to sharpen the inherent traits of motivation.<sup>9</sup> So, this support and sharpening have to be done by the teachers. The attribution theory supports the expectancy theory assuming that the past failures and successes will determine the level of motivation of the learner and their future achievement.<sup>10</sup> Another influential theory called *Self-efficacy theory* refers to motivation with regard to the learner's judgements on their own capabilities. Goal theories discuss motivation in relation to goals. Setting goals and attempting to achieve them show the level of motivation in the learners.<sup>11</sup> Self-Determination theory is an expansion of Gardner's intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In the light of Self-Determination theory, the motivation is intrinsic in the learner to achieve self-satisfaction whereas motivation towards achieving goals, awards and other external benefits is extrinsic.<sup>12</sup>

All these theories conceptualize diverse aspects of motivation, demonstrating its complexity as well as its fundamental importance in L2 learning.

Further, it is clear that the researchers have concluded that teachers are one of the most determinant factors of L2 learners' motivation.<sup>13</sup> Studies have been set out to investigate how as the counterparts of teaching-learning process, the teacher and the learner become the staple sources of motivation. Further investigations have been made on how teachers positively affect the learner's motivation.<sup>14</sup> Among the roles that teachers play in L2 classes are as an initiator, a facilitator, a motivator, an ideal model of the target language speaker, a mentor, a consultant, and a mental supporter.<sup>15</sup> Each role of the teacher, in addition to teaching, affects the learner's success of achieving the set targets of L2 learning. Because of this vital role played by the teachers in learning an L2, it is the teacher's responsibility to employ strategies to motivate the learner and to help the learner to persist with motivation. As a result, the teacher's creativity in using motivational strategies and updating them are essential in order to maintain the learner's motivation as unfluctuating towards the achievement of learning targets. For the teachers, the learner's motivation is a key variable that frequently is of concern and presents a challenge in language classrooms.<sup>16</sup> Dörnyei and Csizer (1998) have studied the use of teaching strategies to motivate learners among Hungarian teachers of English and "assigned 51 motivational strategies and studied the significance attributed to each strategy by the teachers and how often teachers employ each strategy in their classes".<sup>17</sup> So, the large existing body of research on the field of motivation has to be constantly updated in line with current trends of language learning because the teachers should know how to "whet the students' appetite" and attract their attention to learn the

language<sup>18</sup>. Instructional interventions are applied by the teacher to elicit and stimulate the student's motivation and the self-regulating strategies that are used purposefully by individual students to manage the level of their own motivation.<sup>19</sup> Among various motivational strategies employed by the modern linguists as explained by Williams and Burden (1996) are to recognize the complexity of motivation, be aware of both initiating and sustaining motivation, recognize people as individuals, develop internal beliefs, enhance intrinsic motivation, build up a supportive learning environment, and give feedback that is informational, etc. Dörnyei (1994) also states the importance of setting a personal example with the teacher's own behaviour, creating a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in class, developing a good relationship with the learners, increasing the learner's linguistic self-confidence, promoting learner autonomy, etc. In addition to these motivational strategies, every language teacher throughout the world uses diverse arrays of motivational strategies in their teaching. Introducing these motivational strategies Dörnyei (*ibid*) agrees that these motivational strategies are "not rock-solid golden rules, but rather suggestions that may work with one teacher or group better than another and that might work today but not tomorrow as they lose their novelty." Accordingly, the learners get fed up with language learning when the teachers use the same method over a long period. This highlighted quest for motivational strategies broadens the research opportunities of the field. Accordingly, creating new motivational strategies is a pivotal aspect of teaching.

### **Motivational strategies used by the Buddha**

The Buddha, as the best teacher ever, was able through his teaching methods to attract the masses to his fresh and broad philosophy. In addition to his "extraordinary ability" as the Buddha, the motivational strategies he has employed also supported to a great extent the popularizing and realizing of his philosophy by others. A study of the Buddhist canon demonstrates various strategies used by the Buddha on various occasions in motivating and educating people. Even though all those methods cannot be used in language teaching there are highly effective techniques that can be used in language teaching. Some of these methods have been suggested by modern linguists as a result of broad researching. But what is extraordinary is that the Buddha had already used these methods more than 2500 years ago. Among the many motivational strategies of the Buddha, a few are listed below that have been selected from various places of the Buddhist canon. They are, preaching the Dhamma based on individual differences, preaching the Dhamma depending on the level and understanding the appropriate time, preaching based on the background of the disciple, preaching by understanding the attitudes of the disciple, explaining through synonyms, using repetitions, starting with disciples' ideas and finally presenting the Buddha's view based on that, using questions and answers, holding discussions, explaining through stories, using analogies as illustrations, showing appreciation of the disciples, showing weaknesses and using visual aids. The following section discusses the applicability of the above motivational techniques in teaching English.

## Motivational strategies in Buddhism in teaching English

### 1. Preaching the Dhamma based on individual differences

The Buddha has used various teaching methods based on the individual understanding of the disciples and devotees. The Buddha had a special knowledge to understand others' minds, their level of *Paññā* and the strength of merits. So, understanding the capacity of the various individuals, the Buddha changed his teaching methods respectively. For instance, in helping Ālavaka, Kisagotami, Ven. Nanda, and Ven. Cullapantaka realize the Dhamma, the Buddha uses diverse techniques and strategies depending on the person and situation. In the Ālavaka Sutta<sup>20</sup>, the Buddha silently obeys the orders of the demon Ālavaka several times, and later on when the Buddha rejects his commands the demon goes berserk and asks questions. Hearing Buddha's answers to his questions, he realizes the Dhamma. Kisagotami,<sup>21</sup> who goes mad after the death of her only son behaves crazily and one wise person who knows that the Buddha is the best teacher directs her to him. Understanding her mentality, the Buddha selects the best way to motive her and to make her realize the truth. Going in search of a handful of mustard seeds to cure her son, she understands that the death is destined to everybody. The Buddha employs another strategy in control of Arahant Nanda's worldly desires. The Buddha takes him to heaven and by showing the divine mates has him compare the beauty of Janapada Kalyani with divine mates and gradually he understands the truth and rejects sensual pleasures. The Buddha motivates Cūḷa Panthaka Thero by letting him rub a piece cloth and helping him understands *anicca*. These few examples out of many explain how the Buddha attracts various individuals to his great philosophy using various strategies. Even the people who were totally distracted, utterly helpless, utterly neglected, etc. find refuge in the Buddha and his unconditional compassion relieves them all.

In applying this to teaching English, it is obvious that at the beginning of the English teaching, the teacher should have a prior knowledge of the levels and standard of the students. A pre-test is acceptable in understanding the level of the students and in grouping the students. As the Buddha followed individual methods to motivate his disciples, the English teachers can change teaching method, material and content depending on the level of the students. Even though these methods are followed nowadays in many instances, it is clear that what the Buddha has seen from his knowledge can never fail and could be effectively used in language teaching as a highly methodical technique.

### 2. Teaching the Dhamma at the appropriate moment

All the above examples also evidence how the Buddha waits for the right moment and correctly judges how to use the right method. Another excellent example is in the Aṅgulimāla Sutta.<sup>22</sup> Aṅgulimāla is brought into full control before he commits an *ānathariya kamma* by killing his mother. This approach of the Buddha has been developed into language teaching by Krashen in the Natural Order Hypothesis of the Monitor Theory, suggesting that the language structures should be taught from

the easier to the harder. This is also a good way of creating motivation by starting teaching with simple rules and then continuing to the complex ones as the students improve.

### **3. Preaching based on the students' background**

In the Kasi Bhāradvāja Sutta,<sup>23</sup> when Bhāradvāja asks the Buddha to plough and plant his own food and eat, the Buddha replies, “Faith is my seed, austerity the rain, wisdom my yoke and plow, modesty is the pole; mind the strap, mindfulness is my plowshare and goad”, explaining with imagery extracted from paddy field and farming. Here the Buddha explains the path to nirvana and because of the simplicity and applicability of the imagery, Bhāradvāja understands it easily. In the same manner, English teachers should teach English based on the situation and taking examples from the relevant situation. Normally, many English grammar books are written based on the British and American life context. In teaching to Sri Lankan students, this rule should be applied to our context by taking examples from our daily lives and surroundings. Further, using authentic material is interesting and motivational. For example, in teaching English to young people, material like songs, love stories, adventures, biographies, etc, that catch their interest can be used motivationally. In teaching English to Buddhist monks, interesting Jātaka stories, stanzas and sutras can be used to inspire, as they are familiar and comprehensible.

### **4. Explaining through synonyms, similes and repetition**

The Buddha uses synonyms in abundance in simplification and illustration of the complex facts. Talking about the hell he uses “*apāyam*”, “*duggathin*”, “*vinipatam*” and even English teachers can use synonyms in order to confirm that every student understands what she/he is teaching. Using similes is also another effective technique of motivation. The Alagaddupama Sutta (MN) is about clinging to views, which is conveyed by using two similes, the simile of the water-snake and the simile of the raft. Taken together, these similes focus on the skill needed to grasp Right View properly as a means of leading to the cessation of suffering, rather than an object of clinging. Further, sense desire is compared to a bare bone, lump of flesh, torch of straw, pit of burning coal, a dream, borrowed goods, fruit bearing tree, slaughter house, stake of swords, etc. Likewise, in English teaching, when similes are taken from the surroundings it will help reduce monotony, boredom and the reluctance of the students. In the same manner, the Buddha repeats the facts in many Suttas like he does in Dhammacakkappavattana<sup>24</sup>. By repeating the important facts, the teachers will be able to attract the students to the lesson. Sometimes repetition may be boring for the clever students but repeating with synonyms will enhance the vocabulary while refreshing the memory of students.

### **5. Using questions and answers/ discussions**

Student-centered teaching has become the norm in second language teaching in the modern world. But the Buddha had developed this method more than 2500 years ago, which is valid even today. In his preaching the Buddha constantly asks questions from others, he replies to others' questions and has discussions with them

to encourage them to practice the Dhamma. These are good techniques that can be used to get active participation of the students in the lesson. When the students get answers to their questions, when they interact with the teacher, and engage in pair and group activities, these activities and learning strategies will intensify their interest and motivation.

### **6. Offering new designations**

Offering designations is another highly motivational approach that the Buddha practiced in attracting people to his philosophy. The Buddha offered various designations in his order of monks and nuns, that confirmed the organization of the Order while motivating the novices to join the Order. For instance, in Cula-Vedalla Sutta<sup>25</sup> the Buddha praises Dhammadinna the nun and appoints her as the foremost Dhamma teacher among his nun disciples. In the same manner, English teachers also can appoint subject leaders and group leaders, encouraging them and creating a sense of responsibility to learn English.

### **7. Using visual aids**

The modern language trainers emphasize the importance of using visual aids in language teaching. The Buddha has used visuals for making the matters clearer. For instance, the Buddha removes Magandhiya's excessive pride by making her see how extremely beautiful women lose their beauty as they gradually become older. Here, the Buddha uses visual aids, demonstrating its great effect on learning.

### **8. Pointing out mistakes**

The Buddha pointed out the mistakes and faults of the Bhikkus whenever he saw any in them. The Buddha has the special ability to see past lives and shows how to correct the mistakes made during the long cycle of births and deaths. Error correction is essential in teaching a second language. The theorists of the L2 teaching have pointed out the ways of correcting errors and agree that it is clear that errors should be shown at the very moment they are made before allowing them to fossilize. When the errors are pointed out, the learners will be motivated to correct them, thus enhancing language improvement.

### **Conclusion**

As far as the above discussion is concerned, it is clear that the motivational techniques used by the Buddha in attracting various types of people to his philosophy, can also be successfully applied in teaching English. The effectiveness of these strategies can be increased by applying them in teaching English, especially to Sri Lankan learners and to Buddhist monks. Accordingly, the current study concludes that the motivational strategies used by the Buddha can be effectively utilized in teaching English.



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## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Dornyei, 2009

<sup>2</sup> Gardner, 1985; Clement and Dornyei, 2001

- <sup>3</sup> Gardner & Lambert, 1972
- <sup>4</sup> Munoz,2006,Dörnyei, 2009
- <sup>5</sup> Gardner, 1985, p. 10
- <sup>6</sup> Dörnyei and Ottó,1998
- <sup>7</sup> Gardner, 1985, p. 10
- <sup>8</sup> Williams and Burden , 2001
- <sup>9</sup> Wigfield, 1999
- <sup>10</sup> Weiner, 1985
- <sup>11</sup> Dörnyei, 1998
- <sup>12</sup>*ibid*
- <sup>13</sup> Dörnyei, 1994; Tanaka, 2005
- <sup>14</sup> e.g., Kikuchi, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Tanak, 2005
- <sup>15</sup> Kaboody, 2013
- <sup>16</sup> Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007; Scheidecker & Freeman, 1999
- <sup>17</sup> Kaboody, 2013, p.4
- <sup>18</sup> Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011
- <sup>19</sup> Dörnyei and Guilloteaux, 2008
- <sup>20</sup> SN 10.12
- <sup>21</sup> Theri Gātha
- <sup>22</sup> MN
- <sup>23</sup> SN
- <sup>24</sup> SN
- <sup>25</sup> MN