

An exploration of students' perceptions of the role of english teacher feedback as a motivator in a kurdish school context

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Abstract

Motivation in education has widely been used by researchers and educators as a major factor in enhancing second language learning. There have been many studies carried out in foreign context to know how motivation affects language learning. Few of them have been conducted so as to understand the role of teacher's feedback as a motivator in learning English as a second language in Kurdistan of Iraq. This present study aimed to explore how teacher feedback as a motivator affects student's capability of learning English as L2 in school context. It is also aimed to investigate the issue of motivation in EFL in the Kurdish high school context. The gap has been noticed that students in secondary level in Kurdish context that they are rarely motivated to learn a L2 through providing feedback. With regard to data collection and analysis, the researcher focuses on qualitative and quantitative methods in order to understand in depth. The questionnaire was used as a research instrument, which started from general background to the most specific one. The results reveal that the vast majority of participants feel that their teacher's feedback play a significant role in their language learning. The findings also revealed that motivational feedback from their teacher are helping in continuing their studies. The researcher highly recommends that the Kurdish Government and, in particular, the Ministry of Education encourage teachers to provide positive feedback. The Ministry of Education should train English teachers to understand the significance of motivation and how to provide feedback to their learners.

Keywords: motivation, attribution theory, teacher feedback, english l2 learning

1. Introduction

Motivation in education has long been discussed as a major factor in enhancing second language learning. The term 'motivation' has been defined by many researchers. Dörnyei defines the term as "a general way of referring to the antecedents of actions" Dörnyei (2000, p: 6). This means that people's actions are the causes of behaviour. Gardner (2007) [7] has emphasised the impact of the teacher and the classroom. He argues that students' perceptions should be considered, because the teacher and the classroom atmosphere have a strong influence on the students' ability to learn in the classroom. According to Gardner (2007) [7] motivation not only involves motivation orientation, but also increasing desire, interest and future goal achievement (Wang, 2009; Gardner, 2007) [7]. The aim of this present study is to investigate the issue of motivation in EFL in the Kurdish high school context. The gap has been noticed that students in secondary level in Kurdish context of Kurdistan Region that they are rarely motivated to learn a second language through providing feedback by their instructors. This probably leaves to have a little chance to learn English as a L2.

This paper argues that motivation and teacher motivational feedback is vital for Kurdish students in the school context. It will enhance the process of language comprehension and the achievement of success. It will help them to achieve a good level of English and also to develop their English skills successfully. The researcher highly recommends that the Kurdish Government and, in particular, the Ministry of

Education encourage teachers to provide positive feedback. By 'positive' feedback, I mean feedback which provides formative support and encouragement to the students, as well as recognition of effort. If positive feedback is rewarding, it might increase learners' confidence and interest, as well as create a pleasant learning environment. The administrators may need to train teachers in how to deal with different students. Teachers should know that they should praise their students for good work and also explain their errors through feedback, which may help to increase students' interest. According to Hyland (2006) [9], praised feedback could be used to soften criticism and suggestions while teachers provide feedback.

This paper comprises three sections, excluding the introduction. Firstly, there is a review of literature concerning different theories from different researchers. Next is the importance of motivation for learners of other languages. Finally, the data analysis and discussions on the research findings precede the conclusion.

1.1 Research question

In order to investigate the students' perceptions on the effects of the teacher's feedback and the type of feedback that their instructors provide them, this study will address the following research questions: 1- How do Kurdish learners of English perceive the role of their teachers in motivating them to learn English as a L2? 2-What kind of feedback from their teachers motivates them to learn language and why?

1.2 Hypothesis

Teacher's feedback as a motivator has an effect on students' motivation towards learning English language in school context.

2. The review of literature

2.1 The theory of attribution in motivation

In this review of literature, the researcher is looking at the importance of the theory of both attribution and the process model of L2 motivation. A review of the literature helps the researcher to find out how the theory is practically implemented in high school academic institutions. It is attempted to discover how a teacher's feedback affects students learning a second language in a high school context.

Attribution theory relates to how people review their actions in the past and plan for future events in order to achieve goals. Weiner (1985) [22] has defined attribution theory as the students' 'causal ascriptions' for success and failure in their academic studies. This theory is probably a fundamental factor in learning. According to Dörnyei (2001) [4], the term attribution theory 'refers to explanations people offer about why they were successful or, more importantly, why they failed in the past' (Dörnyei, 2001, p: 118) [4]. It seems that this kind of explanation is not based on objective evidence. Rather, it depends on the person's own interpretation of the event.

According to Pintrich and Schunk (1996) [17], the theory of attribution consists of three general dimensions of 'causal structure' referring firstly to a *locus* dimension which concerns the causality. It can be either internal or external causes for learners, such as, ability or luck. Secondly, there is a *stability* dimension which refers to *stable versus unstable* factors. For example, ability might be stable but effort might be unstable. Finally, there is a *controllability* dimension. This concerns the *controllable versus uncontrollable* factors, for instance, how individuals might be able to take control of circumstances themselves or how circumstances might be beyond the students' control (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996; Weiner, 1986; Sinclair, 2003) [17, 23, 18].

Perceived causes of attribution theory, based on effort, ability and task difficulty, are central to the theory (ibid). According to Sinclair (2003) [18] effort attribution is significant in learning language. She suggests that learners should attempt to find out the best way to learn. For example, she states that 'students need to know about learning and be realistic about the time and effort this takes' (Sinclair 2003, pp: 105) [18]. It is evident that the realistic approach could be the basis for students to obtain goals in language learning.

The attribution model is influenced by several factors, for example, environment and personal factors. These factors can influence the process of attribution in learning in the classroom. The environment factor is considered to be the information which is provided by a teacher, (e.g. a teacher tells students, that they are not doing their homework very well, or their writing is very poor). Personal factors consist of a range of perceptions, for example, about performance in an exam. These factors may affect students' beliefs in the classroom for L2 learning (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996, 2002; Lightbown and Spada, 2013) [16, 17, 12].

However, it has been a criticism that ascribing the wrong attributions to the outcome might result in depression,

loneliness and helplessness, which may result in the failure to successfully learn a second language. Harvey and Weary (1984) [8] argue that helplessness is related to attribution style. The ability attribution can be the basis for individuals to feel disappointed with their studies. Dörnyei (2001) [4] summarises two main points which are directly relevant to learning a second language. Firstly, he considers that a number of students around the world try to master the English language but they fail to achieve proficiency due to fear of failure. Secondly, he mentioned attribution training. This means the kind of training which helps learners avoid a negative attribution. For example, instead of saying, 'I have no ability to solve maths problems', it is better to say, 'I will work harder and practise until I solve the maths problems'. It is clear that the terms ability and effort have a huge impact on the learners' beliefs in learning a second language in the classroom.

Different individuals may have different beliefs about learning L2. Some learners' perceptions might be inappropriate for language learning. Some believe that teachers directly affect students' desire to learn a language. Some people may think that they learn a second language when they are motivated in the classroom. Some hold the opinion that the motivational feedback from the teacher is important when learning a language. Others, however, believe that negative feedback from their teacher might help them to work harder when learning a language (Dörnyei, 2001; Lightbown and Spada, 2013) [4, 12]. Thus, attribution theory influences an individual's belief, which is crucial in the process of learning L2. This is because students are perhaps pleased when educators respect and take their views into consideration.

Research into motivation suggests that educators should try to adjust the learners' belief to accept that they all have their own ability to learn, and that this can change, for instance, with age (Pintrich and Schunk, 2002; Harvey and Weary, 1984) [16, 8]. However, failure may be the result of a lack of ability rather than lack of effort. It might depend on the understanding of individuals of the attribution which influences students' actions (Weiner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2001; Kelley H. and Michela, J. 1980) [22, 4, 11]. It is remarkable that the components of L2 motivation are so various. Another framework is offered by Dörnyei, (2001) [4] which is vital for teachers to be able to understand how a student's motivation is affected by the teacher.

2.1.1 The dynamic view of motivation

As has been mentioned earlier, the attribution theory plays an important role in an individual's behaviour. Learners are motivated to master the goals of language learning but a learner's motivation might be flexible over time and educators may affect a learner's motivation to learning L2.

According to Dörnyei (2001) [4], the process model of L2 motivation tends to be central to learning a second language. He argues that, 'what most teachers find is that their students' motivation fluctuates, going through ebbs and flows' (Dörnyei 2001, p: 19) [4]. The Process Model of L2 Motivation tends to be important because this theory focuses on the changes in a student's actions in learning language. In other words, a student's motivation of L2 is affected by materials and individuals in the classroom environment and this seems to be

unstable.

According to Dörnyei (2001) ^[4], the process of model L2 motivation has three stages, namely, ‘*choice motivation*’, which generates information, for instance, about setting goals. Secondly, there is ‘*executive motivation*’ or ‘*maintained and protected motivation*’. This type of motivation is closely related to the classroom environment. Students are influenced by a number of factors, for example, the teacher’s influence on learners and the ‘*anxiety of tasks*’ as well as the ‘*physical conditions*’ required to complete learning tasks. Finally, there is ‘*motivational retrospection*’ which concerns the completion of classroom activities, for example, feedback and the evaluation of performance in order to learn from mistakes (Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei and Otto, 1998; Manolopoulou-Sergi, 2004) ^[4, 5, 13]. Received feedback might be a factor for students to develop their language learning.

Several researchers have acknowledged that motivation is a key factor for success for learning a second language in the classroom (Lightbown & Spada 2013; Busse, 2013; Dörnyei, 2013; Sinclair, 2003 and Weiner, 1985) ^[12, 3, 22]. Research conducted by Oxford and Shearin, (1994) investigates how the teacher as motivator is vital for learning a second language in the classroom. This means that motivation affects how second language learners acquire language effectively. Research study by Oller and his colleagues (1977) in American universities, about the influence of motivation on 46 foreign language learners showed that the teacher’s motivational skills greatly influenced students learning a foreign language. Indeed, the teacher’s role is important for learners and this role affects learners over time.

Such factors can be either intrinsic or extrinsic in nature. Intrinsic factors include confidence, for example. Intrinsic motivation drives learners to undertake activities and to continue studying because of interest in the subject (Vallerand, Pelletier, Blais, Briere, Senecal and Vallieres, (1992) ^[20]. External factors include the role of teachers and parents, for example, to encourage learners to pay more attention to their second language learning. Some research shows that teachers are perhaps more responsible for motivating learners to achieve their future goals (Busse, 2013, Manolopoulou-Sergi 2004; Yunus, Osman and Ishaq, 2011). There is a wide range of feedback which may impact on an individual’s attribution, such as formative feedback, which is important for students if they are to improve and build their confidence.

3. Teacher feedback in school classrooms

As highlighted previously, teacher feedback has a crucial effect on students’ development. Lightbown & Spada state that, ‘teachers can make a positive contribution to students’ motivation to learn if classrooms are places students enjoy coming to’ (Lightbown & Spada 2013, p: 88) ^[12]. Furthermore, Dörnyei (2001) ^[4] suggests that teachers have to recognise effort in order to encourage students to continue their studies. He claims that in the failure situation, teachers should set out future goals and emphasise the need for hard work in order to achieve success. Interestingly, this kind of feedback encourages the process of learning a second language. For example, if students receive a motivational feedback (e.g. you are good at speaking) it helps learners to take an interest in

their development because they feel happy and this result in increasing self-confidence in learning language (Dörnyei, 2001, Lightbown & Spada, 2013) ^[4, 12].

The term feedback in pedagogy has been defined in many ways. According to Ur’s definition (1996), feedback is information that is given to the students about their performance of learning activities. This is often with the aim of enhancing the students’ performance in the school context. Ford (1992 cited in Dörnyei 2001) ^[4] defines feedback as a tool to boost knowledge. This information will help learners to achieve their goals in the future. According to Pintrich and Schunk (2002) ^[16], teacher feedback, is the fundamental instrument for improving foreign language acquisition. However, there are several kinds of feedback such as performance feedback, motivational feedback, attribution feedback, verbal feedback and strategy feedback, which are provided by teachers. Each kind of feedback has its own effect on students’ progress.

3.1 Performance feedback

It is suggested that feedback be given to students regarding performance work. This kind of feedback can be either positive or negative. Research suggests that teachers should be motivators in such cases. For instance, when teachers notice students’ errors, they must be careful how they comment on the students’ work.

Research conducted by Fedor and his colleagues (2001) shows that negative feedback might play an important role in learning because it can change an individual’s behaviour or performance. Negative feedback may provoke poor performance and this negative attitude could directly affect the learner’s mood. Instead of providing negative feedback, such as, “that is wrong”, or “your writing skills are poor”, it is better to say, “that’s not really acceptable. I believe you can write it better”, (Harvey and Weary 1984; Pintrich and Schunk, 2002) ^[8, 16].

3.1.1 Motivational feedback

This kind of feedback seems to be the most significant for the teacher as a motivator in the school classroom. It provides hope and happiness as well as confidence for future work. Research study by Brophy (2004) ^[2] has mentioned that this kind of feedback is necessary for students to pursue their academic studies. Research conducted by Pintrich and Schunk (2002) ^[16] shows that this sort of feedback is designed to motivate students rather than focus their attention on the accuracy of their work. In this respect, it is apparent that persuasive feedback helps learners to successfully undertake their tasks and also helps them to study more, because learners feel optimistic rather than pessimistic about their work.

3.1.1.1 Attribution feedback

Students are trained to attribute their learning outcomes in order to control factors which might lead to poor effort (Pintrich and Schunk, 2002) ^[16]. For example, whenever students perceive that they have failed, they may be discouraged to make the effort to succeed because they feel hopeless (Dörnyei, 2001; Pintrich and Schunk (2002) ^[4, 16]. However, if students realise that effort is controllable, they may work harder in order to achieve success in the future.

Effort feedback is essential for young learners who may have difficulty in acquiring L2 in the classroom. This kind of feedback may motivate L2 learners to participate in learning language.

3.1.1.2 Verbal feedback

Several researchers have defined the verbal feedback as a way of providing information immediately. This can be both as either motivational or demotivational feedback. It is often considered as direct response to students' academic performance, which is believed to be one of the most powerful school classroom interaction between teachers and learners. Research shows that this kind of feedback is commonly used in school context (Abbas, 2015) [1]. It is worth mentioning that teachers should be aware of giving praise feedback because it may foster students' progress and encourage learners' engagement which makes them feel happy about their efforts.

3.2 Strategy feedback

Strategy feedback is perhaps a type of ability feedback. This kind of feedback can be used to help students utilise different strategies for learning a second language (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996, 2002) [16, 17]. This sort of feedback tends to be useful for learners in maintaining their results. Research shows that, when students feel that they have performed poorly, they may be given a variety of techniques to improve their skills, in particular, writing aptitudes. However, it seems to be difficult for individuals to use different strategies without sufficient motivational information about their work.

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

In this study, the 30 participants for this research were selected from two academic high school context and a questionnaire was distributed, in Kurdistan Region. All

participants were in the tenth grade and they were females. The data was gathered in one week. The researcher ensured that all participants had information about this study and agreed formally to participate by signing a consent form. This paper will seek to answer the following research questions: 1- How do Kurdish learners of English perceive the role of their teachers in motivating them to learn English as a L2? 2- What kind of feedback from their teachers motivates them to learn language and why?

4.1.1 Instruments

In this questionnaire, the researcher focuses on qualitative and quantitative methods in order to understand in depth. 16 questions were asked and two of them were open-ended questions. All participants were asked the same questions in the same school in the region. The researcher analysed and discussed the participants' responses in order to obtain the data in detail. The questions varied from general background questions to the most specific questions regarding the students' perception of the role of the English teacher's feedback as a motivator in a Kurdish high school context. The participants' experience of studying English varied from 8 to 10 years, with an average of 9 years' experience of learning English in the Kurdistan context. The researcher will try to clarify the students' perceptions of the teacher's feedback as motivator in high school.

5. The results and data analysis

This section analyses the results of the questionnaire throughout the study. For question 1, all the participants are female because the school selected is for girls only. For statement 2, the vast majority of students are between 14-15 years of age. Only 5 respondents are between 16-17 years of age.

The graph below illustrates students' beliefs concerning teacher motivation

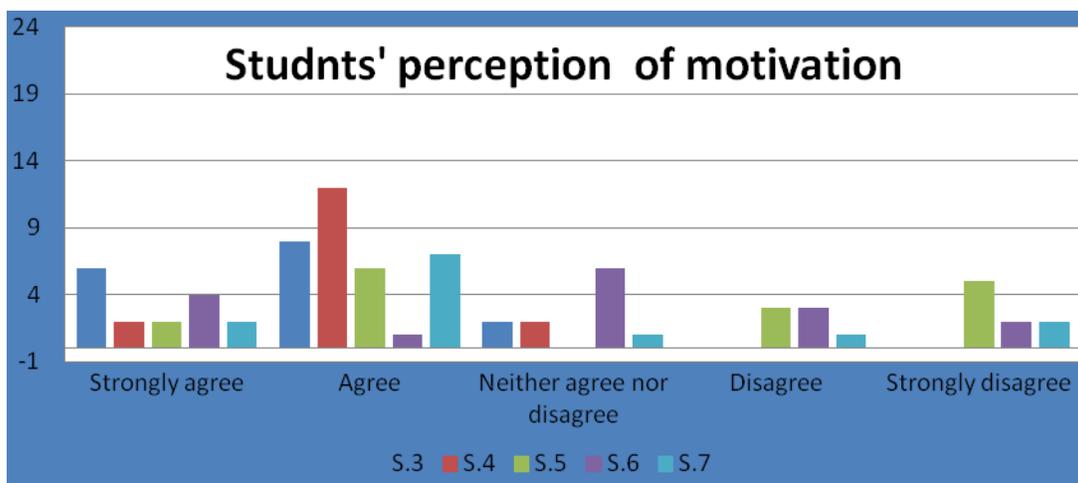


Fig 1: Summarises the participants' responses to the statements (3, 4, 5, 6 7 see appendix 1)

In reply to statement 3, 50% of participants agree and 37.5% strongly agree that a highly motivated learner is a good language learner. Only 12.5% are neutral. However, none of them disagreed or strongly disagreed. With regard to

statement 4 (see appendix 1) 12.5% and 75% of participants feel that the predictor for success in learning English is only motivation. However, 12.5% of participants are unsure and 0% disagrees or strongly disagrees with the statement. In

response to statements 5, 6 and 7, 12.5% and 32.5% of respondents, respectively, feel that they agree or strongly agree that it is difficult to see their teacher as a motivator. By contrast, 31.25% and 18.75% of participants regard their teacher as a motivator, but none of them are unsure about that. The result is very similar for statement 6, 25% and 75% of students agree or strongly agree but only 18.75% and 12.5% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. They feel that teachers can sometimes increase their anxiety. However, results show that 37.5% of respondents neither agree nor disagree that teachers can sometimes increase their anxiety. For statement 7, 12.5% of participants strongly agree and 43.75% agree that teacher feedback does not affect their motivation. However, 31.27% disagree and 6.25% strongly disagree with the statement. Only 6.5% of respondents were unsure.

According to questions 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12, (see appendix 1), results show that students have different opinions. 37.5% of participants agree and 43.37% strongly agree that positive feedback from their teacher enhances the process of learning whereas a small percentage of respondents disagree and strongly disagree with 0% of responses being neutral. With regard to negative feedback from their tutors and how it motivates their language learning, 6.25% and 25% of participants agree and 12.5% and 25% disagree and strongly disagree. However, 31.25% of participants are neutral. In reply to question 10, the vast majority of respondents not only agree but also strongly agree that their personal goals motivate them to learn. It is about 56.25% and 31.25% who agree and strongly agree respectively in response to that question. However, none of them strongly disagrees and disagrees, while 6.25% were unsure. For statement 11, 62.5% of participants agree and strongly agree that the teacher motivates them. By contrast, 12.87% of students believe that their teachers do not motivate them to learn. Only 18.75% of students are not sure. With regard to statement 12, 81.25% of respondents agree and strongly agree that other people motivate them to learn the foreign language. However, the results show that none of them disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.

According to questions 13 and 14 (see appendix 1), 87.25% of participants indicate that their motivation is affected by their teachers. However, 12.5% of students feel that their motivation is stable. Results for question 14 find that 81.25% of students are pleased when they are motivated for learning their language but only 18.75% of respondents disagreed that motivation helps them to learn language.

The results from the last two open ended questions show that participants almost always have similar answers. Most students agree that the feedback they receive from their teacher motivates them because when students complete their tasks, the teacher praises them. However, the results for question 16, indicate that most participants are demotivated by their teachers when they are criticised for making mistakes. Very few students feel that negative feedback from their teacher helps them to learn by their mistakes.

6. Discussions

After the data collection and analysis, it is evident that motivation is a key factor in obtaining any goals in future

study. It would seem that most participants believe that motivation and a teacher as a motivator are factors in developing students' success and that they are at the heart of academic education. According to the results, most of the participants hardly regard their teacher as a motivator and feel that a demotivated teacher does not support their learning of a second language. From the results of this study it can be seen that students in the Kurdish school context are highly motivated and would learn better than those who are not.

It is obvious that motivation encourages students in their study and learning. Motivation in education is credible for the Kurdistan high school context. The role of teacher as motivator was not well known in the academic context, due to the lack of information about motivation. The vast majority of students in the Kurdish context think that they are motivated when they are good at learning the subject and that those who are poor are demotivated. Based on the findings, participants revealed that the motivation was dependent on the ability of learners. The learners who were good at activities were encouraged by teachers. This kind of motivation seemed to be random and was not based on a scientific approach. The results showed that the teacher as a motivator was rarely seen in the Kurdish context while teacher feedback had a great impact on students. The study showed that most teachers gave negative feedback to students but this kind of feedback hindered them in learning the English language.

The results reveal that the vast majority of participants feel that their teachers play a significant role in their learning and this role can sometimes affect students negatively. Therefore, teachers have to be careful how they treat students in the classroom. This is in accordance with what Dörnyei (2001) ^[4] suggests, that teachers should not use some negative terms in the classroom. For example, to criticise a student's ability by saying, "you are not able to do that". This kind of expression used by some teachers in the Kurdish context is the main reason students fail exams. In this way, students may lose their confidence.

Based on the responses of the participants, however, the students who receive motivational feedback from their teacher are aiding in continuing their studies. Similarly, Pintrich and Schunk (2002) ^[16] mentioned that positive feedback will increase students' aspirations encourage them to achieve their future goals. All of them feel happy when a teacher motivates them. Only a few of the participants felt that negative feedback might help them become aware of their errors. It is important to note that negative feedback could be appropriate for those students who are absent most of the time, while, for students who are serious about their work, it would be better to provide encouraging feedback concerning their performance in order to help them aspire to success.

Positive attribution can be key to predicting success in learning other languages. Therefore, teachers can play an effective role in motivating their students in order to overcome issues. However, negative attribution can contribute to failure and a feeling of hopelessness for future success. Of course, fear of failure can induce anxiety, which is a barrier to learning a language easily. Most participants suggest that teachers should use motivational feedback to facilitate students in learning better. This is important as Harackiewicz (1979) ^[10] mentions that formative feedback may increase

students' intrinsic motivation in learning L2 language.

A number of participants pointed out that their teacher demotivates them when they make a mistake, for instance, when they are reading a text or speaking, the teacher immediately criticise them for mispronouncing words. In this situation, it is clear that in the Kurdish context students may not feel confident which could cause them to drop out of schools because students may feel that their teacher considers their ability to be limited and they are incapable of language learning. Therefore students can feel disappointed with their efforts at learning language. However, if teachers are experienced in dealing with students, they may use different strategies for motivating students. For example, when a student speaking English makes a mistake, the teacher should encourage the positive aspects first, rather than the negative ones. In this way, students' self-confidence may rise and they may continue with their language learning.

7. Conclusions

The findings of this study show that motivation in learning a second language is the most fundamental aspect of learning L2. Teachers and students may need to study on the theories of general attribution and the process model of L2 motivation. Teachers greatly affect learners' achievements in second language learning. The results show that teachers as motivators are significant in pedagogy in the Kurdish context. However, the findings of this study reveal that the teacher as motivator is rare in the Kurdish high school. Findings also show that most students want to be motivated by their teachers in order to continue with their studies.

The aim of this paper is to investigate students' perceptions of teacher motivation and the role of teacher feedback for students in Kurdish high schools.

This study recommends that teachers in the Kurdish school context motivate students and provide formative feedback to them. The Ministry of Education needs to train English teachers to understand the significance of motivation and how to provide feedback to their learners. For example, when learners fail exams teachers should explain that the lack of effort has resulted in lack of success. This study suggests that the Kurdish Government should pay more attention to motivation in schooling. Teachers should be made aware of the benefits of providing encouraging feedback which considers the student's effort rather than merely ability, in order that students may achieve their goals in learning English as a foreign language in the Kurdish school context.

Due to the limitations of this paper, the selected sample might not be representative of the target participants of all the L2 Kurdish learners. Various instruments could be used such class observation and interviews. Further research needs to be done to find the significance of motivation in the Kurdish school context. A larger number of participants from different schools and from different cities should be used for the future studies of the teacher feedback as a motivator in academic context of the Kurdistan Region.

8. References

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