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Fostering EFL Learners' Motivation: A Comparison of Facilitating Negotiation Interaction and Maximizing Learning Opportunities

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Abstract

Boosting EFL learners' motivation has been and continues to be a prominent theme in the theory and praxis of language teaching. Accordingly, this study sought to investigate the comparative impact of maximizing learning opportunities (MLO) and facilitating negotiation interaction (FNI) on Iranian EFL learners' motivation through a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest comparison group design. Following a pilot administration of a sample Cambridge English Key Test (KET) with 25 learners, the modified test was administered to 90 EFL learners. Sixty three learners whose scores fell within one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected through non-random convenience sampling. Of these participants, 32 learners were assigned randomly to the MLO group and 31 learners to the FNI group. The learners' motivation was measured using a validated Persian translation of Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) administered as both the pre- and posttest. During the treatment period, each group received instructions through tasks and activities designed in accordance with the principles of its respective instructional approach. The one-way ANCOVA indicated that both MLO and FNI had a significant impact on enhancing EFL learners' motivation. However, no significant difference was found between the two approaches in terms of their motivational effects ($F = 0.620$, $p = 0.434 > 0.05$). The study suggests the application of both procedures in the ELT environment to boost EFL learners' motivation.

Keywords: Facilitating negotiation interaction, Maximizing learning opportunities, Motivation.

I | INTRODUCTION

Language learning can be compared to baking a cake where the ingredients are important, but how the final product is presented may make all the difference. This mode of presentation is important in the ELT classroom, as presenting language in an engaging and relevant way may motivate learners and capture their interest (Guilloteaux, 2007; Jones, 2020). Thus, effective delivery is essential to engage learners and fosters a perhaps lasting motivation in language learning. To this end, Dörnyei (2001) emphasized that motivation plays a central role in the process of learning as it drives learners to interact with the input meaningfully and a well-presented 'language cake' may thus ensure learners' feeling motivated to explore, practice, and take risks in their language learning.

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In ELT classrooms, motivation is a dynamic force that can shift over time, shaped by some internal and external factors (Ushioda, 2017). Motivation is, indeed, not only a psychological state but also a response to the learning environment (Al-Hoorie, 2017). The physical and emotional atmosphere of the classroom, the teacher's interpersonal style, the clarity of learning goals, and even the type of feedback students receive can either foster or hinder motivation (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). When learners are exposed to repetitive, uninspiring activities or feel disconnected from the learning goals, motivation may wane (Hattie & Donoghue, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Conversely, when they see relevance in what they are doing, feel a sense of progress, and enjoy the learning experience, their motivation tends to increase (Harackiewicz et al., 2016; Linnenbrink-Garcia et al., 2016).

With the importance attached to motivation as attested by ample studies in the ELT literature (e.g., Dewi, 2023; Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014; Ferdinez & Sabordo, 2025; Huang, 2022; Marashi & Eghtedar, 2021), researchers are continuously engaged in exploring innovative teaching procedures to enhance motivation in the classroom. Two such procedures which are embedded in the postmethod condition championed by Kumaravadivelu (1994), facilitate negotiation interaction (FNI) and maximize learning opportunities (MLO). FNI is a macro-strategy rooted in interactionist views of second language acquisition which emphasize the role of communication in developing linguistic competence (Loewen & Sato, 2018). According to Foster and Ohta (2005), when learners are involved in meaningful interactions, especially in situations where they must negotiate meaning, they are more likely to process language deeply. This type of negotiation typically occurs when learners encounter communication gaps and are prompted to ask for clarification, confirm understanding, or rephrase their ideas (Gass & Mackey, 2017). These moments of negotiation serve as opportunities for learners to focus on form while using language for real communicative purposes (Long, 2015).

In line with the well-documented interaction hypothesis (Long, 1996) and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), FNI emphasizes the co-construction of meaning through social interactions (Philp & Duchesne, 2016; Sato & Ballinger, 2016). Ellis (2021) highlighted that meaningful negotiation sequences offer uptake-rich environments where learners are not only exposed to modified input but also encouraged to produce modified output. Moreover, FNI contributes to a learner's sense of relatedness and autonomy, two key components in motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). When learners are given space to express themselves, clarify their ideas, and make linguistic choices within interaction, they are more likely to feel in control of their learning process and more connected to their peers (Dewi, 2023).

As another macro-strategy, MLO can impact learner motivation and engagement in the language classroom (Ellis, 2019). Kumaravadivelu (2003) characterized this strategy as an approach focused on identifying and expanding moments of learning in the classroom by fostering student involvement, and meeting evolving learner needs. Also, Littlewood (2018) reinforced this notion by highlighting the importance of teacher reflection and responsiveness in seizing unexpected but meaningful opportunities that arise during instruction. MLO also involves promoting learner autonomy, encouraging risk-taking, and validating learner voices and practices that are aligned closely with motivational frameworks (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Indeed, when learners feel their input is valued and their questions are pursued meaningfully, they are more likely to stay cognitively and emotionally engaged (Dörnyei, 2020).

Furthermore, MLO is not limited to lesson plans or pre-designed tasks; rather, this macro-strategy is a mindset that invites flexibility, attentiveness, and learner-centeredness in the classroom (Sato & Lyster, 2012; Swain, 2005). It acknowledges the classroom as a dynamic environment where language development can occur not only through structured instruction but also through spontaneous engagement, individualized feedback, and meaningful interaction (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Kumaravadivelu, 2008).

The subsequent brief literature review delineates the convergent conceptual premises underlying FNI and MLO that perhaps formulate the theoretical framework of the present empirical study. Indeed, both instructional interventions are founded upon the well-cited notions of learners' active involvement, learner-driven initiatives, and scaffolding of learners (e.g., Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013; Kumaravadivelu, 2007; MacIntyre et al., 2016). Both FNI and MLO are implemented through providing meaningful content and context which learners can relate to readily while boosting their enjoyment and thus motivation through encouraging their curiosity and creativity in the teaching-learning process. In addition, there appears to

be a noteworthy emphasis on the collaboration of learners in the very theoretical definition and praxis of both FNI and MLO.

II. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Motivation in language learning

Motivation in language learning is closely tied to learners' self-concept and future goals (Lamb, 2017). Learners often invest in a new language not just to pass an exam, but they see it as part of who they want to become, whether that is a confident traveler, a future academic, or a successful professional (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021; You et al., 2016). This future-oriented vision, often referred to as the 'ideal L2 self' (Dörnyei, 2019), can be a powerful motivational force (Al-Hoorie, 2018). When instructional practices tap into this personal vision, motivation is more likely to be sustained over time by helping learners imagine themselves using the language in meaningful, real-life contexts (Ushioda, 2013).

Also, the role of task design and classroom interaction in shaping motivation is important (Shaddad & Jember, 2024). Learners respond better to activities that are meaningful and achievable and involve communication (Lee, 2019). Tasks that allow for creativity, problem-solving, and personal expression tend to be more engaging than those focused solely on accuracy or memorization (Hmelo-Silver et al., 2007). When students feel that their ideas are valued and that they are active participants rather than passive recipients, their motivation can flourish (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020).

According to Ryan and Deci (2020), motivation in language learning can be understood through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. That is, learners who feel they have control over their learning, who perceive their language abilities as improving, and who experience meaningful social connections with others are more likely to maintain motivation over the long term. Indeed, motivation is an internal drive that helps individuals to take action toward a goal, shaping their engagement and achievement (Schunk et al., 2008). Needless to say, a myriad of factors influence motivation, from teaching methods, materials, and assessment tools to issues such as anxiety (Attia & Algazo, 2025; Latifah et al., 2025; Yang & Lian, 2023).

2.2. Facilitating negotiation interaction

FNI indicates that "the learner should be actively involved in clarification, confirmation, comprehension checks, requests, repairing, reacting, and taking turns. It also means that the learners should be given the freedom and encouragement to initiate talk, not just react and respond to it" (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, pp. 33-34). FNI places emphasis on collaborative communication and learner-driven meaning-making (Li & Vu, 2021; Sato, 2017).

At an empirical level, Mackey and Gass (2016) demonstrated that negotiation enhances learners' awareness of language forms and increases communicative confidence, while Lamb and Wedell (2015) asserted that debate tasks, for instance, promote cognitive challenge and personal involvement, which have been empirically linked to increased learner motivation. Also, Kormos and Csizér (2014) confirmed that, when learners perceive tasks as personally meaningful and collaborative through negotiation, their motivation improves. Further research by Zhao and Qin (2021) showed that when teachers shift from a directive to a facilitative role, learners feel more empowered and invested in their own progress. This finding is reinforced by Noels et al. (2019), whose analysis indicated that feedback gained through interaction enhances motivation.

McTighe (2005) argued that involving learners in negotiation increases their sense of purpose and ownership, namely the factors that are closely tied to motivation. Storch (2002) investigated patterns of interaction in pair work and found that learners who engaged in collaborative negotiation demonstrated greater linguistic gains than those who worked individually. Similarly, Sato and Ballinger (2012) explored how peer interaction fosters language awareness and promotes the use of newly acquired structures. Their findings suggest that peer-mediated negotiation interaction encourages learners to actively engage with language and refine their output. In addition, Robinson (2011) delineated that engaging in negotiation helps learners process language more deeply, leading to the better retention of vocabulary, grammar, and discourse patterns.

In a study on negotiation interaction and communication strategies, Li (2025) showed that negotiation occurs more frequently in information-gap tasks rather than decision-making tasks and that learners primarily employ confirmation checks. A similar finding has also been corroborated by Yan et al. (2025).

Nakahama et al. (2001) demonstrated that negotiation interaction has the potential to offer substantial learning

opportunities at multiple levels of interaction. Furthermore, Yi and Sun (2013) and Subari (2021) concluded that FNI helps learners to improve their vocabulary acquisition.

2.3. Maximizing learning opportunities

MLO “is about teaching as a process of creating and utilizing learning opportunities, a process in which teachers strike a balance between their role as managers of teaching and their role as mediators of learning” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 7). Driven by several theoretical concepts such as Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), MLO may involve creating learning experiences where learners receive scaffolding from teachers or peers that helps them achieve tasks they cannot yet perform alone (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Swain et al., 2015).

MLO, as described by Kumaravadivelu (2007) and supported by Ellis (2015), involves structuring the learning context to provide rich and personalized input through real-time feedback, adaptive activities, and meaningful tasks. Empirical studies show that tasks such as story completion increase engagement through creativity and unpredictability (Reinders & Wattana, 2015). Reinders and Benson (2021) emphasized the role of enjoyment and curiosity in sustaining motivation during such tasks, while Ellis (2019) found that learners who had opportunities to interact with input and receive feedback showed higher levels of motivation.

MLO has proved to create an engaging and dynamic learning environment where students can actively participate in their language development (Boudah, 2013; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013). Swain and Lapkin (2002) demonstrated that MLO often occurs through collaborative tasks, problem-solving activities, and real-time feedback, all of which encourage learners to take ownership of their learning process. Furthermore, Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) noted that MLO through peer collaboration can foster motivation by creating a sense of community and shared purpose. When learners collaborate with peers through MLO, they experience social support, encouragement, and positive reinforcement, which are important factors in increasing motivation (Csizér & Kormos, 2009; MacIntyre et al., 2016).

The above brief literature review demonstrates the well-established significance and indispensability of motivation in language learning and perhaps the universal need to explore pedagogical possibilities aimed at enhancing learners’ motivation. At the same time, the reviewed empirical studies signify the positive contribution of each of the two interventions of MLO and FNI to language learning and motivation.

III. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

It is arguably indisputable that motivation plays a significant role in learners’ success as a multitude of studies in education in general and ELT as one such domain demonstrate that motivated learners are more likely to engage with the material, participate actively in class, and persist in overcoming challenges (e.g., Gardner, 2010; Ghorbandordinejad, 2014; Li et al., 2024; Marashi & Khatami, 2017; Zhang, 2024). However, not all EFL learners necessarily enjoy an adequate level of motivation, which can hinder their progress in language learning. This, of course, necessitates the ongoing imperative to explore pedagogical procedures aimed at enhancing learners’ motivation.

While the benefits of FNI and MLO for improving language learning have been documented in the ELT literature (as briefly described earlier) and that each intervention – on its own – has proved beneficial for motivation (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003; McTighe, 2005), the researchers were not able to locate any studies comparing their effects on these two macro-strategies on EFL learners’ motivation. Therefore, to address this gap in the literature, the following research question was raised:

- Is there any significant difference between the effect of maximizing learning opportunities and facilitating negotiation interaction on Iranian EFL learners’ motivation?

By investigating the comparative effect of FNI and MLO, this research sought to deepen teachers’ understanding of how the two approaches can enhance learners’ motivation. As such, this study may add to the growing body of literature on postmethod pedagogy, highlighting the relevance and application of Kumaravadivelu’s (1994) macro-strategies in practical teaching scenarios. By testing and comparing these two macro-strategies, the study may reveal new pathways for integrating innovative teaching practices in EFL classrooms.



IV. METHODOLOGY

This section details all the steps taken in conducting this research with its quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest, comparison group design.

4.1. Participants

A total of 52 pre-intermediate EFL learners (30 males and 22 females) aged 14-17 who were studying at one of Tehran's private language schools participated in this study. These learners were selected through nonrandom convenience sampling from among 90 such learners based on their performance on a piloted sample Cambridge ESOL Key English Test (2020) to ensure a homogeneous sample (i.e., those 52 learners whose scores fell within one standard deviation above and below the mean). These learners were subsequently assigned into two experimental groups randomly: 25 engaged in MLO activities, while the other 27 participated in FNI activities.

An additional 25 elementary learners (both male and female aged 15-18) with almost similar language proficiency as the actual learners undergoing the treatment participated in the piloting of the sample KET. The purpose of this test piloting was of course to calculate the preliminary reliability of the test and to identify the malfunctioning items. The reliability of the scores on this piloting was 0.87 (using Cronbach's alpha). The item analysis which was conducted following this piloting revealed that nine items were malfunctioning, thus discarded from the sample KET which was ultimately administered for homogenization.

Furthermore, the two researchers served as the raters of the writing section of the sample KET, with their inter-rater reliability having been established a priori using the Pearson correlation test ($r = 0.966$, $p = 0.0001 < 0.01$). Also, the participants' parents were informed that they were taking part in a research study and that their anonymity and confidentiality would be respected with their scores on the instruments employed in the study, bearing no impact on their status at the language school.

4.2. Instrumentation and materials

4.2.1. Language proficiency test

In order to ensure the homogeneity of the participants at the outset of the study, the researchers administered a sample piloted KET designed to evaluate English language proficiency at the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The KET is specifically targeted at learners who possess elementary to lower-intermediate language skills and consists of three papers: Reading and Writing (Paper 1), Listening (Paper 2), and Speaking (Paper 3). For issues of practicality, the speaking section was not administered, and the standard ESOL rating rubric for the writing section was employed. The total number of the items was 81 after the piloting and running the item analysis and discarding the faulty multiple-choice items.

4.2.2. Motivation questionnaire

A Persian version of Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) developed and validated by Ghorbandordinejad (2014) was utilized in this study as the pretest and posttest. This translation consisted of one complete section with 37 Likert-type items. The construct validity of the questionnaire was confirmed through confirmatory factor analysis, revealing seven distinct factors aligned with Gardner's socio-educational model. The factor loadings for the items ranged from approximately 0.60 to 0.85, indicating strong correlations with their intended factors and thus confirming the construct validity. Additionally, the reliability of the questionnaire was established, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.848, reflecting internal consistency. The total duration of responding to this questionnaire was 30 minutes.

4.2.3. Course book

In this study, *Got It! 1* (Bowen & Delaney, 2014) published by Oxford University Press was used as the course book. This book is specifically designed for pre-intermediate English learners, and it tends to provide a comprehensive approach to language learning by integrating grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. The book consists of eight units with two units designed to be covered during each semester.

4.2.4. Semi-structured interviews

A semi-structured interview with 15 learners who volunteered (eight from the MLO group and seven from the FNI group) was conducted after the completion of the study. The open-ended interview focused on providing the learners with the opportunity to recount their experience with the treatment. The interview began with the general question of asking the participants how they perceived the treatment and included a number of follow-up questions based on the responses provided by the participants. The interview took a maximum of 10 minutes, serving to elicit some narrative information alongside the quantitative data obtained through the process of the statistical analysis. Naturally, the interview was conducted in Farsi to enable the pre-intermediate learners to openly express their views. Again, the participants' parents were informed that anonymity and confidentiality would be respected. Also, their consent regarding the recording of their voices, which would be used merely for the purposes of this research, was obtained prior to the interview.

4.3. Procedure

The study spanned a semester and consisted of 14 sessions in total, each lasting 90 minutes. The first session was allocated to the pretest and the last session to the posttest, leaving 12 sessions for the treatment phase. During these 12 instructional sessions, each of the two experimental groups was engaged in activities aligned with one of the two instructional methods. Each experimental group consisted of three classes; the MLO group included a total of 25 students, while the FNI group comprised 27 students. The sessions were designed to be consistent in duration across both groups to allow for a fair comparison as much as possible between the two teaching approaches.

Both groups were taught by the same teacher (one of the researchers). It is to be noted that the teacher had implemented FNI and MLO for two terms in pre-intermediate classes prior to this experimentation. The teacher had designed both interventions in accordance with the guidelines documented in the ELT literature, a number of which were noted previously in this paper, such as [Kumaravadivelu \(1994\)](#), [Kumaravadivelu \(2007\)](#), and [Ellis \(2015\)](#). Before conducting this research, the teacher and the other researcher worked together to design specific lesson plans for each session. Furthermore, the second researcher observed each of the six classes (three classes in each experimental group) once throughout the 12-session treatment, thus making sure that the teacher was teaching in line with the designed lesson plans.

Albeit the specific task treatment in each of the two experimental groups varied, the lesson structure tended to remain consistent. Each session typically began with an objective discussion and warm-up, followed by a modeling phase to clarify the task and expected language. This was usually followed by guided practice, then scaffolded practice with reduced support, and finally an independent practice stage. These stages tended to provide a clear and supportive progression for the learners as they engaged with the tasks.

In addition to the shared structure, both groups received an equal number of tasks with comparable time devoted to each activity. Pair and group work were incorporated regularly in both groups to foster collaboration and communication. Feedback opportunities, whether peer-based or teacher-led, were also offered during each session. While the tasks themselves differed in nature, the language learning focus, which tended to be centered on improving communicative skills, remained the same. These shared features were intended to provide a consistent learning environment. The section below provides a detailed description of the activities for each instructional approach.

4.3.1. Maximizing learning opportunities

The following tasks were designed in the MLO group.

4.3.1.1. Information gap activity

Information gap activities encourage learners to engage in meaningful interactive communication by creating a genuine need to interact ([Richards, 2006](#)). In this activity, the learners worked in pairs, each partner receiving different but complementary information needed to complete a task. For example, one partner might have had a map with certain locations marked, while the other had descriptions of those locations. The pair asked and answered questions to exchange details and complete their understanding of the map. By asking the learners to rely on each other for essential information, the activity may have maximized the opportunities for language practice and fostered active participation.



Error correction in this task began with peer feedback as the learners were encouraged to correct each other naturally during the interaction. The teacher monitored the activity by walking around the classroom, listening to the conversations without interrupting the communicative flow. When necessary, she provided recasts and clarification requests to guide the learners toward more accurate language use. At the end of the activity, the teacher offered a brief recap of the common errors observed and provided clarification where needed.

4.3.1.2. Role-play with real-world scenarios

Role-playing activities are highly effective for MLO as they allow learners to practice the language in a controlled, goal-oriented environment (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). In this role-playing activity, the learners were assigned specific roles based on real-world scenarios such as a customer-service agent and a customer or a tourist and a tour guide. Each learner was provided with information specific to their role. The learners used the information to engage in a realistic conversation, adapting their language to fit the context of the role.

Error correction in this task was done in a way that respected its learner-led nature. Since the teacher did not participate in the role-play directly, correction during the task was limited to monitoring and taking notes on common or significant errors. The learners were encouraged to rely on peer feedback when appropriate, offering gentle corrections to each other as part of their interaction. After the role-plays, the teacher provided a brief whole-class feedback, using the examples selected from the observed interactions to clarify the errors.

4.3.1.3. Story completion

Story completion is a collaborative activity in which learners contribute to the development of a story (Li, 2025) and thus maximizes learning opportunities by fostering listening, creativity, and spontaneous language use (Thornbury, 2005). The teacher began a story, and each learner took turns to add a line or two, building on what the previous learner had contributed. The learners were assigned key vocabulary or phrases to incorporate, ensuring that each learner made a unique contribution to the narrative.

During the task, the teacher acted as a facilitator and observer, providing recasts and clarification requests only when errors significantly affected meaning. Fewer critical mistakes were noted and addressed after the activity, allowing the learners to stay focused on idea generation. Moreover, to support story cohesion, the teacher made it clear before the activity that each new sentence should logically follow the one before it, helping the learners to create a unified storyline. If a learner introduced an unrelated idea, the teacher responded supportively and redirected them by saying utterances such as ‘That’s creative! How can we connect that to what just happened in the story?’

4.3.2. Facilitating negotiation interactions

The tasks below were implemented in the FNI group.

4.3.2.1. Debate on a current topic

This activity enhances negotiation skills by requiring learners to understand and address differing perspectives, encouraging them to clarify and refine their arguments (Littlewood, 2004). The chosen topics tended to be general, and the learners had already learned and practiced the related key words. During the debate, the learners were divided into groups representing opposing viewpoints on a relevant topic such as ‘Is it acceptable to test drugs on animals?’ Each group prepared simple arguments to support their position and then participated in a debate, responding to each other’s points and negotiating meaning as they defend their ideas.

Since the primary goal of the task was to express opinions and respond to the opposing viewpoints, correction during the debate itself was kept to a minimum to avoid interrupting the flow of ideas. The teacher monitored the debate silently, taking notes on common errors or unclear expressions that affected communication. Occasionally, if a misunderstanding occurred or a learner struggled to express an idea clearly, the teacher offered clarification requests or prompted self-correction with guiding questions. After the debate, the teacher addressed the selected language issues observed during the discussion.

4.3.2.2. Opinion gap activity

Opinion gap activity encourages learners to express their views, listen to others, and refine their ideas in response to feedback (Nunan, 2004). The learners were presented with an open-ended question such as ‘What should be the most important goal for a school?’ Working in pairs or small groups, they discussed their ideas and worked together to reach a consensus, requiring negotiation of meaning, turn-taking, and compromise.

As the learners engaged in discussions to share and compare their opinions, the teacher primarily acted as a monitor, walking around the classroom, observing the interactions, and taking notes. The learners were encouraged to support and correct one another during the conversations, offering gentle feedback when they noticed mistakes. When the learners faced difficulties or breakdown in communication, the teacher stepped in briefly with clarification requests or gentle prompts to keep the discussion flowing. After the activity, the teacher highlighted some examples from the observed interactions and provided recasts and model corrections for the class to repeat or reformulate.

4.3.2.3. Planning an event

This type of task-based activity emphasizes negotiation interaction by requiring learners to communicate their ideas clearly and work toward a shared goal (Nunan, 2004). In this activity, the learners worked in groups to plan a hypothetical school event. Each group discussed different elements such as the event's theme, budget, and activities. As the learners proposed different ideas, they negotiated, made compromises, and reached consensus on the event details.

Throughout the activity, the teacher adopted a monitoring role, moving around the classroom, listening to the group interactions, and noting down the language errors or areas for improvement. Peer interaction was encouraged, and the learners often supported each other by rephrasing, clarifying, or offering suggestions when misunderstandings occurred. The teacher intervened only when necessary, using clarification requests or gentle prompts to guide the learners back on track without interrupting their process. Following the activity, the teacher addressed the common language issues with recasts and model corrections.

Each of the six tasks described above was intended to immerse the learners in purposeful communication, either by maximizing the language input or by engaging in negotiation. At the conclusion of the intervention, the participants completed the AMTB as the posttest. In addition, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews to support the interpretation of the quantitative results.

V. RESULTS

The statistical analysis conducted in this study comprised descriptive statistics (i.e., mean, standard deviation, skewness, and reliability) and inferential statistics (that is, a one-way analysis of covariance together with its assumptions).

5.1. Participant selection

5.1.1. Descriptive statistics of the KET administration

Following the piloting of the KET (as detailed earlier), the test was administered to 90 learners. The descriptive statistics of this administration were calculated with the mean and standard deviation standing at 51.31 and 17.26, respectively (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the KET administration

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation
KET administration	90	10	81	51.31	17.258
Valid N (listwise)	90				

Furthermore, the reliability of the scores through this administration stood at 0.88 (using Cronbach alpha).

5.1.2. Dividing the participants into two experimental groups

To make sure that the two experimental groups bore no significant difference in terms of their general language proficiency prior to the treatment, the researchers checked whether the mean scores of the two groups on the KET bore any significant difference or not. The descriptive statistics of the scores obtained by these 52 learners (25 in the MLO and 27 in the FNI group) on the KET are presented in Table 2.



Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the two experimental groups' scores on the KET

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation	Skewness
KET MLO	25	38	77	57.31	7.112	-0.212 0.414
KET FNI	27	39	72	55.22	8.608	-0.311 0.421
Valid N (listwise)	31					

As shown, the mean and standard deviation of the MLO group were 57.31 and 7.11, respectively, while those of the FNI group were 55.22 and 8.61, respectively. Furthermore, the skewness ratios of both groups ($-0.212 / 0.414 = -0.512$ and $-0.311 / 0.421 = -0.739$) fell within the acceptable range of ± 1.96 , thus signifying that the distributions in both groups were normal. Therefore, running the parametric independent samples *t*-test was legitimized.

As Table 3 indicates, with the *F* value of 0.667 at the significance level of 0.331 being larger than 0.05, the variances between the two groups were not significantly different. Therefore, the results of the *t*-test with the assumption of homogeneity of the variances were reported here. The results ($t = 0.987, p = 0.212 > 0.05$) indicate that there was no significant difference between the mean KET scores of the two groups at the outset; consequently, the potentially intervening variable of the learners' language proficiency was factored out.

Table 3. Independent samples *t*-test of the mean KET scores of the two experimental groups

	Levene's test for equality of variances		<i>t</i> -test for equality of means						
	<i>F</i>	Sig.	<i>t</i>	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
Equal variances assumed	0.667	0.3331	0.987	50	.212	1.006	1.656	-2.113	5.674
Equal variances not assumed			0.654	49.3	.545	1.801	2.169	-2.78	6.001

5.2. Pretest

Following the KET administration and the establishment of the two experimental groups, the 52 participants sat for the AMTB as the pretest. Table 4 displays the descriptive statistics of these pretest scores. As it can be seen, the mean and standard deviation of the MLO group on the pretest were 94.12 and 20.32, respectively, while those of the FNI group were 91.45 and 19.13, respectively. Furthermore, both sets of scores enjoyed normality ($-0.121 / 0.414 = -0.026$ and $-0.245 / 0.434 = -0.564$). Also, the reliability of the two sets of scores stood at 0.81 and 0.89, using the Cronbach Alpha.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the pretest scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation	Skewness
MLO pretest	25	58	130	94.12	20.321	-0.121 0.414
FNI pretest	27	54	129	91.45	19.013	-0.245 0.421
Valid N (listwise)	25					

5.3. Posttest

Once the treatment in both experimental groups was completed, the AMTB was administered again to both groups as the posttest. Table 5 displays the descriptive statistics of these posttest scores. As it can be seen, the mean and standard deviation of the MLO group on the posttest were 100.68 and 23.11, respectively, while those of the FNI group were 99.77 and 24.36, respectively. Furthermore, both sets of scores were normal ($-0.158 / 0.414 = -0.382$ and $-0.266 / 0.421 = -0.632$). Also, using the Cronbach Alpha, the reliability of the two sets of scores were found to be 0.85 and 0.88,

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of the posttest scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. deviation	Skewness
MLO posttest	25	61	136	100.68	23.111	-0.158 0.414
FNI posttest	27	51	136	99.77	24.356	-0.266 0.421
Valid N (listwise)	25					

5.4. Testing the null hypothesis

In order to test the null hypothesis which was formulated in accordance with the research question, that *is there is no significant difference between the effect of MLO and FNI on EFL learners' motivation*, an ANCOVA was run on both groups' scores on the pre- and posttest.

First, the assumptions for running this parametric test were checked. To begin with, all the sets of scores on the course had normality as demonstrated earlier (Tables 4 and 5). The second procedure was testing the homogeneity of variance for which the Levene's test was run ($F_{(1,50)} = 2.324, p = 0.318 > 0.05$) which showed that the variances were not significantly different. As one covariate was investigated (motivation pretest), the third assumption of the correlation among covariates did not apply in this case. The fourth assumption is linearity. As it can be seen in Figure 1, the general distribution of the scores is almost linear.

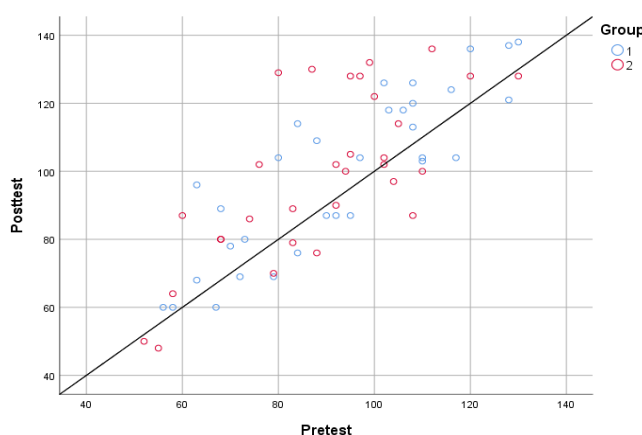


Figure 1. Histogram of the linearity of the scores obtained by the two groups on the AMTB pretest and posttest

The fifth and final assumption is that of homogeneity of regression slopes. Table 6 shows that the interaction (i.e. Group * Pretest) is 0.886, which is larger than 0.05, thus indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes has not been violated in this set of scores.

Table 6. Tests of between-subjects effects (1)

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Corrected model	13432.1tt ^a	3	5566.312	54.198	0.000	0.776
Intercept	714.008	1	324.101	21.664	0.200	0.114
Group	120.130	1	54.133	.119	0.781	0.001
Pretest	32122.878	1	21411.874	67.765	0.000	0.812
Group * Pretest	3.876	1	12.534	0.456	0.886	0.023
Error	24545.11	48	134.34			
Total	35632.010	52				
Corrected total	31267.008	51				

^a. R squared = 0.719 (adjusted R squared = 0.710)

With the above assumptions in place, running an ANCOVA was legitimized. According to Table 7, the AMTB pretest scores (the covariate in the model) were significant ($F = 99.121, p = 0.0001 < 0.05$), thus demonstrating that prior to the treatment, there was a significant difference between the two groups in terms of their motivation. Furthermore, there was a significant relationship between the covariate (the

pretest) and the dependent variable (the posttest) while controlling for the independent variable ($F = 0.987$, $p = 0.331 > 0.05$). Hence, the null hypothesis of the study which stated that there is no significant difference between the impact of maximizing learning opportunities and facilitating negotiation interaction on EFL learners' motivation was not rejected.

Table 7. Tests of between-subjects effects (2)

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean square	<i>F</i>	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Corrected model	11324.452 ^a	2	43575.879	61.113	0.000	0.513
Intercept	765.989	1	459.007	4.567	0.086	0.135
Pretest	34561.778	1	13565.678	99.121	0.000	0.629
Group	334.335	1	675.890	0.987	0.331	0.010
Error	12123.456	60	354.675			
Total	68908.887	52				
Corrected total	45468.991	51				

^a. R squared = 0.765 (adjusted R squared = 0.715)

VI. DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrated that both MLO and FNI positively affected EFL learners' motivation with no statistically significant difference found between the two experimental groups in terms of their motivational gains. These findings are consistent with the general understanding in the field that learner motivation is influenced by a complex interplay of classroom factors including task design, teacher support, and opportunities for meaningful engagement (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007; Ushioda, 2011). Both macro-strategies of MLO and FNI share a learner-centered foundation, emphasizing engagement, interaction, and autonomy, which have long been recognized as critical components of motivation (Dörnyei, 2001; Lamb, 2017). Therefore, it is perhaps not unexpected that the two approaches led to similar outcomes in this study.

At an empirical level, the outcome is also aligned with those reported by Ellis (2015) and Kumaravadivelu (2003) who suggested that effective classroom practices depend more on the quality of interaction and the learning opportunities created rather than on the specific label of the instructional approach. In both groups, the learners were actively engaged in tasks that encouraged meaning-making, collaboration, and reflection which, according to Mackey and Gass (2016), contribute significantly to motivation through increased communicative confidence.

The result of this study regarding the effectiveness of FNI in enhancing learners' motivation is very much congruent with what Lamb and Wedell (2015) and Kormos and Csizér (2014) reported in their studies. In addition, Noels et al. (2019) and McTighe (2005) presented the same finding on how FNI contributes to learners' motivation. As for the positive effect of MLO on motivation, the outcome of this research converges with the reporting of a number of studies including Reinders and Benson (2021), Ellis (2019), Dörnyei and Murphey (2003), Csizér and Kormos (2009), and MacIntyre et al. (2016).

At a theoretical level, the findings reported in this study align with the concept of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2020) as, in effect, individuals feel more motivated to learn when they play an active role in negotiated interaction and, thus, bear more control over their learning. This very conceptualization is asserted by quite a number of scholars (e.g., Al-Hoorie et al., 2022; Chio et al., 2026; Dhiman et al., 2024; Jenö et al., 2026).

Moreover, the conclusion of this study highlights that, beyond the labelling of a teaching method, what actually matters is the quality and mechanism of the classroom intervention. While MLO and FNI have been defined as distinct pedagogical procedures in the ELT literature (Ellis, 2021), their joint emphasis on providing the pretext for interaction is perhaps the driver at work when it comes to both methods' positive contribution to motivating learners. And this equation arguably lies at the heart of post-method pedagogy in that the pivotal success factor in the classroom may transcend the mere nomenclature, classifications, and sub-classifications attached to the method and, thus, circle around what the teacher actually does to involve and engage learners in the learning process.

The aforesaid proposition is perhaps attested by the learners themselves in both the FNI and MLO experimental groups who reported that many of the activities felt like games rather than formal lessons, thereby motivating them to participate actively. Indeed, during the post-treatment interviews, one learner emphasized the supportive nature of the tasks as she recalled feeling frustrated at the beginning due to being the youngest person in class. Accordingly, she asserted that the tasks facilitated the process of learning the new vocabulary and grammar through practicing with classmates very much like a game. This sense of playfulness and enjoyment appeared to reduce anxiety and increase engagement, leading the learners to participate more freely. Consequently, the fun and game-like nature of the tasks might have contributed to the similar motivational outcomes across the two groups as both approaches provided almost equally enjoyable and interactive experiences. In effect, most of the interviewed participants reported that completing the tasks enhanced their confidence, reduced stress, and increased motivation to speak in English. One learner reflected that she was a bit stressed at the outset but the classroom felt friendly as nobody laughed at each other's mistakes, thus enabling her to feel more confident to share her ideas. Again, seeing how much she improved made her more motivated to participate.

In this respect, a few learners reported that they experienced stress at the beginning of the term due to unfamiliarity with the class or fear of mistakes. However, the combination of interactive activities and peer collaboration reduced these concerns. One learner noted during the interview that she was stressed because it was her first term at the language school and she had no friends. But the stress subsided as the class atmosphere was congenial and she soon learned that making mistakes was part of learning and the activities felt like games. Another learner stated that he was a bit shy and never tried speaking English at home in front of his parents or at school; nevertheless, the English class was like an icebreaker for him as he could talk more and feel more motivated to speak with his friends. He further noted that the teacher's positive feedback and supportive reactions encouraged participation by openly saying that, at first, he was frightened to speak but became more confident when he realized that making mistakes was acceptable. To this end, the students' participation in interactive and meaningful tasks likely fostered a sense of ownership and personal involvement which, as [McTighe \(2005\)](#) and [Ushioda \(2020\)](#) emphasize, are essential for sustaining motivation.

The lack of significant difference between MLO and FNI may also be explained by their overlapping principles. As described by [Kumaravadivelu \(2007\)](#) and [Lee \(2019\)](#), MLO seeks to create conditions where learners can engage in authentic and personalized tasks while FNI, according to [Li \(2025\)](#), promotes negotiation and collaboration through communicative interaction. Both frameworks encouraged the learners to take active roles in constructing knowledge, receive timely feedback, and co-construct meaning, all of which enhance motivation ([Dewi, 2023](#); [Hattie & Timperley, 2007](#); [Reinders & Wattana, 2015](#); [Zhao & Qin, 2021](#)). Thus, both macro-strategies may have activated similar motivational processes, resulting in comparable levels of improvement. This is indeed evident as the majority of the learners emphasized the real-world applicability of the tasks. For example, one student stated that she really enjoyed the activity where she was a chef in a restaurant and offered food to her classmates as it felt like a real situation. She said that she wanted to go abroad one day and start a food court and that this activity was like practice for her future job.

Furthermore, the present findings support the claims made by [Aksoy \(2023\)](#) who found that, when teachers adopt a facilitative rather than directive role, learners tend to feel more empowered and motivated. Both MLO and FNI, by design, require the teacher to function as a facilitator rather than a transmitter of knowledge. Consequently, both groups may have benefited from this shift in classroom dynamics which encouraged learner agency and collaboration, namely the two key drivers of sustained motivation ([Ushioda, 2020](#)). Accordingly, quite a number of learners reported that this facilitative role of the teacher juxtaposed with the interactive activities increased both confidence and motivation with one learner remarking that, before this term, he just memorized grammar and vocabulary, whereas now he was using language in real contexts.

The planning activities may have also contributed to the learners' sense of agency and ability to express ideas. One participant explained that he really enjoyed planning the events, especially the picnic as he liked sharing his ideas and making decisions with his friends; all this happened through talking in English. Another student highlighted that, when he was completing the tasks, he could see his improvement by

being better than he thought he was. This realization of course made him more eager to learn English and talk more.

Generally speaking, the learners in the MLO group reported that the tasks provided a relaxed, engaging environment that promoted learning, reduced anxiety, and encouraged participation. The learners generally expressed positive attitudes towards the activities, emphasizing enjoyment, increasing motivation, and the opportunity to actively participate in English. One such learner stated that her favorite activity was when the teacher gave them one line of a story and they had to add another line and subsequently shared their lines one by one, thus making a story in class with the other learners. She found this activity most motivating.

Similarly, the learners in the FNI group expressed positive attitudes towards the interactive and opinion-gap activities, highlighting the practical nature of the tasks and the supportive classroom environment. These learners noted that they benefited from the practical and interactive nature of the tasks which increased their motivation, confidence, and ability to use English in real-life contexts, even if a few of them preferred more traditional learning methods.

In conclusion, this study corroborates prior research findings by emphasizing that motivation can be effectively fostered through learner-centered, interactive, and meaning-oriented classroom practices (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008; Reinders & Benson, 2021). As no significant difference was detected between the effects of MLO and FNI, the positive impact of both approaches on learners' motivation underscored their pedagogical value. The results suggest that teachers may flexibly select either strategy based on their learners' needs, institutional constraints, and teaching styles, as both have the potential to create an engaging and motivating classroom atmosphere.

VII. Conclusion and implications

As noted earlier, the statistical analysis conducted in this study delineated that there was no significant difference between the impact of MLO and FNI on EFL learners' motivation. The findings of the study may offer some practical implications for EFL teachers regarding the use of MLO and FNI in the classroom. Teachers could adopt either strategy depending on contextual factors, available resources, and personal teaching style as the findings suggest that both approaches appear to produce comparable motivational gains. To do so, they could also take into account the unique characteristics of the learners.

First and foremost, the study suggests that motivation may not depend solely on the choice of the instructional strategy. Rather, the quality of classroom interaction, the opportunities for meaningful participation, and the supportive role of the teacher could be the key factors influencing motivation. Both MLO and FNI seemed to encourage meaning-focused communication, providing learners with opportunities to use English in purposeful contexts. Interactive and collaborative task design may, therefore, be particularly important as tasks that foster negotiation, meaning-making, and authentic communication could facilitate higher levels of learner engagement.

Secondly, the study highlights the potential importance of creating enjoyable and low-anxiety learning environments. Many learners indicated that classroom tasks felt like fun and were interactive, which seemed to reduce performance anxiety and encourage greater participation. This game-like and enjoyable quality could contribute to communicative confidence and willingness to take risks; they are the factors that may enhance intrinsic motivation. While enjoyment alone might not guarantee sustained motivation, it seems to play an important complementary role in promoting active engagement.

Thirdly, the findings may reinforce the potential value of learner agency and autonomy. When learners are permitted to negotiate, ask questions, express ideas, and influence the direction of classroom interaction, they may feel more responsible for their learning outcomes. Both groups appeared to benefit from a facilitative teaching style as observed in classroom practice and confirmed through interview data, where the learners expressed appreciation for opportunities to make choices and contribute ideas. Therefore, teachers' adopting a role as facilitators rather than didactic or 'oppressive' lecturers, to borrow the memorable Freirian term, could support learner independence, promote intrinsic motivation, and foster a sense of ownership over the learning process. However, it should be noted that some learners might require more structured guidance initially, suggesting the need for a flexible and responsive approach.

Furthermore, continuous feedback and reflective practices might be particularly beneficial. The learners in this study responded positively to the tasks where the teacher provided timely and constructive feedback, noting that it helped them recognize their progress and areas needing improvement. Feedback could reinforce motivation by fostering a sense of achievement and encouraging continued effort. Nevertheless, its effectiveness might vary depending on learners' responsiveness, the complexity of tasks, or prior familiarity with the activities thereby indicating that feedback may need to be carefully tailored to learners' individual needs.

The findings of this study may likewise be informative for syllabus designers. Curricula could incorporate communicative tasks that align with the principles of MLO and FNI, allowing learners to negotiate meaning and capitalize on spontaneous learning opportunities. Moreover, syllabi may allow flexibility in instructional implementation so teachers can adapt activities rather than follow rigid procedures. To this end, motivational factors such as autonomy support, personalization, and social interaction may be embedded as core design principles rather than supplementary components.

Drawing on the findings of the present study conducted amidst a number of limitations, the following suggestions are proposed for future research in this area. To begin with, the present study was conducted with an unequal distribution of the male and female participants, which may have affected the balance of the sample. To improve the generalizability of future research, it is suggested that similar studies be conducted with an approximately equal number of male and female learners. Next, future research could investigate the effects of MLO and FNI on different age groups. While the present study involved learners aged 12 to 18, future studies could examine young learners or adult learners to determine whether age-related factors influence the impact of these instructional approaches on motivation or not. At the same time, the aforesaid age group comprises adolescents, teenagers, and young adults, that is, three diverse categories with perhaps different degrees of cognitive and emotional development; future studies could focus on each age category to reduce any possible intervening effect.

Another direction for future research could be to explore the impact of using a broader range of activities within each instructional approach. Moreover, albeit the present study incorporated both quantitative data and qualitative support through interviews, future research may benefit from employing a more comprehensive mixed-methods design in which qualitative and quantitative data are systematically integrated. Last but not least, future studies could investigate the long-term effects of MLO and FNI by adopting longitudinal research designs. Examining motivational changes over an extended period may reveal delayed or cumulative effects that are not immediately observable within a single semester.

AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES

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