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# Investigating the Phenomenon of Directed Motivational Current (DMC) in EFL Learners: A Case Study on How DMC Works for ESP Learners

Aswin Abbas
State Makassar University, South Sulawesi, Indonesia
*aswinabbas86@gmail.com*

## Abstract:

Directed Motivational Current (DMC), or DMCs, is a new theory in the field of applied linguistics introduced by Dornyei and his colleagues (2015). Although research on DMC in second language acquisition (L2) has advanced recently, systematic analysis of EFL learners remains insufficient. In this context, through an activity-theoretic lens and the novelty of this theory, this study examined how EFL learners experience the key aspects of DMC. The three students identified as having DMC took part in this research. Data were gathered through observations and semi-structured interviews. The results revealed that when EFL learners experience DMC, they engage with all the core elements of DMC, including goals and vision, triggering factors, salient facilitative structures, and positivity emotionality. Further, personalized learning experiences, supportive learning environments, and ongoing self-reflection were crucial for maintaining motivation and achieving language proficiency. Students who actively monitor their progress, celebrate their achievements, and manage their time and resources effectively demonstrate a greater capacity for sustained engagement and successful language acquisition. These results emphasise that while everyone is motivated, not all experience DMC. EFL learners illustrate this, indicating a crucial opportunity to develop and explore how DMC affects English learning.

**Keywords**: Directed Motivational Current; English Foreign Language; English for Specific Purposes

## INTRODUCTION

Motivation plays an essential role in acquiring language (Ushioda, 2011). Motivation to learn English as a foreign language (EFL) is a crucial determinant of student performance, particularly in contexts that need specialised abilities such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Factors such as the intricacy of technical terminology, insufficient exposure to genuine contexts, professional aspirations, and the perceived relevance of materials frequently undermine sustained motivation (Kormos & Csizér, 2014). Nonetheless, a significant proportion of EFL learners encounter difficulties in sustaining motivation during their language acquisition process. Directed motivational currents (DMC) are recognised as potent influences that motivate learners and propel them

toward goal attainment (Karimi & Parsamajd, 2024). The theory of Directed Motivational Currents (DMC) provides a dynamic framework for comprehending this phenomenon, highlighting that motivation is not static but rather fluctuates and can be influenced by intricate interactions among explicit objectives, positive emotional experiences, social support, learning autonomy, and contextual stimuli. It represents an intense, motivational drive or surge that can stimulate and sustain long-term behaviours, such as acquiring a second language (Dörnyei et al., 2016; Dörnyei et al., 2015).

Within the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) framework, DMC, a novel concept introduced by Dörnyei et al. (2016), Henry (2019), and Henry et al. (2015) emerges as a robust motivational force propelled by pragmatic requirements. For instance, driven engineering students attain proficiency in English to comprehend software documentation or engage in international initiatives. Research from Jahedizadeh & Al-Hoorie (2021) indicates that career-oriented objectives (e.g., becoming a multinational engineer) and recognition of the necessity for language proficiency are critical determinants in eliciting DMC. The DMC framework adopts a socio-dynamic perspective, wherein learner motivation, individual learner characteristics, the learning task, and the specific learning situation are viewed as dynamically interconnected. Considering the DMC framework's novelty, its descriptions are predominantly theoretical (Peng & Phakiti, 2022).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### DMC Frameworks

DMC is an exceptional motivational surge characterized by goal/vision-orientedness, a salient facilitative structure, positive emotionality, and generating parameters (Al-Hoorie, 2017; Dörnyei, Ibrahim, et al., 2014; Dörnyei, Muir, et al., 2014; Muir & Dörnyei, 2013). A vision in the case of a DMC is so vivid that learners can imagine themselves achieving their future projects (Ibrahim, 2016a). A salient facilitative structure provides a distinctive pathway that facilitates the establishment of behavioral routines to sustain the DMC's ongoing intensive motivation until achieving the desired goal (Dörnyei et al., 2016). Positive emotionality is the enjoyment of getting closer to the end goal (Henry et al., 2015). The generating parameters are triggers for a DMC; these situations, either positive or negative, push the learners to react emotionally to achieve a significant goal (Ibrahim, 2017). A DMC has a clear, well-defined target goal for the individual's

motivation and energy investment to help students achieve their wants, like mastering English; in other words, those caught up in a DMC use all their resources to achieve a well-defined target goal (Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2023). However, the sustainability of this motivation depends on structural support, such as access to contextual ESP materials (Hyland, 2022) and learning autonomy that allows students to tailor learning strategies to their specific needs. (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011)

Furthermore, the emotional dimension of DMC, such as the sense of pride when successfully applying technical vocabulary or the satisfaction of completing a simulation project, strengthens the commitment to learning. This shows a core of DMC, which is positive emotionality (Peng & Phakiti, 2022). The challenge lies in how educators can design an ESP curriculum that meets academic needs and creates continuous motivation through meaningful tasks that connect to students' professional identities (Henry, 2020). A deep understanding of the mechanisms of DMC in ESP is key to transforming situational motivation into lasting language competencies.

Learning ESP requires high motivation due to its specific and often complex nature. EFL students studying ESP face additional challenges in mastering English related to their field of study, such as technical terminology and unique professional contexts. Research shows that sustained motivation is essential for the success of language learning, especially in the context of ESP, where students must be able to apply their language skills in real-world situations; specific needs are also an essential concern of ESP. (Basturkmen, H. *(2010). Developing Courses in English for Specific Purposes. Cambridge University Press, n.d.)*

Previous research has explored motivation in language learning, including EFL, from various perspectives. Theories such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000) highlight the importance of internal and external factors in motivating students. In contrast, goal theory (Locke & Latham, 2002) shows how clear goals can improve learning performance and commitment. In addition, research on motivation in the context of EFL has identified various factors influencing student motivation, including social context, teacher support, and the relevance of learning materials (Ushioda, 2011).

However, studies that specifically explore the phenomenon of DMC in the context of EFL are still limited. The DMC theory provides a strong theoretical framework,

explaining how motivation can be directed and maintained through positive experiences, facilitative structure, and social support. Some early studies suggest that DMC can be essential in increasing student engagement in language learning. Still, this study has not explicitly linked DMC to specific needs in ESP. Research by Jahedizadeh and Al-Hoorie (2021) and Gümüş and MuiR (2020) highlights the need for more empirical studies to understand how DMC operates in particular contexts such as ESP. Research by Muir (2020) suggests that understanding the dynamics of DMC can help educators design more effective interventions to increase student motivation. The study's findings of Zarrinabadi and Khodarahmi (2023) indicated that the fundamental components of the DMCs were identifiable within the Iranian EFL context. This illustrates that the DMC construct is a valid and reliable framework for understanding the profound motivating experiences of language learners. To meet this, the research question was formulated:

RQ1.   How do the EFL students experience DMC in learning ESP?

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study utilised qualitative research with a case study to examine the phenomenon under study. The qualitative design describes human experiences based on what people see, think, feel, remember, judge, and do (Creswell, J. W., 2017). . Furthermore, Creswell (2013) it emphasises that qualitative research is essential to understand the complexity of problems that quantitative data cannot adequately explain. The research involves a rich, flexible, and contextual interpretive process, allowing researchers to dig deep insights into the participants' experiences. Most DMC studies use a qualitative design (Henry et al., 2015; Zarrinabadi & Tavakoli, 2017; Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2023).

### Participants

This research takes place in Insitut Teknologi Gamalama (INTEG), a vocational higher college and private University located in the City of Ternate, North Maluku, Indonesia. The participants' targets are students from two majors: Informatics and Computer Engineering. Based on preliminary data from Campus Administration Staff, there are currently 140 active students in both majors, and they will be the ones who will receive questionnaires later. Anyone with DMC experience is the researcher who will look at it.

Not all motivational experiences will have the energy of DMCs (Zarrinabadi et al., 2019; Henry et al., 2015; Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2024). They may have a motive, but they do not have a DMC. The challenges and limitations in getting participants identified as experiencing DMC are also felt by Karimi & Parsamajd (2024), Zarrinabadi & Tavakoli (2017), Rasman (2021), Sak (2019), and Murillo-Miranda (2019). Therefore, as done previously by some researchers, to enhance the potential of identifying students with a DMC-type experience, this study adopted a systematic participant sampling technique to evaluate the presence of DMC among EFL students' learning ESP.

**Instruments**

This research used a single instrument to cover the RQs: a Semi-Structured Interview. The Semi-structured interview was obtained from Zarrinabadi et al. (2019) and Zarrinabadi and Khodarahmi (2024). It is applied to collect data on how EFL students experience DMC. This instrument is one of the most commonly used methods in qualitative inquiry and offers researchers significant latitude to adjust courses as needed (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

**Data Collection Procedures**

Several things need to be considered in the process of collecting data. According to Saldaña (2013) those processes, settings involve selecting participants or sites to understand the research problem and question, rather than random sampling or many locations. Qualitative interviews involve several methods, such as in-person, telephone, or focus group interviews, with some documents supported, such as audiovisual, book notes, pen, and recording. However, this study focuses on face-to-face interviews. In short, the procedures were requesting official approval from INTEG, requesting confirmation from two English lecturers to obtain their authorization for providing sample recommendations, sharing instruments, an open-ended instrument from Muir (2016) to help the researcher redetermine and strengthen the sample, analysing the result if the questionnaire and determining the sample, conducting an interview process started by semi-structured interview simultaneously, 12 questions given, about 30 – 60 minutes per person, based on Creswell (2013).

**Data Analysis Procedures**

This study's data analysis procedure followed Saldaña and Omasta (2018) begins with a verbatim interview transcription to understand the context. The researcher then read the data repeatedly to familiarize themselves and record the initial impressions. After that, the researchers grouped the codes into thematic categories through the second coding cycle to find the appropriate data linked to the theory. Memoing is done to record reflections and ideas. The main themes are identified, and validation is done through member checking and triangulation. Finally, the findings are connected to relevant DMC theories to provide a deeper context.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The present study explores how EFL students experience Directed Motivational Currents (DMC) in the context of learning English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly for computer-related fields. The findings reveal that the DMC experience is dynamic and multifaceted, shaped by a blend of personal goals, triggering events, supportive structures, and positive emotional experiences.

**Interplay of DMC Components in ESP Learning**

The results align closely with Dörnyei et al.'s (2016) conceptualization of DMC as a powerful motivational surge characterized by a clear vision, triggering factors, facilitative structures, and positive emotionality. These are the core of DMC found in students' experience.

In this study, students' goals, such as becoming a graphic designer or cybersecurity expert, served as strong motivational visions, echoing Dörnyei and Ushioda's (2011) emphasis on the importance of future self-guides in sustaining long-term motivation. These goals provided direction and a sense of purpose, which previous research has shown to be crucial for the emergence of DMC (Muir & Dörnyei, 2013). Like Ridho, who aims to become a skilled graphic designer, Aulia aims to master her English vocabulary and speaking skills; Azilah aspires to excel in cybersecurity and work in a tech company.

> Ridho: ... I want to be a graphic designer, and I can be great there. There are also many English terms.
>
> Aulia: … expand knowledge of common vocabulary and phrases, improve English-language dialogue skills.

> Azilah: … is to become an expert in cybersecurity and work in a technology company.

In addition, when observing how students determine their goals, it has been found that the goals they choose depend on individual factors and their future professional careers. These goals encompass their development of English language skills and engineering skills relevant to their current field of study.

> Ridho: I decided that this was my goal after college, and was supported by my parents

> Aulia: … My personal goal is to practice independently with the help of apps, Google, and peer support.

This statement seeks to explore how they determine their English learning goals. Several factors influenced this decision, including parental support, individual abilities, deep dreams, a passion for the English language, and a curiosity about technology.

Key factors, including impactful early experiences with English via native speakers or interactive classroom experiences, are vital for starting the DMC process. This aligns with Henry et al. (2015), who emphasized the importance of strong motivational triggers in sparking DMC episodes in language learners. Ridho, the first participant, is driven to expand his English vocabulary because he often encounters English terminology in his studies. He is confident that improving his English abilities will enhance his career opportunities in the technology sector.

> Ridho: … Many courses have mostly English or computer materials. So, I deepened my English so that I could get career opportunities in the field of technology. This is the most motivating thing.

Ridho's experience with DMC is connected to his participation in competitions. He feels motivated during English for Computers while competing in campus design events. The abundance of English terms fuels his curiosity and desire to learn. This experience enhances students' interest in English, reinforcing their motivation to study further. On-campus design competitions foster a challenging environment; interactions with English-speaking peers provide a practical language context.

> Ridho: ... There are many terms when participating in the competition on campus, so it becomes more interesting because of the large number of English words used.

The presence of salient facilitative structures, including individualized strategies and digital resources, mirrors the findings of Zarrinabadi et al. (2021), who observed that supportive learning environments and accessible resources help students maintain momentum in their language learning journeys.

Aulia uses technology, Google Translate, and YouTube tutorials to visualize and achieve their goals. This kind of activity is categorized as the facilitative structure at DMC. Aulia often watches video tutorials and learns to use an English dictionary as her main activity to achieve her English learning goals. Access to these resources allows her to study independently and achieve her learning goals.

> Aulia: I opened it and asked for Google Translate help, watched the tutorial on YouTube

Azilah visualizes her goal. She is studying harder and updating her knowledge in the field of technology. This statement shows a facilitative structure. Students experience DMC by setting a clear strategy and committing to studying harder. This decision is supported by the desire to constantly update knowledge, which may be influenced by external factors such as the educational environment and social support.

> Azilah: Study harder, and renew knowledge about technological developments.

The final core positive emotionality, another key component of DMC, was evident in students' enjoyment of English through music, films, and engaging classroom experiences. This supports Dörnyei's (2019) argument that positive affect sustains engagement and enhances the overall learning experience, rewarding and self-reinforcing the motivational current.

Ridho notes that DMC enables him to stay focused and motivated by providing clear goals and structured pathways for his learning, resulting in a directed and efficient study process. These clear goals and structured pathways are essential.

> Ridho: ... DMC helps me stay focused, have clear goals, and provide a structured path.

Meanwhile, Aulia mentions that having DMC influences her enthusiasm and motivation, allowing her to learn freely and at her own pace, anywhere and anytime. Flexible learning and sustained motivation: DMC positively influences Aulia's motivation and involvement in learning English for computers. The flexibility provided by DMC

allows students to learn freely, both in terms of time and place, which strengthens their enthusiasm and motivation.

> Aulia: ... DMC encourages creativity and motivation, allowing for free and flexible learning.

Azilah finds learning English challenging and enjoyable, even though she has liked it since junior high school. She appreciates the interest and challenge of acquiring a new language, particularly the vocabulary, which keeps her motivated and engaged. This shows that viewing language learning as a fun and stimulating activity can sustain motivation. She has been deeply interested in English from the start and has maintained her enthusiasm up to now.

> Azilah: My experience of learning English was challenging and exciting, sir. Kind of, there is a new vocabulary that needs to be learned. I have loved English since junior high school, and I immediately liked it the first time I got to speak it.

Their experiences show that personal interest and emotional engagement can greatly motivate language learning. Enjoyable activities also play a vital role in enhancing language skills. The motivation stemming from a passion for Western music and film creates a consistent drive to learn English. This motivation grows during her college years, highlighting how personal interests and external influences can boost language acquisition. Additionally, they practice English through informal methods, such as listening to English songs and watching Western movies. These activities make learning enjoyable and help them naturally acquire vocabulary. This also influences the presence of the four cores that DMC encounters. It all began with this positive experience.

This section highlights that Directed Motivational Current (DMC) significantly influences students' motivation and engagement in learning computer English vocabulary. Students reported that DMC helps them stay focused and motivated by offering clear goals, structured pathways, and a supportive learning environment. This framework enables students to learn efficiently and effectively, enhancing their overall engagement and enthusiasm. Therefore, the researcher argues that DMC creates optimal conditions for boosting motivation and engagement in learning English related to computers. Clear goals, supportive structures, positive feedback, and intense emotional experiences are essential factors that promote a strong flow of motivation.

**The Role of Early Motivational Encounters**

The research highlights the crucial impact of early motivational experiences on developing DMC. Those who encountered English at an early stage, be it through media, schooling, or interacting with native speakers, tended to establish a robust motivational foundation. This aligns with Ushioda's (2013) findings, which indicate that positive early interactions with the target language can ignite curiosity and cultivate a long-standing interest, setting the stage for significant motivational experiences in the future.

**Sustaining Motivation in ESP Contexts**

A notable insight from this research is the importance of clear objectives, well-defined triggers, and nurturing environments in sustaining DMC within ESP learning. Students who could connect their English learning to specific academic or career goals demonstrated impressive commitment and enthusiasm, reflecting the goal-oriented nature of DMC described by Dörnyei et al. (2016). The ESP context, focusing on practical and professional applications, amplifies the relevance and immediacy of students' goals, thereby strengthening their motivational currents (Basturkmen, 2010; Hyland, 2013).

Based on the interviews, students' experiences with English learning vary and are influenced by different situations and conditions. The first participant, Ridho, became interested in English during elementary school. His interest grew with the arrival of a native speaker at his school to teach and offer a course. This early exposure and interaction with native speakers played a crucial role in shaping his motivation and establishing a strong foundation for his learning journey.

> Ridho: I first learned and liked English when I was in elementary school (SD), grades 5 to 6. At that time, several people from abroad came to school to open an English course, so I took the time to participate. I participated for approximately two years.

Like Ridho, Aulia also initially learned English during her vocational high school years and took an English course. However, she still encounters challenges in learning, particularly with vocabulary. She overcame these obstacles through hard work and support from her lecturers and friends. This underscores the importance of a supportive learning environment in maintaining motivation.

Aulia: I have experience discussing English since I was in the 2nd grade of the Vocational High School (SMK). I once took a course, but after entering college, I stopped. Before college, English vocabulary was the most difficult for me.

The study shows that DMC among EFL-ESP learners is a dynamic process influenced by personal aspirations, early experiences, and nurturing learning environments. This understanding provides important guidance for educators aiming to promote lasting motivation in language learners, especially in specialized or vocational contexts.

## CONCLUSION

These findings contribute to a growing body of literature on DMC in language learning by illustrating how EFL students in ESP settings experience and maintain intense motivational episodes. The results pertain to the four core areas involved in students' experiences in learning ESP. Thus, they support and expand upon previous research by highlighting the interplay between personal vision, triggering events, supportive structures, and positive emotional experiences. Additionally, they suggest that ESP contexts, with their clear professional pathways, may be particularly conducive to the development of DMC.

Furthermore, the students' experiences indicate that learning English vocabulary related to computers is a multifaceted process shaped by practical needs, personal interests, supportive tools, emotional engagement, and the joy of learning. Each student's journey illustrates a dynamic interaction between motivation and effective learning strategies, resulting in the successful acquisition of technical vocabulary.

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