

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

Language learning is a dynamic and socially influenced process. Motivation, anxiety, and self-perception are crucial factors that influence language learning, particularly when learners face the challenge of perceived linguistic deficiency. The way learners emotionally respond to these challenges, whether through anxiety, boredom, or enjoyment, affects their engagement and persistence in learning. Recent studies have begun to explore the complex relationship between emotions, self-perception, and motivation, shedding light on how these factors shape learners' strategies and overall success in language learning.

These previous studies have contributed to a growing body of research that investigates the interplay between emotion, motivation, and self-perception in second or foreign language acquisition. For example, Ryan and Deci (2020) applied Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to illustrate how learners' motivation is contingent on the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. They found that when learners perceive themselves as competent and feel supported within their learning environment, they tend to exhibit higher levels of intrinsic motivation and persistence.

Conversely, when learners perceive themselves as lacking competence, often due to linguistic deficiencies, they experience heightened anxiety, which can inhibit motivation and performance.

Building on this, Mahadi and Jafari (2021) examined the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Their findings suggest that learners who are intrinsically motivated, driven by a genuine interest or internal desire to master a language, are generally more resilient and successful in their language acquisition. In contrast, extrinsically motivated learners, whose efforts are driven by external rewards or pressures, are more likely to experience motivational decline over time, particularly when they face repeated setbacks or perceive themselves as underperforming.

The emotional dimension of language learning has also been a focal point of recent empirical studies. For instance, Dewaele and Pavelescu (2021) explored how emotions such as anxiety and enjoyment influence learners' participation in language learning. Their study showed that negative emotions can result in avoidance behaviors, reduced classroom interaction, and cognitive overload, while positive emotions promote engagement, creativity, and sustained effort. This indicates that learners who perceive themselves as linguistically deficient may either withdraw due to anxiety or be motivated to improve, depending on how they emotionally frame their experience.

Similarly, Li and Wei (2022) found that anxiety and boredom were significantly associated with lower language proficiency, whereas enjoyment

was correlated with higher levels of motivation, better learning outcomes, and more strategic engagement. Their study reinforces the argument that emotional responses to perceived linguistic inadequacy play a pivotal role in shaping learners' behavioral and cognitive responses, including whether they persist through challenges or disengage.

In another study, Dewaele, Saito, and Halimi (2022) emphasized the protective function of enjoyment in language learning. They concluded that learners who derive enjoyment from the learning process are more likely to develop adaptive learning strategies, remain motivated despite difficulties, and demonstrate greater resilience in the face of linguistic challenges. These findings support the emerging consensus that emotional well-being is not merely an outcome of successful language learning but a core component of the learning process itself.

To contextualize these findings within a broader philosophical and ethical framework, it is useful to consider relevant spiritual insights, particularly from Islamic teachings, which underscore the importance of self-initiative and internal transformation. This concept is powerfully articulated in Surah Ar-Ra'd (13:11) of the Qur'an:

لَهُ مُعَقِّبَاتٌ مِّنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ يَحْفَظُونَهُ، مَن أَمَرَ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمْ ۗ وَإِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ

سُوًّا فَلَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِّن دُونِهِ مِن وَالٍ ﴿١١﴾

This verse can be interpreted as a theological affirmation of the agency and responsibility of the individual in initiating personal transformation. The idea that meaningful change whether spiritual, psychological, or educational, must begin from within is consistent with the empirical evidence outlined above. Just as learners must internally reframe their perceptions of deficiency and cultivate positive emotional states and motivation, the verse implies that external improvement is contingent upon inner change. Thus, the integration of this spiritual principle provides not only an ethical anchor but also a holistic perspective that aligns with modern theories of learner autonomy and motivation (Guay, 2023).

Despite the progress in this area of research, there remains a significant gap in exploring how learners specifically interpret and respond to their perceived linguistic deficiencies. While some learners may view these deficiencies as a challenge to be overcome, prompting increased effort and strategy use, others may experience demotivation, fear of failure, and eventual withdrawal from the learning process (Wallace, Leong, 2020). Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by exploring whether learners internalize linguistic deficiency as a source of motivational drive or psychological burden. In doing so, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how self-perception, emotional response, and spiritual insight collectively shape learners' persistence and success in language learning (Ryan, Deci 2020).

B. Definition of Key Terms

1. **Perceived Linguistic Deficiency.** Perceived linguistic deficiency refers to a learner's belief that their language skills are inadequate compared to their peers (Graham, 2022). This perception can arise from difficulties in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, or fluency, often leading to anxiety and self-doubt (Wang et al., 2021). In this study, perceived linguistic deficiency specifically relates to how learners experience the feeling of falling behind in language learning and how this perception influences their motivation and learning strategies.
2. **Language Learning Motivation.** Language learning motivation refers to the internal and external factors that encourage learners to initiate, sustain, and direct their efforts in learning a language (Ryan, Deci, 2020). It determines the extent to which learners are willing to invest time, effort, and persistence in achieving their language learning goals despite encountering various challenges (Mahadi, Jafari, 2012). In this study, language learning motivation refers to learners' willingness to continue learning English despite experiencing feelings of falling behind and the extent to which these experiences encourage or discourage their engagement in the language learning process.

3. **Self Determination Theory.** Self-Determination Theory is a psychological theory that explains human motivation that is influenced by the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to learners' sense of control over their own learning, competence refers to learners' belief in their ability to successfully perform learning tasks, and relatedness refers to learners' sense of connection and belonging with others (Ryan, Deci, 2020). In this study, Self-Determination Theory serves as the theoretical framework for explaining how perceived linguistic deficiency influences learners' language learning motivation and learning strategies, particularly in understanding how the fulfillment of these psychological needs helps learners cope with feelings of falling behind.

C. Research Questions

1. How do language learners experience the feeling of falling behind in understanding certain aspects of language compared to their peers?
2. How does the feeling of falling behind affect learner's motivation and what strategies they use in language learning?

D. Objectives of Study

This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of how English language learners experience the feeling of falling behind in language learning and how they respond to such experiences. Specifically, this study aims:

1. To explore learners' experiences and emotional responses toward the feeling of falling behind compared to their peers.
2. To examine how the perception of falling behind influences learners' motivation and learning strategies through the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (SDT).

E. Significance of Study

This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of English language learning, particularly in understanding learners' experiences of feeling left behind in language learning.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the existing literature by providing a deeper understanding of perceived linguistic deficiency as a psychological and motivational experience among EFL learners. While previous studies have extensively discussed motivation, anxiety, and self-perceived competence as separate constructs, this study specifically examines

how learners experience the feeling of falling behind and how they respond to it emotionally, motivationally, and behaviorally. In addition, this study enriches the application of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by demonstrating how the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness influence learners' motivation when they perceive themselves as less capable than their peers.

Practically, this study is expected to provide insights for English educators in creating more supportive and learner-centered classroom environments. By understanding that feelings of falling behind are common among learners and may affect their motivation, teachers can implement instructional strategies that promote confidence, collaboration, and active participation. Furthermore, this study may help learners become more aware of their emotional responses and encourage them to adopt adaptive learning strategies to maintain their motivation. Finally, this study may serve as a reference for future researchers who are interested in exploring the relationship between learners' self-perception, emotional factors, motivation, and language learning behavior in different educational contexts.