



### **A Qualitative Validation of Directed Motivational Currents in the Acquisition of English as a Second Language in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan**

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**Abstract:** The present research validates the feature of a novel psychological construct i.e. Directed Motivational Currents in the acquisition of English as second language in the context of KP, Pakistan. DMCs have recently been introduced in the field of applied linguistics specifically in L2 motivation by Dornyei et al. (2014). Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs) is a new motivational construct which is related to the different periods of highly motivated behavior in the achievement of a personally significant well defined end goal. The main purpose of the researcher in the present study is to identify and validate the DMC cases in the population of KP, Pakistan. The researcher adopted the qualitative research method where the data has been collected from the ESL learners at universities, colleges and language institutes through semi structured interviews. The data from interview has been analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings highlights that true DMC cases exist in the KP, province of Pakistan as many ESL learners have gone through the DMC experience. The study also validates the main characteristics of DMCs in the learners gone through DMC experience.

**Keywords:** Directed Motivational Currents, Identification of DMCs, DMCs and Language Learning.

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#### **1.Introduction**

The concept of motivation, which can be challenging to define generally refers to the inner desire to undertake a particular action. It has been a central focus of research in the field of applied linguistics for many years. This emphasis on motivation has led to significant advancements in the study of L2 motivation, reaching to the emergence of a novel phenomenon known as Directed Motivational Currents (Henceforth DMC), as described by Dornyei et al. (2014). Directed Motivational Currents is a new motivational construct which is related to the different periods of highly motivated behavior in the achievement of a personally significant well defined end goal (Dörnyei, Henry & Muir, 2016). This new construct contains intensive engagement, consistent effort and a positive impact where a person shows a highly motivated behavior that exceeds normal expectations.

These DMCs are experienced by a majority of individuals in various contexts, particularly in the context of learning a second language, as reported by Muir (2016). Muir (2016) identified instances of DMCs across different parts of the world, explaining this unique phenomenon. Apart from Muir's study, another Ph.D. thesis by Ibrahim in 2016 analyzed the DMC qualitatively, and only a few articles have been published related to DMCs. This suggests that there is still a need for further exploration and analysis of DMCs in various L2 learning contexts (Muir, 2020; Muir & Gümüş, 2020; Xiaolu et al., 2017; Le et. al, 2021 and Jahedizadeh & Al-Hoorie, 2021).

Thus, the present study focuses on DMCs within the context of learning English as a second language in Pakistan. However, this study takes a qualitative approach by examining DMCs in the context of acquiring a second language within Pakistan's multilingual society. The study mainly focuses on the validation of DMCs and its key features i.e. goal/vision orientation, the start of a DMCs, DMC structure, and the end of DMCs as highlighted by Henry et al. (2015) and Dörnyei et al. (2015).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Directed Motivational Currents**

Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs) is a new theory with its focus on L2 motivation focus on intensive motivational surges intended to achieve well defined goals (Dörnyei, et al., 2015). This type motivation is influenced by contextual and personal factors which create a motivational momentum in the achievement of personalized and clearly defined goals (Dörnyei et al., 2015). DMCs are experienced by learners who perform exceptionally well. With the beginning of this motivational surge, the individual begins to work harder than normal, and this surge pushes him/her towards pursuit of their goals (Muir & Dörnyei, 2013), so much so that this motivational surge is felt by people nearby as it is quite powerful.

### **2.2 Key Aspects of Directed Motivation Currents**

In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of DMCs, Dörnyei, Henry, and Muir (2016) have used various research possibilities both within and beyond L2 motivation research. While individual contributions cannot provide a full explanation of the DMCs, these researchers state that a thorough explanation can be achieved by considering all the elements collectively. The following sections focuses on the theoretical foundation of the five key features of DMCs: goal/vision orientation, the start of a DMCs, DMC structure, positive emotional loading, and the end of DMCs.

### **2.3 Goal Orientedness**

The first and key feature of a DMC is its goal orientedness where the individuals caught up in DMC have a well-defined goal (Henry et al., 2015). Dörnyei et al. (2015) also highlight the significance of personalized and clearly-defined goals to create this type of motivational momentum. Furthermore, Dörnyei et al. (2014) highlight that DMC cannot be attained without a well-defined and clear goal.

### **2.4 The DMC Start**

The second significant aspect of the DMCs includes a defined starting point, closely related to a specific triggering factor that initiates action. DMC experiences start from a well-known source connected to essential conditions, including contextual, personal, and temporal factors, along with the presence of a unique triggering stimulus. Due to several combinations, these triggering factors can be different and some common features have emerged from various sources with similar insights from research on flow theory. Dörnyei et al. (2016) suggest that it is reasonable to explore this aspect of DMCs by assuming that the prerequisites for entering a state of flow are equally applicable to the DMC experience. Dörnyei, Ibrahim, and Muir (2015) state that every DMC experience starts with an identifiable starting point and those who are in DMCs are quite aware of their DMC starting points. According to Muir & Dörnyei (2013) every DMC has a clear starting point and the DMC cases know when and why their DMCs start.

### **2.5 The DMCs Structure**

The third feature that distinguishes Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs) is their unique structure. This structural aspect makes them different not only from the concept of flow but also from the framework of any other motivational construct due to their distinct self-renewing properties. The structure of a DMC actively contributes to maintaining the motivational flow (Dörnyei et al., 2016). Three essential components are highlighted here, which, when examined together, provide a theoretical explanation for this phenomenon: automatic behavioral routines, sub goals, and progress checks, and positive feedback.

## **2.6 The End of DMCs**

The significance of the final phases of a Directed Motivational Currents (DMCs) is obvious when it is studied in the context of language learning. Language acquisition is a lifelong process that continues even after the end of DMC motivation and thus a DMC or DMCs become a part of this lifelong process of language process. Henry et al. (2015) are of the view that a DMC has an end point sometimes DMC ends abruptly upon the achievement of a goal while other times DMC gradually decreases and ends. The motivation at the end of a DMC can decrease, similar to what happens after a concert or any other event, or it can gradually decrease. Some of the important factors given below that can result in a loss of motivation in a DMC.

## **3. Methodology**

The present study follows qualitative research method to investigate L2 motivation within the framework of Directed Motivational Currents. According to Ushioda (1994, 2001) states that the quantitative approach must be complemented by the qualitative approach for the understanding the dynamics of L2 motivation. She is also of the view that the quantitative approach applied in the Socio Psychological period in the L2 motivational field is not enough to investigate the L2 motivational orientations. She stated that this approach must be complemented by the qualitative approach. This qualitative approach was a significant contribution to understanding the dynamic and the socio-cultural facets of L2 motivation.

### **3.1 Population and Sample**

The researcher has selected 20 participants for the data collection through interview. These participants are selected through purposive sampling technique as the researcher wanted to target representative DMC cases from different areas of KP, Pakistan. After the initial interviews, the researcher has thoroughly focused on the key DMC features in the interviews of the participants and only 8 participants were found to be true DMC cases among these 20 participants whose answer to the interview question adequately addressed the research questions. The researcher has given codes from A to I to these participants.

## **4. Analysis of the Interviews**

### **4.1 The Demographic Information of the Participants**

The researcher has conducted 20 informal interviews for the investigation of the true DMC cases and in doing so, the researcher has selected 8 cases that presented the true picture of the construct. All these participants are the learners of English at different universities and language institutions. Five of them are the students of English at university level doing their graduation while three of them are the learners of English language at language institutes. All of them belong to three major districts of KP, Kohat, Mardan and Peshawar. Two from erstwhile FATA, Kohat, three from Mardan and three from Peshawar. Their first language was Pashto.

The presence of intense motivation in learning English as a second language in KP, Pakistan. All these respondents were very fluent in English language while introducing their demographic information during the interview process. Apart from the demographic information that is related to the area, institute and first language, the significant question in this section is related to the participants' connection to English language learning in terms of duration and why they selected English in particular. All these participants were quite aware of the importance of English language learning in Pakistan due to two obvious reasons. The first reason was their English graduation degrees and any English graduate one way or the other way know the importance of English language in Pakistan for multiple reasons. The second reason was their motivation towards English language learning and their connection to English language learning in terms of duration. As highlighted by one of the participants "I have been in touch with English language for the last 9 years, from the time I passed 6<sup>th</sup> grade as till then I never focused consciously on English language learning" (Interview A). For some participants, the English language learning process started since their primary education and for some the intentional acquisition of English as a second language started after they entered collage.

### **4.2 DMCs Start in English Language Learning**

These participants were highly motivated to learn English language due to many different reasons. They shared reasons from their likeness towards English culture and English language. As was noted out by one participant that I really think "English people are very energetic" (Interview L). Almost all the participants stated that their

motivation stated from a very early age but in terms of DMC phase their starting points and reasons were different. For some respondents' vocabulary was important, for others, communication with others and for some it was a personal desire to learn English language. The first question in connection to DMCs was related to the participant engagement with English language learning. When and how they felt that they are intensely motivated. One interesting answer to the motivational intensity in this regard was when a participant stated "I have a sort of madness.... and I was very much obsessed with English...and I used to read the English newspaper from the first page till the last page in two days" (Interview A). In such a motivational surge, the individual is taken over by the activity he/she is engaged in and forgot any other thing. All these participant stated that they were focusing on learning English language from any source all the day as one participant highlighted that "I used to watch English movies day and night" (Interview B). This obsessive engagement with English language learning can also be seen in one participant answer when she says "I used to read books and underline words and then tried to use these words every day" (Interview H). Additionally, one participant added the essence of the DMC and he stated that "I didn't have time even to think of something else" (Interview I).

After the confirmation that the participants knew about the motivational intensity in their language learning process, the researcher's main focus in the first part of the interview was how this unique experience of DMC started and why they took this much interest in English language. It is a general and obvious phenomenon in Pakistan that many students get motivated for English language learning because it increases job opportunities and it adds in passing the competitive exams or sometime for going abroad. Apart from these reasons, there are some general cases where the students in Pakistan are integrative motivated, they like the English culture and English people etc. and thus they get motivated to learn English language. The participants in the present study had gone through the motivational currents and the question here in this study was asked for the purpose to know how and why this high motivational intensity or DMC started. One of the obvious triggering point in such case is the failure in any exam and this failure sometimes motivate individual for doing something extra. In a similar connection a participant stated that the triggering point was "the day I could not pass my ISSB examination". This kind of failure is one of the major reason for triggering DMCs in the individuals. In a similar way, another participant added that "when I was rejected in a job interview, I was shocked and upset." (Interview B). Apart from this, the triggering points was an inspiration as in the case of one participant when she said that "my teachers, the way they used to speak English ... and I really liked the English in the cartoons and movies" (Interview H). Some people like to pass a kind of exam, other to get a job and some to go an English country and thus they start focusing on English language learning and they get language learning motivation. One of the participant pointed out the very reason of passing a particular exam when he said that "when I decided to go for competitive exam" (Interview C). it should be noted here that in KP Pakistan many students want to learn English to pass CSS examination. Yet there are other reason and factors which triggered DMCs in some respondent and it is not always a failure or to pass exam. For some people communication is everything and they just want to communicate in a particular language as they are forced to do it. For example, one participate stated that, "I was born and raised in middle east before I came to Pakistan and I needed to learn English language to interact to people outside of family" (Interview).

There is one significant aspect which the researcher wants to highlight here and that is the goals and wishes all these participants had in their mind except for two interviews for whom the DMC triggered the very day they failed to accomplish a certain activity. These prior goals in the minds of the participant in a way prepared them for this unique experience of DMC. For example, as mentioned earlier passing the interview, passing the competitive exam, to communicate with others, inspiration from teachers to use English like them, were some of the interests of the participant. These wishes and goals were not actually related to the learning of English language for them but English language learning was a necessary step for them to achieve these goals. These goals were not the only points that triggered the DMCs in these participants and a particular stimulus, a triggering point was needed for everyone and thus they were challenged by the circumstances and then DMCs started. For example, a participant added that I was called by my uncle to read a newspaper and I was unable to read it but my cousin was able to read it "I was able to read only two lines" (Interview A). This was the triggering moment for the participant which initiated the DMC experience.

### **4.3 The Significance of Goals**

One of the significant features of DMC is its goal orientedness. Dörnyei et al. (2016) is of the view that DMCs are directional in each and every case where the motivational energy is channeled in clear goal direction. Goals are significantly important for the DMC experience and this unique experience of motivational surge cannot occur

without having clear goals. (Muir and Dörnyei, 2013; Henry et. al., 2015; Dörnyei et. al., 2015; Muir, 2016). In connection to this feature the researcher has included two questions in the interview, one enquiring whether the participants had set goals in their mind when they had been caught in DMC and the other the effects of their goals on their language learning performance.

All these participants confirmed the importance of goals in language learning and they also stated that they had specific and clear goals in their minds during the launch of their DMC experiences. One of the participants stated that “I did not have many goals at that time but I only wanted to improve my pronunciation, then came a time when I wanted to know the meanings of the words and then after sometime I wanted to learn idioms.... I had a path and I had a plan to improve my English language” (Interview U). The participant had a very clear vision and goal of what to achieve. Then the participants had set the proxemic goals and thus a self-created pathway was created by the participants. When she came to know that she has worked on the pronunciation she started working on vocabulary and then on idioms. Thus the progress in the language learning kept the participant motivated for long time. The same participant added that “setting goals give you a clear picture of where and how you have to work” (Interview U). The views of the participant clearly indicate that her DMC was goal oriented where she set goals for her. Her goal provided her with clear picture and vision of what to achieve. DMC is a kind of long sustainable motivational journey that sometimes go for months. These goals increase the motivational energy in terms of focus and duration as highlight by another participant. “if you are not going to set a goal, I think you might be motivated for a week” (Interview A). Thus these clear goals provide length to the motivational surge in DMC. One of the key component in the DMC structure is that the individual creates a clear pathway, has a clear aim, sets small task where the individual checks his/her progress and thus the individual is completely busy in the activity. This very feature has been highlighted by another participant when he mentions that “I have the major aim of enhancing my writing skills and I used to set small tasks like getting command over punctuation, spellings which went for months and for year” (Interview S). The participant also added the notion of achieving the goals in particular time period. “so it was necessary to set goals and to achieve goals in a particular time” in this connection another participant added that “I used to set short term goals and then long term goals” (Interview I).

#### **4.4 DMC Structure**

Another key feature of DMC is its unique structure which comprises four main features namely automatized behavioral routines, sub goals and progress checks, and affirmative feedback.

All the participants interviewed in this study mentioned these key features of the unique structure of DMC. Once their DMCS are triggered they started following a specific schedule and clear of how to acquire the English language. In the case of two participants, who failed the interview and exam, they immediately started working and following structure.

“Nobody is going to believe this that I studies the English newspaper 15 hours each day, my motivation forced that I had to learn this I became like machine, ... I used to finish the entire newspaper in two days and I had a notebook where I used to note down 5 to 20 high frequency words each day as well as some proverbs and idioms and I was very relaxed with achieving these small goals”. (Interview A).

It is very evident that the participant had a clear vision of what to do, when to do and in how much time I should do it. So in a way the participants set a self-automated mechanism on which he acted to achieve the main goal of English language learning. Another participant added a very interesting aspect of the routines that he followed during his DMC period. He mentioned that “the routine that I had made for myself was tough, I had to learn vocabulary through repetition every day and I had to write one essay in English every day and it went very well” (Interview S). The first thing which can be noticed here that the participant knew what to do to refine his writing skills and the second interesting aspect of his answer to the question is the toughness of the routine he followed. He knew that he is preparing himself for the competitive exam and the only issues he faced was effective writing in English language, the method and plan he adopted for archiving this goal was very much suitable. The participant was aware of the toughness but his motivational energy kept him working on this tough schedule of which he says in the end that it went very well. In connection to the tough routine another participant who failed the interview and she realized that if she could speak English fluently, she could have passed it. This triggering aspect generated the DMC and she like the other participant started working on a plan. Her routines were completely changed as she mentioned “I liked all those activities which helped me in learning English language and disliked all those activities which causes hindrances in my learning. I sat a time table for myself and that was a very strict time table like I used to learn 30 words per day and I used to read two articles per day” (Interview B). Thus slowly and gradually she

became confident in speaking English language. Once again the participant talked about the toughness of the routines but her DMC made her complete the language learning task.

Another participant who was not focusing on any specific language skill rather wanted to learn this language focusing on speaking as well as writing. So he used different resources and techniques to achieve his goal. He exploited the reading practice, speaking with friends, vocabulary memorization, reading newspaper on daily bases. These new routines became his lifestyle during the DMC period as he stated "I used to speak English with my friends when we would go out for a walk in the evening, furthermore, I was busy in learning and memorizing English vocabulary all the time, reading books, watching English movies and even talking to myself sometime" (Interview I)

The unique structure of DMC where the participant followed a specific routine was very much personally appropriate to them. Even some very strange decisions were taken by the participant to achieve the main goal as a participant mentioned "I started using my mobile phone less" (Interview U). Thus the participant was very confident in making this decision as she wanted to engage herself in language learning. The other significant aspect in the responses of the participant in the interview sessions was the element of self and easy selection of the activities on their daily routine to achieve their goals. They did not undertake an extensive research while adopting a particular routine instead they followed the structure which was fruitful for them in English language learning.

One of the important points is to know how the participants maintained the motivational current for extended period of time. Although there was not an explicit question in the interview explain how they maintained their DMCs, yet the participants shared some points regarding the sustainability of this intense motivation to learn English language. The most important point in this regard is the behavioral and learning routines set by the participants to achieve their main targets. All the participants interviewed explained in their responses the activities in which they were engaged for long time. These activities which they have set for them though unconsciously became their habitual routines. It was sometimes very difficult for them as some of them stated that their experiences were hard to be followed but their motivation kept them on track. One of the participants mentioned that "I liked all those activities which helped me in learning English language and disliked all those activities which causes hindrances in my learning. I sat a time table for myself and that was a very strict time table" (Interview B). in this experience, the participant stats that the time table was very hard to follow but she did not want to lose her way of learning English as the participant did not like anything that cause problems in learning English language. Thus the learning English goal was the sole force that provided extension to the DMC behavior.

#### **4.5 The End of DMCs**

One of the significant points that the researcher wanted to know was related to the end of DMCs. A question was asked from the participants to share their memories of how their DMCs ended. The responses of the participants offered some diverse ways in which their DMCs stopped. For some the experience ended after they achieved their goal as one of the participant stated that "it is when I passed my CSS written examination, I felt relaxed and I saw then many things around me as if I woke up from sleep" (Participant F). The response of this participant reflects a common endpoint as for some of the participant their motivational journey ended when they achieved their goals. This goal oriented behavior kept them busy in learning English but the moment these participants achieved their goals, the driving force ended and so their DMCs. In connection to the length of DMC experience, almost all the participants stated that their experience of intensive engagement with English language learning was from 2 to 4 months (Participant C, D and E)

On the other hand, for the two participants, their motivational energy kept on forcing them to learn English language but they saw a shift from high intensity to normal. in this connection one of the participants added that her "motivation did not end after she finished my exams, it is still there and I am still motivated to learn and polish my English but the intensity I was feeling is lost now" (Participant B). This viewpoint is highlights a kind of sustained motivation that kept the DMC cases motivated for longer times but after they achieve their goals, they lose their high motivational surge. The other participant shared similar remark and stated that "I wouldn't say my motivation ended; it's more like it transformed. It's still there, but not as intense as it once was" (Participant H). Thus in these two cases, the motivation did not end but the intensity decreased after the participant achieved their goals.

One of the interesting answers from participant G was related to the intensity of motivation though getting feedback. He stated that "as I received positive feedback from others, my motivational intensity increased and I started believing that what I say, matters to others". this time the DMCs increased and got more intense with the external feedback and these feedbacks served as powerful motivators for the participant.

The analysis of these participants' views highlights that the end points of DMCs are different for different people. It also suggests that with the attainment of a goal, DMC experience does not end sometime, instead its intensity decreases. Moreover, with the changing circumstances, such motivational surges can be triggered again as in some cases, the motivation does not end but decreases as if it waits for another opportunity to become a DMC.

## 5. Conclusion

The results of the study support the validity of the DMCs presented by Dörnyei et al. (2014) in the context of KP, Pakistan. These DMCs contain all the features of a DMC experience i.e. goal orientedness, facilitative structure, positive emotionality, performing beyond expectations, definite start and end of DMCs confirms the findings of (Dörnyei et al., 2014; Ibrahim, 2017; Dörnyei et al., 2015 & Henry et al., 2015 who have also validated DMCs and highlighted these distinct features of a DMC experience. These individuals have different linguistic and social backgrounds, some of them are from universities, others from collages and some are from language institutes with Pashto as their mother language.

## 5.1 Recommendation

In the present study, the analysis showed the qualitative validation of the DMCs in the acquisition of English as a second language in KP, Pakistan however, it will be very significant to validate the DMCs using mixed method approach.

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