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EFL Learners' Perceptions of English Language Teachers' Implicit Motivating Agency: An Interview Study in the Hungarian Higher Education Context

Han Htoo Naung

Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), Budapest, Hungary

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-1004-1084>

Abstract

The role of language teachers is considered important in shaping their students' motivation to learn a foreign language (L2). The motivational impact of a language teacher predominantly stems from the teacher's personality and behaviour, rather than from the direct use of explicit motivational strategies (Kálmán, 2023). Dörnyei (2001) also claimed that teachers act as key figures, or authorities, who affect the motivational quality of the learning process by providing mentoring, guidance, nurturance, support and limit setting" (p. 35). These point to the importance of teachers' implicit roles in motivating their learners. Research on the implicit role of English language teachers in EFL motivation has not been conducted extensively in general, but especially not at all in the Hungarian higher education context. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the perceptions of EFL learners in relation to their EFL teachers' implicit motivating agency (i.e., the effect of a teacher's personality, behaviour, and appearance on their L2 motivation). To explore such a research niche, this study adopts a qualitative research design with a semi-structured interview. The results based on data collected from 14 EFL learners, from different universities in Hungary, suggest that the teacher's personality traits such as *niceness, friendliness, support, encouragement, enthusiasm, empathy* and *cheerfulness* can motivate the learners implicitly. Regarding the behaviour of the teacher, *creating a warm atmosphere, asking students about their feelings, not behaving in a strict manner, playing games* and *telling jokes* can have a motivational impact on the learners as well. In connection with EFL teachers' appearance, students highlight the importance of *dressing nicely and professionally* and *caring for personal grooming*. The findings of this study may contribute to raising awareness of the importance of an EFL teacher's personality, behaviour as well as appearance in higher education contexts.

Keywords: teacher's role in L2, implicit motivating agency, EFL learners, higher education, Hungary

1. Introduction

Motivation is widely acknowledged as a key factor influencing success and achievement in second language (L2) learning (e.g., Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007; Dörnyei, 2018; Horváth & Kálmán, 2020; Lamb, 2017). Language learners with no motivation might struggle to engage with learning materials, have limited progress or success in their language learning and acquisition process, and these problems can lead to negative attitudes toward language learning in general. Guilloteaux (2013) highlighted that teaching language learners who lack motivation is one of the most significant challenges faced by language teachers across various contexts.

Keller (2010) argued that while teachers cannot directly control students' language learning motivation, they have a significant influence on it, and they also have the power to either ignite a desire to learn or diminish their students' motivation altogether. Matsumoto (2011) and Öztürk and Ok (2014) also highlighted a similar idea, stating that teachers are always regarded as having an important influence on the motivation of the learners. These insights underscore the significant role language teachers play in enhancing their students' motivation to acquire a foreign language. Furthermore, Kálmán (2023) asserted that the influence exerted by language teachers on students' motivation greatly stems from their personality and behaviour, rather than the deliberate implementation of explicit motivational strategies or techniques.

Previous research studies with regard to the teachers' role in motivating their learners have placed an emphasis on teachers' use of explicit motivational strategies (see e.g., Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Howard, 2023; Lee et al., 2020; Min & Chon, 2020). However, the implicit role of the teacher in EFL motivation has not been explored much in general, and not at all in the Hungarian higher education context. Kálmán (2023) has also recently claimed that language teachers' implicit motivational attributes are still unexplored in research. In addition, the influence of teachers' personality, behaviour, and appearance on EFL learners' motivation is still an unexplored topic in L2 motivation research. Therefore, it would be beneficial to explore EFL learners' perceptions regarding their EFL teachers' implicit motivating agency (i.e., the effect of teacher's personality, behaviour, and appearance on their L2 motivation) in the Hungarian higher education context. It is hoped that this interview study will benefit many stakeholders: learners, pre-service and in-service EFL teachers, teacher trainers, teacher trainees, and fellow researchers.

2. Literature Review

Motivation is a key factor in the process of learning second and foreign languages (Shili, 2023), particularly in classroom settings (Al Kaboody, 2013). Its significance has been widely researched in the field of language learning and acquisition (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Khasinah, 2014; Lamb, 2017; Ushioda, 2014). For the theoretical and empirical background of this article, teachers' implicit motivating agency/motivational attributes, teachers' implicit roles in motivating EFL learners, and finally, some empirical research studies on English language teachers' implicit motivational attributes in motivating L2 learners, will be reviewed.

2.1. Teachers' Implicit Motivating Agency/Motivational Attributes

Teachers' implicit motivating agency/motivational attributes have not been explicitly defined in the literature. Therefore, the concepts of motivation proposed by some scholars were used to create new definitions for English language teachers' implicit motivating agency/motivational attributes.

According to Dörnyei (2001), “motivational effectiveness appears to be determined by an interplay of several broad factors (related to the teachers’ personality, enthusiasm, professional knowledge/skills and classroom managerial style)” (p. 35). Lamb (2017) argued that “the aspects of teacher behaviour which appear to have the most motivational impact on language learners are those that relate to the human side of teaching” (p. 45). Kálmán (2021) also claimed that language teachers’ attributes related to appearance, posture, and clothing can implicitly motivate language learners. “The implicit motivating agency includes the language teacher’s support, kindness, empathy, enthusiasm, conscientiousness, joy, charisma and appearance, as well as behavioural and attitudinal attributes evoking achievement and social emotions in language learners” (Kálmán, 2023, p. 42).

Therefore, an English language teacher’s implicit motivating agency can be defined as the motivational impact of a teacher (i.e., how strongly they can motivate language learners) without the teacher being (fully) aware of it. This implicit agency can refer to both appearance and personality traits (e.g., being well-dressed or being conscientious).

2.2. Teachers’ Implicit Roles in Motivating EFL Learners

Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) stated that “almost everything a teacher does in the classroom has a motivational influence on students, which makes the teacher’s behaviour a powerful motivational tool” (p. 109). Kálmán (2023) stated that “the language teacher’s motivational influence derives from the motivational power of the teacher’s personality and behaviour, and not from an explicit use of motivational strategies” (p. 23). Regarding implicit motivation, Kálmán (2023) mentioned in his interview study that:

While the theoretical underpinnings of foreign language (FL) teachers’ motivational strategies are conceptualised and have been validated, the conceptualisation of the teacher’s implicit motivating impact has not been worked out, and empirical evidence revealing motivating language teachers’ attributes and implicit motivating influence is meagre. (p. 23)

According to Kálmán (2023), the emotional, attitudinal, and behavioural attributes can be said to be implicit motivating factors in the field of EFL motivation. Therefore, the teacher’s implicit role can be considered the unconscious ways teachers promote their students’ motivation, for example, through their personality, behaviours, and appearance. Some research studies (see e.g., Freeburg et al., 2011; Göncz, 2017; Kálmán, 2023; Khalilzadeh & Khodi, 2018; Marici et al., 2023) have also demonstrated that language learners are implicitly motivated through their teacher’s personality, behaviour, and appearance. Unfortunately, the implicit domain of motivational agency in second language motivation is substantially underestimated although this domain has a salient role in motivating language learners (Kálmán, 2023).

With regard to the role of the teachers, Dörnyei (2001) also stated that “teachers act as key figures, or authorities, who affect the motivational quality of the learning process by providing mentoring, guidance, nurturance, support and limit setting” (p. 35). Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) also said that the effectiveness of teachers’ motivation can be determined in terms of their personality, enthusiasm, professional knowledge/skills, and classroom management style. “If enthusiasm is to be conceptualised as an affective construct, it can be best assigned to the domain of positive emotion and intrinsic motivation” (Kunter et al., 2011, p. 290). “Enthusiasm

is regarded as an affective, person-specific characteristic that reflects the subjective experience of enjoyment, excitement, and pleasure, and that is manifested in certain teacher behaviours in the classroom” (Kunter et al., 2011, p. 290). McEown and Takeuchi (2014) discovered that teachers’ enthusiasm for teaching English rarely motivates the learners. However, Kálmán’s (2023) study, which focused on primary and secondary learners in Hungary, regarded this personality trait as one of those teacher attributes that contributes to extraordinary motivating agency. “In the second language classroom, charismatic teachers function as role models of their students and they have a high potential to enhance students’ motivation through their own communication” (Kálmán, 2023, p. 28). In the following subsections, personality, behaviour, and appearance theories will be discussed since these are the major foci of this study.

2.2.1. Personality

The term *personality* is defined by various scholars based on their own perspectives. Pervin and John (2001) stated that personality refers to a person’s characteristics or traits that contribute to the consistent patterns of their emotions, thoughts, and actions. Anderson (2009) considered personality “the pattern of collective character, behavioural, temperamental, emotional, and mental traits of an individual” (p. 5).

“The influence of teachers’ actions on students is largely based also on teachers’ personality traits and dimensions, which can best be explained within the context of psychological theories of personality” (Göncz, 2017, p. 82). Due to the multitude of specific traits, constructing an accurate profile of personality is impossible (Sharp, 2008). Thus, different personality theories are applied to investigate the personality of the teacher. This is because there is not a single personality theory, or a set of similar personality theories, that can fulfil all the criteria of a good theory (Göncz, 2017). Cramer (2013) stated that a good personality theory needs to “describe, explain, predict, and control phenomena and behaviour” (p. 9). Personality theories are formulated based on factor analysis, and so, several theoretical frameworks of personality have emerged, namely *Cattell’s personality theory* (Cattell & Mead, 2008), *Eysenck’s personality model* (Eysenck, 1970), *The Five-Factor Model, FFM* (Goldberg, 1992), and the *Myers Briggs Type Indicator, MBTI* (Myers, et al., 1998). Among them, the most frequently used theories to investigate the personality of teachers are *The Five-Factor Model* and the *Myers Briggs Type Indicator*.

The Five-Factor Model, also known as *The Big Five Model*, was “one of the most important starting points in researching teachers’ personalities in the teaching/learning process” (Göncz, 2017, p. 76). This model of personality has five dimensions, and they are *Neuroticism* (N), *Extraversion* (E), *Openness to Experience* (O), *Agreeableness* (A), and *Conscientiousness* (C). The acronyms such as ‘NEOAC’, ‘CANOE’, and ‘OCEAN’ are used as a representation of these dimensions. The dimension *Neuroticism* refers to negative emotions or feelings (e.g., depression, stress, and pessimism) whereas the *Extraversion* dimension represents positive emotions (e.g., friendliness, enthusiasm, and confidence). The third dimension, *Openness to Experience*, refers to creativity, imaginativeness, innovation, and those who have this dimension are receptive to new experiences, unconventional or new ideas, and culture. The *Agreeableness* dimension is related to sociability, i.e., sustaining social stability between individuals (e.g., kindness, carefulness, and helpfulness). The last dimension, *Conscientiousness*, refers to characteristics or the behaviour of an individual (e.g., sense of duty, self-discipline, and time management). A teacher’s nice personality is often conceptualised through the lens of this model, in particular emphasising *Extraversion* and *Agreeableness*.

A theoretical framework HEXACO, the adaptation of *The Five-Factor Model*, is also useful to explore one's personality (Ashton & Lee, 2007; Lee & Ashton, 2013) since it is said to be unique because of the additional dimension of *Honesty-Humility*. HEXACO represents *Honesty-Humility* (H), *Emotionality* (E), *Extraversion* (X), *Agreeableness* (A), *Conscientiousness* (C), and *Openness to Experience* (O). Here, the dimension *Emotionality* (E) is similar to the *Neuroticism* (N) dimension of *The Five-Factor Model*. Göncz (2017) suggested that this new model can be successfully employed "in research when behaviours and traits found on the *Honesty-Humility*, *Agreeableness* and *Emotionality* dimensions are of specific interest, including the study of teacher personality" (p. 90).

The *Myers Briggs Type Indicator* was developed based on Jung's theory of psychological types or personality (Aviles, 2001; Pittenger, 1993), and this theory has four personality dimensions: *extraversion-introversion*, *sensing-intuition*, *thinking-feeling*, and *judging-perception*, through which individuals experience the world. Regarding Jung's framework, Göncz (2017) stated that "one of these is dominant and determines the preferences regarding how people perceive the world and make decisions. Notably, the four functions are expressed in either introverted or extroverted forms" (p. 84).

2.2.2. Behaviour

Teacher behaviour is one of the major determinants in enhancing learners' motivation and learning (Hein, 2012; Opdenakker, 2023; Shah et al., 2021). Adebayo (2023) pointed out the importance of teachers' behaviour and how it can influence learners' motivation, emphasising the positive and negative effects of learners' motivation resulting from teachers' behaviour. She defined a teacher's behaviour as "a function of the characteristics of the teacher, his environment and the task in which the teacher engages" (p. 4205). Shah et al. (2021) also argued how teachers' action has important roles in relation to their students' motivation by stating that:

Teachers are the main source of motivation for the students because they have a daily based regular direct interaction with each other. Students perceive a teacher as a mentor and role model, and this enhances the responsibility of a teacher to behave in an appropriate manner. A teacher's rude behaviour makes students lose their interest in studies and refuse to take part in classroom activities which affect their learning abilities. (p. 121)

Referring to the above statements, it can be said that teachers' behaviour can lead to learners' motivation as well as demotivation if they do not behave appropriately in the classroom setting. Since teacher behaviour has a direct effect on learners' motivation, teachers should maintain positive behaviours to keep their students motivated (Shah et al., 2021). Suryani (2016) claimed that teachers who have charismatic behaviours can have a huge impact on their students' behaviours as well as motivation for learning. According to her, charismatic teachers are the ones who

tend to communicate warmly, love challenge, inspire vision, trust, put high energy, be enthusiastic, be emphatic, inspire self-confidence, caring, encouraging and exciting. They also develop caring, motivating and trusting relationships. By having those characters and relationships, charismatic teachers have a potential role and capacity to nurture students' inner motivation. They can inspire their students' motivation by performing charismatic behaviours and develop warm communication. (p. 74)

Opdenakker (2023) stated that the impact of teachers and their behaviours on their learners can be investigated in a variety of domains within educational research. Various kinds of instruments and measurements have been developed in order to explore the behaviour of the teacher. The most widely used instruments are the *Classroom Assessment Scoring System, CLASS* (Pianta & Hamre, 2009); the *What is Happening In this Class, WIIHC* (Fraser et al., 1996); the *International Comparative Analysis of Learning and Teaching, ICALT* (van de Grift, 2007); the *International System for Teacher Observation and Feedback, ISTOF* (Muijs et al., 2018; Opdenakker & Minnaert, 2011; Teddlie et al., 2006); and the *Teacher As a Social Context, TASC* (Belmont et al., 1992). According to Opdenakker (2023), “all these instruments share overlapping concepts and characteristics that are recognised as effective teaching behaviour in teacher effectiveness research” (p. 39).

2.2.3. Appearance

In the process of language teaching and learning, learner motivation can be influenced by several factors, and teacher's appearance is regarded as one of these influential factors (Hafizi et al., 2020; Shiban et al., 2015). Kálmán (2021; 2023) also put emphasis on the crucial role of teacher's appearance, stating that adult language learners are motivated by their teachers' appearance and it significantly contributes to the learners' external motivation.

According to Khan and Sheikh (2023), the impact of a teacher's appearance on the motivation of learners is gaining widespread acknowledgment from both educational researchers and practitioners. Reviewing the relevant literature, teachers' appearance encompasses the following dimensions: physical/body attractiveness, clothing style, first impressions, smell/odours, role models, accessories, and hairstyle (see e.g., Hong-li, 2011; Kashem, 2019; Khan & Sheikh, 2023). In Marici et al.'s (2023) study, attractive appearance was operationalised as the degree to which a teacher's physical features or attire were perceived as appealing by students. Referring to research on the effects of human attractiveness, it represents such elements as facial attractiveness, physical attractiveness, hairstyle attractiveness, vocal attractiveness, and attire attractiveness (see e.g., Mesko & Bereczkei, 2004; Sebastian & Bristow, 2008; Shang & Liu, 2022; Zhang et al., 2020). In addition, there were some research studies investigating the relationship between shoes and human attractiveness (Morris et al., 2013) and height and human attractiveness (Shepperd & Strathman, 1989).

Physical attractiveness is an effective social mechanism (Gurung & Vespia, 2007; Tan et al., 2019), and people with physical attractiveness are perceived as being more intelligent (Kanazawa & Kovar, 2004; Tan et al., 2019), having more positive qualities and traits (Gurung & Vespia, 2007), being more efficient than people who are less attractive (Jackson et al., 1995), and gaining special attention and preferential treatment from others (Little, 2014; Tan et al., 2019). According to Dion et al. (1972), the majority of young people hold positive impressions towards those who are good-looking, and they thought that physically attractive people possess such positive characteristics as politeness, fun, and being more sociable than less attractive people. Westfall et al. (2016) also stated that students feel more motivated towards learning a language if their instructor is physically attractive than unattractive.

Clothing is a form of nonverbal communication that conveys messages to others or affects the opinions of others (Dixon, 2007; Hong-li, 2011). Yu-ling et al. (2015) also claimed that the teaching effectiveness and reputation of teachers can be enhanced if their appearance is

“rigorous and modest and personal identity and personality are manifested in clothing” (p. 560). Regarding the dress, Marici et al. (2023) described in their research as follows:

When the perception of clothing attractiveness is high, this external evaluation influences the internal evaluation of the person, and this happens in the absence of certain evidence that the person possesses particular internal characteristics, with a positive valence. (p. 2)

Khan and Sheikh (2023) put emphasis on the importance of teacher’s physical looks by stating that

it is generally assumed that first impression is the last impression therefore, a person’s outlook is considered to be important. Students not only learn the subject matter from their teachers, but their teacher’s dressing and presentation could also motivate them towards learning. Therefore, only subject command is not vital but other factors also need to be considered to motivate students towards learning. (p. 1)

Willis and Todorov (2006) stated that social judgements are usually made by inferencing individuals’ perceived facial attractiveness. Facial attractiveness has been linked to many social benefits in life, such as gaining increased popularity, acceptance, and social competence (Mares et al., 2010). Mueser et al. (1984) claimed that a person’s face has a somewhat more influential role of overall human attractiveness than the body. Tatarunaite et al. (2005) also pointed out the importance of facial attractiveness, saying that “smiling and youthful facial appearance make women look more attractive” (p. 676).

Vocal attractiveness plays a substantial role in various kinds of social interaction as well (Zhang et al., 2020). Those who have attractive voice qualities tend to be more successful at political elections and job applications (Degroot & Kluemper, 2007; Tigue et al., 2012). According to Gumelar and Gilipanda (2019), students formed perceptions of their teachers’ attractiveness not solely based on external aspects such as facial expression, and clothing, but also on the auditory experience of their teachers’ voice. Subsequently, they also emphasised the fact that normal voice pitch of both male and female teachers is more attractive than their low and high voice pitch in the classroom setting.

3. Research Method

The present interview study adopted a qualitative research design, and it employed a semi-structured interview, which is one of the most common data collection tools in qualitative research in SLA (Dörnyei, 2007; Friedman, 2012). According to Dörnyei (2007), “qualitative research is concerned with the subjective opinions, experiences and feelings of individuals and thus the explicit goal of research is to explore the participants’ views of the situation being studied” (p. 29); therefore, it is ideal and necessary for this research. In order to investigate the complex nature of motivation (i.e., EFL teachers’ implicit motivating agency and EFL learners’ motivation), the participants were asked to express their opinions, perceptions, experiences, and feelings in relation to the topic.

This study aimed to explore EFL students’ perceptions of EFL teachers’ implicit motivational attributes (i.e., personality, behaviour, and appearance) in motivating EFL learners. To fulfil the aim of the study, the following research question was formulated.

- How do EFL learners perceive the influence of their EFL teachers’ personality, behaviour, and appearance on their motivation in the Hungarian higher education context?

3.1. Participants and Context

In this study, 14 tertiary EFL learners were interviewed. The participants were approached through the *convenience sampling technique*. According to Dörnyei (2007), this type of sampling technique “usually results in willing participants, which is a prerequisite to having a rich dataset” (p. 114). The biographical data of the participants are summarised in Table 1.

TABLE 1. BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF THE PARTICIPANTS (TERTIARY EFL LEARNERS)

Pseudo-nym	Gender	Age	Nationality	Major	Years of English Language Learning	Learner's Perceived Language Proficiency
Tomi	male	22	Albanian	Communication and Media Studies	14	C1
Tina	female	38	Chinese	Educational Science	29	B2
Marina	female	31	Mexican	Semiotics	25	B2
Flora	female	30	Turkish	Communication and Media Studies	15	B2
Ella	female	21	Russian	German Studies	14	C1
Tereza	female	19	Hungarian	German Studies	15	C1
Viola	female	23	Hungarian	English and American Studies in Hungarian Language	12	C1
Nikolasz	male	25	Vietnamese	English and American Studies	12	B2
Dina	female	20	Hungarian	English	11	C1
Eliz	female	23	Hungarian	English and American Studies	12	C1
Bence	male	19	Hungarian	English Linguistics	10	C1
Vera	female	22	Hungarian	English and American Studies	14	C1
Attila	male	21	Hungarian	Electrical Engineering	13	C1
Berti	female	19	Hungarian	Architecture	12	B2

Source: own compilation

3.2. The Research Instrument

For this study, a semi-structured interview guide was applied. The interview guide was designed inductively by the researcher based on the literature review and the purpose of this research, which was an essential step as there is no empirical research that addresses the issue of EFL teachers' implicit motivational attributes in the Hungarian higher education context. The interview protocol was developed by the general guidelines suggested by Dörnyei (2007) and Friedman (2012). That is to say, the interview protocol began with an introduction and a few questions about the participants' biographical data, which was followed by the content questions, and a final closing question. The content questions were organised into three topics (personality, behaviour and appearance), containing two to three questions each. The first content section consisted of questions about participants' perceptions regarding their teacher's

personality (e.g., “In what way are you motivated by your language teacher’s personality?”). The following section included questions about the perceptions of the participants concerning their teacher’s behaviour (e.g., “In what way are you motivated by your language teacher’s behaviour?”). The last content section examined their perspectives on whether a teacher’s appearance has a motivational impact on their language learning (e.g., “In what way are you motivated by your language teacher’s appearance?”) (see Appendix A).

The interview guide validation process involved multiple steps. Questions for a provisional interview guide were formulated first and then checked by two experts, my Ph.D. course instructor and supervisor. It was revised based on expert feedback (i.e., adding questions to the initial ice-breaking section and content section). After that, the interview guide was piloted with three participants. Based on their responses, it was modified and used to interview 11 other participants.

3.3. Data Collection and Data Analysis

For the purpose of data collection, the one-to-one interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams. For the interview sessions, Microsoft Teams invitation links were sent to the interviewees in advance. English was used in each interview session, as this is the common language of the researcher and the participants, and the average length of each session was about 25 minutes. All the interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. The first interview was conducted via Zoom, and the audio recording was transcribed using the Alrite software programme. Starting from the second interview, Microsoft Teams was used for carrying out the interviews as it has an auto-transcribed option, and no additional tool was needed to transcribe the interview data. The transcripts were analysed using thematic content analysis suggested by Dörnyei (2007): (1) transcribing the data, (2) coding the data, (3) collecting and organising ideas (see Appendix B and 4.2.), and (4) interpreting the data and arriving at conclusions.

In order to enhance the trustworthiness or credibility of this study, member checking or participant validation was employed to reinforce whether the interpretations fit with what the participants intended to say. Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality. After that, the interview transcripts were analysed with the help of a co-coder, who participated in 20% of the coding process, as this can ensure the reliability of the analysis. While the transcripts were being analysed, emerging themes were marked. If different themes reappeared in later interviews, the number of occurrences were recorded (e.g., friendly: five out of 14 participants).

3.4. Ethical Considerations

In carrying out this study, thus, I first informed the participants about my research topic as well as the fact that their participation was on a voluntary basis. They were also informed that their responses will only be used for the present interview study, and the data will be kept with complete anonymity and confidentiality. In addition, I let them know their right to withdraw and refuse to participate at any time with no penalty (Dörnyei, 2007).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results of EFL Teachers’ Implicit Motivational Attributes

This section answers the research question, namely, how EFL learners perceive the influence of their EFL teachers’ personality, behaviour, and appearance on their motivation in the

Hungarian higher education context. In presenting the data, results relevant to the three major foci of the instrument will be presented, starting with *personality*, followed by *behaviour*, and finally, *appearance*.

4.1.1. Personality

The personality traits identified by the EFL learners are presented in Table 2, arranged in descending order based on how frequently they emerged during the interviews. It might provide an empirical foundation for analysing how EFL teachers' implicit motivational attribute (i.e., teacher's personality traits) influence learners' motivation.

TABLE 2. FREQUENCY OF EFL TEACHERS' IMPLICIT MOTIVATIONAL ATTRIBUTE: PERSONALITY

Emerging Theme (Teacher's Implicit Motivational Attribute: Personality)	Number of Mentions
friendly, nice, kind, humble, soft	10
helpful, supportive, caring, encouraging	10
enthusiastic, hardworking, active, energetic	9
empathetic, sympathetic, understanding, patient	7
funny, happy, joyful, cheerful	7
confident, knowledgeable	3
positive attitude towards teaching	2
playful	2
open-minded	2
charismatic	1
unique	1
strong communication skills	1
humorous	1
well-organised, prepared	1
responsible	1
creative	1

Source: own compilation

Referring to Table 2, the most prominently mentioned implicit motivational attributes for tertiary EFL learners were *friendliness*, *niceness*, *kindness* and *softness* (10 mentions), and *helpfulness*, *support*, *care*, and *encouragement* (10 mentions). These personality traits reflect a teacher's genuine warmth and approachability which make the learners feel motivated to learn a language. Referring to *Extraversion*: one of the dimensions of *The Big Five Model*, such kinds of personalities can have positive impacts on learner motivation. According to Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (1985), a sense of relatedness, i.e., the feeling of being connected to others, is identified as a fundamental psychological need that can enhance

learners' intrinsic motivation. To put it another way, if learners have teachers who express their friendliness and support, they feel motivated to learn a language. One of the learners said that *"so basically, my English teacher was a really good friend of mine and that's why I started to really like English because she was really friendly"* (Vera). This finding confirms the result of Pálffy's (2024) study that teacher's personality traits such as *kindness* and *friendliness* were regarded as key motivational attributes influencing student's language learning motivation.

The findings (i.e., *teacher's helpfulness, support, care, and encouragement*) align with the conclusions drawn by recent research (see e.g., Kiefer et al., 2015; Luo et al., 2024; Pálffy, 2024; Singh & Singh, 2021). For example, this result confirms Kiefer et al.'s (2015) research outcomes that teacher support can be both academic and social in nature, which can contribute to creating a responsive learning atmosphere and have distinct impacts on enhancing learners' academic motivation. Moreover, Singh and Singh's (2021) study also confirmed that teacher encouragement can foster learners' intrinsic motivation. This can be seen in the following participant's response in which she said how she felt most motivated because of her teacher's emotional support and encouragement.

"I would say that the teacher motivated me the most because of her personality traits such as emotional support and emotional intelligence. For example, I received positive feedback on my performance and her encouragement when I made mistakes, reassuring me that it wasn't a problem and that we could solve it together." (Ella)

Based on what the participant said, EFL teacher's helpfulness substantially influences learners' motivation as it enhances their confidence and competence – a crucial component of intrinsic motivation as stated by Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1985). In addition, these results seem to suggest that the dimensions of *Agreeableness* and *Extraversion* in a teacher's personality play a crucial role in motivating learners.

Other important motivational attributes expressed by tertiary EFL learners were *enthusiasm* and *hard work* (9 mentions), *empathy* and *patience* (7 mentions), and *happiness* and *cheerfulness* (7 mentions). Based on the results, teachers who possess these motivational attributes are highly influential in sustaining learner motivation in tertiary EFL contexts. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) stated that language learners view their teacher's enthusiasm and empathy as essential personality traits for sustaining their motivation. Similarly, some studies also proved that a teacher's enthusiasm plays a vital role in influencing students' motivation and serves as a significant indicator of their intrinsic motivation (see e.g., Kunter et al., 2011; Pan, 2014; Singh & Singh, 2021; Tran & Le, 2022). Remarkably, the majority of tertiary EFL learners in this study also reported that they felt motivated when their teachers exhibited such kinds of personal qualities. These can be seen in the following two excerpts discussed by Ella and Tina:

"I think my English teachers, in general, have enthusiasm, and empathy. So, yeah, this builds like a really nice classroom environment, which makes me motivated to learn." (Ella)

"... Maybe he works very hard and shows more enthusiasm in teaching. This kind of personality may influence me, yeah." (Tina)

In their study, Ghanizadeh and Moafian (2010) confirmed that teacher happiness, empathy and support are strongly associated with learners' motivated learning behaviours. Recent empirical research by Kálmán (2023) also showed that personality traits such as support, kindness, empathy,

enthusiasm, and joy have motivational impacts on primary and secondary school learners in Hungary. In the same way, most of the EFL learners participating in the present study accepted the notion that teachers who are cheerful, happy, joyful, and funny can motivate them in their learning process. Berti supported this, saying that *“I think my English teacher is always very cheerful and he is extremely energetic. And there are no breaks during the lessons, and he is never tired. So, I am eager to join his class.”* Therefore, the happiness and cheerfulness of a language teacher have a profound impact on the motivation of the learners in the EFL classroom settings.

4.1.2. Behaviour

Table 3 shows tertiary EFL learners’ perspectives on their EFL teachers’ behaviour that contributes to their language learning motivation. Similar to EFL teachers’ personality traits, the motivating teachers’ behaviours are organised in descending order according to the frequency of their occurrence during the interviews.

TABLE 3. FREQUENCY OF TERTIARY EFL TEACHERS’ IMPLICIT MOTIVATIONAL ATTRIBUTE: BEHAVIOUR

Emerging Theme (Teacher’s Implicit Motivational Attribute: Behaviour)	Number of Mentions
reduces students’ stress and creates a pleasant atmosphere (good rapport)	10
makes the class enjoyable and engaging	7
encourages students’ participation and asks personal opinion questions	7
promote learners’ self-confidence through praises and positive feedback	4
tells jokes	4
is ready to help	2
shares personal experiences/gives real-life examples	2
respects and values students	2
gives students a lot of attention	2
monitors the class during activities	1
conducts the class on time	1

Source: own compilation

Based on the results presented in Table 3, the most frequently mentioned EFL teacher’s behavioural attribute that motivates EFL learners was *reducing students’ stress and creating a pleasant atmosphere* (10 mentions). This recurring theme focuses on a crucial factor of teachers’ emotional support in motivating their learners in this particular EFL context. This finding supports the earlier work conducted by Naung (2024) that *Displaying appropriate teacher behaviours*, *Creating a pleasant classroom climate*, *Promoting learners’ self-confidence*, and *Recognising learners’ effort* were said to be the most important motivational dimensions among the tertiary EFL learners. The concept of a nice and warm classroom climate corresponds with Dörnyei’s (2001) framework of motivational teaching practice in second language classrooms, which emphasises the importance of establishing a safe and supportive

environment in which students feel valued and motivated. In connection to this point, Berti presented her opinions in this way:

“... I think it is important for the teacher and the students to create a nice welcoming atmosphere for the class, and it can be extremely motivating I think, to be excited to go to class and not to think that, oh no English again.” (Berti)

This finding corroborates Heitzmann’s (2008) longitudinal research focusing on secondary school students in Hungary that classroom setting has an influential role in sustaining students’ motivation. One of the participants, Tomi, expressed the following opinion:

“Yeah, that’s actually true that their [teacher] behaviour can have a huge motivational impact on us. It can make me as a student have less pressure on taking the course and feel less stressful about it and much more engaged in the subject also.” (Tomi)

Shah et al.’s (2021) research showed that a positive relationship between a teachers’ behaviour and their learners’ motivation, and the teachers’ motivated behaviour had a substantial impact on the attitude of the learners, their understanding, learning and mental development. They also found that a vital component that leads to good academic development of learners in the school setting was having good relationships between teachers and students. The research conducted by Henry and Thorsen (2018) also revealed the same result that building positive relationships with teachers plays a crucial role in fostering students’ motivation to learn a second language. Regarding teacher-student good rapport, building trust can be regarded as a basic element in maintaining and sustaining language learner motivation (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020; Singh & Singh, 2021). Vera felt the same and expressed her perceptions as follows:

“I was always looking forward to going to English classes because they were definitely the best part of my week, ... and she [my English teacher] would start the lessons by asking how I felt. And she was like, really nice in a way that I felt like I could trust her.” (Vera)

The second most commonly cited behavioural attributes of EFL teachers that motivate learners were *making an enjoyable and engaging class* (7 mentions) and *encouraging students’ participation and asking questions* (7 mentions). This finding confirms the fact proposed by Dörnyei (2001) that language learners are more likely to be intrinsically motivated if their learning process is fun and enjoyable. Tomi, one of the participants, said:

“... like the class after 5:00 p.m. ... he [teacher] tried to make it [the class] much more enjoyable and not as much like boring to learn. And it was actually engaging and motivating because at that time, we were tired of the class, and we just wanted to have an engaging class and not something like really boring teacher explaining only the lectures. But instead, it [our class] was like engaging as we play games ...” (Tomi)

According to the above excerpt, it can be said that learner motivation also depends on the class hour. Thus, teachers should be aware of it if they teach during these hours. Tereza expressed her opinions that *“... they [teachers] try to find many creative ways to teach the language, so they always search for videos, for example, and it was a playful way to teach us the language, and this motivates me to learn, I guess”*. This aligns with Willis and Willis’ (2007) Task-Based Language Teaching principles, which claimed that tasks involving playful activities and games

foster language learners' motivation by providing real-world contexts in which the target language is used.

With regard to *encouraging students' participation and asking questions* (7 mentions), participants felt that they were motivated if their teachers made them participate in various tasks and activities and ask them topic-related questions and their perspectives. Bence said: "... *if a teacher is too nonchalant, then the students might not be interested in the class. So, what's kept me motivated is that my teacher was very active and also made us participate a lot in various tasks*". Thus, it can be assumed that encouraging EFL learners to take part in various classroom tasks can serve as a powerful motivational tool. According to Deci and Ryan (1985), creating opportunities for learners to contribute their views and thoughts motivates intrinsically. In Marina's opinion,

"... ask us questions like 'what do you think about this?', 'what do you think about that?', I mean, 'do you agree or why do you disagree or why do you agree?'. I think that would be one of the things or one of his [our teacher] behaviours that motivated me. The way he actively asks us questions about our own perspectives." (Marina)

This finding is in agreement with research conducted by Leoanak and Amalo (2018) that teachers can motivate their students through questioning, giving examples, and using teaching materials related to the lessons.

4.1.3. Appearance

Table 4 represents frequency of tertiary EFL teachers' appearance that has a motivational impact on learners in learning a language.

TABLE 4. FREQUENCY OF TERTIARY EFL TEACHERS' IMPLICIT MOTIVATIONAL ATTRIBUTE: APPEARANCE

Emerging Theme (Teacher's Implicit Motivational Attribute: Appearance)	Number of Mentions
dresses nicely and professionally	8
cares for personal grooming (e.g., hair, basic hygiene)	2
has a friendly face	1
has attractive voice	1

Source: own compilation

This finding aligns with what Kálmán (2018), who discovered in his research study that the majority of participants highlighted the importance of dressing in the corporate context in Hungary. Let me quote two participants' words here:

"... also the dressing can have certain kind of effect because I think definitely the appearance is a motivator, i.e., not wearing clothes that match them." (Tomi)

"Well, I don't know, but it would be weird for me if he [the teacher] arrived in his pyjamas or dirty clothes. Yes, appearance matters to me, not like super important, but on a basis level, it would matter a little bit." (Marina)

This finding also corroborates Gashti and Farrokh's (2024) results that there is a strong and statistically significant relationship between teachers' attire and students' motivation. That is, students taught by teachers with tidy physical appearance demonstrated higher motivation in learning a language than those whose teachers had an untidy physical appearance.

Some participants were not very sure whether the clothing style of a teacher has a positive impact on their motivation to learn. However, they have the same opinion regarding this, i.e., teachers should dress up really nicely. Regarding this, Ella said *"clothing should be not that bright, and more like pastel colours. And yes, for example, for a female teacher, that might be just a blouse and skirt like pretty in middle long skirt or a long skirt. And for a man it's just like a suit. Yes, and for women suits are also really nice"*. This finding supports the findings that teachers should choose their clothing carefully since the types of clothes they choose can tell their personality (Hong-li, 2011). Therefore, it can be concluded that teachers should pay attention to their appearance, especially their professional attire as it plays a vital role in motivating learners in the classroom.

5. Conclusion

The present interview study aimed to investigate EFL teachers' implicit motivational attributes in motivating EFL learners in the Hungarian higher education context. This study's findings corroborate the results of Kálmán's (2023) study, i.e., both studies have suggested that the implicit motivating agency of language teachers can be inferred as teacher's *friendliness, kindness, support, helpfulness, care, encouragement, hard work, enthusiasm, empathy, patience, joy, and happiness*, as well as their behavioural attributes and appearance. It is surprising to see that learners' have almost the same perceptions regarding their teachers' motivating agency although the participants of each study are different (i.e., Hungarian students attending primary and secondary schools in Hungary in Kálmán's (2023) study and tertiary EFL students from different countries attending universities in Hungary in the present study). In spite of the fact that the above traits and behaviours proved to have a motivating power according to the participants, their teachers might or might not be aware of this influence. Therefore, a certain proportion of this motivating influence can be assumed to stem from the implicit domain. The results seem to confirm that there is a hidden domain of motivation/implicit motivation that is under-researched to a great extent, and it warrants for further and more extensive research in the field, while it cannot be disputed that the area of this investigation overlaps with teacher agency.

In terms of the limitations of the study, it can be said that using only English during the interview sessions might have resulted in a loss of nuanced data, as participants might not have been able to express themselves in a foreign language to the extent they would have in their mother tongue, no matter how proficient they might be. In other words, the English proficiency level reported by the participants represents their perceived proficiency level, which may not accurately reflect their actual abilities. Another limitation might be related to social desirability bias, that might have distorted the respondents' answers. That is to say, perceptions of personality and appearance can be subjective and culturally loaded, i.e., in this case the participants were from different countries, having different cultural backgrounds. Since motivation is intrinsically subjective, future research might seek to address this aspect through triangulation (e.g., class observation or teacher self-reports/self-concepts).

It is hoped that this study will benefit many stakeholders: learners, pre-service and in-service EFL teachers, teacher trainers, teacher trainees, and fellow researchers. Based on the results of this study, pre-service teachers as well as in-service EFL teachers themselves might become more aware of how they implicitly motivate their students through their personality, behaviour, and appearance. The theoretical implications of the study may be that implicit motivating agency does exist; therefore, more robust research (bigger in scope and more diverse in methodology) would be necessary to corroborate the findings of this study. Then, on the basis of the findings, implicit motivating agency could be conceptualised in a more nuanced manner.

The present study put emphasis only on EFL learners in universities in Hungary; therefore, with respect to future possible research avenues, it would be interesting to focus on EFL teachers' perceptions to check if the findings of this study can be said to be implicit motivational attributes. In addition, based on the results of this study, quantitative research could be conducted via a questionnaire survey in order to be able to generalise the results. If further research is done on a bigger scale involving horizontal and vertical triangulation, it might possibly result in a new conceptual model of teacher's implicit motivating agency. Therefore, it can be said that this paper takes an initial step in that direction. Last but not least, based on the results and findings of this study, student well-being in the classroom might be an area of further research, as motivation and well-being overlap.

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Appendices

Appendix A

The final version of the interview guide for EFL learners

Thank you very much for volunteering to take part in my interview. The interview is part of my Ph.D. research. The aim of my research is to investigate how EFL teachers motivate EFL learners in the Hungarian higher education context with their personality, behaviour, and appearance. I am interested in your personal experiences and opinions rather than the ‘right’ answers: there are no right or wrong answers. The current interview will be used for research purpose only, and the analysis will be made using a summary of data collected. Full anonymity is ensured, and no personal details will be made public. You can withdraw from the interview at any point. The interview is going to take approximately 25 minutes, and with your permission, I’d like to record our conversation.

Introductory questions

In the first part of the interview, I would like to ask you a few biographical questions.

1. How do you describe your gender identity?
2. How old are you?
3. What is your nationality?
4. Which university/college do you attend?
5. What do you major in?
6. When did you start learning English?
7. How would you describe your level in English now (e.g., pre-intermediate, intermediate, etc.)?
8. Do you speak any other foreign languages? If yes, what are they?

Main questions

Thank you. Now, let me move to the next session. Firstly, I would like to ask you about your EFL teacher(s) who make(s)/made you motivate to learn a language harder.

EFL teacher's personality

- In what way are you motivated by your language teacher's personality?
- Do you think there is anything in your teacher's personality that motivates you, but he or she might not be aware of it? What is it? Please tell me about it.
- Can you give me a specific/some specific examples?

EFL teacher's behaviour

- In what way are you motivated by your language teacher's behaviour?
- Do you think there is anything in your teacher's behaviour that motivates you, but he or she might not be aware of it? What is it? Please tell me about it.
- Can you give me a specific/some specific examples?

EFL teacher's appearance

- In what way are you motivated by your language teacher's appearance?
- Do you think there is anything in your teacher's appearance that motivates you, but he or she might not be aware of it? What is it? Please tell me about it.
- Can you give me a specific/some specific examples?

Final part

Now, we are in the final part of the interview. I would like to know if there is anything else you would like to add. If not, thank you very much for your help.

Appendix B

A SAMPLE ANALYSIS OF THE TEACHER'S IMPLICIT MOTIVATING AGENCY (EMERGING THEMES AND SOURCES)

Emerging Themes	Sources
personality (kind) behaviour (creates a pleasant atmosphere)	Well, as I previously mentioned, he was very <u>kind</u> to us, and I think it's a huge factor that motivates me to learn. I think it is important for the teacher and the students to <u>create a nice welcoming atmosphere for the class</u> , and it can be extremely motivating to learn I think, to be excited to go to class and not to think that, oh no English again. (Berti)
	I was always looking forward to going to English classes because they were definitely the best part of my week, and she was just

personality (nice; caring)	always so <u>nice</u> and she would always make me a cup of tea and she would start the lessons by <u>asking how I felt</u> . And she was like, really <u>nice</u> in a way that I felt like I could trust her. (Vera)
personality (friendly; encouraging)	She was, first of all, really easy to approach, like friendly. And yeah, she's <u>friendly</u> , not like the teacher-student hierarchy. ... she said " <u>Oh well, you can do it like you already did it on time and it was really good. Why don't you try again?</u> " She was like that, you know, and it makes me motivated. (Flora)
personality (encouraging) behaviour (give students attention) personality (caring)	Umm, she was <u>encouraging</u> Uh, she was very <u>careful</u> . While teaching to not let any students fall asleep, so she really <u>paid attention to the whole class</u> . And <u>encouraged</u> everyone depending on their level and also uh, <u>she put a lot of time into each and every one of us</u> . So, I think that in the teacher it's important to, on a basis level of, <u>care about their students</u> and also to not let anyone like fall through gaps in English. (Bence)
appearance (vocal attractiveness) appearance (clothing) appearance (personal grooming)	But yeah, it [appearance] can have an effect on it [learner's motivation]. Like I noticed that when English teachers' <u>tone of voice</u> would be kind of higher. He would want attention, and you would be more like, hey, I need to pay attention now to what he's saying. Also, the <u>dressing</u> can have certain kind of effect because I think definitely the appearance is a motivator, i.e., <u>not wearing clothes that match them</u> . Most of the cases that I heard it's mainly for not the male teacher but for the female teachers. I heard it from my friends that they had the experience of being in the bachelor with a female teacher and they would often notice her appearance. Not only the boy, but also the girls said " <u>Oh, her hair is unbrushed or her clothing doesn't match, et cetera or her voice is too low that I cannot hear sometimes.</u> " (Tomi)
appearance (clothing)	Teacher's appearance might have only a little bit influence on my motivation. Yeah, talking about <u>clothing</u> . I would underline maybe the thing that <u>clothing should be not that bright, and more like pastel colours</u> . And yes, for example, for a female teacher, that might be just <u>a blouse and skirt</u> like pretty in middle long skirt or a long skirt. And for a man it's just <u>like a suit</u> . Yes, and for women suits are also really nice so yeah. So, it might be better if teacher wears something usual. (Ella)
appearance (clothing)	During my BA studies at university, my business English teacher always <u>dress up really nicely</u> . Uh, in a way that he would look really a businessman. You know, like he would always <u>wear really nice suits</u> , and he was always really put together and I think he made the business specialisation feel really like, umm, trustworthy. (Vera)
behaviour (encourage student's participation)	Yes, ok. I had a lot of English teachers and once teachers were more focused on just completing the course book and doing one exercise after the other and it was more monotonous. And so, I felt less motivated and bored in those classes compared to <u>the ones who did group discussions</u> and focused more <u>on active participation</u> because it was more stimulating I guess. (Eliz)
	Yeah, I had a pretty strict English teacher, but she really likes me because in our group I am one of the best in speaking English and

behaviour (gives students attention)	that really motivated me how <u>she is giving me a lot of attention</u> . (Attila)
behaviour (creates good rapport)	Umm, well. In my experience my teachers are really, yeah, <u>open about themselves</u> as well. So, like <u>they share some information about themselves as well as they ask us</u> . So, this also <u>makes us a little bit close to them</u> I think, and it's <u>easier to connect</u> . And I think it is a feature of a small group classroom as well. I think that that <u>helps us feel us safe in the classroom</u> . So, I think it motivates me to join their classes. (Dina)
personality (helpful) behaviour (is ready to help) personality (knowledgeable)	Maybe, the <u>helpfulness</u> also can be a motivational factor for me because I'm not good at grammar and I never felt it would be my cup of tea. The grammar stuff and the linguistic stuff. And I always had questions about these parts of the language, and I would feel more confident if I can ask questions and <u>they are ready to help me</u> and they are ready to explain and give examples to understand more rather than just giving the material just go and read it, learn it and we will have a test about it. So, the <u>helpfulness</u> can be also for me, a motivational factor as well. If they are <u>helpful</u> , and if <u>they know what they are talking about</u> because I had teachers who didn't know what they are talking about. They just read the material, and they just moved on and we couldn't ask questions and I was quite unmotivated during those classes. I didn't like those because they didn't help at all, so I couldn't perform. So, it was quite hard. (Viola)

Source: own compilation

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Corresponding Author

The corresponding author for this manuscript is Han Htoo Naung who can be contacted by email via samsonhanhtoo@gmail.com.