

Motivation in Learning English among Thai EFL University Students: Internal vs. External Factors

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Abstract

Acquiring a foreign language presents significant challenges, particularly for individuals with limited exposure in their daily lives. Motivation, therefore, plays a crucial role in facilitating effective language acquisition. This study examines the internal and external motivational factors influencing Thai university students learning English as a foreign language (EFL). The sample consists of 150 Thai freshman students. Data was collected using questionnaires and semi-structured focus group interviews. Findings from both questionnaires and interviews were in the same line by indicating that, on average, participants exhibit a stronger orientation toward extrinsic motivational factors than intrinsic ones. However, both types of motivation are predominantly rated at high to very high levels. Future research is encouraged to investigate further motivational differences based on gender or English proficiency among Thai EFL learners in higher education.

Keywords: Motivation in Learning English, Thai EFL University Students, Internal Factors, External Factors

Background and Signification of the Research Problem

1. The Importance of English and Motivation in Language Learning

English, recognized as the most widely spoken language globally, functions as the international lingua franca. It is acquired by millions of individuals, either as their native language or as an additional language. In Thailand, English is taught and used as a foreign language and holds significant importance across various domains, particularly in education. In the contemporary context, students utilize English not only in face-to-face interactions but also for communication via diverse digital platforms and websites. Moreover, during the educational process, students are

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frequently required to read and comprehend textbooks or supplementary materials to enhance their knowledge and fulfill academic requirements. Given the increasing globalization of the real working world, proficiency in English is now regarded as indispensable (Nishanthi, 2018).

For these reasons, it is essential for learners in higher education to develop English language skills, as these competencies will be crucial for their future careers. A key factor that significantly influences the teaching and learning process is motivation. Motivation is closely tied to success in learning English language, since students' performances are mainly determined by their motivational levels. When students are motivated to learn a foreign language, they have goals in overcoming challenges and understanding the language (Seven, 2020; and Nat, 2022). Conversely, a lack of motivation can result in reduced engagement with the subject, thereby hindering their success. Thus, it is reasonable to state that the motivation students use when studying English language is the most critical factor affecting their success in learning English.

However, it has been observed that many EFL students in higher education do not exhibit a genuine interest in learning English (Lai, 2014) or do not have positive feelings regarding classroom instructions (Ahmed, 2015), as they do not perceive it as a central component of their academic major. Nevertheless, upon graduation, these students frequently come to recognize the importance of English in advancing their careers or pursuing further education.

2. Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Study

Recognized as one of the primary factors of success or failure in second language acquisition (Richards & Schmidt, 2010), the present study aims to explore internal and external factors influencing motivation in English language learning among Thai EFL university students. Although many learners, educators, and administrators are aware of the challenges related to learning English language among Thai students (Tantiwich & Sinwongsuwat, 2021; Tahe, 2020; and Chuanpongpanich, 2021) there remains lacks comprehensive understanding regarding the role of motivation in this process, as well as up-to-date research on the issue.

Furthermore, by examining EFL learners' perceptions and the significance of motivation in English language learning, researchers can gain deeper insights into what learners consider essential for their motivation throughout their language learning journey. This understanding, in turn, enables an evaluation of whether these factors have been adequately addressed in current educational practices.

Research Objective

The objective of the present study is to explore and compare internal and external motivation factors perceived by Thai university students when learning English as a foreign language.

Scope of Research

The study focused on the freshmen at Kasetsart University Sriracha Campus, Thailand, in academic year 2024. They are those who enrolled in a fundamental English course, namely “English for Everyday Life,” which is a compulsory course.

Literature Review

1. Definition of motivation in learning EFL

Gardner (1985) describes motivation as a combination of effort, aspiration toward a goal, and positive attitudes toward achieving it. Crookes and Schmidt (1991) further characterize motivation as the learner’s orientation concerning the objective of acquiring a second language. Broussard and Garrison (2004) interpret motivation as the attribute that influences our decision to act or refrain from action. Additionally, Richards and Schmidt (2010) define motivation as the force that propels action in any given context.

2. Types of motivation

2.1 Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic motivation

Cahyono and Rahayu (2020) propose that intrinsic motivation arises from “the internal feelings of a person”, while extrinsic motivation stems from “factors external to the individual's concerns”. Similarly, Richards and Schmidt (2010) note that “intrinsic motivation refers to the enjoyment derived from the language learning process itself, whereas extrinsic motivation is driven by external factors, such as parental pressure, societal expectations, academic requirements, or other sources of rewards and punishments”.

2.2 Integrative vs. instrumental orientation (motivation)

Firstly, Gardner and Lambert (1972) describe integrative motivation as being “rooted in the desire to become a more valued member of a society”, whereas instrumental motivation is “driven by the goal of securing a good job and gaining social recognition”. Later, Dörnyei (1994) suggests that motivation in the context of English language learning can be categorized into three primary dimensions: the language, the learner, and the learning situation. The language dimension is associated with two key components of motivation: instrumental motivation, such as the desire to secure a well-paying job, and integrative motivation, which involves an interest in learning about the culture of native English speakers. The learner dimension encompasses factors like the need for achievement, self-confidence, language use anxiety, perceived competence in the second language, causal attributions, and self-efficacy. Lastly, the learning situation dimension comprises three elements: the course, the teacher, and the group. Lastly, Richards and Schmidt (2010) explain that integrative orientation is defined by a desire to assimilate with valued members of the target language community,

while instrumental orientation is centered on practical objectives, such as obtaining employment or passing exams. Additionally, they emphasize the importance of maintaining a positive attitude toward both the target language community and the language learning environment, as well as demonstrating a strong commitment to learning the language.

2.3 The importance of motivation in learning a foreign language

According to Lapadat and Lapadat (2023), motivation plays a crucial role in both teaching and learning foreign languages. Motivation pushes individuals to engage with and persist in achieving a goal—in this case, learning a new language. This emphasis on motivation is well-founded, as numerous studies consistently show that motivated students tend to excel in language learning, displaying greater persistence, resilience, and engagement. Language learning is inherently challenging and requires sustained effort, so motivation becomes a key ingredient for long-term success. Students who are motivated are more likely to put in the necessary time to practice and to work through difficulties, while those who lack motivation may become discouraged and lose interest.

Another view towards the importance of motivation from Thohir (2017) stated that as the learners are distanced from the culture and everyday context of the language. Without immersion in an English-speaking environment, learners lack the natural exposure and reinforcement that helps internalize language concepts. This logistical and psychological distance can make it harder to stay motivated, as language learning may feel less relevant or applicable to their daily lives. In this context, motivation becomes especially important, acting as a bridge that can connect learners to the language even when they are removed from their native cultural setting. It can keep them engaged and willing to overcome the many challenges involved. Motivation helps learners maintain interest and a sense of purpose, which can be powerful drivers of progress. In other words, motivation is not just a helpful addition; it is essential for language learners to remain invested and engaged, particularly when logistical and cultural separation can otherwise make learning feel distant or disconnected.

3. Previous studies

3.1 International studies in motivation on learning English as a foreign language

First of all, there are various international studies (Husna & Murtini, 2019; Nevisi & Farhani, 2022; Wallace & Leong, 2020) emphasized the distinction between intrinsic (internal enjoyment and interest) and extrinsic (external rewards or pressures) motivations. Findings suggested that while both types are essential, extrinsic motivation often outweighs intrinsic motivation, especially among beginner and intermediate learners.

Secondly, many studies identified instrumental motivation (learning English for practical benefits, such as career opportunities) as predominant, though integrative motivation (desire to integrate into the target language community) was also significant for some learners (Nguyen, 2019; Wallace & Leong, 2020).

Then, Multiple studies (Respati et al., 2022; Hosseini & Shokrpour, 2019; Ortega-Auquilla et al., 2022) highlighted the influence of teaching styles, teacher characteristics, and learning materials on motivation. Effective teaching practices, engaging materials, and a positive teacher-student relationship were commonly linked to higher motivation levels.

Next, Factors like socioeconomic background, parental expectations, students' academic year, and parents' English proficiency were shown to shape motivation (Nguyen, 2019; Mahmoudi & Mahmoudi, 2015; Al-Zaareer, 2019).

In addition, some studies (My, 2024; Hosseini & Shokrpour, 2019) highlighted how external factors, including peer influence and classroom environment, play crucial roles in sustaining learners' persistence.

Finally, Nevisi and Farhani (2022) found variations in motivation based on learners' proficiency levels, with beginners relying more on extrinsic motivation, while advanced learners showed a stronger intrinsic drive.

3.2 The motivation for learning English as a foreign language in Thailand

First of all, several studies investigated the integrative and instrumental motivation among Thai students. In integrative motivation preference, Hendrajaya (2023) found higher integrative motivation among both liberal arts and engineering students, though liberal arts students displayed higher scores overall. Intakum & Phonwanpongsa (2022) also revealed slightly higher integrative motivation than instrumental motivation, with both levels considered high. Chomthong & Chaichompoo (2015) then identified English majors as more integratively motivated, although their instrumental motivation was slightly higher. In instrumental motivation preference, Esteban (2023) showed significantly higher instrumental motivation among participants, with students believing that English proficiency aids job prospects and confidence abroad. Oranpattanachai (2013) then reported instrumental reasons as more significant than integrative reasons, emphasizing their influence on academic achievements and students' desire to continue learning English. Assavanadda & Tangkiengsirisin (2018) also highlighted that while motivation was high in both types, students were predominantly instrumentally motivated.

Secondly, some studies explored the factors influencing motivation. In socio-cultural influences, Gyamfi & Lai (2020) found that socio-cultural contexts influenced students' grit, adaptability, and learning goals, with future careers, societal needs, and life purpose being key factors. In teaching and peer support, Intakum & Phonwanpongsa (2022) emphasized the role of teachers, school services, and peer support in fostering motivation. In social interaction, Hendrajaya (2023) confirmed that the students' social interaction played a vital role in shaping their motivation.

Moreover, in disciplinary and gender differences, students in liberal arts consistently displayed higher motivation scores compared to engineering or other faculties (Hendrajaya, 2023; Esteban, 2023). Then political science students exhibited high motivation, leaning toward instrumental goals (Assavanadda & Tangkiengsirisin, 2018). Moreover, female students were generally more motivated than male students (Assavanadda & Tangkiengsirisin, 2018). By focusing on the majors the participants studies, there is no found those that studied in the faculty of Management Sciences, and Economics. That is why the present study should be conducted.

Research Methodology

1. Data collection

Participants will be asked to complete questionnaires to gather quantitative data, and then a subset will be purposefully selected for interviews to collect qualitative data. The study will involve 150 freshmen from the Faculty of Management Sciences, Engineering, and Economics at Kasetsart University Srinacha Campus, enrolled in the 2024 academic year. Of these 150 students, all will participate in the quantitative phase through the questionnaire, and 60 will be purposefully chosen for the qualitative phase involving interviews.

The study focuses on first-year university students enrolled in a compulsory fundamental English course which is required for their degree. These participants were selected for their level of English proficiency, as assessed by scores on university-administered English placement tests that were used to group students for the Fundamental English course.

2. Instruments

2.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire utilized in this study is a 5-point Likert Scale, adapted from Gardner (2004) and Hosseini and Shokrpour (2019) to assess both intrinsic and extrinsic student motivation. The questionnaire comprises twenty-five items, divided into two primary sections: intrinsic motivation (items 1-12) and extrinsic motivation (items 13-25). The specific questions are listed below:

A. Intrinsic Motivation Questions (item no. 1-12)

- 1) I am studying English with the objective of enhancing my proficiency in the language.
- 2) I experience a sense of confidence when required to speak during my English class.
- 3) I derive considerable enjoyment and satisfaction from learning English.
- 4) I perceive my English class as an inefficient use of time.
- 5) I have limited interest in my English class.
- 6) I am studying English to fulfill the requirements for obtaining a university degree.

- 7) I study English due to my interest in English-speaking communities and their cultures.
- 8) Learning English provides me with the opportunity to travel abroad and immerse myself in English-speaking cultures.
- 9) Learning English can impart a sense of achievement.
- 10) I study English to gain the ability to comprehend content in English on social media platforms.
- 11) My interest in English has significantly increased due to my strong appreciation for its music and songs.
- 12) For me, learning the English language is of considerable importance due to its significant utility in contemporary society.

B. Extrinsic Motivation Questions (item no. 13-25)

- 13) I study English to achieve a high performance in my examinations.
 - 14) My parents actively encourage me to practice English as extensively as possible.
 - 15) Learning English is crucial as it enables me to engage with a broader and more diverse range of individuals.
 - 16) Learning English is essential for my career advancement and professional development.
 - 17) Proficiency in English is advantageous for securing desirable employment opportunities.
 - 18) My English lecturer serves as a significant source of inspiration for me.
 - 19) English is a crucial component of the school curriculum and is mandated as a compulsory course.
 - 20) The effort I invest in learning English is largely contingent upon the quality of the English classes.
 - 21) The effort I devote to learning English is significantly influenced by the quality of the materials provided in the classroom.
 - 22) I study English to facilitate my comprehension of other academic subjects.
 - 23) I study English to keep pace with global economic and technological advancements.
 - 24) My interest in English has significantly increased due to my strong enthusiasm for pop culture.
 - 25) I study English to enhance my educational opportunities and access job prospects abroad.
- Three faculty experts were then consulted to review the questionnaire items in order to ensure content validity.

2.2 Interview

A structured, face-to-face small group interview was employed to collect qualitative data. This approach served as a follow-up to the respondents' questionnaire responses, with two main objectives: 1) to verify the data obtained from the questionnaire and 2) to gather specific information

that could not be revealed through the questionnaire. The interview questions were designed to explore both internal and external factors influencing motivation in learning English. The interviewees were some of the same participants who had completed the questionnaires, and they were those who got a midterm score higher than 70 percent, resulting in 20 selected groups, three students in each group, totaling 60 students. Each group needs to express their opinion after listening to each question. They were allowed to spend five minutes to finish each question by writing their answer(s) on the provided papers. Selection criteria for interviewees also included their willingness to speak openly and their comfort in sharing ideas. Data collection was facilitated using notetaking. That is due to the potential for interviewees to become excited or nervous when using a recording application. The interview questions are listed below:

- 1) In what classroom learning situations do you feel least motivated? Please explain.
- 2) What teaching strategies do you consider having a motivating impact on English learning in university students?
- 3) How do you encounter English in your free time?
- 4) How motivated do you feel to work with English at a university?
- 5) What is/are your goal(s) in learning English at university?
- 6) What keeps you from being motivated to learn English in the classroom?
- 7) What kind of learning environment motivates you to learn English?
- 8) What makes you interested in learning English in the classroom?
- 9) Do you think that motivation plays a crucial role in learning English? Why?
- 10) In your opinion, which type of motivation (integrative or instrumental) has a significant impact on learning English? Why?
- 11) How can a classroom environment be created that positively influences your motivation to learn English effectively in the university context?
- 12) What teaching and learning resources help you feel motivated to learn English effectively while studying at the university?
- 13) What things do you want to achieve by studying English at university?
- 14) What is your motivation in learning English at university?
- 15) When you face a problem/difficulty in learning English, what is the motivation that keeps you learning English?

3. Data analysis

3.1 For Quantitative data analysis

The questionnaire data were analyzed for frequency, percentage, and mean score. A five-point Likert scale was employed to measure the types and levels of participants' learning motivation. This scale was incorporated in the questionnaire to quantify the degree of agreement or disagreement according to the specified criteria.

Mean Range	Interpretation (degree of motivation)
4.51-5.00	the highest
3.51-4.50	high
2.51-3.50	moderate
1.51-2.50	low
1.00-1.50	the lowest

The findings are subsequently presented in terms of frequencies, percentages, and means.

3.2 For Qualitative data analysis

The qualitative data obtained in this study were analyzed using a six-step process commonly employed in qualitative research. These steps included preparing and organizing the data for analysis, coding the data, using the codes to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the data, presenting the findings, interpreting the findings, and validating their accuracy. Subsequently, detailed descriptions were provided to enhance the significance of the findings.

Results

1. The results from the questionnaire

The results from the questionnaire were divided into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Firstly, table 1 presents the intrinsic motivation results.

Table 1: Intrinsic motivation results

Item no.	Statements	Mean	Degree of motivation
1.	I am studying English with the objective of enhancing my proficiency in the language.	4.64	the highest
2.	I experience a sense of confidence when required to speak during my English class.	2.90	moderate

Table 1: Intrinsic motivation results (Continued)

Item no.	Statements	Mean	Degree of motivation
3.	I derive considerable enjoyment and satisfaction from learning English.	4.01	high
4.	I perceive my English class as an inefficient use of time.	1.33	the lowest
5.	I have limited interest in my English class.	2.37	low
6.	I am studying English to fulfill the requirements for obtaining a university degree.	3.23	moderate
7.	I study English due to my interest in English-speaking communities and their cultures.	3.89	high
8.	Learning English provides me with the opportunity to travel abroad and immerse myself in English-speaking cultures.	4.07	high
9.	Learning English can impart a sense of achievement.	4.24	high
10.	I study English to gain the ability to comprehend content in English on social media platforms.	4.53	the highest
11.	My interest in English has significantly increased due to my strong appreciation for its music and songs.	4.11	high
12.	For me, learning the English language is of considerable importance due to its significant utility in contemporary society.	4.12	high

The top – five highest intrinsic motivation are item no.1 “I am studying English with the objective of enhancing my proficiency in the language.” with the highest level, followed by item no.10 “I study English to gain the ability to comprehend content in English on social media platforms.” with the highest level, item no.9 “Learning English can impart a sense of achievement.” with a high level, item no.12 “For me, learning the English language is of considerable importance due to its significant utility in contemporary society.” with a high level, and item no.11 “My interest in English has significantly increased due to my strong appreciation for its music and songs.” with a high level.

Secondly, table 2 presents the extrinsic motivation results.

Table 2: Extrinsic motivation results

Item no.	Statements	Mean	Degree of motivation
13.	I study English to achieve a high performance in my examinations.	4.10	high
14.	My parents actively encourage me to practice English as extensively as possible.	4.27	high
15.	Learning English is crucial as it enables me to engage with a broader and more diverse range of individuals.	4.64	the highest
16.	Learning English is essential for my career advancement and professional development.	4.77	the highest
17.	Proficiency in English is advantageous for securing desirable employment opportunities.	4.75	the highest
18.	My English lecturer serves as a significant source of inspiration for me.	4.35	high
19.	English is a crucial component of the school curriculum and is mandated as a compulsory course.	4.48	high
20.	The effort I invest in learning English is largely contingent upon the quality of the English classes.	3.92	high
21.	The effort I devote to learning English is significantly influenced by the quality of the materials provided in the classroom.	3.93	high
22.	I study English to facilitate my comprehension of other academic subjects.	4.22	high
23.	I study English to keep pace with global economic and technological advancements.	4.40	high
24.	My interest in English has significantly increased due to my strong enthusiasm for pop culture.	3.75	high
25.	I study English to enhance my educational opportunities and access job prospects abroad.	4.59	the highest

The top – five highest extrinsic motivation are item no.16 “Learning English is essential for my career advancement and professional development.” with the highest level, followed by item no.17 “Proficiency in English is advantageous for securing desirable employment opportunities.”

with the highest level, item no.15 “Learning English is crucial as it enables me to engage with a broader and more diverse range of individuals.” with the highest level, item no.25 “I study English to enhance my educational opportunities and access job prospects abroad.” with the highest level, and item no.19 “English is a crucial component of the school curriculum and is mandated as a compulsory course.” with a high level.

2. The results from the interview

Question no. 1 In what classroom learning situations do you feel least motivated? Please explain.

In the responses provided, students express feeling least motivated in classroom settings where there is a lack of engaging, interactive activities and too much reliance on traditional lecture methods. Situations where instructors follow slides or textbooks too strictly, deliver content in a monotone, or deviate from relevant topics contribute to disengagement. Additionally, rapid pacing, a lack of quizzes, minimal classroom activities, and limited opportunities for critical thinking further hinder motivation, disruptive noise levels from classmates and instructors who create a tense atmosphere or lack credibility also contribute to a lack of motivation. For some, the requirement to prepare presentations or respond solely in English adds stress and reduces enthusiasm.

Question no. 2 What teaching strategies do you consider having a motivating impact on English learning in university students?

The responses suggest that teaching strategies with the most motivating impact on English learning for university students are those that foster active engagement, interactive participation, and a supportive classroom atmosphere. Students appreciate a learning environment where the instructor increases interaction through questioning and active engagement, as this approach helps maintain their focus and stimulates interest. Strategies such as question-and-answer sessions, individual and group activities, and unexpected questions encourage students to pay close attention and participate actively.

Additionally, using engaging instructional materials, incorporating games, and providing online quizzes and review exercises are viewed as helpful in enhancing motivation. These methods support varied learning styles and add an element of enjoyment, making the learning process more dynamic. Creating a relaxed atmosphere with a humorous approach, while consistently encouraging class participation and allowing room for mistakes, also contributes to a motivating environment. Strategies that permit students to share opinions, engage in debates, and practice speaking in English without fear of judgment provide confidence-building opportunities that further strengthen motivation.

Question no. 3 How do you encounter English in your free time?

The responses reveal that students commonly encounter English in their free time through various forms of media and casual interactions. Watching movies, listening to music, and playing games are among the most frequently mentioned activities, highlighting entertainment as a primary way students engage with English. Many students also interact with English while using social media platforms and watching content on YouTube, TikTok, and talk shows, which suggests that digital media plays a significant role in their exposure to the language.

Additionally, some students engage in English conversations with friends, including those from foreign countries, and a few reports translating song lyrics or game content, which indicates a deeper level of language interaction. Reading English books, novels, and foreign news also contributes to their language exposure, although this is less commonly mentioned than entertainment-based activities. Overall, these responses demonstrate that students encounter English primarily through enjoyable, informal contexts outside the classroom, suggesting that popular media and social interactions are key sources of motivation and exposure for language learning.

Question no. 4 How motivated do you feel to work with English at a university?

The responses suggest that students feel motivated to work with English at university primarily due to its perceived value for future career opportunities, personal development, and improved communication skills. Many students see English proficiency as a pathway to secure better job prospects, higher salaries, and the ability to establish connections with international colleagues and friends.

Personal factors, such as self-development, achieving good grades, and fulfilling both self and family expectations, also play a significant role in motivating students. Social influences, including the presence of friends with similar language-learning goals and the desire to connect with international students, further enhance their motivation. The appeal of understanding English-speaking artists, keeping up with global trends, and interactions with foreign lecturers or engaging teaching techniques provide additional intrinsic motivators, making the learning experience more relevant and enjoyable.

Question no. 5 What is/are your goal(s) in learning English at university?

The responses reveal that students' primary goals in learning English at university are largely career-oriented, with a strong emphasis on achieving fluency for future job applications, international communication, and enhancing employability. Many students view English as essential for working in international companies, securing good job opportunities, and preparing for potential internships or professional roles that require proficiency in English. This aligns with instrumental motivation, where the language is learned as a practical tool for career advancement.

In addition to career goals, students also aim to improve their communication skills for daily life, suggesting a desire to use English not only professionally but also socially, enhancing their ability to interact with friends, foreigners, and in diverse everyday contexts. Some students seek to build confidence in public speaking and class presentations, indicating that self-improvement and academic achievement are also valued outcomes.

Lastly, achieving high grades and excelling in English exams are recurring themes, reflecting the academic motivations behind their language learning. Overall, these goals demonstrate a balanced combination of career aspirations, practical communication needs, self-development, and academic performance as key motivators for students in learning English at university.

Question no. 6 What keeps you from being motivated to learn English in the classroom?

The responses indicate that several factors contribute to students' lack of motivation to learn English in the classroom, with a mix of personal, academic, and environmental influences at play. One prominent factor is the instructor's choice of language and the use of unfamiliar vocabulary, which can create barriers to understanding and engagement.

Furthermore, external pressures, such as familial expectations and the desire for good grades, add layers of stress that can detract from intrinsic motivation. The pressure to achieve high marks can lead to a focus on assessment rather than the enjoyment of the learning process, as students may prioritize grades over language proficiency.

The desire for a relaxed learning environment is also highlighted in the responses, suggesting that an overly stressful atmosphere can inhibit motivation. Additionally, the aspiration to build friendships and communicate effectively in English points to the importance of social connections as motivators. However, the fear of not understanding or being unable to converse can create anxiety that detracts from their willingness to engage in the learning process.

Question no. 7 What kind of learning environment motivates you to learn English?

The responses indicate that several key elements in the learning environment significantly motivate students to learn English. A prominent factor is the necessity for communication with peers who use English as their primary means of interaction.

The presence of dedicated classmates and committed instructors is another crucial aspect of a motivating learning environment. Additionally, a relaxed and enjoyable atmosphere is highlighted as vital for motivation. The importance of incorporating opportunities for speaking and listening into the classroom is also noted. Lastly, the emphasis on easily understandable teaching materials further supports the idea that a motivating learning environment should cater to students' comprehension levels.

Question no. 8 What makes you interested in learning English in the classroom?

The responses indicate that students' interest in learning English in the classroom is driven by a combination of personal aspirations, cultural interests, career goals, and the quality of instruction.

Question no. 9 Do you think that motivation plays a crucial role in learning English? Why?

The responses to the question regarding the role of motivation in learning English underscore its pivotal importance in fostering both academic success and personal development. Students consistently emphasize that motivation serves as a catalyst for engaging with the language and achieving proficiency.

Question no. 10 In your opinion, which type of motivation (integrative or instrumental) has a significant impact on learning English? Why?

The responses highlight a nuanced understanding of the interplay between integrative and instrumental motivation in learning English, indicating that both forms of motivation play crucial roles in fostering language acquisition.

Question no. 11 How can a classroom environment be created that positively influences your motivation to learn English effectively in the university context?

The responses reflect a comprehensive understanding of how to create a classroom environment that effectively enhances motivation to learn English in a university context. Several key themes emerge from the students' feedback, highlighting the importance of peer influence, instructional strategies, emotional well-being, and the overall classroom atmosphere.

Question no. 12 What teaching and learning resources help you feel motivated to learn English effectively while studying at the university?

The responses reveal a comprehensive understanding of the teaching and learning resources that can enhance motivation for studying English at the university level. The emphasis on various materials and techniques illustrates a multifaceted approach to language learning, highlighting the importance of engaging resources and supportive environments.

Question no. 13 What things do you want to achieve by studying English at university?

The responses reflect a comprehensive understanding of the diverse aspirations that students have regarding their English studies at the university level. These goals range from practical language skills to academic achievements and career opportunities, underscoring the multifaceted benefits of mastering English in today's global landscape.

Question no. 14 What is your motivation in learning English at university?

The responses reveal a range of motivations for learning English at university, reflecting both personal aspirations and external influences. The key themes summarized from the students' answers are career aspirations, academic success, communication and social connections, personal interests, support systems, desire for growth.

Question no. 15 When you face a problem/difficulty in learning English, what is the motivation that keeps you learning English?

The responses highlight various motivations that sustain students' efforts to learn English despite facing challenges. These motivations can be grouped into key themes that reflect both personal aspirations and external influences. Key themes of motivation in overcoming Challenges are career aspirations, personal goals and dreams, academic success, support from external influences, social and cultural interests, catalyst of problems.

Discussion

1. Questionnaire

1.1 Discussing intrinsic motivation results

This research result outlines the top five intrinsic motivators that encourage learners to study English, highlighting the personal interests and self-fulfilling goals that make the language-learning experience meaningful and engaging.

1) Enhancing Language Proficiency: Ranked at the top, “I am studying English with the objective of enhancing my proficiency in the language,” indicates that learners are primarily motivated by the goal of improving their skills. This form of intrinsic motivation reflects a strong personal drive to gain mastery and confidence in using the language, often fostering a deeper and more sustained commitment to learning.

2) Understanding Social Media Content: The second highest motivator, “I study English to gain the ability to comprehend content in English on social media platforms,” reflects the influence of digital media in driving language learning. With social media being a key source of news, entertainment, and cultural exchange, learners find value in understanding English to engage with global content directly. This motivation highlights the role of media in making language learning personally relevant and enjoyable.

3) Sense of Achievement: The third item, “Learning English can impart a sense of achievement,” emphasizes the intrinsic satisfaction that learners experience through reaching language milestones. Achievements—such as understanding a movie without subtitles or holding a conversation—create a rewarding sense of accomplishment, reinforcing their commitment to learning and growth in English proficiency.

4) Utility in Contemporary Society: The fourth item, “For me, learning the English language is of considerable importance due to its significant utility in contemporary society,” shows that learners recognize English as a practical tool in today’s interconnected world. This awareness can fuel intrinsic motivation, as learners see English as personally beneficial, improving their capacity to navigate an English-speaking world and engage with global information. This is in the same line as Alomar and Alenezi (2020) whose finding indicated that the EFL learners were interested in learning English because of international orientation and the globalization factor. Also, Setiyadi and Sukirlan (2016) found that the EFL learners considered English is worth to learn as it can be used to contact with people worldwide. In addition, Nevisi and Farhani (2020) found that the EFL learners considered social prestige as one of intrinsically based motivational factors.

5) Appreciation for English Music and Songs: The fifth highest motivator, “My interest in English has significantly increased due to my strong appreciation for its music and songs,” underlines the cultural draw of English media. Music is a personal and enjoyable way for many learners to connect with the language, blending entertainment with exposure to English. This cultural interest deepens their engagement with language learning in a way that feels authentic and enjoyable. This is in the same line as Wallace and Leong (2020) who reported that the EFL learners increased their intrinsic motivation to learn because their favorite activities were games and songs. Also, Nevisi and Farhani (2020) found that the EFL learners rated personal enjoyment as one of the intrinsic motivations.

1.2 Discussing extrinsic motivation results

The research result here reveals that learners’ extrinsic motivation for studying English is driven primarily by career, social, and educational incentives. These motivators differ from intrinsic motivation as they focus on external rewards and requirements rather than personal satisfaction or enjoyment.

1) Career Advancement and Professional Development: The highest-ranking extrinsic motivator, “Learning English is essential for my career advancement and professional development,” indicates that learners perceive English proficiency as key to moving forward in their careers. This aligns with the global job market’s preference for candidates fluent in English, as it opens doors in international business, technology, and various professional domains.

2) Employment Opportunities: The second item, “Proficiency in English is advantageous for securing desirable employment opportunities,” emphasizes the practical need for English in the job market. English proficiency is often a requirement for high-paying and prestigious positions, especially in multinational companies. Learners, therefore, are motivated by the belief that English will provide a competitive advantage in securing these positions. This is in the same line as Anwari (2019) who found that students are motivated toward the learning of English language because it is helpful for their careers and jobs in the future. Then, and Esteban et al. (2023) pointed out that the motivation to practice English could help the learners find a job in the future. And Nevisi and Farhani (2020) who found that the EFL learners have motivation to learn English for getting a job.

3) Interpersonal Engagement: The third item, “Learning English is crucial as it enables me to engage with a broader and more diverse range of individuals,” speaks to the social benefits of English. As a global language, English enables communication across cultures, which is valuable not only for personal relationships but also for networking in professional settings. This desire for cross-cultural engagement reinforces English as a tool for expanding one’s social and professional network. This is in line with Nevisi and Farhani (2020) who found that source of extrinsic motivation for EFL learners is for effectively interacting with native speakers.

4) Educational and International Opportunities: The fourth item, “I study English to enhance my educational opportunities and access job prospects abroad,” reflects aspirations to use English for educational and career mobility beyond national borders. Many educational institutions and job markets abroad prioritize or even require English proficiency, making it essential for learners who wish to study or work internationally. This is in the same line as Anwari (2019) and Esteban et al. (2023) who found that the learners find learning English is important for using in abroad.

5) Curriculum Requirement: The fifth item, “English is a crucial component of the school curriculum and is mandated as a compulsory course,” shows that for some learners, studying English is largely driven by institutional requirements. While this form of motivation is more passive, it still plays a role in shaping learners’ engagement with the language, as compulsory courses often provide the foundation for further language learning. This is in line with Nevisi and Farhani (2020) who found that the EFL learners is motivated to learn English for pursuing education.

2. Discussing the interview

2.1 Classroom Environment and Engagement

1) Low Motivation Situations (Q1): Students often feel unmotivated in classrooms where the instruction is monotonous, lecture-heavy, or rigidly follows slides without encouraging interaction. Distractions, high noise levels, and stressful atmospheres further reduce motivation.

2) Motivating Environments (Q7): In contrast, students are most motivated in classrooms that foster communication, allow for interaction, and have a relaxed, enjoyable atmosphere. Supportive peers and approachable, committed instructors create an environment that encourages active learning.

3) Positive Classroom Atmosphere (Q11): A motivating classroom is built on peer support, engaging instructional strategies, and a warm environment. Creating opportunities for social interaction and speaking practice can strengthen motivation and improve learning outcomes.

2.2 Teaching Methods and Strategies

1) Effective Teaching Strategies (Q2): Strategies that increase engagement, such as question-and-answer sessions, group work, games, and quizzes, make learning English more stimulating. Incorporating humor and allowing students to share opinions and make mistakes fosters a positive learning atmosphere.

2) Teaching Resources (Q12): Interactive resources, such as digital tools, games, and varied instructional materials, keep students engaged and motivated. Access to diverse materials helps address different learning styles, adding depth and variety to the learning experience.

3) Motivating Factors for Interest in Classroom Learning (Q8): Instructional quality, culturally relevant materials, and career-oriented teaching approaches maintain students' interest in English, as these align with personal goals and aspirations.

2.3 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations

1) Motivation Types (Q10): Both integrative and instrumental motivations play a role in learning English. Integrative motivation encourages students to connect with English-speaking cultures, while instrumental motivation is tied to career goals, academic achievements, and skill development. Each type contributes to a comprehensive motivation strategy.

2) Personal and Academic Aspirations (Q13, Q14): Students aspire to improve both career and personal skills through English learning. Career-oriented goals, like job opportunities and public speaking skills, intersect with academic success and personal growth, showing the multifaceted reasons behind learning English.

2.4 Career-Oriented Goals and Practical Applications

1) Career and Communication Goals (Q5): The primary goal for many students is career-oriented, including achieving fluency for job opportunities and international communication. Students view English as crucial for professional success, internships, and future roles.

2) Role of Motivation in Career Aspirations (Q9, Q15): Students believe motivation is essential for learning English and achieving professional goals. When facing challenges, career aspirations, and personal dreams help students persist in their language studies, reinforcing the link between motivation and long-term achievements.

2.5 Social and Cultural Exposure Outside the Classroom

1) Encounters with English Outside the Classroom (Q3): Students often engage with English in informal settings, such as media, social media, and interactions with foreign friends. This exposure suggests that language learning extends beyond the classroom, with popular culture and casual encounters reinforcing their skills and interest.

2) Social and Cultural Interests (Q15): Cultural connections and the ability to engage with global trends serve as additional motivators. Students who can connect their learning to personal interests or popular media feel a stronger drive to continue studying English.

Conclusion

This study examined internal and external motivational factors perceived by Thai university students learning English as a foreign language by employing both questionnaire and semi-structured, face-to-face focus group interview. Results showed that both types of motivation were generally rated at high to very high levels, aligning with findings from Wallace and Leong (2020). The results from both the questionnaire and interviews revealed that participants considered both internal (intrinsic) and external (extrinsic) factors important for learning English, though external factors were rated higher on average. In summary, findings from both methods suggest that students value both types of motivation in learning English.

Suggestion

Future research should explore motivational differences based on gender and English proficiency level among Thai EFL students in higher education.

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