

Delving Into The Motivational Factors Among Iraqi University Students

Yahia Haroon Dhaighem¹, Ali Mohammad Mohammadi²

^{1,2}Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Language and Literature, Arak University, Arak, Iran, ali63sh@gmail.com

Abstract

Motivational factors have inspired university students to make considerable amount of effort in their language accomplishment. To stretch this line of inquiry, the present study adopted a mixed-method approach to identify the role of motivational factors in iraqi university students. To achieve this purpose, 200 students were selected based on the convenience sampling from various universities in iraq. The participants were required to fill in mtb designed by gardner (1985). Moreover, through running semi-structured interviews, the researchers delved into the motivational orientations of the participants. To analyze quantitative data, t-test was employed. In the qualitative phase, the obtained data was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed based on thematic analysis. In this regard, eight themes were emerged encompassing intrinsic and extrinsic motivational resources. Factors including being an english teacher, personal development, interest in learning english were categorized as intrinsic motivational sources while factors such as seeking job opportunity, maintaining education abroad, travelling, and enhancing professional competencies were detected as extrinsic motivational sources. Furthermore, the findings were discussed and interpreted in light of empirical findings and several implications were proposed for policymakers and university instructors.

Keywords: efl learner, language achievement, motivation, t-test, thematic analysis

1.INTRODUCTION

Language learning is a process in which a fruitful achievement occurs in the context of classroom. Researchers have attempted to boost the effectiveness of learning through sustaining learners' motivation and their endeavors. As a social context, learners need enjoyable atmosphere to progress and engage in the fulfilling scholarly activities; In this regard, the relationships between instructor-learners are of utmost significance in creating a climate in which the learners feel belongness and responsible to their learning (Ushioda, 2016). A bunch of studies in the realm of foreign language learning has demonstrated the contribution of successful interaction between instructor-learner to their language achievements (Pishghadam et al., 2019; Xie and Derakhshan, 2021). Reviewing the literature have shown the predominant role of motivation in sustaining students' engagement in their struggle in learning English as a foreign language in an academic setting. A growing body of research has shown that social relationships within educational settings play a facilitative or debilitating role in students' motivation (Raufelder et al., 2013). On the top of these relationships is teacher-student relationship in which teachers' actions and behavior are presented as types of feedback through supporting or disapproving a learners' performance (Raufelder et al., 2013). Moreover, adopting a particular teaching style has been reported to influence learners' motivation. A variety of components put effect in learners' emotional well-being. As an instance, creating an autonomy-supportive by instructors or following a learner-centered teaching approach contributes to cultivating learners' intrinsic motivation, and as a consequence, their class attendance and engagement increases (Radel et al., 2010; Roth et al., 2007). Academic achievement flourishes as learners hold positive attitudes toward school-related factors and place values and interest on such learning environments (Eccles & Roeser, 1999). However, an undermining of motivation and participation occurs as instructors provide learners with limited choice in tasks and boring assignments. Another significant social factor in sustaining learners' motivation and their sense of belongness is classmates. Positive interactions with classmates can influence team work among and learners transfer their knowledge more conveniently than in learning context that learners feel alone (Wentzel et al., 2010). Furthermore, one of the challenges in developing effective learning approach has been how to sustain learners' motivation in learning process. Due to the significant rate of declining in learner engagement and motivation which resulted in academic dropout and learner alienation, scholars have taken these negative consequences into consideration (Ladd et al., 2009). These issues have led to delegating more

attention to learner motivation. In this vein, teachers are concerned with the problems of disengagement and lack of satisfaction emerged from learner unwillingness to deal with assignments. These undesirable findings have spurred them to revolutionize the curriculum and devote much attention toward motivational sources. To stretch the motivational era of research, the present researchers made effort to scrutinize the motivational sources among Iraqi university students.

2.REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Gardner (1985), motivation has consistently demonstrated the most critical factor in sustaining learners' active participation in academic assignments. Motivation is a significant force in encouraging instructors and learners to establish goals and to make effort for attaining them (Fernet et al., 2008; Royaei & Ghanizadeh, 2016). One of the prominent theoretical standpoints underpinning vast empirical studies is Self-Determination Theory (SDT) proposed by Deci and Ryne (2000). Viewing from the lens of this theory, motivational beliefs are composed of three types of motivation including intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation (Vallerand, 1997). Within the principles of SDT, the facilitative and debilitating roles of motivation emerging from social and cultural components in individuals' well-being are described (Ryan & Deci, 2017, 2020). According to this theory, motivation is composed of five types, amotivation, external regulation and introjected regulation are related to motivational force which are outside of individuals' control and non-autonomous, and identified regulation and integrated regulation types of motivation which focus on autonomous behavior. Amotivation occurs when an individual does not have any motivational orientation to act. Developing from amotivation to extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation is enriched through satisfying the three general needs including: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy is the need when individuals feel their behaviors and goals are in their control; competence is the need when individuals feel effective in encountering challenges and difficulties; and relatedness is the need when individuals pay attention and care for others and feel connected and belongness (Ryan & Deci, 2017, 2020). Meng (2021) carried out a study to explore the effectiveness of rapport between the instructor and learners in learners' motivation. She realized that high level of rapport significantly impacted learners' motivation and engagement in classroom activities. Ng (2019) conducted a systematic review to identify the contributions of learning environments to motivated students especially its influence on students' self-efficacy and academic engagement. His theoretical assumptions emerged from socio-cognitive models of instruction. He found that the access to motivation sources helped students in distance education system and students obtained more achievements in learning context filled with socio-cognitive factors rather than those based on individualistic models. He concluded that focusing on enhancing socio-cognitive factors cultivates students' motivation. It could be interpreted in light of the principles of SDT that emphasizes the effect of the social setting in supporting or underpinning optimal motivation Ryan and Deci (2017).

Ryan and Deci (2020) claimed that SDT has been employed in research related to enhancing students' achievement in the face-to-face learning context. Due to the critical role of motivation in learning and the strong position of SDT in explaining students' motivation, scholars tend to shift the focus of attention to the role of SDT in online learning. In particular, these scholars proposed that SDT should be applied in research in the context of e-learning and the way technology tools fosters students' motivation. Adhering to this argument, Chiu (2022) made effort to explain students' engagement based on SDT in online learning. He indicated that the amount of digital support that students gained through resulted in more satisfaction regarding students' needs. Moreover, he proved the predictive role of students' needs in participants' engagement. To the researchers' best knowledge, there is scarce of research investigating motivational resources among English and psychology university students. The following research questions were formulated:

- 1-Is there any significant difference between the means of English and non-English university students?
- 2-What are the motivational sources of English and non-English university students in Iraqi context?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

The sample of this study was composed of two main groups. In the quantitative part, the instrument was administered to 225 university students. 200 students completed the questionnaire and 22 students did not respond the questionnaire fully. They were selected from two different departments including English and psychology from Iraq universities. The participants were predominantly female (115) and 85 was male. Their age varied from 18 to 29 and their English learning experience ranged from 3 to 5. Table 1 presents the demographic features of the participants. In the qualitative part, 20 participants were selected for conducting semi-structured interviews.

Table 1 *The Demographic Features of Participants*

| Variable | Categories | N |
|--------------------|------------|-----|
| Gender | Male | 85 |
| | Female | 115 |
| University subject | English | 120 |
| | Psychology | 80 |
| Age | 18-24 | 130 |
| | 24-29 | 70 |

3.2. Instruments

To measure participants' motivational orientations, the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) developed and validated by Gardner (2000). The scale consists of 10 multiple-choice items. The participants responded the items on 5-point Likert ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). The reliability of this questionnaire examined through Cronbach's alpha was 0.83.

3.3. Semi-structured interview

To scrutinize the motivational factors which were influential in participants' learning experiences, the researchers formulated several interview questions. Following are the core questions asked in the interview:

- 1-How many years have you studied English?
- 2-How do you feel about learning English?
- 3-What are the factors that inspire you to make effort in learning English?
- 4-What strategies do you apply in removing barriers in learning English?
- 5-What kinds of activities do you prefer to do to increase your interest in learning English?

3.4. Data collection

The process of data collection started with distributing the AMTB scale among 200 university students. Before distributing the scale, the researcher explained the objectives of this study and took the professors' permission to devote 20 m of their time classes to filling in the scale. Moreover, the participants' consent was obtained before responding the items.

3.5. Data analysis

To analyze data quantitatively, the researchers utilized descriptive statistics (the mean, standard deviation) and independent samples t-test in SPSS software. In the qualitative part, thematic analysis was employed to interpret data emerged from semi-structured interviews. To do this, first, the researchers examined all data for the purpose of preliminary coding. Then, the researchers coded data individually and based on the similarities among participants' responses, they were classified into specific categories. Furthermore, the researchers studied the categories carefully to ensure no new category was obtained and the categories were saturated. As a critical procedure in checking the validity, Corbin and Strauss (2008) suggest the researchers to give the interpreted data to participants to check whether the results would match their responses. To achieve this purpose, the researchers invited an instructor with sufficient experience to examine the analyses. After giving some comments, she confirmed the process. Table 2 indicates that all five interview items have acceptable interrater reliability.

Table 2. *Interrater Reliability of Interview*

| Item | Percent agreement | Scott's Pi | Cohen's Kappa |
|------|-------------------|------------|---------------|
|------|-------------------|------------|---------------|

| | | | |
|--------|-----|------|------|
| Item 1 | 92 | 0.92 | 0.93 |
| Item2 | 100 | 1 | 1 |
| Item3 | 85 | 0.85 | 0.86 |
| Item4 | 100 | 1 | 1 |
| Item5 | 92 | 0.92 | 0.93 |

4. RESULTS

A)The qualitative part

Motivational sources influencing university students' English learning

In this section, the participants' responses to semi-interview questions were classified into eight themes as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Motivational Sources Influencing Participants' Learning English*

| Theme | Subtheme | Example |
|-----------|---|--|
| Intrinsic | Becoming an English teacher | Being an English teacher gives me a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment |
| | Integration with professional community | I enjoy learning English to share my Knowledge and ideas in English language |
| | Interest in learning English | From childhood, I have enjoyed learning English. It's so interesting for me to present my ideas, experiences in English. |
| | Personal development | I attempt to learn English to gain social confidence. |
| Extrinsic | Job opportunity | I think being master of English provides me with more job selection |
| | Professional growth | I like to be successful in my job. So, I improve my English language knowledge. |
| | Access to academic sources | Being proficient in English helps me to enjoy reading international sources. |
| | Travelling | My aim of learning English is to travel around the world to get familiar with different people, food, and events. |

As Table 3. indicated, two types of motivational factors were identified in investigating the participants' narration focusing on motivational sources. Concerning intrinsic motivational sources, four themes were found entailing becoming an English teacher, integration with professional community, personal development, and interest in learning English. To have more elaboration, one participant's efforts in improving learning English was attributed to connect and collaborate with international professional community. In this vein, she mentioned that: "I'd like to learn English to share my knowledge and experiences with international researchers." With respect to becoming an English teacher, one participant state that: "Being an English teacher gives me a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment." Concerning personal development, one participant's response was: "I'd like to learn English to gain social confidence."

Moreover, four themes related to extrinsic motivation were extracted from interview analysis. These themes include job opportunity, professional growth, travelling, and access to academic sources. Regarding job opportunity, one participant mentioned that: "I think being master of English provides me with more job selection." With respect to access to academic source, one participant asserted that: "Being proficient in English helps me to enjoy reading international sources." Concerning professional growth, one of the responses was: "I like to be successful in my job. So, I improve my English language knowledge." Regarding the theme travelling, one participant explained that: "My aim of learning English is to travel around the world to get familiar with different people, food, and events."

Motivational sources influencing psychology students' English learning

Table 4 presents the motivational sources behind learning English among psychology students

Table 4. *Motivational Sources Influencing Psychology Students*

| Theme | Subtheme | Example |
|-----------|--|---|
| Intrinsic | Connection with professional community | I enjoy learning English to share my knowledge with the professional community of my subject. |
| | Personal development | Learning English increases my confidence and sense of efficacy. |
| Extrinsic | Job opportunity | I learn English to find better job opportunities in abroad. |
| | Travelling | I like to travel to foreign countries to see other cultures and historical buildings. |
| | Educational requirements | In order to pass PhD exam, I should have enough knowledge in English. |

With respect to psychology students, the findings as described in Table 3, indicated that both intrinsic and extrinsic sources impacted participants' efforts to learn English language. The intrinsic factors include connection with professional community such as LinkedIn (*"Being proficient in English is essential in developing my professional life. In this way, I'm interested in learning English to enrich my work."*), personal development such as cultivating self-efficacy, self-confidence, and resilience in challenging situations (*learning English encourages me to invest time and energy on developing confidence. Or When I see I can speak a foreign language and talk about my plans, wishes, and ideas in a new language, I find a sense of pride."*)

A large percent of English learners' motivation who follow English courses seriously were more extrinsically-oriented. In particular, satisfying educational requirements, extending job opportunities, and travelling to English language countries were the main motivational reasons that encouraged the participants to put attempt in progressing in English. Concerning job opportunity, one participant argued that: *"I tend to learn English to find better job opportunities in English language countries."* With regard to educational requirement, one participant mentioned that: *"I like to learn English to demonstrate my academic abilities. Without learning English it's rather impossible."* One participant remarked that: *a considerable amount of professional knowledge is presented in English. So, I try my best to learn English."* Another participant narrated that: *"since English is an international language and every aim we want to pursue among scholars, we should have an appropriate level of English proficiency."*

Motivational sources influencing English students' English learning

Table 5. Motivational Sources Influencing English Students

| Subject | Theme | Subtheme | Example |
|---------|----------------------|--|---|
| English | Intrinsic | Becoming an English teacher | I like to learn English to continue my education and become a teacher. |
| | | Interest in English language | From childhood, I have enjoyed learning English. It's so interesting for me to present my ideas and experiences in English. |
| | Personal development | Today's the social media is full of texts and pictures related to emotional well-being. I'd like to learn English to use them. | |
| | Extrinsic | Job opportunity | I'd like to increase my English knowledge to find my favorite job. |
| | | Professional growth | I like to improve my professional competencies, so, I need to develop my English. |
| | | Use of international academic sources | I want to be proficient in English to use various sources in social media |

The second research question deals with identifying the motivational resources that put influential in progressing learning English among English students. The themes emerged from participants' responses to semi-structured interviews are presented in Table 5. According to this table, participants narrated that

their motivational resources created from both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. Becoming an English teacher, interest in English language, and personal development were three intrinsic factors reported by English students. Following are elaborated by participants as instances of these motivational resources. Concerning the theme becoming an English teacher, one participant stated that: *"I'm willing to learn English to continue my education in teaching and become a teacher."* Another participant who followed his interest and made effort to learn English mentioned that: *"From childhood, I have enjoyed learning English. It's so interesting for me to present my ideas and experiences in English."* With regard to personal development, one participant mentioned that: *"Today's the social media is full of texts and pictures related to emotional well-being. I'd like to learn English to use them."* With respect to extrinsic motivational resources, three themes were obtained including job opportunities, professional growth, and use of international academic sources. One participant pointed to seeking better job opportunities through strengthening his knowledge of English language and narrated that: *"I'd like to increase my English knowledge to find my favorite job."* Concerning professional growth, another participant remarked that: *"I like to improve my professional competencies, so, I need to develop my English."* Regarding use of international academic sources, one participant stated that: *"I want to be proficient in English to use various sources in social media."* As the analyses showed that most English students have intrinsic tendency to engage in learning English.

Table 6. The shared motivational sources among the participants

| Theme | Subtheme | English | Psychology |
|-----------|-------------------------|---------|------------|
| Intrinsic | Personal development | + | + |
| Extrinsic | Job opportunity | + | + |
| | Use of academic sources | + | + |

As Table 6. shows, personal development as an intrinsic source, job opportunities and use of academic sources as extrinsic sources are common motivational factors among two groups of students.

B)The quantitative part

To investigate whether motivation level varies across English and non-English students, an independent samples *t*-test was employed. The outcome of this analysis is shown in Table 7.

Table 7.

Descriptive Statistics of Motivation Level between English and Non-English Students

| | degree | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|------------|--------|-----|--------|----------------|-----------------|
| Motivation | 1 | 80 | 175.12 | 24.22 | 2.70 |
| | 2 | 120 | 184.35 | 28.59 | 2.60 |

As the table shows, the mean scores of this variable is different in the two groups (1: non-English students, 2: English students). As can be seen, the motivation level of English students is higher than that of their non-English counterparts.

To examine whether this difference is statistically significant, an independent samples *t*-tests was employed. The results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | | | | | |
|------------|-------------------------|---|------|-------|-----|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference |
| Motivation | Equal variances assumed | 1.71 | .182 | -2.27 | 198 | .023 | -8.86 | 3.88 |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------|--------|------|-------|------|
| Equal variances not assumed | -2.34 | 186.73 | .018 | -8.86 | 3.88 |
|--------------------------------|-------|--------|------|-------|------|

As indicated in Table 8., a significant difference between English and non-English subject was found in favor of English students ($t=-2.28, p<0.05$). Therefore, the research hypothesis is rejected.

5.DISCUSSION

Identifying motivational sources have spurred an effort to delve into why some children are more motivated than others. To extend this line of inquiry, the authors made effort to investigate the motivational sources adopted by university students majoring English and psychology. The results indicated the multiple facets of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among participant. This issue has been consistently reported in previous studies (Zheng et al., 2019). Regarding students majoring in English, the participants expressed willingness to continue their education to become an English instructor. It could be justified that English students selected their university major in English subjects (e.g. teaching, translation) in order to deal with English language in instructional issues and translation. It seems clear that these students perceived the advantages of learning English and pursued their aims related to English language. Due to these reasons, this group of participants have adopted intrinsic motivation sources. The minor of psychology participants was a-motivated to maintain attempts in learning English. They showed no willingness to learn English since they did not set any clear goal for their future. As they remarked, lack of job opportunities related to English language was the main factor that diminish their willingness to make plans for learning English. However, a considerable number of psychology students reported that immigration to abroad especially English language countries was the key motivational source. Putting emphasis on developing English language proficiency to communicate with international researchers was the second motivational source among psychology students. It can be stated that the present findings support the previous finding in that both sources of motivation are influential in maintaining students' struggles in learning English language (Zarei, & Elekaei, 2013). This point can be addressed in designing tasks and developing materials to flourish learners' engagement in learning process. Through conducting semi-structured interviews, differences in participants' responses concerning the influential environmental factors in learning English successfully were identified. Some participants mentioned that positive climate of classroom produced largely by instructor-students relation. However, it is not much concern for some students. Their motivation in learning English was not solely contingent on desirable feelings towards the instructors. They believed that instructors' professional abilities such as having high knowledge such as clear and sufficient elaboration on difficult points, managing classroom, and giving useful comments to students are more critical in student achievement than having a warm relationship. Some participants narrated that learning English in peer group is a motivation resource. For these participants, having motivated classmates are more beneficial than learning individually. To achieve it, they tend to establish a group, they set schedule for their learning and make an appointment for discussing the lessons and practice assignments. Subsequently, they obtain good amount of knowledge and share their experiences. Another classification of answers indicated that some participant enjoyed learning English without participating in class as they perceived these were not resulted in successful achievement. To support the qualitative data, quantitative analyses including independent samples t-test was employed between English and psychology students. As the findings showed, a significant difference between English and psychology participants was gained. This difference could be justified in terms of differences in individual interest, duration of learning English, and the objectives of instructional materials. Regarding individual interests, most of English students claimed that they have started learning English from childhood and they are intrinsically motivated to progress in learning English. It is clear that such participants' identity has been shaped differently from those who learnt English in adolescence. Moreover, these participants deal with English language more than psychology participants. It provoked them to establish their professional goals through strengthening English proficiency and in this regard, they fulfill their needs and aims by practicing English. Furthermore, most English students learnt English through covering textbooks that focused on communicative abilities which were more intriguing than those thought in high schools revolving around grammar and structure of English language. The type of activities in English textbooks thought in language institutes are group works in which the learners acquire

the social abilities and interactive strategies in using a new language. The climate of such learning context motivates the participants to devote more time, attention, and energy to carry out tasks. Consequently, the learners find more engagement and belongingness to the learning process.

6.CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study indicated that the integration of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations encouraged learners to devote time and effort to obtain their needs in English language. This study encompasses several implications across educational domains. Concerning policymakers and curriculum designers, the establishment of motivational patterns can assist to boost the role of individual differences in developing instructional materials. Moreover, the findings might help to underscore the effect of individual differences in creating rapport between university instructors and students (Wigfield & Eccles, 2001). Fostering the rapport between instructors and students diminishes the anxiety level of complicated tasks and encourages students to rely on their instructors' support and care. With regard to instructors, identifying the motivational orientation might help to cover students' needs, promote classroom management, and respect to students' preferences in the educational setting. Instructors can contribute to extending students' achievement through generating an atmosphere in which learners feel comfortable in transferring their feelings and emotions. They can accommodate their teaching style with students' learning strategies. In this regard, the students are not observed as maladjusted ones who cannot match with instructor's teaching style. They need sufficient attention to their various motivational needs. The critical role of instructors as a prominent source of motivation for students evidenced by the qualitative finding of the present study (almost 80% of the sample).

Moreover, due to the critical role of instructors on flourishing students' self-confidence and motivation, instructors tend to adopt an effective learning path toward students' achievement (VanderVoort, 2006). In this regard, syllabus designers are suggested to put attempt to integrate instructors' voices in their instructional practices. To achieve this aim, devoting attention to instructors' motivational disposition could be fruitful in their professional functioning (Fernet et al., 2012). Additionally, learning a language possesses a multi-facets nature meaning that cognitive, social, and emotional components are intertwined together. As a bunch of research has documented, when students feel enjoyment in practicing cognitive domain, they gain more motivational aspirations and make more struggle. Therefore, it raises the achievement level. This can be implied in English classes that incorporating motivational factors contributes to learners' emotional well-being and pushes them to make attempts and take more responsibilities in their accomplishments (Wang et al., 2021). Concerning the psychology participants, as their motivational resources are oriented toward extrinsic components such as continuing education, developing professional aspects such as extending professional knowledge, instructors should specify a part of class time to focus on these issues and discuss them with extrinsic-oriented students to enhance their engagement. As other research projects, this study includes some limitations. First, identifying motivational sources is better gained by conducting longitudinal research since there should be intervening factors in learning process and the researchers cannot the obtained findings to a limited set of factors. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted cautiously while generalizing to other samples. One of the critical variables in examining the motivational factors is contextual factor; Whether the family, school contexts have been suitable to nurture motivation among students. Moreover, identifying the challenges that have diminished students' motivation could be helpful in designing new motivational tasks.

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