

The Impact Of Motivation On English Learning Outcomes And The Moderating Role Of Gender On The Relationship Between Motivation And English Learning Outcomes Of Advanced Level Students In The Kurunegala District In Sri Lanka

E.M.H.J. Edirisinghe^{1*}, Ali Khatibi², S. M. Ferdous Azam³

¹Department of English Language Teaching, Wayamba University of Sri Lanka, Kuliyaipitiya, SriLankahemanthawusl@gmail.com

²Graduate School of Management (GSM), Management and Science University, Selangor, Malaysia, alik@msu.edu.my

³Graduate School of Management (GSM), Management and Science University, Selangor, Malaysia, drferdous@msu.edu.my

Abstract

In line with several previous studies, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation plays a pivotal role in shaping learners' perseverance, engagement, and overall academic performance. On the other hand, gender's effect on the relationship between learner motivation and successful learning outcomes in English as a second language (ESL) has yielded conflicting findings in prior research. While some studies suggest that female learners exhibit greater motivation and achieve superior learning performances, several studies present opposing evidence. Additionally, many studies report no discernible gender-based differences in this relationship.

Consequently, the present research aims to investigate the impact of learner motivation on successful English learning outcomes and whether gender differences influence the strength or direction of this relationship. This quantitative research employed a questionnaire-based methodology involving 396 advanced-level students selected through stratified sampling from the arts stream of the 30 national schools in the Kurunegala district of Sri Lanka. Statistical analysis of the quantitative data was performed using SPSS version 25, employing techniques such as independent sample t-tests, descriptive statistics, and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

The study substantiates that intrinsic motivation has a significant influence on the achievement of learning outcomes in the General English subject of the G.C.E. (Advanced Level) curriculum, whereas extrinsic motivation demonstrates no significant effect. Additionally, the findings reveal that gender does not moderate the relationship between either intrinsic or extrinsic motivation and learning outcomes.

These findings will lay a foundation for further research on the interrelationship between motivation, gender and academic accomplishment in English language learning, both in Sri Lanka and similar educational contexts. Furthermore, the results will offer critical implications for educators and policymakers when developing more effective curricula and refining instructional practices to enhance English language learning outcomes.

Keywords: English language learning outcome, Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, Gender

INTRODUCTION

Second language (L2) acquisition is inherently a multifaceted process, shaped by an interplay of biological and psychological factors (Ranjan & Philominraj, 2020). Previous studies have indicated that students' learning engagement is influenced by many factors (Chai *et al.*, 2023). Among these factors, learner motivation and gender emerge as pivotal determinants influencing the trajectory of L2 learning. Research studies conducted worldwide have proven close relationships between motivation and L2 learning outcomes. L2 learners' higher motivation displays good discipline of the learners succeeding in valuable learning outcomes (Lăpădat & Lăpădat, 2024; Yuliani *et al.*, 2023; Le, X. & Le, T., 2022; Jiao, *et al.*, 2022; Jingyi Ai, *et al.*, 2021; Larasati & Simatupang, 2020; Nurhidayah, 2020; Astuti, 2020). Furthermore,

Liao *et al.* (2023) identify engagement in learning as a dynamic mechanism that involves personal as well as contextual factors, while motivation is an individual factor that influences learning engagement. However, the scholars emphasize the necessity of conducting more studies to investigate the effects of learner motivation on their achievement of L2 proficiency. Further studies should be conducted with many English language learners to specify the role of motivation in L2 acquisition (Nurhidayah, 2020). Further, the studies conducted to investigate the effect of gender on motivation and learning outcomes have observed contrasting findings. Scholars like Zohra & Aziz (2023), Bergman & Svensson (2021), Wahyu *et al.* (2021), and Obiageri *et al.* (2019) found that female students had better tendencies in motivation to learn English than their male counterparts, being better performers than the male students. In addition, the studies conducted by Rahman *et al.* (2021), Niaz *et al.* (2018), and Areen (2017) have not revealed any impact of gender differences on L2 motivation. In addition, Areen (2017) found that male students performed better than female students in the process of learning English. Naz *et al.* (2020) and Saranraj *et al.* (2016) found that the educational attainment of the students was affected significantly by both their extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, where the male students were more motivated extrinsically than female students. Due to these conflicting findings, it is obvious that more studies should be conducted to confirm or refute the results of previous studies. The effects of gender on motivation and learning outcomes need to be explored and investigated more in countries where English is learned as a foreign or second language (Agus *et al.* 2021).

Nonetheless, investigations related to the scenario are very limited in the Sri Lankan context, leading to a notable gap in the literature. Hence, understanding the effect of learners' motivation on learning outcomes and the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between motivation and learning outcomes will assist education policymakers, curriculum and material developers, and language teachers to better scaffold the design of course contents and apply better teaching methodologies to achieve the targeted objectives of the teaching-learning process. As a result, the relationship between learners' motivation, gender, and L2 learning outcomes should be explored further to achieve better results in the L2 teaching-learning process in Sri Lanka.

The English language, for decades, has achieved the distinction of being the most extensively spoken and internationally influential means of communication, and this dominance of the English language has solidified an indispensable status in Sri Lanka as well, and the constitution of Sri Lanka recognizes English as the "link" language (Parliament Secretariat, 2021), complementing Sinhala and Tamil, the country's official and national languages. Thus, reflecting its significant role in numerous sectors, English has long been incorporated as a core subject in the Sri Lankan state school curriculum, from grades 03 to 13. Further, English is taught as an additional subject in higher education courses, highlighting its importance in the academic landscape.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gardner (1985) classifies motivation in L2 learning into two basic types, namely, instrumental (that arises from the learner's necessity to learn that language, such as passing an examination or winning financial rewards) and integrative (that refers to learning that language for personal development and cultural enhancement). Dörnyei (1998) on the other hand, has defined motivation as extrinsic (EM) (the actions performed by an L2 learner to achieve instrumental aims such as obtaining a kind of reward for the actions or preventing a punishment - a kind of incentive, stimulated by external factors) and intrinsic motivation (IM) (which denotes the motivation to be involved in an action due to its enjoyable nature - a kind of mental satisfaction).

These definitions of EM and IM were revisited by Deci & Ryan (2000) in their Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and they classified IM as the accomplishment of a task for its innate satisfaction, devoid of any important thought. EM, on the other hand, is the accomplishment of an activity to obtain external rewards. The SDT shows the discrepancies between EM and IM with their different types. Accordingly, IM generally denotes the motivation of immersion in a task since it results in one's feeling of enjoyment or satisfaction. Deci & Ryan (2000) explain that this is one's innate necessity for competence and self-

determination, and with the freedom given to perform an activity, intrinsically motivated individuals find interesting circumstances to develop themselves through the challenges given by the activity. IM, as Deci & Ryan (2000) explain, has three main types such as IM knowledge (motivation to do a particular activity to explore new concepts and develop novel knowledge), IM accomplishment (received satisfaction in the effort to accomplish a goal or to master an activity), and IM stimulation (stimulation that results from completing a task). The SDT proposes three main drivers (basic psychological needs) of IM, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness in learning. The empirical studies have proven that an improvement of these psychological drivers in the learners enhances their IM to learn. If the learners' competence, autonomy, and relatedness are improved, it will increase the learners' IM (Amin, 2020).

Autonomy in learning emphasises the learners' independence with a sense of control, and it will improve the learners' IM, enabling them to process information deeply. In this case, to support the learners' autonomy, they can be encouraged to set learning objectives on their own, and contribute to teaching material, and more suitable teaching techniques can be implemented for them (Valerio, 2012).

Competence, on the other hand, refers to one's tendency to his/her feeling of effectiveness in achieving valuable, expected, and useful results. The term, competence is used to define a person with sufficient qualities to complete a given assignment or to describe the state of having enough skill, intellect, and strength (Gabriel, 2021). 'Competence involves an individual's knowledge of how to accomplish an outcome as well as his/her ability to perform the actions to achieve the outcome' (Xiaoping & Tianzhu, 2021, p.01). Amanda (2021) explains that competence generally refers to the feeling of 'effectiveness' in the context of an individual's social environment, and those who are competent are more willing to take on challenges than those who are not. Amanda (2021), Xiaoping & Tianzhu (2021), and Elliott *et al.* (2004) explain that learners' competence can be increased by creating the most appropriate learning experiences, providing optimal challenges, and giving constructive and authentic feedback to them. Feedback is defined by Jug *et al.* (2019) as the delivery of information based on direct observation to improve performance. Effective feedback given to the learners can be considered a powerful intervention to upkeep learning (Ivonne & Kim, 2022), and it increases student motivation (Asnwi & Wariyati, 2021). It is thus understood that the teacher's feedback after the learning tasks (exercises, assignments, projects, tests, etc.) assists in cultivating learner competence, leading to subsequent learning.

Further, explaining the ways to cultivate competence, Amanda (2021) suggests strategies such as providing the learners with video resources as well as lesson handouts that cover evidence-based learning strategies, note-taking and reading strategies, and goal-setting skills and making them easily accessible for the students. Difficulties in accessing and utilizing the learning materials make the learners suffer and create obstacles to motivation (Amanda, 2021). Further, for building competence in the learners, Elliott *et al.* (2004) suggest creating the most appropriate learning experiences and challenges in the class and inspiring a sense of initiation. It is then recommended that better language learning experiences and challenges, such as activity-based, student-centred learning, pair and group work, and extra-curricular activities like language competitions, games, debates, projects, English clubs, and computer-assisted teaching, should be implemented in L2 classes rather than using traditional teacher-centred teaching methods. These learning experiences intrinsically motivate learners to perform their tasks since the engagement in those activities is enjoyable and interesting for them, and participation is its own reward, helping them to be motivated in their investment of the task-directed effort (Dysvik & Kuvass, 2013). Extra-curricular activities aid the learner's confidence development and self-esteem (Nord, 2022), attract the learners to get motivated and positively change their attitudes (especially introverted students), create a better learning environment and promote their communication skills, create an environment for the learners to share their ideas and opinions without hesitation and the language preparatory programs should organize such language oriented extra-curricular activities (Yildiz Yunus, 2016). Engaging in these types of activities will enhance their aspiration to feel connected to others and cared for by others, which finally increases their IM to learn the subject.

Relatedness in the SDT refers to one's aspiration to feel connected to others and cared for by others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In short, people have the desire to experience a sense of belonging and attachment to

others, which leads to IM doing an activity. The individual's tendency for the feeling of relation and connection with others is identified as the need for relatedness (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). Thus, the learners who work with others are concerned with motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). As per Deci & Ryan (2000), there are four levels of EM in education, namely external regulation, introjection, identification, and integrated regulation. As they further describe, external regulation happens when the learner is determined by tangible benefits or external rewards, whereas introjection is identified as the learner's performance in the tasks because of the pressure to complete an activity that is not self-determined, because the action is done only as a reaction to pressure and not of personal choice. Identification (identified regulation) is described as the most self-determined EM form. The learner carries out tasks because of their importance and relevance to him or her. Noels *et al.* (2000) explain this as the learner who knows the importance of proficiency in L2 will agree to tolerate repetitive exercises. Integrated regulation is explained as the learner deciding to carry on certain activities in L2 with such kind of motivation because such engagements form an important part of his/ her individuality (the rest of the learner's valued goals and life activities). Further, external regulation involves performing an activity to obtain a reward or avoid punishment, and Introjected regulation is driven by internal pressures such as guilt or obligation (Guay, 2021). He further explains that identified regulation occurs when individuals value a behavior and recognize its personal importance, even if they do not enjoy it, while integrated regulation happens when that behavior aligns with their central values and sense of self.

Furthermore, scholars view the motivation of the learner as a key factor in successful L2 learning outcomes. Kintu *et al.* (2017) define learning outcomes as statements that refer to what a learner should know, understand, and demonstrate in the completion of a learning process. Similarly, Persky *et al.* (2020) define the same as components of educational accomplishments, namely student awareness of learning aims, learning occurrence, performance improvement, and result accomplishment.

Scholars have identified the necessity of L2 motivation for effective language learning. Student motivation plays a key role in successful language learning that should be paid much attention to in the teaching-learning process (Lăpădat & Lăpădat, 2024; Saranraj *et al.*, 2016; Dörnyei, 1998; Gardner, 1985). L2 learners' constructive attitude and higher motivation display good discipline of the learners, succeeding in valuable learning outcomes (Astuti, 2020). Students' proficiency in their second foreign language is influenced positively by their instrumental and integrative motivations to learn the language (Zhang & Wang, 2020). Furthermore, Dörnyei & Ushioda (2021) explain that learners with IM are likely to continue more in learning even while facing learning difficulties. Thus, learners' IM should be improved for better learning outcomes. One way to enhance language proficiency is by fostering learners' IM to learn (Marszalek *et al.* 2022).

On the other hand, research studies have proved that gender affects the outcomes of learning (Alkaabi, 2016). Paying attention to the studies conducted to investigate the effect of gender on motivation and learning outcomes, contrasting findings are observed. It is noticeable that language learner's motivation, attitudes and gender have significant influences on the L2 learning process (Hamad, 2014). To examine these relationships, the researcher piloted a questionnaire-based descriptive method research study with students in the Department of English at King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia. He found that both genders had demonstrated an instrumental type of motivation concerning the learning process, and female students were more motivated to learn English than their male counterparts, being better performers than the male students.

Somchay & Hui (2022) surveyed 76 English-major undergraduates from different levels of study in a university in the Northern State of the Lao PDR and found gender variances in the integrative motivational orientations to learning English, where female respondents reported a higher aggregate score compared to male counterparts. Integrativeness refers to self-oriented motivation, such as learning for an individual's self-satisfaction or pleasure, while instrumental motivation is much associated with pragmatic reasons for learning L2 (Dörnyei, 1998). A similar result was found by Baker & MacIntyre (2000, as cited in Somchay & Hui, 2022), where they found higher integrative motivation in female students with higher instrumental motivation in male learners in L2 learning. Further, Bergman & Svensson (2021) ascertain

that female learners possess a stronger desire generally to learn English as an L2, and this desire may impact their higher performance levels in L2 learning. Agus *et al.* (2021) investigated the interrelatedness of the learners' gender differences, attitudes, and motivation toward English language teaching with 70 students at a state junior high school in Banyumas Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. The findings have demonstrated significant differences in the effect of gender on students' motivation and attitudes. Both males and females were proven to be highly motivated and had positive attitudes to learn, whereas female students showed higher average scores on the results (Agus *et al.* 2021).

Almegren (2022) examined the motivation of Saudis to learn English after the proclamation of the Saudi Vision 2030 (strategic economic and social development plan), conducting a questionnaire-based survey with 175 male and female Saudi citizens aged 18–55 years. The results exposed higher motivational levels among female and younger participants to learn English than their male and older counterparts. The findings also indicated more intrinsic-oriented motivations than extrinsic ones among the participants.

Zohra & Aziz (2023) explored the effect of learners' attitudes, motivation, and gender differences on EFL Learning in Adrar Middle Schools, distributing questionnaires among 242 middle school learners from different levels of study in different schools around the city of Adrar. The results indicated that these learners had positive emotional, behavioral, and cognitive attitudes toward learning English, and they exhibited higher motivation to learn English. In addition, concerning gender, the researchers found that female students were more motivated and had higher positive attitudes to learn English than male learners.

Wahyu *et al.* (2021) conducted a study to explore the students' overall motivation and gender differences in motivation to learn English online during the COVID-19 pandemic. This questionnaire-based quantitative study collected data from 568 senior high school students in Bontang City, East Borneo, in Indonesia. The findings have indicated that learners' overall motivation varies by gender. Moreover, in general, higher levels of motivation have been observed in female students than in male students in learning English online. Concerning the motivational variables, the results have indicated higher levels of instrumental orientation among female learners, and they have been more self-regulated than male students. However, regarding their self-efficacy beliefs, significant differences have not been distinguished between the two genders in online learning English during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study has further ascertained that female learners outperform their male counterparts in language learning. Similarly, Obiageri *et al.* (2019) and Gardner & Lambert (1972) have advocated that female students have a greater motivation to learn, showing higher expected achievements in studies.

Hou-Keat *et al.* (2017) conducted a mixed-method research study, engaging 448 students of the Universiti Kuala Lumpur Malaysian Spanish Institute to find the effect of motivation and gender in learning Spanish as a foreign language. The study identified that these students were greatly motivated to learn Spanish. However, significant differences have not been found between instrumental and integrative motivations and gender. Both qualitative and quantitative results suggest that these students are slightly more instrumentally motivated and appreciate the Spanish language and its culture simultaneously (Hou-Keat *et al.* 2017). They further explain that because of this reason, female students are highly motivated instrumentally to learn Spanish.

In addition, Dornyei *et al.* (2006) also confirm that female learners are more motivated in L2 learning than their male peers. These scholars have further identified that females show a willingness to put more effort into L2 learning than male learners. Additionally, Sabiq *et al.* (2021) also found significant gender differences in motivation toward learning English in their studies, with female students scoring higher than males.

To find the impact of the gender of the learner on L2 motivation and learning, Areen, (2017) conducted a mixed-method investigation using questionnaires and conducting interviews with the students at basic and secondary schools (Harem Secondary School, Sara High School in SaidSadiq, and Sarcham Primary School in Dukan) and the students in the English department of the University of Sulaimani in Chamchamal District. The findings have not revealed any impact of gender differences on L2 motivation. However, the results exposed that male students perform better than female students in the process of

learning English (Areen, 2017). A similar finding about gender differences in motivation is found in the questionnaire survey conducted by Rahman *et al.* (2021) with 300 participants selected from six Aliya madrasahs in Bangladesh to explore the factors and motivation levels for learning English among Aliya madrasah students in Bangladesh. The results revealed no significant difference in motivation for learning English by gender. Similarly, Chung & Huang (2010) found in their study that males and females were similarly motivated to learn due to encouragement and compliments received from their teachers and parents, leading to no significant gender difference in motivation and learning outcomes. Further, Makesvanh & Low (2022) conducted a study to examine integrative motivation among the learners of English in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. The findings have not indicated any significant gender differences in their overall integrative motivation to learn English. A similar finding has been observed in the study conducted by Niaz *et al.* (2018) with English language learners at the Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh, Jamshoro. The researchers have not found any considerable differences in the levels of motivation between genders. Furthermore, Arslan & Ciftci (2021) also found in their study that gender did not influence EFL learners' motivation.

In contrast, some research on gender effects on motivation for L2 learning has indicated that male learners exhibit higher motivation than female learners, resulting in a gap in the findings. In their quantitative, descriptive survey research study, conducted with 162 students from the University of Haripur and Hazara University, Mansehra in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to investigate the students' motivation from the gender point of view with their academic achievement, Naz *et al.*, (2020) have found that the educational attainment of the students is affected significantly both by their extrinsic and intrinsic motivation where male students are more motivated extrinsically than female students. A quantitative investigation was conducted by Saranraj *et al.* (2016) to explore the effect of student motivational factors on the L2 learning process and the differences in gender between instrumental and integrative orientation among 43 engineering undergraduates of the VIT University in India. The study has found that motivation assists L2 learners in creating very strong desires to achieve their expected learning outcomes, and it is an indispensable factor in the success of learning an L2. In addition, very high integrative and instrumental motivations have been observed in males than the females. Female undergraduates do not consider much about qualifications as well as employability (Saranraj *et al.*, 2016).

Furthermore, a literature review by Gulecoğlu & Öztürk (2021) revealed mixed findings: seven studies favoured female learners, two supported males, and five reported no significant gender differences in L2 learning motivation.

Commenting on the above studies, it is evident that contradicting views are observed in gender-based motivational differences and learning outcomes in L2 learning studies in some contexts, showing differences, while others with no significant differences between genders, which leads to a gap in literature. Hence, due to the contrasting nature of the findings, it is obvious that more studies must be conducted in this regard to confirm or refute these findings. This necessity has been emphasized by researchers like Sabiq *et al.* (2021), Gulecoğlu & Öztürk (2021) and Agus *et al.* (2021).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Is there any effect of students' intrinsic motivation on learning outcomes of the General English subject in the advanced level curriculum in Sri Lanka?
2. Is there any effect of students' extrinsic motivation on learning outcomes of the General English subject in the advanced level curriculum in Sri Lanka?
3. Does gender moderate the relationship between students' intrinsic motivation to learn and the learning outcomes in the General English subject in the advanced level curriculum in Sri Lanka?
4. Does gender moderate the relationship between students' extrinsic motivation to learn and the learning outcomes in the General English subject in the advanced level curriculum in Sri Lanka?

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Setting

A total of 396 students, comprising both males and females, were randomly selected from the advanced-level Arts stream across 30 national schools in the *Kurunegala* district, located within the North Western Province in Sri Lanka. The rationale for selecting national schools as the focus of this study lies in their relatively uniform provision of educational resources, coupled with a representative demographic encompassing diverse economic, socio-cultural, and gender-based profiles. Furthermore, the study was deliberately centered on the Arts stream due to its comparatively larger student population and year-wise higher failure rate at the General English subject relative to other academic streams of the advanced-level curriculum. Consequently, the findings are expected to be more broadly applicable and generalizable to a wider student population.

Instruments

Each participant completed an 18-item 5-point Likert-style self-determination questionnaire electronically, designed to assess the influence of motivation on learning outcomes and the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between students' motivation to learn English and the learning outcomes. To ensure the content validity of the instrument, two research experts critically reviewed the questionnaire, and their recommendations were subsequently integrated.

To test the questionnaire's efficiency and feasibility, the questionnaire was pilot tested with 35 students. The Cronbach Alpha Value for intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation were 0.930 and 0.861, respectively, with 9 items recording Alpha values greater than 0.80. Hence, these instruments are treated as reliable in measuring student motivation towards learning English. Consequently, the instrument is considered to be reliable and consistent internally to measure the respective variables and constructs. "The reliability when the Cronbach Alpha is less than 0.60 is low, around the 0.70 range is acceptable, and that alpha is more than 0.80 is considered good." (Azam *et al.* 2021, p.250).

Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

Prior permission to conduct the study was first obtained from the authority of the Provincial Ministry of Education, and the participants were informed of the purpose, confidentiality, and ethical procedures of the research in the questionnaire itself. The study was quantitative, and the questionnaires were electronically administered to the participants in a Google Form. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the dataset due to its core functions, including statistical analysis, model programming, text analysis, and data visualisation, which support systematic research. Further, it efficiently handles large, multi-format data sets, offering reliable, fast results with minimal errors and effective data management (William, 2022). The principal analytical technique adopted is multiple regression analysis, while univariate and multivariate analyses were performed to achieve the specific research objectives.

Analysis of the results

Table 1: Path Coefficients and Statistical Significance for Predictors of English Learning Outcome

Predictor	β (Original Sample)	Sample Mean (M)	SD	t	p
Extrinsic Motivation → English Learning Outcome	-0.034	-0.040	0.079	0.438	.661
Intrinsic Motivation → English Learning Outcome	0.326	0.332	0.092	3.546	<.001
Gender → English Learning Outcome	0.095	0.096	0.030	3.138	.002
Gender × Extrinsic Motivation → Outcome	0.046	0.049	0.074	0.619	.536
Gender × Intrinsic Motivation → Outcome	-0.060	-0.063	0.092	0.653	.514

Note. β = standardized path coefficient; SD = standard deviation. P-values less than .05 are considered statistically significant.

As per the above table, the p-value for intrinsic motivation and English learning outcomes is 0.000 (less than 0.05) and is statistically significant. The positive t-value (3.546) and the positive mean for intrinsic motivation suggest a positive relationship between these two variables. Accordingly, it is concluded that the student's intrinsic motivation to learn English affects the learning outcomes of the General English subject at the G.C.E. (A/L) Examination. In addition, the positive t-value (3.546) and the positive mean for intrinsic motivation (0.332) further indicate that learners with very high intrinsic motivation tend to possess better English learning outcomes. Further, the p-value for extrinsic motivation (0.661), and all gender interaction terms* are not statistically significant (greater than 0.05). This suggests that there is not enough evidence to conclude that the means of these constructs are statistically different from the hypothesised values (or from zero in the case of the gender* terms). As a result, the moderating effects of gender on the relationships between intrinsic as well as extrinsic motivation and learning outcomes are not supported.

DISCUSSION

RQ 01. Is there any effect of students' intrinsic motivation on the learning outcomes of the General English subject in the advanced level curriculum in Sri Lanka?

The findings of the study confirm that learners' intrinsic motivation to learn English affects the successful learning outcome of the General English subject of the G.C.E. (A/L) curriculum. This can be compared with the findings of other empirical studies conducted over the years. Among other numerous factors that affect successful learning, the learner's motivation in any form is considered the most imperative factor interconnected with successful L2 learning (Huiyu & Yingchong, 2020; Shan, 2020; Saranraj *et al.*, 2016; Lee *et al.*, 2010) as cited in Shan, 2020; Valerio, 2012; Dörnyei, 1998; Gardner, 1985).

The intriguing research studies establish that the intrinsic motives to learn comprise engaging in the opportunities of learning because learners find them interesting, enjoyable, gratifying, and related to meeting their core psychological needs. Consequently, such motivation accompanies exploring new learning topics and higher stages of effort to face the challenges of L2 learning, leading to successful task performance.

Thus, as per the views of scholars, learners who possess higher intrinsic motivation levels exhibit improved memories, resilient conceptual learning, higher overall learning achievements, confidence in their abilities, and control of their learning than learners with lower intrinsic motivation. Commonly, language learners with higher academic success are found to be additionally confident in their abilities, and they experience more control of their learning (Wu, 2003: p. 511 as cited in Shan, 2020), demonstrate improved memory, strong conceptual learning, and higher overall achievements in learning. In addition, Gardner (1985) points out that learners' intrinsic motivation in learning affects the successful learning outcome than extrinsic motivation due to the enjoyment learners get and the hard work because of their intrinsic motivation. Dörnyei & Ushioda (2021) also emphasize that learners with IM are likely to persist more in their learning, even when they face difficulties in learning. Further, in the study piloted to examine the connection between learners' IM and the dispositional flow of L2 learners, Marszalek *et al.* (2022) recommend that fostering learners' IM to learn can enhance proficiency in language learning.

The intrinsic motivation of the participants in the present study to learn English can be understood concerning the self-determination theory introduced by Deci & Ryan (1985). The central idea of this theory is that when an individual feels that his/her needs are reasonably satisfied, he/she tends to perceive his/her actions to be motivated intrinsically (self-determined), and it will lead to better performance. Further, the core principle of this theory will also provide an effective framework for language teachers to create productive learning environments that support learners' increased intrinsic motivation. In

addition, an improvement of the psychological drivers of learners, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness in learning, proposed by Ryan & Deci (2015), will enhance L2 learning.

Then, teachers need to create a learning environment where the learners, as well as their views, are respected without disregarding them (Furrer & Skinner, 2003, as cited in Xiaoping & Tianzhu, 2021). Further explained, the main approach to supporting the needs of the learners to relate to others is to organize classroom activities where they will work together in mutually supportive ways, recognizing learners' diversity and minimizing competition among them. As a result, the intrinsic motivation of these learners can be enhanced, and that will lead to success in L2 learning without expecting any kind of incentives such as rewards or higher grades. Intrinsically motivated learners complete the tasks assigned to them based on their satisfaction with the task itself, without any kind of additional reward (Kotera *et al.* 2021; Deci & Ryan, 2000).

RQ 02. Is there any effect of students' extrinsic motivation on the learning outcomes of the General English subject in the advanced level curriculum in Sri Lanka?

Sennett (2021), Deci & Ryan, (2016) and Dörnyei (1998) explain extrinsic motivation as the learner's inspiration to fulfil an activity to succeed in a target since he/she thinks that this outcome in the particular task will result as a final point in getting a reward or a punishment or a kind of appreciation for his/her efficacious completion of the task. It is a kind of energy that will drive an individual learner to perform an activity with an inner initiative to carry out something, and it becomes a reason for him/her to proceed with the activity. Further explained, it is a kind of incentive given to him that is stimulated by external factors (Arron, 2022).

The findings of the present study confirm that the extrinsic motivation of the students to learn English does not affect learning achievement of the General English subject at the G.C.E. (A/L) curriculum. This finding can be compared with the study results of Debora *et al.* (2018). The researchers piloted a quantitative study to identify the correlation between motivation in English learning and proficiency achievement, with 77 students in the English Study Program of Bengkulu University in the fifth semester. Students have indicated higher dominant intrinsic motivation levels and a substantial correlation between learner motivation and proficiency achievement. Participants have exhibited a higher intrinsic motivation mean score than the extrinsic motivation mean score. Similar to the findings of the present study, this research has not found any correlation between extrinsic motivation and proficiency achievement.

In addition, the study of Unrau and Schlackman (2006, as cited in Debora *et al.*, 2018) that investigated the effects of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation on the reading success of Hispanic and Asian middle school students found intrinsic motivation having a positive effect on reading achievement, with the negative impact of extrinsic motivation. Concerning the correlation between extrinsic motivation and proficiency achievement, it was found that extrinsic motivation does not influence students' proficiency achievement. Fitriwati (2018) also found the same result in their study on the effect of learner motivation on learning achievement, conducted with 80 students in grade 08 in SMPN5, Bantan. A significant and positive influence of learners' intrinsic motivation on their learning achievement was observed, but a significant effect between students' extrinsic motivation with their English learning achievement could not be identified (Fitriwati, 2018). They further state that learners, motivated extrinsically, will perform things for a purpose, and with this achievement, they may lose their interest in the same task. This is well explained by Deci and Ryan (2000) in their self-determination theory of motivation; extrinsically motivated actions are done to achieve some instrumental targets and not due to inherent interests.

Concerning the participants in the present study, the four levels of motivation introduced by Deci & Ryan (2000) do not seem to be active with them for many reasons. For example, external regulation does not take place as the learners are not determined by the benefits or external rewards of learning English, since passing the General English subject at the G.C.E (A/L) examination is not an essential requirement to pass the examination and to enter universities in Sri Lanka. The admission criteria to state universities do not demand even a simple pass for the General English subject to enter the universities (Gunaratne *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, as far as introjection, identification and integrated regulation are concerned, it is

identified that these learners do not have any pressure to complete any activities of learning English since their focus is on the core subjects of the curriculum due to the higher competitiveness of the examination. According to the statistics of the National Human Resources Development Council of Sri Lanka in 2023, in the 2021/2022 academic year, even though a total number of 166938 candidates were qualified to enter the universities in all subject streams, only 43568 (25.39%) students were admitted to the 17 public universities in the country. Due to this flexibility and higher competition at the examination, these students may consider studying English as a waste of time because learning English at this level is not important or relevant to them. English periods are used to teach core subjects in the A/L classes due to the requirement of good grades in those subjects in higher education (Gunaratne *et al.* 2021). A/L students give their prominence only to core subjects, leading to low English proficiency. Learners' lack of positive motivation to learn English is identified as a major issue in A/L classes (Abdul & Rifka, 2020). Further, learning English does not seem to form an important part of learners' individuality. Even though the most important skill any L2 learner expects is generally identified as speaking skill, the curriculum of the subject pays less attention to improving this skill. There is a general consensus that teachers' guides and materials focus mainly on reading and writing, with less emphasis placed on listening and speaking (Bimali & Sharon, 2022). In addition, listening and speaking skills are not tested in the ordinary and advanced level examinations, and teachers do not focus their attention on improving these skills in their classroom teaching. "The pressure on teachers to focus on preparing students for national exams mitigates against developing listening and speaking skills, as these are not yet tested in the O- and A-level examinations" (Bimali & Sharon, 2022).

Similarly, Gardner (1985) in his socio-educational model notes that motivation is perceived to be composed of elements such as effort (time spent studying L2 and the drive of the learner), desire (how much the learner wants to become proficient in the language) and affect (the learner's emotional reactions related to language study). These learners do not spend much time learning English because their focus is on core subjects, and their need to improve their speaking skills is not paid much attention in the process, and their emotional reactions to learn English seem to be negative. However, in contrast, Huiyu & Yingchong (2020), Huo (2018), Dornyei (1998), and Gardner (1985) emphasize that the learner's extrinsic motivation has a favourable impact on L2 learning achievement.

3. Does gender moderate the relationship between students' intrinsic motivation to learn and the learning outcomes in the General English subject in the advanced level curriculum in Sri Lanka?
and

4. Does gender moderate the relationship between students' extrinsic motivation to learn and the learning outcomes in the General English subject in the advanced level curriculum in Sri Lanka?

The findings of the present study confirm that gender does not moderate the relationships between extrinsic or intrinsic motivation and English learning outcomes. These findings can be compared with the results of the studies conducted by Makesavanh & Low (2022), Arslan & Ciftti (2021), Rahman *et al.* (2021), and Hou-Keat *et al.* (2017), where they found no significant gender difference in the relationship between motivation and L2 learning outcomes. The reason for this is that both genders are provided with equal educational opportunities, and education is considered the avenue for a better future in Sri Lanka. In addition, gender differences in the field of education are not considered culturally in the country.

However, contrasting views are also detected about the effect of gender in terms of student motivation and learning outcomes. For example, Zohra & Aziz (2023), Almegren (2022), Agus *et al.* (2021), Aldosari (2014), and Dornyei *et al.* (2006) found that female students possess higher motivations toward learning English than boys do. Furthermore, opposing that, the findings of Naz *et al.* (2020), Areen (2017), and Saranraj *et al.* (2016) confirm that male students possess higher motivation to learn English.

CONCLUSION

This article discusses the effect of motivation on learning outcomes and the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between motivation and English learning outcomes of advanced-level students in the *Kurunegala* District in Sri Lanka. Based on the findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

01. The students' intrinsic motivation affects the English learning outcomes of advanced-level students in the *Kurunegala* District in Sri Lanka, and therefore, students' intrinsic motivation to learn needs to be increased to achieve the expected L2 learning outcomes.
02. There is no significant influence of learners' extrinsic motivation on the English learning outcomes of advanced-level students in the *Kurunegala* District in Sri Lanka.
03. There is no moderating effect of gender on the relationships separately between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and learning outcomes of advanced-level students in the *Kurunegala* District in Sri Lanka.

Commenting on the findings of the present study and the above studies, it is evident that contradicting views are observed concerning the effects of learners' gender, motivation, and learning outcome, which leads to a gap in the field of study. Hence, more studies need to be conducted to fill this gap in literature. The effect of gender on motivation and learning outcomes needs to be explored and investigated more in countries where English is learned as a foreign or second language (Agus *et al.*, 2021).

Further, these findings will provide practical guidance and critical insights for policymakers, educators, and instructors in the refinement of curricula and instructional strategies in the process of English language teaching. In short, by leveraging these findings, stakeholders can implement more effective pedagogical approaches that enhance learner motivation, engagement and overall success in acquiring proficiency in the English language.

Implications, Limitations, Further Research

The present study will offer valuable guidance to education policymakers, educators, and teachers in improving curricula and teaching strategies to boost student success in learning the English language.

Moreover, these findings will lay the groundwork for future research on the relationship between motivation, gender and academic achievement in English language learning. Additionally, investigating the effects of other moderating variables such as learners' age, their economic backgrounds, learning facilities, family backgrounds, teaching methodologies, and teachers in future research will supply a complete assessment to this research.

As the study was restricted only to a selected area, the following limitations were also identified, and they may provide some directions for future studies on the issue. The first limitation lies with the sample selection. Data were collected from 394 students in the Art stream out of five subject streams of the National schools in the district. The sample is relatively small with low statistical power, and it may not represent students in other subject streams of the advanced-level classes, leading to difficulties in generalizing the results. In addition, conducting studies with larger sample sizes, selected with a broader stratum than the small sample sizes, would assist in more accurate, comprehensive, and broader discoveries. Thus, for fair representation, more participants from other subject streams and other schools and educational institutes need to be included in a future study.

Moreover, due to access difficulties, the views of education policymakers, curriculum designers, principals, teachers of English, and parents were not taken into consideration. Future research may also include them since they may have different views to express in this regard. In addition, since Sri Lankan students are not usually familiar with this type of research study, the presence of the researcher as an outsider may influence participants' true and free opinions because of their fear that their opinions may affect them personally.

Similarly, the present study is a quantitative-based questionnaire survey, conducted within a short time. Using a variety of research methods for collecting data in a single study (observations, interviews, and surveys) and evaluating the learner motivation styles over longer intervals of time will disclose more accurate and undiscovered findings and validate the generalizability of the findings.

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