

EFL's Learners' Motivation and Attitude in English Language Learning: A Qualitative Study

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Abstrak

Studi kualitatif ini berupaya memahami faktor pendorong khusus di balik motivasi dan sikap pembelajar bahasa Inggris terhadap bahasa tersebut, serta bagaimana motivasi memengaruhi sikap tersebut. Fokusnya adalah pada enam belas siswa yang dipilih secara sengaja dari kursus bahasa Inggris privat di Jawa Timur. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan bantuan wawancara semi-terstruktur dan dianalisis berdasarkan analisis tematik. Teori Penentuan Nasib Sendiri (Ryan & Deci, 2000) merupakan kerangka teoritis utama yang memandu penelitian ini. Temuan yang terkait dengan pertanyaan penelitian pertama mengidentifikasi dua bentuk motivasi yang dominan: intrinsik dan ekstrinsik. Motivasi intrinsik yang lebih umum, dikaitkan dengan minat pribadi dan mencakup faktor-faktor seperti keingintahuan intelektual, kepuasan emosional, pengembangan diri, dan tujuan komunikasi global. Beberapa bentuk motivasi ekstrinsik juga muncul melalui prestasi akademik, harapan orang tua, perilaku yang dihargai, dan norma sosial, meskipun hal-hal tersebut jauh kurang dominan. Terkait dengan pertanyaan penelitian kedua, siswa menunjukkan berbagai sikap terhadap pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Mayoritas menyatakan sikap positif atau sangat positif, ditandai dengan kesenangan, keterlibatan, dan kemauan untuk meningkatkan diri. Namun, sebagian kecil menyatakan sikap negatif yang terkait dengan tekanan eksternal atau kepercayaan diri yang rendah. Pertanyaan ketiga meneliti bagaimana motivasi dan sikap saling terkait. Siswa dengan motivasi intrinsik yang kuat atau gaya motivasi campuran ditemukan lebih positif dalam sikap mereka, sementara mereka yang termotivasi murni secara ekstrinsik cenderung lebih negatif atau apatis dalam sikap mereka. Ini menggarisbawahi peran motivasi, terutama motivasi internal, dalam membentuk keterlibatan emosional dan perilaku pelajar dalam konteks Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL). Penelitian ini memperluas pemahaman tentang motivasi dan psikologi pelajar dalam konteks pendidikan informal, menyediakan sumber daya yang berharga bagi para pendidik dan perancang kursus yang berusaha meningkatkan motivasi dan sikap siswa.

Kata Kunci: motivasi, sikap bahasa, motivasi intrinsik, motivasi ekstrinsik, pendidikan informal

Abstract

This qualitative study seeks to understand the specific drivers behind English learners' motivations and their attitudes towards the language, as well as how motivation impacts these attitudes. The focus is on sixteen purposively selected students from a private English course in East Java. Data collection was accomplished with the aid of semi-structured interviews and analyzed based on thematic analysis. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) was the main theoretical framework guiding the research. Findings related to the first research question identified two predominant forms of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. The more prevalent, intrinsic motivation, was tied to personal interests and included factors such as intellectual curiosity, emotional satisfaction, self-development, and global communication goals. Some forms of extrinsic motivation also emerged through academic achievement, parental expectancy, rewarded behavior, and social norms, although these were far less dominant. Relating to the second research question, students exhibited a range of attitudes towards learning English. A majority expressed positive or very positive attitudes, characterized by enjoyment, engagement, and a willingness to improve. However, a smaller subset expressed negative attitudes linked to external pressures or low self-confidence. The third question examined how motivation and attitudes are interrelated. Students with strong intrinsic motivation or mixed motivational styles were found to be more positive in their attitudes, while those motivated purely extrinsically tended to be more negative or apathetic in their attitudes. This underscores the role of motivation, especially internalized motivation, in shaping learners' emotional and behavioral engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. This research broadens the understanding of learner motivation and psychology within informal education contexts, providing a valuable resource for educators and course designers seeking to improve student motivation and attitude.

Keywords: motivation, language attitude, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, informal education

INTRODUCTION

In the context of learning a new language, motivation and attitude are two key psychological factors that largely impact the success of the learner. Motivation determines the purpose, scope, and effort of the learner's actions. On the other hand, attitude focuses on the emotional and judgmental aspect of the students regarding what is to be learnt, in this case, a language. In the case of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class, where learners are often burdened with multiple external expectations and difficulties, both motivation and attitude are even more critical to help provide continuous engagement and success. Motivation in simple terms, is often defined within the framework of an internal force that motivates a person to act or 'wake-up' to a set goal (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Motivation helps in determining the amount of effort that a learner is ready to put in to learn a language, how much he/she is willing to persevere in challenging situations, and the level of engagement the learner has with the language.

The motivation types explained in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Ryan and Deci (2000) are helpful to contextualize different types of motivation in language education. They are defined between two major groups. The first one is intrinsic motivation, which is internal to the learner, for example, interest, enjoyment, or personal development. The second one is extrinsic motivation which is drawn from outside the learner like rewards, grades or social acceptance. Intrinsic motivation happens when learners pick up a language simply because they think it's fun or important to them. A student might study English because they love movies, want to understand song lyrics, or just feel good when they get a sentence right. Extrinsic motivation comes from outside sources: parents asking for good grades, a teacher giving stickers, or even an app rewarding daily practice. This outside push can start a learning habit, but experts usually say it won't last as long as the inside drive unless the learner makes it personally valuable through something called identified regulation.

Motivation goes hand-in-hand with attitude. Gardner, an early researcher, described attitude as the mix of beliefs, feelings, and plans learners hold about the language, the lessons, and even the people who speak it. When students have a positive attitude toward English, they show up excited, try extra exercises, and stick with tough grammar rules. On the flip side, negative beliefs or bad experiences can lead them to zone out, skip practice, or argue that learning just isn't worth the effort. Gardner's bigger Socio-Educational Model points out that good attitudes feed motivation and strong motivation boosts attitude, creating a cycle that can build or wear down a learner's enthusiasm. Most books and articles about motivation and attitude look at students in regular classrooms, like those found in schools or universities. Yet in Indonesia, a large number of learners also sign up for private language classes held

outside of these formal places. Because people choose these courses on their own, the schedule is loose, the teacher talks with them more as a partner, and the atmosphere usually feels friendlier; all of this changes the way we can think about what pushes students and how they feel while picking up a new language.

Under this less-rigid setup, someone might enroll because they love movies in English, need a better score for a college application, or simply want to travel and chat with new friends. Because of such mixed reasons, these schools turn into handy little laboratories where researchers can watch how inside drives, outside pressures, and the learners' attitudes bounce off each other. The fact that no one locks them into daily classes means that almost every student shows up after deciding they really do want to learn, so the mental side of motivation and attitude stands out even more.

Most past research on motivation and attitude in English-for-Foreign-Learner's classrooms has stuck with numbers-survey questions and charts-to figure out what students think and do. Numbers are useful because they give a wide view of trends, but they miss the personal stories and gut feelings that explain why a learner picks one answer over another. Because of this, using interviews, diaries, or open-ended chats instead of just surveys can paint a fuller picture of why learners get fired up, how they really feel about English, and how those feelings spill over into everyday life.

This study looks at why and how private English-course students in East Java, Indonesia, feel about learning the language. To get a clear cross section, sixteen learners of different ages, backgrounds, and experience levels were picked on purpose. Semi-structured interviews were then used to tackle three basic questions:

1. What kinds of motivation do students have in learning English?
2. What attitudes do students show toward learning English?
3. How does motivation shape those attitudes?

Using Self-Determination Theory as its big guide and thematic analysis to pull out clear patterns, the study wants to map the link between drive and attitude in a non-formal EFL setting. The hope is that the findings will boost both theory and everyday practice. Theoretically, the study adds fresh proof that SDT holds true outside traditional classrooms. Practically, its results give teachers and course planners ideas on how to spark lasting motivation and build positive outlooks in EFL learners, especially those studying in relaxed, informal places. To build a language program that sticks and feels more than just busy work, teachers really need to tune into what students care about inside and how they feel. Listening first-hand to learners not only guides lesson plans, it also lifts up student-centered learning by making the Why and How of every lesson the focus teachers work to improve.

METHOD

This research draws on a qualitative descriptive design, anchored in an embedded case study, to map student motivations, gauge attitudes toward learning English, and trace the connections between these two factors. Such an approach privileges thick, contextual data over numerically driven indicators, permitting a richer picture of learners’ internal thoughts, emotions, and day-to-day encounters that standardized questionnaires would miss. Fieldwork took place at a private English-language course in East Java, Indonesia, chosen for its ready access, relevant demographic, and active consent to participate. Classrooms in this non-formal setting attract students who register voluntarily, seeking fluency outside the rigid school timetable, and therefore provide a compelling lens through which to explore motivation and attitude in a more adaptable, learner-centered environment.

Sixteen students enrolled in the course formed the purposefully chosen sample for this study. Selection focused on three criteria: sustained classroom participation, diverse sources of motivation, and genuine willingness to discuss personal learning journeys. Because volunteers ranged in age and educational background, their accounts promised a rich variety of perspectives. To protect privacy, all participants are referred to by pseudonyms (Student A through Student P), and the institution's name is not revealed in this publication.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews so that participants could speak freely while the researcher still covered essential topics. The interview guide asked open-ended questions about (1) reasons for learning English, (2) emotions and beliefs linked to the process, and (3) perceived effects of motivation on classroom engagement. Each session lasted roughly thirty to forty-five minutes and was held either face-to-face or over video call, according to individual schedules. Alongside the interviews, participants filled out a set of attitude questionnaires designed to gauge their emotional responses to learning English. The tool featured statements tapping into the students emotional, cognitive, and behavioral outlooks, with a five-point Likert scale indicating how positive or negative each attitude was.

Transcripts and survey scores were examined by thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarkes (2006) six steps: reading the material, coding ideas, grouping codes into themes, checking these themes, naming and describing them, and writing the final report. To highlight links between motivation and attitude, themes were mapped onto Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Several strategies reinforced the trustworthiness of findings. Data triangulation compared the interview insights with the quantitative scores from the questionnaire. Member checking invited participants to

read selected excerpts and confirm they accurately represented their views. Finally, a reflective journal documented each research stage, promoting transparency and curbing researcher bias.

The study spanned two months and included stages of preparation, data gathering, and subsequent analysis. Each participant gave informed consent, and standard ethical safeguards were followed, including voluntary involvement, assured confidentiality, and the freedom to withdraw at any point. This design was selected to yield detailed, context-sensitive accounts of learners motivation and attitude in a nonformal EFL setting, with the goal of enhancing both theory and classroom practice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Students’ Motivation in English Learning

The study first aimed to find out what sorts of motivation students have when learning English outside formal classrooms. After looking through 16 interview transcripts-see Appendix 1-and grouping the answers using Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), researchers spotted two main types: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The analysis turned up 28 statements linked to intrinsic drive and 20 that pointed to extrinsic push. Because the intrinsic responses were more numerous, it seems most students care more about personal interest and emotional reward than about outside rewards or demands.

Motivation	Factors	Number
Intrinsic	Personal Interest	6
	Intellectual Curiosity	6
	Emotional Satisfaction	3
	Self-Development	4
	Global Communication Desire	5
	Early Exposure	1
	Role Model Inspiration	3
Total		28
Extrinsic	Parental Pressure	4
	Academic Achievement	5
	Parental Rewards	1
	Social Expectation	2
	Career Preparation	1
	Social Competition	0
Total		20

The evidence clearly shows that intrinsic motivation outweighed extrinsic influence in this student sample. In this informal learning environment, participants pursued topics primarily out of personal curiosity and the satisfaction that stems from mastering new ideas, not because of grades or supervisor pressure. The two most common intrinsic drivers, personal interest and intellectual curiosity, were mentioned by six learners each. Such

motives align with Self-Determination Theory's idea of autonomous regulation, as these students chose to engage simply for enjoyment, intellectual challenge, or a sense of self-fulfillment. Additional intrinsic themes-coding for self-improvement, emotional reward, early exposure, and inspiration from visible role models-indicate varied internal sources sustaining their engagement.

Extrinsic motivation did exist, but it played a secondary role. Academic success emerged as the leading external reason, followed closely by pressure from parents. Both reflect controlled regulation, where learners act mainly to meet outside expectations or gain tangible rewards. Although such external motives can trigger initial effort, SDT argues they foster durable persistence only when they are gradually internalized. The coexistence of intrinsic and extrinsic drives lends empirical support to Self-Determination Theory's motivation continuum, which ranges from amotivation to fully internalized engagement, with varied extrinsic forms occupying the middle space. Notably, several learners exhibited multiple motivational forms at once, underscoring that academic motivation is both multi-faceted and sensitive to changing contexts. In a voluntary private English course, the elevated rates of intrinsic motivation likely stem from learners enjoying more autonomy and seeing English as relevant to their personal aspirations. This pattern reinforces the idea that cultivating intrinsic elements is crucial for keeping students motivated and engaged over extended periods.

Types of Students' Attitudes in English Learning

The second research question examined the nature of students' attitudes toward learning English. In language learning, attitude describes learners' overall disposition-emotional, cognitive, and behavioral-toward the language, the process itself, and the experiences that come with both (Gardner, 1985). Results from the attitude questionnaire given to the 16 participants showed the following pattern:

Attitude	Number
Very Positive	9
Positive	5
Negative	2
Very Negative	0
Total	16

Overall, fourteen of the sixteen students showed either a positive or very positive attitude toward learning English, suggesting that the class enjoys the subject, feels enthusiastic, and is eager to participate in language activities. Nine learners fell into the very positive group, a sign that they not only like English but also approach it with confidence, strong motivation, and a belief that they are making steady progress. Gardner's research from 1985 indicates that students with this mindset tend to keep

working, push through difficulties, and look for extra chances to use the new language.

At the same time, five students were placed in the simply positive category, which is still encouraging but may include a touch of self-doubt or interest that waxes and wanes. These individuals are engaged, yet they typically benefit from steady encouragement and recognition in order to keep their commitment at the same high level as their classmates. Only two students showed clear negative feelings about the course, and no one appeared extremely upset. Most observers think these limited bad attitudes come from nervousness, self-doubt, or pressure from outside. Gardner's socio-educational model suggests that such learners lose some motivation, move more slowly, and speak up less in class. Similarly, Self-Determination Theory links negative feelings to controlled motivation or amotivation, when students believe they have no real choice and the material is worthless.

On the whole, the group profile is still mostly positive. That good outlook probably follows the voluntary nature of the non-formal program students join because they want to and face no rigid grades. In these hours, attitudes depend on how relevant the work seems, how supportive teachers and peers are, and how often learners use English in real-life talk. The results confirm the strong bond between positive attitudes and autonomous motivation. When learners see English as useful and fun, they invest more emotion in every task. Teachers in similar settings can build on this by shaping lessons that spark enjoyment, personal growth, and meaningful exchanges, thus protecting and boosting the favorable outlook.

The Motivations Influence Language Learning Attitudes

The third research question investigated how different types of motivation correlate with students' attitudes toward learning English. This link is important to both Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and Gardner's early socio-educational model (1985), which argue that motivation and attitude influence each other in a steady give-and-take. The table on the next page summarizes the combined data for motivation type and attitude level from sixteen students:

Motivation - Attitude	Number
Intrinsic – Very Positive	6
Intrinsic – Positive	2
Extrinsic – Positive	1
Extrinsic & Intrinsic – Positive	5
Extrinsic & Intrinsic – Negative	2
Total	16

The strongest positive attitudes in the group lined up with intrinsic motivation. Six students driven by personal

interest and enjoyment reported very positive feelings toward learning, and another two showed mostly positive attitudes. This pattern backs the Self-Determination Theory claim that motivation grounded in internal goals sparks deeper emotional engagement, higher confidence, and greater persistence. When motivation mixed intrinsic interest with some extrinsic pushes, such as parental encouragement, five students still maintained positive attitudes. Their experience suggests that external factors do not automatically spoil a learner's outlook as long as the activities feel personally meaningful. In SDT terms, this situation maps onto identified regulation, where an outside source is accepted and reshaped into internal purpose.

One student listed as purely externally motivated managed to stay positive, indicating that a supportive teacher or an easily reached goal can make external drive work in the short run. Still, research shows that this kind of motivation usually wavers over time unless it is strengthened by internally felt rewards. Interestingly, only students who reported significant levels of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation exhibited unequivocally negative attitudes. This finding suggests that mixed motives, rather than pure interest or obligation, created an emotional climate susceptible to pressure, duty, or ruinous classroom episodes. It is plausible that outer demands overshadowed or corrupted the sincerity of their inner drive, leaving enjoyment crippled even though both forces were present. From the evidence three patterns emerge. First, students animated mainly by intrinsic motives express extremely positive or simply positive attitudes about learning English. Second, mixed motivation causes attitudes to swing wildly, producing either approval or discontent depending on how well the learner internalizes outer expectations and balances them with personal value. Third, learners motivated purely by extrinsic rewards display positive attitudes only sporadically; they engage acceptably when contextual incentives, such as grades or praise, temporarily outweigh boredom or resentment.

Collectively, these observations reinforce the notion that the quality of motivation-varying from autonomous inward impulses to rigid external rules-shapes how feel about studying English. The more a student chooses to engage, the more pleasure, self-assurance, and tenacity the learner exhibits. When participation stems chiefly from compliance, however, attitudes may wobble, fade, or even react defiantly against the learning task. For educators and course designers, research indicates that cultivating internal motives-such as personal interest, curiosity, and a sense of usefulness-is crucial if they wish to sustain positive learner attitudes over the long term. Although extrinsic pressures, including grades and parental encouragement, often jump-start a student's effort, these

external incentives should slowly be offset by classroom practices that grant autonomy and guide learners toward more self-determined objectives.

CONCLUSION

This research focused on students' motivations toward learning English in the scope of a non-formal educational setting, their attitudes toward the process, as well as the correlation between these two components. Moreover, this study explored the most salient components of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) alongside Gardner's socio-educational model, which shaped the findings into prominent conclusions owing to their integration. With regard to the findings, students demonstrated both extrinsic and intrinsic types of motivation, with intrinsic motivation dominating. Personal interest, intellectual curiosity, emotional satisfaction, and self-development on a global scale were the hallmarks of the participants' motivation. While extrinsic motivation did and often appeared as a secondary factor during participation, it was largely subordinate to interests stemming from personal engagement and passion. Additionally, a majority of the participants exhibited a positive attitude towards learning English. These attitudes involved enjoyment and enthusiasm, confidence, and a strong belief in the importance of English for several personal milestones. At the opposite end, only two students exhibited negative attitudes associated with externally imposed frameworks and low levels of internal motivation. Third, an observable pattern of association exists between motivation type and attitude. Students who demonstrated a positive or very positive attitude were those who were intrinsically motivated or had internalized their extrinsic motives. On the other hand, primarily extrinsically motivated students particularly those who lacked internal valuation of the motivation ended toward negative attitudes. These findings reinforce the importance of intrinsic motivation in fostering positive attitudes and engagement with English learning in a voluntary, non-formal context. The findings also stress the need to internalize external motives to enhance the emotional and cognitive investment.

On the basis of this study's results, it is possible to make some recommendations to improve learners' motivation and attitudes toward English language learning in informal educational settings. Instructors and curriculum developers should aim to foster intrinsic motivation by ensuring that the learning activities are meaningful, enjoyable, and relevant to the students personally. Emotions can be fortified through internalization when extrinsic motives are rationalized within real-life goals as a result of autonomy-supporting environments, appreciation of efforts, and choice

provision. While extrinsic factors such as grades, parental prompts, and social expectations can act as triggers for learning, they must eventually be aligned with internalized values to be effective for the long term. Furthermore, supportive climates that mitigate anxiety while affirming learners' progress make a significant difference in cultivating positive attitudes. Lastly, greater participant diversity, different educational contexts, or longitudinal frameworks would help answer how motivation and attitude interplay over time, and thus, should be pursued in future research.

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