EXPLORING STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN THE ENGLISH CLASS: A CASE STUDY OF ROMANIAN STUDENTS

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Abstract: *THE PRESENT STUDY EXPLORES THE CRITICAL ROLE OF MOTIVATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING HIGHLIGHTING THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO ITS CULTIVATION. MOTIVATION IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM IS NOT MERELY ABOUT LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY BUT EXTENDS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL THINKING, PROBLEM-SOLVING, AND A LIFELONG LOVE FOR LEARNING.*
THE RESULTS ARE STRENGTHENED BY A 12-ITEM QUESTIONNAIRE APPLIED TO STUDENTS FROM THE FACULTY OF MEDICAL AND BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES AND DISTRIBUTED BY THE FOLLOWING SPECIALIZATIONS: KINESITHERAPY AND SPECIAL MOTRICITY, PHARMACY ASSISTANCE, AND GENERAL MEDICAL ASSISTANCE.
FINDINGS REVEALED THAT MOST OF THE PARTICIPANTS WERE HIGHLY MOTIVATED BY FUN ACTIVITIES AND GAMES, THE USE OF MULTIMEDIA TOOLS, TEACHER'S ENCOURAGEMENT AND FEEDBACK AND SUGGESTED THAT THEIR MOTIVATION MAY BE LARGELY INFLUENCED BY THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, NOTABLY THE POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TEACHER AND THE TYPES OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES EMPLOYED TO ACHIEVE THE LEARNING AIMS.

Keywords: INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION, LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT, UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, VIBRANT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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INTRODUCTION

In the realm of education, fostering student motivation is a permanent concern, and nowhere is this more evident than in the context of English language class. In order to navigate the complexities of language learning effectively, students must be intrinsically motivated to engage with the subject matter.

To cultivate motivation in the English class, teachers must take into consideration the relevance of English to students' lives, the use of engaging and relatable materials, the setting of achievable goals,

a growth mindset, and a supportive and positive learning environment. Moreover, encouraging real-life communication, choice, and collaborative learning can further enhance students' motivation to excel in English.

For many students, particularly those in non-English-speaking regions, the English class transforms into a gateway to opportunities, cultural exchange, and academic advancement. However, the journey toward mastering English as a foreign language is often fraught with challenges, and one critical determinant of success lies in the motivational forces that drive students' engagement. The motivation to learn a foreign language such as English is a complex interweaving of personal, cultural, and educational factors. Understanding and harnessing these motivational elements are paramount for teachers seeking to create vibrant and effective learning environments.

This study seeks to contribute to an in-depth understanding of the nuances involved in motivating students in EFL settings, offering insights that can inform teaching practices, curriculum development, and educational policies tailored to the unique needs of learners whose encounters with English extend beyond the boundaries of their native language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivation and learning achievement are closely interconnected, and several authors have contributed significantly to the literature on motivation in the English language classroom.

Dr. Robert C. Gardner is widely known for his seminal work on language learning motivation, particularly his development of the socio-educational model.

Gardner's research, along with his collaborator Wallace Lambert (1972), has significantly influenced the understanding of motivation in the context of second language acquisition. Gardner's most notable contribution is the development of the socio-educational model of second language acquisition. This model suggests that social and cultural factors, in addition to individual characteristics, play a crucial role in determining the level of motivation and success in language learning. He proposed that learners' attitudes toward the target language community and their motivation to integrate into that community are key factors influencing language learning outcomes. Gardner introduced the concepts of integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation refers to a learner's desire to learn a language to connect with and become a part of the target language community. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, involves learning a language for practical or utilitarian purposes. He highlighted the significance of the teacher in influencing students' motivation. A supportive and encouraging teacher can positively impact learners' attitudes and motivation, fostering a more conducive learning environment.

Later on, in the 90s, the learning contexts and the needs of the students and teachers in the classroom were considered more significant than the community and the social context. Zoltán Dörnyei is a prominent figure in the field of language learning motivation and his research often explores the various aspects of motivation, including intrinsic and extrinsic factors, goal-setting, and the impact of teacher-student relationships. Investigating young adult learners in a foreign language learning situation in Hungary, Zoltan (1990) identified three loosely related dimensions of a broadly conceived integrative motivational subsystem: 1) interest in foreign languages, cultures, and people; 2) desire to broaden ones view and avoid provincialism; and 3) desire for new stimuli and challenges. A fourth dimension, the desire to integrate into a new community, overlapped with the instrumental motivational subsystem.

The study by Rebecca L. Oxford and John Shearin (1994), entitled "Language Learning Motivation: Expanding the Theoretical Framework," is a significant contribution to the field of

language learning motivation. The study builds upon previous motivational theories, such as Gardner's socio-educational model, and proposes a new model called the "Language Learning Motivation (LLM) Model" identifying five main components within the LLM Model: Intentionality which is the conscious decision and commitment to learn a language; Motivational Intensity which represents the strength and depth of the individual's motivation; Attitudes and Affects which are the emotional and attitudinal aspects of motivation; Attributions and Beliefs meaning how learners attribute success or failure and their beliefs about language learning; Goal Setting and Planning meaning the setting of specific language learning goals and the planning of strategies to achieve them. The LLM Model places a significant emphasis on affective factors, recognizing the importance of emotions and attitudes in language learning motivation. This inclusion acknowledges the role of the affective domain in influencing learners' intentions and commitment to language learning.

The process-oriented period shows a more special interest in language learners and their specific circumstances. Williams and Burden (1997), for instance, considered the learning process before and during the classroom experience.

Known for her work on mindset and motivation, Carol Dweck's research explores how beliefs about learning and intelligence can influence students' motivation. According to Carol Dweck (2000), there are two beliefs on intelligence: a fixed mindset which means that intelligence is innate and fixed from birth and a growth mindset which means that intelligence is flexible and students can learn and improve through perseverance. Dweck and her colleagues examined the brains of people with different mindsets and concluded that the brains of those with a fixed mindset showed higher activity when they were told that their answers to a series of questions were right or wrong, but they showed no interest when researchers offered them help to learn from their mistakes. They didn't believe they could improve, so they didn't try.

Siriluck and Sirithip (2004) also conducted a study about the relationship between motivation and proficiency in English learning of undergraduate students. The study indicated that high English proficiency students are more motivated than low English proficiency students.

Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) contributed to the field of language learning motivation exploring the intricate relationship between motivation, language identity, and the second language (L2) self. Dörnyei and Ushioda introduce the L2 Motivational Self System which posits that individuals are motivated to learn a language when they envision a future version of themselves proficient in that language and see positive connections between their identity and the language. Central to the L2MSS are the concepts of the Ideal L2 Self and the Ought-to L2 Self. The Ideal L2 Self represents the individual's desired future self-proficient in the target language, while the Ought-to L2 Self represents the self that conforms to external expectations and obligations.

Rula Mahdi and Saba Qadhi (2023) conducted a study which examines the motivation for English language learning (integrative or instrumental) of 19 undergraduate students at the College of Education, Qatar University. The findings of this study indicated that students are more promotion focus motivated to learn the English language. This reveals that intrinsic motivation holds a significant relationship with language proficiency.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research study is to explore undergraduate students' motivation in the English class and to determine the factors that influence them in learning English. The target population is represented by students from "Constantin Brancusi" University of Tg-Jiu, the Faculty of Medical and Behavioural Sciences who study English language as a foreign language.

This quantitative research study tried to obtain feedback from students on their perceptions of the motivation in the English learning process. The research was a survey having as a tool a *12-item* questionnaire and using SPSS 26 Statistics program for analyzing data.

The size of the analyzed sample was 80 students, distributed by the following specializations: Pharmacy Assistance, Kinesitherapy and Special Motricity and General Medical Assistance. Category responses ranged from *strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree* to *disagree, strongly disagree.*

Data Collection Method

Data was collected online by filling a questionnaire on the survey planet app or sent on whatsapp during the academic year 2023–2024. The participants received information about the purpose of the survey and approved the participation to the study. Their names were not collected in order to respect anonymity and confidentiality.

The Research Instrument

The questionnaire included items corresponding to the twelve research questions. For the first research question, a *yes* or *no* answer was applied. For the other 11 statements, a 5 point scale was used (5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 2=disagree, 1-strongly disagree).

The survey developed for the study was designed to collect quantitative data for analysis. The 80 students, distributed by 3 specializations expressed their opinions concerning the motivation in the English class. This descriptive survey research study sought to answer the following research statements through the collection of convenience sampling of students:

Research question 1: Do you enjoy learning English?

Research question 2: I would rather spend more time in my English class and less in other classes.

Research question 3: Speaking motivates me more than writing and listening.

Research question 4: Integrating fun activities and games makes me to be more tuned into and motivated.

Research question 5: Working in teams/groups motivates me more than working by myself when having a task to do.

Research question 6: Learning English for a particular purpose better motivates me? (job interview, travelling, going on Erasmus programme etc.)

Research question 7: Using multimedia tools such as computers, tablets, smartphones and online platforms makes me feel more engaged in learning English.

Research question 8: My teacher's encouragement helps me to be more motivated and confident.

Research question 9: It motivates me if my teacher provides me feedback all the time.

Research question 10: I spend much time on studying English outside the classroom (movies, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram etc.)

Research question 11: I stay more motivated and engaged in the learning process when rewards are set.

Research question 12: I am more motivated in writing an essay, giving a speech, or creating a presentation rather than completing a simple task.

Results of the Empirical Analysis

The data and information gathered from the questionnaire were summarized and analyzed by using statistical tools SPSS 26 for analyzing data to answer research statements.

The centralized data, in absolute value and in values expressed as a percentage, are presented in figures 1-12.

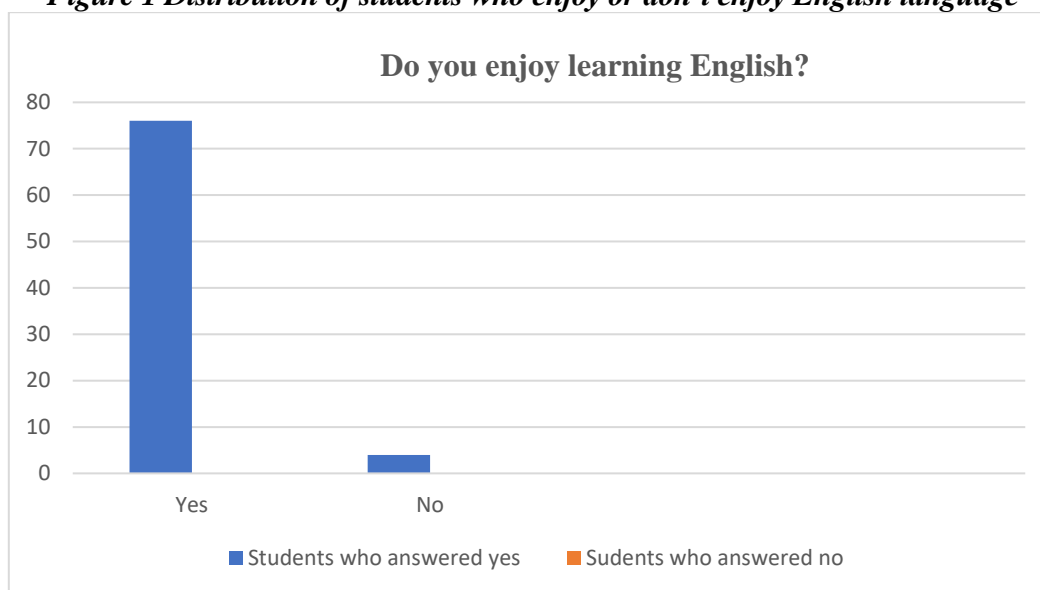*Figure 1 Distribution of students who enjoy or don't enjoy English language*

Figure 1 shows that 76 students out of 80 enjoy studying English and this is because knowing English can increase their careers or business opportunities, give them access to scientific and technical information and help them to take part in international program such as Erasmus.

Figure 2 Distribution of students who enjoyed to spend more time in the English class and less in other classes

From Figure 2, we can see that 25 students strongly agree, 32 agree, 18 neither agree nor disagree and 5 disagree with the idea of spending more time in the English class and less in the others.

Figure 3 Distribution of students motivated more by speaking than writing and listening
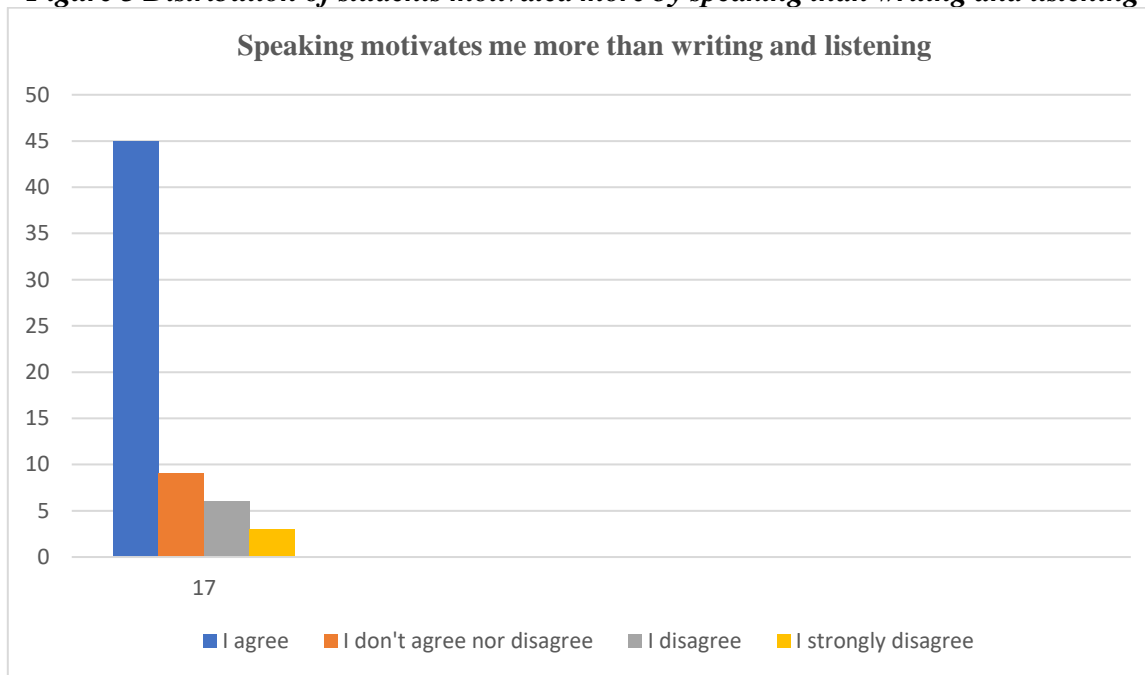
According to the study, 45 students out of 80 are more motivated by speaking than writing or listening which means that they feel more confident expressing themselves orally and find speaking more interactive or engaging. However, 6 of them disagreed and 3 strongly disagreed with the idea, indicating a divergence in motivation among the surveyed students.

Figure 4 Distribution of students motivated more by integrating fun activities and games
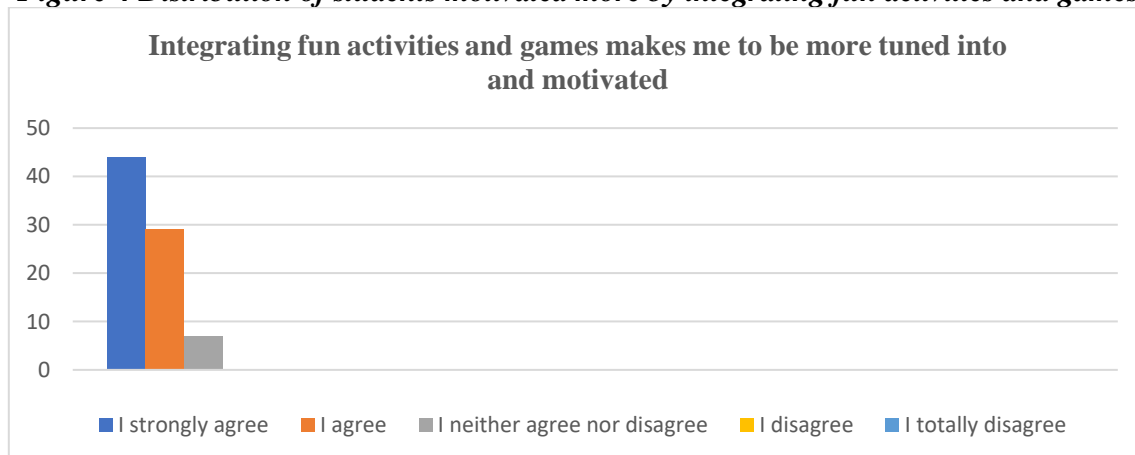
The overwhelming agreement from 44 students who strongly agreed and 29 who agreed suggests that integrating fun activities and games significantly enhances students' engagement and motivation in the English class. Additionally, the small number of students (7 students) who neither

agreed nor disagreed may indicate a potential for further exploration into their preferences or experiences with such activities.

Figure 5 Distribution of students motivated more by working in teams/groups than working by themselves when having a task to do.
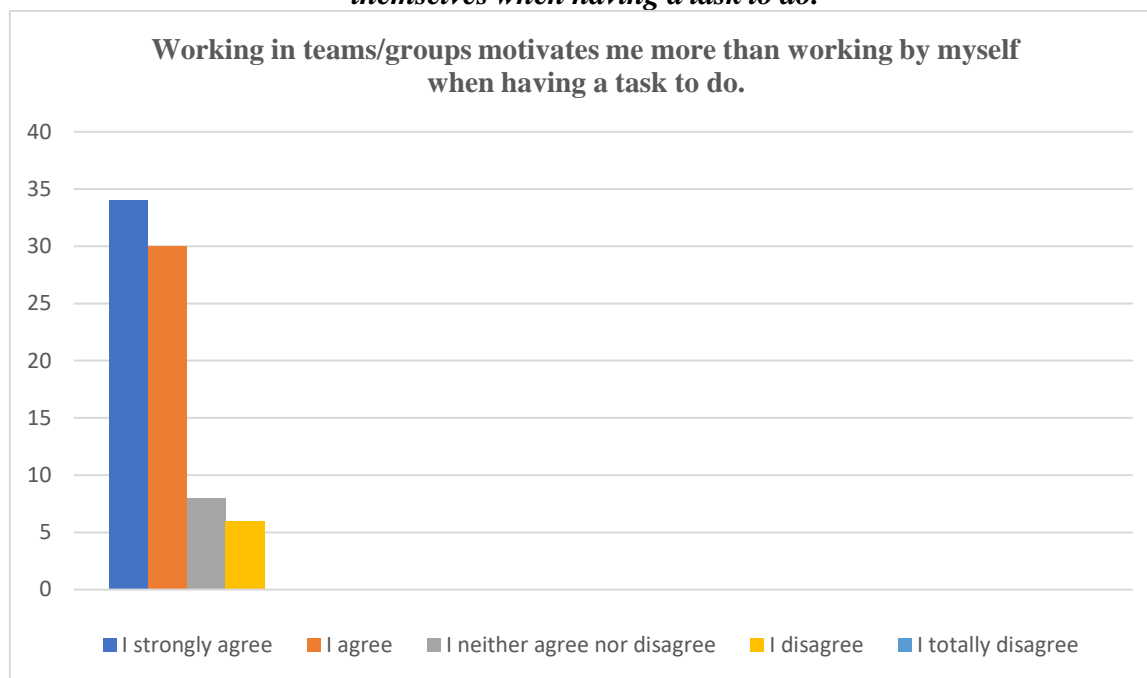

Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of students' opinions regarding motivation to work in teams versus independently. The majority, with 34 strongly agreeing and 30 agreeing, appears to favor working in teams, while a smaller proportion (6 students) expressed disagreement with the idea.

Figure 6 Distribution of students motivated by learning English for a particular purpose
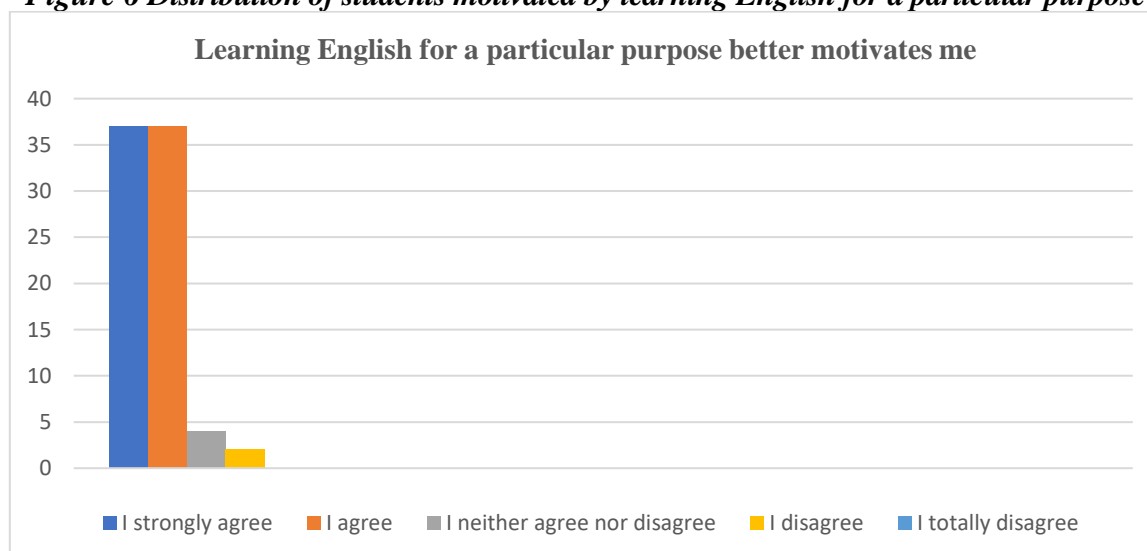
In the distribution of students motivated by learning English for a particular purpose, Figure 6 shows a balanced response, with 37 students strongly agreeing and 37 agreeing with this motivation. A small proportion of 4 students neither agreed nor disagreed while only 2 students expressed disagreement with the idea. This suggests that a generally high level of motivation among the surveyed students towards learning English for specific purposes.

Figure 7 Distribution of students motivated by using multimedia tools such as computers, tablets, smartphones and online platforms in learning English
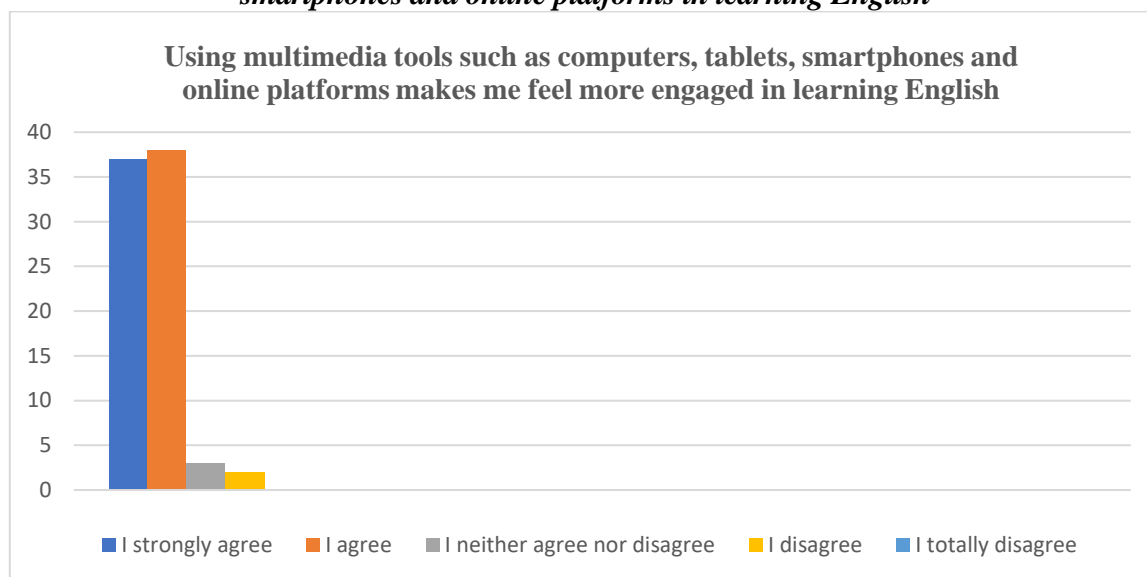

Figure 7 depicts the responses regarding the use of multimedia tools, such as computers, tablets, smartphones and online platforms, to enhance engagement in learning English. The data show strong agreement among 37 students and agreement among 38, indicating widespread support for the use of multimedia tools. A small proportion of 3 students neither agreed nor disagreed, while only 2 students expressed disagreement.

Figure 8 Distribution of students motivated by teacher's encouragement

According to the data, 56 students strongly agreed and 24 students agreed that teacher's encouragement played a significant role in boosting their motivation and confidence. This majority

suggests that students value and respond positively to encouragement from their teacher as a motivating factor in their English learning journey.

Figure 9 Distribution of students motivated by teacher's feedback

Figure 9 illustrates the distribution of students' responses regarding motivation derived from teacher's feedback. The data indicate that a majority of students, 35 strongly agreeing and 40 agreeing, perceive teacher's feedback as a motivating factor in their English learning. 5 students neither agreed nor disagreed, suggesting a need for further investigation into their perception.

Figure 10 Distribution of students who spend much time on studying English outside the classroom

Figure 10 presents students' responses regarding the amount of time spent studying English outside the classroom. The data reveal that a significant number of students, with 18 strongly agreeing and 36 agreeing, acknowledge investing considerable time in self-study. 19 students neither agreed nor disagreed, indicating a range of study habits among the surveyed group. Interestingly, only 1 student totally disagreed with the notion of spending time on English study outside the classroom, suggesting a generally positive attitude towards self-directed learning.

Figure 11 Distribution of students who stay more motivated and engaged in the learning process when rewards are set.

As we can see in Figure 11, a majority of students, with 16 strongly agreeing and 37 agreeing, finds rewards to be effective motivators. However, a small proportion of 6 students disagreed with the idea. Moreover, 21 students neither agreed nor disagreed, suggesting a diversity of perspectives on the impact of rewards on motivation and engagement in learning English.

Figure 12 Distribution of students who are more motivated when writing an essay, giving a speech, or creating a presentation rather than completing a simple task.
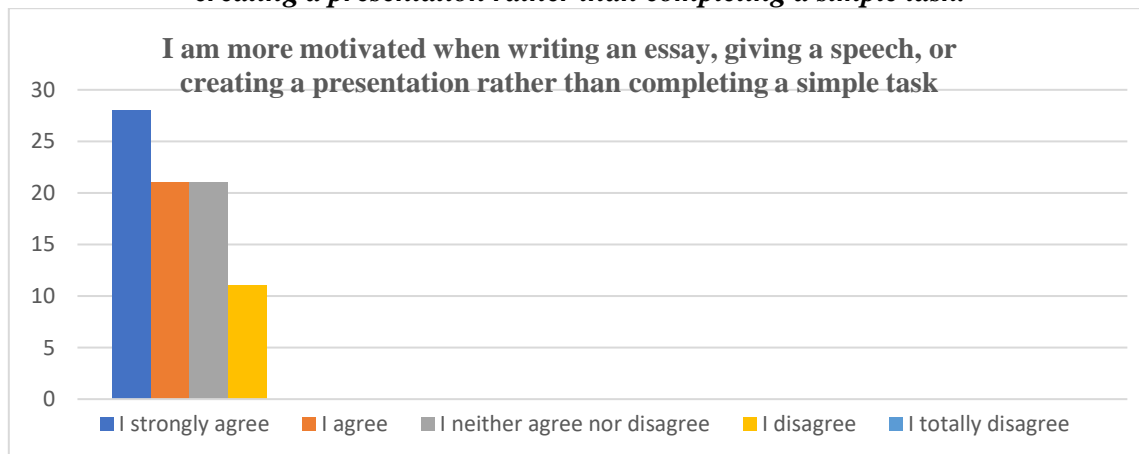

Figure 12 depicts the distribution of students' responses regarding motivation levels when faced with different tasks. The data show that a significant number of students, with 28 strongly agreeing and 21 agreeing, feel more motivated when writing an essay, giving a speech or creating a presentation compared to completing a simple task. 11 students disagreed with this while 21 students neither agreed nor disagreed, suggesting a range of preferences among students. Writing is an essential skill that allows students to express themselves, enabling them to explore and articulate thoughts, emotions and experiences. Writing fosters analytical thinking and problem-solving as they must organize their ideas coherently and promotes lifelong learning and personal growth by encouraging reflection and self-discovery.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Based on the results we have provided for each figure, we can discuss several aspects of the findings. The majority of students (76 out of 80) enjoy studying English and a great number of them would like to spend more time in the English class than in others classes. Also, there are similarities between the attitudes expressed by such findings in this study and those described by Long, Ming and Chen's (2013) study examining student motivation in English learning in Geiju, China. Their findings revealed that students expressed a keen interest in learning English because they realized the importance of learning English, and they thought that it could improve their own quality of life.

A considerable number of students (45 out of 80) are motivated by speaking activities indicating a preference for oral communication. This aforementioned finding about speaking preference is not in line with Ahmed's (2015) study examining the attitudes and motivation of undergraduate EFL students at a public university in Malaysia towards learning English. His findings asserted that students were in favor of the grammar-translation method and vocabulary.

Concerning their attitude towards fun activities and games, the results reveal that the majority of them perceive the fun and games in the English class like motivators. Regarding the motivation to work in teams or individually, a significant proportion of students are motivated to work in teams, highlighting the perceived benefits of collaborative learning. In terms of motivation by learning for a purpose, the finding indicates that a balanced response is observed with an equal number of students strongly agreeing and agreeing that learning English for a particular purpose is motivating.

The majority of students believe that using multimedia tools enhances their engagement in learning English. Alemdag and Cagiltay (2018) conducted a systematic review of eye-tracking research on multimedia learning and found that while this research method was on the rise it was mainly used to understand the effects of multimedia use among higher education students.

Teacher's feedback also plays an important role in students' perception as a motivating factor.

A considerable number of students invest considerable time in studying English outside the classroom, indicating a strong commitment to self-directed learning.

Concerning the rewards, most of the students find them as effective motivators.

Motivation by challenging tasks such as writing essays, giving speeches, creating presentation is relevant for the great majority.

Overall, these findings highlight the complexity of students' motivation in English learning, emphasizing the importance of individualized approaches and varied instructional strategies to cater to diverse students' needs.

CONCLUSION

All in one, the results from the 12 figures provide valuable insights into students' motivation in English language learning. Despite differing perspectives, several consistent themes emerge, including the importance of teacher's feedback, the value of engaging instructional methods such as fun activities and challenging tasks, the use of multimedia tools that enhance their engagement in learning English and the significance of self-directed learning habits.

These findings underscore the need for teachers to adopt a flexible and student-centered approach, incorporating a variety of teaching strategies and catering to individual learning styles and preferences.

The study provided some specific and useful information about learners' motivation and English language learning. When students are motivated in the English classroom, the benefits extend far beyond just language proficiency, they can develop critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and a love for lifelong learning.

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