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The Investigation of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations Impacting EFL Students' English Language Learning

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Abstract: ***This study aims to (1) investigate the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, (2) examine EFL students' perspectives on these motivational factors, and (3) identify any significant gender differences in these motivations. Conducted with 200 EFL students at the National University of Battambang, this research employed qualitative methods to explore how intrinsic and extrinsic factors influence students' motivation for English learning. The findings revealed that both types of motivation significantly impact students' enthusiasm to learn English, highlighting the need for further studies across different institutions. Additionally, socioeconomic and cultural factors should be considered to inform strategies for enhancing motivation and learning outcomes among EFL students.***

Keywords: Intrinsic Factor, Extrinsic Factor, Motivation.

1. INTRODUCTION

English is widely considered the most essential global language, critical for cross-border communication, and integral to sectors such as education, the economy, society, and international business. In Cambodia, English is taught as a foreign language and is regarded as the second most important language after Khmer, as reflected in various educational policies [1,2]. Cambodian schools currently incorporate English instruction from grade one through university [3]. The goal of foreign language education is to enhance students' communication skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing while also fostering lifelong learners who are creative and confident. Despite these goals, many EFL teachers need help in helping students develop these skills, mainly when students show limited motivation [1,4]. Motivation is one of the most significant factors affecting academic success, especially in foreign language programs where direct exposure to native speakers is limited [5]. High motivation levels are strongly associated with better language mastery, making motivation a critical component in

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enhancing English learning outcomes [6]. Motivational factors have a particularly pronounced impact on English majors, influencing their academic progress, language skills, and practical use of English in everyday situations [7].

However, many students need help with English learning, including difficulties with pronunciation, grammar, spelling, and word choice. A lack of enthusiasm and a focus on merely passing courses often hinder students' engagement with the material, impacting their listening comprehension and content retention [8]. Schools also need help in meeting the demand for English language teaching (ELT) due to shortages of teachers, classrooms, and instructional materials [9].

To address these issues, this study investigates the following research questions:
1. What levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are present among EFL students studying English?
2. How do students perceive intrinsic and extrinsic motivations driving their English studies?
3. Are there statistically significant differences in intrinsic and extrinsic motivation by gender?

This research examines the factors influencing English learning motivation among 120 randomly selected English majors at a university in Battambang Province, surveyed from May to July 2024. Although the findings offer valuable insights, they may need to be more generalizable to other institutions with differing academic contexts. Data were collected through questionnaires examining the correlation between students' backgrounds and their motivation to learn English as a foreign language.

2. RELATED WORK

Learning and teaching English as a second or foreign language is challenging and requires substantial effort from both educators and learners. Motivation, along with its opposite—demotivation—is widely recognized as a critical factor in language acquisition. Recent studies highlight the importance of motivation in learning English as a foreign language [6], emphasizing that motivation dramatically impacts students' ability to complete tasks and acquire new skills effectively [10,11]. Generally, highly motivated students demonstrate better performance, while those with lower motivation levels tend to engage less and achieve less [12,13]. Since each student has unique motivational drivers, understanding these is essential for teachers to foster a supportive learning environment [14,15].

Motivation, therefore, plays a central role in language education, with student success closely linked to their motivational levels [16]. Intrinsic motivation, or the internal desire to engage in activities out of personal interest and enjoyment, drives individuals to explore, learn, and achieve personal fulfillment [17,18,19,20]. For example, a student studying diligently because they find the subject fascinating is displaying intrinsic motivation [21]. This form of motivation is often associated with positive feelings toward the language, the teacher, or the class, contributing to enhanced performance [1]. Intrinsically motivated students participate in

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learning activities for personal satisfaction rather than external rewards [22,23,24]. Intrinsic motivation is typically categorized into three areas: knowledge (pleasure in learning new things), accomplishment (satisfaction in achieving a goal), and stimulation (enjoyment and excitement in the activity) [25].

Conversely, extrinsic motivation refers to engaging in activities to gain external rewards, such as grades, money, or recognition [26,27]. This type of motivation stems from factors outside the learner's inherent interest in the task [28]. For instance, a student studying for a test to achieve a high score rather than for personal enjoyment exhibits extrinsic motivation [29,30]. Factors such as low self-confidence, shyness, or limited study time may hinder student motivation, making the teacher's role critical in maintaining student engagement [6,31].

Teachers play a central role in enhancing student motivation. Effective teaching methods, paired with personalized support, can significantly elevate students' drive to learn. Students appreciate innovative approaches that enrich their learning experience, and teachers are often pivotal to student motivation due to their influential position in education. Additionally, individualized feedback focused on personal progress fosters motivation by recognizing student achievements and improvements [32]. Parents also contribute significantly to student motivation, offering encouragement that boosts students' confidence and belief in their abilities [33,34]. Beyond parental support, societal attitudes toward English as a global language further enhance students' motivation to learn. Classroom environment factors, such as class size, available technology, and physical setting, also influence students' motivation levels [6].

3. METHODOLOGY

This study examines the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic factors influencing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' motivation to study English at the National University of Battambang in Cambodia. Data were collected from EFL students aged 18-25 through paper-based survey questionnaires. From a pool of 200 students, participants were selected and asked to complete multiple-choice questionnaires. Adhering to ethical guidelines, the study secured approvals from the university and consent from all participants. The questionnaire focused on four primary areas: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic factors related to the learning environment, instructor influences, and parental support. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS, incorporating descriptive and inferential statistics, such as means, standard deviations, frequencies, and independent sample t-tests. Reliability was assessed through the coefficient alpha method, with a reliability score of 0.70 or higher, meeting standard requirements. Expert input was used to refine the questionnaire, and a pilot test was conducted to confirm its validity. This research explores the motivational factors impacting EFL students' learning, providing valuable insights into their English learning experiences and potentially informing strategies to enhance language education.

Table 1 Questionnaire Reliability

Variables	Number of items	Alpha
Intrinsic (INM)	6	.68

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Extrinsic (EXM)	5	.74
Extrinsic (EXC)	6	.77
Extrinsic (EXP)	4	.79

The following results are interpreted through mean rank interpretation:

Table 2 Mean Rank Interpretation

Level	Interpretation
3.01-4.00	High Level of Motivation
2.01-3.00	Moderate Level of Motivation
1.00-2.00	Low Level of Motivation

A mean score of 1 to 2 suggests a low level of motivation, 2.01 to 3 shows moderate motivation, and 3.01 to 4 indicates strong motivation.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following results are explained using mean rank interpretation.

Table 3 Demographic profile of the participants

Demographic/characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	41	20.5
	Female	159	79.5
Age	18-22	159	79.5
	23-25	35	17.5
	25- above	6	3.0
Period in learning English	Less than 1 year	30	15.0
	1-3 years	63	31.5
	3-5 years above	43	21.5
	5 years above	64	32.0
Academic Year	Year 1	29	14.5
	Year 2	65	32.5
	Year 3	76	38.0
	Year 4	30	15.0

Table 3 reveals a notable gender imbalance among the 200 participants, with 20.5% (41) male and 79.5% (159) female students, highlighting a higher representation of female students in the study. The majority of participants (79.5%) are aged 18–22, indicating that younger university students form the primary study demographic. A smaller portion, 17.5%, are aged 23–25, and only 3.0% are above 25, suggesting a predominant focus on younger learners. The students' English learning experience varies widely. The largest group, 32.0%, has been studying English for more than five years, while 31.5% have studied for 1–3 years, 21.5% for 3–5 years, and 15.0% for less than one year. This range demonstrates that participants represent various stages of English language acquisition, with the majority having multiple years of learning

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experience. Participants are pretty distributed across academic years, with Year 3 students making up the largest group at 38.0%, followed by Year 2 at 32.5%, Year 4 at 15.0%, and Year 1 at 14.5%. This distribution shows that the study includes students from different academic stages, though Year 3 and Year 2 students are most prominently represented.

4.1. Findings Based on Research Question One: What is the Level of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation Among EFL Students Studying English?

Table 4 Level of motivation for the intrinsic and extrinsic factors

Motivation for the intrinsic and extrinsic factors			
Variables	N	Mean	Interpretation
Intrinsic (INM)	200	3.30	High level
Extrinsic (EXM)	200	3.13	High level
Extrinsic (EXC)	200	3.20	High level
Extrinsic (EXP)	200	3.45	High level

Table 4 presents the levels of motivation among students, highlighting both intrinsic and extrinsic factors as indicated by mean scores from a sample of 200 students. The mean score of 3.30 reflects a high level of intrinsic motivation among students, suggesting that internal factors—such as personal interest, enjoyment in learning, and self-set goals—strongly influence their desire to learn English. With a mean score of 3.13, students show a strong level of extrinsic motivation tied to their learning environment. This points to the impact of external elements, including classroom conditions, available resources, and peer interactions, on their motivation. A mean score of 3.20 indicates that students are also highly motivated by classroom and teacher-related factors. This suggests that teacher engagement, teaching methods, and overall classroom dynamics play a significant role in shaping students' motivation. Scoring the highest at 3.45, parental influence emerges as the most significant extrinsic motivator. This finding reflects the substantial impact of parental support, encouragement, and expectations on students' willingness to engage in learning. In conclusion, all factors—both intrinsic and extrinsic—contribute substantially to student motivation, with parental influence identified as the most influential external motivator. These results underscore the importance of both internal drives and external support in fostering motivation among students at the National University of Battambang.

4.2. The Findings are Based on Research Question Two: How do students perceive the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that drive them to study English?

Table 5 Levels of Agreement in Intrinsic Motivation (INM)

Items	**Statements**	**Level of Agreement %**				**M**	**SD**
		SD	D	A	SA		
INM1	You wish to learn how to speak English.	0%	1.5%	42.5%	56.0%	3.55	529
INM2	You want to go around the world.	0%	9.5%	52.0%	38.5%	3.29	.631

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INM3	To pursue your ideal career, you must be fluent in English.	1.5%	6.5%	50.0%	42.0%	3.33	.665
INM4	You understand how important it is to speak English fluently in order to attain your long-term goals.	0%	8.0%	56.5%	36.0%	3.28	.603
INM5	When you can communicate effectively in English, you feel pleased with your abilities.	1.0%	5.0%	55.5%	38.5%	3.32	.615
INM6	You want to approach your preferred English-language media (movies, music, etc.) without using Khmer subtitles.	0.5%	15.%	60.5%	23.5%	3.07	.638
	Total					3.30	.603

Table 5 outlines students' opinions on intrinsic motivation (INM) factors associated with learning English. Mean scores (M) range from 3.07 to 3.55 on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The statement "You wish to learn how to speak English" (INM1) received the highest mean score of 3.55, indicating that a large majority of students strongly desire to achieve fluency in spoken English through their studies." When you can communicate effectively in English, you feel pleased with your abilities" (INM5) had a mean score of 3.32, reflecting a high level of student satisfaction associated with effective English communication. The statement "To pursue your ideal career, you must be fluent in English" (INM3) scored a mean of 3.33, showing that many students believe strong English skills are essential for achieving their career aspirations. The lowest mean score, 3.07, was associated with the statement, "You want to approach your preferred English-language media (movies, music, etc.) without using Khmer subtitles" (INM6). This suggests that while students generally prefer accessing English-language media without translations, their interest in doing so is slightly lower compared to other intrinsic motivations. These findings reveal that, while all intrinsic factors hold importance, the desire for fluent spoken English is the strongest intrinsic motivator among students.

Table 6 Agreement levels in extrinsic motivation (EXM, EXC, and EXP)

Items	**Statement**	**Level of Agreement%**				**M**	**SD**
		SD	D	A	SA		
EXM1	You can study with a lot of your active friends	5%	9%	71.5%	19.0%	3.09	.542
EXM2	The learning environment is comfortable for you.	0%	8.5%	61.0%	30.5%	3.22	.586
EXM3	You are allowed to express your opinions that contribute to the lesson	0%	6.5%	69.5%	24.0%	3.18	.525
EXM4	Your classroom has proper lighting and high-quality equipment.	0%	9.5%	61.0%	29.5%	3.20	.593

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EXM5	Your group work constantly discusses a topic.	0.5%	14.0%	71.5%	25.5%	2.99	.549
EXC1	Your teacher communicates in a kind manner.	0%	14.0%	71.5%	14.0%	3.25	.485
EXC2	Your teacher employs innovative and effective instructional strategies.	0%	4.0%	60.0%	36.0%	3.32	.547
EXC3	Your teacher gently corrects your mistakes.	0%	3.0%	66.0%	31.0%	3.28	.513
EXC4	Your teacher uses authentic and relevant materials to teach.	0.5%	12.5%	64.0%	23.0%	3.10	.606
EXC5	Your teacher engages you with enjoyable tasks	0%	8.5%	71.5%	20.0%	3.12	.523
EXC6	Your teacher is active and dedicated to Students.	0%	7.0%	69.5%	23.5%	3.17	.528
EXP1	Your parents turn you to study as much English as possible.	1.5%	3.5%	43.5%	51.5%	3.35	.640
EXP2	Your parents think English is crucial for your future job.	0%	3.05%	44.0%	53.0%	3.50	.558
EXP3	Your parents will be pleased if you succeed in English.	0%	5.0%	38.5%	56.5%	3.52	.592
EXP4	Your parents provide constant encouragement during your English learning journey.	1.0%	5.5%	53.0%	40.5%	3.33	.627
Total						3.25	.560

Table 6 presents students' perceptions of various extrinsic factors (EXM, EXC, and EXP) related to learning English. The mean scores (M) range from 2.99 to 3.52 on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The highest mean score, 3.52, was recorded for the statement "Your parents will be pleased if you succeed in English" (EXP3). This indicates that most students perceive parental solid support and satisfaction associated with their achievements in English. Closely following, "Your parents think English is crucial for your future job" (EXP2) scored a mean of 3.50, highlighting a high level of agreement among students that their parents consider English proficiency essential for career success. With a mean score of 3.23, the statement "Your teacher employs innovative and effective instructional strategies" (EXC2) reflects students' recognition of the importance of creative and impactful teaching methods in their English learning experience. The lowest mean score, 2.99, was given to the statement, "Your group work constantly discusses a topic" (EXM5), suggesting that students show relatively less interest in frequent group discussions. However, they still find it somewhat relevant to the learning process. These findings indicate that parental expectations and support are extrinsic solid motivators, while the influence of group discussions on motivation is relatively moderate.

4.3. Findings Based on Research Question Three: Are There Statistically Significant

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Differences in Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivating Factors Across Genders?

Table 7 Intrinsic and extrinsic factor motivations of EFL students toward learning English across gender

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig
Intrinsic (INM)	Male	41	20.07	2.687	1.738	198	.439
	Female	159	19.76	2.186			
Extrinsic (EXM)	Male	41	15.85	2.404	.648	198	.518
	Female	159	15.63	1.857			
Extrinsic (EXC)	Male	41	19.73	2.429	1.738	198	.084
	Female	159	19.06	2.134			
Extrinsic (EXP)	Male	41	19.73	2.429	1.738	198	.084
	Female	159	19.06	2.134			

Table 7 compares male and female students' motivation to learn English, focusing on intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The analysis presents mean values, standard deviations (SDs), and t-test results to examine gender-based differences. For intrinsic motivation (INM), males had a slightly higher mean score (20.07) compared to females (19.76), though the difference was not statistically significant ($t = 1.738$, $df = 198$, $p = .439$). Similarly, for extrinsic motivation related to the learning environment (EXM), males scored marginally higher (mean = 15.85) than females (mean = 15.63), but this difference was also not significant ($t = .648$, $df = 198$, $p = .518$). In terms of classroom and teacher-related extrinsic motivation (EXC and EXP), males again scored slightly higher (mean = 19.73) than females (mean = 19.06). However, these differences were not statistically significant ($p = .084$ for both EXC and EXP), suggesting that gender does not substantially influence motivation factors in this sample. This similarity in motivation levels between male and female students provides reassurance about the fairness and objectivity of the study. Overall, the data indicate that male and female students are similarly motivated by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors in learning English.

Regarding the first research question, descriptive analysis shows a total mean score of 3.30 (SD = 0.382) for intrinsic motivation (INM) among all participants. In contrast, scores for extrinsic factors (EXM, EXC, EXP) ranged from 3.13 to 3.45 (SD = 0.395–0.474). This indicates that students are highly motivated to learn English due to both internal and external factors. Supporting findings from [35], other studies on EFL student motivation have shown a high degree of intrinsic motivation, with a mean score of 4.09, and a similarly high level of extrinsic motivation, with a mean score of 3.97. This high degree of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among students should instill optimism about their commitment to learning English. Thus, students are driven to learn English for a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. In alignment with [36], the present study found that students are mainly motivated by extrinsic factors when learning English. Key external motivators include:

- Striving for high grades,
- Studying for exams,
- Seeking external rewards and
- Receiving encouragement from parents or guardians.

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When examining both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators collectively, the data suggest that students in this context exhibit a moderate overall motivation to learn English. However, [37] found that intrinsic factors played a more significant role in influencing the academic achievement of English education graduates, with supportive peer relationships enhancing extrinsic motivation. In contrast to [38, 43, 44], who analyzed both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, the current study primarily utilized a closed-ended Likert scale questionnaire, with findings represented through tables, pie charts, and 3D columns. Results revealed that while extrinsic motivation was the dominant factor in English acquisition, students overall displayed moderate levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

For the second research question, the highest intrinsic mean score (3.55) corresponded to the statement "You wish to learn how to speak English" (INM1), suggesting an intense desire among students to achieve fluency. Similarly, the statement "Your parents will be pleased if you succeed in English" (EXP3) scored the highest for extrinsic motivation (mean = 3.52), indicating that parental support is a significant motivator. These responses highlight the influential roles of intrinsic and extrinsic factors in motivating students to learn English, particularly the significant role of parental support, which the audience should appreciate. In relation to the third research question, t-test results found no significant gender differences in motivation ($t(198) = 1.738$, $p = 0.084$), confirming that intrinsic and extrinsic factors did not vary significantly by gender. However, [30, 41, 42, 45] noted that female students demonstrated greater motivation and optimism toward using class points in EFL courses, with class points shown to increase intrinsic motivation more effectively than extrinsic rewards. These findings suggest that English instructors could enhance motivation in male students by incorporating engaging activities and rewards that enrich the learning experience.

5. CONCLUSION

This study highlights that both intrinsic and extrinsic factors are critical in shaping EFL students' motivation at the National University of Battambang. Intrinsic motivations, such as personal interest in learning English and career aspirations, drive students to engage actively with language learning. However, extrinsic motivators, particularly parental encouragement, classroom environment, and teacher support, are shown to have the most substantial influence, with parental influence emerging as the most vital factor. These findings underscore the need to consider both internal and external motivations to develop a well-rounded approach to enhancing language learning motivation. The study's scope is limited to a single institution, indicating a need for broader research across various Cambodian universities and regions to understand how different contexts—such as socioeconomic status and cultural background—might influence motivation. This expanded perspective could inform targeted strategies for educators and policymakers aimed at optimizing motivational factors to improve EFL learning outcomes across diverse educational settings.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, it focuses on a single institution, the National University of Battambang, which may limit the generalizability of the

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findings to other universities or educational contexts in Cambodia. Different universities may have unique cultural, socioeconomic, or environmental factors that influence students' motivation differently, thus requiring further studies across varied settings. Secondly, the data were gathered solely through self-reported questionnaires, which can introduce bias, as students might respond in socially desirable ways. Future research might benefit from incorporating mixed methods, including interviews or observational studies, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of student motivation. Lastly, while this study examines a range of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors, it does not account for the potential impact of other variables such as individual learning styles, previous English proficiency levels, or access to language resources outside the classroom. Including these aspects in future research could provide a more nuanced view of the factors affecting EFL motivation in Cambodian higher education.

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