

Teaching English at Tertiary Level: Motivating Students of Technical Study Programs

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ABSTRACT

Student motivation has always concerned foreign language instructors. It has become more topical in recent years, after the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions, and the new global phenomenon known as remote learning. Previously, it has been claimed that teachers should pay greater attention to intrinsic motivation (e.g., curiosity, autonomy, interest in the subject, novelty), as only intrinsically motivated learners are kept motivated throughout the whole course of learning. It has been proven that extrinsic motivational factors (e.g., awards, positive feedback, good marks, pressure from the family) are inadequate to keep learners motivated over a long period. Still, psychologists suggest that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation must be activated to ensure an efficient learning process. The present research is aimed at investigating the view of the learners of technical study programs on intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors as regards foreign language learning, the interrelation between the teacher's character, studying environment, classroom management, and family involvement in the studying process and motivation, as well as to investigate the factors that motivate the technical students to learn and kept them motivated in the remote learning setting. The author of this research surveyed 140 students of Riga Technical University of the technical study programs. The results showed that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are essential for student motivation in the post-pandemic time. However, in a crisis situation, even self-motivated students appear to lose their intrinsic motivation and seek support from families, peers, and teachers to stay motivated. The challenging, entertaining, and engaging tasks, good classroom management, and the application of digital teaching methods are appreciated by students in these times.

Keywords: internal motivation, external motivation, student motivation, foreign language teaching

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, a lot of attention has been pointed towards student motivation. Motivation is viewed as the “engine” of studies (Dobbs et al., 2017). It can positively influence the study results, and engagement and support the learning process both inside and outside the educational institution. While the lack of motivation can negatively affect knowledge acquisition and skills development even for the most gifted learners (Al-Said, 2023). Several researchers still claim that more attention should be paid to intrinsic motivation, while extrinsic motivation (such as grades, and feedback) is not enough to keep the student motivated throughout the whole course of the studies. Others suggest that both types of motivation should be directed towards in the learning process. The present research aims to establish the extrinsic and intrinsic motivating factors that motivate the technical students at Riga Technical University, involving the factors motivating them to study as well as the ones motivating them to study English, not being their major.

Nowadays, the world should be ready for the crisis situation which can happen overnight. The COVID pandemic strongly affected student motivation which is difficult to maintain when

learning is happening remotely. Still, little research has been done on motivating the students in the online setting. The factors that kept the students motivated throughout the COVID pandemic are established as part of this research as the potential areas of interest for the teachers delivering the classes remotely.

Some researchers claim that students require support from the teacher to keep them motivated. It has been proven that the provision of appropriate study materials and tasks also adds greatly to student motivation (Nakamura, 2017; Pekrun et al., 2017). The role of meaningful communication between teachers and students has also been referred to as a motivating factor (Chen et al., 2021). Certain researchers suggest that poor material delivery and classroom management are the demotivating factors often leading to high dropout rates (Bai et al., 2022). Following the theory on student motivation, the following are the factors that can greatly contribute to motivating students to study: a healthy studying environment, a positive teacher's attitude, family involvement, and good classroom management. One of the aims of the present research is to evaluate the degree how the mentioned motivating factors influence student motivation.

Overall, the goal of this research is to establish the intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors that motivate technical students to be committed to studies, as well as to study English during the pandemic and post-pandemic time. To achieve this goal, the following research objectives were set:

- To research the concepts of motivation, student motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as well as amotivation.
- To identify the major extrinsic and intrinsic motivating factors that motivate technical students to continue their studies and study English.
- To establish the motivating factors which kept the students motivated during the COVID pandemic.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definition of Motivation

Motivation has been defined as a way of prompting, encouraging, and empowering individuals to work willingly, with interest, imagination, assurance, content, and a coordinated method to reach the established goals (Steinmayr et al., 2019). Siyuan et al. (2020) define motivation as a method of stimulating humans to meet high standards of work and surpass barriers.

Singh (2016) suggests that motivation involves factors (either intrinsic or extrinsic) that initiate actions in living creatures. Gribanova (2020) accentuates that humans have various motives, so before motivating them, individual driving forces should be established. Motivation, according to the mentioned researcher, prompts management, discipline, and perseverance in humans. Steinmayr et al. (2019) clarify that motivation can be described as the force that (1) intensifies a human behavior; (2) directs these behaviors; and (3) strengthens and supports behaviors and attitudes. Siyuan et al. (2020) establish the most important questions in regard to motivation: (1) the motives behind starting, continuing, and finishing the action; and (2) the reasons behind the strength of a particular behavior over time.

2.2. Student Motivation

Motivating students can have a direct effect on the student's progress and study results. Therefore, Silva (2020) claims that those who are interested in boosting student's performance should be familiar with the factors that influence student motivation:

- According to Yilmaz et al. (2017), good classroom management abilities of a teacher, being the core characteristics of a positive classroom environment, can have a positive impact on student motivation. It helps to develop individual learning abilities, efficiency, and performance to ensure the uninterrupted learning process in an efficient classroom environment.

- The positively formed relationships between a student and a teacher, as well as the professional and positive communication atmosphere, can influence both student motivation and academic results (Yilmaz et al., 2017). The communication happening outside the classroom plays a vital role in forming the relationships between students and teachers (Ekiz & Kulmetov, 2016). Moreover, as the studies suggest, the teacher's ethical behavior and positive attitude have a positive impact on students' motivation, feelings associated with the educational institution and learning, and determination (Thaker & Tiberewal, 2019).

- Hodo (2016) mentions that one of the factors influencing student motivation is the effective use of teaching methods. Bayraktar (2015) clarifies that in order to build an effective studying environment, teachers should effectively apply teaching methods, approaches, tools, and materials in the appropriate teaching situations.

- Hodo (2016) points out that family involvement positively affects student progress and productivity. Due to the tendency of the student families to be involved in the studying process of the students at all levels, student motivation, academic assimilation, and results have been improved (Shen et al., 2015). The researchers ascribe the increased motivation to the willingness of the students to achieve the same level of success as their parents having a high level of education, as well as the wish to have a better future (Hodo, 2016).

- Yilmaz et al. (2017) highlight that high family expectations are another motivational factor. They emphasize that the students' wish to maintain the family's social and educational status is a great motivator. Thaker and Tiberewal (2019) accentuate that high parental expectations can result in a certain amount of stress, motivating them to study and concentrate more on education.

- Firdaus (2019) suggests that emotional stability is another important motivating factor. The emotional troubles resulting in depression, such as the loss of a loved one, love fiasco, and problems fulfilling the parents' expectations may greatly demotivate the students.

- Yilmaz et al. (2017) claimed that motivation cannot be related to a single factor, but is rather a combination of various motivational factors, which, if used together, can assist in motivating students and improving their performance, progress, and success in learning.

- Jeremy Harmer (2001) suggests that the following are the deciding factors in student motivation:

1. *Activity*: the challenging, interesting, and engaging nature and variety of activities used in the classroom increase the learners' motivation and engagement.
2. *Agency*: the learners are motivated when they are participating in their learning by performing the tasks and activities, not when they are only passive observers.
3. *Affect*: the way students are being treated by the teachers strongly influences the students' motivation.

4. *Adaptation*: teacher's flexibility and readiness to respond to unexpected situations in the classroom may influence the learners' motivation.
5. *Attitude*: teacher's professional behavior in the classroom strongly affects the students' motivation.
6. *Achievement*: there exists an interrelation between success and motivation, thus, it is the teacher's task to make the learners successful in their subject on the condition that the learners are putting some effort into making it happen.

Researchers highlight the role of teachers in boosting student motivation and therefore increasing involvement in the studying process by means of the provision of appropriate feedback, as well as required assistance and support (Harati et al., 2021). With the advent of modern technologies, the possibilities of student involvement have increased dramatically – teachers can involve their students in the educational process by the application of multimedia, the use of breakout rooms in online meetings to allow for more profound discussions and analysis, the use of game-based platforms, and screen sharing for the class material presentation (Kurt & Yildirim, 2018).

2.3. Intrinsic Motivation

The intrinsic motivation comes from a human itself, not the external rewards, such as prizes, or good grades (Santos-Longhurst, 2019). The intrinsically motivated individual derives pleasure from the task itself, the sense of achievement gained from completing or conducting a task (ibid.). An intrinsically motivated individual will be motivated to work on the tasks they find pleasurable, challenging, or interesting (Sleimi & Davut, 2015). An illustrative example was provided by Li (2021) to portray an intrinsically motivated student – the student may appreciate a good grade for the assignment; however, if the assignment is not challenging, interesting, or pleasurable, a good grade alone will be inadequate to motivate the student. Cherry (2019) accentuates that intrinsically motivated people do not require incentives to stay motivated, as incentives alone are believed to be inadequate to keep them motivated. The intrinsic motivators can be viewed as inspirational ones, which humans are interested in completing, or wish to achieve themselves, even if on the completion of the task, they are not going to be rewarded (Di-Domenico, 2017; Li, 2021). A teacher seeking to motivate the learners intrinsically will attempt to deliver the topic in an interactive, entertaining, challenging, and exciting manner trying to involve them in the studying process rather than just make them memorize the ideas before the test to keep them in the short-term memory (Santos-Longhurst, 2019).

Intrinsic motivation is an important factor influencing the students' involvement in the studying process as well as the final learning results (Zhou & Zhang, 2023). Previous research has shown the interrelation between intrinsic motivation and control of one's learning, self-assuredness, and personal interest in learning (Kovach, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2019; Siddiqui et al., 2020). Ryan and Deci (2020) suggest that intrinsic motivation is an enduring, self-supporting, and rewarding type of motivation.

2.4. Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation can be defined as the type of motivation that arises from outside factors rather than the individual's wish, interest, or feeling of accomplishment (Siyuan et al., 2020). Sennett (2021) describes extrinsic motivation as a situation where a human participates in an activity or finishes a task owing to external motivating factors, such as incentives (e.g., monetary rewards or high grades) or avoiding punishment. Siyuan et al. (2020) suggest that these incentives provide a sense of achievement and satisfaction that performing the work alone

cannot bring. Cherry (2021) mentions various examples of extrinsic motivators, such as a happy face, fame, money, a prize, or a good mark. Meadows-Fernandez (2018) explains that extrinsically motivated individuals will continue working on an assignment even if the process itself does not bring them satisfaction for the reason that they expect to receive content from a reward. Siyuan et al. (2020) and Krugman (2021) highlight that extrinsically motivated students will not obligatory despise completing or finishing an assignment, it implies that the satisfaction they will anticipate from getting a reward would keep them motivated even if the assignment does not seem interesting. For instance, extrinsically motivated learners may stay motivated to continue working on assignments that they find uninteresting because of the prospect of getting rewarded with a good grade (Legault, 2016).

Depending on the level of self-determination, extrinsic motivation is divided into two categories, namely external and identified regulations, where external regulation, being a nonautonomous form of motivation, involves the behavior of individuals moved or controlled by external rewards or punishments, while identified regulation incorporates the more autonomously ratified behavior where the individuals recognize the value of the action (Ryan & Deci, 2019). Nevertheless, the concept of identified regulation resembles intrinsic motivation, it is considered to be a sub-category of extrinsic motivation for the reason that the action “is not performed for itself but as a means to an end” (Guay et al., 2000, p. 177).

Recently, two additional categories have been added to the classification of extrinsic motivation, namely introjected regulation and integrated regulation. Introjected regulation, being a more self-governed form of external regulation, includes behaviors motivated by more personalized rewards and punishments (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Integrated regulation, being, in turn, a more self-governed form of identified regulation, relates to a feeling of “congruence” with the main value of the action (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

2.5. Amotivation

Amotivation is the degree to which the individual is not motivated to carry out specific tasks or activities or the extent to which the actions of a person lack intentionality (Ryan & Deci, 2020). An amotivated individual can be seen as being neither intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated (Zhou & Zhang, 2023). Amotivation is often viewed as the lowest degree of self-determination, which may be a result of the lack of capability, proficiency, expertise, or skills, or the lack of control, or interest in carrying out the activities (Guay, 2022). In comparison with the classroom setting, the online learning environment requires the learners to be more self-reliant and self-motivated (Wong et al., 2019). An amotivated learner will not be involved in the online learning process and therefore not perform well in the online study course (Zhou & Zhang, 2023). Figure 1 shows the reviewed taxonomy of the self-determination theory on motivation.

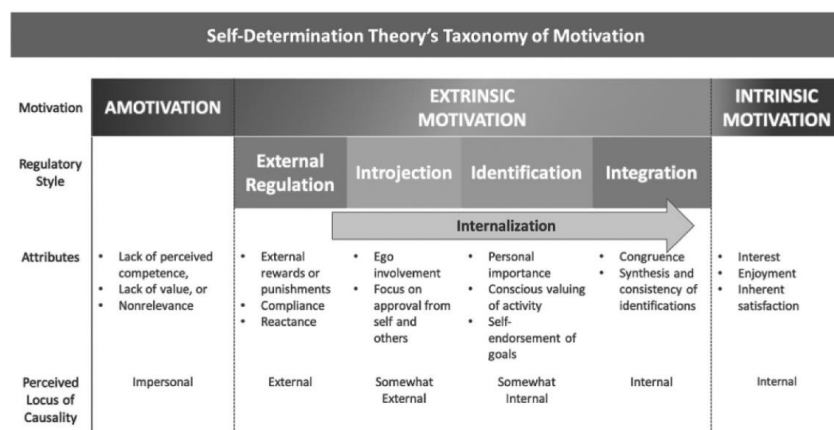


Figure 1. Self-Determination Theory's Taxonomy of Motivation

Note. From the center for Self-Determination Theory (2017, as cited in Zhou & Zhang, 2023)

3. Materials and Methods

140 first-year students of technical programs, namely Customs Administration and Taxes, Logistics, Information Technology, Computer Systems, Adaptronics, and Telecommunications, at Riga Technical University participated in the study. The students were required to complete the survey on Google Forms listing the factors that motivated them to study, study English, and continue their studies during the COVID pandemic, selecting the aspects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators that keep them motivated, as well as the classroom organizational aspects.

3.1. Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation of Technical Students

The following paragraphs will summarize the results of the survey completed by the first-year students of technical study programs at Riga Technical University.

The first question was aimed at establishing the aspects which motivate the students to study. This is a summary of the factors that keep the students motivated, as emphasized by them:

Table 1.

The factors that motivate the students to study

Motivating Factors	No of Students	Comments
Future	32	students' future, goals, plans for the future, or career prospects motivate them to study
Self-development	21	the following motivators were referred to in the questionnaire: 'learning new skills', 'improving skills', 'new knowledge', 'self-development', and 'personal growth'
Diploma	16	diploma, degree, or bachelor's degree were referred to as the incentives
Monetary rewards, salary, or scholarship	13	some students referred to a 'wealthy future', others to a 'well-paid job', or money that can be viewed as one of the opportunities the education can bring
Need for change	13	the students hoped that the studies would make them more efficient, intelligent, independent, and different
Job opportunities	12	students stated that 'good job', 'job possibilities', or 'dream job' are the motivators for them
Family	11	the main motivating factors for the students are their families and friends, as well as the need to support their families

Motivating Factors	No of Students	Comments
Interest in learning	6	the students' interest in the learning process and the satisfaction of acquiring new knowledge is the driving force for them
Classroom management	5	classroom environment, teaching methods, and feedback from the teacher are the motivating factors for the students
Good grades	5	the group of learners is motivated by the extrinsic motivating factors – good grades and positive feedback
Improving the level of life	4	the learners related to the fact that they wish to improve their life level, or to 'get better life'
The need for education	3	the students are motivated by the extrinsic motivator – the need for education
Other	4	other replies were 'life', 'situations', 'nothing', and 'weekends'

The factors presented below were referred to as the motivators for learning the English language:

Table 2.

The factors that motivate the students to study English

Motivating Factors	No of Students	Comments
Usability	40	the respondents related to the fact that English is useful for traveling, working, watching movies, listening to music, living abroad, access to knowledge and data, personal development, international partnership
Self-development	28	the students mentioned skills and fluency development, proficiency improvement, and gathering knowledge as the incentives that keep them motivated
Characteristics of the English language	26	the learners referred to the facts that English is an international, universal, and global language as the motivators for learning the language
Communication	21	the idea that language is a means of communication was referred to by the students
Classroom management	11	the learners suggested that they like the activities, the teacher, the way of delivering the information, and interesting topics
Future	9	the future life, career, and plans are the incentives for the students
Nothing	4	nothing motivates the group of learners to study English
Family	3	families were referred to as the main motivators
Other	4	other responses were: 'university', 'getting a higher score at IELTS', finishing the studies, 'being an example for others', and 'attending the classes is a big responsibility'

As regards the extrinsic motivating factors, the majority of the students marked in the questionnaire, these were relevance to the job, positive feedback, and good grades (selected by 90, 89, and 84 respondents respectively). About 20% of the respondents chose public recognition, prizes for winning in contests, and family financial situation (selected by 34, 29, and 24 students respectively). The responses added in the other section were related to the use of humor in the classroom, and winning in Kahoot (see Figure 2 below).

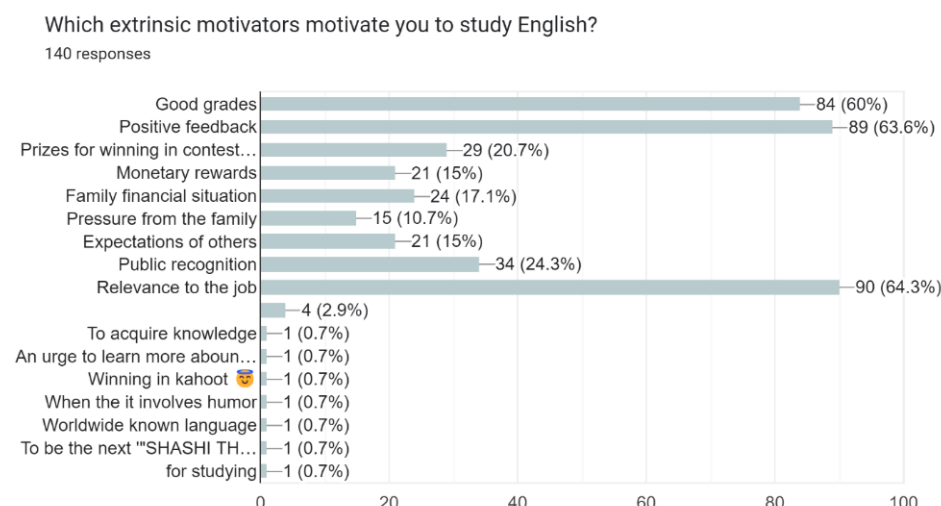


Figure 2. Extrinsic motivators selected by the students

The following question asked about the intrinsic motivating factors that motivate the learners to study English. Those marked by most students were: interest in the subject and feeling of accomplishment (chosen by 90 and 87 learners respectively). About a third of those surveyed selected curiosity and originality of the task (selected by 55 and 40 students respectively) (see Figure 3 below for the results).

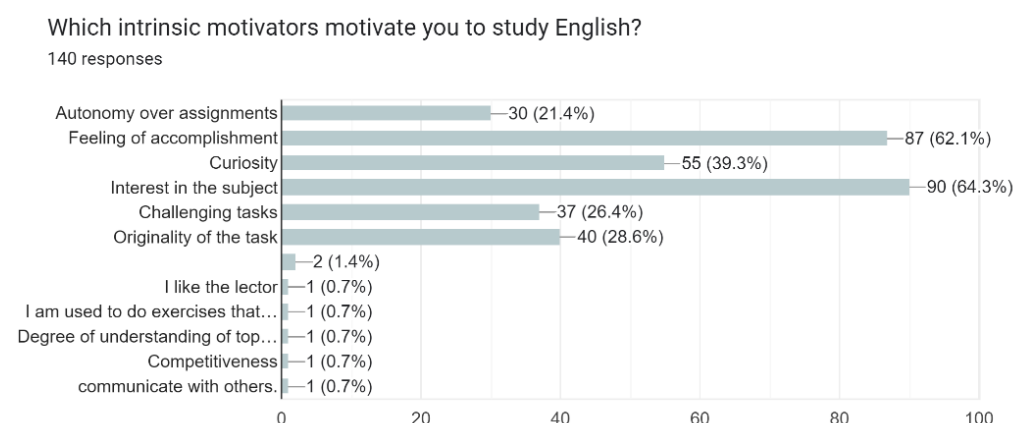


Figure 3. Intrinsic motivators selected by the students

In the following question, the students were required to evaluate the extent to which the teacher's positive attitude motivated them to study the English language. The average grade assigned by the students to this motivating factor was 8.86 with the majority of the students (or 65 respondents) evaluating this factor with a grade of 10 points (see Figure 4 below).

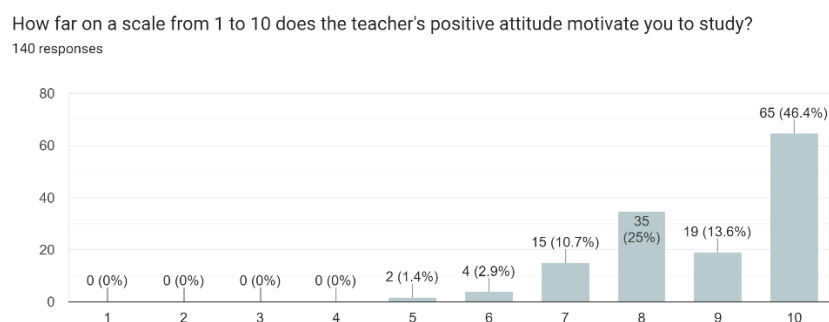


Figure 4. The extent to which the teacher's positive attitude motivates the students to study

The students were supposed to evaluate the extent to which good classroom management motivates them to study in the following question. The average grade assigned by the students to this factor was 8.2 with the majority of the learners evaluating it with a grade of 10 and nine points (see Figure 5 below).

How far on a scale from 1 to 10 does the good classroom management motivate you to study?
140 responses

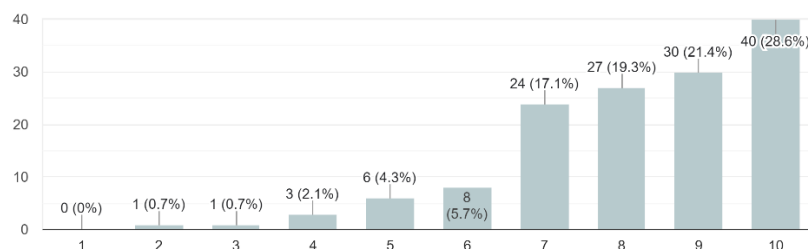


Figure 5. The extent to which good classroom management motivates the students to study

The next motivating factor the degree of which the students were supposed to assess was the positive studying environment. The students evaluated this factor with an average grade of 8.66 – where most of the respondents assigned grades of 10 points and eight points (57 and 32 surveyed respectively) (see Figure 6 for the results).

How far on a scale from 1 to 10 does the positive studying environment motivate you to study?
140 responses

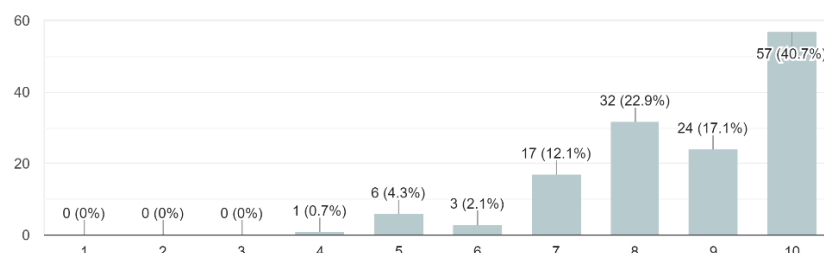


Figure 6. The extent to which the positive studying environment motivates the students to study

The students were asked to evaluate the degree to which family involvement motivates them to study on a scale from 1 to 10. The average grade assigned by the students is 6.4 points, where most of those surveyed assessed the factor with a grade of 10 and five points (29 and 23 learners respectively) (See Figure 7 below for the results).

How far on a scale from 1 to 10 does the family involvement in the studying process motivate you to study?
140 responses

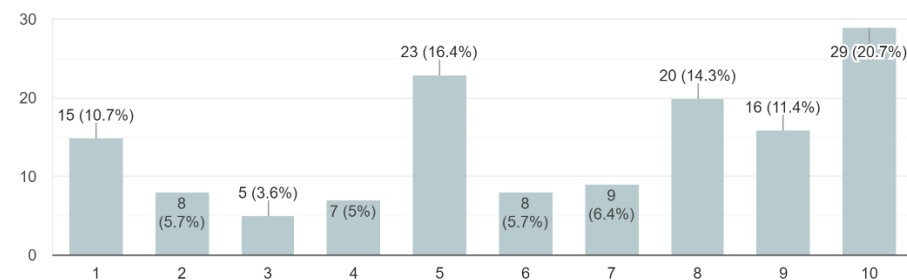


Figure 7. The extent to which family involvement motivates the students to study

Three-quarters of those surveyed claimed that the use of digital teaching methods (e.g., Kahoot, presentations, Quizzlet, movies) in the classroom motivates them to study (See Figure 8 below).

Do digital teaching methods motivate you to study?

140 responses

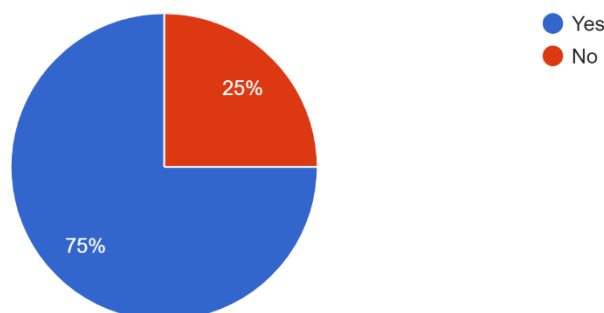


Figure 8. The student motivation derived from the use of digital teaching methods in the classroom

The students were asked to specify the digital teaching methods that motivate them to study in the following question. The replies received included: (1) the use of Kahoot and other game-based platforms; (2) watching movies, TV series, and YouTube videos; (3) listening to podcasts; (4) presentation-making assignments; (5) completion of the tests online; (6) the use of online teaching platforms; (7) the access to online handouts and e-books; (8) the use of social media platforms in the classroom; (9) the studies happening remotely; (10) the application of digital whiteboards; and (11) surfing the internet to find an answer to the question or complete a task.

When asked about the best metrics to evaluate student motivation, the student replies were distributed in the following way. More than half of the respondents selected involvement in the studying process, a better understanding of the subject, and enthusiasm (selected by 88, 81, and 75 of those surveyed). Nearly half of the surveyees chose attendance, study results (e.g., grades), and assignment submissions (66, 63, and 61 learners respectively) (See Figure 9 below).

What are the best metrics for measuring student motivation?

140 responses

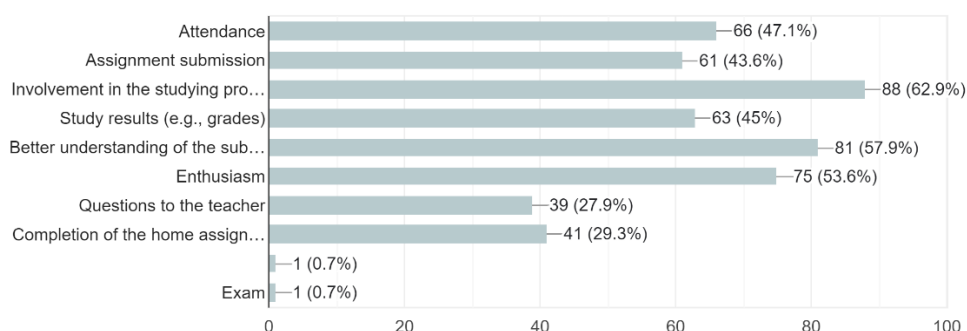


Figure 9. The metrics used for measuring student motivation

The students were supposed to emphasize the factors that motivated them to continue their studies during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 3.

The factors that motivated the students to continue studies during COVID pandemics

Motivating Factors	No of Students	Comments
Nothing	31	The group of learners stated that nothing motivated them to continue their studies, where one student specified that they ‘nearly died in that time’, one suggested that they experienced tremendous problems with their motivation, and two claimed that the time had a negative effect on their knowledge
Family and friends	15	the learners were motivated by the support or pressure from their families and friends, while two learners mentioned that the family situation kept them motivated
Interest in the studies	14	the students suggested that their interest in their studies and the wish to become a better person kept them motivated
Future	13	the students’ goals and plans for the future kept them motivated
Study results	12	the learners were motivated by the study results, specifically the high grades
No result	12	the learners claimed that the COVID pandemic did not influence their motivation, and most of those found this time beneficial, as it allowed them to plan their time, stay at home, and pursue their dreams
Hope that the pandemic will end	11	the respondents were motivated by the hope that the pandemic would end once, and everything would get back to normal.
Wish to graduate	6	the wish to graduate high school and discipline were the motivating factors for the students
Took an academic break	2	two students took an academic break as a result of the COVID pandemics
Other	10	the other replies received were Bible, “The Supreme Soul”, the tuition fee, mortgage, a small business, “Asian culture, Asian music”, competition with others, the ability to plan your day, meditation, as well as habit.

4. Conclusions

Overall, motivation can be defined as a way of stimulating human behavior towards achieving some goals set (e.g., corporate, individual, educational, social).

As regards the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation is the one which comes from within the human – for example, the students will stay motivated if the task seems interesting, challenging, or exciting to them, while extrinsic motivation arises from the outside factors, such as prizes, grades, or positive feedback. Both types of motivation have been claimed as being very important in reaching the goals set.

The three extrinsic motivating factors selected by the students as influencing their motivation to study the language more than the others are relevance to the job, positive feedback, and good grades. The intrinsic motivating factors selected were interest in the subject, feeling of accomplishment, and curiosity.

When evaluating the student motivating factors, it turned out that all the students highly evaluated the teacher’s positive attitude towards them, the positive studying environment, as

well as the good classroom management effect on motivation. The family involvement turned out to have a varying influence on the student motivation, with the majority of the respondents assessing its influence with either a grade of 10 or 5 points.

When comparing the motivating factors that motivate the learners currently and the motivating factors during the pandemic times, the survey results show that in the post-pandemic time, the students are more self-motivated - they find motivation in their goals and plans for the future, self-development, and job opportunities, as well as the need for change. While, during the pandemic, when some of the students lost their motivation, others found it in the support of their families and friends (extrinsic motivation), interesting tasks (intrinsic motivation), and study results (extrinsic motivation). Goals and plans for the future were still important factors for some, but a much lower number of students referred to this point in their questionnaire.

The results of the survey showed that the characteristics of the English language, especially its practicality, as well as the fact it is a means of communication are the motivating factors for the technical students. Some of those surveyed selected self-development (intrinsic motivation), less learners chose classroom management techniques (extrinsic motivation) as the factors motivating them to study English.

The majority of the learners accentuated that their motivation increased if the teacher applied digital teaching methods. Those mentioned by the learners as motivating were mostly Kahoot, movies, podcasts, videos, presentations, online tests, handouts and e-books, and social media platforms.

As concerns the metrics used to evaluate student motivation, approximately half of those surveyed selected involvement in the studying process, better understanding of the subject, enthusiasm for the subject, attendance, study results, and assignment submission.

Overall, it can be concluded that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are important in motivating the learners to study, and to study languages. However, in a crisis time, such as the COVID pandemic, intrinsic motivation seems to be not enough even for the students who appear to be very self-motivated. The students seek support from their families, friends, and teachers, they appreciate the interesting, challenging, and entertaining tasks, the good classroom management, and the use of digital teaching methods.

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