

Navigating Motivation: Freshmen's Quest for English Proficiency in Taiwanese University Contexts

Chao-Wen Chiu¹

¹ Holistic Education Center, Fu Jen Catholic University, New Taipei City, Taiwan

Correspondence: Chao-Wen Chiu, Holistic Education Center, Fu Jen Catholic University, New Taipei City, Taiwan. E-mail: cwchiu515@gmail.com

Received: February 23, 2024

Accepted: March 20, 2024

Online Published: March 23, 2024

doi: 10.5539/elt.v17n4p34

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v17n4p34>

Abstract

English language proficiency is crucial in today's globalized world, prompting Taiwanese universities to mandate one to four years of English courses. With the implementation of a national bilingual education program for college students, universities aim to enhance English proficiency through Freshman English courses, facilitating a smooth transition to English-mediated instruction in subsequent years, particularly in specialized subjects. Despite the official emphasis on English's importance for future success, the effectiveness of language instruction hinges on understanding students' motivations. This study investigates English learning motivations among Taiwanese undergraduates, utilizing a Likert-scale questionnaire to discern general trends. The sample comprises 360 undergraduates from a northern Taiwanese university, with factor analysis revealing five motivational factors: intrinsic appreciation, instrumental motivation, external expectations motivation, exam-driven motivation, and interpersonal influence. These findings offer valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of English language learning motivations among Taiwanese freshmen, contributing to existing literature by highlighting nuanced motivational factors. The identified motivational factors hold implications for both theoretical understanding and pedagogical approaches, providing educators with insights to tailor instruction to students' diverse motivations. This study aims to enrich the discourse on language learning motivation and serve as a foundation for future research in similar contexts.

Keywords: EFL learning contexts, English learning motivation, factor analysis, Taiwan, university freshmen

1. Introduction

1.1 Navigating the Landscape of English Language Education in Taiwan: Policies, Challenges, and Motivational Dynamics

In response to the challenges posed by globalization, Taiwan has identified the pivotal role of English in enhancing international competitiveness. The government's proactive approach is evident in the implementation of the "2030 Bilingual National Policy Development Blueprint," emphasizing the importance of enhancing students' English proficiency. This commitment is further demonstrated by allocating funds to the Forward-looking Infrastructure Development Program, which aims to develop infrastructure projects that support future growth and advancement in various sectors (Executive Yuan, 2023). Recognizing the urgency for students to be globally competitive, universities are called upon to intensify English instruction, fostering a bilingual teaching environment aimed at elevating Taiwan's standing in international higher education (Chang, 2022). The Ministry of Education, through the promotion of English as a medium of instruction (EMI), seeks to enhance students' English abilities, ultimately bolstering the international competitiveness of Taiwan's higher education institutions.

To address the global demand for improved English proficiency, educational authorities in many English as a foreign language (EFL) countries have prioritized English integration into mandatory courses (Kirkpatrick, 2016). In Taiwan, English is compulsory for students across various academic levels in elementary and secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2018). Even at the higher education level, where various universities have adopted diverse curriculum plans, all freshmen are mandated to undergo a year-long Freshman English course (Chern, 2010). Over the past decade, more and more universities have extended mandatory English courses beyond the freshman year to the sophomore, junior, and even senior years. While English courses are commonly integrated into universities' general education requirements, the absence of a nationally standardized

curriculum leads to variations in credits, content, and graduation requirements. Within the sphere of academic autonomy, universities determine English course content, leading to variations in weekly teaching hours, required credits (ranging from four to fourteen), and study duration (spanning one to four years) (Chern, 2010).

Acknowledging that students are at the core of education, Chern and Yeh (2005, cited in Chern, 2010) surveyed university students' English needs, revealing a primary demand for practicality. They advocate for prioritizing enhancing language abilities in university English courses by incorporating diverse and engaging content that aligns with contemporary needs. Wang's (2003) research on students' views on general English courses highlighted that 85.7% of students strongly desired to enhance their English skills through these courses, with 91.8% acknowledging the significant impact of English on future career opportunities. However, in line with Taiwan's bilingual education program for college students, the effectiveness of English language instruction depends on a thorough understanding of students' motivations, despite the official emphasis on the language's significance for students' future success.

Regardless of these extensive efforts, a critical research gap exists in understanding the specific motivations driving English language learning among Taiwanese university freshmen. While prior studies have delved into teaching methods, effectiveness, and perspectives of teachers and students in general English courses, enhancement programs for Freshman English, and proposals for standardized tests (Chern, 2010), a comprehensive investigation into the distinct motivational factors shaping English language learning is notably lacking. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining the diverse motivations influencing students' engagement with English learning, thus providing a deeper understanding of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational drivers. A deeper understanding of students' motivation is essential for creating compelling, student-centered language education programs, fostering positive learning experiences, and contributing to the overall success of language learners.

1.2 Understanding Motivational Dynamics in Taiwanese EFL Learning Environments

Motivation is a widely used term to account for the success or failure of learners in various tasks. Gardner's classical model has greatly contributed to understanding the motivational factors behind second or foreign language learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991). Gardner and Lambert (1972) extensively studied language learners in Canada and the United States, identifying two major types of motivation: instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivation involves acquiring a language for practical purposes, such as career advancement, technical reading, and translation. In contrast, integrative motivation reflects a desire to integrate into the culture of the target language group and engage in social interactions within that community. Gardner and MacIntyre (1991) further expanded on this instrumental/integrative dichotomy, framing it as a matter of orientation. They emphasized that learners' motivations can vary based on their learning context, whether academic/career-oriented (instrumental) or culturally oriented (integrative). This extension is crucial as it recognizes that learners may exhibit varying degrees of motivation within each orientation.

Since the 1990s, scholars have advocated for expanding Gardner's theory to incorporate insights from a broader range of psychological theories (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). These expanded models have introduced new factors such as learning situation (Dörnyei, 1994) and self-confidence (Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994), reflecting a growing recognition of the multifaceted nature of language learning motivation. Moreover, greater attention has been placed on learner differences, including gender, age, learning strategies, and communicative requirements, suggesting the need for tailored language teaching approaches to accommodate diverse learner groups (Cohen & Dörnyei, 2002; Nunan, 2001). It is important to acknowledge that Gardner's original and expanded motivational models were primarily developed in the North American context, raising questions about their applicability to the Far East context, which requires further investigation (Chen, Warden, & Chang, 2005).

In EFL settings, such as those found in Taiwan, limited English usage outside the classroom is compounded by heavy academic demands, creating a challenging environment for language learning. Despite exposure to English through media channels, there is often little motivation for engagement in daily life activities using the language. Global corporations efficiently provide localized content, allowing residents, including EFL learners, to access various cultural elements in their native language. However, within the Taiwanese EFL context, language teachers often face the unique challenge of managing large class sizes, which can significantly impact the effectiveness of traditional teaching methods (Chen et al., 2005).

The Taiwanese EFL context presents a departure from conventional language learning research settings, highlighting the necessity for a nuanced understanding of students' specific motivations within their local environments. Chen et al. (2005) undertook a study to investigate the influence of culture on language learning

motivation in Taiwan, where English study is mandatory for a large student population. With 567 participants, the research employed surveys to explore motivation orientation, expectancy, and self-evaluated skill levels. Utilizing factor analysis and structural equation modeling, the study identified expectancy as an intervening construct between motivation orientations and self-evaluated skills. Notably, the required motivation demonstrated the most robust connection to expectancy, while integrative motivation played a negligible role. Moreover, Chen et al. (2005) introduced the concept of “the Chinese Imperative” as a proposed motivator, offering insights into language learning motivation within the framework of Chinese cultural and educational history. These findings underscore the necessity of reconsidering motivation constructs in non-Western cultural settings, providing valuable implications for teaching practices tailored to EFL learners in the Taiwanese educational context.

Recently, for a better understanding of foreign language learning motivation in Taiwan, Huang (2021) referred to two earlier studies by Chen et al. (2005) and Warden and Lin (2000), which found that Taiwanese learners of English are primarily motivated by instrumental orientation and course requirements. Building upon this, she further investigated the motivation of college students enrolled in elective courses in modern languages other than English (LOTEs) in Taiwan, using the Second Language Motivational Self System (L2MSS) framework as a guide. Huang’s research involved 337 participants who completed surveys, with an additional 22 participating in interviews. Through both questionnaire surveys and interviews, the study revealed that a positive learning experience emerged as the strongest motivator for effort, while the ought-to L2 self was found to be insignificant. Instead, factors such as academic responsibility and instrumentality were deemed more relevant, echoing studies by Chen et al. (2005) and Warden and Lin (2000). The role of the ideal self appeared less clear, suggesting potential differences from the English ideal self. Overall, Huang’s (2021) study contributes to expanding our understanding of language learner types by employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, providing a holistic examination of language learning motivation in Taiwan. It underscores the importance of elective LOTE courses in fostering learners’ interest and potential for future endeavors, suggesting their relevance in today’s geopolitical climate.

The findings from Hennebry-Leung, Tseng and Gao’s (2023) study offer valuable insights into the dynamics of motivation, particularly within the context of East Asia’s geopolitical climate. This research explores how the L2 learning context influences motivation among secondary school English learners in Hong Kong. Employing an agency perspective, the study surveyed 3854 students across three instructional settings: English medium, Chinese medium, and mixed medium. Through hierarchical regression analysis, the study disclosed varying impacts of motivation on language proficiency within these environments, highlighting the diverse internal frameworks of L2 motivation. Furthermore, the research discusses the differences in the role of agentic and non-agentic motivational orientations across settings, underscoring implications for understanding motivation and informing language teaching practices.

Gao, Zhao, Cheng and Zhou (2004) conducted a study on EFL learners’ motivation in China, providing an exploratory classification of English learning motivations. They examined 2272 undergraduates, identifying seven motivation types: intrinsic interest, immediate achievement, learning situation, going abroad, social responsibility, individual development, and information medium. Furthermore, they generalized the seven types as instrumental, cultural, and situational motivations. Their findings bolster Gardner’s classical and expanded motivation theories, showcasing the cross-context appropriateness of these frameworks. The study refines these theories by unveiling distinct characteristics of motivation types among Chinese learners that are not precisely accommodated by the traditional instrumental-integrative division. Gao et al.’s (2004) research identifies diverse instrumental motivations, with a notable emphasis on “immediate achievement” linked to certificates, offering empirical evidence for previously noted motivations. Moreover, the study introduces the concept that cultural motivations can be directed towards the native culture, challenging the typical integrative perspective. This native-culture orientation suggests a deep-rooted Chinese cultural influence on language learning motivations. The motivation framework proposed by Gao et al.’s (2004) study provides a nuanced understanding of Chinese EFL learners, offering valuable insights for future research in similar cultural settings. Additionally, these findings have the potential to inform studies in other Asian countries and regions, enhancing our comprehension of motivation dynamics in diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

In spite of extensive efforts by the Taiwanese government to promote bilingual education, a critical research gap remains in understanding the specific motivations that drive English language learning among Taiwanese university freshmen. There is a notable absence of comprehensive investigations into the distinct motivational factors shaping English language learning in this context. Building upon the framework established by Gao et al. (2004), this study aims to address this gap by exploring the motivational factors influencing English language

learning among Taiwanese freshmen.

The central research question guiding this study is: What are the diverse motivational factors shaping the English language learning endeavors of university freshmen in Taiwan? By examining the diverse motivations impacting students' engagement with English learning, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the motivational factors influencing Taiwanese college students. This deeper insight into student motivation is crucial for designing effective, student-centered language education programs, fostering positive learning experiences, and enhancing the overall success of language learners.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The study comprised 360 college freshmen enrolled in a Freshman English course at a university located in northern Taiwan, from seven Freshman English classes. Generally, participants commenced their English language learning journey in elementary school. Their English proficiency ranged from intermediate to advanced levels, as indicated by the results of the placement test administered by the university authority. English majors were deliberately excluded from the study due to the predominant presence of non-English majors among undergraduates in English classrooms. This decision aimed to facilitate a focused examination of motivational factors within a homogenous group while acknowledging the potential differences between English and non-English majors, warranting separate investigation.

2.2 Instrument

The questionnaire utilized in this study, adapted from Gao et al. (2004), initially consisted of 30 items designed to encompass a wide range of motivational factors. It was translated into Traditional Chinese, the standardized form of written Chinese characters used in Taiwan, to accommodate linguistic differences between Simplified Chinese used in Mainland China and Traditional Chinese used in Taiwan, ensuring participants' comprehension of the questionnaire items and facilitating appropriate responses. The adoption of Traditional Chinese was crucial, given the nuanced variations in expressions between the two forms of written Chinese.

The decision to utilize this instrument was primarily driven by the exploratory nature of the study, aimed at uncovering potential motivational factors among Taiwanese EFL learners. Drawing from the methodology of Gao et al. (2004), a bottom-up approach was adopted to identify possible motivational factors within the Taiwanese EFL context. To assess the suitability of Gao et al.'s (2004) questionnaire for this study, a pilot study involving 42 freshmen from a Freshman English class was conducted. During this pilot study, participants provided open responses to the question, "Why do you study English?" The responses were categorized to determine their alignment with the questionnaire items of Gao et al. (2004) (See Appendix for Items 1-30). However, based on the pilot study conducted with the freshman English class, three types of responses could not be categorized into Gao et al.'s (2004) questionnaire. Therefore, three new items were added to the questionnaire (See Appendix for Items 31-33), and an expert panel consisting of three members was convened to ensure the content validity and wording of the questionnaire.

Consequently, the questionnaire utilized as the research instrument comprised 33 items and was measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = uncertain; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree). While Gao et al. (2004) attempted to identify possible motivation types among Chinese undergraduates using a questionnaire in Simplified Chinese, the distinct learning contexts between Taiwan and Mainland China necessitated the inclusion of additional items to adequately capture motivational factors among Taiwanese students. As Gao et al.'s (2004) research was conducted in Mainland China, this study aimed to assess whether their questionnaire would yield different results in the Taiwanese context. Moreover, the study aimed to develop a more comprehensive framework for understanding language learning motivation in Taiwan.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis

To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted before officially administering the 33-item questionnaire in the main study. The pilot study yielded 200 valid responses out of 231 distributed copies, with a reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) of 0.79. Factor analysis identified five motivational factors, explaining 61.12% of the total variance. Based on the satisfactory results obtained, minor adjustments were made to the wording of the questionnaire. These adjustments aimed to enhance clarity and comprehensibility.

In the main study, participants were assured of anonymity and informed that their responses would not affect their course scores. The questionnaires were distributed to students after receiving approval from their course instructors, and participation was voluntary. No incentives were provided to complete the questionnaire. Of the

398 distributed questionnaires, 360 valid responses were obtained, with internal consistency reliabilities of 0.86.

In the process of data analysis, an exploratory factor analysis using SPSS was conducted to categorize the 33 questionnaire items into psychometrically acceptable categories, as elaborated in the subsequent results section. Factor analysis aims to identify the underlying structure of a dataset by reducing observed variables into a smaller set of unobserved factors (Yong & Pearce, 2013). The selection of factors was guided by specific criteria, including adherence to the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalue greater than 1) and the interpretability of the factors, alongside the requirement for each factor to comprise a minimum of three items. This approach was adopted to maintain the robustness and reliability of the analysis.

Factors with fewer than three items were excluded to guarantee robustness in interpretation. The number of factors extracted was determined based on their interpretability, with a focus on retaining factors comprising a minimum of three items. This criterion ensures a comprehensive understanding of motivation, enhances reliability by improving internal consistency, and increases the trustworthiness of study findings, ultimately strengthening the validity of conclusions regarding language learning motivation. This approach aimed to uncover the dataset's underlying structure, with factor analysis serving as a powerful tool for dimensionality reduction and providing valuable insights into the motivations driving language learning behavior.

3. Results

Based on the aforementioned data collection and analysis, this section proceeds to present a comprehensive examination of the results, focusing on the outcomes of factor analysis iterations.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure (.876) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < .000$) confirmed the data's suitability for factor analysis. Nonetheless, factors comprising only one or two items were considered insufficient as independent factors and were consequently eliminated. Additional iterations of principal components analysis with oblique (direct oblimin) rotation were conducted to extract factors, ensuring each consisted of a minimum of three items for robustness.

Initially, eight factors were extracted, explaining 65.27% of the total variance. However, one factor containing only two items was removed. Subsequent rounds of analysis revealed the extraction of seven factors in the second round, with a similar instance of factors containing insufficient items. This iterative process continued until the fourth round, during which six factors were identified, but one consisting of only two items was deemed inadequate and subsequently removed. Finally, five motivational factors were identified in the fifth round, collectively explaining 59.51% of the total variance. This number of factors appeared to offer a more concise and pertinent depiction of the data, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the primary motivational factors influencing Taiwanese freshmen in their pursuit of English language learning.

The configuration and loadings of these five factors, provisionally named A, B, C, D, and E, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Factor Configuration and Loadings

	Factor A	Factor B	Factor C	Factor D	Factor E
% of Variance	26.09	13.57	9.54	6.05	4.26
Eigenvalue	7.05	3.66	2.58	1.63	1.15
Item 21: Like this language	.84				
Item 1: Fell in love with English at first sight	.79				
Item 19: Interest in language learning	.78				
Item 18: Interest in English-speaking people and their culture	.72				
Item 23: Interest in English literature	.72				
Item 20: Interest in English movies or songs	.64				
Item 22: In order to let the world know more about Taiwan	.61				
Item 13: English is a useful tool for communication in contemporary society		.82			
Item 16: Good English skills can help me find a good job in the future		.79			
Item 15: In order to facilitate the learning of other academic subjects		.72			
Item 26: In order to find better education or job opportunities abroad		.70			
Item 29: Good English skills are an important stepping stone to success in life		.69			
Item 33: Much new information nowadays is presented in English		.54			
Item 14: Learning English can give me a sense of achievement		.54			
Item 12: In order to obtain high scores in exams concerning going abroad or career development in Taiwan		.50			
Item 30: Fluent spoken English is a symbol of education and accomplishment		.43			
Item 32: In order to meet my teachers' expectations			.76		
Item 25: In order to live up to my parents' expectations			.73		
Item 24: In order to contribute effectively to Taiwan's prosperity			.66		
Item 28: In order to immigrate to English-speaking countries			.49		
Item 4: Driven by test scores (before entering university)				.80	
Item 6: Driven by test scores (after entering university)				.72	
Item 3: In order to obtain high scores in the university entrance exam				.71	
Item 11: In order to obtain a university degree				.51	
Item 5: Depended on whether I liked my English teachers (before entering university)					.82
Item 7: Depended on whether I liked my English teachers (after entering university)					.79
Item 10: Depended on whether I liked my fellow students in the English class (after entering university)					.65

Note. The figure for each item is the result of oblique rotation.

4. Discussion

Having outlined the motivational factors influencing Taiwanese freshmen in their pursuit of English language learning, as described in the preceding section, this discussion now delves into the interpretation and implications of these findings. Central to this exploration is the research question guiding this study: What are the diverse motivational factors shaping the English language learning endeavors of university freshmen in Taiwan? By dissecting the identified motivational factors and contextualizing them within the broader landscape of language learning motivation, this discussion aims to shed light on the nuances and implications of language education practices in Taiwanese universities. Based on the items encompassed within each motivational factor, the five factors were named and elucidated as follows:

A. Intrinsic Appreciation

This factor encompasses the intrinsic motivation driven by a genuine fondness for the English language itself and its associated cultural elements. Items such as “like this language” (Item 21) and “fell in love with English at first sight” (Item 1) reflect a deep personal connection and affection towards English. Furthermore, items like “interest in language learning” (Item 19) and “interest in English literature” (Item 23) suggest a genuine enjoyment derived from exploring the language and its literary aspects. The item “interest in English-speaking people and their culture” (Item 18) indicates an intrinsic curiosity about English-speaking culture. In contrast, “interest in English movies or songs” (Item 20) highlights an appreciation for English media, further emphasizing the intrinsic enjoyment and appreciation associated with learning English. Moreover, “in order to let the world know more about Taiwan” (Item 22) reflects a motivation rooted in cultural pride and the desire to promote understanding of Taiwan globally. Overall, this factor explains the inherent pleasure and interest in the language itself, its cultural aspects, and the learning process, driving individuals to engage in English language learning.

B. Instrumental Motivation

This factor represents instrumental motivation, which involves learning English for practical and utilitarian purposes rather than intrinsic interest or enjoyment. Items such as “English is a useful tool for communication in contemporary society” (Item 13), “good English skills can help me find a good job in the future” (Item 16), and “in order to find better education or job opportunities abroad” (Item 26) highlight the pragmatic benefits associated with English proficiency, such as enhancing communication skills, career prospects, and access to education or job opportunities internationally. In addition, “good English skills are an important stepping stone to success in life” (Item 29) emphasizes the overarching significance of English as a practical skill for various aspects of life. “In order to facilitate the learning of other academic subjects” (Item 15) suggests a functional motivation to improve English proficiency for academic success in other subjects. At the same time, “much new information nowadays is presented in English” (Item 33) underscores the practical necessity of English for accessing information in a globalized world. Finally, “learning English can give me a sense of achievement” (Item 14) reflects an instrumental motivation driven by the desire for personal accomplishment and success in English learning endeavors. Moreover, “in order to obtain high scores in exams concerning going abroad or career development in Taiwan” (Item 12) and “fluent spoken English is a symbol of education and accomplishment” (Item 30) are also indicative of instrumental motivation, as they highlight the practical benefits and symbolic value associated with English proficiency, respectively. These items further emphasize the pragmatic orientation towards English learning, reinforcing the instrumental motivations underlying the pursuit of English language skills.

C. External Expectations Motivation

The term external expectations motivation encompasses the external pressures, expectations, or influences that drive individuals to learn English, whether stemming from parental expectations, societal pressures, or the desire to meet external standards or requirements. This factor emerges from the external influences and societal pressures that drive individuals to learn English. Items such as “in order to meet my teachers’ expectations” (Item 32) and “in order to live up to my parents’ expectations” (Item 25) reflect the influence of authority figures and familial expectations, suggesting a motivation to fulfill external obligations or meet perceived standards set by others. Moreover, “in order to contribute effectively to Taiwan’s prosperity” (Item 24) indicates a motivation driven by national or societal aspirations, where individuals may feel compelled to contribute to the advancement or success of their country by acquiring English language skills. Similarly, “in order to immigrate to English-speaking countries” (Item 28) signifies a desire to meet external criteria or requirements for potential migration, which could involve language proficiency as a prerequisite for relocating to another country. This factor underscores the influence of external pressures, expectations, and societal goals in shaping individuals’

motivations to learn English. Based on Confucian tradition, the fulfillment of social expectations could be informed by “collectivism pressures” (Chen et al., 2005, p. 623), reflecting values deeply ingrained in this culture.

D. Exam-Driven Motivation

This factor encloses motivation driven by the pressure to excel academically, particularly in examinations, and the aspiration to succeed in academic endeavors. It arises from the specific objective of meeting academic standards and achieving success in English language assessments or coursework. Items such as “driven by test scores (before entering university)” (Item 4) and “driven by test scores (after entering university)” (Item 6) underscore the importance of academic evaluations and their impact on motivation, both pre- and post-university education. In addition, “in order to obtain high scores in the university entrance exam” (Item 3) and “in order to obtain a university degree” (Item 11) demonstrate a motivation focused on academic accomplishment and the attainment of qualifications, highlighting the functional role of English proficiency in academic success and advancement. This factor emphasizes the significance of academic performance and the pursuit of educational objectives as primary motivators in English language learning. The distinctiveness of this motivational factor will be further elucidated in the following comparison with existing literature.

E. Interpersonal Influence

Termed interpersonal influence, this factor emerges from the impact of interpersonal relationships, particularly those with teachers or peers, on the motivation to learn English. Items like “depended on whether I liked my English teachers (before entering university)” (Item 5) and “depended on whether I liked my English teachers (after entering university)” (Item 7) accentuate the significance of teacher-student rapport and preference in motivating learning, both before and during university education. Furthermore, “depended on whether I liked my fellow students in the English class (after entering university)” (Item 10) suggests that social dynamics within the classroom, such as peer relationships and group cohesion, can influence motivation. This factor emphasizes the interpersonal dimensions of English language learning and highlights the crucial role of social connections in shaping motivation levels.

Among the five motivational factors identified in this study, instrumental motivation and exam-driven motivation align with the instrumental orientation/motivation in Gardner’s classical model, which pertains to acquiring a language for practical purposes. In this study, instrumental motivation encompasses a broader pursuit of social status, while exam-driven motivation focuses on meeting specific exam requirements or qualifications. Exam-driven motivation resonates with Chen et al.’s (2005) findings, which underscored the enduring importance of academic achievement and the pressure to excel in educational assessments within Chinese cultural contexts. In other words, exam-driven motivation identified in the current study highlights the persistent influence of academic standards and success in shaping motivation for English language learning. Exam-driven motivation is a particularly unique learning motivation among Taiwanese students. This emphasis has not waned over time, as evidenced by the fact that in contemporary Taiwan, the government comprises five branches, one of which is exclusively tasked with overseeing civil service examinations: the Examination Yuan.

Exam-driven motivation exemplifies the distinctive nature of freshmen’s English learning motivation within Taiwanese universities, largely influenced by Taiwan’s educational culture’s strong emphasis on academic progression. Despite the gradual introduction of diverse teaching methodologies following the full implementation of twelve-year compulsory education in 2014, institutions remain bound by the university entrance examination system. Consequently, English instruction predominantly caters to preparing students for these exams, with curriculum content closely aligned with exam requirements. This trend persists into university education, where students increasingly recognize that academic advancement is not the sole impetus for continuing their English language studies. To heighten students’ appreciation of the importance of English proficiency and promote internationalization, many universities have implemented English graduation requirements. However, the extent to which these requirements effectively enhance students’ international engagement remains a topic of debate. Nevertheless, the predominant focus of university students’ English learning remains centered on exam performance, with English proficiency exam pass rates serving as a pivotal evaluative metric.

Intrinsic appreciation, found in this study, shares similarities with integrative orientation/motivation in Gardner’s model but can also denote a genuine interest in language and literature beyond cultural integration. External expectations motivation appears context-specific and prevalent in certain Asian contexts, such as Taiwan and China, as will be further discussed in the subsequent paragraph. Interpersonal influence stands apart from instrumental or integrative orientations/motivations and reflects Dörnyei’s (1994) concept of the learning

situational level, emphasizing the role of interpersonal relationships in motivation.

When comparing the findings with Gao et al.'s (2004) study in China, their examination of EFL learners' motivation revealed a variety of instrumental motivations, with particular emphasis on "immediate achievement" associated with certificates. This echoes the current study's identification of exam-driven motivation, suggesting a shared emphasis on tangible, immediate outcomes in both Taiwanese and Chinese educational settings. Moreover, cultural influences on English learning are evident. The identification of external expectations motivation in this study highlights the impact of external pressures, expectations, and societal objectives on individuals' motivations to learn English. Similarly, Gao et al.'s (2004) exploration of social responsibility underscores a native-culture-oriented motivation for language learning. The notion that native culture significantly influences motivations for language learning suggests a departure from Western individualism, where in Eastern Confucian culture, English learning may also serve to fulfill external expectations or pressures, not solely individual goals. Drawing from Confucian tradition, the fulfillment of social expectations may be driven by "collectivism pressures" (Chen et al., 2005, p. 623), a phenomenon also observed in Gao et al.'s (2004) study in China. By juxtaposing Gao et al.'s (2004) findings with those of the current study, we can gain insights into the commonalities and differences in motivational factors among EFL learners in Taiwan and China, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of motivation in language learning across diverse Asian contexts.

The motivational factors identified in this study not only builds upon existing motivational theories but also offers insights into the nuances of motivation among Taiwanese university freshmen. While instrumental and exam-driven motivations underscore the practical aspects of language learning, intrinsic appreciation delves into the intrinsic enjoyment of language itself. External expectations motivation sheds light on the influence of societal and familial pressures, particularly prominent in Asian cultures. Interpersonal influence highlights the significance of interpersonal dynamics within the learning environment, suggesting that motivation can be shaped by relationships with peers and teachers. Figure 1 illustrates the extent to which each factor explains why students want to learn English (eigenvalue divided by the total variance explained). Intrinsic appreciation accounts for the highest proportion of freshmen's motivation to learn English, at 44%. Following this is instrumental motivation at 23%, noteworthy for including the most questionnaire items, totaling 9. External expectations motivation follows at 16%, while exam-driven motivation and interpersonal influence account for 10% and 7%, respectively.

Conversing with the literature, these findings corroborate and extend previous research on motivational dynamics in language learning. Gardner's distinction between instrumental and integrative orientations/motivations provides a theoretical framework for understanding the practical and socio-cultural dimensions of motivation. Dörnyei's (1994) expanded model further emphasizes the role of situational factors, such as interpersonal relationships, in shaping motivation. Chen et al.'s (2005) and Gao et al.'s (2004) studies

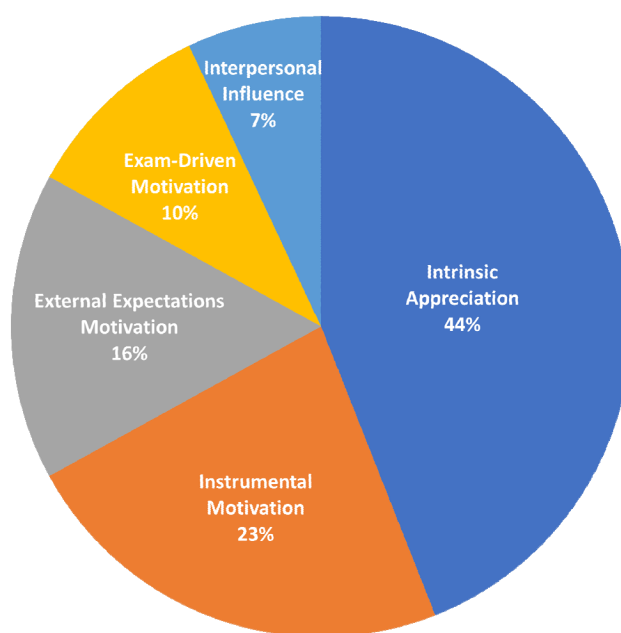


Figure 1. Proportion of Freshmen's Motivation Explained by Each Factor

deepen our understanding of the profound impact of native culture on motivation for English language learning. By contextualizing these theories within the Taiwanese educational landscape, this study enhances our comprehension of motivation among EFL learners in Asia.

5. Conclusion

The conclusion of the current study encapsulates several important findings and contributions to the field of English language learning motivation. First and foremost, the study aimed to transcend the traditional dichotomy of instrumental and integrative orientations/motivations by unveiling a more nuanced framework. Through a comprehensive investigation among Taiwanese EFL learners, the study revealed five distinct motivational factors: intrinsic appreciation, instrumental motivation, external expectations motivation, exam-driven motivation, and interpersonal influence. This not only enhances our understanding of motivational dynamics in Taiwanese EFL learning environments but also contributes to a broader understanding of motivation in language learning across diverse Asian contexts, thus offering innovative insights and enriching existing knowledge in EFL studies. Furthermore, the study delves into pedagogical implications and recognizes the necessity for additional exploration by identifying areas for future research, thereby enriching our understanding of English language learning motivation.

5.1 Pedagogical Implications

Given the emphasis on bilingual education in Taiwan, the nuanced understanding of motivational factors provides language educators with valuable insights for designing student-centered learning experiences tailored to diverse motivational profiles. By aligning instructional strategies with students' motivations, educators can create more effective and engaging learning environments. Expanding on the identified intrinsic appreciation for the English language and its cultural aspects, educators can elevate student-centered learning experiences by infusing culturally relevant materials and activities. By integrating literature, media, and discussions that resonate with students' language and cultural interests, educators can effectively tap into their innate motivation for English acquisition. This approach fosters a deeper connection to the language and its cultural nuances, enriching the learning process with meaning and engagement. Students are thus empowered to explore language acquisition in a context that reflects their cultural identity, enhancing their overall language proficiency and cultural understanding.

Next, understanding the instrumental and exam-driven motivations prevalent among Taiwanese EFL learners offers valuable insights for designing effective pedagogical approaches. Educators can customize strategies to align with these motivations, enhancing student engagement and achievement. For instance, recognizing the pragmatic motivation towards English learning, educators can integrate real-world tasks and scenarios into the curriculum. Activities such as role-plays, simulations, and problem-solving tasks related to job interviews or academic presentations can help students develop language skills applicable to future careers and academic pursuits. Additionally, providing opportunities for students to explore diverse career paths and study abroad options can further motivate them to excel in English language learning, showcasing the tangible benefits of their proficiency in achieving personal and professional goals. Moreover, acknowledging the strong emphasis on academic performance and examination success, educators can implement targeted exam preparation strategies. These may include practice exams, exam-focused exercises, and effective test-taking strategies to build students' confidence and proficiency. By equipping students with these skills, educators can alleviate anxiety, enhance motivation, and improve academic outcomes. Overall, by understanding and leveraging instrumental and exam-driven motivations, educators can create purposeful and relevant learning environments that empower students to achieve their academic and professional aspirations through English language proficiency.

Gaining insights into how external expectations motivation and interpersonal influence shape English language learning among Taiwanese students offers educators valuable guidance for fostering inclusive and supportive classroom environments. Educators can acknowledge and address the external pressures students face by fostering a culture of understanding and support and recognizing the influence of parental and societal expectations. Offering personalized support and guidance tailored to individual needs can help students navigate external pressures more effectively and maintain their intrinsic motivation for learning English. Furthermore, leveraging interpersonal influence in the classroom can enhance student engagement and motivation. Educators can prioritize building strong teacher-student relationships characterized by trust, respect, and empathy. Encouraging peer collaboration and fostering a sense of belonging within the classroom community can further enhance motivation. Implementing cooperative learning activities, peer tutoring programs and group projects can provide opportunities for students to interact and support each other in their language learning journey. By recognizing and harnessing the power of interpersonal relationships, educators can cultivate a positive and

supportive learning environment where students feel valued, motivated, and empowered to succeed in their English language studies.

Overall, aligning instructional strategies with the diverse motivational profiles of students empowers educators to establish more effective and student-centered learning environments, thus nurturing positive learning experiences and enhancing the overall success of language learners. Recognizing and understanding students' motivations are essential elements in crafting language education programs that not only facilitate positive learning encounters but also foster academic achievement.

5.2 Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

While this study sheds light on motivational dynamics in EFL contexts, it's essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The small sample size and the focus on a single university restrict the generalizability of the findings. In addition, variables such as gender, major, and family background, which were not thoroughly examined in this study, could significantly influence English learning motivation. Therefore, future research should address these limitations by conducting studies with larger and more diverse samples. Exploring motivational factors across various contexts will provide a deeper understanding of motivation in language learning and enable educators to better support language learners in their journey towards proficiency and success.

Recognizing the need for further exploration, future studies could explore how these motivational factors evolve and intersect with other socio-cultural variables. Additionally, examining the effectiveness of pedagogical interventions tailored to these motivational factors could offer valuable insights for language educators striving to create student-centered learning environments. Altogether, ongoing research efforts to investigate and refine our understanding of motivation will contribute to developing more effective language education programs and ultimately enhance language learners' success.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions, which greatly contributed to the improvement of the manuscript. Their insightful feedback and constructive criticism have played a crucial role in shaping the final version of the paper. The author is deeply appreciative of their time, effort, and expertise invested in reviewing the work.

References

- Chang, Y. (2022). (Re)Imagining Taiwan through “2030 Bilingual Nation”: Languages, identities, and ideologies. *Taiwan Journal of TESOL*, 19(1), 121-146. [https://doi.org/10.30397/TJTESOL.202204_19\(1\).0005](https://doi.org/10.30397/TJTESOL.202204_19(1).0005)
- Chen, J. F., Warden, C. A., & Chang, H. (2005). Motivators that do not motivate: The case of Chinese EFL learners and the influence of culture on motivation. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(4), 609-633. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3588524>
- Chern, C. L. (2010). General English programs at universities in Taiwan: Curriculum design and implementations. *Chang Gung Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 3, 253-274. <https://doi.org/10.30114/CGJHSS.201010.0002>
- Clément, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K. A. (1994). Motivation, self-confidence, and group cohesion in the foreign language classroom. *Language Learning*, 44, 417- 448. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1994.tb01113.x>
- Cohen, A. D., & Dörnyei, Z. (2002). Focus on the language learner: Motivation, styles, and strategies. In N. Schmitt (Ed.), *An introduction to applied linguistics* (pp. 170-190). London: Arnold.
- Dörnyei, Z. (1994). Motivation and motivating in the foreign language classroom. *Modern Language Journal*, 78, 273–284. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1994.tb02042.x>
- Executive Yuan. (2023, March 31). In *Forward-looking Infrastructure Development Program: Human resources*. Retrieved February 18, 2024, from <https://english.ey.gov.tw/News3/9E5540D592A5FECDDDF57302-f9f8-41a2-b2dd-3fd966da0767>
- Gao, Y., Zhao, Y., Cheng, Y., & Zhou, Y. (2004). Motivation types of Chinese university undergraduates. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*, 14, 45–64. <https://www.airitilibrary.com/Article/Detail?DocID=P20180321001-200412-201803230012-201803230012-45-64>
- Gardner, R. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. London: Edward Arnold.

- Gardner, R. C., & Lambert, W. E. (1972). *Attitudes and motivation in second language learning*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Gardner, R. C., & MacIntyre, P. D. (1991). An instrumental motivation in language study: Who says it isn't effective? *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 13, 57-72. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263100009724>
- Hennebry-Leung, M., Tseng, W. T., Gao, X. (2023). Language learning motivation, learner agency, and the medium of instruction. *Psychology in the Schools*, 60, 3575-3591. <https://hdl.handle.net/102.100.100/490508>
- Huang, S. C. (2021). Motivators for learners of languages other than English in college elective courses in a monolingual social setting. *Language Education & Assessment*, 4(2), 59-80. <https://doi.org/10.29140/lea.v4n2.480>
- Kirkpatrick, R. (2016). *English language education policy in Asia*. New York: Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-22464-0>
- Ministry of Education. (2018). *Curriculum guidelines of 12-year basic education*. Retrieved from <https://cirn.moe.edu.tw/Upload/file/38224/104344.pdf>
- Nunan, D. (2001). *Second language teaching and learning*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Oxford, R., & Shearin, J. (1994). Language learning motivation: Expanding the theoretical framework. *Modern Language Journal*, 78, 12-28. <https://doi.org/10.2307/329249>
- Wang, Y. C. (2003). Communication-orientation in Freshman English curriculum: A new response. In *Selected Papers from the Twelfth International Symposium on English Teaching* (pp. 588-598). Taipei: Crane Publishing.
- Warden, C. A. & Lin, H. J. (2000). Existence of integrative motivation in an Asian EFL setting. *Foreign Language Annals*, 33(5), 535-545. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2000.tb01997.x>
- Yong, A. G., & Pearce, S. (2013) A beginner's guide to factor analysis: Focusing on exploratory factor analysis. *Tutorials in Quantitative Methods for Psychology*, 9, 79-94. <https://doi.org/10.20982/tqmp.09.2.p079>

Appendix

Questionnaire Exploring Motivational Factors

(Adapted from Gao et al., 2004)

Please circle one number below to indicate your level of agreement with each statement. 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Uncertain; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree.

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | I fell in love with English at first sight, without particular reasons. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | I began to study English because my parents/school required me to learn it. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | Before entering university, my purpose in learning English was mainly to obtain high scores in the university entrance examination. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. | Before entering university, my effort in English learning depended, to a large extent, on test scores. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. | Before entering university, my effort in learning English depended, to a large extent, on whether I liked my English teachers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. | After entering university, my effort in learning English depended, to a large extent, on test scores. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. | After entering university, my effort in learning English depended, to a large extent, on whether I liked my English teachers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. | After entering university, my effort in learning English depended, to a large extent, on the quality of English classes. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. | After entering university, my effort in learning English depended, to a large extent, on the quality of English textbooks. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. | After entering university, my effort in learning English depended, to a large extent, on whether I liked my fellow students in the English class. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. | An important purpose for my English learning is to obtain a university degree. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. | The main objective of my English learning is to obtain high scores in examinations concerning going abroad or career development in Taiwan. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. | Learning English is important because it is a useful tool for communication in contemporary society. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. | Learning English can give me a sense of achievement. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. | I learn English in order to facilitate the learning of other academic subjects. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. | Only with good English skills can I find a good job in the future. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. | I learn English so as to catch up with the world's economic and technological developments. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. | I learn English because I am interested in English-speaking people and their culture. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. | I have a special interest in language learning. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. | Out of my love of English songs/movies, I have developed a great interest in the language. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

21.	I learn English because I like this language.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	I learn English in order to let the world know more about Taiwan.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	I have developed a great interest in the language because I love English literature.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	Only when I have a good command of English can I contribute effectively to Taiwan's prosperity.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	I can live up to my parents' expectations only when I have a good command of English.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	I learn English in order to find better education and job opportunities abroad.	1	2	3	4	5
27.	I learn English so that I can go abroad and experience English-speaking culture.	1	2	3	4	5
28.	The ultimate purpose of my English learning is to immigrate to English-speaking countries.	1	2	3	4	5
29.	Acquiring good English skills is an important stepping stone to success in life.	1	2	3	4	5
30.	Fluent spoken English is a symbol of education and accomplishment.	1	2	3	4	5
31.	I learn English in order to travel abroad.	1	2	3	4	5
32.	I can meet my teachers' expectations only when I have a good command of English.	1	2	3	4	5
33.	I learn English because much new information nowadays is presented in English.	1	2	3	4	5

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).