

# Students' Motivation and Engagement with Task-Based Activities Using Google Workspace

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## Abstract

The current demand for integrating technology into English language instruction to engage students in meaningful conversations is pressing in the digital era. Despite this, research on employing Google tools for collaborative, task-based activities in English education is scarce, particularly in meeting the needs of today's digital learners and boosting their motivation. This study aims to bridge this research gap by evaluating the impact of using task-based Google's collaborative tools on creating a cooperative learning environment and increasing students' engagement and motivation in English classes. Over one academic year, data were collected from 65 Saudi university students with varying levels of English proficiency using approximately 45 task-based activities administered using different Google tools. According to questionnaire results, motivation was a significant predictor of students' initiative and enjoyment in using these collaborative tools. The study confirms that students appreciate these Google tools and associates their use with increased motivation to learn English. These findings suggest that educators should align their teaching with the preferences of the digital generation by incorporating tools like Google Forms with preemptive feedback, Google Slides, and Google Docs to foster meaningful English learning. This approach can narrow the divide between traditional teaching methods and the preferred learning styles of digital learners. This study was conducted prior to the surge in Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools; the study also points out that the rise of AI has expedited the creation of task-based activities, warranting further consideration in educational practices.

**Keywords:** task-based tools, learners' engagement, motivation

## 1. Introduction

The integration of technology into educational settings offers an array of strategies for enhancing the interactivity and efficacy of classroom experiences, such as the deployment of task-based instructional tools via Google's suite. The facilitation of task-based learning within the English pedagogical context has been associated with improved educational outcomes (Juan-Garau & Jacob, 2015). The methodologies for implementing task based activities (TB) may range from conventional to digital approaches. This study advocates for the structured integration of Google's collaborative tools (i.e, Google forms with preemptive feedback, Google slides and Google doc.). These cloud-based applications enable real-time, synchronous engagement among students working collectively on assignments, thereby providing immediate feedback and cooperative interaction on user-contributed content during online sessions. This includes more meaningful conversations, which is the point of task-based design. Research by Kessler, Bikowski and Boggs (2012) indicates that collaborative writing exercises within the academic setting considerably enhance the quality of students' written work. The efficacy of Google's collaborative tools in refining students' writing aptitudes has been the subject of numerous research (Kessler, Bikowski, & Boggs, 2012). While the value of collaborative tasks in fostering students' engagement has been underscored by academics such as Pozzi and Persico (2011), the specific application of task-based learning in this context warrants further exploration.

The present study seeks to examine the application of task-based Google collaborative tools over the course of a 13-week academic term, corresponding to one instructional module, across two tiers of English language proficiency. The focus will primarily be on the teaching of productive language skills: grammar, vocabulary, and writing. This research will delve into students' personal experiences with the task-based Google collaborative tools within an instructional setting and the correlation between these experiences and their motivation to learn English.

## 2. Literature Review

Task-based instruction (TBI) represents a shift from traditional language teaching methods towards a more dynamic and student-centered approach. It involves the meticulous design of specific tasks that are aligned with linguistic learning objectives. Seyyedi and Ismail (2012) articulate that this approach emphasizes the engagement of language learners in meaningful communication, thereby nurturing skills in problem-solving, project execution, and decision-making processes. Additionally, TBI inherently supports language focus within content-based curricula by integrating language form and function with the completion of authentic tasks. In this instructional paradigm, tasks are considered the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching. They are defined as activities that require learners to use language, with an emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective. This approach encourages the use of language as a tool for communication, reflecting its real-world usage. Seyyedi and Ismail (2012) highlight the potential of TBI to provide a rich context for learners to develop both fluency and accuracy, as the tasks are designed to be both relevant and engaging to the students' own life experiences and academic needs. Furthermore, TBI fosters an environment where language is learned inductively, thereby promoting a deeper understanding and retention of language structures. It operates on the premise that language that is learned while engaging in meaningful tasks is more likely to be remembered and used spontaneously outside the classroom (Xi, 2013; Seyyedi & Ismail, 2012).

This study will delve into the application of TBI through Google's collaborative tools, examining how such digital platforms can be utilized to facilitate the aforementioned benefits of task-based learning. By implementing TBI over a sustained period and across varying levels of proficiency, the research will provide insights into how digital collaboration influences the acquisition of productive language skills and the overall motivation of English language learners.

A substantial body of research within second language (L2) acquisition has drawn upon Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, positing that learning is inherently a social endeavor, flourishing through communicative interaction (Abrams, 2019; Bikowski & Vithanage, 2016; Elola & Oskoz, 2010; Hsu & Lo, 2018; Kessler et al., 2012; Stroble, 2014). Within this domain, online collaborative writing, often facilitated by platforms such as Google Docs, has been extensively studied (Abrams, 2016). However, a critical examination reveals that these studies predominantly concentrate on the collaborative aspect of learning, at times to the exclusion of individual learner variables, such as agency and motivation, which are equally crucial to the learning process.

The mobile complex framework, developed by Pachler, Bachmair, Cook and Kress (2010), with its emphasis on learners' agency, offers a more nuanced understanding of the L2 learning experience. This framework proposes that learning is situated within the interplay of agency, structure, and cultural practices where "agency" signifies the learners' active engagement with technology, "structure" denotes the technical and social architectures that facilitate or hinder such engagement, and "cultural practices" involve the pedagogical contexts that shape learning experiences ( see Figure 1 below).

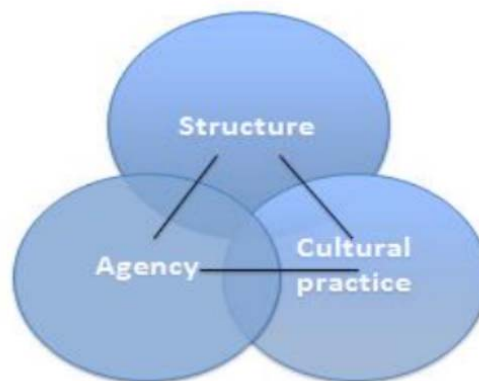


Figure 1. Mobile Complex Framework

In the area of Google collaborative tools, scholars have often focused on writing to the detriment of other critical skills like grammar and vocabulary, or the motivational dynamics at play in the use of online collaborative tools (Ebadi & Rahimi, 2017; Lawrence & Wah, 2016; Woodrich & Fan, 2017). Khalil (2018) observed the beneficial impact of Google Docs on student behavior, particularly in grammar instructions, yet his research did not fully explore the broader implications of technology use. Furthermore, Woodrich and Fan (2017) underscored the importance of tool familiarity, suggesting that successful collaboration via Google Workspace is contingent on prior student training. Moreover, the role of the teacher in promoting technology adoption cannot be understated, as evidenced by Zhang (2017). This current study, therefore, will interrogate the learner experiences with task-based activities using Google collaborative tools through the lens of the mobile complex framework, seeking to extend Zhang's findings. This research adopts the mobile complex framework due to its focus on learner agency—an area often neglected in studies fixated on the Vygotskian perspective. The present study aims to fill this gap by examining how learner's agency, alongside the technological and pedagogical structures, shapes learners' engagement with English through Task based Google collaborative tools.

Furthermore, the pivotal role of motivation in language learning is highlighted in the literature, with the self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan (1985) being particularly influential. This theory categorizes motivation into intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation, and has been widely referenced in second language research (Dörnyei, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Notably, Henry and Lamb (2020) applied this theory to investigate learners' engagement with various language learning technologies.

This study aims to concentrate on intrinsic motivation within the context of the mobile complex framework, exploring how this form of motivation interacts with learners' use of task-based Google collaborative tools in the L2 classroom. In doing so, it endeavors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence successful language acquisition in technologically enriched learning environments.

### 3. Research Questions

The study will seek answers to the following research questions:

- 1) What shapes students guided experiences with the task-based Google collaborative activities in the classroom?
- 2) How do students' motivation towards English predict learners' experiences with task-based Google collaborative activities?

### 4. Methodology

The research adopted a sequential design, starting by utilizing various Google tools and then administering an online questionnaire. Initially, data were gathered over an annual cycle from two distinct English language courses at a Saudi university. These courses catered to students with proficiency levels corresponding to B1 and B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). A suite of over 45 Google Workspace tools was employed to facilitate and augment instruction in writing, grammar, and vocabulary competencies. These tools included Google Docs for collaborative writing, Google Slides for interactive presentations, and Google Forms for assessments and proactive feedback. The table presented below offers an in-depth breakdown of the functionalities and pedagogical applications of each tool within the scope of task-based learning activities.

Table 1. Summary of the task based Google tools used in this study

Task Type	Total Number of Tasks
Grammar	15
Vocabulary	15
Composition	15

The study engaged 65 participants in an exploration of Google's collaborative tools over the course of 13 weeks. Subsequent to the intervention period, at the semester's end, the students were invited to contribute to an online questionnaire designed to evaluate their experiences with the diverse array of task-based Google collaborative tools and to gauge their motivation levels. Data collection was executed via Qualtrics platform, which is documented in Appendix A. The aim was to measure students' motivation and their experiences with the use of task-based Google collaborative tools across the span of one academic semester.

## 5. Results

Upon completion of the data collections. The data was uploaded into SPSS (version 27) and reliability analysis was conducted and it showed acceptable reliability as shown in the Table 2 below.

Table 2. Reliability analysis

No.	Name of the scales	Excluded participants	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Value
1	Agency	4	5	.743
2	Structure :social resources; peers)	5	5	.604
3	Structure : material resources "Perceptions towards google materials"	5	3	.736
4	Cultural practice	6	3	.900
5	Motivation towards English	8	4	.904

The above table reports the internal consistency which indicates if the items are measuring the same underlying construct (Pallant, 2016). As can be seen from Table 2 the results show that the alpha value is within acceptable range except for the structure which is related to social resources as it is slightly under the acceptable range as according to Dörnyei (2007) any value above (.7) is considered acceptable in social sciences. Nonetheless, the level of alpha value for the social resources was not very low as the scale is considered short and for that reason it has not been removed. Then descriptive analysis and inferential analysis were conducted accordingly to answer the research questions as shown in the Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics

No.	Name of the scales	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
1	Agency	1.82	.47	-.41	-.55
2	Structure :social resources,peers.	1.82	.45	-.64	-.73
3	Structure: material resources. "Perceptions towards TBI materials"	1.62	.60	.46	-.042
4	Cultural practice	1.4	.57	.90	.628
5	Motivation towards English	1.5	.55	.714	.618

The above table reports the mean value and the skewness and kurtosis of all the scales. As it can be seen the mean value is under two but this is expected with a small sample size and short scales (Dörnyei, 2007).

To answer the research questions for this study and to assess the relation between the variables a correlation analysis was conducted in this study and then to assess the strength of the  $r$  coefficient, I followed the guidelines of Cohen (1988, p.79) who recommended that the strength of the correlation can be further assessed as follows:

$r = .50$  to  $1.0$  can be considered as large

$r = .30$  to  $.49$  can be considered as medium

$r = .10$  to  $.29$  can be considered as weak

Table 4. Correlation analysis

Scales	1	2	3	4
1-Agency	-	.584*	.377*	.484*
2- Structure :social resources; peers	.584*	-	.301	.306
3- Structure : TB resources	.377	.515*	-	.250
4-Cultural practice	.484	.306*	.515*	-
5- Motivation towards English	.532*	.484*	.512*	.421

As can be seen all the four constructs strongly correlated with motivation towards learning English with the exception of social resources where the correlation is considered moderate. Agency correlated strongly with social resources as well as with Task based (TB) resources. Also, cultural practices and TB material resources correlated strongly with each other.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to explore the relationship between one dependent variable and the independent variables (Pallant, 2016). In this study, I conducted the stepwise which is a method that is based on a statistical criterion as the researcher does not choose the order, and it is useful in exploratory research; there are also several types of stepwise multiple regression: forward, backward, or stepwise. Field ( 2005) suggested that stepwise should be only used in exploratory research, which is the case in this exploratory study. R<sup>2</sup> is usually considered an adequate measure of the effect size for multiple regression. Nonetheless, Allen, Bennet, & Heritage (2014) suggested calculating the effect size for R<sup>2</sup> to increase the robustness of the result. Cohen’s effect size for R<sup>2</sup> can be calculated using the following equation (Allen et al., 2014):

$$f^2 = \frac{R^2}{1-R^2} \tag{1}$$

According to Cohen (1988, pp. 477–478), the effect size for f<sup>2</sup> can be determined based on the following classification:

Table 5. The effect size for f<sup>2</sup>

<i>f<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Effect size</i>
.02	Small
.15	Medium
.35	Large

As stated previously, a major aim of this study is to understand how learners’ motivation predict the learners’ experiences with the use of task based Google collaborative tools (Agency, TB structure and social practices). The stepwise regression analysis included all four independent variables mentioned above and the dependent variable is students’ motivation towards English. Before interpreting the multiple regression analysis model, a number of assumptions were tested and checks were performed this includes inspection of the scatterplot of standardised residuals compared with the standardised predicted values indicated that the assumption of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity of residuals. Also, the Mahalanobis distance was within an acceptable range. The table below (Table 6) provides the result of the multiple regression model.

Table 6. Stepwise multiple regression analysis

Regression analysis based on learners’ motivation towards learning English as an outcome

Variable	<i>B</i>	SE B	Final model	
			Beta	<i>Sr<sup>2</sup></i>
Constant				
1-Agency	.497	.994	.133	.518
2-Structure : (social resources and peers)	.384	.373	.046	.457
R	.797			
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.636			
<b>F for change in R<sup>2</sup></b>	13.98			

Note. ^R<sup>2</sup> in model 2= .735, \*P<.05.

As can be seen from the table above motivation towards learning English predicted learners’ agency and also the construct of structure which includes social resources. The R<sup>2</sup> of the model is considered to some extent strong. In the coming section, I will discuss these findings in light of the literature.

### 6. Discussion

I will begin this section by answering the research questions of this study then I will move to the pedagogical implications to highlight the importance of this study. The questionnaire successfully shows that learners were influenced by their peers and felt that Task based google tools is a great way to share their answers and they don’t feel pressure or embarrassed by sharing their answers in front of their peers, this result supports the finding of (Woodrich & Fan, 2017; Kalili, 2018). Additionally, students value the task based materials provided by the teachers via Google tools and they appreciate the fact that they can use it anytime and anywhere which supports the theoretical framework implemented in this study where appropriateness is an important part of learners’ experiences with technology. By appropriateness I mean learners ability to benefit from the provided technology

and to use it at their convenience. Contrary to Khalil (2018) suggestion that learners might need some training to use Google tools. In this study learners' did not need any intensive training and a brief orientation was enough for them to engage in different Google collaborative tools.

Furthermore, students felt that these task based tools helped them to practice the writing and learn vocabularies. Moreover, students scored high level of motivation and agency which validates the Mobile complex theoretical framework used for this study and which is also in line with these studies (i.e., Woodrich & Fan, 2017; Lawrence & Wah, 2016; Ebadi & Rahimi, 2017). The study expanded on the findings of pervious studies (i.e., Woodrich & Fan, 2017; Lawrence & Wah, 2016) and shows how learners' motivation are strongly related to learners' positive attitudes towards the use of task based activities.

Additionally, the findings of this study show that students' motivation towards learning English, specifically their intrinsic motivation, predicts their agency. This means that those who are intrinsically motivated towards learning English are more likely to engage with different task based Google collaborative tools. Furthermore, agency strongly correlates with social and material resources, indicating that students who are willing to use Google collaborative tools are influenced by their peers and appreciate their benefits. Consequently, learners' motivation towards learning English is a key factor in fostering a positive attitude towards the utilization of different task based Google collaborative tools, aligning with the findings of Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), who suggested that motivation is the primary factor for the success of English learning experiences.

While it is crucial to acknowledge that correlation does not equate to causation, the theoretical framework and the stepwise multiple regression analysis employed in this study permit the inference that motivation is a likely precursor to increased engagement with task-based Google collaborative tools (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Future research should investigate advancements in technology and examine how various Artificial Intelligence tools may further augment the creation of diverse task-based activities.

### **7. Limitation of the Study**

Every study has its limitations, and this study is no exception. One of the main limitations of this study is the small sample size used. Although the sample size was sufficient to meet the requirements of the statistical tests used, it may not be representative of the wider population. This can limit the generalizability of the findings to other settings and contexts.

This small sample also prevented me from conducting factor analysis to make sure that the items of the scales are measuring the same construct. Future study could benefit from this and could enlarge the number to make sure that the items of the scale related to the mobile complex are separate construct and do not overlap.

### **8. Pedagogical Implications**

The findings of this study suggest that English teachers should consider using task-based Google collaborative activities in their classrooms, as students have positive experiences with these tools. This can be an effective way of engaging students and promoting active learning, which can enhance their English language skills and their motivation as well.

Moreover, future research could also investigate the impact of these task-based tools on learning outcomes. While this study showed that students have positive experiences with these task-based tools, it is important to determine whether they actually lead to improved learning outcomes. This would provide more insight into the effectiveness of using task-based Google collaborative tools in English language classrooms.

Overall, this study has highlighted the potential benefits of using task-based Google collaborative tools to teach the productive skills in English language classrooms. However, more research is needed to determine their effectiveness for different types of learners and their impact on learning outcomes.

### **9. Future Research Direction**

Recent advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools have significantly transformed the creation of task-based activities, making the process faster and more efficient, particularly with the advent of ChatGPT-4. This study was conducted before the introduction of AI in 2020 to 2021. This breakthrough in AI technology is paving the way for the quicker integration of task-based designs into a broader range of classroom activities, which, in turn, is expected to enhance students' motivation based on the findings of this study. Given this shift, it becomes crucial to highlight the importance of prompt engineering in developing highly effective task-based activities (Lo, 2023). The ability to craft precise and engaging prompts is becoming a key skill in utilizing AI tools for educational purposes. As such, future research in this field should focus on optimizing prompt engineering techniques to improve the quality of AI-generated task-based activities.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

**Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

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## Appendix A

### paper-based version but the original questionnaire was online via Qualtrics

Questionnaire of the study

**1) Please choose the number from 1 to 5 that best expresses how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please don't leave out any items.**

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*Strongly Disagree(1)    Disagree (2) Neutral (3)    Agree (4)    Strongly agree(5)*

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Instrument:

1) Agency (Motivation and Enjoyment)

#### **a. enjoyment:**

1- I enjoy the use of Google tools (i.e., Google docs and Google forms) in the classroom.

2- I prefer paper based traditional learning materials.

3- The use of Google tools (i.e., Google docs and Google forms..etc) was boring.

4- Learning English is more fun with the use of technology such as Google tools.

5- I felt excited to use TB Google tools (Google doc, Google forms..etc) in the classroom.

6- The use of TB Google tools (Google doc, Google forms...etc) makes the class more interesting



**b. Motivation toward the use of Task based Google tools:**

- 1- I feel that the use of TB Google tools (i.e., Google docs and Google forms) enhanced my motivation to learn English.
- 2- The use of TB Google tools (i.e., Google docs and Google forms) increased my desire to learn English.
- 3- Sharing our work in Google tools (i.e., Google docs and Google forms) made us learn English.
- 4- I want to learn English to be able to share my language in the class.
- 5- Structure (social resources : relationship with teachers and peers, material resources)

**a. The impact of task based Google tools on students' relationship with their peers:**

- 1- Google collaborative tools is a great way to work with my peers during the classroom.
- 2- I feel that showing my answers in front of my classmates via Google tools is embarrassing.
- 3- I really think that sharing the class answers is helpful so we can learn from each other's mistakes.

**b. The impact of task based google tools on students communication with teachers:**

- 1- Google forms facilitate the process of receiving feedback from the teachers.
- 2- I really feel comfortable that our teacher can monitor our group work activities via Google forms.
- 3- I prefer that our teachers do not observe our group work activities.

**c. Students' perception toward the task based Google form materials**

- 1- I sometimes refer to the Google forms outside the classroom time.
- 2- Google tools allow the accessibility of the forms anytime.
- 3- The materials in the google forms are not really useful.
- 4- The writing answers of my classmates in the Google docs are extremely helpful.

**4) Cultural practice (learner's activities):**

- 1- I prefer to use google tools when working in most of the collaborative class activities.
- 2- Google docs facilitate the writing tasks.
- 3- Google forms was a great source to practice the new vocabularies.

**5) Motivation towards English learning:**

- 1- Generally speaking , I like the English language.
- 2- The English language is fun for me.
- 3- I dedicated lots of time to learning English because I am interested in it.
- 4- I have a strong desire to learn English.

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