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Role of Motivation in the English Language for Pakistani Learners



¹Zeeshan Ali, ²Rafaqat Ali, ³Shahid Ali

¹Research Scholar, Department, English Language & Literature, The Shaikh Ayaz University, Shikarpur, Sindh, Pakistan zeeshankhanchanna631@gmail.com

²Research Scholar, Department, English Language & Literature, The Shaikh Ayaz University, Shikarpur, Sindh, Pakistan shaikhrafaqatali56@gmail.com

³Research Scholar, Department, English Language & Literature, The Shaikh Ayaz University, Shikarpur, Sindh, Pakistan shahidburiro23@gmail.com

Abstract

Motivation is widely recognized as a key factor in second language acquisition; its influence within specific educational settings, such as undergraduate English Language Learners, requires deeper examination. The research investigates 110 respondents to examine how motivation impacts learning outcomes and identifies the primary motivational factors affecting English Language learners. This mixed study was conducted among undergraduate students of the English Department. Data was collected using an online questionnaire with closed-ended and open-ended questions shared via WhatsApp groups, and data was analyzed in charts and graphs. The findings highlight that the majority of students feel motivated in their English language learning at the university, with both internal factors, like personal interest, and external factors, such as teacher feedback and peer influence, playing significant roles. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating engaging, practical teaching methods and creating supportive learning environments to enhance learner motivation and improve English language acquisition among English language learners.

Keywords: L2 Motivation, English Language, Second Language Acquisition, Language Learning.

Introduction

Motivation is widely recognized as a crucial determinant in achieving success in any domain, particularly in education (Ahmad et al., 2025). In the context of second language (L2) acquisition, motivation serves as the driving force that not only initiates the learning process in Pakistan but also sustains and directs it over time. Without sufficient motivation, even the most capable learners may struggle to progress or achieve fluency. This makes motivation a pivotal element in second language learning, where learners must consistently engage with new vocabulary, unfamiliar structures, and diverse cultural perspectives (Dörnyei, 2001).

Slavin (2001) describes motivation as “an internal process that activates, guides, and maintains behavior over time” (p. 345). These definitions underscore the enduring and dynamic nature of motivation, which is particularly crucial in the long-term commitment required to learn a second language. Motivation in language learning refers to the driving force that initiates, directs, and sustains language learning behavior. It is influenced by a variety of internal and external factors, including personal goals, cultural attitudes, and

educational experiences (Alrabai, 2021). Instrumental (the desire to achieve practical benefits such as employment). More recently, Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System has gained prominence, highlighting the learner's vision of their future language self and how it interacts with their learning environment and societal expectations.

In the context of Pakistan, where English serves as a symbol of prestige and upward mobility, the motivation to learn English is often influenced by complex sociocultural dynamics. Learners may be driven by instrumental reasons such as access to better job markets, higher education, or international migration (Soomro et al., 2023). At the same time, integrative motives may also emerge in urban and elite educational settings, where English is closely tied to identity and social belonging (Mahboob & Talaat, 2020). Understanding the unique motivational drivers of adult learners in diverse contexts is critical for language educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers. By identifying the core motivational factors and comparing them across different settings, this study aims to highlight effective strategies that can enhance learners' engagement and performance. Such insights will help teachers adapt more effectively when transitioning between English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching paradigms (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Research has shown that motivation is not merely an accessory to the learning process but a foundational element that can determine the extent to which learners commit to and succeed in mastering a second language (Gardner, 2007). The present study explores the diverse motivational factors affecting adult learners in Pakistan, seeking to uncover implications for more informed and adaptive language teaching practices in varying educational and cultural settings.

Problem Statement

While motivation is widely acknowledged as a critical factor in second language (L2) acquisition, there remains a lack of contextualized understanding of how it influences English language learning among adult learners in Pakistan. Existing motivational theories, such as Gardner's socio-educational model and Dörnyei's L2 motivation framework, offer valuable insights but are often applied without sufficient consideration at the university level. As English continues to serve as a key language for academic advancement and socioeconomic mobility, to enhance English Language skills, there is a pressing need to explore the specific motivational factors that affect university students. This study aims to address this gap and will contribute to helping future studies in enhancing effective English language instruction.

Research Aim

This study aims to explore the significant role of motivation in the English language learning process, with a particular focus on learners in the English Department at the university level. The research seeks to examine how different types and levels of motivation, such as integrative and instrumental, affect language learning outcomes. It also aims to identify educational factors that influence learners' motivation in these distinct contexts. Furthermore, the study will aim to analyze the challenges faced by learners due to a lack of motivation and provide practical insights for language educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers to design more effective and context-sensitive teaching strategies. By doing so, the research aspires to contribute to a better understanding of learner engagement and performance in second language acquisition.

Research Questions

RQ: 1 What are the key motivational factors that influence English language learners at the university level?

Significance

This study holds significant importance for various stakeholders involved in English language education, including language teachers, policymakers, curriculum developers, and learners themselves at the local, regional, and international levels. By focusing on the role of motivation in English language learning among adult learners in Pakistan, this research addresses a critical yet underexplored aspect of second language acquisition within the local context. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more culturally responsive and contextually grounded pedagogical approaches. These insights will enable educators to create more engaging and supportive learning environments, tailored to the specific motivational needs and goals of adult learners in Pakistan. Moreover, curriculum planners can benefit from this research by integrating motivation-enhancing components into English language programs, ultimately leading to improved learner retention, engagement, and success.

Literature Review

Definition

Motivation plays an indispensable role in the process of second language (L2) acquisition, influencing learners' willingness to initiate learning, persist through challenges, and ultimately achieve proficiency (Maitlo et al., 2024). Over the decades, scholars have

developed various theories to explain the nature of motivation and its relationship with language learning outcomes. In this section, the review examines theoretical models, global and regional empirical studies, and Pakistan-specific research to contextualize the role of motivation in English language learning.

Theoretical Perspectives on L2 Motivation

Gardner's Socio-Educational Model One of the foundational frameworks for understanding L2 motivation is Gardner's (2007) socio-educational model. This model emphasizes the learner's attitude, effort, and desire to learn a language, integrating both psychological and sociocultural dimensions. Gardner distinguishes between:

- Integrative motivation – when learners wish to connect with the culture and community of the target language.
- Instrumental motivation – when language is seen as a tool for achieving practical goals, such as employment or academic advancement.

Gardner argued that integrative motivation is more effective in long-term language learning success, particularly in environments where cultural integration is feasible.

Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System, recognizing the limitations of Gardner's model in diverse settings, Dörnyei (2009) introduced the L2 Motivational Self System, which integrates self-concept and learner identity into motivation. The model includes:

Ideal L2 Self: The learner's vision of themselves as a successful L2 user.

Ought-to L2 Self: The attributes learners feel they should possess due to social pressure or expectations.

Learning Experience

Motivation is derived from the immediate learning environment, teacher influence, and classroom experiences.

This model has been particularly influential in understanding language motivation in both ESL and EFL contexts, where the learner's future self-image plays a strong role in their dedication to language learning.

Additional models, such as Self-Determination Theory (Liu, 2007), differentiate between intrinsic motivation (driven by interest or enjoyment) and extrinsic motivation (driven by rewards or recognition). These distinctions are vital in understanding Pakistani learners, where external pressures, like job opportunities or academic requirements, often dominate learners' motivational landscapes.

Global Empirical Studies on Motivation and Language Learning

Numerous empirical studies have explored how motivation affects language learning across cultural contexts. Noels et al. (2000) found that students with higher integrative motivation demonstrated greater persistence and success in acquiring a second language. Csizér & Dörnyei (2005), in a Hungarian context, validated the importance of self-concept and vision in driving motivation.

In Asian settings, studies by Liu (2007) in China and Kim (2009) in South Korea revealed how socio-cultural values and educational systems shape learners' motivation. These learners often possess strong instrumental motivation due to exam pressures and job markets, mirroring trends in South Asia.

Similarly, Ushioda (2011) emphasized the need for learner-centered approaches that consider the real-life contexts and individual differences in motivation, which are often overlooked in rigid curriculum systems.

Motivation and English Language Learning in the Pakistani Context: In Pakistan, English holds a prestigious status as the language of higher education, government, and global communication. This gives rise to strong instrumental motivation among learners who view English as essential for securing employment, gaining admission to universities, and improving social status. Rahman (2002) described English in Pakistan as both a marker of elite identity and a barrier to social equity, influencing learners' attitudes and experiences.

While integrative motivation is limited due to the cultural and geographic distance from English-speaking communities, learners in urban centers may still aspire to adopt global cultural traits. However, due to a lack of authentic interaction with native speakers and minimal cultural immersion, integrative motivation often remains underdeveloped in comparison to instrumental goals.

Research conducted in Pakistani universities (e.g., Ali & Bibi, 2017; Manan, 2015) suggests that students show high levels of instrumental motivation, often driven by job market requirements, competitive exams, and parental expectations. Many learners associate proficiency in English with professional success and upward mobility, yet they often struggle with low self-confidence, limited exposure, and outdated teaching methods, which negatively impact motivation.

Shamim (2008) noted that large class sizes, exam-oriented curricula, and lack of

communicative opportunities in Pakistani classrooms hinder the development of positive motivation. This aligns with Mahboob (2009) who emphasized the need for localized pedagogical models that align with learners' sociolinguistic realities.

Motivation in EFL vs. ESL Contexts

An important distinction in motivational studies is between EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and ESL (English as a Second Language) contexts. In EFL contexts like Pakistan, English is typically learned in classroom settings without frequent real-life use. In contrast, ESL learners, often in immigrant or English-dominant countries, are surrounded by the target language, making integrative motivation more prominent.

Dörnyei & Ushioda (2011) suggest that learners in EFL contexts often rely more on instrumental motivation, which needs to be supported through meaningful classroom engagement and real-world relevance. For Pakistani learners, where English is a second official language but not widely spoken outside academic and professional settings, this distinction has major implications for motivational strategies.

Identified Gaps and Need for Contextualized Research: While motivation in second language learning has been widely researched globally, there is a clear lack of localized, empirical research focused specifically on adult learners in Pakistan (Ahmad et al., 2021). Most studies have either targeted school-aged learners or used imported models without adapting them to the local sociocultural context.

Additionally, there is minimal comparative analysis between different learner types (e.g., urban vs. rural, gender differences, private vs. public institutions) and between ESL and EFL instructional approaches within Pakistan. Addressing these gaps can lead to more effective, inclusive, and motivating learning environments.

The literature establishes motivation as a cornerstone of successful English language learning. While global theories and models such as Gardner's and Dörnyei's provide a solid foundation, their application in the Pakistani context demands adaptation to the local cultural, social, and educational landscape. Instrumental motivation dominates among Pakistani learners, yet a lack of engaging teaching practices and authentic language exposure often undermines learner confidence and persistence (Maitlo et al., 2025). This review highlights the urgent need for context-sensitive research and teaching strategies that align with learners' aspirations, identities, and real-world needs in Pakistan.

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Research Methodology

The methodology refers to the approach researchers use to collect data and address the research question. This study uses a mixed-methods approach, which blends both qualitative and quantitative techniques to offer a more well-rounded understanding. Researchers gathered data from a sample of 100 participants using an online survey to explore the study's goals. For analysis, they followed two main steps: first, they examined demographic information and written responses to identify patterns and themes qualitatively. Then, they supported their findings with quantitative analysis by organizing the data into tables and visualizing it through charts.

Respondents

The 100 participants were undergraduate students from four different classes within the Department of English Language & Literature. They came from varied academic backgrounds, making them a suitable group for studying motivational factors in English learning.

Instruments

Data was collected using an online questionnaire that included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions helped gather measurable data on students' motivation levels, preferences, and challenges. The open-ended questions allowed students to share their personal experiences and thoughts.

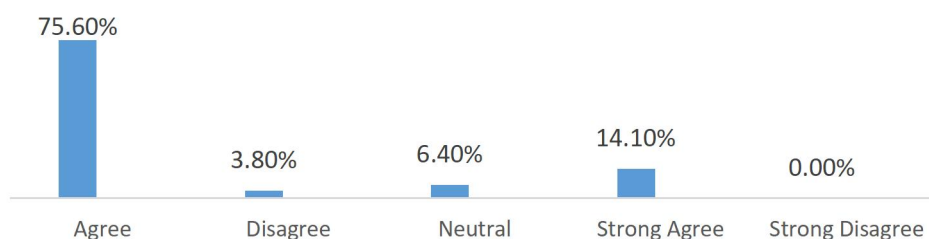
Procedures

The questionnaire was shared online with students in all four classes. The responses to the closed-ended questions were analyzed using simple statistical tools like frequency, correlation, and cross-tabulation to find patterns and relationships. The open-ended responses were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify the results.

Results

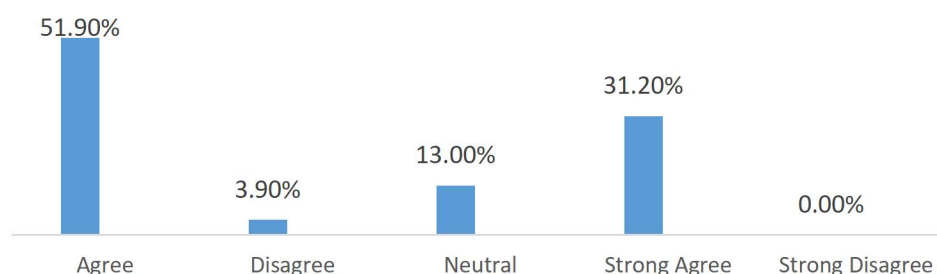
Qualitative Data

Graph 1: I feel motivated while learning the English language at university.



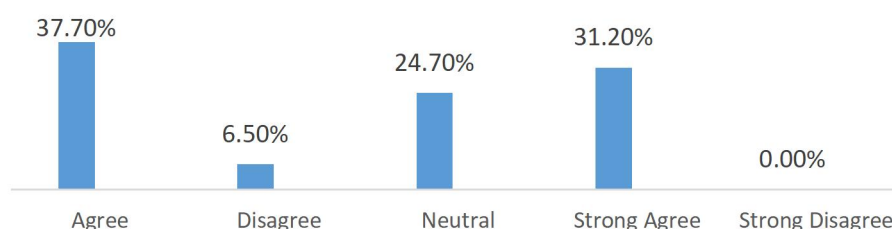
Graph 1 illustrates the responses of university students regarding their motivation to learn the English language. The majority of respondents (75.6%) indicated that they "Agree" with the statement "I feel motivated while learning English language at university." Additionally, 14.1% of the participants "Strongly agree," showing a high overall level of motivation. A small percentage of respondents selected "Neutral" (6.4%) and "Disagree" (3.8%), while none of the participants chose "Strongly Disagree" (0.0%). These findings suggest that most students perceive themselves as motivated in their English language learning journey at the university level.

Graph 2: My motivation to learn English increases when I see others speaking it fluently.



The Graph 2 presents data on students' motivation levels regarding English language learning at the university level. A significant proportion of respondents (51.9%) "Agree" that they feel motivated, while a notable 31.2% "Strongly agree," indicating a strong overall positive sentiment. Meanwhile, 13.0% of the students selected a "Neutral" response, showing some level of indecision or variability in motivation. Only 3.9% of participants "Disagree" with the statement, and no respondents (0.0%) chose "Strongly Disagree." These results reflect a generally high level of motivation among students in learning English at the university.

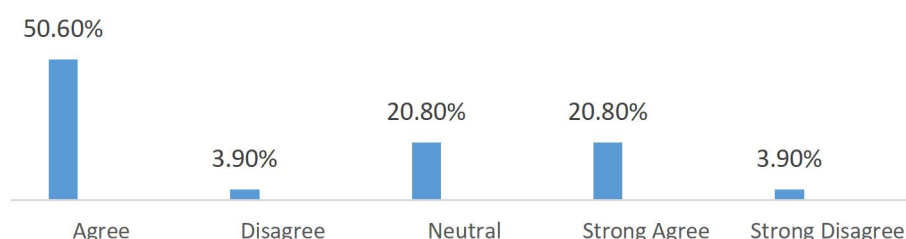
Graph 3: I feel more motivated to learn English when I receive appreciation or rewards.



The Graph 3 illustrates the responses of participants regarding the role of motivation in learning English. The data reveals that a significant majority of respondents recognize the importance of motivation in language learning. Specifically, 37.7% of participants agreed,

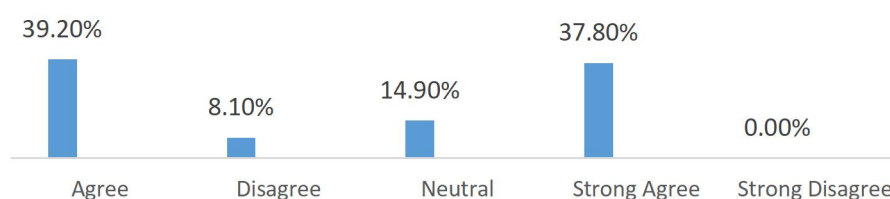
and 31.2% strongly agreed that motivation plays a vital role. Additionally, 24.7% remained neutral, indicating uncertainty or a balanced perspective on the matter. Only 6.5% disagreed, and no participants strongly disagreed with the statement. These findings suggest that most learners perceive motivation as a crucial factor in acquiring the English language, which aligns with the core focus of this research.

Graph 4: My teachers create a learning environment that motivates me to improve my English skills.



The Graph 4 shows the distribution of students' responses to their motivation in learning English at the university level. A little over half of the respondents (50.6%) "Agree" with the statement, while 20.8% "Strongly Agree," indicating that the majority perceive themselves as motivated. An equal percentage (20.8%) selected "Neutral," suggesting a notable proportion of students neither agree nor disagree. Only 3.9% of students "Disagree," and another 3.9% "Strongly disagree," indicating minimal negative responses. These results suggest a generally positive but slightly more mixed perception of motivation compared to previous graphs.

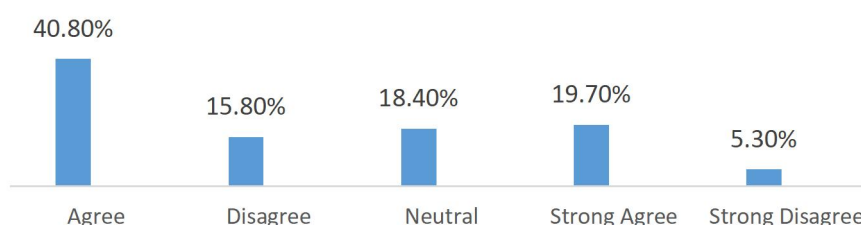
Graph 5: I feel more motivated when I can understand English movies, songs, or shows.



The Graph 5 represents participants' opinions regarding the significance of motivation in the process of learning English. The results show that a substantial majority support the idea, with 39.2% agreeing and 37.8% strongly agreeing that motivation is essential for effective language acquisition. Meanwhile, 14.9% of respondents remained neutral, and only 8.1% disagreed, indicating a minor level of opposition. Notably, no participants strongly disagreed. These findings reinforce the idea that motivation is widely regarded as a key factor in English

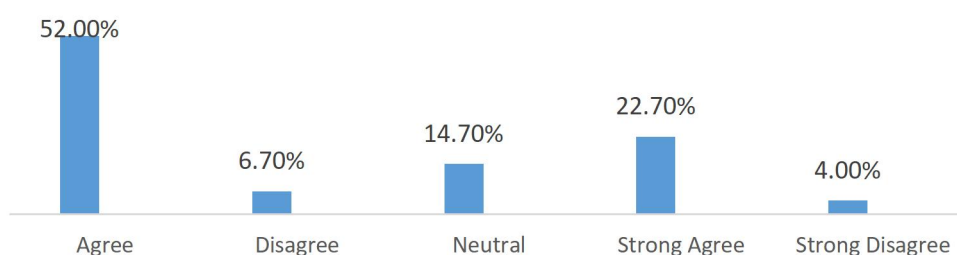
language learning among Pakistani learners, highlighting its influential role in educational success.

Graph 6: My motivation decreases when I face difficulty in understanding English.



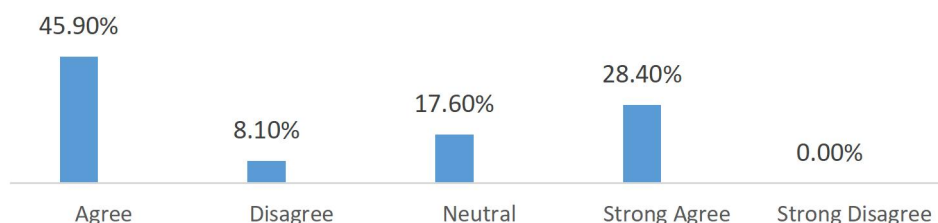
The Graph 6 reflects a range of opinions regarding the role of motivation in learning English. A substantial portion of respondents (40.80%) agreed with the statement, while 19.70% strongly agreed, indicating overall positive support. Meanwhile, 18.40% remained neutral, suggesting some uncertainty or variability in perception. A notable minority (15.80%) disagreed, and 5.30% strongly disagreed. These results point to a generally favorable view of motivation's influence, though a degree of skepticism or lack of consensus exists among a segment of the participants.

Graph 7: I would feel more motivated if English were taught more engagingly and practically.



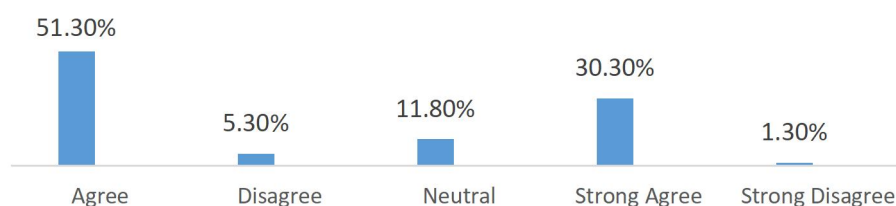
The Graph 7 presents responses to the statement that motivation would increase if English were taught more engagingly and practically. A majority of participants (52.00%) agreed with the statement, while 22.70% strongly agreed. A smaller proportion, 14.70%, remained neutral. Disagreement was relatively low, with 6.70% disagreeing and only 4.00% strongly disagreeing. These results indicate that learners generally favor teaching methods that are interactive and relevant to real-life contexts.

Graph 8: I feel English is easy to understand with the motivation.



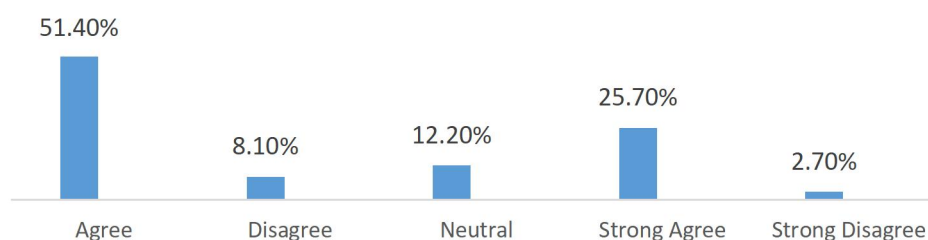
The Graph 8 shows that 45.90% of participants agreed and 28.40% strongly agreed that English is easier to understand when learners are motivated. A moderate portion of respondents (17.60%) were neutral, while 8.10% disagreed. Notably, there were no strong disagreements. The data suggest that motivation plays a significant role in enhancing English comprehension.

Graph 9: Motivational environment is essential for learning English language in institutions.



The Graph 9 highlights the importance of a motivational environment in learning English within institutions. Over half of the respondents (51.30%) agreed with the statement, and 30.30% strongly agreed. A smaller percentage (11.80%) were neutral, while 5.30% disagreed and 1.30% strongly disagreed. These findings emphasize the crucial role of a supportive and encouraging atmosphere in promoting effective English language learning in institutional settings.

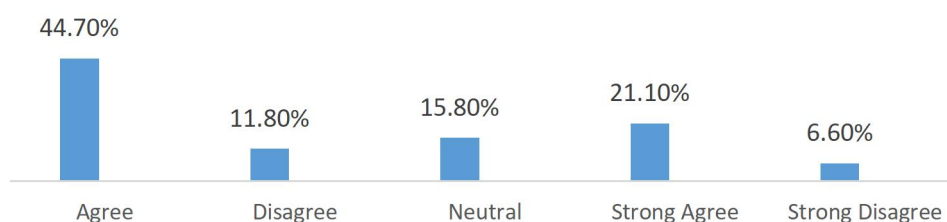
Graph 10: Pakistan needs motivational speakers who motivate students to learn English language.



The Graph 10 data indicate that 51.40% of participants agreed and 25.70% strongly agreed

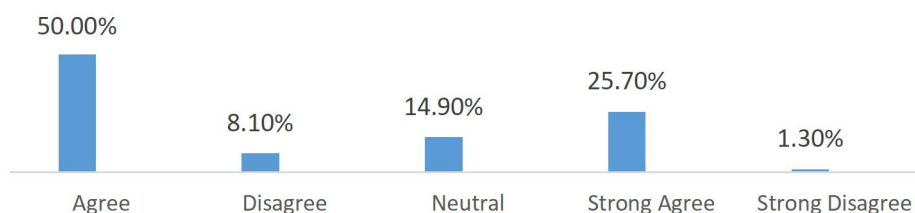
that Pakistan needs motivational speakers to inspire students to learn the English language. A smaller proportion (12.20%) remained neutral, while 8.10% disagreed and only 2.70% strongly disagreed. These results suggest a general consensus on the positive influence of motivational speakers in enhancing students' interest and engagement in English language learning.

Graph 11: I feel, lack of motivation is a major reason why some students struggle to learn English.



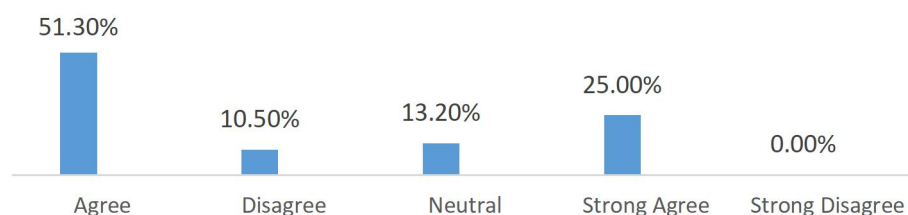
The Graph 11 results, 44.70% of respondents agreed and 21.10% strongly agreed that a lack of motivation is a major reason why some students struggle to learn English. A moderate percentage (15.80%) remained neutral. However, 11.80% disagreed and 6.60% strongly disagreed. The findings highlight the significance of motivational factors in overcoming challenges faced by learners of English.

Graph 12: My teacher's feedback boosts my motivation



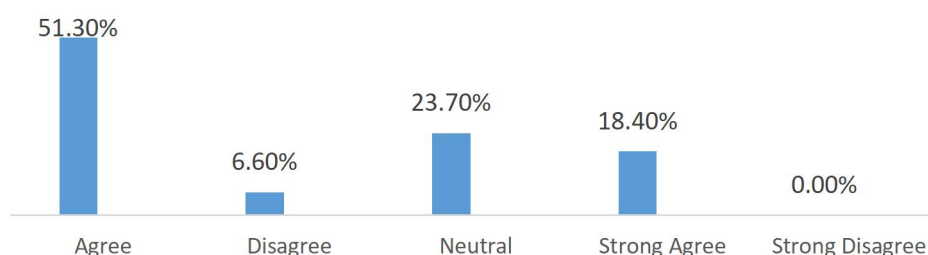
Graph 12 demonstrates that half of the participants (50.00%) agreed and 25.70% strongly agreed that their teacher's feedback boosts their motivation. A smaller percentage (14.90%) was neutral, while 8.10% disagreed, and only 1.30% strongly disagreed. These results underscore the influential role of teacher feedback in fostering student motivation and encouraging sustained engagement with the English language.

Graph 13: Setting goals helps me stay motivated in English



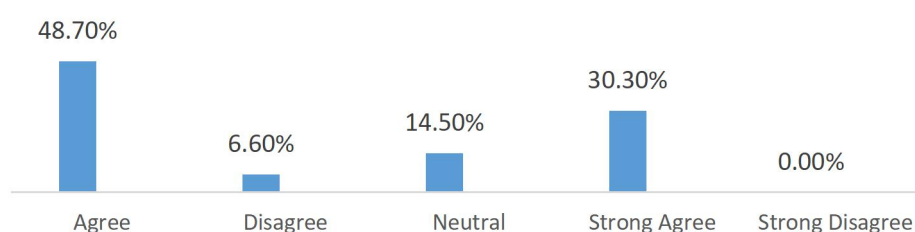
The Graph 13 shows that 51.30% of participants agreed and 25.00% strongly agreed that setting goals helps them stay motivated in learning English. A smaller group (13.20%) remained neutral, while 10.50% disagreed. Notably, no participants strongly disagreed. These results suggest that goal setting is perceived as an effective motivational strategy among English learners.

Graph 14: Motivation helps me face difficulties in learning English



The Graph 14 Shows that motivation helps learners face difficulties in English, 51.30% of participants agreed and 18.40% strongly agreed. A moderate proportion (23.70%) was neutral, while only 6.60% disagreed and none strongly disagreed. The findings reinforce the idea that motivation plays a key role in helping learners persist through challenges in their language learning journey.

Graph 15: I feel think English is prioritized in our region over other languages.



The Graph 15 reveals that 48.70% of participants agreed and 30.30% strongly agreed that English is prioritized in their region over other languages. A small percentage (14.50%) remained neutral, while 6.60% disagreed. No respondents strongly disagreed. This suggests a broad perception that English holds a position of importance and preference within the local

context.

Discussion

The findings of this research clearly show that motivation plays a very important role in learning the English language for Pakistani students. Out of 120 students in the English department at Shaikh Ayaz University, Shikarpur, a sample of 80 students was selected for this study. The questionnaire, which included 15 questions, helped in understanding their views and experiences related to learning English. According to the results, almost 80% of the students gave positive responses. This means that a large number of students believe that motivation, whether it comes from teachers, family, environment, or personal goals, greatly helps them in improving their English skills.

Many students shared that they feel more interested in learning English when their teachers use encouraging methods, when they see English as helpful for their future careers, or when they are exposed to English through media, such as movies, songs, and the internet. Personal ambition, like the desire to go abroad, get a good job, or score well in exams, also acted as a strong motivator. These results match with other studies in the same field, which also show that students learn better when they are motivated. In our local context, where English is a second language, motivation becomes even more important to overcome challenges like a lack of practice, fear of making mistakes, and limited English-speaking environments. The findings of this study show that most students are genuinely interested in learning a second language. They have a positive attitude toward learning English and enjoy speaking it with one another. Many of them even practice English in their free time to become more confident and fluent. While a small number of students were only learning English to earn academic credits and didn't show much enthusiasm, they were in the minority. Overall, students preferred learning international English rather than native varieties, focusing on practical communication. Their interest went beyond just passing exams—they recognized English as a valuable and essential skill in today's world.

Previous research closely related to the current study provides useful insights. For instance, Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) found that Yemeni petroleum engineering students generally had a positive attitude toward learning English. Similarly, Nahavandi and Mukundan (2013) discovered that Iranian EFL engineering students also showed a favorable attitude toward English. Dehbozorgi (2012) explored college students' perspectives and found similar results. On the other hand, it was pointed out that while Japanese university students

often have a strong grasp of English grammar, their spoken English skills tend to be weaker, and their motivation for learning the language can be mixed. Shams (2008) looked into students' attitudes, motivation, and classroom anxiety, finding high levels of enthusiasm for learning English, though the degree of anxiety varied among students.

Conclusion

This Study highlights the critical role that motivation plays in English language learning among adult learners in Pakistan. Drawing on both theoretical perspectives and empirical insights, the study reveals that motivation is not a one-size-fits-all concept but rather a dynamic and context-sensitive factor that shapes learners' engagement, persistence, and achievement in second language acquisition. Among Pakistani learners, instrumental motivation such as aspirations for better career opportunities, academic advancement, and social mobility emerges as the dominant driving force. However, integrative motivation, though less common due to limited cultural exposure, still holds value in shaping learners' attitudes toward the English language.

The findings emphasize the need for localized and learner-centered teaching approaches that acknowledge the diverse social, cultural, and educational backgrounds of learners. Motivation must be nurtured through relevant curriculum design, supportive learning environments, and teaching practices that build learners' confidence and connect English learning to real-life goals. Moreover, the distinction between EFL and ESL settings underscores the importance of aligning instructional methods with learners' immediate contexts and experiences.

Ultimately, this study calls for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers to recognize and respond to the specific motivational needs of Pakistani learners. By doing so, they can foster a more inclusive, engaging, and effective English language learning experience that empowers learners to reach their full potential.

Recommendations

- Encourage English use beyond the classroom, such as through English clubs, online forums, or language apps, to make learning more immersive.
- Provide regular, constructive feedback to boost learners' self-efficacy and reduce fear of making mistakes.
- Encourage peer collaboration to promote mutual learning, motivation, and social support among students.

- Support research on localized motivational models, encouraging future studies that reflect the sociolinguistic realities of Pakistani learners.

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