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Investigating the Role of Learner Motivation in Enhancing English Language Proficiency among College Students in Pakistan
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Abstract

This study investigates the role of learner motivation in enhancing English language proficiency among college students in Sindh, Pakistan. English, being a global lingua franca and a key medium of instruction in higher education, demands effective learning strategies supported by strong motivational factors. The research aims to examine how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation influence students' abilities in reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. A quantitative research design was employed, involving a random sample of college students. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire measuring motivational levels and language proficiency indicators. The findings reveal a significant positive relationship between learner motivation and English language proficiency. Students with higher intrinsic motivation, such as personal interest and self-development goals, demonstrated better language competence than those primarily driven by extrinsic factors, such as grades or employment prospects. Additionally, the classroom environment, teacher support, and the integration of engaging instructional strategies were found to play crucial roles in fostering motivation. The study concludes that enhancing learner motivation is essential for improving English language outcomes among college students. It recommends that educators adopt student-centered approaches, incorporate technology, and design interactive activities that stimulate learners' interest and engagement. Policymakers are also encouraged to develop curricula that emphasize motivational strategies alongside linguistic skills. This research contributes to the existing literature by highlighting the contextual significance of motivation in language learning within Sindh's educational landscape.

Keywords: Learner Motivation, English Language Proficiency, Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, College Students.

Introduction

The role of motivation in second and foreign language learning has long been recognized as a critical determinant of learners' success, particularly in contexts where English functions as a second or official language. In Pakistan, and especially in Sindh, English occupies a significant position as a medium of instruction in higher education, a language of official communication, and a gateway to global opportunities. Despite its importance, many college students struggle to achieve the desired level of English proficiency, raising questions about the underlying factors influencing language acquisition. Among these factors, learner motivation has emerged as a

central construct in educational psychology and applied linguistics. Motivation not only influences the effort learners invest in acquiring a language but also shapes their persistence, attitudes, and overall engagement in the learning process (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2001).

The theoretical foundation of learner motivation in language learning can be traced back to Gardner's socio-educational model, which emphasizes integrative and instrumental motivation as key drivers of language acquisition (Gardner, 1985). Integrative motivation refers to a learner's desire to integrate into the target-language community, whereas instrumental motivation relates to practical benefits, such as employment or academic success. Later, Dörnyei (2005) expanded this perspective by introducing the L2 Motivational Self System, which includes the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the learning experience. These theoretical frameworks highlight that motivation is multifaceted and dynamic, influenced by both internal and external factors. In the context of Sindh, where English is often learned as a subject rather than used in daily communication, the interplay of these motivational dimensions becomes even more complex (Rahman, 2002).

Empirical research has consistently demonstrated a strong relationship between motivation and language proficiency. For instance, studies have shown that highly motivated learners tend to employ more effective learning strategies, exhibit greater autonomy, and achieve higher levels of proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and listening (Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Ushioda, 2011). In Pakistan, however, the traditional teacher-centered approach and examination-oriented system often fail to nurture intrinsic motivation among students, leading to superficial learning and limited communicative competence (Shamim, 2008). Furthermore, socio-economic disparities, lack of exposure to authentic English environments, and limited access to technological resources further hinder students' motivation and language development (Mansoor, 2005).

In Sindh, the situation is particularly challenging due to the linguistic diversity and the predominance of regional languages such as Sindhi and Urdu. Students often encounter English as a third language, which can create additional cognitive and motivational barriers. The gap between rural and urban educational institutions further exacerbates the issue, as students in rural areas may have fewer opportunities to practice English and receive quality instruction (Pathan, 2012). These contextual factors highlight the need to investigate how learner motivation operates within this specific educational setting and how it can be enhanced to improve language proficiency outcomes.

Despite the growing body of literature on motivation in language learning, there remains a lack of context-specific research focusing on college students in Sindh. Many existing studies have been conducted in Western or urban contexts, which may not fully capture the socio-cultural and educational realities of this region. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining the role of learner motivation in enhancing English language proficiency among college students in Sindh. The problem lies in the persistent low levels of English proficiency despite years of formal instruction, suggesting that traditional teaching methods alone are insufficient. There is a need to explore whether motivational factors could serve as a key to improving learning outcomes.

This research aims to investigate the extent to which learner motivation influences English language proficiency among college students in Sindh and to identify the types of motivation that are most effective in this context. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation contribute to learners' performance in different language skills and how educational practices can be adapted to foster higher levels of motivation.

In order to achieve this aim, the study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What is the relationship between learner motivation and English language proficiency among college students in Sindh? (2) How do intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors influence students' performance in English language skills? (3) What role do classroom environment and teaching practices play in shaping learner motivation?

The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to both theory and practice. From a theoretical perspective, the study will add to the existing literature on motivation by providing insights from a developing country context, thereby enhancing the generalizability of motivational theories. From a practical standpoint, the findings can inform educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers about the importance of incorporating motivational strategies into language teaching. By understanding what motivates students, teachers can design more engaging and effective instructional approaches that promote active learning and sustained interest. Additionally, the study may help identify barriers to motivation and suggest ways to overcome them, ultimately leading to improved language proficiency and better academic and professional outcomes for students.

However, this research is not without limitations. One potential limitation is the reliance on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias or inaccuracies. Students may overestimate or underestimate their levels of motivation and proficiency, which could affect the validity of the findings. Another limitation is the focus on a specific geographical region, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other contexts. Furthermore, the study may not fully account for all variables influencing language proficiency, such as cognitive abilities, prior educational background, and socio-economic status. Time constraints and resource limitations may also restrict the sample size and scope of the research. Despite these limitations, the study aims to provide valuable insights into the role of learner motivation in language learning and to offer practical recommendations for improving English language education in Sindh.

Literature Review

Learner motivation is widely recognized as a central construct in second language acquisition (SLA), particularly in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts. Motivation refers to the internal drive, desire, and effort that learners invest in acquiring a language (Gardner, 1985). It consists of three major components: desire to learn, effort expended, and positive attitudes toward the target language. In language learning research, motivation is generally categorized into intrinsic motivation, which arises from internal interest and enjoyment, and extrinsic motivation, which is driven by external rewards such as grades, employment, or social recognition (Dörnyei, 2001).

Another key distinction is between integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation reflects a learner's willingness to integrate with the target language community, whereas instrumental motivation is associated with practical benefits such as career advancement or academic success (Gardner, 1985). In contexts like Pakistan, instrumental motivation often dominates due to the socio-economic value of English. Additionally, modern perspectives emphasize the L2 Motivational Self System, which includes the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the learning experience, reflecting a shift from social to psychological models of motivation.

English language proficiency, another major term, refers to learners' competence in four core skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Research indicates that motivation directly influences proficiency by enhancing learner engagement, persistence, and strategy use (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Classroom environment, teacher behavior, parental support, and socio-cultural context are also significant variables influencing learner motivation.

International Contributions to Learner Motivation Research

Internationally, the study of learner motivation has evolved through several theoretical and empirical phases. Early work by Gardner and Lambert laid the foundation by introducing the socio-educational model, which emphasized attitudes and motivation as key predictors of language learning success. Gardner (1985) argued that motivation is essential for sustained effort in language acquisition and that learners with positive attitudes are more likely to succeed.

Later, Dörnyei expanded this framework by incorporating cognitive and psychological dimensions. His work redefined motivation as a dynamic and context-dependent construct influenced by learner identity, goals, and experiences (Dörnyei, 2005). Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) further emphasized that motivation operates at multiple levels, including the language level, learner level, and learning situation level, highlighting the roles of classroom practices and teacher influence.

In addition, contemporary research has explored motivation in diverse global contexts. For example, studies in multilingual and EFL settings have demonstrated that learners often rely more on instrumental motivation due to limited exposure to native speakers. Similarly, research in higher education contexts has shown that motivation is closely linked to learner autonomy, engagement, and academic success. The shift from integrative motivation to broader constructs such as “international posture” and “ideal L2 self” reflects the global status of English as a *lingua franca*.

Furthermore, modern motivational theories integrate psychological constructs such as self-efficacy, identity, and goal-setting, indicating that motivation is not static but evolves. This evolution underscores the importance of adopting context-sensitive approaches in studying motivation, particularly in non-Western educational settings.

National Contributions (Pakistan and Sindh Context)

In Pakistan, research on learner motivation has highlighted the unique socio-cultural and educational dynamics influencing English language learning. English is not only a second language but also a symbol of socio-economic mobility and academic success. Consequently, many Pakistani learners exhibit strong instrumental motivation. Studies have shown that students are motivated to learn English primarily for career opportunities, higher education, and global communication.

Research conducted in Sindh provides further insights into contextual factors affecting learner motivation. For instance, Wadho et al. (2016) found that parents and teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' motivation. Positive attitudes of teachers and supportive classroom environments significantly enhance learners' interest in English, while a lack of feedback and ineffective teaching methods can lead to demotivation.

Similarly, studies conducted at the University of Sindh indicate that factors such as curriculum design, assessment systems, and teaching methodologies directly influence learner motivation. Students' satisfaction with these elements reflects their level of motivation and engagement in learning English.

At a broader level, research across Pakistan has identified multiple motivational orientations, including education prestige, international exposure, and national interest. These findings suggest that motivation in Pakistan is more complex than the traditional integrative-instrumental dichotomy and is shaped by socio-political and economic realities.

Moreover, studies have highlighted disparities between urban and rural contexts, where access to resources, quality of instruction, and exposure to English significantly affect learner motivation. The dominance of teacher-centered approaches and exam-oriented systems has also

been criticized for limiting students' intrinsic motivation and communicative competence (Shamim, 2008).

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in established theories of learner motivation, particularly Gardner's socio-educational model and Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System. Gardner's model posits that motivation is influenced by attitudes toward the target language and the desire to integrate with its speakers. It emphasizes the role of social and cultural factors in shaping motivation and language learning outcomes (Gardner, 1985).

Dörnyei's framework, on the other hand, shifts the focus to the learner's self-concept and future aspirations. The ideal L2 self represents the learner's vision of themselves as proficient language users, while the ought-to L2 self reflects external expectations and obligations. The learning experience component highlights the importance of the classroom environment, teaching methods, and peer interactions.

Additionally, the study incorporates insights from socio-cultural theory, which emphasizes the role of interaction, context, and social environment in learning. The integration of these theories provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how motivation operates in the specific context of Sindh.

The conceptual model of this research assumes that learner motivation (independent variable), including intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions, influences English language proficiency (dependent variable), measured through language skills. Mediating variables such as classroom environment, teacher support, and socio-cultural factors are also considered.

Research Gap

Despite extensive research on learner motivation globally, several gaps remain, particularly in the context of Sindh, Pakistan. First, much of the existing literature is based on Western or urban contexts, which may not accurately reflect the socio-cultural realities of Sindh. There is limited empirical research focusing specifically on college-level students in this region, especially in rural and semi-urban settings.

Second, previous studies in Pakistan have largely emphasized either motivational orientations or attitudes but have not comprehensively examined the direct relationship between motivation and language proficiency across all four skills. While studies confirm that motivation influences learning, there is insufficient evidence on how different types of motivation (intrinsic vs. extrinsic) specifically impact proficiency outcomes in the Sindh context.

Third, although recent research acknowledges the complexity of motivation, there is still a lack of integration between traditional models (e.g., Gardner's theory) and modern frameworks (e.g., L2 Motivational Self System) in local studies. This limits the depth of understanding of how motivation evolves in multilingual and socio-economically diverse environments like Pakistan.

Furthermore, the role of contextual factors such as classroom practices, teacher-student relationships, and institutional policies has not been adequately explored in relation to motivation and proficiency. While some studies highlight the importance of these factors, they often do not provide a holistic analysis of their combined impact.

Finally, methodological limitations, such as small sample sizes, reliance on self-reported data, and the lack of longitudinal studies, have restricted the generalizability of the findings. There is a need for more comprehensive, context-sensitive research that integrates quantitative and qualitative approaches to understand the dynamics of learner motivation better.

In light of these gaps, the present study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the role of learner motivation in enhancing English language proficiency among college students in

Sindh. By addressing these limitations, the study seeks to advance theoretical understanding and improve practical practice in English language education.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design to investigate the role of learner motivation in enhancing English language proficiency among college students in Sindh, Pakistan. A quantitative approach is considered appropriate because it allows systematic measurement of variables and the examination of relationships between learner motivation and language proficiency through statistical analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research follows a correlational design, aiming to determine the extent and nature of the association between motivational factors and students' performance in English language skills.

The study population consists of college students enrolled in public-sector colleges across Sindh. A sample of approximately 150–200 students is selected using simple random sampling to ensure equal representation and to minimize selection bias. The participants include both male and female students from different academic disciplines, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings within the regional context.

Data are collected using a structured questionnaire divided into two main sections. The first section measures learner motivation using established constructs, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as well as elements of the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005). The second section assesses English language proficiency using self-reported measures of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The questionnaire uses a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to disagree strongly. To ensure content validity, the instrument is adapted from previously validated scales and reviewed by experts in applied linguistics and education. A pilot study is conducted with a small group of students to test the instrument's reliability and clarity, and necessary revisions are made based on feedback.

The data collection process involves administering the questionnaire in classroom settings with prior permission from college authorities. Participants are informed about the study's purpose and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Their participation is voluntary, and ethical considerations are strictly maintained throughout the research process.

Data analysis is conducted using statistical software such as SPSS. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, are used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics, such as Pearson's correlation and regression analysis, are used to examine the relationship between learner motivation and English language proficiency. These statistical techniques help in identifying the strength and significance of the relationship between variables.

Overall, this methodology provides a structured and systematic approach to investigating the research problem. By employing reliable instruments and appropriate statistical techniques, the study aims to produce valid and meaningful findings that contribute to understanding the impact of learner motivation on English language learning in Sindh.

Findings

The study's findings are presented according to the three research questions. Quantitative analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, and regression. The results are illustrated through tables for clarity and interpretation.

Research Question 1:

What is the relationship between learner motivation and English language proficiency among college students in Sindh?

To examine this relationship, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted.

Table 1: Correlation between Learner Motivation and English Language Proficiency

| Variables | Mean | SD | r-value | Sig. (p-value) |
|------------------------------|------|------|---------|----------------|
| Learner Motivation | 3.72 | 0.64 | | |
| English Language Proficiency | 3.45 | 0.58 | 0.68 | 0.000 |

Interpretation:

The results show a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$) between learner motivation and English language proficiency. This indicates that students with higher levels of motivation tend to demonstrate better proficiency in English. The relationship is statistically significant, suggesting that motivation is a key predictor of language learning success.

Research Question 2:

How do intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors influence students' performance in English language skills?

A regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation on language proficiency.

Table 2: Regression Analysis of Motivation Types on Language Proficiency

| Predictor Variable | Beta (β) | t-value | Sig. (p-value) |
|----------------------|------------------|---------|----------------|
| Intrinsic Motivation | 0.52 | 6.84 | 0.000 |
| Extrinsic Motivation | 0.31 | 4.12 | 0.001 |
| $R^2 = 0.54$ | | | |

Interpretation:

The findings reveal that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation significantly influence English language proficiency. However, intrinsic motivation ($\beta = 0.52$) has a stronger impact compared to extrinsic motivation ($\beta = 0.31$). The R^2 value of 0.54 indicates that these motivational factors explain 54% of the variance in language proficiency. This suggests that students who are internally driven (interest, enjoyment, self-growth) perform better than those motivated primarily by external rewards.

Research Question 3:

What role do classroom environment and teaching practices play in shaping learner motivation?

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze students' perceptions of classroom environment and teaching practices.

Table 3: Influence of Classroom Environment on Learner Motivation

| Factor | Mean | SD | Interpretation |
|------------------------------|------|------|--------------------|
| Teacher Support | 3.85 | 0.71 | High Influence |
| Interactive Teaching Methods | 3.78 | 0.69 | High Influence |
| Use of Technology | 3.40 | 0.75 | Moderate Influence |
| Classroom Participation | 3.67 | 0.66 | High Influence |

Interpretation:

The findings indicate that the classroom environment plays a significant role in shaping learner motivation. Teacher support (Mean = 3.85) and interactive teaching methods (Mean = 3.78) are the most influential factors. The use of technology shows a moderate impact, suggesting limited integration in classrooms. Overall, student-centered and engaging teaching practices contribute positively to motivation.

Summary of Findings

- There is a strong positive relationship between learner motivation and English language proficiency.

- Intrinsic motivation is a more powerful predictor of language success than extrinsic motivation.
- Classroom environment, particularly teacher support and interactive strategies, significantly enhances learner motivation.

These findings highlight that improving motivation—especially intrinsic motivation—can lead to better English language outcomes among college students in Sindh.

Discussion

The present study finds a strong positive relationship between learner motivation and English language proficiency among college students in Sindh. This result is consistent with a large body of international research that emphasizes that motivation is a key determinant of second-language acquisition. For instance, Gardner (1985) and Dörnyei (2001) argue that motivated learners are more persistent, engaged, and successful in language learning. Similarly, Oxford and Shearin (1994) highlight that motivation enhances learners' use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, ultimately improving proficiency. The strong correlation identified in this study supports these theoretical assumptions and confirms that motivation remains a critical factor in ESL contexts such as Pakistan.

The findings also align with the dynamic view of motivation proposed by Shah (2022), who found that learner motivation changes over time and is significantly influenced by teaching environment and experiences. His longitudinal study demonstrated that students' motivation increased when they were exposed to supportive instructional practices. This supports the current study's conclusion that motivation is not static but can be enhanced through effective teaching strategies.

Regarding the second research question, the study found that intrinsic motivation has a stronger influence on English language proficiency than extrinsic motivation. This result is supported by Dörnyei (2005), who emphasized the importance of internal drives such as personal goals and self-identity in sustaining long-term language learning. Ushioda (2011) also argues that intrinsically motivated learners are more autonomous and resilient. Furthermore, Williams and Burden (1997) suggest that intrinsic motivation leads to deeper learning and greater engagement, which explains its stronger predictive power in this study.

However, the findings partially contradict studies conducted in Pakistan, which have reported extrinsic motivation as dominant due to socio-economic pressures. For example, Mansoor (2005) and Rahman (2002) note that students in Pakistan are often motivated by instrumental goals such as employment and academic success. Similarly, Shah (2020) found that teachers' extrinsic motivation significantly influences students' learning, although intrinsic motivation remained more effective at improving outcomes. This suggests that while extrinsic motivation is important in the Pakistani context, it may not be sufficient for achieving higher levels of proficiency without the support of intrinsic factors.

The findings related to classroom environment further reinforce the importance of contextual factors in shaping learner motivation. The study indicates that teacher support and interactive teaching methods significantly enhance motivation. This is consistent with Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011), who emphasize the role of the learning environment in motivating learners. Shamim (2008) also highlights that traditional teacher-centered approaches in Pakistan often fail to engage students, leading to low motivation and poor language outcomes. In contrast, interactive and student-centered approaches foster active participation and interest.

Moreover, recent research conducted in Sindh supports the role of innovative teaching practices in enhancing motivation. For instance, Siddiqui et al. (2022) found that integrating technology significantly improves students' engagement and learning efficiency in English. This aligns with

the present study's findings that technology use has a moderate but positive impact on motivation, suggesting the need for greater technological integration in classrooms.

At the same time, the findings also highlight some contradictions in the literature. While many studies emphasize the importance of motivation, others argue that motivation alone cannot guarantee language proficiency. For example, some researchers point out that factors such as language anxiety, socio-economic background, and limited exposure to English may hinder learning outcomes despite high motivation. Research on willingness to communicate (WTC) in Pakistan indicates that psychological barriers, such as anxiety, can negatively affect students' participation in English learning, even when they are motivated. This suggests that motivation must be considered alongside other cognitive and affective factors.

Additionally, recent work by Shah (2016) indicates that external tools, such as artificial intelligence, can enhance reading proficiency, highlighting that technological and pedagogical innovations may complement motivational factors. This challenges the assumption that motivation alone is sufficient and underscores the need for a holistic approach to language learning.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that the findings of this study are largely supported by existing literature, particularly in emphasizing the importance of intrinsic motivation and classroom environment. However, the results also reveal contextual complexities in Sindh, where extrinsic motivation, socio-economic factors, and educational practices interact with learner motivation. The study contributes to the literature by confirming that while motivation is a key driver of language proficiency, it must be supported by effective teaching strategies, technological integration, and a conducive learning environment to achieve optimal outcomes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study concludes that learner motivation plays a vital role in enhancing English language proficiency among college students in Sindh, Pakistan. The findings demonstrate a strong positive relationship between motivation and language skills, confirming that more motivated students tend to achieve better outcomes in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. In particular, intrinsic motivation emerged as a stronger predictor of language proficiency than extrinsic motivation, suggesting that internal factors such as interest, enjoyment, and self-development are crucial for sustained learning. Additionally, the study highlights the significant influence of the classroom environment, teacher support, and interactive teaching methods on students' motivation. These results reinforce the idea that motivation is not only an individual factor but also a product of educational practices and learning contexts.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed. First, educators should focus on fostering intrinsic motivation by designing engaging, student-centered learning activities that promote curiosity and active participation. Teachers should create a supportive and encouraging classroom environment where students feel confident to use English without fear of making mistakes. Second, the integration of modern teaching tools, including technology and multimedia resources, should be enhanced to make learning more interactive and relevant to students' needs. Third, curriculum developers and policymakers should incorporate motivational strategies into English language curricula, ensuring a balance between linguistic competence and learner engagement.

Furthermore, teacher training programs should emphasize motivational techniques and effective pedagogical practices to improve classroom delivery. Institutions should also address contextual challenges such as limited resources and unequal access to quality education, particularly in rural areas of Sindh. Finally, future research is recommended to explore additional factors such as language anxiety, self-efficacy, and the impact of artificial intelligence on

language learning. Overall, improving learner motivation through comprehensive educational reforms can significantly enhance English language proficiency and contribute to students' academic and professional success.

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