

Cambodian students' motivation in learning the English language: A small-scale survey at a private high school in Phnom Penh

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ABSTRACT

English has become the world's language, and it has been used by many people in different countries as a means of international communication. Motivation to learn English has been seen as the most important factor contributing to the success of students' learning. The current study employed a quantitative design and was conducted to find out the motivation levels of students studying English as a foreign language at a private high school in Phnom Penh. 60 students participated in a survey after we sought agreement from school principals and teachers of English there. The findings show that the students in the studied context were more extrinsically motivated to learn English rather than intrinsically. The sum of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations also revealed students' moderate motivation to learn English. Due to the small scale of the survey study, a future study should be conducted with larger sample size and at other educational institutions across Cambodia. Qualitative and mixed-methods designs are also highly recommended.

Keywords: cambodia; motivation; high school students; teaching techniques; learning skills

INTRODUCTION

English is a very essential language nowadays. This language has been used by many people in the world. This section shows the readers about the different aspects of English, English for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), English in Cambodia, the importance of English, and the importance of motivation to learn English. The section also shows the readers the objectives of the current study.

English originated in Britain, but now it has become a global or an international language and has been used worldwide as a means of international communication (Jenkins, 2002). Many countries have accepted this language as a foreign language and allowed their students to study this language at schools among the other school subjects (Horwitz, 1988). Some countries have accepted English as their second language to add to their existing official language or first language, and English has been used widely in those countries (Chou, 2018). Some countries, like the United States of America (USA), New Zealand, and Singapore, have been using English as their official language for different modes of communication (Trudgill & Hannah, 2017).

ASEAN, including the countries of Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, the Philippines, Myanmar (or Burma), Lao, Vietnam, Singapore, and Cambodia, has adopted English as its official language (Kirkpatrick, 2008). This language is primarily used during their annual meeting (Kirkpatrick, 2012). English is a common foreign language among students, instructors, researchers, authors, and foreign tourists to Cambodia because this country is also one of the ASEAN nations (Hashim et al., 2014).

English was first brought to Cambodia under the Khmer Republic, often known as Lon Nol, which lasted from 1970 to 1975. The Khmer Rouge (KR) or Pol Pot dictatorship, which ruled from 1975 to 1979, then banned this language completely (Em & Mao, 2022; Neau, 2003). 1979 saw the fall of the KR government. However, English was not permitted to be taught and learned until 1989 owing to the influence of communism. English teachers and students were detained as criminals during this period if they did the activities of learning and teaching (Igawa, 2008). English is already taught in schools beginning in Grade 4 and will likely be taught starting in the near future at preschool levels (MoEYS, 2015). Students in Grade 12 must take English as one of their high school examinations in addition to their other required subjects. Although English is not now a required subject for high school students in Cambodia (Soeung et al., 2019), learning this language will open doors for them to pursue higher education studies (Hashim et al., 2014).

People's lives are greatly impacted by the English language since it enables them to speak with the majority of people throughout the world, in addition to their friends and relatives (Kim, 2020). In addition, it is the most often used language in the world for academic study at all levels. Learning English benefits students because it increases their employment options, broadens their perspectives, and nurtures their emotional intelligence. When students seek further education in their own countries or abroad, English becomes even more unique. Students at this level must read several documents in English to do assignments and other schoolwork; if they are not proficient in the language, they may struggle academically (Ilyosovna, 2020; Rao, 2019a, 2019b). Additionally, the majority of the sources that students, teachers, professors, researchers, and authors find on the internet are in English (Ilyosovna, 2020).

Additionally, because English is the primary language used for worldwide communication, its use as a global or international language is growing with time, and the majority of countries in the world require this language for a variety of reasons (Ilyosovna, 2020; McKay, 2018; Rao, 2019b). Because the vast majority of readers are only familiar with English and not any other language, English is also frequently utilized in literature and the media (McKay, 2018; Rao, 2019b). English proficiency is crucial while producing articles for publications. Your work will only be read by a tiny number of readers, most of whom will be people from your own country if you write your pieces in your mother tongue rather than in English. As an alternative, if you write your articles in English, they can reach a wider audience (Heng et al., 2021).

Sang (2021) noted that motivation frequently affects success. Investigating motivation is important since it affects how effective language learners are. Motivation has many more benefits than drawbacks. It is difficult to estimate how much of a factor it may be given that motivation can vary across language learners, and they have varied perspectives on it. The motivation and consciousness of language learners may vary depending on the environment, which can have a variety of effects on the process and results of language acquisition. Without enough motivation, students' English language learning might come to an end, and the success of English language learning might be like an imagination that would never come true.

Many students cannot learn English well because they lack learning motivation (Liu, 2016). As a result, those students face difficulties when they pursue their high education (Hashim et al., 2014). This study aims to explore students' motivation in learning English at a private high school in Phnom Penh.

Research objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To compare if the students are more intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to learn English as a foreign language.
2. To find out to what extent high school students are motivated to learn English as a foreign language.

Research questions

The research questions in this study are as follows:

1. Are the students more intrinsically or extrinsically motivated to learn English as a foreign language?
2. To what extent are high school students motivated to learn English as a foreign language?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Types of motivation

Extrinsic and intrinsic motivations are the two main divisions of motivation. Extrinsic motivation is a concept that applies whenever an action is taken to achieve a distinct consequence, while intrinsic motivation is the feeling of wanting to do something without being forced by outside factors (Gilakjani et al., 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Covington and Müeller (2001) and Ryan and Deci (2000) also noted that extrinsic motivation is the act of acting for the sake of receiving rewards from outside sources. In terms of work, this might include monetary gain, rewards, privileges, and even avoiding termination.

Refocusing on external incentives can help you quickly recommit to a goal or activity when you feel your motivation is being pushed by other factors, whether that goal or activity is doing well at work or maintaining a regular workout schedule. Trying to concentrate on the external factors, such as the salary that pays your rent, the health insurance, or even the free fruit in the cafeteria, to get motivated if you regularly complain about your commute to a job, you are not enthusiastic about is also an example of extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Uusberg et al., 2019).

Cini et al. (2013) and Ryan and Deci (2000) noted that intrinsic motivation is described as engaging in an activity for its inherent enjoyment rather than for some separate result. When a person is intrinsically driven, he or she is motivated by the joy or challenge involved rather than by outside things, demands, or incentives.

When someone performs any task that he or she is not forced to do, it is a sign of intrinsic motivation. For example, you go for a run because you appreciate the feeling of doing it, or you help your neighbor carry their groceries up the stairs because you feel good doing it. These types of activity emerge from inner drives which are examples of intrinsic motivation (Gowan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Intrinsic motivation is when you act because it makes you feel good. For doing it, you feel internally rewarded. This may be accomplished at work by accomplishing objectives you have set for yourself, having fun with your co-workers, or performing work that makes you feel purposeful (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wulf & Lewthwaite, 2016).

To cut a long story short, extrinsic motivation is the drive that urges individuals to do activities because they need to fulfill their demands from outside factors, while intrinsic motivation is the inner drive that encourages individuals to do activities based on their passions or desires.

Some previous studies of motivation in learning English

Motivation to learn English is a well-studied topic, particularly in developed countries and those where English is used as a first and second language. However, there are not many studies concerning motivation in learning English in poor and developing countries. For example, there are only a few studies regarding motivation in learning English in Cambodia, and most of them are not published. The students only conducted their studies to fulfill the requirements of their studies in order to obtain the degrees from the universities where they were doing their courses. This section will review the studies of motivation in learning English from the world views to local views and the Cambodian context.

In a survey conducted with 114 first-year students enrolled in a department of a large public university in Turkey, Ölmez (2015) found that those 114 respondents were attending their classes to fulfill their degree requirements. The requirements established by the universities or colleges were extrinsic influences. Those students were, therefore, more extrinsically motivated to learn English.

Another study conducted by Şentürk (2015) with 61 participants at the School of Foreign Languages of Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University in Turkey also found that overall extrinsic motivation was higher than overall intrinsic motivation. The responders were, as a result, noticeably more externally motivated to learn English.

Aulia and Zainil (2020) conducted a study with 78 junior high school students (Grades 7 and 8) from SMP N 11 and SMP N 46 Sijunjung in Indonesia and found that most students were more extrinsically driven to learn English rather than they were intrinsically motivated since they learned English mostly for social interactions, grades, and class competitions.

However, a study by Miyamoto et al. (2018) conducted with 4,619 German students in Grades 5-7 found that these students were devoted to learning English because of their natural motivation. This study found that those learners had a propensity to acquire English as a consequence of their internal stimulation, notably by reading texts, passages, and other materials written in English. Thus, those students were intrinsically motivated to learn English rather than extrinsically.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Subakthiasih & Putri (2020) conducted a study with 90 students studying at the Faculty of Foreign Language at Mahasaraswati University, Indonesia, and found that those graduates were also more intrinsically motivated to learn English in comparison with extrinsic motivation.

But, in Cambodia, Keo et al. (2022) conducted a study with 93 Buddhist monk students learning English as a foreign language at a Buddhist primary school in Kampong Cham town and found that those Buddhist monks had high motivation toward learning English, and they were more extrinsically motivated than intrinsically.

Another study in Cambodia conducted with 265 students at a high school in Pre Vey province, by Sor et al. (2022) also found that the students who participated in the study had high motivation to learn English as a foreign language. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivations were also examined. As a result, those students were more extrinsically motivated to learn English.

METHODS

Research design

This study is a part of a bigger study of an unpublished work by Em et al. (2018). A quantitative study was employed in the study. There are different types of quantitative designs. Those types include survey design, casual comparative design, correlational design, and experimental design. The current study employed a survey design.

Research instrument

The Gardner's Attitudes/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), which has been adopted by several L2 motivation researchers, served as the foundation for the questionnaire. Participants were asked to circle or tick one of the five supplied options for each sentence (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree) on a Likert scale with five possible responses. Thus, reliability was confirmed by utilizing the five-point Likert scale (for more details, see Em et al., 2018).

Data collection and participants

The current study was utilized at a private high school in Phnom Penh (see Em et al., 2018). After having gotten the letter of permission for the study from the National Institute of Education (NIE) in Cambodia where we were training to become higher school teachers of English, we went to seek agreements from school principals, teachers of English, and students. Our request was agreed upon. All the target participants consented to our study. Then data collection process was conducted. There were around 120 students in Grades 10-12, and half of the students (60) were randomly selected. 20 students were randomly selected from Grade 10. 20 students were randomly selected from Grade 11, and 20 students were randomly selected from Grade 12. As a result, 25 male and 35 female students were randomly selected from the three Grades.

Data analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 19 was used for the analysis of quantitative data obtained in the current study. Each item's mean (*M*) and standard deviation (*SD*) were calculated, and all the items were examined with an emphasis on *M* and *SD*. All the items of extrinsic motivation were then computed and analyzed with an emphasis on *M* and *SD*, and the same things were done with all the items of intrinsic motivation. The overall extrinsic and intrinsic motivations were also combined to find out the extent of students' motivation to learn English. Minimum (*Min*) and (*Max*) maximum values were also considered at all stages of analysis, but they were not reported in the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' demographic information

TABLE 1. Students' demographic information (N = 60)

Demographics	Values	N	Frequency (%)
Genders			
	Male	25	41.70
	Female	35	53.30
Ages			
	14-16	21	35.00
	17-19	31	51.70
	20-over	8	13.30
Grades			
	Grade 10	20	33.33
	Grade 11	20	33.33
	Grade 12	20	33.33

As shown in Table 1, there were 60 students (35, or 53.30%, were females) participated in the study. Of the participants, 21, or 35%, were aged 14 to 16 years old. Of the participants, 31, or 51.70%, were from 17 to 19 years old, and 8 participants, or 13.30%, were 20 years old and over. 20 students, or 33.33%, were from Grade 10, 20 students, or 33.33%, were from Grade 11, and 20 students, or 33.33%, were from Grade 12.

Students' extrinsic motivation

TABLE 2. Students' extrinsic motivation (N = 60)

No.	Extrinsic motivation items	M	SD	Min	Max
1.	Knowing English will be helpful for my career.	4.70	.75	2.00	5.00
2.	I need to know English to enter university.	4.60	.94	2.00	5.00
3.	English will broaden my future options.	4.40	.85	2.00	5.00
4.	English helps or will help when I travel overseas.	4.57	.81	2.00	5.00
5.	I learn English to communicate with others.	4.45	.63	2.00	5.00
6.	English helps or will help me when I meet foreigners.	4.28	.81	2.00	5.00
7.	My family or friends encourage me to learn English.	4.38	.92	2.00	5.00
8.	I learn English to know more about the world.	4.10	.88	2.00	5.00

Note: Mean score of 1.00-1.80 = Lowest, 1.81-2.60 = Low, 2.61-3.40 = Moderate, 3.41-4.20 = High, and 4.21-5.00 = Highest

As revealed in Table 2, students reported the highest motivation in items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 (i.e., Knowing English will be helpful for my career., I need to know English to enter university., English will broaden my future options., English helps or will help when I travel overseas., I learn English to communicate with others., English helps or will help me when I meet foreigners., and My family or friends encourage me to learn English.). Finally, the students reported high motivation in item 8 (i.e., I learn English to know more about the world.). The reports of each item show that the students learning English in the studied context are mainly urged or forced by external factors, like parents' burden, school burden, or external rewards.

Students' intrinsic motivation

TABLE 3. Students' intrinsic motivation (N = 60)

No.	Intrinsic motivation items	M	SD	Min	Max
1.	English is essential for my personal development.	4.03	.65	2.00	5.00
2.	I watch films, listen to songs or read in English.	3.82	.80	2.00	5.00
3.	Knowing English gives me a feeling of success.	3.85	.88	2.00	5.00
4.	I study English because I like it.	4.02	.89	2.00	5.00
5.	I usually learn English by myself at home.	3.48	.94	1.00	5.00
6.	Learning English is easy.	3.67	.85	2.00	5.00
7.	I want to learn English.	3.97	.87	1.00	5.00
8.	I usually use English outside the class.	3.13	.93	1.00	5.00

As revealed in Table 3, students reported high motivation in items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 (i.e., English is essential for my personal development., I watch films, listen to songs or read in English., Knowing English gives me a feeling of success., I study English because I like it., I usually learn English by myself at home., Learning English is easy., and I want to learn English.). Finally, the students reported moderate motivation in item 8 (i.e., I usually use English outside the class.). The reports of each item show that there could be some internal factors, like the students' own intentions, students' being pleased with the language, or students' feelings of success in learning the language, that encourage them to learn English.

Students' overall motivation

TABLE 4. Students' overall motivation (N = 60)

No.	Motivation	M	SD	Min	Max
1.	Extrinsic motivation	4.43	.82	2.00	5.00
2.	Intrinsic motivation	3.74	.85	1.62	5.00
3.	Overall	4.09	.84	1.81	5.00

As shown in Table 4, students reported highest extrinsic motivation to learn English ($M = 4.43$, $SD = .82931$), and they reported moderate intrinsic motivation to learn English ($M = 3.74$, $SD = .85519$). These reports show that the students in the studied context were more extrinsically motivated to learn English rather than intrinsically. Finally, the overall sum of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation shows that the students in the studied context had the moderate motivation to learn English as a foreign language.

Discussion

The present study shows that the students were highly extrinsically motivated to learn English as a foreign language. There could be external factors contributing to their extrinsic motivation. Those factors could include getting the highest score in the class; preparing for the exams; learning to win external rewards, or it might be external drives from their parents or guardians. When putting extrinsic and intrinsic motivations together, the report shows the students in the studied context had the moderate motivation to learn English as a foreign language.

The findings of the present study collaborate with those of Ölmez (2015), who conducted a study with 114 university students in Turkey and found that the participant students were more extrinsically motivated to learn English. The current study also collaborates with another study conducted in Indonesia by Aulia and Zainil (2020), who found that the 78 junior high school students (Grades 7 and 8) who participated in the study were more extrinsically motivated to learn English.

Apart from that, the current study also collaborates with those of Şentürk (2015), who conducted a study with 61 participants at the School of Foreign Languages of Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University in Turkey. The findings revealed that the participants were more extrinsically motivated to learn English.

In the Cambodian context, two current studies were conducted and found similar results. The first one was conducted by Keo et al. (2022) at a Buddhist primary school and found that the Buddhist monk students were more extrinsically motivated, and the second one was conducted with 265 high school students by Sor et al. (2022) and found the high school students were more extrinsically motivated to learn English as a foreign language. These two studies also revealed the same thing: the participants had high motivation to learn English. The findings from these two studies are also

paralleled with the present study, which also reveals that the participants had the moderate motivation to learn English.

CONCLUSION

The current study reveals that the student participants were more extrinsically motivated to learn English as a foreign language. The overall moderate motivation was also revealed when putting intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation together.

In the current context, the participants had higher extrinsic motivation than an intrinsic one. It seems like learning English is a burden rather than a self-desire. The burden of learning is not a good idea to learn the subject. Thus, being happy should be given to students to make them happy and feel positive when they learn English or any other subjects. Therefore, the current study has the following recommendations.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport

To motivate students to learn English better, MoEYS should consider the following points: First, MoEYS should regularly update the English textbooks so that the content of the books is up-to-date and full of social activities. Then when the students use that kind of book, they feel like they are learning what is being used in the real world (Em & Nun, 2022). Second, MoEYS should increase teacher professional development opportunities for teachers of English in Cambodia. When teachers have such opportunities, they are able to meet each other, and they can share and exchange their new ideas and experiences regarding learning and teaching English (see Em et al., 2021). Third, MoEYS should provide learning and teaching materials that cannot be made to schools so that the teachers of English can use those different sources in case of need (see Em, 2019; Em, 2022). Finally, and most importantly, MoEYS should also seek funds from all concerned education stakeholders, especially from the government, to support and increase teachers' salaries. Without enough rice to eat and water to drink, teachers could not perform their jobs well, even if all the above-mentioned points were well-equipped (see Em, 2021).

Educational institutions

Educational institutions, including schools, universities, and other institutions where students can study, should, first of all, prepare their learning environment to be a friendly place. When the learning environment is beautiful and smart, the students will likely learn and love their schools. As a result, students' motivation, especially intrinsic ones, will increase. Another point that the heads of schools should take into account is helping teachers of English produce learning and teaching materials and keeping those materials in a proper place so that the teachers at school can use those things when they are in need. Finally, giving incentives like letters of recognition to well-performed teachers is another great action. School principals or heads of schools can also encourage teachers of English by giving some kind of evidence, such as a certificate of recognition, to the teachers who always care about their students' learning achievements and their teaching performance.

Teachers of English

Teachers of English are considered the most important characters in encouraging students to learn English. Teachers play the most important role in teaching English to students. Encouragement, motivation, and inspiration are all very important to increasing students' learning of internal emotions. In those processes, teachers should use sweet remarks and polite words to speak with the students. They should never bemoan or discriminate against their students. If they do, their students are entitled to be discouraged and won't learn well at all. Houn and Em (2022) noted that as a teacher of English, one should always encourage the students to learn and use different teaching techniques to teach them. Heng (2017) also recommended that the improvement of pupils' capacity to communicate successfully in language learning should be taken into account by teachers. Teachers should employ problem-solving exercises and assignments that call for students to collaborate, bargain, or exchange information with one another, such as pair work, group work, role play, interviews, presentations, debates, games, and surveys. In brief, teachers should regularly encourage their students to learn

English, and should also use different teaching techniques for students so that they can improve their learning skills.

Recommendation for future research

The sample of the current study was small and was conducted at a private high school in Phnom Penh. A study on a larger scale and at other schools in Cambodia should be conducted. Students' motivation according to gender and students' motivation to learn other skills, like listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as grammar or vocabulary, should also be considered. Finally, qualitative and mixed-methods designs are highly recommended.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

We would like to declare that the study was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

