

## EXPLORING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND MOTIVATION IN LEARNING ENGLISH: A SURVEY OF NON - ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

*English language proficiency has become increasingly essential for non-English major students, both academically and professionally. This study investigates perception and motivation that drive non-English major students to learn English, the internal and external factors influencing their motivation, and the dominant factor motivating them to learn English. Using a cross-sectional survey design, data were collected through a structured questionnaire from undergraduate students at Program Studi Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan, Universitas Negeri Makassar. The findings reveal that intrinsic motivation such as enjoyment, curiosity, and satisfaction in learning; emerged as the dominant factor, with 95% of students expressing enjoyment in learning English. Extrinsic factors like academic performance, career prospects, and social expectations also significantly influenced motivation. Moreover, students generally perceived themselves as competent in understanding classroom content but showed lower confidence in communicative skills. Many reported autonomous behaviours, such as setting goals and practicing independently. These results underscore the importance of fostering both internal interest and practical application through engaging and supportive instruction. Future research is recommended to explore motivational changes over time and the impact of interactive learning environments on communicative competence.*

*Keywords: English Learning Motivation, Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, Learner Autonomy, Non-English Major Students.*

### INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, English has evolved into a vital medium for international communication across various fields, including education, science, business, and technology (Kurniawan, 2023; Pennycook, 2017; Santhosh, 2025). Its role as a global lingua franca positions it as more than just a subject in the curriculum, it becomes a gateway to global participation. As such, proficiency in English is increasingly valued not only in academic circles but also in the broader context of professional and personal development. In many countries, including Indonesia, the need for effective English language instruction continues to grow in response to these global demands.

Learning English as a foreign language (EFL), however, is a complex process that goes beyond mastering vocabulary and grammar (Daar, 2020). It involves cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions that influence how students engage with the language. Among these, motivation has long been recognized as one of the most critical factors



determining students' success in language learning (Tambunan & Siregar, 2016). Motivation affects how students set goals, manage their learning, and persist in the face of challenges. A highly motivated learner is more likely to take initiative, explore language independently, and invest effort consistently.

According to Safitri et al. (2025), in academic environments, mastering English skills is essential for students to engage with international scholarly resources, keep pace with ongoing scientific advancements, and participate meaningfully in academic discourse. In the context of higher education in Indonesia, English is taught as a compulsory subject to students from all disciplines, regardless of whether they major in English or not. For non-English majors, English is often perceived as an additional requirement rather than a meaningful skill to be developed. This perception can lead to a lack of engagement or even resistance, particularly when learning materials or classroom activities feel disconnected from students' academic or professional goals.

The reality is that many general English courses are designed generically, with minimal attention to the varied needs and motivations of students across different faculties. This disconnect between instructional content and learners' lived experiences often results in poor learning outcomes and limited language retention. For students who struggle to see the relevance of English to their personal or career aspirations, motivation tends to decline. Some may attend classes out of obligation rather than interest, while others may lack the confidence or support needed to pursue language learning meaningfully. These challenges highlight the importance of investigating students' motivations in a more systematic and context-specific way.

Although studies on English language motivation have been conducted globally, research focusing specifically on non-English major students in Indonesian universities remains limited. Some of the existing literature focus on English majors or secondary school learners, leaving a significant gap in understanding how students from other academic backgrounds approach English learning. Given that these students represent the majority in most higher education institutions, it is crucial to explore what motivates them, what challenges they face, and how instruction can be better tailored to support their language development.

This study responds to that need by exploring the motivation of non-English major students in learning English through a survey-based research design. This study seeks to investigate various dimensions of motivation, including intrinsic and extrinsic factors, perception on perceived competence, perception on relevance to academic and career goals, and learner autonomy. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights into students' attitudes and expectations, offering a foundation for more responsive and relevant English language instruction.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **a. Research Design**

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to explore the motivation of non-English major students in learning English. A cross-sectional design is suitable for obtaining data at a specific point in time, allowing researchers to identify current attitudes, perceptions, and motivational patterns without manipulating variables (Mills & Gay, 2016). This approach is commonly used in educational research to analyze relationships between constructs and to provide a snapshot of learners' psychological states, such as motivation, across a selected population.

### **b. Participants**



The participants in this study were 62 undergraduate students from Program Studi Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan at Universitas Negeri Makassar. These students were enrolled in a compulsory English course during the semester in which data collection took place. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, focusing on students who were non-English majors but were required to study English as part of their academic curriculum. This group was chosen to represent learners whose academic focus lies outside of language studies, yet who still face expectations to develop English competence for academic and professional growth.

#### c. Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to measure various dimensions of English learning motivation. The questionnaire included multiple sections that assessed seven motivational constructs, namely intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, perceived competence, classroom and teacher influence, relevance to academic and career goals, emotional response, as well as learner autonomy. Each construct was represented by several items written in the form of statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (5). The questionnaire was administered in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure clarity and accessibility for all participants.

## RESULTS

### Intrinsic Motivation

Students responses indicated that 95% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they learn English because they enjoy the process. Ninety-eight percent of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they feel excited when understanding something new in English. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they are curious to explore English language beyond what is taught in class. However, 32% of the respondents expressed neutral, either agreed or disagreed. In addressing students' intrinsic motivation, the result from the questionnaire showed a significant result of their intrinsic motivation. This is shown by the large number of students responded either agreed or strongly agreed, revealing that majority of students enjoyed and excited in learning English. Besides, students also were interested in learning English more than what they learnt in class. Therefore, this indicated that students were driven by their intrinsic motivation in learning English language.

**Table 1. Responses to Likert Items Related to Intrinsic Motivation**

	<b>Strongly Agree (5)</b>	<b>Agree (4)</b>	<b>Neutral (3)</b>	<b>Disagree (2)</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (1)</b>
I learn English because I enjoy the process of learning it	43%	52%	5%		
I feel excited when I understand something new in English	66%	32%	2%		
I am curious to explore English beyond what is taught in class	24%	44%	32%		

### Extrinsic Motivation

Eighty-five percent of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that getting academic grades drove them to learn English. Thirteen percent expressed neutral and two percent expressed disagree. Sixty-seven percent either agreed or strongly agreed that their family members and/or people around were expecting them to master English skills.



Meanwhile, 31% of the students expressed neutral and 2% strongly disagree. Ninety-three percent either agreed or strongly agreed that mastering English skills can lead to better career opportunities. The remaining seven percent expressed neutral, means either agreed or disagreed. The results indicated that non-English major students were significantly influenced by external motivational factors in their English learning.

**Table 2. Responses to Likert Items Related to Extrinsic Motivation**

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
I want to learn English to get better academic grades	43%	42%	13%	2%	
My family and/or my surroundings expect me to be good at English	22%	45%	31%		2%
I believe mastering English will help me to get a better job in the future	64%	29%	7%		

### Perceived Competence

Ninety percent of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the success in learning English is achievable through hard work. The remaining two percent expressed neutral. Eighty-one percent either agreed or strongly agreed that they are able to grasp most of the content taught in English lessons. Nineteen percent expressed neutral on this statement. Fifty percent of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they can communicate confidently in simple English dialogue. Meanwhile, 45% of the students expressed neutral, and the remaining five percent expressed disagree. The findings reveal that the students generally possess a positive sense of perceived competence in learning English, particularly in relation to effort, comprehension, and to some extent, communication.

**Table 3. Responses to Likert Items Related to Perceived Competence**

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
I believe I can succeed in learning English if I try hard	58%	40%	2%		
I understand most of what is taught in English class	15%	66%	19%		
I am confident using English in simple conversations	11%	39%	45%	5%	

### Relevance to Academic and Career Goals

Eighty-nine percent of the respondent either agreed or strongly agreed that English holds significant value for future activities. The remaining 11% of the respondents expressed neutral. Eighty-seven percent either agreed or strongly agreed that various careers demand proficiency in English. Thirteen percent of the respondents expressed neutral. These results demonstrate that non-English major students strongly recognize the relevance of English language proficiency to their academic and professional aspirations.

**Table 4. Responses to Likert Items Related to Relevance to Academic and Career Goals**

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
English is a valuable skill for my future	44%	45%	11%		



Many fields of work require English language skills	47%	40%	13%		
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Autonomy in Learning

Seventy-six percent of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they take initiative to practice English outside the classroom environment. The remaining 24% expressed neutral. Sixty-six percent either agreed or strongly agreed that they set personal goals to help structure their English learning journey. This indicates that a considerable number of students demonstrate a sense of autonomy in their English learning process.

Table 5. Responses to Likert Items Related to Autonomy in Learning

	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
I try to improve my English skills outside the classroom	15%	61%	24%		
I set personal goals for learning English	18%	48%	32%	2%	

DISCUSSION

Students’ Perception of Learning Experience and Perceived Competence in English Class

The findings of this study reveal that non-English major students generally perceive their learning experiences in English classes positively, particularly in terms of cognitive engagement and perceived competence. A significant 90% of respondents concurred that hard work is the key to success in learning English, demonstrating a strong growth attitude and self-efficacy. This implies that pupils think their own work is crucial to learning a language. Additionally, 81% of respondents expressed that they are able to comprehend most of the material presented during English lessons, indicating a foundational understanding of academic English content. These significant results indicate that students experienced positive emotions in their English class. In line to this finding, current studies have acknowledged that positive emotions is one of the factors which can enhance students’ engagement and more likely increasing students’ intrinsic motivation (Fathi et al., 2023; Li & Zhang, 2024; Pawlak et al., 2022; Song, 2024). Therefore, this study suggests that lecturers or English teachers provide a supportive environment to promote students’ positive emotions during the English lessons, leading to increased intrinsic motivation.

However, when it comes to practical communication, students exhibited a more varied response. Only 50% of students reported confidence in engaging in simple English conversations, while 45% responded neutrally and 5% disagreed. This discrepancy between academic comprehension and communicative confidence highlights an important area for pedagogical focus. While students appear capable of processing and understanding classroom material, some continue to struggle with spontaneous or applied language use. Therefore, adding more communicative exercises that mimic real-world usage and progressively increase students’ confidence in spoken English may be beneficial for future instruction. Related to this finding, a study by Namaziandost et al. (2024) revealed that academic engagement plays a significant role in enhancing students’ willingness to communicate. Students who participate in academic activities, especially in interactive learning environments, feel more connected and like they belong, which motivates them to take part in communicative tasks more actively.





### **Internal and External Factors on Students' Motivation to Learn English**

Students' motivation to learn English was found to be influenced by both internal and external factors. The data indicated that intrinsic motivation plays a dominant role, as evidenced by 95% of students stating that they enjoy the process of learning English. Enjoyment, curiosity, and the personal satisfaction derived from understanding new material were strong motivational components. In particular, 98% of the participants reported feelings of excitement when comprehending new aspects of the English language, and 68% expressed curiosity to explore English beyond what is taught in class. These results suggest that intrinsic motivation among the respondents is not only present but robust, supporting the idea that many students are engaged with English learning because of its inherent appeal and personal relevance.

In addition to intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivators also significantly influenced students' learning behaviour. A large portion (85%) agreed that achieving good academic grades served as a motivator. Meanwhile, 67% of students felt motivated by expectations from their family or social circles, and 93% strongly linked English proficiency to better career prospects. These findings suggest that while students enjoy learning English, they are also driven by external incentives such as academic achievement, social pressure, and professional advancement. This dual presence of internal and external motivation highlights the multifaceted nature of language learning among non-English majors and calls for a balanced pedagogical approach that supports both enjoyment and goal attainment.

### **The Dominant Factor Motivating Students to Learn English**

Among the various dimensions explored in this study, intrinsic motivation emerged as the most reliable and common factor influencing English learning among non-English major students. The enjoyment of learning itself, reported by 95% of the students, as well as the excitement of discovering new knowledge (98%) and curiosity to explore beyond the syllabus (68%) illustrate that many learners are genuinely engaged. This aligns with findings from prior research, such as Nguyen & Habók (2021), which demonstrated that intrinsic interest and the perceived value of English learning strongly influenced Vietnamese non-English-major students' motivation and commitment. The study by Dang et al. (2021) also highlighted the dominance of intrinsic motivation towards students' English learning as the students have acknowledged the significant role of English. Accordingly, Burton et al. (2006) mentioned intrinsic motivation in education has been associated to greater academic accomplishment and a more positive sense of wellbeing. Therefore, lecturers or English teachers should prioritize instructional strategies that cultivate and sustain students' intrinsic motivation. This includes creating engaging, meaningful, and personally relevant learning experiences that emphasize curiosity, autonomy, and a sense of accomplishment.

While intrinsic motivation stood out, the results also demonstrated that extrinsic motivation remains a significant contributor to students' learning efforts. Career prospects (93%) and academic performance (85%) were key motivators, with social expectations (67%) also playing a substantial role. In line with this, students showed a clear understanding of the relevance of English in academic and professional contexts, with 89% acknowledging its future importance and 87% recognizing its necessity across various career fields. These findings indicate that students view English learning as not only enjoyable but also instrumental for their success, thereby reinforcing the importance of addressing both internal interest and external aspirations in the design of English language instruction.

Lastly, the study revealed notable signs of learner autonomy among participants. A majority of students (76%) reported actively practicing English outside the classroom, and 66% confirmed setting personal goals to guide their learning. These behaviours reflect a self-regulated approach to language acquisition and suggest that many students are taking ownership of their progress. This insight is particularly important for educators, as fostering



autonomy can sustain long-term engagement and success. Creating learning environments that allow for choice, exploration, and self-directed learning may further encourage students to remain committed to developing their English proficiency.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study highlights that non-English major students generally demonstrate a strong motivation to learn English, with intrinsic factors emerging as the most dominant drivers. Enjoyment, curiosity, and excitement about learning indicate that many students find English personally meaningful, which significantly contributes to their sustained engagement. At the same time, extrinsic motivators such as academic performance, career aspirations, and social expectations, also play a key role in shaping their learning behaviours. While students report confidence in understanding classroom content, many remain hesitant in practical communication, suggesting the need for more interactive and real-life speaking opportunities. Moreover, the findings show encouraging signs of learner autonomy, as students actively take initiative beyond formal instruction. These insights underscore the importance of creating a supportive, engaging, and autonomy-friendly learning environment that nurtures both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. By aligning instruction with students' personal interests and professional goals, educators can enhance both language proficiency and long-term motivation.

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