

# **English learning motivating and demotivating factors among post-socialist Mongolia's future English teachers**

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## **ABSTRACT**

A declining number of credit hours of English courses for English-majoring students at the National University of Mongolia lead teachers and students to focus on effective English education and what factors would affect it within credit hours allowed at the university. Meanwhile, English teaching class hours in Mongolian secondary schools have been increasing for the last few years, due to the national interest in learning English, resulting in a greater demand for English teachers. This study investigated the motivation of Mongolian English-majoring students towards learning English and the factors affecting them to be demotivated. A total of 20 students majoring in English teaching at the National University of Mongolia, Erdenet School of the 2019/2020 academic year completed the questionnaire on English learning motivation and attended focus group interviews. The findings showed that the students had instrumental orientation and demonstrated a strong desire to learn English. However, they felt demotivated by their teachers' and classmates' attitudes and living situations. The researcher recommends that the students and the teachers create a conducive environment in the classroom, where the students can feel comfortable despite making mistakes, and also suggests other practical takeaways given this post-socialist English learning environment.

**Keywords:** *Learning motivation; Instrumental motivation; Integrative motivation; Demotivation; Internal factors; External factors*

## **1. Introduction**

English language knowledge lists at 21<sup>st</sup> (US) and 34<sup>th</sup> (UK) among 120 skills the Nesta report considers important for future demand in occupations (Bakhshi, Downing, Osborne, & Schneider, 2017). This high rank predicts the development in science, technology, and social areas will be done and delivered or introduced in English. There is no doubt that English is served as a tool not only in communication to break any potential barriers among the nations where people speak their own languages as the mother tongue, but also in exploring various knowledge and sciences developed by numerous scientists across nations (Tulung, 2020).

Mongolia, landlocked between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, was a premier Socialist country before 1990 when its democratic revolution shifted the nation to democracy. Such a political and social situation led Mongolians to rapidly develop foreign relations beyond Russia. Nationally, they shifted attention beyond Russia to study English. English has been one of the most important subjects in Mongolian schools since its teaching began in the 1992-1993 academic year.

A further change to English language education was implemented with the victory of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) in the national election of 2000 (Cohen, 2004). The newly elected parliament drafted a white paper stating that English should receive further emphasis in the education system. This resulted from Mongolia's integration with the world economy, the rise of tourism, and the overall benefits of studying the primary international language. Since the 2005/2006 academic year, the Mongolian government mandated that whenever possible, students should begin studying English in the fourth grade, and all should continue studying it through the then newly added eleventh grade (Shagdarsuren & Davaasuren, 2017).

Required English credit hours in Mongolian public schools have steadily increased. Shagdarsuren and Davaasuren (2017) estimated that English class hours at the secondary school level had increased from 655 to 700 for 6-7 years and reached 840 hours of English lesson in 2008. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Science, and Sports (MECSS) of Mongolia then declared a further increase in English class hours for secondary schools. For 5<sup>th</sup> graders, this increased by 99 academic hours (Ministry of Education and Science (MES), 2014). For 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> graders, this increased by 420 hours (Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (MECSS), 2015). For the upper-secondary level, or 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades, it increased by 387 hours. These totaled an increase of up to 906 hours of required English classes. The students might also add up to 9 credit hours of electives, a total of up to 387 additional hours (MECSS, 2016). In secondary schools, the normal workload of English teachers in Mongolia, determined by the Ministry, is 19 hours per week. The academic year continues for 33 weeks, which makes it 627 hours per English teacher. Given the Ministry's high credit requirements for students and large workloads for current teachers in Mongolia, English, as the new foreign language, has created a huge demand for English teachers in the job market. Consequently, many students feel encouraged to major in English teaching.

The National University of Mongolia (NUM) and the Mongolian State University of Education are Mongolia's public institutions that prepare English teachers. The NUM, Erdenet School operates in a rural area and is the sole public university in the Khangai Region offering an undergraduate English teaching program. The students studying at this program come from Mongolia's Khangai and central regions, across 11 provinces. Approximately, 22 students graduate every year and work in these regions (National University of Mongolia (NUM), 2020).

Before 2014, the English teaching program at Erdenet School consisted of 80 credit hours in English courses, a total of 64% of the 125 total credits. Then, the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (MECSS, 2014) decreed that the students in bachelor's degree programs had to pass standardized tests with an upper-intermediate level of English to graduate. Additionally, a 4-year bachelor's program's minimum of 120 credit hours had to include 30% compulsory courses of general education, within which 6 credit hours of English, and 70% courses of the students' majors. This was a huge decline in the number of courses and credit hours of English. The Ministry's decision applied to NUM had affected all the students' degree requirements, including that of the English teaching program (MECSS, 2019). As a result, English credit hours for English teaching majors dropped to 51, or 42.5% of the 120 total credits.

Within this contradicting situation, in which English teachers' demand is high but English course hours at universities are decreasing, English teaching majors' motivating and demotivating factors take the spotlight. The researcher considers the motivation of English-majoring students' toward learning English ought to be higher than that of students of other majors. This study sought to answer two main research questions: "Is the motivation orientation of the students of English teaching major to learn English integrative or instrumental?" and "What are the motivating and demotivating factors affecting the students of English teaching major to learn English?".

## **2. Literature review**

Motivation has taken many definitions. Maslow (1943) defines motivation within a hierarchy of needs including self-actualization, esteem, love and belonging, safety needs, and physiological needs. Gray and Klapper (2009) offer the role of affective factors, emphasizing motivation as among the most important of four essential elements: understanding language acquisition, learning styles, affective factors, being involved in shaping the courses to learn and teach English. Gardner (2007) explains that motivation affects second language acquisition, wherein specific motivation exists toward language classes and situations of learning another language. Student motivation affects students' attitudes toward learning (Afzal, Ali, Khan, & Hamid, 2010; Dornyei, 2018). In addition, William and Burden (1997) define motivation as a state of cognitive and emotional arousal leading to a conscious decision to act. This gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to attain set goals.

The researcher focuses on how Gardner and Lambert (1972) divide motivation into two categories, integrative and instrumental motivation. Motivation and orientation are related by a collection of reasons that reflect common or conceptually similar goals (Gardner, 2001). Instrumental orientation is the purpose of language study that reflects the more utilitarian value of linguistic achievements, such as getting ahead in one's occupation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). In contrast, integrative orientation encompasses students' wishes to learn more about another cultural community because of open-minded interests, to the point of eventually being accepted as a member of that group (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

Motivation is a base factor affecting students' academic performance at the university level (Klimova, 2011; Chen, 2014; Ozuturk & Hursen, 2014). Motivation to do something is influenced by a range of factors, some of which are internal and some external. (William & Burden, 1997). Zanghar (2012), who studied undergraduate Libyan students majoring in English, had unusual findings. While the students had both high instrumental and integrative motivation, the integrative motivation appeared slightly higher than the instrumental one, and the students' motivation had no relationship with their academic achievement. William and Burden (1997) offer a motivation model that reflects the dynamic interaction between internal and external variables, where learners act based on the factors surrounding them.

Dornyei and Ushioda (2011) describe the factors affecting motivation and demotivation. They define demotivating factors as "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivational basis of a behavioral intention or an ongoing action" (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011, p. 140). In other words, demotivation encompasses when students have no interest or intention to learn. Ali and Pathan (2017) found the factors of demotivation in the students and also listed grammar-based teaching, classroom environment, the effect of low test scores, teachers' behavior, course contents and teaching materials, lack of self-confidence and interest as the other factors. Dornyei (1998) revealed the factors affecting demotivation among 50 students by interviewing them for 10-30 minutes. The factors included teachers, reduced self-confidence, inadequate school facilities, negative attitudes toward L2, the compulsory nature of L2, interference of another language, negative attitudes towards the L2 community, attitudes of group members, and the course book. According to Chambers (1993), teachers can be among the most demotivating factors for students to learn English. Kikuchi and Sakai (2009) surveyed 112 learners of English from universities in Japan. They identified demotivating factors such as course books, inadequate school facilities, test scores, non-communicative methods, and teachers' competence and teaching styles in their questionnaire. Jung (2011) also conducted a survey among Korean college students about the demotivating factors and found out that, in general, the external factors were more involved in the demotivation process for the students.

Given this background of motivating and demotivating factors, the researcher investigated how these results would manifest in post-Socialist Mongolia. Particularly,

the researcher studied the students of English teaching majors, who might become Mongolia's future teachers.

### 3. Method

This study employed a mixed-method research design involving 20 undergraduate students (18 to 24 years old) studying to be English teachers at the National University of Mongolia (NUM), Erdenet School, Mongolia. Among 20 participants involved in this study, 4 were male and 16 were female students, and 16 were sophomores and 4 were seniors. According to Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, and Turner (2007), mixed-method research is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research elements.

Mixed-method research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e. g., “use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration” (Johnson *et al.*, 2007, p. 123).

By employing this mixed methods research, the researcher believes that the data collected in this study are rich and cover both sides: from direct input through a survey and from the participants' voices through a focus group discussion.

#### 3.1. Instruments and procedure

##### 3.1.1. Questionnaire

The researcher surveyed the students at the end of the first term of the 2019/2020 academic year. The researcher used MINI-AMTB, an adapted version of the questionnaire Attitude Motivation Test Battery, developed by Gardner (2004). Although the participants majored in English teaching, the researcher translated the questionnaire into Mongolian, as the participants' first language is Mongolian. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part collected demographic information (e.g., age, gender, academic year), and the second one consisted of 12 items, asking about interest in foreign language, motivational intensity, English class anxiety, English teacher evaluation, attitudes toward learning English, attitudes toward English-speaking people, desire to learn English, English course evaluation, English use anxiety, and integrative and instrumental orientation.

For each statement, the participants rated on a scale of 1-7 (scale 1 included weak, unfavorable, very little, and low, whereas scale 7 included strong, favorable, very much, and high (Table 1)). Before the participants started answering, the researcher reminded them not to worry and to feel relaxed to deliver their answers based on their opinion and evaluation.

#### Table 1

Content of the questionnaire.

Question to discover	Items in the questionnaire	Rating
Integrative orientation	My motivation to learn English in order to communicate with English speaking people is:	Weak_1:_2:_3:_4:_5:_6:_7 Strong
Attitudes toward English-speaking people	My attitude toward English speaking people is	Unfavorable_1:_2:_3:_4:_5:_6:_7 Favorable
Interest in a foreign language	My interest in foreign languages is	Very low_1:_2:_3:_4:_5:_6:_7 Very high
Desire to learn English	My desire to learn English is	Weak_1:_2:_3:_4:_5:_6:_7 Strong
Attitudes toward Learning English	My attitude toward learning English is	Unfavorable_1:_2:_3:_4:_5:_6:_7 Favorable
English Teacher Evaluation	My attitude toward my English teacher is	Unfavorable_1:_2:_3:_4:_5:_6:_7 Favorable
Instrumental orientation	My motivation to learn English for practical purposes (e.g., to get a good job) is	Weak_1:_2:_3:_4:_5:_6:_7 Strong
English use Anxiety	I worry about speaking English outside of class	Very little_1:_2:_3:_4:_5:_6:_7 Very much
English course evaluation	My attitude toward my English course is	Unfavorable_1:_2:_3:_4:_5:_6:_7 Favorable
English class anxiety	I worry about speaking in my English class	Very little_1:_2:_3:_4:_5:_6:_7 Very much
Motivational intensity	My motivation to learn English is	Very low_1:_2:_3:_4:_5:_6:_7 Very high
Parental encouragement	My parents encourage me to learn English	Very little_1:_2:_3:_4:_5:_6:_7 Very much

### 3.1.2. Focus group interview

In the second part of the study, on the same day after the questionnaire, the researcher conducted a focus group interview in Mongolian with the same participants, consisting of 4 male and 15 female students. The interview aimed to find out the participants' opinions on the significance of English, the reasons of studying English, the common factors affecting motivation and demotivation in learning English, and the

possible changes that would occur if they acquired English to an advanced level. The researcher asked the following questions in Mongolian:

- A. What is the significance of English?
- B. Why are you studying English?
- C. What are your internal and external demotivating factors toward learning English?
- D. What outcomes do you expect after learning English?
- E. Do you believe the attitudes of other people will change if you learn English well?

The first two questions were warm-ups, to ease the participants into the important questions. The third item was the key focus group question, whereas items 4 and 5 were the follow-up questions.

The researcher, who is a Mongolian, conducted the focus group as the moderator. The researcher prepared the classroom and seats in advance (Krueger & Casey, 2015). In order to create a warm and relaxed atmosphere, the researcher explained the interview goal and asked the participants to feel free to express their opinions, thoughts, and real conditions they encountered in school. The moderator conducted the interview and started with warm-up questions to lead the interview to the follow-up questions about demotivating factors. The moderator also took notes and recorded the interview. The moderator then asked the participants to respond to the questions one by one and to take turns. The focus group interview lasted for 60 minutes.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Questionnaire

The researcher conducted the questionnaire reliability analysis using the IBM SPSS v.23 program and calculated means, standard deviations, and other statistics. The questionnaire results are presented in Table 2 and Figure 1 in the following.

**Table 2**

Descriptive statistics.

	N	Range	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation	
	Statistics	Statistics	Statistics	Statistics	Statistics	Std. Error	Statistics
<b>Integrative orientation</b>	20	5.00	2.00	7.00	5.3500	.34240	1.53125
<b>Attitudes toward English-speaking people</b>	20	5.00	2.00	7.00	5.1000	.33950	1.51831
<b>Interest in foreign</b>	20	4.00	3.00	7.00	5.00	.3244	1.45095

<b>language</b>					00	4	
<b>Desire to learn English</b>	20	4.00	3.00	7.00	5.95	.2853	1.27630
<b>Attitudes toward Learning English</b>	20	6.00	1.00	7.00	4.65	.3101	1.38697
<b>English teacher Evaluation</b>	20	6.00	1.00	7.00	4.75	.3760	1.68195
<b>Instrumental orientation</b>	20	4.00	3.00	7.00	5.90	.2282	1.02084
<b>English use Anxiety</b>	20	6.00	1.00	7.00	4.30	.4478	2.00263
<b>English course evaluation</b>	20	5.00	2.00	7.00	5.00	.2901	1.29777
<b>English class Anxiety</b>	20	5.00	1.00	6.00	3.80	.4267	1.90843
<b>Motivational intensity</b>	20	5.00	2.00	7.00	5.50	.3120	1.39548
<b>Parental encouragement</b>	20	6.00	1.00	7.00	5.70	.3845	1.71985

Table 2 shows the students' instrumental orientation (5.900) and integrative orientation (5.300) are high. But the difference between the two orientations is 0.600. In other words, the students have higher instrumental motivation than integrative orientation. The mean of "Desire to learn English" item is the highest, at 5.9500. The lowest items scored are "English use anxiety" (4.3000) and "English class anxiety" (3.8000). Furthermore, "Parental encouragement" and "Motivational intensity" are also rather high.

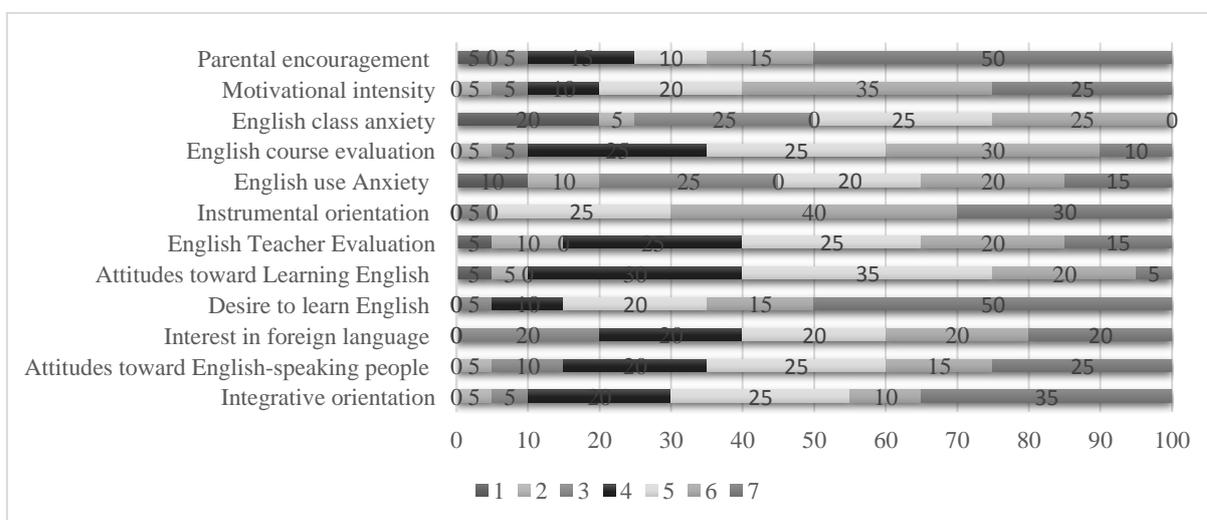


Figure 1. Questionnaire results by percent.

#### 4.2. Focus group interview

The researcher explains the interview results below, in accordance with the focus group interview items list. For the first question, the students commented on English being an important language and means of communication to receive information, to travel and live abroad, to learn and get educated, and to socialize.

The second question was “Why are you studying English?” and the students responded that they learned English since it was their major, so they took compulsory courses. Also, English is a world language and their parents demanded that they study English. They also added that all the scientific and professional documents and materials were written in English. For the key item of the interview, the students gave answers related to the teachers’ and other students’ attitudes. The researcher translated these from Mongolian to English.

Teachers’ attitudes make me stop studying English. Sometimes they say you cannot graduate as English teachers.

Sometimes teachers get frustrated when we don’t get the lesson.

When I read or pronounce some words wrong, some students giggle, and I feel uncomfortable.

Moreover, the students replied that they felt demotivated because of the school and other environments.

We are not allowed to stay at school after six o’clock in the evening.

The period for checking out course books [from the library] is not long enough. We have to return them quickly. And this demotivates me.

I have a family, and my baby is young. Thus, when I get home, I have no time and place to study.

I stay at my relatives’. Thus, it is difficult to study because I am the one responsible to do the chores at home.

For the internal factors, the students stated the following.

I have different wishes. For example, I prefer playing basketball rather than practicing English.

I think I don’t have good time management.

I feel lazy and inactive.

I feel ashamed when other students speak English fluently and do well in English.

For the follow-up item 4, the students answered they would be able to reach their goals of travelling, studying abroad, getting better jobs, working abroad, and being self-confident and sociable.

For question 5, the students felt other people would respect them and give them more attention if they learned English well.

When I work as an English teacher at a secondary school, I will get respected more by students.

I will be a role model for other people because I have perfect English.

I will work and live in a great environment, surrounded by better people.

## **5. Discussion**

The researcher investigated Mongolian students' motivation toward learning English and the factors demotivating them, particularly to determine whether English-majoring students have had instrumental or integrative orientation. The questionnaire results showed the students' motivation was more instrumentally oriented than integrated. In other words, the pragmatic reasons to learn English seem common among Mongolian students majoring in English teaching.

In Mongolia, the demand for English teachers in the labor market has been increasing lately because the total hours of English classes in secondary education have increased nationwide. Furthermore, private schools have opened that offer and teach English as a foreign language from the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. Thus, the researcher interprets that these findings—parental encouragement of learning English, students' interests in a foreign language and desire to learn English—might be related to Mongolia's unique social circumstances. Likewise, since the students have chosen their careers as English teachers, their desires and interests in English as instrumental orientation relates to their goals.

Additionally, one of the lowest mean items of the questionnaire was English class anxiety, which means the students feel rather confident when speaking English in class. But the students' English use anxiety was higher, which reveals the students' worry about their use of English outside of classes. Mongolia lacks English speaking situations, and the students struggle to find real-life situations to speak English daily, outside community and school clubs and events that offer English practice.

The focus group interview revealed the factors demotivating the students could be internal and external. The researcher divides the external factors affecting the motivation of learning English into the teachers' attitudes and the school and classroom environment. Previous studies showed that the teacher factor is one of the important factors demotivating the students (Ali & Pathan, 2017). As for the school and classroom

environment, as Ali and Pathan (2017), Dornyei and Ushioda (2011), and Kikuchi and Sakai (2009) have mentioned, school or classroom environments affect students as well.

Significant differences from related studies included that the students did not give answers related to teaching materials (Ali & Pathan, 2017) or course books (Dornyei, 1998). The researcher observed that the living conditions were one of the special demotivating factors for the students interviewed. It is common for the students not only to stay at the university dormitory or rent a flat with other students but also to stay with their relatives during their university years. This is because the students usually enroll from different provinces in Mongolia. When the students stay with their relatives, they may remain in Mongolian-language environments, which limit their English competence and may decrease their motivation toward learning English. Most of the students at Erdenet School are female. Some students who are mothers and also participated in the focus group interview said their babies prevented them from practicing and studying English. Moreover, other students' attitudes seemed to be one of the important demotivating factors for them. For instance, some students hesitate to speak or practice English when the other students correct their mistakes or giggle when they make mistakes.

For the internal factors, the researcher considers some accounts. These include the students' wishes, goal settings, learning, and cognitive styles, the formation of characters, upbringing, and self-confidence and psychological conditions. The students mentioned the internal motivating factors of being accepted, respected, and appreciated as rather important to them because of the impression that society favors good English speakers. English-majoring students have also a high need for esteem (Maslow, 1943). This may be resulted from Mongolians' high appreciation and respect toward teachers and people with advanced English knowledge.

## **6. Conclusion and recommendations**

The study aimed to investigate the motivation orientation toward learning English among English-majoring students at the National University of Mongolia, Erdenet School, and the factors leading to demotivation toward learning English, particularly within the Mongolia's context.

The findings from the questionnaire and focus group interview showed that English-majoring students have had a higher instrumental orientation than an integrative orientation toward learning English, both because they have already chosen the program as their future profession and because English teachers' demand in Mongolia has been increasing. Moreover, their parents' encouragement and desire for them to learn English have also been strong.

Some demotivating factors included their teachers' attitudes and their school environment. The students also responded with significantly different factors what affected their learning English motivation, including living conditions and classmates' attitudes.

The researcher recommends English teachers pay attention to their attitudes toward the students, classroom behaviors, atmosphere, and organization of the lessons. Especially in Mongolia, the students and the teachers should work together to create a safe space environment in the classroom, wherein the students will feel more comfortable when making mistakes. The teachers should also provide real-life situations in class, in which the students can practice English more. Further, the researcher suggests that school administrators consider making library services more flexible. Clubs, training, and seminars designed to develop the students personally and academically should be run and organized more often at the university.

## 7. Limitations

This study provided some results on the motivation of English-majoring students towards learning English and the factors demotivating them. Nonetheless, the study only surveyed the students of one university of one major. Therefore, the results may not be generalized to other English-majoring students in Mongolia. Additionally, although the study was conducted on all English major students at the university, the university's student population was quite small. Therefore, the sample size was also small, thus a limited scope.

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