Quality Education: A Study on the Factors Influencing Enjoyment of Learning English among Higher Educational Institution Students

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Abstract

In today's interconnected world, mastering English holds immense importance due to its pervasive use. Higher education institutions globally prioritize English proficiency for academic and career success. However, learning a second language, like English, presents challenges impacting motivation. This paper examines factors influencing students' enjoyment of learning English in higher education, encompassing instructional quality, material relevance, challenge level, social context, and personal traits. Intrinsic enjoyment, rooted in Maslow's hierarchy, significantly boosts motivation, engagement, and education quality. The research explores these factors via qualitative methods, spotlighting intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. Findings emphasize the role of a clear learning purpose, including social communication needs, career prospects, and intercultural literacy. Teachers play a vital role in shaping enjoyment through effective strategies and supportive environments. Enhancing English-speaking opportunities and teaching methods also heightens enjoyment. This research underscores the critical link between enjoyment and language learning motivation, guiding higher education institutions to create quality teaching environments. It bridges gaps and lays a foundation for enhancing students' English learning enjoyment in higher education.

Keywords: *English language learning, higher education, motivation, teaching strategies, quality education.*

1. Introduction

Learning English has become increasingly important in today's globalized world, where English is widely used as a medium of communication in various fields (Rao, 2019). Higher educational institutions in many countries have recognized the importance of English language proficiency for their students' academic and career success (Rose et al., 2020). However, learning a second language like English can be challenging, and students may face various obstacles that affect their motivation to learn.

This paper mainly explores the factors that affect students' enjoyment of English learning in higher education institutions. Enjoyment in this research refers to the positive emotional experience that students have when learning English as a second language. It is a subjective feeling that arises when students find the learning experience pleasurable,

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interesting, and engaging (Dewaele & Li, 2021). Enjoyment of learning English can result from various factors, such as the quality of instruction, the relevance of the material, the level of challenge, the social context of learning, and the students' personal characteristics and preferences (Chu et al., 2021). Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, enjoyment as an intrinsic factor can have a great impact on individuals' motivation (Ibrahim & Nat, 2019). Students who enjoy learning a language are more likely to engage in the learning process, put in greater effort, and achieve better learning outcomes (Bai & Wang, 2023). Therefore, it is crucial to explore the factors that contribute to students' enjoyment of learning English as a second language. By investigating these factors, the study aims to provide insights into how higher education institutions can create a positive learning environment that fosters enjoyment and promotes students' motivation to learn English. This is in line with SDG 4's target 4.1 from 2015, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all (United Nations [UN], Target 4.1).

2. Research Objective

This research endeavors to comprehensively explore and elucidate the intricate dynamics underlying students' enjoyment of learning English within higher education. By delving deeply into the multifaceted factors shaping positive emotional experiences during the English language learning journey, this study aims to illuminate the nuanced elements contributing to the cultivation of this sense of enjoyment. Thus, the research objective is as follows.

RO: To investigate the factors influencing students' enjoyment of learning English in the higher education context.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Methods

This research adopted the form of interview and started with semi-open-ended questions to explore the factors affecting the respondents' enjoyment of English learning which can be interpreted from the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation perspective (Daramola, 2021). The first question primarily reveals the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation factors that influence the enjoyment of English learning. The second to fourth questions dig into the internal and external reasons for the existence of these factors, and the fifth question explores other factors that exist in English learning.

3.2. Data Collection Method

The respondents included 15 participants comprising eight female students and seven male students, who are currently taking English language courses in their schools to prepare for their next formal admission. The sample respondents were drawn from different socio-economic and cultural contexts to ensure a well- represented student population. Interviews were conducted in English. Each interview took around six to eight minutes. The interviews were recorded using Tencent Meeting and WeChat applications, with the consent of the participants.

3.3. Data Analysis Method

This paper used a qualitative research method to analyze the responses. It began by reviewing the data and identifying patterns that emerged from the participants' responses. The responses were then grouped into themes based on the research questions. Each theme was examined in detail to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perceptions and motivations related to their enjoyment of learning English. Through this analysis, the researchers were able to identify common factors that influenced students' enjoyment of learning English.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation to English Learning

In Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, intrinsic needs refer to needs that are innate and internally motivated, such as the need for self-esteem, self-actualization, and personal growth. Extrinsic needs, on the other hand, refer to needs that are externally motivated, such as the need for material possessions, social status, and power (Liao et al., 2022).

When it comes to English language learning, intrinsic motivation can be fostered by creating a supportive and engaging learning environment (Lin & Wang, 2021). This can include providing opportunities for students to explore their interests, encouraging self-directed learning, and providing meaningful and relevant tasks and activities. Therefore, when students feel that they have autonomy and control over their learning, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to engage in the process. In this research, Intrinsic motivation is mainly showed from students' English learning purpose and learning environment. Extrinsic motivation can also be a valuable tool for language learning, particularly when it comes to goal setting and achievement (Asrial et al., 2019). Setting clear goals and providing feedback on progress can help students stay motivated and focused on their learning. Therefore, the role of teacher plays an important part in extrinsic motivation to learning English.

4.2 Enjoyment and Motivation

Based on the theory above, enjoyment of learning can be considered a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, as it is motivated and linked to higher-order needs, such as self-actualization, personal growth and, social status (Bradshaw et al., 2021). Previous research has consistently found that enjoyment has a positive influence on students' motivation to learn English (Gamlo, 2019; Lee & Lee, 2021; Subakthiasih & Putri, 2020). Students who enjoy learning English are more likely to be motivated, engage in autonomous learning behaviors, and achieve higher academic performance. A study by Zohdijalal (2021) examined the impact of enjoyment on Iranian EFL learners' motivation. The study found that enjoyment had a significant positive effect on students' motivation, particularly on their intrinsic motivation to learn. Compared to intrinsic motivation, Cheng et al (2023) suggest that setting goals can provide a clear direction for learners, and the achievement of goals can act as an extrinsic motivator that promotes continued effort and engagement in the learning process. Therefore, extrinsic motivation, particularly in the form of goal setting and achievement, can be a valuable tool for promoting language learning among students. Rajanthran et al. (2023) recommend implementing High-Impact Educational Practices (HIPs) in primary education to enhance classroom self-management, student engagement, and academic success.

4.3 Factors Influencing Enjoyment of English Learning

The studies mentioned above have confirmed enjoyment has some impact on students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of learning English, with some limitations. They do not delve into the ultimate causes that affect enjoyment of learning English. Therefore, further research is necessary to investigate the various factors that influence students' enjoyment in learning English. In recent years, some research on the factors affecting enjoyment of English learning is evident. A study by Zhang et al (2022) investigated the influence of the teaching environment on Chinese university students' English learning enjoyment, which found that the quality of the learning environment, including factors such as class size, teaching materials, and technology, had a significant impact on students' enjoyment of learning English. Similarly, Teng and Wang (2021) explored the impact of the teacher on Chinese university students' English learning enjoyment. The study found that teacher-student interactions, teaching methods, and the teacher's attitude towards teaching all had a significant influence on students' enjoyment of learning English. As for purpose of English learning, Wang and Guan (2020) examined the

relationship between students' motivation and their purpose for learning English, which found students who had a clear purpose for learning English, such as for career advancement or personal development, were more likely to enjoy learning English. All the above studies are closely related to the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors that influence English learning.

5. Gaps

While previous research has established the positive impact of enjoyment on students' motivation to learn English, there is a need to investigate the various factors that influence enjoyment of learning English among higher educational institution students and whether there are other influencing factors still need to be further explored (Zhou et al., 2022). Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining the factors that influence enjoyment of learning English among higher educational institution students.

6. Findings

6.1 Purpose

6.1.1 Social communication Needs

According to the feedback of the interviewees, it can be clearly concluded that most of the interviewed students showed a strong sense of purpose in English learning. Based on the results of the interview, most of the students mentioned the following aspects: 'Enjoying speaking English with friends and teachers', 'Learning about different cultures', 'Improving job prospects', 'Improving communication skills' 'Broadening their horizons….'. Feraco et al (2023) found that having a clear purpose for learning English, such as improving job prospects or developing intercultural competence, was positively associated with motivation and achievement in language learning. According to the views of the interviewees, six respondents think that learning English helps to make friends and communicate with foreigners. This shows that socialization has a significant impact on students' enjoyment of learning English. Language learning is a social activity and students' interaction with their peers affects their motivation to learn and ultimately their enjoyment of the learning process (Papi & Hiver, 2020). Socialization is an important factor in students' enjoyment of English language learning. By creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment that creates meaningful and relevant opportunities for students to use language and promotes positive social interaction. This can help increase student engagement, motivation, and enjoyment of the learning process.

6.1.2 Career Prospects Needs

Career prospects can affect a student's enjoyment of learning English. Many students choose to study English because of the potential career opportunities it can provide. According to the views of the interviewees, four respondents think that learning English helps to get more opportunities to study and work. Career prospects can play a role in how students learn English. It can help increase motivation and engagement by making the connection between language learning and career goals clear and relevant (Ryan & Deci, 2020). By doing so, students may be more likely to see the value of language learning and be more motivated to continue learning. Tan et al.'s (2022) study found that the quality of the learning environment and content directly impacts learner quality, which subsequently influences students' employability. To enhance student motivation and engagement, the study recommends prioritizing high-quality learning environments and materials.

6.1.3 Intercultural Literacy Improvement Needs

Intercultural literacy refers to the ability to understand and appreciate different cultures and the ability to communicate effectively with people from different backgrounds (Chang et al., 2022). Learning English provides opportunities for intercultural communication and can enhance learners' intercultural competence. According to the views of the interviewees, five respondents think learning English helps to learn more about cultures. When they travel around the country, they can communicate in English to learn about the customs and cultures of different countries and gain a deeper understanding of different ways of thinking and living. This can enhance their enjoyment of the learning process and increase their motivation to continue learning.

6.2 The Role of Teacher

6.2.1 Importance of the Teacher

Show through interview content, teachers play an important role in shaping students' enjoyment in learning English. One student didn't like English initially because she 'didn't like their high school English teacher'. There is another student who thinks that 'Teachers should be kind, friendly to students. So, the 'positive influence' of an English teacher can have a significant impact on a student's 'interest in English learning'. If 'teachers can help students', it will 'make it easier for them to learn English'. At the same time, four of respondents think that teachers also play an important role in 'encouraging students to speak' in English learning and 'providing helpful learning suggestions. Competent teachers are able to provide high-quality instruction, which in turn affects student progress (Kunter et al., 2013). Additionally, teachers are instrumental in 'correcting students' mistakes' and 'ensuring they stay on the right track' in their language learning journey.

6.2.2 Teaching Strategies

According to several participants, teachers employ strategies to enhance students' interest in learning, which involves conveying the significance of education. Effective English instruction hinges not only on a teacher's knowledge but also their proficiency in pronunciation, fluency, and accurate language usage. The teacher's language competence and their ability to motivate students significantly impact English learning (Gan et al., 2021). Mispronunciation can directly affect speaking and indirectly influence listening skills. Therefore, teachers should adeptly employ language to provide encouragement and praise in the classroom. Additionally, an English teacher's enthusiasm for teaching and their personal dedication positively resonates with students. Conversely, while some educators may possess high degrees, a lack of teaching skills could impede their effectiveness in facilitating student learning.

6.3 Learning Environment

According to the interviewees，93.3% people think that a good classroom environment is important for learning and has a positive impact. The environment and atmosphere of the classroom affect their concentration and learning ability. They believe that a good classroom environment can improve students' attitudes toward learning and increase their motivation to study hard. Overall, students recognized the importance of a good classroom environment in facilitating learning, with some emphasizing the positive impact on student attitudes, performance, and efficiency, while others stressed the importance of various factors such as classroom furniture, learning facilities, and the role of the teacher in shaping the environment. It follows that the learning environment can have a significant impact on students' enjoyment of learning English. When learners feel safe, valued, and respected in their learning environment, they are more likely to be motivated and engaged in the learning process (Hanaysha et al., 2023). A positive learning environment fosters a sense of community among learners. When students feel a sense of belonging and connection to their peers, they are more likely to enjoy the

learning process. The learning environment can affect students' enjoyment of learning English in many ways. Through the establishment of a positive and supportive learning environment that nurtures a sense of community, integrates pertinent and engaging materials, offers assistance and motivation, and facilitates cooperation and engagement among learners, the enhancement of the learning process's enjoyment becomes achievable (Tan et al., 2023). Consequently, this approach contributes to fostering successful language learning outcomes.

6.4 Other Factors Influencing Enjoyment of English Learning

6.4.1 Opportunities for English Speaking and Communication

With regard to this part of the interview, the respondents put forward some suggestions to improve oral English learning. One of the suggestions is to 'use lunch time to communicate with foreign students' and improve their oral skills. Another suggestion is to create more opportunities for oral English, including 'organizing English corners and inviting more foreigners to participate in school activities. In order to improve the learning environment, it is suggested to 'create a comfortable space' and encourage students to communicate in English. The classroom is the ideal platform to acquire good communication skills, especially, speaking skills. (Rao, 2019). Finally, increasing students' opportunities to speak English in the classroom, such as 'holding English discussions and establishing English discussion groups' which will also help improve language skills. These suggestions aim to create an environment to promote English learning and encourage students to use English in various environments.

6.4.2 Improvements in Teaching Methods

According to the interview content, this section describes the 'importance of vocabulary cannot be overemphasized'. 'Before speaking and reading', it is essential to master 'a solid grammar foundation'. However, just 'remembering words and grammar rules' is not enough. In order to really improve oral English ability, it is necessary to create an English communication environment and encourage students to use the language in a practical and meaningful way. 'Visual aids such as pictures and videos' also help stimulate students' enjoyment in learning and promote understanding. Technology enables teachers to adapt classroom activities, thus enhancing the language learning process (Mandasari & Wahyudin, 2021). In addition, it is important to 'create a classroom environment that encourages students to speak English boldly' without worrying about making mistakes. In order to achieve this, the 'task-based teaching method' can be used to let student complete specific tasks in English. Finally, in order to further improve students' oral English ability, it may be beneficial to 'replace traditional English textbooks with more practical and interactive English textbooks.' This can be combined with the adjustment of 'class size' to promote more 'personalized attention' and 'stronger multimedia teaching'.

6.5 Conclusion

Based on the findings presented in this paper, it can be concluded that there are several factors that influence students' enjoyment of learning English in higher education institutions. The most significant factor is the purpose of learning, as students who have a clear purpose for learning English, such as improving job prospects or developing intercultural competence, are more likely to be motivated and achieve greater success in language learning (Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020). Additionally, students who reported a purpose of improving communication skills experienced greater improvements in their language proficiency.

Another significant factor that affects students' enjoyment of learning English is the role of teachers. Teachers who are supportive and provide positive feedback help students develop greater confidence in their language abilities, leading to a more enjoyable learning experience (Li et al., 2022). On the other hand, teachers who are overly critical or do not provide enough support can hinder students' confidence and enjoyment in

learning English. Lastly, the learning environment also has a significant impact on students' enjoyment of learning English. A positive and supportive learning environment, including access to adequate resources and materials, as well as a sense of belonging and motivation, can enhance students' English learning experiences and enjoyment (Alobaid, 2020). Universities must strive to develop action plans for integrating sustainability across their value chain in order to ensure long-term value creation and to give students the skills and knowledge required to apply design, innovation, and leadership competencies inside the university ecosystem (Rasli et al., 2022).

This is in line with SDG 4's target 4.1 from 2015, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all (United Nations [UN], Target 4.1). Finally, this paper highlights the importance of creating a positive and supportive learning environment that fosters enjoyment and promotes students' motivation to learn English. By taking into consideration the factors discussed in this paper, schools and educators can develop effective strategies to improve English learning outcomes and ensure that students have a positive and enjoyable learning experience.

6.6 Future research

Further exploration is warranted to attain a more profound understanding of these influencing factors. For instance, there is a need to delve into the significance and magnitude of the effects exerted by these factors on students' English learning within the context of higher education institutions (Lasagabaster, 2022). Concurrently, the research should endeavor to formulate and refine more potent strategies aimed at augmenting students' enjoyment of the English learning process. This extension of inquiry will not only enrich our comprehension of the underlying dynamics but also enable the development of strategies that can more effectively enhance the overall English learning experience.

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