

Motivational Perspective of Tertiary Level Students Pursuing English Studies: Insights From Two Private Universities in Bangladesh

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Abstract: Motivation, a psychological construct, plays a substantial role in determining the success of students' learning endeavors. This qualitative study aims to explore the motivational perspective of undergraduate students studying English at private universities in Bangladesh. Data were collected from 21 students pursuing BA (Hons) in English at two private universities in Bangladesh. The research employed semi-structured interviews to explore students' motivational perspectives and objectives in studying the BA (Hons) in English, which comprises courses on the English language and literature. The findings of the study reveal that learners' motivational perspectives encompass both intrinsic and instrumental factors. The implications of this study suggest that the insights gained from the findings can provide valuable guidance for tertiary-level teachers and policymakers in designing syllabuses, lesson plans, and course objectives based on students' motivation. By addressing the students' motivational needs, stakeholders can enhance the effectiveness of English language and literature education at the tertiary level.

Keywords: Motivation, intrinsic motivation, instrumental motivation, BA in English, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

The historical background of English education in the Indian subcontinent is related to the British colonial rules in this region after the Battle of Plassey in 1757. As a direct result of their triumph, the company was able to accumulate huge political power and control in India. In this respect, Wali (2018) states that the origins of English education in Bangladesh trace back to the early 19th century, during the reign of the British East India Company. Primarily, the purposes of English education were in the direct interest of colonial authority, which needs local clerks to support them in administration. Through English education, the colonizers wanted to generate a group of local people who, regardless of race or origin, would be culturally English-minded and able to serve as mediators between the ruling people and

the millions of local people (Islam, 2001). With the English Education Act of 1835, passed under the East India Company, English-language education was promulgated across the Indian subcontinent (Amin, 2019).

The first English Department in India was founded in 1824 at Presidency College in Calcutta (now Kolkata), and following that, English Departments were later established at the Universities of Calcutta founded in 1857, Madras in 1857, and Bombay in 1857 (now the University of Mumbai). In this connection, the first English department in Bangladesh was established in the early 20th century at Rajshahi College, affiliated with Calcutta University. Next, Dhaka University, established in 1921, started the English department, one of the foundational departments. Later, English departments were inaugurated at Rajshahi, Chittagong, and Jahangirnagar universities in 1953, 1966, and 1970, respectively (Yeasmin, 2011, cited in Wali, 2018). At present, there are 53 public and 112 listed private institutions, and of the private, four have yet to begin academic activities (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, 2022–2023). Among them, many of the universities offer the program BA (Hons) in English, which comprises courses in English language and literature as the major.

In the early stages, a BA in English was mainly literature-based, comprising English literature and literary history. An analysis of the syllabus of a public university in Bangladesh demonstrates that approximately 95% of the classes focus on literature in some way (Wali, 2018). However, in recent years, the curriculum has been shifted from focusing predominantly on literature to incorporating language, linguistics, and phonetics, as well as phonology, culture, and more relevant courses like cultural studies and media studies as related disciplines (Wali, 2018). An overview of the curricula of private and public universities in Bangladesh demonstrates that most of the curricula cover some common fields of study, like language courses to develop learners' four skills - listening, speaking, writing, and reading - linguistics, social and literary history of England, Bangladesh studies, history of the emerging of Bangladesh, British and American literature (prose and poetry), Greek and Roman classics, western ideas, literary criticism, critical theories, South Asian literature, ELT (English Language Teaching), research methodology, and some GED (General Education Development) courses, including computer application, management, economics, etc.

The general objective of a BA (Hons) in English is to make students keenly aware of the major crosscurrents of English language, literature, and language instruction. The curricula also seek to acquaint students with their national identity, cultural heritage, and traditions to prepare them to successfully navigate the contemporary world. Through an interdisciplinary approach, greater emphasis is placed on bringing students up to the expected level so that they can acquire functional knowledge of the English language, literature, philosophy, and history. Today, in our globalized society, the importance of English as a language of communication has increased (Zamir, 2017). Having a command of the English language requires not only the ability to read and write but also to listen and talk in the same language. We all know that it is quite difficult to obtain a sophisticated profession in today's world without first acquiring and perfecting these four skills (Wali, 2018). Considering the objectives and realities of Bangladesh, it is essential to conduct a qualitative study to comprehend the motivational perspective of university-level English

learners in Bangladesh. In this context, the research question of the present study is: What are the intrinsic and extrinsic motivational reasons for tertiary-level students in Bangladesh to study English at private universities?

The study is notable as it focuses on the instinctive and instrumental motivations of tertiary-level students studying English at private universities in Bangladesh. Finding out what motivates Bangladeshi students to study the English language and literature can aid in resolving any issues or obstacles they may encounter while taking the courses and enhance teaching strategies. Consequently, language and literature classes could have become more engaging and interactive, resulting in enhanced student performance. In addition, understanding the motivations for studying English can shed light on the larger socioeconomic implications of language education in Bangladesh, such as job prospects and the function of language in determining social dynamics.

According to Wolters (1999) and Li (2013) students typically employ several motivational management tactics to increase their learning concentration. Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model distinguishes two distinct types of orientations: (1) integrativeness, or "willingness to be like valued members of the language community" (Gardner & Lambert, 1959, p. 271), and (2) instrumentality, which emphasizes "the practical value and advantages of learning a new language" (Gardner, 1985, p. 133), which is the most widely accepted motivation theory in the field of L2 learning. Extrinsic motivation, also known as instrumentality, refers to current incentives, bolstering attraction, yearning for peer acceptance, etc. Instrumental or intrinsic motivation encompasses curiosity, thirst for knowledge, interest, etc. The similar distinction between integrative and instrumental motivations is reinforced by Brown's (2000) research. Extrinsic motivation and instrumental motivation are related because they both refer to the desire to learn a second or foreign language because of social pressures or rewards, internalized motivations for learning an L2, and/or personal decisions to do so, as well as their value for the chosen goals (as cited in Liu, 2007). Gao (2012) claims that second-language motivational teaching tactics and learning strategies determine many of the second-language motivational regulation strategies.

In the context of learning a second language (L2), extrinsic motivation includes three categories (Noels et al., 1999, 2000). The first type of regulation is external regulation, where a student gains an L2 because of social pressure or reward, like career advancement or course credit. It is probable that the learner will quit putting effort into L2 acquisition once the pressure or reward is removed. Internal motives for learning a second language, such as regret or humiliation, are referred to as inverted regulation. Like external regulation, participation is likely to decline if the pressure is removed. The most self-determined form of extrinsic motivation examined in the L2 environment is recognized regulation. In this case, the student is learning a second language because she consciously chose to do so and because the activity advances the goals she has chosen. The learner is likely to continue working toward L2 acquisition as long as this target is important. In this study, the responses of the stakeholders have been gathered through interviews, and the data have been analyzed following Gardner's (1985) integrativeness and instrumentality orientations.

2. Literature Review

The term “motivation” is derived from the Latin word “movere” which means “to move”. It is a dynamic rather than a static motive force that accelerates, stimulates, or encourages the action of an individual or a team. Motivation is viewed as a dynamic, contextual, and social construct (Norton, 2000), and many researchers have found it to be strongly tied to the learners’ identity formation. (Dornyei, 2005; Gardner, 2000; Noels et al., 2001; Gao et al., 2007). Elliot and Thrash (2001) state that motivation provides the reasons for people’s actions, desires, and needs. Broussard and Garrison (2004) describe motivation as a quality that influences our decision to act or not to act. A motivated learner is one who is eager to learn the language, willing to exert effort in the learning activity, and keen to continue the learning activity, according to White (2007). On the contrary, Dörnyei (2005) defines demotivation as specific extrinsic influences that weaken or diminish the motivational underpinnings of a behavioral goal or current action. According to Narayanan (2006), motivation is the cause or reason behind an individual’s actions or behaviors. Guay et al. (2010) identified motivation as the reasons for learners’ underlying behavior. According to Subakhtiasih and Putri (2020) motivation can be defined as an individual’s intention or aspiration to achieve success and prevent failure in life. Motivation can be defined as a sequential course of action undertaken to attain a specific objective.

The theories of motivation mostly explain why and how stakeholders choose, perform, and persist in various activities (Mosha, 2014). Like all achievements, language learning is also dependent on learners’ internal forces and motivation. Al-Hazemi (2000) opines that learners with a strong desire to learn a language can obtain a high level of competence in the target language. Without adequate motivation, language acquisition cannot be accomplished successfully (Csizer & Dornyei, 2005; Sugita & Takeuchi, 2010). Thus, it is widely acknowledged that motivation is the key to second or foreign language learning success.

The study by Oroujlou and Vahedi (2011) confirms that among the determining elements that can affect learners’ acquisition of the target language are their motivation, attitudes, and set of beliefs. In his study, Gardner (2000) focuses on linguistic aptitude and motivation as the two most important drivers of language accomplishment and demonstrates how motivation influences language achievement. According to the study, these two internal forces help students succeed. The study of Latifah et al. (2011) demonstrated an association between motivation, attitude, anxiety, and instrumental orientation. The study demonstrates that motivation and a favorable attitude toward the target language, culture, and people, including behavior, disposition, feeling, and position, have a positive impact on L2 performance.

Bobkina and Fernandez’s (2012) study on 72 EFL engineering students at the Technical University of Spain regarding motivational patterns and attitudes towards the English language confirms that the students’ motivation is extrinsic in nature, and most of the successful learners have a positive attitude towards the English language and native English speakers. In the empirical study undertaken by Al Samadani and Ibnian (2015) at Umm Al-Qura University, Saudi Arabia, on 112 students, it was revealed that learners with positive attitudes towards the English language achieve higher GPAs than those with negative attitudes. Yang’s (2012) study at the University of Malaya regarding students’

attitudes and motivation finds that learners with positive attitudes and high motivation toward the target language achieve more success than the counter group.

According to Ziahosseini and Salehi's (2008) study on learners' motivation, extrinsic motivation has little bearing on the decision of which language-learning strategies to use. According to Moskovsy and Alrabai (2009), instrumental motivation is more crucial to EFL learning than integrative motivation. According to Lucas (2010), students are naturally motivated to learn speaking and reading abilities, as well as to gain knowledge and attain goals. According to Tahaineh and Daan's (2013) research on female undergraduates in Jordan, the learners' motivation is of an instrumental nature, and they have a favorable attitude toward the target language and its society. L2 performance is positively impacted by a good attitude (manner, disposition, sentiment, position, etc.) toward the target language, culture, and people.

Language learners are concurrently driven instrumentally and socially, according to Moiiinvaziri's (2009) study. The study by Chalak and Kassaian (2010) at Islamic Azad University in Iran demonstrates that EFL students often acquire English for both practical and integrative purposes and that they generally have a very favorable attitude toward the target language. According to Dital (2012), students are extremely motivated and have a positive outlook on studying English. In his study, motivation for learning is both instinctive and instrumental in nature. A study conducted by Goktepe (2014) at a Turkish institution reached a similar conclusion, showing that the students' reasons for learning English are both instrumental and instinctive.

In this respect, the recent study of Islam and Akter (2021), involving 222 undergraduate students from the Department of English across 11 prominent public and private universities in Bangladesh, explored motivational aspects. This research also delves into the influence of teachers on nurturing students' motivation. The findings of the study reveal that students draw motivation from both instrumental and integrative aspects. Notably, their drive to study in the English department is predominantly linked to integrative factors rather than instrumental ones. In this context, teachers play a pivotal role in cultivating and sustaining students' motivation throughout their academic journey within the department.

3. Methodology

As the purpose of the study is to explore the students' motivational perspectives regarding their study of BA (Hons) in English, perceptions and explanatory statements from stakeholders are necessary. Therefore, the study has been conducted following a qualitative research approach that investigates and offers more profound insights into issues that offer a deeper understanding of the actual reasons (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). In this study, the participants are tertiary-level students who study BA (Hons) in English. A purposeful sampling technique has been applied to collect qualitative data through interviews. In this study, 21 students participated, and the researchers personally communicated with the participants. Among the participants, there were 15 female students and 6 male students; however, in this study, the gender issue was not taken into consideration. In this study, participants were assigned pseudonyms containing numbers.

The universities are in Chittagong and Cumilla. To collect data, a semi-structured interview was conducted in English individually for 15–20 minutes to find out the motivational perspective of the learners to study BA in English. The interviews were conducted both online and face-to-face. The participants were asked questions regarding their educational background, family members 'education level, the reasons to study English as a subject, their motivational perspectives, career objectives, their attitude toward the target language, etc. Regarding the semi-structured interview, Nunan (1992) opines that it gives the interviewee a certain amount of power and control over the subject of the interview. Accordingly, it provides the interviewer with sufficient flexibility. In this study, the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Dörnyei, 2007). In this process, an inductive approach was followed: data were repeatedly read to create codes, and then the codes were organized into categories, and finally the categories were merged into themes. Here the total number of codes was counted to 24, then the codes were organized into categories in round 2a, and finally the categories were merged to get two major themes in round 2b.

4. Findings and Discussion

The responses from the students provide valuable insight into their motivation and interests in studying for the BA (Hons) in English Language and Literature. In this study, in round 2a, 11 categories were created with the following points: personal development, intellectual advancement, a passion for English language and literature, cross-cultural knowledge, communication purpose with the international community, learning a foreign language, job opportunity, studying abroad, academic progression, social prestige, and family desire. Finally, in round 2b, the 11 categories were merged into two major themes: “instinctive motivation” and “instrumental motivation”.

The statements made by several students show that their passion for English literature, language, and culture, as well as their desire for intellectual advancement, are what naturally motivate them. Sty (S-1) justifies her decision to pursue a BA in English, stating, “Firstly, it allows me to enjoy a world of charming literature, and secondly, English studies provide a key to philosophical ideas, helping me develop critical thinking skills and explore profound questions about life and existence.” She thinks the subject will help her develop critical thinking skills through philosophical concepts and a deeper understanding of life and existence. Another student, Imi (S-17), opines, “I used to read story books in childhood as an enjoyable pastime. Studying English literature is somehow a pleasurable way of learning for me.” In this respect, Por (S-11) states, “It helps us to develop our ability to think critically, logically, and effectively; that is also where I am genuinely interested.” As additional reasons for studying English, Nat (S-3) states, “It will give me an opportunity to explore myself in the beauty of language, literature, and the complexities of human expression.” Far (S-5), Mya (S-8), and Sur (S-14) express their interest in literature and the English language, stating that learning English will enable them to pursue their interests, improve their communication skills, and spread their prospects.

The instrumental motivation of the learners focuses on job opportunity, studying abroad, academic progression, social prestige, and family desire. In addition, these are

the practical benefits of studying English. Dia's (S-2) motivation is derived from her parents and her schoolteacher's recognition of her English proficiency. She opines that studying English as a global subject will help her develop communication and analytical skills, which can lead to career development in writing, editing, teaching, research, or journalism. Far (S-5) emphasizes the value of enhancing language skills and the variety of career opportunities for English graduates who develop critical thinking, analytic abilities, and communication skills. Some students argue that external causes played a role in their decision to study the language. Sal (S-4) said, "Though studying in English was not my plan, I didn't get into the desired public university and the subject that motivated me to study in English. First, my good grades in English are the main reason; it was my mom who told me that you are good enough in English that I should pursue a BA in English." That means this student was motivated to pursue a BA in English by both her good results in English and her mother's advice. A similar motivation is found in another student, Sia (S-2), who mentions that the encouragement she received was from her private tuition teacher. Jah (S-6) describes his interest in English studies as a bright career, which led him to concentrate on English as a subject of study and build a career in education. As justification, he says, "I want to become a teacher. The teaching profession is very respectable, and it has a wide career. Therefore, a BA (Hons) degree in English is an excellent starting point for a career in teaching," Hena (S-12) mentions both her lifelong aspiration to work in the field of education and her passion for the English language and literature.

Overall, the learners' motivation for pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in English Language and Literature includes both a personal enthusiasm for literature, language, and culture as well as an interest in the practical benefits and employment opportunities associated with learning English. That means learners have both instinctive and instrumental motivation for studying the subjects. The instrumental motive emphasizes the need for nurturing one's self-enlightenment, exploring foreign culture and literature, gaining knowledge, and developing an appreciation for artistic and cultural productions. The instrumental motive highlights the practical abilities, job prospects, opportunities for communication, social prestige, and possibilities for global involvement that may be obtained through the study of English.

5. Conclusion

The motivation to pursue a course of study is contingent on several factors. Numerous studies have affirmed that the social, cultural, familial, and personal preferences of learners play a significant role in this regard. In Bangladesh, learners are almost universally motivated to pursue a BA (Hons) in English by a combination of instrumental and integrative factors. However, like the research conducted by Islam and Akter (2021), this study did not assess the relative prevalence of integrative and instrumental motivational perspectives. This research predominantly offers a comprehensive synopsis of the motivational issues of the students. The current research can help Bangladeshi students overcome problems and improve instruction by revealing their reasons for studying the English language and literature. In addition, considering the motivational

issues of learners, policymakers and educators may develop a pragmatic curriculum and prepare students for the competitive job market. However, the current study has several limitations because it is a small-scale investigation, and only data from two private universities were collected. To delve deeper into the motivational viewpoints, it is necessary to conduct more comprehensive studies collecting data from more public and private universities in Bangladesh.

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