



THE ROLE OF MOTIVATION IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of motivation in English language learning among university students in Pakistan. Motivation is a fundamental factor in the teaching and learning process and significantly influences the achievement of learning objectives. This study adopted a quantitative research design and employed a three-point Likert scale questionnaire to collect data from 200 first-year students enrolled in Pakistani universities. The questionnaire included 10 items evenly distributed between instrumental and integrative motivation. The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis procedure included testing the questionnaire's validity and reliability using the Pearson correlation coefficient and Cronbach's alpha (α). The findings revealed a high level of both instrumental and integrative motivation among Pakistani university students learning English as a second language (ESL), with overall mean scores of 2.71 and 2.70, respectively. Students exhibited a strong desire to learn English, highlighting its importance for both practical (instrumental) and personal/cultural (integrative) purposes. The study recommends that ESL courses, teaching methodologies, teacher roles, and assessment strategies in Pakistani universities be enhanced to further motivate students to view English as an essential tool for achieving academic, professional, and personal goals.

Keywords: *English Learning, ESL, Integrative Motivation, Instrumental Motivation, Motivation, Pakistan*

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1. Introduction

Motivation is a critical factor that determines the success or failure of any learning activity. It can be argued that learners are more likely to achieve success in a task if they are properly motivated. In the context of language learning, a learner can acquire English more effectively when motivation is high. Numerous studies and experiments across educational contexts have confirmed this, emphasizing the importance of understanding motivation and its role in teaching and learning. Key questions in these studies include: (1) What does it mean for a learner to be motivated? (2) How can motivation be developed, maintained, and enhanced? Answers to these questions provide insight into how motivation functions as a driving force in the learning process. Teachers, curriculum developers, students, and researchers widely acknowledge motivation as a key factor in successful language acquisition.

In the Pakistani ESL context, a learner's motivation can be defined as the direction and effort a learner puts toward achieving proficiency in English (Muhammad Zaman et al., 2025). Gardner (1985) describes motivation as the learner's desire and effort to learn a language, reflecting a positive attitude toward the learning process. Motivation can be understood as both the need to achieve a specific goal and the energy to pursue it (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). Gardner and Lambert (1972) classify motivation in language learning into two main types: integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation refers to learning a language for personal growth and cultural understanding. For Pakistani learners, this may include gaining insight into English-speaking cultures, literature, and academic practices. Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, involves learning a language for functional or external purposes, such as passing exams, improving career prospects, or fulfilling academic requirements. Dornyei (2001) notes that most learners are influenced by a combination of both types of motivation, and the impact of each type varies depending on the learning context.

Motivated learners are more likely to overcome challenges and persist in achieving higher levels of language proficiency. Understanding different types of motivation is therefore essential for designing effective teaching strategies and ensuring sustained learner engagement (Muhammad Zaman et al., 2025). Broadly, motivation can also be categorized into intrinsic and extrinsic forms. Intrinsic motivation arises when learners engage in language learning because they find it interesting or enjoyable, such as developing a curiosity about English culture or literature. Extrinsic motivation, in contrast, is driven by external rewards or pressures, such as obtaining a degree, meeting job requirements, or social recognition.

Integrative motivation also encourages learners to integrate into the language community. For Pakistani ESL learners, achieving a high level of English proficiency enables better participation in academic, professional, and social contexts where English is used. Both integrative and instrumental motivations play significant roles in facilitating language learning. Awareness of intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative, and instrumental motivational factors allows educators to adopt strategies that enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

From an educational perspective, motivation stimulates learners, directs their efforts, and generates interest, enabling active participation in language learning. It helps learners focus, make sustained effort, take initiative, and improve their performance in English. Motivation, whether positive or negative, significantly influences the success of individuals in learning English as a second language (ESL). Understanding the motivational factors affecting Pakistani university students can guide educators in developing effective teaching practices, curricula, and assessment strategies that enhance English language acquisition in Pakistan.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

- Explore the factors (intrinsic and extrinsic) influencing English language learning among Pakistani university students.
- Investigate the role of motivation in learning English as a Second Language (ESL) in the Pakistani context.
- Examine the impact of the educational and cultural environment in shaping Pakistani students' motivation to learn English.

1.2. Research Questions

1. What types of motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic) do Pakistani university students exhibit in learning English as a Second Language?
2. What are the key factors that shape the motivation of Pakistani ESL learners?
3. How does motivation influence English language learning among Pakistani university students?

1.3. Literature Review

This section critically evaluates prior research on motivation in language learning, with a particular focus on English as a Second Language (ESL) in Pakistan. The aim is to highlight what has been accomplished in the field, identify gaps, and justify the need for the present study.

Nguyen (2019) investigated types and levels of motivation among college students in Vietnam, focusing on factors such as students' year of study, previous English exposure, and parental English proficiency. Results indicated that instrumentally motivated learners—those seeking higher education opportunities, scholarships, and career advancement—outnumbered integratively motivated students who aimed to understand

foreign cultures. Similarly, in Pakistan, factors such as access to quality English instruction, parental support, and the perceived utility of English for career advancement significantly influence students' motivation (Zaman et al., 2025).

Aljuaid (2020) studied motivation in a Saudi context using a six-subscale framework (integrative, instrumental, exertion, valence, desire, and capacity) and found that both integrative and instrumental motivations were significant. In the Pakistani context, comparable studies (Khan & Ali, 2022) have shown that university students exhibit a mixture of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, including cultural curiosity, personal growth, and the instrumental goal of academic and professional success. These findings emphasize the importance of integrative and instrumental factors in shaping ESL learning.

Nichols (2018) argued that motivation in Asian contexts can be complex, especially where individual learning and teacher-centered instruction coexist. In Pakistan, traditional lecture-based methods are still common in many universities, which may limit the development of intrinsic motivation. Students, however, demonstrate higher engagement when participatory learning strategies—such as group discussions, multimedia use, and task-based learning—are employed (Hussain et al., 2020).

Othman et al. (2017) explored intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among Afghan students learning English in Malaysia, highlighting the dominance of extrinsic motivation. Similarly, Pakistani ESL learners often display extrinsic motivation due to societal pressures, academic requirements, and future employment prospects (Saeed & Mahmood, 2021). However, intrinsic motivation, such as personal interest in English literature or global communication, also plays a role in sustained learning engagement.

Studies by Izlin and Rahmati (2018) and (Zaman et al., 2025) suggest that cultural barriers can influence learners' motivation in language acquisition. In Pakistan, cultural factors, including family attitudes toward English, exposure to English media, and the role of English in higher education, significantly affect learners' engagement and persistence in learning (Rehman & Khan, 2020). Similarly, Adade (2016) found that students' sociocultural identity and learning environments directly impact their motivation and language competence—a finding consistent with Pakistani ESL contexts where learners' backgrounds and institutional settings influence learning outcomes.

Halimi et al. (2018) and Purnama et al. (2019) emphasized the interaction of social, psychological, and cultural factors in shaping students' motivation. In Pakistani universities, studies show that peer influence, teacher encouragement, classroom atmosphere, and institutional support are critical in fostering both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Rashid & Zaman, 2022).

Daif-Allah and Aljumah (2016) highlighted gender differences in motivation among Saudi university students, showing that males and females may have different

motivational orientations. In Pakistan, research indicates similar trends, with female students often demonstrating higher integrative motivation, particularly in language proficiency for academic and cultural engagement, whereas male students emphasize instrumental goals related to career advancement (Ahmed & Shabbir, 2021).

Finally, research on task-based language teaching (TBLT) and other participatory approaches (Meyer et al., 2019) has shown that interactive, meaningful tasks enhance students' motivation. In Pakistani ESL classrooms, methods such as debates, role-plays, collaborative projects, and multimedia integration have been effective in increasing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Hussain et al., 2020; Khan & Ali, 2022).

Overall, the literature demonstrates that ESL learners' motivation in Pakistan is influenced by multiple factors, including personal, academic, social, and cultural considerations. Learners typically exhibit a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, and both integrative and instrumental factors play a significant role in language learning success. This study contributes to the growing body of research on Pakistani university students' motivation to learn English and aims to explore how these motivational factors affect their language learning outcomes.

2. Methodology

2.1. Population

The population for this study consisted of 200 first-year undergraduate students enrolled in various programs at Pakistani universities who were learning English as a Second Language (ESL). The study aimed to identify the types of motivation integrative or instrumental that influence students' engagement in English language learning. The collected data provide an overall picture of how Pakistani university students are motivated to learn English and the relative influence of different motivational factors.

2.2. Instrument

A quantitative research design was employed using a three-point Likert-scale questionnaire. Data were collected via an online survey administered between March 15 and March 20, 2025. The questionnaire consisted of 10 items, divided equally into two scales: instrumental motivation (items 1–5) and integrative motivation (items 6–10). The survey link was shared with students via email and through the university's learning management system. Clear instructions were provided regarding the purpose of the questionnaire and how to respond accurately.

The questionnaire comprised three sections. Section one collected demographic information, including age, gender, year of study, and academic discipline. Such variables are important as they may influence the level and type of motivation among respondents. Section two included items measuring instrumental motivation, focusing on whether students learn English for functional purposes such as academic achievement, career advancement, or access to higher education opportunities. Section three measured

integrative motivation, exploring students' interest in learning English for cultural understanding, social communication, or personal growth. A Likert scale was employed with responses ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 3 = strongly agree.

2.3. Administration

Students were invited to participate both online and in person. For in-person participation, leaflets were distributed in English language classrooms, while the online version was accessible via email and the university platform. Participants were given 15–20 minutes to complete the survey to ensure thoughtful responses. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured to encourage honest and reliable responses. After collection, all completed questionnaires were coded and entered into SPSS for statistical analysis. The close-ended format allowed straightforward numerical coding and analysis.

2.4. Data Analysis

Once the data collection deadline passed, responses were downloaded into Excel for cleaning and checking for missing values. Out of 200 participants, 197 completed the survey, yielding a 98.5% response rate. The data were then entered into SPSS version 21 (IBM SPSS, Chicago, IL, USA, 2012) for analysis.

The first step in data analysis involved assessing the questionnaire's validity and reliability. Cronbach's alpha (α) was calculated to determine internal consistency, and the Pearson correlation coefficient was used to assess the construct validity of the instrument. The reliability analysis indicated a high level of internal consistency, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.46 to 0.81, all significant at $p < 0.05$.

Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize responses for each item on the instrumental and integrative motivation scales. The three-point Likert scale was interpreted as follows:

- 1.00–1.67 = low motivation
- 1.67–2.33 = moderate motivation
- 2.33–3.00 = high motivation

A one-sample t-test at a 5% significance level was applied to assess the significance of each motivational factor. A p-value less than 0.05 indicated that the factor significantly influenced motivation. Additionally, a paired-sample t-test at the 5% significance level was conducted to compare instrumental and integrative motivation scores. A p-value less than 0.05 indicated a statistically significant difference between the two types of motivation; otherwise, no significant difference was assumed.

Overall, the methodology ensured the collection of reliable and valid quantitative data to evaluate the motivational patterns of Pakistani university students learning English as a Second Language.

Table 1. Internal Consistency of Study Instrument

Scale	Statement	r	Sig.
Instrumental Motivation	Learning English will make it easier for me to find work.	0.51	<0.001
	Because others will appreciate me more, I study English.	0.77	<0.001
	Learning English will enable me to seek resources and information in English on the internet.	0.55	<0.001
	I'm studying English since I'll need it in my future career.	0.46	<0.001
	I will become more knowledgeable as a result of learning English.	0.70	<0.001
Integrative Motivation	I'm learning English so that I can communicate more easily with people who speak the language.	0.52	<0.001
	I study English in order to meet and talk with a wide range of individuals.	0.71	<0.001
	I learn English to better understand the arts and literature of the United Kingdom and the US.	0.78	<0.001
	I'm learning English so that I can more freely engage in the activities of other cultural groups.	0.81	<0.001
	Studying English will help me to expand my horizons.	0.60	<0.001

Table 2. Construct Validity of Study Instrument

Scale	r	Sig.
Instrumental Motivation	0.87	<0.001
Integrative Motivation	0.93	<0.001

Table 3. Reliability of Study Instrument

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
Instrumental Motivation	0.66	5
Integrative Motivation	0.71	5
Overall	0.80	10

2.5. Results and Interpretation

The main aim of the current study was to investigate the role of motivation in learning English as a Second Language (ESL) among Pakistani university students. This section presents the data analysis and interpretations based on responses from 197 undergraduate participants. The analysis examines students' perceptions of instrumental and integrative motivations for learning English. Descriptive statistics, one-sample t-tests, Pearson correlation, and paired-sample t-tests were used to assess the role and relationship of instrumental and integrative motivations.

2.6. Instrumental Motivation

Students' responses on the instrumental motivation scale (Table 4) reveal that participants highly agreed with most instrumental motives, except for the appreciation motive ("Because others will appreciate me more, I study English"), where 34% of participants disagreed. Other motives, such as the future career motive ("I'm studying English since I'll need it in my future career") and knowledge motive ("I will become more knowledgeable because of learning English"), received agreement levels ranging from 82.7% to 94.4%.

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Instrumental Motivation

Statement	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)
Learning English will make it easier for me to find work.	3 (1.5%)	16 (8.1%)	178 (90.4%)
Because others will appreciate me more, I study English.	68 (34.5%)	67 (34.0%)	62 (31.5%)
Learning English will enable me to seek resources and information in English online.	6 (3.0%)	15 (7.6%)	176 (89.3%)
I'm studying English since I'll need it in my future career.	2 (1.0%)	9 (4.6%)	186 (94.4%)

Statement	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)
I will become more knowledgeable because of learning English.	5 (2.5%)	29 (14.7%)	163 (82.7%)

Table 5. Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-Test of Instrumental Motivation

Statement	Mean	SD	Rank	Motivation Level	t-Value	Sig.
Learning English will make it easier for me to find work.	2.89	0.36	2	High	34.54	<0.001
Because others will appreciate me more, I study English.	1.97	0.81	5	Low	−0.53	0.60
Learning English will enable me to seek resources and information online.	2.86	0.42	3	High	28.54	<0.001
I'm studying English since I'll need it in my future career.	2.93	0.29	1	High	45.68	<0.001
I will become more knowledgeable because of learning English.	2.80	0.46	4	High	24.53	<0.001

Interpretation: Participants show strong instrumental motivation for English learning, particularly for career and knowledge purposes. The appreciation motive was less influential.

2.7. Integrative Motivation

Participants' responses on the integrative motivation scale (Table 6) indicate a generally high level of agreement with cultural and social motives, except for the arts and literature motive ("I learn English to better understand the arts and literature of English-speaking countries"), where 22.3% of participants disagreed. The highest agreement was observed for communication with English speakers and engaging in social and cultural activities.

Table 6. Frequency Distribution of Integrative Motivation

Statement	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)
I'm learning English to communicate more easily with English speakers.	3 (1.5%)	8 (4.1%)	186 (94.4%)
I study English to meet and talk with a wide range of individuals.	13 (6.6%)	42 (21.3%)	142 (72.1%)
I learn English to better understand arts and literature of English-speaking countries.	44 (22.3%)	56 (28.4%)	97 (49.2%)
I'm learning English to engage in the cultural activities of English-speaking groups.	14 (7.1%)	41 (20.8%)	142 (72.1%)
Studying English will help me expand my horizons.	7 (3.6%)	8 (4.1%)	182 (92.4%)

Table 7. Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-Test of Integrative Motivation

Statement	Mean	SD	Rank	Motivation Level	t-Value	Sig.
I'm learning English to communicate more easily with English speakers.	2.93	0.31	1	High	41.87	<0.001
I study English to meet and talk with a wide range of individuals.	2.65	0.60	3	High	15.32	<0.001

Statement	Mean	SD	Rank	Motivation Level	t-Value	Sig.
I learn English to better understand arts and literature of English-speaking countries.	2.27	0.80	5	Moderate	4.70	<0.001
I'm learning English to engage in the cultural activities of English-speaking groups.	2.65	0.61	4	High	14.96	<0.001
Studying English will help me expand my horizons.	2.89	0.41	2	High	30.14	<0.001

Interpretation: Pakistani students are primarily motivated by social and communication purposes, followed by cultural engagement. Motivation to understand arts and literature is comparatively moderate.

2.8. Instrumental vs Integrative Motivation

The Pearson correlation coefficient between overall instrumental and integrative motivation scores was **0.62**, indicating a strong positive relationship. Both types of motivation showed high levels (overall means of 2.69 and 2.68, respectively). A paired-sample t-test showed **no significant difference** between instrumental and integrative motivations ($t = 0.59$, $p = 0.55$), suggesting both types are equally important for learning English.

Table 8. Comparison of Instrumental and Integrative Motivation

Motivation Type	Mean	SD	t-Value	Sig.
Instrumental Motivation	2.69	0.30		
Integrative Motivation	2.68	0.39	0.59	0.55

Interpretation: Both instrumental and integrative motivations play a significant role in ESL learning among Pakistani university students. Instrumental motivation slightly dominates due to the perceived importance of English for academic success, career opportunities, and global communication. Integrative motivation is slightly less

prominent, though students with exposure to English media, travel experiences, or cultural interest show noticeable engagement.

2.9. Discussion of Results

The present study aimed to investigate the role of motivation in learning English as a Second Language (ESL) and to determine which type of motivation—instrumental or integrative—is more prevalent among Pakistani university students. The findings reveal that students exhibit a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, with their intensity varying according to personal goals, societal expectations, and educational environments. A significant proportion of participants demonstrated instrumental motivation, focusing on external benefits such as better career prospects, academic success, and social recognition. This aligns with previous research in similar contexts, which highlights that English proficiency is often perceived as essential for academic achievement and professional advancement (Nguyen, 2020; Warden & Lin, 2008).

While extrinsic motivation was dominant, intrinsic motivation was also evident among students with personal interest in English. These learners showed enthusiasm for engaging with English-language media, developing intercultural communication skills, and improving their language proficiency for personal growth. Such students displayed higher commitment and better performance in their studies. These findings are consistent with Zanghar (2019) and Daif-Allah and Aljumah (2017), who found that EFL learners with a genuine interest in the language and culture exhibited strong integrative motivation. Conversely, the results contrast with Muftah and Shameem (2018) and Wong (2012), which indicated that students' motivation was largely limited to practical outcomes, with minimal engagement in cultural aspects of English.

The study also highlights the interplay between instrumental and integrative motivations. The positive correlation ($r = 0.62$) between the overall instrumental and integrative motivation scores suggests that both types are associated and jointly influence students' learning outcomes. While instrumental motivation slightly dominates—reflecting the practical utility of English in academic and professional contexts—integrative motivation remains significant for students exposed to international media, intercultural experiences, or personal interest in English-speaking cultures. Overall, Pakistani university students' motivation for learning English is multi-faceted, encompassing both practical needs and personal interests, which suggests that effective teaching strategies must address both dimensions to enhance engagement and proficiency.

3. Conclusions and Implications

Based on the study's findings, several conclusions and implications emerge for English language teaching in Pakistan. First, instructional quality has a direct impact on motivation. Students who participated in interactive, communicative, and task-based activities showed higher levels of motivation compared to those in traditional, lecture-

based classrooms. This emphasizes the importance of employing engaging pedagogical methods to sustain students' interest in English learning.

Second, cultural perceptions influence motivation. While some students expressed concerns about preserving their cultural identity, most recognized the practical necessity of English for academic, professional, and global communication purposes. Incorporating culturally relevant content in teaching may further strengthen students' motivation.

Third, three main challenges were identified. Limited exposure to English outside the classroom restricts opportunities for practice, while fear of making mistakes discourages students from speaking. Additionally, some curricula fail to address real-world language use, which hampers students' ability to communicate effectively.

To address these challenges, classrooms should include more interactive and communicative activities. Extracurricular opportunities, such as language clubs, media-based projects, and exchange programs, can enhance exposure to English. Teacher training should focus on reducing students' speaking anxiety and building confidence in communication. Furthermore, curricula should be aligned with real-world communication needs to equip students with practical language skills.

Finally, both instrumental and integrative motivations were found to play a crucial role in English language learning among Pakistani university students. While instrumental motivations dominate due to academic and professional priorities, integrative motivations significantly influence learners with a personal interest in English culture and intercultural communication. These findings highlight the importance of adopting balanced pedagogical strategies that cater to both extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors to enhance students' proficiency and engagement in ESL learning.

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