Motivation for Learning English Among Thai EFL Vocational Students Majoring in English in Chiang Mai

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Abstract

English is recognized as the international lingua franca, and in Thailand, it plays a vital role as a foreign language. Despite its importance, Thai vocational students often lack proficiency in English, which is essential for their future careers. This study aimed to investigate the levels and types of English learning motivation among 100 English major vocational students and five English teachers from a private vocational college, using a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The research instrument was adapted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). The data were analyzed using percentage, frequency, mean, and standard deviation. The findings revealed that students exhibited a very high level of integrative motivation ($\bar{x}$= 4.75) and slightly lower instrumental motivation ($\bar{x}$= 4.68). Students with high integrative motivation understood foreign language media like movies and music, helping them engage with others and feel more confident communicating with native speakers. On the other hand, their instrumental motivation was driven by the compulsory nature of the subject and the desire to succeed in their future careers. English teachers emphasized that integrating active teaching methods, current events, role-plays, learning technology, and humor is essential to enhancing students' motivation.

Keywords: English Learning Motivation, Vocational Students, EFL

Introduction

In today's interconnected world, English plays a crucial role as a global language in communication, education, business, and cross-cultural understanding. It serves as a key to accessing information, building international relationships, and participating in global economic and social systems. According to the Bureau of Academic Affairs and Educational Standards (2008), English proficiency supports students in acquiring knowledge

and developing a global vision. In this context, learning English not only enhances individual communication abilities but also fosters openness toward diverse cultures and worldviews. For countries like Thailand, where English is used as a foreign language, this skill is increasingly indispensable.

In Thailand, English is widely used for both personal and professional purposes, including communication, media consumption, and job applications (Phumiphak, 2019). Therefore, improving students' English communication skills is vital to prepare them for global engagement (Ministry of Education, 2008). A key factor in achieving success in learning English is motivation. Gardner (1985) emphasized the significance of motivation in second language acquisition, while Crookes and Schmidt (1991) described motivation as a learner's goal-oriented behavior. Motivation is commonly divided into two types: integrative, which stems from a desire to connect with the language and culture, and instrumental, which relates to practical benefits such as career advancement (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, 1985).

Research in Thailand has shown that students generally possess a high level of motivation to learn English, with instrumental motivation frequently surpassing integrative motivation (Naruponjirakul & Sanboonvej, 2019). However, studies focusing specifically on vocational education remain scarce. Aiyakorn and Somphong (2019) examined vocational students and found that they were more instrumentally motivated, indicating a desire to learn English for practical, career-related reasons. These findings underscore the need for further investigation into motivational factors within vocational education to guide more effective teaching practices.

This study explores English learning motivation among vocational students at a private college in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The college emphasizes English instruction, especially for third-year English major students, who are required to complete internships in positions such as receptionist or tour guide. By examining their levels and types of motivation, the study aims to inform instructional strategies that support English language learning in vocational contexts, where practical language use is essential.

The Purposes

1. To investigate the levels of English learning motivation of English major students at a private vocational college in Chiang Mai

2. To explore the types of motivation of English major students at a private vocational college in Chiang Mai

3. To investigate the teaching strategies to enhance the students' motivation of English teachers at a private vocational college in Chiang Mai

Literary Review

1. Definition

Motivation is a complex concept that has been widely studied across various disciplines. Gardner (1985) defined motivation as the combination of effort, desire, and positive attitudes toward achieving a goal in language learning. Crookes and Schmidt (1991) viewed motivation as the learner's orientation toward acquiring a second language. Other scholars, such as Elliot and Covington (2001), described motivation as the driving force behind people's actions, desires, and needs, while Oxford and Shearin (1994) emphasized it as the desire to achieve a goal coupled with determination. Overall, motivation serves as the factor that propels individuals to act or develop preferences for certain behaviors (Pardee, 1990; Guay, 2010).

Motivation in language learning is often classified into different types. Gardner and Lambert (1972, 1985) distinguished between integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation involves learning a language for personal growth and cultural enrichment, while instrumental motivation is driven by practical goals, such as career advancement or academic achievement. Spaulding (1992) introduced intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, with intrinsic motivation stemming from internal satisfaction and extrinsic motivation being influenced by external rewards. Brown, H. D. (2000) expanded on this classification, including both intrinsic and extrinsic alongside integrative and instrumental motivations. Dörnyei, Z. (1998) highlighted that these motivations often coexist and are shaped by contextual factors, such as whether the language is learned as a second or foreign language.

Motivation plays a crucial role in English language learning, as it significantly influences student success. According to Gardner, R. C. (1985), motivated students tend to have clear goals, overcome challenges, and demonstrate a positive attitude toward learning. Forbes, J. (2017) and Spolsky, B. (1990) noted that highly motivated students are more likely to persevere in the face of difficulty and achieve better results. Motivation, therefore, is critical to successful language acquisition.

Dörnyei, Z. (1994) identified three levels of motivation: language level, learner level, and situation level. The language level pertains to attitudes toward the culture and potential success with the language. The learner level focuses on self-confidence and factors such as anxiety and perceived competence. Finally, the situation level refers to context-specific motivational factors within the classroom, including the course, teacher and peer influences. These levels highlight the multifaceted nature of motivation and the importance of both internal and external factors in language learning.

2. Previous studies

Research on students' motivation for learning English has explored various factors influencing language acquisition, with notable studies focusing on vocational students, English majors, and non-English majors. Aiyakorn, S., and Somphong, M. (2019) studied 120 vocational certificate students and found that their

instrumental motivation, which includes practical goals such as career advancement, was higher than their integrative motivation, which pertains to cultural enrichment. They recommended designing teaching methodologies that maintain and increase students' motivation. Similarly, Naruponjirakul, S., and Sanboonvej, S. (2019) surveyed 225 undergraduate students in education programs, revealing that, like vocational students, their instrumental motivation outweighed integrative motivation. The study also identified grammar as the primary challenge in language learning, followed by listening and speaking skills. The findings led to recommendations for exploring additional factors that affect motivation and expanding research to compare motivations across diverse student groups.

In contrast, studies focusing on English major students present a different pattern of motivation. Juntiya, T., Panyasi, S., and Kakaew, J. (2017) examined 143 English Education students and found that instrumental motivation was dominant over integrative motivation, with internal factors such as personal achievement driving motivation. Similarly, Kitjaroonchai, P., and Kitjaroonchai, S. (2012) studied 137 Thai English majors and found a relatively balanced presence of both integrative and instrumental motivations. This suggests that English majors may possess a broader range of motivations compared to non-English majors or vocational students, with both practical and personal development factors influencing their language learning.

Research on non-major students, like Chintaradeja, P. (2019) study of 62 first-year students in business administration, highlighted high levels of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, indicating that students in various fields may have diverse motivations based on personal and external goals. In Myanmar, studies such as those by Narada, K., Kanokkamalade, V., and Klinchan, N. (2020) and Pannasara, V., Kanokkamalade, V., and Klinchan, N. (2020) revealed that Myanmar students exhibited more integrative motivation compared to their Thai counterparts, suggesting cultural and regional differences in motivation. These studies emphasize the need to consider the context and background of learners when designing language learning programs, highlighting the importance of tailoring strategies to fit the motivational profiles of different student groups.

Methodology

This research used a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques (Creswell, J. W., 1999). The questionnaire explored English learning motivation among English major students at a vocational college, while interviews gathered insights from teachers on techniques to inspire students. This approach offers a comprehensive, balanced perspective on the research topic.

1. Population and participants: The participants consisted of 100 students enrolled in the Vocational Certificate in English program at a private commercial college in Chiang Mai, along with five English teachers who had over five years of teaching experience, using Yamane's (1967) equation for the sample size. For the

interview part, five in-service English teachers at the vocational college responded five questions on their teaching technique to motivate students.

2. Research tools: The research tools were a questionnaire on English learning motivation, adapted from The Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) by Gardner's (2004), and a set of questions to interview teachers. The questionnaire items were reviewed by three experts in English as a Foreign Language and English Teaching. They assessed its validity using the Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) method, and the average IOC score was deemed acceptable. The interview questions were developed based on the researchers' classroom observations to ensure the appropriateness of the items. Prior to implementation, the questions were reviewed and validated by two experts.

3. Data Collection:

3.1 The researchers collected data from 100 Vocational Certificate English major students after obtaining permission from the college director. Participants were informed about the research details, then completed a Google Form questionnaire within 30 minutes. Participation was voluntary, with confidentiality ensured, and participants could withdraw at any time.

3.2 Interviews were conducted for each teacher to gather information on what strategies the used to enhance their students' levels of motivation in learning English.

4. Data Analysis: The researchers collected questionnaires to analyze the research results. The data in the second part of the questionnaire were analyzed statistically by using percentage, frequency, mean and standard deviation. The criteria for analyzing and interpreting the questionnaire adapted from Siljaru, T. (2017), ranging from 5.00-4.50 (Very High), 4.49-3.50 (High), 3.49-2.50 (Medium), 2.49-1.50 (Low), and 1.49-1.00 (Very Low).

5. Statistics: The statistics used in the research are descriptive in nature, consisting of mean scores and standard deviations. These measures were chosen to summarize and present the data in a clear and concise manner.

Results

This part presents the findings of exploring English learning motivation from 100 Vocational Certificate in English major students at a private vocational college in Chiang Mai. The findings are divided into two main parts. The first part was general demographic information. The second part focused on the types and levels on English learning motivation.

1. General Demographic Information

There were 100 English major students. The majority of English major students were female (75%), with only 25% were male. Nearly half of students were 17 to 18 years old (40%). One-third of them were 19 to 20

years old (32%), followed by 15 to 16 years old (24%). Surprisingly, only 4% were over 20 years old. The majority of the students were Vocational Certificate level 2 (37%), followed by Vocational Certificate level 3 (34%). The minority of the students were Vocational Certificate level 1 (29%).

2. The Types and Levels on English Learning Motivation

This part illustrates the types and levels on English learning motivation of English major students, a private commercial college in Chiang Mai as follows: Instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. The researchers can classify the research results according to Table 1-2 as follows

Table 1 Integrative Motivation and Instrumental Motivation on English Learning of English Major Students at a private vocational college in Chiang Mai

Statement	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level
Integrative motivation	4.75	0.54	Very high
Instrumental motivation	4.68	0.72	Very high

As can be seen from Table 1, the types and levels on English learning motivation of English major students. Over all of them tended to have a very high level of integrative motivation ($\bar{x}$= 4.75). However, students appeared to have an instrumental motivation slightly lower than integrative motivation ($\bar{x}$= 4.68).

Table 2 Integrative Motivation on English Learning of English Major Students at a private vocational college in Chiang Mai

Item	Statement	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level
1	Learning English enable me fully understand movies and music in foreign languages.	4.83	0.43	Very high
2	Learning English is essential because it enables me to engage in activities with individuals from all cultures.	4.76	0.51	Very high
3	Learning English is essential because it gives me the confidence to travel abroad and converse with people.	4.75	0.59	Very high
4	Learning English is important because I want to learn more about the world events.	4.75	0.56	Very high
5	I enjoy learning English from foreigner teachers.	4.74	0.48	Very high
6	Learning English makes me want to imitate the accent and tone of voice of native speaker.	4.73	0.58	Very high
7	Learning English makes me feel more comfortable and confident to communicate with native speakers.	4.72	0.64	Very high

8	Learning English allows me to meet and converse with a wider variety of people.	4.72	0.49	Very high
Total		4.75	0.54	Very High

According to Table 2 students appeared to have a very high level of integrative motivation on English learning ($\bar{x}$= 4.75). The students fully understood movies and music in foreign languages ($\bar{x}$= 4.83) which enabled them to engage in activities with individuals from all cultures ($\bar{x}$= 4.76). In addition, they were confident to travel abroad and converse with people ($\bar{x}$= 4.75). Additionally, they wanted to learn more about the world events ($\bar{x}$= 4.75). However, they enjoyed learning English from foreign teachers ($\bar{x}$= 4.74) and they wanted to imitate the accent and tone of voice of native speakers ($\bar{x}$= 4.73), by reason of they felt more comfortable and confident to communicate with native speakers ($\bar{x}$= 4.72).

3. Instrumental Motivation on English Learning of English Major Students at a Private Vocational College in Chiang Mai

The researchers can classify the research results according to Table 3 as follows

Table 3 Instrumental Motivation on English Learning of English Major Students at a private vocational college in Chiang Mai

Item	Statement	$\bar{x}$	S.D.	Level
1	Studying English is important to me as it is a compulsory subject at college.	4.84	0.37	Very high
2	I study English because I want to earn a bachelor's degree.	4.81	0.51	Very high
3	Learning English is important because I need to use English for my future work.	4.74	0.65	Very high
4	Learning English is important because it will make others respect and accept me more that I can use a foreign language.	4.67	0.71	Very high
5	I feel pleased and proud of myself for learning English.	4.66	0.77	Very high
6	Learning English is important because it enables me be confident when I give a presentation in front of the class.	4.64	0.73	Very high
7	I wish I were fluent in English.	4.55	0.93	Very high
8	I study English diligently in order to obtain an honorary grade.	4.55	0.91	Very high
Total		4.68	0.72	Very high

As shown in Table 3, the students were likely to have a very high level of instrumental motivation on English learning ($\bar{x}$= 4.68). Particularly, they studied English as it a compulsory subject at college ($\bar{x}$= 4.84). As a

result, they wanted to earn a bachelor's degree ($\bar{x}$= 4.81) as well as needed to use English for their future work ($\bar{x}$= 4.74). Furthermore, they believed others respected and accepted them more if they could use a foreign language ($\bar{x}$= 4.67). Therefore, they felt pleased and proud of themselves for learning English ($\bar{x}$= 4.66) and they were confident when giving a presentation in front of the class ($\bar{x}$= 4.64). Surprisingly, they wished they were fluent in English ($\bar{x}$= 4.55). They also studied English diligently in order to obtain an honorary grade ($\bar{x}$= 4.55).

4. Interview Results

From the interviews with five English teachers at a vocational college on teaching strategies to enhance the students' motivation, it was found that student engagement is crucial, and diverse teaching techniques are essential to enhance motivation. The first teacher highlighted using global stories and current events to spark interest, emphasizing the role of technology, especially YouTube, in engaging students. Having students answer questions individually encourages them to pay closer attention to the lesson, she said, adding that informal discussions on relatable topics, such as celebrities, help create a stimulating learning environment. The use of storytelling and personalized approaches was key to motivating students.

The second teacher emphasized role-playing as a strategy to foster active participation, suggesting that in each classroom and for each student, the level of interest will vary, which is normal. By integrating technology, like QR codes for interactive question sessions, the teacher encouraged greater student involvement. Answering questions by scanning QR codes encourages students' participation and helps stimulate greater interest in learning, he explained.

The third teacher focused on motivation through tangible rewards like points and prizes, using group work to boost participation. By leveraging students' preferences for music, teachers can select songs that resonate with learners' interests, she noted, which enhanced the learning experience through multimedia tools like movies and music.

The fourth teacher noted that humor could reduce tension and create a relaxed learning atmosphere. "Telling jokes is another effective technique. It helps students relax, have fun, feel more comfortable with the teacher, and become more open to learning," she stated. This method, along with creating real-life learning experiences, such as speaking English with tourists or participating in online activities, motivated students to engage more enthusiastically.

The fifth teacher focused on linking language lessons to real-life events like weather, as well as using vocabulary games to maintain student interest. "Vocabulary games have consistently been one of the most effective techniques for teaching students at all levels," she said, demonstrating the value of dynamic, context-based learning. These strategies highlight the importance of diverse teaching methods in fostering motivation and student participation, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of English language learning.

Conclusion and Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that English major students generally exhibited a very high level of integrative motivation, indicating that they value learning English as a means of connecting with others and engaging in cross-cultural exchanges. This suggests that they are highly motivated to learn the language for personal growth and social integration. However, it was also observed that their instrumental motivation while still important was slightly lower, suggesting that while they understand the practical benefits of English, such as career prospects and academic achievement, they prioritize the integrative aspects of learning the language. The study highlights that these students prefer learning English through interaction with native speakers and outside of traditional textbooks. This preference points to the significance of authentic language use in boosting learners' confidence and comfort in using English in real-life situations. Consequently, to sustain high levels of motivation and continue progressing in their language acquisition, it is essential for students to balance their learning approach by incorporating textbook study, online resources, and immersion in environments where they can use English regularly.

The implications of these findings suggest that both educators and students should focus on creating learning environments that promote both integrative and instrumental motivations. Educators can facilitate this by incorporating real-world English usage into the curriculum, providing opportunities for students to interact with native speakers, and fostering clear, achievable language learning goals. Moreover, students are encouraged to set personal goals and seek opportunities to use English in practical contexts, which will support their lifelong learning journey and enhance their English proficiency.

In terms of practical application, this study provides valuable insights that can be utilized to develop more effective teaching strategies and interventions aimed at enhancing students' motivation to learn English. By understanding the motivational factors at play, educators can better design lessons and activities that cater to students' interests and future aspirations. Ultimately, fostering a strong motivation to learn English will not only help students achieve proficiency in the language but also contribute to their personal and professional growth in an increasingly globalized world.

1. Discussion of the First Question

What are the levels of English learning motivation of English major students at a private vocational college in Chiang Mai

The level of motivation of English major students at a private vocational college in Chiang Mai was at a very high level. This point can be explained as follows: English major students studied English as a foreign language to use it in their daily lives, such as watching movies and listening to music. Also, they were confident to travel abroad and converse with people. Furthermore, they enjoyed learning English from foreign teachers and they wished they were fluent in English. Huy-Cuong, N. (2019) stated that more students with high levels

of motivation would like to learn English to develop themselves in everyday use and be able to communicate well with foreigners than students with low levels of motivation.

English major students had a very high level of motivation because they wanted to be a part of an international culture and they are interested in using English in their daily lives to improve their abilities and knowledge. The most important thing is that students in Vocational Certificate Level three must go through the internship required in a place that involves the use of English for two months and graduate to become vocational workers. Therefore, they need to focus heavily on learning English for use in their daily lives. This would enable them to succeed on learning English they deem relevant to their personal, professional, and life goals.

This study is consistent with Aiyakorn, S., and Somphong, M. (2018), they studied the level of motivation to learn English of Vocational Certificate students from college in Sakon Nakhon province and found that the motivation to learn English was very high. The findings confirmed the importance and level of motivation in learning English and found that students of all years had a very high level of English learning motivation, which shows that regardless of what year students are in, they were aware of the importance of English and had a desire to learn it.

2. Discussion of the Second Question

What are the types of motivation of English major students at a private vocational college in Chiang Mai The type of motivation of English major students at tended to have integrative motivation slightly higher than instrumental motivation because they studied English as a foreign language to use it in their daily lives, such as watching movies and speaking English with other people which enabled them to engage in activities with individuals from several cultures. According to Saville-Troike, M. (2006), integrative motivation in foreign language learning is defined as the desire to be a part of recognized or important members of the community or society that speaks the language. In addition, they wanted to imitate the accent and tone of voice of native speakers by reason of they felt more comfortable and confident to communicate with native speakers.

This study is consistent with Narada, K., Kanokkamalade, V., and Klinchan, N. (2020), who investigated the levels and types of motivation for English language learning at Vietnam National University. The findings revealed that integrative motivation slightly higher than instrumental motivation. In contrast, it is clearly seen that the findings mentioned above are different from this research due to the completely different population, which is the Vietnamese students, who use English as a foreign language but they have a motivation to succeed in learning English as well.

3. Discussion of the Third Question

What are the teaching strategies to enhance the students' motivation of English teachers at a private vocational college in Chiang Mai Interviews with five English teachers at a private vocational college revealed

several strategies for engaging students and fostering motivation in English language learning. The teachers emphasized the importance of using diverse teaching techniques to cater to the varied needs of students. Key strategies include using global stories and current events to connect lessons to real-world contexts, effectively sparking student interest and enhancing lesson relevance. To make it practical, Tursunova, U. A. (2024) recommended incorporating project-based learning (PBL), which promotes inquiry, collaboration, and real-world language use. The integration of technology, particularly platforms like YouTube, was highlighted as a crucial resource for delivering dynamic and interactive content as for example, Watkins, J., and Wilkins, M. (2011) stated that YouTube videos can serve as authentic materials to support cultural learning and exposure to World Englishes. They also help develop authentic vocabulary and can be integrated into reading and writing tasks. Both in-class activities and at-home projects can effectively incorporate online streaming videos. This combination of storytelling, technology, and personalized instruction was seen as essential for motivating students.

Another significant strategy discussed by the teachers was the use of role-play techniques to foster active participation. By allowing students to take on meaningful roles, these activities deepened their engagement with the subject matter. Teachers also noted the value of providing tangible rewards, such as points or teacher-prepared prizes, to encourage students to actively participate in classroom activities. Additionally, incorporating multimedia tools like movies and music was considered highly effective in making lessons more enjoyable while offering immersive learning experiences that enhance language comprehension.

The teachers also emphasized the importance of using humor to reduce tension in the classroom and introduce new vocabulary and proverbs. This approach helped students feel more comfortable and opened them to learning. Furthermore, integrating real-life situations into lessons, such as linking weather events to content, was seen as a practical way to make language learning more relatable and engaging. Overall, the findings highlighted the significance of combining innovative teaching strategies, technology, and real-life relevance to create a motivating and dynamic learning environment for vocational college students.

Academic Findings or New Knowledge

The research findings will serve as valuable guidelines for those in non-formal education who wish to pursue further studies with an emphasis on English for career. Moreover, the findings will contribute to the promotion of lifelong learning in the field of English for occupational purposes. For English language teachers, the results can enhance the groundwork for designing effective and practical courses tailored to the needs of both vocational and non-vocational learners.

Suggestions

1. Suggestions for Use

1.1 The research findings can inform the development of English language instructional materials ranging from basic to advanced levels, with a focus on vocational content aligned with labor market demands. Such materials can bridge the gap between language education and the skills required in real-world professional contexts, thus enhancing learners' employability.

1.2 These findings can be applied to enhance teacher competencies by offering pedagogical strategies that align with the authentic communicative needs of various industries. This alignment supports a shift from traditional, textbook-driven instruction toward task-based and context-sensitive teaching approaches, fostering more meaningful and applicable learning experiences.

1.3 Moreover, the study's outcomes can contribute to the promotion of learner-centered instruction by guiding the integration of English language skills that are directly relevant to learners' personal goals and career aspirations. By tailoring language input and tasks to learners' real-life needs, educators can increase learner motivation, engagement, and long-term language retention.

2. Suggestions for Future Research

2.1 Future research in English language teaching could investigate how real-life exposure such as travel, internships, or part-time jobs impacts students' motivation and language acquisition. Comparing instructional approaches, such as Thai teachers versus native speakers, may offer insights into motivational and learning differences. Exploring formal learning alongside informal activities, like online exchanges or English clubs, could reveal how structured and experiential learning complement each other.

2.2 Further studies could compare vocational and university students to understand how institutional environments and career goals influence motivation. Including diverse student backgrounds and using longitudinal and qualitative methods would provide deeper insights into personal, psychological, and contextual factors affecting English learning.

However, this study faced limitations in sample size and time. Although the target population included 130 students, only 100 consented to participate, which may affect the generalizability of the results. Time constraints also posed challenges, as the study was conducted over a single semester with limited time for questionnaire development and data collection.

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