

## **Why learn English? A case study of students' motivation at Dili Institute of Technology**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Motivation is one of the key factors driving language learning success. Without student motivation, there is no pulse; there is no life in the class. This paper is an attempt to look at what motivates the students of Dili Institute of Technology (DIT) to learn English and the relationship between students' motivation and their English achievement. In particular, investigates whether the students are driven by intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, and the impact of the motivation on students' achievement. The method used in this research is questionnaires to elicit information about factors which contribute to students' motivation in learning English. The sample is 80 students from the first term of the 2017 academic year. The results show that the majority of DIT students have good motivation to learn English. They are driven by both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, but intrinsic motivation is higher than extrinsic motivation. Their claimed motivation is reflected in their practical initiatives to achieve their goals in learning English through a number of productive and receptive learning activities done outside of class.

**Keywords:** Motivation, Language Learning, Student motivation, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation

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## Introduction

Dili Institute of Technology (DIT) is in the process of moving from Indonesian to English and Tetun as languages of instruction. Therefore, an intensive English course was set up for the Tourism and Engineering faculties, starting in 2015 and 2016 respectively. In 2018, intensive English courses will additionally be implemented for the Petroleum Studies and Business and Finance Management faculties.

The intensive English course at DIT is currently conducted for 15–20 hours per week throughout the first year, in contrast to non-intensive courses, which were historically taught for 2–4 hours per week. English levels used are beginner, elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate, as defined in the *Speakout* series (Eales and Oakes, 2011). The students are divided into four to five classes per faculty, based on their English entrance test, with 30 to 40 students in each class. Most students start at the beginner level, however, so far there has always been one class in each faculty which started at elementary level. During the year-long course, students from the Tourism faculty complete three levels, which for most students means beginner, elementary and pre-intermediate, while the top class reaches pre-intermediate. Within the Engineering faculty, after elementary level, students continue with English for specific purposes, namely Technical English I and Technical English 2.

The content of the material for the Tourism faculty is general English which encompass general topics related to daily life and work. For the Engineering faculty, the materials consist of both general English and specific technical English. The manual used for teaching general English is *Speakout* (Eales and Oakes, 2011). This is an interactive and engaging course that covers all the skills, including speaking, listening, reading, writing, grammar and pronunciation. A book called *Technical English* (Bonamy 2008) is used for Technical English. This series of books contains pictures, technical vocabulary, texts, audio and exercises, both written and oral. Students' performance is assessed in various ways, both written and oral. Written tests are given after each unit and speaking tests two or three times per term. At present, DIT has twenty full-time English lecturers (eleven male and nine female) in the English department. This makes it the largest department at DIT. Nearly all are under 30 years of age. They are energetic, and work very well as a team. Some of them specialise in teaching English to the Tourism faculty, and some to the Engineering faculty.

## Literature review

### Characteristics of motivation

There is no widely accepted definition of motivation. However, there are many agreed characteristics of a motivated learner. For instance, Gardner (2007, 2) says that “the motivated individual is goal directed, expends effort, is persistent, is attentive, has desires (wants), exhibits positive affect, is aroused, has expectancies, demonstrates self-confidence (self-efficacy), and has reasons (motives).” That is, motivation involves thoughts, feelings, and actions.

## Types of motivation

Brown (2000) classifies motivation into integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation refers to language learning for personal growth and cultural enhancement. That is, the learner desires to learn a language to integrate successfully into the target language community. Instrumental motivation arises out of a need to learn a language for functional or external reasons such as passing an exam, furthering a career, or promotion. In the 1990s, researchers grouped integrative and instrumental motivation together under the category of “extrinsic motivation” (e.g. Al-Ghamdi 2014, 7), and add a further category of “intrinsic motivation”.

Extrinsic motivation refers to the motivation which is driven by outside factors or sources rather than an inside willingness from oneself. It is a desire to carry out something due to its advantage, for example, to gain a position and a well-paid job, to pass an exam, or to please the teachers.

Intrinsic motivation is defined by Anjomshoa and Sadighi (2015, 126) as motivation which originates within a person. The result is that the person does something because of their own will, initiating and regulating the activity themselves. Intrinsic motivation includes finding the activity pleasant and satisfying, considering it worthwhile, or sensing that learning has its own rewards. It is a personal desire to learn independently and voluntarily and is not forced by other people because they think it is worthy and essential for the learner.

There are significant differences between intrinsically and extrinsically motivated learners, particularly in language learning progress. Learners who are intrinsically motivated perform better in a course, while externally motivated students may apply just the bare minimum of effort, have lower satisfaction levels, and higher anxiety, stress and frustration (Lei 2010, 157).

Overall, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation arouse action. Most teachers agree that both types of motivation play important roles in the learning process.

## Importance of motivation for language learning

According to many researchers and teachers, motivation is a key factor that drives students to succeed in learning a second language (e.g. Gilakjani et al. 2012, 9; Wang 2008, 642). Motivation has many benefits. It is the driving force that fuels students' initiative to learn a foreign or second language and it also maintains students' mood to keep going during the long and dull learning process. According to Oxford and Shearin (1994, 12), “Motivation determines the extent of active, personal involvement in L2 learning. [...] Research shows that motivation directly influences how often students use L2 learning strategies, how much students interact with native speakers, how much input they receive in the language being learned, [...] how well they do on curriculum-related achievement tests, how high their general proficiency level becomes, and how long they persevere and maintain L2 skills after language study is over.” Wimolmas (2012, 907) notes that students who are highly motivated will participate keenly, taking an active part in any tasks or activities. In contrast, students who are less motivated are likely to lose concentration, perform badly, and cause discipline problems. As noted by Dörnyei & Csizér (1998, 203), “without sufficient motivation, even individuals with remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals”, even if they are taught with appropriate curriculum and good teaching methods. Not only is motivation a key factor in student success, but it is also important for teachers to understand the correlation between motivation and its outcome on language acquisition (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011, 995). They also need to understand what motivates their students, so that they can build on this motivation in class.

## The research question

Since motivation is so important in language learning, we decided to investigate DIT students' motivation for learning English. In particular, we investigate to what extent students are driven by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. We also analyse the relationship between students' involvement in out-of-class English activities and their English achievement. Understanding student motivation will help teachers to know to what extent students are motivated, and what motivates them, thus helping them to figure out more interesting ways to maintain or even to increase students' interest and willingness to learn English.

## Research methods

Information on motivation was obtained using questionnaires. There were 21 questions eliciting demographic information, information about various types of motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, and what students do outside of class to improve their English. Since the students are studying English intensively, the questionnaire was in English. The sample was 90 first-year students from the first term of the 2017 academic year, with students chosen from a mixture of achievement levels in each English class in the Tourism and Engineering faculties. This research was carried out on 30<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup> May 2017 at the DIT campus in Dili.

We then looked at students' marks in first term (February-June), and compared these with their own initiative in learning English outside class, to see whether there was any correlation between them.

One limitation of this study is that it only focuses on motivation from the students' point of view. It merely looks into what they do on their own to achieve their goals in learning English as driven by their motivation. But it excludes the impact of teachers, physical classroom conditions, and the resources used in teaching students at DIT.

## Results

### Demographic overview

There were 90 students surveyed, 45 from the Tourism faculty and 45 from the Engineering faculty. There were 52 males and 38 females, with ages ranging from 18 to 21.

### What motivates DIT students to learn English?

Figure 2 below presents intrinsic factors that encourage DIT students to learn English.

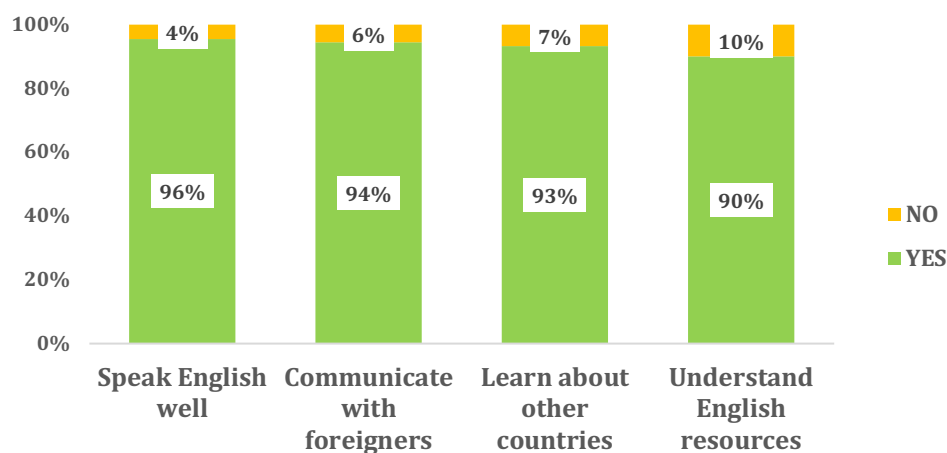
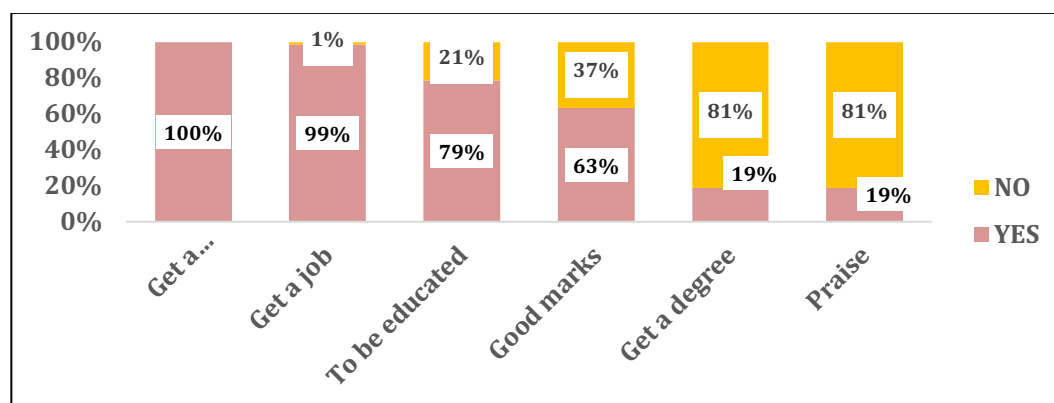


Figure 2. Intrinsic factors

All four intrinsic factors in the questionnaire received a ‘yes’ answer from over 90% of the students. Almost all the respondents (96%) agreed that they want to learn English because they want to speak English well. The second highest factor is learning English in order to communicate with foreigners (94%). This may be because there are a number of foreigners in Timor-Leste and the students are motivated to speak English with them, but it also helps with obtaining scholarships and well-paying jobs (extrinsic motivations). Learning about other countries (93%) is another important motivation for students to learn English, as there are many books, websites and films about other countries in English. The last internal motivation that moves students to learn English is to understand English resources (90%). This indicates a desire to understand material provided in English, including in electronic form (phone, computer, internet, TV etc.), in print (books, newspaper and magazine etc.).

Figure 2 below presents information concerning extrinsic factors that motivate students to learn English.



**Figure 3.** Extrinsic factors

As shown here, the highest outside factor that drives students to learn English is to get scholarships (100%). All respondents hope that English skills can help them get a scholarship to attend short courses or to obtain their degree or Masters’ degree overseas. Another highly significant motivation for learning English is in order to get a job (99%). English skill is possibly one of the most important criteria for obtaining well-paid jobs in Timor-Leste nowadays, therefore, students consider English as an essential skill that may help them get a job after they graduate. Another important factor that encourages students to learn English is to be an educated person (79%). In Timor-Leste, English is considered as a difficult language, and not many people speak it well. Consequently, people who can master and speak this language well can be deemed educated and clever. Another extrinsic source of motivation to learn English, which was chosen by far less students, is to achieve good marks (63%), English being one of the general subjects included in their program of study.

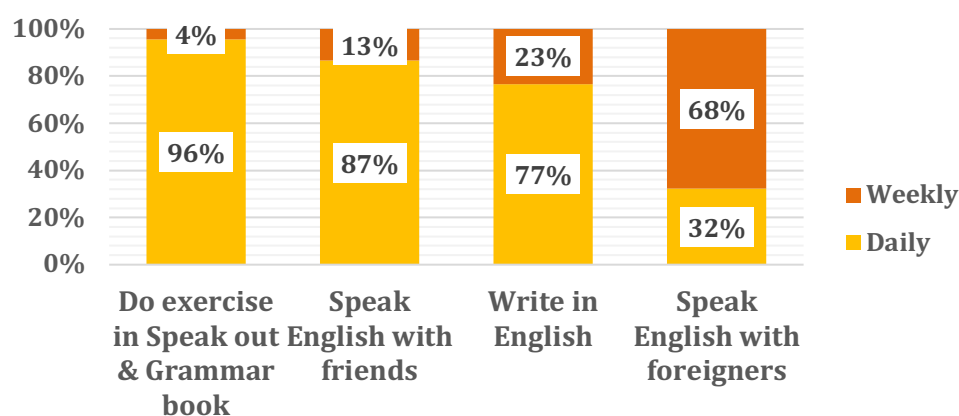
There are two extrinsic causes of motivation which were chosen by only a minority of students (both 19%). These are to get a degree and to get praise from teachers and family. Presumably getting a degree is a low motivator because DIT does not offer a degree in English and they have not yet seen how important English skills are for succeeding in other degrees when these are taught in English. Students have been accustomed to a learning environment without praise since they were in primary school. As a result, praise is not a crucial issue for them in learning a language.

Overall, it can be seen that DIT students are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to study English. However, all intrinsic motivations rate very highly, while only some of the extrinsic ones do not. This suggests that students have internal desire and initiative to learn English.

### What do DIT students do to achieve their goals in learning English?

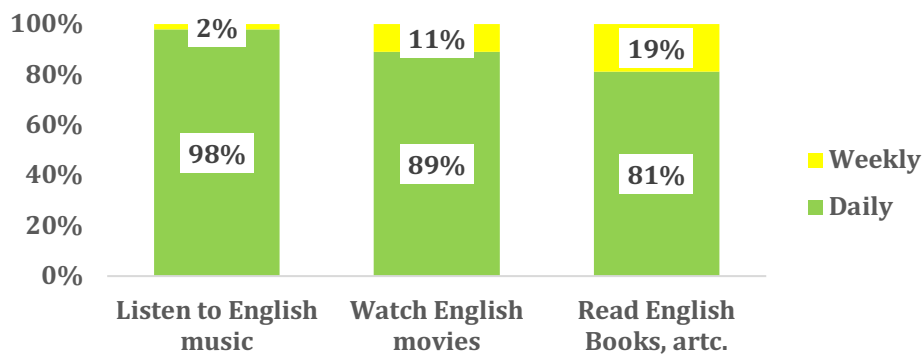
In this research, besides investigating students' motivation to learn English we also look at what students do as individuals to learn English outside of intensive English classes at DIT. This is to measure the level of their motivation through their actions. There are several receptive and productive learning activities done by students. For this, students were given a list of options, and asked how often they did each activity. Besides attending intensive English at DIT, about 64% of the respondents report that they have attended English courses outside. A number of students have taken English courses prior to coming to DIT and others are doing so while studying at DIT. Of the students who attended courses outside, 36% of the respondents took English courses at SOLS (Science of Life System), 12% at LELI (Lorosa's English Language Institute), 10% at ETDA (East Timor Development Agency) and 43% at other institutions offered by several NGOs and government institutions. This clearly shows that students already had initiative to learn English before coming to DIT.

Figure 3 below shows other English learning activities done by students outside of class. 96% of the respondents said that they do exercises from the *Speakout* manual used for teaching intensive English at DIT, or do exercises from English grammar books at home on a daily basis. 87% stated that they speak English with their friends, for instance at home or on campus. 77% of them responded that they write in English, for example, chatting on Facebook, SMS and email. Only 32% declared that they speak English with foreigners. This could be in part due to not being confident enough with their English.



**Figure 4.** Productive English learning activities

Besides the productive learning activities above, students are also proactive in several receptive learning activities in a daily basis, such as listening to English music (98%), watching English movies (89%) and reading English books, articles, magazines, and newspaper (81%).

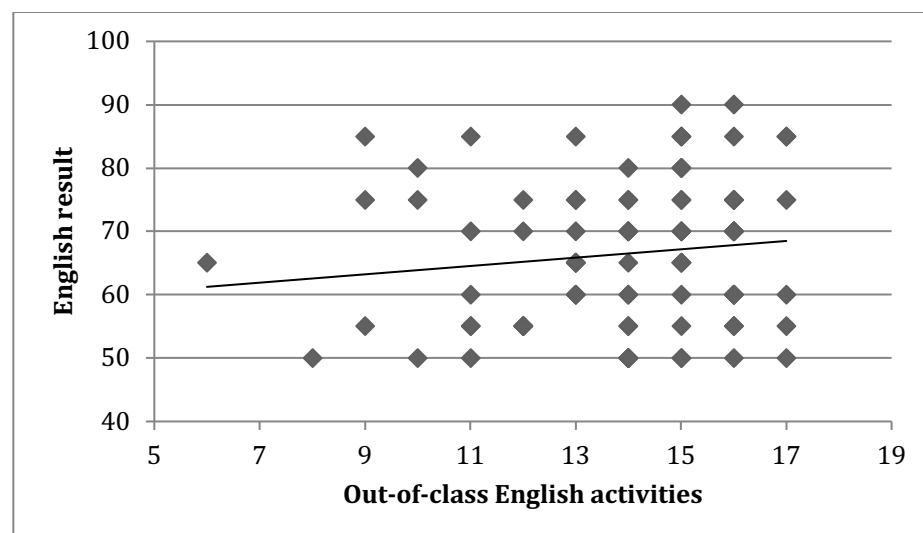


**Figure 5.** Receptive English learning activities

Overall, the results show that students are more frequently engaged in receptive learning activities than productive learning activities. This could be due to the fact that receiving is easier than producing. In addition, the receptive learning resources, such as English music, movies, and books, are readily available and easy to access.

### The relationship between English activities and English achievement

Figure 5 below shows the relationship between students' involvement in out-of-class English activities, and the final mark for term 1 English for each student, regardless of their English level. To determine this relationship, we first needed to quantify their motivation. For yes/no questions, students were given one point for each "Yes" (or for two questions "No") answer that showed motivation. For questions about frequency, one point was given for every answer that showed activities were done at least once per week, or where this was not relevant, at least "sometimes". This graph shows that exam marks are higher for students with greater involvement in out-of-class English activities, but that the effect is not large.

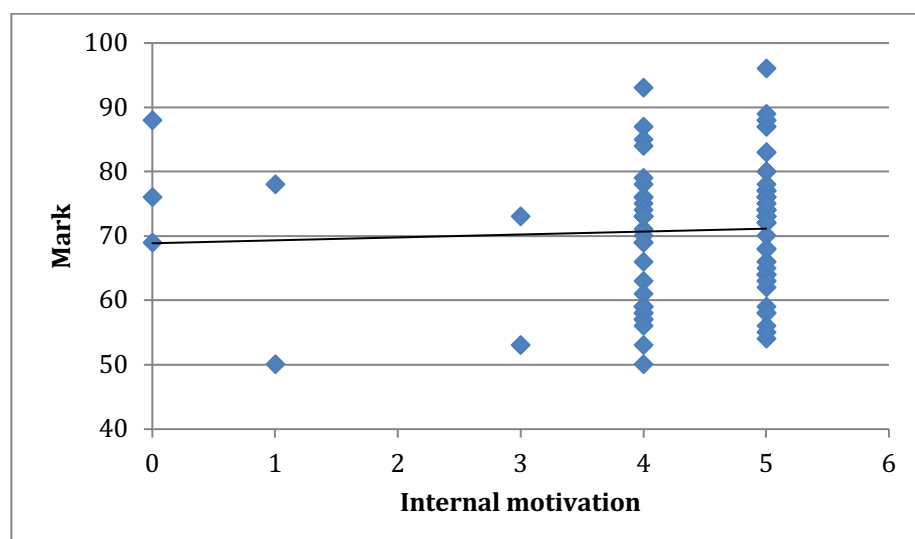


**Figure 6.** Students' involvement in out-of-class English activities versus English achievement

Surprisingly, students in the higher English classes were not significantly more involved in English activities out of class than students in lower classes.

### The relationship between intrinsic motivation and English achievement

Figure 6 plots intrinsic motivation against the students' final English mark. The number for intrinsic motivation was calculated by adding up all the "Yes" responses for the relevant questions.



**Figure 7.** Students' intrinsic motivation versus English mark

The results indicate that students with higher intrinsic motivation tend to achieve better results in English exams. The effect of intrinsic motivation is however very weak in this study. Given that many studies in the literature point to motivation as a key factor in students' success in language learning (e.g. Gilakjani et al. 2012, 9; Wang 2008, 642), this weak correlation is somewhat surprising. Presumably it came about because many other factors also come into play in language learning success, and because both motivation and English achievement are difficult to measure accurately.

### Conclusion

This pilot research shows that the majority of DIT students have good motivation to learn English. They are driven by both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation, but intrinsic motivation is higher than extrinsic motivation. Their claimed motivation is reflected in their practical initiatives to achieve their goals in learning English through a number of productive and receptive learning activities done outside of class. Motivation has in other studies around the world been shown to be an important contributor to success in language learning. This correlation was weak in the present study. Nevertheless, based on the literature we consider it important to build on students' motivation to learn. There are many ways to do this. Dörnyei (2001, 137-144) summarises these into four principles of motivational teaching practice. Dörnyei firstly recommends creating the basic motivational conditions, namely fostering a pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere, maintaining good relationships with students, and developing a cohesive learner group with appropriate norms.

Secondly, he recommends generating initial student motivation, through their expectation of achievement and through being goal-oriented, creating realistic beliefs, and incorporating students' needs and interests into the teaching curriculum as much as possible. The third recommendation is maintaining the motivation that students already have, by making learning enjoyable and stimulating, giving learners autonomy, protecting their self-esteem and self-



confidence, setting specific goals, and promoting self-motivating strategies and cooperation among students. Fourthly, he advocates encouraging positive self-evaluation, increasing learner satisfaction and offering rewards.

Possibilities for future research include looking at other factors that contribute to students' motivation and success in learning English, such as teaching methods, physical conditions in class, facilities, and resources used for teaching.

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