

The Role of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation in English Language Acquisition among Young Football Athletes

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Abstract

Motivation plays a crucial role in the process of learning, particularly in the field of language acquisition. Research has consistently shown that motivated learners demonstrate greater success in mastering new languages. For young athletes, especially football players, proficiency in English is increasingly vital as it serves as the global language of communication in sports, encompassing areas such as interviews, contracts, and academic advancement. At Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT) Football Academy, students must balance rigorous athletic training with academic responsibilities, making English learning both relevant and necessary. However, their motivation to learn the language may differ due to factors such as personal interest, external incentives, or a lack of perceived relevance. This study aims to examine the types and levels of motivation—specifically intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation—among young footballers at JDT Academy, and to explore how these motivational factors influence their English language acquisition. Findings from this study are expected to provide valuable insights for educators, coaches, and curriculum designers in developing more effective English learning programs tailored to the needs of athlete-students.

Keywords: Motivation, English Language Acquisition, Learning, Athletes

Problem Statement

This study aims to explore the role of motivation—specifically intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation—in influencing English language acquisition among young footballers at JDT Academy.

Although the need for English proficiency among young footballers is evident, there appears to be a gap in their motivation levels to learn the language. Many young athletes prioritize physical training over academic development, potentially overlooking the long-term benefits that English communication skills can offer for international sporting careers. Furthermore, motivational factors specific to young athletes learning English are often overlooked in educational research, which tends to focus on general school populations rather than specialized groups like football academy students.

At JDT Football Academy, where students balance rigorous athletic training with academic expectations, understanding the types of motivation driving English language learning is crucial. Without clear insights into what encourages or discourages these learners, it becomes difficult for educators, coaches, and program designers to create effective English language interventions tailored for athlete-students.

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Research Objectives

1. To identify the dominant types of motivation (intrinsic, extrinsic, amotivation) among young footballers learning English at JDT Football Academy.
2. To analyze the relationship between motivation levels and self-rated English proficiency among the athletes.

Significance of Study

This study is significant as it provides a deeper understanding of how motivation influences English language learning among young athletes at Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT) Football Academy. In a globalized sporting arena, English serves as the universal medium of communication—essential for interviews, contract negotiations, social media engagement, and collaboration with international teams. Therefore, exploring the motivational factors that drive or hinder young footballers' English learning is crucial for promoting both their academic and professional growth.

For educators, the study offers valuable insights into developing more effective and contextually relevant English learning programs for young athletes. By understanding the types of motivation—*intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation*—teachers can design lessons that connect language learning with the students' passion for football. This could include football-related vocabulary, communicative tasks based on real-life sports scenarios, and authentic learning experiences that increase engagement and retention.

For coaches and academy administrators, the findings can assist in recognizing the academic and linguistic needs of players beyond their physical and technical training. Integrating English communication into daily practice sessions, press simulation activities, or tactical discussions can help athletes see language learning as a natural and beneficial part of their sports journey rather than as a separate academic task.

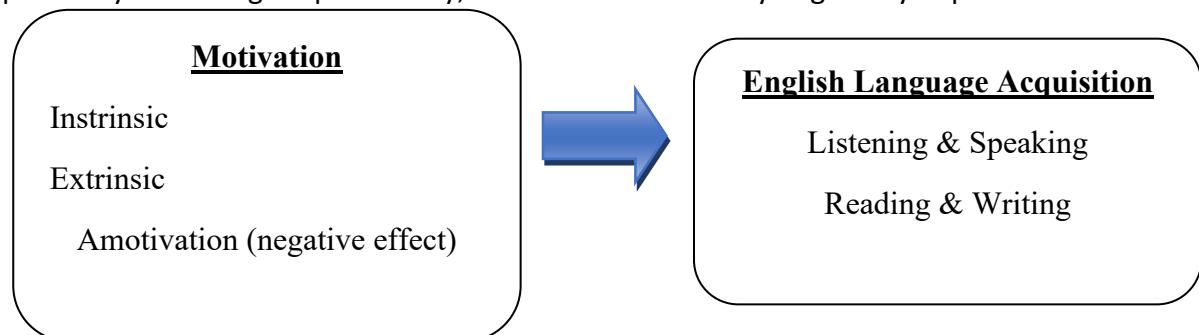
For students, the study encourages self-reflection on the importance of English for personal and career development. Understanding how language proficiency can enhance their prospects in international football and related fields may inspire greater intrinsic motivation to learn.

For researchers, this study contributes to the limited body of literature on motivation and language learning among sports academy students, particularly within the Malaysian context. It highlights the intersection of language education, motivation theory, and sports training.

Overall, understanding the different types of motivation will enable all stakeholders to integrate English learning more naturally with football training, making language acquisition both relevant and engaging. This integration not only enhances communication skills but also supports the holistic development of athlete-students, preparing them to succeed academically, professionally, and globally.

Research Framework

This study conceptualizes motivation (intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation) as the independent variables influencing English language acquisition (dependent variable) among young athletes. The model assumes that higher intrinsic and extrinsic motivation levels will positively affect English proficiency, while amotivation may negatively impact it.



In addition, this study is guided by Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), which categorizes motivation into three main types: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. SDT suggests that human behavior is driven either by internal satisfaction, external rewards, or the absence of intent. In the context of English language learning, SDT helps explain why some young athletes are highly motivated, while others may lack engagement.

Literature Review

Motivation is widely regarded as one of the key factors determining success or failure in second language acquisition. It is defined as the driving force that initiates, guides, and sustains goal-oriented behavior (Dörnyei, 1998). In the context of learning English, motivation influences the amount of effort learners are willing to invest, the persistence they demonstrate when faced with challenges, and the strategies they adopt to enhance their learning.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) were among the first to systematically study motivation in second language learning, introducing two major orientations: integrative and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation refers to learning a language to integrate into the culture of its speakers, while instrumental motivation focuses on learning for practical benefits, such as employment or education. These two types of motivation have since been widely acknowledged in language learning research.

More contemporary theories, such as Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), have refined the understanding of motivation by emphasizing the quality rather than merely the amount of motivation. Motivation can range from intrinsic (driven by interest and enjoyment) to extrinsic (driven by external rewards) to amotivation (lack of motivation). In the language

learning context, students with higher intrinsic motivation are more likely to engage actively in classroom activities, use English outside of the classroom, and achieve higher levels of language proficiency.

In addition, Dörnyei (2001) proposed the L2 Motivational Self System, highlighting the importance of learners' visions of their ideal future selves using the language. This concept suggests that learners who have a strong and positive image of themselves as proficient English speakers are more motivated to achieve that vision.

In the specific context of young footballers, motivation to learn English may not purely stem from academic interests but from the functional need to use English in their sporting careers. Therefore, understanding how different types of motivation operate in a sports-based education environment, such as JDT Football Academy, is essential to support effective language learning interventions.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), is a widely recognized theory of human motivation that focuses on the degree to which individuals' behavior is self-motivated and self-determined. In educational settings, SDT provides a comprehensive framework for understanding students' motivation by categorizing it into three broad types: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation.

Central to SDT is the idea that people have three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are met, individuals experience higher levels of motivation and engagement. For student-athletes, lessons that support autonomy (choice in learning tasks), build competence (football-related English activities), and foster relatedness (positive relationships with coaches and teachers) are more likely to sustain motivation.

Research using SDT in language learning contexts (e.g., Noels et al., 2000) has consistently shown that higher levels of self-determined motivation predict better engagement, persistence, and achievement. In the setting of sports academies like JDT, applying SDT can help educators and coaches understand how to design English learning experiences that align with learners' internal goals and sporting aspirations.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation in English Language Learning

Intrinsic motivation in English learning refers to a learner's internal desire to acquire the language for personal satisfaction, interest, or enjoyment. Learners who are intrinsically motivated tend to seek challenges, persist through difficulties, and derive joy from the learning process itself. For example, a student might feel a deep sense of accomplishment when understanding English lyrics, reading football articles, or holding a conversation with an English-speaking coach. Research has shown that intrinsic motivation is associated with higher levels of language proficiency, deeper learning strategies, and long-term retention of knowledge (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ushioda, 2011).

Extrinsic motivation involves engaging in a behavior to attain external rewards or avoid negative outcomes. In the context of English language learning, extrinsic motivators might include passing exams, gaining scholarships, receiving praise from coaches or teachers, or

increasing employability prospects. For student-athletes, particularly those at institutions like the JDT Football Academy, extrinsic motivation may arise from the understanding that English proficiency is crucial for participating in international matches, receiving overseas scholarships, or engaging with global football media.

While extrinsic motivation can effectively initiate learning behaviors, studies suggest that its effectiveness depends on the degree to which the extrinsic goals are internalized by the learner (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When students perceive external rewards as personally meaningful, their motivation becomes more self-determined, leading to better outcomes compared to those who view learning as merely imposed by others.

Balancing intrinsic and extrinsic motivations is critical in promoting sustained engagement in English learning. Teachers and coaches can foster intrinsic motivation by creating enjoyable, relevant, and autonomy-supportive learning environments. Simultaneously, they can leverage extrinsic incentives that align with learners' broader goals, such as using football-related content or highlighting the career advantages of English proficiency.

Amotivation and its Impact on Language Learning

Motivation plays a pivotal role in the development and performance of young athletes, not only in sports but also in academic and language learning contexts. Student-athletes, such as those at the JDT Football Academy, often balance dual commitments—athletic training and educational advancement—making motivation a central factor in managing both areas effectively.

According to sports psychology literature, motivation among athletes is influenced by both internal drives (e.g., enjoyment of the game, desire to improve) and external pressures (e.g., expectations from coaches, scholarships, competition). Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT) has been widely applied in the sports context, highlighting that when athletes' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met, they are more likely to experience high-quality motivation. In contrast, controlling environments and excessive pressure can lead to decreased motivation, burnout, or disengagement.

For young athletes, intrinsic motivation often emerges from a love of the sport, enjoyment of training, or a desire to reach personal bests. Similarly, in educational settings, intrinsic motivation can drive student-athletes to learn English if they find the content enjoyable or relevant to their lives—for instance, when language learning is integrated with football-related topics.

Extrinsic motivation among athletes tends to include the pursuit of scholarships, career advancement, recognition, or rewards. In a language learning context, young footballers may be motivated to learn English due to its perceived value in securing opportunities abroad, understanding instructions from foreign coaches, or participating in international competitions. Studies such as those by Vallerand and Losier (1999) emphasize that when extrinsic motivators align with athletes' personal goals, motivation tends to be more sustainable.

However, the presence of amotivation in young athletes should not be overlooked. Factors such as academic pressure, lack of confidence, or poor classroom experiences can cause students to lose interest or disengage from language learning. This is particularly critical in high-performance environments where students may prioritize athletic success over academic achievement unless they perceive a direct link between the two.

Integrating sports content into English language learning can be an effective strategy to increase motivation. Research by Cervantes et al. (2015) suggests that contextualizing academic content within learners' interests—such as football—enhances engagement and learning outcomes. Therefore, understanding how motivation operates among young athletes can guide educators in designing tailored interventions that align educational goals with athletic aspirations.

In the context of this study, identifying how intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivated students respond to English learning tasks will shed light on which strategies are most effective for promoting motivation and improving English proficiency among student-athletes.

Language Learning in Sports Contexts

A growing body of research highlights the significant influence of motivation on English language learning, especially among adolescent learners. Motivation not only affects students' willingness to participate in learning activities but also impacts their language performance, engagement, and long-term retention of skills.

Studies on Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Noels et al. (2000) investigated the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in second language acquisition and found that students who were intrinsically motivated showed more persistence and deeper learning strategies than those who were primarily extrinsically motivated. Similarly, Ushioda (2011) emphasized that intrinsic motivation often leads to greater autonomy and learner investment, which are critical for long-term language success.

Conversely, extrinsic motivation can be effective, particularly when linked to meaningful goals. For example, Wong (2016) studied Malaysian secondary school students and found that those motivated by future career prospects—such as studying abroad or working in international fields—tended to perform better in English. However, the study also noted that over-reliance on external rewards can result in surface learning or short-term engagement.

Motivation in Sports-Academic Contexts

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in the academic motivation of student-athletes. Cervantes et al. (2015) examined motivation among high school athletes learning English in a sports-integrated curriculum and concluded that using sports-related content improved students' attitudes toward language learning. The study found a positive correlation between football-specific vocabulary and students' willingness to use English in real-world contexts, especially during training and competitions.

Similarly, a study by Han et al. (2020) explored English learning motivation among Chinese student-athletes and discovered that motivation levels varied based on perceived usefulness

of English in international sports careers. Students who anticipated overseas opportunities were more engaged in English classes and had better academic performance.

Measuring Motivation in Language Learning

This section reviews established tools for measuring learner motivation, particularly in second language acquisition. Instruments such as the Language Learning Orientation Scale (LLOS) and the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) have been widely used to assess intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation among language learners (Noels et al., 2000). In adolescent and ESL contexts, these scales have shown reliability in capturing motivational dynamics. However, many researchers adapt or design their own Likert-scale questionnaires to reflect specific cultural or contextual factors. In the current study, a customized motivation questionnaire was developed to reflect the unique environment of student-athletes at the JDT Football Academy, ensuring relevance to their dual identity as learners and athletes.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design using a survey-based approach. The primary goal is to identify and analyze the motivational factors (intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation) that influence English language learning among young athletes at the JDT Football Academy. A survey is an effective tool for collecting large amounts of data from a relatively large sample, making it suitable for this study's objectives.

Additionally, the study is descriptive in nature, as it aims to describe the current levels of motivation and English language proficiency among the students, rather than examining cause-and-effect relationships.

Population and Sample

Population

The population for this study consists of students aged 12-17 who are enrolled in the JDT Football Academy in Johor Bahru, Malaysia. These students are actively involved in football training and participate in English language lessons designed for their specific needs.

Sample

The sample will be selected using a convenience sampling technique, where all available students from the academy who meet the criteria (age and enrollment status) are invited to participate. It is anticipated that approximately 50–75 students will be involved in the study, ensuring a diverse sample in terms of age, gender, and English proficiency levels.

Inclusion Criteria

- Students aged 12-17 years
- Currently enrolled in JDT Football Academy
- Actively participating in both football training and English language lessons

The primary instrument for this study is the Motivation Questionnaire, which will measure the different types of motivation (intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation) that influence English language learning. The questionnaire will use a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to assess students' attitudes and motivations toward learning English. The

questionnaire will include items related to football-specific English content, personal goals, and external rewards or pressures.

In addition to the questionnaire, a semi-structured interview guide will be developed to capture more nuanced insights into the students' motivational factors. The interview questions will be designed to explore:

- Students' perceptions of the role of English in their football careers
- The influence of their coaches and peers on their motivation
- Challenges they face in learning English
- The relevance of football-related content in enhancing their language skills

Data collected from the Motivation Questionnaire will be analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize the responses and identify trends in motivation levels. Measures such as mean, median, and standard deviation will be used to describe the distribution of responses. Additionally, correlation analysis may be used to explore relationships between motivational factors and self-reported English proficiency.

Data from the interviews will be analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Transcriptions of the interviews will be reviewed, and recurring themes related to motivation, language learning, and football will be identified. This will allow for a deeper understanding of how students' motivation influences their engagement with English language learning in the context of football training.

Findings and Results

This chapter presents the findings from the survey and interviews conducted with student-athletes at the JDT Football Academy. The results are organized according to the study's research objectives and questions. Quantitative data from the questionnaire is analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data from the interviews is discussed thematically.

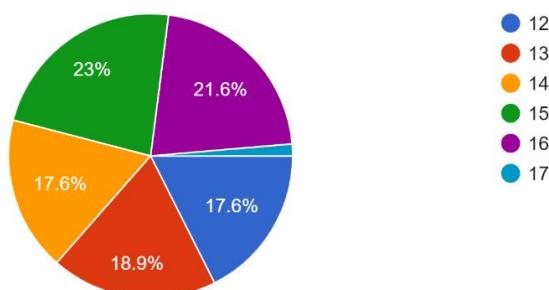
The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings that address the research question: "How do intrinsic and extrinsic motivation affect English language learning among young footballers at the JDT Football Academy?"

Demographic Profile of Respondents (Section A)

The sample consisted of 74 students aged 12 to 17, with the following breakdown:

Section A: Demographics What is your age?

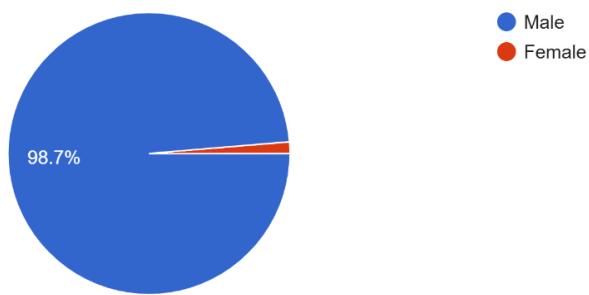
74 responses



Gender: 100% male, 0% female

Gender

75 responses

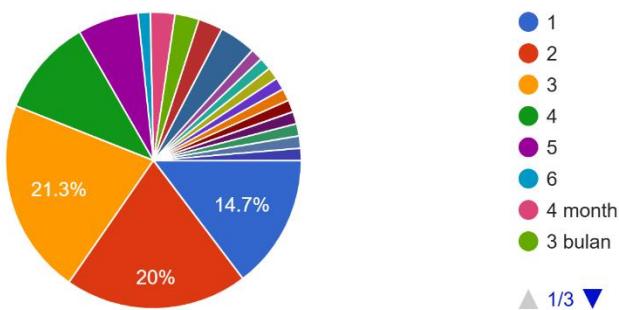


Years in JDT Academy: Ranged from 1–5 years

Although the questionnaire included options for both male and female respondents, all students enrolled in the JDT Football Academy at the time of data collection were male. One response was marked as female, which is likely a ticking error and was treated accordingly during data analysis.

3. Years at JDT Football Academy

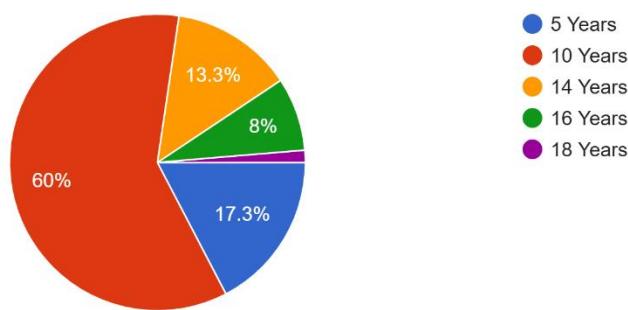
75 responses



Years of English Learning: Average of 12.6 years

4. Years learning English

75 responses



Self-rated proficiency: Majority rated themselves as intermediate (46.7%)

5. How would you rate your English level?

75 responses

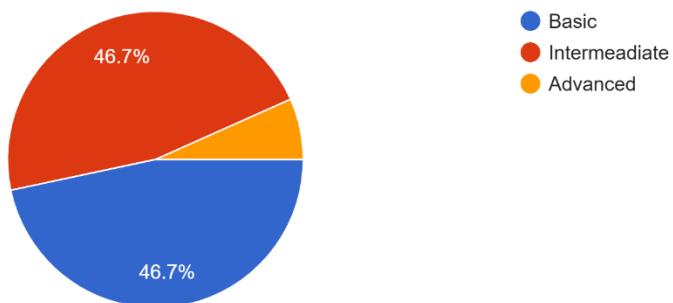


Table 4.1: Demographic Summary of Respondents

Motivation Scale Results (Section B)

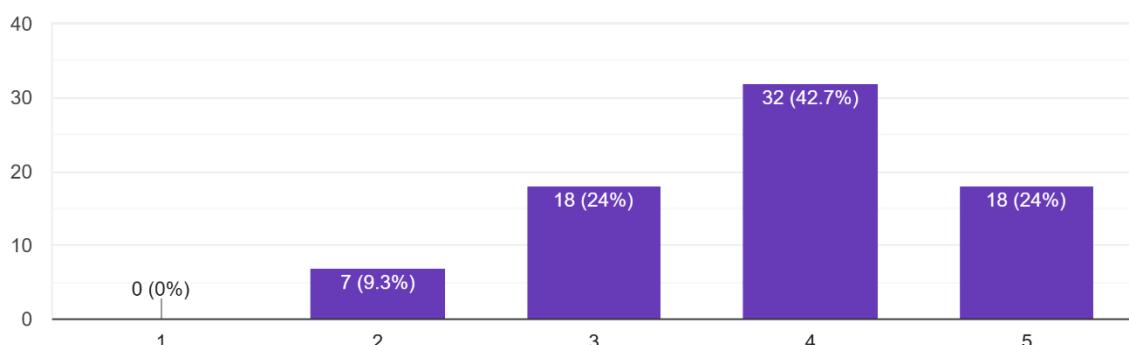
Intrinsic Motivation

Respondents showed a generally high level of intrinsic motivation:

"I enjoy learning English because it is interesting" – Mean: 3.81

Intrinsic Motivation: I enjoy learning English because it is interesting.

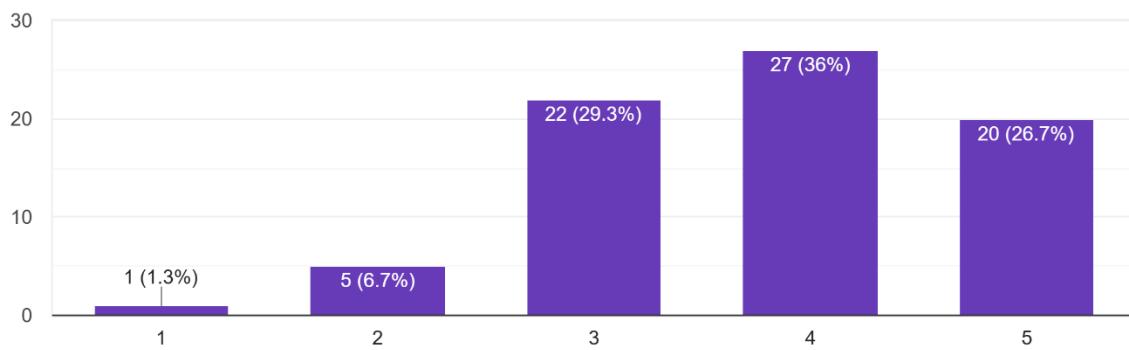
75 responses



"I feel proud when I speak or write in English" – Mean: 2.92

Intrinsic Motivation: I feel proud when I speak or write in English.

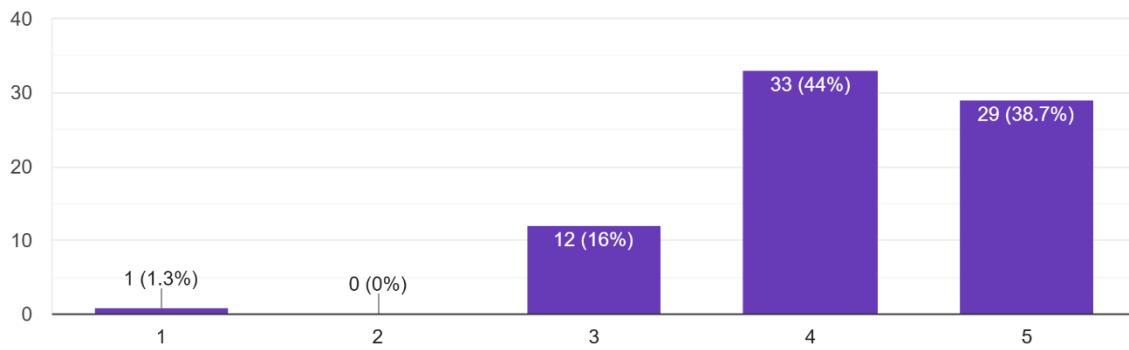
75 responses



"I like learning English words related to football" – Mean: 4.18

Intrinsic Motivation: I like learning new English words related to football.

75 responses



These results suggest students are internally driven to learn English, especially when lessons are linked to their sports interests.

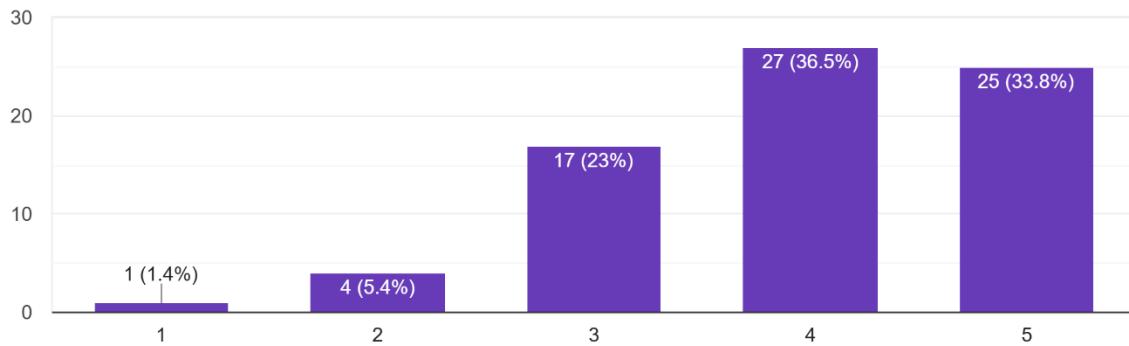
Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation was also high:

"I want to learn English to get a football scholarship" – Mean: 3.95

Extrinsic Motivation: I want to learn English to get a football scholarship.

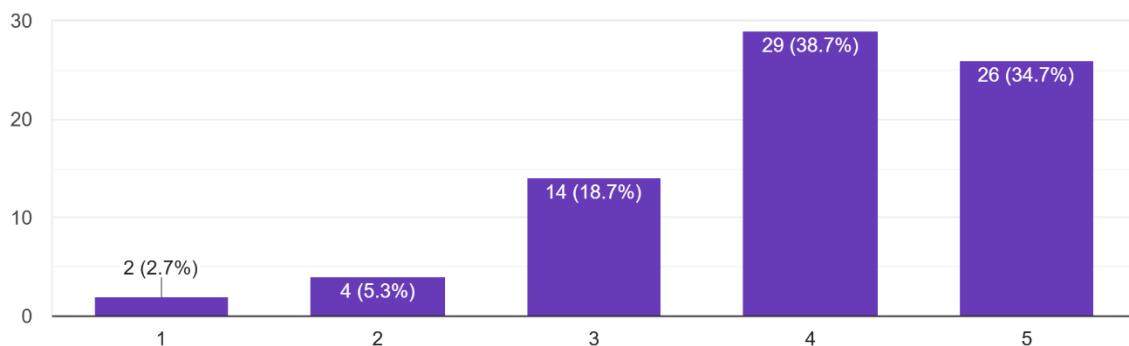
74 responses



"My coach encourages me to learn English" – Mean: 3.97

Extrinsic Motivation: My coach encourages me to learn English.

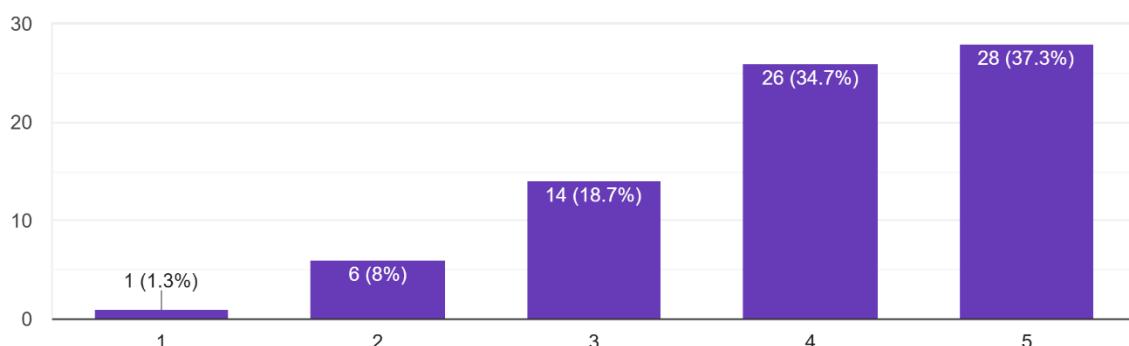
75 responses



"English helps me understand football interviews and match videos" – Mean: 3.99

Extrinsic Motivation: English helps me follow football interviews and match reports.

75 responses



This reflects the role of future goals, coaches, and media in reinforcing the value of English.

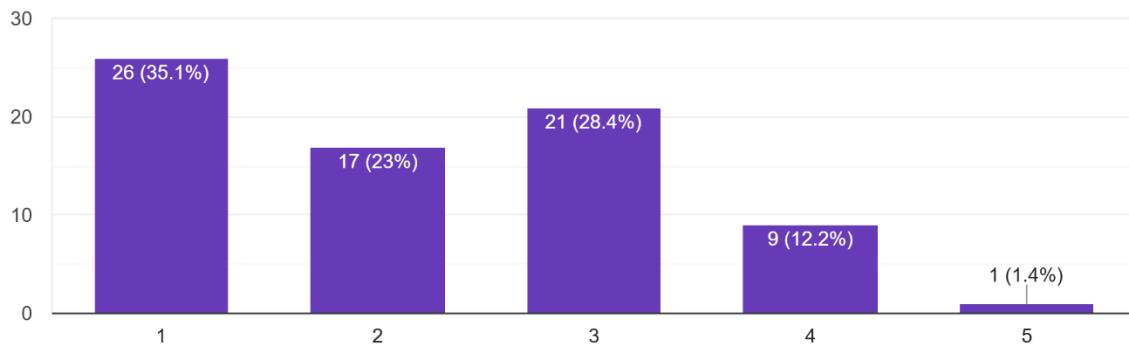
Amotivation

Amotivation levels were relatively low:

"I don't know why I am learning English" – Mean: 2.21

Amotivation: I don't know why I am learning English.

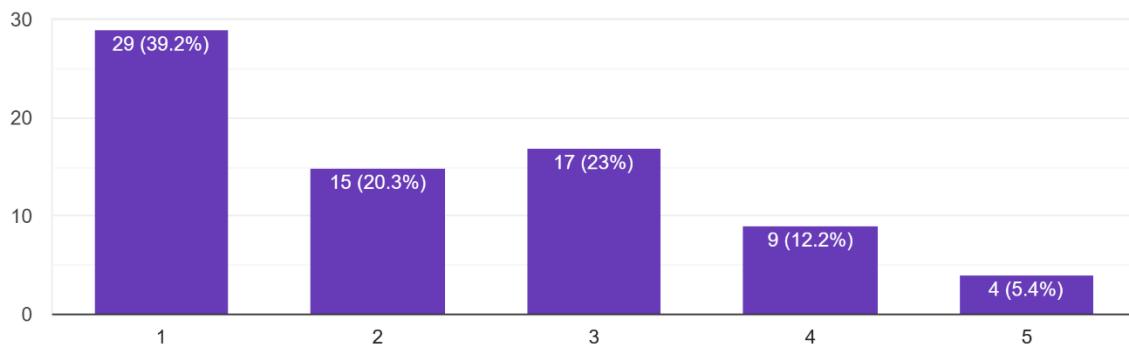
74 responses



"I feel bored and unmotivated in English class" – Mean: 2.24

Amotivation: I feel bored and unmotivated in English class.

74 responses



This suggests most learners are purpose-driven and engaged in their English lessons.

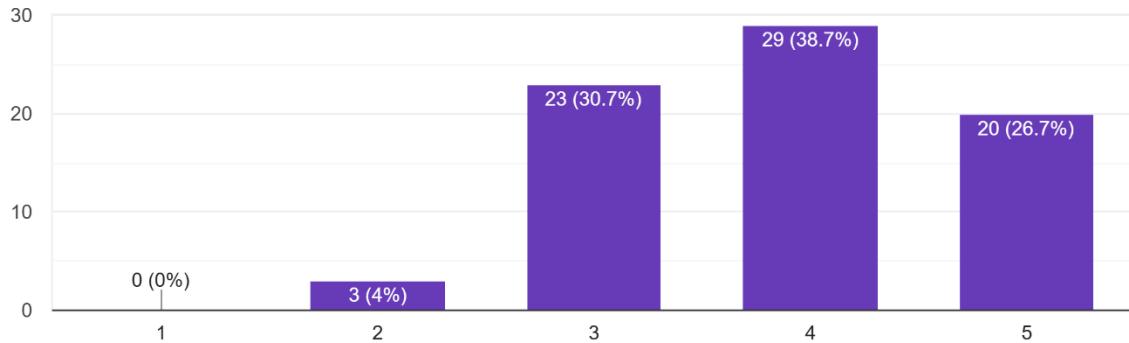
Self-Perceived English Skills (Section C)

Students rated themselves highest in Reading (Mean: 3.88) and lowest in Writing (Mean: 3.4), which may reflect their real-life exposure to English through football commentary, interviews, and videos.

Reading

Section C: Self-Rated Language Skills "Your English Language Skills (Rate 1 = Poor to 5 = Excellent)"

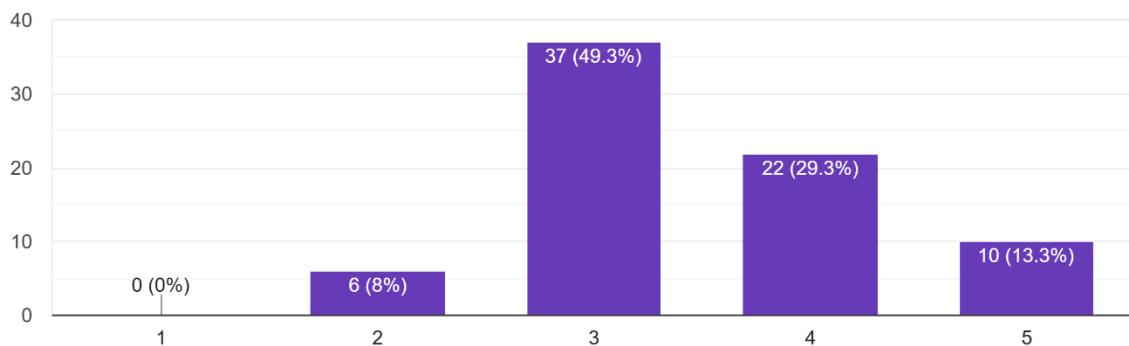
75 responses



Speaking

Section C: Self-Rated Language Skills "Your English Language Skills (Rate 1 = Poor to 5 = Excellent)"

75 responses



Thematic Analysis of Interviews

Interview data revealed five key themes:

Theme 1: Relevance of English to Football

Many participants expressed that they see English as essential for understanding international football content such as match interviews, training instructions, and football-related media.

"I want to understand what professional players are saying in interviews and on social media."
– Participant 1

Theme 2: Coach and Peer Influence

Some students indicated that encouragement from coaches and teammates motivates them to improve their English.

"My coach speaks in English during drills, so I try to understand better." – Participant 3

Theme 3: Preference for Football-Integrated English Lessons

Participants showed a preference for English classes that include sports-related content, which they find more engaging and practical.

"I learn faster when English lessons use football terms or videos." – Participant 4

Theme 4: Future-Oriented Motivation

Students often mentioned their dreams of playing internationally as a driving force for learning English.

"I want to play overseas, so I need English to talk to teammates and coaches there." – Participant 2

Theme 5: Lack of Interest in Traditional Learning Methods

A few respondents reported losing interest in English when lessons are textbook-based or not connected to football.

"Sometimes the English class feels boring because it's not about football." – Participant 5

Discussions

The results show that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation significantly influence English learning among student-athletes. This supports previous research that sports-contextualized education can boost motivation (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000).

According to Baharudin et al. (2024, p. 2802), their study revealed that students are driven either by intrinsic factors, such as a genuine passion for learning the language, or by extrinsic pressures, like the necessity of English proficiency to enhance future career prospects.

Low amotivation scores indicate that lessons tailored to students' interests (football) help keep them engaged. The findings also align with the Self-Determination Theory, suggesting students thrive when lessons support their personal interests and future goals.

Football-themed English lessons can boost language engagement. Coaches and educators play a key role in sustaining motivation and Programs that connect English with real-world football use (interviews, tactics, commentary) are likely to be effective. Besides that, incorporating technology in English lesson provides immersive and interactive experiences that could facilitate language acquisition (Selvarajoo et al., 2024).

According to Baharudin et al. (2024, p. 2802), their study revealed that students are driven either by intrinsic factors, such as a genuine passion for learning the language, or by extrinsic pressures, like the necessity of English proficiency to enhance future career prospects.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between motivation and English language learning among young athletes at Johor Darul Ta'zim (JDT) Football

Academy, several limitations must be acknowledged to ensure a balanced interpretation of the findings. The study's sample size is relatively limited, which may restrict the generalizability of the results to the broader population of student-athletes. As participants are drawn from a specific group within a single academy, their experiences, attitudes, and motivational patterns may not fully represent those of young athletes from other academies, schools, or sporting institutions. A larger and more diverse sample would provide a stronger basis for comparison and improve the robustness of the conclusions.

The study primarily relies on self-reported data collected through questionnaires and interviews. While this method is valuable for capturing participants' perceptions, attitudes, and motivations, it is inherently subject to certain biases. Respondents may provide socially desirable answers or overstate their motivation to appear more engaged or committed. Conversely, some participants may underreport their true feelings due to fear of judgment or misunderstanding of questions. Such biases may influence the accuracy of the data and, consequently, the interpretation of the results.

The research is conducted exclusively within Johor Darul Ta'zim Football Academy, a specialized sports education environment in Malaysia. This context is unique in its combination of academic and athletic commitments, institutional culture, and student demographics. Therefore, the findings may not be directly applicable to student-athletes in other regions, sports, or educational settings. The motivational factors influencing English learning could differ significantly depending on institutional policies, language exposure, or cultural attitudes toward English.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a meaningful foundation for understanding how motivation affects English language acquisition among athlete-students. Future research with larger and more diverse samples, cross-institutional comparisons, and mixed-method approaches could further validate and expand upon these findings, contributing to a broader understanding of language learning motivation in sports education contexts.

Conclusion

This study explored how motivation—*intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation*—affects English language acquisition among student-athletes at the JDT Football Academy. Both quantitative and qualitative findings revealed that learners are highly influenced by football-related goals, social support from coaches and peers, and future career aspirations. However, traditional English teaching methods may not fully engage these learners due to limited contextual relevance. These findings underline the necessity of tailored instructional strategies that align with the learners' interests and ambitions.

Educational Implications

The results suggest that curriculum developers and English language instructors should consider incorporating football-based content and communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches. This can enhance learner engagement, especially among student-athletes who may not respond well to generic lesson materials.

Institutional Implications

Institutions like the JDT Football Academy should recognize the dual identity of student-athletes and support English instruction that reflects their sporting context. Collaboration between language educators and coaching staff can lead to integrated learning experiences.

Theoretical Implications

The findings support the applicability of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), Dörnyei's motivational framework (2005), and contextualized learning theories in understanding how sports influence language learning motivation.

By recognizing the above implications, schools and educators can better support students' language learning regardless of the types of motivation they have at the point of their studies in the institution.

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