

# CAMBODIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' MOTIVATION TOWARD LEARNING ENGLISH

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## Abstract

This present study explored the motivation levels and motivation types of Cambodian high school students learning English. With a focus on Hun Sen Peam Ro high school in Prey Veng province, the data was gathered using a quantitative approach. The study's objectives were to determine to what extent the students were motivated to learn English, to determine whether their motivation was more intrinsic or extrinsic, and to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between the motivation levels of male and female students. 265 students attended the study. As a result, it was indicated that the students were highly motivated to learn English, and they were more extrinsically motivated than intrinsically. It was also noted that female students had a statistically higher extrinsic motivation than male students did. The current study suggests that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation must be interrelated because overall motivation is essential for students' success in learning English. Finally, future studies should be conducted with larger sample size and at other educational institutions across the country using other statistical analyses. Qualitative and mixed-methods designs are also recommended.

**Keywords:** Cambodia, High School Students, MoEYS, Motivation, Male and Female Students

## INTRODUCTION

English is an international language, and it has been used in most countries worldwide. Originally, Under the Khmer Republic, often known as the Lon Nol regime, which existed from 1970 to 1975, English was first introduced to Cambodia. Then, this language was fully outlawed by the Khmer Rouge (KR) or Pol Pot regime, lasting from 1975 to 1979 (Em & Mao, 2022; Neau, 2003). In 1979, the KR government was overthrown (Clayton, 1998). The communist influence, however, prevented English from being taught and learned until 1989. If teachers and students engaged in the activities of learning and teaching English during these last 10 years, those English teachers and students were imprisoned as criminals (Igawa, 2008). English is now already taught in public schools starting in Grade 1 and is probably going to start being taught at preschool levels soon (MoEYS, 2015).

English is one of the high school exam subjects that students in Grade 12 must take in addition to their other obligatory courses. That means English is not currently a subject that Cambodian high school students, especially those in Grade 12, are required to take with the need in earning passing scores during their high school exams. That means if the students pass or fail this subject, their pass or fail rates are not affected. However, if the students can gain high scores in English, their overall grades might be good. Soeung et al. (2019) noted that English score is a surplus in addition to other subjects. Even though English is not so important at high school levels, studying English will enable students to pursue their studies at higher education levels more easily because most documents are written in English (Hashim et al., 2014).

Nowadays, English is used in many different functions around the world, and its importance as an international language is growing. Significant developments in business, education, science, and technology have been brought about by new technologies and the widespread use of the internet, all of which call for a high degree of English proficiency (Godwin-Jones, 2017).

As a result, people who have a high level of English proficiency will have more opportunities. Many people today are starting to study English as they recognize how important it is (Igawa, 2008). Currently, English is taught as a foreign language in the majority of public and private schools in Cambodia, and Cambodians pay more attention to it. English plays a crucial role in Cambodia, just as it does in many other emerging nations. It was mentioned that overseas business owners are currently encouraging their workers to learn and use English so that those workers can become more proficient in the language and land higher jobs (Lon, 2001). Additionally, more foreigners have invested in Cambodia due to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) community's formal debut in 2015. However, it is also difficult for some Cambodian employees to learn English and other job skills due to the rise of this community (OECD, 2018).

The teaching of English is receiving increasing emphasis from the Cambodian government. The majority of Cambodian schools begin teaching English in the first grade, and many of them also employ foreign instructors whose first or second language is English because it is thought that young students usually imitate teachers' words through acquisition (Hashim et al., 2014).

The current study aimed to explore to what extent high school students were motivated to learn English as a foreign language. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation was also investigated. Finally, students' motivation according to gender was also examined.

### **Types of Motivation**

The two primary categories of motivation are extrinsic and intrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is the sensation of wanting to do something without being coerced by outside circumstances, whereas extrinsic motivation is a concept that applies whenever an action is performed to obtain a certain outcome (Dörnyei, 2003; Gilakjani et al., 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Extrinsic motivation, as defined by Covington and Müeller (2001), Dörnyei (2003), and Ryan and Deci (2000), is the act of doing something to gain benefits from outside sources. Regarding the workplace, this could entail financial gain, accolades, perks, or simply staying employed.

If you feel that other reasons are pushing your motivation away from a goal or an activity, such as performing well at work or keeping up a regular workout routine, refocusing on external rewards might help you rapidly recommit to that goal or activity. Another example of extrinsic motivation is focusing on external variables to become motivated, like the wage that pays your rent, your health insurance, or even the free fruit in the cafeteria, if you frequently grumble about your commute to a job you are not passionate about (Dörnyei, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Uusberg et al., 2019).

Intrinsic motivation, according to Cini et al. (2013), Dörnyei (2003), and Ryan and Deci (2000), is defined as enjoying an activity for its own sake rather than doing it to achieve a specific goal. When someone is intrinsically motivated, he or she is inspired by the fun or challenge involved rather than by goods, requirements, or rewards from the outside world.

A person has intrinsic drive when that man does any activity that is not required. For instance, you could assist your neighbors by taking their groceries up the stairs because you enjoy the sensation of helping, or you might go for a run because you enjoy the feeling of doing it. These activities are instances of intrinsic motivation since they result from internal urges (Dörnyei, 2003; Gowan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

When you behave because it makes you feel good, you are motivated by intrinsic factors. You feel internally gratified by achieving it. This may be done at work by achieving the goals you have set for yourself, having fun with your coworkers, or working on projects that give you a sense of purpose. These are also signs of intrinsic motivation (Dörnyei, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wulf & Lewthwaite, 2016).

Overall, extrinsic motivation is the outer drive that propels people to do their work, often with a push from others, whereas intrinsic motivation is the inner drive that propels people to pursue their passions independently and voluntarily.

### **Prior Studies of Motivation in Learning English**

English language learning motivation has been extensively researched, especially in industrialized nations and those where English is spoken both as a first and second language. However, there is not much research on English learning motivation in underdeveloped and underprivileged nations. For instance, most of the research on motivation for learning English in Cambodia is unpublished, and there are very few of them. The main reason the university students conducted those studies was to finish what they were required to graduate from the institutions where they were taking their courses to receive their degrees. This section will examine motivational studies for learning English from a global perspective to a local perspective and the Cambodian setting.

114 first-year students who were enrolled in a department of a significant public university in Turkey were asked to participate in a survey, and the results, according to Ölmez (2015), revealed that the 114 respondents were learning English mostly to complete their degree requirements. Extrinsic influences were the standards set by the universities or colleges. Therefore, such students were more externally driven to study English.

Extrinsic motivation was often stronger than intrinsic motivation, according to another study conducted by Şentürk (2015) with 61 participants at the School of Foreign Languages of Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University in Turkey. As a consequence, the respondents showed a discernible increase in their external motivation to study English.

The majority of students were more extrinsically motivated to learn English than they were intrinsically motivated, according to Aulia and Zainil's (2020) study of 78 junior high school students (Grades 7 and 8) from SMP N 11 and SMP N 46 Sijunjung in Indonesia. The students learned English primarily for social interactions, grades, and class competitions.

But a study by Miyamoto et al. (2018), which involved 4,619 German students in Grades 5-7, discovered that those students were committed to studying English due to their innate desire. According to the results of this study, those students were more likely to pick up English as a result of their internal stimulation, particularly in reading texts, passages, and other materials written in English. Therefore, those students were internally motivated to learn English rather than being externally driven.

In a study with 90 students at the Faculty of Foreign Language at Mahasaraswati University, Indonesia, conducted during the COVID-19 epidemic, Subakthiasih & Putri (2020) discovered that the graduates were likewise more intrinsically driven to learn English than the extrinsic incentive.

However, Keo et al. (2022a) reported that the 93 Buddhist monk students in their study of English as a foreign language at a Buddhist primary school in Kampong Cham town, Cambodia, showed a great desire for learning the English language and that their motivation was more extrinsic than intrinsic (see also Keo et al., 2022b).

Before this, Em et al. (2018) conducted a study with 60 students at a private high school in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and found that those students were more extrinsically motivated to learn English as a foreign language.

## METHOD

In the present investigation, a quantitative design was used. Survey design, correlational design, casual comparison design, and experimental design are some of the different types of quantitative study. Every category has its distinct traits. This study is quantitative with a probability sampling design (Apuke, 2017). This study used a survey with a casual comparative design as its quantitative method. Following the authors' formal request, the Department of English at the Chea Sim University of Kamchaymear, Prey Veng Campus, granted official permission to conduct this study with a formal letter, and the target school principal agreed with the study.

The study was conducted at Peam Ro high school, Prey Veng province, Cambodia. After being fully apprised of the study's objectives and research ethics by the authors, 265 students were chosen with their voluntary agreements to take part in the study. Those students were randomly selected from Grades 10, 11, and 12. The students were then instructed to fill in the questionnaire, available in both English and Khmer language, provided by the authors. The questionnaire was adapted from Keo et al. (2022a).

SPSS version 21 was used to analyze the data processing. The data was used in the data analysis process after Skewness and Kurtosis tests for normal distributions had revealed no data outlier. Both the extrinsic variables and intrinsic variables' items were computed. Additionally, an overall motivation was calculated using all the items of both motivations. Each item was wasted and statistically examined. The significant distribution of responses for questions on the five-point Likert scale was examined using descriptive statistics. To find significant variations in the motivation of the students, mean (*M*) and standard deviation (*SD*) were calculated. Finally, in the dependent samples T-test was used to examine the there was a statistically significant difference in the reported levels, according to students' genders.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### Participants' Demographic Information (N = 265)

**Table 1.** Participants' demographic information

Demographic	Value	N	Percentage
Gender			

Age	Male	109	41.13
	Female	156	58.87
Age	11-15	33	12.50
	16-20	229	86.40
	21-Over	3	1.10
Grade	Grade 10	69	26.00
	Grade 11	102	38.50
	Grade 12	94	35.50

As shown in Table 1, there were 265 students (165 females) participated in the study. Their ages were between 11 and 15 (33 participants), 16 and 20 (229 participants), and 21 and over (3 participants). All the participants were from Grades 10, 11, and 12 of a high school.

### Students' Overall Motivation Toward English Language Learning (N = 265)

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of students' overall motivation in learning English

	N	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Overall motivation	265	3.85	.45	2.75	4.95
Valid N (listwise)	265				

Note: Mean score of 1.00-1.80 = Lowest, 1.81-2.60 = Low, 2.61-3.40 = Moderate, 3.41-4.20 = High, and 4.21-5.00 = Highest

As shown in Table 2, the student participants were highly ( $M = 3.85$ ,  $SD = .45$ ) motivated toward learning English. This result shows that the students wanted to learn English very much.

### Students' Intrinsic Motivation Toward English Language Learning (N = 265)

**Table 3.** Students' intrinsic motivation for learning English

No.	Intrinsic Motivation Items	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
1.	I learn English because I like it.	4.08	.53	2.00	5.00
2.	I learn English because I enjoy it.	3.88	.87	1.00	5.00
3.	I learn English because I feel happy when I learn it.	3.72	.97	1.00	5.00
4.	I learn English because I like learning about people's cultures.	3.52	1.07	1.00	5.00
5.	I learn English because I like making more friends.	3.73	.99	1.00	5.00
6.	I learn English because I like listening to English songs.	4.09	.89	2.00	5.00
7.	I learn English because I feel interested in it.	3.88	.82	1.00	5.00
8.	I learn English because I feel that the language is fun.	3.63	1.03	1.00	5.00
9.	I learn English because I like reading texts in English.	3.81	.91	1.00	5.00
10.	I learn English because I like keeping in touch with foreign friends.	3.49	1.02	1.00	5.00
11.	Overall	3.78	.52	2.40	5.00

As shown in Table 3, students reported high motivation in all items 1-10. Overall, the sum of all items also shows students' high intrinsic motivation toward learning English as a foreign

language ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = .52$ ). The results mean that the students who participated in the study had high intrinsic motivation toward learning English, and they wanted to learn it.

### Students' Extrinsic Motivation Toward English Language Learning (N = 265)

**Table 4.** Students' Extrinsic motivation in learning English

No.	Extrinsic Motivation Items	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
1.	I learn English because I need it for my study.	4.56	.54	3.00	5.00
2.	I learn English because I need admiration from others.	2.95	1.16	1.00	5.00
3.	I learn English because I need to search for documents.	3.89	.88	1.00	5.00
4.	I learn English because I need to use it in my future career.	4.47	.66	2.00	5.00
5.	I learn English because I need to become a knowledgeable person.	4.23	.70	2.00	5.00
6.	I learn English because my school needs me to learn.	3.32	1.11	1.00	5.00
7.	I learn English because I need to win speaking competitions.	3.25	1.07	1.00	5.00
8.	I learn English because I want to appear more educated.	3.53	1.06	1.00	5.00
9.	I learn English because I want to get a good job.	4.51	.56	2.00	5.00
10.	I learn English because I want to pass the exam.	4.38	.65	2.00	5.00
11.	Overall	3.91	.49	2.80	4.90

As shown in Table 4, the students reported the highest motivation in items 1, 4, 5, 9, and 10. The students also reported high motivation in items 3 and 8. Next, the students reported moderate motivation in items 2, 6, and 7. Overall, the sum of all items shows students' high extrinsic motivation toward learning English as a foreign language ( $M = 3.9140$ ,  $SD = .49695$ ). The results also mean that the students who participated in the study had high intrinsic motivation toward learning English, and they preferred learning it.

### Students' Motivation to Learn English According to Gender (N = 265)

**Table 5.** Descriptive Statistics of Students' Motivation According to Gender

	Genders	N	M	SD	Std. Error Mean
Intrinsic	Male	109	3.76	.51	.04939
	Female	156	3.80	.52	.04210
Extrinsic	Male	109	3.86	.44	.04285
	Female	156	3.95	.52	.04221
Overall	Male	109	3.81	.41	.03978
	Female	156	3.87	.47	.03798

As shown in Table 5, male students' intrinsic motivation is lower than that of female students. Male students' extrinsic motivation is also lower than that of female students. Thus, overall



motivation shows that male students' extrinsic motivation ( $M = 3.8128$ ,  $SD = .41535$ ) is lower than that of female students ( $M = 3.8772$ ,  $SD = .47439$ ). That means the students, especially females, were learning English due to outside factors rather than voluntary factors.

**Table 6.** Inferential Statistics of Students' Motivation According to Genders

Motivation	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means			
	F	Sig	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
Intrinsic	Equal variances assumed	0.60	.806	-.632	263	.528
	Equal variances not assumed			-.635	235.401	.526
Extrinsic	Equal variances assumed	5.933	.016	-1.415	263	.158
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.457	253.190	.146
Overall	Equal variances assumed	2.648	.105	-1.144	263	.254
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.171	249.296	.243

Note: Male = 109, Female = 156, Confidence Interval of the Difference is 95%.

As shown in Table 6, there was no statistically significant difference in the reported levels between male and female students' perceptions of intrinsic motivation in learning English,  $t(263) = 235.401$ ,  $p > .05$  (Sig = .806). This result shows that male and female students had similar perceptions of intrinsic motivation in learning English. However, here there was a statistically significant difference in the reported levels between male and female students' perceptions of extrinsic motivation in learning English,  $t(263) = 253.190$ ,  $p < .05$  (Sig = .016). Thus, according to Table 5 shown earlier, female students were more extrinsically motivated toward learning English as a foreign language. Finally, combining intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, there was no statistically significant difference in the reported levels for male and female students  $t(263) = 249.296$ ,  $p > .05$  (Sig = .105).

## Discussion

The current study was conducted at Peam Ro high school in Cambodia and found that the students had high motivation toward learning English as a foreign language. The reports also reveal that those high school students were more extrinsically motivated to learn English. There was not a statistically significant difference in the reported levels of male and female students regarding intrinsic motivation, but there was a statistically significant difference in the reported levels of male and female students regarding extrinsic motivation. Female students revealed a higher statistically significant extrinsic motivation than male students.

The current study is in line with many other studies. For example, Ölmez (2015) conducted a study with 114 freshman students studying in a department of a major state university in Turkey and found that the 114 respondent students were doing their courses to fulfill the requirements of their studies. The requirements assigned by the universities or schools were extrinsic factors. Thus, those students were extrinsically motivated toward learning English. The current study is

also in line with Şentürk (2015), who conducted a study at Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University, the School of Foreign Languages, with the participation of 61 students in Turkey, and found that the respondents were much more extrinsically motivated toward learning English.

Similarly, Em et al. (2018) surveyed 60 students at Northline upper secondary school in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and found that most adult learners were learning English mainly because they were extrinsically motivated. Recently, Aulia and Zainil (2020) conducted a study with 78 junior high school students (Grades 7 and 8) of SMP N 11 and SMP N 46 Sijunjung in Indonesia. The report also shows that the students were more extrinsically motivated toward learning English (see also Em et al., 2022).

The current study also accepts the findings of those conducted by Keo et al. (2022) with 93 Buddhist monk students at a Buddhist primary school in Cambodia. The results show that the Buddhist monk students had high motivation to learn English, and they were more extrinsically motivated to learn English as a foreign language.

However, the current study is different from those of Miyamoto et al. (2018) who conducted a study with 4,619 students from Grades 5 to 7 in Germany and found that those students were stuck to learning English because of their intrinsic motivation. The study shows that the learners of those levels tended to learn English, especially through reading texts, passages, and other materials in English, due to their internal stimulation.

## CONCLUSION

The present study was carried out at Peam Ro High school, Prey Veng province, and there were 265 students participated in the study. The results show that the students were quite enthusiastic about learning English as a foreign language. The students were also shown to be more extrinsically driven to study English as a foreign language. Notably, female students were more extrinsic than male students, according to inferential statistics analysis. The results imply that most Cambodian students are more extrinsically motivated toward learning English as a foreign language. The present study also has the following recommendations.

### *The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport*

Because education is critical to the development of a country, MoEYS must focus on informing students about the benefits of learning English. There are some main points that MoEYS should motivate students about learning English. First, MoEYS should create a culture of encouraging students to learn English. When the students are familiar with the English language, they will pay more attention and spend more time learning or practicing what they have been learning. Moreover, MoEYS has to promote or share experiences about the benefits of learning English with the related partners to make sure that the students have some concepts or ideas that make them involved in learning English. Second, MoEYS must recognize students for their accomplishments. The students need MoEYS to praise them, like giving some study materials or awards when they get a high score in an examination. Next, MoEYS must encourage students to set their own long-term goals for learning the English language. When they have already had their own goals, they will concentrate on what they have already set. For example, they learn English because they want to get a Grade of A on their high school exam. Another point is updating English textbooks so that the students are motivated by the materials in the book, and are willing to learn (see Em & Nun, 2022). Finally, English must be a required subject for high school exams. That means its scores should not be a surplus anymore.

### *Educational Institutions*



First and foremost, educational institutions, including schools, colleges, and other places where students can learn, should create a welcoming climate within their walls. Students are more inclined to learn and like their schools when the learning environment is lovely and sophisticated. By doing so, students' motivation will consequently rise, particularly their intrinsic motivation. The creation of learning and teaching resources in English and the correct storage of such materials so that English instructors at the school can utilize them when necessary are additional considerations for school administrators. Giving rewards to instructors who do well, such as letters of commendation, is another admirable move. School principals or heads of schools may also motivate English teachers of English by presenting some sort of proof, such as a certificate of appreciation, to the instructors who consistently care about their students' learning accomplishments and their teaching performance. Em (2021) also noted that school principals are not only able to encourage their teachers to work well, but also they can have a good relationship with students' parents and community heads to make learning and teaching aspects better.

### *Teachers of English*

The most influential individuals in motivating students to learn English are thought to be English teachers (Em, 2019; Em, 2022). The most significant part of teaching English to students is played by teachers. For students to learn more effectively, encouragement, motivation, and inspiration are all crucial. Teachers should respond to the students in certain situations with kind words and lovely compliments. Never should they complain about or treat their students unfairly. If they do, their students will be rightfully disheartened and will not learn anything at all. According to Houn and Em (2022), English teachers should always encourage their students to learn and employ a variety of teaching methods while instructing them. Heng (2017) suggested that teachers take into account their students' ability to properly communicate when learning a language. Students should be required to cooperate, bargain, or communicate information with one another as parts of problem-solving activities and assignments, such as pair work, group work, role play, interviews, presentations, debates, games, and surveys.

Furthermore, English teachers in the twenty-first century must be knowledgeable about educational technology (see Em et al., 2021; Pang et al., 2022), and they must motivate their students to study not only macro skills, vocabulary, and grammar but also intercultural competence (IC) in the context of the English language. To do this, Bon (2022) noted that the teachers must equip themselves with IC knowledge first. In conclusion, teachers should consistently encourage their students to learn English, and they should also employ a variety of teaching methods to help students become better learners.

Overall, the current study found students' high motivation in learning English. However, the current study was conducted with a small scale of 265 students from a high school. Therefore, future studies can be conducted with a large sample size using other statistical analyses at other educational institutions. Qualitative and mixed-methods designs are also recommended.

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