

The Interplay of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations with Challenges and Learning Preferences among Iraqi EFL University Students Enrolling in English Departments

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate the motivation of the Iraqi EFL students, the factors that discourage their pursuing of the language studies and the available options that the Iraqi students consider in learning the language. A questionnaire was conducted to 124 EFL students enrolled in the Department of English at the College of Education/University of Kufa. The results revealed students are strongly dependent on extrinsic motivation that comes from the pre-university level educational experience. The most important extrinsic motivation that propels the students to study English is improving the job opportunities in the market along with improving the academic options in the post graduate level. The result also shows that intrinsic motivation such as the student's interest in the English culture and literature have less effect on their learning motivation. Additionally, the study designates some challenges that impede the learning process, including limited exposure to English outside the classroom, issues within the educational system and socioeconomic factors that hinder students' learning. Furthermore, the research highlights the importance of teacher-student dynamics. In terms of learning preferences, the students are interested in interactive and multimedia resources in addition to traditional classroom experience. The paper offers some recommendations for enhancing student's motivation and engagement through targeted interventions, such as incorporating practical applications, extracurricular activities, and access to digital resources. These findings contribute to the understanding of EFL education in Iraq and offer insights for teachers and policymakers aiming to improve English language learning outcomes in the region.

KEYWORDS

Iraqi EFL students; motivation; challenges; extrinsic; intrinsic; learning

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, English language proficiency has become increasingly important for individuals seeking academic, professional and personal success (Graddol, 2006). This is especially true for Iraqi EFL learners, as the ability to communicate effectively in English can open doors to many opportunities (Al-Zubaidi & Richards, 2010).

Many factors can influence EFL learners' decisions to enrol in English departments, including their motivations, perceived difficulties, institutional support, attitudes towards writing, etc. According to Dörnyei (2005), EFL learners have complementary motivations (willingness to participate in the target language) or instrumental motivation (task

development). desire to achieve practical goals) can motivate These feelings can determine their interest in learning English. Difficulties and perceived difficulties may also influence enrollment decisions. As Leckie (1992) and Storch (2009) highlighted, EFL learners may face challenges related to academic writing traditions, language skills and cultural differences. If these challenges are deemed insurmountable, students may be prevented from enrolling in English departments. Institutional support and resources are another influencing factor. EFL learners require extra language and learning assistance services in most cases (Andrade, 2006). These findings suggest that the amount of support services that are available, and the quality of those services, shall impact the views that prospective students have about the institution and their willingness to take up study programs in English. As also said earlier, students' knowledge about English writing may also influence their enrolment choice. Positive attitudes and expectations towards writing instruction and support can encourage enrolment (Hyland, 2003), while negative attitudes or apprehensions may discourage students may discourage students from pursuing English language studies. Besides, students are also influenced with external factors including prospect of a career, social attitudes as well as family pressures to join certain courses (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2012). They carry out their studies if English language is seen as important for employment or social class in the near future in English departments. With reference to these diverse factors, it will be easier for English departments to work out the strategies of managing and educating EFL learners, and thus provide a successful learning environment for them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The motivation of students in learning EFL has been extensively researched in various contexts, including Iraq. Several studies have examined the reason which led the Iraqi EFL students to pursue English at university level.

Some studies identified in the literature involves examining motivations for learning English and, among them, the perceived benefits relevance of English. Al-Murtadha (2019) found that Iraqi EFL learners are largely motivated by extrinsic motivational factors such as better job opportunity and chances to learn. According to the author, students perceive English as a utility that is helpful in career mobility and in search for well-paid jobs as sought in the Iraqi context. It is however equally important to note that intrinsic motivation also prevails in motivation of the Iraqi EFL learners. In his article Al-Jubouri (2021) points out that students' interest in the culture and literature of the English language acts as a driving factor. The study shows that though there is utilitarian reasoning present in the students, many students are also motivated by their appreciation of language and desire for contact with world culture through English.

The challenges and barriers that Iraqi EFL learners encounter to accomplish the required English language have also been discussed in the literature. Hameed and Yasin (2020) reveal that restricted ESL access outside the classroom as well as structural factors in the system negatively influence language development. According to the authors, such difficulties can create barriers to learning, as well as demotivate learners. Teacher-student dynamics also influence Iraqi EFL learners' motivation. Al-Hamdani (2021) claims that unfriendly attitudes observed by teachers may influence students in a negative way and needs to be changed in future.

Many techniques and approaches have been advocated in motivation and participation of Iraqi EFL students by various authors and researchers. Technology plays a huge role in the teaching of English language and Al-Saadi and Salman (2022) urges that the use of internet and other technological tools enhance the learning prospects of students. Similarly, Al-

Khafazi and Hameed (2021) recommend incorporating more practical and career-oriented components into the English curriculum to increase students' motivation and engagement.

The literature review explores the motivation in learning EFL as a multifaceted construct while showing how extrinsic and intrinsic factors defines Iraqi students' English language participation noting the difficulties students experience and the strengthening of new strategies to enhance students learning experiences. The present research further intends to extend from this knowledge by identifying and explaining the motivation, challenges and preference of the Iraqi EFL learners so as to enhance strategies for improving English language learning outcomes in the country.

Importance of English Language Proficiency for Iraqi EFL Students

The importance of English language skills for Iraqi EFL students cannot be overstated. English has emerged as the primary language of global interaction and commerce, technology, and scholarship; it serves as the means through which information is processed, business partners are contacted, academic information and jobs are sought (Crystal, 2012). This paper focus on Iraq, where a weak education system caused by political and economic resource instability, called for enhanced English language proficiency (Al-Hamdani, 2015).

Several studies have highlighted the advantages that Iraqi EFL students can gain from developing their English language proficiency. These students can benefit by improving their English language by being able to engage in more instructional experiences and interact more partake in more discussions and learning experiences in class (Al-Zubaidi & Richards, 2010). Also, strong English skills enhance Iraqi EFL students' chances of getting a job in either the local or foreign job market given the fact that the students become more marketable globally as the world gears up for English as a global language (Graddol, 2006).

Furthermore, the ability to communicate in English can foster cultural exchange and understanding, enabling Iraqi EFL learners to engage with diverse perspectives and participate in international projects (Crystal, 2012). This in turn can contribute to the personal and professional growth of these students, as they navigate the complex globalized world (Al-Hamdani, 2015).

Given the importance of English for Iraqi EFL learners, it is important to understand the factors that motivate and influence them to pursue English courses. The objectives of this study are:(a)to explore the main motivations for Iraqi EFL learners to learn English,(b) to examine the challenges and barriers that Iraqi EFL learners face in pursuing English proficiency, and to explore possible strategies to overcome these obstacles, (c)to identify preferred learning activities and instructional strategies that match Iraqi EFL learners, to address their different learning styles and preferences, (d) provide insights and suggestions for teachers, curricula developers, and policymakers. The study aims to provide valuable insights that can inform educational policy and teaching practices in Iraq. With these objectives in mind, the study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the main motivations for Iraqi EFL students to study English at university?
2. What are the perceived challenges and obstacles faced by Iraqi EFL learners in their quest to master English?
3. What strategies or interventions do Iraqi EFL students believe could enhance their motivation and engagement in English language learning within the university context?

Motivation in English Language Learning with Reference to Iraqi EFL Students

Motivation is a fundamental concept in the field of language learning, as it plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's willingness, effort, and persistence in acquiring a new

language (Dörnyei, 2001). Motivation can be defined as the driving force that energizes, directs, and sustains an individual's behaviour towards a specific goal or outcome (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In the context of English language learning, motivation encompasses the complex interplay of various factors that influence a learner's desire to engage with and master the language (Gardner, 1985). These factors can be broadly categorized as intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

Intrinsic motivation refers to the intrinsic drive and inherent interest of a learner in a language learning process (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Learners who engage in language learning activities not because of external rewards or pressures but because of the satisfaction, challenge or personal growth that naturally flows from the process (Dörnyei, 2001).

Interest, every need to communicate, aspects of attitude, self-perceived abilities towards learning language may also be associated with intrinsic motivation (Gardner, 1985). Learners who are intrinsically motivated are more likely enhance their understanding and value language when learning languages and even with difficulties they encounter /Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Previous research revealed that concerns related to informative and social interests play a significant role in this type of motivation among the students of this background (Al-Zubaidi & Richards, 2010; Mahdi & Al-Dera, 2013). The first motivation that may prompt Iraqi EFL learners to be interested in learning English is the extent of intellectual challenge and, personal satisfaction when one masters an additional language for communication (Graddol, 2006).

On the other hand, extrinsic motivation deals with external factors that necessitate the student's behavior or action, these may include the desire to pursue a course or gain a particular result or eradicate the perception of getting or receiving a particular outcome (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Extrinsic factors may include the acquisition of academic and job prospects, contact with variety of individuals, or acknowledgment of English as world recognized language (Gardner, 1985). A prominent extrinsic motivation for Iraqi EFL students is the recognition of English as a crucial tool for academic and professional success (Al-Hamdani, 2015). While a breakthrough in Iraq and elsewhere, EFL learners consider fluency in English as a tool that opens a door to access universities and other institutions of higher learning in Iraq and other parts of the world as well as a way to advance one's career in the global employment sector (Graddol, 2006; Crystal, 2012).

The in the field of SLA, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations aligns more closely with integrative and instrumental motivations proposed by Gardner and Lambert (1959). Integrative motivation, more closely related to intrinsic motivation, refers to the desire to learn a language in order to integrate with the target language community and culture. On the other hand, Instrumental Motivation, more aligned with extrinsic motivation, is more practical and utilitarian in nature. It refers to the desire to learn a language for functional reasons, such as enhancing career prospects, meeting educational requirements, or achieving other pragmatic goals (Dörnyei, 2003; Gardner, 2001; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Norris-Holt, 2001).

However, distinguishing between types of motivation can be challenging, as students may have meanings of language learning that do not fit neatly into traditional motivational categories. Dacey and Ryan (1980) distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and emphasize that it depends on the presence of externally mediated rewards or constraints in a given situation. Extrinsic motivation results from cases in which individuals receive extrinsic rewards such as money, praise, avoidance of punishment, etc. for participating in a task In contrast, intrinsic motivation applies to situations in which there is no extrinsic reward there is a clear presence, where individuals are motivated by inherent interest or by fulfilment derived from the activity itself.

Furthermore, the social and cultural importance of English proficiency in Iraq can be a strong external motivator for Iraqi EFL learners. Proficiency in English is often considered a sign of prestige and social advancement, as it can enhance one's status and opportunities for intercultural communication and interaction (Al-Zubaidi & Richards, 2010; Mahdi & Al-Dera, 2010; 2013).

The interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can significantly affect Iraqi EFL learners' learning and self-determination, and shape their preferences and expectations when learning English (Al-Hamdani, 2015). A comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in English language learning is important for teachers and policy makers to design effective strategies and interventions to foster students' consistent language acquisition (Gardner, 1985; Dörnyei, 2001). For the purpose of this study, the analysis will focus on only two types of motivations: intrinsic and extrinsic.

Challenges and Barriers Faced by Iraqi EFL Students

Although the pursuit of English proficiency is highly valued by Iraqi EFL learners, they often face challenges and barriers that can impede their progress and motivation. These challenges are embedded in the historical, social, political and educational contexts of Iraq in large scale, especially protracted conflict political instability. Understanding these barriers is critical to developing effective strategies and interventions to support this student population.

One of the main challenges faced by Iraqi EFL learners is their limited proficiency in authentic English, as they do not speak English extensively or use it in daily life (Ghfar & Amin, 2022, Al-Hamdani, 2015). English is not widely spoken or used in daily life in many parts of Iraq, which may limit opportunities for effective language use and immersion (Al-Zubaidi & Richards, 2010). These oversights can create challenges for students to build and to become confident in English (Ghfar & Amin; 2022 Hamad & Seyyedi, 2020; Sourani, et al., 2023).

In addition, the Iraqi education system has experienced significant difficulties because of political crisis, lack of funds and resources (Al-Hamdani, 2015). The Iraqi education system has for years suffered from conflict. Education policies and procedures are for the most part, broken. The Iran-Iraq War, the gulf war and the U.S. invasion which began in 2003 greatly affected the education systems. This deteriorated in 2003 when sectarian conflict began, and when Daesh came into the scene, the country becomes more unstable (Al-Shaikhly & Cui, 2017). These can lead to the poor teaching approaches, out-dated curricula, and unqualified teachers of English which results in poor quality of teaching of this language (Al-Zubaidi and Richards, 2010).

Another thematic area of concern is the socioeconomic instability as a factor that affects the Iraqi EFL learners. Most learners are from rural or remote background, and they are financially incapable of paying for English learning or other facilitating resources (Ghafa & Amin, 2022; Al-Hamdani, 2015). Moreover, some students have no access to new opportunities for learning a foreign language, or they cannot afford to receive private lessons that only rich students can afford, which only makes existing disparities worse (Al-Zubaidi & Richards, 2010).

Again, Iraqi EFL learners face learning challenges because of psychological and cultural factors. Some Iraqi EFL learners might have emotional challenges such as trauma or anxiety, this may affect their cognitive capacity and, therefore, their learning mechanism (Sourani, et al., 2023). Besides, there may be some positive and or negative attitudes towards learning a foreign language, particularly those considered to be linked with western culture (Al-

Hamdani, 2015). These assumptions creep in and demotivate students and foster other psychological barriers to language learning.

Limited educational programs and learning resources presents a big problem to Iraqi EFL learners. A lot of schools are in very bad state or are non-existent and there is lack of schools and classes in many schools compound. Most classes are overcrowded inappropriate environment have adverse impact on language acquisition (Sourani et al.2023, Ghafar & Amin 2022). Also, appropriate instructional materials including the text and learning needs essential in EFL are, for a lack of a better word, missing (Ghafa & Amin, 2022).

The education system in Iraq has also faced the issues of new curriculum that failed to address the modern requirement of students learning EFL. As for the teaching practices, there is a critical lack of using such contemporary approaches which focus on communication skills in English. Furthermore, teachers seldom use English as a medium of communication. As for the teaching practices. Unfortunately, many teachers do not possess the appropriate certification or professional development with regard to teaching English, and this impairs the teaching and learning progressions planned for EFL learners (Ghafar & Amin, 2022).

Therefore, overcoming these challenges calls for a multiple of effort that encompass structural, socioeconomic and cultural factors that defines the learning context of the Iraqi EFL learners. Barriers such as insufficient training of teachers and the lack of updated content, resources, and support may be addressed by a number of strategies such as; upgrading training institutions, curriculum development, making appropriate resources and materials available and creating facilitating learning environment may reduce these barriers and enhance the motivation and achievement of Iraqi EFL learners (Al-Zubaidi & Richards 2010).

Strategies and Interventions to Enhance Motivation

Self-motivation in the Iraqi EFL learners is therefore important in the learners' performance and achievement. Previous studies have pointed out a number of approaches and practices that were successful in creating and maintaining motivation for this type of students. Such approaches and tasks are under-girded by documenting learning strategies, curricula and lessons, co-curricular activities and support structures in educational organizations.

A number of strategies have been discovered to be optimum in altering motivation amongst EFL learners. For instance, the integration of communicative language teaching (CLT) has been therefore proved to raise the level of students' motivation (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2012, Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009). CLT also pays attention to communication while communication in the language learning process can stimulate learner interest. Task-based learning (TBL) is yet another technique that can be used successfully in the implementation of knowledge management strategy. In TBL, students are provided with real life assignments that have to be accomplished while using target language. This approach has been found to increase student motivation and engagement, as it gives students a sense of purpose and worth (Bao et al., 2012). Similarly, Khidhir-Abas (2020) conducted a study on Iraqi EFL secondary school teachers' perceptions of five specific writing styles (conventional writing, planning, storytelling, diary writing, etc.) presented writing fluency improves peer-correction) influence and... critical feedback in EFL learners. Teachers noted the positive results, emphasizing students' confidence and ability to write well. Sabati et al. (2019) investigated the relationship between writing anxiety, achievement motivation and self-efficacy on the writing ability of EFL learners in Iraq. Their findings showed that higher levels of writing anxiety were associated with lower writing performance, whereas higher

levels of self-efficacy and motivated achievement were associated with improved writing achievement the face is connected

Curriculum design plays an important role in increasing motivation among Iraqi EFL learners. Relevant, engaging and challenging learning programs can increase student motivation and engagement. For instance, Abdul rasoul (2012) survey revealed that students who wanted to learn English were apt to be more involved and involute in the learning materials.

Extracurricular activities also help in boosting the motivation levels of Iraqi EFL learners. For instance, English clubs and language learning centre offer the extra chances for the students to exercise the improvement of language and participate in the target language (Yildiz, 2015).

It has also been revealed that motivation among Iraqi EFL learners can also be boosted through support systems in educational institutions. For instance, by availing language assistance services including language help tutorial assistance and language learning aids students can be assisted to overcome the language barriers which can boost their learning motivation (Albodakh & Cinkara, 2017).

RESEARCH METHODS

Participants and Sampling

The participants of this research comprise Iraqi EFL learners studying in the English departments of the College of Education at the University of Kufa in Iraq. The population was composed of 124 male and female students of the 2023-2024 academic year. Out of these, 64 were male students and the rest 60 were female students. The ages of the participants are between 19 and 26 years. All of them are native speakers of Iraqi Arabic. A random sampling technique is employed to select participants from each academic stage. Participants were ensured of their voluntary participation. The sample size is appropriately divided across the four study stages to ensure adequate representation of students at different levels of English proficiency.

Instruments and Data Analysis Procedure

The researcher used a data collection questionnaire divided into five sections. It had 28 items and was used to collect quantitative data from participants. The first section focused on students' background, while the second dealt with extrinsic motivation. The focus of the third stage was on intrinsic motivation. The fourth was on challenges and barriers, and the final section examined learning preferences and interventions. The researcher purposely designed the questionnaire items for this study. The questions were scored on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". To ensure validity, the items of the questionnaire were reviewed by three experts who confirmed their validity and reliability. The questionnaire data were analysed using SPSS software. Responses were summarized and descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations were calculated to identify patterns in the data

Data Analysis and Results

Data from the questionnaire were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive analyses were conducted to explore different motivations, challenges and barriers among participants as well as learning preferences and interventions.

The demographic information shown in Table (1) reflects the gender distribution and age range of approximately 20-21 years. Most of the participants were between 20 and 21 years

of age, these two groups accounted for almost half of the sample (47.7%). As these ages correspond to university-level students, the findings are likely representative of their academic phase, maturity, and life circumstances. A large portion of participants are second-year students (39.5%), followed by first-year students (30.5%). The majority of students come from urban areas (45.2%), followed by a significant portion from semi-urban areas (38.7%). Rural students make up a smaller portion (16.1%) of the sample. These factors can influence how different groups of students perceive and respond to various motivational factors and learning activities. For example, students from urban areas may prefer more technologically-driven learning tools, while rural students might face resource limitations that affect their language learning experiences. Similarly, younger students might have different motivational drivers compared to those in their final years of study.

Table 1. Demographic information of the participants

Field	Characteristic	Percentage
Gender	Male	51.6
	Female	48.4
Age	19	9.9
	20	28.8
	21	18.9
	22	12.9
	23	12.9
	24	6.6
	25	6.7
Grade	26	3.2
	First	30.5
	Second	39.5
	Third	20.5
Geographic location	Fourth	19.5
	Rural	16.1
	Urban	45.2
	Semi-urban	38.7

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of extrinsic motivation

No	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Learning English will improve my job prospects in the future.	2.24	0.76
2	Proficiency in English will open up more academic opportunities for me	2.07	0.64
3	English language skills are essential for career advancement in Iraq.	2.12	0.72
4	Knowing English will help me access better-paying jobs.	2.25	0.74
5	English proficiency is necessary for pursuing higher education abroad	1.76	0.43
Total		10.44	3.29

The high mean scores across all items indicate that Iraqi EFL students are motivated primarily by external factors, with a mean score above 2 for all statements except for the last one, which is slightly lower at 1.76. The relatively high standard deviations suggest variability in responses, indicating that while many students see the value of English for job prospects and academic opportunities, there are differing opinions on its necessity for higher education abroad. This suggests that while extrinsic motivations are strong, there may be some scepticism or uncertainty among students regarding the direct impact of English on their educational aspirations.

Table 3. Descriptive analysis of intrinsic motivation

No	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	I am genuinely interested in learning about English-speaking cultures.	2.09	0.72
2.	Learning English will allow me to appreciate English literature, media.	1.79	0.41
3.	I find the English language fascinating and want to learn it for personal enrichment.	2.24	0.75
4.	Interacting with English speakers from different cultures excites me.	2.09	0.72
5.	Learning English will expand my understanding of the world.	2.53	0.80
Total		10.74	3.4

The mean scores for intrinsic motivations show a strong interest among students in cultural aspects and personal enrichment through learning English. The highest mean score (2.53) indicates that many students believe learning English will broaden their understanding of the world. The standard deviations are relatively high, particularly for the statement regarding appreciation for English literature and media, suggesting a divide in opinions. While many students are motivated by intrinsic factors, some may not find personal enrichment or cultural engagement as compelling reasons for learning English. These results indicate that students' intrinsic motivations are heavily tied to cultural and personal enrichment, rather than just practical applications of the language.

Table 4. Descriptive analysis of challenges and barriers

No	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Limited exposure to English outside the classroom hinders my language learning.	2.36	0.74
2.	The educational system in Iraq poses challenges for effective English language learning.	2.34	0.73
3.	Socioeconomic factors (e.g., financial constraints, family obligations) affect my ability to focus on English studies.	2.20	0.72
4.	The unfriendly attitude of teachers might act as a factor that discourages students.	1.81	0.39
5.	I face difficulties in finding suitable resources and materials for English language learning.	2.18	0.70
Total		10.89	3.28

The analysis of challenges and barriers shows that students perceive significant barriers in their English learning. The mean scores indicate that limited exposure and difficulties in the education system are the most important issues. The standard deviations indicate that students agree on these barriers. The lowest mean score (1.81) is associated with unfriendly teacher attitudes, indicating that although this is a concern, it is universally felt as other challenges. Overall, these findings highlight the need for policy reform in education and increased opportunities for language use.

Table 5. Descriptive analysis of learning preferences and intervention

No	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	I prefer group discussions and interactive communicative activities in English language classes.	2.03	0.69
2.	I enjoy learning English through multimedia resources (videos, audio, etc.)	2.14	0.70
3.	I find traditional classroom exercises (grammar, vocabulary, etc.) helpful.	2.50	0.78

4.	I prefer learning English through real-life situations and practical applications.	2.38	0.76
5.	Extracurricular activities and language clubs would motivate me to improve my English skills.	2.11	0.71
6.	Access to online resources and digital learning platforms would enhance my English language learning experience	2.25	0.74
7.	Opportunities for cultural exchange and interaction with English speakers would be beneficial.	2.41	0.77
8.	Incorporating more practical and career-oriented components in the English curriculum would increase my motivation.	2.26	0.75
Total		18.08	5.9

Iraqi EFL learners' learning preferences indicate a variety of flexible teaching strategies. The mean scores indicate a preference for traditional classroom exercises, with a mean of 2.50, while interactive and multimedia strategies are also appreciated. Standard deviations indicate variability in preferences, especially for group discussions and practical activities. This diversity point to the need to diversified teaching methods in order to capture all groups of students so that all the students conduct themselves in the language. Since the data captures the beliefs that students have about learning extracurricular activities and experiences, and given that some students reported they have access to digital resources to aid in learning English, there is adequate justification and opportunity to obtain this data. The findings for the mean scores suggest that participants possess positive perceptions about these interventions, with emphasis on the importance of the cultural exchange opportunities. Standard deviations obtained suggest moderate extent of students' agreement suggesting that despite the fact that these interventions seem to be rather helpful, there is still room for improvement in implementation

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that the extrinsic motivation factors are the most prominent among Iraqi EFL learners. The primary encouragement to learn English is the student's expectation to have a better job and alternative education opportunities. This is consistent with studies in Iraq like that of Al-Murtadha (2019) that shows how Iraqi students view the mastery of English as a tool to boost employability in a vice competitive job market as opposed to reasons that may be intrinsic, for example, interest in English speaking culture and literary works. These findings testifying to increased emphasis in the culture aspect of language learning are in concordance with that of Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2016) and Al-Jubouri (2021), who have also concluded that students are more willing to interact with cultures around the world through English. However, with less emphasis on intrinsic motivation compared to extrinsic motivation, even if students recognize the cultural value of English, practical considerations often take precedence in formulating their learning motivation.

The challenges faced by Iraqi EFL learners, especially limited exposure to English outside the classroom and the perceived inadequacy of the education system echo the findings of Hamid and Yasin's (2020) study in Iraq. Their findings highlighted limited practices and systemic issues within educational institutions as significant barriers to effective language learning. The findings that 51.6% of students agree that limited English proficiency hinders their language learning support work of Al-Hamadi (2019), who highlighted the lack of opportunities for effective language use in Iraq. This limited exposure is exacerbated by challenges in the educational system. Despite being perceived as a barrier to effective English learning, high concerns about teachers' behaviour, and 54.8% of students admitting that they are discouraged by unfriendly teacher behaviour. This is

consistent with the findings of Al-Rowais (2021), who found that teacher and student achievement highly motivate and engage students in language learning. These barriers emphasize the need for comprehensive changes in the educational system to create a supportive and positive learning environment for EFL learners. The high percentage of learners who feel discouraged by teachers' behaviour (54.8% strongly agree) are particularly concerned and documented in Al-Hamdani's (2021) study in Iraq. The study showed that negative interaction between teachers and students is likely to negatively impact students' motivation and, therefore, there is a research imperative for professional development and training for teachers regarding positive interaction to enhance students' learning motivation.

The recommendation of extracurricular activities, internet access and student exchange mentioned by Iraqi EFL learners as mean to increase motivation corresponds to previous educational research in Iraq. For instance, Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2016) as well as Al-Saadi and Salman (2022) show that in order to increase learners' motivation, educational institutions in Iraq may use technology enhanced learning environments. In addition, these practical and administrative aspects of curriculum have also supported the recommendations provided by Al-Shammari (2020) and Al-Khafaji Hameed (2021) for purposeful curriculum that aims at fulfilling students' needs in the job market. These findings imply that educational institutions in Iraq should continue to incorporate and involve real-world experience and cultural aspect with English language learning to improve students' motivation in the overall society.

CONCLUSIONS

The investigation of motivations, challenges and preference of Iraqi EFL learners are important to the existing academic work or research done in Iraq since work and learning opportunities are the most important extrinsic factors that motivate Iraqi EFL learners; besides appreciation, personal wealth and cultural intrinsic motivations also motivate the EFL Iraqi learners.

Students face major challenges, such as limited use of English in the classroom, structural issues in the educational system, and socioeconomic factors that impede their progress. The study also showed that the unfriendly teacher attitudes also contribute to student demotivation, emphasizing the need for a more supportive learning environment. Furthermore, the research disclosed that students favor a mix of traditional classroom activities and interactive multimedia resources. They also expressed a desire for useful career-related content in the curriculum to make their learning experience more relevant to their future professional needs. These preferences reflect an understanding of English proficiency as they are practically applied in the lives of students.

Overall, the findings of the study highlight the need for targeted interventions that can address the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of Iraqi EFL learners. Improving teacher and student achievement, increasing exposure to practical English, and incorporating practical, career-relevant materials into the curriculum can enhance student motivation and engagement. By understanding and addressing the various motivations and challenges of Iraqi EFL learners, teachers and policy makers can implement strategies that better match students' needs, and ultimately improve English language learning in Iraq.

Future research could extend this investigation into how regional, gender, and socioeconomic differences influence Iraqi EFL learners' motivations and challenges, providing a broader context for understanding language learning dynamics in different segments of the population.

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