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The Relationship Between Motivation and English Language Test Performance among Secondary Vocational Schools' Students in China

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Abstract

In China, secondary school students studying at the vocational stream often struggle to keep up with English language learning. This study investigates the relationship between two types of motivation – extrinsic and intrinsic – towards the English language test performance of students from a secondary vocational school in Chongqing, China. A mixed-method research design was employed via a survey and a semi-structured interview. A total of 212 second-grade students at randomly selected secondary vocational schools completed the questionnaire. A correlational analysis was performed to discover if there was a relationship between students' extrinsic and intrinsic motivation towards their English performance. The results reveal that the intrinsic motivation was strongly correlated with the students' English performance with $r=0.216$, $p<0.05$, while the extrinsic motivation showed zero association with the students' English performance with $r=0.125$, $p>0.05$. A multiple linear regression analysis was also conducted to investigate the extent that students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation predicted their English performance. However, the findings showed that the prediction was only 4.7%. To understand more about the explanation of the findings, a total of 12

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students were then interviewed voluntarily. The interview results reveal three themes revolving around the students' cognitive, affective and social domains in their learning environment. The findings from this study would inform stakeholders to improve the existing teaching and learning models in improving students' motivation towards English language learning, specifically in the China context.

Keywords: English language, extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation, learning performance, vocational education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over decades, secondary vocational schools have been known for training students with skills tailored to specific careers. Many students in China chose the vocational education stream because the skills taught align with the country's high-demand jobs. In the vocational stream, the focus is placed on specialised courses that emphasise mostly skilled trades. Thus, English is often regarded as a dispensable and minor subject to which attention is not fully given. In China, most secondary vocational school students are unable to attend mainstream high schools. Research shows that vocational students' motivational baseline is relatively low, and that has grown to many negative drawbacks to English learning (C. Liu, 2020). The secondary vocational school scenario proves this in China, where the students studying at the schools are found to experience many challenges. The most extreme setback involves students' negative learning attitudes and lack of motivation toward English because they do not see the relevance of its usage after high school (Sarani & Ahmadi, 2013).

Through the government of China's efforts, in 2018, the National Vocational Education Reform plan was carried out, and it explicitly pointed out that vocational education is as important as general education. In March 2021, the Ministry of Education (MOE) issued the Notice on the Enrolment in Secondary Vocational Schools, requiring an equal enrolment ratio of secondary vocational and public high schools. According to the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan and the Outline of the 2035 Vision Goals, China will establish the Classified College Entrance Examination (CCEE) vocational education system and develop a number of high-level undergraduates, vocational majors, colleges and universities.

These efforts indicate that the government is paying more attention to vocational education to ensure a good quality work experience given before students enter the labour market, and the prejudice on it will hopefully be eliminated gradually. The scenario of more vocational school students entering colleges or universities would soon become a reality. Therefore, as a compulsory subject in CCEE, English should receive better attention in the vocational education stream.

Learning motivation influences learners' academic performance in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning context (Anwar et al., 2021). Gardner (1985, p. 10) describes motivation as "the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes toward learning the language". In the case of vocational students, motivation can also drive learners to achieve their learning goals (Pinem, 2021). Therefore, stimulating learning motivation can improve learning quality and ultimately change learning results.

The two commonly explored and discussed forms of motivation, extrinsic and intrinsic, are among the most highlighted issues for the past few years and have raised much interest in EFL learning (Oletić & Ilić, 2014). However, the literature shows a gap in terms of limited context where the focus on secondary vocational schools, particularly in China, is still scarce. The new vocational education reform has raised the awareness of the importance of English being practised and mastered by the vocational schools' students, especially those who wish to enrol to the tertiary level of education. Therefore, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a relationship between intrinsic motivation and English performance among secondary vocational school students?
2. Is there a relationship between extrinsic motivation and English performance among secondary vocational school students?
3. To what extent do intrinsic and extrinsic motivation predict English performance among secondary vocational school students?
4. What factors affect the association between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation with English performance?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivation is the direct power of action. It can stimulate people to achieve the goal of internal action. Learning motivation acting as a driving factor for students' learning outcomes is a dynamic tendency that affects students' learning behaviours and directs them to specific academic goals (Eriyanto et al., 2021). In addition, motivation is also seen as an inner driving force that pushes learners to achieve their goals. From a foreign language learning perspective, motivation refers to a positive attitude that learners exert in order to achieve learning goals (Filgona et al., 2020; Gardner & Lambert, 1972). In the same vein, Dörnyei (1998) states that motivation is considered one of the key success factors in foreign language learning. However, a lack of EFL learning motivation has been reported as one of the leading learning challenges for students (Adara & Puspahaty, 2021; Hibatullah, 2019; Yulia, 2013).

Researchers and educators have long been interested in motivation since it is closely connected to achievement and performance (Meşe & Sevilen, 2021). Soviana (2018) asserts that with motivation, students will be able to achieve their language learning goals via positive drives. These positive drives have forced learners to sustain themselves during the long and tedious learning process of learning a foreign language. Indeed, all the other factors involved in EFL acquisition presuppose motivation to some extent (Dörnyei & Otto, 1998) and maintaining a high level of motivation during a period of language learning is one of the best ways to make the whole process more successful (Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020). Among many types of motivation, many researchers use extrinsic and intrinsic motivation as a starting point to examine their effects on learning performance (Davis et al., 1992; Deci, 1976; Ryan & Deci, 2000a; C. Liu, 2020).

2.1 Intrinsic Motivation

Over the past few decades, much emphasis has been given to the importance of students' intrinsic motivation and its values in academic achievements (Oletić & Ilić,

2014). In the view of intrinsic motivation, students learn because of their inner force, personal interest and enjoyment (Indrayadi, 2021). In other words, students are willing to learn new and interesting knowledge to fulfil their curiosity, the need to know and the feeling of competence and growth (Kong, 2009). According to Dörnyei (1998), there are three types of intrinsic motivation, i.e. motivation to learn, to achieve the targeted goals and to experience stimulation.

Intrinsic motivation plays an important part in most learners' EFL learning success. For Dörnyei (1998), intrinsic motivation is directly linked to an individual's pleasure and satisfaction when performing. Moreover, for Deci (1975, p. 23), people who are intrinsically motivated seem to "engage in activities for their own sake" rather than for rewards which are external activities. In short, no extraneous factor could push students to learn because they feel intrinsically motivated to learn, which has been hailed as the most effective way to help them push boundaries and achieve their goals.

2.2 Extrinsic Motivation

In contrast to intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation refers to the performance of an activity to attain some distinguishable outcome (Vatankhah & Tanbakooei, 2014). It can be stimulated by some external factors like environment, rewards, and punishments (Elizabeth & Ena, 2019). Do Quyen (2020) also points out that students are found to be extrinsically motivated to perform a behaviour or to engage in an activity to earn a reward or even to avoid punishment, criticism and threat. For example, when students study hard to get a higher social status (Oletić & Ilić, 2014), career advancement or a course credit (Noels et al., 2001) to win their parents' favour, teachers' praise (Kong, 2009) or even to secure pocket money, they do it because of extrinsic motivation.

According to Ryan and Deci (2000b), extrinsic motivation contains external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation. External regulation refers to the behaviours performed to satisfy an external demand, introjected regulation refers to the performed behaviours to avoid guilt and anxiety or to attain self-esteem or pride, identified regulation is the stage in which individuals get autonomy, and integrated regulation is when identified regulations have been fully assimilated to the self. In other words, extrinsic motivation pertains to behaviours where an activity is performed for reasons not inherent to the task.

2.3 Cognitive, Affective and Social Domains

In acquiring English as a foreign language, cognitive, affective and social variables are considered critical domains in students' learning motivation (Lee & Dražati, 2019). Firstly, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are predictors of cognitive variables (Noels et al., 2001), which include learning skills predominantly related to mental capacities (Rapita, 2021). Secondly, the affective variables cover lower anxiety and positive attitudes towards language learning. Social variables are defined as deepening understanding and support from the government, schools, and families to be the predictors of motivational intensity (Noels et al., 2001). According to Kim (2020), motivation has been associated with positive cognitive, affective, and social outcomes in educational settings.

2.4 Previous Studies

As motivation is one of the key factors affecting EFL learners' success and performance (Meşe & Sevilen, 2021), many researchers have studied this topic. For example, I. F. Liu (2020) finds that high school students had higher intrinsic motivation while vocational students had stronger extrinsic motivation, which means that the various prizes and rewards of the competitive activities were more attractive to the vocational school students. In another study, a developmental decline in intrinsic motivation for studying, in general, might have an influence on English lessons. Intrinsic motivation, for example, can be predicted by the level of curiosity and enjoyment in EFL learning (Carreira, 2011).

The correlation between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and achievement, however, did not show any significant association (Kreishan & Al-Dhaimat, 2013). On the contrary, Cortright et al. (2013) find that learners with high intrinsic motivation levels show higher achievement in learning, which indicates that there might be a significant association between these two variables. When it comes to which motivation is more dominant over the other, Elizabeth and Ena (2019) report that intrinsic motivation outweighed extrinsic motivation. Interestingly, Azhari and Daayah (2018) find that neither intrinsic nor extrinsic motivations had a positive association with English learning achievement.

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Approach

This research aims to determine the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and the English performance of secondary vocational school students in China. The explanatory mixed-methods sequential design, involving quantitative data collection and analyses prior to those of qualitative data in two consecutive phases within one study, was applied in the current study (Creswell, 2003). A quantitative method was used to collect the quantitative data by distributing the adopted Questionnaire Star, a commonly-used online instrument in China (see Figure 1). Afterwards, a qualitative method was conducted through a semi-structured interview.

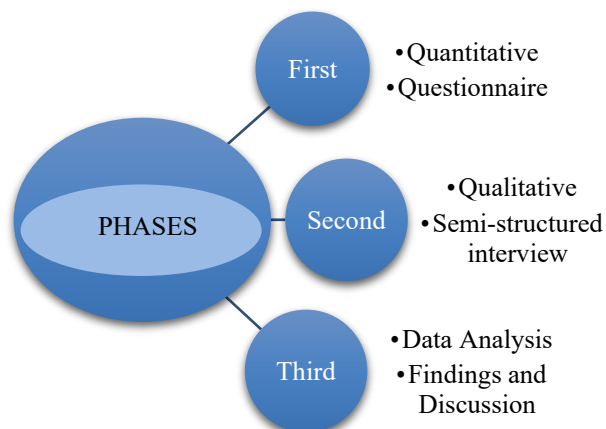


Figure 1. Research design.

3.2 Sample of the Study

The researchers employed a cluster sampling technique for the first phase of the quantitative survey (see Figure 2). A total of 212 students from grade two in different majors and classes were selected as the respondents from a secondary vocational school in Chongqing, China. The researchers administered the Questionnaire Star by providing the respondents with a QR code during their English class. The researchers used the typical-case sampling method for the second qualitative phase (see Figure 2). Of 212 respondents, 12 agreed to be interviewed for the next stage.

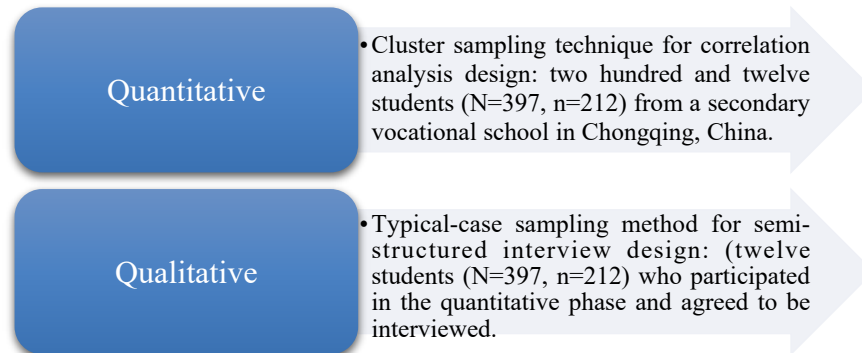


Figure 2. Participant selection techniques.

3.3 Instruments for Data Collection

In the first phase, a questionnaire (see Figure 3) was administered to 212 students from a secondary vocational school in Chongqing, China, through an online platform.

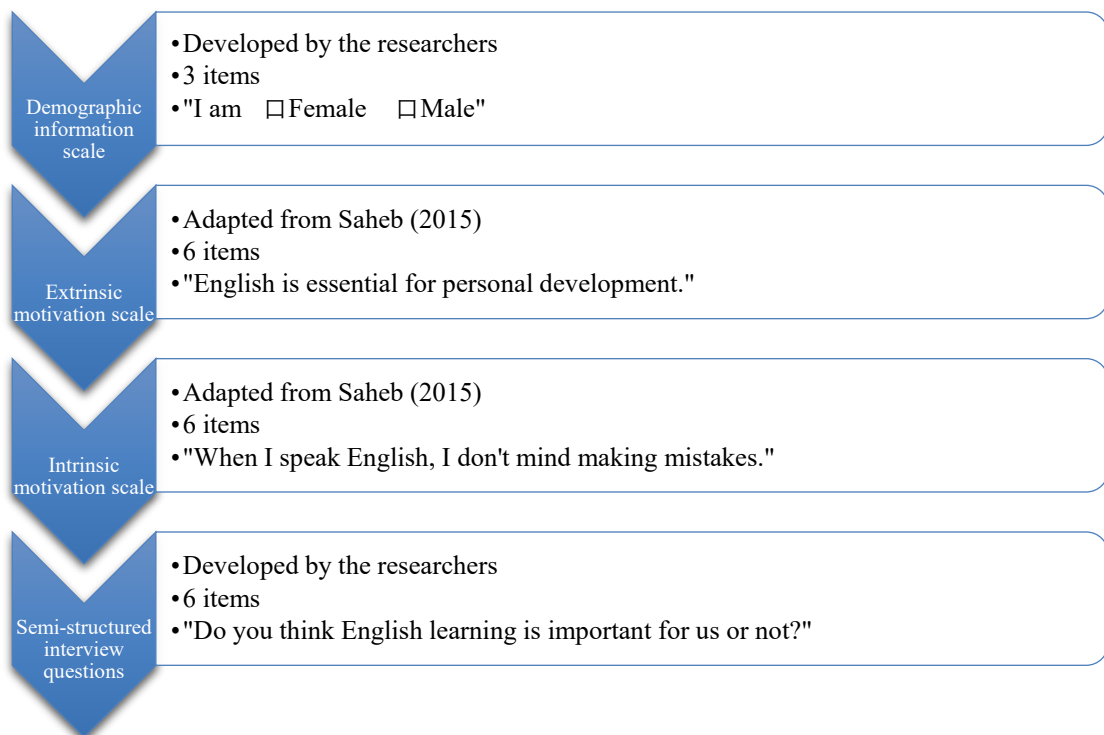


Figure 3. Instruments.

The questionnaire was first translated into Chinese before being distributed to the students for better comprehension and responses. The extrinsic and intrinsic motivation items were adapted from previous research (see Saheb, 2015). The adapted questionnaire was divided into three different parts. The first part was the demographic information that elicited students' personal information such as gender, time spent on English study every week, and mid-term English performance section. The second part of the questionnaire was the questions for the extrinsic motivation of English learning which included six items, and the third part was the questions for the intrinsic motivation of English learning which also contained six items.

This study used a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1 point) to 'strongly agree' (5 points) and asked participants to answer all items in each construct. For the second phase, the researchers developed six semi-structured interview questions (see Figure 3) to further explore why students had such levels of motivation and their connections with their English performance.

3.4 Instruments for Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaire were analysed using the SPSS version 26.0 application. Cronbach's α analysis was performed prior to the other analyses to test the reliability of the instrument (see Table 1).

Table 1. The reliability statistics.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.811	12

The result shows a value of 0.811, which indicates that the instrument had a high reliability level because, according to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), a scale is considered reliable when Cronbach's α value exceeds 0.70. Descriptive statistical analysis was performed to report participants' demographic section based on gender, time spent on English learning weekly and their English scores section. According to Boone and Boone (2012), Likert scale items should be analysed at the interval measurement scale by determining a composite score (sum or mean) from four or more type Likert-type items. Hence, Pearson's r , t -test, ANOVA, and regression procedures are viewed as suitable data analysis procedures.

Inferential statistical analysis was further performed in addressing the research questions using Pearson correlation analysis. This analysis was chosen to examine the relationship between English learning motivation, including intrinsic and extrinsic motivation towards English performance. Meanwhile, a multiple linear regression analysis was applied to examine if intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can predict students' English performance. The level of motivation based on the mean score values were categorised based on Nailufar (2018) (see Table 2). Finally, thematic analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interview (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Table 2. Level of motivation (Nailufar, 2018).

Mean Scores Value	Level of Motivation
3.68 to 5	High degree of motivation
2.34 to 3.67	Moderate degree of motivation
1 to 2.33	Low degree of motivation

4. RESULTS

4.1 Results of Quantitative Data

4.1.1 Descriptive analysis

Table 3 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 3. Demographic characteristics (N=212).

Demographic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	134	63.2
	Female	78	36.8
Time spending weekly	less than 1 hour	89	42
	1-3 hours	89	42
	3-5 hours	23	10.8
	more than 5 hours	11	5.2
English performance section	less than 30	64	30.2
	30-59	89	42
	60-79	52	24.5
	80-100	7	3.3
Total		212	100

Out of 212 respondents, 134 were males (63.2%), and 78 were females (36.8%). As for the time the respondents devoted to their English study every week, most spent less than 1 hour or only 1-3 hours a week, accounting for 42% (N=89) of the total participants, respectively. As predicted, only a few respondents spent more than 5 hours per week, with 11 respondents (5.2%). The mid-term results revealed that most students had English test scores between 30 and 59 out of 100. This indicates that more than 50% of respondents had below mediocre performance, and only seven respondents (3.3%) scored high at 80 and above.

Table 4 depicts the minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation of the respondents' English performance and motivation.

Table 4. Descriptive results of English performance and motivations (N=212).

Items	Min	Max	Mean	SD
English performance	0.00	94.00	44.38	20.67
Extrinsic motivation	1.67	5.00	4.22	0.57
Intrinsic motivation	1.33	5.00	3.41	0.57
Motivation	1.75	5.00	3.81	0.51

The results in Table 4 illustrate that students' English test performance in the secondary vocational school ranged from 0.00 to 94 (M=44.38, SD=20.67). Based on the mean score values, the extrinsic motivation degree (M=4.22, SD=0.51) of the students in the secondary vocational schools in China was categorised as high, while the intrinsic motivation level (M=3.41, SD=0.57) was considered as moderate. In total, the aggregated score for motivation was 3.81 (SD=0.57), which is considered high.

4.1.2 Normality distribution analysis

In order to determine whether the data is normally distributed, a P-P Plot was shown in Figure 4.

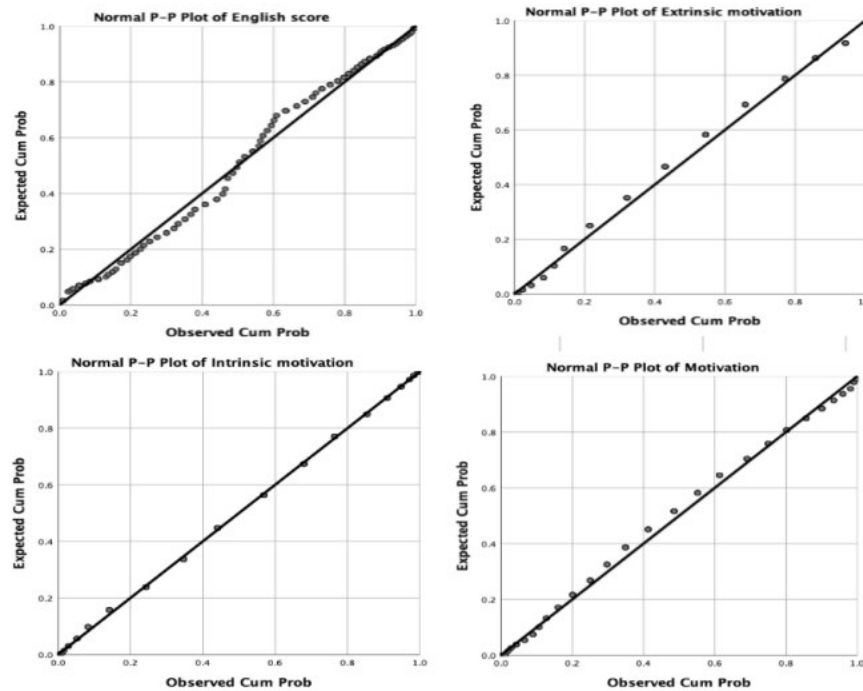


Figure 4. Normal P-P Plot.

From Figure 4, all scatter was evenly distributed close to the oblique line. Therefore, the data on English performance, extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation, and overall motivation followed a normal tabulation. Therefore, a parametric test, Pearson correlation analysis, was selected to determine the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and English performance.

4.1.3 Pearson correlation analysis

In order to answer the first and second research questions, Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to seek the relationship between intrinsic motivation and English performance, along with extrinsic motivation and English performance among the respondents. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Correlation coefficients of variables (N=212).

Items	Correlations	English performance	Extrinsic motivation	Intrinsic motivation	Motivation
English performance	Pearson Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
Extrinsic motivation	Pearson Correlation	0.125	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.069			

Table 5 continued...

Intrinsic motivation	Pearson Correlation	.216**	.573**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.002	0		
Motivation	Pearson Correlation	.193**	.885**	.888**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.005	0	0	

** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The findings presented in Table 5 reveal a significant relationship between intrinsic motivation and English performance ($r=0.216, p=0.002, p<0.05$). However, there was no significant relationship between extrinsic motivation and English performance ($r=0.125, p=0.069, p>0.05$).

4.1.4 Multiple linear regression analysis

In order to address the third research question, Multiple linear regression analysis was selected, and the findings are shown in Figure 5 and Table 6.

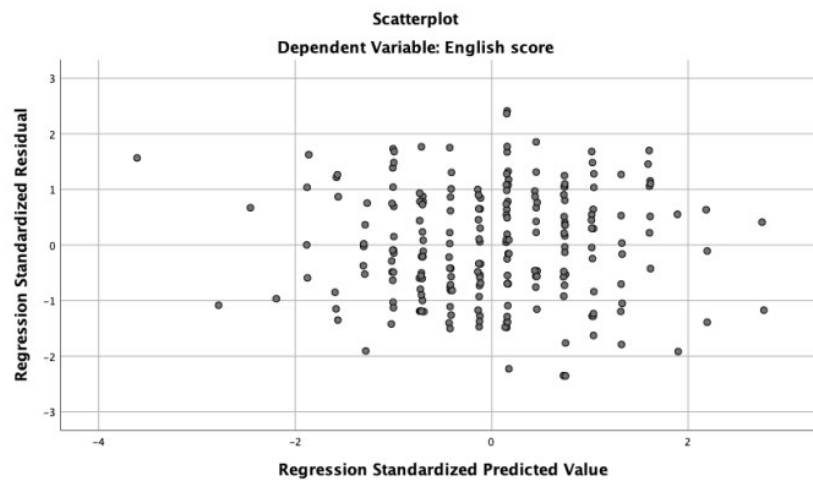


Figure 5. Scatter plot.

Table 6. Multiple linear regression, important statistics (N=212).

Variables	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F (2,209)	Beta	t	Tolerance	VIF
DV English performance	0.216 a	0.047	0.038	5.12				
IV Extrinsic motivation					0.003	0.032	0.675	1.482
Intrinsic motivation					0.215	2.611*	0.675	1.482

* $p<0.05$

Table 6 presents a multiple linear regression analysis conducted to determine the best linear combination of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation in predicting students'

English performance. Statistical assumptions, such as the normal distribution of residuals (see Figure 5) and the non-linear correlation between predicted variables and residuals, were all met in the analysis (see Figure 5). The regression method of 'enter' shows that the combination of the two independent variables did not significantly predict the student's English performance, $F(2,209)=5.120$. Intrinsic motivation has significantly contributed to the prediction ($p<0.05$), but extrinsic motivation did not contribute significantly ($p>0.05$) (see Table 5). The Beta weights, presented in Table 6, also suggest that intrinsic motivation contributed higher to predicting students' English performance. The R Square value was only 0.047, which indicated that the model explained 4.7 percent of the variance in students' English performance. The standardised regression formulation is students' English performance = $0.003 \times$ extrinsic motivation + $0.215 \times$ intrinsic motivation.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

As there was a significant positive correlation between students' intrinsic motivation and English performance, the relationship between extrinsic motivation and English performance revealed a low correlation. In addressing the fourth research question and further comprehending the underlying reasons, the researchers conducted a semi-structured interview with 12 students out of the total 212 respondents. Open-thematic coding was the method used for this purpose (Ebadi & Ghuchi, 2018). Therefore, six major themes, namely, personal opinion on English language learning, previous and present feelings on English language learning, problems faced in English language learning, family support on English language learning, environment for English study and policies support for English language learning emerged in this study. Details of the findings are as follows.

4.2.1 Personal opinion on English language learning

For this theme, 11 out of 12 students thought English learning was important for them for various reasons. Students believed that English is a very important subject and has been a part of their life. For example, S11 said:

- (1) It is important because it can be used in many aspects of our life. (S11)

S12 also said:

- (2) ...of course, English is important because it is our second language. (S12)

In addition, the students spoke that English was beneficial for their careers. In this case, S3 said:

- (3) I think English is important because we are tourism and catering majors, and we need to master English to introduce scenic spots and dishes to travellers. (S3)

Both S7 and S9 confirmed that:

- (4) English is important because it is good for our careers. (S7)

Some students said English was useful when travelling abroad and beneficial to other aspects of life. For example, S4 said:

- (5) It is very important. We can use it for travelling and working. It also can help to build our characters. (S4)

In addition, S8 and S10 have similar thoughts:

- (6) English can be used when travelling outside our country. (S8)

Only S6 thought English was not important because he believed that artificial intelligent translators available today can fully be relied on when it comes to English translation that he would need:

- (7) There are some intelligent translators nowadays. There is no use of English, so I do not listen to English class. (S6)

4.2.2 Previous experience in English language learning

Most respondents had a negative experience learning English during their junior high school years. They did not have any interest in learning English. Therefore, their performance was not satisfactory from the beginning. For example, S2 said:

- (8) My English was not good in junior school. I did not like it because I thought passing the test was the only purpose of learning English. (S2)

S7 also said that:

- (9) My English was very poor from the beginning because I did not like to study. (S7)

Furthermore, S4 expressed that:

- (10) My English was poor from the beginning. I never listened to the teacher in class because I thought learning English was not important at that time. (S4)

The same situation applied to S6 and S9, who both agreed that:

- (11) I was poor at this subject from the beginning. There was no reason for this. I just could not understand this subject. It was hard. (S6)

Four interviewed students reported that they were at first good at learning English but later fell behind because they had friends that influenced and started to quit studying. S1 said:

- (12) It was okay at first, but when I was in the second grade, I always went out to play with my friends, and then I felt left behind in English class. (S1)

The same situation was reported by S5, S8, and S10. Furthermore, some students did not like the way English was taught. For example, S12 admitted that:

- (13) No, my English is not good. I did not like it (i.e., the subject). I liked having fun. I did not like to recite words and passages. I loved freedom. (S12)

S3 also added that her interests in English decreased once the teacher in her junior high gave materials that was tedious to her:

- (14) My English was okay in junior high school. It was all right at first, but in the second grade, the teacher always asked us to recite the materials, I did not like it anymore. (S3)

4.2.3 *Problems faced in English language learning*

The majority of the respondents stated that they had problems with vocabulary learning. The respondents revealed that they had very limited vocabulary. Once they could not recognise the words, they would lose interest immediately, making it hard for them to learn English well. For example, S1 said:

- (15) I think the biggest problems are grammar and vocabulary, and there are also too many subjects to learn at the same time. (S1)

The same problem was reported by S4, she said:

- (16) I am short of vocabulary. I did not understand the questions during examinations. (S4)

S9 also spoke of how the speed of learning in the classroom was too fast for him. While he was still struggling with the vocabulary being learned at the time, the next day, the teacher continued to the next lesson of the English class.

- (17) I wanted the teacher to teach us vocabulary. I lost motivation when the class continued to other topics because it was hard for me. (S9)

Another vocabulary problem was reported by S11, who said:

- (18) I do not know the pronunciation of many words, so I do not know how to do tasks related to pronunciation. (s11)

In learning vocabulary, many students expressed concerns on their poor sense of self-regulation, memory problems to learn new words and expressions in English, and learning habits that were not ideal.

- (19) Words and expressions are important, and self-regulation is also important; those are what I lack. (S3)

- (20) My learning habit is not good. I do not like to learn words, and my memory is not sharp either. (S7)

- (21) I cannot understand the English lesson, and I cannot focus on the subject. I am not motivated to learn vocabulary. (S8)

- (22) I have no self-regulation. (S10)

- (23) I have a poor memory and learning habit. (S12)

4.2.4 Family support on English language learning

For theme 4, almost all of the respondents' parents did not provide the necessary support because most were too occupied with work or their work was far from home. For example, S1 said:

- (24) Yes, we often talk about my study, but usually, I have to be responsible for myself because they are busy, and I also have a three-year-old sister, so they have to concentrate on her. We do not talk about English subjects because they do not understand the subject. (S1)

S2, S3, and S5 also had the same opinion, stating that:

- (25) They care about me, but we rarely talk about my study because they are busy. We do not talk about English subjects because they did not learn English at their age, so they cannot understand the subject. (S2)

Furthermore, their parents also did not have much knowledge, especially about English subjects, and thus were not able to offer any assistance to the students. In this case, S4 and S11 said that:

- (26) ...we sometimes talk about my study, but they do not understand English. (S4)

The same case was reported by S2, S3, S5, S7, S9, S10, S11, and S12. In addition, some students did not have a close relationship with their parents, so they did not have a loving and conducive home environment. For example, three of the students' parents were divorced, and they were in the final grade.

- (27) My parents were divorced when I was very young. My father and stepmother are too busy to care about my study, let alone my English subject because they do not understand it. (S7)

- (28) Yeah, they care about my study, but they divorced when I was three, so I do not have much contact with my mother. My father always asks me to send my score report to him, so we sometimes talk about English lessons. (S8)

- (29) My parents got divorced when I was eight. They used to care about my study when I was in primary school, but they no longer cared much. We do not talk about English lessons because they do not understand the lesson. (S9)

Finally, only one student said their parents showed care and support for their studies. The student, S12, said that:

- (30) Yes, they care about my study. We talk on the phone every week to talk about my study, but we seldom talk about my English lesson. (S12)

4.2.5 Environment for English language learning

The findings show that the environment for learning English was not encouraging. Students were often distracted by games on their smartphones, and some were smoking and dozing off in class. The students reported that most of their classmates showed no interest in learning. S2, S4, S5, S6, S8, S11, and S12 shared the same opinion, as expressed in (31).

- (31) The atmosphere of my class was not supportive because many students played with their phones, slept or talked, or just thought about other things, and these behaviours would have a bad effect on my learning process in the class. (S5)

In addition, S1, S3, S7, and S9 said:

- (32) Students would choose to study when they were inclined to do it. Some of them would study, but a majority of them would not. (S7)

4.2.6 Policies support for English language learning

Several students thought the support provided by the school was insufficient, and there was no policy to encourage them to study or punish them if they did not study. Some saw that management was a problem, where the school put more concern on the physical facilities of the school compared to the nonphysical facilities.

- (33) The school does not give enough support. The school does not care much about our studies. (S1)
- (34) The school cares more about physical facilities than nonphysical infrastructure. (S11)
- (35) The school is not well-managed. The headmaster and teachers do not care much about our studies. (S4)

In addition, some students thought that the teachers were so occupied with other responsibilities and tasks that they could no longer monitor what their students were doing. In this case, S10 said:

- (36) The headmaster and teachers only communicate with the students about the lesson because they are busy. They should care more about us. (S10)

5. DISCUSSION

This study attempted to determine the association between two types of motivation, intrinsic and extrinsic, and English test performance before assessing how much these two motivations predict English performance. The variables influencing the relationship between these two motivational types and English proficiency among Chinese secondary vocational school students were also investigated.

5.1 Quantitative Findings

For the first research question, the quantitative findings show that intrinsic motivation strongly correlated with the students' English performance with $r=0.216$, $p=0.002$. The same results were found in some other studies, such as Cortright et al. (2013), who revealed that intrinsic motivation significantly impacted students' performance. In a similar study, Hendijani et al. (2016) found that students' course grades strongly correlated with their intrinsic motivation with $r=0.47$, $p=0.000$. Likewise, Salehpour and Roohani (2020) also reported a statistically significant correlation between the students' speaking performance and their intrinsic motivation with $r=0.56$, $p<0.05$. However, no correlation was found between extrinsic motivation

and the students' English performance for the second research question, with $r=0.125$ and $p=0.069$. Similarly, [Hendijani et al. \(2016\)](#) revealed that the relationship between students' performance and extrinsic motivation was insignificant, with $r=0.06$ and $p=0.389$.

The result of the multiple linear regression analysis could contribute to concluding that the prediction effect from the aggregated motivation, including intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, on English performance was only 4.7%. Intrinsic motivation ($\beta=0.215$) contributed more to predicting students' English performance than extrinsic motivation ($\beta=0.003$). This is in accordance with [Elizabeth and Ena \(2019\)](#), who reported that English education graduate students' achievement is dominated more by intrinsic motivation than extrinsic motivation by qualitative research. Another study by [Lemos and Verissimo \(2014\)](#) also revealed that intrinsic motivation is positively related to the students' performance, but extrinsic motivation did not positively correlate with their achievements. [Lepper et al. \(2005\)](#) expressed similar views and reported a significant relationship between intrinsic motivation and the students' academic performance, but a negative relationship was found with extrinsic motivation.

5.2 Qualitative Findings

Through thematic analysis, the semi-structured interview can be discussed from the following domains.

5.2.1 Cognitive domain

From theme one, 11 out of all the 12 interviewees believed that English plays an important role in one's career and for travelling purposes and tertiary education enrolment. All participants expressed their willingness to learn English well in terms of their subjective will. Only one student thought that with the increasingly advanced technology of artificial intelligence translation, there was no use in learning this language.

Five interviewees showed that their most significant problem in learning English was lack of vocabulary as their lexical knowledge, as shown in theme three. There was no environment for students to practice English outside the school in China. The participants expressed that they gradually lost interest and sense of achievement towards English when they could not recognise the words. Five students said they did not have a strong sense of self-control in English lessons and other subjects.

How students understand the learning process and use the knowledge they have received falls under the cognitive domain ([Alinier & Harwood, 2005](#)). Few students actually communicated their cognitive aims in this way. In the EFL context, students are often poorly motivated to study English because they cannot understand the lesson. When students have not mastered what they have learnt, in this case, recalling information as the basic form of the cognitive domain, this would further disrupt from creating the mental skills, thus preventing students from acquiring knowledge. [Chen et al. \(2014\)](#) found that learners with an analytic-independent cognitive style performed better and improved significantly in the delayed post-test. It is suggested that teachers solicit inquiries about goal setting and look into creating cognitive goals in order to assist students in considering the purpose and anticipated outcomes ([Piyarat](#)

& Wareesiri, 2018). Furthermore, it is advised that the level of cognitive domains could be achieved through in-class debates, tutorial activities and seminars, the use of realia, project- and problem-based learning, and so forth (Kasilingam et al., 2014).

5.2.2 *Affective domain*

From theme two, all 12 respondents had negative English learning experiences during their junior middle school. Five students said that learning English was not interesting, so their performance was not good from the start. Two of them were initially very interested in this subject, but they gradually lost interest due to the un motivating learning methods such as text recitation and word dictation. Four students indicated that they felt obliged to the peer pressure in junior high school, which also led to their demotivation in English learning. However, most students said they had gradually realised the importance of English.

According to Hoque (2016), the affective domain encompasses attitudes, values, enthusiasms, and feelings. In order to motivate students to learn, these elements under the umbrella of the affective domain must be engaged. Past studies suggest that affective domains are significant to the point that they could enhance or inhibit the learning process in general (Zayed & Al-Ghamdi, 2019). This is visible in this study, where 12 students had negative experiences during junior middle school. When they entered high school, they were still scarred from their past incidents, thus affecting their overall motivation to learn English. From the psychological perspective, ‘emotional injury’ or ‘emotional scar’ refers to a lasting effect of emotional trauma. Without the right formula of strategies to promote motivation, we could see a negative correlation with learning motivation as the outcome. As Al-Mekhlafi (2010) found in his study, motivation correlates significantly with achievement in language learning. Tridinanti (2018) also strengthened the finding by proving that students’ anxiety, self-confidence and language achievement produced a correlation. Students who struggled to manage their emotions were more likely to forget what they had to say and thus struggled to rectify errors in EFL learning (Piyarat & Wareesiri, 2018), which could also be the case in this study. Therefore, receiving, responding, assessing, organising, grouping, and describing are recommended as some initiatives to improve the level of affective domain (Kasilingam et al., 2014), which would help enhance students’ motivation to learn not only in English but also other subject matters as well.

5.2.3 *Social domain*

Themes four, five and six are related to the social domain. Part four deals with family support, where parents did not provide their children with the necessary support or interaction because of their busy and far-distance work. Some of the students’ family relationship was not very harmonious, which had a negative effect on the students. When students do not get sufficient support or have poor relations with their families, this lessens their learning motivation (see Shao & Kang, 2022). Similarly, learning motivation and learners’ behaviour have also been proven to be predictors of students’ academic self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). In addition, Vatankhah and Tanbakooei (2014) discovered that social support from family members, close friends, and EFL teachers improved EFL students’ motivation. This shows that family members, particularly parents, have a significant role in supporting students’ learning in terms of social support.

On top of that, the overall learning atmosphere of secondary vocational schools was not supportive and ideal, as students were always found sleeping, chatting and showing other deviant behaviours in class. The majority of the participants shared that although the government has given more emphasis on vocational education, the application is still at an initial stage because the existing policy support has not emphasised the use of English elsewhere. With that, limited usage resulted in students' lack of motivation to use the language. [Azhar and Gopal \(2021\)](#) reported in their study that with a policy that emphasises English usage, effective speaking outcomes and increased motivation were found to further support the use of English.

In order to further guarantee the quality of graduates, English teachers need to further innovate with their teaching methods, improve their content knowledge, and develop teaching design and other aspects that would improve their teaching quality. [Noels et al. \(2001\)](#) found that teachers' behaviour affects students' overall motivation as well as their perceptions of competence and autonomy. In a related study, [Phan \(2010\)](#) found that participants' motivation to learn English was influenced by their instructors' encouragement as well as their pedagogical skills ([Johnson, 2017](#)). Additionally, [Abdullah & Al-Mofti \(2017\)](#) showed that goals, external social influences, and intention all play a role in motivation to learn English. Therefore, it is recommended that the social domain plays an integral part in boosting learning motivation which should be paid more attention to.

Cognitive, affective, and behavioural, including social responses, depend on a person's perceived capacity to deal with events ([Lazarus, 1966; Jhangiani et al., 2022](#)). Findings from the qualitative data seem to echo most of what the quantitative results suggested in terms of the relationship between the students' motivation and their English test performance. The significant correlation between students' performance and intrinsic motivation may attribute to students' moderate degree of intrinsic motivation in learning English and their below-average test performance ($M=44.38$). Despite students' strong subjective dedication and high extrinsic motivation, family support, government policy, and learning instructions are less supportive. This may contribute to the weak correlation between extrinsic motivation and students' English test performance.

6. CONCLUSION

This study offers a statistical analysis of the relationship between English performance and the two types of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. The research revealed a significant relationship between intrinsic motivation and students' English performance, but no significant relationship was found between students' extrinsic motivation and English performance. The overall motivation, including intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, did not positively predict students' English performance. From the cognitive domain, the students in this study believed that English learning was important because it would help them get a better career, travel, and continue their studies. The limited vocabulary knowledge and sense of self-control led to unsatisfactory performance. With such extrinsic rewards, participants were found to have a high degree of motivation. In the same vein, the participants showed poor self-regulation and terrible learning habits from the affective and social domains. The unsupported and non-conducive learning environment might further affect the low

intrinsic motivation. These research results can be used to advocate more serious efforts by the stakeholders to improve the English learning quality in vocational schools, particularly in the China context.

It should also be acknowledged that there are some limitations to this research. This research only focuses on the relationship between students' intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and their mid-term scores in English subjects in the second semester of 2020-2021. Future research should focus on other types of motivation among other secondary school students aside from the vocational stream. Expanding the research into quasi-experimental studies could offer statistical evidence on how intervention could help improve vocational schools' students' learning performance and improve their learning motivation simultaneously.

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