

Motivations for Specializing in English at the Graduate Level of University Education: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

Article History:

Submitted 26 Jan 2025

Reviewed 25 May 2025

Accepted 30 July 2025

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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.3126/eltp.v10i1-2.82898>

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Publisher

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The study aimed to explore the learners' motivational factors for specializing in English in the university education system in Nepal. This study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically adopting the narrative inquiry design. The participants consisted of five second-year Bachelor of Education students majoring in English at the university level. They were selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research focus. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guideline. The collected data were ethically handled, systematically coded, and analyzed. Following the coding process, themes were developed and discussed thematically to derive meaningful insights. The study's findings showed that learners are motivated by competitive events and functions, interpersonal and self-motivation, job and finance, results of previous examinations, and study and university-level employment abroad. They were motivated from the early age of schooling to the immediate past education portfolio, grade XII. Motivations for specializing in English had multiple factors depending on the contents and contexts.

Intrinsic motivations of the learners were explored in the study, but further researchers need to dig out probable supporting motivational aspects, both intrinsic and extrinsic, to enhance the specialization in the English language. The findings of the study demand further studies in the area of motivations for the learners.

Keywords: Motivation, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, specializing in English

Introduction

Many factors contribute to the choice of learning a second language. Among them, the motivation factors are crucial in specializing in the English language in university education in Nepal. Gardner,

Tremblay, and Masgoret (1997) stated that in L2 learning, many variables have been suggested as potential attributes of individuals who will be at learning another language. Those attributes can vary from one situation to another. These include motivations, anxieties, aptitudes, self-confidence, and strategies. Ryan & Deci (2000) motivation is concerned with “energy, direction, persistence, and equifinality-all aspects of activation and intention” (p. 69). Motivation is defined as the combination of effort and desire to learn a language. In addition, Brown and Park (2002) defined motivation with certain terms like inner drive, impulse, emotion, or desire, and these terms motivate the learners to perform a particular action. In university-level education, students are aware of learning, and they know how they are motivated in their specialized area. In 2005, Dornyei proposed a new approach to the understanding of L2 motivation, conceived within an L2 Motivational Self System, which attempts to integrate a number of L2 theories (Gardner, 2001; Ushioda, 2001) with findings of self-research in psychology. According to Rahamat (2018), the environment is also a factor that hinders or facilitates language learning. Motivations are the intrinsic drive to learn a language. Basically, motivations are classified into two types they are intrinsic and extrinsic (Deci & Ryan 1985)

Intrinsic motivation is the real motivation, which is driven by the learners themselves to achieve or get something. The phenomenon of intrinsic motivation was first acknowledged within experimental studies of animal behavior, where it was discovered that many organisms engage in exploratory, playful, and curiosity-driven behaviors even in the absence of reinforcement or reward. Now, this is described as the natural motivation, which creates an internal and inherent passion for learning anything. Intrinsic motivation has emerged as an important phenomenon for educators, a natural wellspring of learning and achievement that can be systematically undermined by parent and teacher practices (Ryan & Stiller, 1991). It gives more results because the learners themselves initiated the motivation. They are convinced by themselves, and they feel the essence of targeted objectives or aims. These are the flawless and spontaneous behaviors for boosting one’s interest and curiosity in the defined goals.

Extrinsic motivations are the created or constructed motivations by the associated characters, like teachers, parents, friends, relatives, etc. In the classic literature, extrinsic motivation has typically been characterized as a pale and impoverished (even if powerful) form of motivation that contrasts with intrinsic motivation (deCharms, 1968). These motivations are added by highlighting the values and importance of the goals or targets. For these, the role of the motivator will be in the center, and convinced accordingly, as things will happen.

Here, the study discusses more about reflections and experiences of the English specialized students in university education in the context of Nepal. Learning a second language is a continuous process, and it has its own complications and motivations. The root causes for learning languages can be determined by different motivational issues, events, and even purposes. By choosing English as a specialization, learners may have multiple motivations to connect English to their lives. As English is used as a global lingua franca, the language itself creates a global platform for learners in this capitalistic world. It creates better opportunities in academia and finance. In the context of Nepal, English is taught as a compulsory subject till the bachelor’s level, and English is taught as an optional subject from the secondary level to higher studies.

Now, I frequently observe that English language teacher vacancies are announced in different

types of organizations like teacher service commissions, community school teachers, private school teachers, English translators, language instructors, and others. And I also find the applicants are not enough applicants. Learning the English language has been motivated by the global dominant status of English in education, science, technology, computer, tourism, diplomacy, world literature, philosophy, business, aviation, and communication. English has the role of global lingua franca across diverse socioeconomic politics with the indigenous linguistic identity through code-mixing and code-switching procedures. So, I am planning to investigate the contributing factors to being a successful second language learner. English language learning has been previously viewed as a luxury afforded to the most socially and economically privileged groups. However, new perspectives regarding the importance of English language education, along with the implementation of national EFL-focused educational policies, have begun to reshape those views. My focus is on the motivational factors to specialize in English at the graduate level of university education. In second language learning, motivation has been shown to have a strong relationship with motivational behaviors (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Hashemian & Heidari, 2013), which influence L2 acquisition. Nishanthi (2018) views English as “a vital language for all kinds of professional and personal goals” (p. 871). In the view of Mahu (2012), learning English as a foreign language “allows us to fully appreciate the culture and its context of a country, it widens our understanding” (p. 374). This change has had the effect of creating English language learning opportunities for people from a wider socio-economic range (Hernández-Fernández & Rojas, 2018). So, learning a language is not a common phenomenon, rather, it has the intrinsic motivation to choose it as a specialization.

Motivation is the key driver to enhance the success of the learners. Motivation plays a significant role in building comprehension in second language learning. In the Nepalese context, English language learning and graduating with a specialization in English in university education is affected by various contexts. Situational factors play a crucial role in learning English as a second language. Mostly, earlier research like Gardner (2001) focused on quantitative analysis of data by just collecting data from observations, checklists, and rating scales, but my study varies from those because I followed the qualitative data in the study and narrative stories of the students at university education relating their motivations for specializing in English.

More specifically, I investigated the exploration of motivational factors of learners for specializing in English education at the university level in Nepal. To carry out the study, I followed the following research questions to elicit the data. Why are you motivated to specialize in English university level? What are the factors and reasons that make you choose English specialization?

Self-Determination as the Theoretical Framework

The present study followed the Self-determination theory, which was developed by psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in 1970 (Ryan, & Deci, 2024). The theory came into practice as a response to earlier theories that focused on just external rewards and punishment systems in learning. Deci and Richard Ryan focus on the role of intrinsic motivation, initiated with the inner willingness for long-term engagement and attachment to the subject matter. That willingness creates satisfaction and personal involvement in the long race of motivation. The theory focuses on human motivation in relation to the macro study. It relies on the empirical elicitation of the data with the real social context background. The theory goes with three other related assumptions. It believes that the human mind

is inherently proactive in nature, so learners can assume about their destination. They can simply create a favorable environment, engagement, and activity to foster their learning. The second belief is that of an inherent tendency towards growth. This belief in the environment, resources, organisms, and tendencies of growth fosters learning. It focuses on the need for autonomy, collaboration, and cooperation of the learners to engage in long-term learning goals. The third one is the learners' personal readiness or environment to achieve the learning. Here, learners' personal setting, seeking of resources, new information, maturity of learning, effective coping with the situation, and a self-supporting environment for language learning matter. So, I felt this theory could be connected in my study to connect the themes from the collected data. I adopted the self-determination theory in my present study (Ryan, & Deci, 2024)

Methodology

In this study, I followed the narrative inquiry design under the qualitative method. Narrative inquiry is a method in research that believes in the process of collecting information for the purpose of study through storytelling. Narrative is a fundamental way of organizing human experience and a tool for constructing models of reality (Herman, 2013). Participants' stories were the basic paramount for the research. These stories were systematically gathered, analyzed, and thematized to represent the people's stories. The stories are used to understand and analyze social patterns and phenomena. The method is used for an in-depth understanding of the situation and context for those who seek insightful results.

Narrative research describes the lives of individuals, collects and tells stories about people's lives, and writes narratives of individual experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Similarly, Kramp (2004, p. 107) says that stories assist humans in making life experiences meaningful. Stories preserved in our memories prompt our reflections, connect us to our past and present, and assist us in envisioning our future. Clandinin and Connelly (2000), explain, Narrative inquiry as umbrella term that captures personal and human dimensions of experience over time and takes account of the relationship between individual experiences and cultural context Furthermore, they also said, "Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into experience through collaboration between researcher and participants, over time in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus (p.20).

The central element of any study was undoubtedly the population and sample. A population is simply any group of individuals that has one or more characteristics in common. Many factors, such as expense, time, and accessibility, frequently prevent researchers from gaining information from the whole population is called a sample (Cohen et al., 2013). For this qualitative research purpose, purposive sampling was adopted. In small-scale research, researchers can make use of convenience sampling, quota sampling, purposive sampling, dimensional sampling, snowball sampling, etc. Among these kinds, purposive sampling is undertaken for several kinds of research, including to achieve representativeness to enable comparisons to be made, to focus on specific unique issues or cases, to generate theory through the gradual accumulation of data from different sources (Cohen et al., 2013).

Here, my study site was one of the constituent campuses of Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. I followed the purposive sampling procedure for the selection of my research participants. I selected five English language learning students, majoring in English at the bachelor's level, second year. Among the five, three were males and two were females.

Data Collection Procedure

Tools are the key elements for any kind of research. My study was based on a qualitative approach, and more specifically, narrative inquiry was adopted. In-depth interviews, casual conversations, and formal conversations with the participants were the tools for the study. The sources of the data were both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources of the data were the students of Mahendra Ratna Campus, studying English in bachelor's degree second year. Secondary sources were articles, journals, research studies, internet materials, and information related to the study, and the reports and available research will also be looked at carefully, and with other related documents.

To analyze the collected data, I followed the procedures suggested by Hyncer (1985, as cited in Cohen et al., 2013). While analyzing the data first, I transcribed the data, then I followed the bracketing and phenomenology reduction in the data, then I listened to the interviews for the sense of the whole, and then I delimited the general meanings from the transcribed data. Then, I connected the relevant meaning to the research questions in the study, and after that, I eliminated the redundancies in the data. Then, I clustered the units into related and relevant meanings. After developing the cluster, I developed the themes from it, and finally, I composed the summary of the analysis and interpretation.

Participants' Profile

S.N	Participants pseudo-name	Birthplace	Current status	Background information
1.	Narayan	Arghakhanchi	Grade-teacher-3	12th pass from Arghakhanchi
2.	Kalpana	Dolakha	Receptionist	12th pass from Dolakha
3.	Kul	Pyuthan	Past-teacher	12th pass from Pyuthan
4.	Rita	Gorkha	-	12th pass from Gorkha
5.	Mukunda	Dhading	-	12th pass from Dhading

I followed all the procedures for analyzing the data. I had ethically coded and maintained the ethical considerations of the participants in both data and personal concerns. I used pseudonyms for the participants in the analysis and interpretations. I coded the data and analyzed them thematically in accordance with the narrative and interpretative perspective. I maintained the ethical issues of asking permission to take data, maintaining secrecy, and maintaining personal values and ethics, and analyzed the data without any bias in interpretation and discussion.

Results and Discussion

Results after processing the semi-structured interview and in-depth casual conversation showed that they were intrinsically motivated to learn English. There were many motivational factors, like competitive events and functions, interpersonal and self-motivations, job and finance, results of previous examinations, and abroad study and employment for the learners in the university-level education. They were motivated from the early age of schooling to the immediate past education portfolio, grade XII. Family background, socioeconomic status, and socio-political situations were the key motivations for learners. To better understand the consequences of an increased ideal L2 self toward learning the English language, it would be helpful to consider volition, which is motivated behavior such as effort and persistence (Yashima, 2012).

Competitive Events and Functions

Motivations towards majoring English arose from the competitive events and functions. Learners

frequently participated in the functions and won prizes. After, winning the prizes they motivated in the English language learning. Similarly, some organized functions inspired them in English learning.

Narayan: When I was in class 7, school organized the debate competition, and I was among the five schools located nearby. Every school had 3/3 participants. I won the first prize and got 3 story books and one Oxford dictionary, then started to read stories and I became more and more interested in English.

As Narayan's story, many people raised their interest in learning English. Achievements became the source of motivation for the learners.

Another participant Kalpana's story is also close to Narayan: At the end of grade XII, I got the free ship (scholarship), then I increased my interest in learning English.

Such a simple scholarship program was a source of motivation for the learners. There can be another program that can arise interest in the readers.

Rita: I am motivated in English because my maternal uncle brought many English books from Kathmandu. He gave me children's story books. I won many debate competitions with the help of books and my uncle.

Events in the schools motivated learners to learn the English language.

Mukunda: I used to listen to the "Current Affairs" program broadcasted by BBC. The program inspired me to major in English.

The above-discussed discourse was connected to my theoretical framework too. These functions and events were the self-determinant practices of the learners themselves. Winners in different competitive events were only to a limited extent a resource for the institutional development of teaching (Scheidig, & Tremp, 2024). So, I claim, that my study findings and discussions were interrelated with the theoretical framework which I followed in my study.

Interpersonal/Self-motivation

Most participants followed some ideal person as the source of motivation but in some cases, learners did not have a particular person as the source of motivation. Learners are motivated by themselves if they realize the essence of something. Here, some participants were motivated by ideal persons and some by themselves.

Narayan: I am inspired by my school teacher's motivation. He taught me so many things and told me that if I had good English I should major in English in university education too.

Personal motivations were the main source to specialize in English because people do have positive perceptions towards English in the Nepalese context. They think English is a prestigious language and helps to get good jobs.

In the same theme, Kalpana has the story: My uncle told me that if we take a major in English, it helps us to go abroad. Going abroad means having a good life.

Rita: I was inspired by my maternal uncle who teaches near my house and stayed at my home.

Family members inspired and recommended the juniors or the followers to choose the subjects, so they also played a motivational role in choosing the study area.

Other participants had different sources of motivations, they claimed that no one was there to inspire them but themselves were the source. I also believe to some extent if no one is educated in the family and even community then, who inspired them. Let's observe the stories of the self-motivators.

Kul: My teacher told me that I was so disciplined, and obedient. I never missed the homework. I was enthusiastic about learning English. I have had the habit of memorizing the word meaning in Nepali and grammatical structure. The teacher told me that I was interested in learning English from my childhood.

Mukunda: I was interested in English from my childhood. I was inspired by the programs of broadcasting media like; BBC, CNN, DISCOVERY, etc.

Personal and self-motivation were the sources of motivation to specialize in English in university education. This discussion is aligned with my theoretical framework. Self-determination does not rely only on other's motivation it rather relies on itself. If the learners are self-determined then, learning is more effective and productive.

Job and Finance

Job and finance were the motivational factors for the learners. Specializing in English associated with job security and financial support. Participants viewed that English supported job placement and the economy. The stories are stated in the same way;

Narayan: Specializing in English helps in employment. Now, I have got a job in a boarding school due to my English subject. After completing B.Ed., I have a plan to compete in secondary level English teacher in the Teachers Service Commission..... I don't have to ask for money, my expenses are fine. I receive my salary at the end of the month. I am happy with my job and subject.

Mukunda: The Human Resource of English is always demanding. Boarding schools are seeking English teachers for every vacancy. English helps us to run the usual and normal life cycle. We can easily get a job and need not worry about our expenses if we are engaged.

Kul has a similar story: I got the job of a primary teacher with my major in English because villagers demanded for English teacher. I was upgraded up to lower secondary.....parents were happy because my son was an English teacher and financial support was also there in the family.

Boarding schools offer English medium instruction, and nowadays, even government schools offer EMI, so English teachers are in high demand. Taking a major in English helped me to engage and survive financially. Similarly, English was equally useful in other jobs too. English also fits in educational consultancy.

Kalpana: I have good English. Few days before, I got the job in consultancy with the reference of my brother. I was selected due to my English. Job made me easy to bear personal expenses, so it financially supportive to me.

Rita: In my view, if we study English, then we don't have any trouble running our personal life. Mostly, we get good jobs if not moderate jobs are here and there.

The explored stories favored the specialization of English and offered opportunities in jobs and finance. Motivations guided with personal career and finance. English created job opportunities among the learners. Participants perceived their English proficiency as a significant advantage in diverse job markets (Thuy, 2024). Jobs are for job- seekers, if one is not interested in a job then what to do? So, self-determination theory clearly worked here. The discussion claimed that the findings and interpretations are interconnected with the self-determination of one.

Examination Results

Every participant faced both internal and external examinations. Their specification of examination grades resulted in learners specializing in their major subject. Most of the learners followed their best subject for the specialization. Some students specialized in their major area on the basis of their previous examination results. Some significant experiences shared by the participants are explored as follows.

Narayan: I got B+ in SEE examination in English subject from government school. It is a good mark in English so I choose to major in English in grades XI & XII. I passed English with a good score B+ in grade XII, so I decided to choose to major in English in B.Ed.

Kul: I passed with good marks in SEE and joined major English in XI and passed with good marks and continued in XII. The good score made me motivated to take major in English in B. Ed.

Those participants do have similar stories, they were good in English from their schooling. They have consistency in their scores in 10 and 12. The good grades made them choose a major in English. On the other hand, another participant was average in 10th grade, but improved a lot at grades XI & XII with the help of the teacher and scored good marks in XII. Her story is illustrated as follows;

Kalpna: I was average in English when I was in 10th grade. When I joined XI with a major in English, we had a very good and inspiring teacher who taught very clearly in grades XI & XII, I passed XII with very good marks and I choose to major in English in B.Ed.

Learners chose English on the basis of their grades or scores in previous examinations. That builds up confidence in them to choose. The score was the motivational factor for them to specialize in the subject. Their previous result was the product of their individual and collaborative effort. The determination made by them was influential to specialize in English. Their self-determination was connected to scoring high and specializing major English. So, my framework aligned with the discussion and result of the data.

Abroad Study and Employed in Foreign Land

English is an international language. Learners had dreams for abroad study and employment. They felt learning English would be good for education and quality of life. Participants believed that studying in a foreign country had quality education, and earning money in a foreign land had a significant contribution in Nepal, when dollar converts into NRS. Some stories were as follows;

Rita: I chose English because I have a dream to receive a degree from a foreign university. After receiving the degree, no doubt I will back to my homeland. I prefer native exposure in my English, so I took a major in English in B.Ed.

Participants accepted the native degree in English speaking country. Native exposure was the source of motivation. Another participant focused on foreign employment. The story was as follows;

Kalpna: I got confused, sometimes I plan to employ foreign land but not sure. I think we cannot earn much in Nepal. Salary in Nepal does not work.

Participants were motivated in English because it provides access to a foreign land. A positive study-abroad experience has the potential to boost a learner's L2 motivation (Wang, 2023). Foreign land for higher studies and finance. The determination was clear, they had their expectancy in a foreign degree and employment. Their determination led them to specialize in the English language in the

University Education system of Nepal.

Results are not discussed properly. Please discuss the results to reach to an appropriate conclusion.

Conclusion and Implications

This particular narrative inquiry explored the influential motivational factors among the students of the Nepalese University who specialized in English at the Bachelor's level of University Education. The findings of the study were driven by the combination of self-motivation, such as intrinsic motivation, and competitive events, and self-motivation. The extrinsic factors, like job perspectives, financial support, and opportunities to study in foreign universities, were the sources of motivation. The study findings aligned with the self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2024), focusing on how competence, autonomy, and support shaped the motivations.

This study will spark educators and institutions to design motivational interventions, such as debates and writing contexts, to motivate learners in university education in English. Similarly, disseminating the successful stories of English specialized learners in diverse fields will be the motivational agenda for learners. Policy makers should develop the public discourse to address the socio-economic growth agenda. Further researchers can utilize the study in larger samples, longitudinal studies, and comparative analysis to explore more on specialization in English at the university level in Nepal.

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