

Intrinsic Drivers: Examining the Nexus of Motivation and Task Engagement in Junior High English Education

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ABSTRACT

English plays an important role in academic learning and communication in the Philippines. This study examined the motivation and task engagement of Grade 7 to Grade 10 students at Diplahan National High School to provide a basis for instructional development. Anchored on Self-Determination Theory and Task-Based Language Teaching, a descriptive-correlational research design was employed. Data were gathered from 301 respondents selected through proportionate stratified sampling using a validated 30-item questionnaire adapted from the Academic Motivation Scale and Student Engagement Scale. Descriptive statistics and the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient were utilized for data analysis. Results revealed an overall motivation mean of 3.88 (SD = 0.53), categorized as High, with intrinsic motivation obtaining the highest mean (4.21, Very High). Overall task engagement was also High (M = 4.13, SD = 0.59), led by emotional engagement (4.22). A significant positive relationship was found between motivation and task engagement ($r = .600$, $p < .001$), prompting the rejection of the null hypothesis. The correlation was strongest among Grade 7 students ($r = .719$). Although engagement was high, cognitive engagement was comparatively lower (4.05). These findings suggest that motivated learners tend to demonstrate higher task engagement, while active participation does not necessarily guarantee deep cognitive processing. The findings offer a framework for enhancing student participation and meaningful learning in resource-limited secondary English education settings.

Keywords: *English language learning, motivation, task engagement, intrinsic motivation, student engagement, task-based language teaching, junior high school*

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INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role in academic learning, professional preparation, and communication in an increasingly interconnected world. In the Philippine educational context, English is widely used as a medium of instruction and remains an important component of students' academic development. However, students do not always demonstrate the same level of interest, persistence, and involvement in English language learning. Such challenges may be associated with limited opportunities to use English beyond the classroom, as frequent language practice is considered important for developing mastery and sustained control of the language (**Dolba, 2023**). Difficulties may arise from limited exposure to English outside the classroom, differences in prior knowledge, instructional practices, available resources, and students' perceptions of the relevance and difficulty of English. Corroborating this within the local context, **Dangan (2023)** found that factors such as inadequate school facilities, unengaging learning content, and ineffective teaching foci act as significant demotivators that actively hinder Filipino students' desire to learn English as a second language.

Motivation is an important factor in language learning because it influences students' willingness to initiate and sustain learning activities. Self-Determination Theory distinguishes among different forms of motivation, including intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation (**Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000**). Recent research continues to apply self-determination principles to explain engagement in English as a foreign language, emphasizing the role of motivational conditions in sustaining classroom participation (**Dincer et al., 2021; Jang et al., 2021**).

Alongside motivation, student engagement represents an important dimension of successful learning. Engagement is multidimensional and may be expressed behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively (**Fredricks et al., 2004**). Behavioral engagement refers to participation, effort, and persistence; emotional engagement involves students' interest, enjoyment, and feelings toward learning; and cognitive engagement concerns students' mental investment, strategic learning, and deeper processing of information.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) provides a useful instructional perspective for understanding engagement in English classrooms. TBLT emphasizes meaningful tasks in which learners use language to accomplish communicative purposes (**Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Willis, 1996**). Recent work on language learning engagement likewise emphasizes meaningful classroom activities and motivating instructional practices in supporting learners' active involvement (**Hiver et al., 2021; Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020**).

Previous studies have established links between motivation and engagement in educational settings. However, there remains a need for context-specific evidence concerning how these variables interact among junior high school learners in Philippine public schools, particularly in settings where instructional resources may be limited. The present study addresses this need by examining the motivation and task engagement of Grade 7 to Grade 10 students at Diplahan National High School.

This research is deeply anchored in the global framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, by identifying evidence-based strategies to enhance student engagement and meaningful participation in secondary English education, this study directly contributes to SDG 4 (Quality Education). This objective aligns seamlessly with SDG Target 4.1, which aims to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes (**United Nations, n.d.**).

Anchored primarily on Self-Determination Theory and Task-Based Language Teaching, this study examined students' motivational orientations and engagement in English learning tasks. The study sought to provide evidence that can inform instructional practices responsive to students' motivational and engagement needs.

Objectives

This research examined the motivation for learning English and task engagement among Grade 7 to Grade 10 students in a public high school in the Philippines.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the level of students' motivation for learning English in terms of:
 - 1.1. intrinsic motivation;
 - 1.2. extrinsic motivation; and
 - 1.3. amotivation;
2. determine the level of students' task engagement in terms of:
 - 2.1. behavioral engagement;
 - 2.2. emotional engagement; and
 - 2.3. cognitive engagement;
3. examine the significant relationship between students' motivation for learning English and their task engagement; and
4. develop instructional implications based on the findings of the study.

The study tested the following null hypothesis:

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between students' motivation for learning English and their level of task engagement.

METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive component was used to determine the levels of students' motivation and task engagement, while the correlational component was used to determine whether a significant relationship existed between the two variables.

Participants and Sampling

The study was conducted at Diplahan National High School in Diplahan, Zamboanga Sibugay, Philippines. The population consisted of 1,362 Grade 7 to Grade 10 students enrolled during School Year 2026–2027. The population included 417 Grade 7 students, 356 Grade 8 students, 288 Grade 9 students, and 301 Grade 10 students. Using the stated sample-size computation, 301 respondents were included in the study. Proportionate stratified sampling was used to obtain representation from each grade level: 92 Grade 7 students, 79 Grade 8 students, 64 Grade 9 students, and 66 Grade 10 students.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured 30-item questionnaire adapted from the Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand et al., 1992) and the Student Engagement Scale (Fredricks et al., 2004). The questionnaire consisted of two major sections. The first section measured motivation through three dimensions: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. The second section measured task engagement through behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Each dimension consisted of five items, resulting in 30 items overall. Responses were recorded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Mean scores were interpreted as follows: 4.21–5.00, Very High; 3.41–4.20, High; 2.61–3.40, Moderate; 1.81–2.60, Low; and 1.00–1.80, Very Low.

Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire underwent content validation by three experts with backgrounds in education, English, curriculum, supervision, and research. Pilot testing was conducted among 30 Grade 7 to Grade 10 students from a nearby public secondary school who shared characteristics similar to the target respondents but were not included in the actual sample. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine internal consistency. The pilot-test results indicated acceptable to good reliability: Intrinsic Motivation $\alpha = .82$; Extrinsic Motivation $\alpha = .78$; Amotivation $\alpha = .75$; Behavioral Engagement $\alpha = .80$; Emotional Engagement $\alpha = .84$; Cognitive Engagement $\alpha = .79$; and the overall instrument $\alpha = .88$. Values of .70 and above were treated as acceptable, while values of .80 and above were interpreted as good internal consistency.

Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct the study was secured from the appropriate school authorities. Because the respondents were minors, parental or guardian consent and student assent were obtained. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw without negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. The collected information was used for academic and research purposes, and data were stored securely.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, particularly mean and standard deviation, were used to determine the levels of motivation and task engagement. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to determine the direction, strength, and statistical significance of the relationship between motivation and task engagement. Statistical significance was evaluated at the .05 level.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Students' Motivation for Learning English

The students obtained an overall motivation mean of 3.88 (SD = 0.53), interpreted as High. Intrinsic motivation obtained the highest mean of 4.21, interpreted as Very High. Extrinsic motivation obtained a mean of 3.99, interpreted as High, while amotivation obtained a mean of 3.43, also within the High descriptive range.

Table 1*Students' Motivation for Learning English Across Grade Levels*

Grade	Intrinsic	Extrinsic	Amotivation	Overall	Interpretation
7 (n=92)	3.97	3.80	3.48	3.75	High
8 (n=79)	4.38	4.11	3.36	3.95	High
9 (n=64)	4.23	4.19	3.65	4.03	High
10 (n=66)	4.31	3.92	3.22	3.82	High
Overall (N=301)	4.21	3.99	3.43	3.88	High

Note. Adapted from research findings on student motivation.

The high overall motivation suggests that students generally possess favorable motivational orientations toward learning English. The particularly high intrinsic motivation indicates that students' interest, enjoyment, curiosity, and sense of accomplishment are important sources of their willingness to learn English.

Grade 9 recorded the highest overall motivation mean (4.03), followed by Grade 8 (3.95), Grade 10 (3.82), and Grade 7 (3.75). Although all groups were categorized as highly motivated, Grade 7 showed the lowest overall motivation. This finding highlights the importance of providing appropriate transition support to students entering junior high school.

The results are consistent with the principles of Self-Determination Theory, which emphasize the importance of meaningful and personally satisfying learning experiences. The findings also support previous research suggesting that students' motivation is influenced by the perceived relevance of English to their future academic and career goals.

Students' Task Engagement in English Learning

The students obtained an overall task engagement mean of 4.13 (SD = 0.59), interpreted as High. Emotional engagement obtained the highest mean (4.22), followed by behavioral engagement (4.13) and cognitive engagement (4.05).

Table 2*Students' Task Engagement Across Grade Levels*

Grade	Behavioral	Emotional	Cognitive	Overall	Interpretation
7 (n=92)	3.86	3.94	3.83	3.88	High
8 (n=79)	4.30	4.46	4.18	4.31	Very High
9 (n=64)	4.15	4.13	4.08	4.12	High
10 (n=66)	4.29	4.40	4.15	4.28	Very High
Overall (N=301)	4.13	4.22	4.05	4.13	High

Note. Adapted from research findings on task engagement.

The results demonstrate that students generally participate actively in English learning tasks and experience positive feelings toward English classes. Emotional engagement obtained the highest overall score, suggesting that interest and enjoyment are particularly strong aspects of students' engagement.

Cognitive engagement, although still high, obtained the lowest mean among the three dimensions. This finding suggests that students may participate in activities and enjoy English lessons without always demonstrating equally

strong levels of deep cognitive processing. Activities that explicitly teach students how to summarize, question, make connections, reflect, and monitor their understanding may therefore be useful.

Grade 8 recorded the highest overall task engagement (4.31), followed by Grade 10 (4.28), Grade 9 (4.12), and Grade 7 (3.88). The relatively lower engagement of Grade 7 students suggests that adjustment to junior high school routines and academic demands may influence their participation and involvement.

Relationship Between Motivation and Task Engagement

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between motivation and task engagement.

Table 3

Correlation Analysis Between Motivation and Task Engagement

Grade	n	Pearson r	p-value	Interpretation	Decision
7	92	.719	< .001	Strong Positive	Reject Ho
8	79	.540	< .001	Moderate Positive	Reject Ho
9	64	.391	.001	Weak Positive	Reject Ho
10	66	.582	< .001	Moderate Positive	Reject Ho
Overall	301	.600	< .001	Strong Positive	Reject Ho

Note. Adapted from correlation analysis data.

For the overall sample, the correlation coefficient was $r = .600$, $p < .001$, indicating a statistically significant positive relationship between motivation and task engagement. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

The findings indicate that students with higher levels of motivation tend to report higher levels of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement in English learning tasks. The result supports the theoretical assumptions of Self-Determination Theory, which proposes that motivated learners are more likely to direct effort, attention, and persistence toward learning activities.

The relationship was strongest among Grade 7 students ($r = .719$). Grade 10 showed a moderate positive relationship ($r = .582$), followed by Grade 8 ($r = .540$), while Grade 9 showed the weakest but still statistically significant relationship ($r = .391$). These differences suggest that the relationship between motivation and engagement may vary across developmental and educational stages.

Importantly, the correlational nature of the study means that the findings demonstrate association rather than causation. Thus, the results should not be interpreted as evidence that increased motivation directly causes increased engagement. Rather, the two constructs are significantly related within the context of the participating students.

Instructional Implications

First, teachers should sustain students' already strong intrinsic motivation by incorporating activities that promote curiosity, enjoyment, autonomy, and personal relevance. Student-choice activities, storytelling, role-play, games, and authentic communication tasks may provide opportunities to build on students' existing interest in English.

Second, Grade 10 students may benefit from activities that strengthen the perceived relevance of English. Career-oriented tasks, goal-setting activities, and authentic language activities connected with future academic and occupational contexts may help students understand the practical value of English.

Third, cognitive engagement deserves particular attention because it recorded the lowest of the three engagement dimensions. Teachers may explicitly teach strategies such as summarizing, questioning, connecting concepts, organizing information, and reflecting on learning.

Fourth, Grade 7 students require additional transition support. Scaffolded tasks, peer mentoring, confidence-building activities, and structured classroom routines may help students adjust to junior high school English instruction.

Finally, the significant relationship between motivation and engagement suggests that instructional practices should address both constructs simultaneously. Autonomy-supportive teaching, meaningful tasks, positive feedback, and collaborative learning activities may provide a supportive environment for students' motivation and engagement.

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that Grade 7 to Grade 10 students at Diplahan National High School generally exhibit high motivation for learning English and high task engagement. Intrinsic motivation emerged as the strongest motivational dimension, while emotional engagement emerged as the strongest engagement dimension.

Although the students demonstrated high levels of engagement overall, cognitive engagement was comparatively lower than behavioral and emotional engagement. This suggests that active participation and enjoyment do not necessarily guarantee deep cognitive investment. Instruction should therefore provide students with explicit opportunities to think deeply, use learning strategies, make connections, and reflect on their understanding.

Most importantly, motivation and task engagement were significantly and positively correlated across the overall sample and each grade level. The overall correlation of $r = .600$ indicates a strong positive association between the two constructs. The findings therefore provide empirical support for considering motivation and engagement together when designing English language learning activities.

The results also provide a basis for an instructional development approach grounded in Self-Determination Theory and Task-Based Language Teaching. Such an approach should preserve students' intrinsic interest, strengthen the perceived relevance of English, develop cognitive learning strategies, and provide targeted support for students at different grade levels.

Based on the findings, English teachers are encouraged to design meaningful, student-centered, and authentic tasks that build on students' intrinsic motivation. Teachers should incorporate choice, collaboration, real-world communication, and positive feedback into English learning activities. Explicit instruction in cognitive strategies such as summarizing, questioning, organizing information, and making connections should also be integrated into regular English lessons.

For Grade 7 students, teachers and school personnel may provide transition activities, peer mentoring, scaffolded learning tasks, and confidence-building activities to support adjustment to junior high school. For Grade 10 students, English teachers may incorporate career-oriented and future-focused activities to strengthen students' understanding of the relevance of English to further education and employment.

School administrators may support professional development related to Self-Determination Theory and Task-Based Language Teaching and provide opportunities for teachers to develop meaningful, learner-centered English tasks. Future researchers may replicate the study in other schools and contexts and employ longitudinal, experimental, or quasi-experimental designs to determine whether instructional interventions can produce measurable changes in motivation and task engagement over time.

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