EXPLORING EFL STUDENTS' MOTIVATIONS FOR PARTICIPATING IN ESP CLUBS: A CASE STUDY AT A VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY

Ngan Cam Hong[i]
Faculty of Foreign Languages,
Nam Can Tho University,
168 Nguyen Van Cu Street,
An Binh Ward, Can Tho City,
Vietnam

Abstract:

The English Club is an extracurricular activity that brings many benefits to participating members. However, previous studies have shown that a lack of motivation to participate in the English Club will lead to negative consequences, such as failure to achieve results or leaving the club. In Vietnam, there are not many studies on students' motivation to participate in the English Club, and they are mainly about English majors. Thus, there is a gap in the investigation on EFL students' motivation to participate in the English Club of many different majors. This study aims to fill this gap as a case study involving 35 different majors at Nam Can Tho University, Vietnam. This study uses a mixed research method, quantitative through the Likert-Scale questionnaire designed based on Self-Determination Theory with 491 EFL students and qualitative through semi-structured interviews with 12 students from 12 faculties. The results show that there is a positive correlation between the frequency of club participation and the level of satisfaction with the motivations of students to participate in the ESP club. The findings on specific student motivations propose important recommended strategies to help clubs operate more effectively. The results offer insights for educators and researchers on the role of ESP clubs, promoting extracurricular activities effectively to improve students' English skills.

Keywords: motivation, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, self-determination theory, English for specific purposes clubs, English clubs, Nam Can Tho University

1. Introduction

The English Club is crucial to help increase the use of English for students (Dornyei, 2020). It brings many benefits to the participating members such as supporting students to develop English communication skills (Desmiyanti *et al.*, 2017; Melviza *et al.*, 2017; Hamadameen & Najim, 2020; Hijrah & Umar, 2021; Fitriany *et al.*, 2021; Ramadhani *et al.*,

---

[i] Correspondence: email hcngan@nctu.edu.vn

2023; Nguyen Q. T., 2021), offering enthusiasm, eagerness, fun, and enjoyment (Melviza *et al.*, 2017; Hamadameen & Najim, 2020), developing debating skills in an intimate, comfortable environment (Hamadameen & Najim, 2020; Nguyen Q. T., 2021). Previous studies have shown that motivation plays a crucial role in students' participation and maintenance of club attendance (Tran & Dang, 2021). For example, games, rewards, and practice points attract students to the Club (Juliana, 2022; Tran & Dang, 2021; Nguyen Q. T., 2021). However, a lack of motivation to participate in English Clubs will lead to negative consequences such as not achieving results or leaving the Club (Tran & Dang, 2021; Good & Lavigne, 2017). In Vietnam, there are not many studies on students' motivation to participate in English Clubs, and they are mainly about English majors (Do & Nguyen, 2017; Tran & Dang, 2021; Nguyen & Le, 2011; Nguyen Q. T., 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research on the motivation to participate in English clubs of different majors – English for Specific Purposes (ESP) clubs.

With the current trend of internationalization, Nam Can Tho University (DNC), a private university in Vietnam, has established ESP clubs in each faculty since January 2024, aiming to create a dynamic playground and elevate students' ESP proficiency. However, initial observations indicate an inconsistent level of student participation and engagement. Despite the perceived benefits, many clubs struggle to maintain a consistent membership and active involvement from their target audience (Nam Can Tho University, Clubs, Faculty Union, Student Association, 2024). This situation highlights a critical need to understand the underlying factors influencing student motivation to join and actively participate in these clubs. Thus, there is a significant gap in exploring students' motivations for participating in ESP Clubs at DNC. Addressing this gap is important given the different elements of motivation to join ESP clubs of EFL students from different majors in a private university in Vietnam. The findings are crucial for developing strategies that can enhance students' motivations and facilitate ESP clubs' presidents to effectively operate and manage the clubs in the Vietnamese educational context. The results provide valuable insights that can lead to more effectively designing and organize the extracurricular activities to enhance students' ESP competences.

2. Research Aims and Research Questions

2.1 Research Aims
This study aims to determine the motivation to promote enrollment and maintain participation in ESP clubs of EFL students in Nam Can Tho University in Vietnam, thereby proposing appropriate strategies to organize club activities, meeting the needs and expectations of students, promoting participation and achieving the goals of ESP clubs, such as enhancing students' ESP competences.

2.2 Research Questions
This study was designed to find out the answers to the following questions:

1) What are Nam Can Tho University EFL students' motivations to participate in ESP clubs?

2) To what extent are students' motivations satisfied after participating in the ESP clubs?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Definitions of Motivation

Historically, motivation was initially studied in the field of educational psychology, and then in the field of language (Brown, 2014). Motivation is a state of cognitive stimulation leading to the decision to act and maintain mental and (or) physical effort for an individual's attainment of a previous goal (Tran & Dang, 2021). In other words, motivation is a kind of internal drive that engages people to utilize things to achieve their goals. According to Cambridge Dictionary Online, *"motivation in literature and film is the reason a character behaves a certain way"* (Cambridge University Press, 2025).

3.2 Self-Determination Theory

This study's theoretical framework is Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which is a psychological and educational theory proposed by researchers Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in the 1980s (Deci & Ryan, 1980; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Adams *et al.*, 2017). This theory presents the detailed origins and consequences of proactive human actions (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2012). SDT was originally developed from the research foundation on the effects of intrinsic rewards (such as interest, needs to enhance knowledge, happiness, etc.) and extrinsic rewards (such as bonuses, gifts, awards, positive feedback, etc.) on human motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1980; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Intrinsic motivation reflects enjoyment, interest, and the fulfillment of innate human needs for competence and self-determination. Meanwhile, extrinsic motivation is seen as a tool for achieving some specific results. Reiss (2012) gave an example of extrinsic motivation as when a child plays baseball to please his parents or win a championship. Therefore, extrinsic motivation is driven by the expectation of external rewards that act on the self. Typical extrinsic rewards are money, prizes, grades, and even some forms of positive feedback. Behaviors that are performed solely to avoid punishment are also extrinsically motivated (Brown, 2014). For example, some students join English clubs for training points or because they are required by the school. Thus, they may not receive any achievements from English clubs, such as improving or enhancing their English (Tran & Dang, Tri thức Trẻ thời đại 4.0, 2021).

These two types of motivation interact with each other. On one hand, extrinsic motivation can restrain intrinsic motivation, such as negative feedback and threats (Deci & Cascio, 1972), monitoring (Lepper & Greene, 1975), deadlines (Amabile *et al.*, 1976), evaluation (Amabile, 1979), and internal competition (Deci et al., 1981). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation can actually boost intrinsic motivation, such as providing freedom of choice (Zuckerman *et al.*, 1978), recognition of emotions (Koestner *et al.*, 1984),

receiving positive feedback on behavior (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002), and feeling competent (Dysvik *et al.*, 2013). In particular, extrinsic rewards may negatively impact on intrinsic motivation when the recipient knows that the reward will be there and perceives it as a reason to accomplish the task, and then the reward is no longer there (Deci E. L., 1971). However, not all extrinsic rewards may make intrinsic motivation decrease. If the extrinsic reward is unexpected, it will not usually reduce intrinsic motivation, for example, rewards for good performance that are not given in advance (Deci *et al.*, 1999).

Based on the SDT, people are motivated to change and grow by the influence of three basic human needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The satisfaction of these three basic human needs is considered essential to maintain intrinsic motivation and self-regulation of extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Adams *et al.*, 2017). The need for autonomy is satisfied when an individual experiences choice and volition in their actions and perceives that they themselves are the source of that action. Autonomy is an action that is self-affirming and consistent with the individual's own values and preferences (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2012). The need for competence reflects people's desire to effectively control their environment and experience a sense of competence in it (Adams *et al.*, 2017). The need for relatedness is related to social connection. Relatedness is the satisfaction derived from feeling connected to others, cared for, and cared for by others (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

3.3 Related Studies

This section summarizes international and Vietnamese studies related to motivation to participate in English clubs. Regarding international studies, a review study on students' perceptions of English clubs found that 88.2% of participants had positive perceptions, mainly driven by the motivational benefits of improving communication skills and social connections. High levels of positive perceptions reflect strong extrinsic motivations (e.g., the opportunity to expand community networks) and intrinsic motivations (e.g., students' satisfaction with improved speaking ability) (Destrianti *et al.*, 2018). This suggests that both intrinsic (personal achievement) and extrinsic (practical skills) motivations drive participation. Therefore, English club activities significantly boost students' overall motivation to learn English, thereby further strengthening their participation (Juliana, 2022).

Specifically, some studies demonstrated the role of English clubs in improving students' speaking skills. The club helped them feel more confident in expressing their ideas in English (Desmiyanti *et al.*, 2017), have less effort to understand, and be more willing to communicate (Fitriany *et al.*, 2021). There was a positive effect on the speaking grades by engaging in face-to-face communication (Amengual-Pizarro, 2024). This is an intrinsic motivation that stems from personal growth and language proficiency (Deci & Ryan, 1980). Subsequently, students' motivation to participate in English clubs stemmed from the belief that these clubs can improve their English-speaking fluency (Hijrah & Umar, 2021). Clubs serve as effective platforms for students to seek additional practice opportunities to improve their English-speaking skills, strengthening their commitment

to participate (Desmiyanti *et al.*, 2017; Hijrah & Umar, 2021; Fitriany *et al.*, 2021). Specifically, students were motivated to participate in English clubs due to the fun and interactive nature of practicing speaking in pairs. Clubs promote intrinsic motivation through a fun and engaging atmosphere. The sense of fun and enthusiasm of club members helped students maintain regular participation and provided a more enjoyable language learning experience (Melviza *et al.*, 2017; Good & Lavigne, 2017; Hamadameen & Najim, 2020). In addition, clubs also raise students' awareness of the importance of English for their future careers, which is also an important extrinsic motivation to promote club participation (Hamadameen & Najim, 2020).

However, students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) often have difficulty mastering the language, which can reduce motivation. According to Tu and Du (2024), almost all pronunciation problems of non-English majors came from their lack of practice on English pronunciation, and their poor knowledge of English. Research showed that creating a stress-free and engaging learning environment is essential to sustain intrinsic motivation and overcome these barriers (Hamadameen & Najim, 2020). Students in small groups had more willingness to communicate in English than in large meetings (Al Amrani, 2019). In addition to the general English club, a recent study investigated the motivation of engineering students to participate in ESP clubs at a private university in Indonesia. (Ramadhani *et al.*, 2023). The main motivation of students was the desire to engage in active English communication to support their academic performance and future career prospects, both of which are extrinsic motivations. Students expressed a need for club materials related to real-life careers and social interactions. Their interest may be boosted by working in groups with active learning tools, such as real-world projects (Murtazina & Kondrateva, 2023). This suggests that connecting club activities to real-life applications will enhance extrinsic motivation.

In Vietnamese contexts, some studies on ESP clubs have also been conducted. Specifically, Do and Nguyen (2017) examined the motivation of English major students at Quy Nhon University when participating in English clubs. Students were motivated by academic goals, such as preparing for the IELTS exam, and extrinsic motivations, such as participating in speaking contests and interacting with native speakers. This study emphasized the importance of diverse, engaging activities to maintain motivation, including entertainment and career guidance sessions. Another study examined learning motivation at Ho Chi Minh City University of Education and found that students were motivated by an intrinsic desire to improve their speaking fluency in a supportive environment where they could practice without fear of making mistakes (Nguyen Q. T., 2021). Similarly, Tran and Dang (2021) analyzed the motivation of English major students at Ho Chi Minh City University of Industry. The results identified that improved listening and speaking skills are the main intrinsic motivators for students to participate in clubs. However, studies have noted that less engaging activities, especially those in online sessions, can reduce motivation. This suggests that more dynamic formats are needed to maintain student interest (Nguyen Q. T., 2021). Suggested solutions include

creating a comfortable environment for practicing and sharing knowledge about English-speaking cultures to enhance both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Tran & Dang, 2021). In summary, the reviewed studies highlight the importance of English club members' motivation and the benefits that English clubs bring to participating members. Although each person considers different aspects of motivation, most authors conclude that all members have their own motivation when participating in English clubs. Students' motivation to participate in English clubs is driven by a combination of intrinsic motivations, such as enjoyment, self-confidence, and skill improvement, and extrinsic motivations, including academic and career benefits, social connections, and rewards. Therefore, while the general importance of motivation in English learning is well-established, there is a specific research gap concerning the motivations of non-English major students in Vietnamese universities participating in English clubs. Most existing studies tend to focus on English-majored students, or general English learning, rather than club-specific motivations across diverse disciplines.

3.4 Research Context

With its vision and mission extending to 2030, DNC aims to become a leading private university in the Mekong Delta, Vietnam. Recently, DNC includes 17 faculties of which 12 faculties are responsible for undergraduate majors (Nam Can Tho University, Misson - Vision - Development Perspectives, 2024). To achieve these objectives, DNC's leadership has mandated the establishment of ESP clubs across the faculties to enhance students' English proficiency, thereby improving academic performance and preparing them for employment in an increasingly globalized international environment. As of January 2024, all 12 faculties with undergraduate majors had established ESP clubs, which hold monthly meetings (Nam Can Tho University, Clubs, Faculty Union, Student Association, 2024). To support these clubs, the university leadership has allocated monthly financial assistance and tasked the Office of International Affairs with monitoring club activities, attending sessions, and providing feedback to enhance their effectiveness. The clubs organize engaging activities such as games, and role-playing, which have attracted significant student participation. Some clubs have also invited guest speakers to share insights on learning English, scientific knowledge, or ESP. However, student attendance at club meetings has been inconsistent, with significant fluctuations.

4. Materials and Methods

4.1 Research Instruments

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of student motivation in ESP Club participation.

4.1.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was based on SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and was adapted from previous studies (Do & Nguyen, 2017; Fitriany *et al.*, 2021; Juliana, 2022; Tran & Dang, 2021). The questionnaire consisted of 3 parts. The first part designed to collect demographic and basic information, especially, participation frequency of club meetings including 5 levels: 1 (Never - Never joined the club); 2 (Seldom - attended about 10% of club meetings); 3 (Sometimes - attended about 50%); 4 (Frequently - attended about 80%); 5 (Always - attended 100%). The latter part consisted of 38 items classified into two clusters, namely students' motivation before joining the clubs (19 items included the first 6 items related to extrinsic motivations and the last remaining items regarding intrinsic motivations), students' satisfaction according to motivation after joining the clubs (the same items as previous cluster). The last part was another feedback section.

The items in the questionnaire were scored on a 5-point Likert scale with values ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire was piloted before being officially used to ensure reliability. The results of the pilot survey of 51 students, the Cronbach's Alpha index reached 0.99, showing that the survey questionnaire has high reliability. As a result, no revisions were necessary.

4.1.2 Interview

This study used semi-structured interviews via the internet to gain a deeper understanding of the motivation to participate in the ESP Club. The advantages of internet interviews are that they are quick to conduct, easy to organize, and reduced bias or subjectivity of the interviewer (Roopa & Rani, 2012). Therefore, the answers are less affected by the social context, and the process is easy to control. Moreover, the interviewer in semi-structured interviews can redefine the question in case it is unclear or ambiguous to the interviewee (Fraenkel *et al.*, 2012). Specifically, based on the interviewee's answers, the researcher can ask for more details on important answers related to the research aims. Students were invited to participate in the interview via email containing a link to answer via Google Forms. After receiving the feedback, the researcher would check and contact the interviewee via email or phone to ask for more information that is unclear or needs more specific information.

The questions were built based on the results of the students' questionnaire responses. The students' participation frequency in club meetings was divided into three groups: Group A (never participated), Group B (seldom participated), and Group C (always participated). Based on the theoretical framework of motivation and previous studies, the researcher designed appropriate interview questions for each group. The interview questions were designed. Specifically, as follows:

- Form 1 included two questions to interview students of Group A. They were the difficulties and obstacles that prevented students from joining the club, and suggestions to help students have favorable conditions to join the club.
- Form 2 included 5 questions to interview students of Group B and Group C. The interview content was the motivation to join clubs, self-assessment of progress in

English proficiency, favorite club activities, obstacles arising, and suggestions to improve club activities.

4.2 Participants

A convenience sampling method was used to collect the questionnaire data. Firstly, the authors provided detailed instructions so that the survey takers could understand and fully answer the questions in the questionnaire, avoiding misunderstandings or missing questions. The sample size depends on the reliability expectations of the study. Therefore, the author believes that the representativeness of the research sample is ensured when each faculty has at least 30 students who have participated in clubs, and at the same time, information must be collected from some students who have not yet joined clubs. This helps the research find out the reasons and obstacles that prevent students from joining clubs.

The research involved 491 participants from all of 12 faculties with undergraduate majors in DNC, including 41 students who had never participated in the club and 450 students who had participated in activities with a frequency ranging from seldom to always (Table 4.2.1). In the 450 students who participated in the club activities, there were 192 males and 258 females.

Regarding the interview participants, the researcher randomly selected and sent an email inviting interviews to students in Group A, Group B and Group C. When receiving enough 4 respondents from each group, the interviewees were contacted via phone to find out more information about their answers.

Table 4.2.1: Summary of the Questionnaire Participants

No.	Faculty	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Frequently	Always	Total
		Frequency of participation in the club					
1	Automative Engineering	1	7	8	7	8	31
2	Information Technology	4	6	10	13	10	43
3	Tourism and Hospitality Management	0	9	16	5	2	32
4	Pharmacy	0	0	8	16	7	31
5	Architecture, Construction, and Environmental	2	8	13	8	1	32
6	Economics	17	16	18	5	6	62
7	Engineering and Technology	7	12	25	6	3	53
8	Law	4	2	16	7	7	36
9	Foreign Languages	4	13	29	5	0	51
10	Business Administration and Marketing	1	5	17	14	2	39
11	Dentistry	1	0	10	24	16	51
12	Medicine	0	10	12	4	4	30
Total		41	88	182	114	66	491

4.3 Data Collection and Data Analysis

Based on the context, previous related studies, and SDT, the data collection tools were designed adequately to ensure reliability. The questionnaire was designed on Google Forms to send to students to respond to the survey. After the pilot questionnaire was

ensured to have reliability, the official questionnaire link was distributed to participants, including any students who were from 12 faculties with undergraduate majors, after obtaining agreement from faculty members. All collected data, both quantitative and qualitative, were organized and stored securely to ensure confidentiality and facilitate analysis.

After collecting data from the questionnaire, the author analyzed the data through SPSS statistical software. First, Cronbach's Alpha test was performed to check the reliability of the official questionnaire with 491 participants. The questionnaire achieved high reliability with an index of 0.99. Then, to summarize the survey data, descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies, means, standard deviations) were employed. After that, different statistical tests (e.g., t-tests, ANOVA, correlation analysis) were conducted to find out the students' motivation to drive entering or maintain participation in ESP club meetings, compare between data groups, as well as determine the correlation between variables. The results were evaluated and interpreted based on the evaluation criteria of Oxford (1990), presented in the table below.

Table 4.3.1: Key to Understanding the Averages (Oxford, 1990)

Level	Range
Very high	4.5 to 5.0
High	3.6 to 4.4
Medium	2.5 to 3.5
Low	1.0 to 2.4

Based on the results, the author grouped respondents into three groups to conduct semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the interview was to further study the data collected from the survey. The researcher coded and analyzed the interview transcripts through thematic analysis, which is a method used to classify, analyze, and report on patterns (themes) in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is a significant method for understanding someone's views, opinions, experiences, knowledge, or values from qualitative data provided by that person through interviews (Caulfield, 2024). Thematic analysis was conducted following the steps as instructed by Braun and Clarke (2006), including familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, identifying and naming themes, and writing a report. In case there was any unclear point, the researcher would contact the participant again to confirm the information or find out the details, ensuring the accuracy and objectivity of the research results. The data was interpreted based on SDT and previous studies.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Nam Can Tho University Students' Motivations Before Participating in ESP Clubs

The statistical results of responses from 491 students showed that their motivations before joining the club (MB) were all at a high level (mean values ranged from 3.67 to 4.26) (Oxford, 1990). Especially, the motivation of club members was higher than that of

students who never participated in clubs (Table 5.1.1), with a statistically significant difference. This finding aligned with Destrianti et al.'s (2018) study, supporting that most of club members had positive perceptions of English clubs. Especially, a significant distinction was observed among club members' participation frequency. There was a positive correlation between participation frequency and motivation in joining clubs.

Table 5.1.1: Means of Motivations Before Participating in
Clubs of Students Who Never Participated, and Club Members

Students	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Never participated in clubs	41	3.5597	1.042	.163
Club members (participated in clubs)	450	3.9563	.822	.039

Specifically, the findings indicated that extrinsic motivations (Item 1 to Item 6) were highly prominent among DNC students when considering initial participation in clubs (Figure 5.1.1). For instance, the opportunity to gain training points was a significant incentive, aligning with the finding of Tran and Dang (2021). Next, the prospect of receiving material rewards or prizes during club activities also played a notable role, as stated by previous studies (Good & Lavigne, 2017). Then, students often cited the long-term advantages of improved English skills for their future professional endeavors and academic performance as a primary motivator. This aligned with previous research suggesting that external incentives effectively attract initial student engagement (Hamadameen & Najim, 2020; Ramadhani *et al.*, 2023).
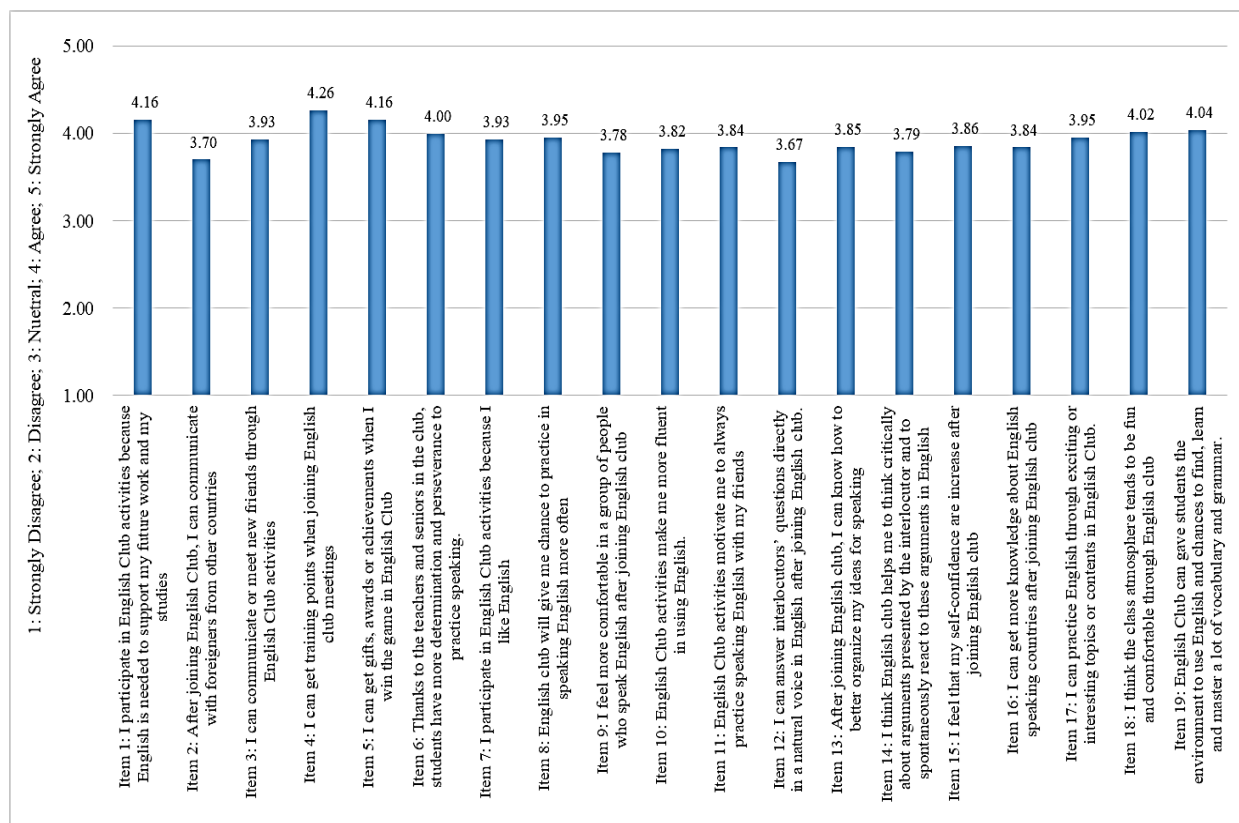

Figure 5.1.1: Means of 491 Students' Motivations Before Participating in ESP Clubs

However, the study also revealed a diverse range of initial motivations, extending beyond purely external factors. Many students expressed a genuine desire to improve their English skills (Desmiyanti *et al.*, 2017; Melviza *et al.*, 2017; Hamadameen & Najim, 2020; Hijrah & Umar, 2021; Fitriany *et al.*, 2021; Ramadhani *et al.*, 2023; Nguyen Q. T., 2021), suggesting an underlying intrinsic drive for enhancing debating skills in a comfortable environment (Hamadameen & Najim, 2020; Nguyen Q. T., 2021). Additionally, overcoming communication anxiety and the opportunity to socialize and make new friends were also identified as important initial motivators, aligning with findings of previous research, supplying enthusiasm, eagerness, fun, and enjoyment (Melviza *et al.*, 2017; Hamadameen & Najim, 2020). Some skills were performed in the clubs that may facilitate students' majors and future direction, such as communication, teamwork, time management, problem-solving, and presentation skills (Lu *et al.*, 2024).

Interestingly, while most of the participants indicated that extrinsic motivations were higher than intrinsic motivations, Group C revealed a more profound intrinsic motivation. This suggested a two-stage motivational process: extrinsic factors initiate participation, but intrinsic factors, such as a genuine love for English and a desire for self-improvement, are vital for converting casual attendees into committed members. This dynamic supports SDT's continuum of motivation, where external regulation can pave the way for more internalized forms of motivation when psychological needs are met (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Besides, Group B had a similar level between internal and external motivation. The interview results showed that 2 out of 4 students were stressed to speak English due to poor English proficiency. This finding aligned with Hamadameen and Najim's (2020) affirmation that, for the majority of students, those for whom English is not their mother tongue, they face difficulties in grasping the language. Meanwhile, Group A showed that all of their motivations were external, such as training points, rewards for winning games, and expanding relationships. And the reasons for not joining the club included a lack of confidence in English ability, and having no free time. From the above results, they did not find internal motivation related to meeting the innate psychological needs of competence and self-determination when joining the club.

From the analysis of Group A and Group B, the motivation for the reward of winning the game may weaken the intrinsic motivation (Deci E. L., 1971), when students knew in advance that they would get a reward if they won the game, but they were completely deprived of the conditions to satisfy their innate need for competence (due to their poor English competence), meaning that they knew it was difficult to win the game. This indicated that the intrinsic motivation to participate in the club of Group A and Group B was clearly negatively affected by the threat and negative comments (which may arise from people around them about their English competence) (Deci & Cascio, 1972), the evaluation (Amabile, 1979) and the supervision of the surrounding people (Lepper & Greene, 1975), and the fear of competing with other students for the reward (Deci *et al.*, 1981). If the clubs did not have a timely solution, Group B were likely to leave the club due to a lack of motivation (Tran & Dang, 2021).

Based on SDT, the satisfaction of three innate psychological needs is considered to be extremely important to maintain intrinsic motivation and self-regulation of extrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Adams *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, extrinsic motivation also really promotes intrinsic motivation, such as acknowledging emotions (Koestner *et al.*, 1984), providing freedom of choice (Zuckerman *et al.*, 1978), receiving positive feedback on behavior (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002), and feeling competent (Dysvik *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, to help promote the motivation of these students, club managers need to implement solutions to meet their innate needs of competence and self-determination. Specifically, the club helps them improve their English level through games that both learn new vocabulary and allow them to have fun. They can choose the way they feel most confident in, such as playing in groups with someone good at English to support them. The chances of them winning the game and receiving gifts will be higher, from which they can experience the feeling of being capable, being self-determined and being connected with friends in the Club.

5.2 Nam Can Tho University Students' Satisfaction According to Motivations After Participating in the ESP Clubs

Students' satisfaction after joining clubs was higher than their motivation before joining clubs (Table 5.2.1), and this difference was not statistically significant. That means the clubs have organized the activities well, generally maintaining their motivation after participating. This result was similar to the study of Destrianti *et al.* (2018), where 88.2% of respondents had a positive perception of their English club.

Table 5.2.1: Students' Motivations Before Participating
in Clubs and Their Satisfaction after Joining Clubs

Cluster	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Motivations of students before participating in clubs (MB)	1.00	5.00	3.956	.822
Students' satisfaction according to motivations after joining clubs (MA)	1.00	5.00	3.966	.880
N = 450				

Similarly, Figure 5.2.1 showed that their satisfaction with the motivations after joining clubs also has the superiority of external motivations such as training points, rewards and gifts, and general job and study support, aligning with previous studies (Juliana, 2022; Nguyen Q. T., 2021; Tran & Dang, 2021). The internal motivations concluded that an English-speaking environment, fun and comfortable atmosphere for learning, as Hamadameen and Najim (2020) and Nguyen (2021) have also demonstrated.
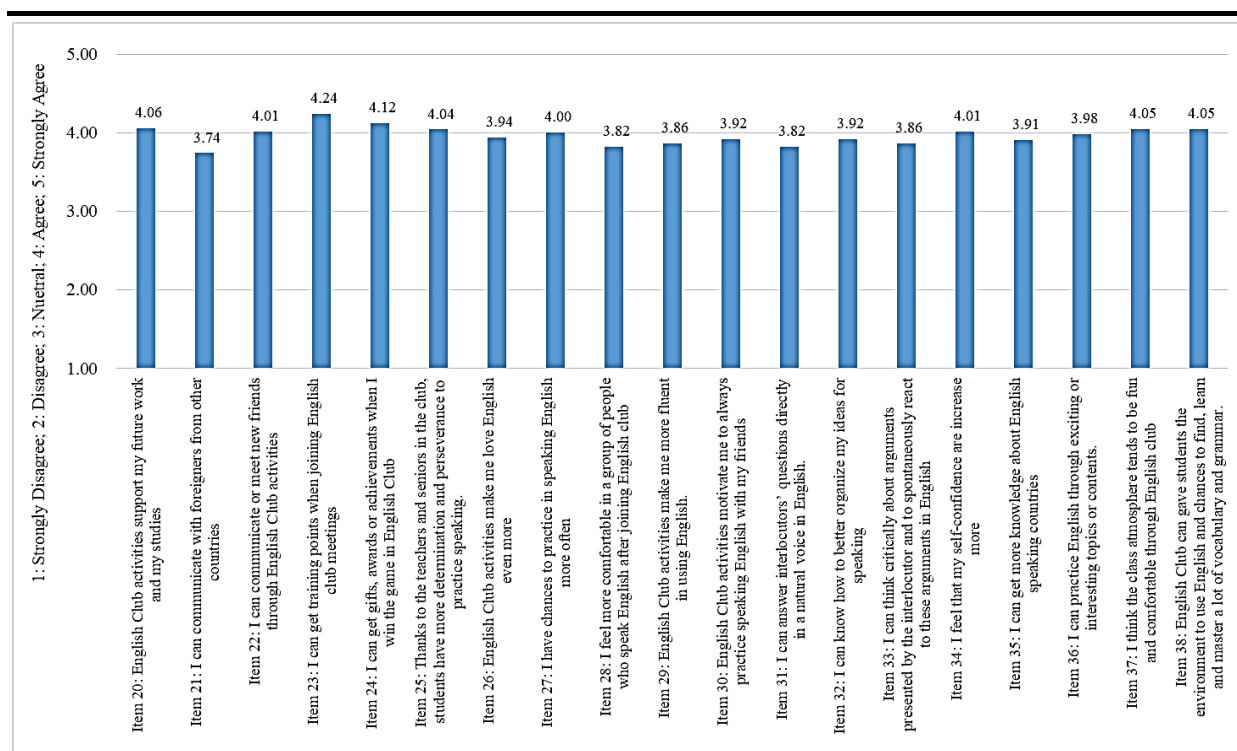
Figure 5.2.1: Club Members' Satisfaction According
to Motivations after Participating in ESP Clubs

The study found a clear and positive correlation between the frequency of club participation and the level of student satisfaction with their initial motivations. Group C reported higher satisfaction with their progress and the club's ability to meet their needs. This result aligned with the results of the student interviews. Group C reported that their satisfaction regarding intrinsic motivation was higher than extrinsic motivation. This is completely consistent with the SDT, when three innate physiological needs are met, motivation will increase (Deci E. L., 1971; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In this case, extrinsic motivation really promotes intrinsic motivation. Particularly, only 3 out of 4 students in group C were not hindered by poor English-speaking skills or lack of confidence when speaking English in public, which showed that the majority of students in group C felt capable of increasing intrinsic motivation (Dysvik *et al.*, 2013). They enjoyed and had fun with games and English performances, reflecting positive feedback on behavior that increases intrinsic motivation (Henderlong & Lepper, 2002; Melviza *et al.*, 2017; Hamadameen & Najim, 2020). Furthermore, rewards further increased the intrinsic motivation of this group (Juliana, 2022; Nguyen Q. T., 2021; Tran & Dang, 2021) because they were confident in their English proficiency, they enjoyed working in groups, which increases the satisfaction of the need for connection, thereby increasing intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For instance, Student C1's need for autonomy was met when having a friendly environment to practice English for facilitating his future career (Vansteenkiste *et al.*, 2012), resulting in his feeling of competence through experienced choice on games and extracurricular activities (Adams *et al.*, 2017), and increasing connectedness via being supported by like-minded friends (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As a

result, his motivation to maintain club participation increased due to maintaining internal motivation and self-regulation of external motivations (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Adams *et al.*, 2017).

> *"The biggest difficulty for me is scheduling time. There are activities that fall close to exams or overlap with group study schedules, forcing me to choose between studying and joining the club. In addition, the pressure of speaking English in front of a crowd also makes me feel stressed, especially the first time I speak and stumble or use the wrong words. I used to be afraid that people would judge me. However, after a while, I learned to manage my time more flexibly: I write down the club schedule in my notebook or phone in advance so I don't forget, and I try to finish my homework early so I can participate with peace of mind. As for the stress of speaking, I think practicing regularly in a friendly environment like the club is the key. I also remind myself that "it's okay to make mistakes, the important thing is that I'm learning" – thanks to that, I gradually feel less pressured and speak more naturally."* (Student C1)

According to students' progress after participating in clubs, most students in Group C had significantly improved English proficiency, especially speaking skills and specialized vocabulary. Besides, their communication and public speaking skills also improved significantly, similar to the results of many previous studies (Desmiyanti *et al.*, 2017; Melviza *et al.*, 2017; Hamadameen & Najim, 2020; Hijrah & Umar, 2021; Fitriany *et al.*, 2021; Ramadhani *et al.*, 2023; Nguyen Q. T., 2021). Student C2 commented:

> *"After joining the club, I feel that my English-speaking skills have improved significantly, especially my confidence in communication. Before, I often kept quiet because I was afraid of mispronouncing or speaking incorrectly in grammar, but thanks to joining the club, I became more confident and no longer shy. After that day, I saw myself making clear progress."* (Student C2)

In Group B, 3 out of 4 students responded that their English competence and confidence had increased. Conversely, the limited progress reported by some less frequent attendees or those with primarily social initial motivations suggests that merely joining a club does not guarantee skill development or satisfaction. The lack of active engagement, possibly due to low initial proficiency or a mismatch between personal goals and club activities, can hinder the fulfillment of competence needs. In general, these were students with very little initial motivation, consisting of connecting with friends, supporting English learning or earning training points. Typically, Student B2, whose motivation for joining the club is having the opportunity to make friends, commented: *"I have not improved much because people do not understand what I say."* Thus, this was the reason why Group B had a low frequency of participating in clubs when they could not satisfy their initial motivations.

According to Deci and Ryan (1980), if people do not have a strong sense of competence, autonomy and accompanying internal motivation, they will be less able to manage strong stimulating inputs (in this topic, training points, making friends), so they will act unmotivatedly and tend to be less self-determined. That is, they will not be consistent with the initial motivation they had. This result clearly demonstrated that lack of motivation, especially internal motivation, can be the cause of leaving the club, as confirmed in the study of Tran and Dang (2021). Regarding Oxford (1990), language learning strategies, including methods and activities that learners use to make learning easier, more interesting, more directed, and more effective, will play an important role in improving learning effectiveness and maintaining motivation. This indicated that while the club provides opportunities, individual proactivity and tailored support are essential. Club organizers should consider diverse entry levels and motivational profiles to ensure that all members, regardless of their initial proficiency or primary motivation, feel challenged and supported in their learning journey.

6. Recommendations

Future studies should investigate on incorporation standardized English proficiency tests (e.g., CEFR-aligned speaking tests) before and after club participation to objectively quantify language skill improvement. Moreover, further research could explore the influence of additional external factors (e.g., club organizers, academic workload, personal time constraints, peer influence) on student motivation and participation. Additionally, longitudinal studies could investigate the sustained effects of English club involvement on students' career trajectories and their ability to integrate into global contexts.

7. Conclusions

This study successfully identified the motivations for DNC students' participation in ESP Clubs and assessed their satisfaction levels according to their initial motivations. A clear positive correlation was found between participation frequency and primary motivation, and participation frequency and satisfaction, underscoring the importance of sustained engagement. Both intrinsic motivations (e.g., the joy of learning, English speaking skills) and extrinsic motivations (e.g., getting training points, career preparation, academic benefits) play crucial roles in driving student involvement in clubs. The dominance of extrinsic motivations among DNC students' initial decision to join ESP clubs aligns with common observations in educational settings where tangible rewards, training points or future benefits are powerful drivers. This initial pull is crucial for attracting students to voluntary activities. Particularly, most regular attendees predominantly demonstrated higher levels of intrinsic motivation compared to their extrinsic counterparts. This implies that while external factors may initially draw students to the clubs, a deeper,

inherent interest in the English language and a commitment to self-improvement are crucial for sustaining long-term engagement. It aligns with the SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The positive correlation between participation frequency and satisfaction is a key finding, reinforcing the idea that active engagement in a supportive environment leads to perceived progress and greater contentment. The reported improvements in speaking, specialized vocabulary, and public speaking confidence among regular attendees highlight the effectiveness of ESP clubs as practical language learning spaces. This validates the club's role in fulfilling students' need for competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000), as they experience tangible growth in their language skills. This finding recommends that the ESP clubs should integrate career-oriented activities to link English proficiency with future professional goals, thereby strengthening extrinsic motivation and demonstrating practical relevance. Some activities include task-based speaking activities (Giovanoglou, 2025), teamwork, problem-solving, and presentation (Lu *et al.*, 2024).

Conversely, some students, particularly those with lower initial English proficiency or those whose primary motivation was solely social (e.g., making friends or getting training points) rather than active language acquisition, reported less significant progress or continued to experience difficulties. Challenges included a persistent lack of confidence when speaking publicly or limited improvement due to insufficient active engagement. These findings suggest that initial motivational profile and baseline language proficiency can influence perceived outcomes and satisfaction levels. A recommendation for club organizers is to invite guest speakers and experts to share knowledge and experience, providing valuable insights and enhancing the learning experience.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Authors
Ms. Ngan Cam Hong, M.A. in TESOL and M.Sc. in Environmental Management, is a lecturer at Nam Can Tho University, Vietnam. Her research interests include EFL teaching and learning, ICT, Environmental Strategies, waste recycling and management. She has published research articles in local and international journals and international conference proceedings. She is a peer abstract reviewer for VietTESOL International Convention.

Email: hcngan@nctu.edu.vn, hongcamngan@gmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-3125-8247.

References

Adams, N., Little, T. D., & Ryan, R. M. (2017). Self-determination theory. In M. L. Wehmeyer, K. A. Shogren, T. D. Little, & S. J. Lopez, *Development of self-determination through the life-course* (pp. 47-54). Springer Science + Business Media. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1042-6_4

Al Amrani, S. N. (2019). Communication and Affective Variables Influencing Omani EFL Learners' Willingness to Communicate. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics, 10*(1), 51-77. https://doi.org/10.22055/rals.2019.14179

Amabile, T. M. (1979). Effects of external evaluation on artistic creativity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37*(2), 221-233. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.37.2.221

Amabile, T. M., DeJong, W., & Lepper, M. (1976). Effects of Externally-Imposed Deadlines on Subsequent Intrinsic Motivation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 34*(1), 92-98. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.34.1.92

Amengual-Pizarro, M. (2024). Exploring the relationship between out-of-class engagement with English and academic achievement at the university level. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics, 15*(2), 103-116. https://doi.org/10.22055/rals.2024.46193.3243

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brown, H. D. (2014). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching - A Course in Second Language Acquisition* (sixth ed.). New York: Pearson.

Cambridge University Press. (2025, Jul 02). *Cambridge Dictionary*. Meaning of motivation in English. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/motivation

Caulfield, J. (2024, June 07). *How to Do Thematic Analysis | Guide & Examples*. Retrieved July 03, 2025, from Scribbr. https://www.scribbr.co.uk/research-methods/thematic-analysis-explained/

Deci, E. L. (1971). The Effects of Externally Mediated Rewards on Intrinsic Motivation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 18*(1), 105-115. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0030644

Deci, E. L., & Cascio, W. F. (1972). Changes in Intrinsic Motivation as a Function of Negative Feedback and Threats. *The Eastern Psychological Association Meeting.* Boston, Massachusetts: U.S. Department of Health, Education & Welfare Office of Education. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED063558.pdf

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1980). Self-determination Theory: When Mind Mediates Behavior. *The Journal of Mind and Behavior, 1*(1), 33-43. https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/43852807

Deci, E. L., Betley, G., Kahle, J., Abrams, L., & Porac, J. (1981). When Trying to Win: Competition and Intrinsic Motivation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 7*(1), 79-83. https://doi.org/10.1177/014616728171012

Deci, E. L., Koestner, R., & Ryan, R. M. (1999). A meta-analytic review of experiments examining the effects of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation. *Psychological bulletin, 6*(627-668), 125. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.125.6.627

Desmiyanti, Wachyuni, S., Sulistiyo, U., & Saudagar, F. (2017). The Role of English Club in Improving Students' Speaking Skills: A Literature Review. *International Conference on Language Teaching and Education (ICoLTE)* (pp. 47-51). Jambi: University of Jambi.

Destrianti, E., S, S., & Hati, G. M. (2018). The Perception of the English Club Members of the English Department Students Association (EDSA) toward Their Club. *Journal of English Education and Teaching (JEET), 2*(3), 1-6.

Do, T. V., & Nguyen, N. Q. (2017). Students' Needs for and Assessments of English Club Activities at Quy Nhon University. *Quy Nhon University Journal Of Science, 11*(4), 5-14.

Dornyei, Z. (2020). *Innovations and Challenges in Language Learning Motivation.* Routledge.

Dysvik, A., Kuvaas, B., & Gagné, M. (2013). An investigation of the unique, synergistic and balanced relationships between basic psychological needs and intrinsic motivation. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 43*(5), 1050-1064. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12068

Fitriany, S., Yuliani, S., Sulaiman, M., & Rositasari, T. (2021). The Importance of English Club: A Case at English Education Study Program, Universitas Muhammadiyah Palembang. *English Community Journal, 5*(2), 91-101.

Fraenkel, J., Wallen, N., & Hyun, H. (2012). *How to design and evaluate research in education.* (8th, Ed.) New York: McGraw-Hill Humanities.

Giovanoglou, E. (2025). The Importance of Practicing the Speaking Skill for Students of The Merchant Marine Academy. *European Journal of English Language Teaching, 9*(6), 167-170. https://doi.org/10.46827/ejel.v9i6.5906

Good, T. L., & Lavigne, A. L. (2017). *Looking in Classrooms.* Routledge.

Hamadameen, S. A., & Najim, Q. N. (2020). The Impact of English Club Activities on EFL Students' Communicative Skills. *Journal of Medical Sciences*, 285-295. https://doi.org/10.21271/zjhs.24.4.18

Henderlong, J., & Lepper, M. R. (2002). The effects of praise on children's intrinsic motivation: a review and synthesis. *Psychological Bulletin, 128*(5), 774-795. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.128.5.774

Hijrah, & Umar, N. H. (2021). English Meeting Club: Students' Perception and Their Speaking Skill. *Journal of Development Research, 5*(2), 174-178. https://doi.org/10.28926/jdr.v5i2.181

Juliana, J. (2022). English Club Activities to Increase the Nursing Students' Motivation in Learning English: Students' Perception. *Lingua Didaktika: Jurnal Bahasa dan Pembelajaran Bahasa, 16*(2), 144-154. https://doi.org/10.24036/ld.v16i2.117001

Koestner, R., Ryan, R., Bernieri, F. J., & Holt, K. D. (1984). Setting limits on children's behavior: The differential effects of controlling vs. informational styles on intrinsic motivation and creativity. *Journal of Personality, 52*(3), 233-248. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1984.tb00879.x

Lepper, M. R., & Greene, D. (1975). Turning play into work: Effects of adult surveillance and extrinsic rewards on children's intrinsic motivation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 31*(3), 479-486. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1037/h0076484

Lu, B. P., Chau, T. V., Pham, T. N., & Huynh, H. (2024). Foreign Language Students' Perceptions on The Significance of Soft Skills Development through Extracurricular Activities in Vietnam. *European Journal of English Language Teaching, 9*(4), 157-165. https://doi.org/10.46827/ejel.v9i4.5630

Melviza, Z., Ys, S. B., & Erdiana, N. (2017). Students' Perception toward English Club Activities. *Research in English and Education (READ), 2*(2), 101-109.

Murtazina, E. I., & Kondrateva, I. G. (2023). Strengthening the Motivation of English Language Students to do Research Work along with Interdisciplinary Interaction. *Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Research in Applied Linguistics, Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics. 14*, pp. 157-161. Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz. https://doi.org/10.22055/rals.2023.19480

Nam Can Tho University. (2024). *Clubs, Faculty Union, Student Association*. Retrieved Jul 07, 2025, from Nam Can Tho University. https://nctu.edu.vn/eng/student-activities/student-clubs

Nam Can Tho University. (2024). *Mission - Vision - Development Perspectives*. Retrieved Jul 07, 2025, from Nam Can Tho University. https://nctu.edu.vn/eng/mission-vision-development-perspectives

Nguyen, M. T., & Le, T. P. (2011). Improving the quality of extracurricular English activities for foreign language majors (Cải thiện chất lượng hoạt động tiếng Anh ngoại khóa cho sinh viên chuyên ngành ngoại ngữ). *Tạp chí Khoa học Trường Đại học Mở TP.HCM (Journal of Ho Chi Minh City Open University), 6*(2), 118-125.

Nguyen, Q. T. (2021). Students' Perception of Speaking Practice in Step Up English Club at Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Education. *Indonesia Journal of Educational Research and Technology, 1*(3), 123-134.

Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language learning Strategies.* Boston: Heinle and Heinle Publications.

Ramadhani, R., Aulawi, H., Setiawan, R., & Rahayu, S. (2023). The Speaking English Material Needs of Engineering Students for the English Club Program: An ESP Analysis. *SCOPE: Journal of English Language Teaching, 7*(2), 259-266.

Roopa, S., & Rani, M. (2012). Questionnaire Designing for a Survey. *J Ind Orthod Soc, 46*(4), 273-277. https://doi.org/10.5005/jp-journals-10021-1104

Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation: Classic Definitions and New Directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*(1), 54-67.

Tran, T. T., & Dang, M. H. (2021). Motivation for Participating in English Clubs of English Major at IUH. *3rd Young Scientists Conference 2021-IUH (YSC2021). 3*, pp. 71-79. Ho Chi Minh: Industrial university of Ho Chi Minh city.

Tu, L. T., & Du, T. T. (2024). English Pronunciation Problems among Vietnamese Learners of English: An Empirical Study. *European Journal of English Language Teaching, 9*(5), 69-91. https://doi.org/10.46827/ejel.v9i5.5664

Vansteenkiste, M., Williams, G. C., & Resnicow, K. (2012). Toward systematic integration between self-determination theory and motivational interviewing as examples of top-down and bottom-up intervention development: autonomy or volition as a fundamental theoretical principle. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity, 9*(23), 1-11. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1186/1479-5868-9-23

Zuckerman, M., Porac, J., Lathin, D., & Deci, A. L. (1978). On the Importance of Self-Determination for Intrinsically-Motivated Behavior. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 4*(3), 443-446. https://doi.org/10.1177/014616727800400317

Appendices

Appendix 5.1.1

Results of Independent Samples Test and Correlations Test between students never participated in clubs and club members in terms of their motivation before joining the clubs.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Motivations of students before joining the clubs	Equal variances assumed	4.160	.042	-2.886	489	.004	-.39657	.13741	-.66655	-.12658
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.369	44.646	.022	-.39657	.16740	-.73380	-.05933

Correlations

		Participation Frequency
Motivations of students before joining the clubs	Pearson Correlation	.129**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004
	N	491

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

Appendix 5.1.2

Means of club members' motivations before joining the clubs (MB), and their satisfaction after participating in the clubs (MA) regarding the participation frequency of club meetings.

Participation Frequency of club members		MB	MA
Seldom (N=88)	Mean	3.6717	3.6657
	Std. Deviation	.892	.979
Sometimes (N=182)	Mean	4.0315	4.0547
	Std. Deviation	.840	.912
Frequently (N=114)	Mean	3.9815	3.9677
	Std. Deviation	.685	.708
Always (N=66)	Mean	4.0845	4.1172
	Std. Deviation	.825	.844
Total (N=450)	Mean	3.9563	3.9657
	Std. Deviation	.822	.880

Results of ANOVA Test and Correlations Test between participation frequency of club members regarding MB, and MA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
MB	Between Groups	9.318	3	3.106	4.710	.003
	Within Groups	294.137	446	.659		
	Total	**303.455**	**449**			
MA	Between Groups	10.878	3	3.626	4.801	.003
	Within Groups	336.824	446	.755		
	Total	**347.701**	**449**			

Correlations

		MB	MA
Participation frequency of club members in club meetings	Pearson Correlation	.127**	.123**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	.009
	N	450	450

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

Appendix 5.2.1

Result of Paired Samples Test between students' motivation before participating in the club and their satisfaction after joining the club

Pair 1	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
MB - MA	-.009	.326	.015	-.040	.021	-.617	449	.537