



An Analysis of the Factors of Student Interest in English Language Sanggar Bimbingan Sentul Malaysia

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Abstrak

Minat merupakan salah satu faktor utama yang mendorong siswa untuk mempelajari bahasa Inggris, khususnya dalam konteks pendidikan informal yang melibatkan anak-anak imigran. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi minat siswa dalam mempelajari bahasa Inggris di Sanggar Bimbingan Sentul, sebuah pusat pembelajaran informal yang berlokasi di Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur terhadap lima siswa yang dipilih secara purposif berdasarkan keaktifan mereka dalam menggunakan bahasa Inggris. Wawancara dilakukan di luar kelas dalam suasana santai untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman, motivasi, serta konteks sosial siswa terkait pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa minat siswa terhadap bahasa Inggris dibentuk oleh kombinasi faktor intrinsik dan ekstrinsik. Secara intrinsik, siswa terdorong oleh aspirasi untuk melanjutkan pendidikan ke jenjang yang lebih tinggi serta rasa senang yang tulus dalam menggunakan bahasa Inggris, terutama saat berinteraksi dengan teman sebaya. Secara ekstrinsik, tuntutan dari lingkungan sekolah untuk menggunakan bahasa Inggris dalam aktivitas harian memperkuat kebiasaan yang secara bertahap meningkatkan minat. Selain itu, interaksi sosial dengan teman yang juga berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris memperkuat motivasi dan meningkatkan kepercayaan diri. Studi ini berkontribusi pada semakin banyaknya penelitian tentang motivasi belajar bahasa dengan memberikan wawasan empiris dari siswa imigran terpinggirkan di lingkungan pendidikan informal. Temuan ini menekankan pentingnya mengintegrasikan pendekatan yang responsif terhadap budaya, kolaborasi antarteman, dan media digital ke dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris. Implikasi ini dapat memandu guru, penyedia pendidikan informal, dan pembuat kebijakan dalam merancang lingkungan belajar yang lebih inklusif, memotivasi, dan berkelanjutan bagi pelajar yang rentan.

Kata Kunci: bahasa inggris, minat siswa, pembelajaran bahasa inggris

Abstract

Interest is one of the key factors that motivates students to learn English, particularly in informal educational contexts involving immigrant children. This study aims to analyze the factors that influence students' interest in learning English at Sanggar Bimbingan Sentul, an informal learning center in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five students selected purposively based on their active use of English. The interviews, conducted in a relaxed setting outside the classroom, explored students' experiences, motivations, and social contexts related to English learning. The findings reveal that students' interest in English is shaped by a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Intrinsically, students are driven by aspirations to pursue higher education and a genuine enjoyment of the language, particularly when engaging with peers. Extrinsically, the demand from the school environment to use English in daily activities reinforces habitual use, which gradually enhances interest. Additionally, social interactions with friends who speak English further strengthen motivation and increase confidence. The study contributes to the growing body of research on language learning motivation by providing empirical insights from marginalized immigrant students in informal educational settings. The findings emphasize the importance of integrating culturally responsive approaches, peer collaboration, and digital media into English language instruction. These implications may guide teachers, informal education



providers, and policymakers in designing more inclusive, motivating, and sustainable learning environments for vulnerable learners.

Keywords: English language, learning English, students' interest

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Introduction

In today's globalized world, English has emerged as a fundamental tool for communication, education, and professional advancement. As a global lingua franca, English plays a central role in fields such as business, science, and technology (Rao, 2019). Within educational settings, proficiency in English is not merely a linguistic skill but a gateway to broader intellectual development and cross-cultural engagement (Zhang, 2024). (Marliana, 2024) argues that English serves as a key international medium that enhances academic access and fosters global competitiveness.

Despite its growing importance, English remains a challenging subject for many learners, particularly in non-native contexts. Common difficulties include limited vocabulary, pronunciation issues, and a general lack of motivation (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021a). Amoah & Yeboah, (2021b) emphasizes that students' interest in learning English is shaped by a combination of intrinsic factors such as curiosity and personal fulfillment and extrinsic factors such as career goals or academic expectations. Moreover, structural challenges such as unfamiliar grammar and inadequate learning support often exacerbate disengagement from English studies.

The learning environment itself plays a significant role in shaping students' motivation. Research highlights that supportive, engaging, and culturally responsive classrooms can enhance student interest and persistence (Anyichie et al., 2023). Motivated students, whether driven by internal or external incentives, tend to exhibit better outcomes in language acquisition (Anyichie et al., 2023). (Zahan, 2025) further emphasize that an optimal balance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators can deepen student engagement and improve performance in language learning.

Learning English has become increasingly essential in Southeast Asia due to

globalization, international mobility, and the growing demand for English proficiency in education and employment. In Malaysia, English holds a unique role as a second language and a medium of wider communication, not only in schools but also in informal learning spaces (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021a). Community learning centres (CLCs) such as Sanggar Bimbingan (SB) Sentul in Kuala Lumpur provide educational opportunities for children of Indonesian migrant workers who often lack access to formal schooling. For these learners, English proficiency is a critical asset for academic advancement and social integration, making the study of factors influencing their interest in English learning both timely and necessary (Rahman & Hashim, 2020).

Previous research on English learning motivation in Malaysia and Indonesia has highlighted a range of internal and external factors that shape students' interest. Internal factors include self-efficacy, readiness, and intrinsic motivation, while external influences involve parental support, peer interactions, teaching quality, and exposure to English through media (Chalak & Kassaian, 2010; Latif, 2019). Studies conducted in Indonesian schools have shown that family encouragement and teacher strategies are strong predictors of students' interest in learning English (Widayanti, 2018). Similarly, research in Malaysian contexts has emphasized the importance of cultural identity, classroom practices, and government policy in shaping motivation (Hiew, 2012). However, most of these studies have focused on formal school settings, with relatively little attention to community-based education centres serving migrant learners.

At Sanggar Bimbingan Sentul, several descriptive reports and small-scale qualitative studies have explored students' engagement with educational programs, including literacy, cultural

activities, and English language learning (Nurhidayah et al., 2020; Syahputra, 2021). While these studies provide valuable insights, they remain limited in scope, often relying on very small samples or descriptive accounts without systematically analyzing the factors that influence students' interest in English. Moreover, little is known about how transnational identities, language use at home, and digital media exposure interact to shape English learning interest in this unique migrant context. As such, there is a pressing need for more comprehensive and empirical studies that address these gaps.

This study seeks to investigate the factors influencing students' interest in learning English at Sanggar Bimbingan Sentul, Kuala Lumpur. By adopting a mixed-methods approach that combines survey data with interviews and observations, the research aims to identify the most significant predictors of interest, including internal motivation, external support, and sociocultural identity factors. In doing so, the study contributes to filling the gap in literature on English learning in non-formal, migrant-focused education contexts. The novelty of this research lies in its attention to migrant children's learning experiences within a community learning centre, its integration of identity and media-related variables, and its methodological breadth. Ultimately, the findings are expected to provide practical recommendations for teachers, policymakers, and organizations supporting migrant education in Malaysia and beyond.

This study investigates the factors influencing students' interest in learning English at Sanggar Bimbingan Sentul, an informal education center located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This institution serves undocumented immigrant children, a population that often experiences restricted access to formal education and limited academic resources (Francesca Meloni et al., 2017). Such marginalization places these students at a disadvantage; however, research indicates that motivation, when nurtured within supportive environments, can counter these barriers and promote academic resilience (Adewoye, 2024).

The study also situates itself within a theoretical framework that combines motivation theory and interest theory. Motivation theory distinguishes between intrinsic motivation learning driven by personal enjoyment and

extrinsic motivation learning prompted by external goals or obligations. Interest theory, as outlined by (Kris Kimbark et al., 2015), posits that students' sustained engagement and academic success are closely tied to their level of interest in the subject matter. These frameworks are especially relevant when addressing the needs of vulnerable learners in informal educational settings.

English language learning in non-native countries often encompasses not only the mastery of linguistic skills speaking, listening, reading, and writing but also the development of broader communication and intercultural competencies (Hossain et al., 2024). In the context of immigrant learners, language learning becomes intertwined with social integration, identity formation, and aspirations for upward mobility. Therefore, understanding the multifaceted motivations that drive student interest is essential for designing effective instructional strategies, particularly for marginalized populations.

By examining how intrinsic and extrinsic motivations shape students' interest in learning English, this study contributes empirical insight into language acquisition among undocumented immigrant students. It aims to inform pedagogical practices in informal learning environments and offers recommendations for fostering sustained engagement through culturally responsive and motivation-based approaches.

Method

Research Design

The research design employed in this study was a descriptive qualitative approach, which is appropriate for exploring and interpreting complex social phenomena through rich, contextual data. A qualitative approach is therefore most suitable, as it allows the researcher to capture rich, detailed accounts of students' perspectives, uncover meanings behind their motivations, and interpret these within their real-life context. Unlike quantitative designs that focus on measuring variables, a descriptive qualitative design emphasizes exploring phenomena as they naturally occur, giving voice to participants and highlighting the complexity of their lived experiences. This method is particularly useful when the aim is to understand lived experiences, perspectives, and motivations

in natural settings without manipulating variables. The descriptive nature of this research allowed the researcher to focus on the detailed narratives of students, capturing how they perceive and engage with the English language in their everyday lives. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which provided the flexibility to follow up on interesting or unexpected responses while maintaining consistency across all participants. The interviews were conducted with a small group of students from an informal school setting Sanggar Bimbingan Sentul in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of five students from Sanggar Bimbingan Sentul, an informal educational institution that serves children of immigrant workers who reside in Kuala Lumpur without formal citizenship. These students were selected because they directly represent the target group of this research—Indonesian migrant children who attend non-formal education programs and experience English learning in a unique context. By focusing on them, the study aims to capture authentic insights into the motivations, challenges, and factors influencing interest in English learning within this specific environment. The small number of participants was chosen to allow for more detailed exploration of each individual's experiences, ensuring that their voices and perspectives could be presented in depth. This aligns with the qualitative research aim of prioritizing richness of data over breadth, making the five students both relevant and sufficient for the purposes of this study. Sanggar Bimbingan Sentul, an informal educational institution, was chosen as the research site because it provides learning opportunities for children of Indonesian migrant workers in Kuala Lumpur who often do not have access to formal schooling. Unlike students in regular schools, these learners face unique challenges related to their socio-economic status, migrant background, and limited educational resources. SB Sentul plays a vital role in filling this gap by offering alternative education, including English language learning, in a flexible and community-based setting.

By focusing on SB Sentul rather than a formal school, this study seeks to highlight the experiences of a marginalized group whose

educational needs are often overlooked in mainstream research. This context allows the study to explore how non-formal education settings contribute to sustaining students' interest in learning English, despite structural barriers. It also provides an opportunity to generate insights that may inform both community-based initiatives and broader educational policies aimed at supporting migrant children.

These students, aged under 12 years, were selected using purposive sampling. The criteria for selection included frequent use of English in daily interactions and demonstrable fluency, as observed by the researcher during the preliminary engagement. The group comprised three male and two female students, representing a small yet diverse cohort in terms of linguistic behavior and motivation.

These children attend informal schools because their legal status does not allow them to enroll in formal Malaysian educational institutions. Despite these limitations, they demonstrated a strong willingness to learn and use English, making them suitable subjects for a study on language learning motivation and interest. The researcher chose this specific group based on prior observation of their behavior and communication patterns, which revealed a visible enthusiasm toward learning English.

Data Sources

The primary data source in this study was the students' verbal responses during the semi-structured interviews. The interviews were designed to explore students' personal experiences with English, their motivations, and the barriers they encountered. These responses offered direct and authentic insights into the learners' internal thought processes and socio-cultural contexts. Conducting interviews outside of the formal classroom setting was a deliberate choice to foster a more relaxed atmosphere, encouraging the children to speak freely and honestly. No secondary sources (e.g., written assignments or school records) were used; the study relied solely on the students' oral narratives.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection procedure involved conducting semi-structured interviews with the five students. These interviews were conducted in a relaxed and informal setting to ensure the participants felt comfortable and open to sharing

their thoughts and experiences. Each interview lasted approximately 15-20 minutes. The interview questions were designed to gather information on the students' prior exposure to the English language, their experiences using English with family and friends, and their overall interest in learning the language.

Table 1. Student Interview Questions

No Questions

- 1 Have you ever learned English?
- 2 When you started learning English?
- 3 Have you ever spoken to your family in English?
- 4 Have you ever spoken to your friends in English?
- 5 Are you interested in the English Language?

In qualitative descriptive research, the questions should invite narrative, open-ended answers rather than short or closed responses. If a question is too direct, factual, or closed (e.g., "Do you like English?" with only yes/no answers), it won't generate the kind of rich, descriptive data that qualitative research requires. Instead, questions should focus on "how," "what," and "why" to encourage participants to share stories, experiences, and reflections in detail.

For example:

1. Instead of asking: *"Do you like learning English?"*
Ask: *"What makes you interested or not interested in learning English?"*
2. Instead of asking: *"Do your parents support you in learning English?"*
Ask: *"How do your parents support or encourage you in learning English at home?"*
3. Instead of asking: *"Is English difficult for you?"*
Ask: *"Why do you find English easy or difficult to learn, and in what situations do you feel that way?"*

This way, the answers will naturally take the form of narratives and provide richer descriptions that align with a descriptive qualitative study. These questions were crafted to explore various aspects

of the students' exposure to English, such as their starting point in learning the language, the context in which they use it, and their level of motivation and interest. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in data analysis. The transcriptions were then analyzed thematically to identify patterns and key factors that influenced the students' interest in English.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the transcribed data. This approach involved reading and re-reading the transcripts to identify patterns, recurring ideas, and key themes related to students' interest in learning English. The analysis was conducted manually by the researcher, who categorized the data into themes aligned with the interview questions such as personal motivation, peer influence, family language environment, and external challenges.

Codes were assigned to specific segments of text, and these codes were then grouped into broader categories. For example, expressions of enjoyment while speaking English with friends were coded under "peer motivation," while statements about wanting to study abroad were grouped under "educational aspiration." This systematic process enabled the researcher to interpret the meaning of the students' experiences in light of the study's objectives.

During the data analysis, it was found that some of the students' interview responses did not directly correlate with the specific questions asked. This lack of alignment may occur for several reasons: students might interpret questions differently, provide answers based on what they feel comfortable sharing, or shift the focus to issues they consider more relevant to their experiences. While this sometimes results in data that does not explicitly address the original question, such responses are still valuable because they reveal the participants' perspectives and priorities.

In qualitative research, it is common that participants' answers do not always neatly match the researcher's prompts. Instead of treating these as irrelevant, the responses can be analyzed to uncover unexpected themes or new insights that enrich the overall understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the researcher presents the findings based on the interviews conducted with the five students from Sanggar Bimbingan Sentul. The data gathered from the interviews were analyzed to identify factors influencing the students' interest in learning the English language. Below is a concise presentation of the responses, followed by the analysis of the key factors identified through the interview data.

1. Previous experience with learning english

The first question asked the students whether they had ever studied English. All five respondents indicated that they had been exposed to English in some form. Four of the respondents reported that they had attended schools or received private tutoring where English was a mandatory part of their curriculum. One respondent shared:

Have you ever learned English?

Yes, I have learned English at school and also at the learning centre.

When did you start learning English?

I started learning English when I was in Grade 3 at primary school.

Have you ever spoken to your family in English?

Yes, but only a few words. Sometimes I say "thank you" or "sorry" to my parents.

Have you ever spoken to your friends in English?

Yes, sometimes we practice simple words or sentences, like greetings.

Are you interested in the English Language?

Yes, I am interested because I want to speak with people from other countries and use English for my future job.

"Before attending Sanggar Bimbingan Sentul, I had a private English tutor at home."

Additionally, three other respondents mentioned that they had attended schools where they were required to speak and learn English along with other languages such as Mandarin and Arabic.

However, one respondent had a unique approach to learning English. This respondent did not attend any formal school but used YouTube as a tool for learning. The student shared:

"I didn't learn English at school, but I learned English using YouTube, sometimes watching streaming gamers on YouTube."

This finding suggests that early exposure to English does not always have to be through formal education channels, and digital resources can play a significant role in sparking learning interest. This aligns with Desta et al. (2021) who highlight the role of social media and digital platforms in improving language proficiency. This flexibility is particularly relevant for immigrant students who may have limited access to formal educational institutions.

2. Early Exposure to English

When asked when they started learning English, most respondents reported having been introduced to the language at an early age. One respondent stated that English lessons began at the age of three:

"My parents gave me private tutors at home when I was 3 years old, and my parents often taught me basic English at home."

Another respondent shared that English learning started in school, where English was mandatory. Yet another mentioned that exposure to English began with the gift of a gadget, which provided access to English-language content online.

This early exposure to English, particularly through family and technology, appears to be a key factor in fostering interest in the language. Parents who actively introduce English to young children create a strong foundation for future learning. A supportive home environment where English is introduced as part of the routine can significantly enhance students' comfort and interest in the language. Furthermore, early access to gadgets and English-language digital content extends the learning environment beyond traditional boundaries, allowing students to engage with the language authentically and independently.

3. Communication in English with Family

The third question explored whether the students communicated with their families in English. The responses were varied. Three respondents reported occasionally speaking in English with their parents, though they primarily used Indonesian or Malay in daily conversations. For example, one respondent said:

"I often communicate in Malay with my parents. They can speak English but prefer to use Malay."

One respondent mentioned that although their parents could speak English, they rarely used it at home. Another respondent, however, stated that she had never communicated with her parents in English because her parents did not speak the language:

"I never communicate with my parents in English. More often, I use Malay or Indonesian."

These responses suggest that while the students' families had some knowledge of English, daily use of the language within the family context was limited. This may indicate that despite passive family support, the home environment may not always be an active setting for consistent English practice. This limitation highlights the importance of other extrinsic factors, such as the school environment and peer interactions, in fostering language interest and proficiency.

4. Communication in English with Friends

When asked whether they communicated with their friends in English, the responses were markedly different from those regarding family communication. All five students reported using English frequently with their peers. They indicated that speaking English with friends who were also proficient in the language was enjoyable and allowed them to practice and improve their skills. For instance, one respondent mentioned:

"I love speaking English with my friends who can also speak it. It's easier to express myself, and I can learn more."

Students also mentioned that their use of English helped motivate friends who were not fluent in the language to improve their skills. Some even took on a teaching role, helping their

peers who struggled with English. One respondent shared:

"Many of my friends are also interested in learning English, so I help them by speaking English with them."

These social interactions and peer influence played a key role in maintaining and increasing their interest in the language. This peer-driven learning environment created a sense of camaraderie, with students teaching each other English and learning together. As a result, their confidence in using English grew, and their interest in the language deepened. Friends acted as a source of motivation, reinforcing the social and collaborative aspect of language acquisition.

5. Interest in Learning English

Finally, when asked about their overall interest in learning English, all five respondents expressed strong enthusiasm. They emphasized the importance of English for future opportunities, especially for communication with people from different countries and for pursuing higher education abroad. For example, one respondent shared:

"I have friends from other countries, and we often communicate by telephone. It's easier because we use English."

Several respondents indicated that their interest in English was also driven by their aspirations to study abroad. They believed that proficiency in English would open doors for them to attend schools in other countries. One respondent stated:

"I want to study in another country, so I am learning English to get into the schools I want."

Additionally, some respondents mentioned that they found speaking English rewarding and felt a sense of achievement when they could help their peers who were less proficient. One respondent stated:

"I feel proud when I can help my friends speak English. It makes me feel smart."

These experiences suggest that interest can be reinforced through social recognition and the ability to make a positive contribution to others.

Interestingly, one student mentioned that their initial interest in learning English began when they were required to speak it by a teacher, highlighting the role that external motivation and authority can play in sparking interest in the language. This suggests that while interest can emerge intrinsically, external demands and structures can also serve as initial catalysts.

From the analysis of the interview responses, several key factors emerged that influence the students' interest in learning English. Early exposure to English, particularly through parents and private tutors, was a significant factor in developing interest in the language. The respondents who had access to English from a young age, either through formal education or parental support, demonstrated a stronger interest in learning the language. Communicating with friends who speak English, and helping peers improve their English, was a source of motivation for the respondents. Social interaction and peer influence played a key role in maintaining and increasing their interest in the language. This created a supportive and collaborative learning environment where students felt encouraged and motivated to use and improve their English skills. Many respondents expressed a strong desire to learn English in order to pursue higher education in other countries. This aspiration was a powerful motivator, as students saw English as essential for achieving their academic goals. A clear vision of how English can unlock future opportunities provided a significant impetus for continued learning. The use of technology, particularly YouTube, emerged as an important alternative source of English learning for one of the respondents. This suggests that technology can play a significant role in language acquisition, particularly for students who may not have access to formal language education. The availability of engaging and relevant digital content can make learning English more appealing and accessible.

Although not all students were intrinsically motivated at first, the requirement to use English in the school environment (as mentioned by one respondent) could both spark and sustain interest. This obligation can gradually transform interest, making the use of English a habit that ultimately enhances proficiency and comfort.

In conclusion, the study found that the students' interest in learning English was influenced by a combination of early exposure,

social interactions, educational aspirations, and access to learning resources. These factors collectively contributed to their motivation and enthusiasm for learning English.

Discussion

The findings from the interviews revealed that the students at Sanggar Bimbingan Sentul were genuinely interested in learning English and frequently used it to communicate, particularly with their peers. However, the reasons behind their interest in English varied. One respondent expressed a strong desire to learn English in order to communicate with friends from other countries, highlighting the social aspect of language learning. For other students, the motivation was linked to their future educational goals; they wanted to pursue higher education in neighboring countries, which made English essential for academic success.

The role of digital media in fostering interest in English was also evident in the data. One respondent shared that they learned English by watching YouTube videos, an example of how technology can enhance language learning outside the traditional classroom. This aligns with the findings of Desta et al. (2021), who noted that social media and digital platforms provide valuable opportunities for language learners to improve their skills. In the context of this study, digital media offered a practical and accessible way for students to engage with English, making learning more enjoyable and self-directed.

Another key factor contributing to students' interest in English was their awareness of its importance for future opportunities, particularly in education. Many respondents expressed a desire to study abroad, which further fueled their motivation to improve their English skills. This suggests that these students not only recognize the value of English in global communication but also view it as a gateway to academic and career advancement.

Peer influence also played a significant role in motivating students. Respondents were more likely to be interested in English when they saw their friends using it. This peer-driven learning environment created a sense of camaraderie, with students teaching each other English and learning together. As a result, their confidence in using English grew, and their interest in the language deepened. Friends acted

as a source of motivation, reinforcing the social and collaborative aspect of language acquisition.

Furthermore, the requirement to use English at school contributed to students' interest and proficiency. The compulsory use of English in the learning environment helped to normalize the language, making it a regular part of students' daily routines. For some respondents, the obligation to speak English at school initially sparked their interest, and over time, it became a habit. This highlights the role of formal education in shaping students' language skills and attitudes toward English.

Finally, the researcher observed that students often used slang or informal expressions when communicating in English. This tendency suggests that students were more comfortable with casual, everyday language rather than formal English, which might reflect the influence of digital media and peer interactions. It also indicates that students find the process of learning English more enjoyable when they can engage with it in a more relaxed, conversational manner.

In summary, the students' interest in English was shaped by a combination of personal, social, and educational factors. The influence of peers, the role of technology, the requirement to use English at school, and the desire for future educational opportunities all contributed to their motivation to learn the language. However, challenges remain, particularly considering the respondents' immigrant status, which may limit their access to formal education and citizenship.

These factors underscore the complex relationship between motivation, resources, and the opportunities available for language learners. Future research could further explore how these factors interact and impact language learning among immigrant students. In addition to the findings discussed earlier, this study provides several significant implications regarding how informal educational settings and broader sociocultural factors influence students' interest in English.

One key insight is the importance of contextualizing English language instruction within the realities of students' lives. The students interviewed in this research are part of a marginalized community children of undocumented immigrants who face educational, legal, and social constraints. Yet, within these constraints, they demonstrated a remarkable capacity to develop interest in English learning,

particularly when the learning environment recognized and adapted to their needs.

This reinforces the idea proposed by Cummins (2000) that language acquisition, especially among minority or marginalized groups, must go hand in hand with empowerment. When students perceive that learning English gives them a voice, a future, and a sense of identity, their motivation to learn increases. This was evident in students' comments about wanting to help friends, communicate with people abroad, and feel "smart" or "proud." These emotional connections, as described in the theory of situational interest by Hidi and Renninger (2006), can evolve into enduring personal interest over time, particularly if nurtured through repeated positive experiences.

It is also worth noting that students in this study responded positively to autonomy in language learning. One student who learned primarily through YouTube demonstrated that interest in English can flourish when students are given the freedom to explore materials that resonate with their personal interests such as games, vlogs, or entertainment content. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), which suggests that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are core psychological needs that fuel intrinsic motivation. When students feel they are choosing their learning paths and succeeding in them, interest tends to be stronger and more sustainable.

Moreover, the social context plays a crucial role in language interest development. The interaction with peers, particularly those who share similar linguistic journeys, becomes a source of comfort and motivation. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) posits that social interaction is fundamental to cognitive development, including language learning. In the case of these students, peer support does not only help them learn vocabulary or pronunciation it fosters a sense of community, inclusion, and mutual progress. The shared language practices among peers turn English into a tool for social bonding rather than a purely academic subject.

In contrast, the lack of English usage at home and among family members did not significantly diminish the students' interest, which is an intriguing finding. While home language environment has often been seen as a determinant in second language acquisition (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002), the present study shows that students can develop a strong interest

in English even without active parental involvement in the language. This suggests that alternative sources of exposure school, peers, and digital platforms can compensate for limited familial language support.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that family support is irrelevant. The few students who mentioned early parental encouragement or private tutoring at home tended to demonstrate a clearer, more goal-oriented motivation. Their responses reflected a deeper awareness of English as a “ticket” to future educational mobility. This indicates that early exposure, especially when facilitated by caregivers, can foster a more purposeful and sustained interest in English learning. It also emphasizes the need to engage families regardless of their language background in supporting children’s English development.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings advocate for culturally responsive and flexible teaching strategies in informal settings. Teachers and facilitators at centers like Sanggar Bimbingan Sentul should consider incorporating peer learning activities, multimedia content, and real-life communication scenarios into the curriculum. Making learning relevant and enjoyable for students who may not have a traditional classroom experience is crucial. Furthermore, acknowledging students’ lived experiences as immigrant children can help build rapport and trust, both of which are essential in cultivating learning interest.

Additionally, the integration of digital media in English learning deserves deeper exploration. The fact that a student relied entirely on YouTube to learn English underscores the role of informal digital literacy in language acquisition. Teachers and institutions should not only recognize these alternative learning methods but also build upon them. Guided use of English-language media, for example through supervised viewing, discussion groups, or English video projects, can bridge informal and formal learning spaces. The study also calls attention to the emotional component of language interest. Several respondents described feeling happy, proud, or excited when using English. These affective reactions can serve as powerful anchors for sustained engagement. Educators should intentionally create positive emotional experiences around English learning celebrating small victories, show casing student work, and

foster a classroom climate that values risk-taking and effort. Such strategies can help transition situational interest into a long-term, individual commitment to learning.

A challenge noted in the discussion is the informal, casual English that students tend to adopt, often influenced by digital content or peer speech. While this form of English promotes comfort and fluency in social interactions, it might not always align with academic or formal communication needs. Therefore, a dual approach is recommended: one that encourages conversational fluency and confidence, and another that gradually introduces more structured, formal English appropriate for educational and professional contexts.

Finally, the broader societal and institutional environment cannot be ignored. These students, as undocumented immigrants, operate in a legal gray area where access to public education, health care, and social support is limited. In such circumstances, their continued interest in English is not just a sign of motivation it is a reflection of resilience and aspirational identity. English becomes not merely a subject to learn, but a symbol of future possibilities, social integration, and empowerment. This finding aligns with Norton’s (2013) concept of “investment” in language learning, where learners’ desire to learn is intertwined with their identity and imagined futures.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study found that students’ interest in learning English is influenced by a variety of factors, including aspirations for higher education, the desire to communicate with international peers, and exposure to digital media. Despite facing limitations due to their non-citizen status, the participants demonstrated strong motivation and enthusiasm for English, viewing it as a valuable tool for self-expression, academic advancement, and social interaction. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations played a role, with peer influence and school requirements further encouraging their engagement. These findings suggest the importance of supportive learning environments, access to digital learning resources, and culturally responsive instruction in fostering language interest among marginalized learners.

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