

Theme-based Instruction and Factors Affecting Non-English Major Students' Motivation and Engagement in EFL Teaching and Learning Activities

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ABSTRACT

Students' motivation and engagement are two crucial variables in EFL teaching. One strategy to improve them is via altering teaching approaches. Theme-based instruction was deemed effective in boosting EFL students' motivation and engagement. The reason for conducting this study was to assess how theme-based instruction affected the motivation and engagement of non-English major students in EFL teaching and learning activities. A mixed-method research approach was employed to uncover elements that boosted students' motivation and engagement in learning English utilizing theme-based instruction. The respondents employed in this study were students of a history education study program from a state-owned university in South Sumatra, Indonesia. Interviews and questionnaires were utilized to collect data for this study. While data from interviews were evaluated thematically, data from questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS. The results of the questionnaire demonstrated higher mean scores for attitude toward the approach, affect, motivation, self-confidence, and sense of improvement before and after the students' EFL teaching and learning activities were intervened with a theme-based instructional approach. These statistics demonstrated positive impact of a theme-based educational approach. Findings from interviews revealed three elements affecting students' motivation and engagement in EFL teaching with the approach. These included teacher factors, peer and teacher impact, and sense of improvement in English learning. In summary, theme-based instruction increased non-majoring-in-English students' performance in EFL teaching and learning activities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) can use a variety of approaches and methods to successfully teach English to students who do not speak the language. The approaches and methods used in EFL teaching have actually changed considerably. Teachers quite often have the difficult task of making language acquisition interesting and meaningful, especially for students who are not majoring in English and who at first may think that learning a language is difficult or unrelated to their

academic goals (Achugar & Tardio, 2023; Ferris, 2017). There are various approaches they can use. One of them is a theme-based instructional approach.

Theme-based instruction is a powerful and effective approach to teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to non-English speaking students. By focusing on specific themes or topics, educators can create a cohesive curriculum that integrates language learning with real-world content. This method not only enhances students' language skills but also boosts their overall comprehension and retention of the material (Habte-Gabr, 2017). In an EFL classroom, where students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, theme-based instruction provides a structured framework for learning that is engaging and relevant. By organizing lessons around common themes such as travel, food, family, or technology, teachers can contextualize language in a meaningful way that resonates with students' interests and experiences. This approach helps students make connections between words, grammar, and cultural concepts, leading to a more well-rounded understanding of the language (Kim, 2020). Furthermore, theme-based instruction promotes integrated language skills development. Students are exposed to various language components such as vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, reading, and writing within the context of a particular theme. This holistic approach allows students to practice and reinforce their language skills in a purposeful manner, leading to improved proficiency and fluency.

One of the critical advantages of theme-based instruction is its versatility and adaptability. Educators can tailor themes to suit the needs and interests of their students, making the learning experience more personalized and meaningful. Whether teaching young learners, adults, beginners, or advanced students, the flexibility of this approach allows teachers to create dynamic and engaging lessons that cater to a diverse range of learners.

Overall, theme-based instruction offers a comprehensive and engaging method for teaching English as a Foreign Language to non-English speaking students. By integrating language learning with thematic content, educators can create a stimulating and immersive learning environment that fosters language acquisition, cultural awareness, and communication skills. This approach not only helps students get better at language use, but also helps them understand and value the English language and all of its cultural uses (Bakić et al., 2023; Maqsood et al., 2024; Newton, 2016).

The use of a theme-based instructional approach offers benefits for EFL students, especially in terms of enhancing their engagement and motivation in language learning. The two elements are crucial in the process of acquiring a second or foreign language. Dörnyei (2014) posits that motivation significantly affects the pace and effectiveness of second or foreign language acquisition. "It serves as the fundamental catalyst for commencing L2 learning and subsequently acts as the sustaining force throughout the prolonged and frequently arduous learning journey; in fact, all other elements related to SLA are contingent upon motivation to a certain degree" (Dörnyei, 2014, p. 65). Motivation functions as a primary catalyst for learning and subsequently provides a sustained and strong force that supports the prolonged and often challenging process of acquiring a second or foreign language (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007; Srivoranart et al., 2022; Yang, 2009). Yang (2009) posits that student engagement in teaching and learning activities can be achieved through a theme-based instructional approach, contingent upon the inclusion of appropriate techniques, learning materials, and teaching media. An instance of this is the learning material for extensive reading, which has been shown to genuinely improve students' engagement in English learning (Guo, 2012; Mutiarani & Rahman, 2019). In summary, Motivation and engagement are essential factors that significantly influence the success of acquiring a second or foreign language (Dörnyei, 2014; Richards & Schmidt, 2013; Winke, 2005).

There are various characteristics that support the growth of students' motivation and engagement in EFL teaching utilizing theme-based instructional strategy. In his hypothesis of the L2 motivational system, Dörnyei (2009) believes that there are three aspects that influence students' motivation. They are the ought-to L2 self, the ideal L2 self, and the L2 learning opportunity. The ideal L2 self is "the L2-specific facet of one's ideal self," according to Dörnyei (2009, p. 27). It is an individual's future self-

portrayal as a learner of a second language. Imagining a point in the future when one will be able to employ the language naturally helps keep one motivated when things get rough. The ought-to self, according to Dörnyei (2009), is "what a person feels obliged or duty-bound to become" (p. 47), which comprises a variety of duties, obligations, or responsibilities, in order to prevent potential unpleasant outcomes. It is the idea of how a learner of a second language will use the language in the future, depending on what they believe other people to be right or suitable. "Situation-specific motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience" are the focus of the third component, the L2 learning experience (Dörnyei, 2009, p. 76). This means that elements like the influence of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, and past success experiences all affect how motivated children are to acquire a second language (L2).

Out of the three theories, the L2 learning opportunity and the ideal L2 self theories appear to support the use of theme-based instruction in EFL instruction for students who are not majoring in English. The majority of today's students understand how crucial it is to speak English well for their future employment. When the theme is one from their content subject that they are already familiar with, those who have a strong Ideal L2 Self will demonstrate higher levels of intrinsic motivation and willingness to speak in English (Ockert, 2014). Realizing that English learning can be facilitated through theme-based instructional approach will have an impact on their motivation and engagement as well since they have opportunity to learn English through their content subject. Speaking motivation can rise and content terminology can be better understood when material is integrated with language learning objectives (Boivin & Razali, 2013).

The use of theme-based training is not limited to EFL students majoring in English; it can also be used with EFL students who do not major in English. Through theme-based training, students who do not major in English can learn English by studying their content subject taught in English. This model of teaching gives the students two benefits. They expand their content understanding and enhance their English language proficiency (Bigych, 2018; Ortega-Auquilla et al., 2021). As EFL teaching for non-English major students in most Indonesian higher education is mainly focused on reading comprehension (Dewayani et al., 2020; Masduqi & Fatimah, 2022), the students seem to be easily bored during the teaching and learning activities. It is then intriguing to employ theme-based instruction in EFL instruction for non-English majors in higher education. It appears to ensure that students will succeed in learning the language.

Some studies have been conducted to investigate the implementation of theme-based instruction in EFL classes in the Indonesian context. A study done by Rosyita and Faridi (2017) compared theme-based instruction (TBI) and competence-based language teaching (CBLT) and found that TBI was more effective than CBLT in improving students' reading comprehension among high school students, regardless of their interest levels. Another study by Said et al. (2018) investigating the use of a theme-based approach in reading comprehension found that Theme-based instruction using local culture-based curriculum contents improved English reading comprehension achievement in EFL teaching. A study conducted by Mutiarani and Rahman (2019) reported that TBI in teaching extensive reading significantly increased student participation and improved reading scores by 21% over the course of their study. These findings suggest that TBI can be an effective approach for enhancing reading skills across different educational levels in EFL contexts.

While previous studies have examined the effects of theme-based instruction on reading comprehension and general engagement, there is limited research on its specific impact on motivation and engagement among non-English majors in higher education. It was hence the objective of this study to investigate the aspects in EFL teaching with a theme-based instructional strategy that impacts on non-English major students' engagement and motivation in learning English as a foreign language in the higher education context in Indonesia. The research question of this study was "What are the factors in EFL teaching with a theme-based instructional approach that have impacts on non-English major students' engagement and motivation in learning English as a foreign language?"

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study was a practitioner enquiry with a mixed-method research design designed to discover factors that enhanced non-English students' motivation and engagement in learning English using theme-based instructional strategy. It was a practitioner investigation since the researcher as an EFL lecturer evaluated his own teaching practice with the objective of improving it. Marsh and Deacon (2024) claim that "Practitioner enquiry is both situational and participatory with teachers attempting to identify and solve problems in their specific context" (p. 2). In this study, the researcher, as the lecturer implemented themes-based instructional approach in his EFL class and explored the aspects that enhanced his students' enthusiasm and engagement during the teaching and learning activities with the instructional method. Since the data in this study were obtained in the form of questionnaires and interviews, it can be claimed that this study was a mixed-method case study investigation. Creswell and Clark (2018) claim "A mixed methods case study design is a type of mixed methods study in which the quantitative and qualitative data collection, results, and integration are used to provide in-depth evidence for a case(s) or develop cases for comparative analysis" (p. 116).

2.2 Research Site and Participants

As previously mentioned, this research was carried out at the history education study program, in the faculty of teacher training and education of a state-owned university in South Sumatra, Indonesia. The first semester history education students who took English as a required subject participated in this study. As research participants in this study, originally, 39 students were involved. They were selected through two stages of sampling, convenience sampling and stratified random sampling. Convenience sampling was used since the students were available for this study. They took English, a compulsory subject offered for the first semester students. At the same time, they also took History of Southeast Asian Nations, the content subject which became a focus of investigation in this study. The second stage of sampling used was stratified random sampling, in which students were given a pre-test, a TOEFL-like test. Their scores were ranked in order listed from the highest to the lowest. The odd numbers were grouped into the non-intervention class while the even numbers were grouped into the intervention class. As a result, 20 students were in NIC and 19 students were in IC. Unfortunately, two students in the IC resigned from the class. Therefore, there were only 17 students in the IC.

The research sample was undoubtedly too small to accurately reflect the broader context of EFL teaching in Indonesia. As a result, one of the study's weakness was that its conclusions could not be generalised to EFL teaching context, either in Indonesia or elsewhere. A potential bias of the findings could be also affected the sampling methods used. Nonetheless, this study offers a certain "indicative" value that emerges from the rich picture of a specific group of South Sumatran students.

2.3 Data Collection

The data gathered for this study and presented in this article were exclusive to the IC students since they were the only ones receiving EFL education using a theme-based instructional strategy. The information provided was gathered through questionnaires and interviews. Before the first meeting and after the last meeting of the English course, the IC students were given a Likert-scale questionnaire designed to gather data on their motivation and engagement toward learning English using a theme-based instructional approach. The purpose of the interviews was to gather detailed information about the elements that influence students' motivation and engagement in EFL teaching and learning activities while using a theme-based instructional approach.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaire were analysed with the SPSS program to find out the mean scores both before and after the students received theme-based English instruction, and the levels of significance or *Sig.(2-tailed)* through paired samples test to determine factors affecting students' motivation and engagement. The data from interview were analysed using six-step thematic analysis from Braun and Clarke (2006). They were familiarizing with data, generating initial code, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings from the questionnaire

The IC students self-reported their attitudes and motivation levels in this section of the questionnaire both before and after they received EFL teaching using the theme-based instructional approach.

The IC students were asked to consider their motivation and attitude levels both before and after the intervention session using 25 items in the questionnaire. Using Likert scales ranging from "strongly agree" (equivalent to 5) to "strongly disagree" (equivalent to 1), seventeen students ($n = 17$) responded to them. Figures 1 and 3 present a summary of the results.

Figure 1 presents the findings of an analysis of data obtained from the questionnaire about the attitudes and motivation levels of IC students before and after the intervention program. The questionnaire data were analyzed with the SPSS software. The mean scores of IC students before and after the intervention were reported.

Among the 25 items asking for self-reports from IC students regarding their attitudes and learning motivation before and after the intervention, 22 items showed increasing mean scores, two items had decreasing mean scores, and one item maintained a constant mean score. These results imply that students recognized an enhancement in their attitudes and learning motivation. It is important to note that for certain items, rising scores signified a reported positive change, and for others, decreasing scores also represented a felt improvement. Details of the pre and post-intervention scores of IC students' self-assessment of attitudes and motivation levels can be seen in Figure 2 below.

Table 1. IC students' self-assessment of attitudes and motivation levels before and after intervention

		Pre-intervention			Post-intervention		
		M	SD	SEM	M	SD	SEM
1	The fact that English is an international language makes it crucial to learn	4.71	0.47	.114	5.00	0.00	.000
2	Overall, I'm happy with how I performed in English	2.24	0.56	.136	2.53	0.80	.194
3	I have faith that I can do well in learning English in this class.	3.82	1.13	.274	4.12	0.93	.225
4	I have faith in my ability to pass English	4.06	0.90	.218	3.59	1.28	.310
5	I am sure I can do better academically than other students.	2.88	1.45	.352	3.18	1.29	.312
6	My teacher's EFL teaching strategies are inspiring.	4.29	0.99	.239	4.65	0.49	.119
7	My instructor uses engaging EFL teaching materials.	4.12	0.93	.225	4.47	0.51	.125
8	My English teacher uses EFL teaching resources, which are quite pertinent to my major.	3.94	1.25	.303	4.76	0.44	.106
9	My English teacher's usage of EFL teaching materials has improved my understanding of them	4.12	0.70	.169	4.65	0.49	.119
10	My English teacher is good-natured.	4.53	0.51	.125	4.65	0.49	.119
11	I always get encouragement to communicate in English from my English teacher.	4.18	0.73	.176	4.76	0.44	.106
12	I get the chance to practice my English with my English teacher.	4.59	0.51	.123	4.65	0.49	.119
13	In our English class, my English teacher uses the four language skills.	4.71	0.47	.114	4.71	0.47	.114
14	My teacher of English provides me with opportunity to practice the language.	4.53	0.51	.125	4.47	0.51	.125
15	I felt that I understood the subject in the English language teaching materials relevant to my degree.	4.12	0.60	.146	4.24	0.75	.182
16	I enjoy learning English along with my friends in this session.	4.00	0.87	.210	4.47	0.51	.125
17	I feel engaged and fascinated throughout this English class	4.29	0.47	.114	4.47	0.51	.125
18	Every English lecture I attended in this class provided me with a wealth of knowledge	4.29	0.47	.114	4.59	0.51	.123
19	My teacher's educational approach inspires me to learn more effectively	4.18	1.01	.246	4.53	0.51	.125
20	I believe I am getting better at English	3.88	0.70	.169	4.12	1.11	.270
21	I think my English teacher's contemporary method of instruction is better than the old-fashioned methods taught in the classroom.	3.59	1.33	.322	4.29	0.47	.114
22	My background knowledge in history, which was used as my English language study resources, motivates me to work even harder at learning the language.	4.41	0.62	.150	4.59	0.51	.123
23	Attending this lesson doesn't make me feel afraid.	3.82	0.95	.231	4.29	0.47	.114
24	I am glad to engage in the discussions presented in English in this course	3.65	1.06	.256	3.88	1.05	.256
25	If I have a lot of leisure time, I will use it studying English more intensively.	3.59	1.12	.272	3.82	0.95	.231

Table 2. Pre and Post Intervention Scores of IC students' self-assessment of attitudes and motivation levels

No	Name	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS														
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		
1	Sutra	4	5	2	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	1	5
2	Keyla	5	5	2	2	4	5	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	5	5
3	Bintang	5	5	2	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	1	4	1	4	5
4	Memboet	5	5	2	2	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5
5	Kane	4	5	2	2	5	4	4	4	2	4	5	5	4	5	4
6	Synyster	5	5	3	4	5	5	4	4	1	4	5	4	5	5	5
7	Mudjoeno	4	5	2	3	2	5	4	5	2	3	5	5	5	5	5
8	Jodi	4	5	3	3	2	4	4	1	4	1	5	5	4	4	4
9	Ririn	5	5	2	2	4	4	4	1	1	1	4	4	4	4	4
10	Mufiathun	5	5	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	4	4	4	4	4
11	Andriy	5	5	2	2	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	4	5
12	Zharatusra	5	5	2	2	4	4	4	4	3	4	4	5	4	5	3
13	Lolipop	4	5	2	2	2	4	4	4	1	4	4	5	4	5	4
14	Annicke	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	2	3	5	4	5	4	5
15	Rendi	5	5	2	2	4	4	4	4	4	2	4	5	4	4	4
16	Wira	5	5	2	4	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	5	5
17	Mahardika	5	5	2	3	4	4	4	4	1	1	4	5	4	5	4
TOTAL		80	85	38	43	65	70	69	61	49	54	73	79	70	76	67
MEAN		4,71	5,00	2,24	2,53	3,82	4,12	4,06	3,59	2,88	3,18	4,29	4,65	4,12	4,47	3,94

No	Name	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS														
		14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25			
1	Sutra	5	4	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	4
2	Keyla	4	5	3	4	5	5	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	2
3	Bintang	4	5	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
4	Memboet	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	3	5	5	5	4
5	Kane	4	4	3	4	2	4	4	5	5	5	5	2	5	4	4
6	Synyster	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	5	5	4	5	4
7	Mudjoeno	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	5
8	Jodi	5	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	1	5	4	4	4	4
9	Ririn	4	4	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	1	1	4	4
10	Mufiathun	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	2	4	4	2	1
11	Andriy	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	4
12	Zharatusra	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	1	5	4
13	Lolipop	5	5	5	5	2	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	4	2	2
14	Annicke	5	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	5	5	5	4	4	3
15	Rendi	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
16	Wira	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5
17	Mahardika	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4
TOTAL		77	76	70	72	68	76	73	76	73	78	71	77	66	70	61
MEAN		4,53	4,47	4,12	4,24	4,00	4,47	4,29	4,47	4,29	4,59	4,18	4,53	3,88	4,12	3,59

Table 3. IC students' attitudes and motivation levels (p-value) before and after the intervention

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
11	I always get encouragement to communicate in English from my English teacher.	-0.59	0.71	0.17	-0.95	-0.22	-3.41	16	0.00
9	My English teacher's usage of EFL teaching materials has improved my understanding of them	-0.53	0.80	0.19	-0.94	-0.12	-2.73	16	0.01
1	The fact that English is an international language makes it crucial to learn.	-0.29	0.47	0.11	-0.54	-0.05	-2.58	16	0.02
8	My English teacher uses EFL teaching resources, which are quite pertinent to my major.	-0.82	1.38	0.33	-1.53	-0.11	-2.46	16	0.03
16	I enjoy learning English along with my friends in this session.	-0.47	0.80	0.19	-0.88	-0.06	-2.43	16	0.03
23	Attending this lesson doesn't make me feel afraid.	-0.47	0.80	0.19	-0.88	-0.06	-2.43	16	0.03
2	Overall, I'm happy with how I performed in English	-0.29	0.59	0.14	-0.60	0.01	-2.06	16	0.06
18	Every English lecture I attended in this class provided me with a wealth of knowledge	-0.29	0.59	0.14	-0.60	0.01	-2.06	16	0.06
12	I get the chance to practice my English with my English teacher.	0.53	1.18	0.29	-0.08	1.14	1.85	16	0.08
4	I have faith in my ability to pass English.	0.47	1.07	0.26	-0.08	1.02	1.82	16	0.09
21	I think my English teacher's contemporary method of instruction is better than the old-fashioned methods taught in the classroom.	-0.35	0.93	0.23	-0.83	0.13	-1.56	16	0.14
6	My teacher's EFL teaching strategies are inspiring.	-0.35	0.93	0.23	-0.83	0.13	-1.56	16	0.14
7	My instructor uses engaging EFL teaching materials.	-0.35	1.00	0.24	-0.87	0.16	-1.46	16	0.16
13	In our English class, my English teacher uses the four language skills.	-0.35	1.06	0.26	-0.90	0.19	-1.38	16	0.19
19	My teacher's educational approach inspires me to learn more effectively	-0.35	1.06	0.26	-0.90	0.19	-1.38	16	0.19
22	My background knowledge in history, which was used as my English language study resources, motivates me to work even harder at learning the language.	-0.18	0.64	0.15	-0.50	0.15	-1.14	16	0.27
3	I have faith that I can do well in learning English in this class.	-0.29	1.10	0.27	-0.86	0.27	-1.10	16	0.29
24	I am glad to engage in the discussions presented in English in this course	-0.24	0.90	0.22	-0.70	0.23	-1.07	16	0.30
25	If I have a lot of leisure time, I will use it studying English more intensively.	-0.24	0.90	0.22	-0.70	0.23	-1.07	16	0.30
17	I feel engaged and fascinated throughout this English class	-0.18	0.73	0.18	-0.55	0.20	-1.00	16	0.33
10	My English teacher is good-natured.	-0.12	0.60	0.15	-0.43	0.19	-0.81	16	0.43
5	I am sure I can do better academically than other students.	-0.29	1.57	0.38	-1.10	0.51	-0.77	16	0.45
20	I believe I am getting better at English	-0.24	1.39	0.34	-0.95	0.48	-0.70	16	0.50
15	I felt that I understood the subject in the English language teaching materials relevant to my degree.	-0.12	0.78	0.19	-0.52	0.28	-0.62	16	0.54
14	My teacher of English provides me with opportunity to practice the language.	0.06	0.66	0.16	-0.28	0.40	0.37	16	0.72

3.1.1 Attitude towards the current approach

Under the heading of attitude regarding the current approach, four items were pooled; three of the items had non-significant increases, while one item showed a substantial increase.

Item number 8, "My English teacher uses EFL teaching resources, which are quite pertinent to my major," revealed a statistically significant rise in mean scores (3.94 → 4.76, $p=0.03$). The mean scores

increased non-significantly ($3.59 \rightarrow 4.29$, $p=0.14$) for item number 21, "I think my English teacher's contemporary method of instruction is better than the old-fashioned methods taught in the classroom." The mean scores for item number 7, "My instructor uses engaging EFL teaching materials," likewise increased non-significantly ($4.12 \rightarrow 4.47$, $p=0.16$). The final item in this category, item number 6, "My teacher's EFL teaching strategies are inspiring," revealed a non-significant improvement in mean scores ($4.29 \rightarrow 4.65$, $p=0.14$).

3.1.2 Teacher support

Five items total—three showing non-significant increases, one showing a significant rise, and one showing no change in mean scores—were grouped under the category of teacher assistance.

The mean scores significantly increased ($4.18 \rightarrow 4.76$, $p = 0.00$) for item number 11, "I always get encouragement to communicate in English from my English teacher." The mean scores increased for the next item (number 10), "My English teacher is good-natured," however the rise was not statistically significant ($4.53 \rightarrow 4.65$, $p=0.43$). The mean scores for item number 12, "I get the chance to practice my English with my English teacher," also increased non-significantly ($4.59 \rightarrow 4.65$, $p=0.08$). The mean scores for item number 14, "My teacher of English provides me with opportunity to practice the language," decreased non-significantly ($4.53 \rightarrow 4.47$, $p=0.72$). The final item, item number 13, "In our English class, my English teacher uses the four language skills," revealed no change in mean scores ($4.71 = 4.71$, $p=0.19$), indicating that the IC students' self-reported perception of their EFL teacher in the intervention class and their previous EFL teachers' application of the four language skills was identical.

3.1.3 Affect

Two items had significant increases and three items had non-significant increases out of the five items that made up the effect category.

The mean scores for item number 16, "I enjoy learning English along with my friends in this session," increased significantly ($4.00 \rightarrow 4.47$, $p=0.03$). The mean scores for the second question, number 23, "Attending this lesson doesn't make me feel afraid" also considerably increased ($3.82 \rightarrow 4.29$, $p=0.03$), indicating a considerable decline in the students' self-reported anxiety when attending English class. The mean scores for item number 2, "Overall, I'm happy with how I performed in English," increased non-significantly ($2.24 \rightarrow 2.53$, $p=0.06$). The final item in this category, item number 17, "I feel engaged and fascinated throughout this English class," revealed a non-significant increase in the mean scores ($4.29 \rightarrow 4.47$, $p=0.33$).

3.1.4 Motivation

Three items—one with a significant rise and three with non-significant increases—were categorized as motivation. There was a noteworthy rise in mean scores ($4.71 \rightarrow 5.00$, $p=0.02$) for item number 1, "The fact that English is an international language makes it crucial to learn." A non-significant rise in mean scores was observed for secondary question number 19, "My teacher's educational approach inspires me to learn more effectively" ($4.18 \rightarrow 4.53$, $p=0.19$). There was also a non-significant increase in the mean scores ($4.41 \rightarrow 4.59$, $p= 0.27$) for item number 22, "My background knowledge in history, which was used as my English language study resources, motivates me to work even harder at learning the language."

3.1.5 Self-confidence

Three items were categorized as belonging to the self-confidence category: two had non-significant increases and one had a non-significant reduction.

The mean scores for item number 4, "I have faith in my ability to pass English," decreased non-significantly ($4.06 \rightarrow 3.59$, $p=0.09$). This finding would indicate that after taking part in the intervention program, students' self-reported confidence in their ability to pass English declined. The mean scores

for item number 3, "I have faith that I can do well in learning English in this class," likewise increased non-significantly ($3.82 \rightarrow 4.12$, $p=0.29$). The final item, number 5, "I am sure I can do better academically than other students," displayed a mean score rise that was again not statistically significant ($2.88 \rightarrow 3.18$, $p=0.45$).

3.1.6 Sense of improvement

Four items—one with a substantial rise and three with non-significant increases—were categorized as feeling improved.

The mean scores significantly increased on item number 9, "My English teacher's usage of EFL teaching materials has improved my understanding of them." ($4.12 \rightarrow 4.65$, $p=0.01$). The mean scores increased for item number 18, "Every English lecture I attended in this class provided me with a wealth of knowledge," but the rise was not statistically significant ($4.29 \rightarrow 4.59$, $p=0.06$). The mean scores for item number 20, "I believe I am getting better at English," also increased non-significantly ($3.88 \rightarrow 4.12$, $p=0.50$). The penultimate item with a non-significant increase in mean scores ($4.12 \rightarrow 4.24$, $p=0.54$) was item number 15, which states, "I felt that I understood the subject in the English language teaching materials relevant to my degree."

Based on the aforementioned findings, it can be concluded that there was a favourable trend in the IC students' self-reports about motivation and attitude from before to after the intervention. Of the 25 self-reported items (refer to Figure 1), the mean scores of 21 self-reported items increased. Figure 2 presents the significance level for six self-reported measures from the attitude, teacher support, affect, motivation, self-confidence, and sense of improvement. The significance values ranged from 0.00 to 0.03. Only six of them were statistically significant, but they were all characterized by a favourable trend of elevated motivation and attitudes.

3.2 Findings from the interviews

Data analysis from the interviews found there were three factors affecting students' engagement and motivation. They were teacher's factor, peer and teacher influence, and sense of importance of English learning.

3.2.1 Teacher's factors

There were three criteria that addressed the teacher's aspect specifically. They were teaching techniques, teaching material, and teaching media. The interview findings identified four teaching techniques that increased student motivation and engagement in the teaching and learning activities. These included opportunities for students to talk in their mother tongue when they were at a loss for words in English, the kinds of teaching and learning activities that are employed, the teaching style, and the active encouragement to speak English. The interviewees nominated three distinct categories of teaching and learning activities for remark regarding the types employed. Role-playing, storytelling, and class presentations were among them.

Every time the students completed a reading passage, a short movie, or an audio recording, they had to engage in retelling exercises. Every student was urged to give a verbal summary of the material they had read, listened to, or seen in the movie in their own words. Some of the students commented that this teaching and learning exercise encouraged them to speak up (Synister and Andriy) and enhanced their writing abilities (Lolipop and Jaeng).

Ah, their motivation was good. They were eager to follow the lectures. Many of them competed to express their opinions. They were enthusiastic to speak when you asked them to retell the story in their own words. Yah, their motivation was good. (Synyster).

Yes, my writing improved too. You always gave us assignments to write a paragraph retelling what we had learned on that day. You also taught us how to write a good paragraph. Applying what you had told us in writing made our writing good and even better, I think. (Lolipop)

Jaeng also thought that retelling stories helped him write better. Retelling the story in one or more paragraphs was made easier for him by his improved comprehension of what he had seen in the short film.

The second kind of instructional activity that raised student motivation and engagement is roleplaying. Students were required to act out the characters and become familiar with the circumstances in this learning exercise, which was centered around a significant historical event. The role-playing, for instance, focused on the arrival of Portuguese explorer Magellan in the Philippines at the start of the 16th century. Students were asked to pretend to be King Humabon, Lapu-lapu, Magellan, and his crew. For example, they needed to know what was going on when Magellan encountered King Humabon. Based on real-life events, they fabricated dialogue between Magellan and King Humabon.

Six out of the eleven students (pseudonyms) who were interviewed discussed the advantages of the role-plays, according to data from the interview transcripts. Yogi remarked that it encouraged him "to talk naturally in English". In a similar vein, Lolipop claimed that it required pupils to have the guts to speak up and a natural knowledge of the circumstances. As a result, it assisted them in improving their speaking proficiency. Like these two students, Andriy discovered that he had difficulty speaking during the role-play:

We had to become familiar with the actors, surroundings, and context before we could role-play. Lapu-Lapu had to make up her own statement when she spoke with Magellan. Speaking in context was a tremendous challenge during this exercise. It is incredibly inspiring. (Andriy)

It was "one way to eliminate boredom in learning," according to Moemboet. Bintang added that the role-play gave each student a chance to speak.

Class presentations, the third kind of teaching and learning activity, were thought to boost students' interest and motivation. Students were requested to summarize items from the themes covered during the teaching and learning activities orally in groups of two or three for this assignment. It was suggested that they use any desired educational medium. The student audience was given the chance to ask questions about the lecture at its conclusion. It was expected of each group to respond as best they could to queries from the audience. Many students reported that they gained useful experience from this program. Rendi and Andriy, two pupils, made comments regarding the advantages of this learning exercise. Andriy felt that his speaking abilities had improved as a result of the class presentation.

In front of others, we delivered our material. This exercise required us to communicate. Practicing this task a lot helps us learn to control our blunders. We can directly repair our problems in grammar or pronunciation with the assistance of our teacher, friends, or team members. We felt more at ease presenting our information because of the teacher's and our friends' support. (Andriy)

Rendi also thought the class presentation was helpful since it improved teamwork and lessened her anxiety while speaking in front of others.

The motivation and engagement of students appeared to be enhanced by teachers' teaching styles in addition to the kinds of instruction and learning activities. The teaching methods of the teachers were seen by the students as informal, simple, and enjoyable. The teaching manner of the teacher was criticized by at least three students. The first two students, Jodi and Moemboet, believed that their comfort level was increased by the teacher's method of instruction.

Starting with the manner in which you instruct. It wasn't tense. We could say anything was on our minds. (Jodi)

I believe how you instructed us, sir. Your teaching style was not burdensome. Compared to my English teachers in junior or senior high school, this approach was distinct. Your teaching style was simple to understand, engaging, and non-stressful. (Moemboet)

Students' enthusiasm and involvement during the teaching and learning activities are also increased by the teacher's active encouragement. Some students appeared to be more motivated to learn the material because of the teacher's expectations and encouragement for them to talk more in English. Three students' interview responses served as the foundation for this conclusion. Andriy said:

I enjoyed that this class pushed all students, regardless of how well or poorly they could speak English, to voice their opinions. You've always said that speaking English frequently is necessary to become fluent in the language. (Andriy)

As Andriy mentioned, Mudjiana also said: "We were trained to speak English with our classmates during this lecture, so we were encouraged to practice our English in four different skills." At the very least, I've discovered that my English currently is superior to that in high school. (Judjiana) Ultimately, Jodi felt that he was stimulated and driven to talk more because of the teacher's active encouragement to communicate in English.

I believe that anything I said would be okay because you have always encouraged us to communicate. Making mistakes is understandable as we are still learning. The most crucial thing for me to do was to never stop attempting to speak more clearly. (Jodi).

Giving students permission to utilize their mother tongue when they are stuck and don't know the English terms is the last teacher-related aspect that appears to boost student motivation and engagement. They were free to continue sharing their thoughts in this way without worrying that they wouldn't know the correct English terms. They might substitute terms from Indonesia. According to the students' perspectives in the interviews, this instructional method increased their desire to speak up. You also encouraged me to express it in Indonesian when I didn't have the English terms, so I didn't feel nervous, as Moemboet put it. Like Moemboet, Lolipop said something similar. According to her:

Additionally, as my teacher, you did not make me speak in English when I wasn't ready. To express what I would like to say, I can speak in either Indonesian or English. I was inspired to talk by all of these. (Lollipop)

3.2.2 Peer and teacher influence

Within the motivation and engagement category, the second sub-theme that surfaced as influencing students' motivation to study English was the influence of peers and teachers. This

particular sub-theme encompassed interactions between the students as well as between the students and the instructor. According to the data analysis, these interactions had a variety of effects on students' motivation. When students observed that their classmates could speak English fluently, their desire to learn the language seemed to rise. Three pupils made remarks about this element. In Mudjiana's words:

There were moments when I didn't get the topic being discussed. I became a little impatient with this state. However, a lot of my friends who were proficient in English inspired me. They had good English language skills. I did my best to emulate their behavior. To be able to speak English, I needed to practice hard, be brave, and have confidence. (Mudjiana)

Jaeng voiced a view that was comparable, saying:

I discovered that my pals were quite motivated to study English. A few of them were engaged in the session and had good English language skills. I'm more driven to improve my English thanks to them. I desired to be as proficient in English as they were. (Jaeng)

3.2.3 Sense of importance of English learning

Data from interviews were analyzed, and the results indicated that pupils understood the importance of English. They knew that among the foreign languages they frequently encountered was English as an international language, as shown in university textbooks, online, and in connection with cell phones, Western films, and manuals for electronic appliances. Rendi realized the importance of English when he realized he needed it while viewing Western movies or listening to tunes he didn't comprehend. According to him:

I wish I could comprehend the dialogue that the performers in Western movies were saying. In addition, I enjoy listening to Western music. I can enjoy all of these activities since I speak English well. (Rendi)

The necessity of earning a university degree significantly impacted students' understanding of the value of English. If a student wants to take the undergraduate oral test, they need to demonstrate that they have a basic understanding of the English language, which means they need to have completed an ITP-TOEFL-like test with 450 as the minimal score. As Zarathustra made clear:

I'm always enthusiastic about studying English. In order to get better in English, I have to put in a lot of effort. I will be unable to graduate from this university if I don't receive the minimal passing score of 450 on the TOEFL exam, which is a requirement for graduation. (Zarathustra)

3.3 Discussion

The analysis of student questionnaires and interview transcripts revealed enhanced student motivation and engagement, as shown in the findings. Based on the questionnaire analysis, the six components (i.e., a positive attitude towards the theme-based instructional approach, positive teacher support, less anxiety, motivation, self-confidence, and sense of English improvement) of the 25 items measured, 22 items showed increasing mean scores although only 6 items increased significantly. That only 6 items increased significantly might be caused by short duration of intervention which were only 16 meetings covering 32 teaching hours. When more hours were allocated for the intervention program, the significant increases of the mean scores were believed to happen. Yet, these findings indicated the students felt an improvement in terms of attitude towards the theme-based instructional approach, teacher support, anxiety, motivation, self-confidence, and sense of English improvement

after they were taught English with themed-based instructional approach. The results from the interviews with the students strengthened all of these conclusions.

Based on the analysis of the interviews, three sub-themes—the importance of English, peer and teacher influence, and the teacher factors—arose as the causes of the increase of students' motivation and engagement in EFL teaching and learning with theme-based instructional approach. It appears that teacher factors are crucial to the activities of teaching and learning. The effectiveness of the teaching and learning process depends on the way a teacher runs the classroom, instructs their students, and acts as a mentor for their students (Alam & Farid, 2011).

The interview results highlighted certain teaching strategies that had to do with the layout of learning activities, the style of instruction, and the attitudes or dispositions of the teachers. Several educational exercises were found to be beneficial; among the students, retelling, role-playing, and group presentations were the most well-liked. How teachers carried out his tasks in the classroom had an impact on students' enthusiasm to study. Role-playing appeared to be the most well-liked learning exercise out of the three. Actually, studies show that these kinds of learning exercises are especially beneficial for EFL students. According to Sari (2018), role-playing improved students' interpersonal relations and social transactions among students. When engaging in role-playing exercises, students had to compromise with one another to decide who gets to play whom. According to Piscitelli (2020), the participants must acknowledge the obligations and responsibilities of their roles and functions, and perform to the best of their abilities within the given circumstances for a simulation to occur. According to Bray (2010), "role-plays are tasks which fall towards the freer end of the language learning activity... [and] give students practice accessing their current language resources" (p. 14), unlike more controlled language learning activities, this requirement appears to be pertinent. In summary, role-playing encourages students' interpersonal connection and teamwork to accomplish shared objectives, and it is also an engaging learning exercise.

The second component that was thought to boost students' motivation and engagement was the peer and teacher influence. As mentioned in the results above, five participants suggested that teachers and peers had an impact on students' motivation and level of engagement with language learning. It was evident that peers were impacted by each other's performances. For instance, after observing their peers' interactions in English, students who were clearly lacking confidence or had low English ability (such as Jaeng, Mudjiana, Andriy, and Rendi) reported feeling inspired to take English seriously. Rendi claimed that even a student from a small town like himself could speak English just as well as, if not better than, students from a large metropolis like Palembang. Additionally, two students stated that their peers' encouraging words motivated them to take English seriously. Researchers that have emphasized the value of peer support in language learning include Adams and Oliver (2023). Since they are on equal footing, students feel at ease asking their peers for guidance.

Although peer assistance is more comfortable, teacher support is still crucial because the teacher-student connection is often authoritative (Huang et al., 2010). Additionally, it was evident that peer support had an impact on students' self-confidence on several occasions. Students were urged to emulate their peers' English-language communication after seeing it demonstrated by them (Blegur & Rosari, 2019). Peer feedback in the form of suggestions or corrections might boost their confidence in presenting their thoughts to the class as a whole. I could definitely see this in my own class.

Sense of English improvement emerged as the final sub-theme under motivation and engagement from an examination of interview data. Students understood how important English would be to them in both the present and future. For some, the ability to pass exams and enjoy movies depended on their proficiency in English. Others focused on study abroad and scholarship prospects with an eye toward the future. One of the findings from the questionnaire was that, on the whole, IC students felt more strongly about the value of learning English and about English's status as an international language. Many pupils became more motivated to learn the language when they realized how important it would be for their current and future requirements. Students' perception of the significance of English might

be linked to the ideal L2 self (Dörnyei, 2014). The importance of having strong English language skills for their present and future demands was understood by the students.

All the findings from the questionnaire and interviews seemed to be relevant to Dörnyei's (2009) concept of L2 motivational self-system, especially the ideal L2 self and the L2 learning opportunity. Findings from interview, students' sense of importance of learning English, supports the ideal L2 self. The other two findings, teacher factors including teacher support, and teacher and peer influence support the L2 learning opportunity. When all these factors emerge, they will affect students' attitude, affect, self-confidence, sense of improvement which at the end motivate and engage students in language learning.

All the findings of this study seemed to strengthen the findings from previous studies done by Rosyita and Faridi (2017), Said et al. (2018), and Mutiarani and Rahman (2019) related to the effectiveness of theme-based instruction in EFL teaching. While the three earlier studies examined how well theme-based instruction worked to improve EFL students' language skills, specifically reading comprehension, this study added more information on how well theme-based instruction worked to increase students' motivation and engagement in learning English, particularly for those who were non-English major students in higher education.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the factors influencing students' motivation and engagement in English language learning through a theme-based instructional approach. The questionnaire findings revealed a notable increase in students' positive perceptions of this method, with significant improvements observed in attitudes towards the approach, teacher support, affect, motivation, self-confidence, and perceived English proficiency. Interviews further identified three key factors influencing students' motivation and engagement: teacher-related factors (teaching techniques, materials, and media), peer and teacher influence, and the perceived importance of English. Among the techniques employed, role-playing emerged as the most impactful in enhancing motivation and engagement. Based on these findings, it is recommended that EFL instructors integrate role-playing and peer-supported activities into their teaching strategies to foster motivation and engagement among both English and non-English major students in higher education. Given the study's limitations, including its focus on non-English major students from a single program and a small sample size, further research is needed to explore the use of theme-based instruction across diverse study programs, its impact on various language skills, and its effectiveness with English majors. Such studies will enable broader generalization of findings and provide a more comprehensive perspective on the role of theme-based instruction in EFL pedagogy.

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