Intersections of Motivation and Autonomous Learning Activities Among Moroccan EFL University Students

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Abstract: This study examines the correlations between types of motivation (intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation) and engagement in autonomous learning activities among Moroccan EFL university students. Conducted at Moulay Ismail University, the research surveyed 560 students using adapted versions of established motivational and autonomous learning questionnaires. Findings reveal a significant positive correlation between intrinsic motivation and the engagement in autonomous learning activities, suggesting that intrinsically motivated students are more likely to pursue activities that support language acquisition and independence. In contrast, extrinsic motivation was found to have a very weak negative correlation with autonomous learning, indicating its limited role in fostering learner autonomy. Amotivation showed a strong negative correlation with autonomous learning, underlining its adverse effect on students' engagement and educational outcomes. The results emphasize the importance of enhancing intrinsic motivation and addressing amotivation to improve EFL learning experiences and outcomes.

Keywords: EFL, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, amotivation, autonomous learning.

1. Introduction

Research has been increasingly investigating the interplay between student motivation and autonomous learning activities in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in higher education institutions (Sönmez, 2016; Wang et al., 2022; Sheffield, 2023). This focus is predicated on the understanding that both elements are crucial for fostering linguistic proficiency and academic success among university students. In Morocco, where English is viewed as a critical tool for global communication and professional advancement, exploring these aspects among university learners provides valuable insights into educational practices and student engagement.

Motivation in language education encompasses a spectrum from intrinsic to extrinsic forces, with each type playing a distinctive role in shaping learning behaviors. Intrinsic motivation, which is driven by personal interest and enjoyment, is often linked to deeper engagement and sustained educational pursuits. Extrinsic motivation, influenced by external rewards or obligations, can vary in its impact on learner autonomy, potentially supporting or undermining it depending on how it is internalized by the students. Amotivation, or the lack of motivation, presents challenges to educational outcomes, often leading to disengagement and poor academic performance.

Parallel to the concept of motivation, autonomous learning represents a shift from traditional teacher-led instruction to learner-centered approaches. Autonomous learners take active control over their learning processes, including setting their goals, choosing resources, and evaluating their

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progress. This shift is particularly significant in language education, where the ability to apply language skills outside the classroom is as crucial as the instruction received within it.

Given this backdrop, this study aims to investigate the different categories of motivation and autonomous learning behaviors among Moroccan EFL university students. By examining how these factors correlate, the research seeks to identify patterns and trends that could inform more effective educational strategies. The study's findings are expected to contribute to the broader discourse on enhancing learner autonomy and motivation in EFL contexts, providing empirical data that can guide curriculum design, teaching approaches, and policymaking in Moroccan universities.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1. Learner Autonomy in EFL Contexts

Scholarly interest in the concept of autonomy dates back to the early 17th century, yet its application in applied linguistics has consistently echoed its original emphasis on the learner's role in education. The notion of learner autonomy became prominent during the 1950s alongside the ascent of learner-centered educational methods. Holec's seminal 1981 work crystallized this concept by defining learner autonomy as the "ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3). In a more recent exploration, Benson (2011) refined this definition, describing it as the "capacity to control one's learning" (p. 58). This shift from "ability" to "capacity" and from "taking charge" to "control" signifies a deeper, non-semantic evolution in understanding autonomy, where Benson (2011) specifies three dimensions of control: learning management, cognitive processing, and content, that are integral to autonomous learning.

Little (1991) argues that "autonomy" has become as ubiquitous and nebulous as terms like "authentic" and "communicative" in educational discussions. He systematically addresses and corrects five common misunderstandings about learner autonomy. The first is the notion that autonomy equates to self-teaching, thus eliminating the teacher's role. Little (1991) refutes this, suggesting that autonomy depends more on the pedagogical framework rather than its structure alone. The second misconception is that autonomy requires educators to completely forfeit control and initiative, mistakenly assuming that autonomy renders the teacher's role obsolete or that teacher intervention could stifle learner independence. The third misunderstanding treats autonomy as a pedagogical strategy that can be imposed, whereas Little (1991) highlights the essential, yet non-prescriptive role of teachers in nurturing autonomy. The fourth error is viewing autonomy as a singular, identifiable behavior, when in reality, it varies with factors such as age, learning stage, and specific needs. The fifth misconception considers autonomy as a fixed state; however, Little emphasizes its dynamic nature, with learners showing varying degrees of autonomy across different contexts.

Following his critique, Little (1991) defines autonomy as a "capacity—for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action" (p. 4), aligning with earlier definitions while underscoring the necessity for learners to independently perform tasks, critically think, and make decisions.

Holec (1981) also discusses the broader societal implications of fostering autonomy, arguing that it does not only enhance individual learning but also contributes to societal development. He views education as a tool for enhancing awareness, liberation, and, in some contexts, environmental transformation.

The dialogue surrounding learner autonomy in language education has expanded significantly, supported by a wealth of scholarly work including books (Dam, 1995; Dickinson & Wenden, 1995; van Lier, 1995), international conferences (Esch, 1994; Gardner & Miller, 1994; Pemberton et al., 1996), and newsletters, enriching the field with diverse perspectives and insights.

2.2. Types of Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation, a complex psychological construct, is essential in influencing human behavior and actions. Ryan and Deci (2000) describe motivation as encompassing the factors that initiate, guide, and maintain an individual's effort toward achieving specific objectives. In educational contexts, motivation is particularly crucial as it impacts learning outcomes, student engagement, and overall academic achievement (Dörnyei, 2001). It is deeply connected with learner autonomy, where learners actively manage their learning experiences (Benson, 2011). Grasping the relationship between motivation and learner autonomy is vital for educators and policymakers to create environments that promote effective learning and foster lifelong learners.

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is driven by personal interest or enjoyment in the task itself, without external incentives (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For instance, a student may engage in reading academic literature on literature simply for the pleasure it brings, highlighting his/her intellectual engagement with the content. In contrast, extrinsic motivation is triggered by external rewards or consequences (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic motivation is linked to deeper cognitive engagement, increased persistence, and enhanced creativity, contributing to better academic performance and knowledge retention (Lepper et al., 2005). Ryan and Deci (2000) note that intrinsically motivated students are more committed to their studies. Teachers can nurture intrinsic motivation through strategies that emphasize autonomy, relevance, and mastery, which, in turn, can support self-directed and sustained learning (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Dörnyei (2005) suggests that learner-centered environments can significantly boost intrinsic motivation.

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation involves engaging in an activity for external rewards or to avoid negative outcomes, rather than for the activity's own sake (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In an educational setting, this might include studying for high grades or participating in group activities for social recognition. Unlike intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation depends on external factors like rewards and societal expectations (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The influence of rewards on motivation is multifaceted. While they can provide motivation by setting clear goals and offering feedback (Cameron & Pierce, 1994), they may also detract from intrinsic motivation by focusing on external rewards rather than the learning itself (Lepper et al., 2005). Deci, Koestner, and Ryan (1999) warn that tangible rewards can reduce perceived autonomy, potentially harming motivation. The impact of extrinsic motivators can vary based on the reward's nature, timing, and the learner's personal attributes (Pintrich, 2003). Higgins (1987) discusses how a learner's internal focus, or "regulatory focus," can influence his/her response to extrinsic motivators, either by enhancing motivation toward gains or focusing on avoiding losses.

Amotivation

Amotivation is characterized by a lack of intent to act, stemming from an absence of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). For example, students who find no personal enjoyment or external incentive in their studies may become amotivated. This lack of motivation can lead to low engagement, poor academic performance, and higher dropout rates (Vallerand et al., 1997). Amotivation can result from various factors, including feelings of incompetence or not valuing the activity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Contextual issues like unsupportive teachers or competitive environments can also lead to amotivation (Skinner et al., 2008). Amotivation adversely affects students' willingness to engage in self-regulated learning, thereby impacting their educational progress and growth (Kusurkar et al., 2011). Addressing the causes of amotivation and implementing effective interventions are critical for educators and stakeholders in education.

2.3. Relationship Between Motivation and Learner Autonomy

Learner autonomy comprises the capability and readiness of individuals to manage their own learning, encompassing decision-making regarding goals, resources, and methods (Benson, 2011). This concept deeply intersects with various motivational types: intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation, each playing a distinct role in shaping the educational framework.

There exists a synergistic relationship between intrinsic motivation and learner autonomy. Intrinsic motivation encourages learners to autonomously navigate their educational pathways, displaying enhanced self-regulation, goal setting, and pursuit of learning opportunities (Deci et al., 1991; Ushioda, 2011). Such students are more prone to undertake autonomous learning actions, including self-monitoring and reflective self-assessment (Pintrich, 2003).

In contrast, extrinsic motivation interacts with learner autonomy in more complex ways. While extrinsically motivated behaviors might initially be driven by external regulation, suggesting a possible detriment to autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000), Black and Deci (2000) argue that when external motivations are internalized, they can transform into self-determined forms of motivation, thereby supporting autonomous learning.

Amotivation, however, presents significant challenges in fostering learner autonomy. Learners with amotivation lack both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, making them less inclined to engage in autonomous learning activities. This situation presents a hurdle for educators striving to instill autonomy as a foundational skill for lifelong learning (Kusurkar et al., 2011; Skinner et al., 2008).

In essence, motivation significantly influences learner autonomy. Intrinsic motivation aligns well with and supports autonomous learning. Conversely, extrinsic motivation's effect varies, potentially aiding autonomy if internalized. However, amotivation impedes the development of learner autonomy, necessitating specific educational interventions.

The dynamic interplay between motivation and learner autonomy is pivotal in crafting effective educational strategies. Intrinsic motivation enhances autonomous learning behaviors, improving learner engagement and academic outcomes (Ushioda, 2011; Pintrich, 2003). The impact of extrinsic motivation, however, depends on how deeply it is internalized (Black & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Amotivation acts as a significant barrier to autonomy and requires targeted strategies to overcome (Kusurkar et al., 2011; Skinner et al., 2008).

This intersection offers valuable insights for shaping pedagogical approaches, curriculum design, and educational policy. Aligning motivational strategies with learner autonomy principles is particularly vital in higher education, where autonomy is crucial for both academic and professional advancement (Benson, 2011).

Ultimately, a nuanced understanding of the relationship between motivation and learner autonomy is essential, not only as a theoretical concept but also as a practical necessity for educators. As educational landscapes become more complex and diverse, comprehending these constructs becomes crucial in enhancing student engagement, achievement, and fostering independent, lifelong learners.

2.4. Learning Activities and Language Learning

Language learning activities, encompassing both formal and informal approaches, are crucial in enhancing EFL learning and promoting learner autonomy. These activities are fundamental in developing language skills and can be distinctly categorized into formal and informal types, each playing unique roles in a learner's language education journey.

Types of Learning Activities

Formal Learning Activities are typically situated within structured educational environments and are driven by specific educational objectives. They include the following:

- **Direct Instruction**: This traditional form of lecture-based teaching primarily focuses on grammatical rules and vocabulary. It is rooted in the teacher-centered approach where information is delivered directly to students, as discussed by Richards and Rodgers (2014).

- **Collaborative Learning**: Emphasizing learner interaction, this method involves group discussions and projects that encourage participation and collective problem-solving. Kagan (1994) highlights how these activities leverage group dynamics to enhance learning outcomes.

- **Task-Based Learning**: As described by Ellis (2003), this approach integrates language use as a functional tool to accomplish specific goals, thereby promoting practical application of language skills in real-life scenarios.

Informal Learning Activities, in contrast, occur outside traditional classroom settings and are largely self-directed:

- **Extensive Reading**: This involves independent reading of a wide range of texts, which assists in vocabulary enhancement and comprehension skills. Day et al. (1998) assert the benefits of this activity in fostering an extensive lexical repertoire and improving reading fluency.

- **Interaction with Native Speakers**: This activity provides not only practical language practice but also cultural insights, facilitating a deeper understanding of language in its natural context. Studies such as Chacón (2022) have shown that these interactions significantly enhance learners' listening, speaking, and reading skills, making a strong case for their inclusion in language learning programs.

- **Online Language Learning Tools**: These digital resources offer flexible and personalized learning experiences. Godwin-Jones (2021) points out that technology-driven language learning tools adapt to individual learner needs, enhancing both motivation and engagement.

Effectiveness of Learning Activities

Research indicates varying degrees of effectiveness of these activities in promoting language skills and autonomy. Thomas and Reinders (2010) particularly highlight the efficacy of task-based learning in improving language proficiency and fostering active learning behaviors. Similarly, collaborative learning not only bolsters language skills but also social abilities and learner confidence, as Johnson and Johnson (1999) note.

Extensive reading is often linked with notable gains in vocabulary and comprehension, promoting a positive reading attitude and learner autonomy in choosing reading materials (Krashen, 2004).

Moreover, real-world language application is significantly enhanced through interactions with native speakers, which provide contextual language use critical for communicative competence. Multimedia tools like 'Conversim™' have been shown to simulate effective dialogues with native speakers, offering an innovative solution to the challenge of limited direct interaction opportunities (Harless et al., 1999).

In the digital era, online tools and resources play a pivotal role. Stockwell (2013) emphasizes their contribution to autonomous learning by allowing learners to progress at their own pace and select content that resonates well with their interests.

Both formal and informal learning activities are indispensable to the language acquisition process and the development of learner autonomy. The effective integration of these activities into language education programs is crucial for achieving superior language outcomes and equipping learners for autonomous lifelong learning. This strategic approach not only facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the language but also prepares learners to effectively navigate through diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

RQ1.   What levels of intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation do EFL university students report in their English language learning endeavors?

RQ2.   What kinds of learning activities do EFL university students engage in, both inside and outside the classroom, to facilitate autonomous learning?

RQ3.   How do EFL university students' motivation levels relate to their behaviors and practices pertaining to autonomous learning?

3.2. Respondents

This study, conducted at Moulay Ismail University's School of Arts and Humanities in Meknes, focused on EFL university students enrolled in the English department and utilized convenience sampling. The sample comprised 560 participants from the English department, with gender distribution as follows: 57% female and 43% male. The participants were predominantly from the earlier stages of their academic journey, with 47.9% in their first semester (first year), 27.9% in their third semester (second year), and 24.3% in their fifth semester (third year). The decision to employ convenience sampling was driven by practical considerations, including the accessibility of participants during class times, which contributed to a higher response rate and better control over survey completion times, thus ensuring the reliability of the collected data.

3.3. Instruments

In the exploration of autonomous learning activities and motivational factors among EFL students within tertiary education, meticulous data collection was undertaken utilizing two distinct yet complementary questionnaires. The primary instrument, derived from Chan et al. (2002), stands as a comprehensive tool anchored in the theoretical frameworks of seminal scholars such as Deci (1995), Deci and Ryan (1985), Holec (1981), and Littlewood (1999). Originally comprising 52 items

partitioned into four sections, this questionnaire was selectively employed, focusing exclusively on its final segment comprising 26 items. The second questionnaire employed was the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) (28 items), developed and designed by Vallerand et al. (1992). This instrument, validated meticulously, provides a multidimensional assessment of academic motivation, delineating intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivational orientations, all within the theoretical scope of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Modification of the questionnaires ensued, involving alterations and omissions to refine the instrument, resulting in a total item count of 54. Post-adaptation, the questionnaires were distributed to a sample of respondents (n=38) not involved in the main study to ascertain their reliability. The section adapted from Chan et al.'s (2002) questionnaire demonstrated a reliability coefficient of r=.92, while the AMS exhibited a reliability coefficient of r=.80, thus affirming the robustness of the selected measurement tools.

3.4. Data Analysis

The collected data underwent rigorous analysis to ensure accurate interpretation in line with the research questions. Using IBM SPSS Statistics 25 software, both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted. Descriptive statistics provided an initial understanding of the data's distribution and central tendencies. Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed for inferential analysis due to its suitability in assessing relationships between variables on an ordinal scale or those not adhering to a normal distribution. This statistical test provided insights into statistically significant associations between variables such as decision-making abilities, motivation levels, and autonomous learning practices among participants, contributing substantially to the study's objectives.

4. The Findings

4.1. Students' Motivation Levels

As previously mentioned, the study utilized a questionnaire with 28 items to measure intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation levels among EFL university students. Responses were rated on a five-point scale. The questionnaire was structured into principal subscales: Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, and Amotivation, further divided into seven distinct subscales to provide detailed insights. Intrinsic Motivation included subscales like motivation to know, motivation towards accomplishment, and motivation to experience stimulation. Extrinsic Motivation comprised identified, introjected, and external regulation subscales, indicating different levels of external motivation. Amotivation stood as its own subscale to measure the absence of motivation.
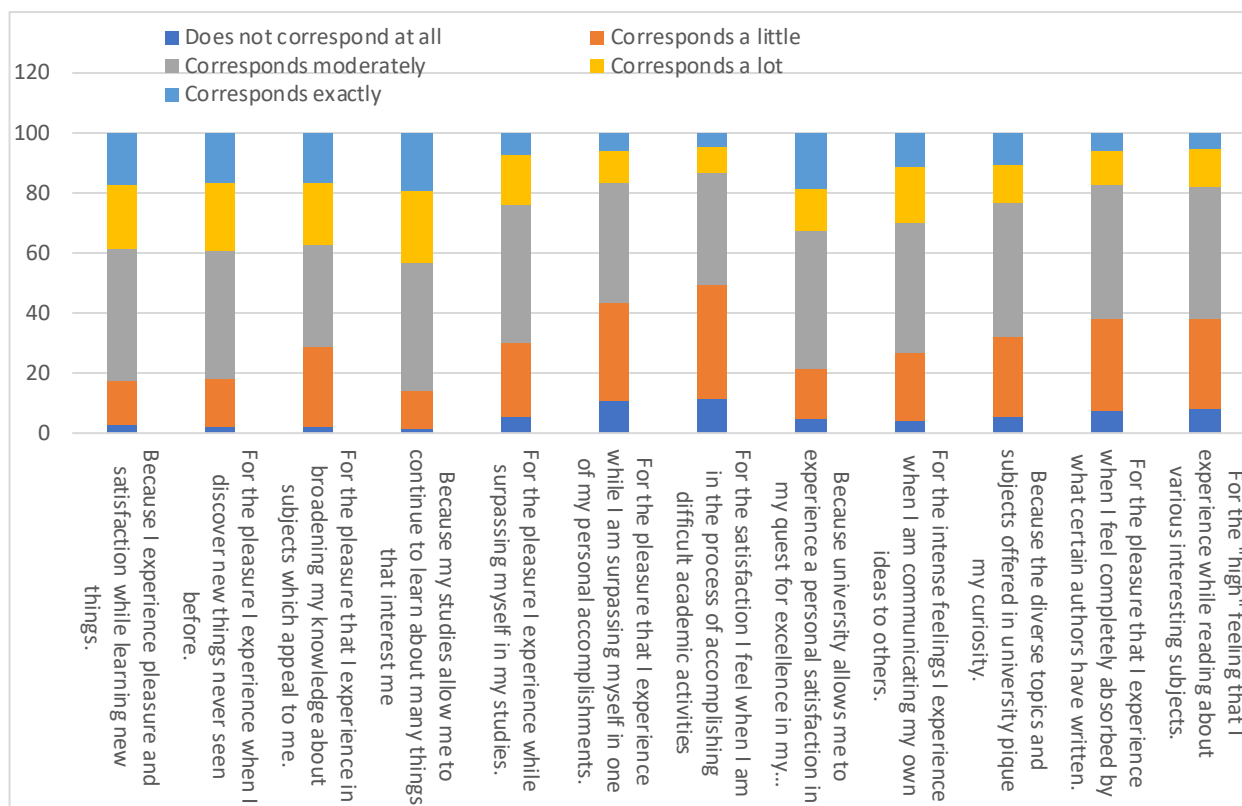
Intrinsic Motivation

Figure 1. Students' intrinsic motivation levels.

Focusing on 'Intrinsic Motivation to Know' (statements 1 to 4), the results reveal that the majority of respondents (43.93% to 42.14%) align moderately with the pleasure and satisfaction derived from learning and discovering new things, broadening one's knowledge, and pursuing studies aligned with personal interests. Notably, statement 4 "Because my studies allow me to continue to learn about many things that interest me," garnered the highest level of agreement, with 24.28% of students expressing a strong resonance.

Transitioning to 'Intrinsic Motivation Toward Accomplishment' (statements 5 to 8), the findings indicate a broader range of agreement levels across statements. Despite the prevalent trend of moderate alignment, statement 8 stands out with 13.93% of students expressing a high level of satisfaction in pursuing excellence in their studies.

Lastly, in 'Intrinsic Motivation to Experience Stimulation' (statements 9 to 12), a considerable percentage of students resonated moderately with the pleasure derived from engaging in academic discourse and exploring captivating topics. Statement 9, focusing on the pleasure derived from communicating personal ideas, garnered 42.85% of moderate agreement and 18.57% strong agreement.

These results, as shown in Figure 1, collectively highlight varying degrees of intrinsic motivation among EFL university students, with a prevalent trend of moderate alignment across the explored categories, albeit with notable distinctions in specific statements indicating higher levels of satisfaction or agreement.
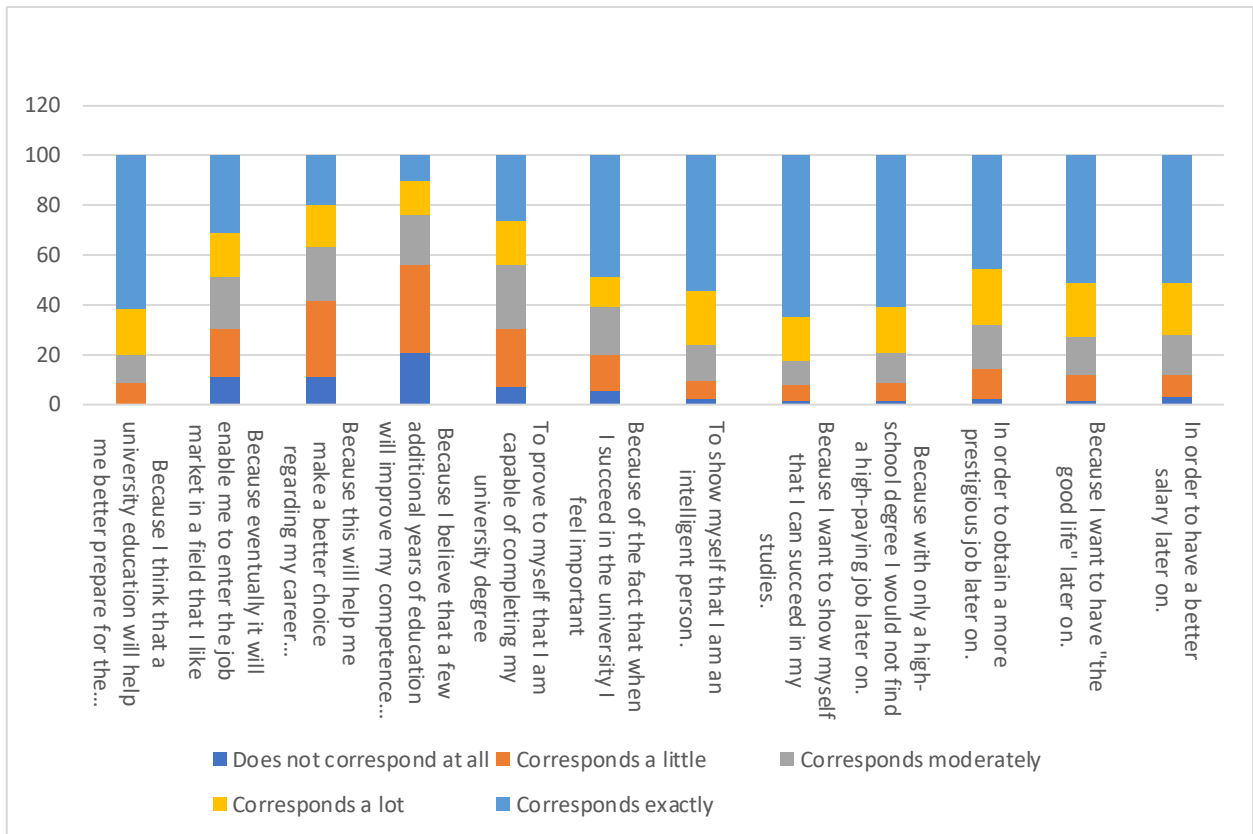
Extrinsic Motivation

Figure 2. Students' extrinsic motivation levels.

In the examination of "Extrinsic Motivation Identified" (statements 1 to 4), statement 1 reveals a predominant agreement (61.25%) among students regarding the preparatory role of university education for their chosen career. However, agreement levels vary across subsequent statements, with statement 2 showing a more distributed response and statement 4 indicating a significant portion of students (35.36%) expressing moderate agreement regarding the belief in the improvement of their competence with additional years of education.

In the category of "Extrinsic Motivation Introjected" (statements 5 to 8), responses display a mixed distribution. While statements 6 and 7 show a predominant agreement with the importance and intelligence associated with university success, statement 5 reflects a relatively balanced distribution of responses related to the drive to prove personal capability in completing a university degree.

Lastly, in the subcategory of "Extrinsic Motivation External Regulation" (statements 9 to 12), future financial and job security concerns emerge as significant motivators. Statements 9 and 12, related to acquiring a high-paying job and a better salary later on, exhibit a high level of agreement (60.54% and 51.07% respectively), while statement 11, germane to aspirations for a "good life," also shows considerable agreement (50.89%). Statement 10, related to obtaining a more prestigious job later on, demonstrates a more balanced distribution of responses.
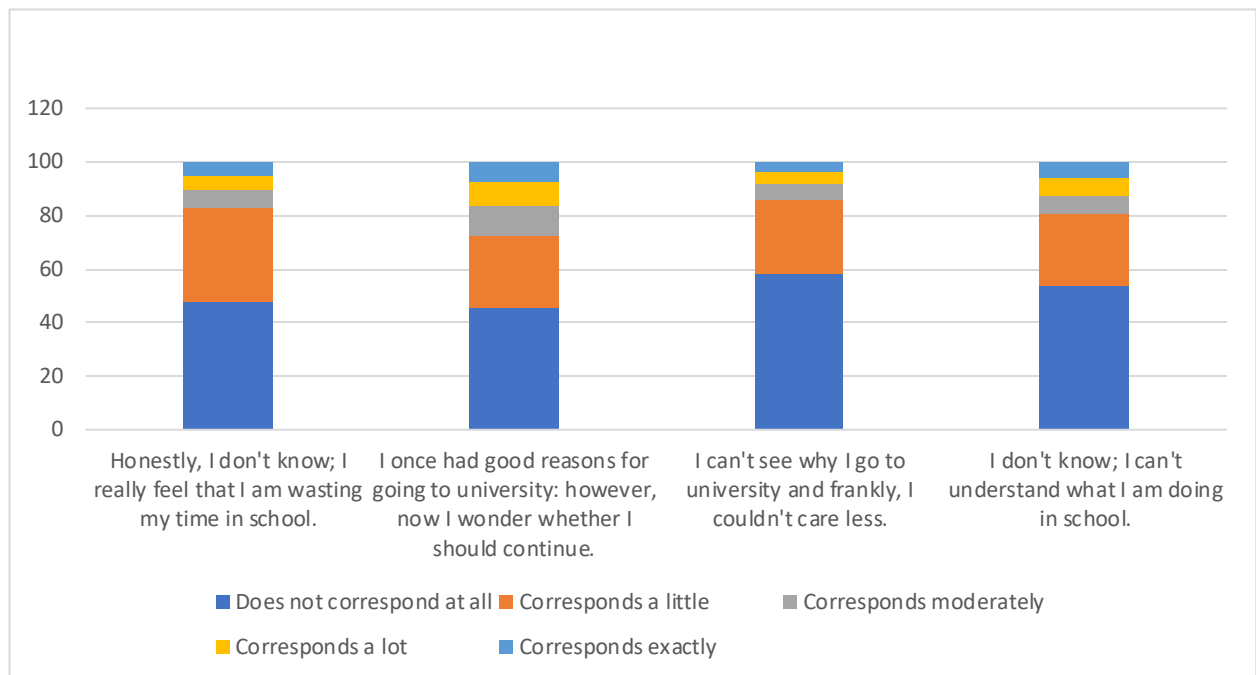
Amotivation

Figure 3. Students' amotivation levels.

In the assessment of students' perceptions regarding their university attendance, the study explores four statements reflecting potential doubts or concerns. In the first statement, regarding their feeling like they are wasting their time in school, a significant portion of students (47.86%) does not believe in it at all, indicating a sense of meaningfulness in their university attendance. However, 35.18% express, at least to some extent, some slight level of doubt.

Moving to the second statement questioning the reasons for attending the university, again, a notable portion (45.18%) does not identify with this sentiment at all. However, 26.96% correspond slightly, suggesting some reconsideration of their motivations.

In the third statement expressing indifference towards university attendance, the majority of students (58.04%) do not agree with this statement at all, indicating a care for their education.

Lastly, in the statement expressing confusion about being in school, more than half of the students (53.39%) do not relate at all. However, 27.5% correspond slightly indicating some level of confusion or lack of understanding.

These responses indicate that the majority of students have a clear understanding and motivation for their university attendance. Yet, a significant minority exhibit varying levels of amotivation or confusion, potentially impacting their academic performance and overall university experience.

4.2. Students' Autonomous English Learning Activities
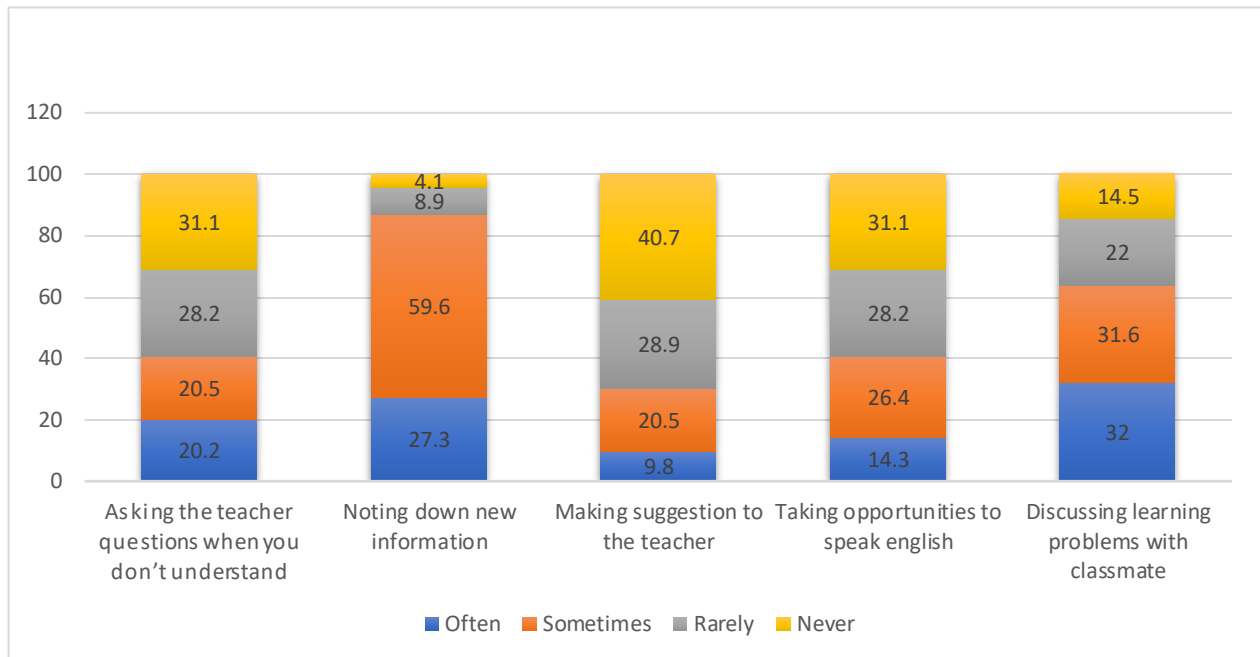
Inside the Classroom

Figure 4. Students' learning activities inside the classroom.

The study examined various learning activities among students revealing insights into their frequency of engagement.

(a) Asking the Teacher Questions: A notable 20.2% of students frequently ask questions when they do not understand, with an additional 20.5% sometimes engaging in this behavior. However, a considerable portion, 28.2% and 31.1%, rarely or never ask questions, respectively.

(b) Noting Down New Information: Approximately 27.3% of students frequently note down new information, while a majority (59.6%) sometimes do. Only a small percentage, 8.9% rarely, and 4.1% never engage in this activity.

(c) Making Suggestions to the Teacher: Merely 9.8% of students frequently make suggestions to the teacher, while 20.5% sometimes do. Conversely, a significant proportion, 28.9% rarely, and 40.7% never make suggestions.

(d) Taking Opportunities to Speak in English: Around 14.3% of students frequently engage in speaking English, with an additional 26.4% sometimes taking the opportunity. However, a considerable 28.2% rarely, and 31.1% never engage in this activity.

(e) Discussing Learning Problems with Classmates: A significant portion (32.0%) of students sometimes discuss learning problems with classmates, closely followed by 31.6% who frequently engage in such discussions. Conversely, 22.0% rarely, and 14.5% never participate in such discussions.

These findings provide valuable insights into the varying levels of engagement in different learning activities among students, which could inform strategies for enhancing classroom participation and learning outcomes.
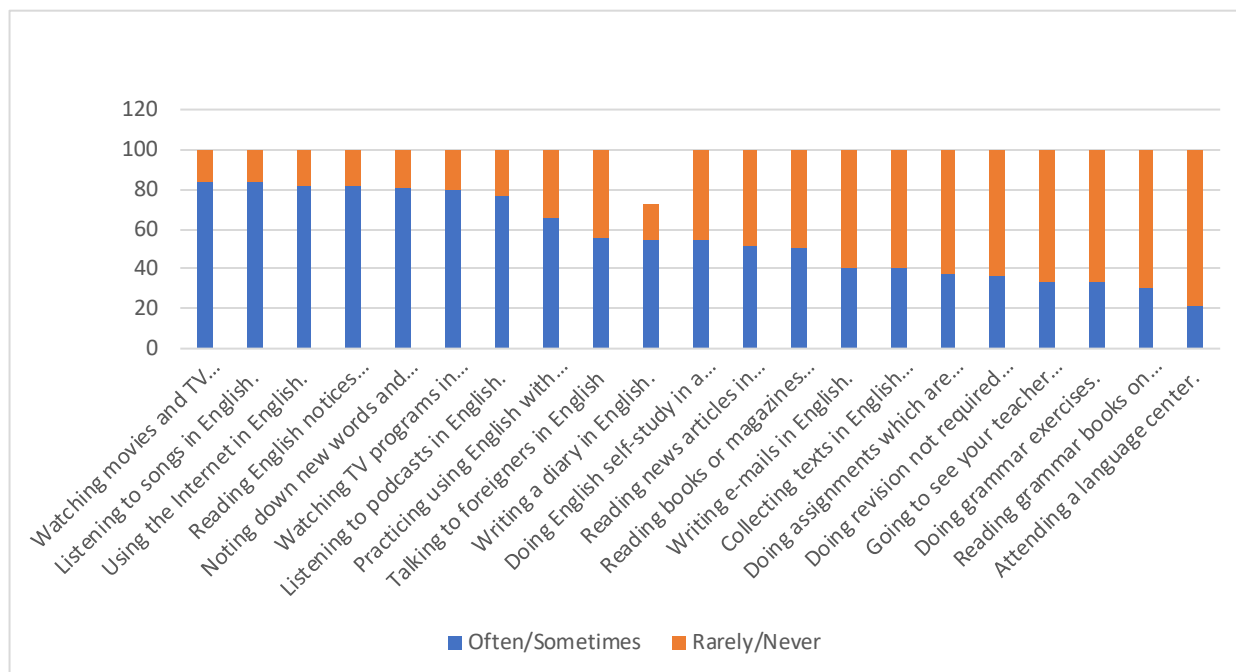
Outside the Classroom

Figure 5. Outside the classroom English learning activities practiced by the students.

The frequency of engagement in various English learning activities among students reveals distinctive trends:

(a) High Engagement in Media Consumption: A significant majority of students frequently engage in activities like watching movies and TV shows (83.9%), listening to songs (83.7%), and using the Internet (82.1%) in English.

(b) Intermediate Level Activities: Activities such as noting down new words (80.2%) and listening to English podcasts (76.7%) are fairly popular but to a slightly lesser extent than media consumption.

(c) Social Interactions: Interpersonal activities in English, like practicing with friends (65.9%) and talking to foreigners (55.6%), exhibit moderate participation levels.

(d) Active Learning Techniques: More active language learning methods, such as writing a diary (55%) and doing English self-study in a group (54.3%), show an even split between 'Often/Sometimes' and 'Rarely/Never' categories.

(e) News and Literature: Reading news articles (51.8%) and books or magazines (50.2%) in English demonstrate a balanced engagement level.

(f) Low Engagement in Formal Activities: Activities like doing non-compulsory assignments (37.1%) and grammar exercises (33.2%) are less popular among students.

(g) Least Popular Activities: Activities requiring more initiative and external support, such as attending a language center are the least frequently reported (21.5%).

These findings shed light on the varying levels of engagement in different types of English learning activities, suggesting potential areas for enhancing autonomous learning strategies.

4.3. Correlation Between Motivation and Students' Autonomous Activities

Intrinsic Motivation and Autonomous Activities

Table 1. Correlation between students' intrinsic motivation and their autonomous learning activities.

	Autonomous learning activities vs. Intrinsic motivation
Correlation Coefficient	.556(**)
p-value	.000
N	560

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

The analysis resulted in a Spearman's correlation coefficient of .556, signifying a moderate positive correlation. The notation with two asterisks (**) indicates that this correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Additionally, the p-value for this correlation is .000, demonstrating a very strong level of statistical significance.

Extrinsic Motivation and Autonomous Activities

Table 2. Correlation between students' extrinsic motivation and their autonomous learning activities.

	Autonomous learning activities vs. Intrinsic motivation
Correlation Coefficient	-.023(**)
p-value	.000
N	560

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

The Spearman's correlation analysis examining the link between extrinsic motivation and autonomous learning activities produced a correlation coefficient of -.023(**). This coefficient points to a very weak negative correlation between the variables under investigation. The p-value from this analysis is .000, showing a significant level of statistical robustness.

Amotivation and Autonomous Activities

Table 3. Correlation between students' amotivation and their autonomous learning activities.

	Autonomous learning activities vs. Intrinsic motivation
Correlation Coefficient	-.763(**)
p-value	.000
N	560

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

The analysis exploring the relationship between amotivation and autonomous learning activities utilized Spearman's correlation method. This approach resulted in a correlation coefficient of -.763(**), indicating a strong negative correlation between amotivation and participation in autonomous learning activities among the participants. The presence of double asterisks (**) signifies that this correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). This is further supported by a p-value of .000, pointing out a high degree of statistical significance.

5. Discussion of the Findings

5.1. Students' levels of intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation

The findings highlight the complex interface of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among EFL university students, along with their impacts on learner autonomy. Intrinsic motivation, anchored by Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1985), is present to a moderate degree. It suggests that enhancing psychological needs like autonomy, competence, and relatedness through pedagogies like problem-based learning could boost intrinsic motivation (Stroet et al., 2013).

Extrinsic motivation is also notable, particularly in the aspects of Identified and External Regulation. Integrating students' career goals with their educational objectives might enhance their autonomy, as discussed by Hussain, Salam, and Farid (2020) and supported by Wigfield and Eccles' (2000) theory. Practical measures such as career counseling and industry visits are recommended to strengthen these motivations (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2017).

However, a segment of the student population shows signs of amotivation, linked to unclear relationships between their actions and outcomes (Vallerand et al., 1992). Addressing this through interventions like diagnostic interviews and individual support is crucial for fostering autonomy (Tinto, 1993; Khazaie & Mesbah, 2014).

Overall, these insights underline the need for a holistic approach in promoting learner autonomy, intermingling pedagogical innovations, career-focused strategies, and psycho-social support to potentially improve the quality of English language education in tertiary environments.

5.2. Students' autonomous English learning activities inside and outside the classroom

A diverse range of in-class activities points to different degrees of engagement in autonomous learning. For example, the survey found that 59.6% of students sometimes engaged in "Noting Down New Information," suggesting a prevalent practice to absorb and retain new knowledge. According to Vygotsky (1978), these actions could be seen as self-initiated scaffolding, where students build their own learning structures. This idea is supported by the interviews, where students pointed out the value of their self-made notes as reference material.

Conversely, "Making Suggestions to the Teacher" was less common, which may reflect a reluctance or low confidence in expressing views. Bandura (1977) suggests this reluctance could be a sign of low self-efficacy, potentially exacerbated by insufficient constructive feedback or a lack of supportive communication channels in the classroom.

Outside the classroom, the engagement spectrum in autonomous learning varies. The survey indicated that "Listening to songs in English" was popular, pointing to a more relaxed or enjoyable method of language learning. Krashen (1982) argues that learners can unconsciously absorb language structures through such informal activities. By contrast, more structured commitments like "Attending a Language Center" were less common among the students.

5.3. The relationship between students' level of motivation and their autonomous English learning activities

The analysis explores the relationship between intrinsic motivation and autonomous learning practices among participants using Spearman's correlation, revealing a moderate positive correlation (coefficient of 0.556). This indicates that higher intrinsic motivation is associated with greater engagement in autonomous learning activities, a statistically significant finding (p-value of 0.000). Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (1985) supports this, suggesting that intrinsic motivation arises when individuals feel in control and enjoy the activity itself, potentially facilitating a shift towards more self-directed learning experiences.

Conversely, the relationship between extrinsic motivation and autonomous learning practices showed a very weak negative correlation (coefficient of −0.023), though statistically significant (p-value of 0.000). This suggests that external motivators like rewards or pressures minimally influence autonomous learning behaviors. Vallerand (1997) notes that not all forms of extrinsic motivation hinder autonomy; some, like identified regulation, may support it, but overall, the impact appears negligible.

The study also examined amotivation, finding a strong negative correlation (coefficient of −0.763) with autonomous learning practices, indicating that higher amotivation leads to lesser engagement. This underscores the need for educational interventions to reduce amotivation and enhance learner autonomy, as suggested by the foundational principles of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Supporting literature includes Vansteenkiste, Lens, and Deci (2006) who examined the motivational dynamics within self-determination theory, particularly focusing on the impact of intrinsic versus extrinsic goals on academic motivation. Their findings corroborate the moderate positive correlation seen in this study between intrinsic motivation and autonomous learning practices, indicating that goals driven by intrinsic factors lead to increased engagement, enhanced conceptual understanding, and greater persistence in learning activities.

In the context of conservatoire music students, Valenzuela, Codina, and Pestana (2018) applied self-determination theory to explore how autonomous motivation influences students' flow, finding that while autonomous motivation positively affects flow, controlled motivation does the opposite. This finding is consistent with the minimal impact of extrinsic motivation on autonomous learning behaviors observed in the current study.

Tuchina, Borysov, Podhurska, Kupina, and Borysenko (2020) investigated the link between selecting personal educational paths and developing learner autonomy, highlighting the necessity of balancing teacher guidance with student responsibility. This balance is crucial for fostering autonomous learning behaviors, as also suggested by the present research.

Gillard, Gillard, and Pratt (2015) focused on enhancing intrinsic motivation through strategies emphasizing autonomy, mastery, and purpose, suggesting that diminishing extrinsic motivation could help students depend more on intrinsic drivers, a point that resonates with the findings of this study regarding the role of external motivators.

Lastly, the research by Wiraningsih and Santosa (2020) looked at the challenges EFL teachers face in promoting learner autonomy within the framework of modern educational practices, pointing out that institutional barriers and pedagogical approaches can hinder the development of autonomous learning practices. Similar to the current study, they underline the negative impact of amotivation on engagement in autonomous learning, stressing the need to address amotivation to improve the learning environment.

6. Implications

The intricate interplay between motivation and autonomous learning activities in EFL settings offers profound insights for educational theory and practice, particularly in university contexts like that of Moroccan EFL students. The research on this subject reveals several key implications that educators and policymakers can leverage to enhance both student engagement and educational outcomes.

Firstly, the positive correlation between intrinsic motivation and autonomous learning activities underscores the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation within educational settings. Intrinsic motivation, characterized by a personal interest and enjoyment in learning tasks, significantly correlates with higher levels of student engagement in autonomous learning activities. Therefore, educational strategies should prioritize fostering intrinsic motivation through curricular designs that allow for student choice and promote interest and enjoyment. Such strategies might include project-based learning, gamification of learning activities, or integration of topics that align with students' personal interests and cultural backgrounds.

Secondly, the study highlights the detrimental impact of amotivation on students' engagement with autonomous learning activities. Amotivation, or a lack of motivation, correlates strongly with reduced participation in both in-class and extracurricular learning activities. This suggests a pressing need for interventions aimed at identifying and mitigating the factors that contribute to amotivation. Educators should be trained to recognize signs of amotivation and provide support through mentoring, counseling, and adjustments to the learning environment that make learning more relevant and accessible to all students.

Furthermore, the research advocates for a balanced integration of formal and informal learning activities. Both types of activities are crucial for language acquisition and the development of autonomy. Formal activities provide structured learning and clear objectives, while informal activities offer practical application and personal engagement with the language. Educational

programs should therefore strive to offer a blend of both, ensuring that students benefit from structured guidance while also having opportunities to explore language use in more naturalistic and self-directed ways.

The cultural and institutional context also plays a critical role in the effectiveness of autonomy-supportive educational practices. The varying degrees of student participation in autonomous activities as highlighted in the study suggest that institutional policies and cultural norms significantly influence learner autonomy. Institutions should strive to create a supportive culture that values and encourages autonomy, perhaps by promoting policies that buttress flexible learning environments and recognize student-led initiatives.

In addition, personalized learning paths tailored to individual students' motivational profiles and learning preferences could further enhance engagement and effectiveness. By adapting learning activities and objectives to meet the unique needs and motivations of each student, educators can maximize learning outcomes and foster a more inclusive and responsive educational environment.

Lastly, the implications for policymakers are clear and call for supportive educational policies that promote learner autonomy and intrinsic motivation. Policies that provide resources for personalized learning, support flexible and student-centered learning environments, and promote continuous professional development for teachers in autonomy-supportive practices will be crucial in advancing these goals.

As a conclusion, the intersection of motivation and autonomous learning activities in Moroccan EFL university contexts provides valuable insights for improving educational practices and policies. By focusing on enhancing intrinsic motivation, addressing amotivation, integrating diverse learning activities, and supporting autonomy through cultural and institutional mechanisms, educators can significantly improve student engagement and learning outcomes in EFL settings. This holistic approach not only enhances academic performance but also equips students with the skills necessary for lifelong learning and success in the global arena.

7. Conclusion

The findings of this study illuminate the complex interplay between types of motivation and autonomous learning activities among Moroccan EFL university students, uncovering nuanced insights into their learning behaviors and motivational dynamics. The data demonstrates a clear correlation between intrinsic motivation and the engagement in autonomous learning activities, underscoring the critical role of intrinsic motivation in promoting learner autonomy. This positive association suggests that when students are intrinsically motivated, they are far more likely to engage in activities that enhance their language skills and by implication their overall learning independence.

Conversely, the study identified a minimal impact of extrinsic motivation on autonomous learning behaviors, indicating that external rewards and pressures do not significantly drive students towards independent learning initiatives. This finding may call for an educational approach that minimizes reliance on external motivators and instead focuses on nurturing an intrinsic appreciation for learning.

Amotivation was found to have a strong negative correlation with autonomous learning, pointing to the detrimental effects of a lack of motivation on students' engagement and educational progress. Addressing amotivation thus emerges as a crucial task for educators, requiring targeted and more informed interventions that can re-engage students and foster a more positive attitude towards learning.

The implications of these findings are of substantial assistance to practitioners in the field and to all stakeholders. To enhance the efficacy of EFL education, it is imperative that educators and curriculum developers create learning environments that promote intrinsic motivation. This could be achieved through pedagogical strategies that prioritize student choice, trigger curiosity, and provide opportunities for self-directed learning. Additionally, the findings suggest the need for support structures that identify and assist amotivated students, potentially through counseling, personalized learning plans, and strategies that connect learning outcomes to personal goals and interests.

In a nutshell, this study contributes to the understanding of how motivation and autonomy interact in the context of EFL education in Morocco. The insights gleaned from the research underscore the importance of fostering intrinsic motivation and addressing amotivation to enhance autonomous learning behaviors. By adopting these strategies, educators can better support students in becoming effective and more independent learners capable of navigating the complexities of language learning and thriving in an increasingly globalized world.

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