

**"Understanding the Motivations of Adults Aged 30-55 for Learning English"**  
**"La Comprensión de las Motivaciones de los Adultos de 30 a 55 años para Aprender Inglés"**

**Autores:**

Garzón-Ayelén, Débora  
UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA DE CUENCA  
Maestrante  
Cuenca – Ecuador



[debora.garzon.66@est.ucacue.edu.ec](mailto:debora.garzon.66@est.ucacue.edu.ec)



<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-1045-2002>

Albán-Neira, Loren  
UNIVERSIDAD CATÓLICA DE CUENCA  
Dra. En Educación Superior  
Docente Tutor  
Cuenca – Ecuador



[malbann@ucacue.edu.ec](mailto:malbann@ucacue.edu.ec)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4874-9489>

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<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8695-5005>

<http://mqrinvestigiar.com/>



## Resumen

En este artículo aborda efectividad de las estrategias de aprendizaje de idiomas mediante la investigación de las motivaciones de los adultos mayores de 30 años que estudian inglés. Existen factores motivacionales, como el desarrollo profesional, el desarrollo personal y las necesidades de comunicación global, que esta investigación busca fundamentar el diseño de enfoques pedagógicos docente que favorecen la actuación y la perseverancia del alumnado. La encuesta recopila datos cuantitativos mediante un cuestionario en línea que destaca las mejores experiencias y objetivos de los estudiantes. Tras analizar los rendimientos, se sugiere lo fundamental que representa la motivación de los adultos para mejorar la retención del alumnado. Además, aprender un segundo idioma contribuye a la salud cognitiva y amplía las posibilidades sociales y profesionales. Esto resalta la importancia de estrategias de enseñanza basadas en las necesidades específicas de los estudiantes adultos. Cabe destacar que esta investigación destaca las implicaciones de una educación eficaz del inglés, que mejora el bienestar cognitivo, la integración social y el éxito profesional. Esta investigación proporciona información valiosa para desarrollar programas educativos y fomentar el éxito a largo plazo en la adquisición del idioma.

**Palabras clave:** programas educativos; estrategias de enseñanza; experiencia de aprendizaje; entorno de aprendizaje; educación de adultos



## Abstract

The effectiveness of language learning strategies is examined in this article by investigating the motivations of adults over 30 who study English. There are some motivational factors, such as career advancement, personal development, and global communication needs, that this research aims to inform the design of teaching methodologies that enhance learner engagement and persistence. The survey collects quantitative data through an online questionnaire, which highlights better students' experiences and goals. After analyzing the results, it is suggested that adult motivation is essential for improving students' retention. Besides, learning a second language contributes to cognitive health and expands social and professional possibilities. This highlights the importance of educators plans that are based on the exclusive demands of adult learners. Significantly, this research points up implications of effective English education, enhancing cognitive well-being, social integrations, and career success. This research provides valuable insights to develop educational programs and foster long-term success in language acquisition.

**Keywords:** educational programs; teaching strategies; learning experience; learning environment; adult education



## Introduction

The study of the acquisition of languages, especially by individuals over 30, has come progressively relevant in the context of modern world. The latest research has highlighted the challenges and the incentives of language during later stages of life. Moreover, cognitive science indicates that obtaining a new language can improve mental agility, delay cognitive decline, and provide social benefits such as communication skills and expanded social networks (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Despite these drawbacks, adults encounter some challenges, such as time constraints, technological barriers, and diverse educational backgrounds, bringing attention to the necessity of developing adapted teaching methodologies (Owatnupat, 2021).

It is crucial to investigate the motivations of adults over 30 who study English because it permits educators to develop new teaching strategies that make them feel engaged and attract this demographic group. Educational programs should be more effectively designed by studying and understanding specific motivations, such as professional advancement, personal growth, or social interaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In addition, this specific approach continues improving the learning experience and reducing withdrawal rates among learners (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Notably, cognitive and social advantages can be provided by learning a new language in adults. Some investigations indicate that studying can enhance memory, postpone the beginning of dementia and other cognitive disorders, and create circumstances for social interaction and cultural engagement (Vygotsky, 1978). By identifying personal motivations that drive students to start learning, permits educational services to highlight benefits, and encourage a great number of adults to be part of learning goals. Gardner (2010) suggested that motivation in learning goes beyond the existence of a reason to study, embracing effort, ambition, and enjoyment. Indeed, Gardner stated that motivation describes some essential requirements for individuals to actively pursue their learning goals, such as desire, effort, and enjoyment. A dominant paradigm for human motivation, Self-Determination Theory reveals that the nature of motivation prevails over its quantity (Deci & Ryan, 1985). There is a



difference between innate desire, which is associated with participation in an activity for the personal satisfaction and enjoyment it provides, and extrinsic motivation, which is driven by external outcomes such as career advancement or social pressure. SDT claims that fostering high-quality autonomous motivation drives three mental and emotional requirements: self-determination (having control over one's behavior), ability (feeling of capability), and accordance (the feeling a sense of mutual care). Learners are more likely to demonstrate greater persistence, deeper engagement, and enhanced well-being by learning in an environment that supports their needs (Ryan & Deci, 2017). What is more, it is crucial that by understanding students' motivations, it would be beneficial for them because of strategies that can foster a positive and supportive learning environment, which can guarantee long-term success (Dörnyei, 2005).

Similarly to the psychological principles of SDT, the principles of andragogy enunciated by Malcolm Knowles can help teach adults. According to andragogy principles, adult learners may differ from children and participate actively because they are broader open-minded to learn new things (Knowles, 1984). A deep need for self-direction is distinguished in adults, bringing a wealth of life experience that serves as a valuable resource for learning, and they are motivated to learn something that may be theoretical importance and application to their personal and professional lives (Knowles, 1980).

A key component of students' learning English is personal drive. In their 2015 study, Chiew Fen Ng and Poh Kiat Ng (2015) studied the influence of motivation on the target language as a second language (ESL) student. Firstly, driven by personal interest and satisfaction, intrinsic motivation is highlighted as a crucial factor for attaining success. Secondly, determined by external elements, for example: professional requirements, extrinsic outcomes have a major impact on supporting learners. Current finding shows that students may balance both types of motivation for beneficial results. Educational strategies should be customized to increase motivation while taking into consideration intrinsic motivation and external needs to create an efficient learning environment for ESL learners.

Some studies have shown that motivation has a correlation with language proficiency. Visioners in the field of second language such as Gardner and Lambert (1972), stated integrative



motivation is associated with higher levels of linguistic competence. Their work stated that students who bear a genuine desire to integrate into culture are deeply and actively involved in the learning process. Stemming from the genuine appreciation for the target culture, this desire ignites a great willingness to devote time and energy to language mastery.

In spite of the effort put in, positive emotional connections have been a significant factor in empowering language proficiency. Wang et al. (2021) described this point highlighting that students who build positive emotional connections such as enjoyment and satisfaction, tend to achieve fluency and accuracy. Creating learning environments that foster enjoyment can reduce anxiety, as said in the latest researches. Moreover, Song (2024) outlined that positive emotional association motivates long-term success. Learners can overcome the inevitable challenges of studying a new language.

The socio-educational model states the sense of integrative motivation as a path to language proficiency. It is actively manifested in learners who look for opportunities to interact with native speakers, immerse themselves in cultural events, and explore authentic materials. This active engagement, guided by integrative motivation, exceeds limitations of traditional classroom instruction and unfastens a deeper level of understanding and proficiency (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

In addition, Dörnyei (2009) suggests in the theory of Motivational Self System that learning English as a foreign language is not merely related to comprehending grammar structures. He studied a notable reconceptualization of students pursuing their goals in foreign language learning. As mentioned by this perspective, motivation derives from the learners' aspirations and self-concept as a potential L2 user. According to this perspective, learner self-concept impacts language learning.

Rahmayana et al. (2021) conducted a study about factors that impact motivation when learning ESL and expressed the key role of teaching strategies in attaining success. This research involves 30 adult students, and motivation was identified as a key factor determining proficiency. Additionally, international communication and professional development were identified as incentives. Whereas effective teaching strategies improve learners' English proficiency by enhancing their engagement and motivation through the use of digital tools, structured speaking



practice, and experimental tasks.

In research a significant gap continues, despite the interest in adult learner English learning, focused on the motivations of individuals over 30 (Mackey & Sachs, 2012). To resolve this gap, this study aims to analyze how motivation, internal and external, may affect adult English learning.

Based on evidences, this research investigates the following inquires:

- In which ways internal and external motivations influence adult student participation and success in learning English?
- How do professional, personal, and social factors influence the decision to learn English for non-native speakers?
- What challenges arise from adults over 30 face when learning English, and how can they be addressed?

## Materials and Methods

This research follows a measurable approach to investigate several motivations behind adults learning English. This research was conducted at a specific point in time, gathering quantitative data from participants through the use of a survey (see Appendix A).

Self-determination theory served as the foundation for the survey (Deci & Ryan, 2013) as well as andragogy principles (Knowles, 1980). The survey inquires about personal information (items 1, 2), educational background (item 3), and professional context (item 4). Following this initial section, items 5 and 6 address motivation and the main reasons for studying English, examining self-determination theory concepts such as personal satisfaction, enjoyment, and personal growth, which relate to intrinsic motivation, and career and professional advancement, related to extrinsic motivation. Item 7 addresses the andragogical principle that adults need to understand the relevance and immediate application of their learning (Knowles, 1980), by focusing on the relevance of English. Item 8 explores preferences for learning environments: in-person classes, online classes, or hybrid classes, which can provide insight into the motivational factors that drive students' preferences for different learning environments. Item 9 deals with



the most helpful skills when learning English (reading, writing, speaking, listening). The purpose of the item is to

distinguish the relation among student's intrinsic motivation and their self-defined criteria for success. By analyzing these preferences, educators and researchers can better understand what these specific learners prioritize, which in turn can reflect their criteria for success and the activities that likely sustain their intrinsic motivation. Item 10 asks participants to identify and describe the challenges they have encountered during their English learning process and item 11 outlines potential improvements on pedagogical approaches, learning resources, scheduling options, and interactive opportunities, which can be aligned with the andragogical principles proposed by Knowles (1984), such as students' need for autonomy, the significance of exposure as a resource for learning, and a problem-centered orientation to learning. The level of current motivation (assessed in item 12) can be related to the autonomy studies, which explains the way in which students feel motivated so they continue studying an unknown language. This type of motivation is associated with better learning outcomes, persistence, and wellness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Finally, item 13 explores strategies that students think would help increase their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and commitment in the process of learning English.

This investigation took place in a private language institute located in Cuenca, Ecuador, where surveyed participants were actively enrolled as students. The English Institute in Cuenca offers courses for all ages in both online and in-person modalities. Recently, they expanded their curriculum to include German and French classes. Their main goal is to ensure that students graduate as bilingual individuals, equipped with strong language skills for academic and professional success. According to the European Reference Framework for Languages, they provide levels from beginner (A1–A2) to intermediate (B1–B2) stages, and up to CAE (Cambridge Advanced English), ensuring structured progress in language proficiency. Eligibility criteria required that individuals should (a) be 30 years of age or older, (b) be currently enrolled in any level of an English program, and (c) provide informed consent for participation. Using administrative enrolment lists, 80 eligible learners were contacted through personalized WhatsApp messages that described the study's aims and provided 2 links: one to



the online questionnaire and the other to the consent to participation form. The selection process was informed to the participants, ensuring that the chosen individuals were suitable for the study. Among those reached, 50 individuals responded to the survey.

The survey was hosted on Google Forms, a platform chosen for its accessibility, smartphone compatibility, and zero cost to respondents. Participants indicated consent by clicking “I agree” on the Google Forms landing page before proceeding to the questions. The average completion time was approximately 15 minutes. Reminder messages were issued five and ten days after the initial invitation to optimize response rates, yet no financial or academic incentives were offered, thereby minimizing potential coercion.

For data analysis, survey responses were numerically coded and processed using Microsoft Office Excel. Statistical analysis was performed to identify percentages and central tendencies within the data. The resulting quantitative data were used to generate bar graphs and pie charts for clear visual interpretation. These findings were then compared with established research in motivation in language acquisition to situate the results within the field.

## Results

The data collected from the survey reveals a wide picture of what drives the participants to study English. The findings are grouped by major themes: demographic variables (covering age, gender, educational background, and professional context) to better understand the participants' backgrounds. Following this, learners' motivation: type of motivation for studying English, main reasons for studying English, the importance of English in their future career. Moreover, personal ambitions and personal interests (type of learning environment, skills to develop in English), and motivation (motivation when learning a new language, strategies to increase motivation) can foster engagement in their learning process.

### Participant's Demographic Information

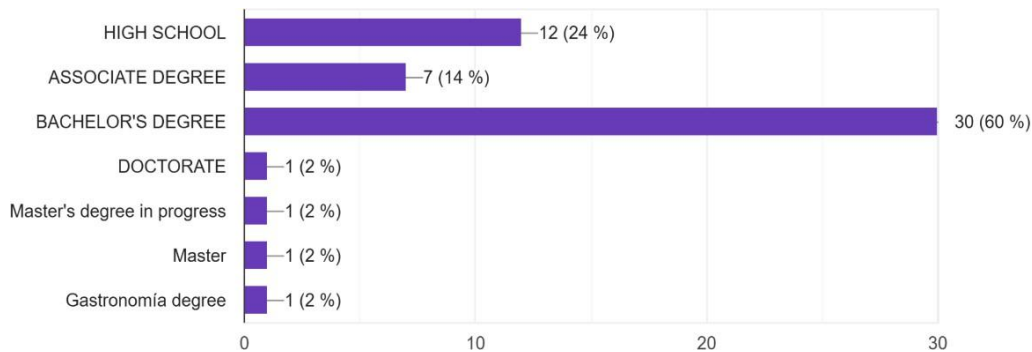
The majority of the participants (76%) were 30-35 years old, 10% between 40-45, 8% 35-40 years old, 2% 45-50 years old, and 4% 50-55 years old. Of the 50 respondents surveyed, an equal distribution of genders was observed, with half of them being women and the other half, men.



Figure 1 describes the academic qualifications of participants. 60 percent of the students hold a bachelor's degree, representing a significant portion. The second chart includes high school diplomas with 24%, associate degrees with 14% and a small number of respondents pursuing or holding advanced degrees, such as master's and doctorate, with 2% of the answers.

### **Figure 1**

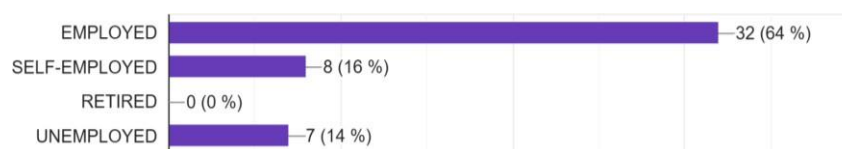
#### *Educational level*



Down below, Figure 2 presents the current professional background of the surveyed students. 64% of students are employed, and some of their jobs may vary from mechanics to teachers. Whereas 14% of them are unemployed.

### **Figure 2**

#### *Professional context*

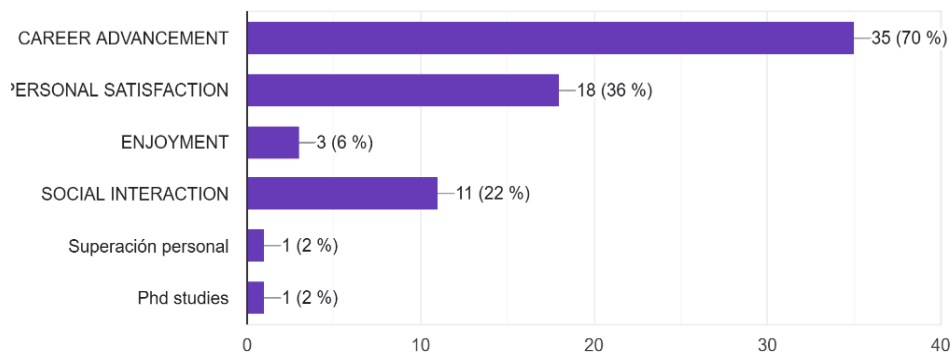


## **Learner's Motivation**

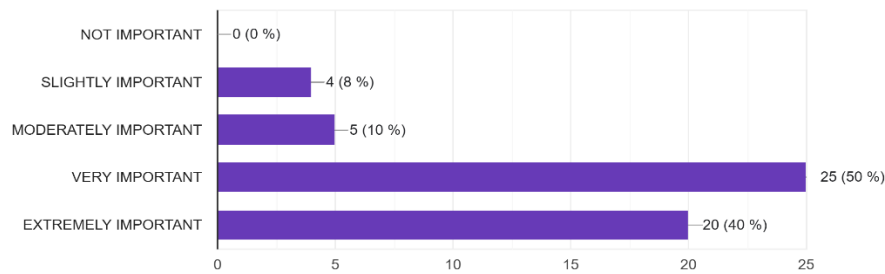
The type of motivation for learning English, as illustrated in Figure 3, shows that 70% of respondents identified career advancement as their primary driving factor. This significant percentage underscores the close connection between learning English and professional aspirations. Together, these figures contribute relevant perceptions into both the motivations and the perceived importance of English among learners, emphasizing its role in personal and career development.

### **Figure 3**

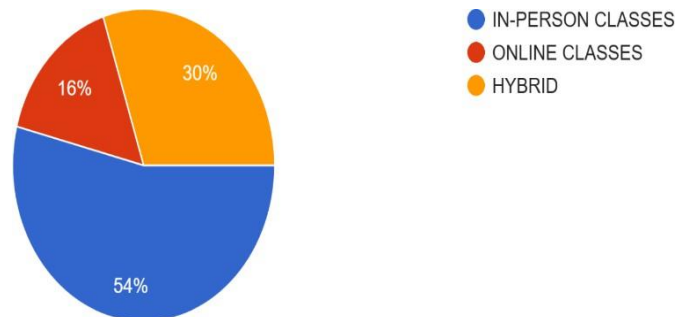
*Type of motivation for studying English*



The perceived importance of English for the future is highlighted in Figure 4, which demonstrates that most of the interviewed valued the point as "Very Important and Extremely important", with 50 percent of answers. This finding reflects a strong consensus among participants regarding the essential role that English plays in shaping their future opportunities.

**Figure 4***How important is English for your future or current career?*

The findings on learning environment preferences highlight a strong demand for traditional and blended models. Face-to-face classes emerged as the leading choice, favored by 54% of the adult learners. The hybrid format was the second most selected option at 30%. Conversely, a purely online environment was the least preferred, accounting for just 16% of the responses.

**Figure 5***What type of learning environment do you prefer?*

The survey results demonstrate that speaking is the skill most highly valued by individuals pursuing English language studies in Figure 6. This finding underscores the importance placed by learners on developing their oral communication abilities, likely due to its critical role in both professional contexts and everyday interactions. Furthermore, when examining the challenges faced in learning English.

**Figure 6**

*Which activities do you find most helpful in learning English?*

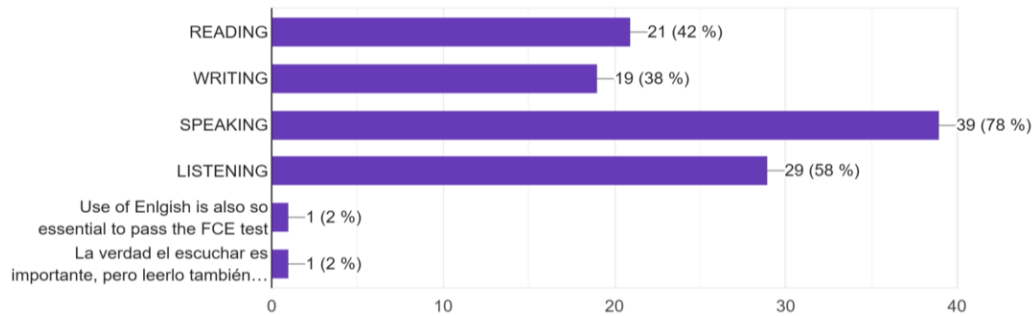
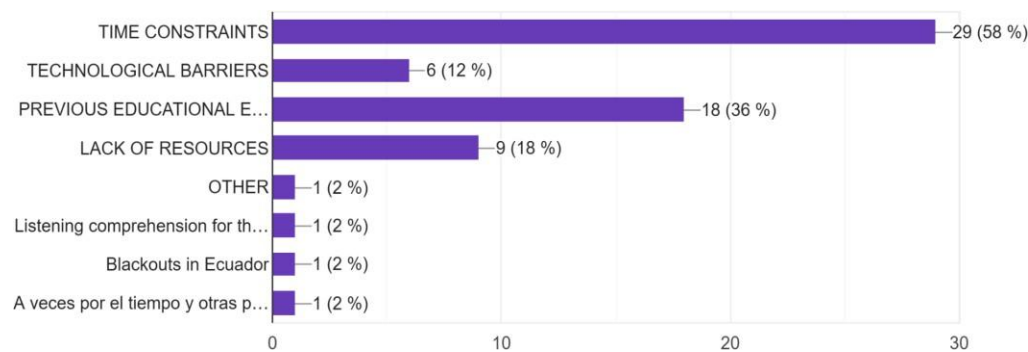


Figure 7 highlights that time constraints emerge as the most significant obstacle encountered by adult learners (58%). This issue is closely followed by the influence of previous educational experiences (36%), which also perform a considerable function in adapting the acquisition process. Together, these insights deliver a profound agreement of the priorities, barriers and situation that English learners face (12%), allowing for a more focused approach to addressing their needs.

**Figure 7**

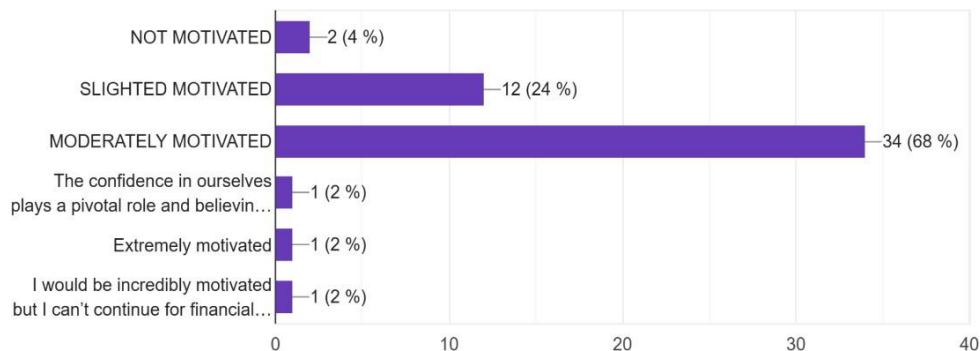
*What challenges have you faced while learning English?*



When respondents were asked about their motivational degree for studying English, the results showed that the majority—over 50%—described themselves as moderately motivated to continue their language-learning journey.

### **Figure 8**

*How motivated do you feel to continue learning English?*

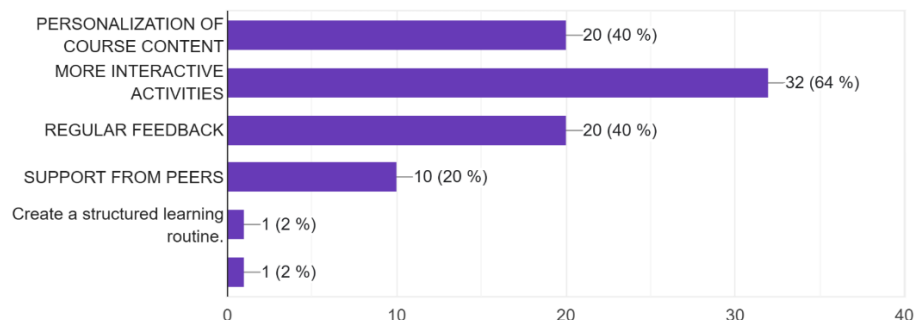


The survey results indicate 64% that participants have expressed a clear and strong preference for the inclusion of more interactive exercises in their classes. This discovery emphasizes the significance that when engaging in participatory activities in the learning process, enhance both understanding and retention.

### **Figure 9**

*What strategies do you think would help increase your motivation and commitment in mastering English?*





## Discussion

Research findings indicate that the main incentive for respondents who decide to study English is career advancement, with general personal growth emerging as a significant secondary factor. These motivational drivers highlight the dual objectives pursued by adult learners, namely, professional development and personal enrichment. Furthermore, the results are consistent with prior research, which suggests that adult learners often engage in educational pursuits for both career-related and personal reasons (Smith, 2010; Johnson, 2015).

The responses also emphasize the need to design fascinating and expressive educational background to sustain and enhance learners' motivation. When examining all the incentive in the background of target language learning, two distinct types of motivational constructs can be considered. Firstly, language learning motivation refers to the overarching drive to develop a foreign language. This form of encouragement is widely acknowledged in models such as the socio-educational framework for target language acquisition, the social paradigm model, and the Self-Determination theory. It represents a general form of motivation that applies to any second language learning context. Secondly, classroom learning motivation specifically pertains to the drive experienced in a classroom setting or within a particular situational context. Consequently, understanding and addressing both types of motivation is crucial to fostering a positive and productive mastering of language experience. Several factors that influence motivation in students may be: the teacher in charge, classroom environment, given content, the supplied material, as well as personal qualities of students themselves. Gardner (2007) studied, these

elements have a deep impact on learners' motivation within the classroom contexts. It is essential to promote a positive and productive learning process by addressing both types of motivation. Highlighting their ability to effectively manage professional responsibilities alongside their educational endeavors, a significant proportion of the respondents indicated that they are currently employed. This dual role emphasizes the critical need for flexible learning that serves the schedule of working adults. Additionally, these findings integrate with existing research looking for adaptable educational programs that address the challenges faced by individuals who try to balance between work and study responsibilities (Smith, W. J., 2023).

Such programs can play a pivotal role in supporting adult learners in achieving their academic and professional goals by accommodating their unique needs. It is indicated in the research that the integration of interactive activities, such as group discussions, role-playing exercises, and real-life scenarios, can considerably enhance the language learning process. All these methodologies contribute to the creation of an effective environment that not only makes the learning experience more entertaining but also improves the impact of language acquisition for adult learners.

The majority of participants agreed that learning English is crucial for their future, especially about achieving their career aspirations. As some participants rated it as "extremely important," while others classified it as "very important although there was general agreement on its importance. How learners prioritize their educational goals differs significantly. Nevertheless, the results demonstrate that fluency in English is extensively regarded as a key tool to develop future professional opportunities.

English has been established as the global language of communication (Crystal, D. 2003). An indispensable skill for individuals aiming to excel and grow in today's interconnected and globalized world it is required to have the ability to communicate effectively and comprehend complex ideas. A mandatory role is played by English in career development, including job opportunities, workplace communication, professional networking, and personal branding. What is more, the findings highlight strategies and resources aimed at improving English language proficiency, thereby fostering learners' professional advancement (Kawsar, M. D., 2023).

These results state the need for designing flexible and experimental learning environments that



follows the professional and personal goals of adult students. To ensure that their educational experiences remain meaningful and practical for their future aspirations, educators can develop programs that promote motivation.

There was one limitation in this study, and it was related to the small sample size; all the individuals selected were selected from a single private institute in Cuenca. The inclusion of a more diverse pool of participants from various institutions and regions could offer a more comprehensive perspective. Despite these findings provide valuable insights it can be analyzed from a learner's point of view. This study was focused on students over 30, which, while consistent with the research objectives, reduces the applicability for young learners' results. The study shows fundamental factors that drive adult learners and presents meaningful insights into more personalized educational programs.

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**Appendix A****Participant's survey**

The following prompts were used to gather information from participants for this study.

1. Age:

☐ 30-35    ☐ 35-40    ☐ 40-45    ☐ 45-50    ☐ 50-55

2. Gender:

☐ Female    ☐ Male    ☐ Prefer not to say

3. Educational level:

☐ High-school    ☐ Associate degree    ☐ Bachelor's degree    ☐ Doctorate    ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Professional context:

☐ Employed    ☐ Self-employed    ☐ Retired    ☐ Unemployed

5. Type of motivation for studying English:

☐ Career advancement    ☐ Personal satisfaction    ☐ Enjoyment    ☐ Social interaction  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. What are your main reasons for studying English?

☐ Professional advancement    ☐ Personal growth    ☐ Social interaction    ☐ Cognitive benefits  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

7. How important is English in your future or current career?

☐ Not important    ☐ Slightly important    ☐ Moderately important    ☐ Very important    ☐ Extremely important  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

8. What type of learning environment do you prefer?

☐ In-person classes    ☐ Online classes    ☐ Hybrid classes    ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

9. Which activities do you find most helpful when learning English?

☐ Reading    ☐ Writing    ☐ Speaking    ☐ Listening    ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

10. What challenges have you faced while learning English?

☐ Time constraints    ☐ Technological barriers    ☐ Previous educational experiences    ☐ Lack of resources  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

11. What improvements would you suggested for your English learning program:

☐ Better teaching methods    ☐ More resources    ☐ Flexible scheduling    ☐ Increased interactions opportunities  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

12. How motivated do you feel to continue learning English?

☐ Not motivated    ☐ Slightly motivated    ☐ Moderately motivated    ☐ Highly motivated  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

13. What strategies do you think would help increase your motivation and engagement in learning English?

☐ Personalization of course content    ☐ More interactive activities    ☐ Regular feedback    ☐ Support from peers  
☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_