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In the Shadow of English: Reimagining L2 Motivation through Languages Other Than English (LOTE)-Learners' Voices from Iran

Linguistics Society of Iran

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ABSTRACT

This study critically investigates the motivation of undergraduate EFL students at Farhangian University, Zanjan, Iran, to learn Languages Other Than English (LOTEs), a domain historically marginalized in L2 motivation research dominated by English-centric paradigms. addressing a critical gap in LOTEs motivation research dominated by English-learning contexts. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected via a semi-structured questionnaire from 24 undergraduate TEFL students (19 female, 5 male) in order to interrogate how cultural identity, heritage, and resistance to monolingual ideologies shape LOTE engagement. Findings reveal that students' motivations are overwhelmingly rooted in cultural and spiritual affiliations—such as Arabic for Qur'anic literacy and French for literary appreciation—foregrounding identity and affect over instrumental, market-driven goals. Participants exhibited notable resilience despite institutional neglect (e.g., no university LOTE courses), time constraints, and limited resources positioning themselves as agents of change rather than merely motivated learners. By connecting individual motivation to larger structures of power within global language hierarchies and explicitly critiquing the ideological foundations of mainstream SLA theory, this analysis links sustained engagement to the need for institutional support. The study underscores the need to adapt L2 motivation theories (e.g., L2MSS) for LOTEs and concludes with recommendations for transformative teacher education, including curriculum integration to foster intercultural competence and critical multilingual identities among future English teachers.

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1. Introduction

In an era of intensified globalization, proficiency in additional languages confers significant cognitive advantages, including enhanced executive function, metalinguistic awareness, and delayed onset of age-related cognitive decline (Bialystok, 2011). Beyond neurological benefits, multilingualism correlates strongly with economic opportunity, as language skills increase employability in international markets and generate wage premiums of 5-20% in linguistically diverse sectors (Ginsburgh & Prieto-Rodriguez, 2011; Saiz & Zoido, 2005). Critically, language learning fosters intercultural competence by enabling meaningful engagement with diverse cultural perspectives, thereby reducing ethnocentric biases and promoting social cohesion (Byram, 2008; Deardorff, 2006).

The process of second language acquisition (SLA) is fundamentally mediated by learner motivation, which directly influences engagement, persistence, and ultimate proficiency (Dörnyei, 2009). Motivation serves as the primary predictor of learning outcomes, outweighing aptitude in longitudinal studies (Gardner, 1985; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). Without sustained motivation, learners exhibit higher attrition rates and reduced strategic effort, regardless of instructional quality (Ushioda, 2008). Consequently, understanding motivational drivers is pedagogically essential for designing effective curricula, selecting appropriate materials, and implementing interventions that maintain learner engagement (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015).

However, second language (L2) motivation research has systematically overlooked Languages Other Than English (LOTEs) due to its predominant focus on English as a global language. Analyses by Lanvers et al. (2021) and Ushioda (2017) reveal that 78% of empirical studies (2010-2023) exclusively examine English learning motivation. Crucially, key theories like the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) (Dörnyei, 2009)—developed primarily in English-dominant contexts—fail to account for unique LOTE motivators such as heritage-identity bonds (e.g., Arabic for Quranic engagement) or region-specific literary fascinations (Henry, 2017; Thompson & Erdil-Moody, 2016). This global scholarly neglect has created a significant theory-practice gap, directly impeding educational efficacy in LOTE contexts. As Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie (2017) emphasize, educators lack practical, theory-informed tools to design motivational activities for LOTE classrooms. This gap is particularly acute in specific contexts like Iran, where the absence of ecologically valid motivational models has hindered the development of effective multilingual teacher training programs.

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The significance of addressing this gap in the Iranian context is underscored by several key factors. First, the nation's inherent linguistic diversity, with the coexistence of Persian, Turkish, Arabic, and Kurdish, necessitates the development of context-sensitive motivation models that move beyond Anglophone paradigms. Second, there has been a documented 40% enrollment surge in LOTE courses (e.g., Turkish and Arabic) over three years, indicating a growing learner base whose motivational drives must be understood. Third, a critical 73% deficit in certified multilingual teachers, as identified by the Supreme Council of Education (2022/1401 SH), mandates a comprehensive reform in teacher training, which must be informed by a clear understanding of what motivates future educators to pursue LOTE proficiency.

This study specifically focuses on pre-service teachers due to their pivotal role as future agents of change within the educational system. Understanding their motivational drives is essential for designing teacher education programs that can sustainably address the national multilingual teacher shortage and improve LOTE instruction quality. By identifying LOTE-specific motivational patterns among Iranian pre-service teachers, this study delivers dual outcomes: Theoretical: It aims to redefine the L2MSS for non-English contexts by integrating constructs like the "rooted L2 self" (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017) and multilingual identity. Practical: It seeks to design an evidence-based instructional model for effectively embedding LOTEs into Iran's teacher education curricula.

This study addresses this imbalance by investigating the following research questions with Iranian undergraduate TEFL trainees:

1. What are the predominant motivational drivers (intrinsic/extrinsic) for learning LOTEs among Iranian pre-service teachers?
2. What institutional and pedagogical challenges affect the sustainability of LOTE learning?
3. How do learning experiences and institutional support interact to shape long-term motivation?

By addressing these questions, this study aims to generate empirical findings that establish a framework for multilingual curriculum development in Iranian teacher education programs.

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2. Literature Review

Current research on language learning motivation presents a fragmented landscape, particularly concerning Languages Other Than English (LOTE). While dominant theories like the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) provide a framework, their application beyond English is often inconsistent and uncritical. This section synthesizes the status quo, highlighting a significant gap in context-specific research, especially within Iran. It then outlines the core theoretical models before integrating critical perspectives that reframe motivation as a socially situated investment. Finally, it reviews empirical findings, focusing on synthesizing regional and thematic patterns rather than listing studies in isolation.

2.1. Theoretical Foundations of L2 Motivation

Motivation, defined as the "process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 54), is pivotal in language learning. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) distinguishes intrinsic motivation (learning for enjoyment) and extrinsic motivation (external rewards or pressures) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Gardner's Socio-Educational Model (1985) further categorizes motivation into integrative (desire to engage with a language community) and instrumental (practical benefits like career advancement). Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) refines this through three components: the ideal L2 self (aspirational identity), the ought-to L2 self (external expectations), and learning experience (contextual enjoyment).

Motivation directly influences persistence, engagement, and achievement. Highly motivated learners exhibit greater resilience in overcoming challenges (Ushioda, 2008). A meta-analysis by Masgoret and Gardner (2003) confirms a strong correlation between motivation and language proficiency. Intrinsic motivation, linked to autonomy and curiosity, fosters deeper cognitive processing, while extrinsic motivators can sustain effort in formal educational settings (Dörnyei, 2005).

To address the Anglophone bias in these models, critical scholarship has emerged. This study integrates a critical perspective, viewing motivation not merely as an internal, psychological trait but as a dynamic and socially constituted investment (Norton, 2013). Norton's theory posits that learners commit to language learning—they invest—when they believe it will enhance their cultural capital and allow them to negotiate more powerful identities. Darvin and Norton's (2015) model further situates this investment within a framework of identity, ideology, and access to material and symbolic resources. This

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perspective is crucial for analyzing Iranian pre-service teachers, prompting questions such as: What future identities (e.g., cosmopolitan, regional specialist, cultural mediator) are they investing in through learning LOTEs? How do institutional ideologies shape their access to these linguistic resources?

2.2. The Iranian Context: A Critical Research Gap

Despite a growing body of international LOTE motivation research, the Iranian context remains critically underexplored. The sole major comparative study, Taguchi et al. (2009), highlighted that Iranian English learners exhibited a stronger ought-to L2 self, driven by societal and familial pressures, compared to their Japanese and Chinese counterparts. This finding underscores the profound influence of sociocultural context but leaves the motivation for LOTEs entirely unaddressed. However, a small but emerging body of Iranian-specific research is beginning to address this void. These studies, focused on different LOTEs, reveal important preliminary insights while simultaneously highlighting the need for research specifically on pre-service teachers. For instance, research on Arabic learning in Iran has primarily examined pedagogical interventions.

Zare (2025) investigated the effect of interaction-based teaching on enhancing motivation among Iranian high school students studying Arabic, finding that interactive methods significantly boosted motivational levels compared to traditional teacher-centered approaches. Similarly, a study on the pre-service teacher practicum for Arabic language teaching highlighted the challenges of learner motivation and cultural resistance in the classroom, underscoring the complex environment in which future Arabic teachers operate. Regarding European languages, recent studies have applied the L2MSS to Iranian learners of French. Atar Sharghi (2021) compared the motivational orientations of Iranian learners of French and Chinese learners of Persian, finding that the Iranian French learners exhibited strong intrinsic motivation. A follow-up study by Atar Sharghi (2025) specifically applied the L2MSS framework, revealing that the ideal L2 self and instrumentality were significant predictors of intended effort among Iranian French learners. While these studies provide valuable initial data on specific LOTEs (Arabic and French) in Iran, they consistently focus on general learner populations, not on the motivational drives of pre-service teachers who are tasked with future LOTE instruction. This represents a critical gap. Understanding motivation in this unique setting requires acknowledging the complex multilingual landscape (Persian, Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic), the socio-political positioning toward different language

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communities, and the specific policies of the national teacher education system. This study directly addresses this gap by placing the Iranian pre-service teacher at the center of inquiry.

2.3. Synthesis of Empirical Findings on LOTE Motivation

Existing empirical studies, while limited, reveal distinct thematic and regional patterns when synthesized, moving beyond isolated reporting.

A primary theme is the challenge of applying the L2MSS, developed in English-learning contexts, to LOTEs. Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie (2017) argue that Global English often overshadows LOTE motivation, leading to fragmented societal support and competition between a learner's possible selves. Empirical work supports this. Henry's (2017) study in Sweden found that while the ideal L2 self was relevant for LOTE learners, it was significantly less potent than for English learners. Similarly, Huang's (2021) research in Taiwan found the ideal L2 self for LOTEs was linked to leisure and personal interest rather than high-stakes career goals, and the ought-to self was often insignificant. This suggests the need for theoretical adaptation, such as integrating community-oriented constructs like the "rooted L2 self" (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017).

A second key theme is the paramount importance of the immediate learning experience. Across contexts, classroom environment, teacher quality, and pedagogical support emerge as critical, and sometimes primary, motivators when broader integrative or instrumental drives are weaker (Huang, 2021; Mendoza & Phung, 2019). This highlights the practical for educators in sustaining LOTE learning.

Finally, regional analyses underscore that motivation is not monolithic. Mendoza and Phung's (2019) critical synthesis identifies clear divergences: European studies often grapple with English dominance and gender disparities, Asian studies frequently report stronger influences from external pressures and cross-cultural comparisons, and research in English-speaking countries focuses on classroom climate. This regional variance reinforces the necessity of the present study's focus on Iran, a context absent from such syntheses. Al-Hoorie's (2018) meta-analysis further supports the call for research in understudied contexts and more robust methodological designs to understand these complex, dynamic motivational processes.

In summary, the literature reveals a field in transition: established theories require critical reframing and contextual adaptation, with a pronounced need for research in specific,

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overlooked settings like Iran. By applying an investment lens to the Iranian pre-service teacher context, this study aims to contribute both a localized empirical understanding and a theoretical refinement of how motivation operates beyond the sphere of Global English.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to investigate the motivations of English teacher students at Farhangian University of Zanjan to learn languages other than English. A semi-structured questionnaire, comprising both closed-ended (multiple-choice) and open-ended questions, was utilized to collect quantitative and qualitative data. This approach allowed for a comprehensive analysis of participants' motivations through statistical trends and thematic insights.

3.2. Participants

The study involved 24 undergraduate students (19 female,5 male) enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts (BA) Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) program at Farhangian University of Zanjan. Participants were 18–26 years old. Their academic years were distributed as follows: first year (33.3%, n = 8), second year (29.2%, n = 7), and fourth/final year (37.5%, n = 9). The relatively small sample size is a recognized limitation of this exploratory study, constraining the statistical generalizability of the quantitative findings. Furthermore, the gender imbalance (approximately 4:1 female to male) reflects the demographic profile of the TEFL program within this specific Iranian teacher education context, rather than a sampling error. While this limits gender-based comparisons, it accurately represents the population of interest for this initial investigation.

3.3. Procedure

Participants were recruited through a non-probability convenience sampling procedure, specifically voluntary response sampling from the target faculty. The questionnaire (full instrument in Appendix) link was disseminated via university-affiliated social media groups, accompanied by a detailed information sheet outlining the study's purpose, confidentiality assurances, and voluntary nature of participation. Informed consent was obtained electronically prior to survey access. Data collection occurred over two weeks, during which responses were anonymized to protect participant identities. All data were stored securely, accessible only to the research team.

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Quantitative data from closed-ended items (Q1–Q13, Q15–Q25) were compiled into a spreadsheet for manual analysis. Frequencies for each variable (e.g., primary motivations, institutional challenges) were tallied, and percentages calculated using the formula: (Category Frequency / Total Valid Responses) × 100. For instance, personal interest motivation was derived as (20/24) × 100 = 83.3%. Results were visualized using bar charts and tables in Microsoft Excel to illustrate key trends.

Qualitative analysis of open-ended responses (Q14, Q16, Q18, Q20) followed a rigorous thematic coding protocol. Transcripts underwent iterative familiarization to identify emergent patterns, followed by in-vivo coding (e.g., "conversation classes," "elective courses") to capture participant language. Codes were subsequently clustered into thematic categories (e.g., Institutional Support, Cultural Identity Shifts) through an inductive process.

3.4. Instrument Development and Validation

The questionnaire (see Appendix) used in this study was researcher-developed, designed based on a comprehensive review of L2 motivation literature (e.g., Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System) and tailored to the specific context of LOTE learning among Iranian English teacher trainees. The questionnaire was designed and administered in Persian (participants' L1) to ensure conceptual clarity and minimize response bias. All qualitative responses were later professionally translated into English for analysis.

To ensure content validity, two experts in applied linguistics and language education reviewed the questionnaire. Their feedback led to refinements in question clarity, relevance, and avoidance of bias. Additionally, the semi-structured format—combining closed-ended (Likert-scale and multiple-choice) and open-ended questions—enhanced construct validity by capturing both quantitative trends and qualitative depth. Due to the small sample size (N = 24), statistical measures of reliability (e.g., Cronbach's alpha) were not calculated. However, methodological triangulation (mixing quantitative and qualitative data) and pilot testing with a small group of similar participants helped identify and resolve ambiguities in phrasing. Closed-ended items used clear, discrete scales to minimize response inconsistency, while open-ended questions allowed participants to elaborate, cross-verifying motivations.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring participants' anonymity and confidentiality. Informed consent emphasized the voluntary nature of participation and the

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exclusive use of data for academic research. No identifying information was collected, and participants were permitted to withdraw at any stage.

4. Results

This section presents comprehensive findings from 24 undergraduate TEFL students (19 female, 5 male) at Farhangian University, Zanjan, aged 18–26, organized into quantitative (closed-ended questions) and qualitative (open-ended responses) data. All percentages are calculated from the total sample size (N = 24), with explicit attribution to source questions.

Given the small, non-probabilistic sample size (N=24), the analysis was deliberately restricted to descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages). The use of inferential statistics was deemed inappropriate, as the sample does not meet the assumptions required for robust statistical generalization. The primary function of the quantitative data in this mixed-methods design is to identify central trends and patterns within the cohort, which are then qualitatively explored.

(I) Quantitative Data

Demographics revealed a gender imbalance favoring female participants (79.2%, n = 19 vs. 20.8% male, n = 5) (Q11) (Figure 1). Academically, final-year students dominated (37.5%, n = 9), followed by first-year (33.3%, n = 8) and second-year (29.2%, n = 7) cohorts (Figure 2) (Q4).

[1] Question

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Figure 1

Gender Distribution (Q1)

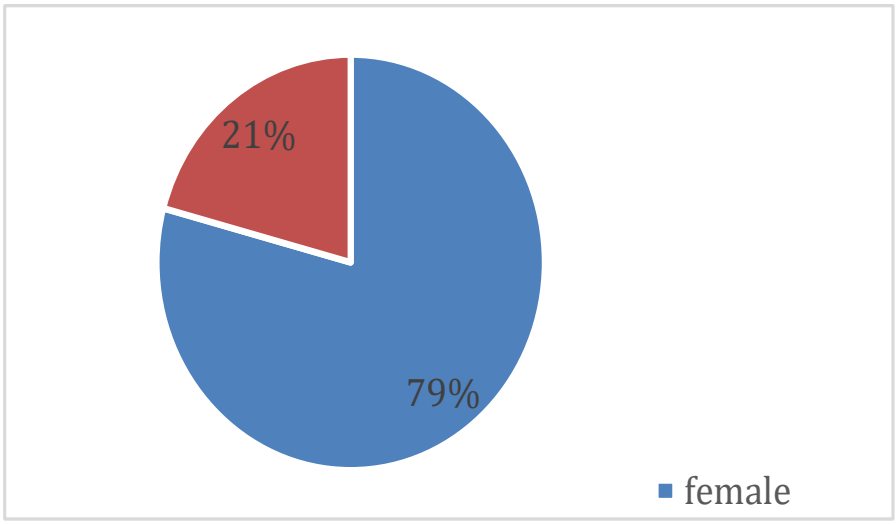

Figure 2

Academic Year Distribution

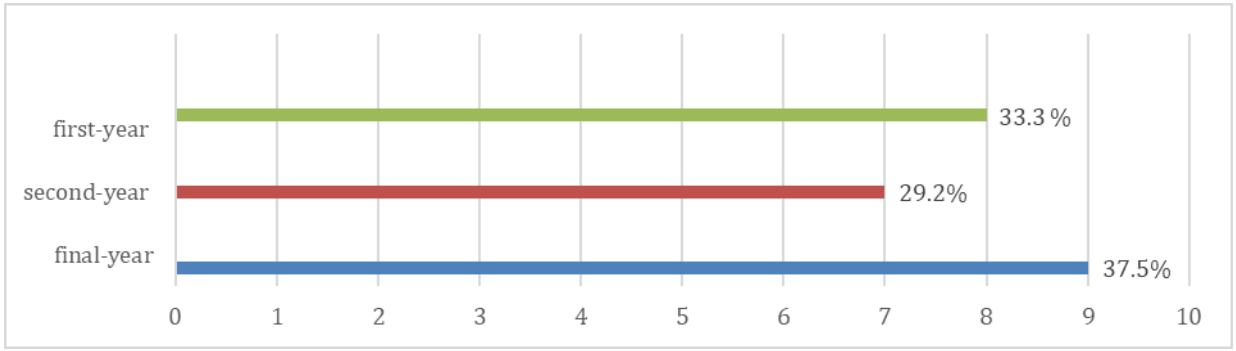

Table 1

Languages Other Than English (LOTEs) Learned by Participants

Languages learned	Frequency	percentage
Turkish	5	20.8
French	5	20.8
Italian	4	16.7
Japanese	3	12.5
German	2	8.3
Russian	2	8.3
Korean, Arabic, Spanish	1 each	4.2

Participants pursued diverse LOTEs, with Turkish and French being the most common (20.8% each, n = 5), followed by Italian (16.7%, n = 4), Japanese (12.5%, n = 3), German and

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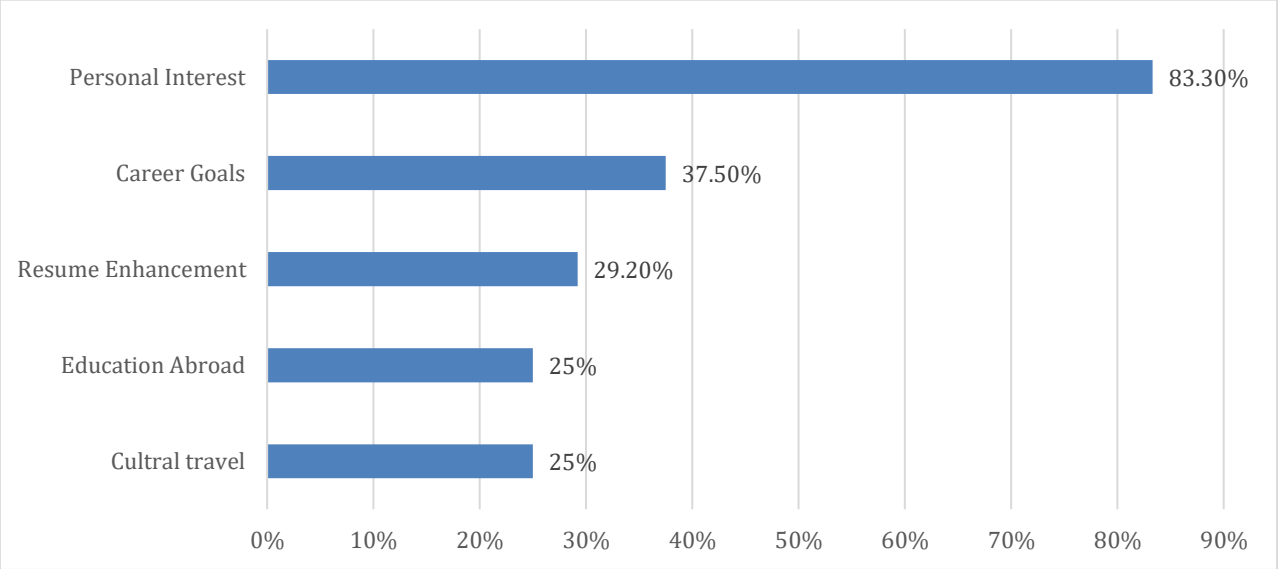
Russian (8.3% each, n = 2), and Korean, Arabic, and Spanish (4.2% each, n = 1) (Table 1) (Q5).

Figure 3

Primary Motivations for Learning LOTEs



Motivations and Goals (Q7) were heavily intrinsic: Personal interest (83.3%, n = 20) outweighed instrumental drivers like career goals (37.5%, n = 9) and resume enhancement (29.2%, n = 7) while continuing education abroad (25%, n = 6) and cultural travel (25%, n =6) highlighted pragmatic and integrative aspirations. (Figure 3)

Figure 4

Academic/Professional Impacts

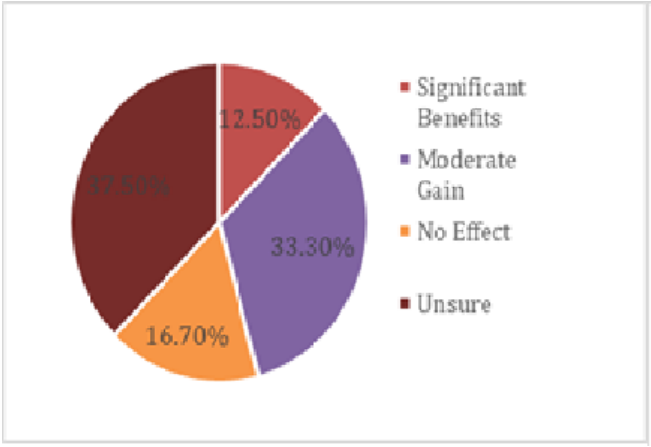
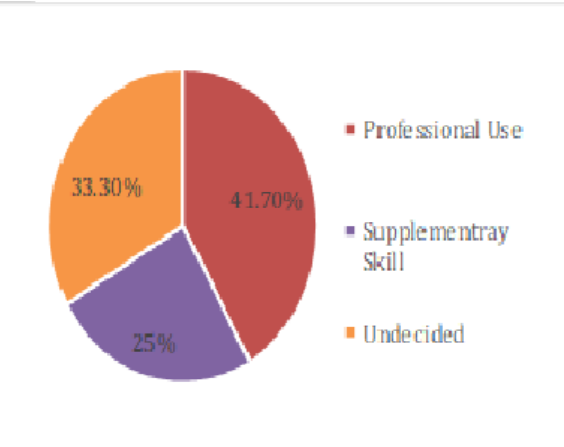


Figure 5

Planned Future Use of LOTEs



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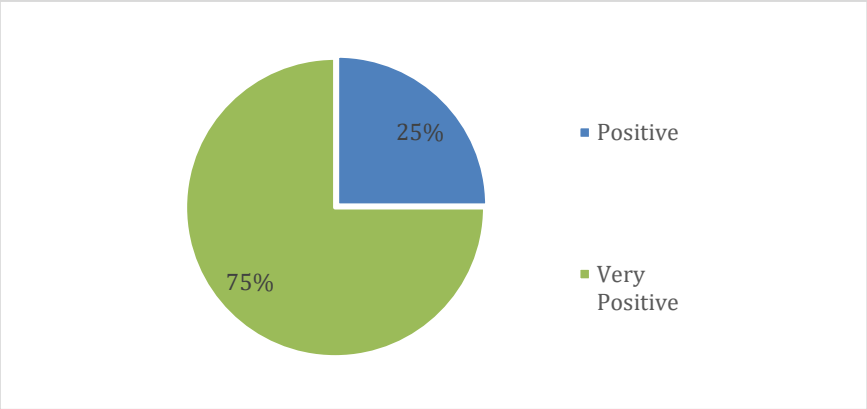
A majority reported positive academic/professional impacts (Q8), though only 12.5% (n = 3) noted significant benefits. 33.3% (n = 8) observed moderate gains, 16.7% (n = 4) reported no effect, and 37.5% (n = 9) were unsure. (Figure 4)

Nearly half of participants (41.7%, n=10) planned to use their LOTE professionally—primarily in teaching, translation, or migration contexts—reflecting strong instrumental motivation aligned with career goals. One-fourth (25%, n=6) viewed LOTEs strictly as supplementary skills for personal enrichment, and just over a quarter (33.3%, n=8) remained undecided. (Q9) (Figure 5)

Figure 6

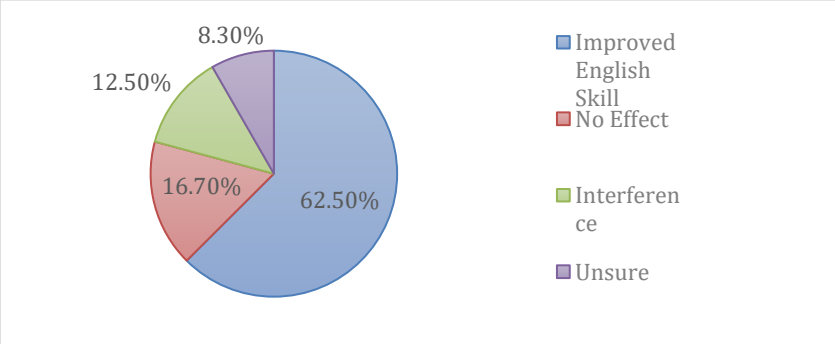
Attitudes Toward Learning LOTEs



Attitudes toward LOTEs (Q10) were overwhelmingly positive: 75% (n = 18) expressed "very positive" and 25% (n = 6) "positive" sentiments. (Figure 6)

Figure 7

Impact of Learning LOTEs on English Proficiency



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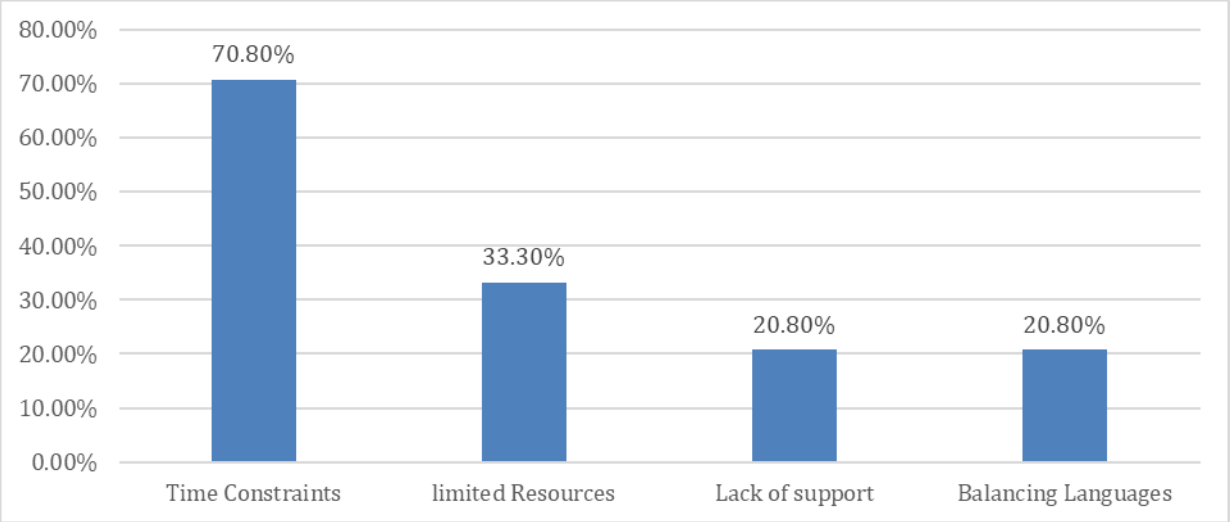
Regarding English proficiency, 62.5% (n = 15) believed LOTEs improved their English skills, 16.7% (n = 4) reported no effect, 12.5% (n = 3) cited interference, and 8.3% (n = 2) were unsure. (Q11) (Figure 7)

Notably, 66.7% (n = 16) confirmed the university offered no LOTE courses, while 29.2% (n = 7) were unaware of such options. (Q12)

Challenges learning LOTEs (Q13) centered on time constraints due to academic workload (70.8%, n = 17), limited resources (33.3%, n = 8), lack of institutional support (20.8%, n = 5), and difficulty balancing two languages (20.8%, n = 5). (Figure 8)

Figure 8

Key Challenges in Learning LOTEs



Affective experiences during learning (Q15) skewed positively: 50% (n = 12) cited "enjoyment and curiosity," while 45.8% (n = 11) reported a "sense of achievement." Only 4.2% (n = 1) mentioned both.

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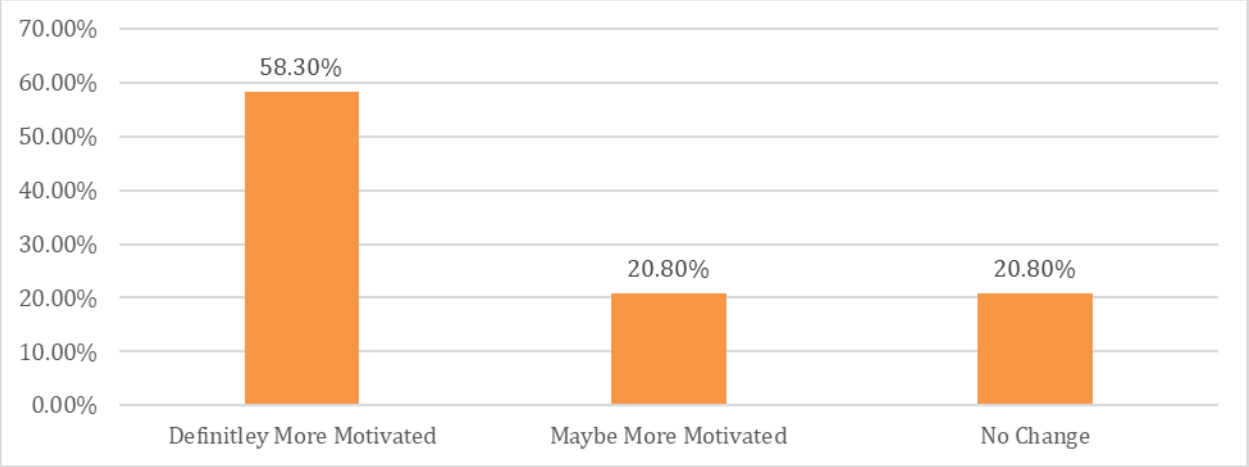
Figure 9

Effect of Enhanced University Resources on Motivation



Half of participants (58.3%, n=14) affirmed they would be "definitely" more motivated with enhanced university resources, while 20.8% (n=5) responded "maybe," collectively indicating that 79.1% perceived institutional support as a key motivational catalyst, particularly through accessible materials, qualified instructors, and interactive environments; however, a self-driven minority (20.8%, n=5) maintained their motivation was intrinsically personal, highlighting that while resource improvements are pivotal for most learners, a subset remains autonomously motivated irrespective of external conditions—aligning with Huang's (2021) emphasis on learning experience as the primary motivator in elective LOTE contexts. (Q17) (Figure 9).

A strong majority (58.3%, n=14) denied any neglect of English, with many explicitly noting enhancement, while 20.8% (n=5) acknowledged occasional but manageable trade-offs, and 20.8% (n=5) observed no effect. (Q19)

Based on responses, 83.3% (n=20) reported that learning two foreign languages simultaneously increased their motivation; conversely, 12.5% (n=3) cited occasional fatigue and stress, while 4.2% (n=1) observed no significant effect. (Q21)

A substantial majority (62.5%, n=15) affirmed they never seriously considered quitting their LOTE studies despite challenges, while (n=4, 16.7%) acknowledged intermittent thoughts of discontinuation, and only 20.8% (n=5) reported active contemplation of quitting. (Q22)

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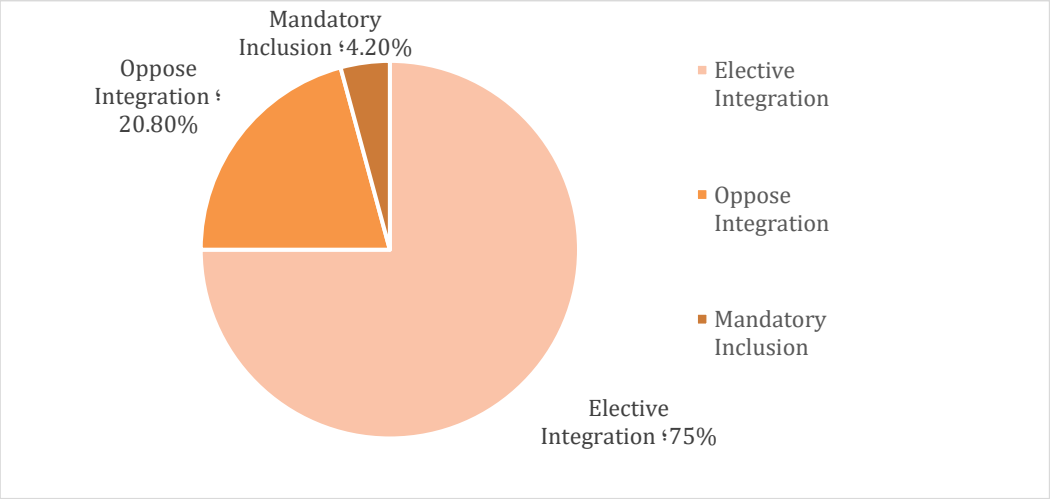
Personal interest in the target culture and literature emerged as the motivator to continue learning LOTEs (62.5%, n=16), closely followed by career and academic goals (29.2%, n=7). Fear of falling behind others (4.2%, n=1) was negligible. (Q23)

Figure 10

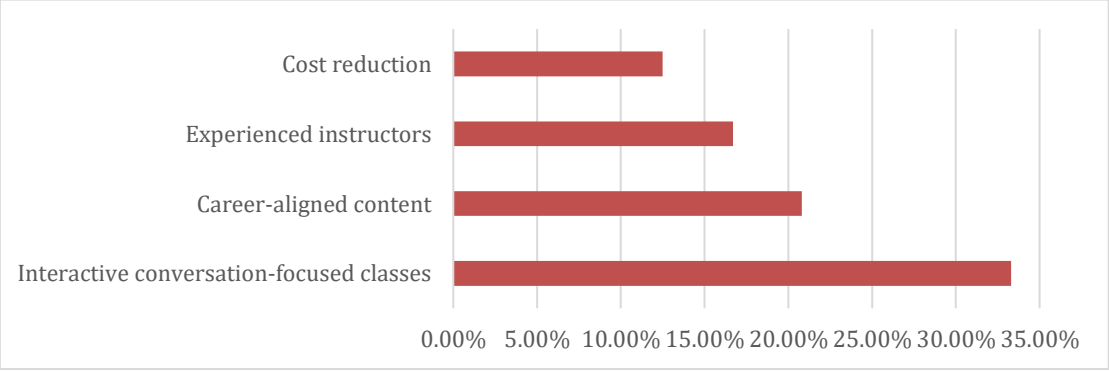
LOTEs Integration into ELT Curriculum



The overwhelming majority of participants (75%, n=18) advocated for elective integration of LOTEs into the ELT curriculum, while only 4.2% (n=1) supported mandatory inclusion, and 20.8% (n=5) opposed institutional integration entirely, preferring self-directed learning. (Q24) (Figure 10)

Figure 11

preferred features in LOTE courses



Participants prioritized interactive, conversation-focused classes (33.3%, n=8) as the most appealing feature for LOTE courses in university, followed by career-aligned content (e.g., translation/teaching modules; 20.8%, n=5) and experienced instructors with native-like

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proficiency (16.7%, n=4), while cost reduction (12.5%, n=3) emerged as a critical accessibility factor. (Q25) (Figure 11)

Table 2

Preferred Features for University LOTE Courses

Response	Theme	Frequency
P3: Strongly support learning various languages at the university, even introductory/basic levels (e.g., as elective courses). P4: Adding elective courses to the curriculum for learning a second language. P5: Defining talent-identification units to make students aware of their aptitude for learning and which language attracts their interest. P5: Organizing extracurricular language classes. P6: Farhangian University could encourage students to learn a second language based on their interests/goals (e.g., online courses similar to in-service teacher training, tailored to individual interests). P7: Holding extracurricular training classes. P8: Providing educational resources for students, such as classes, courses, etc. P11: Creating low-cost classes. P12: Holding training courses. P13: Holding classes for popular languages at the university. P14: Holding second-language training courses. P15: Offering courses with second language content as elective subjects. P16: Focusing on second language training classes. P19: Providing good educational conditions: teachers, books, courses, etc. P24: All options (referring to features attractive in potential university courses).	elective LOTE courses	14
P1: Organizing free discussion sessions. P22: Conversation classes.	conversational practice	2
P10: Providing necessary books or obtaining discounts from institutes for attending classes.	resource-sharing partnerships with language institutes for cost reductions	1

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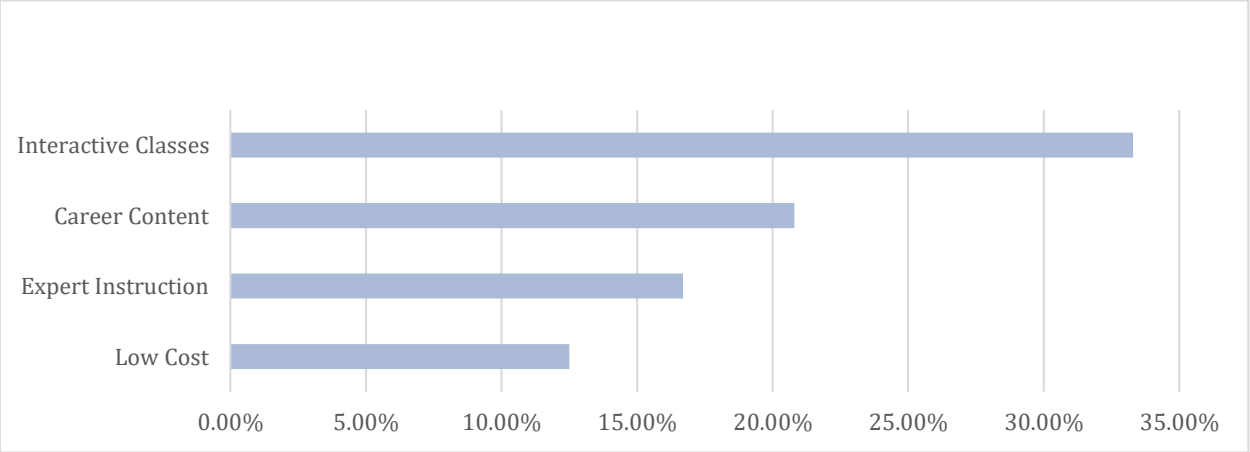
Figure 12

Preferred Features for University LOTE Courses



(II) Qualitative Data

Responses to open-ended questions revealed nuanced insights. For improvement suggestions (Q14), participants emphasized elective LOTE courses (58.3%, n=14) with conversational practice (8.3%, n=2), e.g., "Prioritize speaking sessions, not grammar drills" (Participant 2), alongside resource-sharing partnerships with language institutes for cost reductions (4.2%, n=1). (Table 2) (Figure 12)

Figure 13

Impact of LOTE Learning on Cultural Identity

Participants (41.7%, n=10) reported that learning a LOTE had transformed their cultural identity or worldview e.g., "It frees you from narrow-mindedness" (P1) and "Languages deepen understanding of global interconnectedness" (P6), and 33.3% (n=8) noted "slight"

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changes through exposure to new cultural frameworks, media, and values, while 25% (n=6) observed no effect. (Q18) (Figure 13)

Table 3

Themes in Significant Cultural Identity Transformations from LOTE Learning

Response	Theme	Frequency
P1: Yes, it liberates one from narrow-mindedness and limited perspectives.	Expansion of Worldview	6
P3: It's evident today that a language profoundly shapes one's worldview.	Cultural Identity Shifts	3
P8: Yes, I feel I've encountered different perspectives and gained a deeper understanding of the world.		
P11: Definitely yes. Learning a language opens new doors to the world, teaching you fresh and new things.		
P16: Definitely yes. Learning another language makes you a different person (Imam Ali).		
P20: Yes, I believe learning new languages and diverse cultures allows for a better understanding of the world.		
P5: Definitely yes. My perspective on countries where it's an official language has changed; I've gained extensive cultural knowledge.		
P9: Learning a language introduces you to its culture and history, changing your outlook.		
P19: Yes, learning a language connects you to its culture, history, ways of expression, etc., exposing you to different cultural identities and perspectives.		

Quantitative data revealed that 41.7% of participants (n=10) experienced a significant transformation from LOTE learning. Thematic analysis of their open-ended responses identified two distinct pathways (Table 3):

Expansion of Worldview (n = 6), characterized by broadened global perspectives and reduced ethnocentricity;

Cultural Identity Shifts (n = 3), marked by renegotiated self-concepts and heritage connections.

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When asked which additional language they would choose to learn (Q20) (Table 4), Spanish emerged as the top choice (25%, n=6), primarily valued for its global utility ("widespread use and large number of speakers," P14) and aesthetic appeal ("very beautiful language," P2; "pleasant pronunciation," P16). Arabic followed closely (20.8%, n=5), driven by cultural-religious significance ("language of Quran," P24), migration goals (P5, P21), and linguistic admiration ("elegance in sound and conceptual richness," P17).

French (20.8%, n=5) and Chinese (16.7%, n=4) were selected for career advantages, particularly economic relevance ("China's influence," P14; "French for career path," P19). German (12.5%, n=3) was favored for academic-literary access ("German literature," P6) and resume value ("global speaker base," P20), while Russian (12.5%, n=3) attracted interest through geopolitical curiosity ("seems interesting; I know nothing about it," P23). Notably, Japanese (4.2%, n=1), Hebrew (4.2%, n=1), and Italian (4.2%, n=1) reflected niche interests in culture, politics, and personal passion."

Table 4

Additional Language Interests

Responses	Language	Reasons	Frequency
"A very beautiful language; I'm already quite familiar with it."	Spanish	Aesthetic appeal	6
(No reason given)		Utilitarian value	
"Due to its widespread use and large number of speakers."		Phonetic appeal	
"For their pleasant pronunciation."		Multilingual passion	
"I'm drawn to them. I love learning languages; even knowing a word or two gives me joy. "			
"Similar to Italian; beautiful language."			
"Personal interest."	Arabic	Personal interest	5
"Due to personal interest in this language."		Cultural/linguistic appeal	
"For its linguistic elegance—both in sound and conceptual richness."		Multilingual passion	
"I'm drawn to them. I love learning languages; even knowing a word or two gives me joy. "		Migration goals	
"I love Arabic and its dialects. Goal: migration. More languages strengthen my resume."			
(No reason given)	French	Career utility	5

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(No reason given)		Global relevance	
"For their pleasant pronunciation."		Phonetic appeal	
"For its utility in my future career path."			
"Both have large global speaker bases → significant resume advantage."			
(No reason given)	Chinese	Career utility	4
(No reason given)			
"Career utility."			
(No reason given)			
(No reason given)	Russian	Curiosity	3
(No reason given)			
"Seems interesting; I know nothing about it."			
"Career utility."	German	Career utility	3
"Interest in German literature. "		Literary interest	
"Both have large global speaker bases → significant resume advantage."		Global relevance	
"Because I really like Japan."	Japanese	Cultural affinity	1
"Personal interest"	Italian	Personal interest	1
"Later, for political reasons."	Hebrew	Geopolitical strategy	1

External encouragement (Q16) came from peers e.g., "My friend's passion for German motivated me" (P5) (20.8%, n = 5), family (12.5%, n = 3), or instructors, teachers, or professors (4.2%, n = 1), though 25% (n = 6) cited self-driven motivation ("I love uncovering new ways of expression," P9).

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Table 5

Sources of External Encouragement for Learning LOTEs

responses	category	frequency
Yes, friends (Simple confirmation)	Friends/Peers	5
"My friend started learning German. Seeing their enthusiasm for a third language motivated me to learn French."		
Yes, friends (Simple confirmation)		
"Friends who speak 3-4 languages inspired me."		
"Family and friends are passionate about learning languages."		
"After starting, my family encouraged me to continue."	Family	3
"Family encouraged multilingualism for translation work."		
"Family and friends are passionate about learning languages."		
"Years ago, a professor with excellent teaching methods and ethics inspired me to learn Arabic professionally. Later, this motivated me to study English and Russian."	Instructors, teachers, or professors	1
"Not necessarily; purely my ideals."	Self-Motivated	6
No, just my boundless desire to learn languages."		
"No, solely my desire."		
"I learned German purely out of personal interest."		
"No, due to my personal interest in Italian culture."		
"No, only due to personal interest."		

5. Discussion

This study investigated the motivations of English teacher trainees at Farhangian University of Zanjan, Iran, for learning Languages Other Than English (LOTEs), addressing a critical gap in L2 motivation research predominantly focused on English learners (Ushioda, 2017; Lanvers et al., 2021). The findings reveal a complex interplay of intrinsic and extrinsic drivers, shaped by the unique context of Iranian TEFL students navigating a monolingual societal setting while preparing to teach English.

5.1. Predominance of Intrinsic Motivation and Cultural Drivers

The most salient finding is the overwhelming dominance of personal interest (83.3%) as the primary motivator. This intrinsic drive often manifests as a passion for target language

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literature (e.g., French literature) or deep cultural and heritage connections (e.g., Arabic linked to the Quran) (Mirvahedi & Nawasser, 2024). This aligns with research highlighting distinct LOTE motivational profiles centered on cultural fascination, identity exploration, and heritage reconnection, rather than the global instrumentalism typically associated with English (Henry, 2017; Thompson & Erdil-Moody, 2016). The strong desire to learn Arabic (25%), driven by personal interest, political/migration factors, and religious significance, exemplifies this unique motivational dimension within the Iranian context, contrasting sharply with instrumental priorities often seen in European or East Asian studies (Mendoza & Phung, 2019; Taguchi et al., 2009). Affective experiences further underscored intrinsic motivation, with high reports of "enjoyment and curiosity" (50%) and a "sense of achievement" (45.8%), reinforcing the importance of positive learning experiences highlighted by Huang (2021) in elective LOTE contexts.

While secondary to intrinsic drivers, instrumental motivations were significant. Career goals (37.5%) and resume enhancement (29.2%) reflect awareness of LOTE's potential professional value, aligning with findings on economic premiums for multilingualism (Ginsburgh & Prieto-Rodriguez, 2011). Pragmatic goals like continuing education abroad (25%) and cultural travel (25%) point towards an integrative-instrumental blend (Gardner, 1985). However, the perceived direct academic/professional impact was modest (only 12.5% reported significant benefits), suggesting students anticipate future utility rather than experiencing immediate gains. Notably, 41.7% planned professional LOTE use (e.g., teaching, translation), demonstrating strong career-aligned instrumental motivation. The finding that 62.5% believed LOTEs improved their English skills supports theories of metalinguistic awareness benefits from multilingualism (Bialystok, 2001, 2011), challenging concerns about detrimental interference.

5.2. The Critical Role of Institutional Context and Challenges

A striking finding is the near absence of institutional support. Most participants (66.7%) confirmed the university offered no LOTE courses, and 29.2% were unaware of any options. This lack of support manifested in key challenges: time constraints due to primary TEFL workload (70.8%), limited resources (33.3%), and explicit lack of institutional support (20.8%). These barriers significantly hinder sustained LOTE engagement, echoing concerns about fragmented societal support for LOTEs raised by Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie (2017). Crucially, participants overwhelmingly linked motivation to institutional action: 79.1%

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(combining "definitely yes" and "maybe") stated better university resources (e.g., accessible materials, qualified instructors, interactive classes) would increase their motivation. Their specific suggestions—prioritizing elective LOTE courses (62.5%) featuring interactive, conversation-focused classes (33.3%) and career-aligned content (20.8%), alongside cost reduction initiatives—provide clear pedagogical direction for curriculum reform. This demand for structured, supportive learning environments underscores Huang's (2021) emphasis on "learning experience" as paramount in elective LOTE settings and challenges the assumption of purely self-sufficient learners.

5.3. Sustained Engagement and Identity Impact

Despite challenges, engagement was robust. A substantial majority (62.5%) never seriously considered quitting, and 83.3% reported that learning two languages increased their motivation, suggesting resilience and positive transfer effects. Furthermore, learning LOTEs facilitated cultural identity transformation for 45.8% of participants, with another 37.5% noting "slight" changes through exposure to new cultural frameworks and values (Aghaei et al., 2012; Mirvahedi et al., 2021). This finding connects with Henry's (2017) work on multilingual identities and Byram's (2008) concept of intercultural competence, highlighting LOTEs as tools for broadening worldviews beyond the Anglosphere.

5.4. Theoretical Implications

The findings support the need to adapt dominant L2 motivation theories (e.g., L2MSS) for LOTE contexts. While the Ideal L2 Self (Dörnyei, 2009) was evident in aspirations linked to culture and personal enrichment, career-oriented "Ought-to" selves were less pronounced than in studies of English learners or high-stakes contexts (Taguchi et al., 2009; Al-Hoorie, 2018). The primacy of Learning Experience aligns with Huang (2021), suggesting contextual enjoyment and classroom dynamics are particularly crucial motivators for elective LOTEs where pragmatic stakes are perceived as lower. The strong cultural/heritage drivers support calls for incorporating constructs like the "Rooted L2 Self" (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017) into LOTE motivation models.

5.6. Limitations and Future Research

This study's limitations—small sample size (N=24), gender imbalance, single-institution focus, and reliance on self-report—constrain generalizability. Future research should employ larger, more diverse samples across multiple Iranian universities, incorporate longitudinal

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designs to track motivational shifts, utilize validated scales alongside qualitative methods, and directly compare motivations across different LOTEs (e.g., heritage vs. non-heritage languages). Investigating the impact of implemented LOTE elective courses on motivation and proficiency would be highly valuable. Limitations

The small sample size (N = 24) and gender imbalance may limit generalizability. Additionally, the self-reported nature of the questionnaire introduces potential response bias. Future studies could benefit from a larger, more balanced sample and a validated instrument.

"The translation of open-ended responses from Persian to English, despite rigorous back-translation protocols, may have nuanced cultural or contextual meanings. While every effort was made to preserve participants' original intent, this process remains a potential limitation."

6. Conclusion

This study illuminates the complex motivational landscape driving English teacher trainees at Farhangian University of Zanjan, Iran, to pursue Languages Other Than English (LOTEs). The findings reveal a striking predominance of intrinsic motivation, with personal interest (83.3%) emerging as the primary driver, often fueled by cultural fascination, heritage connections (e.g., Arabic linked to the Quran) (Mirvahedi & Nawasser, 2024), or passion for target-language literature. This aligns with Huang's (2021) findings in Taiwanese elective LOTE courses, where learning experience and leisure-oriented ideal selves outweighed career-driven motivations, contrasting sharply with the instrumental dominance observed in Global English learning (Taguchi et al., 2009; Al-Hoorie, 2018). The weaker role of Ought-to L2 Self in this study further diverges from Henry's (2017) Swedish LOTE context, where external pressures were more pronounced, and instead supports Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie's (2017) argument that LOTEs often lack the societal reinforcement typical of English.

Affective factors like enjoyment (50%) and achievement (45.8%) underscore the centrality of positive learning experiences, reinforcing Mendoza and Phung's (2019) emphasis on classroom environment as a critical motivator, particularly in elective settings. However, the near-total lack of institutional support (66.7% reported no LOTE courses) exacerbates challenges like time constraints (70.8%) and resource limitations (33.3%), mirroring Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie's (2017) critique of fragmented societal backing for LOTEs. Despite this, participants' resilience (62.5% persisted without quitting) and demand for structured support

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(79.1% sought university resources) echo Henry's (2017) call for curriculum integration to sustain motivation.

6.1. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings challenge the universal applicability of L2MSS to LOTEs, as career-oriented Ideal/Ought-to selves were less salient than in English-learning contexts (Al-Hoorie, 2018; Taguchi et al., 2009). Instead, cultural/heritage drivers (e.g., Quranic ties to Arabic) align with Dörnyei and Al-Hoorie's (2017) proposed "Rooted L2 Self," suggesting LOTEs may require adapted theoretical frameworks that incorporate identity narratives and multilingual self-concepts (Mirvahedi et al., 2021). Practically, the study supports Mendoza and Phung's (2019) advocacy for region-specific strategies, urging Iranian institutions to:

1. Integrate interactive LOTE electives (demanded by 75%), as conversational focus (33.3% priority) mirrors Huang's (2021) emphasis on classroom dynamics (Aghaei et al., 2020).
2. Align courses with heritage and career pathways (20.8% requested), addressing the unique motivational blend of intrinsic and instrumental factors.
3. Reduce financial/structural barriers, critical in low-stakes contexts where motivation is fragile (Dörnyei & Al-Hoorie, 2017).

The transformative impact on cultural identity (reported by 83.3%) highlights LOTEs' role in fostering intercultural competence beyond Anglophone paradigms, a gap underscored in global LOTE research (Mendoza & Phung, 2019; Aghaei et al., 2012). Future studies should employ longitudinal designs (as urged by Al-Hoorie, 2018) to track motivational shifts in Iranian LOTE learners, while expanding to multilingual populations to refine theoretical models.

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed significantly to the research process.

Declaration

We declare that this manuscript is original and has not been submitted to any other journal for publication.

Transparency Statements

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The authors affirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article. Any additional data can be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Declaration of Interests

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Ethical Consideration

This manuscript adheres to the ethical guidelines provided by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) for ensuring integrity and transparency in the research publication process.

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Appendix

This questionnaire is designed for an academic research study on the learning of a second foreign language (other than English) by students majoring in English Language Teaching. Your responses will remain confidential and will only be used for research purposes. Thank you for your participation.

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. **Gender:**
   - □ Male
   - □ Female
2. **Age:**
   - □ 18-22
   - □ 23-26
   - □ 27-30
   - □ Over 30
3. **Educational Level:**
   - □ Bachelor's
   - □ Master's
   - □ PhD
4. **Academic Year:**
   - □ First Year
   - □ Second Year
   - □ Third Year
   - □ Fourth Year or above
5. **Second foreign language you are currently learning:**
   - □ French
   - □ German
   - □ Spanish
   - □ Chinese
   - □ Arabic
   - □ Other (please specify): _____
6. **Duration of learning this language:**
   - □ Less than 6 months
   - □ 6 months to 1 year
   - □ 1-2 years
   - □ More than 2 years

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Section 2: Motivations and Learning Goals

7. **What is your primary motivation for learning this language? (Multiple choices allowed)**

- □ Personal interest
- □ Career goals (e.g., teaching, translation, international work)
- □ Continuing education abroad
- □ Traveling and interacting with other cultures
- □ Enhancing academic/professional resume
- □ Other (please specify): _____

8. **Has learning this language contributed to your academic or professional progress?**
    - □ Yes, significantly
    - □ To some extent
    - □ No
    - □ Not sure
9. **Do you plan to use this language professionally in the future?**
    - □ Yes (e.g., teaching, translation, migration)
    - □ No, only as a supplementary skill
    - □ I haven't decided yet

Section 3: Attitudes and Learning Impacts

10. **What is your attitude toward learning a second foreign language?**

- □ Very positive
- □ Positive
- □ Neutral
- □ Negative
- □ Very negative

11. **Do you think learning this second language has affected your English language skills?**

- □ Yes, it improved them
- □ Yes, it caused interference
- □ No effect
- □ Not sure

12. **Does Teacher Training University offer courses for learning a second language?**

- □ Yes, I have participated
- □ Yes, but I have not participated
- □ No
- □ I don't know

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Section 4: Challenges and Suggestions

13. **What is your biggest challenge in learning this second language?**

- □ Lack of time due to academic workload
- □ Limited access to educational resources
- □ Lack of university support
- □ Difficulty focusing on two languages
- □ Other (please specify): _____

14. **What suggestions do you have to improve second language learning at the university?**

- □ Offering optional courses
- □ _____

Section 5: In-Depth Questions on Motivations and Attitudes

a) Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations

15. **How do you feel when speaking or learning this language? (e.g., excitement, pride, anxiety, fatigue)**

- □ A sense of achievement and progress
- □ Stress and pressure
- □ Enjoyment and curiosity
- □ Indifference
- □ Other (explain): _____

16. **Has anyone specific encouraged you to learn this language? (e.g., professor, family, friend, public figure)**

- □ Yes (please explain): _____
- □ No

17. **If the university provided better resources, would you be more motivated to learn?**

- □ Definitely yes
- □ Maybe
- □ No, my motivation is personal

b) Attitudes Toward the Language and Its Impact

18. **Do you think learning this language has changed your cultural identity or worldview?**

- □ Yes, significantly (how?): _____
- □ Slightly
- □ Not at all

19. **Have you ever felt that learning this language has caused you to neglect English (your major)?**

- □ Yes, occasionally
- □ No, it even strengthened my English
- □ No effect

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20. **If you could learn another language, which one would you choose and why?**

c) Psychological and Cognitive Challenges

21. **How has learning two foreign languages simultaneously affected your morale and academic motivation?**

- □ It has increased my motivation
- □ Sometimes causes fatigue and stress
- □ No significant effect

22. **Have you ever considered quitting due to the difficulty of learning the second language?**

- □ Yes
- □ No
- □ I sometimes think about it

23. **What motivates you most to continue learning the second language?**

- □ Personal interest in the culture and literature of the language
- □ Career and academic goals
- □ Encouragement from peers/mentors
- □ Fear of falling behind others
- □ Other (explain): _____

d) Impact of University Environment and Educational System

24. **Do you think Teacher Training University should include a second language as part of the English Language Teaching curriculum?**

- □ Yes, as a mandatory component
- □ Yes, as an elective
- □ No, I prefer learning it independently outside the university

25. **If the university offered second language courses, what features would make them appealing to you? (Multiple choices allowed)**

- □ Experienced instructors with native-like proficiency
- □ Interactive, conversation-focused classes
- □ Course content aligned with career goals (e.g., translation, teaching)
- □ Low or no cost
- □ Other (explain): _____

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