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I, Anita M Szabo, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Literacy and Second Language Studies.

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Students’ Task-related Perceptions and Task Engagement in the ESL Classroom through Qualitative Lenses

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Students’ Task-related Perceptions and Task Engagement in the ESL Classroom through Qualitative Lenses

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Dissertation

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Abstract

The study investigated students’ task-related perceptions, motivation, and engagement at a college-level ESL language classroom. Informed by cognitive motivation theories that connect perceptions and behavior, the study explored students’ task perceptions from a motivational perspective. The study used qualitative methodology to counterbalance the dominance of deductive, quantitative research in the field and to examine students’ task-related perceptions, motivation, and engagement in the context of an actual language classroom.

Data were collected from 10 student interviews, three focus group sessions, and 15 classroom observations during a period of three academic semesters. Data analysis was inductive, allowing themes and patterns to emerge from the data. In the final analysis, the emerging themes, patterns, and relationships were analyzed and contrasted with existing motivational frameworks.

Results indicate that students tend to think about language learning tasks in terms of distinguishable categories. These categories are intricately connected to each other, to motivation, and to motivated behaviors in the classroom. Although the emerging patterns from the study are tentative and need further empirical confirmation, they could contribute to the work on conceptualizing task-motivation in the language learning classroom. The findings also inform classroom practice, confirming and complementing existing motivational strategies in the pedagogical literature.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Motivation plays a central role in successful language learning; it provides the initial drive to learn a language and is fundamental in sustaining the lengthy process of learning a language (Dörnyei, 2005). Successful language learning requires persistence over an extended period of time. It is estimated that it takes two-three years of study for a language learner to attain basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) in a second language and five-seven years to achieve cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1984). It can be a serious challenge for language learners to sustain motivation for such a long time, so it is crucial that they receive motivational support along the way. In a language learning classroom, such motivational support can come from the teacher as well as from the instructional activities that students engage in during class time.

The role of classroom activities in motivation has been acknowledged in the general educational literature. For example, Epstein (1989) in his TARGET model (task, authority, recognition, grouping, evaluation, and time) identified tasks as an element of classroom instruction impacting student motivation that can be successfully influenced by the teacher. In educational research, several motivational models have addressed the situational aspect of student motivation in the classroom, including numerous theories that address task-level motivation or include task-level variables in their motivation models such as Csikszentmihalyi’s (1991) flow theory, Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory, Boekaerts’ (1988) model of motivated learning, Dörneye’s (2005) motivational task processing system, and the value-expectancy theory of achievement motivation (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).
Motivation is a complex, multidimensional construct, and its conceptualization varies greatly in different theoretical frameworks. The 1990s brought a strong emphasis on cognitive theories in classroom motivation research. These theories emphasize the role of thinking in human behavior such as students’ attributions, expectations, and perceptions. One such theory, the value-expectancy theory of achievement motivation (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), connects learners’ perceptions of tasks (how useful, interesting, and important students find tasks) with their performance and engagement with tasks.

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), the motivational aspects of language learning tasks have received relatively little attention. Though the role of motivation in language learning has long been researched in SLA, studies initially focused on Gardner’s (1985) notion of integrative motivation and his theory that linked language learners’ attitudes towards the target language community with language learning. In the 1990s researchers began to realize that the classroom also plays an essential role in language learning. Recognizing the importance of the classroom environment, Dörnyei (2003) advocates the research of language learning tasks for motivation studies, arguing that tasks not only lend themselves as easily identifiable and researchable elements for classroom research but also form basic units of classroom learning.

Although a popular area of inquiry, most of the relevant research on language learning tasks has mainly been from a linguistic-cognitive perspective, with the goal of identifying the types of tasks that are most conducive to language acquisition. Interestingly, affective and motivational factors have not received much attention in task-based research (Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000). This is all the more surprising because language learning theories acknowledge the role of affective factors in language acquisition. For example, Krashen’s well-known affective filter hypothesis (1981) claimed that affective factors act as a kind of filter in language
acquisition: low affective filter (characterized by low anxiety, high motivation, high-self-confidence) promotes language learning because the learner is more receptive to the language input, while high affective filter (characterized by high anxiety, low motivation, low self-confidence), makes the learner less receptive or likely to benefit from the language learning opportunity.

Beyond the apparent gap in research, understanding more about the motivational components of language learning tasks could benefit everyday language teaching in the classrooms. By understanding what attributes of language learning tasks engage and motivate students, language teachers and course planners can be better equipped to plan classroom activities that help sustain student motivation for language learning.

**Purpose and Objective of the Study**

The current study explored the motivational aspects of language learning tasks in the language classroom through qualitative lenses. The goal was to explore students’ perceptions, views, and opinions of language learning tasks through a series of focus group interviews, individual interviews, and classroom observations to understand how these perceptions, views, and opinions were connected to their engagement in the classroom. The study also looked at what other motivational factors could have influenced motivation and engagement with the learning tasks in the language classroom. The study aimed to place task motivation in the larger context of the language classroom by using qualitative methodology and explored how task-related motivation relates to other potential classroom motivational factors.

Employing a qualitative approach, the study sought to gain insights into the motivational aspects of language learning tasks in a college-level ESL classroom setting. The existing educational literature on students’ task motivation is heavily dominated by top-down theoretical
approaches, and empirical research in the area is mostly quantitative-based. As Maehr and Meyer (1997) note: “Motivational researchers need to probe more deeply, and search more extensively and creatively, into the cognitive processes and emotions that accompany motivational orientations. They need to investigate more deeply than questionnaire methods allow” (p. 393). The current study employed a qualitative approach that filled this methodological gap. The results offer valuable insights for conceptualization of task motivation in language learning.

**Research Questions**

The overarching goal of the study was to explore students’ views, opinions, and perceptions of language learning tasks in a college–level ESL classroom and explore how these views, opinions, and perceptions are related to students’ motivation and engagement with the tasks. The study addressed the following main research questions:

1. What are students’ views, opinions, and perceptions of the actual language learning tasks in which they are involved in the classroom?

2. How are these views, opinions, and perceptions related to motivation as expressed by the students during the interviews?

3. Are there any patterns that emerge when examining engagement in the classroom? What is the relationship between students’ expressed opinions and perceptions and their behaviors during classroom activities in terms of motivated behaviors such as engagement and effort?

4. How does the role of tasks compare to other factors in the classroom (e.g. the teacher) in relation to student motivation in the classroom?
Research Approach and Definitions

The study operated within a cognitive theoretical framework combined with an inductive, exploratory qualitative methodology. To answer the research questions, 10 individual interviews and three focus group sessions were conducted with the 17 participants and 15 classes were observed over three academic semesters. Data were analyzed using inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002). Although Wigfield and Eccles’ (2000) categories of subjective task values informed the initial analysis, no preliminary set of predetermined codes were used in the study. The goal of the inductive analysis was to identify categories, themes, and relationships that could further expand existing frameworks of task-motivation in a language learning classroom.

For the purposes of the study, all classroom activities that had an instructional goal were considered to be tasks, and the terms task and activity are used interchangeably in the study. Perceptions were examined in their broadest sense including any views, opinions, or attitudes the students expressed related to the language learning tasks. Motivation was defined as an expression by the students of wanting to complete or engage in the task. Motivated behaviors were defined as engagement and effort. For the observational data, engagement was defined as behavioral engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004), which included any observable on-task or off-task behavior during the observed language learning activities.

Significance of the Study

Despite repeated calls for research (Dörnyei, 2003; Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000) very little is known empirically about the motivational aspects of language learning tasks. The study addressed this need by providing the rich qualitative empirical data that was especially lacking in this area of research. By employing an inductive research design, the study uncovered the dimensions through which students perceive language learning tasks. Furthermore, it provided an
insight into the intricate relationships among these dimensions, motivations, and motivated behaviors.

Although the emerging patterns from the study are tentative and need further empirical confirmation, they could contribute to the work on conceptualizing task-motivation. The study was qualitative in nature, but its result could inform further research in both qualitative and quantitative paradigms.

The study also provides valuable insights for the classroom teacher and the course developer. The findings on students’ task perceptions could inform task and curriculum design. The study confirmed practical recommendations from the pedagogical literature on motivational strategies in the classroom. The study also connected student engagement with certain aspects of classroom management and with cultural differences in classroom behaviors, two areas that are rarely discussed in connection with student task motivation.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Motivation research has a long tradition in psychology and education. The purpose of this review is not to give a full account of this long tradition but to provide the reader with a general introduction to the main approaches and theories of motivational research in the field of education in general and in language learning in particular and to situate the topic of student task perceptions and task motivation within this tradition of research. Thus, this review will begin with a brief outline of the various theoretical approaches to motivation in education; then it will examine the major milestones in the research on language-learning motivation. The next sections will provide a detailed account of task related motivational concepts and theories and review empirical studies on task-related perceptions and motivation in the language classroom. The last section will briefly summarize the chapter and discuss the study’s contribution to the research area.

Theoretical Approaches to Motivation in Education

Textbooks usually define motivation as “an internal state that arouses, directs and maintains behavior” (Woolfolk, 1998, p. 372). Motivation, however, is a complex phenomenon. Its actual definition depends both on the researcher’s theoretical framework and on the context in which the motivation is studied. As Dörnyei (2001) noted, there is no agreement on the term’s precise definition and “researchers disagree strongly on virtually everything concerning the concept” (p. 7). Numerous motivation theories have been applied to explain certain areas of human behavior or certain types of motivation. However, as of today, no comprehensive, integrated theory of motivation exists, and given the diversity of fields where motivation plays an important role (sports, work, education, etc.), devising an all-encompassing motivation theory may even be unrealistic (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).
In a broad view, Chambers (1999) distinguished among four major theoretical approaches in motivation research: the behaviorist, humanistic, and cognitive approaches, and social learning theory. The behaviorist approach holds that human behavior is regulated by external forces, such as rewards, incentives, and punishment. In contrast, humanistic psychology postulates there is an inner need for self-actualization that drives individuals. Cognitive approaches emphasize the role of thinking in human behavior and thus explain motivation by focusing on plans, goals, schemas, expectations, and attributions. Finally, social learning theory integrates behaviorist and cognitive elements: while, similarly to behaviorists, it is concerned with the effects and outcomes of human behavior, it also posits that individual beliefs and expectations also affect that behavior (Chambers, 1999).

All the above approaches to motivation have been applied in educational research or practice. Brophy (2010) noted that behaviorist ideas are still very much present in today’s school culture and lead teachers to employ “carrot-and-stick” approaches based on positive and negative reinforcement. In classroom motivation research, however, attention has increasingly turned toward alternative approaches to student motivation. For example, considerable research has centered on the notions of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and the related theoretical framework, self-determination theory (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). According to this theory, intrinsic motivation is based on the innate need of competence and self-determination of the individual, whereas extrinsically motivated behaviors are carried out to achieve an external goal. In other words, when individuals are intrinsically motivated, they engage in an activity because they want to do it. On the other hand, they are extrinsically motivated if they engage in an activity for an external reward.
Researchers in this theoretical framework have argued that intrinsic motivation is preferable to extrinsic motivation because extrinsic rewards undermine intrinsic motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999) though this conclusion is highly debated (Eisenberger, Pierce, & Cameron, 1999). As for classroom research, several studies examined the conditions under which classrooms promoted intrinsic motivation. They found that classrooms that supported the autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs of students promoted intrinsic motivation while, in classrooms where students felt controlled, student motivation was extrinsic (Brophy, 2010).

Cognitive motivation theories also have been applied widely in classroom motivation research, investigating learners’ motivation-related thinking, intentions, goals, and attributions. One such line of research used attribution theory, a theory focusing on the underlying reasons to which people attribute their successes and failures and examining how these attributions affect people’s choices to engage with an activity (Weiner, 1976). Other researchers investigated the formation of and commitment to goals employing goal-setting theories (Ford, 1992; Lock & Latham, 1990); others examined the properties of these goals and distinguished between mastery versus performance goals (Ames, 1992). Studies based on expectancy value theories connected students’ expectancy of success and the value students saw in the learning task (Brophy, 2010; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000) while research under the theoretical framework of the achievement motivation theory introduced such motivational personality variables as the need for achievement and the fear of failure (Atkinson, 1957). Finally, Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory represented social learning theory, which examines how people’s judgments of self-efficacy, the judgments of their capabilities of carrying out a task, determine their choices of activities, their amount of effort invested in the activities, and their persistence with the activity.
While much of the motivation research in education has followed the traditional paradigm of positivist social sciences, an alternative approach to motivation has emerged. The social constructivist view of motivation advocated by Sivan (1986) broke away from the individualistic notions of motivation that regarded motivation as “the intrapsychological functioning of the individual” (p. 209). Instead, it conceptualized motivation as socially negotiated by the participants of the instructional process. This socially negotiated process is what can be observed as interest and engagement in the classroom. Sivan pointed out that motivation was not only context specific, but also inseparable from and shaped by the classroom and the larger social-cultural environment. More recently, in this vein of research, motivation was conceptualized as “engaged participation” (Hickey, 1997, 2003), and this approach has gained popularity in classroom motivation research (Walker, Pressick-Kilborn, Sainsbury, & MacCallum, 2010).

Research on Language-Learning Motivation

Language-learning motivation is somewhat unique when compared with the motivation to learn in general. For one, in the classroom, language-learning motivation is closely related to academic motivation (the motivation of students to learn a specific school subject; Dörnyei, 2001a). However, as Gardner (1985) and Dörnyei (2001b) point out, language learning involves a lot more than acquiring a set of linguistic skills: Language learning also entails acquiring elements of the target language culture. This cultural element inspired the first comprehensive motivational model of language-learning motivation.

Gardner’s model. The social-cultural aspect of language learning is captured by Gardner’s conceptualization of language-learning motivation. His model has been rooted in social psychology. It connected language-learning motivation with learners’ attitudes toward speakers of the target language (Gardner, 1985). According to Gardner, successful language
learners possess an *integrative motivation*, a strong interest in the target language community and a desire to connect to or to identify with it. Although Gardner (2001) acknowledged that there is "no reason to argue that motivation is only driven by integrative factors" (p. 51), he claimed that integrative factors were decisive when it came to attaining near-native like fluency. Besides integrative motivation, Gardner also posited *instrumental motivation* for learning a language, motivation to attain some external and tangible goal (e.g., good grades or a better job).

The majority of studies employing Gardner’s concepts of integrative and instrumental motivation attempted to support or to refute Gardner’s (1985) claim that integrative motivation was necessary for native-like proficiency in the target language. In his review of these studies, Ellis (1994) concluded that there seemed to be a strong relationship between integrative motivation and L2 achievement. He also noted, however, that in situations where there was relatively little contact between the language learner and the target language group, instrumental motivation seemed to be a powerful predictor of L2 learning success.

In the 1990s, several researchers called for broadening the research agenda of language-learning motivation (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 1994; Skehan, 1989). Up until the 1990s, empirical research within the motivational framework proposed by Gardner and his research associates dominated motivational research in SLA. Dörnyei in his latest review of the history of SLA motivation research called this the cognitive-situated period (Dörnyei & Uhioda, 2011). Language motivation research increasingly turned toward motivational constructs used in educational psychology and toward understanding motivation in the context of the language classroom (Dörnyei & Uhioda, 2011).
**Intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation.** As part of the move to apply constructs of motivation from educational research, several studies successfully reconciled Gardner’s motivational constructs with self-determination theory (Noels, 2001; Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 2001; Noels, Pelletier, Clement, & Vallerand, 2000). They found that Gardner’s integrative motivation strongly correlated with measures of intrinsic motivation, while instrumental motivation associated with external regulation. Noels (2001) also found that the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation did not fully cover all the reasons why students studied the language. In her study, a third set of reasons emerged that were related to positive contact with the target language group. Noels concluded that this finding supported integrativeness as a third category of motivation besides intrinsic and external motivation. In a related line of research, researchers investigated the connection between students’ perceptions of teachers’ of communicative style and intrinsic motivation (Noels, 2003; Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 1999).

To measure motivational orientations for language learning within the framework of self-determination theory, Noels et al. (2000) developed the Language Learning Orientations Scale used by studies investigating intrinsic motivation in different cultural and demographical contexts (Ardasheva, Tong, & Tretter, 2012; Carriera, 2011; Shaikholeslami, & Khayyer, 2006; Wang, 2008).

**Cognitive motivation theories.** Since the 1990s, cognitive motivational constructs (goal, attributions, beliefs, etc.) have become incorporated into various models of language-learning motivation. Dörnyei (1994, 2001b) proposed a comprehensive framework of language-learning motivation that situated L2 motivation in the classroom. Dörnyei arranged the model into three levels: the language level, the learner level, and the learning situation level. The language level
included motivational components that are related to the language itself (such as attitudes toward the community of the speakers of the language) and the practical goals a student may have with learning a language. The learner level involved those personality characteristics that the student brings to the classroom (for example, self-confidence, need for achievement), and the learning situation level includes the situation specific elements of L2 motivation in the classroom (motivational components related to the course, to the teacher, and to the group dynamics of the classroom).

Williams and Burden’s (1997) comprehensive framework of L2 motivation aspired to place language-learning motivation in an even broader, social-cultural context. They divided L2 motivational factors into two main categories: internal factors of the learner and external factors of the classroom and the larger learning environment. Internal factors included motivational factors commonly used in various motivational theories in education: the intrinsic interest in the activity, the perceived value of the activity, sense of agency, mastery (such as feeling of competence, self efficacy), self-concept, attitudes toward language learning in general, affective states (such as confidence, anxiety), developmental age and stage, and gender. External factors included the immediate and larger learning environment, such as significant others (parents, teachers, peers), the nature of interaction with significant others, the learning environment (e.g. resources, class size, school size, class and school ethos), and the broader context (wider family networks, the local education system, interests, norms, societal expectations and attitudes).

Although L2 motivational models increasingly incorporated cognitive motivational constructs, relatively few empirical studies applied a purely cognitive perspective to language-learning motivation. The findings of these studies are in line with the results of similar studies in non-language classrooms. Ushioda (2001) studied attributional thinking of French learners in
Ireland and found that students attributed positive learning outcomes to internal factors, such as ability, and attributed negative outcomes to external but controllable factors (lack of opportunity to spend time in an L2 environment, lack of effort, etc.). Williams, Burden, and Al-Baharna (2001) investigated the difference in students’ and teachers’ attributions of success in a TEFL language class in a Bahraini secondary school. They found that teachers generally attributed their students’ success to external causes, such as teaching materials and methods, while attributed the students’ failure to internal causes, such as students’ traits and characteristics. Not surprisingly, students’ responses reflected just the opposite: They attributed their success to internal causes (e.g., practice), whereas they attributed their failure to external causes (e.g., teaching methods, lack of appropriate support from family and from the teacher).

**Self-perceptions and identity.** In recent years, self-perceptions and identity have become new focal points for language-learning motivation research (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009a, 2014; Norton, 1995) Based on the idea of possible and ideal selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986), and Higgins’ Self-Discrepancy Theory (1987), Dörnyei (2005, 2009a) proposed to conceptualize language learning motivation as part of the learner’s self system. According to Self-Discrepancy Theory, people are motivated by their various self-beliefs and self-perceptions. Applying the idea to language learning, Dörnyei devised the model of L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei 2009a, Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), which has three parts:

- The Ideal L2 Self or one’s aspirations of what type of person one would like to become, such as whether one sees oneself as a speaker of another language or not.

- The Ought-to L2 Self or what kind of expectations one believes one has to meet with regards to L2.
• The L2 Learning Experience, including the learning environment and previous learning experiences with the language.

Based on an empirical study, Kormos, Kiddle, and Csizér (2011) proposed an expanded, interactive model that not only incorporated Dörnyei’s L2 Motivational Self System, but also included the students’ goal systems and social contextual factors.

Representing a critical, poststructuralist research perspective, Norton (1995) also turns to a concept related to self-identity when exploring what makes people invested in learning a second language. However, her conceptualization of identity is social: It is embedded in the social environment, not independent of it. In her view, social identity “integrates the language learner and the language learning context” (Norton, 1995, p.12). She advocates the concept of investment instead of motivation to capture the complex relationship between the language learner and the social world. In her model, investment is not only an investment in the language but in the language learner’s social identity, as well. In her qualitative study on immigrant ESL learners in Canada, she demonstrates how social and power relations between immigrants and native speakers of English shape their social interactions and how these interactions shape both the language learners’ social identity and their desire to speak the target language.
Latest developments in language-learning motivation research. The latest research on language motivation addresses two major challenges. One is the temporal nature of motivation, its tendency to fluctuate over shorter and longer time periods (Dörnyei 2001a; Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998). The other is capturing motivation in its full context, including not only individual variables, but also the larger contextual elements of the classroom and the educational and societal environment, while exploring the interrelationship and interplay among these factors (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

There seems to be a growing realization of the challenges the traditional psychometric approach to motivation is facing when it comes to capturing the complexity of language-learning motivation. Researchers working in interpretative, qualitative research paradigms observed this first. Norton (1995) argued, “because of the dichotomous distinctions between the language learner and the social world, there are disagreements in the literature on the way affective variables interact with the larger social context” (p. 11). She considered these distinctions between the individual and the social to be artificial. Ushioda (2011) argued that instead of treating learners “as abstract bundles of variables” researchers should focus on the person in context and “take a relational (rather than linear) view of these multiple contextual elements, and see motivation as an organic process that emerges through the complex system of interrelations” (pp. 12-13). The appearance of these perspectives is a reflection of larger trends in social sciences and in the field of second language acquisition.

At the same time, mainstream language motivation researchers have also realized the limitations of traditional psychometric models and linear statistical methods (Dörnyei, 2009b; Dörnyei, 2014; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). To capture motivation in its complexity, Dörnyei proposes to view motivation as a dynamic system in which components are interlinked but can
change independently over time. In a dynamic system, Dörnyei points out that there are no linear cause-effect relationships, so dynamic systems cannot be modeled by traditional quantitative methods. However, these systems are not operating in a completely random manner. Its systematic patterns of operation can be discovered by identifying *attractor conglomerates*, groups of constructs that operate in concert and “create predictable states in the system’s behavior” (Dörnyei, 2014, p. 84).

**Motivation in the language-learning classroom.** Although since the 1990s there has been a marked turn toward understanding language-learning motivation in the classroom, empirical research focusing on how practices in the language-learning classroom are connected to motivation is still relatively scarce. Much of this research focused on the connections of motivation to the classroom teacher.

Researchers working within the framework of self-determination theory established a link between the teacher's style and intrinsic motivation (Noels, 2003; Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 1999). Bernaus and Gardner (2008) investigated teachers’ language teaching strategies in an EFL classroom in Spain and their connection to learner motivation. In a large-scale study in South Korea, Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) found a link between teachers' motivational teaching practice and their students' language-learning motivation. Other studies (Nikolov, 2001; Ushioda, 2001) showed the importance personal classroom experience had on motivation for language learning. Still, some aspects of the language classroom, such as language-learning tasks, received relatively little attention in language learning motivation research.
Motivation and Language-Learning Tasks

Classroom activities (i.e. learning tasks) are important motivating factors in the classroom. Tasks are one of the six areas Ames (1992) identified through which teachers could influence students’ motivation to learn. Tasks are also included in Epstein’s model (1989), which combined elements that impacted motivation in the classroom. These elements can be modified by the teacher or the learning environment, including Task design, distribution of Authority, students’ Recognition, Grouping arrangements, Evaluation practices, and Time allocation (TARGET). The TARGET model serves as practical guidance for classroom teachers who wish to improve student motivation (Epstein, 1989).

Likewise, while discussing motivational strategies for language teachers, Dörnyei (1994) cites learning tasks as one of the motivational components in the classroom. He writes,

*Increase students' interest and involvement in the tasks by designing or selecting varied and challenging activities; adapting tasks to the students' interests; making sure that something about each activity is new or different; including game-like features, such as puzzles, problem-solving, avoiding traps, overcoming obstacles, elements of suspense, hidden information, etc.; including imaginative elements that will engage students' emotions; leaving activities open-ended and the actual conclusion uncertain; personalising tasks by encouraging students to engage in meaningful exchanges, such as sharing personal information; and making peer interaction (e.g., pair work and group work) an important teaching component.* (Dörnyei, 1994, p. 181)

There are several models that could inform an investigation into motivation at the task level of the language classroom. Researchers in the field of SLA developed the first one described below, while educational psychologists developed the rest.
**The Dörnyei and Ottó model of L2 motivation.** To capture the temporal nature of language-learning motivation during a task, Dörnyei devised a motivational task processing model that Dörnyei and Ottó later developed into the Model of L2 Motivation (Dörnyei 2001a, 2005; Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). In this model, the researchers conceptualize motivation as a process, which they divide into three phases: the pre-actional phase, which includes the selection of a goal or task; the actional phase, which is the actual involvement with the task (execution); and the post-actional phase, which is a reflection on the task after its completion and includes possible inferences for the future. These different stages are associated with different motives and are subject to different motivational influences. Dörnyei & Tseng (2009) validated the original model with an empirical study.

**Flow theory.** Csikszentmihalyi (1991) coined the term *flow* to describe a person’s state of mind when he or she is deeply engaged in an activity. According to Csikszentmihalyi, people experience flow if they think that the task is challenging and they think they are able to meet the challenges of the task. In other words, flow experience is a function of the perceived challenges of the task and of the perceived ability of the individual to do well on the task. If individuals perceive the challenges to be higher than their abilities, they will experience anxiety. If they think the challenges of the task are not a match for their abilities, they will experience boredom. If both the challenges of the task and the perceived ability are low, then apathy takes over.

**Self-efficacy theory.** While Csikszentmihalyi’s model looks at the match between challenges and perceived ability, self-efficacy theory focuses on the student’s perceived ability to do well on the task. Bandura (1997) introduced the concept of self-efficacy where self-efficacy is the person’s self-judgment regarding his or her capabilities in a particular task or activity. Though various motivation models include similar constructs (self-confidence, self-esteem, etc.),
Bandura’s definition of self-efficacy is unique in the sense that it is situation and task specific and not constant (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996).

Self-efficacy influences task choice and persistence. Students’ perceptions of their ability to do well at a task influence their motivation to engage in and persist at the task. Those with low self-efficacy avoid difficult tasks while high self-efficacy lead to overconfidence when approaching difficult tasks. Bandura suggests that self-efficacy also affects effort and persistence; students with high efficacy tend to exert more effort and persist longer at a task. Many factors, such as aptitudes and personal experience, can influence self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

**Boekaerts’ model of motivated learning.** Boekaerts’ (1988) model differentiates between general (or trait) motivational variables and situational motivational variables specific to the situation or the learning task. General motivational variables are defined as non-task specific personal motivational characteristics that students bring to the classroom, such as the need for achievement, the fear of failure, and so forth. Task-specific variables include the attractiveness of a specific task, its personal utility value, the student’s self-efficacy judgment in relation to the task, and so forth. The main focus of Boekaerts’ research is to separate the influence of these two types of motivational variables on task engagement, effort, and performance. In one of her studies, Boekaerts (1988) examined global and task-specific motivational measures in 14 learning situations including a reading, a drawing, and an arithmetic task. The final analysis showed that task-specific variables accounted for most of the variance in the students’ outcome measures during the actual task. Liking and interest in the task seemed to be the dominant factors among the task specific variables in all learning situations. The other dimensions that emerged as important on the task level were self-efficacy, personal utility, and perceived level of difficulty.
The expectancy-value model of motivation. Similarly to self-efficacy theory, the model
developed by Wigfield and Eccless (2000) also stresses the role of learners’ beliefs about their
own competencies in what the authors call achievement behaviors (task choice, persistence,
effort, cognitive engagement, and actual performance). However, besides competency beliefs,
the expectancy-value model of motivation also incorporates an additional component as a
predictor of achievement behaviors: learners’ perceptions of the learning tasks or subjective task
value.

Based on empirical research in classrooms, Wigfield and Eccless (1992) identified four
components of subjective task value: utility, interest, importance or attainment value, and cost.
Utility is the usefulness of the task for the learners in connection with their goals. Interest is the
enjoyment of doing the task or the intrinsic curiosity about the task and is conceptually similar to
the idea of intrinsic motivation in self-determination theory and to Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of
interest. Attainment value or importance describes how important it is for the student to do well
on the task either because of some future goal or because doing well in a certain domain is a
central part of the student’s self-schema. Cost is defined as the negative aspect of being engaged
in the task, since once an individual is engaged in one task, he or she cannot be engaged in
another (Wigfield & Eccless, 1992).

Eccles and Wigfield place their motivation model in a larger conceptual framework.
According to the model, learners’ perceptions of the task value (i.e., subjective task value) and
their expectancy of how well they are going to do on the task (expectancy of success) directly
influence achievement behaviors. Both expectancy of success and learners’ perceptions of the
task value are influenced by three factors: the learner’s task-specific self-concept (a domain-
specific self-perception of competence, for example, in a certain school subject), the learner’s
perception of the task’s difficulty, and the learner’s goals. In turn, these motivational beliefs are shaped by the learner’s perceptions of their social environment and the learner’s interpretations and attributions of past events, which include the cultural milieu, the behaviors of socializers (parents, teachers, peers, other adults), and past performances and events (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

One important finding that emerged from the application of this model in classroom research is that though both expectancy beliefs about competence and values were positively correlated with achievement, they influenced different types of achievement behaviors. Expectancy beliefs proved to be more significant predictors of actual performance, while value beliefs impacted choice behavior (e.g., whether to take a course or not) and persistence (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).
Summary. Four of the above models addressed the role of task perceptions in motivation is addressed by four of the above models that underline the significance of task perceptions.

Table 2.1 summarizes what perceptions and motivational outcomes these models include.

Table 2.1

Motivation Models at the Task Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory or Model</th>
<th>Perceptions</th>
<th>Motivational Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Csikszentmihalyi's flow model</td>
<td>Difficulty of the task</td>
<td>Flow, active engagement with the activity under the right conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ability to do well on the task</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandura's self efficacy theory</td>
<td>Self-efficacy: the perceived ability to do well on a task</td>
<td>Task choice, engagement with the task, persistence with the task, and performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boekaerts’ model of motivated learning</td>
<td>Various global motivational variables and perceptions about the task and the learning situation</td>
<td>Willingness to work on task, performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The expectancy-value model of motivation</td>
<td>Perceived self-competence on task</td>
<td>Task choice, engagement with the task, persistence with the task, and performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived value of task</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Empirical Research on Task Perceptions and Motivation in Language Learning

Despite the abundance of theories, very few empirical studies attempted to examine students’ task-related perceptions and their motivation in the language-learning classroom. Those that did, painted an incomplete and inconsistent picture.

Dörnyei and Kormos (2000) empirically illustrated the importance of task-specific motivational variables. In their study on the relationship of motivational variables and task performance on a specific oral language-learning task, they found that situation-specific motivational factors (attitudes toward the course and attitudes toward the task), showed significant correlation with language output while general motivational orientations (e.g., attitudes toward learning English in general) did not. Separating the sample into two groups, one in which students scored high on the task attitude scale (viewed the task favorably) and one in which they scored low on the same scale (viewed task less favorably), Dörnyei and Kormos found that the general motivational factors had a positive effect only in the high task attitude group. In other words, task attitudes seemed to have operated as a filter for some other motivational factors. This finding suggested that students’ attitudes toward the task deserve closer investigation.

Egbert (2003) applied Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory in the foreign language classroom and found that the activity that generated the highest flow was a task that involved authentic communication via computer chat. The study, however, did not discuss which attributes of the task were responsible for generating flow.

In a quantitative study, Green (1993) found that students’ perceived enjoyment and usefulness of language-learning materials strongly correlated with each other. Peacock (1998) confirmed this and examined the relationship between these perceptions and students’ on-task
behaviors. Using a sample of 44 Korean EFL students, he found weak correlation between students’ perceived enjoyableness of the materials and their on-task behavior and very low correlation between perceived usefulness and on-task behavior. Peacock noted that on-task behavior fluctuated considerably during the observed period which suggested that there were other factors, possibly the topic of the materials, the type of activity, the teaching approach, and so forth that could have influenced on-task behavior.

In a mixed method study, Barkhuizen (1998) surveyed the task perceptions among Grade 8-11 students in a South African EFL classroom. He distributed 60 questionnaires with a list of 15 activities and asked students to rate each activity on three dimensions: (a) how much they enjoy the activity, (b) if they think the activity helped them to learn English, and (c) if they think the activity was useful to them after they finished school. The survey was followed up by interviews with five teachers and six groups of students. He also collected 25-40 written compositions from each grade in which students wrote about what they liked and disliked about English classes at school.

One surprising finding of the study was the high rating mechanical language skills received on each dimension, including the enjoyment scale. One explanation Barkhuizen offers is that these activities were predominant in the classes and after students completed them, they could have felt a sense of achievement which is usually accompanied by positive feelings. He also found that students perceptions of the task was markedly different for some of the tasks; for example, teachers were surprised to learn that reading literature was rated very low on all variables by the students.

Although in recent years researchers have started to explore students’ task perceptions and task-related motivation in the language classroom, empirical research is still very modest in
this area. What is noticeable in the above studies is the dominance of top-down, deductive approaches and survey type methodologies. Also, none of the studies surveyed the actual tasks as they take place in the classrooms: researchers either asked questions about classes in general (Green 1993, Barkhuizen, 1998), used a list of typical classroom activities (Barkhuizen, 1998), or made arrangements in the classrooms for certain types of activities for the study (to a differing degree) (Peacook, 1998, Dörnyei and Kormos, 2000, Egbert, 2003). Task perceptions and related motivational elements and outcomes were not investigated in a natural setting of the classroom.

Conclusion

Research on language-learning motivation has moved from a social-psychological focus on the cultural aspects of learning a community’s language to a more pedagogically-oriented approach to language-learning motivation in the classroom. As language is acquired and learned in very different contexts, in different learning situations, either the cultural or the academic aspects of language learning could become more salient. This study is concerned with the academic aspect of language learning, applicable in situations when a second or foreign language is taught and learned in the classroom.

Much of the classroom motivation research in language learning was informed by theories and concepts in educational psychology and general educational research. This study has been inspired by theories connecting students’ task perceptions and motivational outcomes, and its goal is to contribute to the scarce empirical research in the area. By following qualitative methodology, this study is in line with the growing interest in using qualitative inquiry in motivation research. By employing a bottom-up rather than a top-down approach, it provides a missing exploratory perspective that could inform further research in the area.
Chapter 3: Method

Research Design

The study employed qualitative methodology within a post-positivist paradigm. Although qualitative research often entails a constructivist or an interpretative approach, this study endorsed a post-positivist perspective, in line with most mainstream motivation research in psychology. Post-positivists believe that an objective reality exists, and although human inquiry may have limited capacities to capture reality in its fullest complexity, researchers should strive to capture the closest approximations possible (Hatch, 2002).

Qualitative inquiry is most often exploratory and examines the issues under investigation in a setting where they naturally occur. It usually represents an inductive approach to theory building, in which themes and relationships emerge from the data. Creswell (2009) notes, however, that the emergent nature of qualitative inquiry may also suit research situations in which the researcher is studying populations that are different from the ones originally used to develop the theories and models or in cases when the relevant theories and models are incomplete or may lack important variables. His definitions precisely describe the state of affairs in the area of task-motivation research in language learning.

The current study used qualitative methodology to counterbalance the dominance of strictly deductive, quantitative research in the field and to examine students’ task-related perceptions, motivation, and engagement in the context of an actual language (ESL) classroom. Although the study applied some initial frameworks from the motivation and engagement literature, it was designed in a way that allowed themes and patterns to emerge from the data. Then, these emerging themes, patterns, and relationships were analyzed and contrasted with existing motivational frameworks.
The overarching goal of the study was to explore students’ views, opinions, and perceptions of language learning tasks in a college–level ESL classroom and explore how these views, opinions, and perceptions are related to students’ motivation and engagement with the tasks. The students’ responses were explored through a series of focus group and individual interview sessions while task engagement was gauged by non-participant observation. Data analysis was conducted using inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002).

Setting and Participants

Participants were recruited from among the students in the ESL courses offered by the Center for ESL at the University of Cincinnati. The courses offered by the Center are attended by international undergraduate and graduate students for whom English is a second language. For most graduate students, these courses are optional, while most undergraduates are placed into these classes based on their English language placement tests (ENTP) or standardized test scores (ACT, SAT).

Most American universities with a sizable international student population offer ESL courses to non-native English speakers. These ESL classes are very often designed to cover problematic language areas and to address the particular needs of students in higher education, for example, academic writing, oral communication, and pronunciation. The ESL courses offered by the Center reflect this general trend: They are general ESL courses (not-discipline specific), and each course focuses on certain language skill areas. For example, there are classes on developing oral proficiency, on developing writing skills, on improving pronunciation and on selected content of interest (American culture, presentation skills, etc.).

For the study, four courses focusing on the development of general and academic oral language skills were chosen because their curricula offered a wider range of typical language
learning activities than writing or pronunciation courses. The site was fairly typical as far as college-level ESL instruction is concerned. The curricula of the selected classes were also fairly typical for ESL courses taught at American universities. The courses were following general curricula developed by the Center for ESL, though there was some variation in the specific assignments and the textbooks used, and four different teachers taught the classes. Two of the courses were undergraduate level, one was graduate level, and one was a mix of both levels. The number of registered students in the individual courses ranged between 10 and 17.

Participation in the study was voluntary; all students in the selected classes were invited to sign up for the study. In the selected four courses, altogether 17 students agreed to participate: five in the first course, three in the second, four in the third, and five in the fourth. Table 3.1 shows the demographic breakdown of the participants.

Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Undergraduates</th>
<th>Graduates</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Chinese (3)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Korean (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Indian (1)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Korean (1)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Taiwanese (1)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Chinese (2)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Japanese (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Chinese (4)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Arabic (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Chinese (9)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Korean (3)</td>
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<td>Japanese (2)</td>
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<td>Arabic (1)</td>
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<td>Indian (1)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Taiwanese (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of the participants were from East Asia (China, Korea, Japan) with more than half of all participants coming from China. This reflects the student population at this particular university, where the majority of the students in the ESL classes are Chinese. It also reflects general trends in international students studying in the United States. According to “Fast Facts” by the Institute of International Education (2013), in 2012-13, the leading places of origin for international students studying in the US were China (28.7%), India (11.8%), South Korea (8.6%), and Saudi Arabia (5.4%). Of course, the actual proportions among students taking ESL classes would be different because this also depends on language proficiency. For example, many Indian students arrive with high English language proficiency, so their proportion in ESL classes is much lower. The sample in the study is not representative by any measure, nor was it aiming to be, as the participants were recruited from one particular site. However, it includes a mix of ESL students that are typical for such settings in the United States. It also includes a balanced mix of male-to-female, and undergraduate-to-graduate student participants.

Data Collection

During the data-collection period in 2012-2013, 15 classes in the selected four courses were observed in total. After observing a class, a focus group session or an individual interview was arranged with the participants, during which they were interviewed about the tasks they had completed. In total, three focus group interviews and 10 individual interviews were conducted with the 17 participants. Data were collected in phases, one course at a time (there was no data collection going on concurrently in more than one class), and there were long breaks between the data collection periods. The data from the four courses were collected in three phases; Appendix A shows the exact schedule of data collection sessions.
During the first phase, there was some overlap among the participants of the focus group sessions and the individual interviews, as the original idea was to have subsequent focus group meetings with the same students several times during one course. However, it became apparent that this arrangement was not working, as students were reluctant to participate in repeated meetings. Therefore, in the subsequent phases of data collection, one-time interviews or focus group meetings were conducted with the participants.

Data collection began after receiving IRB approval and securing permission from the Director of the Center for ESL. The researcher worked as an instructor at the Center, but the classes for the research were selected from among classes not taught by the researcher.

During the study, two major data-collection methods were used: participant interviews (in either a focus group or an individual interview format) and classroom observations. The researcher collected relevant classroom documents and kept a reflective research journal.

**Focus group and individual interviews.** Although participant interviews were conducted in two different formats, there was no significant difference in the interview guide used in the two types of interviews. The focus group interviews were conducted in a similar manner to the individual interviews, keeping in mind, of course, the differences that the group dynamics brought to the interview situation. Altogether, 10 individual and three focus group sessions were conducted during the study.

Before both types of interview sessions, I observed the ESL class and made notes of the different classroom activities. After the classroom observation, I interviewed the participants about the tasks in which they were taking part. All interviews were arranged so that they took place right or shortly after class so that the students still could remember the classroom activities.
The focus group sessions were based on a general interview guide found in Appendix B. The questions centered on students’ perceptions of the language learning tasks and students’ engagement and motivation during the tasks. They were phrased broadly so that they would allow for the participants to come up with views and opinions not prompted or limited by the interview questions. The questions were also tailored so as to address the specific classroom activities completed in a particular class.

As the data collection was completed in phases with data collection and data analysis going on simultaneously, the interview guide went through some development as the study progressed. Most changes occurred during and after the first phase of data collection, as it became evident what kind of questions were better at eliciting broader, richer responses from the participants, and as I, the interviewer, became more skilled at avoiding questions that were too prompting or suggestive. In general, I was trying to go with the topics that came up during the interview rather than trying to push the participants into preconceived directions. The rationale for this was to allow the participants’ own ideas and views about the tasks to come to the forefront, rather than to validate my existing ideas.

Data collected was handled confidentially, and no personally identifiable information was collected. The sessions were audio-recorded transcribed, and coded.

**Observations and field notes.** The classes right before the focus group sessions or the individual interviews were observed. The goal of the observations was twofold: to take brief notes about the classroom activities (as they served as the basis for the focus group and individual interviews) and to observe the students’ engagement with the activities and any behaviors that could be related to their motivation in the classroom.
As the Primary Investigator, I was a non-participatory observer in the selected classrooms. During the observations, I typed field notes on a laptop computer, which I cleaned up shortly after they were taken, using separate templates for the description of the activities and the observational notes on motivation-related classroom behaviors. The observational notes included my comments and impressions in italics. The description of the activities was entered into a summary sheet (see Appendix C). I also collected some class documents (such as task sheets and copies of textbook assignments) as supplements to the descriptions of activities to help understand the classroom activities.

**Research journal.** To ensure the transparency of the research process and to note ideas for data process and analysis, I kept a research journal, as well.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis followed what Hatch (2002) termed inductive analysis. Although Eccles and Wigfield’s (2000) categories of subjective task values and the definition of behavioral engagement (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004) informed the analysis, no preliminary set of predetermined codes were used either for the interview or the observation data. Creswell (2009) describes qualitative research as a continuous process that involves a continual reflection on the data, a process in which data analysis is conducted concurrently with data collection and interpreting data. In this tradition, the goal of the analysis was to identify categories, themes, and relationships that can further expand or modify existing frameworks of task-motivation as applied in a language-learning classroom.

**Participant interviews and focus group sessions.** The transcripts of the interviews and focus group sessions were coded after finishing each phase of data collection. This way, preliminary findings informed the subsequent phases of data collection. The transcripts went
through three cycles of coding altogether. The first cycle coding was a line-by-line exploratory coding for which I used what Saldana (2013) termed “eclectic coding”, a combination of three types of codes. Attribute coding was used to describe the task type and skill areas, (speaking, presentation, grammar, etc.). Descriptive codes and in vivo (word-for-word) codes were used to code participants’ views and opinions about the tasks, as well as any reference they made related to motivation or motivated behaviors. In the first coding cycle, I was trying to stay as close as possible to the original words and expressions the participants used. I also coded all references that carried some importance in the interviews although they may not have seemed to be directly related to task perceptions or motivation (for example, references about attitudes toward group work or about the use of the native language). The first cycle of coding resulted in over 200 codes.

Next, I organized the codes into domains based on categories of codes that conceptually belonged together and moved away from in vivo codes to more conceptualized codes. I eliminated some redundancies and chose salient domains for the study (Hatch, 2002). This process resulted in 104 codes, and the data set was re-coded to reflect the changes. In the second round of coding, I changed the coding from line-by-line to coding larger chunks of data because, by this time, I could more confidently identify which chunks of data belonged together.

After this round of coding, the data within major domains were reviewed to check for patterns and themes. I also looked at relationships across domains to check for potential patterns. At this point, preliminary patterns, relationships, and themes were identified. After the reevaluation of the data and the emerging themes, I revised the code tree for the third time and re-coded the data.
The final code tree had 62 codes. The data set was reexamined for the themes and patterns that were identified in the second phase of the analysis. I collected excerpts from the data in support of the identified patterns, relationships, and themes and looked for non-examples, data that did not fit these identified patterns. In the final phase, the emerging themes for the interviews and observational data were compared, and the findings were summarized by research questions.

Class observations. Data analysis of the class observation notes in general followed a similar pattern to the analysis of in the interview data. However, it only included two cycles of coding, as the collected data were less rich. The first step of the analysis was to separate the two types of data. The notes describing the tasks were compiled into a summary list of classroom activities (see Appendix C) that was used to give background context to the analysis of the interview transcripts. I coded and analyzed the notes on student engagement separately.

The term “task” had to be clarified before analyzing the observational notes. Because of the fluid nature of classroom work the boundaries of activities were not always clear. In some cases, one longer activity may have had several parts, and each part of the activity could be defined as a task in itself. For the purposes of this study, the different parts of longer activities were treated as separate tasks if the different parts included different types of work, such as group discussions followed by group presentations. On the other hand, if an activity had several steps but the type of work was not significantly different in these steps, it was counted as one activity, for example, the teacher’s explanation of a topic followed by a class discussion of the topic.

Although motivational models include several types of motivated behaviors--such as engagement, effort, task choice, and performance--only engagement was readily observable in classes. For the study, I defined engagement as observable on- and off-task behaviors of
students, such as paying attention, asking questions, or contributing to class discussions. During
the first cycle of coding, student behaviors were coded as either on-task or off-task, including a
brief description of the behavior. Those instances of behaviors that were likely to be on-task, for
example, talking to a peer when it was obvious that it was task-related (group discussion, asking
for clarification about the task, etc.), were categorized as on-task. Those that were likely off-task
(for example, talking in the native language to a peer when several other clues indicated that the
group had finished discussing the task) were categorized as off-task.

During coding, it became apparent that not all behaviors could be categorized as on-task or
off-task with certainty. For the second coding cycle, I added a third category. When it was not
clear whether the witnessed behavior was on-task or off-task, it was categorized as ambiguous. I
also added a code describing the intensity of engagement (low, medium, or high). Finally, the
same codes were used for task types and task implementation as in the coding of the interview
transcripts. Appendix E contains the final coding tree used for the observation data.

I used Microsoft Word to create transcripts of all the interviews and to create observation
notes. I used macros to extract coded data for summaries and to examine potential themes. Class
documents (syllabus, task sheets) and task descriptions of the observation protocol were used to
provide a contextual understanding of the classroom activities and of the observed student
behaviors.

**Trustworthiness and Limitations**

Although qualitative research does not aim for the same level of generalization as
quantitative studies, qualitative research, too, needs to be rigorous: (a) Its findings should paint
an accurate picture of the topic under investigation (qualitative validity); (b) its methods of
analysis should be consistent (qualitative reliability); and (c) it should offer an explanation on how its findings may transfer to other contexts (qualitative generalization) (Creswell, 2009).

To ensure validity, data were collected in 15 different classrooms from four different classes over a period of three academic semesters (quarters) using two different data collection methods (interviews and observations). When applicable, I checked the data from different sources for consistency; for example, I checked if the salient points in the observational data received any support from the interviews. I noted any inconsistencies between the different data sources and looked for possible explanations of these.

Another way I checked the validity of the data codes for the interviews was to run a word-count analysis of the interview data (including only what the participants said in the interview) where I looked at the words used by the interviewees most frequently. I compared the list of frequently used words with the list of codes I generated during the analysis and found high consistency between the two. Most of the code words I used in my analysis that referred to the language learning tasks showed up among the high frequency words used by the participants. Appendix F contains the word cloud generated from these high frequency words.

As for reliability, I was following some of the recommended reliability procedures in the literature (Gibbs, 2007; Richards, 2009). After each data collection and coding phase I looked through the transcripts for obvious mistakes. To ensure the consistency in coding, I re-coded samples of data after about a month passed and compared the two coding results. I also asked two colleagues of mine, both qualitative researchers, to complete a similar crosscheck of coding on sample data. After explaining the codes and the code tree in detail and showing a transcript of one coded interview, I asked my colleagues to code a blank interview transcript using the code tree I used for the study. Both crosschecks confirmed that the coding was generally consistent.
In those cases where there were differences in the coding, the different interpretations were easily reconciled. Appendix G includes a sample of the worksheet used for the crosscheck.

Even after taking into account the limitations inherent in qualitative research, I must note limitations that are particular to this study. One major limitation of the study was the composition of the participants. As participation in the study was voluntary, it was very likely that the students who signed up had more positive attitudes toward the ESL class and in general may have been more motivated than those who opted out. In fact, during class observations I noted that those students who were visibly inactive, withdrawn, or unmotivated were not among the students who volunteered for the study. These students could have brought valuable insight into the discussion of classroom tasks and motivation.

As for the participants of the study, I should note that I interviewed students whose native language was not English. As a result, the participants were not always able to express their ideas with the precision and elaboration they perhaps wanted. Some nuances of meaning might have been lost because of language issues. The way I handled this was to rephrase the participants’ answers to my questions during the interview in order to check my comprehension of what they were trying to say.

Another limitation of the study is that although two data sources were used for the analysis—one from the participant interviews and one from the class observations—these only provided limited opportunities for data-source triangulation. I was able to find support for patterns and themes emerging from the class observations by comparing these with data in the participant interviews (especially because as the interviewer I had a chance to ask follow-up questions on what I observed in the classroom during the interview). The other way around, however, opportunities for triangulation were very limited, as the interviews focused on
opinions, thoughts, and perceptions of the participants. These are not observable qualities, so they cannot be confirmed by observation data.

Finally, I realize that no matter how objective I was trying to be in my research procedures, to some extent my own personal experiences as a language teacher and my earlier experiences as a language learner might have shaped the analysis and interpretations of the data. What is reassuring in this respect is that I found some of the study’s findings surprising and unexpected. Hopefully an indication that I was able to maintain a mindset open to different interpretations of the data.
Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore students’ views, opinions, and perceptions of language learning tasks in a college–level English as a second language (ESL) classroom and explore how these views, opinions, and perceptions are related to their motivation and motivated behaviors (engagement and effort) with the tasks. This chapter presents the key findings from three focus group sessions, 10 individual interview sessions, and 15 classroom observations conducted in the course of 2012-2013. The study addressed four specific research questions:

1. What are students' views, opinions, and perceptions of the actual language learning tasks in which they are involved in the classroom?

2. How are these views, opinions, and perceptions related to motivation as expressed by the students during the interviews?

3. Are there any patterns that emerge when examining engagement in the classroom? What is the relationship between students’ expressed opinions and perceptions and their behaviors during classroom activities in terms of motivated behaviors such as engagement and effort?

4. How does the role of tasks compare to other factors in the classroom (e.g., the teacher) in relation to student motivation in the classroom?

To answer these questions, both the students’ interviews and the classroom observations were separately coded using an emerging and evolving coding system (Hatch, 2002).

After the three coding cycles, three broad categories of codes emerged from the data on student interviews. The first category included codes that described student views, opinions, and perceptions of the tasks in the classroom; the second category of codes related to motivation and
motivated behaviors; and finally, a third category of codes was used as a descriptor of the tasks and the classroom environment, such as task length, type of task, teacher, peer, and so on (see Appendix D for the full coding tree for the interview data).

Nine major themes emerged from the study and are summarized below by research question.

Research Question 1: What are students’ views, opinions, and perceptions of the actual language learning tasks in which they are involved in the classroom?

• Theme 1: Students express their views, opinions, and perceptions of tasks in terms of attitudes, task attributes, perceived individual needs and wants, and the learning opportunities and outcomes the task provides.

• Theme 2: The main categories of students’ views, opinions, and perceptions of tasks are interconnected.

Research Question 2: How are these views, opinions, and perceptions related to motivation as expressed by the students during the interviews?

• Theme 3: Expressed motivation may be connected with different tasks attributes such as interest, self-expression, real life, and difficulty.

Research Question 3: Are there any patterns that emerge when examining motivated behaviors (such as engagement and effort) in the classroom? What is the relationship between students’ expressed opinions and perceptions and their behaviors during classroom activities in terms of motivated behaviors?

• Theme 4: There is no consistent pattern for engagement when it comes to different types of tasks, but two types of tasks stood out in terms of engagement. Peer
presentations generally registered low student engagement while traditional listening/note-taking drills seem to engage students more.

- Theme 5: There seems to be a link between students’ on-task behavior and certain aspects of implementing classroom tasks such as timing, task-variety, and teacher involvement.

- Theme 6: Major categories of task perceptions, expressed motivation, and motivated behaviors are interconnected, and the causal relationships among these are not unidirectional.

Research Question 4: How does the role of tasks compare to other factors in the classroom (e.g. teacher) in relation to student motivation in the classroom?

- Theme 7: Peers can facilitate or hinder students’ participation in tasks. For some, group work may represent an additional layer of responsibility leading to increased effort, while others may find some of their peers’ behaviors distracting which could affect their engagement in the task.

- Theme 8: The teacher plays a role in creating interest in the class, and liking the teacher and the activities are connected.

- Theme 9: Engagement can be affected by cultural notions of expected classroom behavior.

The chapter will be organized according to the research questions, including the major themes that are related to each research question. The first part provides a review of the categories that emerged from the student interviews regarding their views, perceptions, and opinions about the classroom tasks and will look at the relationship among these categories in more detail. Next is a review of what emerged about motivation from the interviews, which is
then connected to the perceptions of tasks. Finally, the so-called motivated behaviors are reviewed based on observations in the classroom. These are then connected to the references made by the students during the interviews. The chapter closes with a summary of the main findings. The theoretical implications of the findings will be discussed in Chapter 5.

**Students’ Views, Opinions, and Perceptions of Tasks**

The first research question this study set out to address was: What are students’ views, opinions, and perceptions of the actual language learning tasks in which they are involved in the classroom?

The research question and the related interview questions were phrased to allow for the emergence of different types of expressions that students use to describe their experience and opinions about the classroom tasks. After three coding cycles, I found that the participants’ views, opinions, and perceptions about the classroom tasks could be grouped into four major categories:

- attitudes toward the task;
- task attributes (specific characteristics of the tasks);
- needs and wants of the participants;
- and the learning opportunities and learning outcomes that the task provides for the participant.

This leads to the first theme emerging in the study: *Students express their views, opinions, and perceptions of tasks in terms of attitudes, certain attributes of tasks, their perceived individual needs and wants, and the learning opportunities and outcomes the task provides (Theme 1).*
Emerging categories of task perceptions

**Attitudes.** Attitudes are expressing broad, general feelings and valuations about the task such as, “I liked the activity, or I think that activity was good.” These were usually the first type of responses given on general opening question such as, “What did you think of the task?”

The subcategories for attitudes were liking or disliking the class (like, don’t like, didn’t like); the general value of the task that called goodness (good, not so good, bad); and responses that express enjoyment or lack of enjoyment of the task (fun, not so much fun, enjoy).

**Task attributes.** Students used the expressions in this category to describe specific qualities of the task, such as when they talked about whether the task was interesting, useful, or difficult.

Task attributes are more specific than attitudes, as they point out a certain quality of the task, and many times came up in a second round of questions asking for elaboration after a participant indicated that they liked the activity. The main subcategories in this group were: usefulness, interest, real life and relevance, difficulty, novelty/familiarity, importance, self-expression, creativity, variety, clarity, and interaction. Table 4.1 shows the frequency of each task attribute code in the data-set and the detailed description of the task attribute.
Table 4.1

*Description of Task Attributes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task Attribute</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Usefulness (77)</td>
<td>Any expression by the participant that suggested that the task was useful (or not useful, or indicated any level of usefulness or uselessness). Anything that was said to be &quot;helpful&quot; or &quot;helped&quot; the student was also coded in this category.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest (73)</td>
<td>Any expression by the participant that suggested that the task was interesting or uninteresting or any expression that indicated any level of interest or disinterest (e.g. &quot;not so interesting&quot;).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty (46)</td>
<td>Any expression by the participant that indicated the level of difficulty of the task (difficult, easy, not so difficult&quot;). Any expression that suggested that the task was challenging was coded under this category as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real life &amp; Relevancea (21)</td>
<td>Expressions by the participants when they talked about tasks or qualities of tasks that mimicked real life (e.g. role-play). Instances when the participants said that they have to do similar task(s) outside the ESL classroom were also coded under this category. Any expression by the participant that suggested that the task was some way relevant (or irrelevant) to his/her life/studies outside the ESL classroom was included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novelty/familiarity (19)</td>
<td>Any expression by the participant that suggested that the task was new or unusual, or familiar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance (14)</td>
<td>Any expression by the participant that suggested the task was important (or unimportant, or indicated any level of importance) in some way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-expression (13)</td>
<td>Any expression by the participant that described how much a task allowed or disallowed for expressions of the students’ own thoughts and ideas. Any expression by the participant that described the personal meaningfulness of the task.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity (10)</td>
<td>Any expression by the participant that described how much a task allowed or disallowed for creativity and the use of imagination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety (10)</td>
<td>Any expression by the participant that described the variety or lack of variety of tasks in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarity (9)</td>
<td>Any expression by the participant that referred to how clear or unclear the task or the instructions to complete the task were.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction (8)</td>
<td>Any expression by the participant that referred to interactions or lack of interactions in connection with classroom tasks.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a The original categories of Real life and Relevance have been joined together as they are describing very closely related attributes of the task.*
**Needs and wants.** When talking about what they thought of the classroom tasks, students often mentioned what they needed (to practice, to improve) or what they wanted (e.g. they did not like the activity because they wanted more speaking). Needs and wants were somewhat less directly connected to the actual tasks themselves, but the connection between needs and wants and what students thought of the actual tasks or tasks in general was obvious, as illustrated by the following example (Class 6) [emphasis added].

R: Uh-huh. All right. Let’s move on to the second task. It was, like, after you listened to the lecture, you took notes, T told you to fill out a chart in pairs with a partner. What do you think of that task? Any…any opinions you have; you liked it, didn’t like it, why?
S: Oh, yes, I think…there is a need I have...
R: Mm-hmm.
S: The task need to…need for me, I think.
R: Mm-hmm.
S: Because we can organize our note-taking and our listening comprehension, so I think we need to the note-taking and chart…tab…table.
R: Mm-hmm.
S: But as I told you, we have to talk more. We have to speak more. I don’t know how to reduce the time to writing.
R: Mm-hmm.
S: But I think we have to increase the speak time. I think.

Both needs and wants are represented in the above example. First, the participant notes that he needed the type of task they were doing in the class (note-taking) but then he goes on to say that the class would have to speak more and write less. He uses the word have, which
literally indicates necessity, but in this case it describes what the student wants because that is what he thinks is necessary.

Other participants also expressed that they want to have more speaking in the class (Table 4.2). In six of the interviews, participants explicitly talked about wanting to have more speaking in the class (Class 1, 6, 7, 13, 14a, 14b), and in some interviews they repeatedly brought up this point. Some other expressed wants were also related to speaking, such as wanting to have more presentations, more interaction in the class, or more opportunities to talk to native speakers. Having more opportunities to speak was one want that came across very strongly in the students’ interviews; so strongly that this would be one of the minor themes emerging from the study.

Table 4.2

Students’ Expressions of Wants in the Student Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expressed wants</th>
<th>Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More speaking</td>
<td>Class 1, 6, 7, 13, 14a, 14b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More presentations</td>
<td>Class 1, 14a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking to native speakers</td>
<td>Class 14a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More interaction in class</td>
<td>Class 14b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher should force them using the second language</td>
<td>Class 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More grammar</td>
<td>Class 13a, 14b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn about slang</td>
<td>Class 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interesting activities in which everyone takes part</td>
<td>Class 13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Needs were more like personal reflections on the participants’ part about the need to improve their English [emphasis added].

R: So, let’s talk about the presentations, like when you are presenting, that wasn’t happening today, but presentations in general, when you present. What do you think about a task like that, giving presentations?

S1: At first, I think, I need to get better more detail, yes….I think to improve my English, I need to….I need to take a lot of time to prepare the presentation. And to speak….in
speaking English is the most important factor is the correct pronunciation and correct stress, so I think I have to practice more and more.

R: So there is a lot of preparation and you have to….you think you have to practice more giving presentations?
S1: Yes.

Perhaps because of their personal nature, there were also fewer mentions of needs than wants in the interviews.

**Learning opportunities and learning outcomes.** The last group of categories that emerged from the interviews that was task-related is *learning opportunities* and *learning outcomes*. When students were asked about their opinions about the tasks, they often phrased their reply in terms of a learning opportunity that the task represented for them (Class 5) [emphasis added].

R: Why? Why is it a good activity?

S1: …(thinking)….yes it’s a kind, *it’s a kind of chance to speak* and it’s a kind of ….it’s *a chance to learn more* and…Yes, so it’s good time.

R: So it’s a good activity

This is from Class 13 [emphasis added].

R: What about this other task when you had to conduct an interview with a native speaker, somebody, and then present about that?

S: Um….I think still it improve my pronunciation skill and, um, *it give me a chance to speak with a native English speaker*. 
Similarly, they often talked about specific learning outcomes when voicing their opinions about the tasks, such as improving their English or speaking skills, or learning something (language-related or some other). For example (Class 1) [emphasis added]:

S3: I like presentation or the debate.
R: Debate? Why?
S3: Because if you working in a pair and if I’m from the same country maybe you talk in your mother language a lot.
R: I see, that could be a real problem.
S3: So the... I prefer the presentation, it’s more formal, you can learn most from it. Because if it’s sometimes when you can learn the most.

The interrelatedness of the main categories of task-related perceptions. The emerging categories from the students’ interviews also suggest that these categories are very strongly interlinked. Responses including attitudes (liking, goodness) were typically intertwined with references to task attributes (interest, usefulness, etc.), need and wants, and learning opportunities and outcomes. This is the second theme of the study: The main categories of students’ views, opinions, and perceptions of tasks are interconnected (Theme 2).

In the following interview, an attitude (goodness) is connected with the learning opportunity to speak and the opportunity to learn (Class 3) [emphasis added].

R: Why? Why is it a good activity?
S1: (Thinking)…yes it’s a kind, it’s a kind of chance to speak and it’s a kind of …it’s a chance to learn more and…Yes, so it’s good time.”

Or, in another interview (Class 12), an attitude (goodness) is connected to learning about US culture) and to a task attribute (usefulness) [emphasis added].
S: Yeah, all of the, uh…All of the…I forget the words, uh… act—activities. All of the activities is good for me because sometimes they’re—they’re —they’re almost [ph] about the United States, uh, the culture of United States, the history of United States.

R: Mm-hmm.

S: The education of—the education of United States. So this is the first time to learn those—those things.

R: Mm-hmm.

S: Those things, like, the things of the United States. So, yeah. The lecture and activities is very useful for me to learn the things of the United States.

Some more examples of these are shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

The Interconnection among the Main Categories of Students’ Views, Opinions and Perceptions of Classroom Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Excerpt</th>
<th>Connections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S: I think the--I think is--I think that’s very good task. But I want to--I--if I can, I’d like go into something more, because this is the orality class, so...</td>
<td>Attitudes (goodness) - Needs and Wants (wants to speak more)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R: Yeah.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: I think I have--I--I have to speak more. I think, yeah. &quot; (Class 6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R: How about this particular one, this particular one that you listened to today?</td>
<td>Attitudes (goodness) - Task Attributes (real life, difficultly)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2: Today’s it is also.... I think it was really good because he has real information and it was easy to understand. (Class 4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S: Maybe more..... (silence) I like, as I told you, I like to... to focus on the grammar more and more, focus in the grammar and interact with the people more than using the book. Like I can... you can use the book once a week and speak and interact with the other, with the students for the rest of the week, and speak with him, and you can... because this I think... because I’m international student also, I think this big problem we find here, like speak like natural, like American, like American people speak , of course, you can’t use, have a book and just look it, you know , I like speak more than using the book. (Class 14b)</td>
<td>Wants (more grammar and speaking) - Task Attributes (interaction, real life) - Attitudes (liking)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The interconnectedness of the categories of student task perceptions, views and opinions is illustrated by Figure 1:

![Figure 1](image)

*Figure 1. The interrelatedness among the main categories of task perceptions, views, and opinions*

**Interrelatedness within the main categories of task-related perceptions.** This was demonstrated by one of the most frequently mentioned task attributes: interest. Interest was chosen not only for the frequency with which it was mentioned (73), but also because its connections can shed light on what attributes can make a task interesting.

Interest was the second most coded task attribute. The importance of interest was also expressed by one of the participants (Class 3) [emphasis added].
R: All right so, in. I’m going back again to these general question. I asked them the last time but maybe you have different thoughts about them today. So what do you think, what makes a classroom task good?

S3: It’s interesting.

R: If it’s interesting, it’s good?

S3: Yeah. Interesting…and useful.

R: And useful?

S3: Yeah. That’s what we were talking about.

R: So if the class is boring, then it’s not a good class?

S3: Yeah, because is….if it is boring I won’t listen to the class and I won’t learn something from the class. Yes, so I think, interesting is most important.

From the interviews it seems the students found the tasks interesting when they allowed for self-expression or creativity, were connected to real life, or had some personal relevance for the student outside the class, offered variety in the classroom, and were challenging but not too difficult. Some participants also noted that topics should be interesting and some participants found working in groups interesting.

*Tasks allowing for self-expression and/or use of creativity (imagination).* In the following excerpt the participant says that in general a task is interesting if she can express her thoughts (Class 1) [emphasis added].

R: Can you think of a task that is interesting or motivating, what makes the task interesting or motivating…that you really want to it, that task?

S1: I think, some interview and yes, the time for express our thought…yes...
She also praises the creativity of a picture-based story-telling task in another interview (Class 2) [emphasis added].

S3: First I like this activities, It’s interesting, when I first saw the pictures, I want to know what this mean and I want to use my imagination, and to think about these pictures.

In a focus group meeting she admitted thinking the “adventure trip presentation was more creative” and “because I can decide what I want to do, everything, so it was really interesting” (Class 4).

Another participant notes that the task was not interesting because it required simple answers that did not give opportunity for discussion or expressing any personal meaning (Class 13).

R: So do you think that was interesting or useful?
S: Mm…I think it’s, um…Because…I think sometimes explaining the definition is not so interesting and, uh…

R: Uh-huh.
S: Mm…I think there is nothing special in the definition.
R: Mm-hmm.
S: Like, we talk about para—paraphrase. It’s the same as we…Uh, the result that we come out, it’s the same as we look it up in dictionary. There’s nothing special for we discuss it in the class.

Tasks that are connected to real life or offer some kind of personal relevance to the student. Another group of attributes that was mentioned in the interview in connection with interest was connection to real life and relevance. For example, two participants (Class 1, Class 11) mentioned role-plays as examples of interesting activities in the classroom. One of them
expressed preference for role plays because she “want to be like native speaker,” and that a role-play “seems interesting” (Class 1).

In another interview, a participant found listening to a funny commercial an interesting task, because “you see commercials all the time” (Class 1). On a more general note, one student said a certain teacher’s class was interesting because “she pick up real thi—real things, like, um…Uh, invite some religious believers from Islam and, some other…Uh…And he told us how to write resume—resume and cover letters” (Class 10).

And finally, as for personal relevance, one participant described how a presentation-task was not very interesting or useful because presentations are very different in her field of study (Class 7).

Variety of tasks and new (unusual tasks). Several participants raised the notion of variety and novelty of tasks in connection with interest (Class 2) [emphasis added].

R: Er…what makes a…you said interesting is important…so what makes a task interesting or engaging?

S3: Er…let me think about that. If it’s something new, you can’t do the one activity. Another participants expresses a similar idea (Class 9) [emphasis added].

R: Mm-hmm. Would you say this task was interesting?

S: Uh, not today it wasn’t, because this is like the seventh or eighth time we’ve listened to the same lecture.

One participant emphasized the unusualness of an activity and how much that made the task interesting (Class 13) [emphasis added].
S: I like other kind of class act—activities, like…Like once the teacher, like, divided the class into two group and one group go out and another group sit in the classroom and watch the videotape, and that was...

R: Yeah, I remember that. I was in there.

S: I think that’s interesting.

R: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. So you liked that—that activity. Why?

S: Yes.

R: Why did you like that activity?

S: Because it’s funny. It’s different.

**Difficulty.** From the interviews, it seems that difficulty can make a task interesting or just the opposite, boring. If the student perceives the difficulty as a challenge, it can make the task interesting, as in the following example (Class 13) [emphasis added].

R: Okay, so let’s say if you switch to English and you said that was also an interesting task, what made it interesting?

S: Because we have something to think, mm…Like—like some—some of the—some of the word *is not so easy to find a synonym.*

R: Mm-hmm.

S: Like, *work* and *learn*, it’s not so easy. So I think it’s *not so easy makes it more interesting.*

On the other hand, if the task is perceived as too difficult by the student, it may become boring (Class 6) [emphasis added].

S: The other class, you--you know that we usually there listen to TED talk.com

R: Yes.
S: I think the--just one TED.com is so difficult for me, I--I can't understand that well.

But *at that time, I was a little boring because I can’t understand it.*

The above only serve as an illustration to show the interconnectedness of various task attributes using interest as an example. The interconnectedness exists at so many levels of the data both among and within the main categories that it is not possible to draw up clear causal connections between categories. Nonetheless, the above data seem to suggest some connections between interest, self-expression, creativity, relevance, real life, novelty, variety, and difficulty, as well as between interest and topic, and interest and group work.

**Expressed Motivation**

The second research question of the study sought to connect student motivation with what students thought of the tasks. Students relatively rarely expressed anything that could be directly taken as indication of motivation, but when they did it was coded under *expressed motivation* (“I want to do that”). There were relatively few instances when students explicitly talked about motivation: in all the transcripts the code *expressed motivation* was used six times. Also, explicit references to motivation were extremely short, and the interviewees quickly switched to talking about a related concept such as interest.

Exploring the various links between expressed motivation and task perceptions lead to the third theme of the study: *Expressed motivation may be connected with different tasks attributes, such interest, self-expression, real life, and difficulty (Theme 3).*

Table 4.4 lists the different tasks where students explicitly referred to motivation and the task attributes these were connected to. Appendix H includes the full excerpts of the transcripts coded with *expressed motivation*.
Table 4.4

*Expressed Motivation by Type of Task and Related Task Attributes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Attributes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interviews (in general)</td>
<td>self-expression (“The time for express our thought”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Role-play (in general)</td>
<td>real life, interest (“It seems very interesting”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Watching a funny TV commercial (homework assignment)</td>
<td>real life, interest, enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Picture story (group)</td>
<td>interest, usefulness (student doesn’t want to do useful but boring tasks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>self-expression (“You can think whatever you thought”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>difficulty (challenging), interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Adventure trip presentation (group)</td>
<td>Interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Presentations (in general)</td>
<td>liking &lt;-&gt; difficulty, “I always want to improve myself of English skills or speaking, so I like presentation. It’s hard for me, but I like presentation.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is an extremely limited sample, so we cannot make far-reaching conclusions. It seems to suggest that expressed motivation may be connected to interest, self-expression (when the task gives an opportunity for the students to express their own thoughts), and to tasks that are related to students’ life outside the classroom in some way, perhaps because the task mimics real life, as in the case of a role play, or perhaps because students often meet similar tasks in everyday life (understanding commercials). Difficulty, if perceived as a challenge, may also be motivating, as in the case of the student who was motivated to work on presentations even though he found them hard.
Motivated Behaviors

The third research question examined the relationship between students’ expressed opinions and perceptions about the tasks and their behaviors in the class. In the motivation literature, the behaviors generally associated with motivation (motivated behaviors) are engagement (being on-task as opposed to being off-task), effort (preparing for class, for example), and in certain cases choice (choosing one task over another). To explore students’ motivated behavior, I observed each class before interviewing the students and took notes on both the classroom activities and any behavior related to the previously discussed motivated behaviors.

Another source I used were the student interviews, though understandably they offered less on motivated behaviors than the class observations. In the interviews those instances were coded under motivated behavior when, for example, students mentioned how engaged they were with an activity (if they paid attention, for instance) or made comments about how hard they prepared for a task (effort).

The interviews also gave me an opportunity to ask the participants about some of the observations I made during the class and invite their comments on my observation. I was careful to avoid making references to behaviors of individual students, not wanting to embarrass the participants. On the rare occasion I brought up references to an individual’s behavior during the interview, I was careful to phrase it in a nonthreatening way, describing the behavior and not interpreting or evaluating it. For example, in one interview I told the participant that I noticed she was making notes and asked her what kind of notes she was making during the presentation.
This section discusses motivated behaviors as observed in the classroom, followed by a discussion of the interviews. In the final section the findings from the two data sources are summarized and contrasted.

**Class observations of motivated behaviors.** Class observations took place right before each personal interview and focus group session. These classroom observations had a double purpose. First, I made notes on the tasks students were working on, and second, I also recorded indications of student engagement during these tasks. Engagement was the only type of motivated behavior that I was able to record during the class observations, as engagement was the most observable during the classes.

The followings results are from data collected over a period of three academic semesters in 2012-2013. Similarly to the interview sessions, data collection and analysis were reiterative for the observations as well.

The initial framework included the broad categories of on-task and off-task behaviors, which were further detailed as the analysis progressed. Also, categories on the observed intensity of the engagement were added where applicable (based on the observer’s subjective impression), and descriptive codes were used for the different task types and categories of task implementation. The final coding tree for the observations is in Appendix E.

Before discussing the major themes regarding students’ observed behaviors in the classroom, let me note one important methodological observation that surfaced during the coding of the observation data. A particular behavior can be coded as on-task in one instance and off-task in another. For example, a student is reading his notes could be on-task behavior when the task is to prepare a summary based on notes, but off-task when the student is reading their notes
during a peer presentation (when he is supposed to listen to the presentation). Behavior is task-specific; the same behavior could be on- or off-task, depending on the task itself.

Two major themes emerged from the data on classroom observations:

- **There is no consistent pattern for engagement when it comes to different types of tasks, but two types of tasks stood out in terms of engagement.** Peer presentations generally registered low student engagement; while traditional listening/note-taking drills seem to have students more engaged (Theme 4).

- **Theme 5: There seems to be a link between students’ on-task behavior and certain aspects of implementation of classroom tasks, such as timing, task variety, and teacher involvement (Theme 5).**

**Engagement with different types of tasks.** It was very difficult to find a consistent pattern in student engagement according to different types of tasks. For example, when the teacher explained a language-related issue or had a demonstration in front of the class, students tended to be on-task (paying attention), but other times their attention waned, especially in larger classes. Student engagement was most likely influenced by other factors during teacher explanations, such as how much the students liked the teacher, how interesting they found what the teacher was talking about, or how long the explanation took.

Similarly, during pair and group work on-task behavior did not show a consistent pattern, most likely because other factors also influenced it (interest in the task, general motivation to participate in the class, etc.). Some group or pair work generated more active participation than others, but overall students seemed to be on-task during group activities. The notable exception: groups that finished earlier than the rest of the class tended to get involved in some off-task activities.
Two notable task types stood out in terms of engagement, though in very opposing manners. One was peer presentations, which seemed to be a problem spot; students tended not to pay attention when other students or teams were presenting. This seemed to be an issue in all classes, even in those cases when the presentation topics were supposed to be interesting (e.g. adventure trip presentations).

There could be several reasons for this lack of attention. When several student presentations were scheduled one after the other (which was very often the case), some students or teams were preparing for their own presentation while the other students or teams were presenting. Also, when several student presentations were set up for one class period, the attention paid to these tended to decrease toward the end of the class, possibly due to the lack of variety in the task (most of the class was spent listening to presentations) and because of end-of-class fatigue.

Additional reasons for the inattention could have been that some presenters were difficult to follow, either because of their poor English skills or because of their poor presentation skills. In some cases there seemed to be a lack of interest in the topic of the presentation, and at other times the arrangement of the task was not optimal (for example, teams were presenting standing at their desks rather than standing in front of the whole class).

Interestingly, during listening and note-taking tasks, students tended to be more on task. In one of the classes I noted that ALL students were on-task during such an activity (Class 4). During this activity, the teacher played an academic lecture from a CD and students had to take notes and answer questions in the textbook. In an interview after the class, I asked the participants what they thought the reason could be for this. From the reply it seems that the possibility for being called upon by the teacher to give the right answer was one factor why
students were fully on task. Another reason could be that this was a type of task that largely conforms to student expectations of classroom instruction. This may make them more engaged, not because of the way the task is set up, but because of the familiarity of the task arrangement.

**Timing.** Several time-related factors of task execution surfaced during the class observations that seemed connected to student engagement, such as the length of task, the length of the class, and periods of downtime. During the 15 observations, I noticed several times that students’ attention waned as the task went on. It was especially visible during activities done in groups or pairs. Those groups that finished earlier than the rest of the class routinely went off-task (chatting about topics unrelated to the task, or chatting in their native language). Some teachers let certain activities go on too long: while students were on-task at the beginning of the task, they started to exhibit more and more off-task behaviors towards the end of the activity.

Not only activities but classes could go on too long. At the end of most classes, students started to act a little more restless, more off task, and generally gave the impression of being ready to go. In some instances, students were hardly paying attention to the homework assignment. I call these episodes end-of-class fatigue. The level of this fatigue varied by individual class and by type of class. It was more palpable in undergraduate classes that lasted fifty minutes than graduate classes, which were seventy-five minutes long, and it was more noticeable in larger classes (more than ten people) than in smaller classes.

Another frequently occurring episode was what I coded downtime, extra time between activities when students did not participate in any learning activity. An example is when the teacher had to stop before starting a new activity because she needed to set up equipment, students looked visibly bored and/or were off-task (talking, speaking in their native language, checking their phones, etc.). It is possible that such downtime does not pose an issue for the
overall engagement of the students in the class, but rather serves as a welcome break that can help students concentrate better during the rest of the class. Too much downtime, though, may disrupt the dynamics of the class and negatively affect overall student engagement in the class.

**Task variety.** Another factor related to task implementation that seemed to have some connection to student engagement was the variety of tasks used in the classroom. For example, when students had to do the same type of task, first as a whole class, then in pairs, then again in whole class, students seemed to have lost interest in the later parts of the task (Class 1, Class 13).

**Teacher involvement.** The third factor that seemed to influence student on-task behavior was the level of teacher involvement in the activity. During tasks when the teacher was explaining a language-related issue or had a demonstration in front of the whole class, students tended to pay attention, especially at the beginning of the teacher presentation. However, just as with other types of tasks, the longer the teacher demonstration went on, the more student behavior became off-task.

It is notable, though, that during other task types, teacher intervention could get students back on-task. During peer presentations, students were notoriously off-task not paying attention. In such cases, the first intervention by the teacher, such as asking a question from the presenter or from the class, got the students’ attention.

These teacher interventions, however, had diminishing effects. The more they occurred, the less the students turned their attention back to the presentation. In one case, the presentation turned into an almost a private dialog between the teacher and the presenting student. When the class did not pay attention to the student presentation, the teacher assumed the role of the audience (Class 4).
During pair and group work I observed a similar pattern. Typically, when a group went off-task and the teacher walked up to the group, the group went back on-task. However, just as with peer presentations, the effect of teacher intervention would prove to be temporary: as soon as the teacher left the group, some groups went off-task again.

In short, what emerges from the classroom observations is that although there are no clear patterns of student engagement by task type, there are certain types of tasks with which students seem be more or less engaged. Certain aspects of task and classroom management can also influence student engagement with tasks.

**Summary of findings on motivated behaviors from the observations.** Although, understandably, the student interviews provided a lot less information on motivated behaviors than on-task perceptions, what they mentioned was in line with the main themes emerging from the classroom observations. The interviews gave me an opportunity to ask questions regarding some of the observations I made in the classroom, confirm or expand on my impressions, and discover more about the reasons for the observed behavior.

Data from the interviews support the idea that there is some connection between certain task perceptions and motivated behaviors, though these are not necessarily unidirectional, as the causality can work both ways. Beside task perceptions, there are other factors that may influence motivated behaviors such as the type of task and how the task is set up. Since the interviews provided relatively little information on motivated behaviors, these are very tentative conclusions.

It also should be noted that there were some contradictions between the student interviews and the class observations. For example, some interviewees said that they would like more speaking but when I observed the class I noticed that they did not use opportunities to
speak in class (Class 6, Class 13). The same was true in a focus group interview (Class 14a), where I explicitly asked why they did not make better use of opportunities to speak in class. Their first reaction was to blame the textbook (‘terrible textbook”), but then turned into a discussion about cultural differences in engagement in the classroom. It seems that cultural notions of expected classroom behavior prevented students from taking opportunities to speak.

Another area of discrepancies between classroom observations and student interviews was observed engagement and reported interest. In the classroom, I observed a general lack of engagement or low level of engagement in the class, yet in the interviews following the class the interviewee(s) told me that they found the task interesting (Class 1, Class 2). One possible reason for this discrepancy is that presumably those students who signed up to participate in the study were the ones who generally had a more positive attitude towards the class, and those who were less active or interested in the ESL class did not volunteer for the study.

**Reference to motivated behaviors in the interviews.** To analyze the data on motivated behaviors in the student interviews, I coded any references participants made in the interviews to engagement or effort regarding the learning tasks such as when they talked about the effort they put into preparing for the task, or whether or not they paid attention during the task, and so on. (The third category usually used in categorizing motivated behaviors, choice, did not come up during the interviews.) Although explicit codes for motivated behaviors are relatively few in the interview scripts (engagement was mentioned 19 and effort 7 times), they still suggest some insightful connections.

**Interview data in support of the themes from classroom observations.** During the class observations, two major themes (Theme 4 and 5) emerged. Evidence from the student interviews supports both themes. One emerging theme from the classroom observations was that although
there were no clear patterns of engagement by task type, some type of tasks did consistently registered low and high overall engagement (Theme 4). One such task type that often made students disengaged were peer presentations, and several interviewees confirmed this observation. One student said that it was difficult to listen to peer presentations, and whether she could pay full attention depended on who was doing the presentation and if the topic was interesting (Class 2). Several interviews confirmed that students tended not to pay attention to presentations of other classmates, and several of them noted that they used this time to prepare for their own presentations. (Class 2, Class3, Class 4) [emphasis added].

R: You know when I was sitting there and also looking at how much attention people pay to the tasks, and I mean, I didn’t see you guys because you were sitting a little far away, but I was seeing the people I was seeing, not a lot of people were actively paying attention to the other teams. That was my impression.

S2: Yeah, especially my turn, they were just talking (laughs).

R: So I just wonder why is that...because this was a pretty interesting activity.

S2: Yes, but some people just pay attention to what he will say, just their activity, and after that ...

S3: they prepare for next, so they were not listening to the other groups. Especially in some ….the last one, or something like that, they were prepare all the time.

According to the interviews, one of the main reasons for not paying attention to peer presentations was that students were preparing for their own talks. By organizing presentations differently such as having only one or two presentations per class, or giving a task to involve the audience in peer presentations, the teacher may be able to increase engagement during this activity.
While I was observing the classes, I noticed that there was a listening task during which the whole class was clearly on-task. The class had to listen to an academic lecture played by the teacher from a CD and had to answer questions based on what they heard in the textbook. I noticed that during this activity all of the students in the class were busy listening and taking notes (Class 4). When I asked a follow-up question about this during the after-class interview, the student responded that it was because the teacher was going to ask questions that they were so busy taking notes [emphasis added].

R: Yes, because I noticed when I was sitting in there that when T put in this CD, everybody, everybody started to write. Everybody. You know, when people are presenting, some people listen, some people work on the computer, some people were... so they were not paying that much attention always, but that task, everybody was writing.

S3: [Laughs]

R: So I was just wondering why.

S3: Because when after these T will ask some questions about this, so I want to...I don’t want to...that don’t have the answer, or something that, so they need to write down.

R: I see, I see... so the teacher is going to check it, basically, ask questions...

S2: Yeah.

S3: Yeah. This is the point.

Apparently, students tend to be more on-task when they expect some kind of follow up questions from the teacher. There is a slight hint at this in another interview, as well (Class 11). This was another listening task, but in this case the teacher divided the class into two groups and only one group listened to the video. Each student was paired up—one from the first group, one from the second group—and the one that listened to the video had to take notes and then tell their
partner what was in the video. Based on this summary, the partner had to answer the teacher’s questions after they took and shared notes [emphasis added].

S: So, um, try to, like, write everything. ‘Cause we didn’t, like—we didn’t saw [ph] the question first, right? We—we—we—like, we saw the video first, and then the question.

R: Uh-huh.

S: So I don’t know what—what exactly our instructor will ask us, so I just try to write down everything, everything I can, and make my partner clear to understand. ‘Cause she’s supposed to, like, answer the question, not me.

Here the participant notes that he was trying to write down everything (effort) so that his partner could answer the teacher’s questions (teacher follow-up). This ties into the second major theme I found during class observations: that students’ on-task behavior and certain aspects of the implementation of classroom tasks, such as timing, task-variety, and teacher involvement were connected.

We have seen in the above examples how teacher involvement in the task can affect students’ on-task behavior, but this is not the only data that supports Theme 5 from classroom observations. As for the role of time and timing, I observed that during times when the class worked in groups, the group that finished early usually went off-task: they started to chat or play with their smart phones. One confirmation for this came from the focus group interview (Class 1) [emphasis added]:

R: Was the length of the task enough? Or too long, or too short? The time for the task?

S4: It was enough.

R: Enough?

S3: But It was a bit long. Because I finished before the time, it was too long.
R: Yeah, I noticed some people finished before everybody else is finished and T was going around and stopped at every pair, and she listened to what students were saying. But by this time she finished the round a lot of people were already done.

S1: I think because there was many classmates in one place, a little bit, it’s a waste of time.

R: I mean, I agree, I just don’t know what else the teacher could do with that.

S1: Actually I visiting this year, I’m not a student, I am an auditor, so I am sorry for that.

R: I see, I see…and because I noticed is that when people finished the task they were like chatting with each other, checking their text messages.

S: Yes, right (lots of approving sounds).

It seem that the length of the task and class size were factors affecting engagement. This shows the importance of time management on part of the teacher, and how important it is to time these tasks, especially group activities, in a way so that they are neither too long or too short.

The above examples show some support for Themes 4 and 5 that emerged from the classroom observations. Further analysis of references to motivated behaviors in the student interviews also show that the interconnectedness that characterized the main categories of student task perceptions (Theme 2) is also present among the main task perception categories and motivated behaviors.

The relationship among students’ task perceptions, expressed motivation, and motivated behaviors. This section illustrates how task perceptions and expressed motivation are connected to motivated behaviors as well and leads to the theme that emerged about motivated behaviors from the interviews: Major categories of task perceptions, expressed motivation, and
motivated behaviors are interconnected and the causal relationships among these are not unidirectional (Theme 6).

The first dialog illustrates how a task that the student finds motivating can engage the student. The task the conversation refers to was a group activity, where the students had to come up with a story based on pictures the teacher gave them (Class 2). The student said that she was “active” and time went fast during the task, which is indicative of engagement, and at the same time she also said that she really wanted to do the task, which is indicative of motivation [emphasis added].

R: Interesting. Er…So what would you say, were you actively engaged in these two activities, basically, like the first part and the second part? Where you active, where you motivated, engaged, or…?

S3: I think active, because I saw that picture and I really want to know what this means, what’s this, yeah.

R: So would you like to do more of these?

S3: Yeah, I think when we are doing this activity is I think I think the time goes fast, yeah, so I like it.

Since motivation (wanting to do something) and engagement (actually be doing something) are very closely related notions, the connection between the two in the participant’s response is hardly surprising. The next example may be a little more telling as it demonstrates a connection between self-expression and engagement (Class 13). The participant was asked about speaking in class discussions (engagement) [emphasis added].

S: And, um, the class discussion…Yeah, I—I think I speak sometimes.

R: Mm-hmm.
S: Uh, I think it’s basically enough.

R: Uh-huh.

S: Mm…Oh. Um…But in this class, we usually don’t—maybe it’s because of there are more people in this class than my writing class. In my writing class, there are usually more, like...I need to express my opinion, not just answering some questions. Like, “What’s the meaning of this word?” And we find some words to explain that word.

R: Mm-hmm.

S: Like, um...We have more chance to say our opinion and think that is ...

R: That’s interesting. Mm-hmm.

S: Mm…Like, in our writing class, we, mm…The professor give us a topic and let us talk about: what do we think of that?

The participant above expresses a preference for self-expression. When asked about how much he speaks in class, he states that it is “basically enough,” but points out that in this class students usually do not speak that much because of class size and the lack of opportunity to express their own thoughts and opinions (unlike in the writing class he mentions). He seems to suggest in this passage that there is a connection between self-expression and engagement, in this case, speaking in the class. Again, this is the only one mention of self-expression in connection with engagement, but it is interesting in light of how self-expression seems to be connected to all kinds of student perceptions as noted previously.

While both motivation and self-expression in the above examples were connected to engagement in a straightforward way, difficulty has a mixed relationship with motivated behaviors, just as it had a mixed relationship with task perceptions. In one instance, the participant shares her observation about classmates who, when having difficulty in following the
listening task “kind of just lose track and they sit back and they don’t do anything (Class 9).” In other words, difficulty with the task leads to disengagement.

On the other hand, another participant noted a very different reaction to the difficulty with listening tasks: “So it’s a—it’s a little bit, like, difficult where we listen to, like, materials from the YouTube or something. But I think this make me, like, more concentrate” (Class 11).

It seems that in his case the experienced difficulty made him work harder and be more engaged with the task. So, experiencing difficulty with a task may make students more or less engaged with the task, depending on whether they see it as a challenge and try harder, or whether they see it as a barrier and give up.

In short, the student references to motivated behaviors suggest that there is an interconnected relationship between not only major categories of task perceptions, but also among the categories of perception, expressed motivation, and motivated behaviors. So, the diagram we drew up in Figure 1 could be extended as shown by Figure 2:
Figure 2. The relationship among major categories of task perceptions, motivation, and motivated behaviors

All of the above examples demonstrated a connection between various factors and motivated behaviors that would suggest a unidirectional causal link. For example, when the task was going on too long, it led to disengagement among the students (for those who finished early); when students had to listen to peer presentations, they tended not to pay attention; when the teacher was known to ask questions as a follow up after completing the task, students tended to be more engaged and expend more effort. Student interviews also suggested that (a) having more opportunity to express one’s own ideas and thoughts (self-expression) would make the student more engaged in the task (speak more); (b) if a student feels motivated to do the task,
she will be more engaged with it; and (c) difficulty may positively and negatively affect student engagement and effort. The interview data also showed how group work can impel a student do his best (effort) and how cultural differences in expected classroom behavior influences engagement in certain classroom tasks. This all would suggest that there is a unidirectional causal link between the various task-related factors and motivated behaviors.

However, some of the interviews imply that this causal connection is not necessarily unidirectional. For example, when asked if he likes presentations, one student answers, “Yes, without presentation or my task I didn’t study hard” (Class 3), suggesting that he likes presentation because they make him study hard. It is not that liking the task makes the student expend more effort, but he likes the task because the task makes him exert more effort.

This kind of inverted causal relationship appears in another interview (Class 9). This is the interview where the respondent talks about how she noticed that some of her classmates just tune out when the listening task is too difficult, so she suggests that field trips would be a good task for the class [emphasis added].

S: Mm, maybe, like—like, field trips would also be good.

R: Mm-hmm.

S: Um, because you can, like, take them to a certain place—let’s say, like, a metro park—and then kind of ask them to talk about something that’s going on there and write, like, a little essay or a paragraph on, you know, what they see. Making it in class, like, I know and I’ve noticed—and the two Koreans are really close friends of mine—and I’ve noticed that when they start seeing the lecture and they see that it’s going really fast, they kind of just lose track and they sit back and they don’t do anything.

R: Uh-huh.
S: So it’s, like, if you ask them to do something individually and take them outside the classroom to do it, I think that would, like, help them a lot.

R: Mm-hmm, I see.

What she seems to suggest here is that by taking these students outside the classroom, they could be made more engaged in the task and this would “help them a lot.” In other words, it would be useful for them (any reference to help and helpfulness was coded under usefulness in the study). Here the suggested casual link is that an activity that makes students more engaged is more useful for them.

Finally, in a conversation about the role-play assignment (that all speaking classes had), the participant notes that the fellow students did not make the task as interesting as they could have (Class 13) [emphasis added].

R: Uh-huh, uh-huh. There were some assignments that I know this class has; like, there is a role-play. Did you guys do the role-pay—role—role-play already?

S: Yeah.

R: What did you think of that assignment?

S: Because it is the first presentation, I don’t think we really prepared well for it. Maybe we were still a little bit anxious, so I—I don’t really feel something special about that.

R: Uh-huh. Would you say if it was useful or interesting or any...?

S: Um, I don’t think we did it—did it as interesting as it can.

R: So you, the students, didn’t make it as interesting as you could have?

S: Yes.

R: Mm-hmm.
Because we just—a lot of—a lot of conversation, not... *We could do something interesting, but we didn’t. I think maybe it’s because it’s our first presentation.*

R: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

S: And it was—*you don’t know how to do that.*

In this passage, the student describes how he and his classmates did not make the task as interesting as they could have because it was a new task that was unfamiliar. In other words, what he suggests is that students’ effort to make the task interesting could impact how interesting the task becomes. This also ties into ideas of how much initiative and responsibility students accept for shaping the tasks to their liking or to their benefit, and how much room the task leaves for such student initiatives.

**Other Factors in Connection with Task Perceptions, Motivation, and Motivated Behaviors**

The fourth research question looked at other factors that participants most often mentioned in the interviews in connection to motivational variables. These were peers, the teacher, and the culture of the classroom, and these led to the last three themes of the study:

- **Peers can facilitate or hinder students’ participation in tasks.** For some, group work may represent an additional layer of responsibility leading to increased effort, while others may find some of their peers’ behaviors distracting which could affect their engagement in the task (Theme 7).

- **The teacher plays a role in creating interest in the class and liking the teacher and the activities are connected** (Theme 8).

- **Engagement can be affected by cultural notions of expected classroom behavior** (Theme 9).
The first topic that often came up related to peers in the classroom is group work. Many tasks were organized in small groups or in pairs, including discussions and team presentations. An interesting topic in the interviews is the connection between group work and effort. In one interview, a male Chinese undergraduate student talks about how during group work, he does his best on the task (Class 11). The task he is referring to in the excerpt below was a listening task, when the interviewee had to watch a video and take notes, while the other student was outside of the classroom. Then, the first student had to explain the second student what was in the video and based on his notes the second student had to answer questions from the teacher [emphasis added].

S: Well, I just do my best to, like, write down everything, but it’s a—kind of a mission impossible, ‘cause I cannot just write down everything. So just stuff on keyword [ph]. ‘Cause I came here almost two years. I think my English is better than, like, my partner.

R: Uh-huh.

S: So, um, try to, like, write everything. ‘Cause we didn’t, like—we didn’t saw [ph] the question first, right? We—we—we—like, we saw the video first, and then the question.

R: Uh-huh.

S: So I don’t know what—what exactly our instructor will ask us, so I just try to write down everything, everything I can, and make my partner clear to understand. ‘Cause she’s supposed to, like, answer the question, not me.

R: Mm-hmm.

S: My job is just to write down the note and write down the summary and to make her understandable.
In the above passage, the student seems to express a sense of responsibility for his partner, noting that his job is to take notes and make his partner understand what the video was about. The task is difficult, but he is trying to do his best (effort) because his partner is going to answer the teacher’s question. So having been assigned to work as a pair (group work) and bearing joint responsibility for the outcome seemed to make him put his best effort into the task.

The same participant expressed a similar sentiment later, when talking about a different task. Here he talks about a role-play assignment that students had to complete in small groups where they had to write a script for a role-play and act it out in front of the class [emphasis added].

S: Yeah, it’s called role-play. And just, um, we kind of the actor and the actress and we have, like, own, like, character.

R: Mm-hmm.

S: So I think that is so much fun, you know. I never, like, had that class before in my life, so this is very interesting. Um…I’m a, like, a little bit shy ‘cause, like, I never been to—I never have that situation before. So just to try to, like, do my best, you know, to show them, like, another—the rest of the classmate I, uh—the best of—I—I mean, the best I can do, so...

Obviously, at least in the case of this student, working in a group elicits his best effort through a sense of responsibility to his peers. This well could be just an individual characteristic, and unfortunately there is no further confirmation for such a tendency in the rest of the interviews, as participants rarely discussed how group work affected the effort they put into their work.
Students most often talked about group work in terms of attitudes (whether they liked it or not, whether it was good or not). For example, one participant explains how she changed her attitudes about group work after coming to the United States (Class 10) [emphasis added].

S: Mm, um…I—I became to like that activity in group. Before coming to America, I don’t like group work because it is very troublesome or, mm…I like indep—I like to work independently. It’s easier than in group work, I thought. But recently, I think group work is, mm…Good, good.

R: Mm-hmm. What is good?

S: Becau—because sometimes the partner gives me better answer.

R: Uh-huh.

S: Or better ideas.

Her words suggest that she realized that there is value in cooperation with her classmates. Another student also points out the value of cooperation: “I can help her and she can help me either,” (Class 11) but then he goes on to emphasize the personal bond group work helped him create with his classmate [emphasis added]:

S: So that is, um, the first thing I think, like, activity’s very good. And second one, it’s more closer between, like, me and my partner.

R: Mm-hmm.

S: Even though we is from, like, same—same country, we speak same language, but we still, like, kind of the—you know, not—not very close.

R: Mm-hmm.

S: So the activity make our relationship more closer.

R: Uh-huh.
S: Maybe in the future, we are still in some class and we—based on our, like, very good relationship, we can still help each other.

R: Uh-huh. *So you can get a better relationship.*

S: Yeah.

R: *Get to know each other better.*

Not all students expressed positive attitudes toward group work, though. One respondent expressed his misgiving about the fairness of evaluation in group projects (Class 12), and another student had problems working with his classmates in a group project, possibly because of cultural differences (the student was Arabic, and his partner was Chinese) (Class 14b) [emphasis added]:

R: Would you…Beside interacting with the teacher…I don’t know how much you interacted with the other students in the class…were there a lot of tasks you had to talk in groups, or?

S: Yeah, yeah, I think…yes, we…I did one assignment like presentation with another…with my students, he is a Chinese, I talked to him, I send him email, but I don’t think so, they like to speak with the other people, I don’t know, I think so they are like this, *they don’t like to speak with the other people*, like they want to be more than very first [ph], and actually maybe *they don’t like to talk with me.*

R: Maybe they?

S: Maybe they don’t like to talk with me

R: I don’t think so, I think it’s cultural, it’s different; they are not talking that much in general.
S: I don’t know, yeah I noticed that, I noticed but I don’t know, I see it…all right, if it like good, like this, so that’s your opinion.

Several participants indicated that one problem with group discussions was the use of their native language (Class 3, 12, 13), and two participants thought that the teacher should tell students to use English (Class 12, class 13). Not all participants saw the use of native language as a problem, though; as a student put it, “Whatever, just, uh, which language you use, just, uh, I think the point is you need it to understand” (Class 11).

During regular class work, peers could also be a source of distraction, as this one participant complains (Class 10) [emphasis added]:

R: Any activities that you remember that you really didn’t like? Any classes, any classroom activities?
S: Mm, I like classes, but sometimes I have many complaints about classmates. [laughs] They’re sometimes chatting when teacher tells us very important, uh, information, like homework or thing like that.
R: Mm-hmm.
S: But they chatting, so the voices mix up, so very difficult to listen. So once I complained in that class.

Or, one dominating student can influence the participation of others in the class if they reply to the teacher while the other students are still thinking (Class 13) [emphasis added]:

S: And while we wait for that, um…[laughs] In this class, the old lady always say — always say, uh, before we—all we want to say. Like, we’re still—like, we’re still thinking, or…I think we tend to speak what—what we think is correct. We want to make it—make sure that was way of speaking in public is right before we speak it out.
These interviews showed that peers can facilitate or hinder students’ participation in the tasks. For some, group work may represent an additional layer of responsibility that makes them devote more effort to the task, while others may find some of their peers’ behaviors distracting which affects their engagement with the task. Students have varied attitudes towards group work; some like it or dislike it for various reasons. One recurring issue participants mentioned was the use of the native language when working in groups.

**The teacher.** In this study, the teacher’s role in maintaining engagement has already been illustrated in the section on classroom observations of motivated behaviors. During certain tasks, such as peer presentations and group discussion, the teacher successfully brought students back on-task though interventions, which had a diminishing effect and less success the more the teacher intervened.

In the student interviews there were relatively little that was directly connected to the teacher’s role in maintaining motivation in the classroom. One participant noted that the teacher should make the class interesting and bring in activities outside the textbook (Class 12) [emphasis added]:

S: So I like talking and speaking English and discussing. So, uh... *I think teachers have to bring the resource from not only textbook, but also think about by themselves.*

R: Mm-hmm. So something outside of that textbook.

S: Yeah.

R: Mm-hmm.

S: The topic that we—*that they think it’s good for students or it’s interesting for students.*
A similar sentiment was expressed by another participant during a focus group interview (Class 1):

S2: The style of the teacher is important.
R: What do you mean by the style of the teacher?
S2: First of teacher can speak in English fluently, clearly, ... and also creative or creative lecture it’s very important.
R: Creative lecture? What is a creative lecture? Is it...
S2: A creative lecture err...I can get interested because of the type of the lecture.

Both participants pointed out that the teacher has a role in creating interest in the class. Another important point was expressed by the above participant (Class 1) [emphasis added]:

R: All right, my last question, this is again very similar to what I asked last time...it’s the same question actually. So, if you think of the whole course, how much you like a course, a class, how important the activities are?
S3: I think the first is most influence really for this, how much I like this course, is for the teacher, yeah, and then is the activities. But the activities were influenced the teacher in my mind, yeah, if T give us some very interesting activities, I would like it and I would like this course.

So, according to the participant, the teacher is the most important factor when deciding how much she likes the course, but liking the teacher and thus the course is connected with the type of activities used in class. If the activities are interesting, she would like the course (and the teacher). Another participant in another interview (focus group session) said [emphasis added]:

S3: First, if I like this course, the most important thing, I think is the teacher, I like this teacher that because what is that or the way she does the activities.
R: So this is kind of connected, the teacher and the activities.

The rest of the references to the teacher in the interviews were mostly about how students found the teacher’s guidance or assistance helpful during activities (Class 3, 4, 9, 14a), and expressed that they would like more interaction with the teacher (Class 6, 7, 14b), that the teacher should correct the students’ grammar when speaking (Class 7), and that the teacher should force the use of the second language (Class 12, 13).

**Culture.** In the following excerpts participants discuss cultural differences in engagement during class discussions. In two interviews, participants mention that in China they do not have much discussion the class (Class 2, Class 13). As the participant in Class 2 explained when I asked why some of the class seemed to be less active in a group discussion [emphasis added]:

S3: I think for *Chinese students in the class we are always not so much activity as American students.*

R: I see.

S3: I think it’s because of traditional, I don’t know, because in *China we have less discussion on the class I think, we just listen to the teacher and write down the notes.*

Yeah, it’s like this.

When I asked a similar question in a focus group session, the original response of the students was a very strong and unequivocal condemnation of the textbook (all participants said that the textbook is “terrible”). However, the follow-up questions led to a discussion about cultural differences in behaviors in the classroom (Class 14a) [emphasis added].

R: That’s interesting that you say that you want more speaking, *because at the same time what I noticed when I was observing the class is that when the teacher asks questions,*
most people are silent, so that’s also an opportunity to speak, but very few people actually talk to the teacher.

S1: This is also…not just our fault…I …

R: I know. I know. I’m not saying it’s your fault, I’m s just saying it’s interesting to see that.

S1: Because of the textbook

R: Aha, the textbook

S1: Yes, because of this textbook

S4: Terrible textbook

S1: It’s terrible…terrible question, terrible audios, terrible.

S2: We need to find some new

S4: New material

S2: It is just similar answer for one question, and you know for…in our…China we just have one exact answer. Anyway after the whole education system in China, we just…we get used to we only have one correct answer. We have…well, sometime we get two answers might seem similar for, suitable for one question, we don’t know how to say it, we don’t know which one is correct, so we just keep silence, and you can find that most of the classroom is Chinese, there is only two…one is from Oman and the other one I from...

S1: Jordan

S2: Yeah, from Jordan. So (unintelligible)…our silence, so we just don’t know we need to pick up to report to..
R: Aha, I see, when you talk to the teacher you think you just have to say the right answer, if you don’t know the right answer, you don’t say anything, right? Is that it?

S1: This is what we used to do.

The task they are referring to was a listening task, combined with work on critical thinking skills, in this case critical listening. The students heard a mock discussion (played by actors), reminiscent of political discussion shows on TV about oil exploration in Canada. The interview’s “experts” represented different stakeholders: one was the representative an oil company, the other was an environmental activist, etc. The textbook also introduced the term bias, and the students had to listen to the discussion and then answer the true or false questions in the textbook that asked them not only about what they heard, but also about the potential biases of the different speakers.

From the students’ description, my impression is that the students found the textbook confusing, as they did not know the correct answers to the true or false questions. Many times the questions were ambiguous, so one could have made a case for both the true and false answers. I suspect the intention of the questions was to generate discussion, but instead of having a discussion, students opted to stay silent. As they explained, they did not know the right answer, or in some cases both answers seemed to be right.

According to Chinese cultural norms, they would only volunteer to speak if they knew the correct answer. In this respect, the intended goal of the textbook activity failed, partly because of the confusion and partly because of different cultural expectations of what was expected during the task. The original expectation of the task probably was that if the answers are ambiguous, students would have a discussion to figure out the more acceptable answer and why. However, in the Chinese educational tradition, according to the participants’ description,
the students are expected to come up with the right answer, and if they do not know the answer they would prefer to remain silent.

A similar idea was expressed by another participant in another interview (Class 13) when I asked why some people were not actively participating in a class discussion. The participant also mentioned cultural differences and how Chinese students tend not to talk unless they know the correct answer [emphasis added].

R: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. I—I was looking around, you know, when people—how people are reacting to the task, and a lot of people were giving answers when T asked a question.

S: Mm-hmm.

R: But some people really looked, like, bored and they were not really answering questions and they were not really paying attention.

S: Mm-hmm.

R: Why do you think is that? I’m not talking about you, because I wasn’t looking at you; it was just my—it’s a general express—impression.

S: Mm…I think it’s, hmm…Uh, maybe because, in China, we—in classes we don’t have much discussion.

R: Uh-huh.

S: And, um…So we will say our opinions, but we may wait a moment, wait the others to say it.

R: Uh-huh.

S: I think this is quite China.

R: I see. So it’s—it’s a cultural thing, maybe?
S: Yeah, yeah.
R: Uh-huh.
S: And while we wait for that, um…[laughs] In this class, the old lady always say—always say, uh, before we—all we want to say. Like, we’re still—like, we’re still thinking, o…I think we tend to speak what—what we think is correct. We want to make it—make sure that was way of speaking in public is right before we speak it out.
R: I see, mm-hmm.
S: So it may take a while.
R: Mm-hmm.
S: And, uh…So I think that’s a difference. Some—maybe someone don’t think it’s necessary to—it—it is necessary to say something that not be correct.

In all three excerpts the participants cite cultural differences when explaining students’ lack of apparent engagement in class discussion. This leads us to defining engagement, which seems to be a culturally defined notion. In United States classrooms it means active participation in classroom discussion, while in China it means giving correct answers to the teachers’ questions. Both require engagement—you need to pay attention to what is going on in the classroom to answer the teacher’s question—but it is a different type of engagement. In the United States it is more active and in China, more passive. As the participant in Class 2 put it, “In China we have less discussion on the class I think, we just listen to the teacher and write down the notes.”

Conclusion

The study presented nine major themes. Some of these are better supported by the data than others, but Themes 1, 2, and 6 are well-supported by the data. One main overarching theme
that is developing from all these findings is the interconnected nature of all task perceptions, motivation, and motivated behaviors, which together could represent a model of task-related motivation. Task-related motivation can also be influenced by actors in the classroom environment: peers, the teacher, and the culture students bring with them; in other words task-related motivation is “nested” in the classroom environment.
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore students’ task-related perceptions in an ESL classroom and to explore how these perceptions are connected to student motivation and behavior in the classroom. By employing a qualitative, bottom-up approach, the goal of the study was to provide an in-depth examination of task-related motivation in the ESL classroom that could inform traditional motivation theories and could generate practical pedagogical ideas for motivating students in the classroom through classroom activities.

This study used qualitative inquiry to collect data from 10 student interviews, three focus group sessions, and 15 classroom observations sessions. The data were coded using an emerging, inductive coding system and the emerging themes were organized by research question. The study was based on the following four research questions:

What are students' views, opinions, and perceptions of the actual language learning tasks in which they are involved in the classroom?

How are these views, opinions, and perceptions related to motivation as expressed by the students during the interviews?

Are there any patterns that emerge when examining engagement in the classroom? What is the relationship between students’ expressed opinions and perceptions and their behaviors during classroom activities in terms of motivated behaviors such as engagement and effort?

How does the role of tasks compare to other factors in the classroom (e.g., the teacher) in relation to student motivation in the classroom?
The previous chapter presented the nine major themes that emerged from the study organized by research questions. The purpose of this chapter is to provide interpretative insights into these findings, to place the emerging model from the findings in light of the relevant literature as discussed in Chapter 2, to consider practical implications for the classroom, and to draw final conclusions and recommendations from the study.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Student task perceptions.** One of the main findings that emerged from the participant interviews was that when students reflect on learning tasks, they think in terms of attitudes, task attributes, needs and wants, and learning opportunities and outcomes (Theme 1). This suggests a broader conceptualization of task perceptions than what traditional multivariate motivational theories normally allow.

Eccles-Wigfield’s (2000) model, for example, differentiates among four subject task values: utility, interest, importance (or attainment value), and cost. Utility (usefulness), interest, and importance showed up in the student interviews as part of what I categorized as task attributes, codes that described particular qualities of the task. In fact, usefulness and interest were the two most frequently coded task attributes. This supports the importance of usefulness and interest among student task perceptions.

However, there were many other task attributes that emerged through the student interviews, such as real life and relevance, difficulty, novelty/familiarity, self-expression, creativity, and so forth. These task attributes are interlinked with each other (Theme 2) and offer a complete picture of what students think of the particular qualities of the task.

More importantly, it was clear from the interviews that students do not only think in terms of these particular attributes when they talk about the classroom tasks but also: (a) they
express their attitudes (liking or valuing the task); (b) they talk about them in relation to their needs and wants; and (c) they discuss them in terms of learning opportunities and outcomes. In other words, students’ views, perceptions, and opinions of tasks were relational, or situated, in the context of the individual aspirations of the student and the affordances that the task provides in meeting these aspirations.

The categories of needs and wants and learning opportunities and outcomes are not included in any of the motivational models connecting task perceptions and motivated behaviors discussed in Chapter 2. The Eccles-Wigfield model does include students’ short- and long-term goals as factors that influence task perceptions (subjective task values), and one can argue that needs and wants are related to goals. However, goals assume a higher level of consciousness and purposefulness than what the participants exhibited when they talked about their needs and wants. In the interviews, needs and wants were usually vaguely and generally stated ("I always want to improve myself of English skills or speaking, so I like presentation"). This suggests that the participants did not have clearly articulated goals for language learning but rather a sense of what they would need and want to improve their language skills.

Similarly missing from the traditional motivational models are any references to learning opportunities and outcomes that a task provides or, in other words, to the affordances of the task. It is arguable that some models (the Eccles-Wigfield model, Boekerts’ model, etc.) capture these through more generalized task variables such as utility or interest in a task, as we may assume that a learner would find a task useful or interesting if it provides some opportunity for learning or some learning outcome. However, if we want to go beyond such general attributions and want to gain a complete understanding of how students' task perceptions are shaped, we should
consider additional factors, such as attitudes, needs and wants, and learning opportunities and outcomes.

The relationship among task perception, motivation, and motivated behaviors.

Another important finding is that these task perceptions are not only broader but also closely interlinked with motivation and motivated behaviors in the classroom (Theme 3, Theme 6) and nested in the classroom environment. Figure 3 captures the emerging tentative model:

![Diagram of task perceptions, motivation, and motivated behaviors in the language classroom.](image)

*Figure 3. Students’ task perceptions, motivation, and motivated behaviors in the language classroom – a tentative model.*

Besides the interconnectedness among these categories, the data suggested that there is no unidirectional causal link between task perceptions and motivated behaviors; in fact, the
causality could work in both directions. In one interview, the participant suggested that he liked presentations because they made him study hard. This indicates that the effort he had to make caused him to like the task, not the other way around. In another interview, the participants suggested an activity that would engage the students more and thus would be more useful for them. Finally, one of the participants talked about how the students did not make the task as interesting as they could have. Here, again, “interesting” becomes an output of effort on the students’ part.

Although these examples were very limited in number, they were suggestive of the complexity and possible interaction among these categories. Traditional motivation models usually presume a unidirectional causal link between perception-type variables and motivated behaviors. In Wigfield-Eccless’ model (2000), subjective task values influence achievement behaviors (task choice, persistence, cognitive engagement and effort, and actual performance). In Boekaerts (1988) model, she assumes the same direction between what she calls global and situational variables (including task-specific variables) and outcome variables such as task engagement, effort, and performance. In Bandura's (1997) theory, self-efficacy affects task choice, effort, and persistence, and in Csikszentmihalyi’s (1991) flow theory, flow and other states of mind are the functions of the individual’s perceptions of challenges and abilities.

Task perceptions, motivation, and motivated behaviors in the classroom environment. Another set of findings that emerged from this study illustrated the influence of the classroom environment on these perceptions and behaviors. Theme 5 showed the link between students' on-task behavior and certain aspects of the tasks, such as timing, variety of tasks, and the teacher’s involvement in the task (for example, whether the teacher follows up with questions after the task). These aspects of task implementation are to a large extent under
the control of the teacher. Theme 8 further supported the role the teacher plays in classroom motivation. Some participants expressed their opinion of how liking the teacher, liking the activities, and liking the class were connected. Theme 7 highlighted the role peers played in classroom engagement and in group work participation, and finally, Theme 9 defined the role of culture in classroom engagement.

Again, these themes are only suggestive, as there is limited data to support each theme. Taken together, though, they speak to the complexity and situated nature of task motivation in the language classroom.

**Contribution to empirical research.** The study followed the general trend started in the 1990s in language motivation research that has increasingly turned towards a situated approach to motivation in the language classroom. Its goal was to expand the limited empirical research that addresses tasks in the language classroom from a motivational perspective by applying a cognitive perspective that was underrepresented in language motivation research.

The study employed a qualitative, exploratory approach to survey students’ task-related perceptions and motivation to complement the quantitative studies in the area and purposefully followed a bottom-up, rather than the top down approach commonly employed by motivation researchers. The findings of the current study supplement findings of previous empirical studies and offer a more in-depth insight into students’ task perceptions and motivation.

The study found that task attributes (such as interest, usefulness, importance, self-expression, and so on) are strongly interlinked with each other. Although previous empirical studies only focused on enjoyableness and usefulness of learning materials, two quantitative studies found significant correlation between these two attributes (Green, 1993, Peacock, 1998). Insights from the current study could also explain why Peacock (1998) found only a weak
correlation between enjoyableness of the learning materials and on-task behavior, and very low correlation between the perceived usefulness and on-task behavior. Through the classroom observations and the interviews the challenges of quantifying on-task behavior became evident: seemingly off-task behaviors may in fact indicate engagement with the task, especially as the students act according to different cultural norms in the classroom and exhibit engagement in a way that is not expected by the researcher. This study also showed that on-task behavior is influenced by the actions of peers and the teacher in the classroom, or by how the learning activity is organized and timed. These could be important confounding variables in a quantitative study.

**Conclusion.** The findings of this study draw attention to the limitations of approaches to task motivation based on multivariate motivation models and to the constraints of capturing task motivation in its completeness by quantitative methodologies. These models and methods do not account for possible interactions among the variables and two-way causal links and. This study suggests that motivation in the language classroom is perhaps best conceptualized in a situated, contextualized model, and this could be challenging for traditional multivariate motivational models. Indeed, motivation researchers increasingly recognize the limitations of such models (Dörnyei, 2009b; Dörnyei, 2014; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). It is not the aim of this study to provide paradigmatic decisions for language motivation research in the classroom; however, Ushioda's (2011) call for an "alternative perspective" to the mainstream psychometric approach to language learning motivation seems to be very fitting in light of the findings of this study. One such alternative perspective could be an ecological model that expresses the complexity of causal interrelationships and embeddedness of all the factors that play a role in task motivation in the language classroom.
Pedagogical Implications

In this section, I will briefly interpret the major findings in relation to their practical implications for the classroom. The main focus of this study was student task-related perceptions and how these are connected to motivation and motivated behaviors.

**Student task perceptions.** An exploration of students' task-related perceptions could offer some valuable insights for the teacher. When asked about their thoughts and opinions concerning the language learning tasks, students tended to think in terms of attitudes, task attributes, their individual needs and wants, and the learning opportunities and outcomes of the tasks (Theme 1). All these views and perceptions were not only closely interlinked to each other (Theme 2) but were also linked to motivation and motivated behaviors in the classroom (Theme 6). The teacher played an active role in creating and implementing the activities in the classroom. Decisions about how to implement tasks influenced student engagement (Theme 5). Finally, the students’ attitudes toward the teacher, the activities, and the course were interconnected (Theme 8).

Students not only think in terms of task attributes, such as how useful or interesting a task is, but also consider their needs and wants (how relevant the task is to the student’s needs and goals) and consider the learning opportunities and learning outcomes the task provides (Theme 1). This suggests that we cannot pinpoint a few desirable characteristics of classroom activities that would make a task good for the student. The goodness of the activity depends, to some extent, on each student’s unique combination of needs and wants and thus on the student’s unique perspective.

Keeping the above point in mind, a general take-away from the interviews is that it is important that the classroom tasks are interesting and useful, that they are relevant to the needs
and wants of the students, and that they provide meaningful learning opportunities or some tangible learning outcomes. Among the most often mentioned task attributes, besides interest and usefulness, were real life, difficulty, relevance, self-expression, creativity, novelty/familiarity, and variety. Students appreciated tasks that were interesting and useful, that were authentic or relevant to their lives outside the ESL class, that were challenging but not too difficult, that were new or provided variety in the classroom, and that allowed for self-expression and creativity.

The above conclusions in general are in line with pedagogical suggestions from the literature. Dörnyei (2001b) presented an assortment of motivational strategies for the language teacher based on his experiences as a language learning motivation researcher and as a practicing language teacher. He, too, points out the importance of relevance when designing classroom tasks: "Indeed, one of the most demotivating factors for learners is when they have to learn something that they cannot see the point of because it has no seeming relevance whatsoever to their lives" (p. 63, Dörnyei, 2001b). He suggests that the teacher find out about the interests, hobbies, and needs of the students and bring in topics and activities that are related to the students' real life experiences. He also gives a list of characteristics that could make a task motivating: challenging, interesting content, an element of novelty, fantasy (using imagination), being intriguing or exotic in some way, offering a tangible outcome, relating to the learners' personal lives, using competition, and being humorous. Most of these characteristics appeared in the student interviews during this particular study, as well.

In this study, many students expressed that they wished to have more speaking opportunities and more interaction in the class. This is notable, as the courses in this study were designed precisely for improving speaking skills. At the same time, students did not always use the provided opportunities to speak (during class or group discussions). One explanation that
they gave for this was that they were following different cultural norms of participating in class than what was expected by the teacher and by the task. Teachers should be aware that it is not enough to create opportunities for speaking in the classroom but that they should also help students adjust their culturally programmed classroom behaviors. Teachers could encourage students to speak more during class and group discussions while limiting the use of native language. Teachers could also initiate an open discussion with the students about different cultural norms and their expectations for classroom behaviors while explaining how the students would benefit from more active participation in the speaking activities.

**Student engagement and task implementation.** Another theme that has important practical implications is that certain aspects of task implementation, such as timing, teacher intervention, and task variety influence students’ engagement (on-task behavior).

**Timing.** The observations showed that the student engagement, as exhibited by on- and off-task behavior, tended to ebb and flow during the class. As a general trend, off-task behaviors tended to increase toward the end of the class and when an activity went on too long. It was also clear from the observations that the teacher many times had a direct influence on the students’ on-task behavior, which means the teacher, as a manager of classroom activities, had the opportunity to manage student engagement actively.

Another area that the teacher could actively manage was how long he or she allowed an activity continue. When most of the class was going off-task during an activity, it was best to finish that activity sooner than planned (if possible) and switch to a different one (variety helped with student engagement). Some of the observed teachers had better timing in this sense than others, and those classrooms where the teacher was not lengthening activities (had a somewhat faster pace) seemed to have a more engaged atmosphere throughout the class.
Teacher intervention. There were several examples of teacher interventions, especially during group work, that helped students return to task. For example, the teacher walking around while the class was working on group and pair projects helped groups to get back on-task, sometimes by simply stopping by the group, encouraging the students to work, asking questions or explaining the task as necessary (providing examples). Many times this type of teacher intervention had a lasting effect, but sometimes it was only temporary (that is, as soon as the teacher left, the group went back off-task). In any case, teachers could monitor student engagement in small group and pair work and could help groups to stay on-task as necessary.

Task variety. A related classroom management issue was task variety. A class that had a variety of tasks rather than repeating the same type of tasks seemed to hold the students’ attention better. For the teacher, it was possible to plan the class so that there was a good balance among different types of activities. From the observations, it was clear that no one type of activity was more engaging than any other (e.g. group work over teacher-fronted activities) because during any activity the students started to go off-task if it went on too long or if the same type of activity was used repeatedly.

The above class management issues may be so self-evident that the motivational literature often overlooks them. However, data from both class observations and student interviews suggested that the teacher played an active role in managing motivation and engagement in the classroom. Teachers need to evaluate not only the instructional goals and values of learning tasks but also their motivational value. They need to be aware of how the actual running of the classroom (assigning and managing groups, running class discussions, timing and arranging tasks) could have motivational effects and could influence students' engagement in the class. Many times when students expressed a general liking of the teachers
and liking of the course, they, in fact, liked the way the course was run and the activities the teacher brought in to class. As one of the participants noted, "I think the first is [the] most influence really for this, how much I like this course, is for the teacher, yeah, and then is [for] the activities. But the activities were influenced [by] the teacher in my mind, yeah, if the teacher give (sic) us some very interesting activities, I would like it and I would like this course."

Final Conclusion and Recommendations

The overarching finding of this study is that students' task related perceptions, motivation, and motivated behaviors are interconnected, multi-directional, and situated in a classroom environment of various motivational influences. Students perceive tasks in terms of attitudes, task attributes, needs and wants, and learning opportunities and outcomes, which are interconnected categories in and within themselves, and these task-related perceptions are also linked to motivation and motivated behaviors in the classroom. These are all embedded in the classroom environment (peers, teacher) and the larger cultural context of the classroom that affects task-related perceptions and motivation.

This suggests a tentative model of task motivation in the language classroom that is different from the mainstream motivational models applied in classroom motivation research. Partly, this is because some of these models were not specifically capturing motivation at the task level, but a part of a larger motivational system (Boekaerts, 1998, Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Others were focused only on certain aspects of the tasks (flow theory and self-efficacy theory) or focused on the dynamic aspect of task-motivation (Dörnyei, 2009b; Dörnyei, 2014).

It is hoped that the current study could inform further attempts to conceptualize task motivation in the language classroom. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher is
advocating for a situated, contextualized approach to such conceptualization, rather than the traditional psychometric approach that compartmentalizes motivational factors.

**Recommendations for further research.** This study was a qualitative, exploratory inquiry into the relationship of students’ task-related perceptions, motivation, and motivated behaviors in the classroom. As such, its findings are inherently suggestive and could be further validated (or challenged) by additional studies.

Future studies could choose a different setting for a similar investigation of task-related perceptions and task motivation. The study focused on ESL classrooms at an American university, and data gathered from a limited sample of students and classrooms. Further studies could explore student task perceptions in classes of other languages (for example, interviewing English speakers who are learning a second language), in other types of ESL classes (e.g. in writing classes), in other educational contexts (in adult education or in high schools), and other age groups. Students’ task-related perceptions and motivation could be explored in other types of classrooms (not in a language learning classroom) or non-traditional learning situations (e.g. online learning courses), as well.

Future studies could explore the same topic with a different methodology. Although the researcher advocates a more contextualized approach into this avenue of research, the findings of the study could inform traditional psychometric motivational research by offering a more nuanced understanding of the different categories of task perceptions as related to motivation. Testing these emerging categories and relationships with quantitative techniques that study larger populations could lead to more generalizable results.

With a larger body of empirical research, it would be possible to build more empirically sound models and/or theories of task motivation. Currently, very few models in the literature
focus specifically on task motivation in the classroom. Empirical studies in the area are still scarce especially in the case of language learning. In the end, the ultimate goal is to amass a number of qualitative and quantitative studies in this area that could help develop a model for task motivation in the classroom.

**Recommendations for practitioners.** The emerging findings from this study could inform pedagogical practices and could highlight the importance of the selection of learning activities. The following recommendations could be useful for both teachers and curriculum and textbook developers:

- When planning a class or compiling activities for a course or a textbook, assess the motivational characteristics of tasks, as well. Design tasks that are interesting, useful, relevant to students' lives, authentic, and that allow for self-expression and creativity.
- Design challenging tasks that are not too difficult so they keep students engaged but do not cause students to quit doing them.
- Course developers and teachers need to keep in mind that classroom activities should address the needs and wants of the students. Course developers should collect as much information about the target student population as possible while teachers have the advantage of getting to know their students at a more personal level. By developing good personal relationships with the students, teachers can learn about their students’ needs and wants (and interests, for that matter), which then, in turn, they could use when designing classroom activities. It is probably also a good idea to have an in-class need analysis discussion about students’ needs and wants regarding the course.
• Teachers and course developers should make sure that the tasks provide learning opportunities in line with students’ needs and wants and that they supply tangible learning outcomes.

• Both course developers and teachers should strive for including a variety of activities in the classroom.

In this last respect, the general practice in the United States of designing ESL courses around separate skills (having separate speaking, writing, or grammar courses) may not be optimal. There are valid instructional considerations supporting such an arrangement but allowing for variety in the skills practiced throughout the course would be beneficial for the students from a motivational standpoint.

Teachers should also be aware that certain aspects of classroom management could affect student engagement in the classroom.

• Teachers should try to add variety to the class by using different types of classroom activities. For example, teachers could vary the skills the tasks practice by mixing activities that primarily target: speaking skills, listening skills, vocabulary, grammar, or writing skills. Teachers could also vary frontal teaching techniques (for example, teachers-led class discussions) with work in small groups and pairs, or mix the different types of visual (whiteboard, PowerPoint slides, pictures, websites, handouts, props, videos) and audio materials used in the classroom.

• Teachers should be mindful of how the timing of the classroom activities can affect the students' attention or engagement with the tasks. They should strive to minimize downtime by carefully planning the activities and making sure that they do not last too
long. It is especially challenging to manage the timing for group activities because some groups manage to finish earlier than others. One possible solution is to have extra tasks prepared for those groups that finish early.

- Teachers should also be aware (and most instinctively are) of how general student behavior can affect their peers' engagement with the activities. They should try to minimize disruptive behaviors by establishing clear rules and maintaining discipline in the classroom. They should also pay attention to potential issues in taking turns, such as when one or a couple of students dominate class discussions. Teachers should have strategies to try to involve all students in these activities.

- Finally, teachers should not underestimate or forget about the diverse cultural norms students bring with them to the classroom and how these can influence student engagement. One typical issue was student participation in open-ended classroom discussion, as in some Asian countries this is not general pedagogical practice. Teachers should keep in mind that involving these students in discussions would be difficult, and they may need extra encouragement. An open discussion with the students about the different cultural expectations and norms of classroom participation may also be helpful.

**Researcher's Final Reflection**

At the end of this long journey, I would like to include a short personal reflection on the process I, as a researcher, went through. After reading the literature, I decided on a qualitative study with the intention to explore students’ task-related perceptions and motivation in the classroom to inform or fine-tune existing traditional psychological models. My approach was pragmatic. I thought that although there are paradigmatic differences between the two methods
of inquiry, the qualitative exploratory studies could inform quantitative, more broadly
generalizable studies.

While I still believe this to be true, as the data gathering and analysis unfolded, I started
to doubt whether the complexities of motivation in the classroom could be captured fully by
traditional multivariate motivational models. I found myself siding with calls for a situated
approach to classroom motivation. So for me, this journey was not only a learning process about
the topic at hand and about how to become a researcher, but also it influenced my philosophical
views and the type of researcher I am becoming.
References


## Appendix A

### SCHEDULE OF DATA COLLECTION

**List of Classes Observed and Interview/Focus Group Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CLASS 1:</strong> 4/24/2012 / ESL 603 / 75 min / 16 students / undergraduate / teacher 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus group:</strong> 2 Korean grads (30-40), 3 Chinese undergrads (19-25), 2 male 3 females</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CLASS 2:</strong> 5/9/2012 / ESL 603 / 75 min / 14 students / undergraduate / teacher 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview:</strong> Chinese undergraduate, female (19-25), also in Class 1 focus group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CLASS 3:</strong> 5/17/2012 / ESL 603 / 75 min / 13 students / undergraduate / teacher 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview:</strong> Korean, female, graduate (20-30), also in Class 1 focus group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CLASS 4:</strong> 5/24/2012 / ESL 603 / 75 min / 13 students / undergraduate / teacher 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus group:</strong> 2 Chinese undergraduates, females (19-25), also in Class 1 focus group, one is in Class 2 interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CLASS 5:</strong> 10/1/2012 / ESL 7072 / 50 min / 5 students / graduate / teacher 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No interview (postponed)</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CLASS 6:</strong> 10/3/2012 / ESL 7072 / 50 min / 4 students / graduate / teacher 2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview:</strong> Korean graduate student, male (22-30)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CLASS 7:</strong> 10/5/2012 / ESL 7072 / 50 min / 6 students / graduate / teacher 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview:</strong> Taiwanese, female, grad (CCM), in her 20s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CLASS 8:</strong> 10/17/2012 / ESL 7072 / 50 min / 9 students / graduate / teacher 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No interview (postponed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CLASS 9:</strong> 10/24/2012 / ESL 7072 / 50 min / 7 students / graduate / teacher 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview:</strong> Indian, female, grad, in her 20s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CLASS 10:</strong> 10/29/2012 / ESL 1073 / 50 min / 9 students / undergraduate / teacher 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview:</strong> Female/Japanese/grad/40s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CLASS 11:</strong> 10/31/2012 / ESL 1073 / 50 min / 10 students / undergraduate / teacher 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview:</strong> male/Chinese/undergrad (19-25)</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CLASS 12:</strong> 11/2/2012 / ESL 1073 / 50 min / 8 students / undergraduate / teacher 3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview:</strong> male/Japanese/undergrad (19-25)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CLASS 13:</strong> 11/9/2012 / ESL 1073 / 50 min / 8 students / undergraduate / teacher 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview:</strong> Chinese/ male/undergrad (19-25)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CLASS 14:</strong> 11/15/2013/ESL1073/50 min/ 11 students/ undergraduate / teacher 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A:</strong> Focus group: 4 students, Chinese, undergrad (19-25), 3 males 1 female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B:</strong> Interview: male/Arabic/undergrad (19-25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CLASS 15:</strong> 11/18/2013/ESL1073/50 min/ 11 students/undergraduate / teacher 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No interview data (recorder didn’t record): female/Omani/ undergraduate (19-25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

We are going to talk about the classroom activities that you participated in during the class you just finished before this session. I will go through the classroom activities or learning tasks one by one and ask you to share your thoughts on each. Let’s start with the first activity, … (here describe activity briefly).

First, I’d like to find out what you think about the activity or learning task.

(Start with open-ended questions.)

- What do you think of the activity? Any comments on it?
- Did you like the activity? Why?
- Was it a good activity? Why?

(If open-ended questions did not elicit a rich enough response, more specific questions are used after the open-ended ones.)

- Did you find the activity interesting? What was interesting about it?
- Did you find it useful? What was useful about it?
- Did you find it relevant to what you need to learn a language? How was it relevant?
- Did you find the task difficult/easy? Why?
- Anything else you would like to add about this task? Remember, you can express any thought, opinion, you can tell whether you liked the task or disliked it, and why, whether it worked for you or not, and why, whether you thought it was good task or not, and why? Anything really that comes to your mind.

Wait until no more replies. Then repeat for all tasks observed during the class (probably 3-4).

At the end (after all tasks were covered)

Now I would like to get your thoughts and opinion on the classroom activities in general.

- What do you think makes a classroom task or activity good?
- What do you think makes a language course good: the activities, the teacher, other?
Appendix C

DESCRIPTION OF CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

CLASS 1 - 4/24/2012 / ESL 603 / 75 min /16 students / undergraduate / followed by focus group session
1. Teacher presentation of stress and intonation
teacher explanation and demonstration, whole class
2. Handout – practicing stress and intonation
   list of sentences, practice saying the sentence aloud with the right stress
   whole class, drill, T calls on students, first randomly, then one by one
3. Handout – practicing stress and intonation
   pair work, drill, students practice the sentences with each other
4. Handout – practicing stress and intonation
   whole class, drill, T calls on individual students randomly
5. Pitch & rhythm - sentences to practice the control of pitch, intonation
   Teacher demonstration, whole class, drill
   Whole class, T calls on students in order
6. Explanation of homework
   Students need to watch TV commercials – watch the language of the commercial, and what methods
   they are using to sell stuff, T shows one funny commercial in class
   Whole class/ watching video

CLASS 2 - 5/9/2012 / ESL 603 / 75 min / 14 students / undergraduate / followed by individual interview
1. Picture story activity – discussion 1
   Each team gets a photograph of some people doing something. First they need to discuss what the
   people in the photo may be doing; the teacher encourages teams to come up with something
   elaborative and developed. Group work / discussion
2. Picture story activity – team presentations 1
   Teams have to present their stories to the rest of the class.
   group work / group presentation
3. Picture story activity – discussion 2
   The team receives another picture (e.g. a teapot) and they have to link the new picture to the old
   picture (e.g. why the people in the first picture would want to use a teapot) and modify their story to
   include the new picture as well.
   Group work / discussion
4. Picture story activity – team presentations 2
   Teams have to present their stories to the rest of the class.
   group work / group presentation

CLASS 3 - 5/17/2012 / ESL 603 / 75 min / 13 students / undergraduate / followed by individual interview
Main focus of observation: the participant interviewed after the class
1. Student team presentation: Adventure trip to India
2. Vocabulary: teacher explains a few words that came up during the presentation
   Teacher demonstration, class discussion (involve class in a q&a style)
3. Listening to academic lecture and taking notes, from CD (textbook), whole class
4. Compare notes on the listening task with partner, pair work
5. Listening to academic lecture form CD (textbook), teacher-led class discussion (teacher asks
   questions about what they heard on the CD)

CLASS 4 - 5/24/2012 / ESL 603 / 75 min / 13 students / undergraduate / followed by individual interview
1. Student team presentation: Adventure trip to Australia
2. Follow-up class discussion, led by the teacher
3. Reading and Re-telling a story, part 1
   Teams get a part of a true story, they need to read it, and prepare to re-tell to the rest of class. Each
   team gets a different part of the story (information gap)
   Group-work/ discussion
4. Teacher explains the background of the story
   Teacher demonstration, whole class
5. Team presentations
   Teams present their part of the story to the class

CLASS 5 - 10/1/2012 / ESL 7072 / 50 min / 5 students / graduate / no interview follow-up (interviewee wasn’t available, interview postponed)
Main focus of observation: the participant interviewed after the class, though interview got postponed
1. Small group/pair discussion
   Students were to discuss and prepare for their presentations due the next class in pairs. The
   presentation is about an interview they completed with a native speaker on American academic
   culture (individual presentations, but they were asked to share and reflect on the interview they
   completed in pairs).
2. Teacher demonstration
   Teacher explains the presentation task in detail (as a reminder), using the assignment sheet on
   blackboard.
3. Teacher demonstration and class discussion (transition phrases)
   Teacher explains transition/signal words (what are they, their meaning), list is from the textbook

CLASS 6 - 10/3/2012 / ESL 7072 / 50 min / 4 students / graduate / interview follow-up
Main focus of observation: the participant interviewed after the class
1. Listening to lecture from textbook. Students need to take notes. They listen twice, after which
   students will need to develop a chart based on their notes.
2. Teacher explanation. Teacher tells the class that they will need to develop a chart based on their
   notes. Teacher explains what the chart should be about.
3. Listening to the same lecture again, taking notes (for the chart to be developed afterwards).
4. Developing a chart: based on their notes, they need develop out a chart (supplied by the teacher).
5. Class discussion of charts (teacher puts up each group’s filled out chart on the projector)
6. Teacher explains homework

CLASS 7 - 10/5/2012 / ESL 7072 / 50 min / 6 students / graduate / interview follow-up
1. Answer questions about charts in textbook (Oral Comm .3. pp. 88-89)
   Group work/ textbook
2. Discussion of the textbook task with the whole class.
3. Describing tables of data from the textbook, discussion in pairs (p. 104)
   Pairwork/textbook
4. Pairs presenting tables from textbook to whole class
   Group presentations
5. Student presentations (individual assignment: presenting about an interview with a native speaker)

CLASS 8 - 10/17/2012 / ESL 7072 / 50 min / 9 students / graduate / no follow-up
1. Practicing for role-playing assignment in groups (groups have to produce a role-play script set in an
   academic context, using academic words and then act out the role play next class)

CLASS 9 - 10/24/2012 / ESL 7072 / 50 min / 7 students / graduate / interview follow-up
1. Listening to a video, listening for target words. Students need to write down the sentence they hear the word in, and then write their own definition for the word, in small groups. They have to guess the meaning of the word from the context.
2. Students work on the worksheet for the listening task (guessing words from context)

CLASS 10 - 10/29/2012 / ESL 1073 / 50 min / 9 students /undergraduate / interview follow-up
1. Teacher explains the passive voice
teacher demonstration/whole class
2. Practice forming the passive voice using sentences on the board
whole class/drill
3. Changing active sentences into passive, in pairs
pair work/drill
4. Reviewing sentences put together in pairs with the whole class
Whole class/drill
5. Teacher explains when the passive is used, later develops into a class discussion
teacher demonstration/whole class/discussion
6. Students need to make a list of the ingredients of bread, in pairs
Pair work/discussion
7. Whole class discusses what the pairs came up with (ingredients of bread)
Whole class/discussion
8. Task: looking at ingredients in the textbook (p. 123)
Teacher explanation/whole class/some discussion

CLASS 11 - 10/31/2012 / ESL 1073 / 50 min / 10 students /undergraduate / interview follow-up
1. Watching a video in groups.
The first group watches the first half of the video, takes notes, while the other group is outside. The first group has to summarize what they say to the 2nd group (working in pairs). The video is about the history of Halloween.
Listening/group work
2. Now students, those who listened to their partner’s summary, need to answer the questions the teacher just put up on the board
Whole class/discussion
3. Teacher plays the second half of the video; now the other group goes out, task is the same as in 1.
4. Students, those who listened to their partner’s summary, need to answer the questions the teacher put up on the board
5. Teacher plays few minutes again from the clips, to review

CLASS 12 - 11/2/2012 / ESL 1073 / 50 min / 8 students /undergraduate / interview follow-up
1. Checking the homework, vocabulary task for textbook, p. 124.
Whole class/q&a
2. Teacher explanation: Teacher explains what the scientific method is
Teacher explanation/class discussion
3. Experiment to demonstrate the scientific method. The task is to test whether boys or girls have a better memory when it comes to memorizing words. The class was invited to create a hypothesis on this. Then the teacher put a list of words on the screen, and students had one minute to look at them, Then they had to write down as many as they could remember in a given time. Then the class counted how many words boys and girls remembered (on average).
Whole class
4. Same experiment, but now with remembering numbers, instead of words.
Whole class
5. Write a report on the experiments in groups
Group-work

CLASS 13 - 11/9/2012 / ESL 1073 / 50 min / 8 students /undergraduate / interview follow-up
  1. Teacher talks about paraphrasing, how it is done and why it is important
     Teacher explanation/whole class/ followed by discussion
  2. Teacher put a list of words on the board and students need to come up with synonyms for each (as a way of practicing paraphrasing)
     Group work/vocabulary
  3. Teacher goes through the synonyms with whole class, first group, first word, etc..
     Whole class/discussion

CLASS 14 - 11/15/2013/ESL1073/50 min/ 11 students/undergraduate/focus group + interview follow up
  1. Teacher demonstration about bias, connects it to the discourse analysis task, reads out from the textbook (p. 126).
     Teacher explanation/whole class/ followed by discussion
  2. Listening task, “current affairs club” (textbook, p. 126), the class listen to an audio recording of a discussion on oil production, followed by discussion of the textbook task with the class (true or false questions). The recording is played in three sections, after each section there is a discussion of the textbook class with the class. The task also aims at developing critical thinking skills (by finding the bias in the speakers’ opinions)
     Listening/whole class
  3. Grammar task, reported speech (textbook, p. 128), teacher explains reported speech using examples from the textbook
     Teacher explanation/whole class

CLASS 15 - 11/18/2013/ESL1073/50 min/ 11 students/undergraduate/ followed by interview but recording is lost (recorder didn’t record)
  1. Teacher explanation about the presentation assignment and answers student questions
     Teacher explanation/discussion/ whole class
  2. Listening task, Watching a video about Canadian oil sands, students’ task is to take notes (p. 132 in the textbook)
  3. True and false statements based on listening on p. 133
     Listening/whole class
  4. Debate – class is divided into two groups and they have to come up with arguments for/against expanding oil production. Groups then parent their arguments and debate.
     Debate/group + whole class/speaking
Appendix D

CODING TREE - INTERVIEWS

**STUDENT ATTITUDES**
liking
goodness
enjoyment

**TASK ATTRIBUTES**
usefulness
importance
interest
relevance, real life
novelty/familiarity
difficulty
self-expression
creativity
interaction
clarity
variety
content

**NEEDS & WANTS**
needs
wants

**OPPORTUNITY**
opportunity to practice, opportunity to communicate, opportunity to speak, opportunity to learn

**OUTCOMES**
 improvement, learning, fluency

**OTHER**
agency – responsibility, self-efficacy, choice

culture

**EXPRESSED MOTIVATION**
motivation

**MOTIVATED BEHAVIOR**
effort, engagement

**CLASSROOM**
teacher
textbook
class size

**PEERS**
peer presentation, working with peers,
cooperation, relationship

**TASK INSTRUCTION AND IMPLEMENTATION**
turn-taking, time/timing, evaluation, task implementation (other)

**OTHER TOPICS**
use of L1

**TASK TYPES/ESL SKILL AREAS**
Type of task
role-play, group discussion, class discussion,
note-taking, presentation, peer presentation,
debate, drill, teacher explanation, interview

**ESL Skill Areas**
listening, speaking, pronunciation, vocabulary,
grammar, writing
APPENDIX E
CODING TREE – CLASS OBSERVATIONS

On task:
answering questions, cell phone, discussion,
following instructions, looking at textbook,
looking at the speaker, looking at the
teacher, looking up, nodding, non-verbal,
paying attention/not paying attention,
reading, repeating in choir, taking notes,
watching video, writing

Off task:
cell phone, chatting, fidgeting, laptop,
leaving, looking bored, looking down,
looking out of the window, non-task related
material, not participating, not paying
attention, quietly sitting, reading, sleeping,
unable to do task

Ambiguous:
looking bored, cell-phone, silence to
question, tablet

Engagement: low, medium, high

Teacher
Agency: ownership, - decision, not using the
opportunity to speak

Other
class size, class type, classroom dynamics

TASK INSTRUCTION AND
IMPLEMENTATION
turn-taking, time/timing, downtime, end-of-
class fatigue, evaluation, task
implementation (other)

OTHER TOPICS
use of L1

TASK TYPES/ESL SKILL AREAS
Type of task
role-play, group discussion, class discussion,
note-taking, presentation, peer presentation,
debate, drill, teacher explanation, interview

ESL Skill Areas
listening, speaking, pronunciation,
vocabulary, grammar, writing
Note. Based on the frequency of words in the participants’ responses (after removing filler words, such as “yeah”, “hmm”, and “the”)
## Appendix G

### SAMPLE FOR CROSS-CHECKING CODES

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Page</th>
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<th>Code Check (coder 2)</th>
<th>Original Code</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>R: I'm going to ask you questions about the activity that you did just now in the class, which was a listening activity. So it was, like, two groups; one group stayed in the classroom, listened to the video--</td>
<td>Listening, drill, working with peers <em>Agreed to take “drill” out (misunderstood the task)</em></td>
<td>listening, working with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>: Well, it wasn't very clear, you know, 'cause we are, like, the second lan--uh, we are foreign and we speak, like--'cause English not our, like, main language. So it's a--it's a little bit, like, difficult where we listen to, like, materials from the YouTube or something. But I think this make me, like, more concentrate.</td>
<td>Clarity, task implementation or evaluation, difficulty, listening, content, self-efficacy <em>Coded “more concentrate” as self-efficacy, agreed to change it to effort.</em></td>
<td>listening, clarity, difficulty, effort, task implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>S: 'Cause when I go out, I just a little bit of curiosity, what is--what is going on, like, inside.</td>
<td><em>Self-efficacy, motivation Coded “curiosity” as motivation, agreed with interest.</em></td>
<td>interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>S: So I just, um, base my, like, partner's, like, note and to find out what the video, like, told us and what exactly the main idea, something like that. So just dig [ph] my interest to, um, to find out what's going on. Um… I'm not say my partner is not good, but he's a--she's very good, just maybe the note is not, like, very clear, not very enough to understand. But still have--you know, we--we study very funny, you know, 'cause it's very interesting. Like, it's an American, like, education style. R: Uh-huh. S: Yeah, it's more practice. R: Uh-huh. S: Yeah</td>
<td>Working with peers, interest, clarity, interaction, enjoyment, culture, opportunity to practice</td>
<td>interest, clarity, opportunity to practice, working with peers, culture <em>Did not code “interaction”; I can see the case for it but I don't think it's strong enough.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>S: Yeah, I--I like to, like, ask her, like, &quot;What do you hear about it,&quot; maybe using, like, our language, maybe using Chinese. But it's--I mean, it's fine, you know, 'cause…</td>
<td>Use of L1, needs, cooperation</td>
<td>use of L1, need, working with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R: Mm-hmm.</td>
<td></td>
<td>I used the more neutral code of “working with peers”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S: You know, what--whatever, just, uh, which language you use, just, uh, I think the point is you need it to understand.</td>
<td></td>
<td>, but I can see the case for “cooperation” - &gt; “cooperation” added</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R: Uh-huh. So you did use Chinese as well during discussion?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S: Yeah, I think, like--like, we have a--still have, like, two classmate from Japan. I mean, they probably use, like, Japanese too; I don't know.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R: Uh-huh.</td>
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<td>S: I guess. Yeah, I mean, just to--to understand as well.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>R: Uh-huh. So when you are talking to your partner, like, how much English and how much Chinese do you use? Like, mostly English and a little Chinese, or what's…</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S: No, 50/50.</td>
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<td>R: 50/50?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S:Yeah, 50/50.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>S: Well, I just do my best to, like, write down everything, but it's a--kind of a mission impossible, 'cause I cannot just write down everything. So just stuff on keyword [ph]. 'Cause I came here almost two years. I think my English is better than, like, my partner.</td>
<td>Effort, difficulty, note-taking, familiarity, task implementation</td>
<td>difficulty, effort, task implementation, note-taking</td>
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<td></td>
<td>R: Uh-huh.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S: So, um, try to, like, write everything. 'Cause we didn't, like--we didn't saw [ph] the question first, right? We--we--we--like, we saw the video first, and then the question.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>S: So I don't know what--what exactly our instructor will ask us, so I just try to write down everything, everything I can, and make my partner clear to understand. 'Cause she's supposed to, like, answer the question, not me.</td>
<td>note-taking, clarity, effort, working with peers,</td>
<td>working with peers, effort, responsibility, note-taking</td>
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<td></td>
<td>R: Mm-hmm.</td>
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| 1    | S: My job is just to write down the note and write down the summary and to make her understandable.  
R: Mm-hmm.  
S: So, um, I just do my best to, you know, write down everything I heard and tell my, uh--when my, like, partner come into the classroom, just tell her what's going on.                                                                                                                   | (“made my partner clear to understand”).                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                |
| 2    | **S:** What did you think of the video?  
R: Mm-hmm.  
S: Uh, video was fun. I mean, it's basically a lot of, like, hist--history materials. And, um, actually, I, um, I already do some, like, research about Halloween.  
R: Uh-huh.  
S: 'Cause my lesson last quarter, I take some different class, but they still, like, mention the Halloween. So I know a little bit about Halloween.                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Enjoyment, task implementation, familiarity,                                                                                                                                   | Enjoyment, familiarity |
| 2    | **S:** So, um, I think the materials just to give me, like, the--the version [ph] push [ph], so just make me, like, um… More easier to remember.  
R: Mm-hmm.  
S: 'Cause I can't--I don't need to remember, like, every word he sai--like, video man said. I just need to remember, like, the picture or the--or the video.  
R: Mm-hmm.  
S: Yeah, it's helping to remember                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Difficulty, clarity, usefulness                                                                                                                                                  | Usefulness Added difficulty |
| 2    | R: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. If you had to say, would you think this activity, this listening in two groups, was it a good activity or…?  
S: Yeah.  
R: Uh-huh?  
S: I--I have to say it's a pretty good activity.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Goodness Agreed adding “working with peers.”                                                                                                                                                                                                 | goodness, working with peers |
| 3    | R: Mm-hmm.  
S: Uh, no, I'm sorry. We kind of a big group, right? And… When we done the activity, I know what is my weakness, what is my, uh, like, uh, [unintelligible - background noise].                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Class size, opportunity to learn, effort, clarity, cooperation,                                                                                                                                                                           | cooperation, working with peers, class size Added opportunity to learn (“I know what is my weakness”) and effort (“we find out”)}
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>R: Mm-hmm. S: What I'm not good for. And what is my... And my partner know what is, uh, her, like--is not good.</td>
<td>our, like, mistake and try to make it better”)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>R: Mm-hmm. S: So, um, you know, we find out our, like, mistake and try to make it better and... 'Cause I--I think our instructor goes just to make everybody clear.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>R: Mm-hmm. S: Um, I can help her and she can help me either.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>S: So that is, um, the first thing I think, like, activity's very good</td>
<td>Goodness</td>
<td>goodness</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>S: So that is, um, the first thing I think, like, activity's very good. And second one, it's more closer between, like, me and my partner.</td>
<td>working with peers, relationship</td>
<td>working with peers, relationship</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>R: Mm-hmm. S: Even though we is from, like, same--same country, we speak same language, but we still, like, kind of the--you know, not--not very close.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>R: Mm-hmm. S: So the activity make our relationship more closer.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>R: Uh-huh. S: Maybe in the future, we are still in some class and we--based on our, like, very good relationship, we can still help each other.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>R: Uh-huh. So you can get a better relationship. S: Yeah. R: Get to know each other better. S: Yeah.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>S: Oh, yeah. I really like, um... Last time our instructor give our mission, the mission.</td>
<td>task-implementation, role-play, enjoyment, novelty, interest, effort,</td>
<td>liking, enjoyment, role-play, novelty, interest, effort</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>R: Mm-hmm. S: Every--uh, we have a, like, full group--</td>
<td>agreed adding “liking”.</td>
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<td>136</td>
<td>have, like, own, like, character.</td>
<td>enjoyment, vocabulary, novelty, task-implementation, usefulness, opportunity to learn,</td>
<td>liked, enjoyment, vocabulary, usefulness, learning</td>
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<td></td>
<td>R: Mm-hmm.</td>
<td>Agreement adding liking.</td>
<td>Agree to include “new vocabulary” as “learning” not as “novelty.”</td>
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<td>S: So I think that is so much fun, you know. I never, like, had that class before in my life, so this is very interesting. Um… I'm a, like, a little bit shy 'cause, like, I never been to--I never have that situation before. So just to try to, like, do my best, you know, to show them, like, another--the rest of the classmate I, uh--the best of--I--I mean, the best I can do, so…</td>
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<td>R: Uh-huh.</td>
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<td>R: Why did you like that activity so much? Because it was fun and…?</td>
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<td>S: Yeah, 'cause it was very fun, you know. Um, we did it, like, just to remember the new… 'Cause we supposed to, like, use those three new vocabulary.</td>
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<td>R: Mm-hmm.</td>
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<td>S: And we never learned before.</td>
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<td>R: Mm-hmm.</td>
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<td>S: And so after--so our instructor give out this mission and we needed to translate it and to know what is, like--like, the meaning about this word. So--and also, we need to use it, like, from the conversation, to the conversation. So, I mean, mm, the activities help me to remember this word.</td>
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<td>R: Ah, so it was very helpful for learning these words.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S: Yeah, very, very, very helpful.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>: Uh-huh.</td>
<td>relevance, usefulness, enjoyment, usefulness, learning, real life</td>
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<td>S: So still now in, like, normal conversation with another people, I still can use these three words sometimes.</td>
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<td>R: Mm-hmm.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S: Yeah, I mean, this is--like, this is useful, you know?</td>
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<td>R: Mm-hmm.</td>
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<td>S: Not just for fun.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>: 'Cause the fun is, like, second. It's level two.</td>
<td>enjoyment, vocabulary, “Agreed to add “learning.””</td>
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<td>R: Uh-huh.</td>
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<td>S: Level one is, how--how do you know…</td>
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<td>Like, mm… How do you know this word?</td>
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<td>R: Mm-hmm.</td>
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<td>S: And do you know what it mean? And do you know how to use it? So I think the--the--the first goal, I--I completed.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>: Yeah, that's--our--our instructor very good for this.</td>
<td>Teacher Agreed to add &quot;goodness&quot;</td>
<td>goodness, teacher</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>S: Our assi--assignment about, like--give you, like, a 20--15 or 20 new cabulary [ph]-new vocabulary, I'm sorry. And there is, like, random explanation on the bottom, just--just to find a number to compare the, um, definition [ph] to find what is the meaning about that word.</td>
<td>vocabulary, liking, enjoyment, difficulty, interest, motivation or engagement (for the last underlined part, unsure)</td>
<td>drill, vocabulary, liking, enjoyment, interest, difficulty</td>
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<td>R: Uh-huh. So matching the definition to the word.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S: Yeah, matching the definitions.</td>
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<td>R: Mm-hmm.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S: Yeah, exactly. That one, um, maybe is, like--I don't like it, you know.</td>
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<td>R: Why? Why, why?</td>
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<td>S: 'Cause, um… I think it's no any fun.</td>
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<td>R: Uh-huh.</td>
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<td>S: You know, just, uh… Everybody can do that. You know, just go--go home and check the dictionary or the e-dictionary or whatever you like, just--and to find, like, a similar explanation.</td>
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<td>R: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.</td>
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<td>R: Mm-hmm.</td>
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<td>S: It's, uh, it's kind of a boring. It's not funny like the role-play or like--like video.</td>
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<td>R: Uh-huh.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S: Yeah.</td>
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<td>R: So it's not fun and it's very mechanical.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S: Yeah.</td>
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<td>R: You can go and look--look it up in the dictionary.</td>
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<td>S: Mm-hmm. Just, uh, very, you know…</td>
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<td>R: Mm-hmm.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>S: Yeah.</td>
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<td>R: And it's not very difficult either, right?</td>
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S: Not that difficult.
R: Mm-hmm.
S: Yeah. I mean, I cannot stand it. I don't know the rest of the classmate, but I think I can't handle it.
R: Mm-hmm.
S: Yeah.

5 S: Um… Like, for me, I'm from China, I'm Chinese, so I really like the American education style.
R: Mm-hmm.
S: 'Cause, um… Like, more activity really helpful. Um, and we not just think, "Oh, we need to come today. We must come." And I—I think I, like—like, my responsibility, I think you should come until you finish it. So, you know, no one push me; I just push myself.
R: Uh-huh. I see.
S: So I think that's very helpful.

5 R: But what kind of activity is good, do you think is working [ph], for an English language class?
S: Uh… I don't know, just role-play?
R: Role-play is good?
S: Yeah, role-play is very good. And, mm, just the work with your partner.
R: Mm-hmm. Partner work?
S: Yeah, partner work. That was good, too. And… I don't know anything else about, like… 'Cause the language is still very tough on, you know.

5 S: Yeah, partner work. That was good, too. And… I don't know anything else about, like… 'Cause the language is still very tough on, you know.
R: Mm-hmm.
S: There is no, like… There is no more, like, um… It's already, like, do the best.
R: Mm-hmm.
S: For activity, the role-play or something, like, there is no, like, new or fresh activity you can think about it. So I think it should be—yeah, I think role-play and partner work
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<td>is very good.</td>
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<td>R:</td>
<td>So very good [ph], something active.</td>
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<td>S:</td>
<td>Yeah.</td>
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<td>R:</td>
<td>Mm-hmm.</td>
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<td>S:</td>
<td>That's very good, so…</td>
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Appendix H

EXPRESSED MOTIVATION (CODED AS MOTIVATION) AND ITS CONNECTION TO OTHER CODES

<table>
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<tr>
<th>CLASS 1</th>
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<td>R: Can you think of a task that is interesting or motivating, what makes the task interesting or motivating... that you really want to it, that task? Do you hear the question? S: Yes. (Pause) S1: I think, some interview and yes, the time for express our thought...yes... R: Aha, so when you get a chance to express your thoughts, that's interesting. S1: aha S3: I want be... more like native speaker, so I want to speak, like... I'd want to do, like a kit or something, like... kit R: Kit?n S3: So, I, I want more. kits. Practice. R: With your kit? S3: Yes. R: What do you mean by kit, can you explain that to me? Because... S3: Like, err... in the scene of the life, right,... in the school, or in the restaurant and I just practice what... how can I R: You mean a role-play? S3: Yeah, role-play. how can I order a menu or how can talk with the native speaker, or, like that. S1: It's good idea S3: yeah... I think it's just difficult to understand. R: So, why would an activity like a role-play, kind of sketch, be interesting, ...motivating? Why? S3: Why, because I just... I just prefer my voice (?) inaudible to get a chance. My American friend who learn Japanese is practice like this.... and it seems very interesting. I want to try. R: Okay. Anything you would like to add about what makes a task interesting, that you want to do it? S1: It's like task like the... the TV commercial, yeah, I think that's interesting. R: So, now, that's an interesting question, you have a homework assignment about TV commercials and the commercials look interesting. So do you think that's an interesting task? S: Yes. R: Yeah? S: Yes. R: Do you want to do it? Like you go home like, oh, I really want to do this? Do you have that feeling? S1: Yes. R: Yes? S2: Yes.</td>
<td>self-expression, motivation, want, role-play, real life, difficulty, interest interest, enjoyment, real life, motivation</td>
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**S1:** Sometimes I do that, when I watch the TV... I try to get the topic of commercial, as soon as I watch, so I **enjoy** the tire?? and T is, T... (didn’t finish sentence)

**R:** So what makes that task interesting, the commercial task?

**S2:** There are, there are so many funny commercials, now in the daily life, and ... err... we all want to know what this commercial mean, I think. 

**R:** Because you see it... I mean, you know, when you’re here, you see commercials all the time.

### CLASS 2

**R:** Aha... I see. And you had to be creative; did that make it interesting, too?

**S3:** Yeah.... Maybe some challenges, it's also interesting, because you want to do it.

### CLASS 4

**R:** So, do you think this first presentation, when this... I don't know his name, who was presenting, it doesn’t matter anyway... when he was presenting, you like **actively paying attention** to what he was talking about?

**S3:** Yeah, especially when there are some pictures on the slides I want see what's this and listen to he said what’s this, yeah.

**S2:** Yeah.

**R:** So it was an interesting topic, it’s interesting to do?

**S3:** Yeah.

**S2:** Yeah, I think so too.

**S3:** I think everyone wants to do this.

**S3:** And also when the advent is ... doing the presentation if he's talking about adventure trip I think I want to listen this, yeah, I want to know it.

### CLASS 12

**S:** I always want to improve myself of English skills or speaking, so I like presentation. It's hard for me, but I like presentation. Mm-hmm. discussing

**R:**

### CLASST 2

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<th>Peer presentation, motivation, (engagement)</th>
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<th>Interest), motivation, peer presentation, topic</th>
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<th>Motivation, liking, difficulty, presentation</th>
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