

## Motivation and engagement in English language learning among challenged students of home for girls in DSWD: a phenomenological inquiry

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**Abstract:** This study explored the motivation and engagement of challenged students in learning English at the Home for Girls DSWD through modular-assisted instruction. Using a qualitative research approach, specifically Transcendental Phenomenology, the study aimed to understand the lived experiences of eight female students enrolled in the modular-assisted learning program in partnership with Tantagean National Trade High School during the school year 2024-2025. Participants were purposively selected based on specific inclusion criteria. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed the participants to share their experiences, challenges, and coping strategies in learning English under a non-traditional educational setup. The researcher utilized Braun and Clarke's method for data analysis, which involved identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, and clustering them into 21 emergent themes to reveal the essence of their learning experiences. Findings indicated that while students faced various challenges, including fluency and comprehension difficulties, mental and reading comprehension struggles, limited learning resources, and difficulties in listening and reading comprehension, they also developed coping mechanisms such as self-reliance on learning tools, motivational and social circles, and practice and support. Furthermore, the study revealed that intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, professional examples, media exposure, and personal preference for English played a significant role in sustaining their engagement in language learning. Additionally, their experiences highlighted the influence of challenges on their motivation, as they demonstrated growth mindset and resilience and perseverance in achieving educational goals, despite environmental and institutional constraints.

Keywords: Modular-assisted instruction, Motivation, Engagement, Juvenile offenders

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## INTRODUCTION

Motivation and engagement play a crucial role in English language learning, particularly for students facing educational challenges. While the Department of Education (DepEd) has introduced programs such as the Dropout Reduction Program (DORP) and Alternative Delivery Modes (ADMs) to support at-risk learners, these initiatives do not fully address the needs of students in welfare institutions like the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD). Many of these learners experience constraints that impact their academic progress, making it essential to examine their motivation and engagement in acquiring English proficiency.

In this context, educational engagement among at-risk students is a global concern, with studies emphasizing the role of motivation in language acquisition (Alzaanin, 2023; Poudel, 2022). International frameworks, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on Quality Education, highlight the importance of inclusive learning models for marginalized groups. However, research on motivation and engagement in non-traditional settings, such as juvenile rehabilitation centers, remains limited.

In the Philippines, dropout rates and educational disengagement continue to pose challenges. DepEd has implemented policies (DepEd Order No. 74, s. 2010 & DepEd Order No. 53, s. 2011) to address these concerns, but they do not entirely cater to the distinct learning needs of juvenile offenders. Republic Act No. 9344, or the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006, underscores education's role in rehabilitating and reintegrating these learners. Recent data from DSWD Region 12 (2024) indicate that 45 students under its custody are enrolled in modular-assisted instruction, underscoring the need to assess how this approach influences their motivation and engagement in learning English.

While previous studies (Balones, 2023; Averina & Kuswandono, 2022; Wang & Liu, 2022) highlight motivation as a key factor in language learning, most focus on traditional school settings. Limited research explores how modular-assisted instruction affects marginalized students, particularly those in rehabilitation. Addressing this gap is essential for developing effective educational strategies that support their reintegration into mainstream education and society.

Thus, Findings from this study were shared with DSWD and DepEd to help refine interventions for students under welfare institutions. Educational policymakers, administrators, and teachers may use these insights to enhance modular-assisted instruction and develop strategies that foster motivation and engagement. Additionally, the study contributed to academic discussions on alternative education through presentations and publications. Understanding the experiences of these learners aid in strengthening programs that promote their educational development and reintegration into society.

#### *Statement of the problem*

This study aimed to explore the motivation and engagement in English language learning among challenged students of the Home for Girls in the Care of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) using a phenomenological inquiry approach.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the lived experiences of students in relation to their motivation and engagement on their English Language Learning?
- 2) What are the challenges do these students encounter on their English Language Learning?
- 3) How do these challenges influence the students' motivation and engagement on their English Language Learning?
- 4) How do students cope with the challenges they encounter on their English Language Learning?
- 5) How do the educational interventions, such as modular-assisted instruction, support the motivation and engagement of students on their English Language Learning?

## METHODOLOGY

#### *Protocol type*

The study followed a qualitative research protocol, specifically Transcendental Phenomenology, to explore the lived experiences of challenged students in learning English through modular-assisted instruction.

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### *Search Strategy*

While a typical “search strategy” applies more commonly to systematic reviews, in qualitative studies this can be interpreted as the method for identifying and selecting participants and the setting of the study:

1) The study was conducted at the DSWD Home for Girls in partnership with Tantangan National Trade High School.

2) Participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring that only students fitting specific inclusion criteria were invited to participate.

#### Eligibility Criteria

The inclusion criteria for participant selection included:

1) Must be female students enrolled in the modular-assisted learning program during SY 2024-2025

2) Must be currently housed at the DSWD Home for Girls

3) Must demonstrate willingness to share their experiences in English language learning

#### Data Extraction

In this context, data extraction refers to how information was gathered and analyzed:

1) Data were collected via semi-structured interviews using a researcher-made guide

2) Interviews focused on students’ experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms in

learning English

3) Braun and Clarke’s thematic analysis was used to extract key data, involving:

3.1. Identifying significant statements

3.2. Formulating meanings

3.3. Clustering into 21 emergent themes

3.4 Themes were drawn to reflect motivation, engagement, challenges, and resilience in learning English

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### *Lived experiences that shaped their motivation and engagement in English learning*

The motivation and engagement of students in English language learning were shaped by their lived experiences. These students had clear personal goals, such as improving their education and preparing for future careers. Ellis (2020) emphasized that language learning is most effective when students are able to engage in real-world communication, and this was reflected in how these students remained motivated by their personal aspirations. Even though challenges existed, the students were driven to continue learning because of the goals they had set for themselves.

### *Challenges impacted student motivation and engagement*

The students in this study faced challenges related to vocabulary comprehension, reading comprehension, and fluency. These challenges were magnified by the lack of sufficient resources in the modular-assisted learning setup. Larsen-Freeman (2018) found that language learning is enhanced through active communication and real-time feedback. However, in a modular format, these elements were significantly limited, leading to difficulties in language acquisition. Without peer discussions and teacher feedback, students found it difficult to fully engage with the material, and as a result, their language proficiency lagged.

Despite the difficulties they encountered, many students showed resilience, which positively influenced their motivation. Schmitt (2020) stated that when students face challenges, those with intrinsic motivation and strong self-efficacy are better able to overcome these barriers. In this study, students continued their English studies despite frustration and setbacks, often drawing motivation from family, the desire to improve, and exposure to English media. Their persistence reflected a growth mindset, wherein they viewed challenges as opportunities for improvement.

#### *Coping mechanisms employed by students to overcome learning barriers*

To cope with the challenges of modular instruction, students turned to self-directed learning strategies, such as watching English tutorials or using online resources. Benson (2019) supported this, explaining that learners who engage in autonomous learning and utilize external resources tend to perform better in language acquisition. Students also reached out to peers and family members for support, reflecting their resourcefulness and desire to continue improving their language skills. The use of external resources helped bridge the gap created by the lack of teacher-student interaction, demonstrating the students' resilience and commitment to their learning process.

#### *Modular-assisted instruction on student engagement and motivation*

Modular-assisted instruction provided some structure but lacked interactive and personalized support. Students faced challenges in modular distance learning, such as overloaded activities, module distribution issues, and difficulty monitoring progress. To cope, students developed independent learning strategies and sought support from family, while teachers resolved issues through collaboration, leading to the recommendation of capacity-building programs, counseling, and instructional support to improve modular-assisted learning (Manarpaac et.al., 2022). This suggests that a blended learning approach, combining the structure of modular learning with interactive elements, might provide a more effective learning environment for students.

## CONCLUSION

The students at the DSWD Home for Girls shared diverse lived experiences in their pursuit of learning English. Despite the challenges posed by their custodial setting, they expressed a strong desire to improve their language skills, driven by personal goals such as furthering their education, traveling, and preparing for future careers. Their motivation and engagement were influenced by a combination of personal aspirations, joy in learning, and a deep commitment to self-improvement.

However, the students encountered significant linguistic challenges in their English learning. These difficulties were most evident in areas like vocabulary comprehension, fluency in speaking, and reading and writing proficiency. Cognitive and language processing difficulties, as well as a lack of adequate resources, further compounded these challenges, limiting their ability to fully engage with and grasp the language. Despite these obstacles, the students recognized the importance of learning English and were motivated by external factors such as social comparisons, exposure to English media, and the desire to excel academically and in future career opportunities.

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These challenges, while discouraging at times, also had a profound effect on the students' motivation and engagement. Many students, despite moments of frustration and inconsistency in their studies, were driven by a sense of determination. They relied on social comparisons with peers and media exposure to motivate themselves, as well as personal ambitions for success beyond the classroom. Their resilience was evident in their commitment to continue learning, despite the obstacles they faced.

To cope with the challenges in their English learning, students developed several strategies. These included seeking support from peers and teachers, utilizing available learning tools, and engaging in self-directed study. Their resourcefulness and persistence reflected a growth mindset, as they viewed setbacks as opportunities for improvement rather than insurmountable barriers. This resilience allowed them to stay engaged in their learning journey, even when progress seemed slow.

The modular-assisted learning program played a significant role in supporting the students' motivation and engagement. It offered flexibility and structure, allowing the students to continue their education in a way that was accessible and adapted to their needs. The support provided by teachers, along with the opportunity for peer interaction and the use of educational modules, created an inclusive learning environment that facilitated their progress in English. This approach ensured that the students could maintain their engagement in the face of the challenges they encountered.

In conclusion, while the students faced numerous challenges in learning English, their motivation, persistence, and coping strategies, combined with the support from educational interventions, enabled them to continue making progress. The findings of this study emphasize the importance of providing responsive, adaptive teaching strategies that support the unique needs of students in custodial settings, ensuring their academic and personal growth.

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