

**Example research report – Qualitative study exploring factors affecting motivation in undergraduate students**

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*Comments throughout are in red and italics or added to specific parts at the side of the document. These are not exhaustive but are simply there to indicate where common errors are usually observed within research reports across the board.*

## **Abstract**

Motivation is the drive influenced by internal or external factors toward specific goals, shaped by various influences (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The aim of this study delves into university student motivation, employing Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework to explore factors affecting motivation. Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory accentuates intrinsic motivation driven by autonomy, competence, and relatedness are key components that contribute significantly to student satisfaction and positive outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2017). The positive impact of fulfilling autonomy needs on both intrinsic and extrinsic levels is highlighted, enhancing academic engagement and task performance. Through the thematic analysis of a focus group, the study revealed four themes and eight sub-themes, elucidating the factors shaping motivation for the participants. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation reflected the self-determination theory's principles, emphasising the importance of relatedness, competence, and autonomy in understanding and promoting students' motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2017). Exploring cultural factors through potential research could improve the understanding of the factors influencing university students.

*Very good abstract*

## Introduction

Motivation is the stimulant that triggers, directs, and sustains an individual's behaviours and actions that are influenced by internal or external factors (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Intrinsic motivation is the engagement in an activity due to its enjoyable or satisfactory contributions, driven by internal factors such as enjoyment (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Activity or behaviour derived from extrinsic motivation is due to external sources like monetary reward, rather than enjoyment or satisfaction (Deci et al., 1999; Deci & Ryan, 2020).

Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory was initially developed to elucidate the concept of intrinsic motivation and centres on three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2020). The theory suggests that engaging in activities aligned with one's interests, enabling self-expression, and fostering self-development and meaningful relationships leads to higher satisfaction and motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2017).

Intrinsic motivation is enhanced when internal factors are met (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Deci et al. (1991) showed that students who fulfilled autonomy needs increased intrinsic motivation, task performance, and persistence. Taylor et al. (2014) also found a positive link between intrinsic motivation and performance *(in students)?*. Jang et al. (2010) reported that supporting all three needs in students boosted intrinsic motivation and academic performance. Self-determination theory is utilised within professional fields like education, highlighting that individuals' autonomy, competence, and relatedness must be supported to promote intrinsic motivation and achieve favourable outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Guay, 2022). It indicates that intrinsic motivation enhances interest, enjoyment in learning, and encourages increased engagement, persistence, and comprehension (Deci & Ryan, 2020; Guay, 2022).

While intrinsic motivation yields positive outcomes, self-determination theory also differentiates various forms of extrinsic motivation, suggesting that the level of autonomy and quality lead to diverse effects on behaviour (Guay, 2022; Deci & Ryan, 2020). Mouratdis et al. (2008) revealed that autonomously experienced extrinsic motivation in university students boosted academic engagement and performance, signifying that valuing associated goals led to higher engagement and performance.

**Commented [SC1]:** Multiple citations need to be cited correctly in APA style (alphabetical order)

Multiple factors influence university student motivation. Autonomy support, wherein students have control over their learning (Deci & Ryan, 2020). Parental engagement, encompassing interest, encouragement, and realistic expectations and teacher positive feedback in nurturing settings also promotes motivation (Guay, 2022). In terms of peer support, Deci and Ryan (2017) suggest that positive social interactions can contribute to an individual's sense of relatedness, which, in turn, supports intrinsic motivation. When students find personal meaning in their academic pursuits and experience ownership, it enhances motivation and overall academic performance (Guay, 2022).

**Commented [SC2]:** Incomplete sentence - what about autonomy support?

The purpose of this study was to explore what factors have an influence on university students' motivation to apply for, and maintain engagement with, a university degree programme.

**Commented [SC3]:** Is - remember to write your research question in the present tense. You WILL be doing the research, not have already done it.

*Nice introduction to motivation and relevant information provided that demonstrates factors that influence motivation in university students.*

## Method

### Participants

The participants for this study were chosen based on the conveyed interest by a group of university applicants during the process of application over the previous two years. The participants received an email which included a brief explanation of the study's purpose, a focus group was then organised. Of all those who responded with interest in participating in the study, the four participants mentioned below were those who could attend the specific date, time, and location of the focus group. The participants comprise two males, aged 45 and 20, and two females, aged 32 and 22. The final report used pseudonyms for confidentiality (Mark, Alex, Sarah, Emily).

#### **Data collection**

The researcher designed a semi-structured interview schedule to investigate motivation within university students. Ten open-ended questions were included with additional encouraging prompts for participants to dispense specific examples. A 60-minute audio-recorded focus group that included four participants was conducted using this interview schedule. After completion of the focus group, the researcher transcribed information provided by the participants verbatim for data analysis. pseudonyms were used for all four participants in the final report to ensure confidentiality. Any identifiable information within quotes was also substituted with other pseudonyms to prevent participant recognition. A final transcript was supplied to students for analysis in the second-year research report. Consent forms were given and signed before the study, right to withdraw explained, and debriefs given thereafter.

#### **Data Analysis**

The method chosen to analyse the focus group data from this study was thematic analysis, aiming to identify recurring patterns and themes. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. First, the transcript was consecutively read to establish content familiarity. Next, initial codes and comments were made within the transcript margins to condense large extracts of data to meaningful codes, followed by an attempt to uncover and develop themes from subsequent patterns within generated codes and notes. Individual statements were reviewed for their significance, distinguishing between personal views or a general shared opinion among the participants. In the fourth stage, preliminary themes were reviewed and modified and the cutting and pasting of data to support developing themes. Data correlating to each developed theme was considered to confirm its collaboration with the theme. The analysis's final phase included theme definition and the compilation of a conclusive list of themes and sub-themes.

*Method is clear and detailed.*

## Results

The thematic analysis interpreted four themes, detailed in Table 1, with sub-themes and supporting quotes. The report will elaborate on the themes of influence and intrinsic interest. The table below is summarised, with a more comprehensive version in the appendices. *clear*

**Table 1.**

*Table of Themes, Sub-Themes, and Supported Quotes.*

**Commented [SC4]:** Excellent table formatted well

| Themes             | Sub-Themes        | Supporting Quotes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Influence          | Family            | “So it was like a push from my dad, but I got to choose the course...”<br>“For me it’s literally just my kids. They’re the reason I turn up every day even when I really don’t want to.”                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|                    | Life experience   | “I can no longer work on the sites – tha’s a given at this point.” – 4<br>“And you know, I needed something more than but it genuinely did take me that time to realise that I wanted to do something more.”                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Sense of belonging | Social connection | “I really don’t like the interaction at all.”<br>“... I mean, you’ve said interacting with people in the class, but it’s nice to just – just be around other people, not just on the course.”<br>“...it’s just nice – really nice – to see other people and not just youngsters either, you know, it – it’s just not the youngsters being around you. It’s other people getting involved.” |
|                    | Relatedness       | “And to connect with people who had similar interests as me.”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

|                    |                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                    |                    | <p>"I've made a really good group of friends on on the Applied Computing course though. And I feel like they are pretty much on par with me in terms of my personality in terms of my values in terms of how I, how I am."</p> <p>"...maybe I felt like I didn't deserve to be with any other groups of people."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Intrinsic interest | Enjoyment          | <p>"I Find it interesting the things we can do with computers and what we can make them do, and I feel like studying computing can help me get a better job than I could have got if I just went into work somewhere now that u wouldn't have enjoyed."</p> <p>"I think the motivation to carry on just came from me understanding and making peace with the fact that I didn' know it all at that point. That was a big thing and I was learning and, actually, the learning was the enjoyment from that point on."</p> <p>"But I think he saw the enjoyment I got from ICT when I was in school..." 568 - a</p> |
|                    | Self-determination | <p>"...I think it's fascinating how people think and behave, and I feel like with psychology you can make a difference... I want to make a difference." 110 - s</p> <p>"The pressure of social interactions sometimes just feels too much and I wanted to know why I'm like that..." 130 - e</p> <p>"But realistically I'm here for me and I'm here to learn..." 669 - e</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Extrinsic interest | Financial security | <p>"And I spent a good few days after that thinking about what I want to do after the degree, what else I can do to enhance my CV a bit more so that I can get a decent job and earn a decent amount of money."</p> <p>"I would love to be able to be you know the provider for them..." – 787 - s</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|                    | Career prospects   | <p>"Long-term my literal dream would be to have my own game development studio or company or something. I don't really want to work for someone else."</p> <p>"...my goal, career, wise, would be to go into either forensic psychology or potentially work with young offenders."</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

## Theme 1: Influence

**Commented [SC5]:** Level two heading is correct. Level three heading below for the sub-theme is also correct.

A theme of influence was interpreted with features applicable to all four focus group participants. Sub-themes for influence include family and life experience.

### ***Sub-theme 1.1: Family***

This sub-theme captures the family's influence on the motivation of three participants who mention influence relating to their families.

Sarah's children interpreted clear motivation, even when she lacked the desire to attend university. "They're the reason I turn up every day even when I really don't want to." (Lines 474-475, page 18) and "I want to set an example for them and do better for them and their futures." (Lines 118-119, page 5). This intensifies Sarah's resolve to build a better future for her family, separate from their current situation, and become a role model.

Emily and Alex both share similar parental pressure. Alex explains, "Yeah, he my dad is definitely my main motivation, I think. I mean, he's pushed me to do the best that I can do." (Lines 571-572, page, 22) and "...I really want my dad to be proud of me." (Line 780, page 30). This strongly suggested Alex's father significantly motivated his pursuit of a university education and served as a primary source of motivation, while a personal desire for acceptance is also evident. *good*

Emily shared, "And I had my mum just on my case, 'why are you always moaning? Why don't you go and do something else then' and eventually I kind of just did." (Lines 555-557, page 21). While mentioned only once, this statement suggests enduring parental pressure.

Emily and Alex experienced parental pressure as motivation, whereas Sarah seeks to improve her family's life. While these viewpoints differ, they both stem from family influences.

### ***Sub-theme 1.2: Life experience***

Connection was interpreted between life experience and motivation. Mark expressed an experience that led him to pursue university. Mark stated, “Like I physically can’t do what I want to do anymore so I’ve sort of been pushed to do something else?” (Lines 512-513, page, 20) and “...30 years in the industry....” (Lines 509-510, page, 20). This also related to his previous career experience influencing his selected course. *Could interpret this further for a more nuanced interpretation of Marks situation*

Emily discussed a break to explore job interests. “So took a few years out, did a few jobs or worked at a variety of different places different retail shops. And that just wasn’t me [laughs] at all.” (Lines 527-529, page 20). Emily found that these experiences did not align with her career preferences, nor did she seem satisfied in these roles. This life experience motivated her to peruse another avenue whilst also promoting her autonomy.

Life experience served as a distinct motivator for specific participants, each driven by their unique personal experiences.

## **Theme 2: Intrinsic interest**

Intrinsic interest presented as a common attribute within all four participants and was prevalent in the entire focus group, with sub-themes of enjoyment and self-determination.

### ***Sub-theme 2.1: Enjoyment***

The participants discussed a range of enjoyable motivational factors, whilst also highlighting that lack of enjoyment was demotivating, emphasising the importance of experiencing enjoyment for effective learning and continued engagement.

Alex articulated the joy of learning ICT at school. This early exposure was a clear driver for him to continue pursuing this further at university, as he shared, "...the enjoyment I got from ICT when I was in school..." (Lines 568-569, page 22).

Alex further conveyed that enjoyment was a strong factor. He acknowledged his lack of motivation for academic work that didn't (*do not use contractions*) bring him joy by saying, "There are assignments as well that I've not really fully enjoyed and I feel like there's not really a strong push for me to do something I don't really enjoy." (Lines 583-584, page 22).

Both the presence and absence of enjoyment were discussed within the focus group, indicating that enjoyment is essential for motivation and sustaining interest.

#### ***Sub-theme 2.2: Self-determination***

Participants showed self-determination by making choices *that* aligned with their preferences, values, and goals. Empowered decision-making regarding life goals and personal growth was evident. Emily shared, "The pressure of social interactions sometimes just feels too much and I wanted to know why I'm like that..." (Lines 130-132, page 6). This statement underscores the autonomous choice to understand oneself, highlighting the importance of introspection and self-discovery.

Emily also stated, "But realistically I'm here for me and I'm here to learn..." (Line 669, page 26). This emphasises a self-driven focus on personal growth and education, indicating a strong sense of personal responsibility for learning and development, driven by internal motivation.

Reference by Sarah "...short term pain for long term gain..." (Line 762, page 29),

signified a readiness to face short-term challenges for lasting benefits. This underscores the ability to make choices aligned with one's aspirations, emphasising Sarah's determination to endure temporary discomfort for future success.

The participants demonstrated self-determination by autonomously aligning decisions with personal preferences, values, and goals, highlighting a need for personal growth.

Overall, the focus group provided diverse elements that corresponded to the four interpreted themes, each contributing to a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing motivation.

*Clear engagement with the required analysis with some really nice interpretations provided.*

*A couple of places where your interpretations could have been expanded upon / more nuanced - and some parts related to this were in your discussion, but needed to be in the results.*

### **Discussion**

The study sought to investigate the factors influencing university students' motivation to enrol and sustain engagement within education. This was achieved through a thematic analysis of a focus group *transcript*. The results interpreted four themes and eight corresponding sub-themes, elucidating the factors influencing motivation among university students. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation were discernible and interpreted across the participants.

While Extrinsic motivation was evident, it intertwined with a high degree of autonomy. Alex, for instance, initially found external parental motivation, but the autonomy to choose his course provided a sense of independence in his decision-making. Mark, despite

career challenges, took control and transformed them into a chance for personal development by applying for and studying his original trade. This corresponds with Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory, underlining autonomy's importance for motivation and its positive impact on behaviour and outcomes, even when initially driven by external factors (Deci & Ryan, 2017; Guay, 2022). *Avoid referring to individual participants in the discussion – this information is required in your results section. The discussion should discuss the overall findings only.*

All participants consistently cited intrinsic interest, unanimously agreeing that piqued interest was a key developmental factor. The prominent sub-theme of enjoyment underscored that lacking it in a specific area was demotivating. This reflects the autonomous factor of the self-determination theory, where the participants were more motivated when they made choices that aligned with their preferences (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2017). However, some research suggests that this theory may overly prioritise autonomy, potentially neglecting the significant impact of external and cultural factors on motivation, limiting its universal applicability (Chirkov et al., 2003).

The interpretation emphasised the significance of belonging. Sarah highlighted challenges in her first year, attributing a negative impact to an incompatible social group. Conversely, Alex pointed to positive connections with his 'core' peer group, driving engagement in less interesting topics. Relatedness was evident, with Emily stressing the need for connections despite self-perceived awkwardness. Participants also acknowledged that connection to a lecturer enhanced intrinsic motivation for study topics. These highlight the significance of relatedness for intrinsic motivation in education, aligning with the principles of self-determination theory. (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2017).

As there is widespread acknowledgment, research, and application of the self-determination theory in professional sectors like education to promote positive outcomes, it was unsurprising to find its components, including autonomy, consistently interpreted as motivational factors among all participants. The theory suggests that individuals attain increased motivation and satisfaction when their psychological needs are fulfilled (Deci & Ryan, 2017).

Given that there is argument by some researchers that the principles of the self-determination theory, such as autonomy, are culturally biased, being that cultural values, goals and desires may differ, future research in diverse cultures could enhance the understanding of various factors influencing student motivation, making it more universally applicable (Chirkov et al., 2003; Iyengar & DeVoe, 2003).

In conclusion, participants in this study were motivated by factors aligning with Deci & Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory, emphasising the fulfilment of basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, to apply for, and maintain engagement within university.

*Within the discussion for a qual report, ensure you refer to your **findings** rather than the participants - the interpretations related to the participants have already been referred to within the results section.*

*A couple of small formatting/academic and referencing errors in the report overall.*

## References

*Good reference list – some small issues to deal with (mainly use of title case for article titles – these should be in sentence case)*

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