



# Students' perceptions of lecturers' motivational strategies and their attitudes towards the English language and an academic English module

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Motivation and students' attitudes are generally cited as two of the most important factors influencing language-learning performance. Motivation and attitude not only enhance students' understanding of learning and make them more open to learning, but also raise their expectations of the learning process and lower their anxiety. Therefore, the current study sought to establish the university students' perceptions of their lecturers' motivational strategies and their attitudes towards the English language, and the English Academic module. The study was quantitative in nature and a survey research design was followed. A questionnaire was used to solicit data from 150 first-year Foundation students who were conveniently selected. Likert items were used to measure the respondents' perceptions of their lecturers' motivational strategies and their attitudes toward the English Language and English Academic module. To analyse data, the most frequent responses are considered by working out percentages that agree, disagree, etc. The findings showed that the students perceived their lecturers as using a range of motivational strategies. These include, but are not limited to, allowing students to ask questions, providing feedback, motivating students to read more material, and praising students for good learning behaviour. The findings further revealed that the majority of students had a positive attitude towards the English language and English Academic module. Lecturers' motivational strategies and students' attitudes towards the English language and English Academic module could be perceived as significant considerations for lecturers when they tailor instruction and module design to the needs of the students. In addition, lecturers' awareness of students' attitudes can serve as vital information that could be used as a springboard to change the students' attitudes for the better.

**Keywords:** attitude; positive attitude; negative attitude; English language proficiency; instruction; module design; academic English module.

## Introduction

In South Africa, the postapartheid government that came to power in 1994 inherited an inequitable and unjust education system whose expression included preferential access to education. Therefore, the new democratic government identified education as one of the key areas in need of transformation, and that move meant that all South Africans would have the same right to education. Applauding the move, Fiske and Ladd (2004) and Lewin (2009) consider that the South African education system had made commendable progress in removing barriers that limited physical access to schooling based on race. However, equal access to education in South Africa has not been without challenges. In this regard, it is well documented that many first-year students entering higher education in South Africa are 'unprepared' and lack the English language proficiency to succeed at the tertiary level (Baijnath 2018; Boughey 2010; Moyo 2020; Singh 2004; Van Rooy & Coetzee-Van Rooy 2015). Various mechanisms have been implemented to address this language shortfall, including the Foundation Programme, Extended Programme and Bridging Programme. The three are all-access programmes, but for the purposes of this article, the authors only make reference to the Foundation Programme. These programmes focus on students who are from historically disadvantaged communities and aim to help them gain access to higher education in especially three fields: economic and management sciences, humanities and natural and agricultural sciences.

In the institution where the current study was conducted, the English major and an academic English module were offered. Both modules were characterised by a high failure and dropout rate. The authors of this article and other lecturers were concerned about this situation, especially when

they considered the crucial role played by the English language in South African universities. For example, Web (2003) explains that the use of a second language as the language of instruction and study could be detrimental to students' academic development and the assessment of their progress if the students concerned do not have the expected proficiency in the language of instruction, which is English in this case. This view is supported by Cloud, Genesee and Hamayan (2006), who aver that language proficiency forms the basis of all learning. Despite the value attached to the English language in South Africa, Van Rensburg (2002) indicates that English language proficiency among South African students is low. The Council on Higher Education (2013) puts the blame on systemic faults of the school sector, in particular, the articulation gap between the schools and tertiary institutions. It is against this backdrop that the current study sought to explore students' perceptions of lecturers' motivational strategies, as well as their attitudes towards the English language and the academic English module. The choice of these two concepts was inspired by previous research conducted on the factors that influence second-language learning.

Previous research reveals that foreign or second-language learning is influenced by many factors including, but not limited to, motivation, attitudes, anxiety, learning success, aptitudes, intelligence, age and personality (Shams 2008). The authors of this article felt that investigating the motivation and attitudes of this cohort of students could provide crucial information that would help them provide appropriate academic support for this cohort of students. Many studies have been conducted on student motivation, as well as attitudes. For example, a large number of studies have revealed that a student's attitude is one of the most important aspects influencing language learning (Fayeke 2010; Moshabab Asiri 2014; Ushida 2005). Supporting the significant role played by attitudes in language learning, Ahmed et al. (2021) declare that attitudes could be negative or positive, but a positive attitude is considered one of the most important factors that have an impact on language learning. In addition, Donato et al. (1996) are of the opinion that students with positive attitudes are clearly more likely to succeed in language learning than students who have a negative attitude towards language acquisition. Moreover, Lennartsson (2008) argues that students' negative attitudes can be changed and turned into positive ones. Therefore, it is crucial to understand attitudinal elements as well as variables that influence attitudinal factors (Mustafa, Mohammad Zayed & Islam 2015). Research shows that there is a strong relationship between attitudes and motivation, so the authors of this study chose to focus on both concepts simultaneously. According to Ushida (2005), motivation mediates the connection between language attitudes and language success. Ushida goes on to point out that a motivated learner is eager to learn the language, expand his/her learning efforts and maintain learning activity. Similarly, Csiz'er, Kormos and Sarkadi (2010) declare that a positive attitude enhances students' motivated behaviour. Therefore, it is important for English as a second language (ESL) teachers to use

motivational strategies to increase their students' motivation in ESL classes, as this might lead to better second-language learning.

Considerable research on lecturers' motivational strategies and students' attitudes towards the English language has been conducted in many countries like Saudi Arabia (Alkaff 2013), the United Arab Emirates (Noursi 2013), Indonesia (Soraya, Kurnia & Setiawan 2017), Thailand (Vibulphol 2016), Morocco (Ahmed 2015) and Taiwan (Cheng & Dornyei 2007). However, few studies have been conducted in a South African context that focus on lecturers' motivational strategies and student attitudes towards the English language and an academic English module at the university level. One of the few studies is one by Kadat (2007). The aim of this study was to examine students' attitudes towards English as a second language. The results showed that English was generally regarded as a very necessary professional skill and lingua franca in instrumental terms. Wilson (n.d.) conducted a study on teachers' motivational strategies and academic achievement of social studies learners in secondary schools in South Africa. The results showed that there was a significant association between teachers' timely feedback to learners and their academic performance. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, there are no studies conducted in a South African context that combine the concept of lecturers' motivational strategies and student attitudes towards the English language and academic English module. It is therefore expected that the results of the current study could close this gap and provide information about the students' perceptions of the current motivational strategies used by lecturers in order to create awareness among the lecturers of which motivational strategies their students prefer. In addition, the results of this study are likely to shed light on students' attitudes towards English language and the academic English module. Having information about student attitudes is likely to provide instructors with useful insights that could help them present content and adjust their delivery methods to change their students' attitudes when they happen to be negative. To achieve this goal, the study sought answers to the following research questions:

- What are students' perceptions of their lecturers' motivational strategies?
- What are students' attitudes towards the English language and the academic English module?

## Literature review

### Motivation and teacher motivational strategies

Motivation plays an essential role in the success of second-language teaching and learning as it is the driving force to keep processes going (Erdil-Moody & Thompson 2020). Watt and Richardson (2015) and Dornyei and Ushida (2011) believe that motivation should be considered in the process of second-language learning because it has been used to explain a learner's success and failure, and as such, several studies view motivation as the key to learning. To this end, Dornyei and Kubanyiova (2014) state that second-language teachers, with their use of motivational strategies in second-language

teaching, play an important role in motivating learners. However, Omar et al. (2020) state that little attention has been paid to researching and understanding motivational strategies among English teachers, particularly in higher education, despite the continued interest in the topic.

Some researchers observed that motivational strategies vary in their effectiveness and appropriateness in different ESL or English as a first language (EFL) contexts (Cheng & Dornyei 2007; Guilloteaux & Dornyei 2008; Sugita & Takeuchi 2010). Anita and Emikia (2012) conducted a study on the use of teacher feedback to promote student motivation in teaching EFL. They emphasised that the implication of their study was that much should be done to prepare teachers to use feedback to promote student motivation. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), the primary purpose of providing feedback is to reinforce appropriate learning behaviours by letting students know how they are progressing and expanding learning opportunities. A recent study on the use of feedback as motivational strategy was conducted by Gan, An and Liu (2021) on teachers' feedback practices and their experiences in the context of English courses. The results of their study showed that students reported higher levels of teacher feedback use, as well as student feedback motivation and behaviour.

Xue (2019) conducted a study on students' perceptions of teachers' motivational strategies in English classes. In particular, the study focused on which motivational strategies students rated as the most commonly used in the core courses of their freshman English courses and how they perceived the motivational strategies in the core courses of their programme. The results of the study showed that students perceived motivational strategies positively. They indicated that teachers' motivational strategies encouraged them to participate in classroom activities, increased their interest in the content and inspired them to learn. The relationship between motivational strategies and attitudes has already been explained above; hence, the focus in the next section is on attitudes.

### **Student attitudes towards the English language**

Attitude has been defined in different ways by different authors. Chapman and McKnight (2002) define attitude as the overall mood people interpret from what they see, say and do. Nyamubi (2016) argues that if an attitude of a person to an object such as language is known, it can be used to explain a person's reaction or behaviour. Gomleksiz (2010) states that examining student attitudes is an effective way for language teachers, educational planners, curriculum designers and researchers to gain a better understanding of the language learning and teaching process. Garrett (2010) argues that attitudes encompass beliefs about things that have some social meaning. The issue of beliefs related to attitudes is also mentioned by Latchanna and Dagnew (2009), who argue that attitude is defined as a mental state that includes beliefs and feelings. Lennartsson (2008) points out that students' beliefs can be a barrier when they are unable to

learn the new language successfully. Lennartsson (2008) believes that students' negative attitudes can be changed and that a positive attitude towards language learning is a good start to learning a language.

As is evident from the previous discussion, a student's attitude could influence the language acquisition process. Subsequently, many studies have been conducted to examine student attitudes towards second-language learning in South Africa and other countries around the world. For instance, Shams (2008) conducted a study attempting to investigate students' attitudes, motivation and anxiety towards the learning of English. The findings underlined that the students had affirmative attitudes and high enthusiasm towards English. This also highlighted that most of them showed positive attitudes towards the English language and its learning, which in turn emphasised the value of English language proficiency in daily life (Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi & Alzwari 2012:119). In another study, Momani (2009) investigated the secondary stage students' attitudes towards learning ESL and their achievements in reading comprehension. The findings showed that the respondents had neutral to positive attitudes towards learning English. In addition, there was a strong correlation between the students' attitudes towards learning English and their performance in reading comprehension. The findings of a study by Al-Tamimi and Shuib (2009) on petroleum engineering students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English reveal that they had positive attitudes towards the use of English for social and educational contexts. These students also showed an affirmative attitude towards the cultures of the English-speaking world. In terms of the year of study variable, Al-Zahran (2015) conducted a study to determine the attitudes of students towards English. The statistical analysis revealed that there was not any clear difference among the third-year students in their attitudes towards learning English, as the descriptive statistics showed that the respondents in the third year of study had the same level of attitude. In an African context, Reilly (2019) conducted a study in Malawi on students' attitudes towards English as medium of instruction. The results of his study showed that while English was viewed positively and as suitable for use within universities, it was not viewed uncritically and there were complex attitudes towards the language. A similar study was conducted by Ahmed (2015) on the attitudes of students towards English language learning. The results of the study indicated that the attitudes towards English language learning and using the language in various domains of usage were extremely positive.

In a South African context, Lombard (2017) conducted a study on students' attitudes and preferences towards English at the University of South Africa. The findings showed that the vast majority of students had positive attitudes towards learning the English language.

The implication of these studies is that teachers' awareness of the students' attitudes towards a language they are supposed

to learn is important for instruction, material design and module content. Teachers' awareness of the students' attitudes towards the language they learn in the classroom is likely to give teachers the opportunity to work towards changing the students' attitudes if they are negative. In the above section, it was revealed that positive attitudes towards language breed positive learning outcomes.

Many studies have been conducted that sought to investigate students' attitudes towards academic English modules. Erarslan (2017) conducted a study in Turkey on students' attitudes towards an online module that focused on language areas such as grammar and vocabulary together with language skills, except for speaking. The results showed that students had partly positive attitudes towards this online course. Elyazale (2019) conducted another similar study on the attitudes of university students towards English for specific purposes (ESP). The results revealed that both undergraduate and graduate students held a positive attitude towards English and ESP. In another study, Dashti (2019) investigated students' and staff members' attitudes towards the efficiency of language skills modules offered during the Foundation year. The results indicated that even though most students and staff members showed positive attitudes towards most of the questionnaires' items, others were concerned about a few items.

In a South African context, Wood and Lithauer (2005) conducted a study on the added value of a Foundation Programme with alumni of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. The results of their study showed that students who have completed a Foundation Programme tended to do better in later studies than directly admitted students with similar academic profiles. A similar study was conducted by Van Niekerk (2017) on the expanded programme as a tool to expand access to South African higher education. The results of his study showed that enrolments in the Bachelor of Law (LLB) main programme decreased but increased in the extended LLB programme.

The focus of the studies discussed above was the enrolments and academic performance of students in the Foundation Programmes. Therefore, the current study differs from these studies as it aims to examine students' perceptions of the motivational strategies of the lecturers and their attitudes towards the English language and the academic English module. Based on the reviewed literature, few studies have focused on this combination of concepts.

## Research methods and design

This study followed a quantitative approach, and a survey design was used. Bhandari (2020) defines quantitative data as the process of collecting and analysing numerical data. He further points out that quantitative data can be used to find patterns and averages, make predictions, test causal relationships and generalise results to a wider population. In the current study, the authors felt that the quantitative approach was relevant because it allowed the researchers to

reach a large sample size in an attempt to assess the students' perceptions of their lecturers' motivational strategies and their attitudes towards the variables already mentioned. Bartlett (2005) states that survey research refers to a method of collecting data through surveys to gain a better understanding of individual or group perspectives on a particular concept or topic of interest. Bartlett further notes that this design can allow researchers to gain a better understanding of different populations or groups of people, identify problems or concerns of respondents and/or lead to the identification or development of solutions based on identical problems. In the current study, the design was deemed relevant as it was likely to address the concerns of the researchers already mentioned in the introduction.

## Respondents

The respondents were enrolled for a 4-year extended (Foundation Programme) Bachelor of Arts degree. They were the first-year Foundation Programme students at a university in South Africa, Gauteng province. Students who enrol for the Foundation Programme are those students who did not meet the undergraduate (Bachelor of Arts) admission requirements. The respondents were African students, both male and female. A total of 382 students were expected to participate; however, only 150 (39.27%) students (58 male and 92 female) participated in this investigation. The low return rate means that a sample instead of the population was used in this study. It was convenient for the researchers to use only the Foundation Programme students in this study, because one of the researchers had direct access to them and they could be reached relatively easily. The students were thoroughly informed of the study details via e-mail. Convenience sampling was used for this research. Convenience sampling refers to a sample chosen based on convenience of the researcher (Acharya et al. 2013:1). Convenience sampling was chosen because the respondents were at the right place at the right time, as one of the researchers was a lecturer at the university.

## Data collection methods

A questionnaire was used to collect data. The questionnaire was used in this study because it provided a relatively cheap, quick and efficient way of obtaining large amounts of information from a large sample of people. Data can be collected relatively quickly because the researcher would not need to be present when the questionnaires were completed. The structure of the questionnaire consisted of three variables:

- Variable A, the students' perceptions about their lecturers' motivational strategies. Six options were used to test this variable.
- Variable B, the academic English module students' attitudes about the English language. Eight options were used to test this variable.
- Variable C, the students' attitudes about the academic English module. Six options were used to test this variable.



A questionnaire that used a Likert scale was used. A Likert scale is a set of statements offered for the real hypothetical situation under study (Joshi et al. 2015). The scale enables the researcher to obtain more information on the respondent's opinions or feelings on a particular topic rather than by asking questions that require a 'disagree or agree' or 'yes or no' response (Oppenheim 1992), as quoted by David and Sutton (2004:167). In the current study, the Likert scale contained five possible responses, namely strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. These response categories were given a score that ranges from 1 to 5.

## Data analysis

The data analysis was performed with the assistance of the Department of Statistics at the university by means of using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS; IBM Corporation, Armonk, New York, United States). The analysed data were visually displayed in tables using frequencies and percentage scores, whereafter they were summarised with data descriptions and interpretations.

## Findings

The following is the presentation of the interpretation of the quantitative data. The order of presentation is informed by the order of the research questions. For example, the first research question focuses on the students' perceptions of their lecturers' motivational strategies. This data is presented first.

Table 1 reveals that 35% of the respondents agreed that it is important to get feedback from the lecturer. This is followed by 33% of the respondents who strongly agreed that the teacher's feedback is important to them. Only 8% disagreed with the statement. It could be concluded that feedback is a strong motivating factor for this group of students. Therefore, lecturers' awareness of this fact is likely to encourage them to give students timeous and constructive feedback.

With regard to the lecturers' motivation, Table 1 reveals that 52% of the students strongly agreed and 24% agreed with the statement. This is a clear indication that this cohort of students appreciates being motivated by their lecturers. Only 4% of the students strongly disagreed with the statement.

Table 1 also reveals that 61% of the students strongly agreed that their lecturers give them an opportunity to ask questions,

**TABLE 1:** Students' perceptions of lecturers' motivational strategies.

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	NS (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
It is important to get feedback from my lecturer.	33	35	11	13	8
It is important to me that my lecturer should motivate me to learn.	52	24	15	5	4
My lecturer gives us an opportunity to ask questions.	61	24	7	3	5
My lecturer encourages me to read more.	41	18	23	11	7
I feel good when my lecturer praises me.	52	25	13	5	5
It is important to be motivated to improve my English proficiency by my lecturer.	39	31	18	6	5

SA, strongly agree; A, agree; NS, not sure; D, disagree; SD, strongly disagree.

and 23% agreed with the statement. Only 3% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed. This shows that the majority of students enjoy being involved in class by being allowed to ask questions. This is a good indication of students who are willing to learn and who would like to ask questions for clarity. Seemingly, this motivational strategy is working for the lecturers and could also do more in order to win the few students who disagreed with the statement. Asking questions during a lesson stimulates participation by both the lecturer and the students. What really determines how a student feels about what is learnt in class is how interested they are in the subject and how involved they are during the lesson. Students should not be passive recipients of the knowledge presented but should be active learners who take responsibility for their learning.

With regard to the lecturers' ability to encourage students to read, Table 1 shows that 41% of the students strongly agreed with the statement while 18% agreed. Only 7% strongly disagreed. This motivational strategy is crucial as the more you read the more you become knowledgeable. Therefore, encouraging students to read could lead to their increased understanding of the academic English language module as well as their increased proficiency in the language.

Fifty-two per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that they feel good when their lecturer praises them, and 25% agreed with the statement. Only 5% of them strongly disagreed on the issue and appeared not to care whether they are praised. It is clear that praising the students might yield good results as far as English language learning is concerned. When students are praised for their good behaviour, they demonstrate enthusiasm that makes them to work hard to achieve more. It is also good for them to see that their efforts are acknowledged.

Table 1 also revealed that 39% of the students strongly agreed that it is important to be motivated to improve their English proficiency by their lecturers. In addition, 31% agreed with the statement. The gap between strongly agreed and agreed is too small to confirm that students are willing to improve their English proficiency, and this is an indication that the majority of students felt it important to be motivated to improve their English proficiency. This is important given the fact that English proficiency is important, as English is used as a medium of instruction in many South African universities.

Table 2 reveals that 19% of the respondents consider English to be the most important language, while only 5% disagreed with this position. Although 18% chose to take a neutral stance on this aspect, a meagre 5% of the students strongly agreed that they think English is the most important language. One would expect that students at university are aware of the importance of the English language since it is used as medium of instruction. One might conclude that in this case, maybe they were comparing it with their mother tongues. If that is the case, maybe they would have valid reasons for their choices.

With regard to the importance of English language proficiency, 44% strongly agreed and 18% agreed. Only 5%

**TABLE 2:** Students' attitudes towards the English language.

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	NS (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
I think that English is the most important language.	5	19	18	5	5
English language proficiency is important for my career prospects.	44	17	15	13	10
English is important because it is used in job interviews.	44	17	15	10	13
I want to be proficient in English in order to socialise with a variety of people.	46	5	22	6	5
I cannot be successful at university if my English proficiency is lacking.	44	17	19	5	5
I like people who can speak English very well.	43	26	20	3	8
I do not like people who do not speak English well.	8	9	18	16	50
I want to speak English like a mother tongue speaker.	7	14	11	7	11

SA, strongly agree; A, agree; NS, not sure; D, disagree; SD, strongly disagree.

strongly disagreed. It can therefore be concluded that the respondents who agreed that English language proficiency is important for their career are extrinsically motivated. They are aware of people whose career choices were supported by English language proficiency. This is true in a South African context where the English language dominates as a lingua franca and language of business and government.

A total of 44% of the respondents agreed that English proficiency is important for job interviews and 17% agreed with the statement. This view could be attributed to the fact that English is the language that is used most in job interviews in South Africa. However, 10% of the respondents disagreed that English is important for job interviews. The prospects of a good job that requires English language proficiency could also motivate students to do well in English in order to enhance their chances of impressing the panel when they are being interviewed for a job.

Almost half the respondents (that is, 46%) agreed that they wanted to be proficient in English in order to socialise with ease with a variety of people. This is true given the multilingual nature of South Africa. Only 6% of the respondents disagreed with the statement. It is important for individuals to socialise for the sake of internal satisfaction. Internal satisfaction is linked to intrinsic motivation. The satisfaction that a student derives from his or her successful interaction with peers in English language learning situations may influence his or her attitude towards the target language. When students are in a learning environment, they have a need to socialise with fellow schoolmates. An ability to communicate effectively in English at the university is an advantage because students come from diverse environments.

Table 2 also revealed that 44% of the respondents were of the view that they cannot be successful at university if their English proficiency is lacking. It is good when the majority of students acknowledges the fact that English is the language that should be mastered in order to perform well at university. Only 5% of them do not agree that English language proficiency enhances their chances to master their university work. A large percentage of students know that in order to do

**TABLE 3:** Students' attitudes towards the academic English module.

Item	SA (%)	A (%)	NS (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
EAP enables me to do well in my other subjects.	44	27	19	5	5
EAP is my favourite module because it helps me to understand other subjects.	57	21	15	4	3
I do not care whether or not I pass the EAP module.	19	19	29	19	14
I enjoy the EAP module very much.	57	21	15	4	3
The EAP is my favourite module.	17	15	26	24	18
EAP is a waste of time.	16	16	26	24	18

EAP, English for academic purposes; SA, strongly agree; A, agree; NS, not sure; D, disagree; SD, strongly disagree.

well in all their subjects, they need to have a sound command of the language of instruction, which is English in this context.

Regarding to whether the respondents like people who can speak English very well, 43% strongly agreed with the statement while 26% of them agreed. Twenty percent took a neutral position in this regard. Students could have a positive attitude towards English mother tongue speakers and people who speak English very well for instrumental reasons (for example, to improve their vocabulary in order to perform better academically) but not necessarily for integrative reasons.

Table 2 shows that 50% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that they do not like people who do not speak English well. This finding leads to the conclusion that liking or disliking people is not dependent on their English language proficiency. Only 8% of the respondents strongly agreed, while 9% agreed with the statement.

Only 7% of the respondents agreed that they want to speak English like a mother tongue speaker, while 14% agreed with the statement. Twelve per cent of the respondents chose to be neutral. It could be concluded that students were aware of the fact that speaking a language like a mother tongue is an unobtainable goal for second-language speakers. This could also be attributed to the fact that the respondents did not want to lose their identities.

Table 3 shows that 44% of the respondents strongly agreed that academic English enables them to do well in other subjects, while 27% agreed with the statement. However, 19% of them decided to remain neutral. These responses indicate that the students are overwhelmingly positive about the beneficial effect of academic English module, because English is the medium of instruction at the university in South Africa, Gauteng province. Competence in English could enable students to understand the content of academic English and that of other subjects, too. This finding suggests that students would work harder to do well in academic English in order to succeed in their studies in general. As English is also regarded as a major international language, most students might consider it to be important to develop the ability to read, write and express themselves in English.

With regard to academic English being a favourite subject, 57% strongly agreed while 20% agreed with the statement. Only 4% disagreed with the statement. The majority of the

respondents agree that the academic English module is their favourite module, because English is used as the medium of instruction in the other subjects. Because English is used as the medium of instruction in other subjects, a sound comprehension of the language makes it easy for students to understand the subject matter or content of all their subjects.

Regarding to the respondents not caring whether or not they pass English for academic purposes (EAP), 29% of the respondents indicated that they were neutral in this regard, i.e. they were not sure whether they cared about passing the academic English module or not. Nineteen per cent of the respondents indicated that they did not care whether they passed the module, while 29% of the respondents indicated that they disagreed with the statement and 19% agreed. It is therefore questionable why most of the respondents would be neutral on this issue while in the above statements many students indicated EAP as a favourite subject.

Slightly more than half of the respondents (56%) were of the opinion that they enjoyed the academic English module very much, whereas 15% of the respondents disagreed with the statement and 21% were neutral towards it. Enjoying the module is supposed to be one of the main factors that contribute towards the students' motivation.

Table 3 also showed that 17% of the respondents agreed that they liked the academic English module, while 24% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that it was their favourite module, and 24% of the respondents were neutral in this regard. This finding contradicts most of the preceding findings, as the responses to the majority of the motivation-related questions point towards the respondents liking the module. Studying one's favourite module is supposed to be one of the factors that contributes towards becoming motivated to do well in the module.

Twenty-four per cent of the respondents indicated that they did not consider the academic English module to be a waste of time, while 16% thought that it is. Twenty-six per cent of the respondents took a neutral position in this regard. This finding gives some support to the fact that the learning of academic English is not considered a waste of time.

## Discussion of findings

The aim of the study was to explore university students' perceptions about their lecturers' motivational strategies and their attitudes towards the English language and an academic English module at a South African university. The results of this research indicated that students' perceptions of their lecturers' motivational strategies were that their lecturers did motivate them in class. Specifically, the majority of students indicated that their lecturers granted them opportunities to ask questions. The students viewed this as the most important motivational strategy teachers used. It is clear that involving students in class is a form of motivation. This is important as they get the opportunity to ask questions for clarity. Allowing students to ask questions

is a good motivational strategy for both teachers and students. When students ask questions, the teacher is likely to be in a better position to check if students understood the content presented. By asking questions, the teacher is able to guide the students if the content is misunderstood. In other words, by allowing students to ask questions, lecturers can use that diagnostic opportunity. This finding is in line with the results of a study conducted by Harmer (2002). The results of Harmer's study showed that one of the main tasks for lecturers is to provoke interest and involvement in the subject even when students are not initially interested in it.

Another strategy that lecturers were perceived using by students is praise. Students expressed satisfaction and motivation when their lecturers praised them for good learning behaviour in class. This served as motivation, and students worked hard in order to sustain the good behaviour. Feedback was also cited as a good motivational strategy. When lecturers give constructive, timely feedback, that is seen as motivation by students. This finding is in line with the previous studies. For example, Gan et al. (2021) investigated university students' perceived teacher feedback practices and their feedback experiences in an English studies course context. The results indicated that students reported a high level of teacher feedback use that motivated the students to learn.

The results further indicated that a positive attitude played a role in English language learning. The status of English, its importance as a language of instruction and its dominant position in South Africa incline students to have a positive attitude towards the language. Being a language of instruction, a command of English makes it easy for students to understand and do well in other courses or subjects. They understand that proficiency in English could bear fruits for them in future, and therefore they have a positive attitude towards the academic English module. Socialising with English mother tongue speakers and people who speak English well could contribute towards increasing their proficiency in the language. This finding is in line with previous studies. For example, the results of a study conducted by Kolo and Baba (2020) revealed that positive attitude of both student and lecturer led to the improvement of student academic performance significantly and brought about healthy and good relationship in the students and lecturers.

The findings also revealed most students perceived the academic English module as their favourite module because it helped them understand other subjects. This positive attitude towards the academic English module is important given its role with regard to students' performance, even in other subjects. This positive attitude is important if one takes into consideration the fact that English is used as medium in many South African universities. Therefore, positive attitudes towards the academic English module have potential to open doors for the students in other subjects. This finding concurs with previous studies. For example, Elyazale (2019) conducted a study on students' attitudes towards English and ESP. The



results of his study indicated that students hold a positive attitude towards both English and ESP. Another similar study was conducted by Seongyong (2020) on business major students' attitudes towards the ESP programme. The results showed that students held positive attitudes and behavioural intentions to use the ESP programme.

## Conclusion

The current study sought to establish university students' perceptions about their lecturers' motivational strategies and their attitudes towards the English language and the academic English module. Regarding the students' perceptions about their lecturers' motivational strategies, the findings indicated that the students perceived their lecturers as motivating them to study the academic English module. The most important motivational strategy lecturers were perceived to be using was to grant students an opportunity to ask questions. This is an important motivational strategy as it allows students to be active and afford them the opportunity to interact with the lecturer and other students. The value of feedback as a motivational strategy was also mentioned by the students. Constructive as well as timely feedback serves as a good motivational strategy for lecturers. Whenever students embark on a task, whether oral or written, they are always curious to know the results, and they feel demotivated when feedback does not come forth or is delayed. This finding is significant; hence, the positive or negative attitudes of the students towards lecturers has a bearing on the students' academic success. Furthermore, the results demonstrated that the academic English module was a favourite of many students, as it helped them understand other subjects. Many students also indicated that they enjoyed the academic English module very much. This is further supported by the students' responses on the question on whether the academic English module was a waste of time. In this regard, many students disagreed, and this shows the high value of the academic English module to this cohort of students.

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## Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists

## Authors' contributions

This article was written out of M.M.'s master's research project. M.M. drafted the article, while M.C. revised and finalised it.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was granted by the Tshwane University of Technology's Research Ethics Committee on 03 September, 2020, with ethical clearance REC/2020/05/02.

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## Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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