

ARTICLE

## Engaging International Music Students: Interventions in an English for Academic Purposes Classroom

Doreen TAN and FONG Yoke Sim

Centre for English Language Communication, National University of Singapore

### Correspondence:

Name: Ms Doreen TAN

Address: Centre for English Language Communication (CELC), National University of Singapore (NUS), 12 Kent Ridge Drive, Singapore 119243

Email: [doreen.tan@nus.edu.sg](mailto:doreen.tan@nus.edu.sg)

---

### Recommended Citation:

Tan, D., & Fong Y. S. (2021). Engaging international music students: Interventions in an English for Academic Purposes classroom. *Asian Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 11(2). 93-109.

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper reports the study of motivating international music students in a language module using certain strategies. What inspired this study was the common observation among tutors who had taught this English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course—the significantly low level of motivation among these students in language learning. The tutor (also the PI of this study) also noticed a wide range of interest levels at the beginning of each cohort of the course. The student profile is interesting. Each class has students from several countries, including Uzbekistan, Russia and East Asian countries. While there are many studies on motivation in language learning that partly support my teaching, there is a gap in literature on motivation specifically on international music students taking EAP at tertiary level. Therefore, the tutor became keen on investigating strategies to raise her students' motivation and, in the process, learnt about the effectiveness of three teaching strategies, namely goal setting, reflection writing, and vocabulary presentation. These are based on Dörnyei's (2005) Second Language Motivational Self System (L2MSS) and Norton's (2000) social identity, agency and empowerment framework. The findings of the study indicate that all three strategies led to (1) higher levels of motivation in class, and (2) higher motivation in and out of class as learners apply strategies to their majors, start to plan ahead for future learning and become more enthusiastic about setting goals for themselves in various aspects of their learning. This paper thus recommends the considered application of these or similar strategies to other modules in the EAP classroom and even other disciplines.

**Keywords:** Motivation, language learning, goal setting, international music students

## INTRODUCTION

This paper investigates three teaching strategies introduced in one English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classroom of international music students over one semester in order to engage them in their English learning journey and raise their motivation. These strategies are goal setting, reflection writing, and vocabulary presentation. These students have come to Singapore on full scholarships to read Music in a Conservatory of Music and most have only read and focussed on Music prior to tertiary education; it is observed that the majority are not intrinsically motivated to study Academic English. The next sections will explain the tutor's [also the principal investigator (PI) of this study's] teaching context, which determines the background of this research study.

### *Teaching context*

Students enrolled in the EAP for Music module at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music (YSTCM) in National University of Singapore (NUS) come from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. All of them are international students<sup>1</sup>. These learners read a variety of instrumental majors offered by YSTCM. Two levels of EAP classes are offered, each of them a 12-week course: EM1201 (EAP for Music Students Level 1) and EM1202 (Level 2). As part of their application to YSTCM, international students are required to submit language test scores<sup>2</sup>. If they are successful but do not meet the minimum language score requirements, they will sit for a placement test before the academic year begins to determine their appropriate EAP class level. They could also be exempted for both classes if their written paper for the placement test attains the highest band.

EM1201 focuses on helping learners write effective paragraphs, express themselves clearly in writing and grow in their awareness of grammar. EM1202 develops these fundamental skills to a higher level and aims to increase their understanding of academic register, as well as how to write and present academically. These modules aim to support these Music students in their academic studies as they have to take several general elective modules (GEMs) which are offered by other faculties. Additionally, all other compulsory Music-related modules are conducted fully in English, and they are expected to write and present in Academic English. The EAP class size is small, with a maximum of 12 students. Despite the small class size, students' motivation levels are generally low as they tend to focus more on their music practical training than on English language modules. Generally, some students tend to be late for class, submit graded assignments late and were unresponsive to questions during class. Students also often sought permission to miss EAP classes for music-related programmes.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, lessons from the seventh week of Semester 2 of Academic Year (AY) 2019/20 were conducted mostly online via Zoom. However, the impact of COVID-19 on student learning is beyond the scope of this paper.

### *A study on motivation*

These two EAP modules are only taught to international Music students from YSTCM, which explains why these are the target students for this research. Having taught the compulsory EAP modules for three semesters, the tutor noticed that students' motivation levels were different among the international student cohort. There were some students who were more motivated than others in their participation of class activities. Therefore, this compelled the tutor to study the motivation of international Music students in an EAP classroom. She wanted to investigate what motivates and engages these learners in language learning and how to increase the engagement level, which could indicate growing motivation. While it is hoped that through the teaching strategies, every music learner will be more motivated to learn EAP, there will also be a reduced gap between the most motivated learner and the least motivated one. Another reason that compelled this study is that most research on motivation in language learning focus on general contexts such as in higher education, while some

are more specific, for instance teaching Music students humanities subjects. However, few or close to no research has been conducted on music students who speak English as a second or foreign language, and are studying EAP at tertiary level. Thus, this study aims to address this gap.

Being the coordinator and tutor of these modules as well as this project's PI, there is an unequal power dimension to the student-teacher interaction between the tutor and her participants. In order to have an unbiased analysis of the data, the tutor invited her colleague to partner with her on this project. As they have discussed motivation and shared resources as colleagues, the tutor believes the common interest in this research area would make this an enriching partnership.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews key literature on motivation in learning and teaching activities to increase levels of motivation of learners. Motivation in language learning is dependent upon a complex interplay of factors, and these factors are impacted by the environment, the learner, facilitating educational staff, and appropriate course design (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013). The two authors defined motivation as the strong desire to pursue and achieve a goal. The ability to sustain and maintain this desire throughout the learning process can ultimately determine a learner's success or failure at attaining this goal. Brown (2014) explains that the difficulty of learning a second language requires the learner to develop adequate and sustained motivation to reach the learning objective. The stabilisation or growth in motivation can be strongly encouraged when teachers as learning facilitators construct a learning environment designed to include variety, reward, social interaction, and goal-setting. This paper draws on Dörnyei's Second Language Motivational Self System (L2MSS) in his L2 motivation research (2005, 2009). There are three main components to the L2MSS—Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to Self, and L2 Learning Experience.

It is postulated that people desire to work towards their projected ideal standards, and these future self-guides provide an impetus for action (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2005). Ideal and Ought-to selves are similar in that they are both related to the attainment of a desired end-state, but the significant difference is emphasised:

...ideal self-guides have a promotion focus, concerned with hopes, aspirations, advancements, growth and accomplishments; whereas ought-to self-guides have a prevention focus, regulating the absence or presence of negative outcomes associated with failing to live up to various responsibilities and obligations (p.18).

On the other hand, Dörnyei & Ryan (2015) summarise that

the third component, the L2 Learning Experience, [as] different from the first two in that it focuses on the learner's present experience, covering a range of situated, 'executive' motives related to the immediate learning environment (e.g., the impact of the L2 teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, and the experience of success). (p. 88)

The fact that research has found that most students do not understand why they are engaging in a stipulated learning task makes understanding an application of L2MSS more crucial. In many cases, students do not accept that a task will move them closer to their learning goals. Students often view the goals and tasks as dictated by others and out of their control. Dörnyei (2001) recommends increasing the learning group's goal-orientedness and ensuring that there is alignment between task and goals, and that this alignment be clearly communicated to the students to create and build a sense of direction and common purpose within the classroom environment. This recommendation inspired the implementation of the first teaching strategy, goal setting.

The next strategy, reflection writing, was introduced as it is believed that knowledge is only truly understood and grasped when there is “constant reflection upon the meaning of what is studied” (Dewey, 1933, p. 79). This encourages self-directed learning during and after the course, which is also the learner’s potential for autonomy. *Learner autonomy* is one of the markers for increased motivation. Another benefit of this implementation is the direct application of writing skills of this reflective genre to essay writing, another core assignment for all Year 1 Music students. This is important as the Music modules they take require writing skills, including this genre.

The third strategy, vocabulary presentation, was implemented to encourage integration of oral and other skills to develop metacognition in writing. A study found that oral presentations help improve student achievement in a range of academic areas (Ritchie, 2016). Learning and teaching new words to others also provide the platform for agency and investment. Prior to this strategy, teaching of this EAP course focused more on academic writing skills, and less on receptive and oral skills. Student feedback also revealed their desire to have more speaking practice in class. This implementation is largely informed by Norton (2000)’s framework. In this framework, the term ‘*identity*’ is used “to reference how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 5). The term ‘*identity*’ is a good fit for the Music students of this study who try to make sense of their identity in different learning situations and over time, including their imagined future trajectories. From the tutor’s teaching experience of YSTCM students in the past three years, there were observable changes of the students’ identities from an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to English as a Second Language (ESL) learner and EAP student. The turning point occurred when they became conscious that, as musicians, they would require English in their future careers. That was when they saw the importance of attaining proficiency in English in the future, where they would be reading other elective modules in their tertiary education and communicating musicality to a global audience. Hence, it is evident that they saw the change in their identities in the world. The strengthening of their vocabulary in oral and writing skills would bolster their confidence levels when they are placed in the settings mentioned earlier.

Another notion in Norton (2000) is agency, which relates to how the learners manage their learning experiences, often in a purposeful manner (p. 3). Learners actively construct the terms and conditions of their learning, and their agency provides the motive and significance that link investment to action. The notion of investment “conceives of the language learner as having a complex social history and multiple desires” (p. 10). The learners are assumed to be always “organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world” (p. 11) when they interact with target language speakers. “Thus, an investment in the target language is also an investment in the learner’s own identity, an identity that is constantly changing across time and space” (p. 11). Taking the Uzbek students as examples, being formerly EFL students and EAP students in NUS, they were seen to invest more time and effort in English language learning as English had been taught differently in their home country. In other words, these students reflected on their country’s history and social development, and adapted to the changes in their teaching and learning context in Singapore. They might also aspire to move on to another context in the future—their ‘*imagined community*’ (Norton, 2001)—where English as an International Language (EIL) may be used. Then, the skills they have gained through their investment in their EAP journey can be transferred.

There is a positive correlation between motivation and agency as it is reported that “more autonomous intrinsic motivation is associated with greater engagement, better performance, less dropping out, higher quality learning and greater psychological well-being” (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 92). Similarly, Fong (2019) expounded on her teaching context, where participants in her study discovered their human agency when they managed their learning journeys, often deliberately. This revealed the active learning in progress, where agency provided the purpose and meaning that link investment to action. The notion of investment, as Norton (2000), cited in Fong (2019, p. 103) puts it, “conceives of the language learner as having a complex social history and multiple

desires”. This is also succinctly summarised by Mercer and Dörnyei (2020, p.3), that engagement is perceived to be “always associated with action, ideally combined with internal dimensions of cognitive and affective involvement”.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Drawing from the insights of key research findings as presented in the literature review, this study aims to investigate how some teaching strategies, used in the EAP classroom, positively engage international NUS music students by studying the outcomes. The strategies include:

1. Goal setting at the beginning of the semester based on the module objectives, learning outcomes and students’ personal goals in language learning (Ideal L2 self);
2. Critically reflecting on the goals set and plans (written);
3. Presenting vocabulary learned—how they have encountered the words and how they have used them (spoken)

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Do the teaching strategies positively motivate the Music students studying EAP?
2. If so, how do these strategies positively motivate the Music students? If not, what could be the limiting factor(s)?

## METHODOLOGY

Prior to the beginning of the research process, the two groups of students the tutor was teaching were contacted via email as well as in-person to enable them to understand the research process and requirements. In the original research design, the PI, who was also the students’ tutor, was separate from the consent collection and the focus group interviews planned, so the PI would not know who consented, until the module grading process was over. However, due to pandemic-related disruptions resulting in classes shifting online, focus group interviews were cancelled. In place of these, an online questionnaire<sup>3</sup> was sent to the students (see [Appendix](#)). Any analysis of the collected data started only after the grades had been announced to the students and the time period for review of grades was over. This information on data analysis was also made known to the students, and they understood fully the recruitment and research process.

This is an action research, which is a continual disciplined inquiry conducted to study a teaching practice and the effectiveness of teaching strategies attempted in a classroom. Thus, the teaching strategies and data collection took place over the course of the semester.

Three sets of qualitative data were collected over the semester. Table 1 below provides a summary:

Table 1

*Data collected during the research*

<b>Qualitative Data</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
Reflections	17	End-of-semester reflections; 2 students did not submit.
Presentations of vocabulary learning	16	Over 9 weeks; 3 students did not manage to present after classes went online.
Online Questionnaire	4	Replaced the Focus Group Discussion originally planned.

Students' written reflections and oral vocabulary presentations were collected as data to track their improvement and development, based on the module's learning outcomes. Dörnyei (2005)'s L2MSS, Norton (2000)'s social identity, agency, empowerment are theoretical frameworks used for analysing the reflections. As studies on motivation are not straightforward, as with all investigations on perceptions, the approach taken is to study all the data collected holistically. The analysis includes investigating each of the strategies (goal-setting, reflection, and vocabulary presentations), whether it has any positive impact on student motivation and engagement.

The first objective is to determine if there is motivation in learning the language. The second is to observe any evidence of learning strategy. For example, in the vocabulary presentations, this can be evident from some, if not all, the following aspects: the length of their presentation, quality of content, questions initiated by students and enthusiasm in general. As motivation is intangible, these aspects are taken into consideration as proxies. Student participation in this research is voluntary and they were aware that their participation or non-participation would not affect their grades. To protect students' anonymity, the reflections and video recordings of the presentations were recorded and labelled as Student A, Student B, and so on.

Online questionnaires were completed at the end of the semester. The aim of this questionnaire was to gather student feedback on the effectiveness of the teaching strategies for increasing students' motivation. All the three sets of data collected were primarily analysed by the co-PI, who did NOT teach these students, know them personally or have grading influence over them. The PI then endorsed or added to the co-PI's analysis. Where there is disagreement, the PI and co-PI discussed the analysis to reach a consensus. Post-course evaluations were also used as additional avenues for student feedback. The qualitative data collected thus helped to inform the research objectives.

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

This section dives into the analysis of three data sets: 1) written reflections; 2) oral vocabulary presentations; 3) online questionnaires. Within each sub-section, the analysis will be followed by an in-depth discussion.

Both the PI and Co-PI note the importance in having an independent analyst of the data, besides the course tutor, who can be less objective. Through this research process, they have learned that this partnership contributed to increasing reliability of the results, as the interpretations are solely based on what was written and presented, analysed by the Co-PI who is an objective third party endorsed by the PI.

Observations of the external engagement are used as a gauge of the students' growing internal motivation.

### ***Written reflections***

The students were asked to write a reflection during the final week of the semester. They have been writing weekly wikis as part of their faculty requirement and have also written a mid-semester reflection for this course. Therefore, they are familiar with this writing genre. They were instructed to: reflect on the whole course and learning experience in the 12 weeks of the module; reflect on the goals set at the beginning of the semester; and evaluate the progress of attaining their Ideal L2 self. No word limit was given, but the average length produced was about 300 words per reflection. They could write about any part of the course, any task or any learning experience, and decide how they wish to organise their thoughts. The instructions were intentionally open-ended so that students would not be cued to answer in a certain way to deliberately address the study's research questions. The students are encouraged to prioritise what were memorable and impactful in their writing.



Table 2

*Analysis of students' written reflections*

S/N	Students' reflections	Theoretical framework	Frequency of mention
1	Clear goal setting / Fulfilling goals /Sees the usefulness of goal setting	L2MSS – Ideal L2 Self	82%
2	Self-motivation and task purposes; prioritising of goals	L2MSS	71%
3	Self-evaluation of improvement in speaking, writing and grammar	Social identity and agency	71%
4	Empowerment ("dare to.."; "not afraid to...."); Motivated by successes; speaking better; increased confidence ("can speak more clearly")	Empowerment	71%
5	Self-monitoring of progress	Social identity and agency	65%
6	Learning strategies (turning off subtitles to practise listening); task knowledge	Agency	59%
7	Agency	Agency	59%
8	Self-evaluation of development of receptive skills, knowledge	Social identity and agency	53%
9	Investment (effort)	Investment	53%
10	Desire to learn beyond module - (growing) intrinsic motivation	L2MSS – Ideal L2 Self	47%
11	Self-evaluation of greater ease in learning and understanding/improvement	Social identity and agency	41%
12	Benefits of English Language – social, ELF "many friends", English speaking environment, memorable learning exp	L2MSS – L2 Learning Experience	41%
13	Found many new ways to learn English / using opportunities to learn	L2MSS – L2 Learning Experience	41%
14	Ought-to L2 self - extrinsic motivation	L2MSS – Ought-to L2 Self	35%
15	Understands purpose of speaking tasks/presentations ("very useful", additional benefits "idioms")	Agency	35%
16	Understands purpose of grammar, sentence structure	Agency	35%
17	Learning Strategy (using billboard ads; chat with Singaporeans; improve accent/fluency)	Agency	35%
18	Motivated by the tasks, vocab presentations; wish to do more	L2MSS	35%
19	Presentation leads to sense of empowerment and growing confidence through self-learning and prep.	Empowerment	29%
20	Knowledge of parameters ("more than one accent" and "different nationalities")*	L2MSS – L2 Learning Experience	29%
21	Extended learning beyond module (applying of skills to GET course, planning for next semester)	Agency and investment	29%
22	Motivated by tutor; praise	L2MSS – L2 Learning Experience	24%
23	Identified many purposes for reading	Agency	24%
24	Effective writing skills (sequencing / summative intro/vocabulary)	Agency	18%

25	Interest "(reading) is interesting for me"	L2MSS – L2 Learning Experience	18%
26	Identified benefits of authentic listening	Agency	12%
27	Development between 1st and 2nd attempts for presentation; desires for more opportunities for vocab OP	L2MSS, Agency and Investment	12%
28	Motivated despite being uncomfortable with the move of lessons online	L2MSS, Agency	12%
29	Positive tone throughout, but hardly mentions the strategies or motivation	Social Identity	5%

\* Words in “...” are quoted from students’ written reflections.

### ***Broad overview***

As seen from Table 2, there are 29 types of observations made by students in their written reflections. These were recorded upon reading the co-PI’s analyses. Table 2 also highlights the theoretical frameworks used to categorise the observations. While it is noted that there may be overlaps in some observations, for instance (2) and (6), it was decided that they remain as separate observations as there is also a distinct difference between the two: (2) prioritising of goals stemming from agency and self-motivation; (6) specific mentions of-strategies applied. Another point worth noting is that the percentages suggest what is evident but does not suggest what is not. For example, for (11), 41% of students’ comments indicate a greater ease in learning and understanding, but it does not necessarily mean the remaining 59% did not experience that.

There is concrete evidence in Table 2 that the students have reflected on their goal setting, learning strategies, motivation, L2 selves, and learning experiences. In other words, there was evidence of self-monitoring and self-evaluation, which are useful for supporting growing motivation. Earlier in the paper, it was mentioned that these students have come to Singapore to read Music, and due to their specialised background in Music education, they may be motivated in their Music pursuits, but may not be aware that these motivation strategies can be more targeted in their academic studies. After the implementation of these strategies, it is also evident that there is a positive change in class attendance, submissions of graded assignments and an increased motivation to speak up in English in EAP classes.

### ***Detailed analysis and discussion of motivation in reflections***

As reflected in Table 2, 82% of the submissions reported a sense of fulfilment on achieving goals or progressing toward their ideal L2 selves (Item 1 in Table 2). 71% also recognised the usefulness of the EAP tasks and evaluated their improvement in various aspects of language development (item 3). According to Muir and Dörnyei (2013), students equate success as achieving a positive outcome to a task, and that helps the continual motivation and engagement in learning English. The above results indicate the fact that the strategies have positively engaged these students. To illustrate these observations, here are some short quotations from the students’ reflections:

...speaking skill, I dare to talk with other international students, according to my **goals setting** from beginning of this semester, I **felt my speaking skill get better** than beginning.

–Student B

They are Writing and Speaking. These were **my goals** for the second semester... I look **more natural** when I speak. I **enriched** my vocabulary, my sentence structures are more **clear**. I can **hold attention of the audience** for the **longer** time, than in the past. It is **one of the best achievements** for me.

– Student C

motivation, and confidence as a Music student, and this is one of the examples: “**vocabulary** now also **grows a lot in my daily conversations** like with native speakers in my Music classes. When speaking to people, **I no longer have situations I do not understand.**”

– Student A

Several observations point toward students having developed greater intrinsic motivation: (item 4) empowerment and increased confidence (71%), (item 7) agency (59%), (item 9) investment (53%), (item 10) desire to learn more (47%). It suggests that the learners are immersed in the learning tasks and invested in their learning. Egbert (2003) explained that when we are in a state of “flow”, we will perform at optimal levels, beyond our limits due to the intrinsic motivation as a result of our success. Flow is a state of deep absorption in an activity that is intrinsically enjoyable: as an illustration, when artists are fully focused on their play or performance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Persons in this state perceive their performance to be pleasurable and successful, and the activity is believed to be valuable for its own sake. It is evident that some of the learners have achieved this state of flow. Below are some quotations to exemplify these:

In the future, **I will keep** the habit of making plans and then completing them to learn English. I have made a plan this semester and hope to improve my English a little more – Student Q

I tried to practice my oral English as much as could and it really works. I don’t remember how many not short conversations I’ve had with my classmates or strangers, I feel much more comfortable and confident **than ever before.** – Student M

I have written many reflections to make myself more objective in learning, and know how to do better next time. – Student H

I have trained myself to think in English in this course. This has made my other general education courses easier, and it has helped me to improve in communication with my Music professors – Student P

It may be noteworthy that only 35% reflected on their Ought-to-self, while more emphasis was placed on the other two components of L2MSS. The PI and Co-PI’s conjecture would be that, possibly due to ‘goal setting’ being the focus in this study and discussed in class, students were looking forward to attaining their goals as language learners. This reflects their L2 ideal self. To explain how they plan to achieve their goals, they naturally reflected on their present learning journey, which relates to L2 Learning experience. Ought-to-self, on the other hand, focuses on what they should have prevented and how they could have avoided errors; these possibly were not uppermost in students’ minds like the other two components. This could also be due to the nature of this study, which emphasises on the three teaching interventions.

In their reflections, 16 out of 17 students made an average of 12 out of 29 observations as given in Table 2. The reflection with the highest number of observations had 19, which is an outstanding support of the theories on motivation in this research. This student did not write a very lengthy piece, neither was it error-free. His reflection could illustrate the possibility that there may not be a positive correlation between language accuracy, performance, ability in the subject, and one’s motivation level. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that one of the reflections had a positive tone throughout, but barely mentioned the strategies or motivation. This student had missed many lessons due to the Covid-19 situation as he was serving his Stay-Home Notice as required by the Singapore Government. As a result, he missed the goal-setting lesson and vocabulary presentations; despite that, he submitted his written reflection. Below is an excerpt of this reflection:

For me personally, this semester is even more special. School started for a week and I had to go back to China for some family reasons. Then my flight back to Singapore was cancelled over and over

again because of this terrible virus. But I was lucky enough to make it back to Singapore. Although I have delayed the courses and studies for a period of time, I have made up for them with my efforts –  
Student R

It can be deduced that the strategies and lessons have positively engaged the rest of the students as their reflections made mention of their observations, while this student's reflection is completely different from the others, with no mention of the strategies at all.

### ***Vocabulary presentations***

An analysis was also conducted on students' vocabulary, which is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Analysis of students' vocabulary presentations*

S/N	Observations	Theoretical framework	Frequency
1	Storytelling		100%
2	Explaining the applications of the word/providing example sentences		100%
3	Pronunciations		100%
4	Giving meanings/synonyms/antonyms	L2MSS (L2 learning experience)	93.8%
5	Exploring different forms of the word		25%
6	Examining the root form of the word		6.25%
7	Enthusiasm (3=very enthusiastic ; 2=quite enthusiastic; 1=not enthusiastic)		3: 43.8% 2: 31.2% 1: 25%
8	Effort (3=clearly puts in effort; 2=some effort; 1=minimal effort)	Social Identity, Agency and/or Investment	3: 50% 2: 25% 1: 25%
9	Length of presentation ('=min "=sec)		8'49" (longest) 0'54" (shortest)
10	Questions from others/interest generated (remarks/laughter)		62.5%

### ***Broad overview***

There were 16 participants whose presentations were analysed. Table 3 shows that 100% of the presenters gave the backstory of how they encountered the new words (story telling), taught the class how to use the words by providing example sentences, as well as provided the pronunciation of the new words. All but one participant explained what each new word meant or provided either the synonym or antonym of the word. 25% of them explored the verb forms of the word, i.e. verb, noun, adjective, adverbs. These aspects are carefully considered as the efforts and enthusiasm reflect their agency and investment compared to their previously observed behaviours. One participant was extremely thorough in his presentation by examining the word's root form in addition to all the observations above (see Figure 1). This showed intrinsic motivation in applying L2 learning experience and evidence of investment.

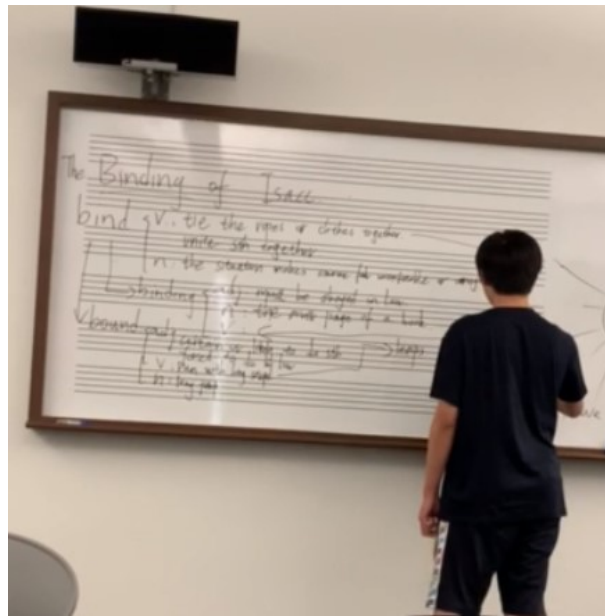


Figure 1. Screenshot of the student presenting new vocabulary by examining the root form of the word

***Detailed analysis and discussion of motivation in vocabulary presentations***

In Table 3, the first six observations evidence the students’ ‘L2 Learning experience’. They were not explicitly taught how to present new vocabulary, but the tutor had instructed them to share how they encountered the words and teach the class to their best ability. The tutor did not model how vocabulary should be presented, so as to allow learners to exercise autonomy in their preferred presentation styles. As a result, there was a variety of styles and ‘teaching methods’, ranging from using the whiteboard (Figure 1), using hand gestures (Figure 2), to using humour to generate interest and laughter (Figure 3).

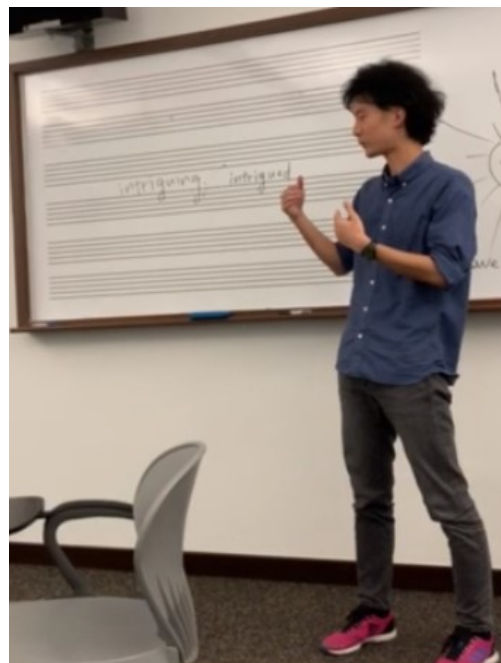


Figure 2. Screenshot of student presenting new vocabulary using hand gestures

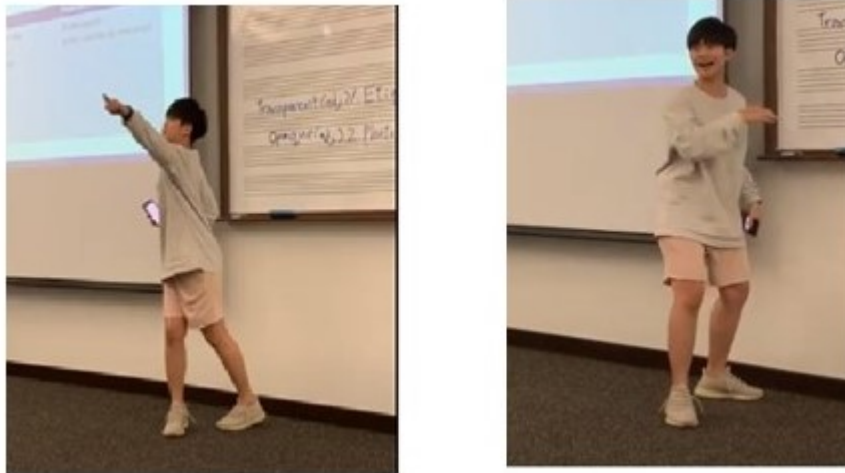


Figure 3. Screenshot of student presenting new vocabulary using humour to generate interest and laughter

There are ample positive evaluations in the student reflections that vocabulary presentation lead to a sense of empowerment, and growing confidence and motivation in their language learning:

This semester class we have a vocabulary presentation, **it makes me know many new words** during the time that I find some words for presentation. – Student B

I did a second vocabulary presentation and **I think it was better than the last time because this time I know what to say and what kind of example I can give to the class.**

– Student D

...**the vocabulary presentation is very useful.** There is a theory that when you want to learn something, you imagine that you are a teacher and you want to teach this thing to others, this process will make you learn better. I think this activity has the same effect. – Student E

Thus, this study's findings on vocabulary presentations support Ritchie (2016)'s conclusion that oral presentations enhance student achievement in other academic areas. Moreover, since the participants had indicated their preference for more in-class oral practice in prior student feedback, the vocabulary presentations were an appropriate strategy to raise their levels of motivation for EAP.

### ***Online questionnaire***

This questionnaire (see [Appendix](#)) aims to collect data on students' evaluations of the three teaching strategies. Out of the four responses received post-course, all of them stated they set goals for other purposes besides learning English as they found it useful in other aspects of learning, including their Music Studies. One of them even recognised that it increases his/her levels of motivation. All of them also positively evaluated the second strategy, writing reflections. There was rationalisation of its purpose, evidence of empowerment and agency. Finally, the response on the third strategy, vocabulary presentation, was also clearly positive. A student found it "a special way to (learn a) new word". Two students observed a positive learning opportunity in integrating oral and other skills while learning Academic English. Once again, this confirms Ritchie's (2016) hypothesis that oral presentations support students' learning of other receptive and productive skills, including listening and writing. One student also noted the benefits of the "extension" of his/her learning, presumably beyond his/her expectation of how language is learned, as well as how the strategies the tutor taught with can be applied and adapted across disciplines.

However, this data collection tool was limited due to the shift to partially online classes from the seventh week of semester. The tutor believed that more comprehensive data could have been collected if in-person focus group discussions had been conducted as originally planned. Students were apprehensive about participating in these discussions, likely because they were going to be held online. This was the main reason why online questionnaires eventually replaced the discussion.

## LIMITATIONS

This study is limited by the small sample size of 19 students due to a small course cohort. This also affected the final data collection, as both the PI and Co-PI believe the data collected from online questionnaires may not be as comprehensive as they would have been through focus group discussions.

Despite the shift to online lessons due to COVID-19, students who became more motivated continued to be engaged online, and two students who were not motivated from the beginning continued to be less motivated. Therefore, both the PI and Co-PI believe that there is little impact on the motivation level of students. Rapport and momentum built over the first half of the semester could be contributing factors. A detailed study on this can possibly be conducted for another paper.

The nature of the module being a compulsory one with zero modular credits could be considered in this paper. It is reasonable to think that students may be unmotivated due to this. However, this has been consistent for the semesters before this project was implemented. The level of student engagement in this study shows that there is growing internal motivation from the low levels of motivation in the past, so there could be other reasons why they were unmotivated. Moreover, the strategies implemented had positive impact on their internal levels of motivation.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

To sum up, these findings strongly indicate that all three teaching strategies—goal setting, reflection writing and vocabulary presentation—positively motivated the music students in the EAP classroom. These were evident in the overall positive disposition throughout the course including improved class attendance, on time submissions of assignments, and an increased effort in class participation and in preparation of tasks, as well as from the perspectives of both the PI and the Co-PI. The key findings of each strategy are highlighted in the next paragraph.

Firstly, goal setting was successful in motivating students not only to manage their EAP module but also to extend this strategy to their immediate study context, such as in their music modules. Many shared that they found this practical and useful for their academic studies. Tutors teaching any course can probably adapt this strategy to suit their learners and classroom needs, as these goals can be short-term, mid-term, or long-term. Secondly, reflection writing fits in extremely well with the first strategy. Students feel empowered after understanding how to critically reflect on their learning process, as they shared the positive feedback they received from their academic advisor and professors from other courses. This also neatly presents itself as a tool for data collection. Finally, results from the vocabulary presentations demonstrate that integrating language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) benefits learners in their metacognitive development. This proved to be an effective way of teaching language, so it is the PI's belief that language teachers can also adapt this teaching strategy in their classroom. With a sound pedagogy underpinning practice, these strategies can be effectively and skilfully employed to increase students' engagement in the classroom, be it in a traditional face-to-face classroom, blended or a hybrid setting.

What makes this paper unique is that the findings helped both the PI and Co-PI see how the international Music students identify themselves as English language learners as well as Music learners. The motivation strategies not only aided in their EAP journey, but also guided them in pursuing their Music endeavours. This is particularly evident in their setting of goals in their academic studies and the increased levels of confidence in communicating in the EAP classroom and among their peers in Music courses and General Education Modules. Hence, this action research has certainly deepened both researchers' understanding of motivation in language learning, which applies to the context of international Music students in higher education. The strategies implemented can be applied and may prove to be useful in ESL (English as a Second Language), EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and EAP classrooms.

## ENDNOTES

1. These students are mostly from Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Russia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan
2. Candidates need to attain an overall score of 6.5 in the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) with a 6.5 score in the Reading and Writing components, or attain a TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) score of 92-93 for the internet-based examination or 580 for the paper-based examination.
3. The questions remained the same in the online questionnaire as the ones proposed for the focus group discussions.

## APPENDIX. [ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE](#)

### ABOUT THE CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

Doreen TAN is currently teaching Academic English courses and is keen on investigating student engagement and motivation in the classroom. She is passionate about developing critical thinkers and moulding the next generation of learners inside out.

Doreen can be reached at [doreen.tan@nus.edu.sg](mailto:doreen.tan@nus.edu.sg).



## REFERENCES

- Brown, H. D. (2014). *Principles of language learning and teaching, sixth edition*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Brown, H. D., & Lee, H. (2015). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy, fourth edition*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: HarperPerennial.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. [E-book] Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2009). The L2 Motivational Self System. In Z. Dörnyei, & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 9-42). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Dörnyei, Z. & Ryan, S. (2015). *The Psychology of The Language Learner Revisited*. New York: Routledge.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2019). Towards a better understanding of the L2 learning experience, the Cinderella of the L2 Motivational Self System. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 9 (1), 19-30. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2019.9.1.2>
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2005). *Motivation, Language Identity and the L2 Self*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2013). *Teaching and researching motivation, second edition*. London: Routledge.
- Egbert, J. (2003). A study of flow theory in the foreign language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 87(4), 499–518. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1192800>
- Fong, Y. S. (2019). *Learners in transition: Chinese students' journeys from EFL to ESL and EIL*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Martin, A. J., Ginns, P. & Papworth, B. (2017). Motivation and engagement: Same or different? Does it matter? *Learning and Individual Differences*, 55, 150–162. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2017.03.013>
- Mercer, S. & Dörnyei, Z. (2020). *Engaging Language Learners in Contemporary Classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Muir, C. & Dörnyei, Z. (2013). Directed motivational currents: Using vision to create effective motivational pathways. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 3(3), 357–375. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2013.3.3.3>
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. London: Longman/Pearson Education. ■