“These works are by dead white men about mostly dead white men”:

Motivating Students in Applied English Classrooms

By

Roxana Andrei

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Abstract

This study explored the motivational strategies Ontario secondary Applied English teachers employ to spur student motivation. In order to gain authentic insight into this topic, interviews were conducted with two secondary school teachers who had copious experience teaching both Academic and Applied English classes. From these interviews, the study found that teachers perceived students’ self-efficacy beliefs, academic aspirations, connection with the material and the English curriculum itself to affect their motivation in Applied English classrooms. However, the participants believe that teachers can overcome these barriers by differentiating the classroom content according to students’ needs and creating a supportive learning environment for students. This study sheds light on the high degree of responsibility that teachers have in identifying the barriers to motivation in their students. In addition, another implication is the need for motivational resources that provide teachers with advice as to how they can motivate students in their Applied English classrooms.

Key Words: motivation, Applied English, classroom environment, motivational strategies, student-teacher relationships
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Chapter 4: Research Findings
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

In Ontario, the secondary English curriculum endeavours to further the intellectual development of every student by allowing them to have a choice in the subjects they learn and the level at which they learn those subjects (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a; Skerrett, 2010). The Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) (2007b) also posits that there is a “direct relationship” (p. 5) between students’ motivation and their ability to succeed. According to Demers and Bennett (2007), intrinsic motivation consists of students wanting to engage in an activity because they have the desire to do so. This study endeavored to identify teachers’ understanding of the reasons why some students in Applied English classrooms lack intrinsic motivation and the ways in which those teachers are currently combatting this problem. In this study, motivation is defined as students’ desire to succeed academically due to the “inherent pleasure derived from [those academic endeavours]” (p. 3).

One of the motivational techniques that is highlighted in the Ontario English Curriculum: Grades 11 and 12 (OME, 2007b) document is that of providing students with the freedom to choose their own texts in order for them to have authentic interests in those texts (Skerrett, 2010). Apart from the Ontario English curriculum documents, the literature on student motivation has outlined best practices teachers can use to motivate their students (Demers and Bennett, 2007; Palardy, 1999). Some practices that motivate students include providing relevant texts, praising students’ effort, providing deserved praise and using different kinds of instruction (Canadian Education Association, 2011; Palardy, 1999). In addition, the literature on motivation and success points to the importance of student-teacher relationships (Martin & Calabrese, 2011; Preston & Claypool, 2013). More specifically, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007b)
suggests that when dealing with students who have low motivation, “the attention, patience and encouragement of teachers can be extremely important to these students’ success” (p. 5). However, the research literature mentioned above only offers vague guidelines for how English teachers should, in practice, seek to motivate their students. Furthermore, the literature that caters more to students in English classes is often centered on motivating specific groups of students to read. For instance, the OME (2004) guidebook stated that males often receive lower scores than females on English standardized tests. Demers and Bennett (2007) further support this by suggesting that male students are more likely to drop out of high school than female students. In order to motivate males, Demers and Bennett (2007) suggest that teachers select novels and activities that cater to both sexes and provide more time in class where students can be active.

Apart from the documents that provide advice and statistics for teachers, a Canadian study that endeavors to bring awareness to student motivation and promote intellectual engagement was conducted by Willms, Friesen and Milton (2009); this study provides data on the level of engagement of students between grade six and grade twelve in Canada.

Nevertheless, the motivation of students in Canadian schools may also depend on the streams in which they are placed. In between grades 9 and 10, students are placed into Academic, Applied or Workplace streams based on their abilities and their post-secondary goals (OME, 2007a). Students who are in grade 11 and 12 are placed in University or College courses based on the type of post-secondary education they aspire to (OME, 2007b). In the Ontario Curriculum: English Grades 11 and 12 curriculum document, the OME (2007b) states that students in University-level English classrooms are given the skills necessary for University, whereas students in the College or Applied stream are prepared for college, apprenticeships or other fields that require training. According to Lopez (2011), some teachers reported that
students in the Academic stream are more academically inclined, whereas students in Applied streams are more ‘hands-on.’ This signals that some teachers may believe students in particular streams require different kinds of motivation in order to want to succeed. However, despite the division of the streams and the different skills taught in each stream, every student who attends high school must pass the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test as a requirement to graduate (Government of Ontario, 2015; OME, 2007a). As a result, it is problematic that stakeholders in education have differing expectations of students, but expect them to pass the same exact high-stakes standardized tests.

1.1 Research Problem

Despite the fact that Canada scored above average in reading, math and science in the Program for International Student Assessment (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014), a lack of motivation in Canadian and Ontarian schools is still common. A national study by Willms, Friesen and Milton (2009) found that only 37% of the students participating in the study were intellectually engaged in their English and Math classes in 2007, which signifies that less than half of students in those classes were motivated. In addition, Demers and Bennett (2007) emphasized that intrinsic motivation is rare in students in today’s society. Since almost 40% of students in Canadian high schools were found to be unmotivated to do well in their academic endeavours, it suggests that they may not see the value of putting effort into their academics (Demers & Bennett, 2007; Willms, Friesen & Milton, 2009). Based on the lack of educational policies that specifically address motivation, it becomes evident that the Ontario education system may not be fully addressing the lack of motivation among students. Rather, teachers are either provided with tips as to how to motivate their students (Canadian Education Association, 2011; Canadian Education Association, 2015) or they are told that they
should focus on motivating solely male students in their classrooms because of their low academic motivation (Demers & Bennett, 2007; OME, 2004).

In order to address this prevalent issue, the Ontario English curriculum provides teachers with the freedom to choose their class’ reading material (Skerrett, 2010; OME, 2007b). However, Skerrett (2010) claims that this policy is “weakly framed” (p. 45) because providing teachers with this freedom does not necessarily entail that teachers know which texts are most engaging for their students. In one study, the texts chosen by teachers were not found to enhance or change the students’ thinking (Kurki, 2015), which supports the inquiry as to whether individual teachers have the ability to know which texts increase student engagement. Moreover, the Ontario English curriculum allows for streaming across English classrooms that often contradicts the testing that students receive (OME, 2007a). This streaming often causes students to be taught different skills depending on the type of post-secondary education they are planning to receive and yet, every student is required to pass the same test, the OSSLT, in order to graduate (Government of Ontario, 2015; OME, 2007a). Lastly, there also is very limited research on the motivation of students in Applied-level English classrooms or in streamed English classrooms due to the fact that certain researchers have focused on studying students based on their motivational level, rather than their academic level (Daniels & Araposthathis, 2005; Morgan & Wagner, 2013).

Due to the fact that teachers can have a sizable influence on a student’s education (Skerrett, 2010), it is important to examine how Canadian teachers are working to develop students’ motivation and which strategies are successful in stimulating an increase in students’ intrinsic motivation. This study endeavoured to identify the factors that teachers believe to affect student motivation in Applied English classrooms and gain concrete insight from those teachers
to help other teachers resolve the motivational issues in their Applied English classrooms. This study examined the extent to which teachers believe that Applied English students’ beliefs, their relationships and the learning environment influence their intrinsic motivation to succeed.

1.2 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore Ontario secondary Applied English teachers’ beliefs about student motivation and the strategies they used to foster intrinsic motivation in their own classrooms. I conducted interviews with a small sample of these teachers to gain insights into their beliefs about motivation, various factors that reportedly influence student motivation, the strategies they are using to motivate students and the perceived impact that student-teacher relationships and the learning environment have on students’ motivation in Applied English classes.

With this study, I hoped to bolster teachers’ awareness of the significant role that motivation has on their students’ academic success. My findings will hopefully help teachers understand that intrinsic motivation necessitates that they motivate students not only through the use of instructional strategies, but also through their relationships with their students and the learning environment they establish in the classroom. Through this study, I also wanted to provide teachers with a guide for how to engender an enduring affirmation towards English from their students. Lastly, teachers’ reports on how they successfully motivated their students can spur a conversation between teachers and the Ontario Ministry of Education that can lead to a creation of motivational standards or policies for the Ontario English Curriculum.

1.3 Research Questions

The central research question guiding the study is: what are Ontario secondary Applied English teachers’ beliefs about and strategies for fostering intrinsic motivation in students? The
sub-questions that also guided this study are:

- Which factors do teachers perceive to have the most negative impact on students’ intrinsic motivation?
- Which practices and instructional approaches are these teachers using to foster motivation and what are their perceived outcomes?
- In what way does the student-teacher relationship and class atmosphere impact student motivation from the perspective of teachers?

1.4 Background of the Researcher

I have always been intrigued by student motivation and engagement, both during my adolescence and my practicum experience. As a European middle-class immigrant, I was highly motivated to succeed by my parents who were often encouraging me to focus on my studies. As a result, I placed a high value on my education, took only Academic courses during high school and always had the means to afford books that furthered my intrinsic love for literature. However, I realize that as a teacher, I will need to also teach students who are not as motivated as I was, such as some students in Applied English classrooms. This sentiment was reflected in my practicum experience, as I observed numerous students completing English assignments and reading texts because they were told to, rather than because they had an intrinsic desire to learn.

I chose to conduct a qualitative study on student motivation in order to find the extent to which student-teacher relationships and the learning environment affect motivation in comparison to the motivational methods employed by English teachers. As a high school student, I was very keen on having strong relationships with my teachers because they were my mentors when I first immigrated to Canada. This may explain why I wanted to study how student motivation is affected by factors other than teachers’ instructional methods.
Since I am currently in a Master of Teaching program with the intent of teaching English and History in a high school setting, this study enabled me to explore the extent to which motivation is a component of English teaching. By learning how to intrinsically motivate all students, I can help them reach their full potential.

1.5 Preview of MTRP

In this introduction, I presented the research problem and the significance of having a qualitative study that examines the motivation of students in the Applied English classrooms in Ontario. In Chapter Two, I will review academic, peer-reviewed literature to find the factors that impact student motivation. In Chapter Three, I will describe my methodology, which includes semi-structured interviews with two English teachers. Chapter Four will combine my findings from the interviews and the literature review to provide an in-depth look at how teachers can motivate students in Applied English classrooms. Lastly, Chapter Five will provide instructional approaches, resources and guidelines for how teachers, the school and the Ministry of Education can work together to spur student motivation in Applied English classrooms.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I review literature that pertains to various factors, teaching practices, relationships and learning environments that influence student motivation. Although this study explores how Canadian teachers motivate high school students in Applied English classrooms, I will focus on literature that addresses the academic motivation of students in both American and Canadian elementary and secondary English classrooms due to the lack of research that distinguishes between Applied and Academic students in Canada (Daniels & Araposthathis, 2005; Morgan & Wagner, 2013). Initially, I will present current research on the factors that have been found to affect student motivation. Secondly, I will present the best practices that teachers are currently using to increase academic motivation so as to identify the emphasis that teachers place on motivation. Lastly, I present findings that reveal the extent to which motivation is influenced by peers, teachers and the learning environment in order to grasp the importance of relationships and the classroom environment to motivation in comparison to motivational strategies.

2.1 Factors that Affect Academic Motivation

When reviewing the research literature to identify the factors that affect academic motivation, it became evident that the factors depended on a researcher’s scope of study and subjective beliefs. Some of these factors are academic goals (Bigelow & Zhou, 2001), teaching practices common in English classes (Hughes, King, Perkins & Fuke, 2011) and socio-economic status (Smith, Schneider & Ruck, 2005). First, I will focus on both students’ and teacher’s reports, while also reviewing different understandings of motivation and the English curriculum in Canada. Afterwards, I will review literature that explores the extent to which students’ self-
efficacy beliefs, academic goals and socio-economic status affect their motivation to succeed.

2.1.1 The various definitions, levels and categories of motivation

Academic motivation has been defined similarly across academic literature. Academically motivated students are often perceived as being able to “see the worthiness of the activity and believe that their efforts will be effective” (Harmon, Hedrick, Wood & Vintinner, 2011, p. 117). Intellectual engagement is slightly synonymous with academic motivation; however, it denotes “a serious emotional and cognitive investment in learning” (Willms, Friesen & Milton, 2009, p. 7). These definitions signify that motivation requires students to be wholly engaged in their academic material (Willms, Friesen & Milton, 2009). Moreover, academic motivation has often been divided into different levels, such as “teacher-dependent” motivation, “peer-dependent” motivation, “teacher-and-peer dependent” motivation or “teacher-and-peer independent” motivation (Raufelder, Jagenow, Drury & Hoferichter, 2013, p. 90). In addition, another understanding of student motivational levels categorizes them as either “reluctantly engaged”, “busily engaged” or “fully engaged” (Conner & Pope, 2013, p. 1433). Researchers have also referred to non-academically oriented students as “reluctant learners” (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005, p. 51), “struggling readers” (Morgan & Wagner, 2013, p. 663) or “at-risk” (Lesley, 2008, p. 174) students. Despite the varying understandings of motivation, the common goal of researchers and this study is to identify the strategies teachers find most effective in intrinsically motivating students, which occurs when they focus on an academic activity for the sake of learning, rather than for the sake of gaining acknowledgment (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Varuzza, Sinatra, Eschenauer & Blake, 2014).

2.1.2 The English curriculum

Although Canada's education system is noted as one of the finest education systems in
the world (Hoferichter, Raufelder, Eid & Bukowski, 2014), in a study of the impact of teacher and peer relationships on student motivation of grade seven and eight students, only 41% of students reported feeling intellectually engaged in their English classrooms in 2009 and 2010. Low engagement in English classrooms may stem from educational policies that continue to use traditional teaching methods, such as regular examination, limited choices in literature and instruction that focuses on content, not skill (Russell, 2005). Recent research (Skerrett, 2010) suggests that allowing teachers to select the material taught can offer them “the space to search for alternative ways of teaching English” (Lopez, 2011, p. 76). However, the flexible curricula has also been interpreted as being “weakly framed” (Skerrett, 2010, p. 45) to an extent because certain Canadian teachers in Skerrett’s study incorporated more American Literature than Canadian Literature in their classrooms when they had the freedom to choose their classroom’s texts. Another teacher in Canada also emphasized the importance of “developing some agency within the curriculum guidelines so as to be more inclusive and socially aware” (Lopez, 2011, p. 81). As a result, there is disagreement as to whether the structure of the English Curriculum in Canada is advantageous or disadvantageous to student motivation.

2.1.3 The self-efficacy beliefs of students

Academic motivation is often linked to an individual’s self-efficacy beliefs (Varuzza et al., 2014). Self-efficacy pertains to how capable an individual feels in their ability to complete a task (Bandura, 1997 as cited in Klassen, Chong, Huan, Wong, Kates & Hannok, 2008). For instance, the use of Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction was found to allow grade seven students to read texts more deeply because they felt “competence in handling complex text[s]” (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014, p. 405). Similarly, a teacher who reported encouraging his History students to use meta-cognitive strategies found an increase in student motivation because the
students were able to reflect on their learning (Smith, Rook & Smith, 2007). Consequently, students’ improved self-efficacy has the potential to strengthen their motivation (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Smith, Rook & Smith, 2007).

However, teachers’ negative perceptions of their students may have a negative effect on students’ self-efficacy (Klassen et al., 2008). For instance, students who are in the Applied stream are sometimes regarded as "less academically capable" (Skerrett, 2010, p. 44), having more classroom management issues and requiring a more “hands-on approach to […] learning” (Lopez, 2011, p. 80). This negative perception of non-academic students can be detrimental to their academic success because those beliefs can affect the entire school environment (Klassen et al., 2008). Similarly, students who are at-risk of dropping out are frequently viewed from a “deficit-based lens” (Martin & Calabrese, 2011, p. 111) that focuses on the students’ inabilities, rather than their abilities. For instance, a study of at-risk students at an alternative school found it surprising that students did not refer to their personal struggles when engaging with texts, which suggests that there previously was a belief that at-risk students could not be engaged unless they related school material to their lives (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). Consequently, this limited perception of students from non-academic streams can have a negative impact on how those students view themselves, especially if teachers treat them differently because of their abilities (Klassen et al., 2008).

2.1.4 The influence of academic goals on student motivation

Although students’ academic goals and educational aspirations can affect their motivation in school (Bigelow & Zhou, 2001), studies have shown that students’ goals differ during adolescence (Shapka, Domene & Keating, 2012). Students’ academic goals often influence their motivation because their goals urge them to act in ways so as to attain that goal (Bigelow &
Zhou, 2001; Varuzza et al., 2014). For instance, certain students may have performance goals, which are goals that are created in order to gain recognition from others for the completion of a task, rather than a genuine interest in the knowledge gained from the task (Harlow, DeBacker & Crowson, 2011). When considering students’ self-reported thoughts, some students expressed that they were not engaged in English classes, despite knowing that their future was dependent on their academic success (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). Similarly, other students perceived high school as a time when they began to explicitly prioritize their social goals over their academic goals (Bigelow & Zhou, 2001). On the other hand, some students have become more engaged once they considered their future goals (Preston & Claypool, 2013), especially with regards to male students during their adolescent years (Shapka, Domene & Keating, 2012). Consequently, this wide variety of academic goals among high school students makes it difficult to pinpoint the effect that academic goals have on student motivation.

2.1.5 The impact of socio-economic status on motivation

With regards to students’ socio-economic status, researchers differ in their claims as to the validity of the relationship between student motivation and socio-economic status. One common belief among researchers is that students who come from wealthier families are more academically successful than other students because their parents have the means to provide them with copious “educational supports” (Smith, Schneider & Ruck, 2005, p. 356). In fact, Canadian teachers have reported that their school’s academic climate was strongly influenced by their students’ socio-economic status (Klassen et al., 2008). However, this seemingly positive correlation between socio-economic status and academic climate is based solely on teacher’s self-reports (Klassen et al., 2008), which suggest that these findings may not be generalizable. However, objective and unbiased data in the form of scores from the Program for International
Student Assessment in 2012 revealed that Canadian students have high scores in reading, math, science and problem solving, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014). Instead of socio-economic status, one study found that parental support was more influential on the academic motivation of Black high school students in Toronto (Smith, Schneider & Ruck, 2005). Overall, research has yet to come to a consensus on the correlation between socio-economic status and students’ motivation.

2.1.6 Conclusion

This section illustrates the various factors that can impact student motivation in English classrooms. It begins by creating a universal definition for student motivation and illustrates the different types of motivated students (Conner & Pope, 2013; Raufelder et al., 2013). It then addresses the advantages and disadvantages of having a flexible English curriculum (Lopez, 2011; Skerrett, 2010). In addition, it illustrates the importance of positive self-efficacy beliefs for students (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014), the effect of varying academic goals on student motivation (Bigelow & Zhou, 2001; Varuzza et al., 2014) and the ambiguity arising as to the extent to which students’ socio-economic status affects their motivation (Klassen et al., 2008; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014). In the upcoming section, I will present various strategies that teachers found most effective in motivating students in their classrooms.

2.2 Strategies Used to Promote Student Motivation

In this section, I focus on the different strategies, mediums and instructional approaches that teachers are currently employing in their classrooms so as to motivate their students. This section focuses mainly on teachers due to their direct contact with students and their self-reported belief that it is their responsibility to motivate students (Harmon et al., 2011). Despite teachers agreeing on the important role that motivation plays in their classrooms (Harmon et al.,
2011), the motivational strategies that teachers employ differ.

2.2.1 The importance of choice

Allowing students to have the freedom to choose the texts that they read in class has been frequently used as a motivational strategy in English classrooms (Daniels & Araposthathis, 2005; Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Harmon et al., 2011; Varuzza et al., 2014); however, research on this topic suggests that it can also undermine students’ success (Skerrett, 2010; Sokal, 2010). In essence, choice has been found to be a means through which teachers could help their students gain “a deeper sense of identity, a developed sense of agency and higher state test scores” (Morgan & Wagner, 2013, p. 660). This technique has been found to be most effective with struggling readers, for their overall reading engagement increased once their teachers permitted them to choose the texts they read (Morgan & Wagner, 2013). The motivational strategy of choice then can be an essential tool in English classes.

Nevertheless, the freedom to choose can become problematic if the role of selecting reading materials rests primarily on teachers (Harmon et al., 2011). Occasionally, this freedom leads to teachers selecting texts that are already prevalent in English classrooms (Skerrett, 2010). A study found that teachers’ ability to choose texts led to them solely teaching authors of Anglo descent (Skerrett, 2010), but the results of this study had the limitation of being based on only one high school in Ontario. In addition, two separate studies have also found that teachers tend to choose texts that do not address the interests of male students (Sokal, 2010; Worthy, Moorman & Turner, 1999). An interesting finding from Sokal’s (2010) study of how Canadian and Thai male high school students view reading found that the majority of those students did not perceive reading as a feminine endeavour, which suggests that some male students are not de-motivated by the task of reading, but by the choice of texts that they have to read. As a result, teachers must
“expand traditional views of school literacy” (Sokal, 2010, p. 53) and not be afraid of choosing texts that “disrupt the dominant and Eurocentric forms of knowledge” (Lopez, 2011, p. 76) in order to increase student motivation. Hence, English teachers must then ensure that their freedom does not limit that of their students.

2.2.2 The relevance of texts to student’s lives

Students are more engaged with reading once they are provided with texts that are meaningful to them and their lives (Guthrie & Klauda 2014; Lesley, 2008). The purpose of using relevant texts is not to “transform” (Kurki, 2015, p. 30) students’ thinking, as one study had trouble doing with students in a Canadian alternative high school. Instead, the purpose of allowing students to choose texts that relate to their lives is to help them become more engaged with those texts (Elish-Piper, Wold & Schwingendorf, 2014). In one study, elementary students experienced a similar increase in intrinsic motivation once the literature they read at school matched their understanding of how they should engage with literature (Beach & Ward, 2013). Some teachers also found that they can spur students’ intrinsic desire to read by incorporating texts that students read outside of the classroom (Beach & Ward, 2013), such as text messages, mystery novels, adventure novels and magazines (Varuzza et al., 2014). Another effective practice is offering students novels that are relevant to their age, such as young adult novels for adolescents (Elish-Piper, Wold & Schwingendorf, 2014).

Motivational engagement can be fostered not only through the texts that students read, but also through the texts that they create. For instance, Hughes et al., (2011) found that students in workplace streams and alternative high schools were more engaged in the writing process once they had the opportunity to create graphic novels that were based on their experiences. Their desire to create graphic novels stemmed from viewing graphic novels as a medium through
which they could share their personal stories with their peers (Hughes et al., 2011). Thus, teachers providing students with texts relevant to their lives has been proven to be an effective motivational instructional method (Lesley, 2008; Hughes et al., 2011).

2.2.3 The use of culturally-relevant pedagogy

The use of culturally-relevant pedagogy in English classes has been linked to increased academic motivation in students, especially if it is through the means of critical literacy, for it invites students to be critical of how society represents their culture or identity (Lopez, 2011). These issues are imperative in English classroom as they are essential to students’ understanding of society (Kurki, 2015; Lesley 2008; Ma’ayan, 2010). Students are increasingly engaged when texts “reflected characters of their own race or culture” (Ma’ayan, 2010, p. 650) and when they are able to find “personal meaning” (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014, p. 405) in those texts. This suggests that students’ identities need to be brought into the classroom in order for them to find the material important (Ma’ayan, 2010). Nevertheless, the use of Critical Literacy, the process of being critical of how identities are portrayed in literature, may not be effective with all students due to its sensitive nature, especially with regards to some students from Indigenous communities who often experience difficulty while learning about how their identities are perceived by society (Pirbhai-Illlich, 2011). In order to avoid focusing solely on sensitive issues, teachers can cater to students’ culture through culturally-relevant instruction, which can take the form of oral discussions that benefit multilingual students (Varuzza et al., 2014). Another approach taken by teachers is providing group work because the practice is well liked by certain students from Indigenous communities (Preston & Claypool, 2013); however, this study was not focused on English classrooms, but practices that teachers can use in every classroom. Culturally-relevant pedagogy can then become a tool in combatting disengagement in schools if
used correctly.

2.2.4 Teachers’ instructional practices

Although teacher’s instructional practices vary, the type of instruction is imperative as it often dictates the extent to which the students will be motivated to read (Martin & Calabrese, 2011; Elish-Piper, Wold & Schwingendorf, 2014). One instructional practice that is proven to be successful is encouraging students to interact with their peers in class as they do outside of class so as to make class discussions less intimidating for students (Kurki, 2015). For instance, teaching practices that encourage participation, such as group projects (Martin & Calabrese, 2011), “Socratic discussions” (Harmon et al., 2011, p. 116) and “performative communication” (Hughes et al., 2011, p. 610), are effective because they enable students to understand texts collectively and express their own opinions. Teachers who ask affective questions are also observing increased engagement from their students due to the fact that these questions ask students to provide their own understanding of class material, rather than asking the students to regurgitate the teacher’s answers (Smith, Rook & Smith, 2007). As a result, teachers can spur student engagement by welcoming students’ voices in the classroom (Martin & Calabrese, 2011).

Teachers have also improved reading engagement by modifying their reading instruction. Some students who were commonly classified as “reluctant readers” (Hughes et al., 2011, p. 603) were found to be highly receptive to graphic novels because it enabled them to express their ideas not solely through words, but also through images. Another means of engaging students who are intimidated by reading is showing them the value of what they are reading and how they are reading (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Guthrie & Klauda, 2014). It then becomes evident that reading is not a skill that comes naturally to certain students and in order for those student to gain that skill, teachers must find alternate ways of engaging students in reading activities.
Teachers’ instructional practices also consist of carefully choosing the types of texts that students read. The support that teachers provide to their students has been found to allow them to understand texts more easily if it is in terms of “competence support” (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014, p. 405), which consists of having students read novels that were appropriate to their reading level and helping them learn how to create attainable goals for themselves. However, a separate study (Varuzza et al., 2014) showed that challenging students, rather than merely catering to their reading levels, can also be an effective means of motivating students. Thus, these studies illustrate that teachers can motivate their students by catering classroom texts to the students in their classes (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014).

2.2.5 The use of technology in the classroom

Some traditional teaching methods no longer interest students in English classrooms (Martin & Calabrese, 2011). Since students are often obtaining information from different modes of technology outside of the classroom, it is important for teachers to make use of those modes and teach students how to be critical of them (Kurki, 2015; Ma’ayan, 2010). For instance, the most common reading activity used by students outside of the classroom is text messaging (Varuzza et al., 2014); however, these types of texts are not frequently seen in today’s classrooms. Teachers can use technology as a way to update their teaching methods, which is what one grade ten teacher did as he incorporated Linked Text Sets to engage students through both print and media texts (Elish-Piper, Wold & Schwingendorf, 2014). However, one growing problem is that technology is used to replace traditional types of instruction, rather than create new means of instruction (Peck, Hewitt, Mullen, Lashley, Eldridge & Douglas, 2015). For instance, even in an English classroom where the teacher had copious technological resources, they were often not used or only used to promote teacher-centered learning (Peck et al., 2015).
As a result, technology can become a means of motivating students if it is purposefully incorporated in the classroom (Peck et al., 2015).

The extent to which technology promotes academic success and motivation in students is still unclear. Students who were categorized as “eLearning Pioneers” (Peck et al., 2015, p. 19) benefitted most from the use of technology because it enabled them to learn at their own pace. For these types of students, technology is an engaging tool because it caters to their interests (Varuzza et al., 2014, p. 117). Meanwhile, students partaking in remedial programs and students categorized as “Digital Rebels” or “Cyber Wanderers” because they use technology to undermine teachers’ instructions or to distract themselves from their academic work, may not experience the positive effects of using technology in the classroom (Peck et al., 2015, p. 15, 18). Rather, these students employ technology for purposes other than to further their learning (Peck et al., 2015). Consequently, teachers must integrate technology in the classroom with caution in order to ensure that students are motivated to learn from their interaction with technology.

2.2.6 Conclusion

Thus, this section reviewed the different strategies that teachers are currently using to motivate their students. It addressed the way in which the power to choose texts (Varuzza et al., 2014), the relevance of texts to student’s lives (Beach & Ward, 2013), the use of culturally-relevant pedagogy (Ma’ayan, 2010) and teacher’s overall instructional practices (Martin & Calabrese, 2011) can positively influence student motivation. In the next section, I will discuss the extent to which student-teacher relationships, student’s peer relationships and the overall classroom environment influence student motivation.

2.3 The Significance of Student Relationships and the Learning Environment

Since the previous section focused on instructional methods, this section will focus on the
extent to which the non-instructional aspects of teaching affect students’ motivation. In this section, only six of the fourteen studies were completed in English classrooms because researchers often assessed the student-teacher relationships and motivation in a variety of classrooms and courses. Although researchers (Martin & Calabrese, 2011; Preston & Claypool, 2013) have already found a strong correlation between teacher-student relationships, the learning environment and academic motivation, the extent to which these affect motivation more than instructional methods is still unknown. Thus, this section will help determine how significant student-teacher relationships, peer relationships and class atmosphere are to students’ motivation.

2.3.1 The significance of student-teacher relationships

Student motivation is often strengthened by the student-teacher relationship, especially with regards to students who are “reluctant learners” (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005, p. 51) or “struggling readers” (Morgan & Wagner, 2013, p. 663) in English classrooms. In a study comparing the extent to which Canadian and German students are motivated by their relationships at school, Hoferichter et al., (2014) found that 57% of high school students in Canada are perceived as “teacher-and-peer dependent” (Raufelder et al., 2013, p. 90). Similarly, Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) found that teachers in an alternative school were able to motivate their students regardless of their students’ lives outside of the classroom. Thus, teachers who support their students have a more influential impact in their motivation (Conner & Pope, 2013; Preston & Claypool, 2013). In fact, interviews with several students from Indigenous communities attending Sun and Moon School found that they felt more confident in themselves once they sensed that their teachers were willing to help them with both personal and academic dilemmas (Preston & Claypool, 2013). Although this study does not focus on English classrooms specifically, it is still valid in showing that the relationship between students and teachers can
influence students’ academic success. Often, the relationships between students and teachers have been found to allow students to feel that they can “trust” (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005, p. 51) their teachers. Similarly, a qualitative case study of student motivation at an alternative high school found that “positive experiences with teachers were the basis for their values of cooperation and mutual respect” (Martin & Calabrese, 2011, p. 116). Consequently, teacher’s responsibilities often go beyond that of teaching students material to providing them with the encouragement to succeed.

Conversely, an evaluative relationship between students and teachers in English classrooms can have a negative impact on students’ engagement at school (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Lapadat, 2000). In a study (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005) of students at an alternative high school, students lacked intrinsic motivation because they perceived grades as, “the only reason someone would work diligently in school” (p. 46). These students further expressed that they felt distanced from their teachers because their teachers judged them according to their abilities (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005), while another qualitative study (Lapadat, 2000) found that English and Social Studies students perceived judging each other based on intellect as “not right” (p. 57). This suggests that teachers who explicitly evaluate their students may be undermining their academic success by robbing them of their intrinsic motivation to succeed (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005).

2.3.2 The importance of a supportive learning environment

Teachers also positively influence their students’ motivation and academic achievement by providing a supportive learning environment (Klassen et al., 2008; Martin & Calabrese, 2011; Preston & Claypool, 2013). For instance, in the study of students from Indigenous communities attending the Moon and Sun School, Preston and Claypool (2013) found that some of the
students asserted that the supportive environment created by the school allowed them to feel like they belonged. In another study that examined English teachers at ten different schools, Varuzza et al., (2014) found that teachers who are prone to “offering encouragement, providing clear instructions [and] offering positive feedback” (p. 116) are also more likely to have students who want to participate in those classes. Harlow, DeBacker and Crowson (2011) also found that having a structured English classroom was a good motivational environment for English students, as these students were reported to have a strong desire to learn for the sake of learning. All of these studies emphasize the significant role that the learning environment has on improving students’ academic success (Harlow, DeBacker & Crowson, 2011; Preston & Claypool, 2013). In addition, the learning environment is also dependent on the relationships between students and teachers. Student and teachers who regularly help one another have been found to create a more respectful environment (Preston & Claypool, 2013) and a “sense of mutuality” (Martin & Calabrese, 2011, p. 116). Thus, it is imperative that teachers empower students by allowing them to contribute in the creation of their learning environment (Martin & Calabrese, 2011).

2.3.3 The influence of peer and parental support

As students enter high school, they encounter various challenges that they cannot overcome without support from others around them. Although Canada has culture that values individualism, students in Canadian schools are often encouraged to learn both cognitive and social skills (Hoferichter et al., 2014), with Canadian teachers often placing emphasis on the social skills or the lack of social skills of their students (Klassen et al., 2008). This sentiment is mirrored in self-reports, as some students and their parents acknowledged that social competence is either equal to or of higher importance than cognitive competence (Bigelow & Zhou, 2001;
Hoferichter et al., 2014). Due to this strong connection between students, they are able to influence each other’s academic endeavours (Lapadat, 2000). However, the lack of peer support can also have an adverse effect on students’ participation, for one study (Lapadat, 2000) showed that the lack of peer support made some students reluctant to ask for extra help. Thus, peer relationships can influence students’ academic success, albeit in a positive or negative manner.

Parents also have a role in influencing their children’s academic motivation; however, researchers are still debating as to whether this relationship is more influential to student motivation than the relationship students have with their peers. In a study on Black students’ reported academic beliefs in Toronto and Halifax schools, Smith, Schneider and Ruck (2005) found that students who received more parental support were more academically successful than students who were not receiving that support. However in another study (Bigelow & Zhou, 2001) where elementary and high school students and parents in Ontario answered questions regarding school goals, parents reported that their children’s peers were very influential in their academic motivation. Thus, the relationships that students have with people around them, including their peers and their parents, are one of the determinants of their academic motivation.

2.3.4 Conclusion

In this section, I reviewed the significant role that teacher-student relationships, peer relationships, parental support and the learning environment have on student motivation to succeed in the classroom. Teachers who support their students find that their students are more motivated to succeed than students lacking that support (Conner & Pope, 2013). Moreover, teachers who create a supportive environment in the classroom also positively influence their students’ motivation in that class (Varuzza et al., 2014). However, peer support is also important to students’ success in a classroom (Lapadat, 2000), which begs the question as to whether peers
or teachers influence students the most.

2.4 Conclusion

This literature review examined student motivation by focusing on the factors that affect motivation, teacher’s current motivational practices, the importance of relationships and the influence of positive learning environments on student motivation. This review of research illustrates the large emphasis that has been placed on teacher’s practices, rather than other non-instructional aspects of teaching that affect motivation. It then raises a concern as to why the non-instructional methods that influence motivation are not frequently studied by researchers. Consequently, this demonstrates that more research is required in order to find if teacher’s instructional practices are more effective in increasing students’ motivation than non-instructional practices, especially with regards to students in Applied English classrooms.

In order to contribute to the current literature, the purpose of this current study is to explore teachers’ experiences of promoting motivation in students of Applied English classes. This study gained insight into teacher’s current motivational techniques by conducting semi-structured interviews with educators of Applied English classrooms, which will shine light on the factors teachers perceived to be the most influential on students in Applied streams. The study also focused on examining the factors that contribute to student motivation, teacher’s current practices and other supports that aid students in gaining motivation in English classrooms. Through this study, I hoped to find the factors that teachers believe to negatively affect student motivation and the methods those teachers are currently employing in their classrooms to combat this. This can potentially create a culture whereby teachers do not merely follow tips on how to motivate students, but rather have best practices available for motivating their students due to the fact that they know where their students’ lack of motivation originated.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I will introduce the qualitative approach that guided this study in order to illustrate the importance of using that approach to study students’ motivation from the perspective of Ontario secondary Applied English teachers. I will then provide an overview of the instruments that I employed to collect the data, in addition to the sampling criteria, sampling procedures and the biographies of the participants who partook in the study. Afterwards, I will present the various techniques that I used to analyze the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews. I will then discuss the ethical review procedures and the means through which I endeavored to minimize participant risk in this study. Lastly, I will showcase the strengths and limitations of conducting a qualitative study in order to reiterate the rationale behind the qualitative approach used for this study. In order to conclude the chapter, I will summarize the methodological choices made for this study and briefly discuss the subsequent chapter.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

In this qualitative research study, I reviewed recent literature on student motivation and conducted semi-structured interviews with two teachers on which to base my conclusions. A qualitative research approach consists of research that endeavors to derive the “meanings, concepts, definitions [and] characteristics” (Berg, 2001, p. 3) of the topic being studied. It is distinct from the quantitative approach, as it does not focus on measuring the topic being studied (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Berg, 2001), but rather on gaining a “deeper understanding of the participants’ lived experiences” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 39). Qualitative research is unique in that it provides researchers with the opportunity to understand how the topic being studied functions in society according to different individuals’ experiences and interactions with
it (Barbour, 2008). Moreover, qualitative research is grounded in the understanding that various individuals have of the topic being studied (Barbour, 2008). This focus emerges from the Constructivist understanding of the world, whereby truth is constructed according to one’s point of view (Guba & Lincoln, 2004). Research that has taken on the constructivist approach to knowledge also dictates that researchers are both the participants and the facilitators in a study (Guba & Lincoln, 2004). As a result, the researcher has a very distinct role in qualitative research, which enables the researcher to obtain a unique view of the topic being studied (Guba & Lincoln, 2004).

Due to the “explanatory power” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004, p. 13) that the qualitative research approach allots to researchers, it is the most appropriate approach for a study that focuses on how English teachers in today’s society motivate their students. This approach encapsulates the purpose of this study, for I did not intend on discovering the percentage of students who were motivated in Canadian classrooms, but rather I focused on identifying the means through which teachers motivate those students. By focusing on the “how” (Barbour, 2008, p. 11), the qualitative approach enabled me to understand the inner workings of student motivation (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004). Furthermore, qualitative research prioritizes the understanding of the topic being studied through different viewpoints (Barbour, 2008; Guba & Lincoln, 2004). This was a natural fit for a study on motivation because by focusing on how various teachers understand motivation, it allowed me to find different solutions that can tackle the lack of motivation in Applied English students. This also strongly relates to the research purpose, as I endeavored to find the most reportedly successful means through which to motivate students, which necessitated that I considered the opinions and experiences of numerous teachers. Hence, the qualitative approach allows readers to understand the intricacies of
motivation and how it manifests itself in the classroom from the perspective of the participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004).

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

In a qualitative study, the most commonly used data collection methods are observations, textual analysis and interviews (Berg, 2001). However, this study employed semi-structured interviews as its sole method of data collection in order to enable me to gain a detailed understanding of how certain teachers understand and interpret motivation (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Semi-structured interviews consist of both structured and unstructured elements, as the same questions are generally posed to every participant (Merriam, 2002); however, certain questions can be open-ended to allow participants to answer the questions based on their understanding of and experience with the topic (Barbour, 2008). The semi-structured interview also allows researchers to inquire into details that stray from the pre-determined questions (Berg, 2001), which enable them adapt their questions and cater the interview to the experiences of the particular participant being interviewed (Arksey & Knight, 1999). By using this specific type of interview, it allowed me to understand how each individual teacher viewed motivation and the unique steps they took to combat low motivation in their classrooms. Lastly, the semi-structured interview creates a balanced relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, as both parties are in charge of the direction of the interview (Barbour, 2008). By establishing this healthy dynamic with my participants, I created a strong rapport that helped them speak freely about student motivation (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Thus, semi-structured interviews are beneficial for both the interviewee and the interviewer.

In this study’s interview protocol, I divided the questions into three topics that address motivation, which are the factors that impact motivation, the motivational strategies teacher use
to spur motivation and the impact of supportive environments and supportive relationships on student motivation. However, each of these categories was addressed during the interview using six to eight open and closed questions. Initially, I began by asking closed questions that assessed the professional background of the participants and then I proceeded to ask open-ended questions that encouraged the participants to reflect on their own experiences in dealing with student motivation (Barbour, 2008). Below, I provide examples of questions that I posed during the interview:

- In your own words, how would you describe student motivation or the lack of student motivation?
- What are some successful motivational strategies that you employ in your own Applied English classroom?
- Describe how you establish a positive and supportive learning environment in your classroom?

3.3 Participants

In every study, researchers must ensure that they make logical decisions about their choice in participants and explain those decisions in order to make their study credible (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Consequently, in this section, I outline the means through which I chose the participants and the sampling methods I used to recruit those participants.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

In order to ensure that the participants were experienced teachers who had implemented motivational strategies in their own Applied English classrooms, the following sampling criteria were met:

- Teachers must be qualified in Ontario to teach English at the secondary level with
at least four years of teaching experience

- Teachers must have at least two years of teaching English in the Applied stream as well as two years of teaching English in the Academic stream
- Teachers must have experience addressing motivation in their own classrooms

Due to the fact that interviews allow researchers to see how participants interpret the topic being studied (Marshall & Rossman, 1995), it is important to choose participants who have copious experience with it. Primarily, the two teachers must be qualified to teach English at the secondary level and must have four years of experience in order to ensure that they have had numerous opportunities to address motivation or the lack thereof in their classrooms. Moreover, the teachers must have had two years of experience in both Applied and Academic English streams because this study is focused on teachers’ experiences of motivating students in the Applied stream. However, in order for the teachers to give an account of how they motivate students in Applied streams, they must have had experience with another stream to which they can compare it. The teachers must also have had experiences with addressing motivation in their own classrooms so as to show that they are dedicated to increasing motivation and have actively taken steps to address it. These criteria ensured that the teachers were able to contribute rich data about motivation to this study.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures

In qualitative research studies, there are various methods that researchers can employ to recruit participants. However, choosing the sampling method requires an “exercise of judgment” (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 58) as different sampling methods may lead to different types of participants. For instance, convenience sampling is a method that is used by qualitative researchers as it allows researchers to choose participants based on their availability (Berg,
Meanwhile, purposive sampling consists of researchers choosing participants who have certain characteristics and who can offer varying viewpoints on the same topic (Barbour, 2008; Berg, 2001). Lastly, snowball sampling includes finding participants through other individuals, as they use their “own networks” (Barbour, 2008, p. 49) to find participants who share the same attributes as them (Berg, 2001).

In this study, I used convenience and snowball sampling to ensure that the participants meet the sampling criteria. With regards to convenience sampling, I choose one participant from the pool of English teachers with whom I had previously been in contact in the past. Even though I choose the participant based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study (Berg, 2001), I ensured that the participant met the criteria for the study and had experience fostering student motivation. In addition, I found the second participant using snowball sampling, whereby I contacted English teachers I previously worked or volunteered with in order to see if they could provide me with the contact information of other teachers who would want to participate in the study and who met the sampling criteria (Barbour, 2008). By using these two methods, it permitted the study to consist of teachers who had copious insight into student motivation in Applied English classrooms.

3.3.3 Participant biographies

Cheryl Robin (pseudonym) has been an English teacher for twenty-five years at Masterfield High School (pseudonym) in Ontario. She obtained her Bachelors of Arts and her teaching degree from the concurrent program at the same university. While teaching at Masterfield High School, she focused predominantly on working with Academic or University-level English classes. However, she also taught approximately five years in the Applied stream, in addition to a number of years teaching locally-developed English classes. During her time at
the school, she has taught every grade level and English course offered. She initially wanted to
do this interview because she had worked with students who were often unmotivated and wanted
to provide new teachers with insight as to how she has motivated her own students.

The second participant is **Lucy Gregory** (pseudonym), who has been an English and History teacher for over ten years. After receiving her teaching certificate in English and History, she obtained several additional qualification courses in Special Education, Guidance and Computers in the Classroom. She began her teaching career in England and was a Long-Term Occasional Teacher in Applied level English classrooms. She accepted a permanent teaching position at Carson High School (pseudonym), where she taught a combination of Academic and Applied English classes. At this particular teaching position, she taught several grade nine Applied English classes, grade eleven and grade twelve College classes, in addition to the grade eleven Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course. Lucy wanted to partake in this study, as she had a deep founded appreciation for teaching and wanted to share her knowledge of student motivation with new, upcoming teachers.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

In qualitative research studies, data analysis is comprised of different steps that allow researchers to interpret the data by finding patterns in that data (Berg, 2001). The process is essential to the study as it brings “order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 111). However, researchers conducting qualitative research value the validity of the data they gain more than the ability to generalize from that data (Schensul, 2012). The first step in data analysis is the transcription of data obtained from participant interviews (Berg, 2001), which may include transcribing participants’ non-verbal cues, such as their tone of voice (Barbour, 2008). Afterwards, each interview transcript is coded according to
different themes that emerged during the interview (Berg, 2001). By doing this, it enables researchers to rapidly locate the data during the process of analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

The division of each interview transcript according to different themes also allows researchers to compare the various themes from each interview transcript and find sections where the participants’ insights converged or diverged from one another (Beitin, 2012; Schensul, 2012). This is an inductive strategy that is commonly used in qualitative research, as it requires researchers to generate conclusions based on patterns found in the data (Merriam, 2002). For instance, in a similar study using the semi-structured interview qualitative method, the researcher created thematic codes after obtaining the data, instead of prior to data collection (Skerrett, 2010). Similarly, in this study, I categorized the data and derived themes that relate to my research topic. Lastly, the final step in the process consists of the researcher making conclusions based on the data that has been obtained (Berg, 2001). However, it is also important to focus on responses that are not given by participants, for the semi-structured interview method allows participants to choose what they will say in response to a question (Arksey & Knight, 1999). By taking these steps, I ensured that the conclusions gained from the data are thorough and authentic.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Qualitative studies often deal with ethical issues due to the direct contact that researchers have with their participants, as they often inquire into the personal beliefs and experiences of the participants (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Before beginning the interview, researchers obtain informed consent to ensure that the participants willingly agree to the interview (Berg, 2001). During the interviews for this study, I had participants sign an Informed Consent form, which ensured that they understood the various components of the study.
and that their responses will be anonymous (Berg, 2001). Consequently, another important ethical practice in this study is anonymity, as it is important that the identities of the participants are not disclosed (Berg, 2001). In order to ensure that the participants are not identified, I assigned a pseudonym to each participant (Berg, 2001). I also guaranteed anonymity by not disclosing any descriptions or names affiliated with the participants that can potentially identify them, such as the schools in which they teach (Barbour, 2008). In addition to not disclosing any information about the participants outside of the interviews (Berg, 2001), on the day of the interviews, I did not disclose the location of the interviews (Arksey & Knight, 1999). It is also imperative that the data gained from the interviews was secured in a location that cannot be accessed by the public (Berg, 2001). Consequently, after the interviews, I stored the audiotapes and transcripts in a password protected laptop that could not be accessed by others. Since it is also important to delete the data after it is no longer in use (Berg, 2001), I will delete the interview and audio recording after the research is published. By guaranteeing anonymity, the participants are not at risk of having any negative repercussions as a result of their disclosure (Berg, 2001).

Furthermore, the impact that the questions can have on the participants is an ethical issue that must be addressed in qualitative studies (Barbour, 2008). In some qualitative studies, participants are asked to address sensitive topics that may cause them to feel uncomfortable (Barbour, 2008). However, in this study on student motivation, the interview questions did not ask participants to address sensitive topics, as the questions often relied on teacher’s practices within a classroom setting. In order to prevent the participants from feeling surprised or overwhelmed by the questions, I reviewed the different components of the research at the beginning of the interview and address the types of questions being asked (Barbour, 2008). In
addition, I advised the individuals that they had the right to withdraw from the study if they do not feel comfortable answering the questions (Marshall, 2003). This was significant as it ensured that the participants acknowledged that the questions were not meant to cause them any harm or discomfort.

Throughout the interviews, I endeavored to establish a safe environment and strong relationship with the participants in order for them to feel comfortable providing truthful responses to the interview questions (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). One ethical risk that participants may have faced is feeling judged if they encountered questions that made presumptions about their use of motivational strategies in their classrooms (Leech, 2002). In order to prevent this, I asked questions that did not make any assumptions about the participants (Leech, 2002), but rather that inquired into the means through which those participants employed motivation in their own classrooms. Although the interview questions themselves did not encourage participants to discuss sensitive issues, the open-ended nature of certain questions may have led to participants sharing experiences that are of the sensitive nature (Barbour, 2008). In order to ensure that the participants felt secure after sharing their experiences, I reminded them that they will be assigned pseudonyms and that the interview transcript would be safely stored to secure their identity (Berg, 2001).

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Many researchers resort to employing a qualitative interview research method to conduct studies that are detailed and subjective (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). Through the open-ended questions commonly found in semi-structured interviews, researchers can study how different individuals in a field describe the topic being studied “in their own words” (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 5). Qualitative interviews also allow researchers to gain
insight into different concepts and associations (Arksey & Knight, 1999), which validate the study because readers gain an understanding of the complexities of those concepts and associations (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). As a result, qualitative interviews allow researchers to gain more detailed information from participants than other qualitative methods, such as surveys (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). Aside from the quality of the information gained from qualitative interviews, this method enables researchers to obtain copious information in a very short period of time and it provides researchers with the opportunity to clarify information as the interview is taking place (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Thus, the qualitative interview method presents a very unique and effective means through which to gain information.

Nevertheless, qualitative interviews have certain limitations with regards to the disclosure of information. In interviews, it is a common occurrence that some participants may not be willing to provide the information that the researcher is interested in, which can limit the researcher’s findings (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In addition, the participants themselves may not be the ideal representatives for the study (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012), as the participant makeup often consists of only the individuals that were willing to share their experiences (Arksey & Knight, 1999). From the ethical standpoint, the copious private information that researchers gain through qualitative interviewing may also pose certain ethical risks for participants (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The need for participants to give consent to the interview may also cause unnecessary anxiety (Barbour, 2008). Moreover, certain qualitative studies run the risk of not being completely reliable, as it is difficult to interpret and draw conclusions from open-ended questions (Arksey & Knight, 1999). As a result, qualitative interviews contain certain complications that researchers must resolve in order to ensure that their study is credible.
In this particular study, the use of qualitative interviews allows for a more in-depth understanding of specific teachers’ experiences (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Since interviews allow researchers to inquire into the personal beliefs of participants (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012), this study’s interviews enabled me to gain insight into how teachers view motivation and their views on how important motivation is to student success. Moreover, qualitative interviews allow researchers to understand different associations (Arksey & Knight, 1999), which also gave me the opportunity to identify the association between motivation, instructional methods and supportive environments established by teachers. Since I only interviewed two teachers for this study, I may not have been able to identify all of the successful motivational strategies because they may not have been willing to share them (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Moreover, interviewing solely teachers may have also prevented me from gaining insight into the different view of the world that children have (Arksey & Knight, 1999), as I was not be able to learn the motivational strategies that are most effective from the students’ point of view. This concern also applies to the exclusion of parental input because it prevented me from learning how parents view their children’s engagement at school (Schensul, 2012). However, these restrictions are necessary as the study itself focuses on how teachers spur students’ motivation, rather than parents or students. Even though it is limiting to focus on the topic being studied as it is experienced by individuals from a particular field and in a specific setting (Suter, 2012), this research method allows me to gain the exact data that I require in order to answer the research problem for this study.

In addition, the data gathered from the interviews is distinct from that which would be gathered during classroom observation, where teachers’ behaviors and relationships may be more evident (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Despite these limitations, it is important to acknowledge
that qualitative interviews are not meant to provide researchers with copious information that they can use to make generalizations, but rather the interviews are meant to focus on a limited sample that can provide optimal insight into the topic being studied (Suter, 2012).

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced the qualitative research approach used in this study in order to gain a thorough understanding of how teachers employ motivational strategies in their classrooms (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). I then explained the rationale for choosing to conduct the study using semi-structured interviews and provided exemplars of the interview protocol. Afterwards, I introduced the participants by explaining the sampling criteria and the sampling procedures. I proceeded to explain the way in which the data from the interviews was analyzed in this study and indicated why this data analysis is beneficial for a qualitative study. In addition, I introduced the ethical review procedures that were addressed throughout the study and the ways in which I minimized participant risk. Lastly, I assessed the advantages and disadvantages of employing a qualitative interview method to conduct this study. In the preceding chapter, I will present the findings that were obtained from my analysis of the interviews.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In Chapter One, I presented the rationale behind teachers’ efforts to motivate students in Applied English classrooms by discussing the research context, the research problem and the research questions. In Chapter Two, I provided a literature review of studies on the factors affecting students’ academic motivation, the strategies teachers are using to increase students’ motivation and the extent to which teacher-student relationships and the classroom environment influence students’ motivation. In Chapter Three, I described the research methodology, in addition to presenting the biographies of the participants. In this chapter, I will present the significant themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews, compare them with findings from other studies and reveal their significance to this study. The following themes emerged from the analysis of two interviews with two English teachers currently teaching in Ontario:

1) Reported factors negatively affecting students’ intrinsic motivation
2) Reported strategies employed by teachers to strengthen motivation
3) Relational and environmental factors that reportedly benefit student motivation

At the end of this chapter, I will outline the findings and transition into the final chapter.

4.1 Reported Factors Negatively Affecting Students’ Intrinsic Motivation

The teachers in this study shared a somewhat unified understanding of the varying factors that reportedly contribute to students’ lack of intrinsic motivation in Applied English classrooms. According to my participants, students’ low self-efficacy beliefs are often determinants of their lack of engagement and motivation to succeed. Students’ lack of academic aspirations was also reported to negatively affect their overall motivation, even though the participants disagreed on
the origin of these aspirations. Aside from students’ beliefs and aspirations, the two teachers reported that students’ lack of connection with the material and the English curriculum requirements made it challenging for students to be motivated to succeed.

In the interviews, both Cheryl and Lucy reported that students with low self-efficacy beliefs were often unmotivated in their English classrooms. In Cheryl’s experience, she found that students’ low self-efficacy beliefs stem from the fact that “they have had a lack of success academically and they don’t really see their strengths so they feel defeated coming into it”. This shows the way in which the students’ pasts can affect the extent to which those students succeed in the present. Lucy echoes this sentiment as she emphasizes that if students repeatedly receive low marks, they lose the motivation to succeed as those marks often act as “further proof that they shouldn’t try”. Later in each interview, both participants explained that students’ low of self-efficacy beliefs may originate from their families. According to both participants, students who lack academic or emotional support from their families rarely have the confidence and motivation to succeed in their classes. For instance, when asked about the reason why a particular student lost the motivation to obtain a mark higher than 65%, Lucy stated that the parents regularly told the student that he did not have the ability to achieve a higher grade.

Nevertheless, both participants emphasized that the students’ low self-efficacy beliefs are prone to change if students are provided with assignments that enable them to acknowledge their ability to succeed. Both participants explained that students can strengthen their self-efficacy beliefs if they are provided with evidence of their great potential. Both participants stated that they provide students with easy projects at the beginning of the semester in order to help them obtain a high mark and consequently realize that they have the ability to obtain those marks if they aspire to it. Thus, the two teachers reported that students’ self-efficacy beliefs can strongly
affect their motivation in Applied English classroom if teachers do not endeavour to change those beliefs early on.

Moreover, the participating teachers reported that students’ lack of overall academic aspirations affects their motivation to succeed in English classrooms. According to Cheryl, certain students in the Applied streams are not motivated by marks due to the fact that they are not planning to attend university. As a result, these students reportedly do not push themselves to succeed in their classes. Although Lucy also asserted that some students in Applied streams lack academic aspirations, the rationale she provided for this phenomenon is that in certain cases, their parents do not have high academic goals for their children. When asked how parents influence their children’s academic aspirations, in her view, Lucy responded:

Fighting against ingrained beliefs towards education [is] the most challenging. I have experienced teaching in a school where the majority of students came from severely economically disadvantaged areas. A great number of students, particularly those in Applied classes, came from families where generations had been on welfare, having never worked. When dealing with students who have witnessed that their parents, grandparents and even great-grandparents have never worked because they are on social assistance and doing fine in their opinions, they have no motivation for school.

As is evident in Lucy’s response, teachers may face a great obstacle if their students do not possess privileges that are required in order to presume a university pathway. However, it is also important to acknowledge that this perception of low-income communities could be interpreted as corresponding with a deficit view of low-income students, which focuses on the students’ perceived weaknesses, rather than their “strengths and possibilities” (Martin & Calabrese, 2011, p. 119).
Furthermore, the participants reported that, in their experience, students are not motivated to do well if they cannot connect to the materials or texts taught in that class. Based on their teaching experiences in Applied English classrooms, both participants stated that students require materials that connect to their identities or their ethnic backgrounds. Cheryl referred to this connection as “intrinsic,” which implies that the connection is one that is ‘natural’ for students to make if provided with the right materials. Furthermore, Lucy emphasized that students need to be engaged at the beginning of an assignment or a unit because if there is “little possibility of connection with the topics and characters,” students will most likely not be engaged in the entire process. Consequently, the two teachers posit that it is imperative for students to find relevance in their schoolwork so as to gain the motivation to complete that work.

Lastly, participants reported that specific content and skills required in the English curriculum guidelines can pose motivational challenges for students in Applied English classrooms. According to Cheryl, many students in the Applied English streams struggle with “literacy…literacy skills and organizational skills,” thereby overwhelming and negatively influencing the students’ motivation to succeed when they are required to exercise these skills in the classroom. However, she clarified that some students have learning disabilities, which may contribute to their lack of strong literacy skills. Furthermore, the skills required by the English curriculum may pose motivational challenges for students who experience difficulty exhibiting those skills. When discussing literature taught in Applied English classrooms, Lucy stated that students often are not motivated when they have to read “works [written] by dead white men about mostly dead white men”. As a result, in their view, the texts currently taught in English classrooms may in fact lead to students’ lack of success. When the participants were asked about the importance of the curriculum in Applied English classrooms, they agreed that the
relationships they establish with students are more important than the curriculum itself. In fact, Cheryl explained that, “It’s really about the social emotional stuff. It’s a lot about mental health and learning disabilities. The curriculum is almost like the last factor. There’s a lot of factors that have to be in place first before you even touch the curriculum.” Evidently, Cheryl clearly illustrates the struggle that teachers face in classrooms where they have to address several issues prior to addressing the curriculum, which also does not suffice for motivating students to succeed. Thus, these two teachers illustrated the way in which the English curriculum can potentially act as a barrier to students’ motivation in the classroom.

Due to the fact that the participants’ reports of the effect that low self-efficacy beliefs have on motivation is also reflected in the literature, it may be inferred that teachers perceive students’ self-efficacy beliefs as determinants of their motivational level. In Smith, Rook and Smith’s (2007) study of a History teacher who had students experiment with metacognitive strategies, the students’ motivation increased as they had the opportunity to focus on their successes rather than their failures. This relates directly to my participants, Cheryl and Lucy, who both stated that students who have experienced failure in the past have difficulty motivating themselves to complete their work. As a result, this illustrates that low self-efficacy beliefs is one barrier that teachers must focus on in order to motivate their students.

Secondly, current research reinforces the reportedly large impact that academic aspirations have on students’ motivation to succeed and their overall success. In Daniels and Arapostathis’ (2005) study of four students who had poor English scores, researchers found that those students perceived marks as the sole reason to come to school and engage with the material. As a result, they lacked an intrinsic desire to learn that may have hindered their motivation to succeed. Although Cheryl emphasized that some of the students in her Applied
English classes were not motivated by marks, her response still relates to the study due to the fact that they both speak to the students’ lack of motivation to learn for the sake of learning and improving themselves. These similar findings emphasize that students’ low academic aspirations may hinder their motivation and success in the classroom, regardless of where those aspirations originated. In the next section, the two teachers offer the strategies they used to overcome some of the barriers to motivation that they have encountered in their classrooms.

4.2 Reported Effective Strategies to Strengthen Motivation

Both teachers described the same strategies for motivating students in their classrooms, which consisted of scaffolding students’ assignments, catering to their students’ needs and identities and incorporating interactive games into lessons. These strategies are means through which the teachers differentiate their instruction, for each strategy necessitates that the two teachers tailor their instruction to their students’ academic needs, identities and personal preferences. According to the participants, scaffolding students’ assignments ensured that those assignments met the needs of the students and seemed less threatening to them. Moreover, the participants found that students responded well and were motivated when they had the opportunity to make connections with the material being taught. Lastly, interactive games were also reported to motivate students in class. These strategies enabled students in those teachers’ classes to not only be more motivated to complete in-class work, but to also engage with classroom material in a more creative capacity.

Teachers found that students who lacked motivation to succeed in the classroom benefitted greatly from scaffolding their assignments. When asked which assignments her students are reportedly most motivated to complete, Cheryl pointed to assignments that were personalized and scaffolded, whereby the process of completing the assignment is “broken
down” into pieces. Similarly, Lucy presented what she referred to as a “no fail-approach”, where she has meetings with students as they move along different sections of an assignment. According to Lucy, this approach increases student motivation because it enables the students to have “multiple opportunities for success” as they are given the opportunity to review their work with the teacher prior to handing it in. When assigning large projects, Cheryl also takes on a similar approach by holding weekly meetings with the students and "negotiat[ing] back and forth" about their work. In both of these interviews, it became evident that scaffolding is one approach the participants believe can prevent students from becoming overwhelmed with the work they are assigned. Since these two participants value the feedback they provide students during the scaffolding process, it suggests that this approach enables the students to increase their self-efficacy beliefs as they complete the project. Thus, scaffolding is one means through which teachers can engender a higher level of motivation to succeed in their English students.

Additionally, the participants reported that students are often motivated if the material is tailored to their personal interests and their identities. Both participating teachers found that it is useful to individualize in an Applied English classroom. However, they both emphasized that in order to individualize effectively, teachers must endeavour to understand their students on a personal level. Most importantly, Lucy stated that teachers should, "find out what the student is interested in at the moment, non-school related," which necessitates that teachers should try to get to know students beyond their academic endeavours. When asked about the specific aspects of students’ identities that she tailors the material to, Cheryl stated that, "it could be culturally, but it could be something as simple as the student likes martial arts or bodybuilding." Consequently, Cheryl’s response reveals that teachers are not restricted to tailoring only to students’ backgrounds, but also their personal interests.
Both teachers emphasized that tailoring texts to the students’ personal interests can determine the students’ motivation in that class. Cheryl found that allowing students to choose the novels they read for their independent study assignment is “empowering” for the students. Lucy also illustrated the importance of individualizing the material in her classroom when she recounted:

These students, especially the boys, typically are not readers in their personal lives and only read when forced to at school. Being forced to read is one thing, but when the material is also in language not familiar to them and involving characters or situations not familiar to them, it becomes more challenging.

In this instance, Lucy's response emphasizes the positive effect that tailoring to students’ interests can have on students who are not fond of reading. Consequently, these participants reveal the large influence that tailoring the material has on students with low motivation in their Applied English classes.

According to participants, another means through which teachers motivate their students is by incorporating interactive games in their classrooms. In both interviews, the participants discussed the ways in which games, such as Kahoot!, engaged students in the material due to its “competitive nature” as Lucy calls it. When asked why Kahoot is effective in Applied English classrooms specifically, Lucy replied that it enables students to showcase their knowledge and understanding because it “removes the fear of looking smart in front of [their] friends when school is not the cool thing to be good at”. Consequently, the game format reportedly strengthens students’ motivation to complete the task. Even though Cheryl saw the inherent value in using games like Kahoot!, she added that:

But it’s great when you can find new things to introduce as well. You know, making
things into like games is actually…fun. And you know, sometimes we’ll do things like you know have prizes at the end and I wouldn’t do that consistently. It’s more like fun in the moment.

From Cheryl’s response, it becomes evident that students are motivated by games because it presents a “fun” way for them to engage with the material. However, both teachers stressed that using a rewards system is also motivational, which suggests that some students are not motivated by the task at hand, but rather by the reward they will receive when they complete it. Nevertheless, one significant takeaway from both the participants is that games should not be used regularly, which Cheryl attributed to certain games turning into a “fad” more than a long-term instructional method. Thus, incorporating interactive games is one of the many tools that teachers use to spur their students’ motivation in a rapid manner.

With regards to the connection between the relevance of text and motivation, the interviews highlighted the same findings as the research. In a case study (Ma’ayan, 2010) of a grade seven student and her struggle to succeed in an English classroom, the researcher found that the student was more engaged with texts that were relevant to her life. Similarly, both of the participants stated that texts read in the classroom must be relevant to students’ personal interests or backgrounds in order to motivate those students to engage with the texts. The finding from this case study and the participant interviews indicate that teachers must not merely teach the curriculum as is, but rather cater it to the students in their particular classroom in order to increase their motivation to learn.

However, some of the research done on the impact that technology has on motivation does not necessarily support the findings from my interviews. One study (Peck et al., 2015) of twenty-one teachers and support staff from different subject areas, including English, found that
technology may enable students to stray from the task at hand and act in contradiction to the teacher’s instruction. Meanwhile, both Cheryl and Lucy found that their students did not use games, such as Kahoot!, to undermine their authority, but rather it enabled them to illustrate their understanding of the subject matter. However, this discrepancy further reinforces the idea posed by both participants, which is that games should not be used regularly throughout the semester. Thus, teachers should use games as motivational tools only when students require a quick motivational boost.

4.3 Relational and Environmental Factors that Reportedly Benefit Student Motivation

Aside from employing motivational strategies, the two interviewees believe that creating a trusting relationships and a supportive environment in their classrooms motivated their students to engage with class material. Both teachers reported that establishing trusting relationships with their students is a prerequisite for them being motivated to complete their work. Additionally, the teachers observed that creating a supportive environment in the classroom is one of the factors that can contribute to higher levels of student motivation.

Throughout the interviews, both participants revealed that a trusting relationship must be established between the teacher and the students in order for latter to want to succeed in that class. According to Lucy, building a trusting relationship with one’s students is the sole way of “mak[ing] headway” in one’s goal to motivate students and Cheryl adds that this is due to the fact that this relationship enables the students to “take risks”. When asked how she engenders positive and trusting relationships in the classroom, Cheryl responded:

By the beginning of November, the kids are starting to trust you and connect with you. And that’s when you see the most amazing things happen so it’s a lot of sort of team building and initially a lot of patience….It’s if you sort of stick with it, it’s the message
of ‘I’m here. I’m always going to be here. No matter what you try, no matter what you do, we’re here to work with you. And it takes a while for them to actually trust that they can work with you.

Cheryl’s response indicates that although it is difficult to foster trust with every single student, it is a very important step if teachers want their students to feel comfortable and free to engage with the material. When asked about how they establish these relationships with their students, both Cheryl and Lucy emphasized that having individual conversations with students is important because it enables teachers to find out about their students outside of their academic work. However, the participants indicate that the sharing policy also applies to teachers. Both participants stressed that teachers should also share a limited amount of information with their students in order to enable their students to view the student-teacher relationship as reciprocal and understand that their teachers also trust them. Thus, in their view, a sense of trust is imperative in classrooms where some students lack the motivation to succeed.

In addition, both participants agree that creating a supportive and positive environment for the students is an important step to motivating those students. Cheryl reported that she fostered this environment by playing music for her students and allowing them to choose the songs they listened to as they completed their work, for this practice establishes “a more social atmosphere [and] a more comfortable atmosphere.” However, it reportedly also enables the students to feel supported by their teacher because they can see that their teacher cares about their wellbeing. Cheryl also emphasized that teachers should say each student’s name every class because it is “reinforcing that they have a standing in the class and also…reinforcing to other students in the class, who this person is”. This illustrates the way in which Cheryl wanted to create a supportive environment in her classroom as a whole. Similarly, Lucy stressed that
creating a positive and supportive environment is essential for students in Applied classrooms, as some may “experience only negativity at home”. Lucy also emphasizes that being a supportive figure is more important to motivation than implementing specific strategies because “strategies only get you so far before they can backfire or become gimmicky.” A positive environment then becomes one of the factors that can positively influence motivation in the classroom. When Lucy was asked how she establishes a supportive environment, she explained, “a majority of students I have worked with have responded well to a more maternal structured environment…There are clear rules and expectations in place, but any corrections are issued with a motherly attitude that is firm, yet encouraging.” Consequently, Lucy illustrates that one way of creating a supportive environment is by taking on a specific role that is supportive and non-threatening to the students. As gathered from these interviews, the classroom environment sets the tone for the students’ success and their desire to succeed in Applied English classrooms.

The connection between trusting relationships and student motivation was perceived as strong not only by the participants, but also by several other researchers (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005; Preston & Claypool, 2013). In a study of grade nine students at an alternative high school, Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) found that students’ motivation to succeed in the class increased if students had teachers whom they could trust. This directly reinforces the findings from the interviews with Cheryl and Lucy, as they both emphasized the importance of building a trusting relationship with their students in order to engender a sense of desire from their students to do well in that class. Consequently, this study’s findings reaffirm other findings that teacher-students relationships heavily influence students’ motivation.

Furthermore, teachers’ reports on the correlation between positive classroom environments and student motivation are also reaffirmed through previous studies on classroom
environments (Preston & Claypool, 2013; Varuzza et al., 2014). In a study of young adolescents in English classrooms, Varuzza et al., (2014) found that teachers who used positive classroom management strategies, such as teacher encouragement and feedback, had students more engaged in their reading tasks. Similarly, Lucy found that taking on a supportive role as a teacher created a positive environment for students, which consequently led to them being more deeply engaged in their work. As a result, the research and the interviews reveal that creating a supportive environment is one of the foundational approaches to strengthening students’ motivation.

4.4 Conclusion

Hence, the semi-structured interviews with the two teachers engender a deeper understanding of the reported factors that negatively affect students’ motivation and the various strategies that they employed to increase student motivation. Initially, the two teachers conferred on the various factors that negatively influence student motivation, which include low self-efficacy beliefs, lack of academic aspirations, lack of connection with the material and problems with the English curriculum itself. These reported factors illustrate the multifaceted status of motivation and the challenge that it poses to teachers who may not know which factors are influencing their students’ lack of motivation.

The teacher participants also presented three motivational strategies that they believed are imperative to motivating students who lack the intrinsic motivation to succeed. Both teachers believe that scaffolding students’ assignments, tailoring the course to the students’ interests and using interactive games helped to increase students’ motivation to succeed. Since these strategies are a means through which the teachers differentiated their instruction, it reveals the importance of tailoring the classroom materials to the students’ academic needs, identities and personal preferences. However, the main takeaway from their interviews is that there is no single strategy.
or means through which to motivate students. Instead, teachers must experiment with several strategies in order to cater to every student’s unique circumstance.

Lastly, the interviews showed the importance of establishing trusting student-teacher relationships and a supportive environment for the students. Both participants found that establishing a sense of trust with their students and creating a supportive environment is fundamental to motivating one’s students and should be the foundation of every classroom.

At the beginning of my research, I commenced with the presumption that teachers would not agree on certain motivational strategies. However, these interviews enabled me to learn that there are common strategies that teachers use in their classrooms. The only reason that motivation is difficult to engender in students is due to it being a nuanced and complex part of learning. There is no straightforward answer as to how to motivate students because every student’s reason for being unmotivated differs. Consequently, the interviews enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the complexity of motivation and engendering motivation in one’s Applied English classroom. These interviews answered the research question by showing that the two teachers agree on similar factors that affect student motivation and similar strategies that can spur student motivation in Applied English classrooms. In the following chapter, I will present insights I gained from the two teachers and the implications that this study has on both teachers and school administrators. Afterwards, I will provide recommendations to school administrators and the Ministry of Education in the hopes of them supporting teachers in their path to motivating students in their Applied English classrooms.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I will present some key findings emerging out of this study with regards to student motivation in Applied English classrooms and their significance to the current research on motivation. I will then discuss the implications that this study has on both the educational community and my own teaching practice. Afterwards, I will present some recommendations for novice English teachers, administrators and the Ministry of Education on how they can play a role in motivating students in Applied English classrooms. Based on my findings, I will also direct researchers and educators to certain areas that require further inquiry. Lastly, I will provide concluding comments that illustrate the significance of this study to the educational community, novice teachers and to myself as a future teacher.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

In this study, the semi-structured interviews with two Applied English teachers, Cheryl and Lucy, brought insight into the various factors that affect student motivation in their classrooms. Initially, the two teachers agreed that some of the barriers to student motivation in Applied English classrooms consisted of students’ low self-efficacy, lack of academic aspirations, lack of connection with the material and problems with the English curriculum itself. However, Lucy and Cheryl both believe that students’ sense of self-efficacy can be improved if teachers provide students with opportunities to succeed and see their potential. Overall, the teachers illustrated that some of the barriers to motivation are not permanent if teachers are willing to make motivation a priority in their classrooms. These findings signify that there are various barriers to student motivation that need to be acknowledged and addressed by teachers in order for them to successfully motivate their students.

In the next section of the interviews, both teachers proposed certain motivational
strategies that were often effective in motivating students in their Applied English classrooms. The teachers emphasized that scaffolding assignments, tailoring classroom materials to their students’ identities and incorporating interactive games in the curriculum enabled them to motivate students to engage with the material. These findings illustrate that there are certain motivational strategies that can be applied uniformly across Applied English classrooms due to the fact that the core of all of these strategies involves tailoring the material to the students’ needs and identities.

Lastly, the third finding revolves around the importance of teachers acting as support networks for their students in order to motivate them. The two teachers stated that they establish trusting relationships with their student and a supportive learning environment so as to make their students feel motivated to learn. They also emphasized that creating this type of relationship and environment was more influential on student motivation than the use of motivational strategies. This finding signifies that teachers of Applied English classrooms may succeed in motivating their students if they establish these types of relationships and classroom environments prior to incorporating motivational strategies.

These three findings signify that teachers can identify specific motivational strategies that work uniformly across Applied English classrooms. This study adds a nuanced perspective to the current educational research that often examines motivational strategies separately from student-teacher relationships and classroom environment (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Hoferichter et al., 2014), as it illustrates that student motivation is not spurred solely by motivational strategies or solely by the classroom environment created by the teacher. Instead, the two teachers emphasized that motivational strategies, positive classroom environments and supportive
student-teacher relationships are interconnected and most effective when used in relation to one another.

5.2 Implications

In the upcoming section, I will present the implications that this study has on teachers, school administrators, specialized school staff and the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, I will also discuss the implications that this study has on my own educational practice and future teaching career. By focusing on the implications of this study, it enabled me to share various insights and concerns I have about student motivation in Applied English classrooms.

5.2.1 Broad implications: The educational community

Based on the interviews with Lucy and Cheryl, one notable implication for novice Applied English teachers and specialized school staff is that some students may be coming into the classroom with negative preconceptions about education and low self-efficacy. This poses a challenge for teachers, as they may have to initially identify the cause of the students’ low motivation in order to brainstorm ways to increase their motivational level. Furthermore, since students have different reasons for being unmotivated in the classroom, it is difficult for the teacher to know which motivational strategies will work on those students.

Additionally, this study brings awareness to the lack of resources provided by the school’s administration or the Ministry of Education that addresses how to motivate students in Applied English classrooms specifically. In both interviews, the teachers stressed that they had to go beyond the curriculum to find ways to motivate their students and rarely mentioned that they received sufficient support from their schools. The teachers not only had to experiment with different motivational strategies, but they were also responsible with creating a positive classroom environment and supportive relationships with students to spur student motivation.
Without resources stipulating how to motivate students in Applied English classrooms, teachers are left to experiment with strategies that have no guarantee of success.

Lastly, other stakeholders that might be affected by this study are the school administrators due to the fact that they are responsible for creating a positive environment in their schools. In the study, both Cheryl and Lucy stated that creating a positive environment for the students is imperative to their motivation to succeed in their Applied English classrooms and added that being a supportive figure is also important to creating that environment. Since this type of support and learning environment is essential to motivation students in those classrooms, administrators must ensure that these strategies become universal across Applied English classrooms and that the teachers know how to establish positive and supportive classrooms.

5.2.2 Narrow implications: My own teaching practice

The findings from this study will also influence how I will motivate students in my own Applied English classrooms. As a student who was motivated throughout my academic career, it was initially difficult for me to understand how some students may be unmotivated to succeed in English classrooms. However, this study enabled me to finally comprehend some of the barriers that impact student motivation in those classrooms. Through the interview, I also had the opportunity to learn about various strategies that I can implement in my own Applied English classroom in order to motivate my students. For instance, I learned the significance of tailoring the curriculum to fit my students’ identities and preferences, rather than merely tailoring it to their culture or their grade level. The two teachers also taught me that in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of each student, I will need to reach out to students’ parents, the school’s specialized staff and the students themselves. I will also scaffold assignments and incorporate interactive games into the classroom in order to make the material seem more
approachable to students. Nevertheless, this study also reaffirmed my belief that a strong bond between teachers and students is imperative to the latter’s desire to succeed. In my own classroom, I will continue to create trusting and supportive relationships with my students so as to make them feel welcome and supported in the classroom. I will also create a positive classroom environment by designing the classroom in such a way that it reflects students’ identities. Lastly, this study also made me acknowledge the importance of collaborating with other teachers, for it enables teachers to collectively identify the most effective strategies that they can implement uniformly across Applied English classrooms at their schools.

Moreover, this study enabled me to revise my understanding of the teacher’s role. Initially, I believed that teachers are meant to help and guide students as they learn about the world. However, through this study, I began to understand that teachers can motivate their students to want to learn for a prolonged period of time. The purpose of motivating students is to help them realize the importance of continued learning both inside and outside of the classroom.

5.3 Recommendations

In this section, I will discuss some recommendations that I have for the educational community based on the findings from this study. Firstly, school administrators should make plans to create a school environment that garners a stronger connection between teachers, parents, and students. Since certain students in Applied English classrooms may arrive in the classroom with negative perceptions about their own ability, it is important for teachers to get to know their students and their parents so as to understand the reason why those students are not motivated. In order to accomplish this, the administrators can hold parent-teacher nights at the beginning of the semester, where parents can have the opportunity to meet their children’s teachers and discuss the students’ needs and motivational level. During the year, administrators can also hold
meetings where teachers can brainstorm motivational strategies with parents, which will ensure that the strategies they implement will be tailored to their students.

Moreover, the Ministry of Education should augment the current *Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10: English* (OME, 2007a) document to include strategies for how teachers can motivate students in both Applied and Academic English classrooms. The document can include different technology that teachers can use in their classrooms for a particular novel or unit. It should also provide varying motivational strategies that teachers can use for each grade and stream. This will then enable the Ministry to tailor the strategies to the particular curriculum expectations for those classes, the particular motivational barriers faced by students in those classes and the motivational strategies that work best for students in those classes. By doing so, the Ministry of Education can help teachers identify strategies that are somewhat uniform and can be applied to other Applied English classes.

Lastly, school administrators should prioritize the school environment and ensure that they are providing teachers with instruction on how to create a positive atmosphere in their Applied English classrooms. These administrators can re-design each classroom and provide teachers with supplies that will make students feel more welcome and motivated to learn. Moreover, administrators can hold Personal Development days, whereby they provide teachers with strategies for how they can create positive and supportive relationships with their students. This will ensure that every teacher in Applied English classes prioritizes motivating their students to the same extent as their colleagues.

Thus, these recommendations propose that teachers receive support in their endeavor to motivate their students so as to ensure that they find the most effective strategies for their particular Applied English classrooms.
5.4 Areas for Future Research

In this section, I will direct readers to areas of student motivation that need to be researched further. Firstly, this study does not examine student motivation from varying perspectives due to the interviews being conducted solely with teachers of Applied English classrooms in Ontario. In order to gain a better understanding of student motivation in those classrooms, it would be useful to also interview students from those classes, in addition to guidance counselors who may have experience supporting unmotivated students.

Furthermore, it would be useful to interview teachers with regards to how the English curriculum is implemented into Applied English classes. This will provide teachers with the opportunity to identify the sections that strengthen and the sections that threaten their students’ motivation and engagement with the material. By focusing on specific sections, it will enable educators to identify the sections that need to be modified or tailored further to meet the needs of students in Applied English classes.

Moreover, future researchers should also interview teachers in order to identify specific resources that they use to motivate their students. For instance, it would be useful to identify engaging novels or particular interactive games that motivate students to succeed in an Applied English classroom. Since this study focuses mostly on general strategies and techniques to motivate students, research on particular resources would enable researchers and the Ministry of Education to compile a list of resources that would be most effective in spurring student motivation in Applied English classrooms.

5.5 Concluding Comments

This study emerged from the initial inquiry into how teachers are currently motivating students in their Applied English classrooms. The inquiry then sprouted into an analysis of the
perceived barriers to motivation, effective motivational strategies that motivate students and the importance of trusting teachers and supportive classroom environments to students’ motivation. This study’s significance was reinforced by semi-structured interviews with two teachers who shared their insights and concerns with regards to how they motivate students in their own Applied English classes. I believe that this research will be useful for novice teachers who want to identify effective motivational strategies prior to working in Applied English classrooms. This research will be especially applicable to my future educational career, as I would like to know how to help students in Applied English classrooms succeed. However, I also hope that this study contributes to the teaching practice of current teachers who do not have the opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues, but have a desire to locate motivational strategies that other teachers find successful. As a teacher and a student, I strongly believe that student motivation is imperative to student academic success and lifelong learning. I then hope that this study helps readers understand that motivating students to want to learn should be a very important goal for each and every teacher in Ontario.
References


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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Consent

Date: _____________________

Dear ________________________________,

I am currently a student in the Masters of Teaching Intermediate/Senior program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and I am conducting a qualitative research study that is part of my degree. My study focuses on teachers’ experiences of and strategies for motivating students in Applied English classrooms and I will be interviewing teachers who have incorporated motivational strategies in their own Applied English classrooms. I am very grateful for your participation in the study, as it will provide insight into how teachers can motivate their own students.

By volunteering to participate in this research, you will partake in a 60-75 minute interview that will be recorded on an audio-device and transcribed after the interview. The information obtained from this interview will inform the research project, which consists of a research paper and a presentation at OISE. In order to ensure your anonymity and the anonymity of the schools and individuals you mention during the interview, any identifying information will be erased and replaced with pseudonyms. As a result, you will not be identifiable in any form in the research paper or the presentation.

In order to further ensure that your identity is protected, the information gained from the interview will be stored in a password-protected computer that only I can access. I will also refrain from sharing any information with regards to your identity or the interview itself with others: the only exception is my course instructor. You have the freedom to withdraw even after you have consented and you may refuse to answer any questions that are sensitive or personal. Any information pertaining to the interview will be destroyed after the research paper has been published. Due to the highly confidential nature of this study, there is no known risk to you.

If you consent to your participation in this study, please sign below. Please retain a copy for your own records. Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Roxana Andrei
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained and that any questions that I posed have been addressed. I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Roxana Andrei and willingly agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described above. I also agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________________

Name: (printed) ________________________________________

Date: ________________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol/Questions

Opening Script
Hi, I am Roxana Andrei and I am currently a student in the Masters of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute of Studies in Education. As a part of this program, I am conducting interviews with several teachers in order to study how teachers incorporate motivational strategies in their Applied English classrooms. Through this research, I am hoping to gain insight into how certain teachers motivate students and which motivational strategies are most effective in Applied English streams. For the next 60-75 minutes, I will be inquiring into the factors that affect student motivation, how you are incorporating motivational strategies in your own classroom and how student-teacher relationships affect students’ academic motivation. Since I have provided you with the consent letter, do you have any questions about this interview before we begin?

[Test and begin the audio-recording.]

Part One: Background Information About Participant
1) Can you tell me about your current position and role?
2) Can you tell me about your education and training?
3) What made you want to join the teaching profession?
4) How many years have you been teaching English at the Applied level in comparison to the Academic level?
5) Which grades have you taught in the English Applied and Academic stream?

Part Two: Factors Affecting Motivation
1) In your own words, what does student motivation or the lack of student motivation look like in English?
2) Based on your experience, which aspects of the English curriculum or English class pose
the greatest motivational challenges for students?

Prompts:

- The Literature Read in English Classrooms
- Grammar
- Spelling
- Assignments/Cumulative Projects

3) Apart from the curriculum itself, which factors do you think negatively affect student motivation in Applied English classrooms?

Prompts:

- Socio-economic Status
- Family Status
- Academic Goals
- Non-academic Goals or Extracurricular Activities
- Self-efficacy Beliefs

4) Can you tell me about a time when you directly observed or experienced a student’s lack of motivation in Applied English?

Prompts:

- Instance when they expressed low engagement
- Instance when they expressed dislike towards an activity
- Instance when they conversed more about their social life than their academics

Part Three: Teachers’ Classroom Practices

1) What are some successful motivational strategies that you employ in your own
Applied English classroom?

Prompts:

• Relevant Texts

• Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

• Technology

• Offering Students Variety and Choice

2) Can you provide an example of a lesson or activity that was highly motivating for your students?

3) What specific aspect of that lesson or activity made it motivational?

4) In your own opinion, how important is the students’ right to choose to their motivation to succeed in a class?

Prompts: Choice refers to…

• Texts They Will Read in Class

• Mediums for their Assignments, such as a Creative Piece

5) In your experience, how does relevance of a text to students’ personal lives affect their motivation?

Prompts: Texts or Activities consist of…

• Non-literary Novels

• Different Genres

• Young Adult Novels

• Composing Own Stories

6) What are some challenges to motivating students that you experience in your classroom?
Prompts:

- Difficult Daily Implementation
- Lack of Support or Information on Motivational Strategies
- Limited Class Time
- Students’ Reception of those Strategies

Part Four: Non-Instructional Motivational Strategies

1) Can you describe, in your own words and from your own experience, the effect of a positive and supportive learning environment on student motivation?

2) What are some ways in which you establish a trusting and supportive relationship with your students?

Prompts:

- Emotional Support for Students
- Discussing Issues Affecting Students

3) Can you provide an example of an instance where you noticed that supporting a student led to that student being motivated to learn?

4) In your experience, to what extent do students’ peers dictate their motivation to succeed in English class?

5) In your own opinion, is creating a supportive environment and being a supportive figure more, less or equally important to student motivation as the use of motivational strategies?

Part Five: Conclusion/Next Steps

1) What are some strategies that you want or hope to implement in your classroom in the future in order to further motivate your students?

2) Do you have any advice for beginning teachers with regards to how they can increase
motivation in their own Applied English classrooms?

Closing Script

The interview has ended now. As we conclude this interview, I want to thank you for agreeing to do this interview and participating in this study. I also strongly appreciate the classroom experience you have shared and the insight you provided that will now inform new English teachers on how to motivate their students. If you have any remaining questions for me, please do not hesitate to ask or contact me after the interview. The letter that I have provided for you includes my contact information and that of the University of Toronto’s Research Ethics Board in case you require further information after the interview.

Stop the Audio-Recording