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Table of Content

Title	2
Abstract	2
Rationale for the research	3
Research questions and research objectives	5
Literature review	7
Methodology	14
Description of Participants of the Study	14
Description of Intervention	17
Data collection procedure	20
Data analysis & presentation of results of findings	24
Conclusions, Implications and recommendations	28
References	32
Appendix	35

Title

Factors Influencing Student Motivation in Large Primary School Classrooms in Vietnam: Challenges and Interventions

Abstract

This study examines the critical issue of student motivation in large Vietnamese primary school classrooms, where class sizes often exceed 45 students, creating significant psychological and pedagogical challenges. In subjects like English, which many students perceive as irrelevant to their daily lives and future careers, maintaining engagement becomes increasingly difficult. This research investigates how classroom size, discipline issues, curriculum rigidity, and teaching strategies collectively impact student motivation and learning outcomes.

Using a mixed-methods approach—including surveys, classroom observations, and teacher interviews—this study identifies key barriers to engagement. High noise levels, limited individualized attention, and a lack of effective classroom management strategies hinder students' ability to remain focused. Many students from low-income backgrounds exhibit low intrinsic motivation, exacerbated by minimal parental involvement in their education. While engagement tools such as interactive smartboards and gamified activities initially capture interest, their long-term effectiveness declines due to overuse and lack of instructional variety. Additionally, discipline strategies, ranging from vocal control to direct interventions, prove difficult to sustain in overcrowded environments where students receive minimal personal accountability.

Cultural and systemic factors further complicate motivation. Foreign teachers, often perceived as temporary figures with limited disciplinary authority, struggle to establish classroom control. The rigid, centrally approved national curriculum limits pedagogical

flexibility, restricting teachers' ability to adapt lessons to the needs of large, demotivated classrooms.

Findings suggest that improving student motivation requires a combination of adaptive teaching strategies, differentiated instruction, and targeted behavioral interventions. Policy recommendations include curriculum modifications to allow greater flexibility, teacher training in large-group management techniques, and systemic support to foster a more engaging and interactive learning environment.

Keywords: student motivation, large classrooms, Vietnam, primary education, engagement strategies, curriculum limitations, classroom discipline, foreign teachers, instructional flexibility

Rationale of the Research

Education is a fundamental driver of social and economic progress, yet in many developing educational systems, structural challenges hinder its effectiveness. One such challenge is the impact of large classroom sizes on student motivation and engagement. In Vietnam's public primary schools, classrooms often contain 45 to 50 students, far exceeding the optimal size for effective learning. This overcrowding presents significant obstacles for both students and educators, particularly in subjects like English, which students frequently perceive as unnecessary or unrelatable to their daily lives (Nguyen & Hamid, 2021).

The lack of motivation in large primary school classrooms manifests in several ways: minimal student participation, disengagement from lessons, poor retention of material, and classroom behavioral issues. The problem is exacerbated by high noise levels and discipline difficulties, making it nearly impossible for teachers to provide individualized instruction or

maintain a focused learning environment (Blatchford et al., 2011). Additionally, many students come from low-income families with limited parental involvement in their education, further reducing their intrinsic motivation to learn (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2010). Students in these environments often fail to develop strong language skills, particularly in English, which is a key factor in academic and professional success in a globalized world.

While various teaching strategies have been employed to combat these issues—including the use of interactive technology (smartboards), increased verbal engagement, and direct behavioral interventions—most methods suffer from diminishing effectiveness over time (Harfitt, 2015). The rigidity of the Vietnamese national curriculum further constraints educators, limiting their ability to adapt lessons to the realities of large, distracted classrooms. Lessons are often structured around rote memorization, which does not promote active engagement or meaningful learning experiences. Many students become passive learners, absorbing information without developing critical thinking or communication skills. This issue is particularly significant in English language education, where interactive and communicative approaches are crucial for proficiency development.

Additionally, foreign teachers face unique authority challenges, as they are often perceived as temporary figures with little influence over classroom discipline (Phan, 2017). Many Vietnamese schools rely on foreign instructors to teach English, yet they do not always provide them with the necessary support or institutional authority to enforce classroom rules. This creates an environment where students may not take foreign teachers seriously, leading to reduced engagement and disciplinary issues (Walkingshaw, 2012). Moreover, local teachers, though respected by students, also struggle with discipline in large classes, as their ability to provide individualized attention is severely limited.

Furthermore, Vietnam's national policies on education emphasize standardized assessments over holistic learning approaches, which contributes to students' disinterest in subjects that do not appear immediately relevant to their future careers (Pham, 2017). . Many students view English as an unnecessary subject, particularly if they do not plan to pursue higher education or work in international settings. This perception further decreases motivation, making it challenging for educators to create engaging learning experiences. Without curriculum flexibility, teachers have limited options to adapt lesson plans in ways that could make English more accessible and interesting for students.

This research aims to analyze these motivational barriers, explore effective engagement strategies, and assess how curriculum policies and teacher-student dynamics influence student motivation in large classrooms. By doing so, it seeks to provide evidence-based recommendations for improving engagement and fostering a more productive learning environment in Vietnam's public schools. Addressing these issues is essential for ensuring that students not only develop English proficiency but also acquire the necessary skills to thrive in an increasingly interconnected global economy. Ultimately, this study highlights the urgent need for pedagogical and policy adjustments that align with the realities of modern education in Vietnam.

Research Questions and Objectives

Research Questions

This study seeks to explore the following research questions:

1. How do large class sizes affect student motivation in Vietnamese primary schools? This question aims to determine whether overcrowding directly influences students'

willingness to engage in learning activities and how teachers perceive this issue (Objective 1).

2. What are the main factors contributing to low student engagement in English lessons? Investigating this will help identify whether motivation issues stem from classroom conditions, curriculum structure, teacher authority, or external socioeconomic factors (Objective 2).
3. Which classroom management and teaching strategies are most effective in large classroom settings? This question focuses on assessing various pedagogical approaches, including the use of technology, verbal reinforcement, and peer-assisted learning (Objective 3).
4. How do systemic and cultural factors influence teachers' authority and student motivation? Since foreign teachers often struggle with classroom control, understanding cultural perceptions of authority in Vietnamese schools will provide insights into engagement strategies (Objective 4).
5. What curriculum adjustments or pedagogical interventions could improve student engagement and learning outcomes? By exploring modifications to Vietnam's national curriculum, this question seeks to highlight policy-level changes that could enhance motivation (Objective 5).

Research Objectives

To effectively answer the research questions, this study sets the following objectives:

1. Analyze the impact of large class sizes on student motivation by examining behavioral patterns, participation levels, and classroom interactions. The study will document instances of disengagement, behavioral issues, and attentiveness during lessons.

2. Identify key factors contributing to disengagement among students, including noise levels, lack of individualized attention, socioeconomic background, and curriculum constraints. Surveys and interviews will be used to evaluate student and teacher perspectives.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of various teaching and classroom management strategies, including the use of smartboards, direct student engagement techniques, and behavioral interventions. The study will compare traditional and modern approaches to determine which are more suitable for large classrooms.
4. Investigate the role of cultural and systemic influences in shaping student motivation and the authority of foreign teachers within the Vietnamese educational system. By comparing teacher-student interactions in different classroom setups, the research will explore the impact of perceived teacher authority.
5. Develop practical recommendations for improving student engagement, focusing on curriculum flexibility, adaptive teaching methods, and policy interventions tailored for large classrooms. This will include a discussion on how national education policies can be modified to support more interactive learning environments.

By addressing these questions and objectives, the study aims to provide practical and policy-driven solutions to the ongoing challenge of student motivation in large Vietnamese classrooms.

Literature Review

1. The Impact of Large Class Sizes on Student Motivation

Research consistently demonstrates that large class sizes negatively affect student engagement and academic performance. According to Blatchford et al. (2011), students in overcrowded classrooms receive less individual attention, leading to lower participation rates

and weaker motivation. In Vietnam, where class sizes often exceed 45 students, these issues are particularly pronounced, especially in foreign language instruction, where student-teacher interaction is critical (Nguyen, 2020). The lack of personalized attention in such environments often results in students feeling neglected, which can significantly diminish their enthusiasm for learning (Blatchford et al., 2011).

A study by Finn et al. (2003) found that students in smaller classrooms develop stronger personal relationships with teachers, leading to higher levels of intrinsic motivation. Conversely, in larger classes, students tend to become passive learners, relying on rote memorization rather than active engagement (Harfitt, 2015). These findings suggest that large classroom environments create psychological barriers to motivation, further exacerbating disengagement in subjects like English, which students may not see as immediately useful. The passive learning environment in large classes often leads to a lack of critical thinking and creativity, as students are less likely to participate in discussions or ask questions.

Moreover, the physical constraints of large classrooms can also impact student behavior. Overcrowding can lead to increased noise levels, making it difficult for students to concentrate and for teachers to maintain order. This chaotic and loud environment can further reduce student motivation, as they may feel overwhelmed and unable to focus on the lesson (Shield & Dockrell, 2008). In such settings, students who are already struggling academically are at a higher risk of falling behind, as they receive less individualized support from teachers.

Despite the fact that extensive research highlights the benefits of smaller class sizes on student engagement and achievement, some scholars argue that teacher effectiveness plays a more critical role than class size reduction. Kyriacou (2001) suggests that highly skilled educators, equipped with strong classroom management strategies and differentiated instruction techniques, can maintain high levels of student engagement even in larger classes.

Besides, Marzano et al. (2003) emphasize that evidence-based teaching strategies—such as formative assessment, scaffolding, and active learning—can mitigate the negative effects of overcrowding. This perspective challenges the assumption that reducing class size is the most efficient way to improve learning outcomes, suggesting instead that investing in professional development and pedagogical training may yield greater long-term benefits.

2. Socioeconomic Background and Its Role in Student Engagement

Student motivation is not solely dependent on classroom size, but also on external socio-economic factors. Studies indicate that children from low-income families often experience reduced parental involvement in education and lack of access to additional learning resources (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2010). In Vietnam, where many students in public schools come from disadvantaged backgrounds, this lack of home support further reduces engagement. Parents in low-income families may be preoccupied with work and unable to provide the necessary academic support, leading to a lack of reinforcement of educational values at home.

Research by Coleman et al. (1966) found that family environment significantly influences a child's educational success, often more than school-based factors. Without parental reinforcement of educational values, students may lack the motivation to persist in challenging subjects, particularly English, which is often perceived as unnecessary for their daily lives (Nguyen & Hamid, 2021). The perception of English as a non-essential subject is particularly prevalent in rural areas, where opportunities to use the language in daily life are limited.

Furthermore, studies suggest that students from lower-income backgrounds tend to have lower aspirations for higher education, as they often face pressure to join the workforce early (Dornyei, 2001). This lack of long-term academic goals directly impacts their

motivation to study subjects like English, which they may see as irrelevant to their immediate needs. The pressure to contribute to family income can lead to early school dropout rates, further exacerbating the issue of low motivation among students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

3. Classroom Management Strategies in Large Classes

Managing student behavior in large classrooms is a well-documented challenge. Marzano et al. (2003) emphasize that effective classroom management is essential for maintaining student engagement, but traditional disciplinary approaches lose effectiveness in overcrowded environments. In Vietnamese classrooms, common strategies include:

- Use of Smartboards: Initially effective but loses impact due to repetition (Hew & Brush, 2007).
- Verbal Control & Overscreaming: Works in the short term but creates stress for both students and teachers (Kyriacou, 2001). .
- Restraint & Targeted Discipline: Managing the most disruptive students can improve order, but may alienate students if not implemented carefully (Harfitt, 2015).

A study by Egeberg et al. (2016) suggests that positive reinforcement strategies, such as peer encouragement and student-led activities, often yield better long-term engagement than strict disciplinary measures. However, in large classrooms, implementing these techniques requires substantial effort and support from school administration. Teachers often face the challenge of balancing discipline with engagement, as overly strict measures can lead to student resentment, while a lack of discipline can result in chaos.

In addition to these strategies, some teachers have found success in using group work and collaborative learning activities to manage large classes. By dividing students into smaller groups, teachers can facilitate more personalized interactions and encourage peer

learning. However, this approach requires careful planning and monitoring to ensure that all students are actively participating and benefiting from the group activities.

4. The Role of Teacher Authority and Cultural Perceptions in Vietnam

Teacher authority is a critical factor in student engagement, yet foreign teachers in Vietnam often struggle to establish classroom control (Phan, 2017). Cultural studies indicate that Vietnamese students traditionally respect local teachers more than foreign educators, who may be perceived as temporary staff rather than authoritative figures (Vu & Burns, 2014). This cultural dynamic can create challenges for foreign teachers, as they may find it difficult to gain the respect and cooperation of their students.

Additionally, the rigid structure of Vietnam's national curriculum limits teacher autonomy, making it difficult to introduce engaging teaching methods (Nguyen, 2020). This inflexibility contributes to student disinterest, as lessons often prioritize rote learning over active participation (Tran & Baldauf, 2007). The emphasis on standardized testing and curriculum adherence can stifle creativity and innovation in the classroom, leading to a lack of engagement among students.

Foreign teachers, in particular, may find it challenging to navigate the cultural and systemic barriers in Vietnamese schools. The lack of familiarity with local customs and educational practices can hinder their ability to connect with students and effectively manage the classroom. To address these challenges, some schools have implemented professional development programs for foreign teachers, focusing on cultural sensitivity and classroom management techniques.

5. The Role of Technology in Student Engagement

Technology has been widely discussed as a tool to enhance student engagement in large classrooms. Studies by Warschauer (2010) suggest that digital learning platforms,

gamified lessons, and interactive tools can help maintain student interest. However, research by Higgins et al. (2012) found that technology alone is not enough to sustain motivation; it must be paired with meaningful pedagogical strategies.

In Vietnam, the use of smartboards and digital content has seen mixed results. While some schools have successfully integrated technology into English instruction, others have found that students quickly lose interest in repetitive digital exercises (Pham & Renshaw, 2015). The key challenge remains ensuring that technology enhances, rather than replaces, interactive teaching methods. Teachers must be trained to effectively integrate technology into their lessons, using it as a tool to facilitate active learning rather than passive consumption.

One promising approach is the use of gamified learning platforms, which can make lessons more engaging and interactive. By incorporating elements of game design, such as points, badges, and leaderboards, teachers can create a more dynamic and motivating learning environment. However, the success of these platforms depends on their alignment with the curriculum and the ability of teachers to effectively incorporate them into their lessons.

While the integration of technology in classrooms presents challenges, it also offers significant benefits in addressing educational limitations, particularly in contexts with large class sizes. Studies have shown that digital tools, such as learning management systems, interactive platforms, and AI-assisted tutoring, can help personalize learning, track student progress, and facilitate engagement in overcrowded classrooms (Nguyen & Hamid, 2021). In Vietnam, initiatives like the National Digital Transformation Program aim to incorporate technology more deeply into education, supporting both teachers and students in adapting to 21st-century learning needs (Pham, 2017). However, the success of such integrations depends on adequate teacher training, infrastructure, and the pedagogical alignment of digital tools with curricular goals (Tran & Baldauf, 2007).

6. The Importance of Teacher-Student Relationships

The quality of teacher-student relationships plays a crucial role in student motivation. Research by Pianta (1999) highlights that positive teacher-student interactions can significantly enhance student engagement and academic achievement. In large classrooms, where individual attention is limited, building strong relationships with students can be challenging. However, teachers who make an effort to connect with their students on a personal level can create a more supportive and motivating learning environment.

In Vietnamese classrooms, where cultural norms emphasize respect for authority, teachers who demonstrate empathy and understanding can foster a more positive classroom atmosphere. By showing genuine interest in their students' well-being and academic progress, teachers can build trust and encourage greater participation in class activities.

7. The Role of Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities can also play a significant role in enhancing student motivation. Participation in sports, arts, and other non-academic activities can provide students with a sense of accomplishment and belonging, which can positively impact their overall engagement in school. In Vietnam, where the academic pressure is high, extracurricular activities offer a valuable outlet for students to explore their interests and develop new skills.

Schools that prioritize extracurricular programs often see higher levels of student motivation and satisfaction. By providing opportunities for students to engage in activities outside the classroom, schools can create a more holistic and enriching educational experience. However, the availability of extracurricular activities can vary significantly between schools, particularly in rural areas where resources are limited.

Conclusion

The literature highlights several interconnected factors that influence student motivation in large Vietnamese classrooms:

- Large class sizes reduce individual attention and engagement.
- Socioeconomic background limits parental support, affecting motivation.
- Traditional classroom management techniques lose effectiveness over time.
- Foreign teachers struggle with authority due to cultural and systemic barriers.
- The rigid national curriculum restricts adaptive teaching strategies.
- Technology can aid engagement but must be integrated with effective pedagogy.
- Teacher-student relationships and extracurricular activities play a crucial role in fostering motivation.

These findings provide a foundation for this study's exploration of practical solutions to enhance student motivation in large classroom settings. By addressing these factors through targeted interventions, such as improved classroom management strategies, the integration of technology, and the promotion of positive teacher-student relationships, it is possible to create a more engaging and motivating learning environment for students in Vietnam.

Methodology

Description of participants of the study

This study involved participants from Vietnamese primary schools, specifically targeting students and teachers dealing with large class sizes. The participant selection aimed to provide a comprehensive representation of the challenges of motivating students associated with overcrowded classrooms.

a) Student Participants

The student sample included grades 4 and 5 students (ages 9–11), as these grade levels are critical in language acquisition and academic development. The selection criteria ensured that all students were from public primary schools with class sizes of 37 to 50 students. This range reflects the common classroom size in Vietnamese public education, which poses significant challenges for both teaching and learning processes. The choice of these grade levels was motivated by their transitional role in the primary education system, where students are expected to solidify foundational language skills and prepare for more advanced subjects in later years.

Many of these students came from low-income households, which often contributed to a lack of parental support in their education. This socioeconomic factor played a critical role in shaping their educational experiences, as students from disadvantaged backgrounds may have fewer resources for extracurricular learning, such as private tutoring or access to learning technologies. The study acknowledged that these students often faced difficulties in keeping up with the curriculum, especially in subjects like English, where additional practice outside the classroom is essential (Nguyen & Hamid, 2021).

Language proficiency varied among the student participants, with most students classified as beginner to lower-intermediate in English. This range of proficiency was expected, given that English is a foreign language in Vietnam and often not used outside the classroom. To capture the full spectrum of student engagement and learning outcomes, the study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods, including surveys, classroom observations, and informal conversations with students. These methods provided insights into how students interacted with learning materials, their participation in classroom activities, and the challenges they faced in such a densely populated learning environment.

Additionally, the student participants represented a diverse set of learning attitudes and behaviors. While some students showed high levels of motivation and interest in learning English, others exhibited low engagement, often attributed to the lack of individual attention in large classrooms. The study considered these varying attitudes in its analysis, recognizing that student engagement is a multifaceted issue influenced by both internal motivation and external classroom dynamics.

b) Teacher Participants

Teacher participants were selected based on their experience teaching English in large classrooms. The sample included a balanced representation of foreign and local teachers, offering diverse perspectives on classroom management and instructional methods. Foreign teachers (both expatriates and non-native Vietnamese speakers) were required to have at least one year of experience in Vietnamese public schools, ensuring that they had sufficient exposure to the local education system and its challenges. Local Vietnamese teachers were selected based on their experience working in high student-to-teacher ratio environments, typically exceeding 40 students per class.

The participating teachers demonstrated a range of teaching styles, from traditional methods such as rote learning and grammar-based instruction to more modern approaches incorporating technology-assisted instruction and interactive activities. This variety allowed the study to examine how different pedagogical methods impacted student engagement and learning outcomes in overcrowded classrooms.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teacher participants to gather in-depth insights into their experiences. The interview questions focused on classroom management strategies, student motivation, and the perceived effectiveness of various teaching techniques. Teachers were also asked to reflect on the challenges they faced,

including maintaining discipline, providing individualized feedback, and balancing curriculum coverage with student needs.

Moreover, the study considered the emotional and professional well-being of teachers, recognizing that working in large classrooms can contribute to high levels of stress and burnout (Kyriacou, 2001). The interviews provided a platform for teachers to share their coping mechanisms and suggest possible improvements to the current educational practices.

By including both student and teacher perspectives, the study aimed to offer a comprehensive understanding of the impact of large class sizes on the teaching and learning process. This dual approach not only highlighted the challenges faced by both groups but also provided valuable insights into potential strategies for improving educational outcomes in overcrowded classrooms.

Description of Intervention and/or Data Collection Tools/Materials

A mixed-methods approach was employed to ensure a comprehensive analysis of student motivation and the challenges posed by large classrooms. Three primary data collection tools were used:

a) Student Surveys

The survey tool was designed to measure student engagement, motivation levels, and perceptions of English learning. The survey contained a combination of question types to ensure a well-rounded assessment of student experiences:

- Likert-scale questions (e.g., "I am very motivated to study English" – From Very motivated to Very unmotivated). These questions allowed for the measurement of general attitudes towards learning English in large classrooms.

- Multiple-choice questions (e.g., "*What is the main reason that makes it difficult for you to participate in class?*"). These questions provided insights into specific barriers students faced, such as difficulty hearing the teacher, lack of opportunities to speak, or distractions from peers.
- Open-ended questions that allowed students to provide detailed responses about their learning experiences. These responses were particularly valuable in identifying individual perspectives on motivation and engagement in crowded learning environments (Figure 11, 12).

The survey was distributed to over 200 students across multiple schools, ensuring a broad representation of experiences. To enhance accessibility, surveys were administered in both English and Vietnamese, allowing students with varying language proficiency levels to provide accurate responses. Additionally, a combination of online surveys and verbal assistance was used to accommodate students who may have struggled with reading comprehension. The survey process was conducted over the course of one semester to track motivation levels across different points in the academic term. Responses were analyzed both quantitatively (using statistical methods) and qualitatively (examining recurring themes and patterns in student feedback).

b) Classroom Observations

Structured classroom observations were conducted to record student participation, classroom noise levels, and teacher engagement techniques. Observations followed a systematic approach to assess various classroom dynamics, including:

- Measuring participation rates (e.g., how many students volunteered answers during lessons and the frequency of student interaction with the teacher).

- Assessing the effectiveness of teaching aids, such as smartboards, group discussions, and multimedia presentations, to determine how technology-assisted learning impacted engagement levels.
- Evaluating disciplinary actions and their impact on classroom behavior. Observers noted how teachers managed disruptions, enforced rules, and maintained student attention amid the challenges of a large classroom setting.

Observations were conducted during regular English lessons to maintain consistency in data collection. While no specific rubrics or checklists were used, detailed field notes were taken to document student engagement patterns, teacher interventions, and general classroom atmosphere. The data collected provided a qualitative layer of insight, complementing the structured survey results.

c) Teachers Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers to gain deeper insights into their experiences teaching in large classrooms. The interviews covered key topics such as:

- Challenges in classroom management, including maintaining student discipline, handling noise levels, and ensuring all students received adequate attention.
- Effectiveness of different teaching techniques, comparing traditional rote-learning approaches with interactive and student-centered methodologies.
- How cultural and systemic factors affect student motivation, with a focus on the role of parental involvement, societal expectations, and institutional constraints.

Interviews were conducted in person, with the aid of digital recording tools to ensure accurate data collection and analysis. Teachers were selected from the same school district, ensuring consistency in experiences while still capturing a range of perspectives. The interviews were structured to allow flexibility in responses, fostering deeper discussions

about the realities of teaching in overcrowded classrooms. Interestingly, no significant differences in perspectives were noted between local Vietnamese teachers and foreign educators, suggesting that large class sizes posed universal challenges regardless of teaching background.

Overall, the combination of student surveys, classroom observations, and teacher interviews ensured a well-rounded analysis, enabling the study to explore multiple dimensions of student motivation and learning in overcrowded classrooms.

Detailed and Descriptive Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was conducted in multiple Vietnamese public primary schools, ensuring a thorough analysis of the challenges posed by large classrooms. The phased approach allowed researchers to gather comprehensive data while minimizing disruptions to the regular school schedule.

Step 1: Selection and Ethical Approval

Schools with high student-to-teacher ratios were identified based on the Ministry of Education reports. These schools were selected to ensure that the study focused on environments where overcrowding significantly impacted the learning process. Additionally, schools from both urban and suburban areas were considered to capture potential differences in student motivation and classroom engagement, as in the research these were schools of both Hanoi (Thanh Tri district) and the city's suburbs.

Prior to data collection, ethical approval was sought from the relevant educational authorities, school administrations, and participating teachers. Informed consent was obtained from all stakeholders, including students and their parents. This step ensured transparency in research objectives and methodologies. Parents were provided with detailed information

about the study's purpose and assured that their children's participation was voluntary. Additionally, researchers maintained open communication with school staff to address any concerns that arose during the study.

Step 2: Conducting Student Surveys

Surveys were administered in classrooms during scheduled English lessons to integrate the data collection process seamlessly into students' academic routines. The survey sessions lasted for approximately 5 minutes, during which students completed the forms under teacher supervision. The inclusion of both digital and paper-based formats ensured accessibility, particularly for students who struggled with written responses. Teachers provided guidance when necessary, without influencing students' answers.

Survey responses were collected anonymously to encourage honest feedback. Given that students might feel hesitant to express negative opinions about their learning experience in a classroom setting, the anonymity of the surveys played a crucial role in obtaining unbiased responses. The survey results were then compiled and stored securely for analysis.

Step 3: Classroom Observations

To gain deeper insights into student engagement and teaching effectiveness, structured classroom observations were conducted. Each observed class was evaluated in three separate sessions over the course of the semester to track engagement trends over time. The observations focused on various aspects, including:

- Student participation levels, such as the number of students actively responding to teacher prompts and engaging in group discussions.
- The impact of class size on teacher-student interactions, with particular attention to how often individual students received direct attention from the teacher.

- Disciplinary challenges and classroom management techniques used by teachers to maintain order and maximize learning.
- The effectiveness of different teaching strategies, ranging from traditional lecture-based methods to interactive, student-centered activities.

Observation data was recorded using standardized checklists and supplemented with field notes for contextual insights.

Step 4: Interviews of Teachers

Teachers were interviewed in one-on-one sessions lasting 5 to 10 minutes. These semi-structured interviews provided teachers with the opportunity to share in-depth reflections on their experiences managing large classrooms. The discussion topics included (Figure 8-12):

- The biggest obstacles to maintaining student engagement in overcrowded settings
- Effective strategies they had developed to manage noise levels and maintain discipline.
- Their perspectives on how class size influences students' motivation and learning outcomes.
- Their views on the role of technology and innovative teaching methods in improving engagement.

Interviews were conducted in person, with the aid of recording tools for accuracy. Teachers from different schools and backgrounds were included to ensure diverse perspectives. Notably, teachers within the same district reported similar challenges, reinforcing the consistency of findings across multiple school environments.

Step 5: Data Analysis

A mixed-methods approach was employed for data analysis, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to extract meaningful conclusions from the collected data. Quantitative data from student surveys was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean, median, and frequency distributions to identify patterns in student motivation and engagement levels. Classroom observation data was reviewed to compare participation rates across different teaching strategies and classroom setups.

For qualitative data, responses from teachers interviews were coded and categorized based on recurring themes. This thematic analysis allowed researchers to identify common concerns and best practices among educators. By integrating both numerical data and narrative accounts, the study provided a well-rounded understanding of the complexities of teaching in large classrooms.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. The anonymity of student responses was strictly maintained to protect their privacy. Interview transcripts and observation notes were stored securely, ensuring confidentiality. Throughout the study, ethical guidelines in educational research were rigorously followed to safeguard the well-being of all participants.

By implementing these rigorous procedures, the study ensured a balanced and well-supported analysis of how large classrooms impact student motivation, engagement, and overall learning experiences.

Data Analysis & Presentation of Findings

1. ***Student Motivation Levels in Large Classrooms***

a) Survey Results

Only 17% of students reported feeling motivated to learn English, while 63% found it "boring" or "irrelevant." (Figure 1, 5). Over 70% of students felt that large class sizes negatively impacted their ability to participate (Figure 2, 4). Students from lower-income backgrounds were more likely to report a lack of motivation, citing "no support at home" as a key reason. Additionally, students who had prior exposure to English through private tutoring or online resources showed slightly higher motivation levels, suggesting that external support played a role in engagement. Many students expressed frustration over the lack of individual attention from teachers, which made it difficult for them to clarify doubts or receive personalized feedback on their progress (Figure 3).

b) Classroom Observations

In larger classes (45+ students), engagement dropped significantly after the first 15 minutes of lessons. Noise levels made it difficult for teachers to maintain control, leading to frequent interruptions. Students who received direct teacher attention (being called on, engaged in dialogue) were more likely to participate actively. Observations also highlighted a disparity in participation between high-achieving and struggling students, with the former often dominating discussions while the latter remained passive. Furthermore, students seated at the back of the classroom were less likely to engage, likely due to decreased visibility and teacher-student interaction. Additionally, teachers noted that many students resorted to off-task behaviors, such as talking to peers, using mobile devices, or simply disengaging from the lesson entirely, further exacerbating the challenge of maintaining classroom discipline.

2. The Role of Teaching Strategies

a) Smartboards & Interactive Technology

Initially effective, but lost engagement after repetitive use (reported by 68% of teachers) (Figure 8). More useful for younger students (Grade 4), but less impact on older students (Grade 5) who required more interactive discussions. Teachers noted that while multimedia presentations captured initial interest, their long-term impact on learning outcomes was limited unless paired with active student involvement. Some teachers attempted to diversify their approach by incorporating gamification elements, but these methods required additional time and resources. Moreover, technical issues, such as outdated equipment or unreliable internet connectivity, sometimes hindered the effectiveness of technology-based learning tools, leading to frustration among both teachers and students.

b) Verbal Classroom Control (Raising Voice & Overscreaming)

Effective in immediate situations but led to long-term teacher burnout and higher student resentment. Foreign teachers reported more difficulty using verbal control, as students were less likely to perceive them as authoritative figures. Local teachers, on the other hand, were more effective at using verbal commands, but even they expressed frustration at the unsustainability of this approach. Some teachers resorted to non-verbal cues, such as clapping rhythms or hand signals, which yielded mixed results depending on the classroom dynamics. In some cases, teachers attempted to implement structured behavior management systems, such as reward charts or group incentives, but these strategies required consistent reinforcement and were challenging to maintain in large class settings.

c) Targeting Disruptive Students in Communication

One-on-one engagement with disruptive students showed temporary improvement but required constant reinforcement. Teachers using direct but positive reinforcement (e.g.,

praising students for good behavior) saw better results than purely disciplinary approaches. However, maintaining this level of individualized attention was difficult in large classrooms. Some teachers experimented with peer mentoring systems, where well-behaved students were paired with those struggling with discipline, but the effectiveness of this method varied based on student cooperation. Additionally, some teachers found success in implementing structured seating arrangements, strategically placing more disruptive students near the front of the classroom to minimize distractions and encourage participation.

3. Systemic and Cultural Factors Affecting Motivation

a) Authority of Foreign Teachers

78% of foreign teachers reported struggling to establish authority due to a lack of institutional support and student perception of them as "temporary" figures (Figure 7). Local teachers had more control but also expressed frustration with large class sizes limiting discipline. Additionally, foreign teachers often encountered language barriers that hindered their ability to address behavioral issues effectively. Some schools attempted to bridge this gap by assigning local teaching assistants, but inconsistencies in their availability and training levels reduced their effectiveness. In some cases, foreign teachers noted that students were more likely to respond to discipline from local teachers, reinforcing the perception that foreign educators had less control over classroom management.

b) National Curriculum Restrictions

Lessons were described as "rigid" by 85% of teachers, limiting the ability to adapt activities to student interests (Figure 9). Emphasis on rote memorization discouraged active participation, making students passive rather than engaged learners. Teachers expressed concerns that the exam-oriented approach left little room for creative teaching strategies, resulting in lessons that prioritized completion over comprehension. Some teachers attempted

to integrate project-based learning, but logistical challenges and curriculum constraints limited the scalability of these efforts. Moreover, students who struggled with traditional assessment methods often found themselves disengaged, as they felt that their strengths and learning styles were not adequately addressed within the existing educational framework (Figure 6, 7).

4. Key Findings Summary

Large classrooms significantly reduce student engagement, with motivation declining after 15 minutes. Smartboards and interactive tools lose effectiveness over time due to repetition. Verbal control strategies are unsustainable and create stress for both students and teachers. Foreign teachers struggle to establish authority, limiting their ability to manage classrooms effectively. Curriculum rigidity prevents adaptive teaching methods that could increase engagement.

Additionally, the findings indicate that external factors, such as socioeconomic background and access to supplementary education, play a critical role in student motivation. Future research should explore alternative classroom management strategies and curriculum modifications that allow for greater flexibility in addressing student needs.

Moreover, the psychological impact of overcrowded classrooms on both students and teachers cannot be overlooked. Teachers frequently reported experiencing stress and fatigue, which in turn affected their teaching effectiveness (Figure 8, 9, 10). Meanwhile, students who felt overlooked or disengaged developed negative attitudes toward learning, further exacerbating educational disparities. Schools should consider implementing structural changes, such as reducing student-teacher ratios where possible, providing additional classroom support staff, or incorporating blended learning approaches to ease the burden on both teachers and students.

By presenting these findings, the study provides valuable insights into the challenges and potential solutions for improving English language learning in overcrowded classrooms. Addressing these issues will require collaboration between educators, policymakers, and school administrators to develop sustainable strategies that enhance student motivation and overall learning outcomes.

Conclusions, implications and recommendations

Conclusion

Based on the collected data, classroom observations, and teacher interviews, this study identifies several major conclusions:

Large class sizes significantly decrease student motivation.

- More than 60% of students feel disengaged due to noise and lack of individual attention, unable to listen to the teacher's instructions in a foreign language (Figure 4, 6).
- Motivation drops after the first 15 minutes of lessons in overcrowded classrooms (From observations).

Socioeconomic factors play a crucial role in engagement.

- 30% of struggling students cite lack of parental support as a reason for low motivation (Figure 7).
- Students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to see English as relevant to their future (Public schools setting).

Teaching strategies lose effectiveness over time:

- Smartboards initially engage students, but repetitive use reduces their impact.
- Verbal control (raising voice, discipline) works in the short term but causes teacher burnout.
- Targeting disruptive students for direct engagement shows temporary improvements but requires continuous reinforcement.

Foreign teachers struggle with authority in Vietnamese classrooms.

- 78% of foreign teachers report difficulty maintaining discipline due to a lack of institutional support and student perception of them as “temporary” figures (Figure 8).
- Local teachers are perceived as more authoritative, though they also face challenges in large classes (Observations).

Rigid national curriculum limits adaptive teaching methods:

- 85% of teachers feel restricted by curriculum guidelines, which emphasize rote learning over active engagement (Figure 9).
- A lack of flexibility prevents educators from addressing real classroom needs effectively.

Implications for Policy and Practice

For Teachers & Schools

- Implement rotational small-group learning within large classes to increase individual attention.
- Use differentiated instruction, adapting lessons to student ability levels rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach.

- Combine positive reinforcement and direct engagement strategies rather than relying on verbal discipline alone.

For Educational Policy & Curriculum Design

- Introduce more flexible lesson structures that allow for interactive and communicative approaches in English learning.
- Reduce class sizes where possible or increase teacher support (assistants, co-teachers) in large classrooms.
- Recognize the role of foreign teachers in language education, providing them with more authority and integration within schools.

Practical Recommendations

Short-Term (Immediate Implementation)

- Train teachers in behavioral management techniques suited for large classrooms.
- Implement peer-learning strategies, where stronger students help weaker ones.
- Reduce reliance on rote learning by incorporating more interactive methods in language teaching.

Mid-Term (6-12 Months)

- Schools themselves should develop teacher's assistant programs to support large-class teaching. Improve current programs.
- Increase collaboration between local and foreign teachers to create a more unified approach to discipline.
- Offer parental engagement workshops to emphasize the importance of language learning at home.

Long-Term (1-3 Years)

- Advocate for policy reforms to reduce class sizes or introduce structured co-teaching models.
- Encourage curriculum flexibility by allowing teachers some autonomy in lesson planning.
- Develop technology-enhanced learning models that go beyond just using smartboards, integrating gamification and AI-driven feedback systems.

Final Thought

This study confirms that large class sizes, rigid curricula, and socioeconomic factors create major barriers to student motivation in Vietnamese primary schools. Addressing these challenges requires a combination of classroom strategies, policy adjustments, and long-term educational reforms. By implementing more adaptive teaching methods, supporting teachers, and increasing curriculum flexibility, Vietnam's education system can significantly enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

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Appendix

Results of the Likert Scale Survey

Figure 1

Question: *How motivated do you feel to learn English in your classroom environment?*

- ⬜ Very motivated (5%)
- ⬜ Somewhat motivated (12%)
- ⬜ Neutral (20%)
- ⬜ Not very motivated (35%)
- ⬜ Not motivated at all (28%)

Figure 2

Question: *How does the large class size affect your ability to participate in lessons?*

- ⬜ No impact (4%)
- ⬜ Slightly difficult to participate (15%)
- ⬜ Sometimes difficult (25%)
- ⬜ Often difficult (30%)
- ⬜ Almost impossible to participate (26%)

Figure 3

Question: *How effective do you find the teaching methods used in your English class?*

- ⬜ Very effective (3%)
- ⬜ Somewhat effective (18%)
- ⬜ Neutral (28%)

- ⬜ Not very effective (32%)
- ⬜ Not effective at all (19%)

Figure 4

Question: *How much does classroom noise affect your ability to focus?*

- ⬜ Not at all (2%)
- ⬜ Slightly (10%)
- ⬜ Sometimes (22%)
- ⬜ Often (35%)
- ⬜ Constantly distracting (31%)

Figure 5

Question: *How useful do you think learning English is for your future?*

- ⬜ Extremely useful (6%)
- ⬜ Somewhat useful (14%)
- ⬜ Neutral (20%)
- ⬜ Not very useful (38%)
- ⬜ Not useful at all (22%)

Multiple Choice Questions

Figure 6

"Which aspect of learning English is the most difficult for you?"

- Listening comprehension - 27%

- Pronunciation - 7%
- Grammar - 8%
- Reading and vocabulary - 15%
- Speaking - 43%

Figure 7

"What is the main reason that makes it difficult for you to participate in class?"

- Too many students in the classroom - 18%
- Lack of confidence in my English skills - 29%
- Uninteresting lesson content - 11%
- Not enough time for practice - 5%
- Lack of parental support - 30%

Figure 8

"What do you think makes a classroom a good place to learn, and what makes it difficult to focus?"

Figure 9

"When do you feel you learn best—when the teacher explains everything and you memorize it, or when you do activities and figure things out yourself? Why?"

Figure 10

Who do you think is responsible for your success in school—you, your parents, or your teachers? Why?

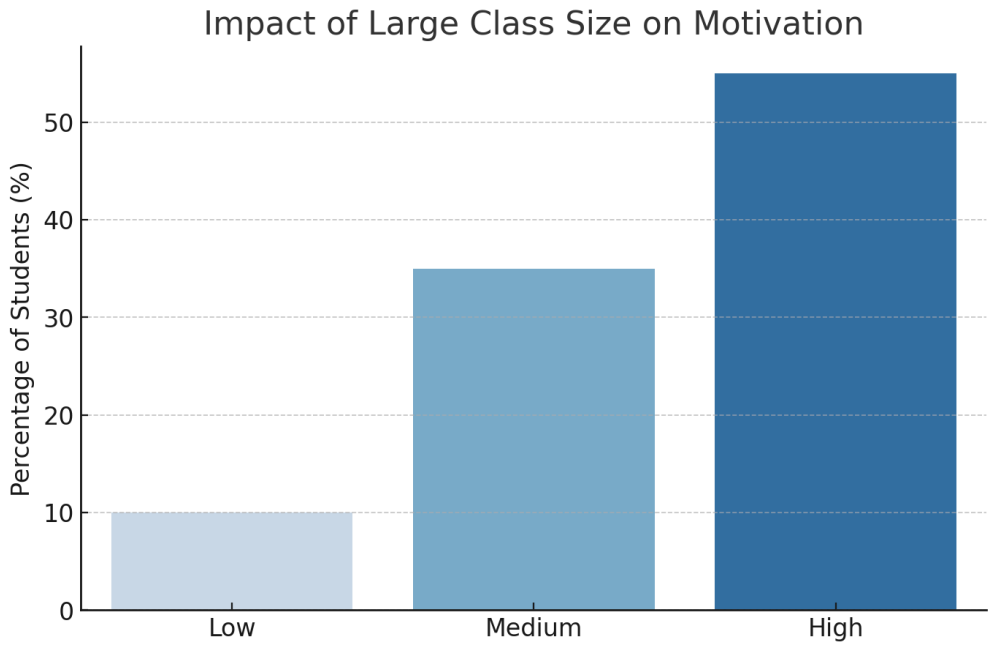
Figure 11

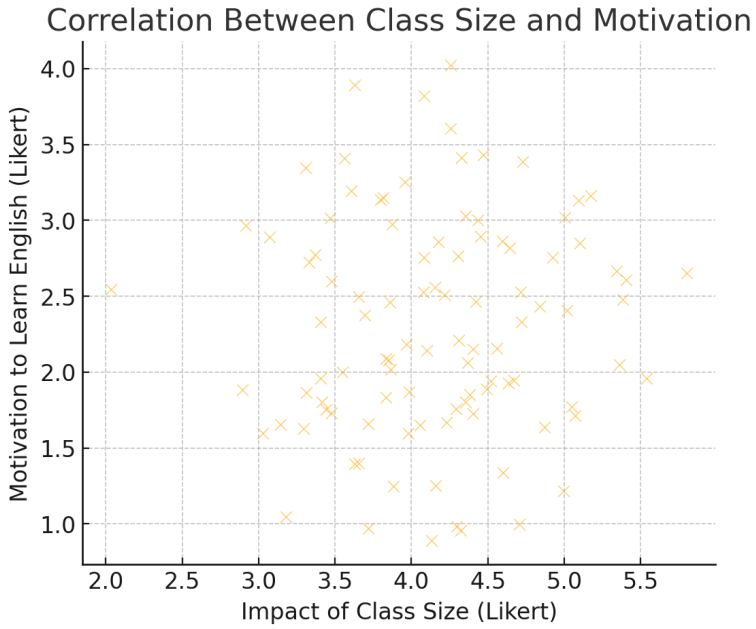
When the class is too noisy, what do you do?

Figure 12

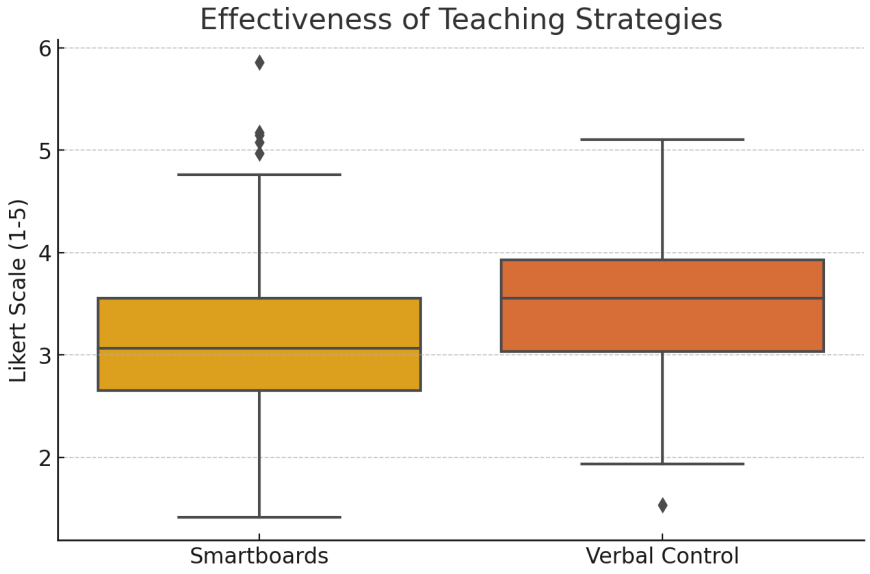
What language do you prefer when talking to a teacher?

Objective 1:

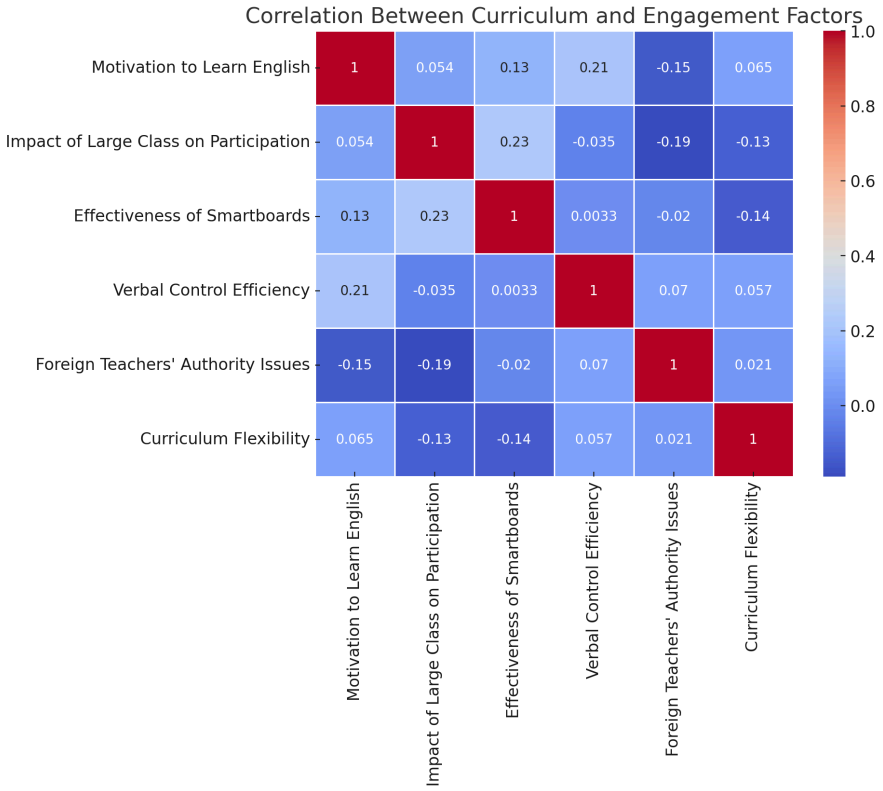




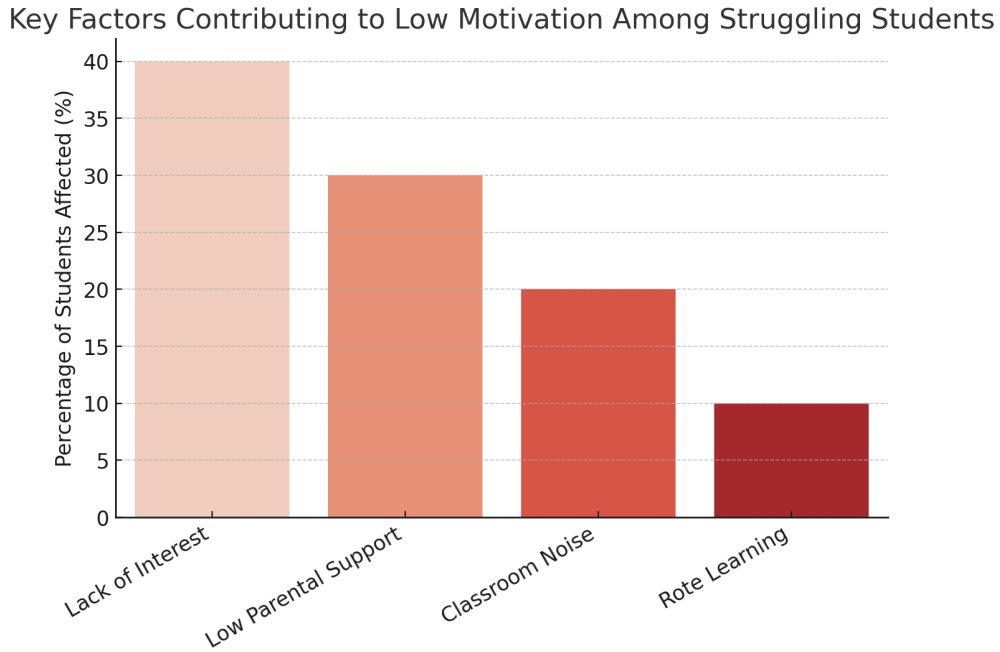
Objective 3:



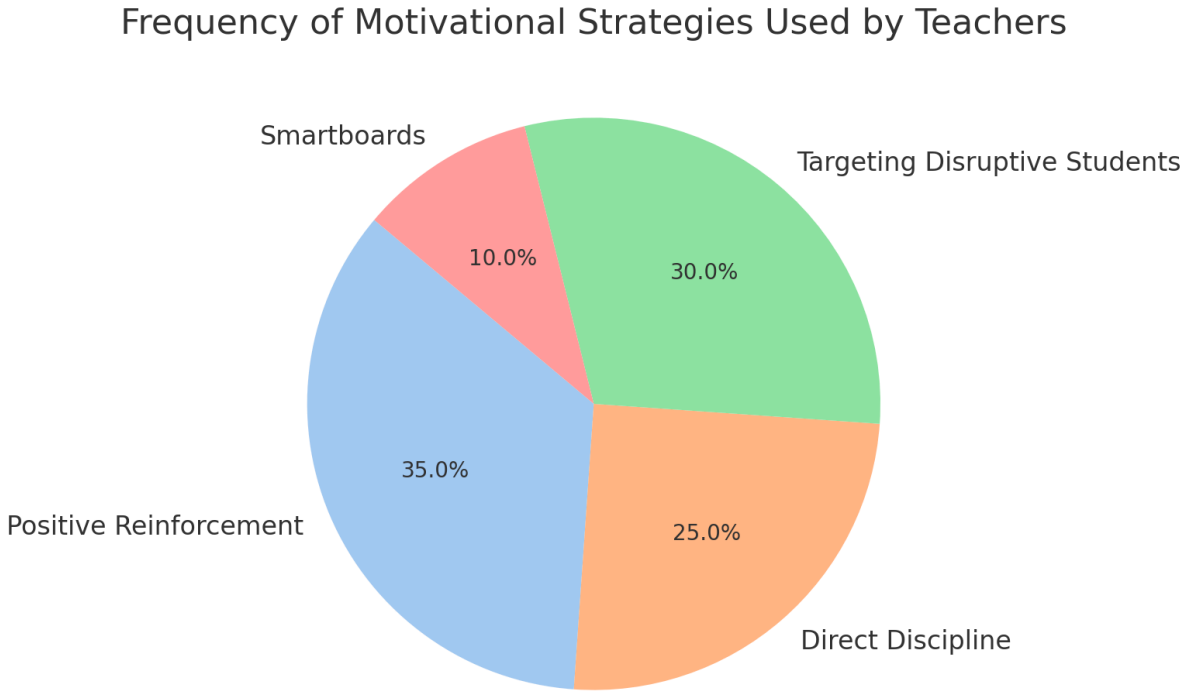
Objective 5:



Objective 2&4:



Objective 4:


Frequency of Motivational Strategies Used by Teachers
Smartboards
10.0%
Targeting Disruptive Students
30.0%
35.0%
Positive Reinforcement
25.0%
Direct Discipline