

# Assessing the Level of Students' Exposure to English Language in ELT Department at Tishk International University-Erbil, Iraq

**Rawand Sabah Ahmad<sup>1</sup>**

Tishk International University, Tishk International University [rawand.sabah@tiu.edu.iq](mailto:rawand.sabah@tiu.edu.iq)

**Reman Sabah Meena<sup>2</sup>**

Tishk International University, Tishk International University [reman.sabah@tiu.edu.iq](mailto:reman.sabah@tiu.edu.iq)

## Abstract

The paper studies students' exposure to the English language in the English language teaching department. The paper starts with an introduction that mentions the scope, the method, the significance, the results, the problems, and background information. The paper aims to assess the level of English Language exposure of only third- and fourth-year students. The study is essential because it helps teachers better find their students' weaknesses and strengths in the target language exposure to improve and regard them in their teaching goals. Being not involved in the second language environment is one of the significant problems in learning a foreign language. Therefore, one of the crucial purposes of this article is encouraging students to create an environment for learning a foreign language, whether inside the university or outside the university. The study depends on the questionnaire conducted to third and fourth-year students in English Language Teaching Department at Tishk International University-Erbil. Later, the paper discusses the results of the questionnaire. There is no doubt that if students have more exposure to the second language, they are more efficient in the target language. Therefore, according to the outcomes, students have much more exposure to English in the university environment; next comes the media with which the students have exposure. After that, students exposed to reading in English. Finally, it comes the family and friends' settings with which the students have little exposure. Lastly, the paper concludes that students generally have more exposure to the university environment than outside the university environment. In the end, the paper recommends that the teachers can exploit events and situations where students have good exposure to the target language for further studies.

## Keywords

English language learning, Second language learning and teaching, English language teaching, ELT.

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## Introduction

English is a growing demand in the country. It is studied from primary school up to high school and further in some university systems. Nevertheless, there are sometimes problems facing students in mastering English and learning the language properly. In addition to these problems, many well-advanced students, high school graduates, and university graduates acquire good fluency and accuracy. To study these differences of such issues among the English language teaching department students, the paper conducts a questionnaire between third and fourth-year students. Undoubtedly, students who are deeply involved in English language exposure and students who have created a sort of English language environment can speak more fluently. It is well-known that acquiring and learning a second language is affected by meta-cognition and motivation and various environmental factors such as language exposure and socio-cultural setting. According to previous studies, there is a direct link between language learning and acquisition and cognitive factors (Peacock & Ho, 2003). If learners of English located in an English environment where they are exposed to more daily English language, such cognitive factors are made more accessible for them. English language exposure leads to better improvement in expressing themselves and more efficient speakers. Exposure refers to the time a learner spends in contacting the target language. The contact may be formal, informal, verbal, or written, and the learner may be passive or active. For example, English language exposure happens when a learner involves a conversation with colleagues, friends, family members, and classmates, whenever they read in the target language, and even when they have a passive role in a place or an environment when the target language is spoken. Chiswick and Miller (1998) describe exposure as the characteristics of learning and "learning by doing", which affect acquiring and learning the fluency of the second language. There are many scopes of exposure to the language, and the current paper merely concentrates on the power of language exposure per unit of time in the setting. The scopes include various prompts such as media, print, and audio visual materials. Exposure to these prompts facilitates English language skills (Magno, Lajom, & de Carvalho Filho, 2011). According to previous studies, exposure to the target language is an environmental factor that boosts learning language proficiency (Ji, Zhang, & Nisbett, 2004; JIA, 2003; Kim & Margolis, 2000). JIA (2003) discovers that learning language proficiency enhances as the learners are more involved in a second language environment. Reber (1985) states that if the learners have more engagement in language exposure, they will be better involved in the socialization process. The socialization process involves contacting English speakers and learners. Through this process, they acquire knowledge, values, and social skills necessary to learn a target language. Seizing this opportunity leads to master attitudes, social norms, and mannerisms that make learners efficient speakers of the target language (Brown, Levinson, & Levinson, 1987; Chen, 1993; Levine, Baxter, & McNulty, 1987). Exposure also increases motivation to language learning; as Kim and Margolis (2000) mention, learners exposed to more English are more motivated. Krashen (1981) mentions two types of linguistic environments in language acquisition and learning: formal and informal. Formal environments include all language teaching systems used in which linguistic rules and feedbacks are presented. On the other hand, rules and feedbacks are not presented in informal environments. However, some studies recommend that learners increase their second language proficiency in informal environments and informal environments. Thus, (Krashen, 1981) considers two hypotheses "Firstly, and the adult second language learner can efficiently utilize the informal environment. Secondly, formal study, or its essential characteristics, is significantly more efficient than informal exposure to increasing second language proficiency in adults".

### Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions about second language exposure:

- 1-In which field (home, friends, media, university, and etc...) students are more engaged in target language exposure?
- 2-Are they exposed more inside class environment or outside class environment?

### The Problem

The paper tries to assess the level of English language exposure between third- and fourth-year

students of English Language Teaching Department at the faculty of Education in Tishk International University. It is quite obvious that the more learners have exposure to second language, the more efficient they are. Being not involved in the second language environment is one of the prodigious problems in the process of learning a second language. Besides, if students do not have good language skills, they cannot get the necessary knowledge in the university. Consequently, the study aims to assess the levels of English language exposure so that it can identify where and at which point students have more exposure and at which points they are less likely to be exposed to second language.

## **The scope**

The research paper deals only to study the level of English language exposure, and particularly third- and fourth-year students. In addition, the paper only attempts to assess the amount of time students spend in exposing the second language.

## **The Significance**

It is essential to know the total amount of time learners dedicate to learn and acquire the second language. Therefore, the paper results are significant as the researcher can predict how to advise learners to be more engaged in learning the second language and pinpoint weak and robust points of learners in general.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

To assess the level of English language exposure between third- and fourth-year students of the English Language Teaching Department in the Faculty of Education at Tishk International University, the students who participated in answering the questionnaire, were 70. There were 35 students of third-year students and 35 students of fourth-year students. Participation in the questionnaire was voluntary. The students were not forced to participate in the questionnaire.

### **Procedure**

The quantitative data was gathered through the Google Form Survey method in English Language Teaching Department at Tishk University. First, the students were told to read the instruction carefully and then check how often the situation applies to their experience. They were later informed to answer the items at their own pace. First, respondents were asked to check in the 5-point scale (always, sometimes, rarely, never). Then, the students answered the questionnaire based on the situation that applies to them. The questions asked in the questionnaire provide valuable information on the total amount of time in which learners spend in exposing a second language because the questions indicate the rate of language exposure in non-native language contexts.

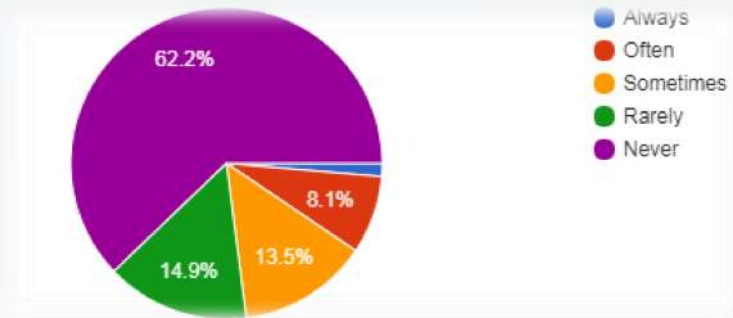
### **Instruments**

The questionnaire was prepared to show the total amount of time the learners were exposed to a second or target language. The questionnaire was conducted for learners whose target language is English. The 5-point scale of the questionnaire shows different settings and situations where English is spoken in the home (e.g., speaking and conversing in English at home), among friends (e.g., conversing in the English language with friends), university (e.g., teachers and classmates speaking in English, activities in university conducted in English), and media (e.g., watching English television shows, listening to English music, reading English books).

## **Results and Discussions**

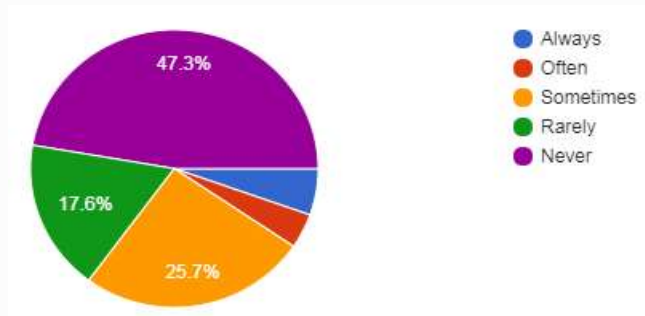
By exposure inside the class environment, we mean English taught by the teacher inside the class

setting. In addition to that, performing any other activities, such as watching a movie or reading a book during the class period, are examples of English exposure inside the class. On the other hand, by English exposure outside the classroom, we mean all aspects and forms of English that the students are faced with or exposed outside the school classroom environment. For example, watching TV, a film, a movie, listening to music, songs, radio programs in English, using social media, and reading a book before bedtimes are aspects of English language exposure outside the class environment. To explain in detail the exposure students have at home, respondents were asked about the frequency they expose to English at home. 62.2% of respondents said that their parents do not talk in English. At the same time, only 8.1% hear their parents talk in English.

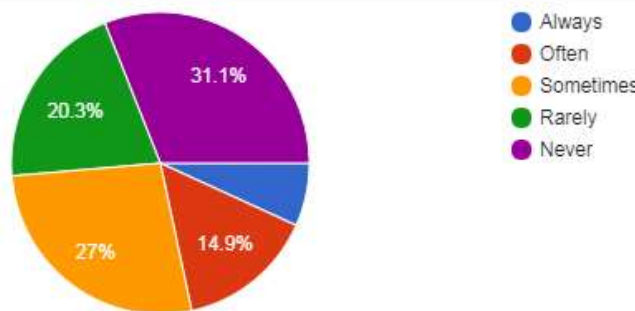


**FIGURE 1.** My Parents Talk in English

Generally, there is little exposure to English at home, as it can be seen in figures 2 and 3. Only 25.7% English is sometimes spoken at home, and only 14.9% of the students often converse in English among the family, meanwhile, 27% of them sometimes converse in English among family members.

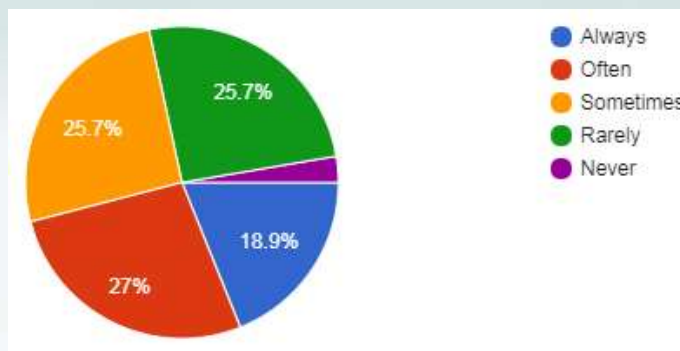


**FIGURE 2.** English is spoken at home



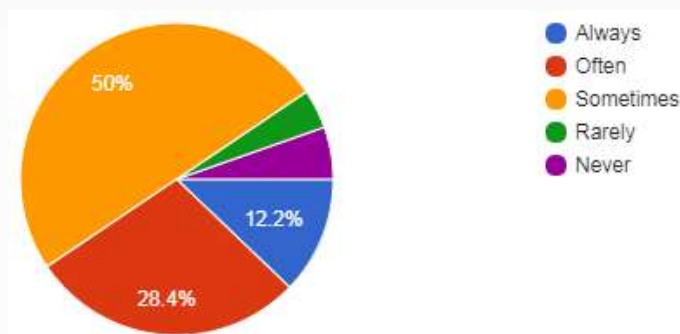
**FIGURE 3.** I converse in English among my family

Students are interested in engaging in the activities where English is used, for more details see figure 4.



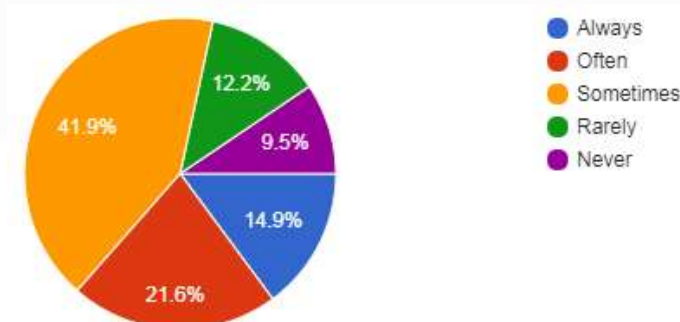
**FIGURE 4.** I engage activities where English is used

Based on the survey results, students are engaged in social situations. This is confirmed when respondents were asked about the frequency, they are involved in speaking English with friends and attending social gatherings where English is used. For instance, 50% of the respondents are sometimes engaged in speaking English with friends, at the same time, 28.4% of their friends often speak English, and 12.2% of their friends always speak English.

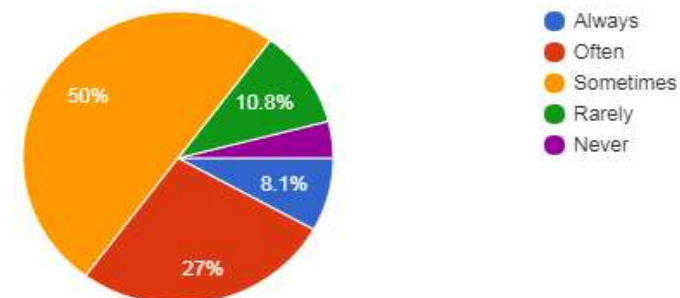


**FIGURE 5.** My Friends speak English

When students were asked about the amount of time they spend in social gatherings, 41.9% of them answered that they sometimes attend, whereas 21.6% answered they often attend, and 12.2% of them said they always attend.

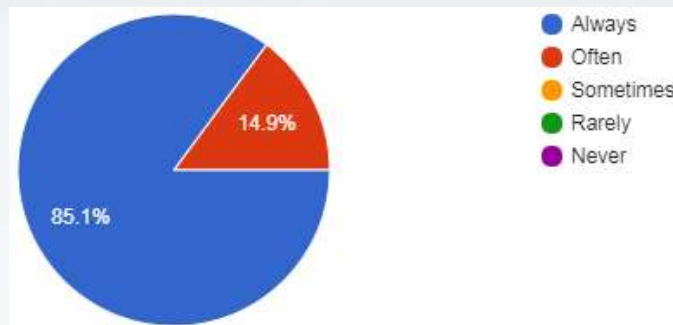


**FIGURE 6.** I attend social gatherings where English is spoken



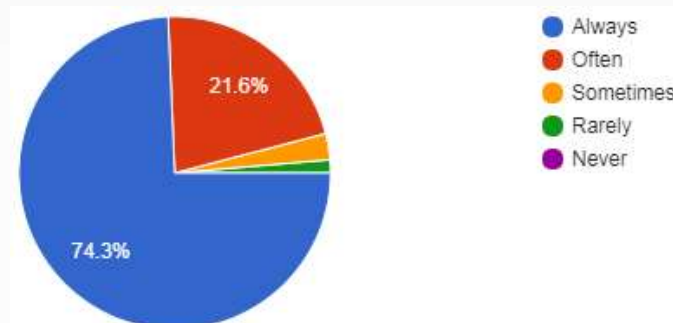
**FIGURE 7.** I talk with my friends in English

When talking about the class environment, students have great exposure to English by their teachers, that is 85.1% of the respondents always hear English from their teachers, and 14.9% of them often expose to English.



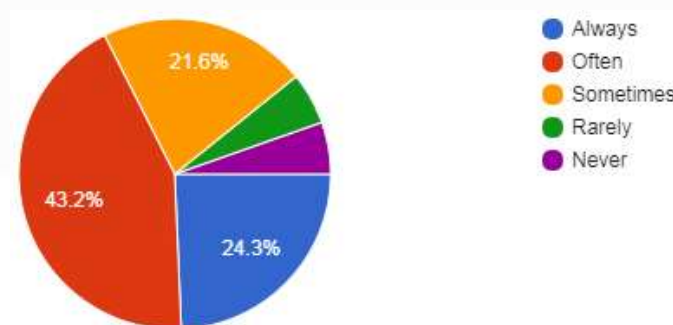
**FIGURE 8.** University: My teachers speak in English

It is also true when talking about activities conducted in the university since 74.3% of the activities are always performed in English. This gives students a good opportunity to expose to the target language. See figure 9.

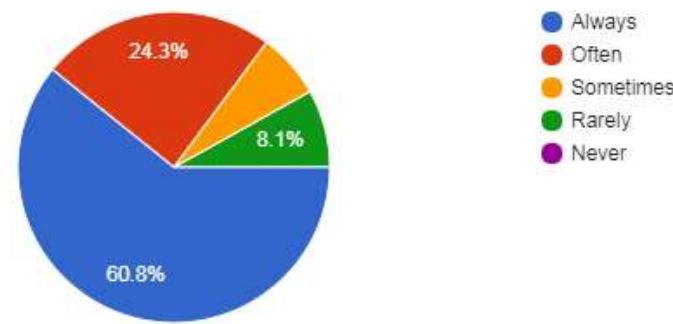


**FIGURE 9.** The activities in my university are conducted in English

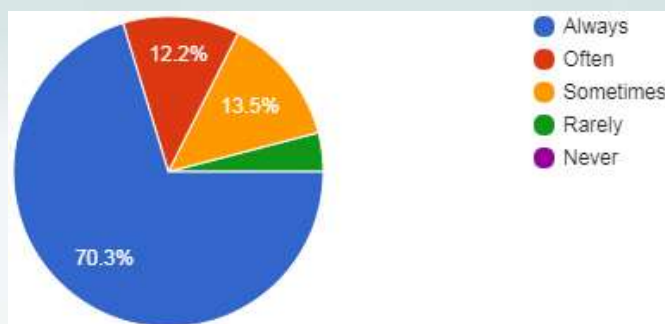
43.2% of the students can benefit from the university environment for English language exposure, for more details see Figure. 10. Besides, 60.8% of the respondents think that the university always encourages and pushes students towards speaking English, for more details see Figure 11. and 12.



**FIGURE 10.** My classmates speak in English

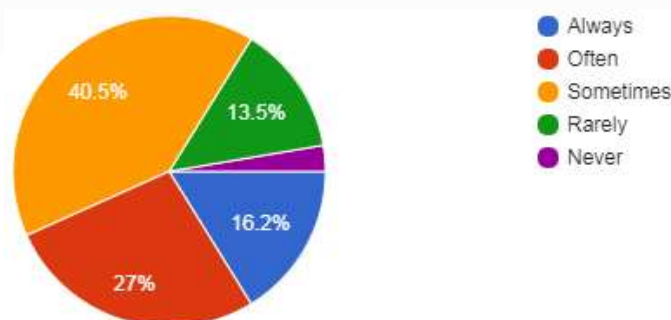


**FIGURE 11.** My university encourages students to speak English



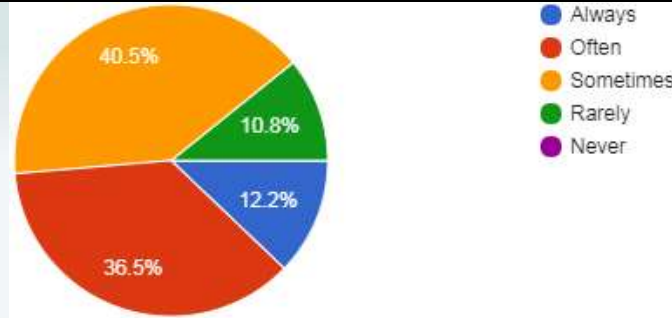
**FIGURE 12.** The medium of instruction used in the classroom is English

When we talk about media, we refer to different forms and aspects of communication such as television, Digital Video Discs, music, the internet, magazines, and newspapers. It is significant to bear in mind that technology has recently increased the exposure to media both inside and outside classrooms. As pointed out by Livingstone and Bovill (2001) "the media today operate as pervasive, yet often imperceptible, elements in the everyday cultures of children and young people" (p. 286). She also recommends that media can have a positive role and consequence on learners who study English as a second language because there are some forms of media that are mainly and chiefly in English (Livingstone & Bovill, 2001). Fluency is an important part of the acquisition of the second language, and this can be supported by a supportive motivational learning environment. Media can be supportive means for language development because it can function as a motivational source and means for language learning and acquisition. Media forms such as chatting and seeking information on the internet increase exposure to English because these forms of media are mostly communicated in English. There is no doubt that English is an international language, besides globalization has made it much more significant than before. Now, media, because of globalization, is available via different means and ways such as television, internet, and radio. English speaking countries have made media a part of daily social life around the world, particularly, through films, and televisions programs. The media, in these countries, has become a helpful means for acquiring and learning English as the second language. There lies an important role of teachers in creating an interesting, motivational, and enthusiastic environment within their subject. It may require a syllable which shows a connection between the real world and the subject taught in the classroom. To see the reality of students' exposure to media, respondents were asked the amount of time they spend on chatting and text messaging. When students were asked about the time they spend on chatting online in English, 40.5% of them said they were sometimes chatting online, 27% of them said they often chat online, and 13.5% of the respondents said that they always chat online in English (Barzani & Jamil, 2021). See Figure 13.



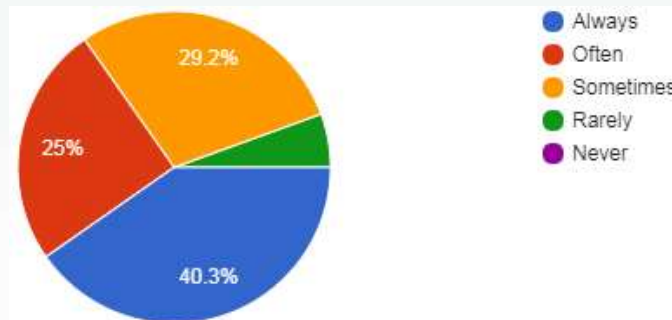
**FIGURE 13.** I chat online in English

Additionally, when students were asked about the frequency of text messaging in English, 40.5% of them said they sometimes send texts in English, 36.5% of them said they often send texts in English, and only 10.8% of them said they rarely text message in English, for more details see Figure 14.



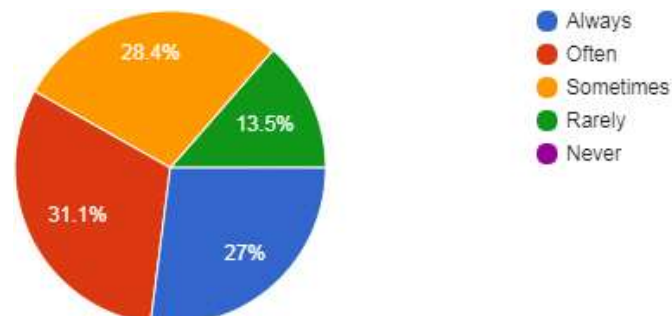
**FIGURE 14.** I send text messages in English

Moreover, 40.3% of the respondents think that they always browse web pages in English, and 25% of them think they often browse web pages in English. For more details see Figure 15.



**FIGURE 15.** I browse web-pages that are written in English

Previously, students learned English mostly from reading books; this was somehow boring needed individual motivation to let learning continues. Learners have recently tended to listen to music, songs in order to improve and enhance their English. Learning through listening makes them feel that learning English in this way is much more pleasurable and comforting. Besides, students exposed to a very large number of vocabularies. Learning songs and lyrics by heart are not forgotten easily. Students listen to them repeatedly throughout their life. Once they learn songs and lyrics, they are going to stay with them, and they are repeatedly reviewing them only because they enjoy the music. In addition, they are going to improve their listening skills and learn a wide variety of vocabularies and phrases. Above all, learning songs renders them native-like pronunciation model, they are going to practice pronunciation, and they are going to imitate native speakers. This would teach them how to speak better, and get better pronunciation, intonation, and fluency. It is worth noting that English music has now become much more popular than before. Listening to English songs would certainly give them a correct collocation, which is a cultural context and placement of words. In examining our students, we learned that 31.1% of the respondents often listen to songs, and 27% of them always listen to songs in English. See Figure 16.

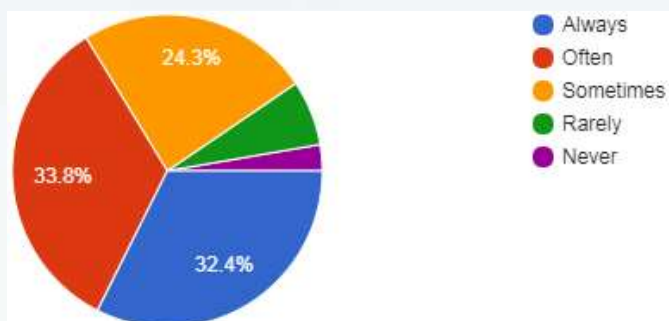


**FIGURE 16.** I listen to songs in English

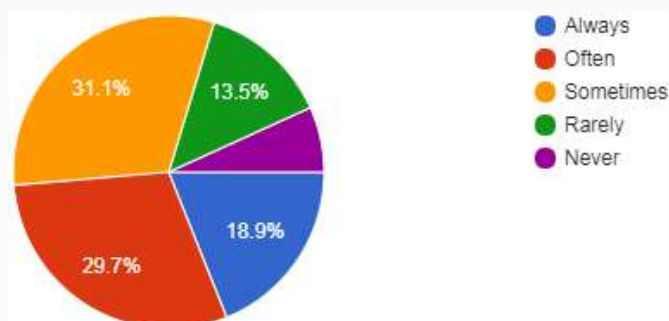
Second language acquisition through films is motivating as it makes language learning process more entertaining and enjoyable. Another benefit which films and movies provide is the authentic and varied language. Films are good examples for providing real-life situations as films expose students to natural expressions and natural speech, especially when learners are not living in an English speaking-country. Movies can also provide visual context by enabling learners to listen to



language and see facial expressions at the same time. Furthermore, films and movies help students to develop all four communicative skills. Luckily, when students were asked about their exposure to films and TV shows, 33.8% of the students said they often watch movies, and 32.4% of them said they always watch movies. Students were also asked about the amount of time they watch TV shows. 29.7% of them said they often watch TV shows, and 18.9% of them said they always watch TV shows. See Figures 17 and 18.

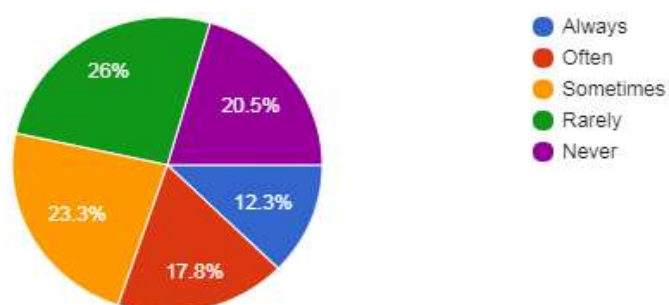


**FIGURE 17.** I watch English movies



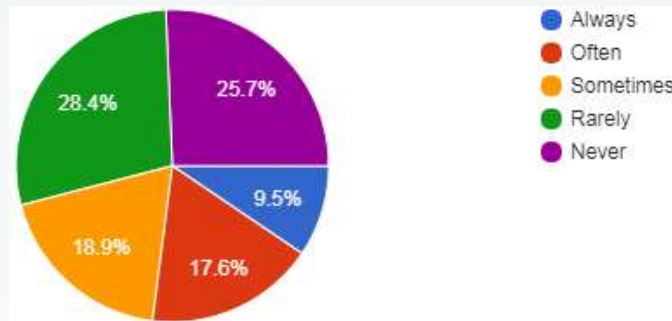
**FIGURE 18.** I watch TV shows in English

Harmer (2001) states that "Reading is an exercise dominated by the eyes and the brain. The eyes receive the messages and the brain then has to work out the significance of these messages. A reading text moves at the speed of the reader. The fact that reading texts are stationary is clearly a huge advantage". In this survey, students were asked about their frequency of exposure to the target language reading materials with which we mean printed media, that is, newspapers, magazines, and books. They are the most widely used forms of the printed media. They are widely used and easily accessible to teachers and learners. Magazines are another form of printed media which is used to inform, entertain and persuade the public. One of the advantages of magazines is that they are colorful and they suggest great opportunities to learners. For example, they can be used to offer colors, means of transport, fables, short stories and other interesting activities. Magazines generally have some advantages. Firstly, they contain authentic materials and a variety of topics. Secondly, they provide facts, data, and stories. Thirdly, they attract learners through colorful and a wide range of topics. Fourthly, they introduce a real natural source of language. Finally, they could be exploited for the culture they transmit. Students can also get in touch with the language they are learning via magazines because they reflect the country's culture. When students asked how often they read magazines written in English. 26% of the respondents answered they rarely read magazines written in English, 23.3% of them said they sometimes read magazines, and 17.8% of them often read them. See Figure 19.



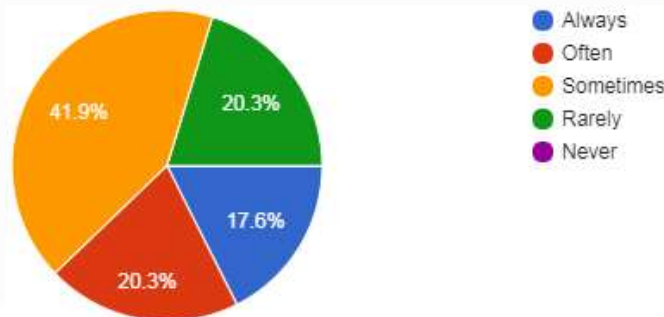
**FIGURE 19.** I read magazines written in English

Newspapers are like magazines; they offer real-life events to students. They also introduce easily accessed and authentic materials (Valva, 2009). The interesting and enjoyable topics they present, encourage learners for further reading. They usually mirror the culture of the target language in question. They contain a linguistically an up to date information (Tafari, 2009). They present real-life situations that are of real significance and emotional worth to the learners, and this stimulates their inquisitiveness. "People learn through reading and reading about interesting new things in one's interest subject, undoubtedly helps motivation (Sanderson, 1999). 18.9% of the students sometimes read from newspapers, 17.6% of them often read newspapers, and 28.4% of the respondents read newspapers. See Figure. 20 for more information.



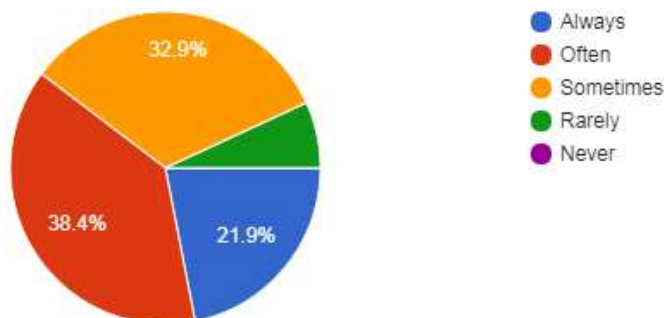
**FIGURE 20.** I read newspapers written in English.

Reading books are regarded as powerful means in education, business, law, science, medicine and entertainment (Tafari, 2009). Students get the knowledge gained by those who came before (Beckert, 1992). Books are the driving force of information used by a human being. Nowadays, books and textbooks have generally reached the highest level and have widened their readership. Reading books don't only give extensive benefits to students but also a wide variety of language styles that can, later on, be modified by the learners themselves in their productive activities and skills. To learn about students' exposure to reading books, we see that 41.9% of the respondents said that they sometimes read books, 20.3% of them said they often read, whereas 17.6% of them said they always read. See Figure 21.



**FIGURE 21.** I read books written in English.

In regard to question 22, where the students asked if the information, they read around is in English.



**FIGURE 22.** The information I read around is in English.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Students have much more exposure to English in the university environment; next comes the media with which the students have exposure. After that, students exposed to reading in English. Finally, the family and friends' settings with which the students have the minor exposure. The paper also concludes that students generally have more exposure to the university environment than outside the university environment. In addition, students have good exposure to English; that is, they are exposed to receiving skills. On the contrary, they do not have good exposure to English in their association with family members and friends; that is, they are not using the productive skills among the friends. In the end, the paper recommends that the teachers can exploit events and situations where students have good exposure to the target language for further studies.

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