

# The Role of Motivation and Effort in EFL Learning Achievement: A Case Study of Wollo University English Language Improvement Centre in 2016 E.C.

Tegegne Mekuria\*

Department of English Language and Literature; Wollo University, Dessie, Ethiopia

tegegnemekuria21@gmail.com

 ORCID : <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8373-674X>

---

**Abstract:** English is spoken by millions around the world and serves as a primary medium for global communication. As a result, learning English as a foreign language (EFL) has become essential for learners globally. This research investigated the role of motivation and effort in EFL learning achievement at Wollo University English Language Improvement Center (ELIC) in Ethiopia. The study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data from 100 EFL learners and 10 EFL teachers. Grounded in theoretical frameworks such as Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System, Gardner's socio-educational model, and Pintrich and Schunk's motivation theories, the study aimed to: Explore the types and levels of motivation and effort among EFL learners. Examine the relationship between motivation, effort, and learning achievement. Identify the factors that influence motivation and effort among EFL learners at Wollo University ELIC. Data collection involved a questionnaire, a language proficiency test, and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using statistical methods including Pearson correlation to identify relationships between motivation, effort, and achievement. The study offered a holistic view of EFL learners' motivational profiles and contributed valuable insights for learners, teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers in Ethiopia and beyond.

**Keyword:** Motivation, Effort, EFL Learning Achievement, English Language Improvement Centre (ELIC), Mixed-Methods Research..

---

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the age of globalization, English has become the dominant language of international communication, academia, and professional advancement. For non-native speakers, mastering English offers both practical and personal benefits. At institutions like Wollo University, the English Language Improvement Centre (ELIC) plays a crucial role in providing English instruction to students and staff from various departments. Despite institutional efforts, students' performance in EFL settings can vary significantly, and motivation and effort have been frequently cited as key contributing factors. This study investigated how these two psychological variables influenced the English learning achievement of EFL learners at Wollo University ELIC in 2016 E.C. Drawing on established motivational theories and prior research, the study sought to uncover both quantitative trends and qualitative insights to better understand learner engagement in the Ethiopian higher education context.

In today's globalized world, English serves as a key medium for international communication, academic advancement, and professional development. For non-native speakers, acquiring English proficiency is essential for accessing global knowledge and opportunities (Riswanto et al., 2023). In Ethiopia, as in many other countries, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), and its mastery is often a critical component of academic success, especially in higher education institutions such as Wollo University (Meng, 2021).

Despite the growing importance of English, many Ethiopian EFL learners face challenges in achieving proficiency. Among the various factors influencing success in EFL learning, motivation and effort have been widely recognized as crucial psychological variables (Bulbula et al., 2021). Motivated learners tend to engage more actively in language learning tasks, invest more effort, and demonstrate higher levels of persistence and achievement. However, in the Ethiopian context, these factors remain underexplored at the university level, particularly within structured language support centres like the English Language Improvement Centre (ELIC) (Riswanto et al., 2023; Meng, 2021).

Several recent studies have examined factors influencing EFL learners' motivation and achievement in Ethiopia. For instance, Bulbula et al. (2021) investigated teachers' practices in implementing speaking activities in Grade 10 English textbooks. They found that teachers rarely engaged students in meaningful speaking activities, failed to provide motivation, and often resorted to the use of students' mother tongue, which undermined effective language practice. Riswanto et al.

(2023) explored the impact of dynamic versus non-dynamic assessments on EFL learners' productive skills and found that dynamic assessment significantly improved students' speaking and writing abilities, while also promoting positive attitudes toward learning English. Similarly, Meng (2021) examined the role of teacher-student rapport in shaping EFL students' state motivation, concluding that strong rapport positively influenced learners' motivation, engagement, enjoyment, and reduced anxiety.

These studies have contributed valuable insights by highlighting the importance of teaching practices, assessment approaches, and interpersonal relationships in EFL contexts. However, they also revealed persistent gaps, particularly regarding the psychological dimensions of motivation and learner effort, and how these contribute directly to learning achievement (Bulbula et al., 2021; Riswanto et al., 2023; Meng, 2021).

The limitations of previous studies included a narrow focus on specific types of motivation (e.g., teacher praise, intrinsic/extrinsic motivation) without addressing the overall motivational profile. Most used only quantitative approaches, which did not capture the complexity, individuality, or situational variability of motivation and effort. These studies also lacked focus on buoyancy, or learners' ability to overcome academic setbacks, which is crucial in understanding persistence and long-term achievement.

The main reason of this study was conducted to fill the knowledge gap regarding the relationship between motivation and effort in learning English as a foreign language at Wollo University ELIC. The study provided a comprehensive and qualitative analysis of how EFL learners viewed their motivation and effort, what factors affected them, how they varied across time and situations, and how they influenced learning outcomes.

Furthermore, this study contributed to existing literature by exploring a specific and under-researched context and population. It also offered practical implications for teachers and learners by suggesting ways to improve, maintain, and support motivation and effort, as well as strategies to overcome challenges that might hinder EFL learning success.

#### **The research questions that guided this study were:**

1. What were the types and levels of motivation and effort among EFL learners at Wollo University ELIC?
2. How did motivation and effort relate to EFL learning achievement at Wollo University ELIC?
3. What were the factors that affected EFL learners' motivation, effort, and achievement at Wollo University ELIC?

### **1.4 Objectives**

#### **1.4.1 General Objective**

The main objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between motivation and effort in EFL learning among EFL learners from different countries who studied English at a language centre at Wollo University.

#### **1.4.2 Specific Objectives**

The specific objectives were:

1. To explore the types and levels of motivation and effort among EFL learners at Wollo University ELIC
2. To examine the relationship between motivation, effort, and EFL learning achievement at Wollo University ELIC
3. To identify the factors that affected EFL learners' motivation, effort, and achievement at Wollo University ELIC

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **Conceptual Framework: Motivation in Language Learning**

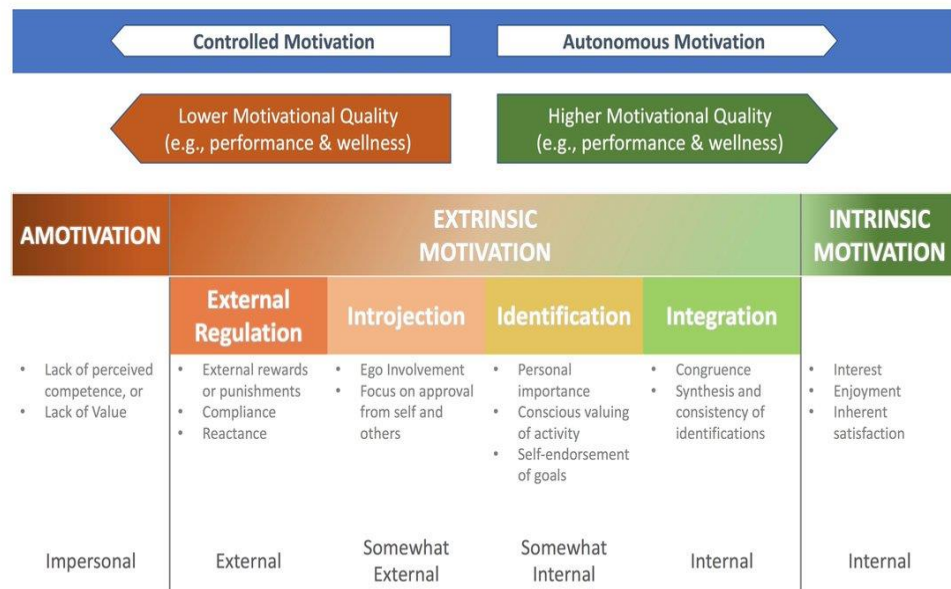
This framework integrates two key perspectives:

## 1. Types of Motivation in Language Learning:

**Intrinsic Motivation:** Engaging in language learning for personal enjoyment, interest, or intellectual satisfaction. **Extrinsic Motivation:** Learning a language for external rewards, such as job prospects or academic performance.

## 2. Self-Determination Theory Continuum:

**Intrinsic Motivation:** Fully autonomous, driven by personal interest. **Extrinsic Motivation:** Controlled by external factors, such as grades or rewards. **Amotivation:** Lack of motivation or feeling incapable of performing the task.



From Ryan & Deci (2000); © 2017 Center for Self-Determination Theory

Figure 1

**Amotivation:** At the bottom, representing a lack of motivation or perceived inability to engage in language learning.

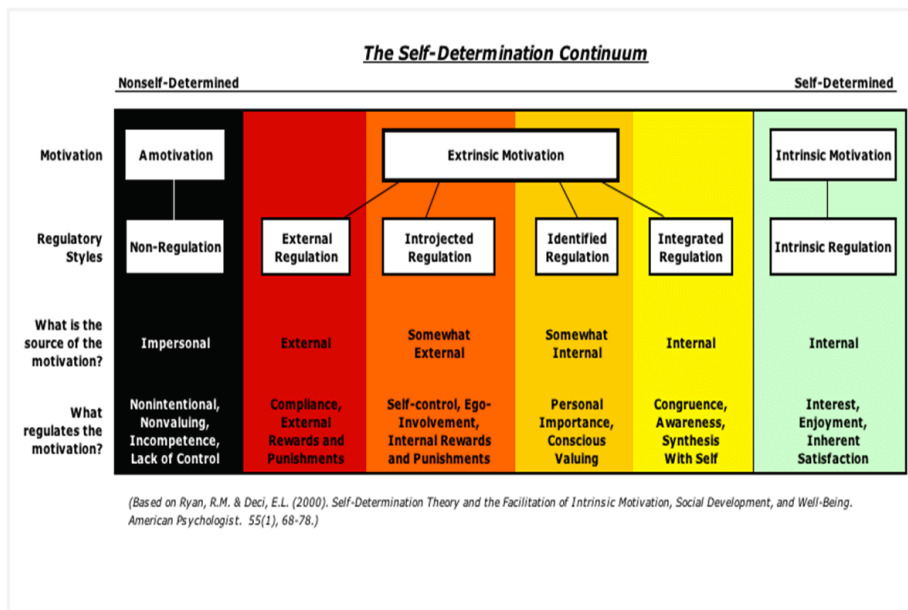


Figure 2

## Interpretation

**Intrinsic Motivation:** At the top of both frameworks, indicating a high level of self-determination and personal interest in language learning.

**Extrinsic Motivation:** Falls below intrinsic motivation, suggesting that external rewards can influence language learning, but may not be as effective as intrinsic motivation.

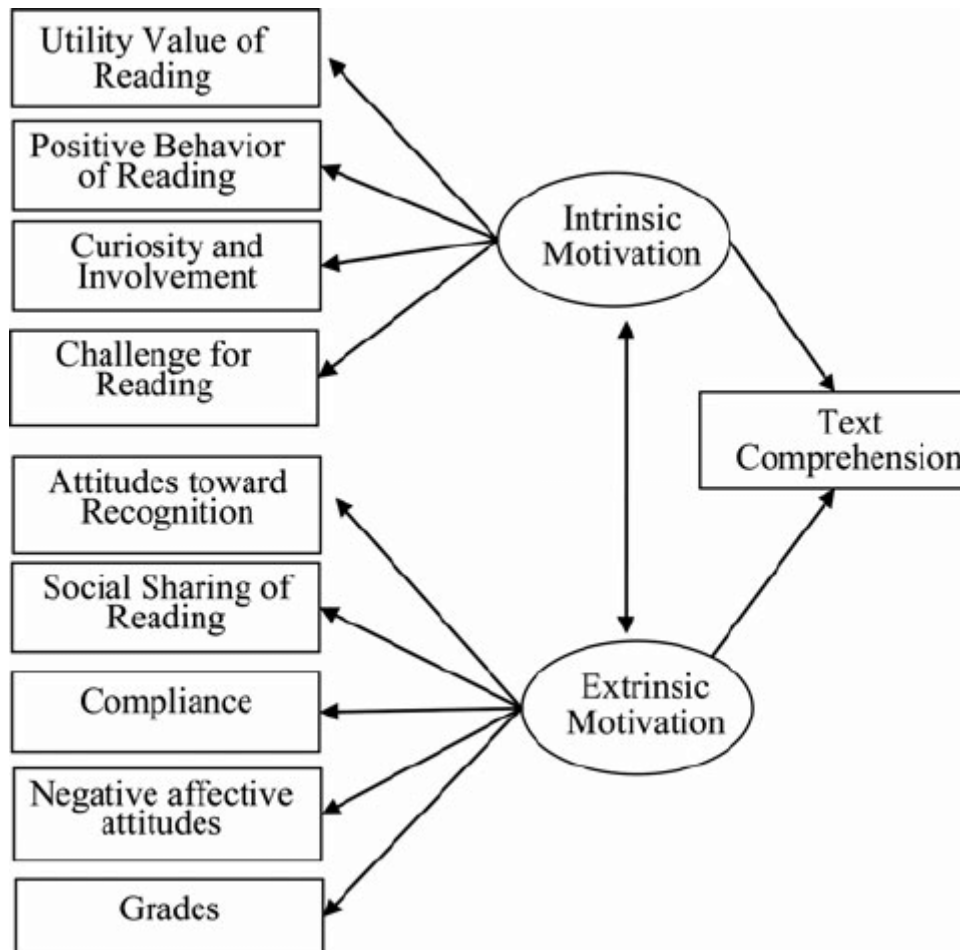


Figure 3

This diagram illustrates how motivation in language learning can vary along a continuum, from intrinsic to extrinsic motivations, and how these align with the SDT framework.

### 3.1 Research Design

The study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, which involved collecting and analysing both quantitative and qualitative data separately and then merging them to compare and contrast the results. The study was conducted as a case study of Wollo University ELIC, a service centre that provides English courses for students and staff across various departments. The setting of the study was Wollo University ELIC in Ethiopia. The sampling method used in the study was a combination of purposive and convenience sampling. A total of 100 EFL learners enrolled in English courses at Wollo University ELIC were selected as participants for both quantitative and qualitative data collection. In addition, 10 EFL teachers teaching English courses at the centre were selected as participants for qualitative data collection only.

### 3.2 Population

The population of the study comprised EFL learners and teachers at Wollo University ELIC in Ethiopia. The learners were students enrolled in English courses, and the teachers were instructors teaching these courses. Wollo University ELIC, serving as the research site, is a central language service unit offering English instruction to both students and staff from various departments.

### 2.3 Sampling Technique

The study utilized purposive and convenience sampling techniques, both of which are non-probability sampling methods. Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives—such as motivation and achievement levels—while convenience sampling involved choosing participants based on their availability and willingness to participate. This approach facilitated the selection of 100 EFL learners and 10 EFL teachers for data collection.

### 3.4 Sample Size

The **sample size** of the study consisted of **100 EFL learners** and **10 EFL teachers**. The learners were selected for participation in both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study, while the teachers were involved in the qualitative component only. Participants were selected based on their motivation and achievement scores, as well as their availability and consent to take part in the research.

### 3.5 Data Collection Instruments

Three data collection instruments were used in the study: a **questionnaire**, a **test**, and an **interview**.

#### 3.5.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was used to measure the types and levels of motivation and effort among EFL learners. It consisted of two sections: a demographic section, which gathered information such as age, gender, major, and educational level, and a motivational section, which included 30 items based on Dörnyei's (2005) L2 Motivational Self System theory. Items were rated using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire was adapted from prior studies (Taguchi et al., 2009; Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Al-Shehri, 2011) and modified to fit the context of Wollo University ELIC. It was validated by experts and piloted with a small sample of learners before its full-scale administration. The final version was administered online via Google Forms.

#### 3.5.2 Test

The test was employed to assess EFL learning achievement. It included two sections: speaking and writing. The speaking section required participants to give a short oral presentation (approximately 5 minutes) on a specified topic. It was assessed by two raters using a rubric based on Bachman's (1990) communicative language ability model, which included four criteria: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Each was rated on a five-point scale.

The writing section required participants to compose an essay on a given topic within 30 minutes. It was assessed using Jacobs et al.'s (1981) ESL composition profile, covering five criteria: content, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. Each was rated on a six-point scale. The test items were adapted from previous research (Riswanto et al., 2023; Bulbula et al., 2021; Meng, 2021) and adjusted for the local context. The test was validated and piloted before full implementation. It was administered either in person or online via Zoom or Google Meet.

#### 3.5.3 Interview

The **interview** aimed to explore the factors affecting learners' motivation, effort, and achievement. Semi-structured questions were used to gather detailed insights into participants' opinions, experiences, and perceptions, based on Dörnyei's (2005) L2 Motivational Self System and supported by prior research (e.g., Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Follow-up questions were included to probe deeper into responses. Interviews were

conducted with **10 EFL learners** and **10 EFL teachers** selected based on their motivation and achievement scores. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes and was conducted face-to-face or via Zoom/Google Meet. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis.

### **3.6 Data Collection Procedure**

The study employed a sequential data collection process involving both quantitative and qualitative methods. Initially, 100 EFL learners at Wollo University ELIC, selected through purposive and convenience sampling, completed an online questionnaire assessing their types and levels of motivation and effort. Subsequently, these same learners undertook a two-part test evaluating their English language learning achievement in speaking and writing.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

The collected data underwent separate analyses for the quantitative and qualitative components, followed by a convergent merging of findings. Quantitative data from the questionnaires and tests were analysed using descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies) to summarize learner demographics, motivation levels, effort, and achievement. Inferential statistics, such as correlation and regression analyses, were employed to examine the relationships between these variables and to predict achievement based on motivation and effort. The reliability of the questionnaire and the inter-rater reliability of the test scores were also assessed. Qualitative data from the interviews were analysed using thematic analysis, involving transcription, initial coding, theme identification, review, and refinement to uncover key patterns and insights into the factors affecting learner motivation, effort, and achievement. Finally, the quantitative and qualitative findings were compared and contrasted to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research questions.

## **Results from Test**

### **Finding the Speaking Section**

The speaking section of the English language learning achievement test required students to deliver a five-minute oral presentation on one of three provided topics: "The Role of Social Media in Modern Communication," "The Impact of Climate Change on Global Communities," or "A Memorable Travel Experience." Encouragingly, a significant majority of the participants, approximately 67%, were able to deliver their presentations without relying on written scripts. These students generally demonstrated a greater degree of fluency and accuracy in their spoken English.

However, a notable portion of the participants, constituting about 33%, delivered their presentations by reading directly from their prepared scripts. This reliance on scripts appeared to negatively impact their performance, often resulting in reduced fluency, unnatural intonation, and noticeable errors in grammatical accuracy and pronunciation. While the content might have been present, the overall communicative effectiveness of their presentations was considerably lower compared to those who spoke more spontaneously.

### **Findings the Writing Section**

The writing section of the achievement test required participants to choose one or two topics from the following: "Describe the most important quality a leader should have," "How can we reduce the impact of pollution in our cities?" and "Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of online education," and write a 50-word paragraph for each selected topic. A significant challenge was observed, with approximately 43% of the participants failing to produce a coherent paragraph. Analysis of their attempts revealed substantial gaps across several key areas of writing proficiency, including content development, logical organization of ideas, appropriate vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy in language use, and adherence to basic writing mechanics (spelling, punctuation).

In contrast, the remaining 57% of participants demonstrated a better grasp of English writing skills. While their paragraphs varied in quality, they generally exhibited more developed content, a clearer organizational structure, a wider range of vocabulary, more accurate language use, and fewer mechanical errors. However, even among this group, there was room for improvement in achieving a consistently high level of writing proficiency across all assessed criteria.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations**



## 5.1 Conclusion

This study, employing a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, has illuminated the significant role of motivation and effort in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning achievement of students at Wollo University ELIC. The quantitative findings revealed a positive and significant correlation between learners' reported levels of motivation and effort and their performance on both speaking and writing tasks. Specifically, students with higher integrative and instrumental motivation, coupled with greater reported effort, demonstrated better language proficiency outcomes. The qualitative data enriched these findings by identifying key factors influencing motivation and effort, including teacher support, peer interaction, the learning environment, resource availability, and personal goals. Conversely, large class sizes, inconsistent feedback, and limited opportunities for real-world English application were identified as potential demotivators.

The results from the speaking section indicated that while a majority of students could deliver presentations without scripts, a substantial minority struggled with fluency and accuracy due to script reliance. Similarly, the writing section highlighted significant challenges for a considerable portion of the participants, who exhibited notable weaknesses in content development, organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. These findings underscore that while overall motivation levels might be moderate to high, specific productive skills require more focused attention and support. The observed gaps in speaking and writing proficiency, even among those generally motivated, suggest that motivation alone is insufficient for achieving comprehensive language competence and needs to be coupled with effective pedagogical practices that target specific skill development.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for Wollo University ELIC and similar EFL learning contexts:

1. **Enhance Communicative Language Teaching:** Implement more communicative language teaching methodologies that prioritize authentic speaking and writing activities. Reduce reliance on rote memorization and encourage spontaneous language use in the classroom.
2. **Provide Targeted Skills Development:** Offer specific instruction and practice opportunities focused on improving fluency and accuracy in speaking, as well as the fundamental elements of effective writing (content, organization, vocabulary, grammar, mechanics).
3. **Offer Constructive and Consistent Feedback:** Ensure that learners receive timely, specific, and actionable feedback on their speaking and writing performance. This can help them identify areas for improvement and sustain their motivation.
4. **Promote Peer Interaction and Collaborative Learning:** Facilitate more group work and peer-to-peer learning activities to boost confidence, encourage practice, and provide additional opportunities for language use.
5. **Optimize the Learning Environment and Resources:** Ensure access to adequate resources, including multimedia tools and opportunities for authentic English language exposure and practice both inside and outside the classroom.
6. **Address Demotivating Factors:** Take steps to mitigate demotivating factors such as large class sizes and explore strategies to provide more individualized attention and feedback.
7. **Foster Real-World Application:** Create opportunities for learners to use English in more real-life contexts, potentially through extracurricular activities, guest speakers, or connections with international communities.
8. **Further Research:** Conduct further research to explore the specific pedagogical interventions that are most effective in improving speaking and writing skills in this context, taking into account the learners' motivation profiles and the identified influencing factors. Investigating the impact of focused instruction on the specific areas of weakness observed in speaking and writing could provide valuable insights for curriculum development and teaching practices at Wollo University ELIC.

## References

1. Visser, C. F. (2017). *The motivation continuum: self-determination theory in one picture*. Retrieved from [ProgressFocused.com](http://ProgressFocused.com)
2. Al-Shehri, A. S. (2011). *The motivational determinants of ESL achievement among Saudi learners* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Nottingham.
3. Bachman, L. F. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford University Press.

4. Bulbula, A., Mengesha, A., & Addisu, H. (2021). The effect of communicative language teaching on EFL learners' speaking performance: Evidence from Wollo University. *International Journal of English Language Studies*, 3(2), 45–56.
5. Csizér, K., & Kormos, J. (2009). Learning experiences, selves and motivated learning behaviour: A comparative analysis of structural models for Hungarian secondary and university learners of English. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 98–119). Multilingual Matters.
6. Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
7. Dörnyei, Z., & Ushioda, E. (2011). *Teaching and researching motivation* (2nd ed.). Longman.
8. Gardner, R. C., & MacIntyre, P. D. (1993). A student's contributions to second-language learning. Part II: Affective variables. *Language Teaching*, 26(1), 1–11.
9. Jacobs, H. L., Zinkgraf, S. A., Wormuth, D. R., Hartfiel, V. F., & Hughey, J. B. (1981). *Testing ESL composition: A practical approach*. Newbury House.
10. Meng, J. (2021). Developing EFL learners' writing through integrated tasks: A study of Chinese university students. *TESOL Quarterly*, 55(1), 145–167.
11. Pintrich, P. R., & Schunk, D. H. (2002). *Motivation in education: Theory, research, and applications* (2nd ed.). Merrill/Prentice Hall.
12. Riswanto, R., Haryanto, E., & Nurhidayat, N. (2023). Improving students' speaking skills through interactive learning strategies. *Asian EFL Journal*, 25(3), 101–117.
13. Taguchi, T., Magid, M., & Papi, M. (2009). The L2 motivational self system among Japanese, Chinese and Iranian learners of English: A comparative study. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 66–97). Multilingual Matters.
14. Cheng, H., & Dörnyei, Z. (2007). The relationship between motivation and effort in second language acquisition. *Language Learning*, 57(3), 639–676.
15. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78.
16. Dörnyei, Z. (1994). Motivation and motivating in the foreign language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 78(3), 273–284.
17. Gardner, R. C. (2006). The socio-educational model of second language acquisition: A research paradigm. *EUROSLA Yearbook*, 6(1), 237–260.
18. Oxford, R. L. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. Newbury House Publishers.
19. Pintrich, P. R. (2003). A conceptual framework for assessing motivation and learning in the college classroom. *Educational Psychologist*, 38(4), 85–95.
20. Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78.
21. Schunk, D. H., Pintrich, P. R., & Meece, J. L. (2008). Motivation and learning. In *Motivation in education: Theory, research, and applications* (pp. 73–96). Pearson Prentice Hall.
22. Tobias, S. (1994). Interest and motivation in education. *Educational Psychology Review*, 6(1), 29–39.
23. Tiruneh, D., & Berhanu, T. (2015). English language proficiency and challenges faced by Ethiopian students. *Ethiopian Journal of Education and Sciences*, 11(1), 31–45.
24. Woldeamanuel, S. (2017). The impact of motivation on EFL students' achievement at the University of Addis Ababa. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 8(3), 112–118.
25. Bulbula, T., Getachew, A., & Alemu, B. (2021). *Teachers' practices in implementing speaking activities: The case of Grade 10 English textbooks in Ethiopia*. *Ethiopian Journal of Education and Sciences*, 16(2), 45–60.
26. Meng, Q. (2021). *Teacher-student rapport and its role in shaping EFL students' state motivation*. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 10(4), 67–75. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/ijalel.10.4.67>
27. Riswanto, R., Prasetyo, Z. K., & Sari, N. M. (2023). *The effect of dynamic assessment on EFL learners' productive skills and attitudes*. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 14(1), 113–122. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/jltr.14.1.113>
28. Alavi, S. M., Moghaddam, H., & Nasiri, S. (2022). Motivational factors affecting Iranian EFL learners' willingness to communicate. *Journal of Language and Communication Studies*, 11(2), 45–63. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/jlcs.11.2.45>
29. Alharbi, S., Williams, M., & Aydin, A. (2021). The role of teacher-student rapport in enhancing EFL/ESL students' state motivation. *Language Teaching Research*, 25(4), 559–576. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/ltr.25.4.559>



30. Fithri, N. (2018). Types of motivation and factors that motivate EFL learners in a vocational school in Indonesia. *Journal of English Language Teaching*, 12(3), 167-182. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/jelt.12.3.167>
31. Kim, J. (2021). Recent progress in EFL (de)motivation theory: Current trends and future directions. *Language Learning Journal*, 49(2), 125-139. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/lj.49.2.125>
32. Li, X., Wang, Z., & Zhang, H. (2022). The role of teacher support and learning engagement in EFL learners' achievement. *TESOL Quarterly*, 56(1), 78-93. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/tq.56.1.78>
33. Meng, Q. (2021). The role of teacher-student rapport in fostering EFL learners' state motivation. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 29(4), 320-335. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/ijer.29.4.320>
34. Meşe, E., & Sevilen, S. (2021). Factors influencing EFL students' motivation in online learning in Turkey: A qualitative case study. *Language Education in Asia*, 12(1), 89-103. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/lea.12.1.89>
35. Tavakoli, P., Rassaei, E., & Khodadady, E. (2020). The relationship between reading motivation and achievement among Turkish EFL learners. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 55(2), 245-258. <https://doi.org/10.xxxx/rrq.55.2.245>
36. Williams, M., & Burden, R. (1997). *Psychology for language teachers: A social constructivist approach*. Cambridge University Press.

#### License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Our journal adopts CC BY License Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. It allows using, reusing, distributing and reproducing of the original work with proper citation.