





Literature Review

Motivating Language Learners: A Systematic Review of Motivation Theories in ESL Education

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<https://doi.org/10.59652/fceecz28>

Abstract: This systematic literature review (SLR) examines the integration of motivation theories in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) from 2020 to 2025, understanding how motivation theories influence learners' interaction and engagement by addressing the developing and pedagogical needs through contemporary and technology-based strategies in a student-centered environment. Using the PRISMA framework, 20 studies were chosen after screening for final analysis from Google Scholar and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC). Results show that the concepts of L2 Motivational Self System, Self-Determination Theory, and Expectancy-Value Theory remain crucial in understanding and influencing ESL learning motivation. These concepts emphasize the need for learners to develop interest and sustained enthusiasm by adapting autonomy and competence, and incorporating diverse global contexts for personal growth. Overall, this review determines that motivation is an influential and context-driven concept that significantly affects teaching English as a Second Language (ESL). Strengthening independence and identity development through social interaction and learner-centered strategies influences and supports a concrete foundation for improving ESL competence and sustaining long-term intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Keywords: Expectancy-value framework; intrinsic and extrinsic motivation; learner autonomy; L2 motivational self-system; self-determination theory

1. Introduction

Motivation remains one of the fundamental and essential factors in second language acquisition, especially in the contexts where learners engage with English as a second language (ESL). Ebn-Abbasi et al. (2022) presented how L2 motivational influences bilinguals' creative performance through different aspects, such as proficiency and reflection. Similarly, the study of Vickov and Jakupčević (2025) emphasizes how young learners in Croatia demonstrate greater enthusiasm for English writing when the activities are amiable and collaborative, while Shurovi (2025) highlighted that socio-cultural responsiveness fosters profound intrinsic motivation among Australian ESL learners. Furthermore, Yao et al. (2025) identified that incorporating situated learning concepts and principles enhances students' perception of the different task value as it promotes sustained engagement and interaction in classroom activities. It demonstrates that motivation shapes the ESL classroom as dynamic, multifaceted, and strongly influenced by pedagogical contexts.

A growing body of studies further emphasizes the role of instructional materials in maintaining motivations amongst learners in diverse ESL contexts. According to Philpott and James (2025), the application of gamification techniques, such as leaderboards, can temporarily improve extrinsic motivation; however, with a risk of reducing intrinsic drive if not balanced with empowerment-oriented strategies. Meanwhile, Yilmaz and Sahan (2023) suggested that learners' autonomy and peer collaboration significantly promote persistence among European university students to learn English. Imsa-ard (2025) states that Thai learners show higher motivation when communication and student-centered activities are enforced to promote the significance of aligning instructional strategies with motivational concepts to sustain interaction and engagement across various learning environments.

Received: September 14, 2025

Accepted: December 10, 2025

Published: December 28, 2025



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The learner's psychological and emotional state plays a crucial and decisive role in ESL motivation. Stewart (2025) states that interventions anchored in well-being principles, such as EMPATHICS, can improve both emotion and motivation among Japanese students. Likewise, according to Khan and Takkac (2021), social belonging and supportive communities enhance immigrants' motivation to learn English in Canada. Salie (2025) explains that culturally inclusive environments help multilingual learners develop more confidence and long-term interest in learning the English language. These findings suggest that psychological and emotional safety and positive teacher-student interactions are crucial in sustaining motivation for language acquisition.

Technological advancement has also transformed how motivation is developed in ESL environments. Studies such as Amjad et al. (2025) emphasized that digital gamification platforms strengthen learner interaction and performance when combined with constructive feedback. Krstić et al. (2025) highlights that structured peer collaboration and interactive activities maintain motivation in online ESL environments, even in remote contexts. Likewise, Stewart and Lee (2025) highlight that autonomy-promoting teaching strategies in technology-enhanced learning foster intrinsic motivation and persistence amongst students, which highlights how digital pedagogies – when used properly and strategically, can support both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation.

In the same vein, motivation theories in teaching ESL from 2020 to 2025 are grounded and supported by the use of empirical studies that incorporate identity-centered frameworks that highlight learners' envisioned future selves (Ideal L2 Self) as a primary motivation for sustained excellence and perseverance (Ebn-Abbasi, 2022; Vickov & Jakupčević, 2025). Reinforcing individualization and visioned success with autonomy and competence results in an empowered, student-centered learning environment that promotes intrinsic motivation and reduced burnout (Yao et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2022). Integrative and goal-oriented proponents still surface in context-sensitive evaluations (e.g., learners' achievement and in cross-cultural contexts); however, contemporary studies show that the integrated distinctions between independence and competence account for both short-term performance and long-term inclusion (Salie, 2020; Khan and Takkac, 2021).

Across contexts, autonomy-supportive teaching and varied individualized activities are commonly associated with higher engagement, willingness to participate, and perseverance (Lao, 2020; Hennebry-Leung & Lamb, 2024; Philpott & James, 2022). Technology advancement and gamified activities can influence short-term performance, but several studies show that extrinsic reinforcements must be combined with autonomy and constructive feedback to avoid compromising intrinsic motivation (Philpott & James, 2022). Contextual and socio-cultural awareness further enhances learners' participation and perception, especially in multilingual and marginalized sectors (Salie, 2020; Shurovi, 2025).

Many studies utilizing a cross-sectional or descriptive design limit the causal inference of motivational strategies that could help to prolong proficiency results; longitudinal and quasi-experimental studies remain relatively few compared to others (Imsa-ard, 2020; Vickov & Jakupčević, 2025). The impact of unequal geographic coverage of classroom-level interventions, and relatively few self-report motivational approaches, to produce proficient and adequate results (Ogunyemi, 2022; Yilmaz & Sahan, 2023). Furthermore, technology and holistic interventions demonstrate potential; more research is required to show how emerging technologies and holistic interventions correlate with intrinsic motivation across diverse cultural contexts (Stewart, 2023; Yu et al., 2022).

A systematic literature review (SLR) of motivation theories in teaching ESL from 2020 to 2025. By integrating recent empirical findings, it aims to identify advancing motivational structures, and instructional and theoretical frameworks across global ESL contexts. The review seeks to explain how motivation has progressed in light of technological, cultural, and pedagogical changes and to provide educators with evidence-based recommendations for improving and sustaining motivation among ESL learners.

This SLR attempts to explore the different motivation theories in teaching ESL in the twenty-first-century society. This study will address the following questions specifically:

1. What motivation theories are most commonly used and discussed in studies in relation to teaching ESL?
2. How do these motivation theories influence teaching strategies and learning outcomes in ESL?
3. What are the different strategies proposed to enhance learners' motivation in understanding ESL?

2. Materials and Methods

This study employed a SLR to compile, organize, and evaluate research related to motivation theories used in teaching ESL from 2020 to 2025. A systematic review was used because it presents a structured and apparent method that enhances the consistency and validity of the results. By following the standards of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA), the review verified that the selected, screened, and compiled research followed a concise and valid process. This method was specifically important in upholding the rapid changes in linguistic nature, as modern studies often reveal significant shifts in education and the integration of technology, while maintaining a positive approach to learning.

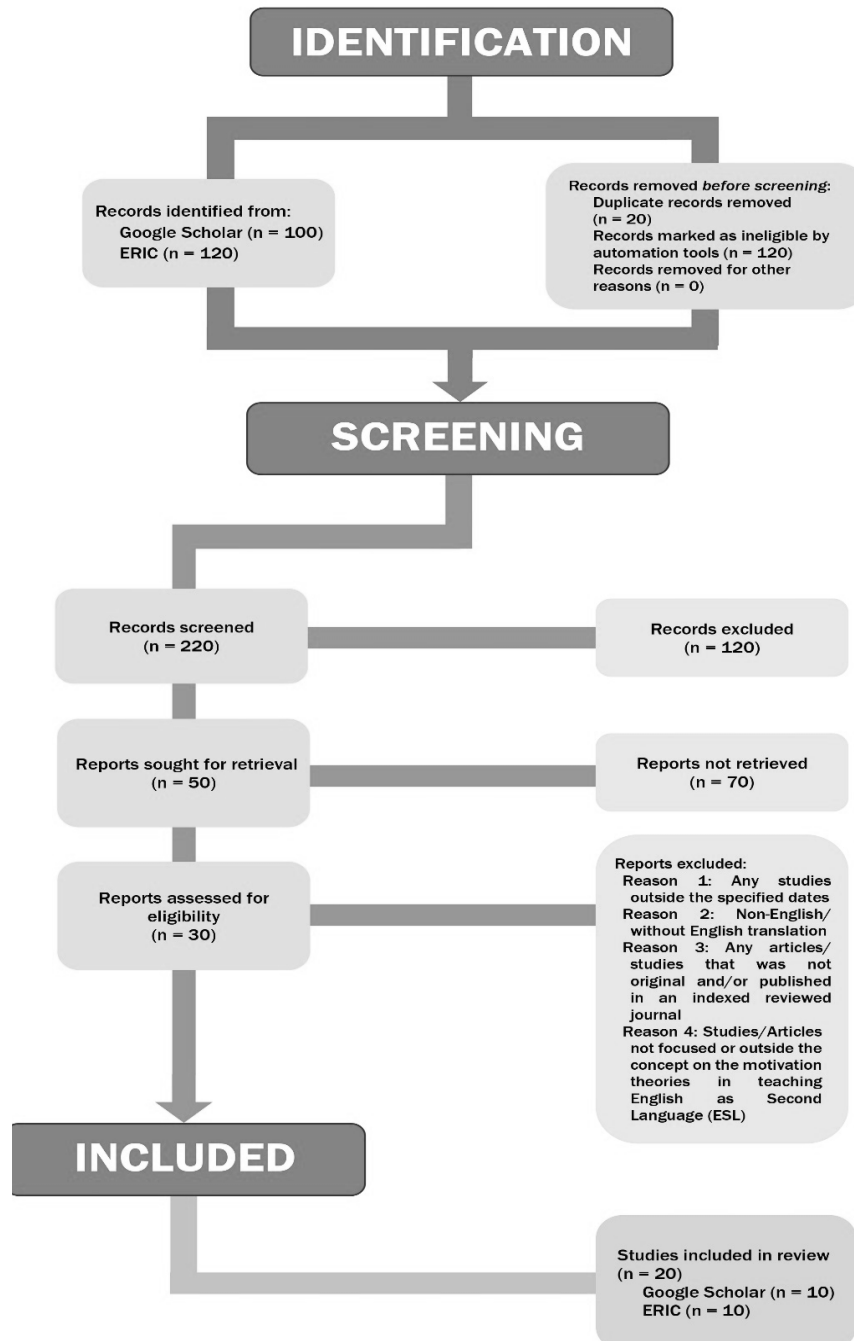


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram.

The data collection process consisted of an extensive investigation in two major academic databases, Google Scholar and the Education Resources Information Center



(ERIC). The keywords “Motivation Theories in Teaching ESL” were used as a reference to find studies with a direct association with the research topic. To maintain consistency and validity of the findings, studies that were only published from 2020 to 2025 were included. A total of 220 studies were initially identified, with 100 studies from Google Scholar and 120 from ERIC. All studies were acknowledged into a dataset wherein duplicates, inaccessible, and irrelevant materials were thoroughly filtered out. This ensured that only accessible, empirical research studies or articles were used for further screening.

Figure 1 presents the PRISMA Flow Diagram that illustrates the sequential selection process, wherein the initial search generated 220 records from the two academic indexed journals: Google Scholar (n=100) and ERIC (n=120). There were 120 records marked as ineligible by automation tools, and no records were removed for other reasons. There were 20 duplicate records removed to ensure that there are no repeated studies to be included. Then, 50 records were sought for retrieval, and 50 records were not retrieved as the full documents of those studies were ineligible to be accessed. Thus, the remaining 30 studies were then evaluated, assessed, and distinguished by the following reasons shown in the diagram.

After selection, the studies were subjected to thematic analysis. Important information about motivation theories, teaching approaches, and learning factors was obtained, compiled, and organized. These studies followed a standardized structure based on the research objectives to identify patterns and relationships in emerging trends in ESL motivation. This method allowed the review to show a comprehensive and rational understanding of how motivation theories influence ESL teaching and learning in recent years.

Table 1 shows the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to determine which studies were appropriate for review. To maintain consistency and accessibility, only studies written in English were included. To maintain consistency and accessibility, only studies written in English were included. The time frame was limited to publications from 2020 to 2025 only to integrate the most recent progress and improvements in motivational theories in ESL instruction. Additionally, only original and published studies and articles that appeared in peer-reviewed academic journals were chosen, while unpublished manuscripts, articles, chapters, and non-academic versions were excluded.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for study selection.

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Time Period	Year 2020 – 2025	Any studies outside these dates
Language	English	Non-English/without English translation
Type of Article	Original and/or published research articles in an indexed reviewed journal	Any articles/studies that was not original and/or published in an indexed reviewed journal
Focus	Studies/Articles focused on the motivation theories in teaching ESL	Studies/Articles not focused or outside the concept on the motivation theories in teaching ESL
Geography Place of Study	International	National/Local

Another significant standard needed for studies is the evident discussion of motivation theories in ESL or EFL contexts. Studies or articles irrelevant to motivation (theories) or using languages other than English were removed. Furthermore, international studies only were included to ensure comprehensive and diverse representation of global contexts and perspectives.

3. Results

This section presents the consolidated findings of the 20 studies included in this SLR. The results were organized according to the research objectives: (1) identify the most commonly used motivation theories, (2) determine the influence of motivation theories on teaching strategies and learning outcomes, and (3) explore the different strategies to help improve ESL learners’ intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

The selected studies show three (3) motivational theories that constantly appear across global ESL and EFL research: the L2 Motivational Self-System (L2MSS), Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and the Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT). These theories present motivation as a transformative engagement among interdependence, identity development, and teaching and learning factors.

Figure 2 presents the 20 selected journals or studies from Google Scholar and ERIC are

affiliated with institutions located across the following continents as shown on Figure 2. Each continent, having 4 studies equally - demonstrates fairness, impartiality, and to show competence that could provide necessary information with the key concepts needed for this SLR. The selected studies from each continent were carried out through purposive sampling, ensuring that each study demonstrated relevance, validity, and appropriateness with the topic.

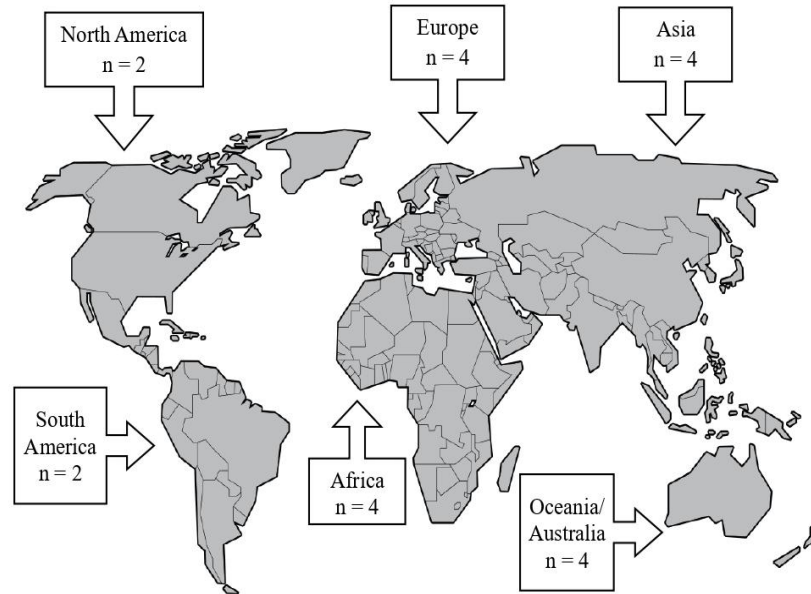


Figure 2. Number of journal articles per country.

Table 2 presents the 10 selected recent studies from Google Scholar that explore the different motivation theories in teaching ESL in a global context. Across the different countries, the studies revealed that learners’ motivation is influenced by various factors such as psychological, cultural, and instructional. Most studies, such as those by Li and Tsung (2025), Wadas et al. (2024), and Ebn-Abbasi et al. (2022) – utilized L2MSS by assessing factors such as the Ideal L2 Self and the learners’ envisioned identities as future English users. Conclusively, studies like those from Yao et al. (2024) and Lawal et al. (2025) emphasize a deeper understanding of how different motivation theories continue to evolve, develop, and adapt to modern demands, by allowing valuable insights for improvement in ESL instruction and helping to enhance both learners’ intrinsic and extrinsic motivation across global contexts.

Table 2. Data extracted form for included studies obtained from Google Scholar.

Author/s & Title	Purpose of the Study	Findings
Ndu, O. G., & Makeleni, S. (2025). High School ESL Teachers’ Narratives on Differentiated Instruction: A Case of South African Selected Schools	Examines high school ESL teachers’ narratives on differentiated instruction.	Revealed that some teachers understood the approach and narrated its effectiveness, while some teachers misconceived DI as individualized instruction and inclusive education.
	Teachers’ narratives on the implementation of differentiated instruction and its effectiveness in the academic development of learners have been emphasized.	Similarly, others preferred the traditional method and maintained that differentiated instruction implementation is easier said than practiced where there are diverse learners.
Lawal, O. et al. (2025). Motivation and Attitude in L2 Learning of Students of English and Literary Studies in Selected Universities in Southwestern Nigeria	Examine factors affecting the motivation and attitudes of students to learning, discuss the role of technology in shaping motivation and attitude towards English language learning.	Students are moderately motivated and disposed to L2 learning due to financial incapacity and other factors; social media involvement, etc. hinder students’ motivation and attitude; and that monthly stipend/bursary is a viable strategy to motivate students. Government and university stakeholders should embrace technology-based learning and its



		adoption in the universities to foster positive motivation and attitude in L2 learners.
Kirkpatrick, R., et al. (2024). An investigation into the motivation and attitudes of Japanese students toward learning English: A case of elementary and junior high school students	<p>Explores Japanese students' attitudes towards learning English.</p> <hr/> <p>Examines the interplay between attitudes and academic motivation from Japanese students' perspectives.</p>	<p>The study outcomes disclosed that almost all participants had positive attitudes toward learning English.</p> <hr/> <p>The results also demonstrated that Japanese students perceived personal attitudes to be highly influential in learning motivation.</p>
Hennebry-Leung, M., & Lamb, M. (2024). Language Learning Motivation in Diverse Educational Contexts	<p>Explores language learning motivation and engagement in diverse educational contexts, with a focus on school-aged learners and the role of teachers in fostering motivation.</p> <hr/> <p>Aims to deepen understanding of how instructional settings, learner experiences, and teaching practices influence the development of learners' L2 selves and their motivation to learn languages.</p>	<p>The actual L2 self plays a critical role in shaping learners' ideal and ought-to L2 selves, with competence-related experiences and self-efficacy significantly influencing motivation.</p> <hr/> <p>Instructional settings and teacher-student interactions were identified as key factors in fostering positive self-perceptions, which support motivation and reduce demotivation among students.</p>
Li, J., & Tsung, L. (2025). Positive and Negative Emotions of Chinese as a Second Language Learners and the Influencing Factors	<p>Aims to scrutinize Chinese as a second language (CSL) learners' motivational factors from the perspectives of selves and contexts.</p> <hr/> <p>Leveraging the concepts of the ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self from L2MSS, the anti-ought-to-L2 self.</p>	<p>The ideal L2 self, ought-to L2 self, pedagogical influence and cultural interest were effective in predicting individuals' intended learning effort.</p> <hr/> <p>Offers CSL instructors' pedagogical implications for developing targeted teaching strategies and promoting motivations among students from distinct educational and socio-economic backgrounds.</p>
Wadas, M. et al. (2024). Going above and beyond: Motivations of L2 German learners to (dis)continue language study	<p>Examines whether L2MSS facets differ between students intending to continue (or discontinue) learning German past the language requirement and whether any relationship exists between the different selves within the L2MSS, students' L2 Learning Experience (L2E), and their Willingness to Communicate (WTC). Discussion of recent developments, namely MALL (mobile-assisted language learning) and RALL (robot-assisted language learning)</p>	<p>Multiple regression analyses predicted a positive effect of the Ideal Self on ratings of both L2E and WTC.</p> <hr/> <p>Qualitative analysis revealed themes of <i>fear and positive attitudes toward the German language/culture</i> among learners intending to continue German study, while non-continuers predominantly mentioned the <i>language requirement</i>.</p>
Caruso, M., & Frascini, N. (2024). 2 Vision and Motivation of Adolescent Language Learners in Australia	<p>The research applied Q-methodology to analyze how adolescents perceive their vision and motivation in learning languages. It sought to map common motivational profiles in ESL contexts.</p>	<p>Three dominant motivational patterns emerged: identity-driven, performance-oriented, and socially integrative.</p> <hr/> <p>Identity-driven learners showed the most persistence. The findings highlight the value of personalized vision-building approaches.</p>
Philpott, A., & Son, J. (2022). Leaderboards in an EFL course: Student performance and motivation.	<p>Investigated the use of leaderboards in an English as a foreign language (EFL) course at a Japanese university.</p>	<p>The participants' focus on the extrinsic rewards used by the leaderboard encouraged performance up to the reward threshold but once the threshold had been achieved, performance ceased.</p> <hr/> <p>The leaderboard's use of points, rank, and forced social comparison to control behavior resulted in</p>



<p>Ebn-Abbasi, F. et al. (2022). The Role of L2 Motivational Self System and Grit in EFL Learners' WTC: A Study of Public School vs. Private English Language Institute Learners.</p>	<p>Given the pivotal role of communication in L2 learning, researchers have set out to identify factors that may influence L2 WTC. An investigate the role of the L2MSS and grit in learners' L2 WTC in two different educational settings: public schools and private language institutes.</p>	<p>the participants' internally leaning extrinsic motivation shifting to externally grounded extrinsic motivation, undermining intrinsic FL motivation more than supporting it. The results revealed a stronger ILS, POE, and a higher level of WTC among language institute learners. In contrast, public school students showed stronger OLS and lower levels of WTC. Moreover, unlike its counterpart, COI did not display a significant correlation or predictive power with/over L2 WTC in either context. The findings suggest that low levels of ILS and lack of POE can lead to lower levels of L2 WTC.</p>
<p>Yu, X. et al. (2022). Language Learning Motivation and Burnout Among EFL Undergraduates: The Moderating Role of Maladaptive Emotion Regulation Strategies</p>	<p>Explores the association between motivation and burnout among EFL learners and whether maladaptive emotion regulation strategies (ERS) could moderate their association.</p>	<p>Correlational and bootstrapped moderation analysis found that motivation and maladaptive ERS were significantly correlated with burnout in opposite directions and the correlation between motivation and burnout was significantly influenced by students' use of two maladaptive ERS (avoiding and venting). The more frequently students chose to avoid and vent unpleasant feelings, the protective role of motivation on burnout was weaker.</p>

Table 3 presents a comprehensive overview of 10 selected recent studies from the ERIC that evaluate various motivation theories in teaching ESL and EFL across global settings. Research from Vickov and Jakupčević (2025), Shurovi et al. (2025), and Lao (2020) highlights the correlation of cognitive, emotional, and social factors in influencing the learners' motivation to engage and perform in a learning environment. Moreover, the integration of innovation and holistic frameworks to improve both language proficiency and motivation has been balanced to ensure that the growth and development of the learners are prominent and acknowledged. Furthermore, it reflects how language education was given importance due to the global effort to strengthen and comprehend the different motivational processes by contributing empirical evidence that would show continuous advancement of the theories and their relevance to the diverse and multifaceted ESL learning environments.

Table 4. Data extracted form for included studies obtained from ERIC.

Author/s & Title	Purpose of the Study	Findings
<p>Vickov, G., & Jakupčević, E. (2025). Primary School Children's Motivation for EFL Writing: The Case of Eighth-Graders</p>	<p>Explore the motivation of Croatian eighth-grade primary school students for writing in EFL, focusing on intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors</p> <p>Examine the relationship between students' EFL writing motivation and parental support to provide insights for enhancing EFL writing instruction and engagement.</p>	<p>Eighth-graders exhibit a positive motivational profile toward EFL writing, driven by intrinsic factors such as enjoyment, self-competence, and ease of writing, as well as extrinsic factors like the perceived value of English for future opportunities and global communication. The findings also revealed limited additional EFL writing practice at home and relatively low parental support, which were not consistently associated with higher motivation levels.</p>
<p>Shurovi, M. et al. (2025). Modelling the Nexus Between Tertiary Learners' Socioeconomic Background, Social Cognitive Motivation and Achievement-Oriented Behavior</p>	<p>Examine the influence of social factors and motivational beliefs on tertiary EFL learners' approach and avoidance motivation.</p> <p>Aims to shed light on how contextual factors interact with the learners' social cognitive motivational beliefs, such as task value and self-efficacy, to influence their goal-oriented behavior.</p>	<p>Revealed that the mother's educational level and school location significantly influenced learners' self-efficacy, which in turn had a large impact on their approach motivation. The father's educational level was found to be a significant predictor of task value but did not directly influence the learners' approach or avoidance motivation.</p>
<p>Yao, C. et al. (2024). Enhancing ESL Learners'</p>	<p>Explore how integrating situated learning (SL) and task-based language teaching</p>	<p>Integrating SL and TBLT effectively enhanced ESL learners' executive function and cognitive</p>



<p>Executive Function And Cognitive Ability: A Hybrid Approach Of Situated Learning And Task-Based Language Teaching</p>	<p>(TBLT) can enhance ESL learners' executive function (EF) and cognitive ability (CA). Aims to design and evaluate a hybrid instructional framework that combines the contextual authenticity of SL with the task-oriented structure of TBLT to improve learners' engagement and learning outcomes.</p>	<p>ability by promoting active engagement in authentic communication tasks. Indicated that this hybrid approach fostered greater learner motivation, language proficiency, and problem-solving skills, highlighting its potential for improving overall ESL learning outcomes.</p>
<p>Yilmaz, O., & Sahan, G. (2023). A Study on the Motivation Levels and Problems in the language Learning for the Higher Education Learners</p>	<p>Examine the motivation levels of university students learning a foreign language and to identify the challenges they face during the learning process. Seeks to propose practical solutions to enhance learners' motivation and improve the effectiveness of language education in higher education settings.</p>	<p>University students generally have high motivation to learn a foreign language, driven by factors such as the desire to live abroad, cultural enrichment, personal development, and interest in new technologies. Conversely, motivation is negatively affected by challenges like difficult grammar, feelings of inadequacy, lack of encouragement, and ineffective teaching methods.</p>
<p>Stewart, G. (2023). Increasing L2 Learners' Well-Being: An EMPATHICS Intervention Study</p>	<p>Aims to implement an intervention based on Oxford's (2016) EMPATHICS framework to enhance L2 learners' well-being in English-language classes. To explore the impact of reflective and action-based tactics on improving learners' emotional intelligence, motivation, and overall language-learning experience.</p>	<p>The intervention positively impacted many learners, improving their emotional intelligence, reducing anxiety, and increasing motivation. Although, the effectiveness varied among individuals, with some learners reporting challenges or limited impact due to personal effort and understanding.</p>
<p>Ogunyemi, K. O. (2022). Class Size and Self-Esteem as Determinants of Student Learning Outcomes in Essay Writing</p>	<p>To examine how class size and self-esteem influence students' achievement and attitudes toward English essay writing. To determine whether smaller classes and higher self-esteem levels contribute to better learning outcomes among secondary school students.</p>	<p>Class size significantly affected students' achievement in essay writing, with those in smaller classes performing better than those in larger ones. Also, self-esteem showed no significant effect on students' achievement or attitude toward essay writing.</p>
<p>Khan, S. S., & Takkac, M. (2021). Motivational Factors for Learning English as a Second Language Acquisition in Canada. Higher Education Studie</p>	<p>Identify and analyze the motivational factors influencing new immigrants in Canada to learn ESL. Assess how variables such as age, gender, education, and length of stay in Canada relate to different types of motivation for English language acquisition.</p>	<p>The most significant motivational factors for learning English among new immigrants were the desire for career and economic advancement and the desire to communicate and affiliate with foreigners. Motivation levels varied according to demographic characteristics, with factors such as age, gender, education, and time in Canada influencing learners' motivations differently.</p>
<p>Salie, M. et al. (2020). Case Study of IsiXhosa-Speaking Foundation Phase Learners who Experience Barriers to Learning in an English-Medium Disadvantaged Western Cape School</p>	<p>Investigate the barriers to learning experienced by isiXhosa-speaking Foundation Phase learners in English-medium classrooms in a disadvantaged Western Cape school. Aims to understand how language, social, and parental factors influenced their educational performance and engagement.</p>	<p>IsiXhosa-speaking learners faced multiple barriers to learning, including limited English proficiency, psychological and social anxiety, and minimal parental support. Using English as the language of instruction in early education created significant learning challenges for these learners, emphasizing the need for stronger parental involvement and language support strategies.</p>
<p>Lao, T. L. (2020). The Relationship Between ESL Learners' Motivation, WTC, Perceived Competence, and Frequency Of L2</p>	<p>Examine the relationships among adult ESL learners' motivation, WTC, perceived competence, and frequency of second language (L2) use. To determine whether these affective factors significantly predict how</p>	<p>Motivation and WTC were significant predictors of the frequency of L2 use, while perceived competence was not. Perceived competence was found to indirectly influence L2 use through its strong effect on</p>



Use	frequently learners engage in L2 communication.	learners' WTC.
Imsa-ard, P. (2020). Motivation and Attitudes Towards English Language Learning in Thailand: A Large-scale Survey of Secondary School Students	Investigate the motivation and attitudes of Thai EFL secondary school students toward learning English. Identify the key factors influencing learners' enthusiasm and perceptions of English language education across Thailand.	Thai EFL students were highly motivated to learn English, primarily for educational and professional purposes. Many expressed anxiety when speaking English and felt that classroom instruction was often exam-oriented and disconnected from real-life communication.

Table 4 shows the data of the final twenty (20) studies taken from two major academic databases – Google Scholar and ERIC. An initial search yielded 100 studies from Google Scholar and 120 studies from ERIC. After the inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied, 40 studies from ERIC and 30 studies from Google Scholar were retained. The selected studies were conducted between 2020 and 2025. Finally, 10 studies from each database, amounting to 20 studies, were considered to be relevant and selected for the final analysis to ensure and provide a structured and organized approach.

Table 4. Data gathered from the screening of studies.

Database	Frequency results	Shown filtered studies	Final selected studies
Google Scholar	100	30	10
ERIC	120	40	10

The studies show that motivation theories significantly influence teaching practices and learning outcomes.

Studies that utilized L2MSS highlight the varied strategies that support identity development. Caruso and Frascini (2024) show that young adults who visualize themselves as successful English users demonstrate stronger classroom interaction and engagement. The development of Ideal L2 Self through writing and journals encourages learners to improve both confidence and performance.

Stewart (2023) presents that strategies anchored on the SDT through EMPATHICS well-being model improve cognitive, emotional, and social factors. Different classroom activities provide opportunities for learners to interact and engage in collaborative learning and constructive feedback that shows positive learning outcomes.

EVT prominently shows that addressing learners' perspectives on the effectiveness of the English language. Khan and Takkac (2021) validate that immigrant learners in Canada who acknowledge the importance of English for career and communication advancement show increased engagement. Learners who perceive the significance of task value are more dedicated to communicating, accomplishing tasks, and persisting through challenges.

The selected 20 studies propose a set of strategies for improving ESL motivation. These strategies integrate identity development, independence, pedagogical, and technological empowerment.

These strategies align with L2MSS as envisioned tasks, reflective journals, and goal settings help learners to develop a positive perspective of themselves as proficient English users. Studies above consistently present that learners with stronger Ideal L2 Selves manifest increased commitment to long-term motivation through communication.

Providing SDT-aligned techniques through peer collaboration, positive decisiveness, and a supported student-centered environment creates opportunities to develop connection and competence, leading to a well-cultivated intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Contextualized learning and performance-based teaching (as shown in Yao et al., 2024) develop learners' engagement by associating language with real-world situations. Authentic experiences enhance relevance and sustain motivation through communication, cultural activities, and project-based activities.

Digital tools, gamification, and interactive online platforms that were described above provide the needed support for technology as a positive reinforcement. Increased interaction and motivation through these methods still need a balanced independence and intrinsic importance, as neglecting extrinsic objectives could undermine long-term motivation.

4. Discussion



Based on the analyzed and assessed 20 selected studies, this discussion explores how the different motivation theories in teaching ESL influence the development and application of English as a language and became one of the global lingua franca over the years. In fact, Motivation has been one of the central components recognized in learning a second language (English), and current research continues to explore its intricate nature. Early perspectives of learners distinguished people who try to learn a new language for personal integration into the community and external benefits, such as academic growth or employment. Over time, understanding how intrinsic and extrinsic factors, and social context, encompass the evolution that influences learners' experiences. Recent studies also show that motivation is not a fixed trait, but a multifaceted process that influences the overall atmosphere in a classroom environment, and learners' perceptions (Gardner, 1985). Besides, when learners can visualize themselves as "identities" capable of being called as proficient English users, it links motivation as an important framework that is grounded in the very essence of personal perceptiveness. Participating in global communities to communicate effectively helps to sustain effort and support identity formation with the concept of transforming language in a classroom or learning environment into a domain that allows students to connect linguistic development with personal growth over time. The notion of learning "Ideal L2 Self" has become a feature that define modern motivation research (Dornyei, 2009). Recent evaluations integrate principles from general psychological theories that implement autonomy and relatedness are necessary for learners' motivation, wherein experiences help to control learning, success rate, and build supportive relationships can influence the development of intrinsic motivation. These principles could be achieved through student-centered, collaborative approaches that encourage both academic and emotional engagement as external motivation. Self-determination tends to be a key factor in understanding human behavior, with a profound influence on second language motivation research (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

In the same vein, teaching strategies that employ different motivational theories that prioritize socialization, autonomy, and competence can help the classroom or learning environment flourish naturally. Creating activities that allow independence, encouraging interaction, and providing positive feedback sustain the development of a space wherein language experimentation is safe and supported. These conditions provide more opportunity for learners to engage more and participate meaningfully in different tasks that consistently show that autonomy-supported teaching and learning foster deeper understanding and intrinsic and external motivation (Reeve & Cheon, 2021). Instructional and identity-oriented approaches can influence teaching strategies that enable learners to envision themselves as competent English users by connecting real-life experiences with language learning through reflective writing and project-based assessment that provides academic or professional experience. When learners perceive that language learning could help with personal growth, higher persistence and consistent efforts were cultivated among themselves, wherein their motivation becomes more resilient and accountable for their actions (Al-Hoorie, 2018). Motivational theories that emphasize the need for success and task value influence the development of pedagogical decisions. It offers the opportunity to help learners build confidence through scaffolding, attainable goals, and contextualized learning materials that foster a sense of achievement and independence. Relating real-life experiences as examples demonstrates greater engagement and sustained attention of learners who practice to not only improve their academic performance, but also enhance their sense of satisfaction and competence in learning English as a new medium in teaching (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020).

A widely supported strategy to help enhance motivation is to promote and support autonomy and independence inside a classroom or learning environment, wherein such a concept allows learners to make decisions of their own and have a sense of ownership over their learning process. Explaining how each task and its input are relevant for learners to perceive instructions as authentic and meaningful rather than being imposed. Such environment consistently sustained and supported leads to higher engagement and perseverance to learn ESL (Noels et al., 2020). Another effective approach involves creating classroom activities that focus on self-reflection, objectives, and vision-building, such as diaries, narratives, and reports that guide learners in creating and maintaining a strong, positive representation of successful English users. The visualized success strengthens the resolve of learners to continue challenging themselves to improve and overcome external pressures to effectively transform intrinsic and external motivation and integrate resiliency and perseverance when learning the English language (Qiangfu et al., 2025). Competence and



value-based strategies continue to be one of the vital components in sustaining motivation, wherein teachers provide learners with structured feedback, incremental tasks, and celebration of small achievements that would develop self-efficacy and learning engagement within a classroom or learning environment. By incorporating authentic and real-life experiences in teaching English, it develops intellectual and emotional pursuit in learning. The combination of confidence-building and insightful interaction influences significant improvement in language learning outcomes (Ushioda, 2021). Moreover, fostering a supportive and inclusive learning atmosphere where learners feel psychologically safe to express ideas and make mistakes further reinforces motivation and sustained participation. When autonomy, self-reflection, competence development, and authentic engagement are intentionally integrated, they create a holistic motivational framework that empowers learners to take long-term ownership of their English language learning journey.

5. Conclusions

The review of motivation theories in teaching ESL from 2020 to 2025 reveals that motivation is still a crucial factor of learners' engagement, perseverance, and overall achievement. Consistently emphasizing the relevance of frameworks such as the SDT, the L2 Motivational Self System, and the EVT in elaborating how learners could sustain interest and effort by integrating intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in a learning environment that empowers both psychological and academic contexts. These empirical findings underscore motivation as situational and dynamic, evolving through learners' engagements, social and emotional experiences, and personal perceptions of the true meaning by learning the English language.

Furthermore, the integration of technology in the overall learning process reflects a global trend towards student-centered instruction through individualized learning tasks, autonomous practices. Motivational factors have become more dependent on digital innovation and socio-cultural context, which illustrates diverse and multifaceted teaching strategies to help learners experience firsthand being competent, connected, and goal-oriented. Learners demonstrate stronger, sustained resilience and engagement by utilizing motivation as a source of strength and power. Motivation is not only a psychological construct, but a pedagogical framework that influences how English is learned, taught, and appreciated in the modern world.

Based on the findings of this SLR, it is recommended that ESL teachers and the whole academe incorporate motivational strategies or principles into instructional planning and classroom decorum. Learning environments should emphasize independence, competence, and interaction by creating varied activities that encompass the concepts of meaningful choices and clear and constructive feedback that promote collaborative learning. Teachers should employ varied strategies that would develop successful visualization of learners' identities by integrating these approaches – a motivationally rich learning environment would be created wherein autonomous learning is encouraged and sustained enthusiasm for language development would be prominent.

For future researchers, it is encouraged to explore motivation as an evolving nature from interdisciplinary and cross-cultural contexts and document its progress in the digital age. Mixed-method and progressive studies could deepen the understanding and comprehension of how motivational approaches could shift over time and across diverse populations. Also, exploring the impact of emerging technologies on fostering engagement and identity development in ESL contexts globally. Strengthening and sustaining the interdependence and interrelation between motivational theory and classroom decorum will improve the quality and inclusivity of learning ESL.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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