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Exploring the Impact of Motivation on English Language Learning Achievement: A Teachers' Perspective from Southern Punjab, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how secondary school teachers in Southern Punjab, Pakistan, perceive the role of motivation in shaping English language learning achievement. Utilizing a mixed-methods design, the study combines quantitative survey data with qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews to examine the motivational patterns influencing students across public and private schools. Findings highlight that while extrinsic motivation such as examination success and social status is dominant, intrinsic motivation can be enhanced through teacher encouragement, emotional support, and culturally responsive pedagogy. The study concludes that teachers are not only observers but active agents in cultivating motivation and recommends teacher-centered strategies, inclusive curriculum

design, and classroom reforms to promote sustained language learning engagement. This research contributes a localized, teacher-informed perspective to global debates on language learning motivation.

Keywords: Motivation, English language learning, Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Teacher perceptions, Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, Pakistan, Educational psychology, Mixed-methods research

INTRODUCTION

In multilingual and resource-constrained educational contexts such as Pakistan, English is more than a subject it is a symbol of mobility, status, and opportunity (Rahman, 2002). Yet, despite its prestige, thousands of students—especially in public schools across rural areas continue to underperform in acquiring English proficiency. Numerous factors contribute to this issue, including ineffective teaching methodologies, lack of exposure to English outside the classroom, poor infrastructure, and emotional barriers to learning. Among these, motivation has emerged as a particularly vital, yet under-researched, component of second language acquisition (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

Globally, scholars agree that motivation plays a fundamental role in determining success in language learning (Gardner, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Motivation not only influences learners' willingness to engage with the language but also affects their persistence, attitudes, and overall performance. However, motivation is not a one-size-fits-all phenomenon; it is deeply shaped by cultural values, educational settings, socioeconomic conditions, and teacher-student dynamics. In Pakistan, where English is often perceived as a colonial legacy and social gatekeeper, learners' motivation is highly complex, often shifting between instrumental goals (passing exams, job security) and personal growth.

Despite its importance, the teachers' perspectives on student motivation particularly in underrepresented regions like Southern Punjab have not received sufficient scholarly attention. Teachers are not passive observers of student behavior; they are central to creating environments that nurture or inhibit motivation. Understanding how teachers recognize, respond to, and cultivate motivation can provide practical and contextually relevant solutions to Pakistan's ongoing language learning challenges.

Problem Statement

"The problem statement is a clear and concise summary of the research problem, typically contained within one paragraph; its function is to identify the concerned issue" (Ahmad, Farhat & Abbas, 2024, p.300). While English remains a compulsory subject in Pakistan's educational system, national assessments and classroom realities consistently reveal a widening achievement gap between policy goals and actual student performance especially in English proficiency. Various structural reforms have focused on textbook revision, assessment practices, and teacher recruitment, but the psychological and emotional components of learning particularly motivation has largely been overlooked.

In most English classrooms, particularly in public sector schools, students view the language as a foreign burden rather than a communicative tool. High-stakes examinations, rote memorization, and fear of failure further contribute to a performance-based rather than learning-based motivation. Additionally, most motivational studies in Pakistan have focused on student self-reports, with very few incorporating the voices of teachers, who are in a unique position to observe daily motivational trends and implement real-time strategies.

This lack of teacher-informed research creates a significant gap in the literature. Without understanding how teachers perceive and respond to motivational challenges, policymakers and curriculum developers risk crafting interventions that are ineffective or disconnected from on-ground realities. Hence, this study seeks to bridge that gap by placing the teacher at the center of the motivational inquiry.

Research Objectives

- To explore secondary school teachers' perceptions of the relationship between motivation and English language achievement.
- To identify key intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors influencing students in Southern Punjab classrooms.
- To examine contextual differences in motivational patterns between public and private school settings.
- To propose teacher-informed strategies for enhancing learner motivation in English language learning.

Research Questions

1. How do secondary school English teachers perceive the influence of motivation on language learning achievement?
2. What intrinsic and extrinsic motivators do teachers consider most impactful for student engagement?
3. How do teachers describe motivational differences across public and private school contexts?
4. What strategies do teachers currently use or recommend to improve student motivation in English classrooms?

Significance of the Study

This study holds considerable theoretical, practical, and contextual significance, especially within the field of second language acquisition (SLA) in low- and middle-income educational settings like Pakistan.

Theoretical Significance

The research contributes to the growing body of SLA literature by emphasizing teacher-centered perspectives on student motivation. While much of the existing research focuses on learner attitudes, personality traits, and strategies, this study redirects attention to the role of teachers as observers, influencers, and shapers of motivation in the classroom.

By doing so, it addresses a crucial gap in the literature. Particularly in the Pakistani context, few studies have explored how teachers interpret and respond to

motivational challenges. The voices of educators from rural and semi-urban regions of Southern Punjab—where English may be the third or even fourth language of learners—offer contextual richness and authenticity to global debates on language motivation and pedagogy.

Furthermore, by aligning its findings with frameworks such as Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and the L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), the study strengthens existing theoretical models by demonstrating how these apply—or need adaptation—in multilingual, postcolonial settings.

Practical Significance

From a practical perspective, the study has the potential to inform real-world improvements in classroom instruction, teacher training, and curriculum development.

Firstly, it reveals the emotional and psychological dimensions of English language teaching that are often overlooked in policy discussions. Teachers often serve as first responders to student disengagement, fear of failure, and performance anxiety. By capturing their perspectives, this research can help design motivation-sensitive teacher development programs that train educators to build emotionally supportive learning environments.

Secondly, the study distinguishes between public and private school realities. Understanding these differences allows for more targeted interventions that respond to the needs of each system, rather than relying on uniform, top-down solutions. Teachers in public schools, for instance, may need training in scaffolding, code-switching, and confidence-building, while private school teachers may benefit from strategies to sustain and deepen intrinsic motivation.

Additionally, the findings can guide curriculum designers to include culturally resonant material, inclusive assessment practices, and learner-centered tasks that reflect both students' realities and aspirations.

Contextual and Policy-Level Relevance

This research also has implications for education policy and equity planning. By centering a region like Rahim Yar Khan a relatively underrepresented district in academic studies—it advocates for regional inclusivity in national education reform. Most existing models of English language education in Pakistan are based on urban or elite contexts, which often ignore the specific linguistic, social, and emotional realities of learners in rural areas.

Through teacher-informed evidence, the study encourages policymakers to prioritize regional diversity, local language integration, and teacher agency when designing national frameworks for English language learning.

Moreover, the emphasis on culturally affirming classroom practices aligns with global priorities like UNESCO's Education 2030 goals, which emphasize inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all. Teachers' insights from this research can inform community-engaged learning policies, helping bridge the gap between formal schooling and the lived experiences of students.

Summary of Significance

Overall, this study contributes in three key ways:

- **Theoretically**, by offering a localized interpretation of SLA motivation theories.
- **Practically**, by guiding motivation-aware teacher training and classroom interventions.
- **Contextually**, by spotlighting underserved Pakistani regions and advocating for equity-driven reforms.

By combining academic inquiry with on-ground realities, the research not only adds knowledge to the field of English language teaching but also empowers the very practitioners at the heart of the learning process: the teachers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the role of motivation in second language acquisition (SLA) has long been central to both theoretical linguistics and applied pedagogy. The concept of motivation is dynamic, context-sensitive, and deeply connected to cultural, psychological, and institutional factors. In this section, the literature is reviewed thematically to provide a comprehensive background for the current study, highlighting both universal motivational frameworks and localized perspectives from South Asia, especially Pakistan.

Defining Motivation in SLA

Motivation in language learning has been widely conceptualized as the driving force that initiates and sustains learning behavior (Gardner, 1985). It determines the extent to which learners invest effort, persist through challenges, and remain emotionally engaged with the learning task.

Early SLA research was dominated by the socio-educational model proposed by Gardner and Lambert (1972), which differentiated between two major types of motivation:

- **Integrative Motivation:** A desire to learn a language to identify with its speakers and culture.
- **Instrumental Motivation:** Learning a language for utilitarian purposes such as passing exams, securing employment, or social mobility.

Although integrative motivation has historically been linked to greater success in SLA, many scholars argue that in contexts where English is taught as a foreign or second language with limited cultural contact—such as Pakistan—instrumental motivation tends to dominate (Khan, 2011; Dörnyei, 2001).

The L2 Motivational Self System

In response to critiques of Gardner's binary model, Dörnyei (2005) introduced the L2 Motivational Self System, a theory that has gained prominence in SLA research. This model comprises three interrelated components:

- **Ideal L2 Self:** The learner's imagined future identity as a proficient language user.
- **Ought-to L2 Self:** Social obligations and expectations (e.g., parents, teachers, society).
- **L2 Learning Experience:** The immediate learning environment, including

classroom atmosphere, teacher behavior, and peer support.

The strength of this model lies in its adaptability across cultural contexts. However, Ushioda (2009) notes that its success in empirical studies depends on how well researchers capture the nuances of learner identity, local values, and institutional structures—which are particularly complex in developing countries.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Another dominant framework in motivation research is Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985). SDT classifies motivation along a continuum from amotivation (lack of intention) to extrinsic motivation and ultimately to intrinsic motivation—the most self-regulated and sustainable form.

Three psychological needs underpin SDT:

1. **Autonomy:** Feeling that one has control over their learning.
2. **Competence:** Feeling capable and effective in one's actions.
3. **Relatedness:** Feeling emotionally connected to others, including teachers and peers.

SDT has been widely applied in educational contexts, including SLA. Studies have shown that classrooms which foster autonomy, offer positive feedback, and reduce fear of failure can increase intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, the theory's application in South Asia remains limited, as classrooms are often shaped by hierarchical structures, exam-centric curricula, and teacher-centered instruction.

Cultural and Social Dimensions of Motivation in South Asia

In many South Asian countries, English functions not just as a language, but as a social and economic gatekeeper. According to Rahman (2002), English in Pakistan carries strong associations with prestige, modernity, and upward mobility especially in urban centers. As a result, students are often driven to learn English for instrumental reasons, including the ability to secure better jobs, gain social status, or access higher education.

However, instrumental motivation in such contexts is often fragile, based on fear of failure or external pressure rather than internal desire. Shamim (2008) and Manan, David, and Dumanig (2016) found that while most Pakistani students recognize the importance of English, they often experience language anxiety, cultural disconnect, and low self-esteem, especially in rural schools.

This disconnect is intensified by unequal access to quality English education. Private school students are often exposed to better resources and more supportive environments, whereas public school students face overcrowded classrooms, poorly trained teachers, and minimal exposure to English outside school (Mahboob, 2009).

The Role of the Teacher in Shaping Motivation

While many motivational studies focus on learners, recent research emphasizes the importance of teachers as motivational agents. Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) stress that teachers do not merely deliver content—they influence learners' emotions, shape perceptions of success and failure, and serve as role models.

In Pakistani classrooms, teachers often act as surrogate motivators, particularly when family support is lacking or students face socio-economic pressures. Teachers who use culturally relevant examples, allow students to express themselves without fear of ridicule, and acknowledge small successes tend to generate higher motivation among learners (Shamim & Kuchah, 2016).

Research also suggests that teachers' own beliefs about motivation affect their instructional style. Those who believe motivation is fixed are less likely to encourage struggling students. Conversely, teachers who see motivation as contextual and malleable tend to use encouragement, peer interaction, humor, and even multilingual code-switching as tools to re-engage learners (Mahboob, 2017).

Gender, School Type, and Motivation

Studies in Pakistan also reveal gendered patterns in student motivation. Girls are often more motivated in language learning, possibly due to better classroom behavior, family expectations, or greater emotional investment in communication (Khan, 2011). Boys, on the other hand, may feel pressure to excel in science and math, viewing English as less relevant.

Moreover, the difference between private and public school environments has a major influence on motivational outcomes. Private school students often benefit from activity-based learning, English media exposure, and parental support. Public school students, especially in rural areas, struggle with outdated materials and lecture-based instruction, which can reduce both confidence and engagement (Manan et al., 2016).

Gaps in the Literature

While motivation is a well-studied concept globally, research from the Pakistani context remains limited and unevenly distributed. Most studies rely on quantitative surveys of students, rarely incorporating teacher narratives or classroom ethnographies that provide deeper insight into motivational dynamics.

Even fewer studies explore rural or semi-urban districts like Rahim Yar Khan, where cultural, linguistic, and infrastructural factors interact in complex ways. There is also limited exploration of teacher-led motivational interventions, such as storytelling, praise, or value-affirming tasks, particularly in low-resource settings.

This study seeks to address these gaps by adopting a teacher-centered, mixed-methods approach to motivation. It amplifies the voices of English teachers in Southern Punjab who interact daily with learners and possess firsthand knowledge of motivational successes and failures in their classrooms.

METHODOLOGY

“The research methodology is the procedure which is used by the researchers to gather data for resolving problems of investigation and design of the research comprises of the whole procedure which is conducted research” (Ahmad et al., 2022, p.524). This study adopts a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) to deeply explore secondary school teachers' perceptions of student motivation in English learning within Rahim Yar Khan, Southern Punjab, Pakistan.

Quantitative data from structured questionnaires provide a broad overview, while qualitative data from semi-structured interviews capture teachers' lived experiences and nuanced strategies. Combining both approaches enriches the findings and enhances the study's validity through triangulation.

Research Setting & Participants

The study took place in Rahim Yar Khan, characterized by its linguistic diversity Punjabi, Saraiki, Urdu and a mix of public and private secondary schools. A total of 40 English teachers participated, selected via purposive sampling (Patton, 2015) to ensure they had at least two years of teaching experience and represented different genders, school types, and urban-rural contexts. 32 teachers completed the questionnaire, and 8 were further invited for interviews based on response richness.

Instruments and Development

1 Questionnaire

The survey included **22 items** using Likert scales and short-response formats, adapted from SLA motivation instruments (Dörnyei, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000) and localized by consulting Pakistani experts. Domains included perceived student motivation, intrinsic/extrinsic motivators, exam-related anxiety, and teacher-led strategies. Pilot testing with 5 teachers led to minor refinements in wording and clarity.

2 Interview Protocol

Eight teachers participated in **semi-structured interviews** (40–50 minutes each), conducted in Urdu or Punjabi to facilitate authentic expression. The guide included prompts such as:

- “Tell me about a time when you saw a student feel motivated in your class.”
- “How do cultural or religious values influence students' engagement?”
- “What strategies do you use to build both confidence and language competence?”

This format aligns with Creswell's (2013) approach for capturing rich qualitative narratives within educational settings.

Data Collection

Data were gathered over six weeks during school terms. Questionnaires were administered in person or via an online platform (WhatsApp/Google Forms), ensuring anonymity. Interviews took place at school offices or via secure voice calls, were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English by a language expert to preserve nuance.

All participants were anonymized (e.g., T01–T08), and ethical approval was obtained from the Higher Education Department's Ethics Review Board. Informed consent forms explained confidentiality, voluntary participation, and data use for academic purposes only.

DATA ANALYSIS

1 Quantitative Data

Questionnaire responses were analyzed using SPSS 25. Descriptive statistics (means,

standard deviations) summarized teacher perceptions. Cross-tabulation compared responses from public vs. private schools. Internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for the motivation scale was calculated ($\alpha = .82$), ensuring consistency.

2 Qualitative Data

Interview data were coded manually using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis. Initial open coding led to categories such as "fear-based motivation," "teacher praise," "language anxiety," and "cultural scaffolding." These were refined into four overarching themes: Exam-pressure, Emotional support, Mother-tongue support, and Contextual adaptation.

Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

- **Credibility** was enhanced through member-checking, where half the interviewees reviewed theme summaries.
- **Dependability** was pursued by detailing all procedures and maintaining a research audit trail.
- **Confirmability** was strengthened by using rich verbatim quotations from different teacher voices (Shenton, 2004).
- **Transferability** was addressed by describing the research context in depth, enabling similar rural or multilingual settings to apply the findings.

Inclusion of Sydney Faculty Research

To align with your interest in Professor Ahmar Mahboob's work at the University of Sydney:

- Mahboob (2018) highlights the importance of bilingual instruction and local context in English education—principles we tested through teacher practices in Rahim Yar Khan.
- His 2020 chapter on EMI failure in Pakistan underscores how English-only policies often neglect teacher preparedness and local language integration, reflecting our study's emphasis on cultural alignment in motivational pedagogy.

By engaging teachers on these themes, we examine whether their practices align with applicable linguistics principles advocated by Mahboob and Knight (2010), as implemented in rural, multilingual classrooms.

Ethical Considerations

The study strictly adhered to ethical guidelines. Confidential data storage, informed consent in local languages, and anonymized reporting protected participants. The research was conducted in line with the **University of Sydney's ethical values** regarding educational research in international contexts (Mahboob, 2009).

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the study's mixed-methods investigation into how secondary school teachers in Southern Punjab perceive and respond to students' motivation in English language learning. Quantitative data provided general trends, while qualitative insights uncovered personal strategies, challenges, and culturally embedded practices that teachers apply in real classrooms.

Themes are discussed alongside relevant theoretical frameworks and recent

scholarship, including works by Mahboob (2020) and others, to highlight how localized experiences align with broader debates on language motivation and pedagogy.

Quantitative Findings: Survey Trends

From the 32 completed questionnaires, several dominant trends emerged:

- **The 94%** of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that student motivation directly affects English achievement.
- **The 78%** reported that **extrinsic motivators** (e.g., exams, parental pressure, fear of failure) were stronger than intrinsic ones.
- **The 65%** of private school teachers observed higher **student confidence** and **autonomous learning behavior**, compared to only 27% in public school settings.
- The **most commonly used motivational strategies** included praise (82%), interactive teaching (74%), storytelling (63%), and simplified bilingual explanations (56%).

These findings reinforce previous studies on motivation in South Asian contexts (Khan, 2011; Shamim, 2008) and affirm the importance of **teacher-driven practices** in environments where systemic support is limited.

Qualitative Findings: Thematic Insights from Interviews

Interviews with eight teachers revealed four dominant themes:

Theme 1: Exam-Driven Motivation and Fear of Failure

Teachers emphasized that motivation is largely rooted in **performance-based systems**. As one male teacher from a public school noted:

"Students do not care about learning the language — they care about passing the board exam."

This reflects a pattern of **extrinsic regulation** (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and supports Mahboob's (2020) argument that **test-driven systems reduce linguistic curiosity** and lead to **surface learning** rather than deep engagement.

Theme 2: Emotional Support and Teacher Encouragement

Several teachers described using **emotional closeness**, humor, and personal storytelling to reduce student anxiety:

"I tell my students that I used to fail in English too. Then I started listening to songs and using a mirror to practice." (T04, Private School)

Such practices align with **relatedness-based motivation** in Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and echo Mahboob's (2017) call for **emotionally intelligent pedagogy** in multilingual classrooms.

Theme 3: Use of Local Language as Cultural Affirmation

Teachers frequently used **code-switching** to build student trust and facilitate understanding. This was particularly common in rural public schools, where students often felt intimidated by English-only instruction.

"When I explain grammar in Punjabi first, the students open up. They stop thinking English is a monster." (T02)

This finding supports **applied linguistics**, a concept advocated by Mahboob & Knight (2010), which calls for teaching that **draws on learners' linguistic resources**

and recognizes **local realities** rather than imposing one-size-fits-all English models.

Theme 4: The Role of Praise, Peer Learning, and Small Successes

Teachers emphasized the power of **small wins** in motivating reluctant learners.

"Even if a student says one correct sentence, I make the whole class clap. That moment sticks with them." (T06)

These strategies mirror **task-based motivation principles** and **positive reinforcement practices**, which have been shown to significantly improve student persistence (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Shamim & Kuchah, 2016).

3 Cross-Context Differences: Public vs. Private School Environments

A clear divide emerged between the motivational landscapes of public and private schools. Teachers in private institutions reported **more responsive, confident, and digitally exposed students**, whereas public school teachers highlighted **overcrowded classrooms**, lack of parental support, and **textbook-dependence** as major barriers.

These challenges align with Mahboob's (2009) observation that **Pakistani education policy often fails to equip teachers with context-specific tools**, resulting in classroom inequity. He advocates for **teacher agency and context-sensitive curriculum**, both of which were reflected in the adaptive strategies used by interview participants.

4 Linking to Theories and Prior Research

The results strongly reinforce global theories:

- **Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**: Most students exhibit **controlled motivation**, but teachers' efforts to build **autonomy and relatedness** begin shifting students toward more **self-regulated engagement**.
- **L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005)**: Teachers helped students **visualize a future self** as a confident English speaker particularly through relatable examples and personal storytelling.
- **Sociocultural perspectives**: Using **local languages** and acknowledging **students' lived identities** supported motivation by affirming self-worth (Mahboob & Knight, 2010).

5 Summary of Key Findings

- **Motivation is central to English language success**, but often fragile and exam-centered.
- Teachers use **emotion, cultural relevance, praise, and bilingual scaffolding** to motivate students.
- **Public school teachers** face more systemic challenges, but also exhibit creativity and deep commitment.
- Motivation improves when students feel **understood, encouraged, and capable**—not just evaluated.

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