# Tracing the Dynamic Evolution of Learning Motivation and Its Effect on Reading Persistence for English Second Language Learners

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**Abstract**
Motivation plays a pivotal role in English language acquisition, particularly by sustaining learners' engagement in reading activities, which are essential for developing language proficiency. Although motivation has been widely examined in educational research, limited attention has been given to its developmental trajectory over time and its impact on the persistence of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in reading tasks. This systematic literature review (SLR) aims to trace the evolving nature of learning motivation and evaluate its immediate influence on learners' sustained engagement with reading. Drawing on sixteen qualitative studies, the review investigates how motivational dynamics vary among learners and identifies the underlying psychological, emotional, and contextual factors that shape these changes. Emerging findings indicate that motivation substantially affects the extent to which students remain committed to reading, with persistence under motivational influence serving as a critical contributor to improvements in reading and overall language competence. Accordingly, the study advocates for instructional strategies that are responsive to fluctuating motivational states, thereby promoting prolonged learner engagement. This review offers valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and researchers seeking to enhance ESL learners' reading proficiency.

## Introduction

Scholars consistently emphasise the pivotal role of motivation in second language acquisition (SLA), particularly in the context of ESL. Motivation not only initiates the language learning process but also significantly influences learners' perseverance in sustaining their efforts. Empirical evidence suggests a strong association between motivation and an individual's capacity to absorb new knowledge, with existing research predominantly focused on examining the immediate factors shaping motivation (Hossain, 2024). However, insufficient attention has been directed towards the evolving nature of motivation and its influence on sustained learning behaviours, such as persistence in reading. Consequently, there remains a notable research gap concerning the development of motivation and its long-term implications for ESL learners' consistent engagement with reading.

Central to this investigation is the limited understanding of how fluctuations in learners' motivational levels affect their reading routines over time. Given the critical role of reading in SLA, consistent engagement

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with reading materials is essential for ESL learners' linguistic advancement. Although numerous studies have explored the determinants of motivation, relatively few have examined how these factors interact dynamically over time, particularly within ESL contexts (Hiver et al., 2022). Addressing this gap, the present study investigates motivational changes and their influence on reading persistence, a behaviour essential for language development. Motivation is a fundamental component in SLA, shaping learners' engagement levels, duration of effort, and overall outcomes. Among the various dimensions of language acquisition, reading is particularly significant as it enhances vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, and intercultural understanding (Kim, 2020). While maintaining reading persistence is crucial for ESL learners, the underlying factors that either support or hinder this persistence remain inadequately understood. Recent investigations have begun employing Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) to explore motivational processes in language learning. Unlike traditional static frameworks, DST conceptualises motivation as a dynamic, non-linear construct, shaped by the interplay of multiple influencing factors over time.

This study aims to examine the developmental trajectory of motivation throughout the ESL learning process and to assess its effect on learners' sustained reading engagement. Employing a structured SLR, the authors synthesised findings from sixteen qualitative studies to identify how psychological, emotional, and contextual elements contribute to motivational shifts. The study's practical value lies in its potential to inform pedagogical strategies and educational policies. A deeper understanding of how reading-related motivational patterns evolve enables educators, curriculum developers, and researchers to implement more responsive and effective interventions, thereby fostering sustained learner engagement and enhancing long-term language proficiency.

## Literature Review

### *Theories of Second Language Learning Motivation*

Motivation significantly influences various aspects of SLA, including learners' interest, commitment, and ultimate achievement. According to SDT, intrinsic motivation emerges when learners experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness, all of which are essential conditions for sustaining engagement and achieving long-term language learning success (Printer, 2023). When learners perceive that their educational experiences are meaningful and under their own control, they are more likely to exert sustained effort. In conjunction with SDT, EVT conceptualises motivation as being shaped by learners' expectations of success and their subjective evaluation of a task's relevance and worth (Hagenauer et al., 2023). Learners who believe they can accomplish language tasks, and who perceive those tasks as useful, engaging, or intellectually enriching, are more likely to maintain motivation in L2 learning. EVT also posits that as the perceived value of a task shifts, so too does motivation. From a sociocultural perspective, L2 motivation is framed as the product of dynamic interactions among learners' social environments, individual identities, and personal agency (Xu & Long, 2021). Learners derive motivational drive from participating in culturally meaningful practices and relationships, highlighting the critical role of social context in shaping and sustaining motivation.

### *The Dynamic Nature of Learning Motivation*

Conventional motivational theories often conceptualise motivation as a stable and linear construct; however, contemporary perspectives acknowledge its dynamic nature, influenced by a complex interplay of internal and external variables. In this context, DST offers a robust theoretical framework for understanding the variability and emergent properties of motivational change, characterising it as non-linear and contextually responsive (Kaplan et al., 2019). According to DST, motivation does not operate in isolation but is shaped through continuous interactions among cognitive, emotional, and situational factors, resulting in diverse motivational states rather than a fixed level of engagement. The application of DST to L2 motivation research highlights the fluidity of learners' motivational trajectories, which may fluctuate depending on their lived experiences, social interactions, and the relative difficulty of learning tasks. This perspective recognises that motivational expressions are temporally situated and idiosyncratic, advocating for longitudinal, context-sensitive data collection to more accurately capture the dynamic evolution of motivation in authentic learning environments.

### *Fluctuations and Changes in Motivation in Second Language Learning*

It is now widely acknowledged that motivation in L2 learning is a complex and evolving construct rather than a static phenomenon. Earlier research often portrayed motivation as relatively fixed, but more recent scholarship recognises its variability in response to both internal and external influences. Foundational work by Gardner (1985) introduced a model distinguishing between integrative and instrumental forms of motivation. However, subsequent investigations have shown that learners' motivation frequently shifts due to personal experiences, emotional states, and contextual changes, such as instructional methods and social interactions (Madsen, 2023). Both cognitive and affective elements—such as self-confidence and emotional connection to the language—play a significant role in shaping motivation, and these factors tend to evolve as

learners progress in their educational journey (Habrat, 2018). Additionally, task-related aspects, including the perceived challenge and relevance of learning activities, can either enhance or diminish motivation, thereby influencing learners' sustained interest. Recognising and responding to these motivational fluctuations is essential for fostering long-term engagement, particularly in reading, where persistence is closely linked to linguistic development.

## Characteristics of Motivation at Different Learning Stages

The degree of motivation experienced by ESL learners at various stages of their educational journey significantly affects both their level of engagement and their capacity for sustained effort (Chen et al., 2024). Over time, learners often become driven not only by intrinsic interests but also by the desire to achieve external success, whether in academic or professional contexts. For both adolescents and adults, motivational patterns are shaped by individual personality traits, levels of self-confidence, and the specific learning environment in which they operate (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017). Longitudinal research indicates that initial enthusiasm tends to decline, but motivation can be maintained through effective goal setting and the development of self-regulatory skills. The surrounding learning context, as well as the degree of autonomy afforded to learners, also plays a crucial role in influencing motivational levels and determining the most appropriate instructional approaches. As learners' motivation evolves, they tend to exhibit stronger persistence in reading and make more substantial progress in L2 acquisition. Distinct motivational orientations emerge at different phases of the L2 learning process. In the initial stage, learners are frequently motivated by performance outcomes, such as examination results or early academic achievements. During the intermediate phase, personal interests and the influence of significant social relationships become more prominent, encouraging deeper engagement (Ryan et al., 2021). As learners progress, those who cultivate internal motivational resources tend to demonstrate greater persistence and adaptability in their learning strategies.

## Definition and Influencing Factors of Reading Persistence

Persistent reading involves learners continually engaging with texts despite encountering repeated challenges. This sustained effort forms the basis of a reading habit, characterised by consistent reading behaviours, focused attention, and the ability to assimilate and apply newly acquired information over time. Reading perseverance is shaped not only by motivation but also by emotional states, cognitive strategies, and the presence of external support systems (Oxford & Bolaños-Sánchez, 2015). Motivation serves a pivotal function by initiating and directing effort, transforming learners' internal drive into purposeful reading behaviours that contribute meaningfully to the overall learning process.

## Relationship Between Motivation and Reading Persistence

Motivation plays a critical role in determining not only whether a learner initiates reading but also whether they continue engaging with it over time. Learners with high levels of motivation are typically more inclined to read extensively and to adopt a variety of strategies that enhance comprehension and retention (Toste et al., 2020). Among the various forms of motivation, intrinsic motivation has been shown to be more effective in sustaining reading engagement and promoting skill development than extrinsic incentives such as rewards (Barbre, 2024). When reading is driven primarily by external reinforcement, it often fails to support long-term habits. In contrast, deriving enjoyment from reading fosters a sense of accomplishment, which in turn encourages further reading and contributes to L2 proficiency. Conversely, low or absent motivation often leads to avoidance of reading, thereby impeding learners' progress in both critical reading skills and broader language development. Learners who find reading inherently interesting tend to demonstrate greater perseverance, as their motivation is rooted in a genuine desire to learn and succeed. This intrinsic drive fosters deeper engagement with content and enhances the likelihood of persistence when faced with difficulties. In the absence of sufficient motivation, however, learners are more susceptible to disengagement, frustration, and a subsequent decline in academic achievement and skill acquisition.

## The Specific Role of Motivation in Sustaining L2 Learners' Reading Behaviour

Sustaining reading engagement in an L2 context presents considerable challenges, as learners must navigate linguistic unfamiliarity, complex vocabulary, and intricate grammatical structures while simultaneously processing entire texts. Motivation plays a vital role in enabling learners to confront and overcome such difficulties throughout the language acquisition process. Research suggests that motivated learners are better equipped to manage these challenges, as they are more inclined to persist in developing their competencies despite obstacles (Erwin, 2024). To foster this motivation, educators are encouraged to provide opportunities for autonomous learning, incorporate enjoyable and meaningful content, and minimise classroom monotony. Such conditions create a supportive learning environment that enhances both student motivation and the effectiveness of reading instruction. In contrast, a lack of motivation can negatively affect reading behaviour. Learners with diminished motivation tend to choose less demanding texts, apply fewer reading strategies, and exhibit reduced cognitive flexibility. Highly motivated individuals, however, are more likely to actively seek and employ diverse reading techniques, which reinforces memory retention and

supports continued engagement. A strong commitment to learning enhances the likelihood of sustained reading efforts, both in the short and long term, as motivated learners are more prepared to tackle complex reading tasks and persevere through linguistic difficulties as they arise.

### Gap in Literature

Although extensive research has been conducted on motivation in language learning, limited understanding exists regarding its developmental trajectory across the lifespan of ESL learners and its significant impact on sustained reading engagement. Many studies overlook the dynamic nature of motivation, which is shaped by a combination of psychological and contextual influences. Furthermore, there remains a scarcity of longitudinal investigations into how motivation for reading affects learners' continued interest and commitment. This gap highlights the need for educators to adopt innovative pedagogical approaches that are sensitive to the evolving motivational states of learners.

## Research Methodology

### Research Design

The research employed in this study investigates how shifts in learning motivation influence ESL learners' persistence in reading. This approach is particularly suitable, as it provides insight into how emotional states, contextual conditions, and individual personality traits progressively shape motivation—an aspect less effectively captured through purely quantitative methodologies.

### Methodology

Through the application of the SLR methodology, this study systematically identified, examined, and synthesised findings from multiple longitudinal investigations focused on ESL learners and their reading motivation. The use of the SLR framework ensures a comprehensive, objective, and replicable process for collecting relevant literature, thereby facilitating an in-depth understanding of how motivational changes unfold over time.

### PRISMA Framework

To ensure transparency and methodological rigour, the review adheres to the PRISMA guidelines. Employing this framework enables the research team to systematically select, assess, and incorporate eligible studies, thereby ensuring that the review process remains replicable and dependable for future researchers.

### Data Collection

The identification of relevant studies for this review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA framework. The search strategy involved the use of prominent academic databases, including Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar, to locate peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers. A range of keyword combinations was employed, such as "learning motivation," "reading persistence," "English Second Language learners," and "longitudinal studies," to ensure a comprehensive search. An initial pool of 312 studies was retrieved. Following the removal of duplicate records (n = 42), the titles and abstracts of the remaining 270 studies were screened. From this, 190 articles were excluded due to irrelevance to the inclusion criteria. This process yielded 80 full-text articles for further evaluation. Of these, 44 were eliminated either for lacking a focus on motivation or for failing to meet the required criteria. Ultimately, 16 high-quality studies were selected for the final synthesis.

### Inclusion Criteria

This systematic review included only those studies that met predefined criteria for both relevance and scholarly rigour. Eligible studies were restricted to peer-reviewed English-language publications issued from 2015 onwards. The central focus of each selected study had to be on ESL learners, specifically examining the evolution of learning motivation over time and its influence on sustained reading engagement. Included research employed either longitudinal designs or in-depth qualitative interviews to track motivational changes. As a result, the reviewed studies provided rich insights into how motivation shapes individuals' continued commitment to reading.

### Exclusion Criteria

Studies that failed to align with the aims of this review or demonstrated methodological shortcomings were excluded from consideration. Research focusing solely on speaking or writing skills, without addressing reading persistence, was not included. Similarly, investigations that examined motivation exclusively through quantitative measures, without incorporating longitudinal or experiential dimensions, were omitted. Dissertations, technical reports, and grey literature were also excluded due to the lack of peer review, which could compromise reliability. To maintain consistency and applicability of findings, only English-language articles published within the specified timeframe were selected.
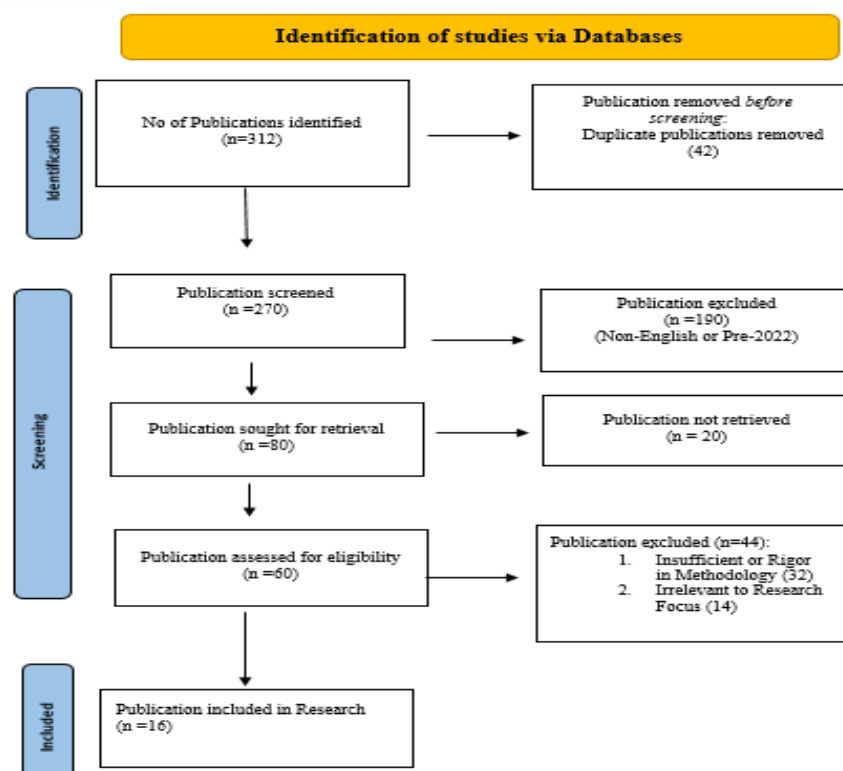
**Figure 1:** *Represents the Systematic Process for the Selection of Studies for Analysis*

*Data Analysis Process*

Thematic Analysis was employed to identify, examine, and report recurring patterns within the selected studies. This approach enabled the researcher to synthesise varied qualitative findings by linking data related to the factors sustaining students' reading engagement, thereby revealing consistent psychological, emotional, and situational influences.

*Ethical Considerations*

As this research was based solely on published studies, it did not require direct involvement of participants, thereby reducing potential ethical risks. Nonetheless, only studies that had received approval from relevant ethical review boards were considered. All sources were properly cited, and the review process was conducted with full respect for intellectual property rights, ensuring transparency, objectivity, and academic integrity throughout.

# Finding and Analysis

This section presents key findings from the systematic literature review, highlighting the progression of learning motivation over time and its influence on ESL learners' sustained engagement with reading. The analysis centres on three primary dimensions: the development of motivation across different learner stages, the interplay between emotional, psychological, and social factors in shaping motivational changes, and the association between motivation and active reading engagement. The reviewed studies consistently indicate that motivation is dynamic, influenced by individual experiences, learning environments, and the nature of external support. Inadequately structured reading practices may diminish learners' persistence and hinder their progress in second language acquisition.

*Selected Studies for Analysis*

The final analysis in this study included sixteen studies, as presented in Table 1. The themes derived from these studies aligned closely with the central focus of the research. The findings draw upon evidence of longitudinal shifts in motivation, comprehensive accounts of learners' reading behaviours, and data linking motivation to sustained reading engagement within ESL contexts. The analysis indicates that elements such as learner autonomy, self-efficacy, emotional stability, and consistent educational support contribute significantly to maintaining learners' interest in reading and enhancing their language development. Whereas, Table 2 presents the emergent themes alongside their corresponding descriptions.

**Table 1:** *SLR Studies for Analysis*

| Citation | Aim or Title | Findings | Codes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Papi and Hiver (2020) | Exploring motivation in language learning as a dynamic system | Learners' motivation continuously evolves in response to perceived control, value, and reality. | Motivation as a fluid construct. |
| Yang and Wang (2025) | Developments in English language assessment and associated research trends | Highlights how both assessment practices and learner motivation have changed over time. | Shifting assessments and motivation. |
| Zhu (2024) | Investigating causes for learner disengagement in English language education | Identifies exam-related reforms as a key factor in learners losing motivation. | Disengagement, assessment consequences. |
| Ushioda (2019) | Tracing the trajectory of L2 motivation research historically and prospectively | Reviews past and present developments and suggests future directions for motivation studies. | Evolving trends, future prospects. |
| Chen et al. (2025) | Learner motivation in AR-integrated writing instruction | Demonstrates that AR technology impacts learner engagement and motivational patterns. | AR, engagement, behavioural shifts. |
| Shafiee Rad (2025) | Enhancing learner involvement in L2 reading | AI tools aid learners in managing their engagement and self-regulation during reading tasks. | AI support, persistence, self-control. |
| Cerezo and Yanguas (2025) | Motivation and equity within virtual learning contexts | Addresses how technological innovations influence motivation and equity in virtual learning spaces. | Virtual platforms, equity, motivation. |
| Tajik (2025) | AI-assisted writing environments and learner motivation | AI tools facilitate improved writing performance and increased learner motivation. | AI platforms, writing enhancement. |
| Solhi et al. (2025) | Emotional strategies, effort, and stress management in language learning | Emotional regulation and perseverance significantly influence task completion and sustained effort. | Emotional strength, grit, endurance. |
| Xu (2025) | Impact of personality and intelligence on L2 achievement | Learners' personality traits play a key role in motivating L2 acquisition and influencing outcomes. | Traits, cognitive ability, motivation. |
| Lu et al. (2025) | Role of L2 learning applications in learner motivation | Design quality of apps affects both learning engagement and motivational consistency. | App design, learning flow, enthusiasm. |
| Wang et al. (2021) | The influence of grit on maintaining motivation amid difficulties | Grit is instrumental in sustaining long-term motivation and perseverance in learning. | Grit, long-term commitment. |
| Hori et al. (2025) | Digital applications' impact on motivation among young EFL learners | Use of digital tools increases learner satisfaction and boosts sustained reading efforts. | EFL tools, satisfaction, reading drive. |
| Li et al. (2025) | Learner engagement in online L2 instruction | Enjoyment and encouragement foster continued engagement in virtual classrooms. | Online interaction, enjoyment, motivation. |
| Mahmoodi and Yousefi (2022) | Overview of a decade of research into second language motivation | Compiles and analyses trends in motivation-related studies over the last ten years. | Meta-analysis, motivational patterns. |
| Dörnyei and Henry (2022) | Resilience within EFL learning environments | Learner adaptability supports motivation under challenging conditions within dynamic learning systems. | Resilience, complexity, motivation. |

**Table 2:** *Identified Themes with Description*

| Theme | Description |
|---|---|
| Theme 1: Dynamic Evolution of Learning Motivation | This theme examines how learners' motivation fluctuates over time, influenced by cognitive, emotional, and situational factors. |
| Theme 2: Impact of Motivation on Reading Persistence | This theme explores the direct relationship between motivation levels and learners' sustained engagement with reading tasks. |
| Theme 3: Motivational Influence on Reading Strategy Adjustment | This theme investigates how motivation affects learners' use of reading strategies, with more motivated learners utilizing deeper cognitive strategies for better comprehension. |
| Theme 4: Comparative Roles of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation | This theme compares the effects of intrinsic (enjoyment, personal interest) and extrinsic (grades, rewards) motivation on learners' long-term reading engagement and achievement. |

*Theme 1: Dynamic Evolution of Learning Motivation*

Understanding the evolving nature of learning motivation is essential for supporting ESL learners in sustaining their reading practices. This study explores shifts in motivation over time and investigates how these shifts relate to learners' ongoing engagement with reading. The primary objective is to examine motivational trajectories among ESL students to inform instructional strategies that encourage consistent reading habits and enhance language acquisition. By employing latent growth curve modelling, the research utilised statistical methods to track variations in motivation across time intervals. The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of motivation, echoing the insights of Papi and Hiver (2020), who posited that motivation is shaped by multiple interrelated constructs, including perceived authenticity, agency, and value. Correlational data revealed a significant association between elevated motivation levels and sustained reading persistence, aligning with Zhu (2024) conclusion that fluctuations in motivational intensity critically affect learners' ability to perform under pressure.

The study further identified that motivational dynamics are influenced by learners' perceived autonomy, the demands of assessment environments, and prevailing socio-cultural expectations. These results reinforce Ushioda (2019) assertion that L2 motivation is dynamic and highly responsive to individual learner experiences. Additionally, evidence from Yang and Wang (2025) confirms a growing scholarly interest in examining motivational development within the domain of English language learning. Collectively, these findings underscore the necessity for pedagogical approaches that adapt to learners' changing motivational states to effectively support their long-term engagement with reading.

*Theme 2: Impact of Motivation on Reading Persistence*

This study adopted a qualitative methodology to investigate how motivation affects the sustained reading behaviour of ESL learners over the duration of an academic year. As learners' involvement in reading activities fluctuated, multiple measurements using motivation and reading persistence instruments were conducted to document these changes. Hierarchical Linear Modelling (HLM) was utilised to statistically examine how variations in motivation interacted with learners' reading progression over time. The findings indicated that high levels of motivation played a pivotal role in maintaining long-term engagement with reading. This conclusion aligns with the work of Chen et al. (2025), who demonstrated that motivation significantly supports learners in remaining actively involved when utilising technology in educational settings.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed that self-regulated learning strategies served as a mediating factor between motivation and persistent reading behaviour. This supports Shafiee Rad (2025) study, which found that artificial intelligence (AI) tools enhance learner interest and foster self-regulatory capabilities during reading tasks. Engagement with interactive digital content was observed to increase learners' commitment to academic objectives, suggesting that immersive virtual environments can positively influence motivation and persistence. In addition, the incorporation of AI-driven feedback systems, as outlined by Tajik (2025), provided learners with tailored guidance that encouraged continued reading efforts. These digital interventions enabled students to persevere even when encountering challenges. The overall findings indicate that sustained reading engagement is largely shaped by motivational strength, and that the integration of technology and self-regulation strategies within educational environments can effectively support ESL learners' persistence throughout the learning process.

*Theme 3: Motivational Influence on Reading Strategy Adjustment*

This research investigated the role of motivation in facilitating ESL learners' adaptation of reading strategies over the course of an academic year by tracking changes in both motivational constructs and strategic reading behaviours. Multiple assessments were carried out to capture variations in motivational dimensions such as grit, flow, and motivation intensity, alongside learners' self-reported reading strategies. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to examine the interrelationships between motivational factors and strategy modification. The findings indicate that motivation serves as a strong predictor of learners' ability to adapt their reading approaches. Consistent with the work of Solhi et al. (2025), this study also confirmed that the presence of grit and the ability to manage boredom effectively play a significant role in fostering adaptive and flexible reading strategies, aiding learners in overcoming reading-related difficulties and maintaining task persistence.

Additionally, personality traits and cognitive abilities, identified by Xu (2025) as influential elements, were similarly observed in this study to mediate the impact of motivation on strategic reading behaviour. Notably, motivation intensity and flow emerged as sequential mediators linking the effectiveness of English learning applications to the adjustment of learners' reading strategies, supporting the findings of Lu et al. (2025) concerning motivation in technology-integrated learning environments. Longitudinal evidence further aligns with Wang et al. (2021), who emphasised that sustained motivation enables ESL learners to cultivate and employ strategies that contribute to prolonged reading engagement. In conclusion, these findings highlight the pivotal influence of motivation on ESL learners' capacity to adjust their reading strategies,

underscoring the importance of providing focused support aimed at enhancing motivation to strengthen learners' strategic reading development.

*Theme 4: Comparative Roles of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation*

Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational sources were found to significantly influence the duration of ESL learners' reading persistence. Participants were repeatedly assessed throughout the study regarding their internal and external motivations, as well as their inclination to continue engaging with reading tasks. Supplementary interviews provided further insight into the evolving nature of learners' motivation over time. Through the application of growth mixture modelling, distinct motivational trajectories were identified, and their impact on reading persistence was systematically analysed. The findings suggest that learners with stronger intrinsic motivation demonstrated higher consistency in reading engagement, which aligns with the findings of Li et al. (2025), who noted that enjoyment and fulfilment play key roles in sustaining learner attention within online educational contexts. In contrast, learners who were primarily driven by external incentives showed more variability in their reading duration, with persistence often influenced by elements such as digital rewards within learning platforms, partially supporting observations made by Hori et al. (2025), where such rewards contributed to learner engagement but only to a limited extent.

The qualitative component of the study further revealed that intrinsic motivation promoted the development and application of independent reading strategies. This observation corresponds with research on resilience in complex dynamic systems, where intrinsic motivation has been linked to greater flexibility and success in learning outcomes (Dörnyei & Henry, 2022). The evidence clearly suggests that while extrinsic motivation may prompt immediate engagement, its effects are often short-lived when compared to the enduring influence of intrinsic motivation (Mahmoodi & Yousefi, 2022). Overall, the data affirm that intrinsic motivation plays a critical role in producing sustained improvements in reading persistence, whereas extrinsic motivators may provide supplementary support, particularly in the early stages of learning or within technology-mediated environments.

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that ESL learners' motivation is not static, but rather fluctuates in response to a range of internal and external factors. The evolving nature of motivational trajectories affirms theoretical frameworks which regard motivation as a dynamic system, where control-related and value-based perspectives interact continuously (Papi & Hiver, 2020). Such evidence challenges the validity of fixed motivational models that treat learners as possessing a singular, unchanging level of motivation, urging educators to reconsider and move beyond these static assumptions. In support of this, Zhu (2024) observed that significant academic pressures, such as national examinations, can severely undermine learners' motivation to engage in reading. Qualitative data from this study also emphasise that fostering learner autonomy and cultivating a supportive learning environment are key strategies for preventing motivational decline. This supports Ushioda (2019) call for increased attention to the temporal shifts in L2 learner motivation, as the current results clearly illustrate that reading persistence is tied not merely to initial motivational levels, but to how motivation evolves throughout the learning process. Similarly, Yang and Wang (2025) noted that recent research is increasingly embracing dynamic approaches, encouraging future investigations to address the adaptive and context-sensitive nature of motivation. Overall, this study provides a clearer understanding of how motivation fluctuates and plays a pivotal role in encouraging ESL learners to maintain their reading efforts, thereby contributing to the more effective design of pedagogical strategies that respond to learners' evolving needs.

The evidence gathered confirms that the consistency of ESL learners in reading activities is primarily governed by their motivational state, which consequently underpins their need to persist in learning tasks. The observed link between motivation and learning behaviour was particularly pronounced in technology-rich environments that offered personalisation and interactive engagement, echoing the findings of (Chen et al., 2025). Furthermore, the use of artificial intelligence was found to support learners' autonomy and perseverance in reading, a finding that aligns with the conclusions drawn by (Shafiee Rad, 2025). The current research highlights that lesson planning which deliberately fosters motivation can play a crucial role in sustaining reading habits. With respect to virtual learning, the data show that online platforms contribute positively by offering engaging contexts, thus sustaining learners' involvement (Cerezo & Yanguas, 2025). Tajik (2025) research similarly demonstrates that personalised technological instruction can both motivate learners and support them in overcoming learning challenges. Taken together, these findings reinforce the conclusion that motivation is dynamic and can rise or decline, but it can be effectively supported through adaptive technologies and learner-managed strategies. Educational technologies that centre learner autonomy have proven to encourage more persistent engagement with reading and ongoing language development.

Moreover, the study reveals that motivation significantly influences ESL learners' capacity to adopt and adapt reading strategies over time. Learners' ability to apply coping strategies and manage emotional

responses was shown to be vital for navigating complex reading tasks, a conclusion also supported by Solhi et al. (2025), who emphasise the influence of strategic flexibility on reading persistence. According to Lu et al. (2025), motivational intensity and flow experiences act as mediating factors between student engagement and their perceived use of learning tools, enabling learners to adjust their strategies effectively. This implies that learning experiences characterised by flow tend to enhance motivation, thereby making reading strategies more relevant and adaptable for each individual. Xu (2025) further contends that motivational interventions must account for learners' unique characteristics, including personal traits and cognitive capabilities. Similarly, Wang et al. (2021) assert that long-term reading engagement and continued interest are central to academic development, a point substantiated by the current findings which reveal the importance of persistence in fostering improved strategic reading abilities. Collectively, these studies underscore the essential role of motivation in enabling ESL learners to persist and adapt their reading strategies, both of which are critical to long-term success. Accordingly, instructional programmes must incorporate both motivational and emotional support mechanisms to enhance learners' ability to refine strategies and achieve sustained reading progress.

This research also reinforces the notion that ESL learners remain committed to reading tasks due to a combination of motivational drivers. Li et al. (2025) similarly found that enjoyment and genuine personal interest are fundamental to maintaining engagement in language acquisition, a finding that resonates with the present study. These intrinsic drivers were observed to support learners' self-management and strategic adaptation, contributing to the development of resilience (Dörnyei & Henry, 2022). Although extrinsic motivation was noted to be initially effective in capturing learners' interest, its long-term impact appears limited, consistent with findings by (Hori et al., 2025). As Mahmoodi and Yousefi (2022) explain, internal motivators tend to exert a more sustained influence compared to externally imposed incentives, which often diminish over time. They advocate for instructional designs that prioritise relevance and learner autonomy, while suggesting that extrinsic rewards may still play a useful role in fostering early-stage engagement. By adhering to this motivational model, educators can enhance both reading effort and overall language proficiency.

Finally, the results of this study align with the principles of DST, which posits that motivation is inherently variable and subject to continuous modulation by psychological, emotional, and contextual factors. The research identified several influences on second language motivation, with internal factors such as learner autonomy, and external ones including task significance and peer interaction, playing key roles. Findings revealed that learners exhibited heightened motivation in contexts where tasks were perceived as meaningful or where social interaction was valued, thereby supporting concepts drawn from both Self-Determination Theory and Expectancy-Value Theory. Given the inherent variability of motivation, ESL instruction must be designed to sustain motivation over time while equipping learners with the necessary strategies to strengthen reading proficiency.

# Conclusion

This review underscores that motivation in ESL learning is a multifaceted and evolving construct, playing a critical role in sustaining learners' engagement with reading activities. The findings demonstrate that motivation is not constant but fluctuates in response to various psychological, emotional, and contextual factors, aligning with the principles of Dynamic Systems Theory. Intrinsic motivation emerges as a key driver in fostering long-term reading engagement, enabling learners to adopt effective strategies and maintain self-regulation. In contrast, extrinsic motivation primarily offers initial encouragement but tends to lose its impact over time. Contemporary educational technologies, particularly those integrating artificial intelligence, offer valuable support by guiding learners and reinforcing their persistence when challenges arise. Moreover, the design of instructional approaches must accommodate the shifting nature of motivation, promoting learner autonomy and enhancing resilience. The evidence suggests that motivation enables ESL learners to adapt their reading strategies effectively, thereby sustaining their progress in language acquisition.

## Limitations of the Study

The reliance on qualitative studies in this research introduces the potential for interpretive bias, particularly in assessing shifts in motivation over time. Furthermore, the exclusive focus on ESL learners limits the generalisability of the findings to other learner populations. Although longitudinal studies offer valuable insights into motivational development across extended periods, they may lack the sensitivity to detect subtle or short-term fluctuations in learners' motivational states.

## Future Directions

Future research should investigate the long-term effectiveness of various motivational strategies in

sustaining and enhancing learners' intrinsic motivation. Additionally, examining the role of cultural and individual learner differences could inform the development of more personalised and context-sensitive instructional approaches. Further exploration into the dynamic application of AI-driven adaptive learning systems is also warranted to refine motivational support mechanisms. Overall, adopting a flexible and responsive motivational framework may better support learners' sustained engagement with ESL reading and contribute more broadly to successful language acquisition.

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