

# Exploring Contemporary Perspectives on EFL Motivation in Ecuador: An In-depth Look at the English Learning Experiences of University Students

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study delves into the motivations and experiences shaping non-English major university students' English language learning journey in Ecuador. As part of a university research project, it investigates individual, sociocultural, and educational factors shaping students' language acquisition endeavors through semi-structured interviews with ten participants. Key focal points include students' perceptions of their Ideal L2 Self, the role of teachers in motivation, and the challenges ingrained within the Ecuadorian educational system. The findings depict that teacher-student relationships, dynamic teaching methods, and contextual relevance boost positive learning experiences and student motivation. The study reveals students' reliance on teachers for emotional support alongside methodological guidance, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between teacher attributes—such as empathy, altruism, and charisma—and student engagement. Moreover, students often perceive their professors as paragons of language proficiency, drawing inspiration from teachers for their own linguistic journeys; a dimension often overlooked in traditional pedagogical approaches. In light of these findings, the study advocates for a paradigm shift in teacher training programs to cultivate attributes that can foster a supportive and stimulating learning environment. Future research avenues include longitudinal studies investigating the long-term impact of teacher characteristics and instructional practices on student motivation and language proficiency.

## KEYWORDS

*teacher's role, student motivation, Ecuadorian university, EFL experience, students' insights*

## INTRODUCTION

In the field of education, motivation is frequently cited by teachers and students as a critical determinant of learning success or failure, with a particular focus on the context of learning a foreign language (FL) or a second language (L2) (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). Motivation, while pivotal in influencing linguistic outcomes, lacks a precise definition, encompassing a variety of meanings and constructs (Dörnyei, 2001). This complexity has led to a diverse range of theories and studies aimed at exploring motivation from different angles, a topic extensively discussed by Lamb (2017). Motivation in language learning is essentially about learners' choices and the effort they put into sustaining these choices (Dörnyei, 2001). Over the past five decades, second language acquisition (SLA) research has focused on identifying the motivational drivers that lead to and maintain the effort in L2 learning (Al-Hoorie, 2017). This study examines explicitly two constructs within Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS)—the ideal L2 self and the learning experience—to understand their influence on language learning motivation.

As Csizér and Kálman (2019) outlined, key gaps in L2 motivation research include the role of teachers in shaping the L2 learning experience and the L2 learning experience itself. Notably, there is a scarcity of empirical studies on English language learning motivation in Ecuador, a gap this study aims to address. The focus here is to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' roles in motivating non-English major university students in Ecuador through a qualitative research approach. This article investigates students' voices, ensuring their experiences and insights take center stage. By presenting these student perspectives, we aspire to offer a comprehensive and nuanced portrayal of the EFL learning landscape to contribute valuable insights that

resonate with educators, researchers, policymakers, and, most importantly, EFL students seeking a deeper understanding of their educational journey.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Gardner and Lambert's (1959) seminal socio-educational model in SLA motivation introduced the key distinction between instrumental and integrative motivations. Instrumental motivation refers to language learning for practical purposes, such as career or academic goals. Integrative motivation, on the other hand, stems from a genuine interest in another culture or language, aiming for integration. Although foundational, these concepts have been critiqued for their limited relevance in EFL contexts and the evolving role of English globally (Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Islam et al., 2013; Kormos & Csizér, 2008; Lamb, 2012).

Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) addressed these criticisms by broadening the concept of integrativeness, reinforcing internal self-identification over external cultural assimilation. This shift paved the way for Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), which redefined motivation in SLA. The L2MSS, according to Dörnyei (2009), is a comprehensive framework encompassing various psycho-linguistic factors previously treated as separate or overlapping concepts. It comprises three main components: the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience. Martinović and Burić (2021) describe the ideal L2 self as an individual's vision of themselves as a proficient L2 speaker, while the ought-to L2 self reflects external expectations and the desire to avoid negative outcomes. The L2 learning experience is shaped by classroom dynamics, including the teacher, curriculum, peers, and experiences of success.

This study focuses on Ecuador's EFL context, examining the ideal L2 self and the L2 learning

experience. The ought-to L2 self is excluded due to its minimal correlation with language learning motivational behavior (LLMB) in related studies (Andrade-Molina et al., 2022). This exclusion reflects a pedagogical shift toward context-specific goals, moving beyond the pursuit of native-like proficiency (Andreou & Galantomos, 2009).

Lamb (2012) commended Dörnyei's L2MSS for adapting Gardner's concepts to contemporary global English learning. Taguchi et al. (2009) confirmed the cross-cultural validity of L2MSS, supporting its application in diverse contexts. Studies consistently show a stronger link between the ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience with motivated behavior than with instrumental or integrative motives (Al-Hoorie, 2017). However, Boo et al. (2015) spotlighted a research gap, showing that around 67% of studies between 2005 and 2014 overlooked the role of teachers and learning experiences in motivating learners. This underscores the need for further research on these factors, especially from both teachers' and students' perspectives.

#### THE L2 LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Csizér and Kálmán (2019) argue that the L2 learning experience has been comparatively overlooked, mainly due to its intangible nature which led to an under-conceptualization of the component and the focus on possible selves in motivational research. Accordingly, they urged researchers to study the construct more extensively. According to the scholars, the L2 learning experience encompasses the learner's internal thoughts and feelings, along with external factors experienced in language learning, both inside and outside the classroom. It is shaped by previous learning experiences and continues to influence perceptions even after the learning process.

Empirical studies consistently show that the L2 learning experience is a strong predictor of motivated behavior and achievement. For example, in a large-scale study in China, You and Dörnyei (2016) found that attitudes towards the L2 learning experience were the strongest motivator for language learning, even when controlling for factors like gender, vision, and learning context. It is important to note that in EFL settings, the desire to invest time and effort in learning is closely tied to the L2 learning experience.

#### THE CURRENT PERIOD OF MOTIVATION RESEARCH (SECOND DECADE OF THE CENTURY)

In recent years, second language acquisition (SLA) has witnessed notable shifts in research approaches, marked by an increased concentration on contextual influences. Academics like Lamb (2012) and Kormos and Kiddle (2013) have explored how social, cultural, and linguistic contexts impact learners' motivation. Following this prevailing paradigm, a substantial body of literature in EFL has emerged to explore groundbreaking theories within diverse geographic and sociocultural contexts. For instance, in Ecuador, Andrade-Molina et al. (2022) found that the Ideal L2 Self and learning experiences inside and outside the classroom were key drivers of motivation, while the ought-to L2 self was negligible. Ortega-Auquilla et al. (2019) surveyed 422 Ecuadorian university students to understand their motivations for learning English, including instrumental and integrative reasons. They uncovered that their motivations included both

short-term goals, like travel, and long-term aspirations such as career advancement. These findings support the international posture construct, which captures attitudes toward global engagement and openness to diverse cultures (Yashima, 2012).

The role of teachers in motivating EFL learners has also gained renewed attention. Studies using Dörnyei's (2001) Motivational Strategies (MotS) taxonomy show that teachers who apply dynamic, student-centered techniques increase students' L2 learning motivation in-class behavior and survey responses, leading to L2 academic success (Lamb, 2017). However, the effectiveness of MotS varies by context, with teacher behavior emerging as the most crucial factor in motivating learners (Lamb & Wedell, 2015). Research has also asserted the importance of teacher-learner relationships, with supportive and nurturing teachers fostering a sense of community and enhancing motivation (Kálmán, 2023). Lamb (2017) argues that fruitful interpersonal communication and constructive teacher-student relationships could be among the highest-order motivational factors. In Little's (2007) view, fostering learner autonomy effectively requires that teachers first develop their own autonomy. Teachers must engage in reflective and self-managing processes in their teaching practices.

Similarly, Dörnyei and Kubanyiova (2014) concluded that teachers occupy a privileged position in shaping the EFL learning experience. Globally, numerous remarkable examples illustrate teachers' potential to become transformative leaders. Kubanyiova (2019) noted the need to recognize various teacher motives, including intrinsic, externally regulated, and altruistic ones. She upholds a practice-oriented epistemology to examine how these motives shape teaching practices and influence student motivation.

Finally, academics are progressively calling for a qualitative approach to better elucidate the psychological factors and key motivational constructs underpinning the EFL learning experience. As aptly stated by Chen (2012), a qualitative research approach is necessary to explore sociocultural influences on the construction of the L2 self. This method can provide deeper insights into the context and dimensions of L2 identities. The researcher also determined the importance of examining the connection between the potential L2 self and language learning, as well as the evolving changes in L2 motivation and identities throughout the learning process.

#### AIMS, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

This study explores the EFL learning journey of non-English major university students in Ecuador from their perspectives, aiming to uncover the unique facets of their experiences. Additionally, it examines how students perceive the role of teachers in motivating their EFL learning and identifies critical factors influencing this perception.

- What characterizes the EFL learning experience of Ecuadorian non-English major university students from their perspectives through the lens of the ideal L2 self-system?
- What characterizes the role of the teacher in the EFL learning motivation of Ecuadorian non-

English major university students from the student’s perspective?

**METHODS**

This qualitative research employs a phenomenological approach to exploring EFL students’ perspectives. The study focuses on understanding the viewpoints of non-English major university students in Ecuador as they navigate the challenges of learning English as a foreign language. The primary emphasis is unraveling EFL teachers’ role in motivating these students and shaping their language learning experiences. In recognizing the pivotal role of teachers, this research acknowledges them not only as conveyors of knowledge but as essential facilitators and mentors who significantly influence the learning journeys of non-English major university students in Ecuador. Two distinct data collection techniques were employed: initial pilot stage focus group interviews and subsequent individual interviews. This methodological choice was made to enrich the substantive quality of the collected data by capturing diverse insights from the participants. Utilizing individual and focus group interviews contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the students’ perspectives and demonstrates the methodological rigor upheld in this study. By incorporating varied data sources and perspectives, this methodological approach enhances the credibility and reliability of the study’s findings, aligning with established research principles (Privitera & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2018).

**RESEARCH CONTEXT**

In Ecuador, university students from all majors must attain B1 proficiency in a foreign language, typically English, before graduation. Bravo et al. (2017) and Ortega and Fernández (2017) pointed out that Ecuadorian students’ proficiency levels upon finishing university fall well below the expected competence. To address this widespread issue, this study focuses on non-English major students, a demographic more representative of the country’s general population.

This research was conducted at a university known for its inclusive admissions policy, drawing students from

**Table 1**  
Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Major	Years of English Instruction Before Entering University	Current Uni English Level
Alisson	20	Female	Plastic Arts	12 years	2 <sup>nd</sup> Level
Anita	25	Female	Graphic Design	12 years	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level
Daniel	40	Male	Law	3 years	5 <sup>th</sup> Level
Esther	21	Female	Accounting	12 years	2 <sup>nd</sup> Level
Magdalena	30	Female	Elementary Education	6 years	2 <sup>nd</sup> Level
Mikaela	24	Female	Psychology	6 years	5 <sup>th</sup> Level
Monica	21	Female	Tourism	6 years	1 <sup>st</sup> Level
Pedro	26	Male	IT	12 years	5 <sup>th</sup> Level
Rafaela	27	Female	Textile Engineering	4 years	5 <sup>th</sup> Level
Sebastian	21	Male	Law	12 years	3 <sup>rd</sup> Level

This study adhered to APA ethical guidelines for research with human participants. All interviews were conducted online in the respondents’ first language (Spanish) and video recorded on Microsoft Teams with

diverse cultural and social backgrounds. Its strategic location plays a critical role in ensuring equitable access to education for both urban areas and those hailing from smaller towns and rural regions. Regardless of their major, students must complete five English courses and pass a rigorous language proficiency test. Alternatively, they can present an internationally recognized B1 certificate for validation or take the proficiency exam independently.

As the data collection instrument, a semi-structured interview guide was devised. Due to its open-ended format, this type of instrument allows the participants to expand on the phenomena under study using an exploratory approach with advice and orientation from the researcher (Dörnyei, 2007). As Wallace (1998) argued, this type of data collection involves a “certain degree of control with a certain amount of freedom to develop an interview” (p. 147). The questions of the semi-structured interview guide were primarily drawn from previous research studies on language learning motivation, notably Lamb’s (2017) State-of-the-Art Article. Also, continuous expert advice was obtained while devising and validating the instrument for the pilot interviews. The instrument was piloted with three EFL students who were not part of the sample.

Ten EFL students, all living and studying in Ecuador, participated in semi-structured interviews, with full confidentiality ensured. These students are enrolled in mandatory English courses at their university. Participants were selected through convenience sampling, consistent with Dörnyei’s (2007) definition: “members of the target population are selected for the study if they meet certain practical criteria, such as geographical proximity, availability at a certain time, easy accessibility or the willingness to volunteer” (p. 85). The participants, spanning a range of English proficiency levels from novice to more advanced levels, offer unique insights from their varied learning experiences. Background details for each one, including their educational history and English language learning journey, are comprehensively presented in Table 1.

their written consent. A pilot phase involving a focus group with three EFL students helped refine interview questions for clarity and relevance. The pilot interview lasted 70 minutes, generating 6500 words, leading to

minor adjustments in the final guide. Subsequent individual interviews lasted 46-50 minutes, yielding a rich corpus of over 4500 words. Quoted excerpts were translated from Spanish to English by the author.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis, and the data was examined using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) framework. This approach involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. A reflexive journal was maintained to document theoretical reflections on potential codes and themes, ensuring a thoughtful and systematic approach to the analysis.

After multiple reviews of the data, initial codes emerged, bringing key features to the forefront. These codes were grouped into themes, and connection diagrams were employed to refine them further—some themes were reworded, removed, or repositioned as needed. Peer debriefing ensured trustworthiness, with another researcher testing some coding schemes to validate the findings. The raw data was revisited throughout the process to confirm that the themes accurately reflected participants’ responses, avoiding researcher bias and enhancing the reliability of the results.

### RESULTS

The adaptability of the interviews revealed a range of motives for English proficiency. Instrumental motivation dominated, with participants highlighting the practical benefits of English, including meeting academic requirements, improving job prospects, and expanding professional opportunities. Participants stressed the immediate relevance of English in their fields, particularly for workplace communication. Some also noted intrinsic motivations, such as personal growth and enjoyment, as well as altruistic motives, like supporting family members in their education. Additionally, the teacher’s role as a motivator and English’s facilitation of cross-cultural interactions were recurring themes, stressing its importance in a globally connected world. The following analysis will explore the EFL experience in Ecuador through the L2MSS framework, examining the interplay between motivation and sociocultural context. The results will be presented in two main categories corresponding to the research questions.

The EFL learning experience of Ecuadorian non-English major university students from their perspectives through the lens of the ideal L2 self.

**Table 2**  
Students’ perceptions of ideal English speakers

Emerging themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Native speaker as ideal L2 self</li> <li>• Teacher as ideal L2 self</li> <li>• Influence of stereotypes on the construct of the ideal L2 self: Individuals holding a B2 certification</li> </ul>

Three out of ten participants viewed native English speakers as the ultimate standard of language proficiency, recognizing not only their mastery but also their ease in everyday communication. Pedro reflected this view: Ideal speakers are natives, they master the English language as a more habitual, fluent language, with just one phrase, we can understand what they are trying to say."

In the EFL context, however, native speakers were not the only idealized users. Most participants also viewed EFL teachers as ideal models of language mastery. Sebastian noted: *"I can definitely see my teacher as an ideal speaker because he speaks the language fluently. He told us what worked for him, how he learned the language, what mistakes we can make, and how to avoid them."*

Participants viewed the ideal language teacher as someone who communicates clearly and fluently. They believe that a teacher should not only know the language but also teach it effectively. They also associated the B2 certification with the ability to communicate well in English. As Monica stated, *"For me, an ideal English speaker is someone who can reach at least the B2 level, to be able to communicate and share with others who speak English."*

Overall, participants idealized not only native speakers but also teachers, with certifications like the B2 level influencing their views on language proficiency, underscoring the multifaceted nature of their expectations.

**Table 3**  
Vision as English speakers

Emerging themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills for global exploration: Language users as cultural ambassadors</li> <li>• Challenges in self-visualization: Sociocultural barriers and temporal constraints</li> <li>• Visualizing Ease: English language side with major and English acquisition for parenting</li> <li>• Ambiguity in self-perceptions as language users</li> <li>• Language identity and personal well-being</li> </ul>

This research delves comprehensively into participants’ multilayered perspectives on English proficiency, revealing insights into their roles as global language users. Central to their discourse is a genuine desire for international exploration and relationship-building, with English as the key facilitator. Rafaela encapsulated this sentiment, expressing the desire to use English to connect globally and travel abroad. Some participants also envisioned themselves as cultural ambassadors, using English to share Ecuadorian indigenous culture.

However, amidst these aspirations lies a narrative thread woven with challenges, mainly due to sociocultural barriers and limited exposure to English. They expressed fears of making mistakes, discomfort when interacting with native speakers, and difficulties with the language due to a lack of immersive environments in their formative years. Magdalena and Esther mentioned struggling to process rapid speech and understand information, attributing these difficulties to insufficient L2 exposure.

The study also highlights the strong link between English proficiency and participants’ future aspirations, extending beyond professional success to personal fulfillment. Sebastian’s reflections on the pride and achievement of mastering English exemplified this holistic view. Other participants echoed this, recognizing language proficiency as essential to personal growth. These narratives deepen our understanding of the role of

English proficiency in global citizenship, cultural exchange, and personal development.

Transitioning from exploring EFL learning experiences, the forthcoming discussion delves into an in-depth analysis of the teacher's fundamental role within this context. Participants accentuated the teacher's importance in engaging students, providing pedagogical support, and promoting English language appreciation. They acknowledged teachers as catalysts for sustained enthusiasm, adopting student-centered approaches to meet individual needs. The role of the teacher transcends knowledge transfer, it is instrumental in nurturing a broader appreciation for the language and its cultural relevance.

**Table 4**  
The teachers' role concerning the ideal L2 self

Emerging themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dynamic and Interactive Teaching Methods: Varieties of resources to learn English</li> <li>Teachers as Role Models, guide and mentor: Encouraging Teachers and Teachers' own learning journey</li> <li>Motivation and Support</li> </ul>

Participants unanimously emphasized the pivotal role of language instructors in shaping their ideal L2 selves, viewing teachers as both educators and inspirations. One participant noted, *"I think that the teacher inspires an ideal speaker, for example, when sharing their experiences with us."* This recurring theme underlined the teacher as a role model, offering practical guidance on achieving proficiency. For participants, understanding how the teacher mastered English is essential, seeing the teacher as a model of linguistic success and a source of support.

Participants also stressed the value of dynamic teaching methods and diverse resources in fostering engagement. Sebastian reflected this preference: *"English must be very dynamic for a person to like it."* They remarked the importance of interactive methods, multimedia tools, and hands-on activities as essential components for a well-rounded L2 experience, aligning with their aspiration to reach the ideal L2 self.

Despite challenges, participants expressed gratitude for their teachers' continuous motivation. Daniel noted, *"Sometimes I want to quit English, but the teacher motivates us not to give up,"* underscoring the teacher's role in fostering perseverance. Teachers were acknowledged as a source of inspiration for students to overcome hurdles and stay committed to their language-learning endeavors. Esther eloquently echoed this sentiment:

*"I think that the teacher inspires an ideal speaker, for example, when sharing their experiences with us—their experiences and how they have also managed to learn the language. So, for us, it is essential to know how the teacher learned the English language. It would also be something crucial for us to apply and how to carry something similar to the teacher."*

**Table 5**  
Teacher influence on students' experiences in EFL learning

Emerging themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive influences: Interactive and Motivational Teaching Approaches, extra-curricular activities, collaborative work, balancing demand with patience, fostering understanding through engagement and accessibility.</li> <li>Negative influences: Monotonous teaching approaches, limited support and demanding teaching, unrealistic expectations, overemphasis on rubrics and textbooks, disruptions in curriculum structure, overlooking varied learning abilities</li> </ul>

The EFL students provided valuable insights into their learning experiences, addressing both positive and negative influences. An overwhelming majority of participants firmly agreed that the pedagogical methodology adopted by instructors was crucial in shaping a favorable learning experience. Monica, for instance, recalled how engaging activities, such as contests and games, motivated her to learn and participate. This underscores the role of teachers' methodological preparedness in fostering positive EFL experiences.

Students conducted a detailed examination of the methodologies used to create a secure learning environment, frequently mentioning the balance between academic rigor and patience. Mikaela appreciated her teacher's demanding yet patient approach, especially given her emotional nature. Participants also valued instructors' accessibility and willingness to offer feedback and second chances. As Daniel noted, *"I am not afraid of making mistakes because the teacher allowed me to resend the homework to improve the grade; she provided feedback and gave us a second chance."*

Conversely, negative experiences, particularly in high school, were often linked to teachers' lack of care and rigid methods. Esther described feeling disconnected due to monotonous teaching and a lack of feedback. Alisson reflected, *"I didn't really know if it was right or wrong; the teacher simply had us fill in the text and memorize, rather than engaging in real interaction. There was a lack of feedback regarding English."* A contrast emerged between motivating teachers who invested time in providing feedback and those who adhered to rigid structures. The contrast between dynamic and monotonous teaching methods highlights the critical importance of instructional vibrancy in English language education.

**Table 6**  
Teacher influence on EFL motivation

Emerging themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teacher's Personality: Positive behavior, attitude, humor, altruism, consideration, empathy, respect, charisma.</li> <li>Methodological preparedness: Supportiveness, student-centeredness, dynamism, practicality, use of technological resources, and teaching methods.</li> </ul>

The results underscored the pivotal role of teachers in fostering a motivational learning atmosphere. Participants highly valued teachers who demonstrated empathy and altruism, seeing them as key to enhancing motivation and learning experiences. Altruistic teachers, who showed genuine concern for students' well-being, were praised for

building a profound sense of trust in the classroom. Empathetic teachers were similarly appreciated for understanding students' struggles and creating a supportive atmosphere. As Anita noted, "*The common denominator among my motivating teachers is that they have a certain level of empathy with the students.*"

Charismatic educators, characterized by their vitality and fervor for pedagogy, inspired active participation. Their contagious zeal for the subject matter engendered a culture of academic excellence among students. Magdalena observed, "*Teachers with charisma are inspiring; they make us feel respected, and that motivates us to succeed.*"

Beyond personality traits, participants also emphasized the significance of teaching methodologies. Methodological preparedness emerged as a cornerstone in shaping motivation, with teachers effectively using technological tools and varied techniques like songs, crosswords, and games to engage students. As Rafaela expressed: "*Teachers make classes fun; they play songs, use crosswords, puzzles, tongue twisters, table games, etc. and I remember the language.*"

Participants unanimously agreed that by fostering a student-centered classroom philosophy, educators cultivated a supportive environment. This approach instilled a sense of belonging among students and significantly bolstered their academic motivation. "*It is easy if I feel supported. I will try my best to achieve*" (Pedro).

## DISCUSSION

Participants' motivations for learning English ranged from academic requirements to altruistic and intrinsic drives. Instrumental motives, like job prospects and higher salaries, identified by Graddol (2006) as the practical utility of English, emerged as strong motivational predictors in Ecuadorian studies (Ortega-Auquilla et al., 2022). This study also stressed intrinsic motivations, including personal growth and enjoyment, harmonizing with findings from other Ecuadorian academics (Luna-Hernández, 2016; Ortega-Auquilla et al., 2019). Additionally, participants recognized English as essential for international cross-cultural relations, supporting Yashima's (2000) International Posture construct. Altruistic motives, such as helping family members, added a social dimension to language learning, a factor not commonly delineated in analogous Ecuadorian studies (Soto et al., 2024). These motivations exhibit the complex interplay of individual, socio-cultural, and economic factors in English acquisition.

Despite the evidence supporting the ideal L2 self as a key motivator, research on teachers' direct impact remains notably scarce. In a quantitative study conducted within the Ecuadorian context, compelling evidence emerged indicating that the Ideal L2 Self stands out as a paramount predictor of student motivation (Andrade-Molina et al., 2022). The present study delved deeper into participants' perceptions of the Ideal L2 Self, revealing that they viewed native speakers and teachers as models, alongside stereotypes like obtaining B2 or C1 certifications as the epitome of achievement. This idealization mirrors the global influence of anglophone pedagogical models (Pavlenko, 2003), linked to societal perceptions of authenticity (Seidlhofer, 2013).

The acknowledgment is notably heartening as it signifies students' discernment of the multifaceted attributes pivotal for effective language instruction, regardless of the instructors' native speaker status, reinforcing both pedagogical and interpersonal dimensions. Students also feel influenced by the stereotype of obtaining a standardized proficiency certificate as the ideal L2 self, which could be shaped by the decade-long importance on acquiring such credentials in Ecuadorian secondary and higher education (Mantilla & Andrade-Molina, 2020).

Participants' visions as English speakers offer glimpses of their aspirations, challenges, and self-perceptions in a globalized world. The emphasis on skills for global exploration and cultural ambassadorship concurs with broader societal trends (Chlopek, 2008; Canagarajah, 2012). However, challenges related to sociocultural barriers and limited exposure exemplify the need for interventions to address structural disparities, reaffirming Dörnyei and Kubanyiova's (2014) view on external factors affecting L2 motivation. Students' realization of their L2 vision as integral to personal well-being depicts the complex interplay of cognitive, social, and emotional dimensions in language learning (Dörnyei & Kubanyiova, 2014).

Participants also drew attention to the practical relevance of English for academic, professional, and community contexts, recognizing proficiency as essential for scholarships and career opportunities, consistent with findings in Ecuador (Luna-Hernández, 2016; Ortega-Auquilla et al., 2019; Soto et al., 2024). Altruistic motives surfaced again as sources of motivation and applications of language in future endeavors, bringing to the fore the ethical dimension of language learning and its potential for positive social change, diverging from the more conventional instrumental motives.

The findings shed light on teachers' significant impact on sculpting students' visions of their ideal L2 selves. Across the board, participants viewed educators as role models, gaining valuable insights from their learning narratives. As Dörnyei (2014) stated, "*...a positive role model – that is, an individual who has achieved outstanding success – can raise the observers' hopes for the future and thus motivate them to pursue similar excellence*" (p. 63). This adheres to the socio-cognitive perspective, where learners construct their ideal selves based on social interactions and EFL role models (Dörnyei, 2009).

Moreover, the importance of dynamic teaching methods and diverse resources reflects the role of experiential learning in fostering students' ideal L2 selves (Lamb, 2017). Participants stressed that interactive methods and practical guidance empowered them to take ownership of their language learning, resonating with research on learner autonomy and agency (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Participants' insights affirm how engaging teaching methodologies and supportive instructors foster positive learning experiences. Achieving a balance between academic expectations and emotional support was seen as key to accessibility. Research consistently highlights the role of teacher-student interactions and affective factors in shaping students' language learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009; Mercer et al., 2016). Conversely,

monotonous teaching approaches led to disconnection and dissatisfaction, urging the need for dynamic, responsive instruction to meet individual needs (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Participants conducted an in-depth analysis, extending beyond methodological factors, to spotlight the importance of emotional support and the potential impact of teacher disengagement. The results clearly show that students view the teacher's role as crucial in shaping their affective attitudes toward L2 learning. They recognized the teacher's influence in both methodological and emotional dimensions. The significant reliance on educators to create a positive learning environment requires careful consideration, as it may indicate a reduced sense of student ownership and accountability.

This study also examined the multifaceted influence of teacher personality and methodological preparedness on L2 motivation. The findings illuminated the importance of empathy, altruism, and charisma in creating a conducive learning environment, resonating with research on teacher-student relationships (Kálmán, 2018). Methodological preparedness, particularly through student-centered approaches and technology integration, fostered higher engagement, aligning with research linking active learning to increased motivation and achievement (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Mukminin et al. (2017) found that altruistic motivation influenced career choice in teaching. Our study reflects this from the students' perspective, as they identified altruistic traits in their teachers and internalized them as motivational sources. This highlights the symbiotic relationship between teacher attributes and student motivation. Teachers who show genuine care build trust and foster participation, while charismatic educators inspire students through their passion and dedication (Babad, 2009).

## CONCLUSION

The motivational EFL landscape in Ecuador encompasses a multifaceted array of pragmatic, personal, and altruistic impetuses, reflecting the complex interplay of individual, cultural, and economic determinants, alongside the escalating significance of intercultural competence in a globalized milieu. While acknowledging the utilitarian value of English proficiency, participants identified challenges stemming from sociocultural impediments and temporal constraints, underscoring the exigency for targeted interventions and equitable learning opportunities. Central to this motivational framework was the conceptualization of the Ideal L2 Self, wherein linguistic proficiency benchmarks, admiration for native interlocutors, and the pivotal role of educators converged to shape learner aspirations and engagement in the language acquisition process.

The study elucidates the pivotal role of educators in shaping language acquisition experiences, positioning them not merely as facilitators but as catalysts of inspiration, underscoring the significance of pedagogical acumen and empathetic disposition. As pedagogues, it is imperative to harness the symbiotic nexus between instructor attributes and learner motivation, fostering an optimal learning experience that leverages our influence to empower and inspire students in their linguistic path. This research accentuates the necessity of prioritizing positive instructor-learner dynamics, characterized by

empathy, mutual respect, and charismatic engagement. Consequently, professional development initiatives should underline the enhancement of educators' interpersonal competencies and didactic methodologies to engender supportive, dynamic learning environments.

The findings accentuate the efficacy of integrating dynamic instructional approaches, diverse resources, and technological tools in augmenting student engagement and motivation, thereby enhancing learning outcomes. These strategies have the potential to cultivate an enriching educational ecosystem that addresses learners' heterogeneous needs and preferences, catalyzes motivation, and nurtures a sustained commitment to language acquisition, ultimately fostering a profound affinity for the target language.

The study highlights the crucial need for contextually appropriate and adaptive pedagogical methods to enhance English language learning in Ecuadorian universities. It urgently calls for professional development programs tailored to address the idiosyncratic challenges inherent in the Ecuadorian educational landscape. It is imperative to critically interrogate the prevailing paradigm that posits student motivation as solely established on academic exigencies. This research elucidates the crucial importance of fostering awareness among educators regarding their capacity to catalyze student inspiration beyond scholastic objectives. Given the profound impact of personal attributes and experiential backgrounds on teacher-student dynamics, it is incumbent upon teacher preparation programs to prioritize the cultivation of these qualities to engender a more conducive and intellectually stimulating learning milieu. Moreover, it is essential to leverage the potent pedagogical potential inherent in educators' own language learning trajectories as exemplars for students, an aspect hitherto largely neglected in conventional pedagogical praxis.

This study's limitations include its focus on Ecuadorian non-English major university students. Future research could explore these findings across different contexts and student populations. Longitudinal studies could investigate the lasting impact of teacher personality and methods on student motivation and proficiency. Qualitative methods, such as classroom observations and interviews, could provide deeper insights into teacher-student dynamics and their influence on motivation.

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