Teachers' Support and Its Effect on Students' Learning Motivation

Desi Pangestu, Afifah Laela Risky, Mawar Rizka Rahmadhani, Noeris Meiristiani

Universitas Pancasakti Tegal, Tegal Municipality, Indonesia

Corresponding author email: desipangestu27@gmail.com

Info Article	Abstract
	This study investigates the role of teacher support in shaping English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' motivation through a structured literature review. Psychological and social factors, especially teacher support, are critical in enhancing student motivation, particularly in settings where learners face anxiety or low confidence. The review focuses on three core types of teacher support, emotional, academic, and autonomy-supportive and their contributions to student engagement and language learning motivation. Ten peer-reviewed articles published between 2014 and 2025 were analyzed using thematic content analysis to identify patterns in findings, methods, and cultural contexts. Results show that teacher support consistently enhances motivation, with integrated support having the strongest impact. The novelty of this study lies in its cross-cultural synthesis and emphasis on the need for integrated and longitudinal approaches. Findings suggest that teacher training programs should adopt holistic strategies to foster and maintain student motivation in EFL classrooms. Keywords: Teacher Support; Language Motivation; EFL; Student Engagement; Autonomy

INTRODUCTION

The process of learning a second or foreign language involves more than just mastering grammar and vocabulary, it is also shaped by psychological and social factors, including the kind of support students receive from their teachers. In many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, especially where learners may feel anxious or lack confidence, teacher support plays a critical role in fostering motivation and engagement (Hennebry-Leung & Xiao, 2023; Gilakjani et al., 2012). Research shows that teacher support affects students' willingness to participate in learning, their emotional involvement, and their perseverance in facing academic challenge (Gao et al., 2024; Zhang & Hu, 2025a).

Teachers not only deliver content but also create classroom environments that influence learning. It includes creating an atmosphere where students feel safe, guided, and trusted to take part in their own learning. In this study, three kinds of teacher support are emphasized: emotional support, academic support, and autonomy support. Emotional support focuses on making students feel cared for and psychologically secure. When students know that their teacher understands and respects them, they tend to feel less anxious and more open to learning (Alrabai & Algazzaz, 2024; Zhang & Hu, 2025a). Academic support includes

giving clear feedback, guidance, and help with learning tasks. This type of support helps students feel\ capable and more confident in handling language challenges (Gao et al., 2024; Liu & Li, 2023). In addition, autonomy support, grounded in Deci & Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (in Manninen et al., 2022), is about giving students space to make decisions, express opinions, and explore their own learning strategies, which encourages intrinsic motivation (Al Kaboody, 2013; Gehr, 2009).

While these three types of support have often been studied separately, their interaction in real classroom settings is just as important. A supportive classroom does not rely on only one kind of support; rather, these dimensions work together. For example, emotional support can build trust, which makes students more open to receiving academic feedback. In turn, academic guidance can give students the confidence they need to make choices and take ownership of their learning—linking it naturally with autonomy support. This interconnected model suggests that emotional, academic, and autonomy support reinforce each other in motivating students and creating a positive learning climate.

Even though several studies have explored these dimensions, many rely mainly on self-report questionnaires and cross-sectional data, which provide only a snapshot of students' experiences (Liu & Li, 2023; Zhang & Hu, 2025b). Fewer studies have examined how these supports function together over time in diverse classroom contexts (Howarth, 2010; Ma et al., 2020). Some evidence points to the impact of teacher care and classroom climate on learners' confidence, grit, and willingness to communicate (Chetty, 2017; Yang et al., 2024); however, there is still limited understanding of how emotional, academic, and autonomy support interact as a system. This article contributes to the existing research by offering a more integrated view of these three forms of support and showing how they jointly shape students' motivation in second or foreign language learning.

This study aims to explore how different forms of teacher support, namely emotional support, academic guidance, and autonomy encouragement affect students' motivation to learn a second or foreign language. Drawing on literature published between 2014 and 2025, this paper synthesizes empirical findings across diverse cultural and educational contexts to highlight key patterns and research gaps. The goal is to provide insights that can inform teacher training practices and future research on sustaining motivation in EFL learning through supportive classroom environments. While this review aims to provide a clear overview of the role of teacher support in language learning motivation, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the review relies mainly on previously published studies, which means it depends on the quality and scope of existing research. Most of the available studies use self-report surveys or short-term observations, which may not fully capture how teacher support affects students over time. Second, the review focuses on three main types of support and does not cover other potential factors such as peer influence, institutional support, or cultural differences in teaching styles. Lastly, because the review draws on studies from different countries with varying educational systems, some findings may not be directly comparable. These limitations should be taken into account when interpreting the conclusions and applying them in specific classroom contexts.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative content-based literature analysis aimed at exploring how various forms of teacher support influence students' motivation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. The analysis focused on synthesizing findings from previously published research to understand how emotional, academic, and autonomy-supportive teacher behaviors contribute to motivational outcomes in language learning settings. Since this is a literature-based study, the data collection and analysis were carried out remotely through online access to scholarly databases and academic libraries. No specific physical location was involved in the research process. Rather than collecting new data, the study systematically analyzes peer-reviewed journal articles to identify recurring themes and patterns.

Research Target/Subject

The primary data sources for this study were peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2014 and 2025, examining the relationship between teacher support and students' language learning motivation. To ensure relevance and quality, the review included only studies that focused on teacher support, motivation, or language learning; involved students or language learners as participants; were published in English and available in full-text format (PDF); and appeared in peer-reviewed journals within the last decade (2014–2025). Studies were excluded if they addressed unrelated topics, such as school management or technology use without teacher involvement, or if they did not examine teachers' support or students' motivation. Non-academic materials (e.g., blogs, reports, opinion pieces) and sources unavailable in full text were also excluded.

The selected studies represented diverse educational levels, primarily high school and university contexts, with most conducted in East Asia and the Middle East. Each article offered insights into one or more of the three central dimensions of teacher support emotional, academic, and autonomy-related and their combined influence on students' motivation to learn English as a foreign language.

Research Procedure

The research procedure began with the identification of relevant keywords and search terms related to teacher support and language learning motivation. A systematic search was then conducted across major academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, and ScienceDirect. Articles were selected based on their publication date, methodological rigor, and alignment with the three categories of teacher support. Each article was assessed for its research design, context, participant demographics, and reported motivational outcomes. A comparative and conceptual framework was used to organize the studies and guide the thematic analysis process. This approach ensured a consistent and comprehensive synthesis of findings across varied cultural and educational contexts.

Instruments, and Data Collection Techniques

As a literature review, this study did not utilize physical instruments or tools for data collection. Instead, it relied on document analysis of peer-reviewed articles retrieved from academic databases. The data collected included descriptions of teacher support, methodological details, contextual information, and findings related to language learning motivation. Each article was coded and categorized according to the dimension of teacher support it addressed and the specific motivational outcomes it examined.

Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using a thematic coding approach, which allowed for the identification of recurring themes and patterns across the selected studies. Special attention was given to how emotional, academic, and autonomy-supportive behaviors were operationalized and their effects measured in each context. The analysis explored the connection between these forms of support and key motivational constructs such as student engagement, learning effort, ideal L2 self, and willingness to communicate. By comparing the findings across all ten studies, the analysis aimed to highlight both commonalities and differences in how teacher support affects learner motivation. The results were interpreted in relation to the research objectives and were guided by relevant theoretical frameworks, particularly Self-Determination Theory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed consistent evidence across studies that teacher support positively influences students' language learning motivation, though the strength and nature of this influence vary depending on the type of support and the context. Then, the results of the literature review are summarized in the following table to provide a clear comparison of how each study addressed the dimensions of teacher support and their relationship to student motivation.

Table 1. Summary of Empirical Findings on Teacher Support and Motivation

No.	Author & Year	Support Type	Effect on Motivation	Context / Participants	Method
1	Kaur et al. (2014)	Autonomy	Increased learning motivation.	Thai elementary students	Quasi-experimental
2	Işık (2020)	Autonomy	Enhanced motivation, reduced affective barriers, supported learning resources, encouraged technology use, and cooperation.	Turkish EFL instructors	Qualitative
3	Alrabai (2021)	Autonomy	Increased EFL learners' autonomy with perceived choice being the strongest predictor.	Saudi EFL school teachers and lecturers, and university learners	Quantitative experimental
4	Liu et al. (2022)	Emotional + Academic + Instrumental	Enhanced EFL learners' engagement	Chinese college EFL learners	Survey + SEM
5	Liu & Li (2023)	Emotional + Academic	Enhanced motivation and perseverance	High school EFL students (Asia)	Mixed-method
6	Alrabai & Algazzaz (2024)	Emotional	Increased engagement & need satisfaction	Saudi EFL students	Quasi-experimental
7	Gao et al. (2024)	Academic + Emotional + Informational	Boosted L2 grit and learning effort	Blended EFL learning (China)	Survey + SEM
8	Yang et al. (2024)	Academic + Instrumental + Emotional	Increased willingness to communicate via classroom enjoyment & grit	University EFL learners	Quantitative
9	Zhang & Hu (2025a)	Competence+ Emotional + Autonomy	Strengthened ideal L2 self, boosted motivation	Chinese university EFL learners	Quantitative survey
10	Guo et al. (2025)	Emotional	Enhanced academic self-efficacy, academic resilience, and	Chinese college students	Quantitative survey

No.	Author & Year	Support Type	Effect on Motivation	Context / Participants	Method
			learning engagement.		

To further clarify the contributions of these studies, the following thematic classification summarizes the key trends across the literature.

Table 2. Thematic Classification of Teacher Support Research

Theme	Related Studies	Key Findings
Emotional support	Alrabai & Algazzaz (2024), Guo et al. (2025)	Increased engagement and need satisfaction, enhanced academic self-efficacy, academic resilience, and learning engagement.
Autonomy support	Kaur et al. (2014), Işık (2020), Alrabai (2021)	Enhanced motivation, reduced affective barriers, supported learning resources, encouraged technology use and cooperation, increased EFL learners' autonomy with perceived choice being the strongest predictor.
Combined/integrated Support (including academic support)	Liu et al., (2022). Liu & Li (2023), Gao et al. (2024), Yang et al. (2024), Zhang & Hu (2025a)	Increased EFL learners' engagement, strengthened motivation and persistence, fostered L2 grit and learning effort, enhanced willingness to communicate through greater enjoyment and resilience, and reinforced the ideal L2 self.

The thematic classification presented in Table 2 synthesizes the core findings from the reviewed studies and organizes them into four major categories: emotional support, autonomy support, academic support, and combined/integrated support. Grounded in Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (in Manninen et al., 2022) this classification highlights how teacher support fulfills learners' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby enhancing their intrinsic motivation and engagement iden EFL contexts. Recent studies have explored these dimensions from various perspectives, emphasizing that emotional, academic, autonomy-based, and integrated supports play complementary roles in promoting students' language learning motivation. The following section discusses these four categories and interprets their findings in relation to students' motivational outcomes.

Emotional Support

Emotional support refers to teachers' care, empathy, and encouragement toward their students. Alrabai & Algazzaz (2024) conducted an intervention study that proved emotional support could significantly increase learners' satisfaction of basic psychological needs, positive emotions, and classroom engagement. Students who experienced emotionally supportive teaching reported lower anxiety and higher enjoyment, which encouraged them to participate more actively in learning. Similarly, Guo et al. (2025) found that emotional support influenced students' engagement indirectly through motivational variables such as L2 grit and intended effort. When students felt understood and valued by their teachers, they showed more perseverance and determination in language learning. These findings indicate that emotional support builds a safe and positive classroom climate that strengthens learners' confidence and emotional connection with the learning process.

Academic Support

Academic support refers to teachers' instructional guidance, feedback, and assistance that help students understand the learning material. Although fewer studies focused on academic support alone, its importance is clearly shown in how it enhances students' perceived competence and self-efficacy. Liu et al. (2022), for example, found that academic support, when combined with emotional encouragement, increased students' engagement by improving their self-efficacy and achievement goal orientation. This

suggests that clear explanations, constructive feedback, and guidance are central elements of teacher support that promote students' belief in their abilities. When students feel more competent, they are more motivated to complete tasks and pursue mastery-oriented goals. Thus, academic support serves as a foundation for sustaining learners' motivation through structured and effective instruction.

Autonomy Support

Autonomy support refers to the extent to which teachers encourage students' independence and decision-making in the learning process. Alrabai (2021) implemented an autonomy-supportive teaching approach and found that students in the experimental group showed higher levels of classroom autonomy and engagement. The study confirmed that giving learners choices, acknowledging their feelings, and providing meaningful reasons for tasks can promote internal motivation. Similarly, Işık (2020) reported that EFL teachers who supported students' out-of-class learning autonomy helped them take more responsibility for their language learning, which increased their motivation and persistence. However, Kaur et al. (2014) found that the effectiveness of autonomy support may depend on cultural expectations. In their study with Thai students, autonomy support did not always enhance motivation because some students preferred more teacher control and guidance. These findings suggest that autonomy support is generally beneficial but should be adjusted according to learners' cultural background and readiness for independent learning.

Combined/Integrated Support

Many recent studies have emphasized the combination of multiple types of support emotional, academic, competence, autonomy, informational, or instrumental and their collective influence on learning motivation. Zhang & Hu (2025a) examined perceived English teacher support consisting of competence, emotional, and autonomy support, and found that its effect on student engagement was mediated by the L2 Motivational Self System. When teachers provided guidance, care, and freedom, students developed stronger self-images as capable language learners, which improved their engagement. Similarly, Gao et al. (2024) focused on emotional, academic, and informational support in blended learning environments and found that teacher support predicted engagement through L2 grit and intended effort. Informational support, which includes giving students clear explanations, feedback, and helpful resources, was particularly useful for connecting emotional encouragement with practical learning behaviors. Although informational support is not the main focus of the present study, it is conceptually related to academic support because both involve instructional clarity and helpful guidance that build competence.

Liu & Li (2023) and Yang et al. (2024) also highlighted the benefits of combining academic, emotional, and instrumental support. Instrumental support refers to the practical or tangible assistance that teachers provide, such as learning materials, opportunities, or direct help with tasks. While this form of support is not the primary concern of this study, it closely relates to academic support in that it helps students overcome learning challenges, and to emotional support because it reflects teachers' care through action. In addition, some studies include informational support alongside emotional and academic forms to describe teachers' communication and advice that guide learners toward effective strategies. These related support types instrumental and informational are not central in this review but are important to acknowledge because they contribute to students' perceived competence and autonomy, linking indirectly with the three main support types discussed here. Overall, integrated support produces stronger and more sustainable effects on motivation, as it satisfies students' psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy simultaneously.

In summary, the reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that teacher support whether emotional, academic, autonomy-based, or integrated plays a key role in improving students' learning motivation and engagement in language classrooms. Emotional support promotes positive emotions and reduces anxiety; academic support enhances competence and self-efficacy; and autonomy support encourages self-regulation and intrinsic motivation. However, when these forms of support are combined, they produce stronger effects on motivation because they meet learners' psychological needs in a balanced way. Although informational and instrumental supports are not treated as main categories in this study, their connection to academic and emotional dimensions underscores the multifaceted nature of teacher support. Mediating factors such as L2

grit, self-efficacy, enjoyment, and the motivational self-system further explain how teacher support influences learning outcomes. Therefore, effective teachers should integrate emotional warmth, clear academic guidance, and autonomy encouragement to create a supportive and motivating environment for language learning.

Conceptual Model of Teacher Support and the Outcomes

Previous studies on teacher support in language learning have often focused on a single dimension such as emotional, academic, or autonomy support while others have explored broader, integrated frameworks combining multiple types. Building on these insights, this study presents an interconnected model of teacher support that integrates emotional, academic, and autonomy support as the three core components influencing students' motivation to learn a second or foreign language.
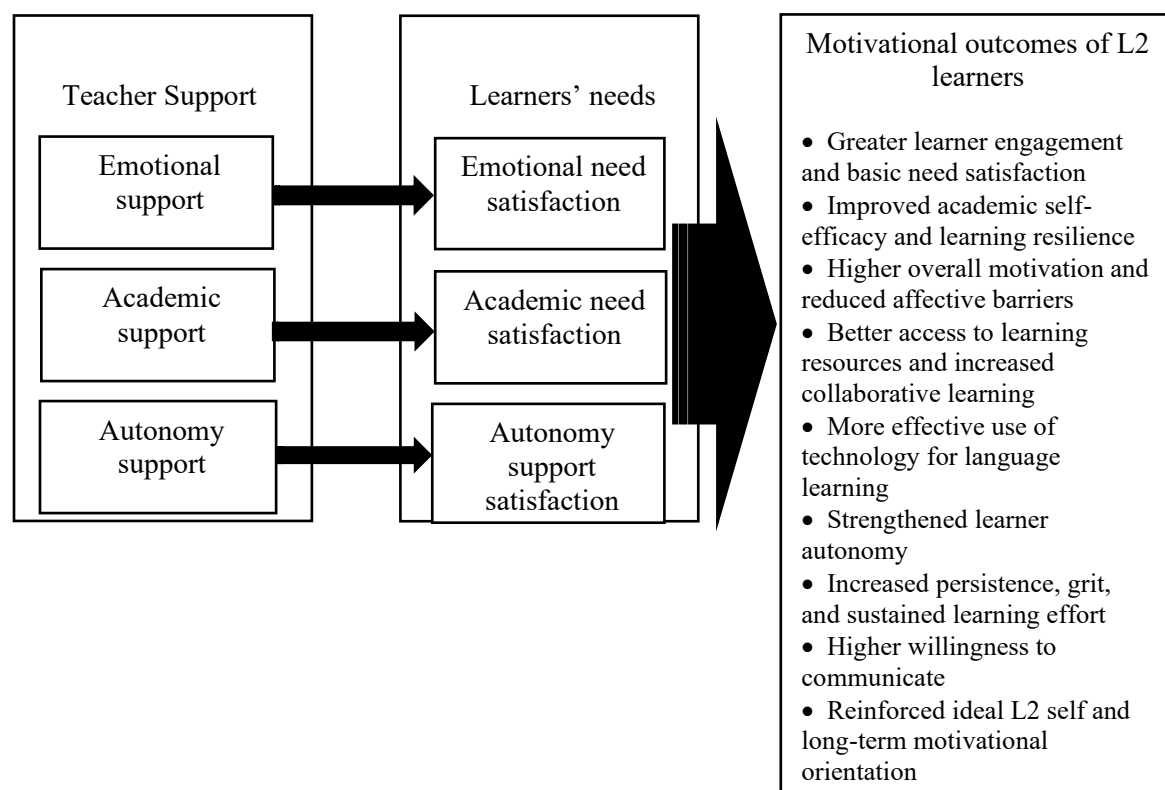
Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Teacher Support and the Outcomes

This model is grounded in Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (in Manninen et al., 2022), which emphasizes the fulfillment of learners' psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy. Emotional support fosters a sense of belonging and reduces anxiety; academic support enhances competence through guidance and feedback; and autonomy support promotes self-direction and intrinsic motivation. When these three supports operate together, they create a synergistic effect that strengthens learners' motivation, engagement, and resilience in language learning contexts.

Implication for Teachers and Education Policy Makers

The analysis of emotional, academic, autonomy, and combined teacher supports offers several practical implications for teacher training and education policy.

First, emotional support should be a key focus in teacher education programs. Since emotional warmth and empathy reduce students' anxiety and foster positive relationships, teachers need training in social–emotional competence, including empathy, active listening, and constructive classroom

communication. Building these interpersonal skills helps create a safe and motivating environment where students feel valued and confident to participate.

Second, academic support should be enhanced through continuous professional development that focuses on effective instructional design, feedback, and scaffolding. Teachers who can offer clear explanations, set achievable goals, and provide supportive feedback help learners develop competence and self-efficacy two essential components of long-term motivation in language learning.

Third, autonomy support should be integrated into teacher practice by promoting instructional strategies that give students choices, encourage independent thinking, and provide rationales for tasks. Such approaches foster self-regulation and intrinsic motivation, aligning with the principles of Self-Determination Theory. Educational policies should also encourage learner-centered curricula and flexible classroom practices that allow students to take ownership of their learning.

Finally, the evidence for combined or integrated support suggests that emotional, academic, and autonomy supports work best when implemented together. Therefore, teacher training should promote a holistic understanding of support that balances empathy, guidance, and autonomy.

For policy makers, these findings indicate the need for professional development programs and evaluation systems that value multidimensional teacher support. Providing institutional resources and time for teachers to develop these skills can help schools foster more motivated, confident, and self-directed language learners.

CONCLUSION

This review highlights the crucial role of teacher support in enhancing students' motivation to learn a second or foreign language. Emotional support helps create a safe and encouraging learning environment, academic support strengthens students' confidence and persistence, and autonomy support fosters intrinsic motivation and learning ownership. While each form of support is beneficial on its own, research consistently shows that they are most effective when implemented together through a holistic approach. The findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge by emphasizing the interactive nature of teacher support and advocating for the integration of emotional, academic, and motivational strategies in EFL instruction. This review also calls for more comprehensive teacher education programs that prepare educators to address not only cognitive but also emotional and motivational aspects of learning. For researchers, future studies should employ longitudinal and classroom-based methods to examine how teacher support operates dynamically across time and contexts. Ultimately, teacher support extends beyond academic outcomes—it cultivates resilience, engagement, and a lifelong desire to learn. Practically, teachers and policymakers should collaborate to design classrooms and professional training that balance empathy, guidance, and autonomy, ensuring language learners feel supported, motivated, and empowered to achieve their fullest potential.

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