

## The Motivational Core of L2 Academic Writing: A Systematic Review of Theory, Research, and Pedagogy

Sahril Nur<sup>1</sup>, Geminastiti Sakkir<sup>2\*</sup>, Auliyanti Sahril Nurfadhilah<sup>3</sup>

Corresponding Author: [geminastitisakkir@unm.ac.id](mailto:geminastitisakkir@unm.ac.id)

Universitas Negeri Makassar, Indonesia

DOI: <https://10.33096/tamaddun.v24i2.984>

Received: 27 August 2025

Accepted: 27 September 2025

Published: 5 December 2025

### Abstract

*Academic writing is a formidable challenge for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, with motivation being a critical determinant of success. This systematic literature review synthesizes the theoretical and empirical landscape of motivation in EFL academic writing. It traces the evolution of key conceptual frameworks, from foundational dichotomies to contemporary socio-dynamic models like the L2 Motivational Self System. A thematic analysis of the literature identifies three core clusters of motivational determinants: the writer's internal world (e.g., self-efficacy, attributions), the nature of the writing task (e.g., choice, authenticity), and the learning environment (e.g., teacher support, classroom climate). The review further examines the motivational impact of pedagogical interventions, including various forms of feedback and the integration of technology from collaborative platforms to generative AI. The discussion proposes an integrated model where motivation emerges from the interplay of identity, agency, and context, highlighting critical research gaps and outlining a forward-looking agenda.*

**Keywords:** *L2 writing motivation, academic writing, EFL, self-determination theory, pedagogical strategies.*

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Situating the Challenge: The Demands of Academic Writing in EFL Contexts

Academic writing in a second or foreign language (L2) stands as a uniquely complex and demanding endeavor. For learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), it represents more than a simple exercise in linguistic production; it is a multifaceted skill that requires the orchestration of advanced cognitive, metacognitive, rhetorical, and linguistic competencies (Kormos, 2012). Unlike conversational fluency, academic writing necessitates mastery of specific conventions, including grammatical precision, sophisticated vocabulary, logical organization, and the ability to construct coherent and persuasive arguments (Kormos, 2012; Muhammad & Halabi, 2021; Woodrow, 2011). The challenge is compounded by the need to navigate the cultural and disciplinary norms embedded within academic discourse; a task that remains formidable even for many native speakers.

Within the broad spectrum of language skills, writing is consistently identified as the most difficult for EFL students to master (Alzubi & Nazim, 2024). This difficulty is not merely a matter of linguistic deficit but is deeply intertwined with psychological and affective factors. It is in this context that motivation emerges as a paramount construct, frequently cited as one of the most powerful predictors of failure or success in the arduous journey of L2 learning (Gardner, 1985; Zareian & Jodaei, 2015). Motivation in this domain is not a static personal trait but a dynamic, internal process that activates, guides, and sustains goal-oriented behavior, providing the essential impetus for learners to engage with and persist through the inherent difficulties of academic writing (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Lai, 2011).

## 1.2. The Centrality of Motivation in Overcoming Writing Hurdles

Motivation serves as the psychological engine that propels learners through the demanding process of acquiring academic writing proficiency. It is the force that determines the extent of a learner's effort, persistence, and engagement with learning tasks (Muhammad & Halabi, 2021). Highly motivated students are more likely to invest the necessary time and energy in their writing, push through obstacles, and achieve better outcomes (Borah, 2021; Muhammad & Halabi, 2021). They demonstrate greater resilience when faced with corrective feedback and are more inclined to engage in the deep, iterative processes of revision and editing that are fundamental to improving writing quality (Guan et al., 2023).

Crucially, motivation is inextricably linked to learner engagement, a multifaceted construct encompassing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement in a task (Fredricks et al., 2004; Hiver et al., 2024). Engagement is increasingly understood as a key mediating variable that connects pedagogical practices, such as the provision of feedback, with tangible learning outcomes (Fu & Huang, 2025; Zhang & Hyland, 2018). A motivated learner is an engaged learner—one who not only completes assignments but also invests cognitively in understanding complex ideas, applies self-regulated strategies to master challenging skills, and maintains a positive emotional connection to the learning process (Fredricks et al., 2004). Without sufficient motivation, even the most well-designed pedagogical support may fail to produce meaningful improvement.

## 1.3. Identifying the Gaps: Toward a Cohesive View of L2 Writing Motivation

Despite the vast body of research on L2 motivation in general, the literature focusing specifically on the domain of academic writing remains comparatively fragmented (Kormos, 2012; Yesilyurt, 2008). Much of the existing research has approached L2 writing motivation as a sub-component of general L2 learning motivation, often failing to address the unique psychological demands and contextual factors specific to academic composition. This has resulted in a landscape where findings from disparate theoretical traditions have yet to be fully synthesized into a cohesive framework that can holistically inform both research and practice.

Furthermore, the field is in a constant state of flux, shaped by evolving pedagogical approaches and the rapid integration of new technologies. The recent advent of generative artificial intelligence (AI), for instance, presents both unprecedented opportunities and significant challenges for learner motivation and autonomy, necessitating a critical examination of its role in the writing classroom (Fathi & Nourzadeh, 2019). There is a clear and pressing need for a systematic review that not only consolidates what is known but also critically evaluates the current state of the field, identifies crucial gaps, and charts a clear path forward (Fu & Huang, 2025; Gardner, 1985).

## 1.4. Purpose and Structure of the Present Review

The purpose of this systematic review is to synthesize and critically evaluate the body of literature pertaining to motivation in EFL academic writing. By mapping the theoretical terrain, examining the key determinants of motivation, and assessing the impact of pedagogical interventions, this review aims to construct a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the "essence" of motivation in this specific context. It seeks to bridge the gap between theory and

practice by providing a cohesive framework that can guide future research and inform evidence-based pedagogy.

To achieve this goal, the article is structured as follows. First, it traces the theoretical evolution of motivational concepts relevant to L2 writing, from foundational frameworks to contemporary socio-dynamic models. Second, it briefly outlines the systematic methodology employed to identify and select the literature for review. Third, it presents a thematic analysis of the key determinants of motivation, categorized as learner-internal, task-related, and environmental factors. Fourth, it examines the motivational impact of various pedagogical interventions, with a focus on feedback and technology. Finally, the discussion section synthesizes these findings into an integrated model, critically evaluates the state of the field, and proposes a robust agenda for future research, followed by a conclusion that distills the key pedagogical implications for the EFL writing classroom.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptualization of motivation in L2 learning has undergone significant evolution, moving from broad socio-psychological dichotomies to more nuanced cognitive and context-sensitive models. This progression provides an increasingly sophisticated lens through which to understand the complex forces that drive EFL learners in the specific domain of academic writing.

### 2.1. Foundational Frameworks: From Instrumental Goals to Intrinsic Desires

Early research in L2 motivation was dominated by Gardner's influential socio-educational model, which introduced the foundational distinction between instrumental and integrative motivation (Gardner, 1985). Instrumental motivation refers to the desire to learn a language for pragmatic or utilitarian purposes, such as passing an examination, securing a better job, or meeting academic requirements (Borah, 2021). Integrative motivation, in contrast, involves a desire to learn the language to connect with, understand, or become part of the target language community and culture (Guan et al., 2023).

Parallel to this, general educational psychology provided the classic dichotomy of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is the drive to engage in an activity for its own sake—for the inherent pleasure, interest, and satisfaction it provides (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2008). An intrinsically motivated writer might enjoy the process of crafting an argument or the satisfaction of expressing complex ideas clearly. Extrinsic motivation, conversely, involves engaging in an activity to obtain a separable outcome, such as receiving a good grade, earning praise from a teacher, or avoiding punishment (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

While these foundational frameworks were pivotal in establishing motivation as a key area of inquiry, their binary nature presents a somewhat simplified view of the complex reality of the EFL academic writer. In an academic context, instrumental goals (e.g., obtaining a degree) are undeniably powerful drivers, and the desire to integrate into a specific academic discourse community can be seen as both an integrative and instrumental aim. The notion that extrinsic motivation is inherently less desirable than intrinsic motivation fails to account for the fact that external goals, such as career advancement, are legitimate and powerful reasons for undertaking the arduous task of mastering academic writing. This recognition of complexity paved the way for more sophisticated theories that could better capture the multifaceted nature of human motivation.

## 2.2. The Cognitive Shift: Self-Determination, Expectancy, and Attributions of Success

The 1990s witnessed a "cognitive shift" in motivation research, moving the focus toward learners' internal beliefs, perceptions, and interpretations of their learning experiences. Three theories from this period are particularly salient for understanding L2 writing motivation.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Ryan and Deci, offers a more nuanced perspective than the simple intrinsic/extrinsic dichotomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT posits that motivation is best understood as existing on a continuum of self-determination, or autonomy (Ryan & Deci, 2000). It reconceptualizes extrinsic motivation into several types that vary in their degree of internalization, from purely external regulation (e.g., writing an essay only to avoid a penalty) to fully integrated regulation (e.g., writing an essay because it aligns with one's personal values and goals). The theory's central tenet is that motivation, well-being, and performance are optimized when three basic psychological needs are satisfied: autonomy (the need to feel a sense of choice and control over one's actions), competence (the need to feel effective and capable), and relatedness (the need to feel connected to others) (Ryan & Deci, 2024; Yesilyurt, 2008). This framework provides a powerful diagnostic tool for the writing classroom, suggesting that motivation can be fostered by providing students with choices, offering constructive feedback that builds competence, and creating a supportive, collaborative community.

Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) proposes that an individual's motivation to perform a task is determined by two key factors: their expectancy for success and the value they attach to the task (Lai, 2011). Expectancy refers to a student's belief about how well they will do on an upcoming task. Value is composed of several components, including intrinsic value (enjoyment), utility value (usefulness for future goals), and attainment value (importance for one's identity) (Abdollahzadeh et al., 2022; Lo & Hyland, 2007). According to EVT, a student will be most motivated to write an academic essay when they believe they can succeed (high expectancy) and when they perceive the task as interesting, useful for their future career, or important for their identity as a scholar (high value) (Muhammad & Halabi, 2021).

Attribution Theory, primarily associated with Weiner, focuses on the causal explanations that individuals develop for their past successes and failures (Mali, 2015). These attributions—such as to ability, effort, task difficulty, or luck—are crucial because they influence expectations for future success and subsequent motivation (Mali, 2015). For instance, a student who attributes a poor essay grade to a lack of effort (an internal, unstable, and controllable factor) is likely to remain motivated and try harder next time. In contrast, a student who attributes the same failure to a lack of innate writing ability (an internal, stable, and uncontrollable factor) may experience learned helplessness and reduced motivation for future writing tasks (Piniel & Csizér, 2014; Waller & Papi, 2017).

## 2.3. The Socio-Dynamic Turn: The L2 Motivational Self System and the Concept of Investment

More recent frameworks have sought to integrate cognitive elements with a renewed appreciation for the social, contextual, and identity-based dimensions of motivation.

The most influential of these is Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS), which reframes L2 motivation through the lens of possible selves (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). The L2MSS consists of three primary components:

- a. The Ideal L2 Self: This is the learner's vision of the person they would ideally like to become as an L2 user. It is a powerful motivator, as the desire to reduce the discrepancy between one's actual self and this idealized future self generates motivation (Papi, 2010; Yesilyurt, 2008). For an academic writer, this could be the image of oneself confidently presenting a paper at an international conference or publishing in a respected journal (Dörnyei, 2001; Guan et al., 2023).
- b. The Ought-to L2 Self: This refers to the attributes a learner believes they ought to possess to meet external expectations or avoid negative outcomes. This self is driven by duties, obligations, and responsibilities, such as the need to pass an exam to please one's parents or satisfy degree requirements (Papi, 2010; Yesilyurt, 2008).
- c. The L2 Learning Experience: This component encompasses the situated, "executive" motives related to the immediate learning environment, including the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, and prior learning experiences (Dörnyei, 2009; Fredricks et al., 2004).

Finally, Norton's Theory of Investment provides a critical sociological lens that connects motivation to identity and power (Darvin & Norton, 2015). This theory posits that learners are not just motivated; they make an investment in learning a language. A learner invests in the practice of academic writing when they believe that doing so will provide them with a wider range of symbolic and material resources, thereby enhancing their cultural capital and social power (Darvin & Norton, 2015). This concept powerfully explains why an EFL student would persist in the often-grueling process of academic writing: they are not merely completing a task, but are actively investing in their future academic and professional identities.

These theoretical frameworks, from foundational dichotomies to complex socio-dynamic systems, provide a rich and evolving conceptual toolkit for understanding the essence of motivation in EFL academic writing. A summary of their core tenets and relevance is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Key Theoretical Frameworks of Motivation in L2 Writing**

Theoretical Framework	Key Proponents	Core Tenets	Relevance to EFL Academic Writing
<b>Socio-Educational Model</b>	Gardner	Distinguishes between <i>instrumental</i> (practical goals) and <i>integrative</i> (cultural affiliation) motivation.	Explains why students are motivated by both pragmatic needs (e.g., getting a degree) and a desire to join an academic community. (Borah, 2021; Gardner, 1985)
<b>Intrinsic/Extrinsic Motivation</b>	Deci, Ryan	Differentiates between motivation driven by internal enjoyment ( <i>intrinsic</i> ) and motivation driven by external rewards or pressures ( <i>extrinsic</i> ).	Highlights the importance of making writing tasks inherently interesting and enjoyable, beyond just focusing on grades. (Bruning & Horn, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2008)
<b>Self-Determination Theory (SDT)</b>	Ryan & Deci	Proposes a continuum of motivation based on internalization. Motivation is fostered when needs for <i>Autonomy</i> , <i>Competence</i> , and <i>Relatedness</i> are met.	Explains why providing topic choice (autonomy), constructive feedback (competence), and collaborative tasks (relatedness) can enhance writing motivation. (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Yesilyurt, 2008)



<b>Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT)</b>	Eccles, Wigfield	Motivation is a product of a learner's <i>expectancy</i> of success and the <i>value</i> (intrinsic, utility, attainment) they place on the task.	Clarifies why students may lack motivation for writing tasks they perceive as irrelevant to their goals (low utility value) or too difficult to succeed at (low expectancy). (Lai, 2011)
<b>Attribution Theory</b>	Weiner	Focuses on the causal reasons learners attribute to past successes and failures (e.g., effort, ability), which shapes future motivation.	Underscores the importance of helping students attribute writing challenges to controllable factors like effort and strategy use, rather than fixed ability. (Mali, 2015; Piniel & Csizér, 2014)
<b>L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS)</b>	Dörnyei	Motivation is generated by the desire to reduce the gap between the actual self and two future self-guides: The <i>Ideal L2 Self</i> and the <i>Ought-to L2 Self</i> .	Emphasizes the power of helping students create a vivid and compelling vision of themselves as successful future academic writers (Ideal L2 Self). (Dörnyei, 2009; Guan et al., 2023)
<b>Theory of Investment</b>	Norton	Links motivation to identity and power. Learners <i>invest</i> in practices they believe will increase their symbolic and material resources.	Provides a critical lens for understanding academic writing as an investment in a student's future identity as a scholar and professional. (Darvin & Norton, 2015)

## METHOD

To ensure a comprehensive and rigorous synthesis, this review employed a systematic methodology for literature identification, screening, and analysis, drawing upon principles outlined in the PRISMA protocol. This approach enhances the credibility of the findings and provides a transparent account of the review process.

The search strategy involved querying major academic databases relevant to applied linguistics and education, including Web of Science, Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar. A combination of keywords and Boolean operators was used to capture relevant literature. Search strings included variations and combinations of terms such as: ("motivation" OR "engagement" OR "self-efficacy" OR "affect") AND ("EFL" OR "L2" OR "second language") AND ("academic writing" OR "writing instruction" OR "composition") (Lai, 2011; Zareian & Jodaei, 2015). The search was primarily limited to peer-reviewed journal articles and systematic reviews published between January 2000 and May 2025 to ensure currency and scholarly rigor.

The inclusion criteria stipulated that studies must (a) be empirical or theoretical reviews, (b) focus on motivation or closely related affective constructs (e.g., engagement, anxiety, self-efficacy) as a primary variable, (c) situate the research within the context of L2 academic writing, and (d) involve learners in higher education or advanced secondary settings. Studies focusing exclusively on creative writing, primary education, or general L2 proficiency without a specific writing component were excluded.

Following the initial search, titles and abstracts were screened for relevance. The full texts of potentially eligible articles were then retrieved and assessed against the inclusion criteria. This process yielded a final corpus of articles for review. A thematic analysis approach was subsequently employed to synthesize the findings from the selected literature (Dörnyei, 2003;

Ryan & Deci, 2000). This involved systematically identifying, coding, and categorizing key patterns and themes related to the theoretical underpinnings, determinants, and pedagogical supports of motivation in EFL academic writing. This systematic process allowed for a structured and cohesive synthesis of a diverse and multifaceted body of research.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The literature reveals that motivation in the EFL writing classroom is not a singular entity but an emergent property of a complex system of interacting factors. These determinants can be broadly categorized into three interconnected domains: the writer's internal psychological landscape, the nature of the writing task itself, and the characteristics of the broader learning environment.

### **4.1. The Writer's Inner World: Self-Concept, Beliefs, and Affective States**

The most powerful influences on writing motivation originate from within the learner. A student's beliefs about themselves as a writer, their explanations for past outcomes, and their emotional state profoundly shape their willingness to engage with academic writing.

A dominant theme in the literature is the concept of self-efficacy, defined as a learner's belief in their own capability to successfully execute the tasks required to produce a written text (Bandura, 1999; Woodrow, 2011). Research consistently demonstrates that students with higher writing self-efficacy are more motivated, persist longer in the face of difficulty, use more effective strategies, and ultimately achieve better writing performance (Teng & Zhang, 2018; Woodrow, 2011). This construct is closely related to the Ideal L2 Writing Self from the L2MSS framework; a student who can vividly imagine themselves as a competent future writer is more likely to possess the self-belief needed to persevere through current challenges (Guan et al., 2023; Tahmouresi & Papi, 2021). Furthermore, adopting a growth mindset—the belief that writing ability can be developed through effort and practice—is strongly associated with higher motivation and resilience, as it frames challenges as opportunities for learning rather than as indictments of fixed ability (Guan et al., 2023).

Building on this, attribution theory provides a framework for understanding how learners' interpretations of their past writing experiences influence future motivation (Mali, 2015). Studies show that motivationally adaptive learners tend to attribute their successes to internal factors like effort and ability, and their failures to controllable and unstable factors like insufficient effort or poor strategy use (Mali, 2015; Piniel & Csizér, 2014). Conversely, students who attribute failure to a perceived lack of innate ability—an uncontrollable and stable factor—are more likely to develop learned helplessness and disengage from writing tasks (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Waller & Papi, 2017).

Finally, affective states, particularly writing anxiety, play a significant role. Writing anxiety is a common experience among EFL learners, characterized by feelings of apprehension and self-doubt that can lead to procrastination and avoidance behaviors (Han & Hiver, 2018; Woodrow, 2011). It is negatively correlated with self-efficacy; as confidence in one's writing ability decreases, anxiety tends to increase, creating a debilitating cycle that undermines both motivation and performance (Woodrow, 2011).

### **4.2. The Nature of the Task: The Power of Choice, Interest, and Authenticity**

The design and nature of the writing task itself is a powerful lever for influencing motivation. When tasks are perceived as meaningful, engaging, and relevant, students are far more likely to invest the necessary cognitive and emotional resources.

One of the most consistently reported findings is the motivational power of choice and topic interest. When students are given the autonomy to select their own writing topics or choose from a range of options that align with their personal interests, their intrinsic motivation increases significantly (Alzubi & Nazim, 2024). Writing about familiar or personally relevant topics liberates learners, builds their confidence, and encourages them to draw upon their existing knowledge, leading to deeper engagement and better writing outcomes (Alzubi & Nazim, 2024; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Yesilyurt, 2008). This aligns directly with Self-Determination Theory's emphasis on the fundamental human need for autonomy.

Beyond topic interest, the overall appeal and authenticity of a writing task are crucial. Authentic tasks—those that mirror real-world purposes and are directed at a genuine audience beyond the teacher—are consistently found to be more motivating than decontextualized academic exercises (Lo & Hyland, 2007; Zhang & Hyland, 2018). For example, writing a letter to a real organization, contributing to a collaborative online project, or preparing a text for publication in a student journal fosters a sense of purpose that transforms writing from a mere classroom requirement into a meaningful act of communication. Conversely, tasks perceived as tedious or inauthentic, such as rote summarization or writing solely for a high-stakes exam, can be highly demotivating (Lo & Hyland, 2007).

#### **4.3. The Learning Environment: Teacher, Peers, and Classroom Climate**

The immediate learning environment, shaped by the teacher, peers, and the overall classroom atmosphere, creates the context in which learner-internal and task-related factors operate. A supportive environment can amplify motivation, while a negative one can stifle it.

The teacher's role is paramount. Teachers act as critical motivational agents through their instructional practices, feedback, and interpersonal style. Research highlights the benefits of an autonomy-supportive teaching style, where instructors acknowledge students' perspectives, provide choices, and offer a rationale for tasks, as opposed to a controlling style that relies on pressure and directives (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Yesilyurt, 2008). A teacher who provides encouragement, demonstrates empathy, and builds a positive rapport with students can significantly enhance their motivation and reduce writing anxiety (Williams, & Burden, 1997; Zhang & Hyland, 2022; Zheng & Yu, 2018).

Peer dynamics and collaborative learning also have a significant motivational impact. Working with peers on writing tasks can help satisfy the psychological need for relatedness, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose (Chen, 2021; Ushioda, 2011). Collaborative writing can reduce the isolation often associated with academic writing, provide opportunities for scaffolding, and create a supportive environment where students feel comfortable sharing ideas and providing feedback (Chen, 2021; Kormos, 2012). However, the motivational benefits of collaboration are contingent on the effective structuring of tasks to ensure positive interdependence and individual accountability.

Finally, the overall classroom climate is a foundational determinant of motivation. A safe, respectful, and non-threatening learning environment is essential for encouraging students to take the intellectual and linguistic risks necessary for writing development (Bruning & Horn, 2000;



Williams & Burden, 1997). When students feel that making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process rather than a cause for criticism, their anxiety decreases and their willingness to experiment and engage increases (Guan et al., 2023).

It is crucial to recognize that these determinants do not operate in isolation. Rather, they form a dynamic, interactive system. For instance, an autonomy-supportive teacher (environmental factor) who provides students with a choice of authentic topics (task factor) directly nurtures a student's internal sense of autonomy and enhances their intrinsic motivation (internal factor). Similarly, a student's internal level of self-efficacy will influence how they perceive the difficulty of a task and how they interpret and engage with teacher feedback. Understanding motivation in EFL academic writing therefore requires a holistic perspective that acknowledges the constant and reciprocal interplay between the writer, the task, and the context.

## Discussion

This systematic review has traversed the theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical landscape of motivation in EFL academic writing. The findings collectively paint a picture of a highly complex and dynamic construct, shaped by a confluence of internal and external forces. This discussion aims to synthesize these findings into a cohesive model, critically evaluate the state of the current literature, and chart a course for future inquiry that can further illuminate this vital area of L2 learning.

### 5.1. Recapitulation: The Multifaceted Nature of L2 Writing Motivation

The review confirms that motivation in EFL academic writing cannot be reduced to a single factor or theory. It is a multifaceted phenomenon that emerges from the dynamic interplay of determinants rooted within the learner, the nature of the writing task, and the broader learning environment. Foundational theories have given way to more sophisticated models that recognize the cognitive, social, and identity-based dimensions of motivation. Empirical research has consistently highlighted the importance of constructs like self-efficacy, task value, and autonomy support, while recent pedagogical shifts, driven by technology, are actively reshaping the motivational dynamics of the writing classroom. The challenge, therefore, is not to find a single source of motivation but to understand how these multiple facets interact to create a motivational ecosystem that either supports or hinders the developing writer.

### 5.2. The Essence of Motivation: An Integrated Model of Identity, Agency, and Context

Synthesizing the evidence presented, the essence of motivation in EFL academic writing can be conceptualized through an integrated model built on three interdependent pillars: Identity Investment, Learner Agency, and a Supportive Context. This model moves beyond a simple list of factors to propose a systemic relationship where each element enables and is enabled by the others.

At the core of sustained motivation lies Identity Investment. The most powerful and enduring driver for undertaking the arduous task of academic writing is the learner's aspirational vision of their future self and their investment in achieving that vision. This is captured most effectively by the L2MSS's concept of the Ideal L2 Writing Self (Dörnyei, 2009; Guan et al., 2023; Tahmouresi & Papi, 2021) and Norton's theory of investment (Darvin & Norton, 2015). When a student can vividly imagine themselves as a competent member of their target academic or professional community—a researcher, a scholar, a successful graduate—they are not merely completing an

assignment; they are actively constructing a desired future identity. This provides the fundamental "why" that fuels long-term persistence and resilience. Without this personal investment, motivation is likely to be fleeting, dependent on the transient appeal of a single task or the presence of an external reward.

However, this identity investment cannot be realized without Learner Agency. Agency is the capacity of the learner to act purposefully and autonomously to shape their own learning process. It is the bridge between the aspirational "why" and the practical "how" of writing development. Agency is manifested when learners are empowered to make meaningful choices about their writing, such as selecting topics of personal interest (Alzubi & Nazim, 2024), which satisfies their need for autonomy as described by SDT. It is expressed through the development of robust self-efficacy, the belief that one has the capacity to succeed, which fuels effort and perseverance (Bandura, 1999; Woodrow, 2011). Furthermore, agency involves the conscious deployment of self-regulated learning strategies—planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own writing process—and engaging in proactive behaviors like seeking out constructive feedback to facilitate improvement (Abdollahzadeh et al., 2022; Lo & Hyland, 2007; Zhang, Y., & Hyland, K., 2022). An agentic learner is not a passive recipient of instruction but an active architect of their own competence.

Finally, both identity and agency are contingent upon a Supportive Context. Learners do not develop in a vacuum; their internal motivational resources must be cultivated within a nurturing pedagogical environment—the "where" of learning. This context is primarily shaped by the teacher, who can create a positive and safe classroom climate that reduces anxiety and encourages risk-taking (Williams & Burden, 1997). A supportive context is one where the teacher provides autonomy support rather than control (Yesilyurt, 2008), offering choices and rationale that empower student agency. It is an environment where feedback is framed as a constructive, dialogic, and emotionally supportive process designed to build competence, not merely to correct errors (Zhang & Hyland, 2022; Zheng & Yu, 2018). In the modern classroom, this context is increasingly mediated by technology, where digital tools are integrated thoughtfully as scaffolds to support learning and agency, rather than as crutches that foster dependency (Kormos, 2012).

In this integrated model, these three pillars are mutually reinforcing. A strong Ideal L2 Self (Identity) fuels the desire to act (Agency). An agentic learner who experiences success through their own efforts in a supportive classroom (Context) reinforces their self-efficacy and strengthens their identity as a competent writer. A teacher who creates a supportive context empowers agency, which in turn allows students the psychological space to develop and invest in their future identities. The breakdown of any one pillar compromises the entire system; a learner with a strong vision but no agency or support will become frustrated, while an agentic learner in an unsupportive context will struggle to sustain motivation. The essence of motivation, therefore, lies not in any single element, but in the synergistic functioning of this entire ecosystem.

### **5.3. Critical Evaluation of the Literature and Identification of Research Gaps**

While the existing literature provides a rich foundation, a critical evaluation reveals several methodological, theoretical, and topical gaps that limit our current understanding and point the way toward future research.

**Methodological Gaps:** A significant portion of the research in this area relies on cross-sectional designs using self-report questionnaires. While valuable for identifying correlations and

establishing broad patterns, these methods provide only a static snapshot of what is inherently a dynamic process. There is a pressing need for more longitudinal research that can track the development and fluctuation of motivational variables over time, for instance, across the duration of a writing course or an entire academic program (Fathi & Nourzadeh, 2019; Tahmouresi & Papi, 2021; Yesilyurt, 2008). Furthermore, the field would benefit greatly from an increased use of qualitative and mixed-methods designs. Methods such as case studies, narrative inquiry, and stimulated recalls can provide deeper, more contextualized insights into the lived motivational experiences of EFL writers, capturing the nuances that quantitative scales often miss (Chen, 2021; Dörnyei, 2003; Fredricks et al., 2004).

**Theoretical Gaps:** While the L2MSS has proven to be a robust and highly influential framework, there is a need for more research that explicitly integrates it with other powerful cognitive theories within the specific domain of writing. For example, how do a student's attributions for past writing failures (Attribution Theory) directly shape the formation or revision of their Ideal L2 Self? How does the perceived utility value of a specific writing task (EVT) contribute to the overall quality of the L2 Learning Experience component of the L2MSS? Forging these theoretical links would allow for more comprehensive and predictive models of L2 writing motivation.

**The Technology Frontier:** The most significant and rapidly evolving gap concerns the impact of generative AI. Current research is only beginning to scratch the surface of how tools like ChatGPT are influencing L2 writing motivation and engagement (Muhammad & Halabi, 2021). Future research must move beyond preliminary efficacy studies to ask more critical questions. How does the use of AI shape a learner's writing identity and sense of agency? Does it foster a genuine sense of competence or a dependency on the tool? What new forms of digital and critical literacy are required to use these tools effectively and ethically? Investigating these questions is paramount for developing a pedagogy that can responsibly navigate this new technological landscape (Hiver et al., 2024; Ryan & Deci, 2024; Teng, L. S., & Zhang, L. J., 2018).

#### **5.4. Charting the Course for Future Research**

Based on the gaps identified, a clear agenda for future research emerges. The field should prioritize:

- a. Longitudinal, mixed-methods studies that track the co-development of key motivational constructs (e.g., Ideal L2 Writing Self, self-efficacy, attributions) and writing proficiency over extended periods. Such studies could illuminate the causal pathways and reciprocal relationships between motivation and achievement.
- b. Interventionist research that designs and empirically tests pedagogical frameworks aimed at explicitly fostering learner agency. This could include studies on the effectiveness of teaching feedback literacy, metacognitive strategy instruction, or attribution retraining within the context of the writing classroom.
- c. Critical and ethnographic studies that explore how EFL students are actually integrating generative AI into their writing processes in authentic academic contexts. Such research should focus on the impact of these practices on their motivation, their development as writers, their sense of authorship, and the evolving role of the teacher.

## **CONCLUSION**

This systematic review has synthesized a broad and diverse body of literature to illuminate the essence of motivation in the challenging domain of EFL academic writing. It has traced the evolution of theoretical thought, mapped the key determinants of motivation, and evaluated the impact of pedagogical interventions. The central contribution of this review is the proposal of an integrated model that frames motivation not as a simple attribute but as a dynamic outcome of the interplay between a learner's identity investment, their capacity for agency, and the supportive context in which they learn. This framework provides a cohesive lens for interpreting existing research and a structured foundation for future inquiry. By highlighting critical gaps in the literature, particularly concerning longitudinal methodologies and the burgeoning influence of generative AI, this review charts a clear and forward-looking research agenda.

## REFERENCES

- Abdollahzadeh, E., Amini Farsani, M., & Zandi, M. (2022). The relationship between L2 motivation and transformative engagement in academic reading among EAP learners: Implications for reading self-regulation. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*, 944650.
- Alzubi, A. A. F., & Nazim, M. (2024). Students' intrinsic motivation in EFL academic writing: Topic-based interest in focus. *Heliyon, 10*(1), e23643.
- Bandura, A. (1999). Social cognitive theory of personality. In L. A. Pervin & O. P. John (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (2nd ed., pp. 154–196). Guilford Press.
- Borah, R. R. (2021). The significance of motivation in an EFL classroom. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 12*(4), 651-656.
- Bruning, R., & Horn, C. (2000). Developing motivation to write. *Educational Psychologist, 35*(1), 25–37.
- Chen, W. (2021). Understanding students' motivation in L2 collaborative writing. *RELC Journal, 52*(1), 143-157.
- Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2015). Identity and a model of investment in language learning. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics, 35*, 1-19.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2008). Self-determination theory: A macrotheory of human motivation, development, and health. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne, 49*(3), 182–185.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2003). *Questionnaires in second language research: Construction, administration, and processing*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2009). The L2 motivational self-system. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 9–42). Multilingual Matters.

- Ellis, R. (2008). *The study of second language acquisition* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2010). A framework for investigating oral and written corrective feedback. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 32(2), 335–349.
- Fathi, J., & Nourzadeh, S. (2019). Examining the effects of writing instruction through blogging on second language writing performance and writing anxiety. *Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research*, 7(2), 63-82.
- Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(1), 59–109.
- Fu, L., & Huang, F. (2025). Exploring learners' engagement with feedback in L2 academic writing: Insights from a multiple case study. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly*, 48, 139-152.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). *Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation*. Edward Arnold.
- Guan, X., Zhu, X., Zhu, S., Yao, J., & Jiang, Y. (2023). Exploring the roles of ideal L2 writing self, growth L2 writing mindset, and L2 writing grit in L2 writing achievement among EFL learners. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 45(5), 1235-1259.
- Han, Y., & Hiver, P. (2018). The interplay of L2 writing self-efficacy, L2 writing anxiety, and L2 writing self-regulated strategies. *System*, 78, 112-124.
- Hiver, P., Al-Hoorie, A. H., Vitta, J. P., & Wu, J. (2024). Learner engagement: A research agenda. *Language Teaching*, 1-17.
- Kormos, J. (2012). The role of individual differences in L2 writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 21(4), 390–403.
- Lai, E. R. (2011). *Motivation: A literature review*. Pearson.
- Lo, J., & Hyland, F. (2007). Enhancing students' engagement and motivation in writing: The case of primary students in Hong Kong. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 16(4), 219-237.
- Luo, L. (2023). Learner engagement with supervisory feedback in undergraduate thesis writing: A multiple-case study. *Assessing Writing*, 55, 100685.
- Mali, Y. (2015). Students' attributions on their success and failure in EFL learning. *Koreja: Konferensi Nasional Bahasa dan Sastra*, 1(1), 479-484.
- Muhammad, F., & Halabi, N. (2021). Exploring possible factors that motivate EFL students' motivation in an academic writing class. *Journal of English and Education*, 11(1), 27-41.
- Papi, M. (2010). The L2 motivational self-system, L2 anxiety, and motivated behavior: A structural equation modeling approach. *System*, 38(3), 467–479.
- Piniel, K., & Csizér, K. (2014). Changes in motivation, anxiety and self-efficacy during the course of an academic writing seminar. In Z. Dörnyei, P. D. MacIntyre, & A. Henry (Eds.), *Motivational dynamics in language learning* (pp. 233–253). Multilingual Matters.



- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2024). *Self-determination theory: Basic psychological needs in motivation, development, and wellness*. Guilford Press.
- Tahmouresi, S., & Papi, M. (2021). The roles of ideal L2 writing self, growth L2 writing mindset, and L2 writing grit in L2 writing achievement among EFL learners. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 43(4), 857-882.
- Teng, L. S., & Zhang, L. J. (2018). The effects of a self-regulated writing program on the writing performance and self-efficacy of EFL learners. *Modern Language Journal*, 102(1), 160-180.
- Ushioda, E. (2011). Motivating learners to speak as themselves. In G. Murray, X. Gao, & T. Lamb (Eds.), *Identity, motivation and autonomy in language learning* (pp. 11–24). Multilingual Matters.
- Waller, L., & Papi, M. (2017). L2 writing motivation: A study of implicit theories and their impact on feedback-seeking orientations. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 37, 52-64.
- Williams, M., & Burden, R. L. (1997). *Psychology for language teachers: A social constructivist approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Woodrow, L. (2011). College English writing proficiency: The role of writing self-efficacy, writing anxiety, and writing strategies. *TESOL Quarterly*, 45(4), 649-673.
- Yesilyurt, S. (2008). Motivational patterns and perceived autonomy in an academic writing course. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, 2(2), 118-135.
- Zareian, G., & Jodaei, H. (2015). Motivation in second language acquisition: A state of the art article. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Education*, 5(2), 295-306.
- Zhang, X., & Hyland, K. (2018). Student engagement with feedback in academic writing: A conceptual review. *Language Teaching*, 51(3), 321–347.
- Zhang, Y., & Hyland, K. (2022). Metadiscourse in the feedback encounter: A study of student engagement. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 56, 101095.
- Zheng, Y., & Yu, S. (2018). Student engagement with teacher written corrective feedback in an EFL writing context: A case study. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 43(8), 1257-1270.