

## **Literature Review about the Intrinsic motivation in Young English as a Foreign Language Learners**

*Revisión bibliográfica acerca de la motivación intrínseca en jóvenes aprendices de inglés como Lengua Extranjera*

**Carla Elizabeth Sánchez Franco, María Isabel Pérez Ortega**

### **ABSTRACT**

This literature review focuses on the influence of intrinsic motivation on learning, particularly among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. The goal is to provide theoretical support for future research and expand knowledge about the significance of intrinsic motivation and the strategies teachers can use to develop it to facilitate classroom work and promote student-centered education. The need for this study arises from the lack of motivation observed in young English learners who perceive the language as complex and not applicable in authentic contexts. This qualitative and descriptive study advanced by selecting relevant information, analyzing it, and presenting findings. The result showed that intrinsic motivation makes students enjoy the learning process, look for their strategies, and solve problems when facing challenges since the desire comes from their inner interest and their own goals. Most authors state that activities that promote automaticity help foster intrinsic motivation arising from self-esteem, self-control, and self-regulation. The specific activities proposed to get students' self-commitment emphasize gamification, research-based projects, project-based learning, and flipped learning, mainly when focusing on social topics, facilitating students' interaction with the target language and instilling confidence in their abilities.

**Keywords:** Intrinsic motivation; learning; young students; English as a Foreign Language learners.

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**Carla Elizabeth Sánchez Franco**

Universidad Católica de Cuenca | Cuenca | Ecuador. carla.sanchez.13@est.ucacue.edu.ec

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-5986-3390>

**María Isabel Pérez Ortega**

Universidad Católica de Cuenca | Cuenca | Ecuador. isabel.perez@ucacue.edu.ec

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0648-0126>

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## RESUMEN

Esta revisión bibliográfica se centra en la influencia de la motivación intrínseca en el aprendizaje, particularmente en los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). El objetivo es brindar apoyo teórico para futuras investigaciones y ampliar el conocimiento sobre la importancia de la motivación intrínseca y las estrategias que los docentes pueden utilizar para desarrollarla de manera que facilite el trabajo en el aula y promueva la educación centrada en el estudiante. La necesidad de este estudio surge de la falta de motivación observada en jóvenes estudiantes de inglés que perciben el idioma como complejo y no aplicable en contextos auténticos. Este estudio cualitativo y descriptivo avanzó seleccionando información relevante, analizándola y presentando hallazgos. El resultado mostró que la motivación intrínseca hace que los estudiantes disfruten el proceso de aprendizaje, busquen sus estrategias y resuelvan problemas al enfrentar desafíos, ya que el deseo proviene de su interés interno y de sus propias metas. La mayoría de los autores afirman que las actividades que promueven la automaticidad ayudan a fomentar la motivación intrínseca derivada de la autoestima, el autocontrol y la autorregulación. Las actividades específicas propuestas para lograr el compromiso de los estudiantes enfatizan en la gamificación, los proyectos basados en investigación, el aprendizaje basado en proyectos y el aprendizaje invertido, principalmente cuando se centran en temas sociales, facilitando la interacción de los estudiantes con la lengua meta e inculcando confianza en sus habilidades.

**Palabras clave:** Motivación intrínseca; aprendizaje; jóvenes estudiantes; Estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera.

## Introduction

This literature review focuses on intrinsic motivation in young EFL learners because it helps students understand the value of knowledge, fostering curiosity and interest. This, in turn, aids in increasing self-regulation and self-esteem while reducing stress and motivates individuals to overcome challenges (Valerio, 2012).

Intrinsic motivation has gained ground through time, even though it was not too explicit initially but implicit in the evolution of learning theories. Two authors, Valentina and Arce (2023), talked about how Behaviorism, reliant on extrinsic motivation through rewards and conditioning as the primary means of achieving objectives, relinquished the foundational principles of learning, thereby ceding ground to Constructivism theory, which incorporates intrinsic motivation principles emphasizing interest in their learning processes, fostering exploration and curiosity.

The relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is such that rewards sometimes weaken motivation itself, which is why theories emerged like the Cognitive focus on enhancing students' self-determination, curiosity, interest, and perseverance in learning (Zhang, 2023).

Over time, more theories (explained below) have emerged supporting intrinsic motivation as a fundamental driving force that prompts action simply for the pleasure or desire of doing so, rendering unnecessary external rewards. The key elements considered in these theories are "autonomy or the possibility of doing something, training or the possibility of advancement, and the purpose of the element to be executed" (Turienzo, 2016).

Those considerations above meant a jump to evolve learning theories are aligned with the elements included in Maslow's theory, cited in Quintero (2011), which shows in the highest level of his "Hierarchy of Needs" that individual potential, achieving personal goals, and pursuing excellence. At this level, intrinsic motivation arises from the need for personal growth, creativity, autonomy, and skill development. Similarly, Pradas (2018), who studied "Locke's Goal Setting Theory," points to the importance of setting meaningful and challenging personal goals that can drive internal motivation and task commitment.

The most recent and in-depth study about intrinsic motivation in learning is "Self-determination Theory," which supports current studies and provides a better understanding of it and its implications for learning. This theory encompasses personal satisfaction, emotional well-being, autonomy, control over actions, better performance, persistence, creativity, and innovation, ultimately leading to success, autonomy, and happiness (Ryan & Deci, 1985).

Regarding the teachers' intentions in Latin America, innovative education is a real challenge because of the low economic resources and large classes (Montoya, 2004), especially in public institutions where it is tough to deal with these conditions to reinforce individual abilities or work on personal objectives. This situation also affects the effective use of English in communicational activities, as well as assessing their progress to provide feedback.

Despite challenges such as large class sizes and limited support from parents and authorities, teachers play a crucial role in helping learners believe in their potential. By implementing strategies that enhance individual abilities, interests, and needs, teachers can create enjoyable, helpful, and practical lessons that foster intrinsic motivation in young EFL students and contribute to their fulfillment; thus, the "development of this motivation also depends on supportive social environments. There is no doubt that the teachers could primarily create such environments" (Sardabi et al., 2023).

Therefore, this literature review aims to collect findings about strategies teachers from Latin American countries use to offer alternatives to these difficulties and help students develop their intrinsic motivation and self-confidence by recognizing their progress.

## Methodology

This study followed a systematic process suggested by Snyder (2019), which consisted of these phases: 1. Design, 2. Conduct, 3. Data abstraction and analysis, and 4. Structuring and writing.

The first step in the design phase was to set this research's characteristics to guide the procedure of each step; therefore, the study was defined under a qualitative approach because it analyses social phenomena by systematically observing documents, such as books or scientific articles (Corona Lisboa, 2018). The scope is of an exploratory type because its results aim to be a previous step of descriptive research, which opens the door for further research (Córdova & Galvis, 2006). It is also non-experimental and causal-correlational because of the "relationships between variables without the researcher controlling or manipulating any of them" (Bhandari, 2021).

In the conduct phase academic databases such as HighBeam, iSEEK, ERIC, Redalyc, Google Scholar, SciELO, ProQuest, and Redalyc were selected for developing the research. Relevant journals, books, and screened articles were reviewed based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, such as publication date, relevance to intrinsic motivation in EFL learners, and focus on young learners. The criteria used to select the data for the research were employed based on Nikolopoulou's (2023) when she states that "inclusion criteria comprise the characteristics or attributes that prospective research participants must have to be included in the study. Common inclusion criteria can be demographic, clinical, or geographic" (See Table 1)

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Focus of the article	Intrinsic Motivation EFL learners Young learners 15 to 24 year old	Studies that cover extrinsic motivation Findings for ESL learners Children or adults
Publication date	Theories From 1980 till present Research since 2019	Findings about intrinsic motivation strategies published before 2019
Geographical reality	Latin-America Educational System	Studies that are not adjusted to Latin-American Educational System
Language	English and Spanish	Other languages will not be included
Biography material	Scientific articles, books, reviews, journals, thesis	Encyclopedias, manuals, catalogs,

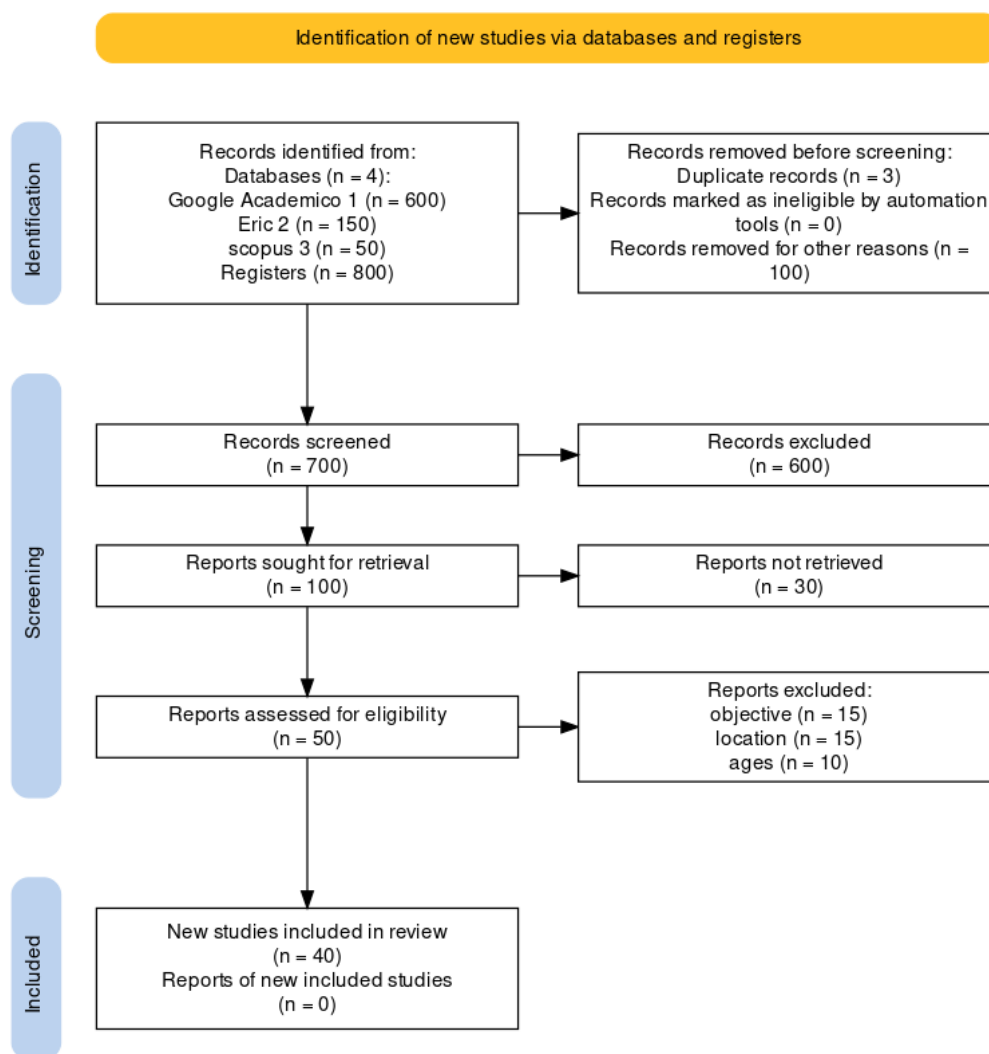
Source: Own elaboration.

The keywords used to find information were "intrinsic motivation" and "young EFL learners", using the filter of the year. The filter "Latin America" did not work so well just about ten articles were found there. Therefore, other articles were found with the keywords "strategies to develop intrinsic motivation" and "motivación intrínseca."

When looking for information, it was necessary to recognize the concepts involved in the research because it helps keep the focus on the objective, avoiding losing the trail. Hence, it was found that Intrinsic Motivation, is considered as "motivation that stems directly from an action rather than a reward" (Ryan & Deci, 1985), while learning is revising one's knowledge and beliefs to be more consistent with objective reality or scientifically supported understandings (Ormrod, 2012). The group of populations to be considered are "young learners", who according to UNICEF (2008) are people from 15 to 24 years old, and "EFL learners" is "the term used to describe the study of English by non-native speakers in countries where English is not the dominant language" (Nordquist, 2020).

During the data abstraction and analysis phase, key information was taken from selected articles, including authors, publication year, research objectives, methodologies, primary findings, and implications for intrinsic motivation in young EFL learners. The extracted data was then organized into a systematic framework for analysis. The PRISMA flow diagram (see Figure 1), set by Page et al. (2021), shows the systematic process that was carried out for the selection.

Figure 1. Prisma flow diagram of the data abstraction.



Source: Prisma diagram structure (Page et al., 2021) – content own elaboration.

Eight of these 40 findings were dismissed because of the exclusion criteria analysis since they did not meet the objectives, giving 32 articles. In this regard, ten concerned strategies were used to develop intrinsic motivation, 12 referred to the impact of intrinsic motivation, and 10 answered the question about the importance of intrinsic motivation in learning.

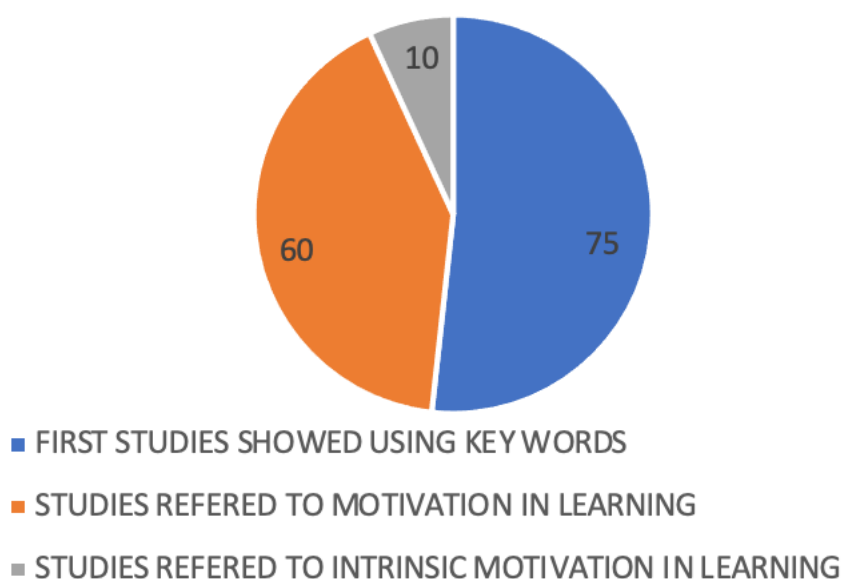
Finally, in the phase of structuring and writing the review, the data was organized to find concordance, coincidences, and differences among authors' contributions to arrive at the main objective of this study, which is to analyze which strategies impact young EFL learners' intrinsic motivation. Therefore, to achieve this goal, it was necessary to identify the importance of intrinsic motivation in EFL classroom learning among students and describe what strategies teachers used to develop intrinsic motivation in young EFL learners.

## Development

The data collected showed that numerous studies based on innovative learning processes emphasize students' motivation in a general manner. Most highlight the importance of motivation in learning, offering various options to engage students in this process. However, a noticeable gap exists since only a few delve into activities that develop intrinsic motivation. This research seeks to shed light on the effectiveness of such strategies in fostering a genuine desire for knowledge acquisition and engagement within the classroom context. (See Figure 2)

The data collected showed that numerous studies based on innovative learning processes emphasize students' motivation in a general manner. Most highlight the importance of motivation in learning, offering various

Figure 2. Representation of the findings collected about strategies to develop intrinsic motivation.



Source: Own elaboration.

## Strategies to develop intrinsic motivation in young EFL learners

Intensely studies of intrinsic motivation in learning were carried out by authors such as Dörnyei (2005), Brown (2014), Harmer, (1986), and Mainly Deci and Richard (1980); the last ones developed the “motivation and self-determination in human behavior” theory and coincide that the factor number one to develop intrinsic motivation is autonomy, including self-control, self-determination, self-esteem, self-consciousness, emotion, and attitude; thus, it means that strategies that teachers employ should be based in these principles.

According to Dörnyei (2005), other factors that need to be considered in the development of intrinsic motivation are competence and personal interest; it instills a sense of possessing skills and knowledge, thereby enhancing inherent motivation. Moreover, the relationship between the students and learning materials is discussed by Harmer (1986), who considers this relationship also supports intrinsic motivation. Harmer concurs with this statement, suggesting that educators can promote intrinsic motivation by encouraging students to deeply engage with the material and develop a broader understanding of the world by exploring universal themes that transcend cultural boundaries through topics such as discrimination, diversity, and social justice, examined from different socio-historical contexts can be employed to foster intrinsic motivation.

All strategies proposed and employed in the experimental findings explained below are based on these principles involving students in the learning process and offering choices and opportunities for them to make decisions about their learning process. This ownership fosters a sense of control over their education (Brown, 2014).

The collected data showed that strategies teachers employ the most to develop intrinsic motivation are related to gamification since these kinds of activities teachers focus on students' multiple intelligences; these gamification activities can be completing song lyrics, solving riddles, performing mathematical operations, engaging in trivia, analyzing 3D figure symmetry, and proving descriptions, among others, can help to develop intrinsic motivation (Aguagüña, 2022) as well as creating avatars as a way to interact using the target language in a fun and creative manner. (Hernández & Cordero, 2020).

Other successful strategies used in English classes that connect students' interests with their experiences are research-based teaching, proposed by Suárez and Gómez (2024a), and project-based learning, suggested by Duque (2023), who argues that through these strategies, students lead their knowledge and develop their self-efficacy, self-control, and satisfaction, thereby enhancing intrinsic motivation and academic performance.



Another vital result in promoting intrinsic motivation was suggested by Casas et al. (2021) in an exploratory study that applied through a flipped learning format for five years, where 2.565 students participated in an English program that employed CPS (Class Preparation Session). It consisted of an auto-directed learning process. It revealed more student participation in independent work and evidence of metacognition and reflection, self-regulation, and self-efficacy, which are categorized within the framework of self-directed learning; this study shows autonomy's significance in increasing the inner desire and a consequence to achieving the expected goals.

In conclusion, teachers can create environments where learners cultivate their intrinsic motivation, considering that the factors influencing this motivation are autonomy, self-determination, self-esteem, self-consciousness, emotion, and attitude. Teachers' tasks should create these learning spaces wherein these qualities are present. In practice, it means composing activities that greatly appeal to students' intelligence, develop their skills, and respond to their characteristics, making these kinds of tasks meaningful to students. In such a way, when the students begin to see meaning in their actions, they also begin to want to achieve their goals, which fosters a sense of satisfaction, joy, and positive education outcomes.

### ***The importance of intrinsic motivation in young EFL learners***

The acknowledgment that authors give to the significance of intrinsic motivation starts from the understanding of the learner's motivational level to get orientations to adjust plans, methodologies, or strategies that fit with the learner's interests, needs, and preferences to get them engaged, enjoy the learning, and improve their performance.

Awareness of motivational students' levels is essential and the first step because this understanding can promote an instructional guide of practices and interventions to accommodate learners' diverse needs, preferences, and learning styles (Hernandez & Murillo 2024); (Dörnyei 2005).

The experimental studies by Duque (2023), and Figueroa (2024), confirmed that working on student's needs develops intrinsic motivation in English language learning, which lies in autonomy and self-regulation to learn. Duque tried it in an "English course based on promoting and developing students' autonomy." This study revealed that when addressed consistently, elements such as "self-regulation, motivation, the teacher-student relationship, and metacognitive strategies" significantly enhance learner autonomy and engagement.

Alike Figueroa explored the relationship between intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and organization in English language learning. This study underscored the pivotal role of intrinsic motivation in achieving success and academic performance. Furthermore, the study highlighted that focusing on mastering the language is a crucial outcome of intrinsic motivation, as enjoyable learning experiences foster a commitment to learning. Hernández and Cordero (2020), and Gooding and Herrera (2021), also argue that motivational factors influence the commitment to persist.



Rodríguez and O'Neil (2023), highlight “engagement” as the primary significance of fostering intrinsic motivation while emphasizing its role in promoting determination, persistence, and commitment, as it was tested in their study on the effects of intrinsic motivation on students' learning processes, underlining the importance of fostering deep language learning. Hernández and Murillo (2024), concur on the importance of self-determination and more profound understanding, adding that intrinsic motivation promotes enjoyable learning, which drives mastery of language acquisition.

However, Gardener (2007), and Reilly (2020), present dissenting views. Gardener challenges traditional distinctions between motivational types, arguing that motivation intensity is the most relevant factor in English learning. He suggests integrative motivation, focusing on cultural identification, plays a significant role in language acquisition, particularly in learning English.

Conversely, Reilly (2020), identifies intrinsic and instrumental motivation as significant drivers in English language learning among university students. His mixed-methods design highlights English's perceived utility in achieving academic tasks, demonstrating the relevance of both intrinsic and instrumental motives in English acquisition.

In conclusion, these authors collectively contribute to understanding the multifaceted nature of intrinsic motivation in mastering English since if teachers create classroom environments where learners work autonomy on activities that are based on their needs, interests, and preferences, they will develop their self-determination, feeling engaged in their learning process which will have an impact on their self-esteem and consequently in their academic performance.

### **Impact of intrinsic motivation on learning**

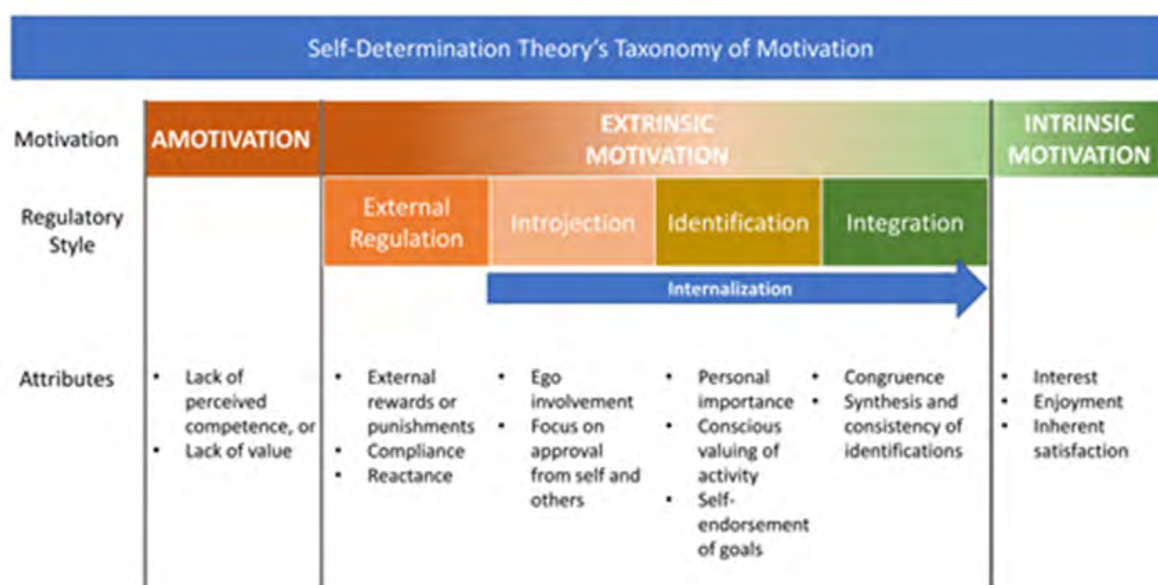
Through this analysis, the authors' studies will show how intrinsic motivation impacts learning and how it can contribute to developing those characteristics that a person is motivated to show when feeling engaged in the learning process.

For Turienzo (2016), Orbegoso (2016), and Ryan and Deci (1985), the autonomy that somebody intrinsically motivated possesses drives them to carry out activities or take action, guiding them toward their own goals with persistence and self-determination.

On the other hand, Orbegoso also considers responsibility and engagement to be the main results of intrinsic motivation, which significantly impacts the educational process. This author mentions that teachers play a crucial role in fostering these values by identifying students' learning needs, adapting content, and creating an environment that encourages autonomy and active participation.

For Ryan and Deci (1985), and Hernández and Cordero (2020), the primary intrinsic motivations influencing learning are self-reflection and awareness of the importance of learning English. Through reflection, students can develop a deeper understanding of the material and connect it to their lives, as shown in the graphic 3. Consciousness and self-reflection become steps from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Steps from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation.



Source: Suarez and Gómez (2024b).

Herrera (2023), concluded in her correlational study that there is a significant association between intrinsic motivation and the learning of technical English vocabulary. Reilly (2020), and Andrade et al. (2021), agree, affirming that intrinsic motivation impacts students' performance because it lies at the core and influences their ability to accomplish academic tasks effectively.

## Conclusion

This research has broadened our understanding of intrinsic motivation, its significance, its impact on learning, and the strategies used to develop it in English classrooms. It demonstrates that intrinsic motivation functions like an engine propelling learner into action, stemming from an inner desire fueled by our commitment and interest. This internal drive enables us to preserve and seek solutions when facing learning challenges.

Many authors emphasized autonomy as the primary factor enhancing intrinsic motivation because autonomy stems from self-esteem, self-control, and self-regulation culminating in self-determination; so the significance that teachers work on these values mentioned lies in learners' belief in their ability to tackle tasks that represent personal challenges aligned with personal goals; Consequently, intrinsic motivation fosters enjoyable learning experiences because this learning is in correspondence with their interests and needs which foster their self-esteem and academic performance.

While the number of strategies proposed in Latin America may not be as abundant as in developed countries in Europe and Asia, critical findings suggest that teachers can employ activities adjusted to American countries reality aimed at fostering intrinsic motivation that includes those promoting automaticity, self-control, self-determination, self-esteem, self-consciousness, and emotional engagement strategies such as gamification activities, research-based projects, project-based learning, and flipped learning when focusing on social topics which facilitate students' interaction with the target language and instill confidence in their abilities.

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## Authors

**Carla Elizabeth Sánchez Franco.** Bachelor of Science in Education, major in English. English teacher at Unidad Educativa Réplica Juan Pío Montufar.

**María Isabel Pérez Ortega.** Bachelor of Science in Education with a major in English Language and Literature. Teacher at the Catholic University of Cuenca in the Language Center and tutor for the Master's Degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language at the Catholic University of Cuenca. Master's degree in Translation and Technologies from the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, and coordinator of the translation team at the Language Center of the Catholic University of Cuenca.

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