Integrating Psychological and Social Factors in the Motivation of University English Specialists

دمج العوامل النفسية والاجتماعية في تحفيز متخصصي اللغة الإنجليزية في الجامعات

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submission date: 21/01/2026 acceptance date: 06/11/2026 published date 15/09/2026

Abstract

This study examines the interaction between psychological and social factors influencing motivation among university students specializing in English. Drawing on Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System and Self-Determination Theory, it focuses on how students' future image as English users may conflict with limited career opportunities after graduation. The study adopts a descriptive research design based on two questionnaires, one addressed to 20 Algerian university EFL teachers, mainly teachers of the Psychology module, and another distributed during class time to 40 third-year LMD EFL students at Khenchela University. The findings show that students are still motivated to study English, but this motivation becomes weaker when they associate the degree with limited career paths, weak social recognition, and job insecurity. Both teachers and students emphasized the need to connect English studies with practical professional opportunities beyond teaching.

Key-words: *Motivational Self System; Self-Determination Theory; Motivational Dissonance; Career Diversification; Glocalized Curriculum*

ملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة التفاعل بين العوامل النفسية والاجتماعية المؤثرة على دافعية طلاب الجامعات المتخصصين في اللغة الإنجليزية. وبالاستناد إلى نظام دورني الذاتي التحفيزي للغة الثانية ونظرية تقرير المصير، تركز الدراسة على كيفية تعارض صورة الطلاب المستقبلية كمستخدمين للغة الإنجليزية مع محدودية الفرص الوظيفية المتاحة بعد التخرج. تعتمد الدراسة منهجًا وصفيًا قائمًا على استبيانين، أحدهما موجه إلى 20 مدرسًا للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في الجامعات الجزائرية، معظمهم من مدرسي وحدة علم النفس، والآخر وُزّع خلال الحصص الدراسية على 40 طالبًا من طلاب السنة الثالثة في برنامج اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بجامعة خنشلة. تُظهر النتائج أن الطلاب ما زالوا متحمسين لدراسة اللغة الإنجليزية، إلا أن هذا الدافع يضعف عندما يربطون الشهادة بمسارات وظيفية محدودة، وضعف التقدير الاجتماعي، وعدم استقرار الوظيفة. وقد أكد كل من المدرسين والطلاب على ضرورة ربط دراسة اللغة الإنجليزية بفرص مهنية عملية تتجاوز مجال التدريس.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النظام الذاتي التحفيزي للغة الثانية؛ نظرية تقرير المصير؛ التنافر التحفيزي؛ تنويع المسارات المهنية؛ المناهج الدراسية المعدلة وفق المنهج العالمي.

Introduction

English studies are now popular everywhere, with the language acting like a kind of currency that helps people get better job chances in today's global world, as Pierre Bourdieu said. In universities all over the world, including Algeria, many students choose to study English because they think it will make them more employable. So when students study English, they are investing a lot in their future, both for their goals and for their careers. For this reason, many Algerian students choose English at university because they believe that it can help them build a better academic and professional future. In this sense, studying English is not only a personal interest but also an investment in future opportunities.

However, the situation of many Algerian EFL students is not always encouraging. After graduation, many English majors face a difficult reality: the number of available jobs is limited, and teaching is often seen as the main career path (Idri, 2017). Yet, teaching is not suitable for every student, and the number of available teaching positions cannot absorb all graduates (Guerid, 2021). As a result, many students start to feel uncertain about the real value of their degree. This may lead them to become less motivated, passive, anxious, or discouraged, especially when they approach graduation (Hamouda, 2022).

This situation creates a gap between what students hope to become through English and what they believe the labour market can actually offer them. In this study, this gap is understood as motivational dissonance, which

results from the conflict between the Ideal L2 Self and the social reality surrounding English graduates (Hadjar & Benzaghou, 2024).

This problem can be understood through Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009) and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000).. Many students begin their studies with a strong future image of themselves as competent users of English (Al-Shehri, 2009). This image can be called the Ideal L2 Self (Dörnyei, 2009). However, when this ideal image meets limited job opportunities, weak social recognition, and lack of career security, a conflict appears (Guerid, 2021). This conflict may create motivational dissonance, where students still like English but feel unsure about what they can do with it after graduation (Thompson, 2017).

In the Algerian context, this issue becomes more serious because English is increasingly promoted in education and public discourse (The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research [MHESR], 2023; Guerid, 2021), while clear professional pathways for English graduates remain limited (Belaid & Sarnou, 2019). Students may hear that English is important, but they may not see enough concrete opportunities outside teaching, which remains the most readily accessible yet overcrowded career option (Mehdaoui, 2022). This gap between academic training and labour-market reality (Idri, 2017) can affect their motivation, engagement, and confidence in their future.

For this reason, the present study investigates the motivation of English major students by considering both psychological and social factors (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). It focuses on third-year LMD EFL students because they are in the final year of their Bachelor degree and are closer to graduation. At this stage, students are more likely to think seriously about employment and future career opportunities (Belaid & Sarnou, 2019). The study also considers the views of university EFL teachers, especially teachers of the Psychology module, because they are familiar with students' behavior, motivation, and academic engagement.

The aim of this study is to examine how limited career opportunities, weak social recognition, and curriculum relevance affect the motivation of English major students. It also aims to explore the possible solutions that may help students connect their English studies with professional opportunities beyond teaching, such as skill-based courses, project-based learning, career guidance, and practical training.

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers and students perceive the motivation of third-year LMD EFL students?

2. How do limited job opportunities, weak social recognition, and lack of job security affect students' motivation?
3. To what extent does the gap between students' aspirations in learning English and realistic career opportunities create motivational dissonance?
4. What curriculum and pedagogical strategies do teachers and students suggest to help English majors pursue career paths beyond teaching?

Literature Review

Second language (L2) motivation research has advanced over the past two decades, particularly through frameworks like the L2 Motivational Self System developed by Dörnyei, which conceptualizes motivation in terms of learners' future self-guides and internalized goals (Dörnyei, 2005). Systematic reviews of EFL motivation research show diverse methodological approaches and populations but also emphasize ongoing needs to link motivational factors with broader learning outcomes and learner context diversity (Vonkova et al., 2021).

Empirical research in language education highlights technology's role in motivation and engagement. An investigation into the use of AI-powered tools among Algerian university EFL learners found high levels of motivation and positive perceptions toward AI, suggesting technology can be a motivating factor in English language learning contexts (Mouas, 2025). Additionally, mixed-methods research at Biskra University demonstrated that implementing motivational strategies based on Dörnyei's framework increased student engagement, underscoring the importance of contextualized pedagogical practice (Bendahmane, 2026). Within Algeria, motivational research has started to consider affective and cognitive factors. One study found significant associations between emotional intelligence and motivation among EFL students, suggesting affective constructs play a role in engagement (Himoura, 2026). Another explored attitude toward reading English texts, revealing that negative attitudes can demotivate learners, which points to motivational challenges tied to language tasks (Mellit & Idri, 2019).

Despite these valuable contributions, a clear gap remains: existing studies often focus on motivational correlates such as technology use, instructional strategies, or affective traits but do not sufficiently investigate how EFL students' motivation relates to their professional aspirations and employability outcomes. Specifically, research has yet to empirically examine how motivational orientations might influence students' career

diversification beyond traditional teaching roles in the Algerian higher education context.

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive research design to investigate university teachers' and students' perspectives on student motivation and potential career pathways for English majors. The study seeks to explore how psychological motivation, social and environmental influences, and curriculum-related factors shape the academic engagement and future expectations of EFL students.

The target population consists of 20 university teachers from different Algerian universities, namely Khenchela, Batna, Oum El Bouaghi, Constantine, and Bejaia. The teachers' questionnaire was designed using Google Forms and sent via email to a selected group of teachers. The selection focused mainly on teachers who teach, or have experience with, the Psychology module because of the relevance of their expertise to the psychological dimensions of student motivation, following a non-probability convenience sampling with purposive selection of teachers and voluntary-response participation. The student sample was selected through convenience sampling, as the participants were accessible to the researcher during class time. It consisted of 40 third-year LMD EFL students from the Department of English at Khenchela University. The choice of third-year LMD EFL students was intentional because they represent a critical stage in the undergraduate learning experience. As final-year Bachelor students, they are approaching graduation and are therefore more directly exposed to questions of employability, career uncertainty, and the practical value of their English degree.

Data were collected through two questionnaires: one addressed to students and another addressed to teachers. The questionnaires included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. These tools were designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data on three main areas: psychological motivation, social and environmental influences, and curriculum or pedagogical solutions.

Results, Analysis, and Discussion

A- The Teachers' Questionnaire Results

Section 1: Psychological Motivation of Students

1. How motivated are your English major students to succeed in their studies?

Level	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Very high	4	20%
High	8	40%

Medium	6	30%
Low	2	10%
Very low	0	0%

Results from the table show that out of 20 teachers, 4 teachers, representing 20 percent, stated that their English major students have a very high level of motivation. 8 teachers, or 40 percent, considered students' motivation to be high. 6 teachers, representing 30 percent, described it as medium, while only 2 teachers, or 10 percent, said that students' motivation is low. No teacher selected very low.

These results show that most teachers still perceive English major students as motivated to succeed in their studies. In fact, 60 percent of the teachers described students' motivation as high or very high. This means that English students do not enter their studies without interest or ambition. However, the presence of 30 percent medium motivation and 10 percent low motivation suggests that this motivation is not completely stable.

This result also suggest that students may start their English studies with enthusiasm and a strong Ideal L2 Self, but their motivation can become weaker when they face social pressure, limited career opportunities, and uncertainty about their professional future. Therefore, the problem is not the absence of motivation, but the risk that this motivation may decrease when students feel that their English degree does not guarantee clear career pathways.

2. How often do you notice students' motivation decreases due to limited job opportunities after graduation?

Frequency	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Always	5	25%
Often	10	50%
Sometimes	4	20%
Rarely	1	5%
Never	0	0%

The results show that most teachers notice a decrease in students' motivation because of limited job opportunities. Half of them, 50 percent, answered often, while 25 percent answered always. This means that 75 percent of the teachers see career uncertainty as a frequent source of demotivation.

This finding leads us to say that English major students may begin with motivation, but this motivation becomes weaker when they feel that their degree offers limited professional opportunities. This creates a gap

between their Ideal L2 Self and the reality of the labour market, which may lead to passivity and motivational dissonance.

3. Estimate what percentage of students seem discouraged because their "Ideal L2 Self" cannot match labor market reality.

Percentage range	Number of Teachers
0–20%	2
21–40%	4
41–60%	8
61–80%	5
81–100%	1

In the table above, the highest number of teachers, 8 teachers, estimate that 41–60 percent of students feel discouraged because their Ideal L2 Self does not match labour market reality. In addition, 5 teachers selected 61–80 percent, and 1 teacher selected 81–100 percent. This means that many teachers believe this problem affects a considerable number of students. This result supports the idea that the gap between students' imagined future as English-speaking professionals and the limited career opportunities available to them can weaken motivation. Such a gap may create motivational dissonance, where students still value English but feel uncertain about its real professional benefits.

Section 2: Social and Environmental Influences

1. Rate the influence of these factors on students' motivation (1 = minimal, 5 = high)

Factor	1	2	3	4	5
Family support	1	2	5	6	6
Peer influence	0	3	8	5	4
Employment prospects	0	0	4	6	10
Curriculum relevance	0	1	5	7	7

The results show that employment prospects have the strongest influence on students' motivation, with 10 teachers rating this factor as highly influential. Curriculum relevance also appears important, as most teachers rated it 4 or 5. Family support and peer influence are present too, but their effect seems slightly less strong. This means that students' motivation is not shaped only by personal interest in English. It is also affected by the social environment, especially the way students see their future after graduation. These findings support the idea that weak career prospects and an irrelevant curriculum can create motivational dissonance and reduce students' engagement.

2. Percentage of students demotivated by lack of social recognition or job security

Range	Number of Teachers	Percentage
0–20%	1	5%
21–40%	3	15%
41–60%	6	30%
61–80%	7	35%
81–100%	3	15%

The above results indicate that lack of social recognition and job security strongly affects students' motivation. 35 percent of teachers estimated that 61–80 percent of students are demotivated by this problem, while 15 percent selected 81–100 percent. This means that half of the teachers believe that the majority of students are affected. This confirms that motivation is not only psychological, but also social. When students feel that their degree is not socially valued and does not offer secure career paths, they may become less engaged and more passive. This creates motivational dissonance between their ambition to succeed in English and the reality they expect after graduation.

Section 3: Curriculum and Pedagogical Solutions

1. Which strategies would most improve student motivation? (Multiple selection allowed)

Strategy	Selected by (# of teachers)	Percentage
Digital content creation modules	12	60%
ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses	14	70%
International relations / diplomacy modules	6	30%
Project-based learning	15	75%

Project-based learning is the most preferred strategy, selected by 75 percent of teachers. ESP courses also received strong support, with 70 percent, followed by digital content creation modules, with 60 percent. International relations and diplomacy modules were selected by 30 percent of teachers. These results suggest that teachers prefer practical and career-oriented solutions rather than purely theoretical teaching. Thus, English studies should be linked to real professional skills, such as ESP, digital content, and project-based learning.

2. Rank these strategies from most to least effective (1 = most effective, 4 = least).

Strategy	Avg. Rank
Project-based learning	1.6
ESP courses	2.1

Digital content creation	2.5
International relations	3.8

The ranking in the table confirms that teachers see project-based learning as the most effective strategy, with the best average rank of 1.6. ESP courses come second with 2.1, followed by digital content creation with 2.5. International relations modules are considered the least effective, with an average rank of 3.8. Teachers give priority to practical classroom strategies that help students use English in real situations. It supports the idea that motivation can be improved when the curriculum moves from theory only to useful, career-oriented learning. Project-based learning and ESP can make students feel that English has concrete value beyond the classroom.

3. What additional measures could universities implement to bridge the gap between academic training and labor market needs?

Theme identified in teachers' answers	Number of teachers	Percentage
Project-based collaboration with companies and real work tasks	14	70%
Skill-based courses linked to market orientation	13	65%
Practical certificates inside the English degree	11	55%
Mentorship with professionals from different sectors	10	50%
Interdisciplinary workshops with other faculties	8	40%
Mini career incubators and student projects	7	35%

The teachers' answers show that they mainly suggest practical and career-oriented solutions. The most frequent suggestion is project-based collaboration with companies, mentioned by 70 percent of teachers, followed by skill-based courses, mentioned by 65 percent. This means that teachers believe English students need more direct contact with the labour market and not only theoretical academic training. Other suggestions, such as certificates, mentorship, interdisciplinary workshops, and mini career incubators, also show the need to open new professional pathways beyond teaching. These answers suggest that the English degree should become more connected to local market needs. This can help reduce motivational dissonance by showing students that English can lead to different careers, not only to a limited and competitive teaching path.

B- The Students' Questionnaire Results

Section 1: Psychological Motivation

1. How motivated are you to succeed in your English studies?

Level	Number of Students	Percentage
Very high	8	20%
High	16	40%
Medium	10	25%
Low	5	12.5%
Very low	1	2.5%

The results show that most students still have a positive level of motivation. 40 percent of students reported high motivation, while 20 percent reported very high motivation. This means that 60 percent of the students are motivated to succeed in their English studies. However, 25 percent selected medium motivation, and 15 percent reported low or very low motivation. This shows that motivation is present, but it is not stable for all students. This result relates to the idea that English students may begin with interest and ambition, but their motivation can become weaker when they face uncertainty about future career opportunities and the value of their degree.

2. How often do you feel your aspirations in learning English do not match your available career opportunities?

Frequency	Number of Students	Percentage
Always	6	15%
Often	18	45%
Sometimes	10	25%
Rarely	5	12.5%
Never	1	2.5%

The results show a clear mismatch between students' aspirations and their perceived career opportunities. 45 percent of students answered often, while 15 percent answered always. This means that 60 percent of the students frequently feel that what they hope to achieve through English does not match the opportunities available after graduation. This finding directly reflects the problem being discussed. Students may have an Ideal L2 Self and may imagine themselves as successful English users, but limited job

prospects can weaken this image. As a result, motivation may turn into uncertainty, passivity, and motivational dissonance.

3. To what extent do you feel discouraged when your future dreams about English do not match the real job opportunities available after graduation?

Level	Number of Students	Percentage
Very highly discouraged	6	15%
Highly discouraged	12	30%
Moderately discouraged	14	35%
Slightly discouraged	6	15%
Not discouraged	2	5%

The results show that students experience a clear level of discouragement. 35 percent feel moderately discouraged, while 45 percent feel highly or very highly discouraged. Only 5 percent said they are not discouraged. This means that many third-year students feel a gap between what they hope to become through English and the real job opportunities they see after graduation. In relation to the article, this reflects the conflict between students' future image as English users and the limited career paths available to them. This gap may weaken motivation and lead to passivity or motivational dissonance.

Section 2: Social and Environmental Influences

1. Rate the influence of these factors on your motivation (1 = minimal, 5 = high).

Factor	1	2	3	4	5
Family support	2	4	10	12	12
Peer influence	1	5	12	14	8
Employment prospects	0	2	8	12	18
Curriculum relevance	1	3	10	12	14

The results show that employment prospects have the strongest influence on students' motivation. 75 percent of students rated this factor as high or very high. Curriculum relevance also appears important, with 65 percent choosing 4 or 5. Family support comes next with 60 percent, while peer influence has a slightly lower effect, with 55 percent. This means that students' motivation is strongly connected to their future expectations. They are not motivated only by personal interest in English but also by what they think the degree can offer after graduation. This supports the idea that weak career prospects and an irrelevant curriculum can create a gap between students' ambitions and social reality, leading to motivational dissonance and lower engagement.

2. How much does the lack of social recognition or job security affect your motivation?

Range	Number of Students	Percentage
0–20%	2	5%
21–40%	6	15%
41–60%	12	30%
61–80%	14	35%
81–100%	6	15%

The results show that lack of social recognition and job security has a clear effect on students' motivation. 35 percent of students said it affects them strongly, while 15 percent said very strongly. This means that half of the students are highly affected by this issue. So, students' motivation is not only personal. It is also shaped by social value and career security. When English students feel that their degree is not socially appreciated or does not lead to stable jobs, their motivation may decrease and become linked to fear about the future.

Section 3: Curriculum and Career Orientation

1. Which strategies would motivate you to pursue careers beyond teaching? (Multiple selection allowed)

Strategy	Selected by students	Percentage
Courses that help students discover their skills and talents	28	70%
Projects with companies or organizations	30	75%
Guidance from professionals or former students	24	60%
Extra certificates in useful skills, such as business English or digital media	26	65%
Workshops with students from other fields, such as business, law, or technology	22	55%

The results show that students strongly support practical strategies that can help them see career options beyond teaching. The most selected strategy is projects with companies or organizations, chosen by 75 percent of students. This is followed by courses that help students discover their skills and talents, with 70 percent, and extra certificates in useful skills, with 65 percent. Guidance from professionals or former students was selected by 60 percent, while workshops with students from other fields were chosen by 55 percent. This means that students want more contact with real professional contexts and clearer examples of how English can be used in different careers.

These results suggest that English studies should not remain limited to theoretical learning or the teaching-only path. Students seem to need a more practical and career-oriented curriculum. Such strategies can help reduce motivational dissonance by showing students that English can be useful in business, media, tourism, translation, communication, and other fields, not only in teaching.

2. Please rank the following strategies from the most helpful to the least helpful for preparing students for careers beyond teaching. 1 = most helpful / 5 = least helpful

Strategy	Avg. Rank
Project-based collaborations	1.8
Skill-based courses	2.0
Certificates	2.5
Mentorship programs	3.1
Interdisciplinary workshops	3.6

The results show that students consider project-based collaborations as the most helpful strategy, with an average rank of 1.8. Skill-based courses come very close, with 2.0, followed by certificates with 2.5. Mentorship programs and interdisciplinary workshops are ranked lower, with 3.1 and 3.6. This means that students prefer direct and practical forms of career preparation. They seem to value activities that allow them to apply English in real professional situations and discover their own abilities.

3. What would help you feel prepared to pursue professional opportunities outside teaching?

What students said they need	Number of students	Percentage
More information about jobs we can do with English	30	75%
Advice about what jobs we can get after graduation	28	70%
Practical courses, like writing emails or translating documents	27	67.5%
Small projects or short internships in real workplaces	25	62.5%
People from different jobs to come and talk to us	23	57.5%
Examples of people who use English in jobs other than teaching	20	50%
Skills that companies need, not only theory	19	47.5%
Activities about online work and digital jobs	18	45%

Group work with students from other departments	16	40%

The students' answers show that they mainly want simple and clear help about their future after graduation. Most of them need more information about the jobs they can do with English and advice about the opportunities available outside teaching. They also asked for practical courses, such as writing emails, translating documents, and learning useful skills that companies need. This means that they do not want English studies to remain only theoretical. They want to learn things that can help them in real work situations.

Other answers also show the importance of short internships, small projects, talks with professionals, and examples of people who use English in different jobs. These suggestions show that students need to see the real value of their English degree.

Therefore, students may become less motivated when they do not see clear career paths. If universities provide practical training, career advice, and contact with the world of work, students may feel more confident and less passive. This can reduce the gap between their dreams about English and the reality they expect after graduation.

Discussion

The findings support the conceptual framework of this study, especially the link between the L2 Motivational Self System and Self-Determination Theory. Both teachers' and students' answers show that English major students still have motivation and interest in English. This reflects the presence of an Ideal L2 Self, as students imagine themselves as successful users of English in the future. However, this motivation becomes weaker when students compare their dreams with the limited career opportunities available after graduation.

This situation confirms the idea of motivational dissonance. Students want English to help them build a better professional future, but they often see teaching as the only clear path. Teachers also notice this problem, especially when students become less active because of job insecurity and weak social recognition. Therefore, the problem is not only inside the student. It is also caused by the social and economic environment around them.

The findings are also related to Self-Determination Theory. Students need to feel competent, autonomous, and socially valued. However, when the English degree seems unclear or risky, their sense of competence and relatedness becomes weaker. As a result, motivation may turn into hesitation, passivity, or fear of the future.

The suggested solutions from both teachers and students support the idea of glocalization and career diversification. Practical courses, project-based learning, certificates, internships, career guidance, and contact with professionals can help students see English as useful beyond teaching. These solutions can create a bridge between the Ideal L2 Self and real labor market needs.

Conclusion

The present study set out to examine how psychological and social factors influence the motivation of university students specializing in English. Based on teachers' and students' answers, the study concludes that English major students are not demotivated because they lack interest in English, but because they do not always see clear career opportunities after graduation.

The findings show that the main problem is the gap between students' aspirations and the real professional paths available to them. This supports the article's framework, especially the idea of motivational dissonance, where students' future image as English users conflicts with limited job prospects and weak social recognition.

The study also shows that teaching is still seen as the main career path for English graduates, although it is not suitable or available for everyone. This situation may weaken students' motivation, especially in their final year, when they start thinking seriously about work and professional stability.

Based on teachers' and students' answers, the study recommends that universities:

1. Introduce skill-based courses that help students discover their abilities.
2. Provide career guidance about jobs English graduates can do beyond teaching.
3. Include project-based learning and short work experiences with companies or organizations.
4. Invite professionals and former students to share real examples.
5. Offer practical modules such as business English, translation, tourism English, digital communication, and content creation.
6. Strengthen links between English departments and local economic sectors.

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