

EFL Teacher Motivation Practices and Learner Engagement in Angolan Higher Education: A Mixed-Methods Case Study

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Abstract: This article investigates the role of the English teacher in motivating the language learning of first-year Psychology students at Instituto Superior do Wako Kungo/Polo Sumbe, Angola, during the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. Adopting a mixed-methods case study design, the research combines a structured questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and systematic classroom observation, applied to a simple random sample of 30 students (15 male; 15 female) drawn from a population of 45. Results reveal that teacher motivational behaviours are perceived positively overall (M = 4.11), with encouragement during error correction, activity variety, and instrumental relevance framing identified as the highest-rated practices. The quality of the teacher-student relationship — particularly teacher immediacy and relational warmth — emerges as the most salient motivational factor. Systematic deficits are identified in learner autonomy support and consistent use of English as the language of instruction. No statistically significant gender differences are found. Findings are discussed in light of Self-Determination Theory, the L2 Motivational Self System, and Dörnyei's motivational strategy taxonomy, contributing empirical evidence to the literature on EFL teaching in Lusophone African higher education.

Keywords: *Language Learning Motivation; Teacher Role; English as a Foreign Language; Higher Education in Angola; Self-Determination Theory; Case Study.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction across African higher education has become a growing subject of scholarly inquiry, particularly in settings where English fulfils a curricular and professional function without being the native language of most students. In Angola, where Portuguese serves as the official medium of communication, the acquisition and teaching of English at tertiary level poses a distinctive set of pedagogical challenges that warrant systematic investigation. Among the factors shaping language learning outcomes, motivational engagement has generated an especially rich and sustained body of scholarship within Applied Linguistics and Foreign Language Education, engaging both the cognitive and social dimensions of the learning experience.

A substantial body of research has established the teacher as a primary proximal influence on learner motivational states. Dörnyei (2001, 2009), Gardner (1985), and Deci and Ryan (2000) have each shown, from distinct theoretical perspectives, that teacher behaviour, instructional

strategies, and interpersonal communication play a decisive role in shaping foreign language learners' motivational orientations. Within higher education contexts in sub-Saharan Africa, however, empirical studies examining these dynamics from a case-study perspective remain comparatively limited, particularly in the Angolan context.

This article investigates the role of the English teacher in motivating first-year Psychology students at Instituto Superior do Wako Kungo/Polo Sumbe during the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. Through a triangulated mixed-methods design combining questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and classroom observation, the study offers grounded insights into motivational dynamics in a specific institutional and sociolinguistic context that has received limited research attention.

As Angolan higher education institutions seek to internationalise their curricula and prepare graduates for a globalised professional environment, understanding the conditions under which EFL learning motivation is fostered

or undermined becomes a matter of both pedagogical and institutional significance. The English teacher occupies a position of particular influence — not merely as a transmitter of linguistic content, but as a motivational agent whose attitudes, competencies, and relational practices directly impact student engagement and persistence.

➤ *Research Problem*

Despite the acknowledged importance of English language proficiency in Angolan academic and professional life, the motivational dimensions of EFL instruction in Angolan universities have received insufficient empirical attention. This gap is especially pronounced at institutions located outside the capital, such as Instituto Superior do Wako Kungo/Polo Sumbe, where resource limitations, diverse student backgrounds, and restricted pedagogical support structures combine to produce a distinctive set of motivational challenges.

The central research problem is formulated as follows: to what extent does the role of the English teacher — as defined by instructional practices, communicative behaviour, and motivational strategies — influence the motivation to learn English among first-year Psychology students at Instituto Superior do Wako Kungo/Polo Sumbe? Subsidiary questions address: (a) what teacher behaviours students perceive as motivating or demotivating; (b) how teacher-student interactions affect learner engagement; and (c) to what degree students' motivational profiles reflect observed pedagogical practices.

By examining the teacher's role through three complementary lenses — student perception (questionnaires), self-report (interviews), and direct observation (classroom observation) — this study produces findings that are simultaneously grounded in a specific institutional context and connected to internationally recognised theoretical frameworks, thereby strengthening the empirical foundation for EFL teacher motivation research in Lusophone African higher education.

➤ *Research Objectives*

The study is guided by the following objectives: (1) To identify teacher behaviours and instructional practices perceived by first-year Psychology students as motivating in the EFL classroom; (2) To analyse the relationship between teacher-student interaction patterns and learner motivation as evidenced through classroom observation; (3) To examine the extent to which motivational strategies employed by the teacher align with theoretical frameworks of EFL motivation; (4) To contribute empirical evidence to the understanding of EFL teacher motivation in Angolan higher education contexts.

➤ *Research Questions*

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: What teacher behaviours and practices do first-year Psychology students identify as motivating in the EFL classroom?

- RQ2: How does the quality of teacher-student interaction influence student motivation to learn English?
- RQ3: To what extent do observed classroom practices reflect motivationally supportive teaching strategies as theorised in the EFL motivation literature?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The review is organised around four interconnected areas: (1) foundational theories of motivation in foreign language education; (2) teacher motivational practice; (3) demotivation and its classroom sources; and (4) EFL motivation in African and Lusophone educational contexts.

➤ *Foundational Theories of Motivation in Foreign Language Learning*

Scholarly inquiry into motivation in second and foreign language learning has developed substantially since the pioneering work of Gardner and Lambert (1972), whose integrative-instrumental framework distinguished between learners driven by a wish to affiliate with the target language community and those motivated by practical or career-related objectives, thereby establishing core conceptual categories that have shaped the field ever since. Gardner's (1985) Socio-Educational Model built on this foundation by embedding motivation within a causal structure alongside attitudes and aptitude as the primary predictors of language learning achievement.

Dörnyei's (2009) L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) reconceptualised language learning motivation around three interrelated components: the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience. Of particular relevance to classroom-based research, the L2 Learning Experience component identifies the teacher as a key proximal motivational force whose daily instructional and relational behaviours shape how learners experience the learning process. Contemporary research has confirmed that teacher support exerts significant influence across all three L2MSS components and is a robust predictor of student engagement (Elsayed et al., 2024; Zhang & Liu, 2022).

Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) posits that human motivation is shaped by the degree to which three fundamental psychological needs are met: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When classroom conditions support these needs, learners tend to develop higher-quality, more self-sustaining motivation; when these needs are frustrated, motivational decline typically follows. More recently, Dewaele et al. (2023) demonstrated that foreign language enjoyment serves as a resilient motivational buffer capable of sustaining engagement even during periods of motivational downturn.

➤ *Teacher Motivational Practice in EFL Contexts*

Dörnyei (2001) developed an influential taxonomy of motivational strategies for the EFL classroom, structured around four sequential phases: establishing foundational motivational conditions, initiating learner motivation, sustaining and safeguarding motivation throughout the

course, and promoting constructive reflection on learning outcomes. A subsequent critical review by Howard (2023) affirmed the ongoing relevance and applicability of this framework in contemporary EFL instructional settings.

Guilloteaux and Dörnyei’s (2008) landmark observational study provided empirical evidence that teacher motivational practice (TMP) correlates significantly and positively with student motivated learning behaviour, validating the use of systematic classroom observation as a productive method for investigating TMP in naturalistic settings. Building on this foundation, more recent research has shown that perceived teacher support predicts student engagement through the mediating role of L2MSS components (Liu et al., 2025).

Ushioda (2009, 2011) argued that teachers who demonstrate genuine enthusiasm and support learner autonomy function as motivational role models. In contexts where students have limited contact with English outside the classroom, as is the case in Angola, this role acquires heightened significance. Derakhshan et al. (2022) further confirmed that teacher immediacy behaviours are strong predictors of student motivation and engagement, even when other contextual factors are less favourable. Complementing these findings, Pálffy (2024) identified encouragement, humour, patience, and interpersonal warmth as the relational qualities learners most frequently associate with motivating teacher behaviour in EFL classrooms.

➤ *Demotivation and Its Classroom Sources*

Demotivation refers to the weakening of an existing motivational orientation through the influence of negative external forces (Dörnyei, 2001), and research has consistently implicated teacher behaviour as one of the most significant sources of this phenomenon in EFL settings. Kikuchi and Sakai (2009) found that teacher-related factors were among the most frequently reported sources of learner demotivation in their survey study. Honarparvaran and Khaghaninejad (2023) further characterised demotivation as a self-reinforcing cycle in which disengagement spreads between learners and their teacher. This growing concern is reflected in the scholarly literature: Hasan et al. (2025) documented a notable surge in demotivation research since 2020 in a systematic review spanning five decades of empirical work.

➤ *EFL Motivation in African and Lusophone Educational Contexts*

Research on EFL motivation in sub-Saharan African contexts remains comparatively sparse despite the region's growing significance in global higher education. Jowi (2024) highlighted the increasing emphasis on foreign language competencies as transversal graduate attributes across African institutions. In Lusophone African contexts, the role of Portuguese as the official medium of instruction creates a distinctive bilingual dynamic in which English occupies a clearly foreign status, increasing the motivational significance of classroom instruction as the primary site of English language contact.

The limited empirical literature for the Angolan higher education context suggests that EFL learners tend to be predominantly instrumentally motivated, with English perceived primarily as a credential for international professional access. The present study addresses this gap by situating original field data from Wako Kungo/Polo Sumbe within the analytical frameworks of the L2MSS, SDT, and teacher motivational practice research.

III. METHODOLOGY

This section describes the research design, institutional context, participants, data collection instruments, and data analysis procedures.

➤ *Research Design*

The study adopts a mixed-methods case study design (Yin, 2018). Quantitative data from a structured questionnaire are complemented by qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and systematic classroom observation, following the triangulation design proposed by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018). The study is positioned within an interpretivist epistemological orientation (Cohen et al., 2018), consistent with trends in EFL motivation research towards methodological pluralism (Boo et al., 2015; Hiver et al., 2021).

➤ *Research Context and Participants*

The study was conducted at Instituto Superior do Wako Kungo/Polo Sumbe during the first semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The population comprised 45 first-year Psychology students. A sample of 30 students was selected through simple random sampling (66.7% of population), comprising 15 male students (ages 20–25) and 15 female students (ages 18–25).

Table 1 Participant Profile by Gender and Age Range

Variable	Category	n	Age Range
Population	Total enrolled	45	18–25
Sample	Total selected	30	18–25
Gender	Male	15	20–25
	Female	15	18–25
Sampling method	Simple random sampling	66.7%	—

Note. Data refer to the 2025/2026 academic year, first semester.

➤ *Data Collection Instruments*

• *Structured Questionnaire*

A structured questionnaire was administered to all 30 participants, drawing on the MSLQ (Pintrich et al., 1991) and the TMP scale (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). Items were presented on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) across four sections: demographic information, teacher instructional practices, teacher interpersonal behaviour, and self-assessed motivation.

• *Semi-Structured Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposively selected sub-sample of eight participants (four male, four female), each lasting 20–35 minutes in Portuguese. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis.

• *Classroom Observation*

Systematic non-participant classroom observation was conducted over four sessions using an adapted version of the Motivational Orientation of Language Teaching (MOLT) observation scheme (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). Field notes were recorded in real time and elaborated into full observational protocols after each session.

➤ *Data Analysis Procedures*

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests computed with SPSS (version 27.0). Qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022)

six-phase reflexive procedure. Cross-instrument triangulation was conducted by juxtaposing questionnaire means, interview themes, and MOLT coding across all four observational sessions, with convergent and divergent patterns assessed against Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for credibility and confirmability.

➤ *Ethical Considerations*

Informed consent was obtained from all participants; anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed; audio recordings are stored securely and will be deleted upon completion of the study; and institutional authorisation was obtained from the academic directorate of Instituto Superior do Wako Kungo/Polo Sumbe prior to commencement of fieldwork.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses findings in an integrated format, organised around the three research questions. Quantitative results are reported first, followed by thematic analysis findings and their interpretation in light of the theoretical framework.

➤ *Student Perceptions of Teacher Motivational Behaviours (RQ1)*

• *Questionnaire Results*

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the twelve items comprising the Teacher Motivational Behaviour (TMB) subscale.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Teacher Motivational Behaviour (TMB) Subscale (N = 30)

Item	M	SD	Rank
The teacher encourages me when I make mistakes	4.73	0.45	1
The teacher uses varied and interesting activities	4.60	0.56	2
The teacher explains how English is useful for my career	4.53	0.63	3
The teacher creates a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere	4.47	0.68	4
The teacher gives me positive feedback on my progress	4.40	0.72	5
The teacher shows genuine enthusiasm for English	4.37	0.76	6
The teacher respects my opinions in class discussions	4.30	0.79	7
The teacher sets achievable but challenging tasks	4.23	0.82	8
The teacher provides corrective feedback constructively	3.97	0.89	9
The teacher connects content to students' interests	3.83	0.94	10
The teacher uses only Portuguese when explaining content	3.17	1.12	11
The teacher gives sufficient time to practise speaking	3.10	1.08	12
Overall TMB subscale mean	4.11	0.62	—

Note. Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Items ranked from highest to lowest M.

The overall TMB subscale mean of M = 4.11 (SD = 0.62) indicates high perceived teacher motivational behaviour. The three highest-ranked items relate to encouragement in error correction (M = 4.73), activity variety (M = 4.60), and instrumental relevance framing (M = 4.53), consistent with Dörnyei's (2001) taxonomy. The two lowest-ranked items — excessive use of Portuguese (M = 3.17) and insufficient speaking practice (M = 3.10) — represent potential demotivating dimensions.

• *Interview and Observation Findings*

Thematic analysis yielded three primary themes: (1) Encouragement and Error Tolerance as Motivational Anchors; (2) Instrumental Relevance and Career Framing; and (3) Language of Instruction as a Motivational Variable.

"When I make a mistake in English and the teacher does not humiliate me, but corrects me calmly and tells me I am improving, I feel like I want to try again. It gives me courage." (P4, female, age 20)

"The teacher always says that mistakes are part of learning. That changes everything for me. In secondary school we were afraid to speak because of the teacher's reaction." (P11, male, age 23)

These responses resonate with Ushioda's (2011) concept of the teacher as motivational role model and with SDT's emphasis on competence support. Classroom observation corroborated these patterns consistently across all four sessions on the MOLT error tolerance dimension.

"Our teacher always reminds us that to work in international organisations or to publish research, we need English. When I hear that, I understand why I am here learning this language." (P7, male, age 22)

The language of instruction theme produced the most divergent pattern: some participants valued Portuguese for conceptual clarity while others identified it as a source of target-language disengagement, reflecting the well-documented tension in EFL pedagogy between maximising comprehensibility and creating the immersive conditions that promote autonomous L2 use (Noels et al., 2000; Ushioda, 2011).

➤ *Teacher-Student Interaction and Learner Engagement (RQ2)*

• *Questionnaire Results*

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics for Teacher-Student Interaction Quality Subscale (N = 30)

Item	M	SD	Rank
The teacher knows my name and addresses me personally	4.67	0.48	1
The teacher listens attentively when I speak in class	4.57	0.57	2
I feel comfortable asking the teacher questions	4.50	0.63	3
The teacher treats all students with equal respect	4.43	0.68	4
The teacher is available to help me outside class time	3.70	1.02	5
The teacher asks for my opinion during lessons	3.63	0.99	6
The teacher involves students in deciding how activities are done	3.27	1.11	7
The teacher connects lesson topics to my daily life and interests	3.20	1.10	8
Overall interaction subscale mean	3.99	0.70	—

Note. Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

The interaction subscale yielded M = 3.99 (SD = 0.70). The highest-rated items reflect teacher immediacy: personal address by name (M = 4.67), attentive listening (M = 4.57), and approachability (M = 4.50), consistent with Christophel's (1990) findings on the positive relationship between teacher immediacy behaviours and student motivation. The lowest-rated items — learner involvement in activity design (M = 3.27) and connection to personal interests (M = 3.20) — indicate a relative deficit in autonomy-supportive practices.

• *Interview and Observation Findings*

"If the teacher does not know who I am, I feel invisible. But this teacher knows my name, knows my difficulties. That makes me want to participate more, because I feel seen." (P6, female, age 21)

"The relationship with the teacher is everything. When the teacher is cold or distant, you come to class just to be

present. When there is warmth, you come to learn." (P2, male, age 24)

These accounts confirm that the satisfaction of the relatedness need is experienced as a motivational precondition rather than an optional quality — fully consistent with SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Five of the eight interview participants also expressed a desire for greater learner agency:

"The teacher decides everything — the topics, the exercises, how we work. I would feel more motivated if sometimes I could choose what we do or how I demonstrate that I have learned." (P8, male, age 22)

This finding is consistent with SDT's autonomy need and with Liu et al.'s (2025) demonstration that learner autonomy support mediates the relationship between teacher support and student engagement.

➤ *Alignment Between Observed Practice and Motivational Theory (RQ3)*

Table 4 Summary of MOLT Classroom Observation Coding Across Four Sessions

Motivational Strategy Category	S1	S2	S3	S4
Positive competence feedback	High	High	High	High
Error tolerance / corrective recast	High	High	High	High
Classroom atmosphere (warmth, inclusion)	High	High	High	High
Goal / relevance framing	High	Moderate	High	High
Task variety and engagement	High	High	Moderate	High
Referential questions / genuine interaction	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	High
Learner autonomy support	Low	Low	Low	Moderate
Target language use (English) during instruction	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate

Note. S1–S4 = observed sessions 1 to 4. High = consistently present; Moderate = intermittently present; Low = rarely or not observed. Based on adapted MOLT scheme (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008).

Competence-supportive strategies — positive feedback, error tolerance, and classroom warmth — were consistently present at high levels across all four sessions. Two areas were systematically underdeveloped: learner autonomy support (Low in three of four sessions) and consistent use of English as the medium of instruction (Moderate or Low across all sessions). These findings converge with the questionnaire and interview data, providing strong triangulated evidence of a relationally strong but structurally partial motivational practice profile.

The teacher’s explicit career framing activates the Ought-to L2 Self (Dörnyei, 2009), while relational warmth contributes to the L2 Learning Experience. The systematic deficit in learner autonomy support represents the most significant theoretical gap, as autonomy is a critical mediating variable in the teacher support–engagement relationship (Liu et al., 2025; Zhang & Liu, 2022). Longitudinal evidence further confirms that teacher motivational practice and student engagement operate as mutually reinforcing processes over time (Zhou et al., 2023).

➤ *Gender Differences in Motivational Perceptions*

Table 5 Independent Samples t-Test: Motivational Scores by Gender

Subscale	M (F)	M (M)	t	df	p
TMB subscale	4.19	4.03	1.12	28	.273 (n.s.)
Interaction subscale	4.11	3.87	1.38	28	.179 (n.s.)
Self-reported motivation	4.28	4.05	1.51	28	.142 (n.s.)

Note. F = female (n = 15); M = male (n = 15). n.s. = not statistically significant (p > .05). Two-tailed test.

No statistically significant gender differences were identified in any subscale, consistent with recent meta-analytic evidence that individual and contextual variables exert greater influence on EFL motivation than gender alone (Elsayed et al., 2024).

- No statistically significant gender differences in motivational perceptions were found, consistent with evidence that contextual variables are stronger predictors than gender alone (Elsayed et al., 2024).
- A motivationally rich EFL classroom environment is achievable within the resource constraints of provincial Angolan higher education, confirming the centrality of individual pedagogical agency in African higher education contexts (Jowi, 2024).

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study has produced a detailed and empirically grounded portrait of teacher motivational practice and its effects on learner motivation at Instituto Superior do Wako Kungo/Polo Sumbe, contributing empirical evidence to an underrepresented Lusophone African higher education context.

➤ *Principal Conclusions*

- Teacher motivational behaviours are perceived at a high overall level (TMB M = 4.11). Encouragement during error correction, activity variety, and explicit career relevance framing are identified as the most salient motivating practices, consistent with Dörnyei’s (2001) taxonomy.
- The quality of teacher-student interaction is the single most foundational motivational variable. Teacher immediacy — personal address, attentive listening, and approachability — consistently ranked highest, confirming the primacy of relational warmth as a motivational precondition (Christophel, 1990; Derakhshan et al., 2022; Ryan & Deci, 2000).
- The teacher’s observed motivational practice demonstrates strong alignment with competence-supportive and relational strategies, with two systematic gaps: learner autonomy support and consistent use of English as the language of instruction.

VI. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- Single institutional context: Findings cannot be directly generalised to other Angolan institutions without further comparative research.
- Sample size: The sample of 30 students limits the statistical power of inferential analyses.
- Single teacher observation: The observational component reflects one practitioner’s motivational profile.
- Social desirability bias: Self-report responses may have been influenced by reluctance to express negative perceptions of the teacher.
- Cross-sectional design: The study captures a snapshot at one point in the academic semester; longitudinal designs would provide a more dynamic account.
- Absence of achievement data: The study does not link motivational perceptions to measurable language learning outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ *For EFL Teachers*

- Sustain and consolidate competence-supportive practices, particularly error-tolerant corrective feedback and positive reinforcement.

- Develop autonomy-supportive teaching strategies through learner choice in task topic or format and negotiated aspects of course structure.
- Adopt a graduated English medium instruction approach, increasing target language use progressively across the semester.
- Integrate explicit goal-setting activities to activate the Ideal L2 Self component of the L2MSS (Dörnyei, 2009; Zhang & Liu, 2022).

➤ *For Institutional Leadership*

- Invest in EFL teacher professional development with a motivational focus, including workshops on Dörnyei's motivational strategy taxonomy and SDT-informed classroom practices.
- Create structured spaces for teacher-student feedback through systematic mid-semester motivational climate surveys.
- Support further research on EFL pedagogy at the institutional level, including longitudinal and multi-institutional studies.

➤ *For Future Research*

- Conduct comparative studies across multiple Angolan higher education institutions and disciplines.
- Design longitudinal studies tracking motivational trajectories across a full academic year or degree programme.
- Integrate objective language achievement data to establish the motivation-achievement relationship.
- Extend the research focus to include teacher perspectives on motivational practice and professional demotivation, building on Hasan et al. (2025), and adopt engagement-centred research designs informed by recent systematic frameworks (Hiver et al., 2024).

FINAL REMARKS

This study has demonstrated that the English teacher occupies a pivotal and multidimensional motivational role at Instituto Superior do Wako Kungo/Polo Sumbe — exercised primarily through the quality of interpersonal relationships, the strategic framing of English as professionally relevant, and the consistent cultivation of a safe and encouraging learning environment. The findings contribute empirical evidence to a field that has historically underrepresented the Lusophone African higher education context, and do so at a moment of particular institutional relevance as Angolan universities increasingly prioritise foreign language competencies as transversal graduate attributes.

The strength of the motivational relationship between teacher and students documented in this study confirms that motivated and motivating EFL teaching is not contingent on abundant material resources, but is fundamentally a relational and professional achievement. It is the authors' hope that these findings will serve as a foundation for continued

empirical enquiry into EFL motivation in Angola and across the broader Lusophone African higher education space.

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