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PARENTING STYLES AND EFL MOTIVATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY IN INDONESIAN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how parenting styles shape students' motivation to learn English in an Indonesian vocational high school. Adopting a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study involved seven students, seven parents, and two English teachers. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and field notes, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that students' motivation was dynamic and context-dependent, with stronger engagement at school than at home. In the classroom, motivation was reflected in active participation, peer interaction, persistence, and future-oriented goals. At home, motivation tended to weaken because of limited parental monitoring and the lack of structured learning routines. Although parents provided little direct academic supervision, they influenced motivation indirectly through reminders, encouragement, recognition of effort, and support for study time and space. These practices supported students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In addition, teacher support, classroom climate, peer interaction, and future aspirations played a compensatory role when home support was limited. The study contributes to the EFL motivation literature by showing that motivation is both psychologically experienced and behaviorally observable, emerging through the interaction of family practices, school environment, and personal goals.

Keywords: EFL Learner, Learning Motivation, Parenting Styles, Qualitative Study, Vocational School Students

INTRODUCTION

English occupies a central position in contemporary education because it provides access to academic knowledge, technological resources, and broader employment opportunities in an increasingly interconnected world (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2011). In EFL contexts such as Indonesia, this global role places considerable pressure on schools to ensure that students not only develop English knowledge and skills but also sustain the motivation necessary for long-term engagement with the language. From this perspective, motivation to learn English extends beyond temporary enthusiasm or confidence in speaking. It also includes learners' interest, effort, persistence, and ongoing

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commitment to learning processes and goals (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021; Henry & Liu, 2024; Ryan & Deci, 2017). This issue is especially salient in vocational education, where English is commonly associated with students' future career pathways, yet actual engagement in English learning often varies considerably. In this context, English is positioned as a supporting subject for employability, but students demonstrate differing levels of commitment, persistence, and classroom engagement in learning English.

Recent studies have moved away from treating second language motivation as a fixed individual trait and instead conceptualize it as dynamic, socially mediated, and context sensitive. Dörnyei & Ushioda (2021) argue that language motivation develops through the interaction of learners' goals, identities, emotions, and learning experiences, while Henry & Liu (2024) further show that motivation and self-regulated learning are reciprocally related rather than separate constructs. Similarly, research grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) demonstrates that learners are more likely to develop sustained and self-endorsed motivation when their environments support autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Across the secondary-school years, such need-supportive conditions appear especially important for maintaining motivation to learn languages over time (Parrish et al., 2025). Together, these studies suggest that students' motivation to learn English is shaped not only by what happens in class, but also by the broader social conditions that either support or frustrate their psychological engagement with learning

Another important development in the field is the recognition that motivation is influenced by significant others, including family members. Noels et al. (2019) show that support from significant others can affect language learners' motivation through processes closely aligned with SDT, especially when learners perceive encouragement, understanding, constructive feedback, and relational support. More recently, Liang et al. (2025), in their systematic review, conclude that parents' beliefs and practices matter substantially for children's English learning, but they also note the need for more context-sensitive studies that explain how parental influence operates in sociocultural settings. This call is reinforced by Guo et al. (2025), whose mixed-methods study found that parental involvement, social support, and peer relationships significantly shaped multiple dimensions of L2 motivation. These findings are important because they shift attention from parental involvement as mere supervision or homework assistance to the broader motivational climate that families create around English learning.

Within parenting research, parenting style provides a useful lens for understanding that broader motivational climate. Rather than referring to isolated parental actions, parenting style captures recurring patterns of warmth, responsiveness, structure, monitoring, and control in parent–child relationships (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019). Baumrind's classic typology, namely authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful, remains influential because it helps explain differences in adolescents' adjustment and academic functioning. At the same time, more recent research emphasizes that parenting should not be treated as culturally neutral. Novick et al. (2023) and Pinquart & Kauser (2018) show that the strength and meaning of parenting effects may vary across cultural contexts, and Fute et al (2024) further demonstrate that parenting styles affect adolescents' academic achievement partly through learning engagement in a non-Western setting.

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Similarly, Tanaka & Takeuchi (2026) reported that parental involvement was linked to young learners' self-efficacy, goal orientations, self-regulated learning strategies, and classroom engagement. This perspective is especially relevant for research in Southeast Sulawesi, where local family expectations, patterns of communication, and limited English exposure outside school may shape how students interpret parental support, pressure, monitoring, or indifference in relation to English learning.

Although studies in the Indonesian context have enriched the understanding of English learning motivation, an important gap remains. Subekti (2018 and Farid & Lamb (2020) show that Indonesian learners' motivation is shaped by self-guides, learning experiences, and locally meaningful aspirations, while more recent studies by Fernanda et al. (2025) and Petriani et al. (2025) highlight the role of intrinsic motives and supportive classroom environments in sustaining students' engagement with English. Other studies also showed that teacher autonomy support, student–teacher relationships, and classroom climate contribute positively to motivation and engagement in EFL learning (Ma et al., 2024; F. Xu et al., 2025; Zhang & Hu, 2025). However, these studies largely emphasize learner-internal and school-based influences, leaving the family context, particularly parenting styles, as a source of emotional support, structure, and motivational regulation, underexamined. These findings suggest that English learning motivation develops through the interaction of home and school experiences. However, most of these studies rely on survey designs, focus on university or general secondary-school contexts outside Indonesia, and examine parental involvement in broad terms rather than how vocational students interpret parenting styles in their everyday family lives. This leaves a clear need for qualitative, context-sensitive research on how perceived parenting styles shape vocational students' motivation to learn English in Indonesian EFL settings.

In the present study, this gap becomes visible in a vocational school in Konawe Regency, where students differ markedly in how they value English, persist in learning, and cope with difficulty, and where such differences appear closely related to variations in family interaction and parenting practices. Thus, prior research explains important sources of English learning motivation in Indonesia, but it does not yet adequately show how perceived parenting styles shape adolescents' motivation to learn English in a vocational EFL setting through the dimensions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This gap is theoretically and practically significant. Theoretically, it calls for a closer integration of Baumrind's parenting style framework with Self-Determination Theory to explain how family interaction patterns may support or undermine students' motivation to learn English. Practically, it matters because students' learning motivation is not formed in classrooms alone. It is also shaped in homes where encouragement, control, indifference, or emotional support may influence how learners perceive English, why they study it, and whether they persist when learning becomes difficult.

Based on this gap, the present study explores how students at a vocational school in Konawe Regency describe their motivation to learn English, what parenting styles and parenting practices they perceive in their families, how those parenting styles shape their motivation to learn English, and what contextual factors interact with parental influence. Accordingly, the study aims to explore the nature of students' English learning motivation,

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identify the parenting styles they experience, explain how those parenting styles shape their motivation, and examine the contextual conditions surrounding that relationship. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on motivation to learn English rather than merely motivation to speak and in its use of a qualitative approach to connect parenting styles, Self-Determination Theory, and the lived experiences of vocational high school students in Southeast Sulawesi.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach to explore how students perceived the role of parenting styles in shaping their motivation to learn English. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study aimed to understand participants' lived experiences, meanings, and interpretations rather than measure variables statistically or test predetermined hypotheses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology was selected because the study focused on the essence of students' experiences as English learners whose motivation developed within family, school, and sociocultural contexts (Moustakas, 1994). The research was conducted over two months at SMKN 3 Konawe, a public vocational high school in Konawe Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. The site was selected because English functions as a supporting subject for students' future employability, yet students show varying levels of engagement and persistence in learning English.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to obtain information-rich cases relevant to the research focus (Patton, 2015). The participants comprised seven students, seven parents or guardians, and two English teachers. The student participants consisted of four Grade XI students and three Grade XII students. These grade levels were selected because the students had studied English for at least two years at the vocational secondary level and, therefore, had sufficient experience to reflect on their learning motivation, classroom engagement, and home support. The students were identified by their English teachers as showing relatively high, moderate, or lower motivation to learn English, allowing the study to capture variation in motivational profiles, study habits, and family backgrounds. Each student was paired with one parent or guardian to connect students' accounts with family perspectives. Two English teachers were included as key informants because they taught and observed the participating students and could provide contextual information about classroom engagement, learning behavior, and the influence of home conditions on study routines. The parent data also showed that most parents worked as farmers, traders, or small-scale sellers, which became an important contextual factor in the analysis because it shaped the time and energy available for academic support at home.

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher served as the primary instrument and was directly involved in participant recruitment, interviewing, classroom observation, transcription, coding, and interpretation. To support this role, the study used semi-structured interview guides, an observation checklist, field-note templates, and a coding framework. Separate interview guides were prepared for students, parents, and teachers so that each group could describe the phenomenon from its own perspective. Student interviews focused on English learning motivation, effort, persistence, classroom

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experiences, and perceived parental influence. Parent interviews explored beliefs about English learning, home learning routines, monitoring practices, and responses to students' difficulties. Teacher interviews focused on students' classroom participation, motivation-related behaviors, and the relationship between school and home support. Non-participant classroom observation was used to document attentiveness, participation, persistence, peer interaction, and responses to teacher feedback. Field notes were used to record contextual details, non-verbal cues, and researcher reflections during fieldwork. The instruments were reviewed through expert judgment by two qualitative research experts and one English education lecturer.

Data were collected over approximately four weeks using multiple qualitative techniques. The primary method was semi-structured interviews, which enabled the researcher to follow guiding questions while probing participants' responses in greater depth. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted in Indonesian so that participants could express their experiences comfortably and accurately. With participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Classroom observations were conducted during English lessons to examine how students' motivation was manifested in practice. The use of interviews, observations, and field notes enabled the phenomenon to be examined from different perspectives and supported a more contextually grounded understanding of how parenting styles shaped motivation to learn English.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun & Clarke (2006). Analysis proceeded iteratively across interview transcripts, observation notes, field notes, and analytic memos. Guided by the coding framework, the basic unit of coding was one meaning unit, usually consisting of one to three sentences. A single excerpt could receive more than one code when it reflected multiple meanings. Each coded segment was also marked according to valence, whether it increased, decreased, or was neutral in relation to motivation, and intensity, with the categories of low, moderate, or high.

The analysis began with repeated reading of the transcripts and observation notes in order to identify recurring patterns and contrasts across students, parents, and teachers. Initial coding used a starting list of broad codes, including motivation, goals, learning experiences, self-regulated learning, perceived competence, parental involvement, parental control, parental feedback, emotional climate, social comparison, school factors, observation indicators, and parenting style. During analysis, emergent codes were added to capture recurring contextual patterns that were especially visible in the data, such as low parental monitoring, parents' work-related constraints, parental prioritization of school attendance rather than the learning process, and the density of school activities. Some responses were split into more than one meaning unit when they contained contrasting meanings. For example, students' descriptions of their motivation at school and at home were coded separately because these often carried different valences.

After initial coding, related codes were grouped into broader categories, such as school-based motivational support, behavioral engagement, future-oriented motivation, self-regulated learning, low academic monitoring, weak home learning structure, and indirect emotional or practical support. These categories were then refined into themes

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through repeated comparison across participant groups and data sources. Only after the themes had been developed inductively from the data were they interpreted using Baumrind's parenting style framework and Self-Determination Theory. The STYLE codes were used at this later stage to classify recurring parenting patterns based on combinations of support and structure rather than from isolated quotations. The final interpretation was linked to the dimensions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to explain how family and school experiences shaped students' motivation to learn English.

Data collection and analysis were conducted concurrently, allowing the researcher to monitor the recurrence of patterns during fieldwork. Sufficient thematic saturation was considered to have been reached when later interviews no longer generated substantially new thematic categories and instead reinforced recurring patterns across students, parents, teachers, and classroom observations. These recurring patterns included stronger motivation at school than at home, low parental monitoring of English learning, the influence of parents' work demands on study routines, and the importance of teacher support, classroom climate, and future goals.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was enhanced through source and method triangulation by comparing data from students, parents, teachers, interviews, classroom observations, and field notes. Transferability was supported through a thick description of the research setting, participant characteristics, and family context. Dependability was strengthened by maintaining an audit trail that documented sampling decisions, instrument development, coding procedures, and theme refinement. Confirmability was addressed through reflexive memo writing and evidence-based theme development grounded in quotations and observational data. In addition, the explicit coding framework, including meaning units, multi-coding, valence, intensity, and emergent codes, formed part of the study's audit trail and contributed to analytic transparency.

RESULTS

This study explored how parenting styles shaped students' motivation to learn English at a public vocational high school in Konawe Regency, Southeast Sulawesi, Indonesia. Drawing on interviews with seven students, seven parents, and two English teachers, supported by classroom observations and field notes, the analysis generated four interrelated themes: (1) students' motivation to learn English was stronger at school than at home, (2) parenting practices were dominated by low monitoring and limited academic follow-up, (3) parenting influenced motivation through simple but meaningful forms of support, and (4) teacher support, classroom climate, peer interaction, and future goals interacted with parental influence in shaping motivation.

Students' Motivation to Learn English Was Stronger at School than at Home

A clear pattern across the student data was that motivation to learn English was generally higher at school than at home. Students described school as a setting where English had clear meaning, immediate structure, and visible social support. In contrast, home was often described as a less regulated space in which English learning received limited attention

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unless homework or tests made it unavoidable. This contrast suggests that students' motivation was not simply an individual disposition; rather, it was activated differently depending on the level of structure, interaction, and reinforcement available in each setting.

Students repeatedly linked their school-based motivation to future-oriented goals such as university study, scholarships, employment, and access to digital information. At the same time, they associated classroom learning with interactive activities, peer participation, and teacher encouragement. One student stated, "At school, my motivation is high… At home, it sometimes drops because no one asks about my progress" (S1). Another similarly noted, "At school, I feel motivated… at home, I study by myself because my parents rarely ask" (S2). These statements did not merely indicate different levels of effort across settings; they pointed to a broader pattern in which motivation became stronger when learning was socially noticed and supported, and weaker when it became largely self-managed.

Classroom observations strengthened this interpretation. During English lessons, students were generally attentive, followed instructions, and engaged in group discussion, vocabulary tasks, and short speaking activities. Participation increased especially during interactive tasks, suggesting that motivation was behaviorally visible when classroom conditions were supportive. Field notes also indicated that students were more responsive when lessons involved collaboration, variation, and clear feedback. By contrast, students rarely described fixed home study routines. English learning at home appeared to occur mainly in response to homework, fatigue permitting, rather than as a regular practice. Overall, these findings indicate that students' motivation to learn English was context-dependent: it was sustained more effectively in environments that offered structure, feedback, and relational support than in settings where learning remained largely unmonitored.

Perceived Parenting Practices Were Dominated by Low Monitoring and Limited Academic Follow-Up

The second theme concerns the dominant pattern of parenting practices reported across student and parent interviews. Parents generally valued education and acknowledged the importance of English, yet their involvement in the actual process of English learning was limited. Their support was usually expressed through broad reminders about attending school, avoiding laziness, or completing homework rather than through regular monitoring, structured study routines, or detailed follow-up on learning progress. Analytically, this pattern suggests not parental indifference in an absolute sense, but a form of academically low-intensity involvement.

Students consistently described this pattern in similar terms. As one student explained, "My parents rarely ask what I am studying… they just say don't skip school" (S1). Another said, "They are busy working, so I study by myself" (S2). Parents' own accounts confirmed these perceptions. Several openly acknowledged that home learning routines were irregular and that they lacked both time and confidence to provide direct assistance. For example, one parent stated, "There is no special schedule… the important thing is that he goes to school" (P3), while another remarked, "I rarely check homework… I just remind her to do it" (P2).

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These responses indicate that parental care was present, but mostly in the form of general discipline and attendance-oriented concern rather than sustained academic engagement.

A further feature of this pattern was the absence of follow-up when students encountered difficulty. Students often reported being told to "ask the teacher" or "keep trying," but these responses were rarely followed by further checking. This suggests that encouragement was present at a general level, yet it was not translated into consistent monitoring or collaborative problem-solving. Importantly, this pattern was also connected to parents' work demands and limited English knowledge. Many parents worked as farmers or traders, which constrained the time and energy available for supervising study at home. As a result, English learning became individualized early: students were expected to manage difficulties on their own, seek help from friends or teachers, and sustain effort without regular home-based academic scaffolding.

Parenting Influenced Motivation through Routine, Encouragement, and Recognition of Effort

Although parents rarely provided direct instructional help, the findings show that parenting still shaped students' motivation in meaningful ways. Students did not expect their parents to teach grammar, correct pronunciation, or explain English material. Instead, they emphasized the motivational value of simple forms of support: being asked about progress, being reminded to study, having time and space to learn, and receiving recognition for effort. This indicates that parenting influenced motivation less through academic expertise than through whether learning was made visible, acknowledged, and emotionally supported in everyday family life.

Students expressed this expectation clearly. One student commented, "I just need my parents to ask for five minutes… that already makes me feel cared for" (S2). Another explained, "Being asked about my progress and being praised is enough" (S3). These accounts suggest that even minimal parental engagement could carry motivational significance because it signaled attention and relational investment. In other words, what mattered was not technical help with English itself, but the creation of a home environment in which the student's effort was recognized.

This interpretation was also supported by observational patterns. Students who reported receiving at least some encouragement or practical support tended to appear more prepared, brought learning materials, and were more willing to attempt classroom tasks. By contrast, students who described very limited parental attention often showed more fluctuating engagement and appeared more dependent on situational prompts from teachers or peers. At home, the absence of parental attention was associated with reduced continuity of learning. Several students indicated that, when no one asked about their study, English became "only a school subject," and home study occurred mainly when homework demanded it. Thus, the findings suggest that parenting contributed to motivational continuity not by intensifying control, but by providing routine, acknowledgement, and an emotionally affirming learning climate.

An important subtheme concerned social comparison. Several students reported feeling pressured, embarrassed, or discouraged when parents compared them with siblings,

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cousins, or peers. Even when such comments were not intended to harm, students often interpreted them as signs of inadequacy. Parents themselves recognized that these comparisons sometimes had negative emotional effects. This pattern indicates that parental talk can influence motivation in opposite directions: supportive attention can strengthen effort, whereas comparison can weaken confidence and reduce willingness to engage.

Teacher Support, Classroom Climate, and Future Goals Interacted with Parental Influence

The final theme shows that parenting did not operate in isolation. Students' motivation was shaped by the interaction between family practices and other contextual resources, especially teacher support, classroom climate, peer interaction, and future aspirations. These factors often compensated for limited academic support at home and helped explain why motivation remained relatively strong at school despite weak home monitoring. Analytically, this means that parenting was one important influence among several, rather than a single determining factor.

Students consistently described classroom activities as major motivational triggers. Discussions, role plays, presentations, games, and creative tasks made English feel more engaging and less intimidating. For example, one student noted, "I enjoy discussions and role plays… it feels more alive" (S3), while another said, "Creative tasks make me more interested" (S4). These comments were reinforced by classroom observations, which showed that participation increased during interactive activities and that students became more willing to speak when tasks were collaborative and non-threatening. This suggests that students' motivation was sustained not only by task content, but also by the sense of safety and participation created around that content.

The role of teachers was especially prominent. Students repeatedly identified teacher encouragement, specific feedback, and non-judgmental responses to mistakes as factors that increased confidence and willingness to try. Teacher interviews supported this interpretation by showing that more motivated students were not necessarily those with the highest proficiency, but those who were willing to attempt tasks, persist after difficulty, and engage with feedback. Teachers also observed that a safe classroom climate reduced fear of ridicule and encouraged speaking. In this sense, teacher support appeared to strengthen students' sense of competence and make engagement more sustainable.

At the same time, future goals and peer relationships functioned as additional motivational resources. Students who mentioned scholarships, higher education, or employment tended to show stronger self-regulation and persistence, even when support at home was limited. Peer interaction also mattered because it reduced anxiety and created opportunities for shared practice. Taken together, these findings indicate that students' motivation to learn English emerged from the interplay of home and school influences. Limited parental monitoring did not automatically eliminate motivation, because students could draw on teachers, peers, and future aspirations. However, when home encouragement was added to these school-based supports, students' motivation appeared more stable and more likely to continue beyond classroom demands.

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DISCUSSION

Students' Motivation as a Context-Dependent and Observable Process

The findings of this study show that students' motivation to learn English was dynamic, context-dependent, and visible in practice. Students consistently expressed strong future-oriented reasons for learning English, such as access to higher education, employment, scholarships, and wider global opportunities. This finding is consistent with previous studies in the Indonesian context showing that learners' motivation is closely related to personally meaningful aspirations and future self-guides (Farid & Lamb, 2020; Subekti, 2018). However, the present study extends this line of research by showing that such aspirations do not automatically translate into equally strong motivation across contexts. While students maintained long-term goals, their actual engagement was stronger at school than at home, suggesting that motivation is not only internally constructed but also unevenly sustained depending on the social conditions surrounding learning.

This finding supports contemporary views of L2 motivation as a socially mediated and situated process (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). In this study, motivation was reinforced at school because the classroom provided structure, feedback, peer interaction, and visible learning routines. By contrast, at home, motivation became less stable when English learning was not regularly noticed, discussed, or followed up on. In this sense, the study shows that students' motivation to learn English is not simply a matter of willingness or personal ambition; it is strengthened or weakened by the extent to which particular environments make learning visible, meaningful, and supported. This is also consistent with Henry & Liu (2024), who argue that motivation and self-regulated learning are mutually reinforcing and reflected in observable learning behavior. The present study adds that such observable behavior is patterned by context: students may remain motivated in principle, yet behave differently depending on whether the environment supports or disrupts continuity of learning.

Parenting as an Emotional and Organizational Learning Environment

The findings show that parenting influenced students' motivation primarily through the emotional and organizational climate created at home rather than through direct academic instruction. Although parents generally valued education and recognized the importance of English, their involvement was usually limited to broad expectations, such as ensuring school attendance, reminding students not to be lazy, or asking them to complete homework. Structured monitoring, regular study routines, and sustained follow-up on English learning were much less visible.

This pattern is significant because it suggests that parental influence in this setting cannot be adequately understood in terms of homework assistance alone. Instead, parenting operated through the extent to which the home environment provided stability, routine, and attention to the learning process. This interpretation is consistent with parenting research that conceptualizes parenting style as a broader combination of warmth, responsiveness, and structure rather than isolated actions (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019). At the same time, the pattern identified here does not fully correspond to the classic authoritative model,

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which combines emotional support with high monitoring and clear structure. Rather, it points to a contextually shaped form of low academic monitoring in which parental care is present, but academic engagement remains limited.

This distinction is important. The findings do not suggest that parents were indifferent to their children's education. Instead, their limited involvement appeared to be shaped by socioeconomic and practical constraints, including demanding work conditions, limited English proficiency, and a strong reliance on the school as the main site of academic guidance. This interpretation supports arguments that parenting practices must be understood within their cultural and socioeconomic contexts rather than judged against idealized models alone (Lansford, 2022). It also resonates with Liang et al (2025), who note that parental involvement in English learning varies according to parents' resources, beliefs, and local realities. However, this study contributes beyond that literature by showing how such limited monitoring is experienced by students themselves and how it affects the visibility of English learning in daily life. In this context, the home did not become a strongly organized learning environment, and as a result, English learning was often left to students' own initiative.

Parenting and Motivation through Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness

A major contribution of this study lies in explaining how parenting shaped motivation through mechanisms aligned with Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Students did not expect their parents to teach English directly or help them solve grammar or speaking difficulties. What they valued instead were simple forms of support such as being asked about their progress, receiving reminders to study, being praised for effort, and being given time and space to learn. These findings suggest that parenting mattered not because parents were academically expert, but because their responses could either support or weaken students' feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

This interpretation strongly aligns with SDT, which posits that motivation is more likely to be sustained when learners experience psychological support for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In this study, even small parental actions such as asking about homework, appreciating effort, or creating a quiet study moment had motivational value because they signaled that learning was recognized and relationally supported. This is consistent with Soenens et al (2017) and Soenens & Vansteenkiste (2005), who found that autonomy-supportive parenting predicts more self-determined learning behavior, and with Noels et al (2019), who argue that support from significant others enhances language motivation when it fosters psychological need satisfaction.

At the same time, the study refines how SDT can be applied in this vocational EFL context. The problem was not primarily that parents could not teach English. Rather, students' motivation became less stable when their learning was not monitored, followed up on, or emotionally acknowledged. In other words, what weakened motivation was not the absence of direct instruction, but the absence of continuity-building support. Students then became more dependent on external demands such as homework deadlines or upcoming tests, which is consistent with SDT's distinction between more autonomous and more controlled forms of motivation.

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The findings also show that social comparison had a negative motivational effect. When students were compared with siblings, cousins, or peers, they often felt pressured, embarrassed, or less confident. This result is important because it shows that even mild comparison can shift students' orientation from self-improvement to self-protection. The finding is in line with previous studies suggesting that psychologically controlling practices can undermine motivation and emotional well-being (Soenens et al., 2017; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2005; F. Xu et al., 2025; L. Xu et al., 2024). In the present study, comparison did not constructively motivate efforts; rather, it weakened students' sense of competence and emotional security, which are both central to sustained learning motivation.

The Compensatory Role of Teachers and Classroom Climate

Another important finding is that teacher support and classroom climate played a compensatory role in sustaining students' motivation, particularly when parental support was limited. Students were more engaged during interactive activities such as discussions, role plays, presentations, games, and creative tasks, and classroom observations confirmed higher participation and enthusiasm during these activities. Teachers also described motivated students as those who showed initiative, persistence, and willingness to try, even when they were not yet highly proficient. This indicates that classroom engagement was shaped less by static ability than by whether students felt safe and encouraged to participate.

This finding aligns with previous studies showing the importance of classroom climate and teacher–student relationships in EFL learning. Supportive classroom environments and constructive teacher feedback are known to predict stronger engagement and more positive learning outcomes (Luo & Derakhshan, 2024; Ma et al., 2024). The present study supports those findings but also adds a more contextual explanation. For many students in this vocational school, the classroom was the main setting where English learning became socially recognized and consistently reinforced. When teachers created a non-judgmental atmosphere and responded to mistakes with supportive feedback, students were more willing to take risks, especially in speaking activities. Thus, the classroom did not merely deliver instruction; it also functioned as a motivational buffer against limited academic support at home.

Peer interaction also played an important role. Students frequently described peers as sources of confidence, especially when learning involved collaboration rather than individual exposure. This supports sociocultural perspectives on learning, in which peer interaction serves as a form of social scaffolding that helps learners persist and participate more actively. At the same time, the findings reveal an important perception gap between teachers and parents. Teachers emphasized that home encouragement helped maintain learning routines outside school, whereas parents often attributed students' motivation mainly to teachers. This discrepancy suggests that parental influence may be underestimated by families themselves. Classroom support can compensate for weak home monitoring during instructional time, but it cannot fully replace the role of the family in sustaining motivation beyond school hours. For this reason, the findings reinforce the need to understand motivation ecologically, as shaped by multiple interacting contexts rather than a single source.

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Toward an Ecological and Behaviorally Grounded Understanding of Motivation

Overall, the findings support an ecological understanding of English learning motivation as emerging from the interaction of family practices, classroom environments, peer relationships, and individual goals. This perspective is consistent with contemporary views that position motivation as socially constructed and context-sensitive (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). However, the present study contributes more specifically by showing that these influences do not simply coexist; they compensate for, reinforce, and sometimes counterbalance one another. When home support was limited, teacher encouragement, peer interaction, and future goals helped sustain motivation. When home attention was added, motivation appeared more stable and more likely to continue beyond immediate classroom demands.

A key contribution of this study is the integration of interview data with classroom observation and field notes, demonstrating that motivation is not only psychologically experienced but also behaviorally enacted. By making motivation visible through participation, persistence, help-seeking, and peer interaction, this study extends existing research that has often relied primarily on self-reported data. It also contributes to the literature on parenting and EFL motivation by showing that in a vocational school context, parenting operates mainly through indirect emotional and organizational support rather than direct instructional involvement. In this way, the study suggests that students' motivation to learn English is best understood as a dynamic, socially situated, and observable process shaped by the ongoing interaction between home and school environments.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how parenting styles shape students' motivation to learn English in a vocational high school context by integrating interview data with classroom observations and field notes. The findings show that students generally had positive and future-oriented reasons for learning English, especially in relation to higher education, employment, scholarships, and access to wider information. However, this motivation was not equally sustained across contexts. It was stronger and more observable at school, where structured activities, teacher support, peer interaction, and a supportive classroom climate encouraged participation and persistence. By contrast, motivation at home was less stable because English learning was rarely supported by regular monitoring, structured routines, or sustained academic follow-up.

The study also found that parenting influenced motivation mainly through the emotional and organizational climate created at home rather than through direct academic instruction. Although parents generally valued education, their involvement in English learning was often limited to general reminders and broad encouragement. Even so, simple forms of support, such as asking about learning progress, recognizing effort, providing study time and space, and showing emotional concern, had important motivational value. These findings suggest that effective parental influence does not depend primarily on parents' ability to teach English content, but on whether the home environment makes learning visible, supported, and meaningful. In this sense, students' motivation to learn English is best

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understood as a dynamic and ecologically shaped process emerging from the interaction of home support, school environment, peer relationships, and personal goals.

The findings have several practical implications. For schools, the results highlight the importance of strengthening communication with parents in simple and realistic ways, such as providing brief updates about weekly learning targets, homework, or classroom activities through accessible channels. Parents do not need advanced English knowledge to support motivation; instead, they can be encouraged to ask basic questions about their children's learning, appreciate effort, and help maintain regular study routines at home. For teachers, the findings reinforce the value of interactive methods, supportive feedback, and a non-judgmental classroom climate, especially for students whose home academic support is limited. For families, the study suggests that small but consistent relational support may be more motivationally effective than pressure, comparison, or irregular control.

This study also has several limitations. First, it was conducted in a single vocational high school with a relatively small number of participants, which limits the transferability of the findings to other contexts. Second, the study focused on students', parents', and teachers' perspectives within a specific sociocultural setting, so the findings should not be generalized without considering local educational and family conditions. Third, because the study was qualitative and cross-sectional, it captured motivation as experienced during a particular period rather than tracing changes over a longer time.

Future research could address these limitations by involving a larger number of schools, comparing vocational and general secondary education contexts, or examining different regions and socioeconomic backgrounds. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable for understanding how parenting practices and English learning motivation develop over time. In addition, future studies could combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine more systematically how parental monitoring, emotional support, teacher support, and classroom climate interact in shaping students' motivation. Such work would deepen understanding of how home and school environments can be better aligned to support sustained engagement in English learning.

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