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Disentangling English Language Motivation: A Study of Motivational Factors and the Interplay with Mindsets in Chilean Secondary Students

Abstract

Research underscores the crucial role of motivation in language learning, emphasizing the connection between growth mindsets—belief in the power of effort to enhance ability—and motivation. This study addresses the need for an updated understanding of English language motivation among Chilean secondary school students, as recent studies on this topic have been lacking since 2011 and 2013. Furthermore, the correlation between language mindsets and language learning motivation in this specific context remains unexplored. The study investigates these aspects among 86 Chilean secondary students, employing a mixed-methods approach using the Language Mindset Inventory, the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) questionnaire, and diary entries. Through this comprehensive approach, the research reveals nuanced motivations, underlining the importance of the ideal L2 self and English learning experiences in shaping motivation, challenging traditional views on the significance of the ought-to L2 self. Quantitative analysis establishes a statistically significant association between language mindsets and L2 motivation. This finding supports the argument that learners with a growth mindset are more inclined to envision a positive ideal L2 self, driven by their belief in improvement and readiness to overcome obstacles in their language learning journey. The study suggests aligning the national curriculum with student aspirations and interests. Additionally, it underscores the significance of cultivating growth-oriented language mindsets in educational settings, with educators playing a pivotal role in inspiring students to approach language acquisition with enthusiasm, dedication, and perseverance.

Keywords: language learning, growth language mindset, L2 motivation, L2MSS, secondary students

In Chile, economic aspirations have long fueled the vision of a bilingual nation. Despite mandating English lessons from the 5th grade onwards, standardized test results consistently reflect a persistent gap in English proficiency among Chilean students. This gap underscores the need to explore the factors influencing language learning. Motivation has been widely acknowledged as a key determinant in language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011); however, the specific drivers motivating Chilean secondary students to pursue English learning remain incompletely understood. Although previous research on student motivation in Chile, such as Kormos and Kiddle (2013) and Kormos et al. (2011), made significant contributions over a decade ago, there is a growing need for updated research that reflects contemporary educational contexts and challenges. Chile's unique geographic isolation from English-speaking countries, combined with socioeconomic disparities and a predominantly monolingual Spanish-speaking population, creates a distinct context where English is seen more as an economic asset than a daily necessity. This makes motivation a particularly complex and essential factor in language acquisition.

Moreover, understanding the relationship between language mindsets and motivation in Chilean students is especially critical in light of these developments. Mindsets—the beliefs about one's ability to learn and improve—are associated with learners' motivation and engagement (Dweck, 2017; Lou & Noels, 2016). However, no studies have yet explored the connection between language mindsets and L2 motivation in the Chilean context. Chilean students face distinct challenges, including limited interaction with native English speakers and an educational system that struggles with effective English teaching and learning, which may influence both their motivation and mindset toward language learning. This study aims to fill this research gap by investigating the relationship between language mindsets and L2 motivation among Chilean students, marking the first time these constructs have been studied together in this context.

Specifically, the study has two primary objectives: first, to identify the key factors that motivate Chilean students to learn English, and second, to explore the relationship between language mindsets and L2 motivation. The outcomes of this research are expected to inform educational policies and classroom practices, providing valuable insights for educators and policymakers striving to enhance English language learning in Chile's unique sociocultural and economic landscape. By delving into students' motivations and the role of mindsets, this study aims to offer practical recommendations for fostering greater enthusiasm and commitment to English language learning in Chile.

Literature Review

Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation, crucial in language acquisition, influences decision-making and effort persistence, and is characterized as a multi-dimensional, dynamic phenomenon shaped by cognitive and affective factors, influenced by individual and contextual elements (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). The evolution of motivation theories in language learning, rooted initially in social and psychological dimensions with integrative and instrumental orientations (Gardner, 1985), transitioned to cognitive theories in the early 1990s, incorporating goal-setting and self-determination theories (SDT; Locke & Latham, 1994; Deci & Ryan, 2002). Zoltán Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) underscores the foreign language's integral role in identity, framing motivation as part of self-realization (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). The L2MSS comprises three primary self-guides: the ideal L2 self (desired language proficiency), the ought-to L2 self (perceived responsibilities as a language learner), and the L2 learning experience (shaped by interactions and past experiences with the target language). In this model, self-concept is central to learners' motivation, propelling efforts to align their current self-concept with ideal and ought-to-be selves (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).

The L2MSS is useful to investigate motivation in English as a foreign language (EFL) environment with limited interaction with native speakers as the ideal L2 self envisions future fluency. This research employs the L2MSS to analyze students' L2 motivation, aligning with global meta-analyses demonstrating its effectiveness in capturing key motivational factors (e.g., Al-Hoorie, 2018; Yousefi & Mahmoodi, 2022).

In Chile, five studies have explored language learning motivation using various components of the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) questionnaire, revealing different motivators across age groups. Kormos et al. (2011) found that both L2 learning attitude and the ideal L2 self were significant motivators for learners of all ages, while the ought-to L2 self was especially relevant for university students and young adults. Kormos and Kiddle (2013) further demonstrated that the ideal L2 self was a strong motivating factor for secondary students, with social class exerting a moderate influence on motivation levels. Sato and Lara (2019) reported higher pre-intervention scores for the ideal L2 self and Learning Experiences compared to the ought-to L2 self in their experiment aimed at enhancing motivation among university EFL learners through communicative tasks. Véliz-Campos et al. (2020) found that, for university students, the L2 Learning Experience was the most prominent factor ($M = 3.12$), followed by the ideal L2 self ($M = 2.97$), with the ought-to L2 self receiving the lowest rating ($M = 2.07$). Finally, Inostroza et al. (2024) studied young learners and

found that students exhibited higher levels of parent-oriented motivation (Md = 4.33) and attitudes toward learning English (Md = 3.50), while the lowest score was recorded for the Ideal L2 self (Md = 3.00). Teachers' profiles and students' gender were identified as factors influencing motivation to learn English.

The findings from these studies highlight the importance of various motivators, including the ideal L2 self and L2 Learning Experience, in language learning across different age groups in Chile. Al-Hoorie (2018) and Kormos et al. (2011) have pointed out that the ought-to L2 self may not consistently enhance learners' motivation. Motivation is dynamic in nature and is influenced by contemporary factors such as increased opportunities to study, travel, and work abroad due to visa facilitation programs, as well as Chile's involvement in international trade agreements and partnerships with English-speaking countries. In light of these influences, it is crucial to investigate the impact of the ideal L2 self, English learning experiences, and the ought-to L2 self on Chilean secondary students' motivation in the 21st century. This need for updated insights is particularly pressing, as the most recent study on this topic involving secondary students in Chile was conducted over a decade ago (Kormos et al., 2011), underscoring how contemporary factors may shape motivation in today's educational landscape. Secondary students are at a critical stage where their academic and career aspirations are formed, making it essential to understand how language motivation interacts with these ambitions, particularly given the increasing importance of English in higher education and professional domains. While previous research highlighted the role of the ideal L2 self and L2 Learning Experiences, it remains to be seen how these motivators have evolved in light of Chile's growing integration into global networks and increasing access to international opportunities.

Mindsets and Motivation in Language Learning

Mindsets have been classified as fixed or growth perspectives, reflecting individuals' beliefs about the adaptability of their language learning abilities. A growth language mindset involves the belief that language learning abilities can be developed and improved through effort; on the other hand, a fixed language mindset reflects the belief that language proficiency is an inherent, relatively static trait (Mercer & Ryan, 2010). Studies indicate that language mindsets are domain-specific, with different mindsets for various language skill domains, such as writing and pronunciation (Mercer & Ryan, 2010; Ryan & Mercer, 2011). Empirical evidence supports this domain-specificity, with studies identifying distinct mindsets related to L2 reading (Khajavy et al., 2022).

Language mindsets significantly influence responses to challenges, shaping reactions in language learning situations (Mercer & Ryan, 2010; Lou &

Noels, 2017). Growth mindsets lead individuals to view difficulties as opportunities for learning, maintaining a positive mood, while fixed mindsets tend to avoid challenges, fostering negative emotions (Lou & Noels, 2017). In educational contexts, mindsets extend their influence to motivation, with learners possessing growth mindsets demonstrating higher motivation to enhance competence through effort, while those with fixed mindsets seek to affirm existing competence due to the belief in immutable intelligence (Dweck, 2017; Lou & Noels, 2020). Understanding mindsets becomes integral in promoting learners' growth and shaping educational practices (Lou & Noels, 2019, 2020).

Research across various domains, including language learning, consistently emphasizes the significant relationship between mindsets and motivational aspects. Blackwell et al. (2007) discovered a positive correlation between a growth mindset and various motivational factors, such as effort beliefs, learning goals, low helpless attributions, and positive strategies among junior high school students, focusing on mathematics. Jennings and Cuevas (2021) demonstrated a substantial association between seventh-grade students' growth mindsets and increased motivation in the USA, within the domain of social studies. Moving to the language learning field, Cacali (2019) found a notable correlation between mindsets and L2 motivation among Japanese university participants. Additionally, Waller and Papi (2017) examined the connection between growth mindsets about writing intelligence and writing motivation in learners.

To deepen understanding within language learning, Lou and Noels (2016, 2017) highlighted the impact of language mindsets on goal orientation and responses to failure in language learners. A recent multilevel meta-analysis of language mindsets and outcomes in second language acquisition (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2024) found that believing in one's ability to learn and improve leads to higher motivation, better academic results, and greater resilience. Additionally, a study in the Chilean context (Tapia Castillo, 2025) showed that fostering a growth mindset in language learning can boost motivation.

Lou and Noels (2020) introduced the Language-Mindset Meaning System (LMMS), emphasizing the consistent link between language mindsets, motivational beliefs, and self-regulatory processes. Their proposed Mindset-Goal-Response Model illustrates how mindsets predict effort beliefs and goal orientation, indirectly influencing emotional and behavioral responses to failure. The call for further exploration by Lou and Noels (2020) encourages studying additional components of LMMS, employing longitudinal methods, and investigating links between mindsets and the L2MSS and SDT. Building on this call, and given that no studies in Chile have examined the relationship between language mindsets and L2 motivation, this research will delve into mindsets and motivation utilizing the L2MSS questionnaire.

English Language Influence in Chile: Economic Motivations and Bilingual Aspirations

Chile, where Spanish is spoken by 95.9% of the population (Instituto Cervantes, 2021), has placed a significant emphasis on English language learning due to economic considerations (Glas, 2008). This emphasis aligns with the country's commitment to strengthening economic ties, participating in global affairs, and expanding trade connections (International Trade Administration, 2022). English proficiency is particularly crucial in industries like mineral production, especially copper, which plays a pivotal role in Chile's international trade (Icef Monitor, 2016). The government envisions a bilingual Chile, with English as the primary second language, to integrate more effectively with the global economy (Icef Monitor, 2016). Despite these efforts, achieving bilingualism in Chilean society remains challenging (Barahona, 2016a).

Chilean schools, whether public or private, follow the national curriculum, mandating English education from 5th to 12th grade since 1998, involving three weekly hours, totaling 144 hours annually (Curriculum Nacional, n.d.). The 2024 curriculum focuses on advancing students' English communication skills and emphasizes the broader benefits of language learning for cognitive development, cultural understanding, technological literacy, and global awareness (Curriculum Nacional, n.d.). Despite these efforts, the majority of 11th-grade students, evaluated in 2010, 2012, and 2014, still fell below the A1 level, indicating persistent challenges in English proficiency (Ministerio de Educación, 2010; Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2012, 2015). A 2017 national English study further confirmed these issues, revealing low scores across socioeconomic groups and only three out of ten students achieving expected basic learning in 8th grade (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2018).

Challenges in English language education in Chile are influenced by potentially ineffective teaching methodologies and unsuccessful adaptation to the Chilean context by EFL teachers (Philominraj et al., 2021). The shortage of EFL teachers, the low prestige of the teaching profession, excessive workloads, large classes, poor infrastructure, and limited investment have collectively contributed to Chile's subpar results in English language proficiency (Arellano & Hatoss, 2023).

The Present Study

This study acknowledges the prevalent low English proficiency among Chilean students and recognizes the pivotal roles of L2 motivation and language mindsets in language learning. The research aims to contribute significantly to our understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the Chilean

context, where economic motivations and bilingual aspirations drive English language education.

The research aims to address two key questions: (1) What factors motivate Chilean secondary students to learn English? and (2) To what extent is students' English language motivation related to their language mindsets? By doing so, it seeks to provide valuable insights that can inform targeted interventions and pedagogical strategies aimed at enhancing English language motivation, which, in turn, may improve language proficiency in Chilean secondary students. Additionally, the study will investigate the intricate connections between language mindsets and motivation, seeking to contribute valuable insights for the development of effective educational policies and practices in Chilean secondary schools.

Methodology

Context

This study is part of a broader project aimed at fostering growth mindsets and motivation among Chilean secondary students learning English. Due to constraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the project employed a pre-experimental design with a one-group pre-, post-, and delayed post-test approach, along with qualitative data. Pre-experimental designs are used in situations where it is difficult to implement a classical experimental design, which includes a control group and random assignment (Neuman, 2014).

For the purposes of this article, only part of the broader study is presented. Specifically, this study focuses on the data collected during the pre-test phase, examining the relationship between students' language mindsets and their motivation to learn English. To identify the factors motivating Chilean secondary students, answers to Diary Entry Question (DEQ) number 2 and data from the L2MSS pre-questionnaire will be analyzed. Additionally, to investigate the relationship between students' English language motivation and their language mindsets, data collected from the pre-questionnaires of the Language Mindset (LM) and L2MSS questionnaires will be utilized.

The study took place across eight schools in four regions of Chile (Santiago, Valparaíso, La Serena, and Rancagua), with students representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The curriculum in all schools followed the national guidelines, focusing on English as a foreign language.

Participants

A total of 86 participants, comprising 50 females and 36 males, took part in the study. These students came from low, lower-middle, and middle socioeconomic groups, all facing challenges in English language performance. School socioeconomic levels were determined based on factors such as socioeconomic status, academic performance, dropout rates, and parents' education and household income. Of the 86 participants, 42 were enrolled in public schools, while 44 attended subsidized private schools, which receive government assistance to cover a portion of students' expenses, with the remainder being paid by parents, foundations, or institutions. Participants ranged in age from 14 to 18 years old (M = 15.73, SD = .938) and were enrolled in grades 9 to 12. Ethical approval was obtained from University of Essex and parental consent was secured for the participation of secondary school students.

Instruments

Questionnaires

The study employed two main questionnaires to assess key variables: the LM and the L2MSS. The LM questionnaire, adapted from Lou and Noels (see Appendix A in Lou & Noels, 2017), comprised three dimensions: General language intelligence beliefs (GLB; e.g., "to be honest, you can't really change your language intelligence"), L2-aptitude beliefs (L2B; e.g., "you can always change your foreign language ability"), and age-sensitivity beliefs about language learning (ASB; e.g., "people can't really learn a new language well after they reach adulthood"), with each subscale containing six items. Utilizing items from previous studies (e.g., Papi, 2010; Ryan, 2009), the L2MSS questionnaire assessed levels of L2 motivation. It comprised components such as ideal L2 self (e.g., "if my dreams come true, I will use English effectively in the future"), ought-to L2 self (e.g., "if I fail to learn English, I'll be letting other people down"), and English learning experience (ELE; e.g., "I really enjoy learning English"), with each consisting of six items. This survey is suitable for examining L2 motivation in environments where English is promoted as a global lingua franca (Dörnyei, 2009). The questionnaires incorporated a neutral response option within the 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), to accommodate uncertainty or a lack of a definitive opinion.

The development and validation of the research instruments involved a meticulous process to ensure reliability and validity. The questionnaires were carefully translated, drawing on the researcher's expertise with Chilean adolescents and fluency in both English and Spanish. According to Dörnyei and Csizér (2012),

translating questionnaires into participants' native language is common practice, as it improves data quality. This approach has been used in other L2MSS studies (e.g., Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Ryan, 2009). The LMI questionnaire was originally developed and validated by Lou and Noels (2017), and the L2MSS questionnaire incorporated items from validated studies on language learning motivation (e.g., Papi, 2010; Ryan, 2009). A linguistic expert with experience as an English language teacher in Chile reviewed the translations for accuracy and contextual relevance, refining the language for clarity. Following Dörnyei's (2003) suggestion, a pilot test was conducted with ten students from the same age group and school types as the study participants to ensure the questions were clear and relevant. Participants provided feedback, and revisions were made to address unclear terms, improving the clarity and ease of use. For instance, "sustancialmente" (substantially) was replaced with "en gran medida" (to a large extent). Finally, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the instruments.

Diary Entry Questions

DEQ were incorporated into this study to complement the information gathered through the L2MSS questionnaire and to enhance the validity of the data through cross-validation. DEQs allowed participants to reflect on what aspects of learning English they enjoyed, allowing for the gathering of intricate and individualized details. Given that while piloting the DEQs, most students did not fully understand the questions in English, participants were given the option to read and answer the questions in either English or Spanish. For this study, answers to DEQ 2: "What do you like about learning English?" were examined.

Data Collection Procedures

Participant recruitment occurred from December 2019 to March 2020 through email and social media outreach to headteachers and English teachers in Chile. The COVID-19 pandemic posed challenges to data collection, affecting school responses and limiting student participation due to insufficient online connectivity and technology resources. It is crucial to note that student involvement was voluntary, requiring internet access and an electronic device for questionnaire completion and participation in online sessions.

The data for this study was collected in April 2020, during which 86 students completed the pre-questionnaire, consisting of the L2MSS and LM questionnaires. Of these 86 students, 38 responded to the DEQ. The qualitative data from the 38 participants who answered the diary entry questions

provided insights into their motivation to learn English, which were compared with the data from the L2MSS pre-questionnaire. Additionally, data from the 86 pre-questionnaires were used for the quantitative analysis of the relationship between students' language mindsets and motivation.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25. Before the main analysis, the internal consistency of the instruments was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis. Internal consistencies were assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, following Hinton et al. (2014) guidelines, which categorize reliability as excellent ($\alpha \geq .90$), high ($.70 \leq \alpha < .90$), or moderate ($.50 \leq \alpha < .70$). The LM questionnaire revealed high to moderate reliability ($\alpha = .84$ for LM overall, $\alpha = .75$ for GLB, $\alpha = .57$ for L2B, and $\alpha = .72$ for ASB). The L2MSS questionnaire demonstrated strong reliability across all subscales ($\alpha = .79$ for L2MSS overall, $\alpha = .92$ for ideal L2, $\alpha = .92$ for ought-to L2, and $\alpha = .92$ for ELE).

Following this evaluation, Spearman's rho correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between students' language mindsets and English language motivation. Correlation strengths were interpreted based on Cohen et al. (2018), with modest correlations ranging from .20 to .35, and moderate correlations nearing .50.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative dataset using NVivo 12 to identify patterns and themes related to the students' motivations for learning English. Responses to DEQ 2, "What do you like about learning English?," were coded using Saldaña's (2021) coding cycles. Themes were developed through repeated coding and identification of patterns. A second coder was involved in cross-checking the coding process to ensure consistency and reliability. The quotes from participants were translated from Spanish into English and cross-verified by another researcher for accuracy. Additionally, pseudonyms were applied to protect the anonymity of the students.

Results

The findings are presented in alignment with the two research questions. The results are organized into thematic and quantitative analyses, corresponding to the qualitative data collected from students' DEQ responses and the quantitative data from the L2MSS and LM questionnaires. Each theme is supported by examples and excerpts from participants, while the quantitative findings are summarized through correlation coefficients, a relevant figure and tables.

Motivational Factors for Learning English

Before diving into the thematic analysis, it is important to note a marked difference in motivational themes across the participants' responses, as reflected in both the qualitative diary entries and the quantitative L2MSS questionnaire. While the ideal L2 self and ELE were the two dominant motivational themes in the qualitative analysis, the ought-to L2 self played a relatively minor role.

In the qualitative responses, the ideal L2 self and ELE generated approximately 100 excerpts each, underscoring their significance in students' motivations. In contrast, only two quotes addressed the ought-to L2 self, reflecting a minimal influence of external obligations, such as pressure from parents or peers, in motivating these learners. This aligns with the quantitative results from the L2MSS pre-questionnaire. As seen in Table 1, participants do not perceive studying English as an obligation to please others. Instead, they learn English to fulfill their personal goals.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Ideal L2 Self, Ought-to L2 self and ELE

	N	Mean	SD
Ideal L2 Mean	86	4.4247	0.75
Ought-to L2 Mean	86	1.9049	1.00
ELE Mean	86	4.355	0.83
Valid *N* (listwise)	86		

The thematic analysis of students' qualitative responses is categorized under two main themes: the ideal L2 self and ELE. These themes are further divided into specific codes (e.g., Code 1, Code 2), which represent distinct motivational factors identified in the data. Each code is linked to specific items in the L2MSS questionnaire, referenced as 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, etc., which correspond to individual ques tionnaire items that measure aspects of the ideal L2 self and ELE.

Theme 1: The Ideal L2 Self Drives Students' Motivation to Learn English

The ideal L2 self emerged as a significant motivator for students learning English, with Code 1 emphasizing the language's role in providing hope for better future opportunities. The excerpts in this theme closely align with all the ideal L2 self items: 4.1 (If my dreams come true, I will use English effectively in the future), 4.2 (I can imagine myself speaking English with international friends or colleagues), 4.3 (Whenever I think of my future, I imagine myself being able to use English), 4.4 (I can imagine myself studying in a university where all my courses are taught in English), 4.5 (I can imagine myself writing English e-mails/letters fluently), and 4.6 (I can imagine myself living abroad and using English effectively for communicating with the locals) in the L2MSS questionnaire.

Code 1: English as Providing Hope for Better Future Opportunities, Such as Travel, Study, and Work. The most prevalent code, with seventy-six excerpts, centered around students' enthusiasm for learning English in relation to future opportunities such as travel, study, and work in an English-speaking environment. Thirty-seven participants referred to these future opportunities. These excerpts align with the more general statements 4.1 and 4.3 and closely align with items 4.2, 4.4, and 4.5 from the ideal L2 self in the L2MSS questionnaire.

For example, Paula mentioned that learning this language would help her to have a better life:

> […] And the most important thing is that it can help me in the future, like get ahead as a person and make my life better. It would be boring to know English and stay in my own country or not be able to travel or do something because my dream is to study or live in another country to make my life there, and if I know English, of course, I wanna use it. [original words]

Code 2: English as a Means of Building Multicultural Communication in the Future. The second most prevalent reason for learning English, related to the ideal L2 self, is to foster multicultural communication. This code bears resemblance to items 4.2 and 4.6 from the ideal L2 self in the L2MSS questionnaire. Fourteen participants articulated this idea, and a total of twenty extracts were identified. For instance, Mark explained: "I like learning English because I can communicate with more and more people, to know their story and share it with the world" [original words].

Code 3: English Improvement for Future Entertainment Purposes. While not a perfect match, this code is somewhat related to items 4.1, 4.2, and 4.5 in the L2MSS questionnaire. Even though these items are not specifically related to learning English for entertainment purposes, 4.1 and 4.2 encompass broader dreams and goals, while 4.5 focuses on the idea of English improvement. Eight students expressed their desire to understand and sing favorite songs, watch movies without Spanish subtitles, appreciate authentic voices in English, and read books in the target language. This sentiment is reflected in Amelia's response who articulated:

> What I like most about learning English is that if I keep doing it, in the future, I will be able to see series, anime, and movies without subtitles. Sometimes, an anime or movie is only translated into English and not Spanish, like some books that just come out and are only in English. I say, "I do not understand much English; I'll just wait 2 years for them to be translated into Spanish," and I'm a big fan of reading. I feel bad when I can't read a book when they just released it because it's only in English [...]. The other aspect is being able to sing in English without invoking any demon, and most importantly, because I like and love English; it is a very great language. I would like to learn it and teach it to my children if I have them.

Theme 2: English Learning Experiences Drive Students' Motivation to Learn English

Ninety-seven extracts were associated with this theme, making it one of the most popular and the most diverse themes, with six different codes assigned. Some codes were intricately linked to items in the L2MSS questionnaire, particularly items 6.1 (Learning English is really great) and 6.4 (I find learning English really interesting). While the L2MSS questionnaire items conveyed general ideas (i.e., great, interesting), the diary entry responses provided more detailed insights into why students cherished their English learning experiences, underscoring the richness of the qualitative data.

Code 1: Realizing English Language Improvement. The most salient code pertained to students' awareness of language development. Twenty-seven students, expressed their affinity for learning English due to its positive impact on their language proficiency and comprehension. For instance, Amelia conveyed her satisfaction with the continuous improvement in her language skills, enabling a better understanding of the English language across various media:

What I appreciate about learning English is that I understand. It's not just about knowing 100 words, but every day, I comprehend more and more. I also like it because I understand songs, series, and books in English more effectively.

Code 2: English is a Beautiful Language. Moreover, fifteen students acknowledged their enjoyment of learning English because they perceived it as a beautiful language. When articulating the allure of this language, many students cited aspects such as pronunciation. Additionally, some students highlighted their ability to express themselves more effectively in English, noting that the language allowed them to convey their sentiments more appropriately. For instance, Lucas expressed:

I like to talk. More than anything, I like the sound, the pronunciation. I like the way it allows me to express myself. It's like a stronger feeling. It's deep. I can express my feelings easier in English than in Spanish. I don't know why but I like it so much. [original words][1]

Code 3: English is a Useful International Language.[2] Eleven students expressed their appreciation for English, citing its usefulness as a key factor. Laura emphasized the practicality of English, noting its widespread use globally:

[...] it is very practical since it is one of the most well-known and spoken languages. Additionally, it is one of the most used languages in various settings, particularly in places characterized by multiculturalism or in tourist areas, even in countries where English is not the official language.

Code 4: I Like the Challenge of Learning English. Furthermore, five participants articulated that they appreciated English primarily because of the challenges it posed. This theme emerged in ten extracts. For instance, Gabriel echoed this sentiment, expressing the satisfaction derived from witnessing his English improvement when grappling with complex tasks: "I like it because it is something challenging that, at the time of testing it, like when trying to read something in English and understand it, leaves an immense feeling of satisfaction and happiness."

Code 5: Communicating with Others in English. Eight students expressed their affinity for learning English as a means of communication. For instance,

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[1] Typos in this extract were amended to facilitate the comprehension of the participants' words.
[2] This code is related to students' English learning experiences, similar to finding English interesting or useful, and differs from the personal aspirations in Theme 1.

Alexander remarked that he appreciated English because it enabled him to connect with individuals from other countries for gaming: "I like English because I enjoy playing and interacting with people from other countries through English, making it easier to understand and play."

Code 6: Varied Methods to Learn English. Five students noted their appreciation for learning English due to the diverse methods available. For instance, Carlos explained: "I like to see that, as in the Spanish language, there are different 'alternatives' to learn, for example: listening to it, reading it, trying to talk about it, also watching videos." Similarly, Mateo emphasized: "But I think what I like most about learning English is that it is a pursuit that entertains you. Regardless of the subject, you can learn English in such varied ways that there are no limits."

The Relationship Between Language Mindset and L2 Motivation

The second inquiry aimed to ascertain the correlation between students' language mindsets and their motivation to learn English. Following Dörnyei's (2007) guidance, Spearman's rho, a non-parametric test, was employed to assess the correlation between non-normally distributed LM questionnaire (Shapiro-Wilk, $p < 0.05$) and normally distributed L2MSS questionnaire (Shapiro-Wilk, $p > 0.05$). There was a statistically significant correlation between the two variables, $r(86) = .36$, $p = .001$, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

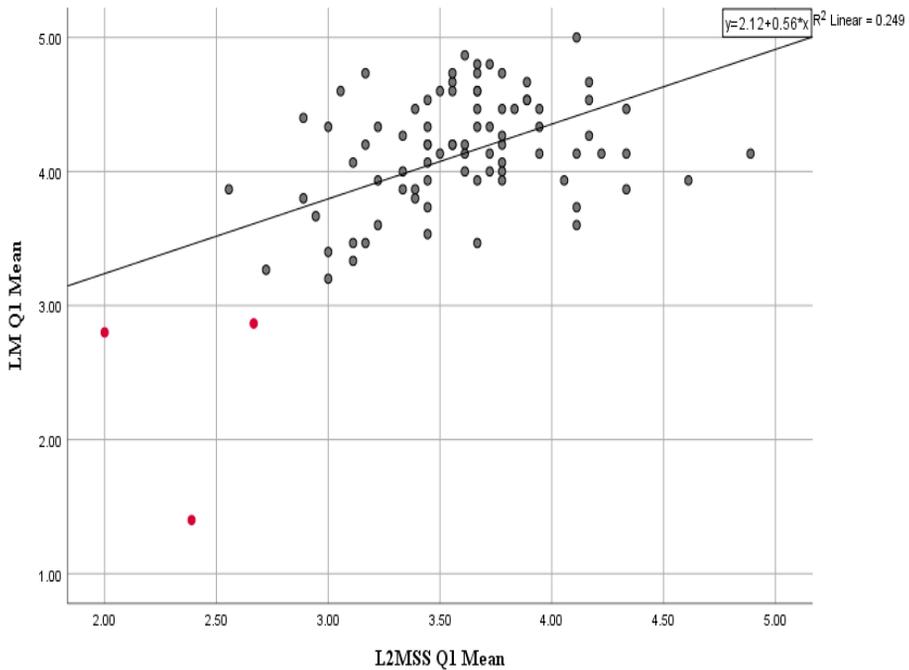*Correlation Between Students' Language Mindsets and L2 Motivation*

		LM Q	L2MSS Q
Spearman's rho	LM Q	1	
	L2MSS Q	.364**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A scatterplot summarizes the results (Figure 1). The scatterplot illustrates that students with lower mindset scores (between 1 and 3), indicating a more fixed mindset, generally exhibit lower motivation (between 2 and 3 points). For students with the highest mindset scores (between 4 and 5), their motivation varies, ranging between 3 and 5 points. Notably, there are no instances of students with low mindset scores and high motivation to learn English.

Figure 1

Scatterplot of Students' Language Mindsets and L2 Motivation

In a more comprehensive analysis, correlations between students' language mindsets and L2MSS sub-scales were examined using Spearman's rho correlation coefficients. All three correlations were found to be statistically significant. A positive correlation was observed between language mindsets and ideal L2 self, $r(86) = .42$, $p < .001$, and between language mindsets and ELE, $r(86) = .53$, $p < .001$. However, a negative correlation existed between mindsets and ought-to L2 self, $r(86) = -.28$, $p = .013$.

Language mindsets demonstrated a weak correlation with general L2 motivation and a moderate correlation with the ideal L2 self and ELE. Additionally, a weak negative relationship was observed between language mindset and the motivational sub-scale related to ought-to L2 self. Language mindsets exhibited stronger correlations with specific aspects of motivation in the L2MSS questionnaire than with the entire questionnaire (see Table 3).

Table 3

Correlation Between Students' Language Mindsets and L2 Motivation Sub-scales

		LM Q	Ideal L2	Ought to L2	ELE
Spearman's rho	LM Q	1			
	Ideal L2	.418**	1		
	Ought to L2	−.267*	−0.038	1	
	ELE	.526**	.565**	−.217*	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Notably, no statistically significant differences in language mindsets or motivation were found between genders, proficiency levels, or types of school ($p > 0.05$) in the analysis. This suggests that the observed relationships between language mindsets and motivation are consistent across these different groups.

Discussion

Motivational Drivers in Chilean Secondary Students' English Learning

The Central Role of the Ideal L2 Self

The ideal L2 self, representing the learners' envisioned future self as proficient English users, emerged as the most significant motivator. This aligns with Kormos et al. (2011) and Kormos and Kiddle (2013), who found that the ideal L2 self was a strong motivator for Chilean secondary students and other age groups. The influence of the ideal L2 self reflects students' aspirations for future academic, professional, and personal opportunities where English proficiency is seen as an asset. This is particularly relevant in the Chilean context, where English is increasingly associated with economic opportunities and global integration (Glas, 2008; Icef Monitor, 2016).

However, as Dörnyei (2009) emphasized, it is crucial to consider the internalization of external influences on the development of the ideal L2 self. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) highlighted that self-perceptions, including the ideal L2 self, are socially grounded and may be shaped by significant others,

such as parents, teachers, or peers. This raises the question of whether the students in this study genuinely possess these aspirations as their own or if they have unconsciously adopted the viewpoints of their significant others. The strong presence of the ideal L2 self among Chilean secondary students could indicate that they have internalized these external influences, perceiving them as personal goals. This phenomenon suggests that the ideal L2 self may not purely reflect the learners' independent aspirations but rather a socially influenced construct that aligns with the expectations of their social environment.

While previous studies have highlighted the role of social class in shaping the ideal L2 self, the current findings suggest that this influence may be less pronounced. Kormos and Kiddle (2013) observed that social class had a moderate impact on motivation levels, with students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrating stronger ideal L2 selves. In contrast, the current study found that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds also exhibited high levels of ideal L2 self, indicating a potential shift in motivational dynamics. This shift may be influenced by increased access to global opportunities and a growing recognition of English as a tool for social mobility in Chile. Interestingly, these students displayed levels of ideal L2 self similar to those previously observed in higher socioeconomic groups, suggesting that aspirations have become more positive and aligned across different social strata over the past decade. However, as participants in this study volunteered, they may have had higher motivation levels than their peers; thus, further research is needed to confirm this trend.

Positive ELE

The positive role of ELE in motivating students is consistent with the findings of Kormos et al. (2011), who identified L2 learning attitude as a key motivator for secondary students, university students, and young adults. Véliz-Campos (2020) also found ELE to be the most prominent motivational factor for university students. Similarly, Sato and Lara (2019) reported that university students had higher pre-intervention scores for ELE compared to the ought-to L2 self. In the current study, secondary students expressed enjoyment and satisfaction with their English learning experiences, which were associated with their progress and engagement in class activities. This indicates that fostering positive learning experiences is essential for motivating Chilean students, particularly in a context where current teaching methodologies have been criticized for being ineffective and inadequately adapted to the local context (Philominraj et al., 2021). A more contextually relevant curriculum could help address these challenges and enhance students' motivation.

Minimal Influence of the Ought-to L2 Self

The study found that the ought-to L2 self had a minimal role in students' motivation, consistent with findings by Kormos et al. (2011) and Al-Hoorie (2018). Kormos et al. (2011) noted its relevance for university students but not for younger learners, while Véliz-Campos et al. (2020) reported similarly low ratings for university students. Sato and Lara (2019) also found higher scores for the ideal L2 self and Learning Experiences compared to the ought-to L2 self among university students. In contrast, Inostroza et al. (2024) observed higher parent-oriented motivation in younger learners. Although their study focused on parent-oriented motivation rather than the ought-to L2 self, both concepts reflect external pressures influencing learners. This suggests a developmental shift from external expectations to personal goals as students mature, highlighting the diminishing influence of the ought-to L2 self with age and the need for age-specific motivational strategies.

The findings of this study, along with those of Inostroza et al. (2024), suggest that language motivation evolves with age, with younger learners more influenced by external factors like parental expectations (similar to the ought-to L2 self) and secondary students driven by their own aspirations and positive learning experiences (ideal L2 self). This aligns with Kormos and Csizér's (2008) observation that motivational dynamics vary across age groups, underscoring the importance of developing age-specific strategies that reflect these evolving influences.

The Relationship Between Language Mindsets and L2 Motivation

Positive Relationship Between Growth Mindsets and the Ideal L2 Self

The study found a statistically significant positive correlation between growth mindsets and the ideal L2 self. This suggests that students who believe in their capacity to improve are more likely to envision a future where English proficiency plays a critical role, supporting the framework proposed by Lou and Noels (2020). In the Chilean context, where aspirations for better educational and professional opportunities are strong motivators, encouraging students to adopt a growth mindset could help them develop a clearer and more compelling vision of their ideal L2 self, thereby enhancing their motivation to learn English. This finding is consistent with Zarrinabadi et al. (2022), who reported a similar positive correlation between growth mindsets and the ideal self among Iranian learners, and with Cacali's (2019) study of Japanese university students, suggesting that the relationship between growth mindsets and the ideal L2 self may be a universal phenomenon.

Association Between Growth Mindsets and Positive ELE

Growth mindsets were also positively correlated with ELE, indicating that students who believe in their potential for improvement tend to find greater enjoyment and satisfaction in their language learning experiences. This intrinsic enjoyment is associated with their motivation and commitment to achieving their ideal L2 self. Studies by Lou and Noels (2017, 2020) and Elahi Shirvan et al. (2024) have shown that learners with growth mindsets exhibit greater resilience and are better equipped to cope with challenges, which may lead to more positive attitudes in language learning contexts. In Chile, fostering growth mindsets could be particularly beneficial in overcoming the challenges associated with low English proficiency levels and enhancing student motivation and engagement in a context where motivation and effective language learning strategies are crucial for achieving educational goals.

Negative Relationship Between Growth Mindsets and the Ought-to L2 Self

The study found a negative correlation between growth mindsets and the ought-to L2 self, suggesting that students with growth mindsets are less influenced by external pressures or obligations. This finding aligns with Lou and Noels' (2020) framework, which highlights the connection between mindsets and the ideal L2 self, as well as similar findings by Zarrinabadi et al. (2022) and Cacali (2019). Learners with growth mindsets are more likely to set goals aligned with their ideal L2 self and view challenges as opportunities to enhance their language proficiency, rather than being driven by the perceived obligations and external expectations associated with the ought-to L2 self.

In this study, the ought-to L2 self appears to be less relevant as a motivating factor, possibly because learners with growth mindsets prioritize personal growth and internal goals over external pressures, such as societal expectations or perceived responsibilities. This contrasts with common motivations in the Chilean context, where learning English is often associated with economic aspirations and the desire for upward mobility, driven by the country's efforts to integrate more deeply into the global economy (Icef Monitor, 2016; International Trade Administration, 2022). Although economic aspirations may initially motivate some students, fostering a growth mindset could help shift their focus toward more intrinsic goals, as suggested by Tapia Castillo (2025), such as the ideal L2 self. This shift would not only enhance their L2 Learning Experience but also make the learning process more meaningful and self-driven. Encouraging this mindset can lead to a deeper, more self-sustained engagement in language learning, beyond merely fulfilling external economic aspirations.

Moreover, the findings from this study contrast with those of Inostroza et al (2024), who observed a stronger influence of parent-oriented motivation among

younger learners in Chile. This suggests a developmental shift in motivational drivers as students grow older and begin to cultivate a more autonomous sense of self in their language learning journey. While younger learners may be more influenced by parental expectations and guidance, older students appear to prioritize their own aspirations and beliefs about personal growth. This highlights the importance of educational practices that support autonomy and foster intrinsic motivation, as these are crucial for sustaining long-term engagement and success in language learning.

Pedagogical Implications for Nurturing Motivation: Integrating Growth Mindset, Fostering Ideal L2 Selves, and Incorporating Student Interests in Learning Experiences

This section of the study underscores the necessity of practical, context-sensitive applications of motivational theories in the classroom, aligning with the broader call for more applied research in this field (Ushioda, 2020). Motivation has been one of the most extensively researched topics in language education (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Ushioda, 2012; Williams et al., 2015), yet there is often a gap between theoretical constructs and their implementation in classroom settings. This gap becomes particularly evident in compulsory education, where language learning is not always a student's choice, and teachers must take an active role in sustaining motivation by providing relevant content, tasks, and activities that resonate with students' interests and future goals (Csizér & Illés, 2020). The findings of the present study emphasize the importance of addressing growth mindsets, ideal L2 self, and ELE simultaneously to maximize their motivational impact on students. Rather than approaching these factors in isolation, educators should integrate them into a cohesive pedagogical strategy.

The study revealed a significant association between language mindsets and L2 motivation, particularly concerning the ideal L2 self and the ELE. These findings are supported by research from Blackwell et al. (2007) and Tapia Castillo (2025), who have demonstrated the positive influence of a growth mindset on motivation. Consequently, educators should actively foster a growth mindset in language learning, recognizing their pivotal role in nurturing this mindset among learners (Dweck, 1999, 2008, 2017; Lou & Noels, 2016, 2017, 2019). The following pedagogical implications offer a framework for implementing these insights into classroom practices, aiming to enhance English language motivation among Chilean secondary students. While tailored to the Chilean context, may also offer valuable insights for other countries or regions facing similar challenges in English language education, particularly those with limited interaction with English speakers, economic aspirations tied to bilingualism, and monolingual populations.

It is essential that all proposed activities accommodate the varying English proficiency levels of students. Although national examinations indicate that many Chilean secondary students have a generally low level of English proficiency, some perform better than others (Agencia de Calidad de la Educación, 2012, 2015, 2018). Growth mindset theory advocates for appropriately challenging all students. Activities should not solely target lower-proficiency learners but should aim to push each student to improve, regardless of their starting level. By ensuring that all students are supported and challenged, educators can foster a growth-oriented environment that motivates students to put forth effort and achieve their learning goals.

Integrating Growth Mindset Principles into English Language Instruction

Recent studies suggest that developing a growth mindset classroom culture is effective in creating conducive learning environments (Murphy et al., 2021). Instead of limiting growth mindset integration to specific workshops or activities, it may be more beneficial to embed it in everyday classroom practices. Classroom agreements developed collectively by students and teachers can focus on norms that promote risk-taking, persistence, and viewing mistakes as learning opportunities. Regularly revisiting these agreements will help maintain a growth-oriented environment.

In addition, educators can employ empirically validated strategies to promote growth mindsets in language learning. Lessons on neuroplasticity, for instance, illustrate that intelligence is not fixed but can be developed through effort (Dweck, 2008, 2017). Incorporating activities and materials that address language learning beliefs can further reinforce a growth mindset by challenging misconceptions and supporting accurate beliefs with facts and real experiences (Lou & Noels, 2017; Tapia Castillo, 2025). Praising students for their hard work and persistence in learning a new language, rather than emphasizing their innate abilities, can also foster this mindset (Zarrinabadi et al., 2021). Engaging students in discussions and evidence-based exploration to demonstrate that language proficiency can be achieved within the classroom is particularly important in resource-limited contexts like Chile (Tapia Castillo, 2025).

Aligning Learning Activities with the Ideal L2 Self

Creating activities aligned with students' future goals and aspirations is essential for fostering motivation. For example, students aiming for careers in technology could work on English projects related to coding, while those interested in travel or tourism could focus on developing cross-cultural

communication skills. Personalized learning modules that allow students to choose themes such as music, sports, or technology, and develop language projects around these topics, can make language learning more relevant by linking it to personal interests and goals.

Visualization techniques, such as creating vision boards or role-playing future scenarios where students achieve their language goals, can help them imagine themselves successfully using English in their desired future roles (see Sato & Lara, 2019). These practices reinforce the motivational impact of the ideal L2 self by connecting current efforts to long-term aspirations, making the learning process more engaging and meaningful.

To further support this, teachers should encourage students to set personalized language learning goals. Developing a growth mindset is essential for goal-setting, as students who believe in their capacity to improve are more likely to set challenging goals (Dweck, 1999; Lou & Noels, 2016, 2017, 2020). Teachers should guide students in creating and achieving these goals, providing structured plans and clear steps for them to follow (Dweck, 1999; Lou & Noels, 2019). By offering clear direction and steps to follow, educators can empower learners to take ownership of their language learning journey and make meaningful progress.

Creating Engaging English Learning Experiences

Since students find ELE a critical factor in their motivation, educators should focus on creating positive and engaging learning experiences. This involves addressing students' current learning context and fostering positive attitudes. Recognizing that students see English as a means to connect with international friends and colleagues, educators should incorporate collaborative and cross-cultural activities into the curriculum. Group projects, language exchange programs, and virtual interactions with English speakers can enhance the social aspect of language learning, aligning with students' aspirations for multicultural communication.

Incorporating activities that simulate real-world scenarios can provide tangible connections between language learning and students' envisioned futures. These simulations not only enhance language skills but also instill a sense of practicality and applicability. Implement project-based learning that connects language learning to real-world contexts. Project-based learning, where students create a business plan, conduct interviews, or organize cultural events, offers opportunities for authentic language use, making learning more relevant and meaningful.

Utilizing digital tools and multimedia resources that align with students' interests—such as analyzing English lyrics of popular songs, reviewing movies or

TV series, or participating in virtual exchange programs—can make language learning more enjoyable and relevant. These activities may foster positive ELE and increase motivation.

Incorporating topics related to Chilean culture, history, and current events into English lessons while also linking them to global issues can help students see the relevance of English in understanding both their own culture and the broader world. By connecting language learning to local and global contexts, teachers can make lessons more engaging and meaningful, supporting the call for a curriculum more appealing to the Chilean context (Philominraj et al., 2021).

Finally, facilitating opportunities for students to interact with English-speaking communities, such as virtual exchanges with schools abroad or participation in local events involving English speakers, can provide practical applications for language use. These authentic interactions can reinforce the utility of English in real-world situations and further enhance students' ELE.

Conclusion

Aligned with prior investigations (Andrade-Molina et al., 2022; Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Kormos et al. 2011; Papi, 2010; Papi & Teimouri, 2012; Ryan, 2009; Taguchi et al., 2009), this study highlights the pivotal role of students' ideal L2 selves and their English learning experiences in shaping motivation. Driven by aspirations for enhanced opportunities, multicultural communication, and personal enjoyment, learners envision futures rich with meaningful conversations, travel, educational pursuits, professional endeavors, and linguistic fluency. Through actual English language experiences, students reveal multifaceted motivations, ranging from recognizing language improvement and appreciating English as an elegant language to understanding its practical utility, embracing challenges, valuing communication, and appreciating diverse learning methods. Nonetheless, the results highlight the minimal impact of the ought-to L2 self compared to the profound influence of personal dreams and experiences on motivation. Furthermore, the statistical analysis of LM and L2MSS questionnaires emphasizes a significant association between language mindset and L2 motivation, particularly concerning the ideal L2 self and ELE.

In the context of persistent challenges in English language education in Chile, previous studies have advocated for reforms in ELT policies (Barahona, 2016b), greater awareness of the multifaceted benefits of learning English (Glas, 2008), and the development of culturally relevant curricula (Philominraj et al., 2021). Recognizing motivation as a key factor in language acquisition, this study aligns with the broader goal of enhancing English language learning experiences and proposes methods to nurture motivation among secondary students.

Building on insights from students' ideal L2 selves and English learning experiences, this research suggests aligning language learning activities with personal and professional goals, incorporating real-world simulations, and fostering collaborative, cross-cultural activities that can enrich the social dimension of language learning, thereby fostering a genuine passion for English among students. Educators can integrate a diverse array of teaching methods and strike a balance between challenges and attainable goals. In alignment with previous research (e.g., Jennings & Cuevas, 2021; Tapia Castillo, 2025), this study suggests that the development of a growth mindset may be a promising approach to fostering motivation. By incorporating growth mindset principles into their pedagogical practices, educators can create an environment that enhances language proficiency while cultivating a sense of empowerment and resilience among students. This proactive approach to fostering a growth mindset aligns with the broader goal of inspiring a lifelong passion for learning and personal development.

While this research makes a valuable contribution to understanding L2 motivation, it is not without limitations. The relatively small sample size and specific participant characteristics—primarily individuals inclined toward a growth mindset with medium to high levels of motivation—may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study predominantly gathered data from students who voluntarily participated, potentially excluding less motivated or lower-performing learners. Future research should aim for more diverse participant profiles and larger sample sizes to capture a broader range of motivational drivers and dynamics. Although the translation of the LM and L2MSS questionnaires was thorough and included a review of the translated items by a linguistic expert and pilot testing, future studies could benefit from a more robust validation process. This could involve further expert evaluations, professional translations, or the use of back-translation procedures to guarantee a more culturally sensitive and precise adaptation of the instruments (see Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010).

Nevertheless, this research represents a significant advance in the understanding of L2 motivation and is the first to examine the relationship between language mindsets and L2 motivation in the Chilean context. By bridging the gap between theoretical constructs and classroom practices, the study provides a foundation for future research and pedagogical strategies aimed at enhancing English language learning. Further exploration could assess the broader impact of the discussed motivational strategies across different contexts and examine how fostering growth mindsets can reframe students' relationships with language learning, ultimately contributing to their long-term academic and professional success.

Acknowledgements

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