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Investigating the Impact of Autonomy-Supportive English Language Instruction on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners' Motivation in Learning General English

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The research investigated how implementing autonomy-supportive strategies in English language classrooms contributes to increased student motivation.

Methods: Participants in this study comprised 100 male EFL learners recruited from an English language institute located in Guilan, Iran. Sixty intermediate language learners were selected using the Oxford Quick Placement Test and subsequently randomly divided into two groups of 30 for the research. A motivation pretest was administered to both cohorts preceding the intervention. The treatment then commenced: the experimental group received autonomy-supportive English language instruction, and the control group followed the CLT approach. A motivation posttest was administered to all participants at the conclusion of the treatment to assess potential differences in motivation levels across the experimental (autonomy-supportive) and control (CLT) groups.

Results: The findings, statistically examined with independent and paired samples t-tests, demonstrated that autonomy-supportive teaching methods effectively boosted English learning motivation in the Iranian student cohort.

Conclusion: The results offer tangible proof that autonomy-supportive methods effectively cultivate more motivating language learning settings and enhance students' inherent motivation to pursue English language acquisition.

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1. Introduction

As motivation is essential for language learning (Dörnyei, 2002), and English holds vital global status, identifying motivational determinants in English classrooms is imperative (Brown, 2007; Dörnyei, 2002; Inngam & Eamoraphan, 2014). Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) contends that supporting intrinsic motivation requires nurturing students' autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs. Autonomy, integral to psychological well-being and positive functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2017), facilitates more self-determined motivation in learners. This leads to increased classroom engagement, which reciprocally amplifies motivation to learn, culminating in superior academic outcomes (Karbakhsh Ravari, Nakhaee Ravari, & Rabani, 2025; Sayadi & Mashhadi Heidar, 2018).

According to Reeve (2016), teacher-supported autonomy fosters greater student motivation and academic success. When students' psychological needs are met, their autonomous motivation enhances engagement and learning efficacy, driving them to seek optimal challenges over simpler tasks. Consequently, these students exhibit superior psychological and physical well-being, higher academic achievement, and enhanced psychological wellness compared to peers (Jang, Kim, & Reeve, 2016; Jang, Reeve, & Halusic, 2016; Shafaei, 2023).

Autonomous learning is a multifaceted construct defined by learners' capacity to self-direct their education. This entails responsibility for decisions across all learning elements, particularly at the behavioral management level (e.g., selecting materials, methods, timeframes, locations, and collaborators). Critically, it also encompasses metacognitive dimensions—planning, critical evaluation, and continuous reflective monitoring of the learning process from initiation to completion (Benson, 2001). These dual dimensions collectively optimize learning efficacy (Hajimaghsoodi & Saghaieh Bolghari, 2019; Singh Negi & Laudari, 2022).

Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) highlight a critical gap: few empirical studies test motivational strategies in language teaching, especially SDT-aligned approaches. This is exacerbated in non-Western contexts (e.g., Taiwan, Saudi Arabia), where teacher-centered methods dominate. Only one identified experimental study (Kaur et al., 2015) explicitly applied SDT in English classrooms. Using a quasi-experimental withdrawal design with Thai Grade 6 students, autonomy-support training for teachers significantly boosted student motivation post-intervention. Effects persisted even after support withdrawal, confirming SDT's practical viability.

This study introduces Autonomy-Supportive English Language Instruction (ASELI)—a novel pedagogical model systematically embedding Reeve's (2016) six evidence-based autonomy-supportive behaviors into English language teaching (ELT) praxis. ASELI translates theory into actionable classroom practices through these dimensions:

1. Perspective-Taking: Eliciting learners' linguistic/cultural backgrounds to tailor content.

2. Inner Motivational Vitalization: Designing tasks that align with students' intrinsic interests.

3. Rationale Provision: Explicitly linking grammar/vocabulary exercises to real-world communication goals.

4. Negative Affect Acknowledgment: Validating language anxiety.

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5. Informational Language Use: Replacing directives.

6. Patience Demonstration: Allowing extended wait time during discussions and scaffolded error correction.

Reeve and colleagues describe autonomy-supportive teaching as a student-centered approach where educators actively identify and cultivate students' needs, interests, and preferences (Reeve et al., 2004). This involves creating classroom opportunities guided by these internal motives. Reeve and Cheon (2021) further define it as maintaining a student-focused attitude and understanding tone to skillfully implement instructional behaviors that satisfy autonomy needs. The dual goals are supporting intrinsic motivation and facilitating internalization – the process where, in a need-supportive environment, students internalize the value of their actions, shifting motivation from controlled to autonomous.

The peer role-switching model (Machi & Nakaya, 2014) redefines autonomy support as a collaborative engine rather than a hierarchical tool. By enabling mutual provision and reception of autonomy support, it satisfies psychological needs more holistically, leading to sustainable engagement and performance gains in group settings. The egalitarian nature of peer groups transforms autonomy support from a transmission model (teacher→student) to a generative ecosystem where mutual teaching-learning experiences organically amplify motivation, cognitive depth, and skill internalization. This explains why collaborative activities "expand and deepen" through reciprocity (Machi & Nakaya, 2014; Palincsar & Herrenkohl, 2002)—each autonomy-supportive interaction simultaneously reinforces giver/receiver competence while strengthening group cohesion.

Autonomy is attained from experiences and practices that are regarded as self-controlled, self-embraced, and are lined up with people's actual qualities and interests (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Reeve (2009) reminds us that autonomy support isn't defined by the giver's intention but by the receiver's experience. Peer collaboration succeeds because equality transforms relational practices into genuine vehicles for self-determination—making "self-controlled decisions" the default social norm rather than an individual exception.

Research has demonstrated that autonomy-supportive teaching approaches yield numerous benefits for young learners. Studies by Kunst et al. (2019) reveal that such methods foster self-regulated learning, enhance deep information processing, and increase persistence in goal-setting and achievement. Furthermore, these pedagogical strategies correlate with improved academic outcomes, greater psychological well-being, and reduced anxiety levels among students. The positive association between autonomy support and these key educational and developmental outcomes highlights its significance in creating optimal learning environments for children. Niemiec and Ryan's framework (2009) ultimately positions autonomy support not as a luxury, but as the pedagogical cornerstone for cultivating learners who are capable, curious, and resilient. The evidence is clear: When students own their learning, they outperform—and outgrow—expectations.

Three primary kinds of autonomy support have been proposed by Stefanou et al. (2004), namely, intellectual, procedural, and institutional. Intellectual autonomy support refers to pedagogical strategies that foster independent thinking (e.g., open-ended questioning, debate, hypothesis generation), encourage cognitive ownership (e.g., "What do you think is the best solution?"), develop self-directed learning skills (e.g., metacognitive reflection, error analysis). Intellectual autonomy targets the act of thinking itself, making it uniquely powerful for deep learning (Stefanou et al., 2004; Wang & Guan, 2020).

Procedural autonomy support involves giving students agency over the "how" of learning—allowing them to make choices about: Task formats (e.g., essay vs. podcast); Work processes (e.g., solo or

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collaborative work); and Physical/Environmental factors (e.g., seating, tools, or pacing). procedural autonomy focuses on executional flexibility. Institutional autonomy support grants students shared governance over the broader learning ecosystem, including: Classroom norms & rules; Assessment design; Curriculum co-creation; and Resource allocation. Institutional autonomy operates at the macro level, transforming students from passive recipients to active architects of their educational culture. Intellectual autonomy support is uniquely powerful because it transforms learners into active meaning-makers, not just task-completers. As Stefanou et al. (2004) and Wang and Guan (2020) assert, it's the "gold standard" for fostering the deep, self-sustaining motivation that drives lifelong learning. Educators prioritizing critical thinking over compliance will see the most profound student growth.

Research demonstrates that educators can significantly enhance students' sense of control through intentional teaching approaches and classroom design (Tsai et al., 2008). By addressing learners' fundamental need for autonomy, these strategies elevate the inherent value students place on educational activities. Empirical evidence consistently links teacher autonomy support with multiple beneficial outcomes across academic settings. Studies indicate that when students view their instructors as autonomy-supportive, they demonstrate greater participation in learning tasks (Hospel & Galand, 2016), develop more self-determined forms of motivation (Trigueros et al., 2020), adopt learning-focused achievement goals (Mammadov & Hertzog, 2021), and achieve measurable improvements in scholastic performance (Eakman et al., 2019). These findings collectively underscore how autonomy-supportive practices create optimal conditions for meaningful student engagement and academic success.

Research by Reeve et al. (2004) demonstrates that educators who consistently implement autonomy-supportive strategies observe significantly higher levels of student engagement and lower instances of classroom boredom among their students. This approach aligns with the fundamental psychological need for autonomy, which encompasses self-determination, personal volition, meaningful learning experiences, and freedom of choice. Bajrami's (2015) work further highlights the transformative potential of learner autonomy, showing how its development during university education fosters critical outcomes including adaptability, flexibility, self-direction, and initiative-taking. These capacities not only enhance academic performance but also equip students with lifelong learning skills. Moreover, the cultivation of autonomous learning contributes to the evolution of more democratic educational systems, where learners become active participants in their educational journey rather than passive recipients of knowledge.

Empirical research demonstrates that autonomy-supportive teaching environments significantly enhance students' emotional and academic experiences. In a controlled experiment, Benita et al. (2014) assigned 117 college students to three conditions—autonomy-supportive, autonomy-suppressive, and neutral—tasking them with improving handwriting quality using intrapersonal-competence standards. Their findings revealed that mastery goals elicited markedly more positive emotional responses in the autonomy-supportive group compared to the other two, underscoring the motivational benefits of such pedagogical approaches. This aligns with broader investigations into autonomy support's role across diverse educational contexts. For instance, Dincer et al. (2019a) examined 412 Turkish EFL learners, analyzing how autonomy support influences classroom engagement through the lens of self-determination theory (SDT). Their work highlighted a robust correlation between autonomy-supportive practices, psychological need satisfaction, and active participation, reinforcing SDT's premise that autonomy fulfillment fosters intrinsic motivation. Similarly, studies involving Chinese accounting students linked autonomy support to higher academic achievement, mediated by enhanced class engagement and need satisfaction.

Emerging research continues to highlight the profound impact of autonomy support on student development. A longitudinal study by Kleinkorres et al. (2023) provides compelling evidence that autonomy-supportive environments play a vital role in enhancing adolescent well-being, demonstrating

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benefits that extend far beyond academic performance to encompass broader psychosocial growth. Building on this growing body of evidence, the current study emphasizes that autonomy support serves not just as an advantageous teaching approach, but as a fundamental requirement for reducing classroom disengagement and fostering deeper, more meaningful learning. This pedagogical approach proves particularly valuable due to its unique ability to simultaneously enhance both emotional investment and cognitive involvement in learning activities, making it an indispensable consideration for both educational researchers and practitioners seeking to optimize student outcomes.

Research has delineated key dimensions of teacher autonomy support that enhance student motivation. Aelterman et al.'s (2019) study of secondary education revealed two particularly effective approaches: participative support, which involves offering meaningful choices in learning activities, and attuning support, characterized by empathetic perspective-taking. Their findings demonstrated significant positive associations between these autonomy-supportive strategies and students' self-determined motivation, particularly intrinsic motivation (learning for inherent satisfaction) and identified regulation (personally valuing academic activities). This empirical evidence underscores how specific, intentional teaching behaviors can cultivate students' authentic engagement in their educational journey.

In a six-week study, Patall et al. (2018) explored how daily autonomy support—or its restriction—affected high school students' motivation and engagement in science classes. The researchers focused on five distinct forms of autonomy support: (1) offering choices, (2) allowing students to work in their preferred manner, (3) taking their opinions, preferences, and interests into account, (4) explaining the relevance and significance of course material, and (5) providing opportunities for students to ask questions. The research results revealed that certain autonomy-supportive teaching strategies had a positive impact on students' self-determined motivation. Specifically, four key practices showed significant correlations with enhanced autonomous motivation: offering meaningful choices to learners, accommodating student preferences, explaining the relevance of learning materials, and creating opportunities for student inquiries. These approaches were particularly effective in boosting both intrinsic motivation (the inherent enjoyment of learning) and identified regulation (recognizing the personal value of academic activities).

Reeve and Cheon (2021) synthesized existing research to propose a framework of seven key elements that define autonomy-supportive teaching. The first component involves (1) adopting the students' perspective to better understand their experiences. To enhance intrinsic motivation, teachers should (2) encourage students to explore their personal interests and (3) design learning tasks in ways that fulfill psychological needs. Additionally, to facilitate internalization—helping students adopt external regulations as their own—four strategies were identified: (4) offering clear explanations for tasks, (5) recognizing and validating students' negative emotions, (6) using suggestive rather than controlling language, and (7) allowing time for students to process and engage voluntarily. The research reviewed in their analysis focused on two key aspects: observable teacher behaviors implementing autonomy support and students' personal interpretations of these supportive practices. This dual perspective yielded concrete evidence supporting the educational benefits of such approaches. The collective results highlight that when educators deliberately employ autonomy-supportive strategies, they can effectively enhance both student motivation and active participation in learning activities. These studies demonstrate that the conscious application of these teaching methods creates measurable improvements in classroom engagement dynamics.

Research has consistently shown that autonomy support plays a crucial role in enhancing students' motivation and learning outcomes. Early studies by Gagné (2003) and Grolnick and Ryan (1989) established that autonomy-supportive teaching fosters both intrinsic motivation (engaging in learning for its own sake) and identified regulation (personally valuing the activity). More recent large-scale research by Parrisius et al. (2022), focusing on ninth-grade students, further confirmed these findings, demonstrating that autonomy-

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supportive teaching methods significantly strengthen students' situation-specific confidence in their abilities (competence beliefs) and their perception of task value. Similarly, Duchatelet and Donche (2019) examined autonomy support in student-centered higher education settings and found that when instructors used autonomy-supportive strategies, students reported higher levels of self-efficacy—the belief in their capacity to succeed. Together, these studies highlight the enduring and wide-ranging benefits of autonomy-supportive teaching across different educational levels and contexts.

Singhnarang and Gajaseni (2018) explored how different teaching styles influence learner autonomy among elementary students studying English as a foreign language. Their survey-based research revealed that students demonstrated greater independence in learning when their teachers exhibited high levels of autonomy support, as opposed to moderate or low levels. The study further emphasized a clear connection between teachers' motivational approaches and the development of students' self-directed learning behaviors in the classroom. These findings suggest that educators who adopt more autonomy-supportive teaching styles can effectively foster greater learner autonomy among young language students.

Several experimental studies have examined the impact of autonomy-supportive teaching on elementary students' motivation. Kaur, Hashim, and Noman (2015) investigated how autonomy-supportive instruction affected Thai students' motivation in English language classrooms, finding that students in the experimental group who received this intervention demonstrated significantly improved learning motivation compared to their peers. Building on these findings, the same research team (Kaur, Hashim, & Noman, 2014) conducted a follow-up study comparing autonomy-supportive teaching methods with traditional approaches. Their results showed that students exposed to autonomy-supportive instruction exhibited greater interest, effort, sense of relatedness, and integrated regulation - demonstrating more internalized motivation - than those taught through conventional methods. These consecutive studies provide compelling empirical evidence that autonomy-supportive teaching strategies can effectively enhance multiple dimensions of student motivation in elementary classroom settings.

This study empirically investigates the impact of Autonomy-Supportive English Language Instruction (ASELI) on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' motivation and classroom enthusiasm, while concurrently examining student perceptions of ASELI's efficacy and experiential influence. The question of this study is as follows:

Does autonomy-supportive English language instruction enhance students' motivation in English language classes?

2. Methodology

As part of this study, a one-group quasi-experimental research design was utilized in order to collect data using a quantitative method. The independent variable in this study is autonomy-supportive English language instruction, while the dependent variable is students' motivation in English language classrooms.

The study involved 100 male Iranian students from an English language institute in Guilan, Iran. All participants were at an intermediate level of English proficiency and shared Persian as their native language. Coming from similar sociocultural backgrounds, their ages ranged between 15 and 25 years. On average, they had been studying English at the institute for approximately four to five years. Additionally, all participants followed the same semester schedule and lesson plans, ensuring consistency in their learning conditions. The group was treated as a quasi-experimental sample for the research.

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Before the study began, the researchers obtained official approval by sending a permission letter to the language institutes involved. This letter outlined the study's purpose and requested authorization to work with a specific group of learners. Once approval was secured, the participating EFL students were briefed on the research objectives, methodology, and overall plan. They were then asked to sign consent forms to confirm their voluntary participation. Additionally, students were assured that their personal data would remain confidential and would not be shared without their explicit consent. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point without any negative impact on their academic standing or performance.

Instruments

This study considered several key variables during its implementation. The first step involved administering the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) to ensure participant homogeneity. This standardized assessment, known for its strong reliability and validity, helps researchers determine learners' proficiency levels—whether elementary, pre-intermediate, or intermediate. The OQPT evaluates a broad range of language skills, including grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing. Specifically, the test comprised 50 multiple-choice questions testing grammar and vocabulary at elementary and intermediate levels, along with 10 comprehension questions (five true-false and five multiple-choice items) that increased in difficulty. Additionally, a writing task was included to assess students' practical language use.

This study assessed motivation using the Language Learning Orientations Scale (LLOS), an instrument developed by Noels et al. (2000) based on self-determination theory. The LLOS includes 20 items designed to evaluate three key dimensions: intrinsic motivation (9 items), extrinsic motivation (8 items), and amotivation (3 items). Participants responded to each item on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). To enhance the scale's content validity, five EFL teachers were consulted to review and refine the survey items, ensuring they were both meaningful and contextually appropriate. Additionally, the reliability of the LLOS and its subscales was confirmed through Cronbach's alpha, which measured the internal consistency of the instrument.

The study began by selecting 100 intermediate-level EFL learners from private English language institutes in Iran using the Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). To examine how autonomy-supportive instruction affects learners' motivation, data were collected through self-reported motivation questionnaires. These responses were analyzed using statistical measures including mean scores, standard deviations, mean differences, and paired-sample t-tests to compare motivation levels before and after the autonomy-supportive intervention.

The study implemented a three-stage teaching model consisting of preparatory, delivery, and reflective phases. Based on Reeve's (2016) pedagogical principles, this autonomy-focused approach emphasized six fundamental instructional strategies: First, educators actively sought to understand learners' viewpoints and incorporate them into lessons. Second, teachers identified and nurtured students' inherent motivational strengths. Third, instructors provided transparent rationales for learning activities. Fourth, educators employed supportive communication that fostered rather than dictated participation. Fifth, teachers acknowledged and addressed students' frustrations or difficulties. Sixth, educators maintained a tolerant, unhurried approach to student progress. Together, these practices created a learning environment that prioritized psychological needs while maintaining academic rigor. This structured approach allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of how autonomy-supportive strategies influence learner motivation in EFL classrooms.

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The initial phase consists of two key components: assessing learners' requirements and interests, then developing customized lessons accordingly. This preparatory stage emphasizes creating instructional materials that resonate with students' existing motivational drivers, personal interests, and individual learning needs. A fundamental aspect of autonomy-supportive language teaching involves actively considering students' viewpoints throughout this process. The analytical component plays a crucial role, as understanding learners' perspectives helps activate their intrinsic motivational potential. Subsequently, the design component focuses on creating or modifying lesson plans and educational activities to better match and stimulate students' internal motivational factors. This dual approach ensures that the instructional content not only meets educational objectives but also aligns with and nurtures learners' natural motivation for language acquisition.

The instructional phase involves two primary components: lesson introduction and implementation. This stage serves to showcase the practical application and efficacy of specially designed lessons in the classroom setting. The process begins with an introductory approach to new learning activities, followed by their actual implementation. Throughout both steps, autonomy-supportive teaching strategies were carefully adapted to suit each phase's specific requirements.

The introduction phase took place before the formal lesson commencement. During this preparatory stage, several key autonomy-supportive techniques were employed, including: considering students' viewpoints, strengthening intrinsic motivational factors, offering clear explanations, and using supportive, non-coercive language. These methods were strategically applied to create an optimal learning environment that fosters student engagement and self-directed learning.

The implementation phase occurs during the actual lesson delivery and focuses on identifying and resolving potential challenges that might diminish student engagement or focus. This crucial step aims to sustain learners' motivation throughout the instructional process. Several autonomy-supportive teaching approaches were employed during this stage to maintain an optimal learning environment. These included recognizing and validating students' negative emotions, exercising patience, integrating learners' viewpoints, and employing constructive, non-judgmental communication. These strategies collectively worked to preserve student interest and foster a positive, supportive classroom atmosphere conducive to effective language learning.

The post-instruction phase serves as a critical feedback mechanism, designed to gather student input for enhancing future lessons. This stage comprises two key components: reflective analysis of completed lessons and proposal of suggestions for upcoming instruction. A fundamental aspect of this phase involves actively integrating students' perspectives through autonomy-supportive teaching practices. The reflection process occurs systematically after each instructional unit, allowing for continuous improvement based on learner experiences and insights. This structured approach ensures that subsequent lessons are progressively refined to better meet students' needs while maintaining the core principles of autonomy-supportive education.

The suggestion phase follows immediately after unit reflection in the post-instruction stage. This crucial step actively incorporates students' viewpoints to gather their recommendations and preferences for upcoming lessons within the established topic framework. Once collected, all student feedback, comments, and suggestions were carefully analyzed during the subsequent pre-instruction phase. This cyclical process continued throughout the entire instructional program, with lessons being continuously refined and adapted during the design phase before their classroom implementation. The iterative nature of this approach ensured ongoing improvement and responsiveness to learners' evolving needs and preferences.

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The data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26.0 to evaluate the effectiveness of implementing autonomy-supportive instruction in English language classrooms and its impact on the motivation of intermediate-level Iranian learners. The study employed various statistical measures, including mean scores, standard deviations, mean differences, independent-samples t-tests, and paired-sample t-tests. These analytical tools were used to compare students' motivation levels both before and after their exposure to the autonomy-supportive teaching approach. Through this comprehensive statistical analysis, the research aimed to determine the significant changes in learner motivation resulting from the instructional intervention.

3. Results And Discussion

The current study's data were mainly quantitative and they were submitted to a range of statistical analysis utilizing the SPSS software. The study's descriptive statistics were measured first followed by the inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to present and describe data as well as create analytical statistical results. 100 EFL learners were selected to provide a homogeneous sample, and 60 students with OQPT exam scores ranging from 30-39 were chosen for the main study. These students were divided into two groups: experimental and control. The OQPT results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Statistics for the results of OQPT

N	**Valid**	**100**
	Missing	**0**
Mean		34.58
Median		34.00
Mode		30
Std. Deviation		5.663
Variance		32.064
Skewness		1.020
Std. Error of Skewness		.241
Kurtosis		1.197
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.478
Range		28
Minimum		24
Maximum		52
Sum		3458

Table 1 presents the statistical analysis of OQPT scores used to establish participant homogeneity among 100 EFL learners. The test results incorporated multiple statistical measures to evaluate the data distribution, including central tendency indicators (mean, median, mode), dispersion metrics (range, variance, standard deviation), and distribution characteristics. Analysis of all 100 participants' scores revealed an average performance of 34.58 with a standard deviation of 5.663, demonstrating the variability in the sample while confirming the appropriate selection of a uniform participant group for the study.

From the initial pool of test-takers, 60 EFL learners who met the required OQPT score threshold were randomly divided into either a control group or an experimental group. Following this group assignment, their responses to the motivation questionnaire were analyzed. The motivation assessment instrument comprised 20 items, with responses recorded on a standard five-point Likert scale. This scale quantified responses from strong agreement (1) through neutral (3) to strong disagreement (5), allowing for precise measurement of participants' motivational orientations. The resulting data provided the basis for comparing motivational differences between the two study groups.

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Before assessing the descriptive results of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted to examine the level of reliability of the questionnaire items. Ten students were selected randomly from the target participants to do this. These students also did not take part in the study. They were required to offer personal information based on the Likert scale of the questionnaire's items. Table 2 shows the reliability of the questionnaire items for each pretest and posttest of the motivation questionnaire.

Table 2. The results of reliability test of the questionnaire items

		No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Value
Motivation Questionnaire	Pretest	20	0.868
	Posttest	20	0.918

To evaluate the reliability of the survey items, the researchers employed Cronbach's alpha test through SPSS version 25. The analysis yielded alpha values exceeding 0.7 for all instruments, indicating strong internal consistency and satisfactory reliability. These results confirm that all questionnaire items effectively measured the intended constructs and were properly aligned with the research objectives. The high reliability coefficients suggest that the survey instruments consistently produced stable and dependable measurements throughout the study.

The descriptive statistics of the motivation questionnaire was displayed at each step since the study's research question was about EFL learners' level of motivation in the English language classroom before and after they followed an autonomy-supportive English language instruction. Initially, the variations in students' motivation in the control and experimental groups prior to the treatment procedure were evaluated and the results of it are shown in Table 3. The variations in pretest mean scores between the experimental and control groups are depicted in Figure 1.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of motivation questionnaire in the pretest

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Control	30	3.0037	.69443	.10980
Experimental	30	3.1088	.71566	.11316

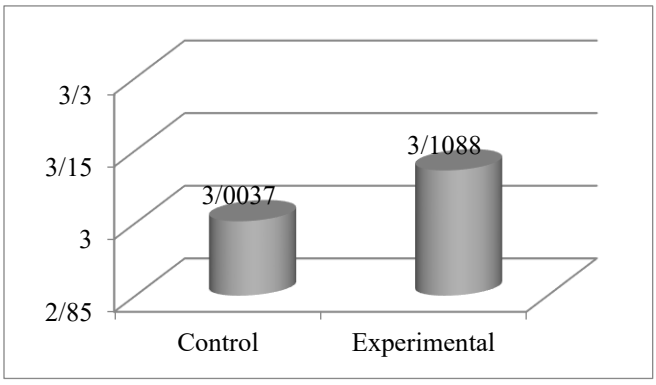


Figure 1. The means plot for the pretest means of the study groups

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Table 3 demonstrates that both groups began the study with comparable motivation levels, as evidenced by the absence of significant differences in their pretest motivation questionnaire scores. This initial equivalence confirms that any subsequent changes in motivation could be attributed to the experimental treatment rather than pre-existing differences. Following the intervention, all participants completed a post-treatment motivation assessment, with their responses subsequently analyzed using SPSS software. The posttest results presented in Table 2, along with the comparative data visualized in Figure 2, reveal noticeable differences in mean motivation scores between the experimental and control groups after the treatment period. These findings suggest that the autonomy-supportive instructional approach may have influenced students' motivation levels in the experimental group.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of motivation questionnaire in the posttest

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Control	30	3.5050	.70763	.11189
Experimental	30	4.0138	.72554	.11472

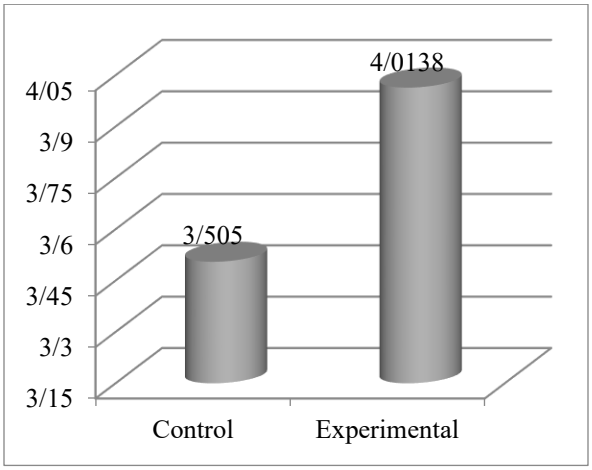


Figure 2. The means plot for the posttest means of the study groups

As shown in Table 4, the experimental group's posttest mean score was greater than the control group. It indicated that learners in both groups had better conditions during the treatment procedure, which enhanced their motivation in the final test. Furthermore, the experimental group students exhibited greater motivation than the control group, and they were more satisfied with their language instruction in the English class.

According to the demographic questions findings of the motivation scale, 30 male students in the control group and 30 male students in the experimental group participated in the study. Responses to demographic questions also revealed that the control group's average age was 16.490.84 years, whereas the experimental group's average age was 17.330.54 years. Furthermore, both groups had qualities that could influence their English proficiency (attending a specific course, taking private lessons, and studying English at a language institute for about 4 or 5 years).

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Prior to carrying out the specific tests chosen to address the study question, the assumption of normality for the dependent variable (motivation questionnaire) was tested. To assess the assumption of normality, the Shapiro-Wilks test was utilized, which is normally performed at the (=.01) level of significance. The Shapiro-Wilks test assesses whether or not sample data were collected from a regularly distributed population. Before determining whether to reject ($p < \alpha$) or keep ($p > \alpha$) the null hypothesis, the Sig. (p) values were compared to the alpha level of significance for the statistic.

Table 5. Tests of normality for the pretest and the posttest scores of motivation scale

	Groups	Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	Control - Motivation Scale	.943	30	.108
	Experimental - Motivation Scale	.896	30	.107
Posttest	Control - Motivation Scale	.950	30	.168
	Experimental - Motivation Scale	.875	30	.202

The Shapiro-Wilks test results for pretest scores of both groups in the motivation scale were .108, and .107, respectively ($p < \alpha$). When it comes to the posttest scores, the values of (p) of both groups in the motivation scale were .168, and .202, respectively ($p < \alpha$). As a result, the assumption of normality was met for these samples.

To answer the research question of the study, the results of motivation scale were evaluated using independent-samples t-tests and paired-sample t-tests. The independent-samples t-test was used to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the pretest scores of motivation scale for the control and experimental groups. The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Results of the independent-samples t-test reported for the pretest scores of motivation scale

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	.064	.801	-.666	78	.507	-.10500	.15767	-.41890	.20890
	Equal variances not assumed			-.666	77.929	.507	-.10500	.15767	-.41890	.20890

As shown in Table 6, the results of the independent-samples t-test for motivation scale depicted that the two-tailed sig was "0.507" which was higher than the p value of "0.05." As a result, it can be concluded that there were no significant differences between the two groups in the pretest. Next, another independent-samples t-test was conducted between the posttest scores of motivation scale for the control and experimental groups to demonstrate the differences between the level of motivation at the end of the treatment procedure. Table 7 shows the results of the independent-samples T-test.

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Table 7. Results of the independent-samples t-test reported for the posttest scores of motivation scale

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper
Pretest	Equal variances assumed	.054	.818	-3.175	78	.002	-.50875	.16025	-.82778	-.18972
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.175	77.951	.002	-.50875	.16025	-.82778	-.18972

As shown in Table 7, the results of the independent-samples T-test for motivation scale depicted that the two-tailed sig was "0.002" which was less than the p value of "0.05". As a result, it can be concluded that there were significant differences between the two groups in the posttest. The results of T value for motivation scale were -3.175. Since the T value of both tests were less than the critical value (-.1.96), it can be said that the study null hypothesis is rejected, and the treatment procedure has good results.

Finally, paired-samples T-test results were evaluated on the pretest and posttest scores of both groups to determine how far students' level of motivation in the English class had progressed over the course of the study. The results of the paired-samples T-test for motivation scale are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. The paired-samples t-test results for the motivation scale in both groups

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Control Group - Pretest and Posttest	-.50125	1.03220	.16321	-.83137	-.17113	-3.071	39	.004
Pair 2	Experimental Group - Pretest and Posttest	-.90500	1.04310	.16493	-1.23860	-.57140	-5.487	39	.000

As depicted in Table 8, the two-tailed sig reported for statistical significance of the mean difference of the experimental and control groups was lower than the predetermined amount of p value, which is 0.05. As a result, it is possible to argue that there are statistically significant differences in the participants' level of motivation scale before and after the tests in both group, whereas the experimental group participants have an upper level of motivation from the pretest to the posttest than the control group.

The study results were used to support or reject the study hypothesis in order to provide a detailed analysis. At the start of the study, both the experimental and control groups completed a motivation pretest, followed by a posttest at the conclusion of the intervention. Initial analysis using an independent-samples t-test showed no significant difference in pretest motivation scores between groups ($p > 0.05$), confirming comparable baseline motivation levels. Following the intervention period, another independent-samples t-test analysis of posttest scores revealed a statistically significant difference between groups ($p < 0.05$), with the experimental group demonstrating higher motivation levels. This significant post-intervention difference led to rejection of the study's null hypothesis, supporting the conclusion that the experimental treatment effectively enhanced participant motivation compared to the control condition. The statistical findings

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validate that the observed between-group differences in posttest motivation scores were unlikely due to chance, confirming the intervention's measurable impact.

Recent cross-cultural studies have increasingly highlighted the universal advantages of autonomy-supportive teaching approaches across diverse educational settings. For instance, research by Zhang, Skilling, and Bobis (2016) conducted comparative analyses across China, the United Kingdom, and Australia, revealing consistent positive effects of teacher autonomy support on student learning outcomes in all three cultural contexts. Notably, their findings challenged previous assumptions by demonstrating that autonomy-supportive methods were equally effective in China's traditionally more structured educational system as they were in Western countries like the UK and Australia. This suggests that the benefits of fostering student autonomy—such as enhanced motivation and engagement—may transcend cultural differences in educational philosophy and classroom norms.

However, cultural determinists challenge the notion that autonomy-supportive teaching is universally beneficial, arguing that its effectiveness depends on cultural context. Scholars in this camp maintain that certain cultures prioritize respect for authority, teacher-directed instruction, and clearly defined hierarchical relationships in educational settings (Reeve et al., 2020). They contend that teaching approaches emphasizing student choice, personal expression, and shared decision-making may not only be culturally inappropriate in some societies but could potentially hinder academic performance. This perspective suggests that in collectivist cultures like Iran's, where conformity and adherence to social norms are highly valued, traditional teacher-centered approaches may be more culturally congruent than autonomy-supportive methods.

Considering the different views regarding the impact of autonomy-supportive English language instruction, in this research, an attempt was made to investigate the role of autonomy-supportive English language instruction on students' motivation in the English class. The data analysis revealed that students in the experimental group, who received autonomy-supportive English language instruction, demonstrated significantly higher motivation levels compared to their counterparts in the control group. Statistical analyses confirmed these differences in motivation were substantial by the study's conclusion. These results strongly suggest that when EFL learners experience greater autonomy and opportunities for self-fulfillment in their language classes, it serves as a key predictor of their motivation to acquire a new language. The findings highlight the importance of incorporating learner-centered approaches that foster independence and personal growth in foreign language education.

Self-determination theory posits that learning environments fostering autonomy significantly enhance students' intrinsic motivation and self-determined engagement in academic activities (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Research has consistently shown that when students perceive their teachers as autonomy-supportive, they demonstrate stronger inherent motivation to learn, particularly in EFL contexts. This observed correlation between autonomy-supportive teaching practices and heightened motivation aligns with self-determination theorists' broader proposition that supportive educational environments universally promote student engagement (Assor, 2012). The theoretical framework suggests that fulfilling students' basic psychological need for autonomy through appropriate instructional strategies creates optimal conditions for sustained motivation and active participation in language learning.

These findings are grounded in Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which, as Little (2020) emphasizes, identifies autonomy as a fundamental human need and a key motivational force. Alamer (2021) further elaborates that SDT suggests learners possess diverse motivational orientations that influence how they perceive, approach, and complete (or avoid) second language learning tasks. The current research provides empirical support for this theoretical framework by showing a strong positive association between

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autonomy-supportive learning environments and intrinsic motivation. Specifically, the study reveals that such supportive contexts nurture and enhance learners' inherent motivation to engage with L2 tasks, whereas controlled or restrictive environments tend to diminish this natural drive.

Existing studies emphasize how instructors' constructive approaches to student mistakes help create a supportive learning environment where errors are viewed as valuable growth opportunities. Jiang and colleagues (2019) found that when educators encourage open discussion of misconceptions and avoid negative reactions to mistakes, they foster what researchers term a "positive error climate." Recent work by Cheon et al. (2023) builds on this understanding, demonstrating that students become more likely to openly share their misunderstandings when they trust they won't face criticism for errors. This body of research collectively suggests that teachers' accepting attitudes toward mistakes significantly influence students' willingness to engage in vulnerable yet educationally crucial moments of misconception disclosure.

The current study's results align with previous research demonstrating the positive impact of teacher autonomy support on student motivation. Kaur and colleagues' (2015) intervention study in a Thai educational setting showed that sixth-grade students exhibited substantially higher motivation levels after experiencing autonomy-supportive teaching practices. These findings corroborate Reeve's (2016) established conclusion that teacher-provided autonomy support serves as a powerful catalyst for enhancing student motivation.

Research has consistently demonstrated that autonomy-supportive teaching practices yield significant benefits for learners. Studies by Cheon et al. (2016) and Reeve et al. (2019) reveal that such approaches help students achieve greater psychological need satisfaction while minimizing frustration, leading to numerous positive outcomes including increased motivation for mastery, stronger self-perception of competence, enhanced creativity, deeper engagement, improved well-being, greater willingness to tackle challenges, better academic results, and heightened persistence. Ikonen's (2013) work further supports these findings, noting that institutional environments are particularly well-suited for implementing autonomy-supportive language instruction. He argues that schools and universities provide ideal settings for fostering learner autonomy, as they naturally facilitate the development of crucial skills like collaboration, technical proficiency, and self-directed learning attitudes within foreign language education. This body of research collectively suggests that with proper implementation, self-guided language learning within formal educational institutions is not just theoretically possible but eminently achievable in practice. The evidence indicates that when educational systems create the right supportive conditions, institutional settings can effectively nurture the various dimensions of learner autonomy while maintaining structured learning objectives.

Pham (2021) and Murase (2015) highlight the teacher's dual supportive role in fostering learner autonomy, emphasizing both psychological and technical dimensions. Psychosocial support involves cultivating teacher qualities like empathy, openness, encouragement, and tolerance to create a nurturing learning environment. Technically, teachers guide students in organizing their learning process by helping establish goals, identify resources, monitor progress, and develop self-assessment skills. Both researchers identify power dynamics as a central challenge in implementing autonomous learning approaches, noting that as students assume greater responsibility for their learning journey, the traditional teacher-centered power structure necessarily shifts. This redistribution of control represents a fundamental transformation in educational roles, where teachers transition from authoritative figures to supportive facilitators while learners progressively develop self-direction capabilities.

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4. Conclusion

This research investigated the impact of Autonomy-Supportive English Language Instruction on student motivation in EFL classrooms, revealing significant findings. The comparative analysis between experimental and control groups demonstrated a marked difference in motivational levels, with the autonomy-supported group showing substantially higher engagement. The results clearly indicate that implementing autonomy-supportive teaching methods effectively enhances students' motivation for English language learning. Following the instructional intervention, participants in the experimental condition exhibited significantly increased motivation compared to their pre-intervention levels and control group counterparts. These outcomes provide empirical evidence supporting the efficacy of autonomy-supportive approaches in creating more motivating language learning environments and fostering students' intrinsic drive to engage with English language acquisition.

The study also revealed that students responded positively to Autonomy-Supportive English Language Instruction across several key areas: their own motivation to learn English, preferred teaching methodologies in language classrooms, and their perception of teachers' instructional motivation. These results provide compelling evidence for the successful application of autonomy-supportive approaches in EFL contexts. Importantly, the research demonstrates that educators can significantly enhance learners' motivation in English courses by consciously adopting autonomy-supportive teaching practices. The findings underscore how teacher behaviors that foster student autonomy - such as providing meaningful choices, encouraging initiative, and supporting self-directed learning - create optimal conditions for developing and sustaining student engagement in language acquisition. This pedagogical approach proves particularly effective in addressing the motivational challenges often encountered in English language classrooms.

The findings revealed that students felt genuinely valued and included in all classroom learning processes when teachers adopted autonomy-supportive approaches. This sense of respect and involvement suggests that expanding students' participatory opportunities and granting them more autonomy in their learning can effectively boost their motivation. The research demonstrates that Autonomy-Supportive English Language Instruction serves as a viable solution to the common challenge of maintaining student motivation in English language learning. By creating more learner-centered environments where students have meaningful input and ownership over their educational experience, teachers can foster greater engagement and enthusiasm for language acquisition. These results highlight how shifting from traditional teacher-dominated instruction to more collaborative, autonomy-supportive practices can transform students' learning experiences and outcomes in EFL classrooms.

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