



Exploring the Influence of Extrinsic Motivation on EFL High School Students' Writing

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Resumen

El presente estudio analiza la influencia de la motivación extrínseca en las habilidades de escritura de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, centrándose en la forma en que estos factores externos inciden en la calidad de sus producciones escritas, la organización de las ideas y la disposición para escribir. Para ello, se implementó un diseño de investigación cuasi experimental, desarrollado en la Unidad Educativa Carlos Estarellas Avilés. Los participantes fueron estudiantes de bachillerato con edades comprendidas entre los 15 y 17 años, quienes cursaban la asignatura de inglés y poseían un nivel de competencia A2 de acuerdo con el Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas (MCER). Asimismo, participaron docentes de inglés de la institución, quienes colaboraron en la implementación de la intervención pedagógica y brindaron apoyo durante el desarrollo del estudio. Los resultados de esta investigación contribuyen a ampliar la comprensión sobre el aprendizaje de la escritura en inglés como lengua extranjera, al evidenciar la relevancia de la motivación extrínseca como un factor que puede fortalecer el desarrollo de las habilidades de escritura en estudiantes de bachillerato.

Abstract

This study explores the influence of extrinsic motivation on EFL high school students' writing skills, focusing on how external factors such as feedback, rewards, and recognition affect their writing performance, organization, and motivation to write. This study adopted a quasi-experimental research design. The study was conducted at *Unidad Educativa Carlos Estarellas Avilés*, the participants consisted of a group of high school students enrolled in EFL classes, whose ages ranged approximately from 15 and 17 years old and whose English proficiency level corresponded to A2 level according to the CEFR. English teachers from the same institution also participated by facilitating the instructional intervention and providing pedagogical support. This

research enhances the comprehension of EFL writing by showing the crucial impact of external motivation on improving writing abilities among high school learners.

Introduction

Today, acquiring a new language is crucial. English has been recognized globally as an essential tool, capable of overcoming obstacles and facilitating vital communication in diverse areas such as education, economics, culture, and social life in general. In Ecuador, English is taught as a foreign language. The aim of teaching foreign languages is to improve students' abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, all while cultivating lifelong learners who are innovative and self-assured. However, numerous EFL teachers face challenges in assisting students to cultivate these competencies, particularly when students exhibit low motivation. Motivation stands out as a critical element influencing educational achievement, especially in language courses where interaction with native speakers is scarce (Nat, 2022).

The dynamics of student motivation and their willingness to learn English writing have attracted the interest of educators and researchers alike. Lai (2011) described motivation as the reasons underlying behaviour characterised by willingness and intent, rooted in beliefs, perceptions, and interests. This view aligns with Borah (2021), who characterised motivation as a catalyst for critical thinking, focus, and effective learning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

Motivation drives learners to think, concentrate, and learn efficiently. It is vital for success in learning English, acting as a guide through the complexities of language acquisition (Borah, 2021; Mali, 2015). Nonetheless, motivating students to excel in EFL remains difficult. Engaging uninterested students who lack motivation or interest in school is a common and frustrating challenge faced by educators today (McCombs, 1995; Wardani & Mali, 2023).

In order to tackle these challenges, this research explores the subsequent inquiries:

1. How does extrinsic motivation influence EFL high school students' writing performance?
2. To what extent do external factors such as feedback, rewards, and recognition affect students' organization and quality of writing?
3. How do EFL high school students perceive the role of extrinsic motivation in their motivation to write?

This study explores the influence of extrinsic motivation on EFL high school students' writing skills, focusing on how external factors such as feedback, rewards, and recognition affect their writing performance, organization, and motivation to write, aimed at a group of 80 students, with a selected sample of 35 students from the educational institution Carlos Estarellas Avilés, the findings reveal positive transformations. The information was obtained through interviews,

checklists, and pre- and post-tests, analyzing the relationship between the students and the impact of motivation on improving writing skills.

General Objective

To explore the influence of extrinsic motivation on EFL high school students' writing skills, focusing on how external factors such as feedback, rewards, and recognition affect their writing performance, organisation, and motivation to write.

Specific Objectives

1. To identify the most common types of extrinsic motivational strategies (e.g., grades, feedback, rewards) used by English teachers to foster writing skills among high school students.
2. To examine the relationship between the application of extrinsic motivational strategies and students' performance in writing tasks, particularly in grammar, organisation, and engagement.
3. To analyze students' and teachers' perceptions of how extrinsic motivation influences participation, creativity, and improvement in writing activities

Literature Review

Motivation has long been recognized as a central factor in second language acquisition (SLA), as it directly influences learners' engagement, persistence, and overall academic performance. Within this framework, motivation should not be understood as a fixed trait, but rather as a dynamic and evolving process that shapes how learners approach different language skills over time. This is especially relevant in the case of writing, which is often considered one of the most demanding skills in language learning, as it requires sustained cognitive effort, organization of ideas, and the ability to produce linguistically accurate and coherent texts. As a result, the role of motivation in writing goes beyond simple engagement and becomes a key factor in determining students' ability to develop and refine their writing skills.

In the field of educational psychology, motivation is usually divided into two main forms: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation refers to engaging in an activity for its inherent satisfaction, while extrinsic motivation involves performing tasks to obtain external rewards or to avoid negative consequences. Although intrinsic motivation has traditionally been associated with deeper learning and long-term engagement, extrinsic motivation remains highly relevant in formal educational settings, particularly at the secondary level, where learning is strongly influenced by evaluation systems such as grades, feedback, and institutional expectations. In such contexts, students often rely on external incentives to regulate their learning behaviors, which makes

extrinsic motivation a critical component in understanding academic performance, especially in structured tasks like writing.

Extrinsic motivation, fueled by external incentives or the avoidance of penalties, is detailed by Expectancy-Value Theory, which emphasizes confidence in achieving goals and the worth of results, along with Social Cognitive Theory, which underscores learning through observation and personal belief in one's abilities. These theories are essential for developing successful educational techniques and settings that foster both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Bandhu et al., 2024 Skinner et al., 2008). Extrinsic motivation is influenced by learners' social and environmental circumstances in addition to rewards and external acknowledgment. Students' academic engagement and perseverance can be greatly impacted by a number of factors, including peer interactions, school climate, family support, socioeconomic conditions, and cultural expectations. These outside factors have an impact on students' perceptions of the importance of education and the amount of time and effort they devote to learning activities, such as language learning and writing development. Rather than interpreting these perspectives as contradictory, it is more accurate to consider that the impact of extrinsic motivation depends largely on how it is implemented and perceived by learners. This issue becomes particularly relevant in writing, where both cognitive demands and motivational factors interact, influencing not only students' willingness to write but also the quality of their written production. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding these dynamics by conceptualizing motivation as a continuum that ranges from external regulation to intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). A key element of this theory is the concept of internalization, which refers to the process through which externally regulated behaviors gradually become integrated into the individual's sense of self. This process involves several stages, including external regulation, introjected regulation, and identified regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). In the context of writing, students may initially engage in writing tasks primarily to obtain grades or comply with teacher expectations; however, as they begin to internalize these external goals, they may start to perceive writing as a meaningful and valuable activity. This shift is essential, as it supports more autonomous forms of motivation, which in turn contribute to sustained engagement and improved writing performance over time.

Writing in EFL contexts is widely recognized as a complex and demanding skill that poses significant challenges for learners. Research shows that students consistently benefit when their learning needs are met for competence, relatedness, and autonomy under the scope of SDT (Averill & Major, 2020). Moreover, it tends to lead to academic success through greater self-study and understanding of strong interpersonal relationships (Bell, 2016). Students, on the other hand, are

motivated to engage in activities more instinctively when their skills support their needs (Wolters, 2003).

These difficulties often lead to writing anxiety and avoidance behaviors, particularly among secondary school students, who may perceive writing as a difficult and discouraging task. In this context, motivation becomes a critical factor in determining whether students are willing to engage in writing tasks and persist despite challenges.

Within this framework, extrinsic motivation can serve as an important initial driver that encourages students to participate in writing activities. External factors such as grades, teacher feedback, and classroom expectations can play a significant role in shaping students' behavior, particularly in environments where writing is assessed and evaluated. Among these factors, teacher feedback has been identified as a key element in supporting writing development, as it provides students with guidance for improvement while also reinforcing their sense of competence and achievement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). However, the effectiveness of these external factors depends on how they are perceived by learners. When feedback and evaluation are experienced as supportive and informative, they can enhance motivation and engagement; in contrast, when they are perceived as controlling, they may reduce students' autonomy and limit deeper involvement in the writing process.

Despite the extensive body of research on motivation in SLA, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding the specific influence of extrinsic motivation on writing performance among EFL high school students. Much of the existing research has focused on general language proficiency or has been conducted in higher education settings, leaving secondary-level learners relatively underexplored. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to how different forms of extrinsic motivation—such as feedback, grades, and classroom environment—interact to influence writing development. Addressing this gap is essential for developing a more nuanced understanding of how motivational factors operate in specific learning contexts.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the influence of extrinsic motivation on EFL high school students' writing performance, with the goal of contributing to a more context-specific understanding of how external motivational factors can be effectively used to support writing development and improve learning outcomes. This focus ensures alignment between the literature, the research problem, and the objectives of the study.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a quasi-experimental research design with a pre-test and post-test approach to examine the effect of extrinsic motivation on EFL high school students' writing performance. This design was selected because it allows for the measurement of changes within the same group over time, making it particularly suitable for educational contexts where random assignment is not feasible. By comparing students' performance before and after the intervention, it is possible to identify the extent to which the implementation of extrinsic motivational strategies influences writing development.

In addition, a mixed-methods approach was employed in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Quantitative data, derived from writing scores, enabled the measurement of changes in performance and motivation levels, while qualitative data, obtained through interviews, checklist and document analysis, offered deeper insight into participants' experiences and perceptions. The integration of both approaches strengthens the validity of the study by allowing for triangulation of data and a more nuanced interpretation of the results.

Participants and Context

The study was conducted at *Unidad Educativa Carlos Estarellas Avilés*, an educational institution located in Ecuador. This context was selected due to its relevance to the target population, as it represents a typical EFL learning environment at the secondary level, where students are required to develop writing skills as part of the national curriculum.

The participants consisted of a group of high school students enrolled in EFL classes, whose ages ranged approximately from 15 and 17 years old and whose English proficiency level corresponded to A2 level according to the CEFR. English teachers from the same institution also participated by facilitating the instructional intervention and providing pedagogical support.

A non-probabilistic convenience sampling method was used, as participants were selected based on accessibility and their enrollment in a grade level where writing skills are a central component of instruction. Although this sampling method limits the generalizability of the findings, it is appropriate for exploratory studies conducted within specific educational contexts.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, and measures were taken to ensure confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation. Consent was obtained prior to data collection, in accordance with ethical research standards.

Instruments

Data collection was carried out using multiple instruments in order to ensure methodological triangulation and enhance the reliability of the findings.

First, **writing pre-tests and post-tests** were administered to assess students' writing performance before and after the intervention. Participants were required to produce short essays based on specific prompts designed to elicit comparable responses. Their writing was evaluated using an analytic rubric that assessed key components, including grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and organization. The use of a standardized rubric ensured consistency in scoring and allowed for objective comparison between pre- and post-test results.

Second, an **extrinsic motivation checklist** was administered using a Likert-scale format. This instrument was designed to measure students' levels of extrinsic motivation in relation to writing tasks, including aspects such as grades, rewards, teacher feedback, and external recognition. The checklist was applied both before and after the intervention in order to identify changes in motivational levels over time.

Third, **semi-structured interviews** were conducted with selected students and English teachers. This instrument allowed for the exploration of participants' perceptions regarding the use of extrinsic motivational strategies in writing activities. The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to gather detailed and context-specific information that could not be captured through quantitative measures alone.

Finally, **document analysis** was conducted on students' written texts produced during the pre-test and post-test phases. This analysis complemented the quantitative data by identifying qualitative improvements in writing performance, such as increased coherence, more accurate language use, and better organization of ideas.

Procedure

The study was conducted over a period of 3 weeks and was organized into three main phases: pre-intervention, intervention, and post-intervention.

During the **pre-intervention phase**, students completed a writing pre-test in order to establish their initial level of writing performance. In addition, they responded to the extrinsic motivation checklist to determine baseline levels of motivation. This phase provided the necessary data for comparison with post-intervention results.

The **intervention phase** involved the implementation of instructional strategies designed to enhance extrinsic motivation within regular EFL classes. These strategies included the use of rewards and incentives (such as points and recognition), positive reinforcement through constructive feedback, goal-setting activities, and public acknowledgment of students' achievements. These techniques were selected because they represent common forms of extrinsic motivation in educational settings and are expected to influence students' engagement and effort.

The intervention was integrated into regular classroom instruction and facilitated by English teachers, ensuring that it was applied consistently and in an authentic learning environment. During the **post-intervention phase**, students completed a writing post-test and the extrinsic motivation checklist again in order to measure changes in both writing performance and motivational levels. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data on participants' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward the use of extrinsic motivation in writing activities.

Results.

Based on the above, the results obtained from the collection of evidence during the investigation are used to determine the analysis of the interview.

Tabla 1.

Analysis of the interview

Category	Key Findings	Supporting (Interview Data)	Evidence Interpretation
Role of Extrinsic Motivation	Grades motivate students to complete tasks and meet deadlines	“Grades play an important role. They encourage students to complete tasks...”	Extrinsic motivation promotes task completion and effort, especially in assessed activities
Teaching Strategies	Use of real-life topics, student choice, and technology	“Connecting writing tasks to real-life situations... blogs, online journals”	Motivation increases when external incentives are combined with meaningful activities
Feedback as Motivation	Personalized and constructive feedback is highly effective	“Constructive personalized feedback is the most motivating”	Feedback functions as a key external motivator that guides improvement
Impact on Writing Performance	Improvement in grammar and structure	“There are noticeable improvements... particularly in grammar and structure”	Extrinsic motivation positively influences measurable aspects of writing
Short-Term Effect	Students perform better when tasks are graded	“Students tend to put more effort into assignments that are graded”	The impact of extrinsic motivation is mainly

Category	Key Findings	Supporting Evidence (Interview Data)	Interpretation
			immediate rather than long-term
Challenges	Low confidence, “Lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, limited vocabulary, fear of mistakes	Internal factors limit the effectiveness of extrinsic motivation making mistakes...”	
Teacher’s Role	Teacher as facilitator and motivator	“Teachers should act as facilitators and motivators”	Teachers play a crucial role in applying motivational strategies
External Support Factors	Access to resources and technology	“Access to learning resources... integration of the technology”	External conditions enhance the effectiveness of motivation strategies

The thematic analysis revealed that extrinsic motivation significantly influences the development of writing skills, especially in the form of grades and external rewards, playing a crucial role in encouraging students to participate in writing assignments and meet academic requirements. Teachers noted that students tend to demonstrate greater effort and better performance when their work is assessed, particularly in aspects such as grammar and structure.

Furthermore, external motivation tactics, such as individualized feedback, the use of rubrics, and the incorporation of technology, were recognized as effective tools for increasing student engagement. These results indicate that extrinsic motivation is related not only to academic performance but also to teaching methodologies that offer clear direction and reinforcement.

However, the data also suggests that the effects of external motivation are mostly temporary and can be limited by internal factors, such as low self-confidence, a limited vocabulary, and fear of making mistakes. This highlights the importance of complementing external strategies with methods that promote more intense and sustained engagement in writing.

Table 2.

Descriptive statistics of pre-test and post-test scores

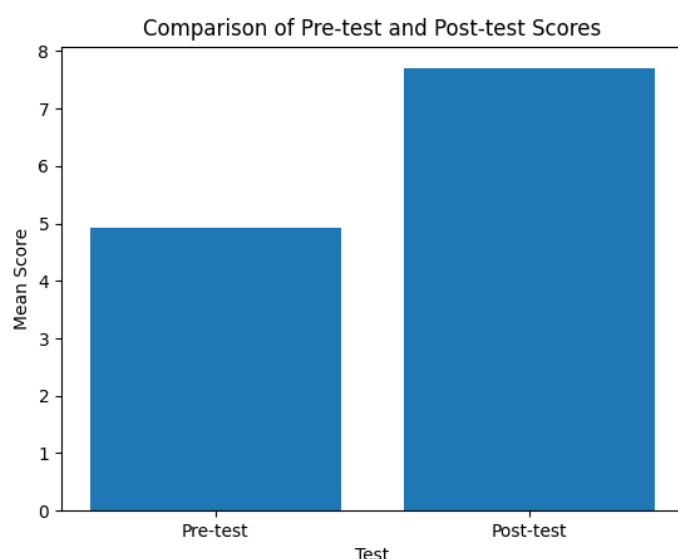
Variable	N	M	SD	Min	Max
Pre-test	35	4.93	0.84	3	6
Post-test	35	7.70	0.53	7	9

The data was analyzed using Jamovi software. A Shapiro-Wilk test was performed to determine if the distributions were normal. The findings showed that the pretest ($W = 0.897$, $p = 0.003$) and posttest ($W = 0.880$, $p = 0.001$) scores did not follow normal distribution.

Descriptive statistics indicated that students significantly improved their writing performance between the pretest ($M = 4.93$, $SD = 0.84$) and posttest ($M = 7.70$, $SD = 0.53$). Because the data were not normally distributed, a Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to compare the scores before and after the intervention. The results showed a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores ($W = 0.00$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that external motivation had a positive effect on students' writing performance. The effect size was substantial ($r = 1.00$), indicating a strong impact of the intervention.

Figure 1

Comparison between pre-test and post-test scores.



According to Figure 1, there was a notable increase in students' writing performance between the initial and final assessments. The average score increased from 4.93 to 7.70, reflecting a considerable improvement after the intervention. This observed trend is consistent with the findings of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test, which verified that the variation between the two measurements was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

Discussion

Motivation plays a fundamental role in education, as confirmed by various studies. In this research, our objective was to explore the influence of extrinsic motivation on the writing skills of secondary school students of English as a foreign language, focusing on how external factors such as

feedback, rewards, and recognition affect their writing performance, organization, and motivation to write. The findings provide strong evidence that extrinsic motivation plays a significant role in enhancing students' writing outcomes.

From a quantitative perspective, the results revealed a statistically significant improvement in students' writing performance between the pre-test and post-test scores ($p < .001$). This finding is consistent with previous research showing that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are positively associated with language learning achievement (Araya Quesada et al., 2024). The substantial increase in mean scores suggests that the implementation of extrinsic motivational strategies contributed to measurable academic gains.

According to Em et al. (2022), Current studies demonstrate that learners displayed a considerable degree of external motivation to learn English as a second language. Influential external elements that could have contributed to this motivation encompass goals of obtaining excellent grades, preparation for exams, seeking external rewards, and encouragement from parents or caregivers. By combining both external and internal motivators, the results suggest that students within the assessed environment exhibited a moderate eagerness toward acquiring English as a foreign language.

Additionally, the significant levels of extrinsic motivation noted among students support the concept that external influences like rewards, grades, and constructive feedback can play a crucial role in shaping learning behaviors. As highlighted by Alnasser and Almoaily (2026), implementing motivational techniques that involve organized feedback and reinforcement greatly improves students' involvement and success in writing activities. In this regard, the outcomes of the current research bolster the perspective that extrinsic motivation acts as a key factor in fostering academic success within EFL settings.

From a qualitative perspective, the interview data provided deeper insights into how extrinsic motivation influenced students' learning experiences. The themes identified—external incentives, increased effort, and positive perceptions aligned with recent qualitative findings. For instance, Abdel Latif and colleagues (2025) highlight that motivational techniques led by instructors influence how engaged students are and their perspectives on writing. In a similar vein, participants in the current research indicated that grades and responses prompted them to be more involved and put in more effort, shedding light on the enhancements seen in the quantitative data.

The merging of the two data sets illustrates a supportive link between performance levels and students' perceptions. Although the statistical results showed progress, qualitative insights clarified the factors driving this transformation. Notably, external motivators seemed to amplify students'

dedication and their commitment to tasks, which subsequently led to improved writing results. This reinforces modern viewpoints asserting that motivation functions as a complex system characterized by the interplay of both outside and internal influences (Jalmasco & Estremera, 2025).

Moreover, recent studies underscore the importance of feedback as a vital tool for teaching and motivation. Luquin and García Mayo (2024) state that when feedback is paired with motivational reinforcement, it can considerably boost writing skills and student engagement. These discoveries resonate with the current research, where students clearly noted that feedback and assessment guidelines heightened their motivation and effort.

In summary, the findings verify that external motivation not only fosters student involvement but also results in noteworthy enhancements in writing skills. Nevertheless, motivation is intricately layered. Although external elements proved beneficial in this analysis, upcoming studies should explore their relationship with internal motivation to support sustained learning achievements. Merging both quantitative and qualitative findings offers a well-rounded perspective on the intervention's impact.

Quantitative data indicated a meaningful enhancement in students' writing capabilities. This enhancement is corroborated by qualitative insights from the checklist, which indicated heightened engagement and involvement, along with feedback from interviews where students expressed favorable views of their educational experience.

In essence, these results imply that the teaching techniques applied during the intervention played a vital role in the advancements seen in students' capabilities and their behavior in the classroom.

Conclusions

This research enhances the comprehension of EFL writing by showcasing the crucial impact of external motivation on improving writing abilities among high school learners. Specifically, techniques like ongoing feedback, incentives, and acknowledgment were shown to have a favorable effect on students' mindsets and the results they achieve in writing assignments. A significant insight is the importance of instructor feedback as a vital external element, as it not only aids in correcting mistakes but also enhances the coherence, structure, and overall caliber of students' written work.

The results also yield vital educational implications for EFL instructional methods. The integration of structured and constructive feedback can greatly elevate students' participation and writing proficiency. Moreover, employing incentives and recognitions can effectively stimulate initial motivation. Nonetheless, these methods must be carefully harmonized with strategies that

encourage student independence, ensuring that learners gradually cultivate more enduring forms of motivation and autonomy in their writing endeavors.

Nevertheless, this research does have some limitations. Concentrating on a specific cohort of high school students may restrict the applicability of the results to different contexts or demographics. Additionally, the brief length of the intervention does not permit a comprehensive evaluation of the long-term implications of external motivation on writing progress. Lastly, focusing primarily on external influences does not fully account for the intricacies of students' motivation dynamics, indicating a need for additional studies that also explore intrinsic motivation.

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