

An Investigation Into the Relationship Between Saudi College EFL Learners' Motivational Orientations, Learning Autonomy, and Achievement

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Abstract—Using the Self Determination Theory (SDT) and the L2 Motivation Self System (L2MSS) as referential framework, this study aimed to explore Saudi college EFL learners' motivation and autonomy in terms of dominant motivational orientations, differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and between ideal and ought-to L2 selves, the level of learning autonomy, and gender differences in motivation and learning autonomy. It also aimed to identify whether motivation predicted learners' autonomy. A further aim was to identify whether motivation and autonomy predicted learners' achievement. Using a 24-item questionnaire, data was collected from 169 learners on their motivational orientations and autonomy. Statistical analysis revealed that the learners' ideal L2 self ranked first followed by intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and ought-to L2 self. Significant differences were found between learners' self-determined/internalized motivation and external motivation in favor of the self-determined/internalized motivation. Learners' autonomy was found to be high and no gender differences were found in learners' motivation or autonomy. Intrinsic motivation and ideal L2 self were found to be the best predictors of learners' autonomy. Of all motivational orientations and learning autonomy, learning autonomy, ideal L2 self and intrinsic motivation explained 47% of variance in learners' achievement. In brief, learners' self-determined/internalized motivation affected their autonomy most strongly, and both autonomy and self-determined/internalized motivation accounted for a sizeable proportion of their achievement.

Index Terms—motivational orientations, learning autonomy, achievement, Saudi college EFL learners

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the paradigm shift that has moved emphasis from the teacher to the learner, learner characteristics and variables have received considerable research interest. Of the learner variables that have received and are still receiving research interest in second (SL) and foreign language (FL) learning are motivation and learner autonomy. The investigation of such variables in different FL contexts is justifiable given that these variables are subject to cultural variations. Contrary to theoretical assumptions, findings of research conducted in different SL and FL contexts revealed that no specific type of motivation is universal in the sense that it works for learners everywhere. Furthermore, learners can engage in language learning by a combination of motives that are theoretically different in nature (e.g., internalized and external motives). Intrinsic motivation can foster language learning in contexts, whereas extrinsic motivation works better for learners in other contexts. Still in other contexts learners can endorse both types of motivation (Brown, 2007). An example of a motivational orientation that works differently in different cultures is the ought-to L2 self that did not prove to be influential in western cultures, but proved influential in Asian cultures (Yashima et al., 2017). It is arguable then that types of motivation are not mutually exclusive and that no type of motivation is superior to another.

As there are variations in motivated language learning across different SL and FL contexts, research revealed mixed findings regarding the effect of motivation on language learning. In some studies, general or specific types of motivation correlated positively with language achievement (Karatas et al., 2015; Teng & Xu, 2015; Alrabai & Moskovsky, 2016; Vaseghi et al., 2020). In other studies, no positive reflection of motivation on achievement was reported (Altasan, 2016; Afshar & Jamshidi, 2022). This provides a rationale for examining the relationship between motivation and achievement in various SL and FL contexts given that this relationship can be lacking or that specific types of motivation, internalized or external, have shown different patterns of relationship with language achievement or proficiency. Learning autonomy, an aim actively sought in today's language education, is another learner variable that is currently receiving noticeable research interest. Like motivation, autonomy is cultural-bound with learners being autonomous in cultures and less autonomous in others.

No consistent research findings regarding the effect of motivation on learning autonomy or language learning have been reported. There are studies reporting a positive relationship between autonomy and motivation (Spratt et al., 2002; Benson, 2007; Liu, 2015; Csizér & Albert, 2024). Meanwhile, there are studies negating this relationship (Hashemian & Soureshjani, 2011; Foroutan et al., 2013). Similarly, some studies reported a positive correlation between autonomy and

language learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013; Karatas et al., 2015; Tan & Zhang, 2015; Jianfeng et al., 2018), while others reported lack of this relationship (Zhang & Li, 2004; Zarei & Zarei, 2015; Ezzi, 2018). The inconsistent research findings regarding the interrelationships among motivation, autonomy and language achievement provides an impetus to explore these interrelationships in various FL contexts. Such investigations can provide a valuable profile of learners' motivated autonomous learning and its relation to language achievement.

The present study aimed to explore the profile of Saudi college EFL learners' motivation and autonomy. The motivational orientations investigated in the present study were taken from the SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and the L2MSS (Dörnyei, 2009). Two orientations were selected from the two motivation models, one from each model. These two orientations represented self-determined/internalized motivation (intrinsic motivation from the SDT and the ideal L2 self from the L2MSS). Two other orientations represented external motivation (extrinsic motivation from the SDT and the ought-to L2 self from the L2MSS). This would help in determining whether the Saudi learners are internally or externally motivated to learn English. The study also explored the relationship between learners' motivation and autonomy, specifically whether learners' motivation contributes to their learning autonomy. Furthermore, the study identified the effect of motivation and autonomy on learners' achievement. More specifically, the study addressed the following questions:

1. What is the profile of Saudi college EFL learners' motivation and autonomy in terms of (a) dominant motivational orientations, (b) differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, and between ideal and ought-to L2 selves, (c) the level of learning autonomy, and (d) gender differences in motivation and learning autonomy?
2. What are the contributions of motivational orientations to learners' autonomy?
3. What are the contributions of motivational orientations and autonomy to learners' achievement?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Motivation

Motivation is indispensable for successful language learning because it drives learners to initiate and pursue the demanding language learning task. Dörnyei (2005) argues that "Without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals, and neither are appropriate curricula and good teaching enough on their own to ensure student achievement" (p. 65). Motivation refers to the reasons for which individuals learn a language. An influential motivation theory in SL is the SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to this theory, different types of motivation are conceived of as lying on a continuum depending on the degree of self-determination or locus of causality, with amotivation and intrinsic motivation at opposite ends. At the lower end, there is amotivation followed by four types of extrinsic motivation, namely external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation. At the higher end, there is intrinsic motivation. Since the emergence of this theory, researchers have investigated two main types of motivation, namely intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to "motivation to engage in an activity for its own sake", while extrinsic motivation refers to "motivation to engage in an activity as a means to an end" (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002, p. 245). Intrinsically motivated learners engage in language learning out of inherent enjoyment and the sense of achievement and satisfaction. Extrinsically motivated learners, on the other hand, engage in language learning for external contingencies and utilitarian benefits such as passing a required course. Although the SDT postulates that intrinsic motivation is more influential than extrinsic motivation, research has shown that in given contexts, extrinsic motivation can be more influential than intrinsic motivation. This suggests that motivation is culture-bound with learners being mainly intrinsically motivated in cultures and extrinsically motivated in others. Furthermore, learners can engage in learning by a combination of motives that are theoretically different in nature (e.g., internalized and external motives).

Another influential model of motivation is the L2MSS (Dörnyei, 2009). This system is based on Gardner's revised model of motivation and Ryan and Deci's SDT. However, in this system "the motivationally important identifications are not with others but with future versions of the self" (Lamb, 2013, p. 1000). The system has three constituents: the ideal L2 self, the ought-to L2 self, and learning experience. The self one would inherently like to become in the future, i.e., becoming a competent language user is the ideal-L2 self, whereas the self one would like to become to meet others' expectations or avoid negatives consequences is the ought-to L2 self. A learner with an ideal L2 self orientation will engage in language learning to realize the desired self. Unlikely, a learner with an ought-to L2 self will engage in language learning to avoid the dreaded self. The desire to move from the current self to the ideal L2 self shapes motivation to learn a language (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). The ideal L2 self is thus similar to intrinsic motivation in the SDT in that it is self-determined/internalized, whereas the ought-to L2 self is similar to extrinsic motivation in that it is less self-determined and external. As the SDT attributes more significance to intrinsic motivation, the L2MSS attributes more significance to the ideal L2 self. However, research has reported the ought-to self as being influential in some SL and FL contexts. For instance, in a study conducted by Yashima et al. (2017) in an Asian context, both the ideal and ought-to L2 selves predicted language proficiency. The researchers attributed the motivational power of the ought-to L2 self to "what appears to be context-driven differences" (p. 701).

B. Autonomy

Learner autonomy is now an incontrovertible goal of language education, especially in FL contexts. Long (2014) argues that autonomy can compensate for the input-poor nature of FL contexts where language learning is mainly limited to the classroom. Although there is no consensus on what learner autonomy is, a definition that captures the essence of autonomy is Little's (1991) 'a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision making and independent action' (p. 4). Benson (2001) maintains that autonomy entails that learners exercise control over learning management, cognitive processing and learning content. By reviewing literature on learner autonomy, one can identify a number of facts about autonomy that seem to be widely agreed upon. First, autonomy is not innate (Sinclair, 2000). Rather, it can be acquired through autonomy supported learning environments. Second, there are degrees of autonomy and complete autonomy is idealistic. It is not something that one can acquire once and for ever. Rather, learners, if engaged in autonomy-nurturing environments, get more autonomous with time (Nunan, 1997). This is reflected in Sinclair's (2000) assertion that "promoting learner autonomy is a matter of empowering learners so that they are in a better position to take on more responsibility for their learning than before" (p. 8). Third, autonomy does not "require the teacher to relinquish all initiative, intervention and control" (Little, 1991, p. 3). The teacher needs to play the important role of converting the learning environment into one that nurtures autonomy, which is not an easy task. Fourth, autonomy is not something that can be programmed into lessons (Little, 1991). Rather, it is a practice where learners are engaged in all aspects of their learning, e.g., setting learning objectives, selecting material, tasks and learning methods, and evaluating their progress (Benson, 2007).

Researchers offer a number of principles which, if applied, can make the FL classroom autonomy supportive. Little (2020) argues that the promotion of language learner autonomy entails "a teaching/learning dynamic in which learners plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate their own learning" (p. 1). That is, for learners to be autonomous, they need to actively engage in learning activities. They need to reflect on their learning and make changes to their learning approach based on the outcomes of reflection. Benson (2001) recommends training on effective language learning strategies, which constitute a tool learners need to be autonomous in their approach to learning. There is also a need for deviation from the traditional roles of teachers and learners. More specifically, the role of the teacher should change from an authoritative conveyor of knowledge into a facilitator and a guide of the learning process. Similarly, the role of learner should change from a passive recipient of knowledge into an active planner of own learning. In this respect Dam (2011) suggests that the development of learner autonomy entails "a move from a teacher-directed teaching environment to a learner-directed learning environment" (p. 41). Finally, Lewis and Reinders (2008) recommend changing the attitude of learners whom they describe as "teacher-centered" (p. 97). Such learners resist autonomous language learning practices and underestimate non-language activities that nurture autonomy like reflection on learning and evaluation of progress.

C. The Relationship Between Motivation, Autonomy and Achievement

Whether motivation precedes autonomy or vice versa has long been debated. The SDT postulates that autonomy is an antecedent to motivation. Contrary to this view, Spratt et al. (2002) found that motivated language learning among Chinese university students enhanced their engagement in autonomous learning practices inside and outside the classroom. Their findings suggest that lack of motivation debilitates the development of learner autonomy. This unresolved debate urged many scholars to maintain that the relationship between motivation and autonomy works in both directions. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2013) conclude that motivation, autonomy, and learning achievement are interrelated forming a cycle. Many researchers in various EFL contexts found a positive correlation between general or specific types of motivation and autonomy. Khonamri et al. (2020) studied the relationship between 100 Iranian EFL learners' motivation and autonomy. A significant positive correlation was found between autonomy and intrinsic motivation, while the correlation between autonomy and extrinsic motivation was significant but negative. In the Taiwanese context, Liu (2015) experimented with 150 non-English majors and reported that motivation explained 50% of variance in learners' autonomous learning. In some other studies, motivation and autonomy did not correlate positively (Hashemian & Soureshjani, 2011; Foroutan et al., 2013; Khonamri et al., 2020). For instance, Foroutan et al. (2013) did not find a significant positive relationship between 361 Malaysian EFL learners' motivation and autonomy.

As to the relationship between learner autonomy and language learning outcomes, a large number of studies found that autonomy leads to better language learning outcomes. For instance, Jianfeng et al. (2018) examined the relationship between motivation, autonomy, and language proficiency of 458 Chinese EFL learners. Motivation and autonomy had significant positive relationships with language proficiency. However, motivation was found to be a better predictor of learners' language proficiency than autonomy. In another study Tan and Zhang (2015) conducted with 212 Chinese EFL learners, learner autonomy strongly explained variance in learners' language proficiency. Other studies did not report positive relationship between autonomy and language learning. In a study conducted on Saudi EFL learners (Alrabai & Moskovsky, 2016), motivation emerged as the strongest predictor of academic achievement, whereas the effect of autonomy on academic achievement was marginal. In another study conducted on Iranian EFL learners by Zarei and Zarei (2015), neither autonomy nor motivation correlated positively with language proficiency.

As the case with learner autonomy, mixed research findings have been reported for the relationship between motivation and language learning, with the larger number of studies reporting a positive relationship. In a Turkish study, Karatas et al. (2015) explored the prediction of English majors' academic achievement by their motivational orientations and autonomous learning. Both intrinsic motivation and autonomous learning strongly predicted learners' academic achievement. A similar finding was reached among Chinese EFL learners (Teng & Xu, 2015) where intrinsic

motivation was found to strongly influence learners' academic achievement. In an Iranian study (Vaseghi et al., 2020), motivation correlated positively with the English proficiency of 60 EFL learners. However, in other studies, no positive relationship between motivation and language learning was reported. In a Saudi sample of EFL learners, achievement scores were not affected by either integrative or instrumental motivation (Altasan, 2016). The effect of motivation on a sample of Iranian EFL learners was found to be marginal compared to personality types (Ebrahimi & Heidarypur, 2016).

D. The Research Context

English is a FL in Saudi Arabia and, as argued by Altasan (2016), it is "rarely spoken in Saudi community and is one of the most failed classes in schools. Many students have no motive to learn English and wonder why they have to study it" (p. 1133). Saudi EFL learners' achievement has been reported to be poor (Al-Khairi, 2013; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). Until recently, studies have reported Saudi learners as non-autonomous (Alrabai, 2017; Asiri & Shukri, 2020). Researchers attributed the low level of learner autonomy among Saudi learners to teacher-centered and spoon-feeding teaching. However, a recent study (Haque et al., 2023) reported Saudi learners as autonomous. The researchers nonetheless documented some obstacles against Saudi EFL learners' autonomy. These included over reliance on their teachers and on their test results, lack of opportunity to express their opinions about learning and not discussing how they work out their learning tasks. There may be a recent move to learner autonomy in the Saudi context and further research endeavors are required to verify this trend, if any. Regarding motivation, Saudi learners have been reported to be lacking motivation to learn English (Al-Khairi, 2013; Alrabai, 2014). Alrabai (2014) attributed lack of motivation among Saudi learners to inappropriate teacher behaviors, students' low self-esteem and self-confidence, high language anxiety, low autonomy, and inappropriate methods of teaching. Furthermore, Saudi learners have been generally found to be instrumentally or extrinsically motivated to learn English (Altasan, 2016; Kassem & Alqahtani, 2023). Accordingly, investigating Saudi EFL learners' motivation and autonomy and how they relate to each other and to academic achievement may shed more light on these significant learner variables.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

A total of 202 students in the Preparatory Year Program (PYP) at an emerging Saudi University were invited to electronically complete the research instruments at the end of the academic year 2023. However, because of missing data, the data of only 169 students was statistically treated. Upon completion of the PYP, the participants would initiate their main university study in medicine ($n = 74$, 43.8%), nursing ($n = 57$, 33.7%), and computer science ($n = 38$, 22.5%). Of the 169 participants, 93 (55%) were females and 76 (45%) were males. Students join the PYP program after they complete their high school (the science section) and satisfy the admission criteria for the PYP. They are native speakers of Arabic and have the same EFL experience regarding years of study and exposure to English.

B. The Instruments

(a). The Motivation and Autonomy Questionnaire

A 24-item questionnaire was used to collect data about learners' motivational orientations and learning autonomy. Driven from the SDT, two orientations represented internalized (i.e., intrinsic motivation) and external guides (i.e., extrinsic motivation). The other two orientations were taken from L2MSS. These were ideal and ought-to L2 selves. A fifth scale measured learning autonomy. Items were developed or adapted from relevant questionnaires in previous studies (Benson, 2007; Ryan, 2009; Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010; Kassem, 2022). Here is a brief description of the scales with sample items:

1. *Intrinsic motivation* (4 items): tapped into themes of learning English for inherent enjoyment (e.g., I study English because studying English is fun; making progress in learning English gives me a feeling of success and achievement).
2. *Extrinsic motivation* (4 items): included items focusing on learning English for external contingencies (e.g., I study English only because it is a required course; I study English because it will be helpful for my future career).
3. *Ideal L2 self* (4 items): had items about imagined successful future language user (e.g. whenever I think of my future career, I imagine myself using English; I can imagine myself living abroad and using English effectively for communicating with locals).
4. *Ought-to L2 self* (4 items): included items related to meeting expectations and avoiding negative outcomes (e.g., I have to study English because if I do not, I think my parents will be disappointed with me; It will have a negative impact on my life if I don't learn English).
5. *Learning autonomy* (8 items): reflected such aspects of autonomy as responsibility for learning, reflection on learning, self-assessment of progress in learning, and use of learning resources (e.g., I use resources like the Internet for my English study; I seek opportunities to practice the English language).

Students responded to the items based on a 5-point scale ranging from 5 "strongly agree" to 1 "strongly disagree". The preliminary version of the questionnaire was administered to a pilot sample of 53 students and its internal consistency was checked by calculating correlations among items and their respective scales. All items correlated

strongly ($p = 0.01$) with their scales with correlations ranging between 0.57 and 0.90. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients of the scales and the total questionnaire ranged between 0.71 and 0.91. That is, the questionnaire and its scales were internally consistent and reliable.

(b). *Achievement*

The students' achievement scores were obtained by averaging their scores in the two courses they study in the PYP: Eng 109 and Eng 110. The total score for each course is 100 obtained from three exams: two midterm exams and a final exam. Thus, a student's minimum score is 0 and maximum score is 100. All the exams the students take in the two courses, midterm or final, include sections on listening comprehension, reading comprehension, writing, grammar and vocabulary. That is, with the exception of speaking, the exams include the main language skills and language elements.

IV. RESULTS

A. *The Profile of Students' Motivational Orientation*

(a). *The Students' Dominant Motivational Orientations*

Before conducting the statistical analysis, the normal distribution of scores was checked by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test. All the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test values were greater than 0.05, indicating that all sets of scores were normally distributed and parametric statistics could be used. To consider a mean as high, medium or low, Oxford's (2001) scoring system was used: high (mean of 3.5 or higher), medium (mean of 2.5 - 3.4), and low (mean of 2.4 or lower). Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the participants' motivational orientations. Of the four motivational orientations, ideal L2 self ranked first ($M = 4.12$, high agreement), followed by intrinsic motivation ($M = 4.02$, high agreement), extrinsic motivation ($M = 3.82$, high agreement), and ought-to L2 self ($M = 3.44$, moderate agreement). This indicates that students' more internalized orientations (ideal L2 self and intrinsic motivation) are stronger than their less internalized ones (extrinsic motivation and ought-to L2 self).

TABLE 1
THE DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF STUDENTS' MOTIVATIONAL ORIENTATIONS

	N	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Intrinsic motivation	169	4.02	.760	-.558	-.242
Extrinsic motivation	169	3.82	.700	.001	-.486
Ideal L2 self	169	4.12	.776	-.770	.123
Ought-to L2 self	169	3.44	.836	-.077	-.367

(b). *Differences Between Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation, and Between Ideal and Ought-To L2 Selves*

The results of the paired-samples t-test (Table 2) revealed a statistically significant difference ($t = 3.5$, $p = .000$) between students' intrinsic ($M = 4.02$) and extrinsic ($M = 3.82$) motivation in favor of intrinsic motivation, signifying that their intrinsic motivation is substantially higher than their extrinsic motivation. Similarly, a statistically significant difference ($t = 9.8$, $p = .000$) was found between students' ideal L2 self ($M = 4.12$) and ought-to L2 self ($M = 3.44$) in favor of the ideal L2 self, indicating that their ideal L2 self is substantially higher than their ought-to L2 self. Overall, these results mean that students are basically motivated by self-determined/internalized contingencies.

TABLE 2
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION, AND BETWEEN IDEAL AND OUGHT-TO L2 SELVES

Variable	M	SD	SEM	t-value	Sig. (2-tailed)
Intrinsic motivation	4.02	.760	.058	3.5	.000
Extrinsic motivation	3.82	.700	.054		
Ideal L2 self	4.12	.776	.060	9.8	.000
Ought-to L2 self	3.44	.836	.064		

(c). *The Level of Students' Learning Autonomy*

As listed in Table 3, the students' learner autonomy is high ($M = 3.84$). That is, students can be said to be autonomous learners of English as a foreign language.

TABLE 3
THE DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF STUDENTS' LEARNING AUTONOMY

	N	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Learning autonomy	169	3.84	.716	-.151	-.833

(d). *Gender Differences in Motivational Orientations and Learning Autonomy*

The t-test for independent samples revealed no gender significant differences in any of the five variables. There is a difference in intrinsic motivation in favor of females, but it was no significant ($t = .081$). Overall, male and female students were similar in their orientations and autonomous learning.

TABLE 4
THE T-TEST FOR GENDER DIFFERENCES IN STUDENTS' MOTIVATIONAL ORIENTATIONS AND LEARNING AUTONOMY

Variable	Test	N	M	SD	t-value	Sig.
Intrinsic motivation	Male	76	3.91	.818	-1.75	.081
	Female	93	4.11	.699		
Extrinsic motivation	Male	76	3.77	.759	-.840	.402
	Female	93	3.86	.650		
Ideal L2 self	Male	76	4.11	.827	-.138	.891
	Female	93	4.13	.737		
Ought-to L2 self	Male	76	3.50	.844	.898	.371
	Female	93	3.39	.831		
Learning autonomy	Male	76	3.81	.747	-.511	.610
	Female	93	3.86	.693		

B. Prediction of Learning Autonomy by Motivational Orientations

Intrinsic motivation correlated most strongly with the ideal L2 self ($r = .58$) and to a much lesser degree with the ought-to L2 self ($r = .26$). Similarly, extrinsic motivation correlated most strongly with the ought-to L2 self ($r = .52$) and to a lesser extent with the ideal L2 self ($r = .47$). This indicates that the self-determined/internalized orientations in the SDT and the L2MSS (i.e., intrinsic motivation and ideal L2 self) are closely related. Similarly, the external orientations (i.e., extrinsic motivation and the ought-to L2 self) are closely related. Overall, this indicates that the self-determined/internalized orientations in the SDT and L2MSS models are similar constructs, and so are the external orientations.

All orientations significantly and positively ($p \leq .01$) correlated with learning autonomy. The orientations that had the strongest correlation with learning autonomy were intrinsic motivation ($r = .53$) and the ideal L2 self ($r = .51$). Extrinsic motivation ($r = .47$) and ought-to L2 self ($r = .37$) also correlated positively with learning autonomy, but to a lesser extent than intrinsic motivation and ideal L2 self. This means that students' learning autonomy correlated more strongly with self-determined/internalized motivations. Achievement correlated most strongly with the ideal L2 self and learning autonomy ($r = .58$ for each) followed by intrinsic motivation ($r = .56$), and extrinsic motivation ($r = .43$). It correlated least strongly with the ought-to L2 self ($r = .22$).

TABLE 5
THE CORRELATIONS BETWEEN STUDENTS' MOTIVATIONAL ORIENTATIONS, LEARNING AUTONOMY AND ACHIEVEMENT

	1	2	3	4	5	6
(1) Intrinsic motivation	-					
(2) Extrinsic motivation	.48**	-				
(3) Ideal L2 self	.58**	.47**	-			
(4) Ought-to L2 self	.26**	.52**	.37**	-		
(5) Autonomy	.53**	.47**	.51**	.37**	-	
(6) Achievement	.56**	.43**	.58**	.22**	.58**	-

To examine the contribution of motivational orientations to students' learning autonomy, a stepwise regression analysis was conducted with the four motivational orientations as predictor variables and learning autonomy as the outcome variable. Before running the regression analyses, the assumptions of normality and linearity were checked and no issues were found. The analysis produced three significant models (Table 6). In model 1, intrinsic motivation alone ($\beta = .53$, $t = 8.0$, $p = .000$) significantly and positively contributed to learning autonomy with 28%. In model 2, both intrinsic motivation ($\beta = .35$, $t = 4.5$, $p = .000$) and ideal L2 self ($\beta = .31$, $t = 4.1$, $p = .000$) significantly and positively contributed to learning autonomy with 35%. In model 3, intrinsic motivation ($\beta = .28$, $t = 3.5$, $p = .000$), ideal L2 self ($\beta = .25$, $t = 3.2$, $p = .000$), and extrinsic motivation ($\beta = .22$, $t = 3.0$, $p = .003$) significantly and positively contributed to learning autonomy with 38%. These results indicate that the strongest predictors of learning autonomy were intrinsic motivation and ideal L2 self, both being internalized motivations. Extrinsic motivation also predicted learning autonomy but to a lesser extent. The ought-to L2 self failed to predict learning autonomy. It is therefore safe to say that more internalized motivational orientations are much stronger predictors of Saudi college EFL students' learning autonomy than less internalized motivational orientations.

TABLE 6
STEPWISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION FOR PREDICTING LEARNING AUTONOMY BY MOTIVATIONAL ORIENTATIONS

Predictors	R	R ²	F	B	SE	β	t	p
<i>Model 1</i>								
Intrinsic motivation	.53	.28	64.7***	.50	.062	.53	8.0	.000
<i>Model 2</i>								
Intrinsic motivation	.58	.35	43.8***	.33	.072	.35	4.5	.000
Ideal L2 self				.29	.071	.31	4.1	.000
<i>Model 3</i>								
Intrinsic motivation	.62	.38	33.7***	.26	.074	.28	3.5	.001
Ideal L2 self				.23	.072	.25	3.2	.001
Extrinsic motivation				.22	.074	.22	3.0	.003

C. Prediction of Achievement by Motivational Orientations and Learning Autonomy

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed with orientations and autonomy as predictor variables and achievement as a dependent variable. The analysis produced 3 models. In model 1, learner autonomy alone ($\beta = .58$, $t = 9.3$, $p = .000$) explained 34% of variance in achievement. In model 2, learner autonomy ($\beta = .39$, $t = 5.7$, $p = .000$) and ideal L2 self ($\beta = .38$, $t = 5.6$, $p = .000$) explained 44% of variance in achievement. In model 3, learner autonomy ($\beta = .32$, $t = 4.5$, $p = .000$), ideal L2 self ($\beta = .29$, $t = 3.9$, $p = .000$), and intrinsic motivation ($\beta = .22$, $t = 3.0$, $p = .003$) positively predicted 47% of achievement. Again learner autonomy and ideal L2 self were the strongest predictors of achievement. Intrinsic motivation significantly and positively contributed to achievement but to a lesser extent. Extrinsic motivation and ought-to L2 self did not contribute to achievement.

TABLE 7
STEPWISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION FOR PREDICTING ACHIEVEMENT BY MOTIVATIONAL ORIENTATIONS AND AUTONOMY

Predictors	R	R ²	F	B	SE	β	t	p
<i>Model 1</i>								
Autonomy	.58	.34	85.9***	8.0	.87	.58	9.3	.000
<i>Model 2</i>								
Autonomy	.67	.44	66.6***	5.3	.93	.39	5.7	.000
Ideal L2 self				4.8	.86	.38	5.6	.000
<i>Model 3</i>								
Autonomy	.69	.47	49.7***	4.4	.96	.32	4.5	.000
Ideal L2 self				3.6	.92	.29	3.9	.000
Intrinsic motivation				2.9	.95	.22	3.0	.003

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results revealed that Saudi EFL learners' ideal L2 self and intrinsic motivation are significantly higher than their ought-to L2 self and extrinsic orientations. Extrinsic motivation and ought-to L2 self emerged as significant orientations, but to a much lesser degree. This suggests that self-determined/internalized orientations on the one hand and less self-determined and external orientations on the other hand are not mutually exclusive (Brown, 2007). This finding contradicts most studies conducted in the Saudi context that documented instrumental or extrinsic motivation as the dominant orientations among Saudi learners from different levels of study (Altasan, 2016; Kassem & Alqahtani, 2023). It nonetheless converges with two studies where Saudi learners were reported to have high levels of intrinsic motivation or ideal L2 self (Alkaabi, 2016; Alshahrani, 2016). A possible explanation for this finding is that the participants who are expected to initiate university degrees in programs that uses English as a medium of instruction, i.e., medicine and computer science have internalized reasons for learning English and an ambitious ideal L2 self. A student of medicine may identify with the image of professional physicians who speak English fluently as a prerequisite of success in the profession. The same observation applies to computer science students who realize that their future career entails communication with native speakers of English. Another possible explanation is that prospective students of medicine and computer science practice autonomous learning by virtue of their desired fields of study. Students of computer science for instance cannot entirely depend on teachers. They need to try things on their own and use e-learning resources. Noels (2001) argues that such autonomous learning practices enhance intrinsic motivation. Similarly, Deci et al. (1991) contend that motivation tends to be self-determined by the satisfaction of the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

The participants were found to be autonomous learners. This finding is not in line with most studies in the Saudi context (Alrabai, 2017; Asiri & Shukri, 2020). The most recent of those studies was conducted in 2020. The current study's finding is nonetheless in agreement with a study conducted in 2023 (Haque et al., 2023). There may be a recent move towards learner autonomy in Saudi education. Furthermore, Saudi universities are now giving more room to distance learning. Recently, Saudi universities require programs to teach a given proportion of their courses online using various platforms, the Blackboard in the case of the university that the study's participants came from. Distance learning by its virtue supports autonomous learning because it facilitates self-access learning and gives learners opportunities to self-direct their learning (Benson, 2001). In a study investigating the effect of the shift to online education during the Covid-19 pandemic on Saudi college EFL learners' autonomy (Kassem, 2022), a sample of interviewed college EFL learners attributed to online education improvement in important aspects of autonomy, e.g., organization of study time, use of the Internet and social media as learning resources, and self-assessment. It is worth mentioning here that all Saudi schools and universities shifted to online education during the pandemic. One final explanation is that teaching in Saudi universities is now delivered by young Saudi faculty members who have obtained their degrees from distinguished western universities. These faculty members may be more cognizant of autonomous supporting teaching practices than older faculty members.

The results revealed no significant gender differences in motivational orientations or autonomy. This finding echoes some previous studies where no differences were found between males and females in motivation (Shokrpour & Shouraki, 2016; Niaz et al., 2018). It is nonetheless inconsistent with a larger number of studies reporting gender

differences in motivation (Mori & Gobel, 2006; You & Dörnyei, 2016; Vaseghi et al., 2020) and learner autonomy (Alrabai, 2017; Komlosi-Ferdinand, 2019) in favor of females.

Conceptually similar orientations in the SDT and L2MSS closely related to each other. Intrinsic motivation correlated most strongly with the ideal L2 self ($r = .58$) and to a much lesser degree with the ought-to L2 self ($r = .26$). Similarly, extrinsic motivation correlated most strongly with the ought-to L2 self ($r = .52$) and to a lesser degree with the ideal L2 self ($r = .47$). This indicates that intrinsic motivation and the ideal L2 self are similar constructs. So are extrinsic motivation and the ought-to L2 self. Similar findings were reached in previous studies. Yashima (2009) demonstrated that the ideal L2 self is more closely related to intrinsic motivation ($r = .44$). In Nishida's (2013) study the ought-to L2 self showed a positive correlation with external regulation ($r = .28$). In the study by Sugita McEown et al. (2014), exploratory factor analysis included the ideal L2 self in one factor with intrinsic motivation, whereas it included the ought-to L2 self with extrinsic motivation in another factor.

A finding that can have a positive reflection on teaching and learning English in Saudi Arabia is the one regarding the relationship between motivational orientations and learner autonomy. Self-determined/internalized motivational orientations not only correlated positively with learners' autonomy but they predicted it substantially as well. Intrinsic motivation and the ideal L2 self explained 35% of variance in learners' autonomy. Extrinsic motivation predicted a very small portion of variance in learners' autonomy. Meanwhile, the ought-to L2 self failed to predict learners' autonomy, which indicates absence of social pressures on learners in the Saudi context. It is safe to suggest that Saudi EFL learners with stronger self-determined/internalized orientations tend to be more autonomous in their approach to learning English. In addition to supporting the assumptions of the SDT and the L2MSS, this finding echoes many previous studies where various motivational orientations correlated with and/or predicted learner autonomy (Spratt et al., 2002; Khonamri et al., 2020; Liu, 2017). Csizér and Albert (2024) investigated contextual variations in the role of individual difference variables in Hungary. Participants were 1152 students from 11 secondary schools across the country. The only variable that correlated with learner autonomy across all schools was motivation. Other previous studies reported findings that are not in line with the current study. In a study conducted on Malaysian EFL learners (Foroutan et al., 2013) motivation did not predict learners' autonomy. Similarly, in an Iranian study (Hashemian & Soureshjani, 2011), learner motivation and autonomy did not correlate significantly. That more self-determined/internalized orientations lead to higher autonomy seems logical. Learners with internalized motives may be more inclined to engage in autonomous learning of the FL than learners who learn the language for external factors.

Another important finding of the current study is that self-determined/internalized orientations and autonomous learning predicted a sizeable proportion on learners' achievement. Learner autonomy, the ideal Ls self and intrinsic motivation together explained 47% of variance in learners' achievement. Extrinsic motivation and ought-to L2 self did not contribute to achievement. A similar finding was reported for 400 Saudi college English majors (Alshahrani, 2016) where the ideal L2 self and learning experience were found to strongly contribute to the criterion measure, i.e., the intended effort to learn English. Similarly, the academic achievement of Turkish college English majors was best predicted by autonomous learning and intrinsic motivation (Karatas et al., 2015). Afshar and Jamshidi (2022) reported autonomy as the strongest predictor of Iranian EFL learners' L2 achievement. This study's finding is also partly in agreement with a Chinese study (Jianfeng et al., 2018) that found motivation practicing the strongest effect on EFL learners' language proficiency (.53), followed by learner autonomy (.43). Alrabai and Moskovsky (2016) reported a finding that is partly consistent with the current study. They found that motivation is the strongest predictor of Saudi college EFL learners' achievement. Autonomy also predicted learners' achievement but to a degree that the authors described as marginal. It seems that except for a small number of studies reporting lack of a relationship between motivation and/or autonomy and EFL learners' achievement (Zhang & Li, 2004; Zarei & Zarei, 2015; Altasan, 2016; Ezzi, 2018; Afshar & Jamshidi, 2022), both motivation and autonomy proved to contribute significantly to language learning outcomes with both alternating being the strongest predictor. That internally motivated and autonomous learners have better language learning outcomes seems logical. These learners learn with teachers in formal classrooms and on their own, which gives them a privilege over learners who entirely depend on teachers. A learner who wishes to be spoon-fed by teachers all the time cannot be as achieving as a learner who learns autonomously inside and outside the classroom.

VI. IMPLICATIONS

The results revealed that Saudi EFL learners with more self-determined/internalized orientations and higher levels of learner autonomy achieve significantly higher than their peers with less self-determined/internalized orientations and lower levels of learner autonomy. EFL teachers are therefore required to nurture learners' self-determined/internalized orientations and learner autonomy. This can be achieved if they succeed in making the FL learning environment motivation and autonomy supportive. Reeve (2016) conceives of teacher behaviors as lying on a continuum with highly controlling style, i.e., spoon feeding learners, on one end and a highly autonomy-supportive motivating style on the other. According to this view, teachers wishing to enhance their learners' motivation and autonomy should move with their learners toward the highly autonomy-supportive motivating environment. This move can be gradual and entails that teachers engage learners in decision making and management of their learning. Dam (2011) proposed a classroom-based framework for enhancing learners' motivated autonomous learning. One of the key elements in this framework is

allowing learners to make choices about their learning on multiple levels ranging from what activity to do to taking part in course design. Another key element is teacher support. Teachers should guide learners and provide them with whatever tools they may need to learn independently, e.g., training on language learning strategies. One more element is providing learners with tools for reflection, assessment, and reassessment. The creation of such motivation and autonomy supportive classrooms entails that Saudi in-service teachers at all levels from the elementary school to the university be trained on how to make their teaching approach motivation and autonomy supportive. Teacher preparation programs at Saudi universities should include a course where learners know about motivation, autonomy and how to enhance them in their students when they are practicing teachers. It is also recommended that university programs include in their assessment plans elements of independent learning, e.g., term papers and projects.

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