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### DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION, COOPERATION AND GLOBAL INTEGRATION IN THE NEW NORMAL

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## RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES ON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL EFL STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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### **Abstract**

*Motivation is one of the key factors in assisting students to achieve their learning goals; however, not all students possess a similar level of motivation in English language learning (ELL). This paper reports a quantitative study that aims to investigate EFL students' motivation in ELL. A group of 182 EFL Vietnamese students from a junior high school in Ho Chi Minh City were recruited to answer the questionnaire whose data were processed by the SPSS software in terms of descriptive statistics. The findings were that junior high school EFL students had a high level of motivation in ELL. Their intrinsic motivation in ELL was positively influenced by their interest, need, hobby, and learning goal, while their extrinsic motivation in ELL was positively affected by their teacher, parents, materials, environment, and peers. Based on the findings, pedagogical implications are recommended in an attempt to enhance the quality of English language teaching and learning in the research context and other similar ones.*

**Keywords:** *EFL learners, learning motivation, Vietnamese*

### **1. Introduction**

English is no doubt an international language and a lingua franca as it is a bridge for people to exchange, study, and work outside of their home country (Tran et al., 2022). Accordingly, there is an increasing demand for English language learning in different contexts. In the context of Vietnam, English is officially taught as a foreign language from the primary level to the higher education level. It is observed that some students are really eager to learn English and feel good about it, but others are demotivated because they lack confidence or a drive to master the language. Additionally, a big number of English language learners are still reluctant to English language learning (ELL) due to different reasons, one of which is their low motivation in ELL (Tran & Chau, 2021) although the degree of a learner's motivation is a key determinant of his/her performance in the language learning process (Yunus & Abdullah, 2011). Ghlamallah (2018) asserts that a complete absence of motivation may result in a negative attitude toward language acquisition and may weaken or impede the process altogether. Likewise, Liu and Chen (2015) pinpoint that motivation is a huge motivator for learners to learn another language that is not their native tongue. Accordingly, motivation is deemed to play an important role in learning a language, and it can impact learners' language learning; those who are fully motivated are ready to get engaged in learning activities (Ur, 1996).

Within this research context, some students are observed to be completely passive during school hours. They seem quite unmotivated in ELL, and consequently, they do not get actively engaged in the English language learning process. What is more, those who have a low level of motivation in ELL do not often achieve a high level of language proficiency. They make no effort or show any enthusiasm for ELL. Students

with such behaviors in ELL usually show a feeling of heaviness and boredom, and they do not feel delighted while learning English, even with the stimulating activities offered by the teacher. With the aforementioned rationale, this study sets to investigate EFL students' motivation in ELL in the context of a junior high school in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The research question is as follows:

What is the level of junior high school EFL students' motivation in ELL?

This study is theoretically hoped to contribute to a further understanding of EFL students' motivation in ELL. Practically, the findings of this study will help EFL teachers understand students' motivation in ELL clearly, so they can have appropriate teaching and learning activities in order to improve the quality of students' ELL.

## **2. Literature Review**

The term motivation is variously understood. According to Gardner (1985), the motivation to learn a new language is "the extent to which the individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so and the satisfaction experienced in this activity" (p.10). Meanwhile, Crookes and Schmidt (1991) define motivation as the learner's attitude toward the aim of learning another language. Similarly, Lumsden (1994) states that motivation is the desire of language learners to engage in the process of language learning. In short, motivation in this study refers to a learner's willingness to learn English, and it covers the reasons for which a learner dedicates himself to ELL.

Scholars (Dörnyei, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000) have divided motivation into kinds, namely intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to "the doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 56). Meanwhile, extrinsic motivation is "doing an activity simply for the enjoyment of the activity itself, rather than its instrumental value" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 60). Learners' language learning is affected by their intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Learners can be intrinsically motivated by chances for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000), while they are extrinsically motivated by rewards or incentives for achieving specific learning goals (Dörnyei, 2001). Learners can learn best when they are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to learn (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation is crucial in influencing a language learner's attitude and interest in participating in class activities and actively absorbing information since language motivation is powerfully and considerably affected by a balanced mix of internal and external influences. The sources of motivation may vary depending on a number of variables, but they will mostly depend on age, sociocultural background, family economic status, friends, interests, and more. Extrinsic motivation can be seen in classroom characteristics and teachers' styles or teaching methods (Madrid et al., 1993). In brief, motivation in this study is understood as one's willingness to do something, and in this specific case, it covers the reasons for which an individual dedicates himself to learning the language of English, and it consists of two main kinds: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic factors that come from within a person can be defined as interests, needs, hobbies, and goals, while extrinsic factors arise from outside the person such as teachers, parents, curriculum, environment, and peers.

Previous studies on different aspects of motivation in ELL have been found in international and local contexts. Internationally, Krishnan, AL-Lafi, and Pathan (2013) carried out a mixed-method research endeavor to discern the driving forces behind language acquisition. The study involved an examination of factors inspiring language learning. The research participants were comprised of eighty 10th-grade students, selected through random sampling, with an even distribution of 40 male and 40 female students. Data collection utilized Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) questionnaire, which encompassed 17 items assessing four distinct motivational factors. To gain a more profound understanding



of the underlying aspects, 10 students were also subjected to interviews. The outcomes unveiled from the study underscored that parental encouragement, social dynamics, a personal desire to learn English, and the instructional approach employed by teachers emerged as the primary wellsprings of motivation among students. A study conducted by Adara (2019) with a mixed method approach found that Indonesian students in an urban area were motivated to study English by intrinsic variables such as an interest in English language skills and positive views about native speakers, English-speaking countries, and English learning, as well as extrinsic considerations such as work possibilities and personal growth. Radfar and Lengkanawati (2020) conducted a study to find out Indonesian students' motivation in ELL. A group of 50 English major students took part in answering the questionnaire. The findings showed that students' motivation in ELL was high, and students' instrumental motivation was higher than their integrative motivation. Hussain et al. (2020) did a study on adult learners' motivation in ELL. The participants were 100 EFL learners from Saudi Arabia and 100 ESL learners from Pakistan. They answered the questionnaire, and the findings were that all learners were intrinsically motivated to learn English. In another context, Imsa-Ard (2020) studied EFL secondary school students' motivation and attitudes toward learning English in the Thai context. The participants were 640 secondary school students who answered the questionnaire. It was found that Thai EFL students were highly motivated in ELL.

In the context of Vietnam, Tran (2007) did a qualitative study examining factors affecting Vietnamese English major students' motivation and attitudes toward ELL. The data were collected from a cohort of 30 English major students in terms of questionnaires and documents. The findings indicated that participants believed that extrinsic and intrinsic motivation were important for them. Pham and Le (2009) conducted a study to examine high school students' motivation in ELL and the factors affecting their motivation. There were 100 EFL students who answered the questionnaire. They found that students were highly motivated to learn English. In a study conducted by Ngo (2015), the focus was on understanding the motivational factors driving tertiary students' English language learning. The research involved 422 participants, comprising 180 students who were not majoring in English and 242 who were majoring in English. The findings revealed three distinct types of motivation among the participants: motivation related to personal and professional growth, intrinsic motivation, and motivation driven by a sense of obligation or avoidance. Notably, the participants' motivation for personal and professional development emerged as the most prominent among these categories. Nguyen's (2019) study at Vietnam National University, Hanoi was conducted on the motivation of 371 first- and second-year undergraduate students at the VNU University of Engineering and Technology (VNU-UET) students to learn English. The instrument used in the study is adopted from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) to assess language learning motivation and attitudes. The findings demonstrated notable enthusiasm among the participants for learning English. Furthermore, the extent of their motivation for English language learning was found to be influenced by both their academic year and the English proficiency of their parents. Another study conducted by Nguyen and Habók (2021) was to examine non-English major students' motivation in ELL. A big group of 1,565 students who were sampled from universities partook in answering the questionnaire, and 13 of them were invited for interviews. The results showed that universities were highly motivated to learn English. In conclusion, it is noticed that motivation in ELL has been intensively and extensively studied with various contexts and participants; nonetheless, most of the studies were conducted at university contexts, and there is a scarcity of research on junior high school students' motivation in ELL in the Vietnamese context. To that end, this study aims to find out students' motivation in ELL at a junior high school in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research design**

The study was designed using quantitative and qualitative methods. Secondary school students were chosen to participate in the survey, which included a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The process of analyzing data was implemented using SPSS and a content analysis approach.

This study presents the qualitative results of a mixed-methods project that examined students' perceptions of motivation in English learning environments and potential routes by which learning experiences may influence students' motivation. Sequential explanatory design: semi-structured interviews and a set of questionnaires were employed to collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data, respectively. A questionnaire was delivered to 182 students at Le Quy Don Secondary School. Even though a participatory action research methodology was not entirely used in this study, efforts were made to make sure that the findings could be applied in practice and would be used to advance real change at Le Quy Don Secondary School.

### **3.2. Research site and participants**

This study was quantitatively conducted at the context of a junior high school in Ho Chi Minh City. Students at this school learn English as a foreign language, and they have three English classes weekly. Besides, they have an extra English learning curriculum to learn subjects in natural science and social sciences.

A group of 182 EFL students from grades 6 to 9 were recruited based on the convenience sampling technique. Among them, the number of male students was 96, while that of female students was 86, which accounted for 52.7% and 47.3%, respectively. There were 31 (17%) participants in grade 6, 46 (25.3%) students in grade 7, 54 (29.7%) participants in grade 8, and 51 (28%) in grade 9. As for the number of years learning English, 95 (52.2%) participants had learned English for more than seven years, and 86 (47.25%) participants spent from three to seven years learning English. Only 1 (.55%) participant had experienced learning English less than three years.

### **3.3. Research instrument**

A closed-ended questionnaire was designed based on the literature review and research focus. It consists of two main sections: Section A is for the respondent's background information; Section B is for the main content seeking the respondent's motivation in ELL. There are 31 items designed with a five-point Likert scale (from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*) which were divided into two categories: intrinsic motivation (8 items) and extrinsic motivation (23 items). The questionnaire was in English, and it was then translated into Vietnamese to assure respondent's understanding and answer the questionnaire without any language barrier. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated at .73, which indicates the questionnaire was reliable.

### **3.4. Data collection and analysis**

The questionnaire had to be piloted before the official study to assure its validity. After being modified, the questionnaire was administered to EFL students in person. The instruction and explanation to the questionnaire was given to respondents before they answered it. The returned copies of the questionnaire were double-checked for their validity, and the valid number was 182.

The SPSS software (Version 24.0) was employed to process the data garnered from the questionnaire. The mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) were calculated. The interval mean scores were understood as 1-1.80: strongly disagree, 1.81-2.60: disagree, 2.61-3.40: neutral, 3.41-4.20: agree, and 4.21 – 5.00: strongly agree.

## **4. Results**

#### 4.1. Junior high school EFL students' motivation in ELL

The findings of junior high school EFL students' motivation (including intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation) in ELL are presented in Table 1. The overall mean score of EFL students' motivation in ELL was 3.86 (SD=.30) out of five. In detail, the mean score of EFL students' intrinsic motivation was 3.95 (SD =.42), while that of EFL students' extrinsic motivation was 3.82 (SD =.35). This means that junior high school EFL students in this study had a high level of motivation. To put it another way, they were highly motivated to learn English intrinsically and extrinsically.

**Table 1. Junior high school EFL students' motivation in ELL**

No.	Components	N=182	
		M	SD
1	Intrinsic motivation	3.95	.42
2	Extrinsic motivation	3.82	.35
	<b>Average total mean score</b>	<b>3.86</b>	<b>.30</b>

#### 4.2. Junior high school EFL students' intrinsic motivation in ELL

In terms of intrinsic motivation including eight items, it was noticed that most EFL learners were intrinsically motivated to learn English because they liked "this subject" (item I1: M = 4.17, SD = .65) and "really [enjoyed] English lessons" (item I2: M = 3.82, SD = .83), and they liked "watching English movies" (item I5, M = 4.04, SD = .91) and "listening to English music" (item I6: M = 4.22, SD = .88). Furthermore, they were intrinsically motivated to learn English because it was "a mandatory subject" (item I3: M = 3.31, SD = 1.11) and "an international language" (item I4: M = 3.79, SD = .57), and they wanted to "study abroad" (item I7: M = 3.97, SD = .78) and "pass the university entrance exam" (item I8: M = 4.25, SD = .77). In brief, Junior high school EFL students in this study were intrinsically motivated to learn English in terms of interest, need, hobby, and goal.

#### 4.3. Junior high school EFL students' extrinsic motivation in ELL

Regarding intrinsic motivation consisting of six factors, namely teacher-related factors, parents-related factors, curriculum-related factors, environment-related factors, and peer-related factors, the results in Table 2 show that the mean scores were 4.09 (SD =.50) for teacher-related factors, 3.95 for peer-related factors (SD =.77), 3.67 for parents-related factors (SD =.57), 3.67 for curriculum-related factors (SD =.57), and 3.48 for environment-related factors (SD =.89). This indicates that teachers-related factors played the most significant roles in motivating EFL students to learn English, while peers-, parents-, materials- and environment-related factors played vital roles in motivating EFL learners to learn English.

**Table 2. Junior high school EFL students' extrinsic motivation in ELL**

No.	Components	N=182	
		M	SD
1	Teacher-related factors	4.09	.50
2	Parents-related factors	3.89	.51
3	Materials -related factors	3.67	.57
4	Environment-related factors	3.48	.89
5	Peers-related factors	3.95	.77

##### 4.3.1. Teacher-related factors

Many EFL students were motivated to learn English thanks to their teachers' good teaching skills (I9: M = 4.18; SD = .67), care for students (I10: M = 4.10; SD = .72), responsibility to students (I11: M = 3.90;

SD = .78), and friendly personalities (I12: M = 4.07; SD = .73). Additionally, they were also motivated to learn English because of their teachers' good rapport with students (I13: M = 4.01; SD = .78), and appropriate adoption of innovative teaching methods (I14: M = 4.40; SD = .69) and digital tools in English language teaching (I15: M = 3.39; SD = .94). These findings imply that junior high school EFL students' motivation to learn English was strongly affected by teacher-related factors.

#### ***4.3.2. Parents-related factors***

The results show that EFL students strongly agreed that they learned English because their parents wanted them to "speak English well" (I16: M = 4.39; SD = .60), and rewarded them "for learning English well" (I17: M = 4.22; SD = .76), and afforded them "to learn English at foreign language centers" (I19: M = 4.20; SD = .77). Nonetheless, they were not sure if their parents "[spoke] English to [them] at home" (I18: M = 2.73; SD = .86). Therefore, it could be stated that parents-related factors could be one of the vital factors affecting junior high school EFL students' extrinsic motivation in ELL.

#### ***4.3.3. Materials-related factors***

As regards these factors, EFL students concurred that they were motivated to learn English because the contents of English textbooks were relevant to them (I20: M = 3.64; SD = .82), the topics in English textbooks were interesting to them (I21: M = 3.64; SD = .93), and the level of language difficulty in English textbooks was appropriate for them (I22: M = 3.69; SD = .95). These findings indicated that junior high school EFL students' motivation in ELL was positively affected by their learning materials.

#### ***4.3.4. Environment-related factors***

Regarding the environment-related factors, EFL students reported that they were motivated to learn English thanks to modern (I23: M = 3.28; SD = .65), suitable (I24: M = 3.37; SD = .89) and supportive (I25: M = 3.38; SD = .73) classroom facilities, and dynamic (I26: M = 3.67; SD = .64), flexible (I27: M = 3.58; SD = .78) class environments for ELL. In short, environment-related factors could positively affect junior high school EFL students' motivation in ELL.

#### ***4.3.5. Peers-related factors***

As for the results of peers-related factors, EFL students agreed that they learned English because their classmates were "active in ELL" (I28: M = 3.63; SD = .84) and "helpful to [their] ELL" (I29: M = 4.01; SD = .78). Moreover, their motivation to learn English was thanks to their classmates' fluency in English (I30: M = 3.95; SD = .98) and good English (I31: M = 3.91; SD = .97). This finding means that EFL students' level of motivation to learn English was relatively high thanks to their friends.

### **5. Discussion**

This study aimed at understanding junior high school EFL students' motivation in ELL, and it unraveled that their motivation to learn English was at a high level. Regarding EFL students' intrinsic motivation in ELL, it was found that their motivation was positively affected by their interest, need, hobby, and learning goal. This could be the fact that most participants (99.45%) in this study had experienced learning English for more than three years, so they may understand the importance of English. That could be why they had a high level of motivation in ELL. Additionally, they were living in a big city where they were exposed to the English environment to a high extent. This finding is supported by the statement by Ryan and Deci (2000) who claim that learners are intrinsically motivated by opportunities to get engaged in autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Compared with previous studies, this finding resonates with that of Radfar and Lengkanawati's (2020), Imsa-Ard's (2020), and Phan and Le's (2009) study. Such a finding may imply that junior high school EFL students can be highly motivated to learn English thanks to their intended.

As for EFL students' extrinsic motivation in ELL, this study revealed that they were highly motivated to learn English as their extrinsic motivation in ELL was affected by different factors, namely teacher-, parents-, materials-, environment-, and peers-related factors. EFL students were motivated to learn English thanks to their teachers' good teaching methods responsibility, personalities, and relationship with students. This finding is supported by Schuitema et al. (2016) who have claimed that teachers play a pivotal role in enhancing their learners' motivation. Furthermore, it was found that EFL students' parents and peers also played a critical role in increasing their motivation in ELL, and EFL students were eager to learn English due to the appropriate learning materials and supporting learning environment. The reasons for such findings could be that the research participants were living in a big city in which their teachers should be qualified in their teaching, and their parents may pay much attention to their children's education; the learning conditions and peers may be good and supporting. It could be concluded that EFL students' level of motivation can be high or low depending on their teachers, parents, materials, environment, and peers.

## 6. Conclusion

Motivation is one of the major driving forces for students to learn English, and this study found that junior high school EFL students were both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to learn English. Their motivation in ELL was positively affected by their interest, need, hobby, and learning goal (intrinsic factors) and their teachers, parents, materials, environment, and peers (extrinsic factors). Accordingly, some pedagogical implications are drawn. Firstly, EFL students' intrinsic motivation in ELL should be paid much attention to because intrinsic motivation is much more important than extrinsic one. By participating in different meaningful learning activities, students can enhance their intrinsic motivation; therefore, teachers should design learning activities appropriate to students' interests, needs, hobbies, and learning goals. Secondly, parents can play a critical role in enhancing students' motivation, so they should consider how to support their children in learning English. For example, they can talk to their children about the importance of the English language in their future careers, or they can use English with their children at home. Thirdly, school administrators should consider the learning materials and environment which are appropriate to students' learning needs and age so that students can feel interested in learning English.

This study still has some limitations. Firstly, this study is part of a big project, so the results do not reflect all the research aspects. Secondly, the findings are based on only one source of data (i.e., students). Therefore, future studies should consider the use of different research instruments (e.g., questionnaire, interview, reflection) from different sources of data (e.g., teachers, parents) so that data triangulation can be made.

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ISBN: 978-604-79-3782-0

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