

## **Does Gender Matter? Motivation and Learning EFL: A Saudi Case Study**

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**Abstract:** Motivation is one of the most determining factors for the acquisition of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) with gender a key factor. This quantitative research focuses on gender, motivation, and EFL learning in Saudi Arabia. An adapted version of the Motivation and Attitude Questionnaire (MAQ) was used in March 2021 at two Eastern Province public secondary schools. Data were collected from 169 students (aged 16–18). The final sample frame (N=100) comprised a quota sample of 50 males and 50 females. Descriptive analytics affirmed that overall motivation to learn EFL was quite high (female M = 4.06; male M = 3.79). Extrinsic and instrumental motivation prevailed overall with intrinsic and integrative motivation highest for female respondents. Gendered differences were not significant at  $p < .005$  (Asymp. Sig. = .772). Recommendations include (a) research to address contradictory results (level/type of motivation and gender influence) and (b) the mediating effect of attitude and (c) focused efforts to ensure intrinsic motivation in EFL education.

**Keywords:** English as a Foreign Language (EFL), gender, integrated/instrumental, intrinsic/extrinsic, motivation, Saudi Arabia

### **1. Introduction**

With the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's decision (KSA 2016) to transit the country from an oil to a knowledge-based economy, it is imperative that labour market participants are fluent in the English language, so that KSA can be competitive in the global market (Alzhrani and Alkubaidi 2020). "English language is the language of international communication. ... At present, Saudi Arabia's Education Policy says that all students in the Kingdom are to be taught at least one foreign language" (Alharbi 2019: 1). English is mandatory from grade four onward including secondary school (Alzhrani and Alkubaidi 2020). Indeed, there is now a concerted effort in KSA to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Al-Awaid 2018; Alharbi 2019; Alzhrani and Alkubaidi 2020), which pertains to someone learning English in a non-English speaking environment (Dunsmore 2019).

Aldosari (2014) noted that, even beyond KSA, motivation is consistently reported as a significant factor that crucially affects the language learning process particularly foreign language acquisition. Motivation is "a conscious decision to act and gives rise to a period of

sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to get a previously set goal” (Aldosari 2014:1). Students who are genuinely motivated to learn foreign languages will acquire a considerable amount of the elements and skills of other languages regardless of their aptitude, capability, and intelligence (Tulu 2014). Without motivation, chances of successful foreign language learning decline. Said and Weda (2018) affirmed that motivation, as well as attitude, belief, and anxiety can strongly influence foreign language learning.

Freed (1995) and Vanderick (2000) had asserted that motivation to learn EFL is influenced by gender. “Research in the relationship between second language learning and the role of gender has become one of the most active and complicated ...areas of linguistic inquiry” (Abdilah & Chowdhury 2013:134). Gender and foreign language acquisition are also of interest in Saudi Arabia because (a) it is a gender-segregated society (Alrabai 2016) and (b) both gender and motivation to learn EFL have been found to be key factors responsible for Saudi secondary students’ low achievement in EFL (Aldosari 2014; Alrabai 2018). Aldosari (2014) noted that Saudi female students were better language learners than male students because females were more motivated and had more positive attitudes toward language learning.

Although research about gender and motivation to learn EFL has historically been considered sophisticated (Freed 1995), results have been inconsistent and often contradictory (Kubi 2019). To illustrate, Tulu (2014), conducting an Ethiopian case study, and Xiong (2010), conducting a Chinese case study, found that females were more strongly motivated than males to learn a second language (called L2 learning). Kubi (2019) (Ghana) reported no gendered differences in EFL learning. Abdilah and Chowdhury (2013) found instrumental motivation for learning English to be higher among Iraqi males than females.

Research in the Saudi context reflects similar contradictory results. Salem (2006) reported no statistically significant differences between Saudi male and female university students’ overall motivation regarding EFL whether instrumental or integrative, although females made more effort to learn English, and they had a higher perception than males of the valence of learning EFL, i.e., the goodness or averseness of learning English. In other studies, Saudi secondary and university female students were found to be more motivated toward learning EFL than males (Aldosari 2014; Daif-Allah & Aljumah 2020). Regardless of the inconsistencies, “gender is an undeniable factor which has remarkable effects on the variables affecting the language learning process, especially ... motivation” (Öztürk & Gürbüz 2013:665).

The issue of gender, motivation, and EFL learning needs further investigation especially in Saudi Arabia with its gender-segregated society and gendered education sector (Alrabai 2016). Furthermore, Saudi Arabia's most recent national development plan (Vision 2030) depends on both women and men for its success. In this plan, women were recognized as a "great asset" to national development (KSA 2016:37). The current government's strategy to move from relying on knowledge besides oil gives focus to language choice. "Vision 2030 is a step towards modernization and being open to the rest of the world; since English is an international language, effective use of English is a core tool required to accomplish such a mission" (Alzhrani & Alkubaidi 2020:45). All Saudi labour market participants (both women and men) must thus be fluent in English. The present study aims to add insights into gender and motivation by striving to determine whether and how gender affects motivation to learn EFL in KSA. A focus on secondary school students reflects the reality that high school graduates constitute KSA's future work force, which must be able to communicate in English to fulfil Vision 2030. Alrabai (2018) attributed Saudi secondary students' low achievement in EFL to their low level of motivation to learn English despite completing nine years of EFL classes before graduating high school (see also Khan 2011).

Al-Awaid (2018) commented that, before Vision 2030, secondary students' "motivation to learn the [English] language suffered in Saudi Arabia" (50). Currently, "Saudi Arabians pragmatically see English as the gateway to improved economic status, national growth, promotion of Islam, and integration with the world" (50). "With the right motivation [secondary school] learners can be enabled to acquire better English skills" (Al-Awaid 2018:55).

Their motivation to learn English may also impact their propensity to advance their EFL proficiency when (if) they attend university in preparation for professional careers in a knowledge-based economy. Parangan and Buslon (2020) interpreted female secondary students' statistically higher scores on English proficiency as evidence of their higher motivation to learn English (i.e., they scored higher because they were more motivated). For this reason, the literature review focused on studies about gender, motivation, and EFL learning in both secondary schools and higher education.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation**

Intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because the activity is inherently, by its very nature, satisfying and rewarding. Intrinsically

motivated learners are engaged, curious, and prefer a challenge that leads to personal growth. Extrinsic motivation involves learning EFL to gain a result other than doing it for the sake of doing it. This result could be more money, career advancement and promotions, better grades, external recognition and validation, or it could be an attempt to address a need to excel or to alleviate negative emotions (e.g., inadequacy or shame) (Salikin et al. 2017).

In short, “intrinsic motivation refers to the internal feelings of a person which urge him or her to do some activities, while extrinsic motivation refers to factors coming from outside of the person’s personal concern” (Cahyono & Rahayu 2020:163). Khazaie and Mesbah (2014) affirmed that it is possible for students to learn EFL for both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons, but intrinsic motivation is preferred, because the inherent sense of fulfilment from the process of learning sustains language learning while extrinsic, instrumental goals may not (i.e., a means to achieve an end).

Fandiño, Muñoz, and Velandia (2019) explored elements associated with Colombian undergraduates’ motivation to learn English via virtual e-learning. Their motivation was significantly affected by extrinsic factors with “all the participants’ responses seem to be framed in one of the [four] levels of extrinsic motivation” (4). Intrinsic motivational factors included a desire to communicate with people from different cultures, obtain competency in the English language, and enhance learning autonomy. Fandiño et al. (2019) explained that when intrinsic motivation is low or declines so do levels of autonomy and overall efforts to learn a foreign language. Conversely, autonomy (self-regulation and self-determination) is a prerequisite for intrinsically regulated behavior like learning EFL (Dörnyei & Otto 1998).

Salehpour and Roohani (2020) reported that female secondary school students in Iran were more intrinsically motivated to learn EFL than males who scored highest on extrinsic motivation. Girls studied EFL because it brought them joy, satisfaction, and happiness while boys intended to use English to get good jobs and pursue higher education. Salehpour and Roohani concluded that higher extrinsic motivation in male students “is related to gender-related differences in the context of Iran” (2020:54). They further concluded that “perceived gender-related differences in the society might affect the perceptions and motives of the students studying English in the educational context of high schools” (55).

## **2.2 Instrumental and integrative motivation**

Gardner and Lambert’s (2014) seminal research distinguished between instrumental and integrative motivation in foreign language achievement. Instrumental motivation concerns pragmatic gains from learning a new

language especially monetary reward, socioeconomic advancement, career expansion and promotions, and more prestige and power in social settings. Integrative motivation refers to learners gaining more positive dispositions toward the people, culture, and even the language that is being learned. Integrate is taken to mean assimilate into and learn about other cultures by first learning their language (L2). Integrative motivation is more affective in nature than pragmatic.

Kubi (2019) investigated how gender influenced Ghanaian secondary learners' instrumental and integrative motivation and their attitude toward EFL performance. Learners were more integratively than instrumentally motivated to learn English. He claimed that his results paralleled other studies where students consistently learned English for integrative rather than instrumental reasons. Generally speaking, Kubi reported that interest in learning EFL was gender neutral. However, "when different Attitude and motivational components were examined, some gender differences were found" (Kubi 2019:91). Female respondents scored higher than males on both integrative and instrumental motivation.

Khong, Hassa, and Ramli (2017) reported that, despite a high degree of motivation, differences between gender and integrative and instrumental motivations were not significant for Malaysian university students' obligatory learning of Spanish as a foreign language. Learners' instrumental (pragmatic) motivation was 'slightly' higher than their integrative motivation with females' instrumental motivation 'significantly' higher than their integrative motivation. Results affirmed that varied learning contexts have varied degrees of influence on motivation to learn a foreign language.

Using a mixed method research design, Öztürk and Gürbüz (2013) explored the impact of gender on Turkish university EFL learners' speaking anxiety and motivation to learn English. Statistical analysis revealed that females showed a higher degree of EFL learning motivation than males. There was a statistically significant difference between motivational levels in terms of gender. Instrumentality was more important for males while females were more motivated by integrativity. Qualitative findings corroborated their quantitative results.

Al-Harthy (2017) reviewed 14 studies (Arab and nonArab) about the impact of sociocultural factors on (mainly secondary) students' motivation to learn EFL. He reported that, at the global level, females outperformed males learning EFL. While some aspects of EFL learning motivation were shared by both sexes, some cultural factors varied by gender: "family support, parental expectations, cultural restrictions, learning environment support, and individual's beliefs about their abilities and expectations" (130). Overall cross-study findings affirmed that integrative motivation was higher

among females than males, but both genders had instrumental motivation to learn EFL.

Bećirović (2017) investigated the relationship between gender, motivation, and performance in the EFL learning process of Sarajevo, Bosnia, and Herzegovina primary and secondary students. There was a statistically significant relationship between gender and motivation with fifth graders exhibiting the highest levels of motivation compared to ninth graders. Female students were more successful (performance) at EFL learning than males at each of the three study sites and grade levels (statistically significant relationship).

In the Saudi context, where literature is more limited, Aldosari (2014) reported that women university students were better language learners than men with women's performance attributed to their higher level of motivation. Additionally, women held more positive attitudes toward EFL learning than men. Daif-Allah and Aljumah (2020) determined that both Saudi male and female university students were highly motivated to the learning EFL. Respondents expressed both strong integrative and instrumental motivations, but females were more motivated than males. They recommended "that gender differences should be taken into consideration when designing English language courses for college students" (Daif-Allah and Aljumah 2020:69).

Alrabai (2016) reported gender and motivation as two key factors responsible for Saudi secondary students' low achievement in EFL. Alrabai (2018) attributed their low EFL achievement level to their lack of motivation to learn English despite taking EFL classes from Grade 4 onward (nine years in total while in public school). Alharbi (2015) and Al-ma'shy (2011) agreed that Saudi secondary school students were generally weak in speaking English. Hamouda (2013) added that their problems with learning EFL often reflected language anxiety. Alrabai (2016) concluded that Saudi secondary students' "low English language achievement can be attributed to ... learner-related variables (e.g., gender, motivation, and anxiety)" (22).

### **3. Research questions**

This study focused on motivation to learn EFL in real time while Fandiño et al. (2019) focused on virtual learning environments. The current study investigated gender, motivation, and learning EFL in the Saudi context, whereas previous research was non-Arabic in nature: Bećirović's (2017) study in Balkans; Khong et al., (2017) in Spain; Kubi (2019) in Ghana; and Öztürk & Gürbüz, (2013) in Turkey.

Many studies have explored gender and motivation in higher education (e.g., Daif-Allah & Aljumah 2020; Fandiño et al. 2019; Öztürk & Gürbüz

2013). And, although Aldosari (2014) and Daif-Allah and Aljumah (2020) investigated the issue in the Saudi context, their instruments were different from that used in this study. Finally, one author is primarily responsible for the most recent research on this topic in KSA's secondary schools – Alrabai (e.g., 2015, 2016, 2018) – thereby opening the door for additional contributions.

There is nominal exploration of gender, motivation, and learning EFL in Saudi secondary schools, and it is hard to find a cadre of research on one particular level of school including secondary (Al-Harthy 2017). Al-Awaid (2018) observed that, before Vision 2030, Saudi secondary school students' motivation to learn EFL had suffered intimidating shortcomings and weaknesses. This study strives to look deeper into what, if anything, is going on between motivation, the EFL learning process, and gender in Saudi secondary schools. High school students' motivation to learn EFL will impact the success of Vision 2030.

Two research questions thus guided this study: (1) What are Saudi secondary students' attitudes toward motivation, and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL)? (2) Who are more motivated to learn EFL, males or females? and (3) what are the factors affecting the participants' motivation to learn English?

## **4. Method**

### **4.1 Sample frame**

After receiving administrators' consent to conduct research at two governmental (public) schools in Dammam in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, secondary students (aged 16-18, basically grades 10, 11, and 12) were approached using a *WhatsApp* text containing the URL for the survey to take part in the study. Participant of this study live in Dammam and have not been outside Saudi Arabia. Their parents' degree of education ranges between high school to university degrees and all of their English teachers have a university BA degree. This province was chosen both for convenience and because it is populated with citizens from across KSA. Public schools were chosen because they tend to have the largest number of Saudi students, the target population. The two selected schools are homogenous in subjects taught and their orientation (students were learning EFL). Using quota sampling to ensure equal gendered representation, the final sample frame comprised 50 girls and 50 boys ( $N=100$ ).

### **4.2 Data collection instrument**

An adaptation of Dörnyei's (1990) 30-item *Motivation and Attitude Questionnaire* (MAQ) was used. Its reliability has been well established

(Öztürk & Gürbüz 2013). The 19-item instrument used in this study removed questions not relevant to the Saudi context or the research questions, especially items about the American context, EFL being a required course, or required for state exam. The final instrument was translated from English to Arabic and then the questions were organized into four categories reflecting insights from the literature review pertaining to intrinsic, instrumental, and integrative motivation.

Motivation for learning EFL included items concerning (a) wanting to be more educated (4 items), (b) job prospects and benefits (4 items), (c) making cultural and international connections (6 items) and (d) self-actualization (5 items). A 5-point Likert scale was used (5 strongly agree, 4 agree, 3 not sure, 2 disagree, and 1 strongly disagree). Respondents were asked to circle the appropriate choice after carefully reading each statement. No changes were made after the instrument was pilot tested.

### **4.3 Data collection**

Students in the two schools received notice of the opportunity to take part in the study via a *WhatsApp* text containing the survey's URL. Data were collected over 10 days in early March 2021. Participation was voluntary, completion of the questionnaire constituted consent, and anonymity was assured.

### **4.4 Data analysis**

Data underwent descriptive statistical analysis (frequencies, percentages, averages, standard deviation (SD), and T-test). Measures of central tendency are acceptable when striving to report what is representative (characteristic) of the group being studied with conclusions thus limited to this data set. In such instances, the average score can be said to represent the group. The analysis herein also respected the caveat that a large standard deviation (SD) with a normal curve does not allow the average (mean) to be used to describe the whole group. When this happens, people are more different than they are alike (Azad 2008; Allen 2018; McGregor 2018).

## **5. Results**

Based on the combined scores for *agree and strongly agree*, nearly three-quarters (72%) of Saudi secondary students in this study said they were motivated to learn EFL. Regarding the four categories of motivation created for this study, job-related items scored highest followed by making cultural and international connections. Being more educated came in third with self-achievement scoring the lowest. This pattern varied by gender suggesting that gender influenced motivation to learn EFL. Saudi female secondary

students were slightly more (55%) motivated than males (45%) but for different reasons (see Table 1).

Females were mostly motivated to learn EFL because they wanted to become more educated (69%) while males wanted to ensure job prospects and benefits (50%). Females agreed that they were least motivated by augmented job prospects (50%) and self-achievement (52%), and males were least motivated by becoming more educated (40%) and making cultural and international connections (43%). As will be explained, these gendered results are not statistically significant.

Table 1. Percentages of overall results by gender and category of motivation to learn EFL

Category of Motivation to Learn EFL	Overall Agree/Strongly Agree	Female	Male
Become More Educated (for items see Table 3)	69	60	40
Job Prospects and Benefits (for items see Table 4)	90	50	50
Make Cultural and International Connections (for items see Table 5)	73	57	43
Self-achievement (for items see Table 6)	54	52	48
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>45</b>

About 14 percent of the responses were *not sure* with most (54%) of those attributed to males. Fourteen percent (14%) of respondents chose the option *disagree/strongly disagree*. The resultant level of surety (72%) (see Table 1) affirms little ambiguity in the data set. Respondents were confident in their choice of *agree/strongly agree* to reflect what motivated them to learn EFL.

From a gendered perspective, both female ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $.480$  SD) and male ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $.589$  SD) participants scored high (*agree*) in their motivation to learn EFL. Although females' motivation was higher, it was not statistically significant (Asymp. Sig. (p-value) =  $.772$ ). Basically, there is a 72 percent chance that gender had little effect on motivation to learn EFL ( $p < .005$ ) in this sample frame (see Table 2). That said, the motivation level was quite high overall thereby meriting a detailed presentation of results organized by the four categories of motivation to learn EFL (see Table 1).

Table 2. Statistically insignificant gendered differences

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) <i>p</i> -value
<b>VAR 00001</b>	Male	50	3.7925	.58937	.29469	.772
	Female	50	4.0650	.48031	.24016	

### 5.1 Become more educated as motivation to learn EFL

Per Table 3, most (69%,  $n=275$ ) respondents said (*agree/strongly agree*) that they were motivated to learn EFL because they could become more educated. Females (60%) were more likely than males (40%) to respond in agreement. Males ( $n=33$ ) were twice as likely as females ( $n=17$ ) to *not be sure* about whether being more education motivated them to learn EFL. If anyone scored in disagreement on the items in Table 3, it was males (79%) rather than females (21%) (not statistically significant).

Table 3. Being more educated as motivation to learn EFL (male,  $n=50$ , female,  $n=50$ )

Item	Strongly Agree <i>n</i> =		Agree		Not Sure		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total <i>N</i> =
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
2. I would like to learn as many languages as possible.	17	23	10	15	8	7	12	5	3	0	
3. After finishing learning English, I'd like to start learning	3	10	14	25	9	10	20	3	4	2	

another language.											
11. I am learning English to become more educated.	23	35	27	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	
16. My colleagues usually know a foreign language at least at an intermediate level.	4	27	10	17	16	0	5	6	15	0	
<i>n</i> =	47	95	61	72	33	$\frac{1}{7}$	37	14	22	2	400
	<b>142</b>		<b>133</b>		<b>50</b>		<b>51</b>		<b>24</b>		

Of the four items comprising this category, item 11 (to become more educated) received the highest (36%) agreement score. Item 2 (want to learn as many languages as possible) has the next highest score (24%). Item 16 (keep up with their colleagues) (21%) and item 3 (learn another language after English) (19% *agree/strongly agree*) had similar scores (see Table 3).

Although not statistically significant, females (58%) were more motivated to learn many languages than males (42%) (item 2 *agree/strongly agree*). More females (67%) than males (33%) expressed their desire to start learning another language after finishing learning English (item 3). Said another way, males (82%) were more likely to express a disinclination to learn another language after learning English than females (18% *disagree/strongly disagree*). This result suggests that females were more motivated than males toward learning foreign languages (not significant at  $p < .005$ ). Male and female respondents were equally in agreement (50%) that they were motivated to learn English so they could become more educated (item 11). More females (75%) than males (25%) agreed they were motivated to learn EFL because their peers knew a foreign language (item 16) (see Table 3).

## 5.2 Job prospects and benefits as motivation to learn EFL

Per Table 4, most (90%,  $n=359$ ) respondents said (*agree/strongly agree*) they were motivated to learn EFL because it augmented job benefits and prospects. Males and females were in equal agreement (50%). Females (80%) were unequivocally more likely than males (20%) to *not be sure* about whether job benefits and prospects motivated them to study EFL (not significant at  $p < .005$ ). No respondents scored disagreement on these items suggesting that they were very clear in their mind on the connection between motivation to learn EFL and its impact on job prospects and benefits.

Table 4. Job prospects and benefits and motivation to learn EFL (male,  $n=50$ , female,  $n=50$ )

Items	Strongly Agree $n=$		Agree		Not Sure		Dis-agree		Strongly Disagree		Total $N=$
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
14. If I could speak English well, I could travel more for official purposes.	26	17	19	20	5	13	0	0	0	0	
13. If I could speak English well, I could find a more interesting job.	38	30	12	15	0	5	0	0	0	0	
10. English proficiency is indispensable for a person to be able to live a fulfilling life.	35	29	15	15	0	6	0	0	0	0	

15. I would have financial benefits if I had English proficiency.	33	27	14	14	3	9	0	0	0	0	
<i>n</i> =	13 2	10 3	60	64	8	33	0	0	0	0	400
	<b>235</b>		<b>124</b>		<b>41</b>		<b>0</b>		<b>0</b>		

Of the four items comprising this category, item 13 (find interesting job) and item 10 (live fulfilling life) scored the highest with virtually identical scores (26% *agree/strongly agree*, totalling 52%). Item 15 (financial benefits) (25%) scored third highest with item 14 (travel for official reasons) following closely at 23% (see Table 4).

This category comprised four items. The gendered pattern of results was quite consistent across the board albeit not statistically significant at  $p < .005$ . While males scored highest on all items (averaging 53%), females were not far behind averaging 47% with a six-point spread on each item except for item 14 (travel for job-related reasons). If males scored higher on anything it was item 14 (55% compared to 45% for females). Put simply, regardless of gender, the majority (89%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were motivated to study EFL because it would help them *equally* to find an interesting job, live a fulfilling life, provide financial benefits, and enable them to travel for official or job-related reasons (see Table 4).

### 5.3 Making cultural and international connections as motivation to learn EFL

Per Table 5, most (73%,  $n=429$ ) respondents said (*agree/strongly agree*) that they were motivated to learn EFL for cultural reasons and international connections. Females (57%) were more likely than males (43%) to respond in agreement. Males (64%) were more likely than females (35%) to *not be sure* about whether cultural factors motivated them to learn EFL. If anyone scored in disagreement on these items, it was males (78%) rather than females (22%) (albeit not statistically significant at  $p < .005$ ).

Table 5. Cultural and international connections as motivation to Learn EFL (male,  $n=50$ , female,  $n=50$ )

Item	Strongly Agree $n=$		Agree		Not Sure		Dis-agree		Strongly Dis-agree		Total $N=$
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
1. If I spent a long time abroad, I would make a great effort to learn the English language.	32	37	12	10	3	3	3	0	0	0	
8. English proficiency is a part of the general culture.	14	19	17	16	15	13	4	2	0	0	
9. English proficiency is important to me, because it allows me to learn about the current intellectual trends of the world.	15	24	15	16	18	10	2	0	0	0	
12. Most of my favorite artists (e.g., actors, musicians) are English native speakers.	2	23	6	15	16	2	18	5	8	5	

17. English proficiency is important to me because it is indispensable for establishing an international reputation.	30	37	13	10	6	3	1	0	0	0	
18. English proficiency is important to me because it will allow me to get to know about various cultures and people.	12	28	21	15	10	7	7	0	0	0	
<i>n</i> =	105	168	84	82	68	38	35	7	0	0	600
	<b>273</b>		<b>166</b>		<b>106</b>		<b>42</b>		<b>0</b>		

Of the six items comprising this category, the two highest scoring items (*agree and strongly agree*) were item 1 (would learn English if living abroad) (21%) and item 17 (English is required for an international reputation) (20%). Each of items 8, 9, and 18 averaged 16% (totalling 48%), respectively being proficient in English is part of general culture, English proficiency enables learning about intellectual trends of the world, and it allows getting to know different cultures. Item 12 (favourite artists are native English speakers) scored lowest (11%) (see Table 5).

Like Theme 3, from a gendered perspective, the pattern of results was quite consistent across the board on the connection between motivation to learn EFL and cultural factors (albeit not statistically significant at  $p < .005$ ), but the pattern was reversed. While females scored highest on all items (averaging 54%) except item 12, males were not far behind averaging 46% with an average five-point spread on each item. One notable difference was item 9 (English proficiency enables learning about intellectual trends of the

world) and item 18 (English allows getting to know different cultures) with females scoring higher (57%) than males (43%) on both items (14-point spread). Item 12 (favourite artists are native English speakers) was an outlier with females scoring much higher (83%) than males (17%) (see Table 5).

#### 5.4 Self-achievement as motivation to learn EFL

Per Table 6, more (54%,  $n=270$ ) respondents scored in agreement (*agree/strongly agree*) than disagreement (*disagree/strongly disagree*) (29%,  $n=147$ ) that they were motivated to learn EFL for reasons of self-achievement. Seventeen percent (17%,  $n=83$ ) were *not sure* whether self-achievement motivated them to learn EFL. Females (51%) were slightly more likely than males (48%) to respond in agreement. Males (59%) were more inclined than females (41%) to disagree that self-achievement was a motivator for learning EFL. Males (52%) and females (48%) were nearly equal in their inclination to *not be sure* about whether self-achievement motivated them to learn EFL (not statistically significant at  $p < .005$ ).

Table 6 .Self-achievement as motivation to learn EFL (male,  $n=50$ , female,  $n=50$ )

Items	Strongly Agree $n=$		Agree		Not Sure		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total $N=$
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
6. Learning a foreign language often gives me a feeling of achievement.	14	27	22	17	8	3	6	3	0	0	
7. Studying English is important to me because it provides an interesting intellectual activity.	6	13	10	16	13	14	14	5	7	2	

19. Studying English is important to me because it offers a new challenge in my life.	15	17	17	19	7	6	7	8	4	0	
5. I don't like the process of learning a foreign language, and I do it only because I need the language.	6	2	15	7	8	12	13	10	8	19	
4. Sometime s, learning a foreign language is a burden for me.	16	10	9	12	7	5	9	3	19	10	
<i>n</i> =	57	69	73	71	43	40	49	29	38	31	500
	<b>126</b>		<b>144</b>		<b>83</b>		<b>78</b>		<b>69</b>		

Regarding agreement ( $n=270$  *agree/strongly agree*) of the five items comprising this category, item 6 (feeling of achievement) (30%) scored the highest followed by item 19 (offers new challenges in life) (25%). Item 7 (an interesting intellectual activity) and item 4 (a burden to learn another language) each scored 17% with item 5 (disliked learning new languages) coming in last (11%). Regarding disagreement ( $n=147$  *disagree/strongly disagree*), item 5 scored the highest (34%) followed by item 4 (28%). These two items accounted for two thirds (62%) of the responses for disagreement. Item 7 scored 19% with item 19 (13%) and item 6 (6%) completing the tally (see Table 6).

From a more detailed gendered perspective (statistically insignificant at  $p < .005$ ), females scored higher than males on all items related to self-achievement except for items 4 and 5. Females (64%) were more inclined

than males (36%) to agree that they were motivated to learn EFL because (a) it is an interesting intellectual activity (item 7), (b) doing so generated a feeling of self-achievement (item 6, females 55%, males 45%) and (c) it offered new life challenges (item 19, females 53%, males 47%). Substantially more males (70%) than females (30%) agreed that they did not like learning EFL and did so only because they needed to know English (item 5). This result suggests that females enjoyed learning EFL and did so for reasons other than being pragmatic. Males (53%) and females (47 %) scored close on agreement that learning a foreign language is a burden (item 4) (see Table 6).

More males (75%) than females (25%) disagreed (*disagree/strongly disagree*) that they were motivated to learn EFL because it is an interesting intellectual activity (item 7), suggesting females were more driven by this motivation. The same can be said for item 6 (feeling of self-achievement) (67% and 33% respectively) and item 19 (offers new life challenges, 58% and 42% respectively). Females (58%) disagreed more often than males (42%) that they disliked learning a new language (item 5) suggesting that enjoyment motivated females to learn EFL more so than males. Although agreement scores for learning EFL is a burden (item 4) were close for males and females (averaging 50% each), males (68%) were more likely than females (32%) to disagree that learning EFL is a burden. This result suggests that men did not think it was a burden. In effect, females were motivated to learn EFL because it is a new language, but they found it burdensome (see Table 6) (not statistically significant at  $p < .005$ ).

## 6. Discussion

A conundrum exists in KSA. All citizens must become fluent in the English language if *Vision 2030* is to be achieved (Alzhrani and Alkubaidi 2020), but it is common knowledge that Saudi secondary students are not performing optimally in EFL courses (Alrabai 2016). Al-Awaid (2018) and Alrabai (2018) both commented on students' low level of motivation to learn EFL. Without motivation, chances of successful foreign language learning decline (Tulu 2014).

Motivation to learn EFL was not an issue in our sample frame (two Eastern Province public schools). Based on the combined scores for *agree/strongly agree*, nearly three-quarters (72%) of respondents said they were highly motivated to learn EFL (Daif-Allah & Aljumah 2020). Both female ( $M = 4.06$ ) and male ( $M = 3.79$ ) respondents scored quite high. This result may well reflect the political and social transformation that KSA is going through vis-à-vis achieving Vision 2030 by ensuring strong English language acquisition by all citizens (Alzhrani & Alkubaidi 2020). High

school students may be starting to appreciate the role that citizens' English proficiency will play in Saudi's economic prosperity.

## 6.1 Different types of motivation

What is telling is the types of motivation that prevailed in this study. Regardless of gender, most (89%) respondents *agreed or strongly agreed* that they were motivated to study EFL for pragmatic, extrinsic reasons. It would help them find an interesting job, provide financial benefits, and enable them to travel for official or job-related reasons (Daif-Allah & Aljumah 2020; Fandiño et al. 2019). That said, females were more likely to say they were *not sure* if extrinsic reasons motivated them to learn EFL, while males seldom chose the *not sure* response for this issue (not statistically significant).

### 6.1.1 Intrinsic/extrinsic motivation

Also, albeit not statistically significant, female students tended to express intrinsic motivation while males expressed extrinsic motivation. Females tended to enjoy learning EFL for reasons other than being pragmatic (see Table 1): become more educated, cultural connections, and self-achievement. Similar to Salehpour and Roohani's (2020) (Iranian) results, females herein were slightly more inclined (52%) than males (48%) to say they were motivated to learn EFL for intrinsic motivation, in this case because it generated a feeling of self-achievement.

Male and female students were equally (50%) inclined to say they wanted to learn English because it would improve their job prospects and benefits (90%) (see Tables 1 and 4). Per Table 4, no one disagreed that extrinsic motivation was not a factor. Pragmatism mattered to everyone. This result contradicted Salehpour and Roohani's (2020) finding that men were more inclined to be extrinsically motivated to learn EFL than women.

For clarification, intrinsic motivation involves internal reasons of satisfaction, curiosity, and personal growth. Extrinsic motivation involves pragmatic, external gains: money, better grades, career advancement, or status (Cahyono & Rahayu 2020; Salikin et al. 2017). When it comes to learning EFL, intrinsic motivation is preferred because an inherent sense of fulfilment can sustain the learning process – learning EFL would become more than a means to an end (Fandiño et al. 2019; Khazaie & Mesbah 2014).

Results herein confirmed that extrinsic motivation prevailed overall with males most inclined to express extrinsic motivation (see Table 4). These results suggest that if Saudi educators want to sustain the EFL learning process, they must give more attention to enhancing the intrinsic aspects of motivation. Future researchers could interview Saudi EFL female secondary

students to dig deeper into the dimensions of their intrinsic motivation to discern lessons learned that can be applied to all Saudi EFL students.

That said, results pertaining to intrinsic/extrinsic motivation can be interpreted in relation to different gender roles that males and females fulfill in Saudi society. Women have traditionally assumed nurturing and socializing roles, so it is not a stretch to suggest that these roles shaped why they mainly manifested intrinsic motivation for learning EFL (e.g., internal feelings, personal growth, satisfaction, and engagement).

### **6.1.2 Integrative/instrumental motivation**

Integrative motivation is so named because learners study EFL so they can gain a sense of connection to people, cultures, and the language itself. Instrumental motivation concerns using language learning to ensure pragmatic gains such as monetary reward, increased social status, career advancement, and power and prestige (Gardner & Lambert 1972). Overall results showed that respondents tended to express instrumental motivation (90%) rather than integrative (73%) with both types being quite strong (near to or higher than three quarters) (see Table 2). This result supports Daif-Allah and Aljumah's (2020) finding wherein Saudi respondents expressed both strong integrative and instrumental motivation to learn EFL regardless of gender.

Results further affirmed that while both male and female students presented with equal degrees of instrumental motivation, females (57%) were more inclined to express integrative motivation than males (43%). This result mirrors those of Al-Harthy (2017) (Aran and nonArab) and Öztürk and Gürbüz (2013) (Turkey) but contradicts Khong et al. (2017) who reported that female Malaysian university students favored instrumental motivation.

## **6.2 Gender and motivation to learn EFL**

Aldosari (2014) reported that Saudi female students were *more motivated* to learn EFL than male students. Our results do not suggest *more motivation* per se but rather motivation for different reasons (albeit not statistically significant at  $p < .005$ ). Overall, Saudi female secondary school students were intrinsically and integratively motivated, and males were extrinsically and instrumentally motivated. But like Khong et al. (2017), Kubi (2019), and Salem (2006), our results were not statistically significant. This suggests that our results do not reinforce other's claims of gendered differences in students' motivation to learn EFL (Freed 1995; Vanderick 2000), and they do not support Aldosari (2014) and Alrabai's (2018) research wherein

gender was reported as a factor responsible for Saudi students' low motivation to learn EFL.

Our gender-neutral result does make sense though because motivation to learn EFL was high overall regardless of gender, with this suggesting that gender was not a mitigating factor in this sample frame (reflected in a *Asymp. Sig.* = .772). This result contradicted Aldosari (2014) and Alrabai's (2018) findings and raised the question, "Why was the link between gender and motivation to learn EFL not statistically significant in this sample frame despite high mean scores in *agree/strongly agree* along the four dimensions of motivation per Table 1?" Is there something unique about Saudi government schools versus private schools? The Eastern Province relative to the other 12 KSA provinces? The age group (secondary school) versus primary/junior high or higher education students?

Future research must examine this statistically insignificant result because it suggests that there is a 772% chance that gender had little effect on these students' motivation to learn EFL ( $p < .005$ ). Our result contradicted Bećirović's (2017) finding of a significant relationship between gender and motivation to learn EFL, which raises the question of what else was in play if not gender? Studies normally report that gender affected motivation to learn EFL (Öztürk & Gürbüz 2013).

### **6.3 Potential role of attitudes and gender combined**

Perhaps, as Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Kubi (2019) suggested, attitudes play a more important role in Saudi students' motivation to learn EFL than gender, or perhaps gender and attitude work in tandem in KSA. Kubi (2019) reported that when attitudes were factored into the equation "gender differences were found" (91). Said and Weda (2018) affirmed that attitudes and beliefs can strongly influence foreign language learning. Aldosari (2014) reported that Saudi female students' attitudes toward EFL learning were more positive than males, and female motivation was higher. Future research should explore the mediating effect of attitude relative to gender and motivation to learn EFL in KSA.

### **6.4 Age level and motivation to learn EFL**

Bećirović's (2017) finding that ninth graders had lower motivation to learn EFL than fifth graders suggests that motivation lessens as learners get older. Our results contradicted this pattern. Saudi Students aged 16–18 (grades 10–12) reported quite high levels of motivation (see Table 2), which bodes well for them entering university with a sustained motivation to learn EFL. Al-Awaid (2018) asserted that Saudi students' ability to learn EFL will improve if they become more motivated. Our results suggest that the high school

students in this study stand a good chance of learning EFL in higher education because they were quite motivated already. Perhaps a case study of this learning context is in order to discern any dynamics at play that could lead to best practices for other situations in KSA.

### **6.5 Transitional motivational dynamics**

On a final note, although Alrabai (2016) said Saudi secondary students' motivation to learn EFL is historically low, Aldosari (2014) and Daif-Allah and Aljumah (2020) reported that Saudi university students were highly motivated to learn EFL. Future research into this issue should be collaborative and involve scholars focused on secondary school and higher education so motivational dynamics relative to learning EFL can be better traced. What role do level of education, or transitioning from one level to another, play in motivation to learn EFL in KSA? Results further suggest that this research thread should include what type of motivation is at play (intrinsic/extrinsic; integrated/instrumental).

### **7. Limitations**

The sample frame should be expanded to include the other 12 Saudi provinces as well as more public schools, private and international schools, and more respondents than  $N=100$ . More sophisticated inferential statistical analyses should be employed. Qualitative and mixed methods research designs would enable digging deeper into this phenomenon in KSA. Future research designs should also include teachers because they are key to the EFL learning process (Alrabai 2016; Khan 2011). Saudi "[EFL] teachers and teaching practices affect students' motivation" (Aldosari 2014:2). Given the prevalence of mandatory online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, future researchers should explore this phenomenon in virtual learning environments. Fandiño et al. (2019) discovered that motivation to learn EFL in an online environment was heavily extrinsic rather than the preferred intrinsic for sustained motivation.

### **8. Conclusion**

The issue of gender and motivation is a longstanding research interest in the context of foreign language learning and a recent research thrust in KSA due to aspirations to achieve Vision 2030 (Alzhrani and Alkubaidi 2020). Research on this issue is underdeveloped in the gendered Saudi context with this study adding to Alrabai's (2015, 2016, 2018) recent scholarship. In the spirit of oft-found contradictory findings (Kubi 2019), results affirmed that KSA secondary school students' motivation to learn EFL was quite high,

with different profiles for females and males, but gendered differences were not statistically significant at  $p < .005$  (Asymp. Sig. = .772).

Studies normally report that gender affects motivation to learn EFL (Öztürk and Gürbüz 2013). Researchers are encouraged to discern why the sample frame herein (i.e., Eastern Province public school secondary students) did not reflect gendered differences or a lack of motivation to learn EFL. Further research should discern why these respondents had a different profile than expected. Determining what made them different could lead to lessons learned and best practice for other KSA educational settings.

In the meantime, results strongly suggest that Saudi EFL educators must become more attuned to how different types of motivation (i.e., intrinsic, extrinsic, instrumental, and integrative) influence EFL learning in KSA. Pragmatic extrinsic and instrumental motivation prevailed overall with intrinsic and integrative motivation highest for female respondents. Efforts should especially be made to strengthen intrinsic motivation across the board because it can sustain interest in learning EFL, which is necessary for achieving Vision 2030.

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