



## PSYCHOLOGY OF EFL LEARNERS IN SAUDI UNIVERSITIES: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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**ABSTRACT:** *With a view to gathering insights for EFL proficiency development amongst Saudi EFL learners, this study reviews the empirical literature on the influence of four key psychological factors on learning English as a foreign language. Specifically, the study addressed the following question: In what ways do the psychological factors of attitude, self-efficacy, anxiety and motivation influence the development of English proficiency amongst university learners in EFL settings?. To this end, 49 research articles published between 1990 and 2021 were selected for a systematic review of the selected factors. The selected studies were conducted in diverse university EFL learning contexts spanning 18 countries. Of this number, the highest numbers of studies (in descending order) falling within the criteria of the review were conducted within the Iranian (9), Chinese (8), Turkish (6) and Saudi (5) contexts. The study found that the psychology of EFL learners at the university level is complex and that there are multiple factors linked to the reviewed factors which need to be taken into account by policymakers, curriculum designers, teacher trainers and teachers to ensure effective EFL learning. The findings of most of the reviewed studies suggest that EFL learning is positively perceived by learners, although obstacles to effective EFL learning do exist and attitudes towards learning English seem to be influenced by a wide range of factors including parental support, gender, level of study, community support and motivation. The reviewed research also suggests a link between strategy-use and EFL learners' self-efficacy and anxiety management. A key implication of these findings for improving the EFL learning experience in the Saudi context is the need to carry out more qualitative and in-depth studies that can help to map and address the actual issues affecting EFL learners. Further, intervention-based, rather than purely survey-based, research can enable Saudi EFL education providers to understand what pedagogical interventions and strategies can work most effectively in the local settings. Longitudinal studies would also enable researchers to understand whether attitudes, self-efficacy, anxiety and motivation evolve over time, and if they do, then what are the factors influencing such development, whether positive or negative. These understandings are key to creating a transformative EFL learning experience for Saudi university students which in turn determines their prospects of success in the academic setting and future employability.*

**KEYWORDS:** Self-efficacy, EFL Learning, L2 Motivation, L2 Anxiety, Attitude Towards EFL Learning



## INTRODUCTION

Saudi Arabia has spent significant funds to implement an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programme designed to support learners in developing proficiency in the core components of the English language (e.g. reading, writing, listening, speaking). The Ministry of Education (MOE) has worked extensively to provide teachers and schools with a comprehensive curriculum that adopts a scaffolded approach to instruction whereby students complete end of term assessments to enable the evaluation of their progress (Al Shammari, 2016, para 1). Yet despite this structured and minutely-regulated approach to English language instruction, Saudi EFL learners have typically failed to achieve proficiency in English, even after numerous years of English language instruction. Moving into university, students show a general apathy towards English, seeing it as a burden, rather than as a new skill to be acquired (Alrabai, 2016, p.21). The reasons for this would appear to be embedded in psychology, more specifically in four key factors related to learning which include attitude, self-efficacy, anxiety, interest and motivation. A significant amount of literature has been devoted to examining these psychological constructs and this paper attempts to provide an overview of some of the major findings associated with each concept.

In what ways do the psychological factors of attitude, self-efficacy, anxiety and motivation influence the development of English proficiency amongst university learners in EFL settings? To address the research question, 49 research articles published between 1990 and 2021 were selected for a systematic review of the selected factors. The studies were selected for inclusion in the review according to several criteria. They had to be based on primary empirical research within foreign language (FL) or English as Foreign Language (EFL) contexts focusing on university-level EFL learners. Quantitative and qualitative studies were included in the review. Only studies based on primary research and reported in the form of journal papers were selected for the present review. These articles were organized into four main categories according to the psychological factors being studied and then into relevant sub-categories for discussion.

Based on the identified parameters for the review, forty-nine studies related to attitude, anxiety, self-efficacy and motivation of EFL learners from a wide range of EFL contexts were selected and reviewed. As table 1 shows, the studies were conducted in diverse university EFL learning contexts spanning 18 countries. Of this number, the highest numbers of studies (in descending order) falling within the criteria of the review were conducted within the Iranian (9), Chinese (8), Turkish (6) and Saudi (5) contexts. Based on the year of publication for each study, Table 2 shows an increasing interest in psychological factors influencing EFL learning.

EFL Context	Reviewed Studies
Botswana	(Magogwe & Oliver, 2007)
Chile	(Montaño-González & Cancino, 2007)
China	(Chiu & Wong, 2018; Gan, 2009; Liu & Liu, 2015; Liu & Ni, 2015; Miao & Vibulphol, 2021; Qiu & Lee, 2020; Xu, Fan & Luo 2020; Yan & Horowitz, 2008)
Hungary	(Tilfarlioğlu & Cğnkara, 2009; Tóth, 2007)



Iran	(Ali, Shamsan & Guduru et al, 2019; Chalak & Kassaian, 2010; Choubsaz & Choubsaz, 2014; Fathi, Derakhshan & Torabi, 2020; Golparvar & Khafi, 2021; Masyhur, Mohd, Yasin & Yunus, 2018; Roshandel, Ghonsooly & Ghanizadeh, 2018; Soleimani & Hanafi, 2013; Zare & Riasti, 2012)
Indonesia	(Mbato & Kharismawan, 2018)
Japan	(Andrade & Williams, 2009; Fuji, 2018; Leeming, 2017; Tanakaa & Ellis, 2016)
Jordan	(Al-Sawalha, 2016)
Korean	(Chae, 2013; Gan, 2009; Kim, 2011; Lee & Lo, 2017)
Lebanon	(Bahous, Bacha & Nabhani, 2011)
Malaysia	(Ahmed, 2015; Masyhur, Mohd, Yasin & Yunus, 2018)
Saudi Arabia	(Abu-Snobar, 2017; Alkaff, 2013; Alkhalaf, 2020; Almutlaq & Etherington; Al-Shehri, 2018)
Taiwan	(Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999)
Thailand	(Khamkhien, 2012)
Turkey	(Çetinkaya 2009; Genc & Aydin, 2017; Genc, Kulusakli & Aydin, 2016; Goktepe, 2014; Sakiroglu & Dikilitas, 2012; Senturk, 2019)
UAE	(Lababidi, 2016)
Vietnam	(Tuan 2012)
Yemen	(Yassin & Razak, 2017)

<b>Table 2: Studies by year</b>	
1990-1999	Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999
2000-2009	Alkaff, 2013; Andrade & Williams, 2009; Çetinkaya 2009; Chalak & Kassaian, 2010; Choubsaz & Choubsaz, 2014; Gan, 2009; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Montaña-González & Cancino, 2007; Sakiroglu & Dikilitas, 2012; Khamkhien, 2012; Soleimani & Hanafi, 2013; Tilfarlioğlu & Cçnkara, 2009; Tóth, 2007
2010-2019	Abu-Snobar, 2017; Ahmed, 2015; Ali, Shamsan & Guduru et al, 2019; Alkhalaf, 2020; Almutlaq & Etherington; Al-Shehri, 2018; Al-Sawalha, 2016; Bahous, Bacha & Nabhani, 2011; Chae, 2013; Chiu & Wong, 2018; Fuji, 2018; Genc & Aydin, 2017; Genc, Kulusakli & Aydin, 2016; Goktepe, 2014; Kim, 2011; Lababidi, 2016; Lee & Lo, 2017; Liu & Liu, 2015; Liu & Ni, 2015; Leeming, 2017; Masyhur, Mohd, Yasin & Yunus, 2018; Mbato & Kharismawan, 2018; Roshandel, Ghonsooly & Ghanizadeh, 2018; Senturk, 2019; Tanakaa & Ellis, 2016; Tuan 2012; Yassin & Razak, 2017; Zare & Riasti, 2012



2020-2022	Fathi, Derakhshan & Torabi, 2020; Golparvar & Khafi, 2021; Miao & Vibulphol, 2021; Qiu & Lee, 2020; Xu, Fan & Luo 2020
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Table 2 shows that most of the reviewed studies were largely quantitative in nature and survey-based with only a limited number of studies making use of experiments/interventions. Only a handful were large-scale (over 1000 respondents) or conducted longitudinally. While the qualitative and mixed methods studies are self-evidently limited in number, a closer look at their publication date suggests a somewhat rising interest in carrying out qualitative or mixed methods research on psychological factors affecting EFL learning over the last decades in particular. As Table 3 shows, some of the evident gaps in existing research suggest the need for more qualitative, intervention-based, large-scale and longitudinal studies to generate deeper, more meaningful and triangulated insights that go beyond learner perceptions and attitudes at a single point in time and examine effective approaches for addressing related issues as well as map the evolution of perceptions and attitudes over time.

<b>Table 3: Type of Study</b>					
Quantitative/Survey based/Correlational	Qualitative/Mixed Methods	Questionnaire and Test	Intervention-based	Large-scale	Longitudinal
Ahmed, 2015; Ali, Shamsan & Guduru et al, 2019; Al-Shehri, 2018 Abu-Snoubar, 2017; Alkaff, 2013; Alkhalaf, 2020; Andrade & Williams, 2009; Chae, 2013; Chalak & Kassaian, 2010; Chiu & Wong, 2018; Choubsaz & Choubsaz, 2014; Gan, 2009; Genc & Aydin, 2017; Genc, Kulusakli & Aydin, 2016; Goktepe, 2014; Khamkhien, 2012; Kim, 2011; Lababidi, 2016; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007;	Almutlaq & Etherington, 2018; Bahous, Bacha & Nabhani, 2011; Çetinkaya 2009; Fuji, 2018; Leeming, 2017 Liu & Ni 2015; Montaña-González & Cancino, 2007 Qiu & Lee, 2020; Yan & Horowitz, 2008	Al-Sawalha, 2016; Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999; Golparvar & Khafi, 2021; Liu & Liu, 2015; Lee & Lo, 2017	Fathi, Derakhshan & Torabi, 2020; Fuji, 2018	Khamkhien, 2012; Liu & Liu, 2015	Magogwe and Oliver, 2007



<p>Masyhur, Mohd, Yasin &amp; Yunus, 2018; Mbato &amp; Kharismawan, 2018; Miao &amp; Vibulphol, 2021; Qiu &amp; Lee, 2020; Xu, Fan &amp; Luo 2020; Roshandel, Ghonsooly &amp; Ghanizadeh, 2018; Sakiroglu &amp; Dikilitas, 2012; Senturk, 2019; Soleimani &amp; Hanafi, 2013; Tanaka &amp; Ellis, 2016; Tilfarlioğlu &amp; Cçnkara, 2009; Tóth, 2007; Tuan, 2012; Yassin &amp; Razak, 2017; Zare &amp; Riasti, 2012</p>					
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### Factor 1: Attitude

Attitudes among students in the Saudi context when learning English have been investigated through a variety of perspectives. Some of these perspectives have related to technology, such as the study by Al-Shammari (2007) that investigated students' attitudes towards computer assisted language learning or the study by Al Fageeh (2011) that examined the use of blogging to develop writing skills and enhance writing skills among Saudi university learners. An additional study by Kabooaha (2016) examined the use of movies in the university classroom, suggesting that students indicated positive attitudes towards this type of intervention. In actuality, the connection between attitudes and EFL learning extends beyond these specific interventions. Wider research into the psychological connections between attitudes and learning suggests that having a positive disposition can contribute to greater gains in EFL learning (Dornyei, 2006).

The attitudes of language learners towards a language and its speakers, in addition to its status and prestige exercise a strong influence on their learning process as well as learning outcomes (Tódor & Degi, 2016, p.123-124). Indeed, research suggests that attitude is a key factor for predicting language learner attainment and efficiency (Caroll, 1964; Csizér 2007; Dörnyei 2009). In documenting students' willingness to communicate, attitude is associated with the affective cognitive context where it becomes one of the foundations for other elements, such



as motivation, self-confidence, behavioural intention and communication behaviour (Dornyei, 2006, p.14).

Influenced by Labov's (1966) ground-breaking study on social stratification in speech communities which showed how language change is catalyzed by perceptions of stigmatized or valued linguistic features by speakers, language attitude has come to be viewed as a key concept in sociolinguistics (Garrett 2010, p. 19). Dragojevic (2017) describes language attitudes as 'evaluative reactions to different language varieties' involving two key processes of 'social categorization and stereotyping'. Dragojevic elaborates that in the first process listeners make use of cues like accent to identify the social group to which the speaker belongs, while in the second process, the listeners associate the stereotypical traits attributed to speakers on the basis of their perceived social grouping, with evaluations spanning perceptions of status (intelligence or education) and solidarity (friendliness or pleasantness). Language attitudes may be understood as comprising cognitive (beliefs about the world and how objects of social importance are related), affective (how language learners feel about the target language) and behavioral aspects (how the language learners behave towards the target language) (Garrett, 2010, p.24).

Dornyei (2006) notes that attitudes are directly linked to tasks, when shaping learners' interests and in association with their enthusiasm for learning an L2. He suggests that, "the quality of the activities used in language classes and the way these activities are presented and administered make an enormous difference in students' attitudes toward learning" (Dornyei, 2006, p.14). In applying this to the context of Saudi Arabia, it is apparent that teachers must play a substantial role in the learning development of students acquiring an L2. This can be particularly problematic in Saudi Arabia because the teacher preparation programs designed for EFL teachers are described as non-systematic and inadequate (Al-Hazmi, 2003, p.341) and as generally inefficient (Al-Seghayer, 2014b, p.143). What emerges is a cycle of applicable challenges where the attitudes of both teachers and students are generally poor, thus negatively affecting the foundation for language learning.

### **Attitudes towards EFL Learning**

In the review of existing research on EFL learners' attitudes towards language learning, studies were found to have investigated university L2 learners' perceptions of EFL (Alkaff, 2013), language orientation (Mbato & Kharismawan, 2018) and attitudes of L2 learners towards English speaking countries and native and local varieties of English (Çetinkaya, 2009). The findings of these studies revealed largely positive perceptions of English and awareness of the importance of English in terms of career prospects, although in the case of the study by Çetinkaya (2009), language learner attitudes towards English were found to be both positive and negative to an varying extents.

To inquire into the perceptions and attitudes of 47 female Saudi EFL science and art majors enrolled in a foundation year program at university towards learning English, Alkaff (2013) administered a questionnaire with a combination of close-ended items and questions and one open-ended question. Based on analysis of data, Alkaff found that most of the learners were positively inclined towards learning English and tried to improve their EFL proficiency, despite limited opportunities and time constraints. Carrying out a correlational study, Mbato and Kharismawan (2018) administered a bilingual language attitude questionnaire and an English language orientation questionnaire to 256 learners from 5 public and private Indonesian



universities. Their study found that language orientation was significantly correlated with the learners' attitudes towards English and that they were well aware of the advantages of learning English for their prospects in the future.

Analyzing qualitative data from interviews from 15 Turkish university L2 learners at the School of Foreign Languages (SFL) in Turkey, Çetinkaya (2009) inquired into how they perceived English and their attitudes towards countries with English as L1 as well as toward native and local varieties of English. The interviews also focused on the learners' motivation for studying English, experiences of learning the language and communicating in it and background information. To gain insights into the learning of English in the research context, Çetinkaya (2009) also used document analysis of textbooks and instructional materials. Triangulating the insights from the other data, Çetinkaya interviewed teachers to understand their perceptions of English and their perspectives on learners' perceptions and attitudes towards L2. The study found that although the learners were aware of the international position of English, they tended to be aware only of native speaker varieties such as British and American English and were inclined towards British English as a model for emulation. Çetinkaya (2009) found that their attitudes were multi-layered encompassing a positive perception of English as an international language and admiration of British English as well as dislike of English as a language of dominance and economic and technological power.

### **Attitudes towards target English Community**

The review identified several studies that examined L2 learner attitudes in terms of their perceptions of the target language community (Chalak & Kassaian, 2010), EFL learner attitudes towards the English speaking communities and their L2 motivational system (Senturk, 2019) and their integrativeness and attitudes towards the target language community (Goktepe, 2014). The studies reported positive attitudes towards the target language community and native speakers among the L2 learners and found evidence for both integrative and instrumental orientations towards learning English.

For instance, administering Gardner's AMTB to 108 Iranian English translation majors at an Iranian university, Chalak and Kassaian (2010) studied participant responses to domains such as interest in English, parental support, intensity of motivation, learner attitudes towards target language community native speakers, integrative and instrumental orientations and wish to learn English. They found that the participants demonstrated largely positive attitudes towards the target language community and native speakers. They also evidenced both integrative and instrumental orientations towards learning English.

In another questionnaire study, Senturk (2019) adapted the attitude questionnaire by Dörnyei and Csizér (2006) to investigate 60 Turkish EFL learners' attitudes towards L2 learning, target language community, ideal L2 self, ought to L2 Self, instrumentality and apprehension towards assimilation. The study found that the ideal L2 self was most significant for the learners which was confirmed by the fact that they were voluntarily enrolled in a foundational English program. Their key motivation to learning English was connected to gaining proficiency in the language for their future careers. To gain insights into learners' integrativeness and their attitudes towards L2 community and learning English, Goktepe (2014) administered a survey which was adapted from instruments designed by Dörnyei and Csizér (2006) and Ryan (2005) to 90 Turkish EFL learners majoring in business studies at university. Goktepe found that most



of the learners were learning English for instrumental reasons and that they dominantly demonstrated a favorable attitude towards native English speaking communities.

### **Attitudes towards EFL and obstacles**

Examining the attitudes of L2 learners towards EFL and obstacles faced by them, the studies reviewed showed that the language learners' attitudes towards EFL learning were largely positive, influencing them to seek extra coaching (Ahmed, 2015), enjoy collaborative L2 writing (Alkhalaf, 2020) and become aware of the importance of English as a global language of communication (Ali, Shamsan & Guduru et al, 2019).

Surveying the attitudes of 238 Malaysian university EFL learners towards learning English and the obstacles faced by them in this, Ahmed (2015) found that the participants had a positive attitude towards English as an L2 and were motivated enough to make use of private tuition to improve their L2 proficiency. In a study conducted with Arab EFL learners, Ali, Shamsan and Guduru et al found that the learners were largely positive towards learning English given their growing awareness of the importance of English. The most significant barriers to the development of their L2 speaking skills pertained to the lack of a suitable environment, interest as well as motivation.

In the Saudi EFL university context, Alkhalaf (2020) focused on examining the attitudes of female tertiary learners towards writing collaboratively in the L2. Fifty female EFL learners responded to a 17 item questionnaire designed to gain insights into their attitudes towards collaborative writing in English and the problems they faced in such activities. While the participants identified some problems in collaborative writing activities arising from learner behavior, evaluation and time management, they were largely positive about writing collaboratively in L2.

### **Relation between attitude towards English and relation to other variables**

Existing studies on L2 learner attitudes towards English in relation to other variables have looked at a range of factors, including gender (Abu-Snoubar, 2017; Genc & Aydin, 2017; Soleimani & Hanafi, 2013), parental influence, selected majors and attainment (Genc & Aydin, 2017), culture (Gan, 2009), community perceptions of L2 (Al-Shehri, 2018) and motivation (Lee & Lo, 2017).

Investigating Saudi university EFL learners' attitudes towards learning English, Abu-Snoubar (2017) administered an adapted version of Gardner's AMTB to 68 male and 108 female science majors. The study found that the students demonstrated positive attitudes towards EFL learning, with female students holding more positive attitudes in comparison with male peers. Making use of the original Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery, Genc and Aydin (2017) investigated the relation between attitude towards English and factors such as gender, involvement of the parents, chosen majors and achievement. The questionnaire was administered to 462 (284 of whom were females) Turkish EFL learners at university. The participating learners were enrolled in an intensive English program designed for students who had failed the university in-house English exam. The study found that while most of the students demonstrated a positive attitude towards learning English, the female learners were significantly more positive about learning English as an L2.



A small-scale questionnaire study by Soleimani and Hanafi examined the emotional, cognitive and behavioral aspects of 40 Iranian male and female medical students. The study found that in this case, male learners demonstrated a more positive attitude towards EFL, with the researchers attributing this to the kind of socialization the Iranian males had experienced.

Seeking to examine possible differences in the attitudes, learning strategies and motivation of mainland Chinese learners and Hong Kong learners towards learning English based on culture, Gan (2009) administered attitude, strategies and motivation questionnaires pertaining to self-directed language learning to 339 Hong Kong and 289 Chinese learners. Based on their test scores and the perceptions of their teachers, 36 successful and unsuccessful learners from Hong Kong and China (18 from each context) were later interviewed about how they felt about L2 learning, the type of activities they liked for L2 learning and what motivated their effort to learn English. The study found that both samples felt positively about SDLL. The findings also suggest that institutional and social contexts rather than cultural differences influenced their motivation, strategies and attitudes towards SDLL.

Administering a 17 item questionnaire, Al-Shehri (2018) investigated the influence of community perceptions on 89 EFL learners in the translation department at a Saudi university. The study found that while the students were motivated to study EFL, their attitudes towards EFL learning were influenced by community factors such as dearth of practice and use of English with family members and anxiety and shyness at using English in community contexts.

Lee and Lo (2017) explored the influence of motivation on classroom language choice on 366 Korean EFL university learners drawn from 20 majors across freshmen and sophomore levels. A sub-sample of the students took part in a computerized speaking test. Lee and Lo found that more proficient learners with higher scores on the scale of the 'Ideal L2 Self' supported English-only instruction. The study also found that when the 'Ideal L2 Self' was stronger, it was a better predictor of learners' attitudes towards language choice in the classroom than L2 learner proficiency.

## **Factor 2: Self-Efficacy**

Given the complexity of the process of learning which tends to be influenced by a range of variables, ranging from knowledge, cognition, intelligence to skills, Schunk (2003) observes that increasing attention in research has now turned to what the learners think and believe as part of their learning. Self-efficacy largely refers to a students' willingness to execute the necessary behaviours in order to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1997). Essentially, it comprises the beliefs of individual learners in their capacity to accomplish a task (Bandura, 1986). Thus, self-efficacy not only seems to play a key role in forecasting how learners will perform in their learning contexts but also appears to serve as a better gauge than actual ability to predict performance (Bandura, 1997). Hence, by the time that students get to university, they must be able to self-regulate their learning so that they are proactively seeking out information that they need, and then they are taking logical steps to master the subject (Al-Otaibi, 2013, pp. 114-115). In developing self-efficacy, students must be able to identify the discrepancy between their current self and their ideal or future self, where deficiencies serve as a motivator for change and mastery of certain topics or subjects (Al-Otaibi, 2013, p. 116).

In the Saudi context, there are some concerning trends that appear when attempting to link self-efficacy to English language learning; specifically, students are not identifying a future



self that is fluent in English, and therefore are not making the changes to their learning to achieve such goals (Alrabai, 2016, pp. 22-23). This is despite the fact that the MOE has implemented strategic initiatives to make English a focus of the core curriculum throughout school-age years moving into university.

This lack of self-efficacy seems to link only with English language learning, as other subjects that students tend to deem 'more necessary' indicate high levels of self-efficacy. For example, a study by Robertson and Al-Zahrani (2012) suggests that university students generally show high skill levels in the area of computing and that self-efficacy increases with computer experience and qualifications (p. 1136). These scholars argue that self-efficacy requires a connection between an individual's personality, behaviour, and environment and that when personal beliefs intersect with working knowledge, there are unconscious behaviours exhibited, which promote further learning until mastery is achieved (p. 1138).

### **Beliefs and self-efficacy**

A review of literature reveals a connection between L2 learners' self-efficacy and beliefs about success and ability in L2 learning (Genc, Kulusakli & Aydin, 2016), influence of study abroad experience on learners' self-efficacy and changes in confidence in L2 learning (Tanakaa & Ellis, 2016) and change in self-efficacy as a result of collaboration-based EFL writing development (Qiu & Lee, 2020).

For example, inquiring into the perceived self-efficacy and beliefs of 210 Turkish EFL English majors in a university teacher training program with the help of the BALLI scale (Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory), Genc, Kulusakli and Aydin (2016) found that the degree of learner self-efficacy (e.g. high or low) had a corresponding influence on the participants' beliefs about their success and ability in L2 learning. To elaborate, highly self-efficacious learners tended to believe that English was easy to learn, felt that it was best learnt in the target community and viewed learning grammar as very useful, also valuing correctness in L2 and enjoying the chance to practice with native speakers and guessing the meanings of unfamiliar words.

An earlier study (Tanakaa & Ellis, 2003) also reported notable changes in language learner beliefs pertaining to self-efficacy and confidence. It sought to examine whether learners' beliefs about language learning and their English proficiency changed as a result of a 15-week study abroad experience in the US. To this end, Tanaka and Ellis administered TOEFL 1 to the 166 Japanese EFL learners in their study 3 months before their study abroad program commenced and the Learner Belief Questionnaire 1 three weeks before they left for the university in the US. TOEFL 2 was administered 13.5 weeks following the commencement of the study abroad and the Learner Belief Questionnaire 2 was administered 15 weeks after the study abroad program had started. The findings revealed significant gains in L2 proficiency reflected in a comparison of the TOEFL results as well as notable changes in language learner beliefs pertaining to self-efficacy and confidence. The study found a weak relationship between what the language learners stated as their beliefs and gains in proficiency, which Tanaka and Ellis explain might be related to the fact changes in behavioral beliefs do not always translate into learner behaviors.

In a recent intervention study within the Chinese EFL context, Qiu and Lee (2020) inquired into the 24 EFL English majors' regulated learning as well as self-efficacy beliefs for



collaborative and second language writing over the course of a semester. The study examined how engaging in collaborative writing (CW) with peers helped the participants in the first year of undergraduate study to develop their L2 writing skills. Data were collected through three writing tasks each learner had to work on individually, recorded task discussions, reflections and follow-up interviews. The participants' writings from pre-test, post-test and delayed post test were gathered to gain insights into how CW influenced learners' writing skills. To understand how the learners regulated their writing behavior and processes while performing the task, data from collaborative discussions of task were analyzed. The researchers also studied the reflective notes on L2 writing self-regulation and self-efficacy. Four of the participants agreed to be interviewed, and they were queried about how they perceived CW and the actions they had taken when managing their process of writing. The study found that engaging in CW helped the learners not only to regulate one another and think about their process of writing but also to acquire self-regulated learning strategies from peers and/or develop personal strategies for writing in the future. CsW also helped the learners to produce extended tasks with the positive effects lasting two months subsequent to the end of the course.

### **Self-efficacy and other variables**

Self-efficacy has been found to be linked to a range of variables by existing research, ranging from attainment, age and gender (Tilfarlioğlu & Cğnkara, 2009), environmental and personal factors (Almutlaq & Etherington, 2018), communicative activities in the classroom (Leeming, 2017) and experience abroad (Kim, 2020).

Tilfarlioğlu and Cğnkara studied Hungarian EFL learners' self-efficacy in relation to academic attainment, age and gender. The English as a Foreign Language Self-Efficacy Questionnaire (EFL-SEQ) was administered to 175 students at Gaziantep University's School of Foreign Languages (GUSFL). The analysis of data from the EFL-SEQ survey showed that the participants reported being self-efficacious in language learning tasks. Therefore, the study found self-efficacy to contribute to their academic success in EFL.

Based on the idea that self-efficacy in L2 writing is multi-layered and changing system responsive to the learners' environment and internal reorganization, Almutlaq and Etherington (2018) carried out a DST study with three Saudi L2 learners enrolled in an English program preparing them for university study. Data were collected thrice over a period of six weeks through the L2 writing self-efficacy scale (capabilities in L2 spelling and punctuation, in the ability to write argumentative essay or short story and in attaining target grades in writing class). The participants also wrote descriptive entries into journals on themes such as attitude towards writing in L2, changes in their attitudes over time, factors influencing their confidence or their anxiety when writing in L2. Almutlaq and Etherington (2018) found that self-efficacy in L2 writing was an ever-changing and multi-dimensional construct with learners' perception of their writing capabilities being influenced by environmental and personal factors such as how they performed in class, the type of feedback they got from the teachers or their levels of achievement and anxiety.

Forming a part of a year-long investigation, Leeming's study into self-efficacy in English speaking within the Japanese EFL classroom inquired into how groupwork fostering 77 university students' L2 speaking skills through communicative activities influenced learners' self-efficacy. Responses to the adapted Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ), were collected from the participants. Eight students were also interviewed at the end



of each semester with a total of 16 interviews being carried out by the researcher. The findings show that the learners perceived their self-efficacy to increase over the semester or academic year. While some of the learners felt that their speaking skills had progressed, others appeared to distinguish English speaking from general ability in the L2.

Analyzing questionnaire data from 197 Korean university learners majoring in English, Kim (2020) studied how the variables of experience abroad, self-perceptions of proficiency and self-efficacy were related and contributed to self-concept in terms of ideal and ought-to L2 motivational selves within the L2 Motivational System. Kim found ideal L2 self to exert more influence on motivating L2 learning behavior than the ought-to self. Experience abroad was also found to be more connected to the ideal L2 self, suggesting that as such experience increases, the ideal L2 self is likely to be augmented. The study found self-efficacy to play a vital role in helping to form the ideal L2 self within the context of experience abroad. Communicative skills proficiency rather than proficiency in academic skills offered a better explanation of the development of learners' ideal L2 self. What these studies highlight is the influence of a wide range of variables on L2 learners' self-efficacy, thus suggesting the need for teachers and other stakeholders to take into account these factors when designing L2 learning.

### **Self-Efficacy and language learning strategies**

A review of literature shows that strategy use and self-efficacy beliefs are linked, with studies concluding that learners who make extended use of strategies are more self-efficacious (Montaño-González & Cancino, 2020) and that the type of instruction learners receive influences their listening self-efficacy and subsequently their use of listening strategies (Xu, Fan & Luo, 2021). The reviewed studies also suggest that linguistic, self-regulatory and performance self-efficacy aspects of self-efficacy can predict strategy use (use of sources and discourse synthesis, planning and evaluation) in relation to summary writing performance (Golparvar & Khafi, 2021) and that communicative interest influences learners to use a variety of strategies (planning, monitoring, and compensatory), while instrumental interest predicts the use of retrieval and compensatory strategies (Chae, 2013).

An earlier large-scale study indicates the dynamic relationships between proficiency and LL strategies as well as education level (in terms of age differences) and self-efficacy beliefs (Magogwe & Oliver, 2007). Montaño-González and Cancino studied the relationship between language learning strategies and self-efficacy in the context of 62 Chilean university EFL learners. Data were collected through the SILL strategy questionnaire and QESE self-efficacy questionnaire. Two learners with high self-efficacy and two learners with low self-efficacy were also selected from the sample to participate in semi-structured interviews. The results showed that the participants' use of language learning strategies was significantly related to their self-efficacy, with qualitative results also suggesting that learners who made extended use of strategies were more self-efficacious. The learners demonstrated a preference for more social strategies which was attributable to the prevalence of a communicative approach to EFL learning in Chile.

In their study with 302 Chinese EFL learners, Xu, Fan and Luo (2021) looked at the relationship between listening instruction type and self-efficacy through LL strategy use. The Listening Instruction Questionnaire, English Language Learning Questionnaire and Self-efficacy Questionnaire were administered to the participants. The study confirmed that the type of



listening instruction learners receive influences their listening self-efficacy and subsequently their use of listening strategies. The findings of the study suggest that the teachers should balance comprehension and process-based instructional approaches to listening with support for self-regulated-based instruction (guidance on note-taking, variety of listening tasks and emotional support) and strategy-based instruction which can improve learner self-efficacy.

In a study investigating whether L2 writing self-efficacy was able to contribute to summary writing strategy use and learner performance in writing tasks, Golparvar and Khafi (2021) implemented a summary task with two individual texts for assessing the ability of 191 university EFL Iranian learners to extract and distill information from multiple texts effectively. They also administered questionnaires on the learners' L2 writing self-efficacy and use of summary writing strategies to the students. The study revealed that three aspects of L2 writing self-efficacy (linguistic, self-regulatory and performance) predicted the summary writing performance of the learners. Linguistic self-efficacy was found to predict strategies pertaining to use of sources and discourse synthesis, whereas the other aspects of writing self-efficacy (self-regulatory and performance) predicted strategies related to the planning and evaluation of writing.

Chae (2013) sought to examine whether Korean college learners' L2 writing self-efficacy in addition to their interest contributed to their use of strategies and writing performance. To this end, the researcher collected data on the participants' L2 writing self-efficacy (The Writing Self-efficacy Scale), interest (Interest measure), strategy uses (Strategy Inventory and performance (writing performance assessment on three topics). The study showed that communicative interest influenced learners to use a variety of strategies (planning, monitoring, and compensatory), while instrumental interest predicted the use of retrieval and compensatory strategies. The findings suggest that L2 writing strategy does contribute to writing performance in the L2, to a statistically significant but minor degree.

Examining the language learning strategies used by Botswanan EFL learners and the relationship between the strategies and variables such as age, education level, proficiency and self-efficacy, Magogwe and Oliver (2007) collected data from 480 learners across primary, secondary and tertiary levels at government schools between 2005 to 2007. A SILL questionnaire, adapted for each level, was used to collect data on the learners' strategy use, whereas the Morgan-Jinks Student Efficacy Scale (MJSES) was administered to collect data on learners' self-efficacy. The study found that while learners across all levels deployed all six categories of the LL strategies irrespective of their education level and proficiency (secondary and tertiary contexts), preference was given to metacognitive, social and cognitive strategies over those related to affect, memory or compensation. This suggests that the preference for some strategies may be influenced by local culture. The study also indicates dynamic relationships between proficiency and LL strategies as well as education level (in terms of age differences) and self-efficacy beliefs.

### **Factor 3: Anxiety**

One of the more pervasive psychological factors associated with EFL learning is the anxiety associated with learning in a foreign language. The literature suggests that anxiety is often associated with other feelings, such as fear and apprehension (Capan & Simsek, 2012, p.116). More specifically, foreign language anxiety is defined as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising



from the uniqueness of language learning process” (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p.128). While foreign language anxiety is often associated with speaking, it exists across all skills as well as in test-taking and other forms of assessment.

In a recent study by Alrabai (2014), it is suggested that in the Saudi context, language anxiety has not been fully investigated (p.83). Studies such as the one by Abu-Ghararah (1999) and Al-Saraj (2013) document small-scale studies on foreign language anxiety using the most common instrument for assessment, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) within the Saudi context. Both studies found that participants attributed anxiety to a wide variety of elements, including the teacher, interaction between the teacher and the student, competitiveness within the learning environment, assessment, or peer influences. Alrabai (2014) contributed to the discussion by surveying a broader range of students within the Saudi educational system and found that students across all levels were experiencing high levels of anxiety in their EFL classes (p.90). From a psychological standpoint, it was the students with low self-esteem and those who compared themselves to an idealized self-image who demonstrated the highest levels of anxiety (p.90). Additional findings indicated that the highest levels of anxiety were often associated with overt participation, such as when giving presentations (Rafada & Madini, 2017, p.54) or producing oral work (e.g. speeches) (Asif, 2017, p.161). From a psychological perspective, the literature related to anxiety in the Saudi context generally suggests a recursive relationship between anxiety, behaviour, and cognition, meaning that learners are often unable to comprehend material or learn new vocabulary if they are hindered by high levels of anxiety, thus creating a particularly problematic cycle (Asif, 2017, p.162)

Research on anxiety shows that the choice and use of L2 strategies is motivated by what makes the L2 learners anxious (Khamkhien, 2012) and that L2 learners’ anxiety decreases with the help of strategy use (Kim, 2011; Fathi, Derakhshan & Torabi, 2020).

## **L2 STRATEGIES AND INFLUENCE OF ANXIETY**

In the Thai EFL context, Khamkhien (2012) surveyed 1405 university English majors by administering the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), a Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ), and a Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The findings of the study showed that Thai learners tended to make use of memory strategies to a dominant extent which were succeeded by strategies pertaining to compensation, metacognition, cognition and affect. Social strategies were the least used. The Thai learners relied on guessing when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary, making use of reflection to monitor their L2 progress. Their choice of strategies tended to be influenced by what motivated them or caused them anxiety. This led Khamkhien to conclude that these two affective variables had the most significant impact on choice of language learning strategies

Examining how 144 Korean college EFL learners’ anxiety, strategy use and proficiency in listening were related, Kim (2011) administered questionnaires focused on the participants’ listening strategy use and anxiety. The TOIEC listening test was used to assess the participants’ proficiency in L2 listening. Kim found that when anxiety was reduced and strategy use was encouraged, L2 learning becomes more successful. In an intervention study providing listening strategy instruction to Iranian EFL majors in the experimental group, Fathi, Derakhshan and Torabi (2020) also found that being taught how to use strategies for L2 listening improved the



participants' comprehension and mitigated their anxiety. However the intervention did not have a significant effect on the learners' L2 listening self-efficacy.

### **Relationship between L2 anxiety and other variables**

Studies investigating L2 anxiety have found that anxiety is influenced by a range of variables, including level of study (Zare & Riasti, 2012; Yassin & Razak, 2017), gender (Liu & Liu, 2015) and nationality (Andrade & Williams, 2009).

In a study carried out with 108 EFL learners at two Iranian universities, Zare and Riasti (2012) sought to examine how language learning anxiety, self-esteem and the level of study were related. Based on analysis of data from self-report questionnaires, Zare and Riasti found that the language learning anxiety of the participants decreased as their self-efficacy progressed and as they advanced in their studies, gaining confidence as they compared their initial proficiency in the target language with their present improved proficiency. Making use of the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale, Yassin and Razak (2017) studied the relationship between foreign language anxiety experienced by 155 Yemeni EFL learners at university. The results showed that rather than the first year students or year 3 or 4 learners, it was the second year learners who faced the greatest anxiety while learning a foreign language.

Lu and Liu (2015) attempted to examine the interrelationships between anxiety in foreign language reading, reading and use of strategy in the foreign language in the Chinese EFL context at university level. They administered the FLRAS questionnaire to the 1702 participants enrolled at 5 Chinese universities in addition to a reading test. The results suggest that while more than fifty percent of the students did not experience FL reading anxiety and made use of multiple FL reading strategies, the male students tended to be more anxious when faced with reading in FL and to make limited use of strategies.

Andrade and Williams (2009) investigated the emotional responses reported by Japanese EFL non-English majors when faced with anxiety-causing situations in their EFL classes. They administered a questionnaire adapted from Matsumoto et al (1988) who had used it to inquire into the similarities between the reactions of US and Japanese learners. In this survey of 132 male and 111 female learners, the researchers found that a majority of the participants experienced varying degrees of anxiety which proved obstructive to at least 11% of them.

### **Anxiety in FL skills**

Anxiety in L2 learning has also been found influence L2 skills, ranging from EFL listening (Al-Sawalha, 2016), L2 reading (Liu & Liu, 2015; Miao & Vibulphol, 2021), L2 writing (Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999; Liu & Ni, 2015), L2 skills and strategy use (Chiu & Wong, 2018; Fuji, 2018).

In the Jordanian EFL context, Al-Sawalha used a mixed methods approach to investigate the influence of anxiety on EFL listening. Sixty English major participants responded to a listening questionnaire, and of this number 24 students volunteered to take part in focus group interviews in researcher-selected groups of six. The study found that limited proficiency and high levels of anxiety were perceived by students as affecting their listening performance in English.



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Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert (1999) sought to investigate the connections between L2 anxiety in the classroom and L2 writing anxiety and their intersections with achievement L2 speaking and writing. 433 male and female Taiwanese EFL learners aged between 17 to 30 years took part in the study. The researchers made use of Horwitz et al's Foreign Language Anxiety Scale and a modified version of Daly and Miller's Writing Apprehension Test to collect data. The study found that whereas L2 classroom was a general kind of anxiety about L2 learning with a strong component of anxiety about speaking, L2 writing anxiety was a language skill related concern. However, in both anxiety constructs, low self-confidence was a distinctive feature.

Examining Chinese EFL writers' anxiety in foreign language writing, Liu and Ni collected data from 1174 first year students majoring in multiple disciplines enrolled at three universities through the Foreign Language Writing Anxiety Scale, background questionnaire and English writing test. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 18 of the participants. The results showed that the participants not only liked English but were also confident about using the language. The study also found that gender and proficiency contributed to significant differences in the FLWAS scales and that multiple factors contributed to EFL learners' writing anxiety.

Within the Hong Kong EFL context, Chiu and Wong (2018) investigated interrelations between reading and listening in a foreign language as well as cognitive (language learning strategies), affective (learning motivation) and behavioral (performance) correlates of anxiety. 306 Chinese undergraduate male and female EFL learners aged between 18 to 26 years participated in the study. The Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) was used to test the participants' reading anxiety, whereas the Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (adapted from FLRAS) tested their listening anxiety. Their motivation was tested through the motivational intensity sub-scale included in Gardner's AMTB, and their use of strategies was assessed through metacognitive and social scales from Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning. The participants' reading and writing performance was assessed by their results in university entry public examinations. Their listening performance assessment was based on how they processed information presented in selected spoken texts. The researchers found that while EFL performance and motivation predicted L2 reading and listening anxiety, learning strategies played a secondary and more indirect role in influencing FL anxieties.

Interested not just in the sources of foreign language anxiety but also in strategies to alleviate it, Fujii (2018) carried out a qualitative study with 7 highly anxious and 4 low anxious Japanese EFL learners at university. First, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale designed by Horwitz et al (1986) was used to calculate the participants' anxiety scores. Following this, 15 intervention classes designed to reduce anxiety and making use of collaborative work, discussion, learner cooperation, preparation before presentation, pair presentations and advice to individual learners were implemented. Once the classes had been implemented, the participants were interviewed. The findings showed that effective strategies for addressing



language anxiety varied from learner to learner and was contingent upon their anxiety levels. More specifically, while learners with high anxiety largely benefitted from being helped to rehearse for presentations and to have the opportunity to co-present with a peer, they found, unlike low-anxious peers, that pair and group work evoked their anxiety. Teacher support was found to be helpful by both types of students, but more anxious learners worried about choosing questions appropriately.

### **Sources of L2 anxiety**

The sources of anxiety in L2 learning can be diverse. The reviewed studies show anxiety in L2 learning to be connected to a breadth of variables including L2 self-concept (Tóth, 2007), motivation (Yan & Horowitz, 2008), stressful classroom environment, prior learning experiences and beliefs as well as attitudes about EFL learning (Lababidi, 2016) and lack of general reading ability and vocabulary-related variables (Miao & Vibulphol, 2021),

In a pilot study seeking to investigate the interrelationships of language learning anxiety with other variables in the perceptions of EFL learners, Yan and Horwitz (2008) carried out a focus group interview with 6 Chinese graduate students at a US institution. They found that motivation not only strongly predicted FL learning success but also influenced their goals as well as expectations and strategies for learning.

In the Hungarian EFL context, Tóth (2007) sought to examine the relationships between FL learning anxiety and cognitive, affective and personality-oriented individual differences. Tóth administered questionnaires to 107 first year university learners on their foreign language anxiety, motivation, self-concept as L2 learners, perfectionism as well as their competitiveness. The study showed that L2-self-concept was very useful in predicting whether first year English majors in the research setting experienced anxiety. A negative self-concept in combination with the personality trait of competitiveness was found to good at predicting L2 learners' anxiety.

The focus of Lababidi's (2016) study was on inquiring into the level of anxiety experienced by UAE EFL learners. This was done by administering the FLCAS anxiety scale for L2 learning in the classroom to 278 learners across level 1 and level 2 of the Foundation program at a UAE HEI. The results indicated the existence of moderate anxiety amongst the participants. The findings from the focus group interview carried out with the participants demonstrating the highest level of anxiety as identified by the FLCAS showed that their FL anxiety was caused by multiple variables, including a stressful classroom environment, prior learning experiences and beliefs as well as attitudes about EFL learning.

Using an adapted version of EFL Reading Anxiety Inventory, Miao and Vibulphol (2021) examined the sources of 459 Chinese university learners' anxiety in EFL reading. The results showed that learners' anxiety mainly arose from their lack of general reading ability and vocabulary-related variables. Miao and Vibulphol found that the participants tended to focus on details while reading and experienced anxiety at not understanding everything.

### **Factor 4: Motivation**

Positive elements demonstrated by EFL students in Saudi Arabia include strong correlations between motivation and positive learning experiences (Alrabai, 2014). The literature has extensively documented that motivation is a key factor in English language learning among Saudi students at all levels (AlMaiman, 2005; Alrabai, 2011). Motivation is a broad term, and



links to other psychological factors within the learning context, including attitude, aptitude, self-confidence, and language anxiety (Alrabai, 2014, p.225). In this way, students who demonstrate solid motivation for EFL learning are more likely to achieve success.

Motivation remains a challenging component of learning among Saudi students, and numerous studies have documented the belief constraints that exist among the student populations in the Saudi context. Specifically, Al-Seghayer (2014) suggests that poor student attitude and low motivation negatively affect classroom performance (p.18). He further suggests that from a psychological perspective, Saudi students hold a dismissive or passive view about learning English because they do not see it as relevant to their needs (p.18). This is consistently supported, as Rahman and Alhaisoni (2013) suggest that even though the Saudi government has made English language learning a core component of the Saudi curriculum, students generally lack the motivation to work hard in this subject. This means that most Saudi students are unable to communicate in English beyond basic reading and writing skills despite many years of English language instruction (Alrabai, 2014b, p.227).

The lack of motivation to learn English has been studied widely across Saudi Arabia. Despite the fact that all studies have been relatively small in scale, the implications of the combined and consistent results are particularly useful in justifying the position that learners in Saudi Arabia remain unmotivated to learn English because they do not see any real benefit to doing so. As a result, unmotivated students generally leave education with only a basic level of English competency.

Research in the EFL context across global settings has also shown the importance of motivation as an influential factor on second language learning. For instance, an intervention study with 16 international learners at a US university English Language Center, Cave and Evans (2018) demonstrated that motivational partnerships in the ESL classroom contributed to an increase in the students' self-efficacy. The study assessed learners' self-efficacy through the Self-efficacy Scale and motivational state through the Student Motivational State Questionnaire week 1 of the class. Based on the results from these scales, learners with high motivation but contrasting levels of self-efficacy were organized into motivational partnerships aimed at leveraging a common goal mindset and catalyzing the natural leadership of the self-efficacious partner in the MP towards fostering the self-efficacy of the low efficacious partner. The learners in the MPs were trained to make use of self-efficacy strategies (personal experience of success, observation of peer success, verbal persuasion, augmenting physiological states) in the first five minutes of every class. Frequency and patterns of strategy were noted in private google doc by the MPs. The post-tests of the scale and the questionnaire were implanted a week prior to the students' summative proficiency examinations. The analysis of data showed that self-efficacy strategies used by the MPs influenced learners' self-efficacy positively particularly in reading which skill was targeted by the course in which the participants were enrolled. Interviews with the learners revealed that they experienced increased confidence, reduction in their apprehensions, increased collaboration and consistent emotional support in addition to more unity within the class.

Studying the L2 motivational self-system and self-efficacy of 210 Iranian EFL university learners, Roshandel, Ghonsooly and Ghanizadeh (2018) found that the ideal L2 self offers significant prediction of learners' L2 self-efficacy. The researchers sought to identify the participants' EFL motivational profile, relationship between the learners' L2 motivation and their self-efficacy in L2 and the most significant sub-factor in the L2 motivational system with



the power to predict self-efficacy in L2. The researchers collected data from the participants through an English learner questionnaire (designed and validated by the School of English Studies of the University of Nottingham UK). The first section of the questionnaire comprised 76 items on learners' attitudes and motivation in L2 learning and the second section comprised 10 questions on the learners' gender, experience abroad, nationality, self-rated of English proficiency and age. The results showed that all L2 motivational sub-factors ( i. criterion measures, ii.ideal L2 self, iii. ought-to L2 self, iv. family influence, v. instrumentality promotion, vi. instrumentality prevention,vii. attitudes towards learning English, viii. attitudes towards L2 community, ix. cultural interest, and x. integrativeness) were significantly related to self-efficacy in L2. However, factors i (criterion measures), ii (ideal L2 self), v (instrumentality promotion) and vii (attitudes towards learning English) predicted L2 self-efficacy most powerfully. As aspects of criterion measures, language choice and intended effort are key motivating factors in L2 learning. With reference to attitudes towards EFL learning, these are predictive of L2 self-efficacy because the more positive learners are towards L2 learning, the greater is their confidence and self-efficiency. Instrumentality promotion and L2 self-efficacy relate to the fact that as learners desire professional success, their instrumental motivation becomes linked to career enhancement which is then logically connected to the ideal L2 self. Thus, the ideal L2 self offers significant prediction of learners' L2 self-efficacy.

A questionnaire study carried out with 129 Turkish university EFL learners highlighted the influence of student gender and level of study on their motivation to learn English as an L2 (Sakiroglu & Dikilitas, 2012). In their survey-based investigation of the motivation orientation of Iranian EFL undergraduate learners, Choubsaz and Choubsaz (2014) found that students tended to be instrumentally motivated to learn an L2 in educational settings. Another study examining the nature of university EFL learners' motivation in the Vietnamese context found that the learners not only displayed a positive attitude towards L2 learning but also exhibited extrinsic and intrinsic motivation towards learning English (Tuan, 2012). Their L2 learning was found to be influenced by their individual approaches to academics and the challenging curriculum and textbooks they were exposed to. The study also looked at the teachers' motivation towards EFL teaching and found it be positive given the close link between motivation and effective learner performance. The influence of parental support and a positive language learning environment was found to influence effective EFL learning in the Malaysian university context in a qualitative study that drew upon analysis of interview data focusing on six EFL learners' learning histories (Masyhur, Mohddd, Yasin & Yunus, 2018).

In an exploratory study inquiring into Lebanese EFL learners' motivation towards EFL learning, 30 students were interviewed by the researchers to identify their perceptions of EFL learning experiences (Bahous, Bacha & Nabhani, 2011). The study revealed that the students lacked motivation to study English because they found the course to be narrowly focused on developing writing skills without integrating novel pedagogical experiences or interesting materials. The students reported feeling demotivated due to lack of clarity over the connection between what they were studying and their majors and future professions.



## CONCLUSION

Based on a survey of studies, this review finds that the psychology of EFL learners at the university level is complex and that there are multiple factors linked to the reviewed factors which need to be taken into account by policymakers, curriculum designers, teacher trainers and teachers to ensure effective EFL learning. This review examined four possible aspects of EFL learning, including attitude, self-efficacy, anxiety, and motivation. It found that existing research points to the deep impact of these four factors on EFL learning. In addition, the findings of most of the reviewed studies suggest that EFL learning is positively perceived by learners, although obstacles to effective EFL learning do exist and attitudes towards learning English seem to be influenced by a wide range of factors including parental support, gender, level of study, community support and motivation. The reviewed research also suggests a link between strategy-use and EFL learners' self-efficacy and anxiety management. A key implication of these findings for improving the EFL learning experience in the Saudi context is the need to carry out more qualitative (e.g. Almutlaq & Etherington, 2018) and in-depth studies that can help to map and address the actual issues affecting EFL learners. Further, intervention-based, rather than purely survey-based, research can enable Saudi EFL education providers to understand what pedagogical interventions and strategies can work most effectively in the local settings. Longitudinal studies would also enable researchers to understand whether attitudes, self-efficacy, anxiety and motivation evolve over time, and if they do, then what are the factors influencing such development, whether positive or negative. These understandings are key to creating a transformative EFL learning experience for Saudi university students which in turn determines their prospects of success in the academic setting and future employability.

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