

Review Article

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A Review of EFL Learners' Motivation Under Organismic Integration Theory: Future Directions

Ha Thanh Bich Loan , Trinh Quoc Lap , Bui Le Diem Trang 

Abstract

Background/purpose. This study conducts a systematic review of research articles related to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' motivation under Organismic Integration Theory (OIT) in the early 2020s (between 2020 and 2024), based on PRISMA statement 2020 (Page et al., 2021), to find out about what recent trends in research on EFL learners' motivation under OIT are, and what types of methodology have been employed for studies in this field.

Materials/methods. Relevant studies in the early 2020s were selected from various sources using Boolean operators to capture recent trends in EFL learners' motivation based on inclusion criteria: (i) EFL learners' motivation, (ii) OIT or SDT (Self-determination Theory) as a theoretical framework, and (iii) diverse EFL settings (e.g., Asia, Europe, etc.), and exclusion criteria: (i) studies focusing on non-EFL contexts, and (ii) review articles. Information from the selected studies was synthesized and described by using content analysis.

Results. The findings revealed that research on EFL learners' motivation has been developing across Asia (Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Japan, Turkey, and Vietnam). SDT and OIT have been increasingly employed in research on EFL learners' motivation. With OIT and SDT frameworks, there have been more mixed- methods and qualitative than quantitative approaches.

Conclusion. The review provides insights into empirical studies on EFL learners' motivation under OIT or SDT and implies future directions: (i) more investigation into the complexity of EFL learners' motivation, (ii) longitudinal research is a significant gap, and (iii) qualitative methods like phenomenology and grounded theory seem absent in this area.

1. Introduction

Among various factors affecting EFL learners' learning process, including age, gender, learning environment, instructors, teaching materials, teaching methods, and cultural context (Alrabai, 2016), motivation plays an indispensable role in learners' engagement (Noels et al., 2019). Research shows that motivated learners often proactively join class activities, look for more opportunities to practice outside the classroom, and do research on the culture related to the language (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

Motivation is not stable or dynamic and changes over time (Waninge et al., 2014), especially when it is put in the chronosystem of Ecological Systems Theory by Bronfenbrenner (1994), which refers to significant historical events (pandemics, wars, etc.) or technological shifts, such as the rise of social media, ChatGPT boom, and so on (Guy-Evans, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic was at its peak between 2020 and 2021; additionally, ChatGPT was first launched in 2022, and since then, it has had a significant effect on all areas, including education, especially language teaching and learning. Accordingly, this paper aims to answer two questions:

(i) What are recent research trends in EFL learners' motivation under OIT or SDT in the first five years of the 2020s?

(ii) What kinds of methodology have been employed for research in this field?

Based on these answers, the research gaps in EFL learners' motivation continuum will be identified for future directions, and the insights into motivational dynamics in the language learning process are also significant to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Motivation continuum

Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are popular concepts when it comes to learner motivation. The former refers to the motive coming from inside the learner; i.e., learners learn a new language just because they are interested in the language (Seven, 2020). The latter mentions things outside the learners; that is, they learn the language because it is necessary for their job, their overseas study, or simply because they are forced to study by institutional policies or requirements from the labor market (Kralova & Dolezelova, 2020).

However, motivation actually exists along a spectrum or a continuum (Ryan & Deci, 2000), encompassing three types: (1) amotivation (lack of motivation), (2) extrinsic motivation, and (3) intrinsic motivation. The first and the last ones are at the two ends, while the second involves four degrees or levels lying between the two extremes: external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation. The continuum is supported by a theory called OIT - one of the six sub-theories of a psychological framework: SDT by Deci & Ryan (1985).

2.2. Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

SDT states that when people are satisfied with their three basic psychological needs: autonomy (freedom of choice), competence (getting positive feedback or feeling competent), and relatedness (connected with their community), they have a sense of well-being (or intrinsic motivation) and will perform their tasks better (Evans, 2015). SDT has been widely employed in studies on human motivation in areas like work, healthcare, sports, and education. There has recently been more and more evidence from studies on motivation in education, especially in English language teaching and learning. Specifically, literature on learner motivation indicates that when having a sense of well-being, EFL learners are most likely to be engaged in learning (Pan et al., 2023) and gain better learning outcomes (Deci et al., 1999).

2.3. Organismic Integration Theory (OIT)

While SDT centers on intrinsic motivation, OIT, based on SDT, complements and details motivation levels. This theory focuses on not only intrinsic and extrinsic motivation but also the whole continuum with six levels (Deci & Ryan, 1985), from (1) the lowest (lack of motivation), (2) external pressure (rewards or punishments), (3) internal pressure (guilt, shame, or pride), (4) personal importance (doing something because of its value or significance), (5) integrated regulation (behavior fits with personal beliefs and values), to (6) the highest (intrinsic motivation). This is called the internalization of motivation (Wang & Wind, 2020), which means motivation is not stable but influenced and changed by motivators or demotivators (Liu, 2020; Pack et al., 2022).

It can be said that OIT is a framework for a deeper understanding of human motivation in general and learner motivation in education in particular. This explains whether learners' engagement is driven by which type or level of motivation. OIT is a child of SDT and, therefore, links to its mother by indicating that the three elements of SDT (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) have certain impacts on learners' internalization of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the scope of EFL learning, OIT helps practitioners determine which specific factors facilitate or hinder EFL learners' motivation (their engagement and persistence in learning) to tailor teaching strategies for better learning outcomes (Liu, 2015).

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Design

The aforementioned aim of this review is to seek answers to the research questions, which aim to identify research gaps in EFL learners' motivation continuum under OIT. The key areas covering this review comprise (1) the impact of types of motivation within OIT on learning outcomes, (2) the influence of educational contexts (e.g., traditional classrooms, online learning environments), which contribute to a rich understanding of how learner motivation differs in varied learning contexts (Moskovsky et al., 2016), (3) qualitative research necessary for a more nuanced understanding of EFL learners' motivation within the SDT framework, according to Ryan (2022), the co-author of SDT, and (4) the characteristics of motivation: complexity and dynamics (motivation changes over time), requiring more longitudinal studies (Dörnyei & Henry, 2022).

To examine those aspects of EFL learners' motivation and ensure consistency in evaluating the selected studies, this review develops a protocol for a structured review procedure based on four key aspects: **what** (research problems), **where** (in which context), **how** (methods), and **how long** (longitudinal or cross-sectional). This protocol includes the steps as follows:

Step 1: *Considering bias control and sources for searching*

To limit publication bias, the review includes relevant studies, namely journal articles, book chapters, theses or dissertations, and conference proceedings that can be gathered from these two search engines: Google and Google Scholar. It is said that Google and Google Scholar play the role of a hub, linking to diverse databases and sources, such as Web of Science, ScienceDirect, ERIC, SpringerLink, Research Gate, ProQuest, research repositories, thesis archives, and so forth. Accordingly, the relevant studies found seem to be universal and varied in scope.

Step 2: *Determining terms for searching*

The search terms directing the initial search process include "learner motivation," "EFL," "motivation continuum," "Organismic Integration Theory," "Self-Determination Theory," and "2020", "2021", "2022", "2023", and "2024". To narrow down the results for relevant studies, the following Boolean operators were employed as the search technique:

- “Learner motivation” AND (“2020” OR “2021” OR “2022” OR “2023” OR “2024”)
- (“learner motivation” AND “EFL” AND (“2020” OR “2021” OR “2022” OR “2023” OR “2024”))
- (“motivation continuum” AND “EFL” AND (“2020” OR “2021” OR “2022” OR “2023” OR “2024”))
- (“learner motivation” AND “EFL” AND “self-determination theory” AND (“2020” OR “2021” OR “2022” OR “2023” OR “2024”))
- (“motivation continuum” AND “EFL” AND “organismic integration theory” AND (“2020” OR “2021” OR “2022” OR “2023” OR “2024”))

Step 3: Screening

Titles, abstracts, article types (research articles, not review articles), and publication years will be screened to select relevant studies.

Step 4: Extracting data

To identify research trends and gaps, information about study characteristics, research problems, educational contexts or research settings, research methodology (e.g., population, research design, methods), findings, and limitations or future directions will be systematically extracted for analysis.

Step 5: Assessing quality

The selected studies will be analyzed and evaluated based on a framework with criteria on methodology (e.g., clearly described and rigorous methods, sample size, sampling, etc.), and theoretical alignment with OIT (Gough et al., 2017).

In a word, to capture recent research trends in EFL learners’ motivation, relevant studies are selected or gathered from a wide variety of sources in the first five years of the 2020s (2020-2024), and involve these **inclusion criteria**: (i) EFL learners’ motivation continuum, (ii) OIT as a theoretical framework, (iii) diverse EFL settings (e.g., Asia, Europe, etc.), (iv) quantitative, or qualitative, or mixed methods, and (v) cross-sectional or longitudinal design, and the following **exclusion criteria**: (i) studies focusing on ESL learners, those not related to OIT, and review articles.

3.2. Sampling

The sampling strategy in this review focuses on identifying all potentially relevant studies that investigated EFL learners’ motivation under the OIT framework from accessible sources and were published between 2020 and 2024. In addition, the sampling unit in this research includes individual empirical studies that provide insights into the spectrum of learners’ motivation degrees, ranging from amotivation (lack of motivation) to intrinsic motivation or autonomous motivation, in EFL learning environments (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Noels et al., 2003).

As mentioned in Step 1, the sampling plan will include both published and unpublished research, such as peer-reviewed journal articles or research articles (not review articles), conference proceedings, dissertations or theses, to reduce publication bias and convey a comprehensive range of perspectives (Rothstein et al., 2005). Additionally, reference chaining will also be utilized to identify more studies cited in relevant articles (Cooper, 2017) so as to obtain the breadth of research on learners’ motivation continuum in EFL contexts.

3.3. Data Collection

After collecting relevant studies, the data will be systematically categorized and entered into Excel sheets with columns of information based on Step 4 above. This was considered as a template

with standardized data extraction that provides consistency across selected studies and makes the comparison of results systematic (Cooper, 2017).

To answer the two research questions above, the information on the four facets (what, where, how, and how long) of the selected studies will be extracted in terms of (i) EFL learners' motivation with constructs of OIT (six levels of motivation), (ii) research problems, (iii) research settings, (iv) research design, (v) methods, (vi) population, (vii) sample size, (viii) findings, and (iv) limitations.

3.4. Process of selecting relevant studies based on PRISMA

First of all, the search terms, as described in Step 1, were input into the search engines of Google and Google Scholar using the Boolean operators as mentioned above. The results showed a wide range of studies from various sources, including names of journals, websites, and other sources, along with the required years (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024) and the links to PDF files or accessible articles.

The reasons for choosing Google and Google Scholar to search the studies involve (i) the Boolean operators seem to work more intensely in these engines, which means they respond to very long operators as listed above; (ii) the results also show words related to search terms in both the titles and the contents of studies, which is undoubtedly helpful for identifying relevant studies; (iii) the results point out a myriad of sources with clear information about whether the studies can be accessed or not; (iv) the results also include the number of the studies that cited the observed study - a type of meaningful information for researchers' reference; and (v) more importantly, the results also indicate the name of the publisher where the observed study or article was published, providing numerous choices for researchers to determine trusted or credible sources.

Then, based on the titles of the accessible articles, book chapters, theses or dissertations, and proceeding papers, the related studies were downloaded and numbered for manageable storage and extraction. Next, the details of the studies' abstracts were screened to ensure they met the exclusion requirements in the aforementioned protocol. Finally, the studies were screened again through their full texts to meet the inclusion criteria. The whole process of selecting and screening studies for this review is summarized in the following flow chart:

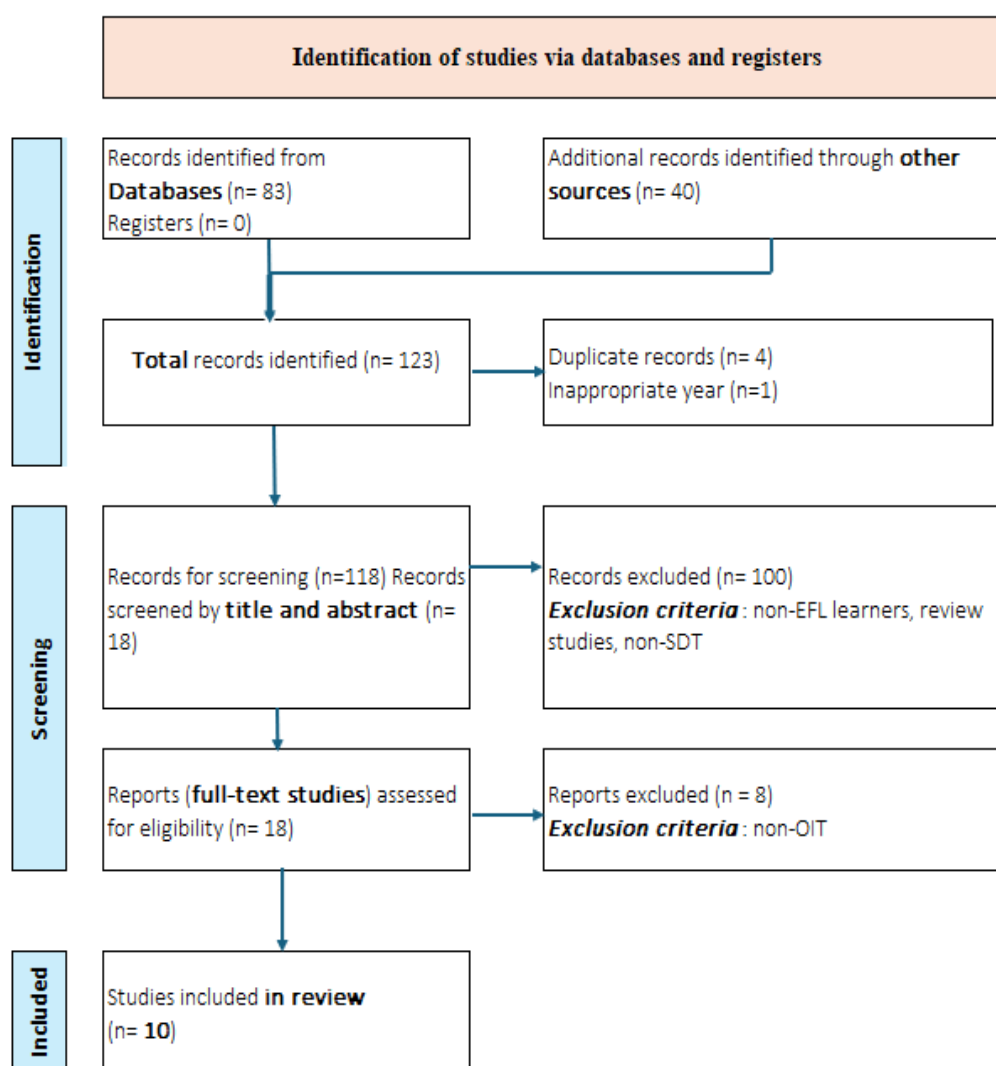


Figure 1. Process of selecting relevant studies for review, adapted from PRISMA (Page et al., 2021)

Figure 1 shows that a total of 123 studies were identified from various databases (83) and sources (40). Web of Science includes the most studies found (60 records, making nearly a half); other databases comprise Scopus (15), and others (8) like ERIC, EBSCO, etc. Notably, university repositories with theses or dissertations also account for a large number of studies identified (24 records). Furthermore, the remaining (16 records) are non-indexed journals (they may be indexed in Web of Science, Scopus, or other databases in the future when they are eligible) that also provide a wide variety of articles on learner motivation. Finally, book chapters and relevant proceedings papers from international conferences also contribute diverse trends in learner motivation research to this review.

With 123 records identified, there were 10 reports left for review, which satisfied both inclusion and exclusion criteria. These reports or studies randomly involve various databases, namely Web of Science, Scopus, and ERIC, as well as sources such as thesis archives, research repositories, Research Gate, and proceedings archives. The detailed results for different types of records are as follows (Table 1).

Table 1. Overview of 123 records identified

Sources	Amount	Types of records identified	Amount
Web of Science	60	Research articles	84
Scopus	15	Review articles	11
Other databases	8	Book chapters	7
Non-indexed journal articles	16	Thesis	18
University repositories, research archives, university libraries	24	Proceedings papers	3
Total	123	Total	123

3.5. Data Analysis

A descriptive analysis is the first step in this phase, using the content analysis approach (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992), which summarizes core information about the selected studies, as mentioned in the data collection stage above, to identify trends through frequency counts and percentages of occurrence, then discuss the meanings behind them.

This provides an overview of frequencies and commonalities throughout the studies in terms of years of publishing, publishers, databases or sources, the number of studies per year, research contexts (countries and continents), and research methods in order to gain an overall picture of the ten selected studies, which is a baseline for the next step. Then, a thematic analysis will be conducted to identify and categorize recurring patterns to find trends and gaps across the studies.

This process basically encompasses two main steps: counting keywords of interest and coding to themes. However, it can be flexible depending on the aim of a specific study (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Accordingly, to answer the two aforementioned research questions, the data analysis includes a four-step **procedure**:

(i) Summarize the core information of the relevant articles in terms of authors, years of publication, research settings, research problems, research designs, research methods, participants, learning outcomes, findings, and limitations.

(ii) Count the frequency of years of publication, research settings, research methods, and participants to gain an overview of the selected articles.

(iii) Analyze and synthesize the other contents, including research designs, learning outcomes, findings, and limitations, to identify the commonalities among the ten articles.

(iv) Group the commonalities into themes or trends.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Overview

With the search procedure mentioned in Steps 1 and 2 and the screening process in Step 3, 123 works published and unpublished between 2020 and 2024, including journal articles, theses or dissertations, book chapters, and proceedings papers, were collected. After excluding review articles and studies on non-EFL learners' motivation, eighteen (18) works were left.

Regarding geographical setting or research context, the 18 eligible studies were conducted in diverse EFL contexts), spreading from Asia to America and Europe, as in Table 2. China and Indonesia

are in the top two, with three studies each. Pertaining to continents, Asia is in the first place with 13/18 studies, accounting for 72.2%, showing that EFL learners' motivation has been a salient research topic in Asian countries.

Table 2. Studies on EFL learners' motivation between 2020 and 2024

No.	Countries	The number of studies on EFL learners' motivation	Continents
1	Bangladesh	1	Asia
2	Canada	1	America
3	China	3	Asia
4	Indonesia	3	Asia
5	Italy	2	Europe
6	Japan	2	Asia
7	Mexico	1	America
8	Turkey	2	Asia-Europe
9	USA	1	America
10	Vietnam	2	Asia
Total		18	

When it comes to *years of publishing*, there were the most studies on EFL learners' motivation under OIT or SDT (7/18, taking 38.88%) published in 2022, as shown in Table 3, a sudden increase compared to the average frequency of four years 2020, 2021, 2023, and 2024 (2.75 studies per year). This indicates that EFL learners' motivation, especially under the SDT or OIT framework, was stable over the five years. However, the year 2022 came in first place with seven studies; this might be because the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath caused learners to adapt to a new learning environment, which may affect EFL learners' motivation.

Table 3. Studies on EFL learners' motivation under OIT or SDT in the early 2020s

<i>Year of publishing</i>	<i>The number of studies</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
2020	1	5.56
2021	3	16.67
2022	7	38.89
2023	4	22.22
2024	3	16.67
Total	18	100

As for *research methods*, Table 4 shows that mixed methods are dominant among the 18 eligible studies, with 8/18 works accounting for 44.4%. The second place belongs to both quantitative and qualitative research, with five studies each (27.7%). That is to say, researchers tend to take advantage of the power of qualitative and quantitative methods to gain a comprehensive understanding of EFL

learners' motivation continuum. This also points out a trend in choosing more mixed methods in researching EFL learners' motivation under OIT than quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Table 4. The frequency of research methods employed throughout the 18 selected studies

Research methods	Studies on EFL learners' motivation	Percentage
Qualitative	5	27.8
Quantitative	5	27.8
Mixed methods	8	44.4
Total	18	100

4.2. The most relevant studies for the review

4.2.1 Characteristics of the selected studies

After extracting the data related to EFL learners' motivation among the 18 studies, as described above, the two final inclusion criteria were added: each selected study must be (i) related to EFL learners' motivation continuum and (ii) explored under the OIT or SDT framework. In total, there were 10/18 studies utilizing the OIT or SDT framework to carry out research on EFL learners' motivation continuum; i.e., 8/18 studies mentioned EFL learners' motivation in general (not EFL learners' motivation continuum) and used other theoretical frameworks.

Among 10 studies left (as in Table 5) satisfying both exclusion and inclusion criteria, there was a fluctuation over the five years. Specifically, 2022 saw the most studies (4/10), followed by 2021 and 2024 with two articles each, and surprisingly, 2020 and 2023 showed only one each. Again, the overwhelming number of studies in 2022 (the year after the COVID-19 pandemic) may indicate that there needs to be a nuanced understanding of change in degrees of learner motivation (learner motivation continuum), especially in significant changes as in the chronosystem of Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

With regard to sources, half (5/10) of the studies were from Web of Science, which means psychology in education is presumably a popular field across the journals of this database. Concerning publication types, 40% (4/10) of the studies are journal articles, followed by three book chapters and two theses on EFL learners' motivation, accounting for 50% of the relevant studies; and the remaining includes one proceedings paper. That is to say, studies on EFL learners' motivation within the OIT framework have been omnipresent, from articles in prestigious journals, book chapters by reputable publishers, and theses or dissertations to proceeding papers, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. General information about the selected studies

No.	Studies	Years	Types	Publishers	Databases/Sources
1	Wang & Wind (2020)	2020	Journal article	Springer	Web of Science
2	Gronchi (2021)	2021	Master's thesis	Università Ca' Foscari Venezia	Thesis Archive
3	Meşe & Sevilen (2021)	2021	Journal article	Gürhan DURAK	ERIC
4	Dincer & Işık (2022)	2022	Book chapter	Multilingual Matters	Web of Science
5	Hashimoto (2022)	2022	Doctoral Thesis	Meiji University	Research Gate
6	Hoang et al. (2022)	2022	Book chapter	Multilingual Matters	Web of Science
7	Li et al. (2022)	2022	Book chapter	Multilingual Matters	Web of Science
8	Sanjaya et al. (2023)	2023	Proceedings paper	Politeknik Negeri Bali	Proceedings Archives
9	Akteruzzaman et al. (2024)	2024	Journal article	Malque Publishing	Scopus
10	Li et al. (2024)	2024	Journal article	Elsevier Sci LTD	Web of Science

4.2.2. Research trends in EFL learners' motivation under OIT or SDT in the early 2020s

To answer the first question of this study, information about research problems, research settings, findings, and study limitations from the ten selected studies was synthesized and thematically analyzed.

As for **research problems**, several trends in studying EFL learners' motivation continuum have emerged: (i) the change in EFL learners' motivation continuum both inside and outside the classroom (Wang & Wind, 2020; Gronchi, 2021; Meşe & Sevilen, 2021; Dincer & Işık, 2022; Hoang et al., 2022; Sanjaya et al., 2023), (ii) SDT as the core theory to examine three poles of EFL learners' motivation - autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Wang & Wind, 2020; Meşe & Sevilen, 2021; Hashimoto, 2022; Li et al., 2024), (iii) impact of teaching activities and strategies on EFL learners' motivation (Hashimoto, 2022), (iv) influence of cultural and educational contexts on EFL learners' motivation, especially in non-English speaking countries (Akteruzzaman et al., 2024; Li et al., 2024), (v) motivation in different EFL learners based on age and learning environment (Hoang et al., 2022; Akteruzzaman et al., 2024), and (vi) autonomy support and motivation in using technology for learning beyond the classroom (Dincer & Işık, 2022; Hoang et al., 2022; Li et al., 2022).

With regard to **research contexts**, emerging themes include (i) learners' motivation in various contexts: learning online, outside the classroom, and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Turkey and China), (ii) using scales for measuring motivation (Turkey and China), (iii) impact of mindset and curriculum structure on learners' motivation (USA and UK), (iv) the role of culture and local settings

in EFL learning motivation (typically in Bangladesh and Vietnam), and (v) the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs of EFL learners (Japan and China).

Concerning *the findings*, the ten studies unveil main themes such as (i) the significance of autonomous motivation (Gronchi, 2021; Hashimoto, 2022; Li et al., 2022), (ii) the influence of the learning environment and teachers' support on EFL learners' motivation (Li et al., 2024), (iii) the impact of the fulfillment of the three basic psychological needs (Li et al., 2024), (iv) learning context and motivational change (Hashimoto, 2022; Hoang et al., 2022), (v) relationship among mindset, motivation, and learning outcomes (Sanjaya et al., 2023), (vi) continuum-based understanding of internalization - viewing internalization as a continuum rather than discrete stages (Wang & Wind, 2020), (vii) motivation in a particular aspect of language like pragmatics (Sanjaya et al., 2022), and (viii) the ongoing challenge of shifting from external to internal motivation (Akteruzzaman et al., 2024).

Regarding the *learning outcomes* influenced by learners' motivation, the findings from the ten studies indicate that the more autonomous, the better students are in their study, pointing out the internalization of motivation along the spectrum, but whether they get their motivation sustained or not depends on many factors that need long term studies or longitudinal research.

Finally, *limitations* from the selected studies also imply future directions via these commonalities: (i) limited generalization due to small sample size and lack of diversity (Gronchi, 2021; Meşe & Sevilen, 2021; Hashimoto, 2022; Hoang et al., 2022; Sanjaya et al., 2023; Akteruzzaman et al., 2024), (ii) lack of longitudinal research to capture long-term dynamic changes in the motivation continuum (Li et al., 2024), (iii) specific research context, making it difficult to apply widely (Hashimoto, 2022; Li et al., 2022), (iv) ignorance of complex factors in the analysis process (Akteruzzaman et al., 2024), and (v) the call for cross-cultural validation of psychometric scales (Wang & Wind, 2020).

4.2.3. Commonalities in methodology in the selected studies

This section will answer the second research question: What kinds of methodology have been employed for research in this field? The foci will be on research settings, research designs, methods, participants, and sample size.

As for *research designs*, the motivation continuum is a spectrum with six levels of motivation and may change depending on the environment (Sugawara, 2017; Yim, 2019) and time (Papi & Hiver, 2020); thus, it requires longitudinal research to gain a deeper understanding of the internalization of motivation along the continuum. Unfortunately, Table 6 below shows that none of the ten selected studies on EFL learners' motivation included an actual longitudinal study. Even though the research by Dincer & Işık (2022) mentioned a longitudinal study, it was merely a part of a larger project. The one by Li et al. (2024) was defined as a longitudinal study with data collected three times, but it happened in only one semester, implying a research gap in research design. The other studies utilized cross-sectional designs or short-term interventions.

In addition, the three *quantitative studies* used popular tools like surveys or questionnaires to measure learner motivation in language learning (Wang & Wind, 2020; Gronchi, 2021; Hashimoto, 2022; Li et al., 2022; Sanjaya et al., 2022; Li et al., 2024). By contrast, the three *qualitative studies* employed a wide variety of instruments for data collection, such as autobiographies, diary studies, open-ended questions (Gronchi, 2021; Sanjaya et al., 2022), semi-structured interviews (Meşe & Sevilen, 2021; Akteruzzaman et al., 2024), open-ended interviews (Dincer & Işık, 2022), focus group discussions (Akteruzzaman et al., 2024), interviews and observation logs (Li et al., 2022), school-walk interviews, photo-elicitation interviews, out-of-school photography, and journal writing (Hoang et al., 2022), which shows that the researchers enhanced the rigor of their research designs.

Each **research setting** has its own **method**, showing coincident commonalities. The most popular approach is mixed-methods design, making half of the selected studies (5/10) from Italy, Japan, China, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. The second place belongs to the three studies from Turkey and Vietnam employing qualitative methods, accounting for 30% of the total. Additionally, two-thirds of the articles from China utilized quantitative methods, taking 20%. This also indicates a trend in employing more mixed-methods approaches to measure EFL learners' motivation continuum to take advantage of the two dimensions of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Furthermore, among the three articles utilizing qualitative methods, there were case study and narrative inquiry, but other qualitative methods listed by Creswell & Poth (2018), such as ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology, seemed to be absent. Despite the diversity of approaches employed to explore the depth of EFL learners' motivation continuum, the studies between 2020 and 2024 show that there is a lack of applying ethnography, grounded theory, and phenomenology to research EFL learners' motivation under OIT or SDT, which also generates a gap in qualitative research methods.

Table 6. Methodology in the selected studies

No.	Studies	Research settings	Research designs	Methods	Participants	Sample size
1	Wang & Wind (2020)	China	Internalization of Learning Motivation (ILM) scale	Quantitative	Chinese college students	1337
2	Gronchi (2021)	Italy	A survey with closed and open-ended questions	Mixed methods	University students	76
3	Meşe & Sevilen (2021)	Turkey	Semi-structured interviews Creative writing assignments	Qualitative case study Cross-sectional	Private university students	12
4	Dincer & Işık (2022)	Turkey	Learning autobiographies Diary-keeping practices Open-ended interviews	Qualitative approach within a longitudinal project	University students	13
5	Hoang et al. (2022)	Vietnam	School-walk interviews Photo-elicitation interviews Out-of-school photography Journal writing	Qualitative (Narrative inquiry)	Upper secondary students	02
6	Hashimoto (2022)	Japan	A questionnaire measuring motivation and basic psychological needs Written comments Semi-structured interviews	Mixed methods approach using a convergent design	University students	52
7	Li et al. (2022)	China	A questionnaire measuring motivation and basic psychological needs	Mixed methods (Action research using a quasi-	College students	405

No.	Studies	Research settings	Research designs	Methods	Participants	Sample size
			English writing proficiency tests Interviews Observation logs	experimental design)		
8	Sanjaya et al. (2022)	Indonesia	A tailor-made questionnaire based on SDT with four sub-scales Open-ended questions	Mixed methods sequential explanatory design	University students	76
9	Akteruzzaman et al. (2024)	Bangladesh	A questionnaire Semi-structured interviews Focus group discussions	Mixed-methods sequential explanatory design	University students	162
10	Li et al. (2024)	China	Questionnaires measuring EFL learners' motivation and their basic psychological needs satisfaction	Quantitative Longitudinal (one semester), person-centered approach using parallel process growth mixture modeling	Junior secondary students	467
Total						2602

With respect to *participants and sample size*, with 2602 participants from seven countries in the ten studies, the EFL learners' motivation continuum was researched in a wide range of population and cultural contexts. This appeared to show a generalization of data, but specifically, there were significant differences in the sample size among the ten studies. For example, one quantitative study in China included 1337 participants, while there were only 467 respondents in another quantitative study, also in China; and notably, there were merely two participants in the qualitative study from Vietnam.

What's more, there were eight studies (80%) whose participants were university or college students, which shows that university students seem to be the main subjects for research on EFL learners' motivation continuum, especially in non-English speaking countries such as Bangladesh, China, Italy, Indonesia, Japan, Turkey, and Vietnam. Remarkably, most of the countries related to the ten studies are in Asia (90%), which also means that teaching and learning EFL seems vigorous in this continent, and so does research on EFL learners' motivation.

5. Conclusion

To put it simply, based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, there were 10 articles left that could answer the two aforementioned research questions. The trends from the selected studies provide insights into the dynamics and complexity of EFL learners' motivation. Simultaneously, they suggest the future directions or research gaps in terms of (i) complexity of motivation (the internalization of motivation along a continuum), (ii) research design (longitudinal studies), (iii) more qualitative methods in terms of grounded theory (to explore the complexity of motivation) and

phenomenology (to investigate EFL learners' lived experiences through different learning courses for measuring change in their motivation over time), and (iv) Vietnamese context with a more significant number of participants for qualitative studies, not just two research subjects as in Hoang et al. (2022).

6. Limitations

The studies identified and selected in this research are from a wide range of accessible sources, which may ignore related articles from the remaining resources. Moreover, the findings were from studies between 2020 and 2024 only; therefore, they may lack results from those published here and there on the first days of January 2025. Plus, the Boolean operators were in English; hence, studies published in other languages were not included. These limitations suggest future directions for more review of studies on EFL learners' motivation continuum or learners' motivation under OIT and SDT retrieved from non-open access sources or databases, and those published in other popular languages and those after December 2024 in order to acquire a nuanced understanding of research trends in what (research issues) and how (methodology employed) in this field.

Declarations

Author Contributions. L.H.: Literature review, conceptualization, methodology, data analysis, and writing. L.T. and T.B.: Advice and review. All authors have read and approved the publication of the article's final version.

Conflicts of Interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval. No ethical approval was required since this research is not related to either human or animal subjects.

Data Availability Statement. Data for this review was gathered from open-access sources.

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