

## A META-ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH ON L2 MOTIVATION IN SAUDI ARABIAN CONTEXT

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### Abstract

*The growing interest in the research on L2 motivation in Saudi Arabia in the recent years has necessitated a research to create the big picture. The present research unifies the results of the previous studies on L2 motivation to identify the trends and slants. The present research bases its findings on 102 published research papers and chapters of edited books published from 2009 to 2021. The theory of motivation, paradigm of research, research methodology, gender of the respondents, institutions, tools used in the research, year of publication etc. have been taken into account for all the samples. The present research is a critique on the available research on motivation in Saudi Arabian context. The results of this study show the complex nature of motivation in Saudi learners and recommends a path for the future research. Most of the sample studies used in the present research claim that learners are motivated intrinsically, extrinsically and integratively. The study also finds that the L2 Motivational Self System was tested and validated in Saudi context. However, there is a need to conduct more longitudinal studies, especially with school learners to gauge the level and intensity of motivation.*

**Keywords:** EFL Saudi students, L2 Motivational Self System, Intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative and instrumental motivation

### Introduction

A plethora of research on EFL motivation in Saudi Arabia has focused on understanding motivation and how to increase the EFL Saudi learners' motivation. Some studies have been also designed to determine what demotivates Saudi EFL learners and how to reduce or eliminate those factors and then motivate them to study English effectively. Researchers mainly focused on the lack of motivation, and grappled with the basic questions: Are the learners motivated to learn English? if answer is 'no', why the students are not motivated; Are the techniques used to motivate students reliable? Researchers in Arab countries, particularly in Saudi Arabia apply the theories of motivation and find that those theories are applicable and could motivate students. Most of them also state that students got motivated after the application of a specific theory or technique, but future researchers again complain that learners lack motivation and are low achievers. A meta-analysis of the available research on motivation in Saudi Arabia can create a better understanding of the overall situation. Such a research generates an evaluation of the previous researches and identifies gaps, if any. Majority of the studies on motivation conducted in Saudi Arabian context study motivation of the university students. The present research recommends some studies to be conducted on young learners and to focus the impact of culture on motivation as well.

## Research Aims

The present research is particularly aimed:

- to review the previous researches on L2 motivation in Saudi Arabia and identify the gap(s), if any
- to unify the results of the previous researches in the area to create a big picture
- to produce/develop a critique on the plethora of research on motivation in KSA.

## Literature Review

L2 pedagogy stems from complicated interplay of indigenous system of beliefs and practices about L2, on the one hand, and the socio-cognitive awareness of the self in the educational system, on the other hand. The situation becomes convoluted further when it comes to Saudi Arabia, a country rich with Islamic traditions and with a history of ‘reluctance to teach English or any other foreign languages’ (Elyas and Picard, 2010, p. 139). A famous phrase ‘more English, less Islam’ as discussed by (Azuri2006, Mehboob and Elyas 2014, Elyas 2008 and Karmani 2005a) shows the tension between the clerics and the reformists. However, in the last two decades, Saudi Arabia took earnest steps in teaching and promoting English including introduction of English as a subject in primary schools in 2003. Not only the antagonism in the historical background of English pedagogy was a noticeable issue, but also the standard of education itself posed as a detrimental force. World Bank (2002) comments on Saudi education system as ‘typically based more on rote learning than it is on critical thinking, problem solving skills, analysis and synthesis of information, and learning how to learn’ (p. 11). The teaching of English was restricted to a few hours a week and instead of focusing the language skills, ‘students are usually asked to memorize four or five pre-written essays or topics [...] within the textbook for the final exam (Elyas 2008). Another formidable factor was the negative reinforcement by the parents regarding the learning of English as reported by (Khan, 2011; Shah, Hussain, & Nassef, 2013).

The growing needs to compete the international and regional markets and ‘English as a vehicle to economic development’ (Aldred and Lees, 2004) realized by the Saudi government, paved the way for more structural and social changes towards promotion of English pedagogy. Keeping in view, such historical legacy of antagonism towards English the research on L2 Motivation in Saudi Arabia becomes a vital concern of the academics naturally. Before surveying the literature on motivation in Saudi Arabian context, we will have a look at the development of the successive theories on motivation briefly.

The abundance of theories and research in motivation bears witness that complexity and importance of the issue. Right from carrot and stick theories to the complex situated-cognitive theories, research on motivation saw ebb and flow of theories. The proper attention on L2 motivation started when Robert Gardner accidentally stumbled upon a possible thesis topic during the discussion with his advisor, Wallace Lambert in 1956. Gardner commented on the L2 learning situation in which if a learner does not like the group, s/he would not learn the language of that group. To his surprise, his advisor recommended him to research the same issue. Ever since during the last 6 decades, motivation has been a prime concern of the L2 researchers. Motivation has been scrutinized from behavioral, social, psychological, cognitive and personal

standpoints. The succeeding scholars identified three or four phases of research on L2 motivation. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) identified 4 phases of research on motivation:

- The social-psychological period (1959–1990)
- The cognitive-situated period (during the 1990s)
- The process-oriented period (1990 to 1999)
- The socio-dynamic period (from 2000 onwards)

### **The social-psychological period**

During the first social-psychological period, Robert Gardner, the pioneer, realized that learning an L2 in formal setting is different from school subjects because it involves personal liking or disliking for the L2 on the part of learners (Gardner and Clement 1990). They were interested in ‘are there specific skills, attitudes and motivations, or personality traits that might facilitate or impede the acquisition of a second language?’ (ibid p. 496). The role of positive attitudes and feelings towards the L2 play a pivotal role in motivation. Gardner, (1985) calls it Integrative motivation. Gardner and Lambert (1972) published a detailed report on the theory of motivation in the backdrop of Second Language Acquisition. This theory remained influential for decades. They considered motivation as an important source of variability in SLA. Gardner and Lambert (1972) identified two types of motivational orientation in language learning: an integrative orientation “reflecting a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other group”; and an instrumental orientation “reflecting the practical value and advantages of learning a new language” (p. 132). Such distinction between the two kinds of orientation proved to be very fruitful for the researchers. Now students’ intelligence was not the only factor to be considered for success rather their attitudes and motivation towards L2 were also seen as contributors. Gardner and Lambert’s major concerns were integrative (assimilation with the native speakers) and instrumental (need to use L2 for external reasons) motivation. Despite of the research benefits of the dichotomy (Integrative - Instrumental), its flaws also came to surface. Lamb (2004) noticed that in some cases it was difficult to distinguish between integrative and instrumental motivation. By this stage, motivation was seen having 2 orientations: intrinsic and integrative with 3 components viz. intensity of motivation, desire to learn L2 and positive or negative attitudes towards L2 that would be influenced individual differences. Robert Gardner expounded his model as dynamic and process oriented, however, the successive models are seen better addressing the issues.

### **The cognitive-situated period**

Dörnyei’s (1994a) presented a three-layered model comprising ‘Language level’, ‘Learner level’ and ‘Learning situation level’. The first level, Language level, was mainly concerned with motivational subsystems: integrative and instrumental. At the learner level, individual differences to achieve motivation were discussed. The least level, learning situation level, focused on social learning environment. Such models got popularity in the context of SLA and pedagogy, learning environment and interpersonal relations became the focus of attention. 1990s saw a rise on cognitive theories in Psychology. The L2 motivation theories also benefited from these theories. Now, the focus shifted from ‘social’ (macro-level) to ‘individual’ (micro-level). Consequently, the learner’s autonomy became pivotal to motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985)

introduced the concept of Self-Determination. It became more popular in 1990s. Self-Determination theory in psychology is based on the basic human psychological need: autonomy, competence and relatedness. This theory is an umbrella theory for 6 mini theories: cognitive evaluation theory, organismic integration theory, causality orientations theory, basic psychology need theory, goal content theory and relationship motivation theory (Legault 2017, p. 2). Two more theories remained influential during this period are Attribution theory (Weiner 1984), and Task motivation theory (Crookes and Gass, 1993a).

### **The process-oriented period**

The researchers in previous two periods tried hard to exhibit the scenario through the quantitative tools to identify patterns of motivation. One problem in such researches was that they dealt with static model of motivation. They could not capture the ‘process’ involved in initiating and sustaining the motivation. It was observed by the language teachers that the students’ motivation does not remain constant during L2 acquisition. Williams and Burden (1997) made distinction between ‘motivation “for” engagement’ (deciding to do something: choices, reasons, intentions etc) and ‘motivation “during” engagement’ (Sustaining the effort: how one feels, responds during the course of learning) (cited in Dronie and Ushioda 2011, p. 61). The process-oriented approaches, naturally, go well with the qualitative research methods. So, the longitudinal studies, observations and interviews became popular. Dörnyei and Ottó (1998) divided the motivation process into three phases: Preactional phase, Actinal phase and Post actional phase. Ushioda (1998) probed various motivation patterns to study the means of sustaining motivation.

### **The socio-dynamic period**

The current period is referred to as socio-dynamic period. Intrinsic-Integrative motivation dichotomy remained influential through decades but, with the rise of Global English and acceptance of Non-Native varieties of English, the very concept of ‘integrative’ underwent a dynamic change. Learning English became synonymous to literacy in many parts of the world. English acquired the status of lingua franca and the non-native speakers of English outnumbered Native-speakers of English (Crystal 2003). Dörnyei (2009a) in a large-scale longitudinal research theorized learners’ ‘ideal L2 self’ by broadening the decades old concept of Integrativeness. The linear approach that dominated the first two phases had been weakened. Boo, Dörnyei, and Ryan observed that the previous periods viewed acquisition of L2 as ‘conscious process’ and is examined for a short period using rather ‘simplistic’ research designs (2015, p.156). L2 Motivational Self System, presented by Dörnyei 2005 benefited from two theories: Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987), and Possible Selves Theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986). L2 Motivational Self System is the most influential model of this period. This model comprises the Ideal L2 self, the Ought- to L2 self, and the L2 learning experience, an imprint of Gardner’s integrativeness is evident. The ideal L2 self represents what a learner would like to become. This motivational construct is responsible to reduce if any discrepancy between actual self and ideal L2 self is there. On the other hand, Ought-to self urges to meet the expectations and achieve the attributes one believes one ought to possess. Actual self interacts with the ideal L2 self and Ought-to self to reduce the discrepancy between actual other self components. Dörnyei and Ryan explained ‘the L2 Learning Experience, is different from the first two in that it focuses on the learner’s present experience, covering a range of situated, ‘executive’ motives related to the

immediate learning environment e.g., the impact of the L2 teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, and the experience of success'(2015, p. 88).

### **Commentary on Research on L2 Motivation in Saudi Arabia**

A significant number of research papers have been published (over 150 research papers) during the last 15 years, on L2 motivation, causes of demotivation, EFL Pedagogical reforms to enhance motivation, attitudes, gender, anxiety, effect on competence due to lack of motivation, gauging motivation through Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMBT) questionnaire, learner's autonomy, etc in Saudi Arabian context. However, most of the researches were interested in Gardner's dichotomy of integrative vs instrumental. He himself admitted that "[motivation] cannot be assessed by merely asking individuals to give reasons for why they think learning a language is important to them." (Gardner, 2006, p. 2). There have been regular complaints against lack of motivation on learners' part by the researchers. Alrabai (2016) states "A significant characteristic of Saudi EFL learners that negatively affects their competence is a lack of motivation for learning English" (p. 34). Another researcher (Melvin, 2014) noted "Saudi students are generally considered to be lacking in motivation, which has surely played a part in those disappointing results (p. 2). There's a long list of researchers who reached the same findings (Al-Seghayer, 2005; Khan 2011; Hastings 2012; Alrabi, 2014; Javid, 2014; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015; Hussain 2019) just to name a few. But this is only one side of the picture; there are many studies claiming that the learners are either highly motivated or after their experimental research, they became highly motivated (Liton 2012, Alqahtani 2015 & 2017b; Al-Mohanna 2010, Ali, 2017, Ali & Bin Hady, 2019). A few researchers like Liton (2012) 'found that most students liked learning English and considered the language prestigious but in the same research, he also interviewed 100 teachers, 96% of whom found there was an absence of interest in the students and considered that they do not appreciate the benefits of EFL' cited in (Melvin, 2014, p. 11). Moskovsky and Alrabai (2009) were noted for their conflicting results regarding the motivation of the learners and teachers.

### **Research Methodology**

The present research used 102 published research papers and chapters of edited books published from 2009 to 2021 as sample. The authors of these sample papers are Saudis or Non-Saudis expatriate teachers or academic advisors of Saudi students etc. The sample research papers focused on extrinsic, intrinsic, integrative, instrumental, L2 self-motivational system, strategies/techniques/practices (to overcome lack of motivation) and demotivation (its causes, consequences and remedies). To study the types of motivation from different perspectives, the researchers categorized the items of the questionnaires to the following categories: intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative, instrumental and motivational self-system items. They also add a category named "other" for items which do not fit into the above-mentioned categories. The categorization of the questionnaire items has been done in accordance with the authors categorization.



## Data Collection and Classification

The researchers identified 102 research papers that qualify the criteria for the present research through web surfing. They searched for the keywords on google search engine such as "L2 motivation in Saudi Arabia, English motivation, learning motivation in Saudi Arabia, theories of motivation in Saudi Arabia, Gardner, Dörnyei, Rayn, Deci in Saudi Arabia; the Socio-psychological motivation, L2 self-motivation system, self-determination theory in Saudi Arabia, Demotivators and how to motivate students in Saudi Arabia" and so on. When the researchers found any paper on Saudi Motivation, they traced the name of the author and his CV, if available online, if the author(s) have/has another paper on motivation and they traced the title of the paper if it is cited in another paper. Sometimes only the titles of some printed papers were found in references. In such cases, the authors were contacted and majority of the authors shared their complete papers.

The data from the 102 studies was classified as under:

- The researchers numbered the studies from 1 to 102 and gave each research a number.
- The year of the publication
- The samples' gender (male, female or mixed).
- Respondents (learners, teachers, or mixed).
- Theoretical constructs underlying the research (intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative, instrumental, L2 self-motivational system or eclectic).
- Type of research methodology (qualitative, quantitative, mixed etc)
- Tools of the study (questionnaire, interview, test, observation, or elective).
- Samples/age group (school, university, institution or mixed).

The data was collected in the form of Excel sheets under the already designated columns for the statistical analysis.

## Statistical and Analytical procedures

Before analyzing the data, the researchers found that some sample papers presented the results in percentage without mentioning the means or standard deviation. The researchers had to recalculate them and got the mean or the standard deviation or both. The researchers also found that some papers followed 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 point-Likert scales. After the data had been collected, the statistical procedures were applied for meta-analysis. Before the data were being analyzed, the processes of editing, coding, classification and tabulation of the data had to be done. After the processes of coding, classification and tabulation, the data were inserted to SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), version 18.0, for analysis. According to the objectives of the study, analysis of the data collected was done.

## Analysis and Discussion

Table 1. Frequencies and percentages for theories followed of the Meta data (N = 102 studies)

Theory Followed	Frequency		Percent
Self-Determination Theory	43		42.16%
Socio-Psychological Motivation	19		18.63%
L2 Self-Motivational System	16		15.69%
Elective	12		11.76%
Demotivation	5		4.9%
No specific theory followed	7		6.86%
Total	102		100.0%

Figure 1. percentages for theories followed of the Meta data (N = 102 studies)

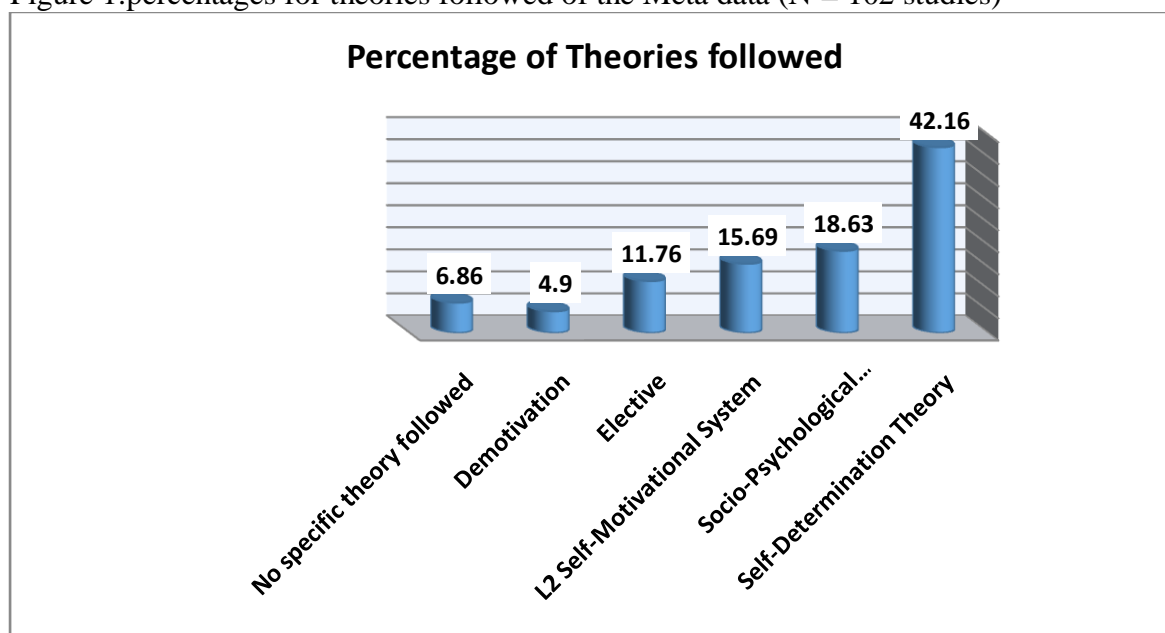


Table (1) and figure (1) show the distribution of the studies focused on the theories of motivation followed by researchers in our Meta-data. There are 43 studies (42.16) which followed Self-Determination Theory (SDT), while 19 studies (18.63) on Socio-Psychological Motivation theory, 16 (15.69%) research papers on L2 Self-Motivational System, 12 studies (11.76%) elective, 5 studies (4.9%) demotivation, 7 studies (6.86%) followed no specific theory. Self-determination theory with highest percentage captured the attention of most of the researchers, especially, after 2015.

Table 2. Frequencies and percentages of the tools used in the Meta-analysis (N = 102 studies)

Tools	Frequency	Percent
Questionnaire	60	58.82%
Questionnaire and interview	11	10.78%
Questionnaire and test	2	1.96%
Questionnaire, interview, and observation	1	0.98%
Questionnaire, interview and test	1	0.98%
Interview	4	3.92%
Experiment	10	9.8%
Collection of tools	1	0.98%
Strategies	6	5.88%
Commentary	6	5.88%
Total	102	100%

Figure 2. percentages of the tools used in the meta-analysis (N = 102 studies)

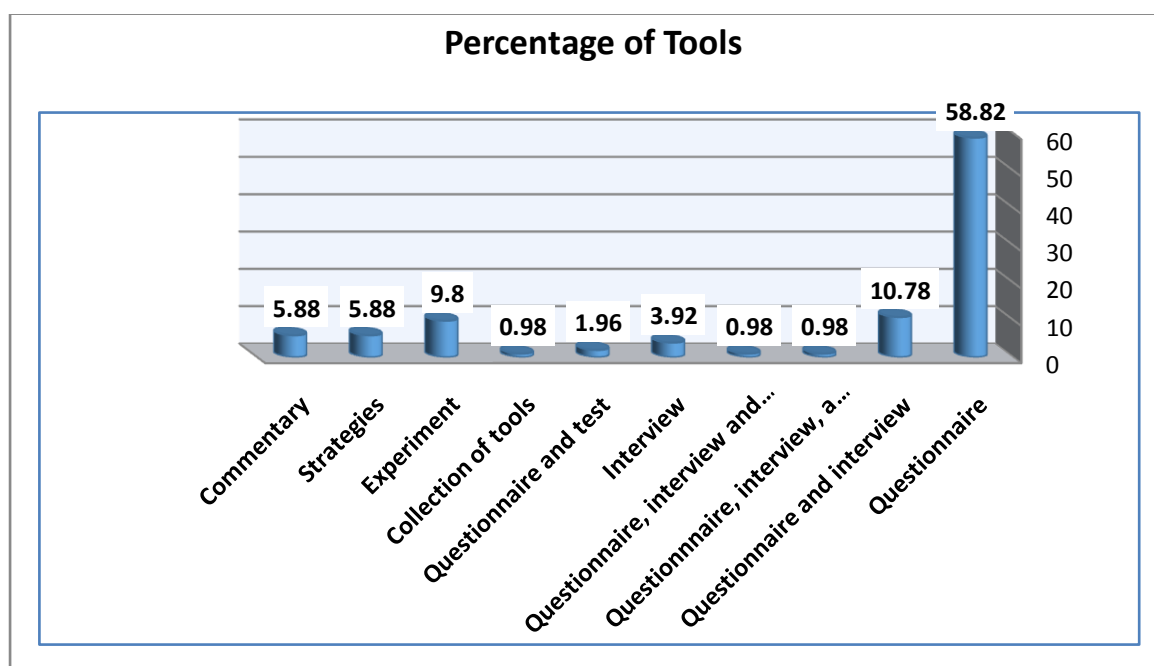




Table (2) and figure (2) show the tools used in the 102 studies. 60 studies (58.82%) used questionnaire instrument. 11 studies (10.78%) used Questionnaire and interview, 2 studies (1.96%) used Questionnaire and test, 1 study (0.98%) used Questionnaire, interview, and observation, 1 study (0.98%) used questionnaire, interview and test, 4 studies (3.92%) used interview, 10 studies (9.8%) used experiment, 1 study (0.98%) used collection of tools and 6 (5.88%) studies were on strategies and 6 studies (5.88%) were commentary. Questionnaire remained the singled-out tool for the previous researchers as per our expectations, however, it also exhibits the lack of longitudinal studies and case studies.

Table 3. Frequencies and percentages for paradigm of our meta data (N = 102 studies)

Paradigm	Frequency	Percent
Quantitative	65	63.73%
Qualitative	9	8.82%
Mixed paradigm	22	21.57%
Not case study	6	5.88%
Total	102	100.0%

Figure 3. percentages of the paradigm used in the meta-analysis (N = 102 studies)

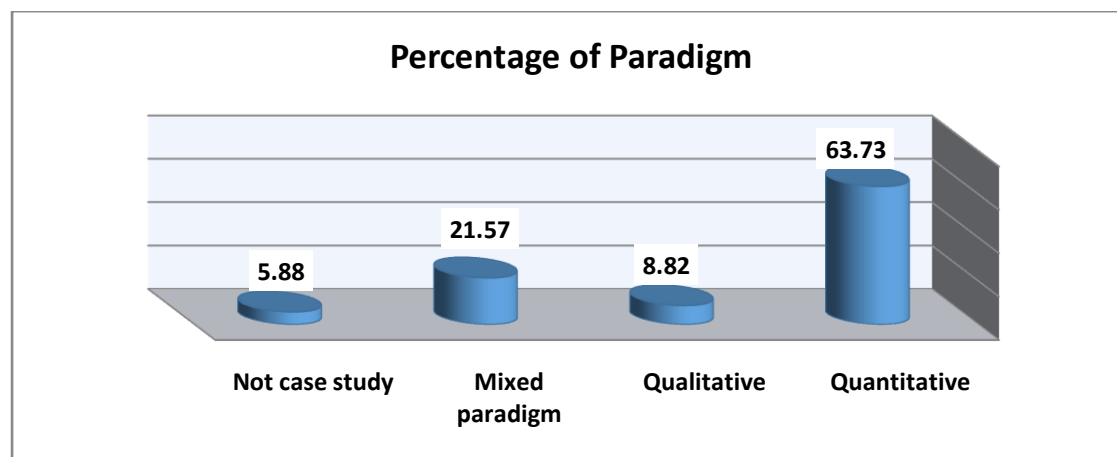


Table (3) and figure (3) show the paradigm of the 102 studies of our Meta-analysis. There are 65 studies (63.37%) which followed a quantitative paradigm, while 9 (8.82%) followed a qualitative paradigm, 22 studies (21.57%) followed quantitative and qualitative (either Mixed Method or Mixed Model) and 4 (5.88) were 'Not a case study' (The studies under this category are only commentary on the previous research).

Table 4. Frequencies and percentages for gender used in the meta-analysis (N = 102 studies)

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	20	19.61%
Male	21	20.59%
Male-female	26	25.5%
Not mentioned gender	35	34.32%
Total	102	100.0%

Figure 4. percentages of the gender used in the meta-analysis (N = 102 studies)

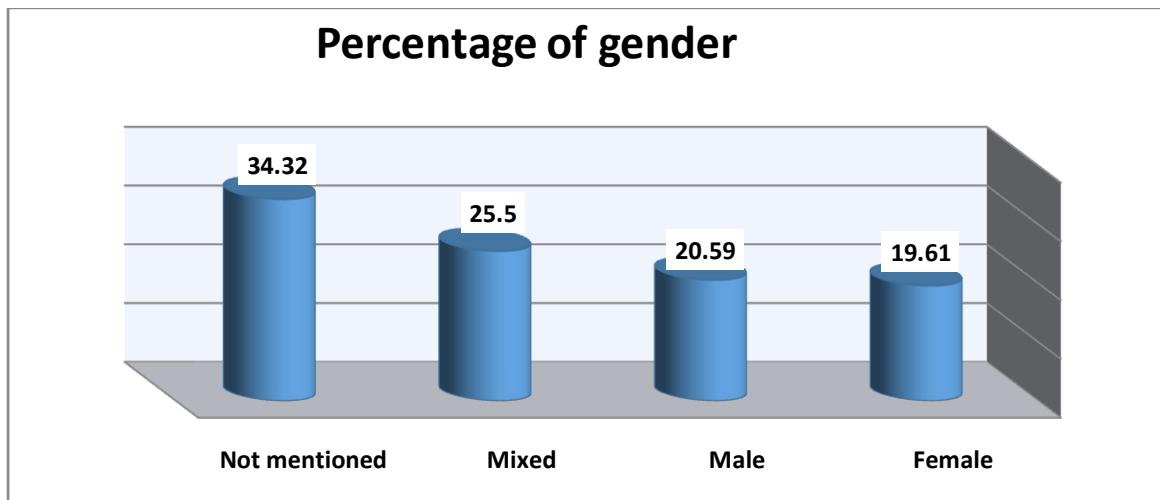


Table (4) and figure (4) show the distribution of the genders of the 102 studies. The respondents of 20 (19.61%) studies were females. The respondents of 21 (20.59%) studies were males and the respondents of 27 (25.5) studies were males and females. 35 (34.32) of the studies did not mention the gender of their studies. Almost a mixed trend is evident in the table. The huge number of gender 'Not mentioned' category may be because if a female research is conducting a research, she may take it for granted that the respondents are female students, and vice versa.

Table 5. Frequencies and percentages of the respondents of the 102 studies

Respondents	Frequency	Percent
Students	77	75.49%
Teachers	5	4.9%
Mixed	11	10.78%

Not mentioned	9	8.82%
Total	102	100.0%

Figure 5. percentages of the respondents used in the meta-analysis (N = 102 studies)

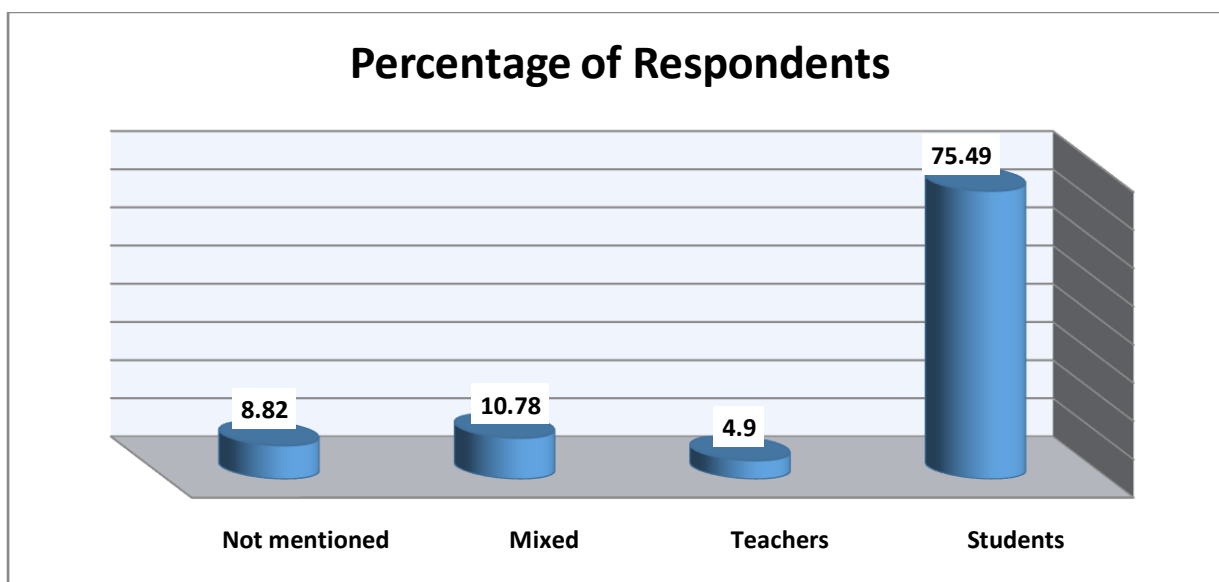


Table (5) shows the distribution of respondents of the 102 studies. The respondents of 77 (75.49%) studies are students. 5 (4.9%) research papers use teachers as their respondents. The respondents of 11 (10.78%) papers are students and teachers. Nine (8.82%) research papers do not mention the participants of their studies at all.

Table 6. Frequencies and percentages for institutions the 102 studies were conducted in

Institutions	Frequency	Percent
School	5	4.9%
School and university	5	4.9%
School, institute, and university	5	4.9%
University	75	73.53%
Institute	3	2.94%
Social media users of English	1	0.98%
Not mentioned	8	7.84%
Total	102	100.0%

Figure 6. Percentage s of the institutions used in the meta-analysis (N

= 102 studies)

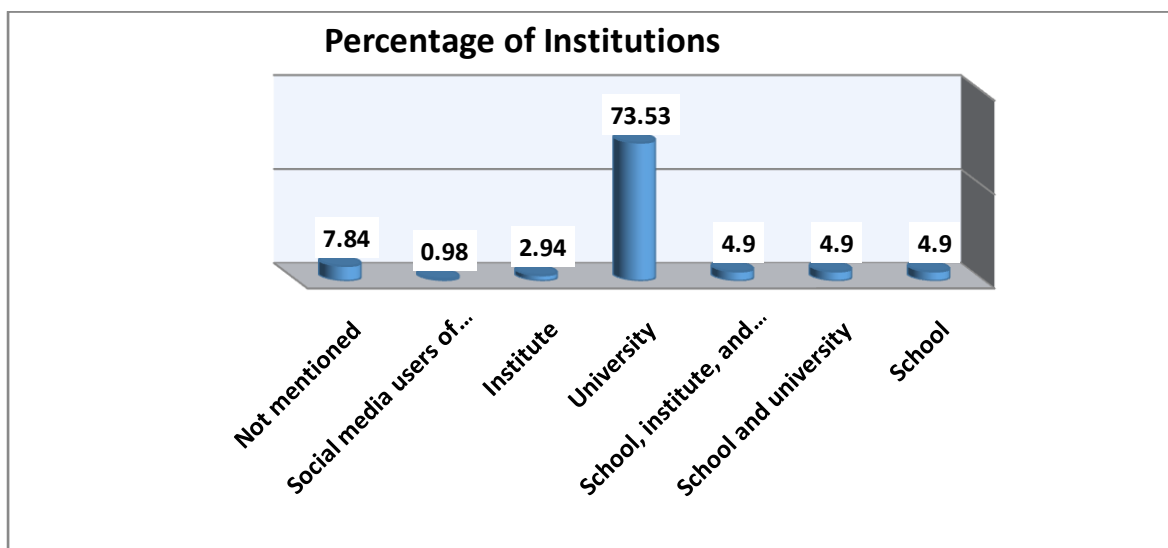


Table (6) and figure (6) shows the distribution of the institutions that the 102 studies were conducted in. Of the 102 studies. 5 (4.9 %) studies were conducted in schools, 5 (4.9 %) in schools and universities, 5 (4.9 %) in schools, institutes and universities. 75 (73.53) studies were conducted in universities. and 5 (5.0%) in schools, institutes and universities, 3 (2.94) in institutes, 1 (0.98%) with social media users of English and 8 (7.84%) were not mentioned.

Table 7. Frequencies and percentages of the year of publication of the meta-analysis (N = 102 studies)

Year of the Publication	Frequency	Percent
2009	3	2.94%
2011	4	3.92%
2012	4	3.92%
2013	11	10.78%
2014	9	8.82%
2015	9	8.82%
2016	14	13.73%
2017	8	7.84%
2018	4	3.92%
2019	13	12.75%
2020	11	10.78%
2021	12	11.76%

Total	102	100.0%
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Figure 7. Percentages of the year of publication of the meta-analysis (N = 102 studies)

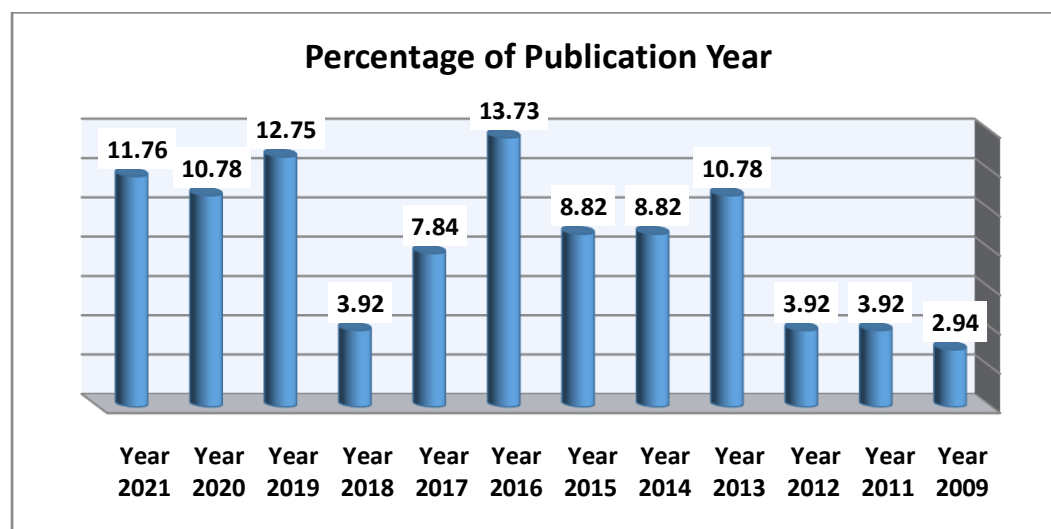


Table (9) shows the distribution of research papers between 2009 and 2021. The study includes 3 (2.94%) researches from 2009, nothing was found from 2010, 4 (3.92%) research paper from 2011 and 4 (3.92%) from 2012. There are 11 (10.78%) papers from 2013 and 9 (8.82%) from 2014. There are also 9 (8.82%) papers in 2015 and the 14 (13.73%) in 2016. There are 8 (7.84%) in 2017 and 4 (3.92%) in 2018. There are 13 (12.75%) in 2019, 11 (10.78%) in 2020 and 12 (11.76%) in 2021. The interest in research on motivation has dwindled only in the years 2017 and 2018. However, the trend is resumed in 2019.

## Conclusion

The present research presented a big picture to identify trends of research on Motivation in Saudi Arabian context. There is hardly any evidence from the 102 studies that suggests the improvements of theoretical constructs of the research on motivation. Most of these studies are just application of the theory and suggestions. The present research will guide the future researchers to choose paths. The dearth of longitudinal research on motivation, and very few studies involving school learners in Saudi Arabia have been noted. The main stakeholders of the research on motivation in KSA are university teachers and respondents are university students. There is a need to involve more school learners and more longitudinal studies to be conducted. The World Englishes have broadened the horizons and now, more than ever, the cultural elements and the individual differences need to be given room in the research in Saudi Arabian context. The list attached as Appendix 1 is a valuable Bibliography of the research on Motivation in Saudi Arabia for the future researchers.

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