

“I Have So Many Ways to Motivate Myself”: A Qualitative Study of Saudi Female College EFL Learners’ Metamotivation and Regulation Strategies

Hajar Al Sultan

Department of English Language, College of Arts, King Faisal University, Al Ahsa, Saudi Arabia

Abstract—As motivation is increasingly viewed as a complex construct shaped by situational, social, and cultural factors, limited qualitative research has explored how Saudi female college EFL learners perceive and regulate their motivation. Addressing this gap, the study uses a metamotivational framework and qualitative design to examine learners’ reported strategies, preferences for promotion or prevention orientations, and how their awareness reflects their metamotivational knowledge. Based on 115 self-reported responses, thematic analysis revealed that learners’ responses were dominated by promotion-oriented strategies—focused on aspirations, achievement, and growth—while demonstrating limited awareness or use of prevention-focused regulation. Learners showed a multidimensional understanding of motivation and adopted an integrated, adaptive approach to regulation, reflecting motivational flexibility. However, their strategies were largely grounded in prior experience. Although the findings reflect perceived rather than observed behavior, learners reported using integrated strategies—such as interest regulation, goal orientation, value alignment, and self-reflection—to regulate their motivation in response to internal beliefs, emotional fluctuations, and external influences. These findings highlight a promotion-prevention imbalance and underscore the need to develop learners’ awareness of motivational quality. The study contributes to current metamotivation research among female learners in non-Western contexts and supports instructional practices that emphasize personal growth, autonomy, and guided reflection to help bridge the gap between learners’ experiences and their metamotivational knowledge in Saudi EFL education.

Index Terms—metamotivation, promotion-prevention orientations, autonomy, EFL learners, qualitative research

I. INTRODUCTION

Motivation is no longer conceptualized as a fixed individual trait but rather as a dynamic, malleable construct shaped by situational, social, and cultural factors. Building on this view, recent research has focused on understanding motivation, with limited attention to how learners perceive and regulate their motivation concerning different task demands and contexts (Al-Hoorie, 2024b; Scholer et al., 2018). If learners view motivation as fixed or difficult to shift, they may be less likely to engage in regulation, potentially reducing their ability to respond adaptively. In contrast, recognizing motivation as context-sensitive and open to regulation offers deeper insights into learners’ autonomy, self-awareness, and use of adaptive strategies (Ushioda, 2016). Research highlights that individuals actively and deliberately regulate their motivational states, drawing on cognitive, emotional, or behavioral strategies to achieve their goals. Inadequate regulation can lead to emotional and behavioral consequences, such as reduced engagement and ineffective strategy use (Al-Hoorie, 2024b; Miele & Scholer, 2018; Wolters, 2003). These observations highlight how important it is to comprehend how students view and control their motivational states, as this can have an impact on both well-being and performance. Recent studies emphasize the role of metamotivational knowledge in shaping learners’ motivational regulation strategies (Al-Hoorie, 2024b; Al Sultan, 2024; Fujita et al., 2024; Miele & Scholer, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2019; Ross et al., 2023; Wolters, 2003; Wolters & Rosenthal, 2000). The use of a metamotivational framework—centered on the regulation of motivation—has gained recognition in academic and language learning contexts. Scholer et al. (2018) underscore the value of studying metamotivation to understand how individuals manage motivation, noting that “what people know about motivation may determine how effectively they are able to manage it” (p. 440). Miele et al. (2020) define metamotivational knowledge as “one’s beliefs about how motivation functions and how it can be changed” (p. 3). According to Scholer et al. (2018), accurate knowledge enables effective regulation, while inaccurate knowledge can hinder self-regulation and reinforce dependence on external rewards. Miele et al. (2020) note that metamotivational knowledge guides not only regulation but also performance and outcomes. Moreover, recent research highlights a consistent bias toward promotion-oriented strategies, particularly among female learners, suggesting that gender may shape motivational preferences and regulation patterns (Al-Hoorie, 2024b; Nguyen et al., 2019, 2022; Scholer & Miele, 2016). This may indicate a potential overgeneralization bias, where learners apply promotion strategies across contexts

without fully considering whether prevention strategies could better support specific task demands.

The purpose of this study is to deepen understanding of learners' motivational flexibility, self-awareness, and adaptive strategy use through the lens of a metamotivational framework. Building on current research that links accurate metamotivational knowledge to effective regulation (e.g., Al-Hoorie, 2024a, 2024b; Murayama et al., 2016; Nguyen et al., 2022; Scholer & Miele, 2016), this study explores learners' reported strategies, their preference for promotion or prevention orientations, and what these patterns reveal their metamotivational knowledge. By using a qualitative design and self-report tasks, the study further examines potential gender-based patterns in motivational awareness and regulation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Metamotivation and Motivation Regulation*

According to Scholer et al. (2018), metamotivation involves "the processes by which individuals monitor and control their motivational states in order to achieve their goals" (Scholer et al., 2018, pp. 437–438). Monitoring one's current motivational state and controlling it are two interconnected processes (Scholer et al., 2018). Miele et al. (2024) identified three aspects of metamotivation: metamotivational self-knowledge, metamotivational task knowledge, and metamotivational strategy knowledge. While metamotivational self-knowledge involves recognizing markers of different motivational states, metamotivational strategy knowledge includes beliefs about managing motivation and effective strategies across situations. Metamotivational task knowledge refers to understanding the motivational demands of given tasks, the level of motivation, and how motivational states align with optimal performance (Al-Hoorie, 2025). Al-Hoorie (2024b) reported that metamotivation research focused on individuals' knowledge about effective ways to stay motivated, how well that knowledge matched what research showed worked in different situations, and how this affected their strategy choices, ability to adapt to tasks, success in reaching goals, and overall well-being. Different types of knowledge are important for effective regulation (Miele et al., 2020; Scholer & Miele, 2016), underscoring Wolters's (1998) idea that regulation is both deliberate and reflective, involving awareness and manipulation of the influencing factors.

Effective regulation involves the quantity of motivation (increasing its intensity) and the quality of motivation. Monitoring one's current motivational state and controlling it to meet task demands requires not only assessing the intensity of motivation but also evaluating its quality and relevance to specific goals. Both quantity and quality are important. Learners must monitor both the quantity and quality of their motivational states and use the insights gained from this monitoring to select strategies that support the most suitable motivational state for the task at hand. Regulating motivation quality mainly involves recognizing different motivational components (e.g., prevention vs. promotion, intrinsic vs. extrinsic, autonomy vs. control), determining which one is the most appropriate, and applying the best strategy (Miele & Scholer, 2018; Miele et al., 2020). In terms of motivational quality, a motivational state depends on situational context and varies not only in intensity but also in type, such as promotion versus prevention. Previous research (Miele et al., 2020) reported that understanding how individuals recognize, interpret, and accurately assess the quality of their motivational states, rather than just quantity, remains limited. For example, how learners recognize and regulate key motivational components such as value, self-relevant value, self-efficacy, and promotion value, along with their associated feelings and strategies, is not fully understood (Al-Hoorie, 2024a; Al Sultan, 2024; Fujita et al., 2024; Miele & Scholer, 2018). Additionally, while recognizing the quality of one's motivational state is more complex than judging its intensity (Al-Hoorie, 2024b), metamotivation research highlights the importance of flexibility and contextual awareness in understanding how different motivational states (e.g., promotion vs. prevention) may influence performance on tasks.

B. *Previous Research*

Recent international and Saudi research on motivation using the quantitative, qualitative, and metamotivational approaches provides various findings. While some aspects of individuals' metamotivational beliefs align with evidence-based models of optimal motivation, others are inconsistent. Al-Hoorie (2024a), for example, examined Saudi teachers' and students' metamotivational beliefs about the effect of extrinsic rewards on intrinsic motivation. Findings were in alignment with previous research (Kuratomi et al., 2023; Murayama et al., 2016), where extrinsic incentives enhance intrinsic motivation. Al-Hoorie (2024b) explored metamotivational beliefs and task-motivation fit among Saudi EFL learners, focusing on how they regulate motivation based on task demands and whether their responses revealed any overgeneralization bias toward either a promotion or prevention orientation. Findings revealed that learners showed greater awareness of fit in promotion-based tasks but tended to overgeneralize promotion strategies even when prevention was more appropriate. This bias was especially evident among female participants. The study highlights learners' imbalanced metamotivational awareness and emphasizes the need to understand how they perceive and apply motivational strategies across contexts to enhance effective self-regulation in language learning. The dominant preference for a promotion orientation, even when it does not match task demands, was also evident in international research (Nguyen et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2022; Scholer & Miele, 2016), indicating a misalignment between individuals' metamotivational beliefs and motivation theory.

Al Sultan (2024) explored Saudi EFL female students' metamotivation, focusing on their metamotivational knowledge of motivation. The qualitative analysis highlighted intrinsic motivation, particularly linking it with high self-relevant value, self-efficacy, and self-control. Students' accurate metamotivational beliefs viewed extrinsic value (e.g., rewards,

grades, social support) as complementary rather than central, with metamotivational states shaping preferences and readiness. Both Al-Hoorie (2024a, 2024b) and Al Sultan (2024) contribute distinct findings but collectively highlight the significance of metamotivation and motivational processes. Studies in other contexts (e.g., Howard et al., 2021; Miele & Scholer, 2018; Murayama et al., 2016; Rose et al., 2023) confirm that metamotivational knowledge enhances performance, goal management, self-regulation, and well-being. Miele and Scholer (2018) explored metamotivational monitoring, identifying key motivational components like self-efficacy, intrinsic value, external value, promotion value, and prevention value, along with metamotivational feelings (boredom and hopelessness) as indicators of challenges. Their findings emphasized developing self-regulation and self-efficacy rather than reliance on teachers and parents, aligning with Howard et al. (2021) and Murayama et al., who emphasized strategies over external rewards. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2019) showed that individuals can independently develop metamotivational knowledge, aligning motivation with tasks without external support.

C. *Statement of the Problem*

Researchers call for integrating metamotivational knowledge, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and autonomy to better understand motivation's malleability within the interplay of internal and external factors (Al Sultan, 2024; Hattie et al., 2020; Howard et al., 2021). Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2019) highlight the role of metamotivational knowledge and self-knowledge in shaping motivation's malleability. Yet, how learners perceive, interpret, and reflect on their motivation—particularly in non-Western, gendered educational settings—is still underexplored (Al-Hoorie, 2024b; Al Sultan, 2024). Despite the increasing emphasis on internal motivation and learner autonomy in Saudi research (Al-Hoorie, 2024a; Alrabai & Alamer, 2024), a significant gap remains between learners' perceived and actual ability to regulate motivation without external rewards. Al-Hoorie (2024b) emphasizes that effective regulation depends on the “learner's implicit beliefs about the malleability of motivation” (p. 61). While much of the existing work drawing on metamotivation remains rooted in Western contexts and dominated by quantitative methods, there remains a gap in understanding how EFL language learners view their motivation (as fixed or malleable) and how they regulate it in response to linguistic and contextual challenges. This study addresses this key gap by using a qualitative design to explore how Saudi female college EFL learners perceive and regulate their motivational states—a dimension that Al-Hoorie (2024b) argues has received insufficient attention.

D. *Research Questions*

The current qualitative analysis was guided by three questions.

1. What types of metamotivational strategies do learners describe using to regulate their motivation?
2. What patterns of preference emerge between promotion and prevention orientations in learners' reported strategy use?
3. What does learners' awareness of motivational orientations and strategies reveal about their metamotivational knowledge?

III. METHODOLOGY

A. *Research Design*

A qualitative approach was used to gather detailed accounts from the participants about their metamotivational knowledge and strategies, allowing for an understanding of their perspectives and personal experiences while capturing their insights in their own words within their particular context. This approach offered more flexibility in the process, enabling me to gather in-depth information that quantitative methods may not fully capture. The study received approval from the Research Ethics Committee at King Faisal University.

B. *Participants*

In alignment with the research objectives, a purposeful sampling method was utilized. The sample included 115 Saudi female EFL learners enrolled in the English Language Department at King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia. Students were assured that their participation was entirely voluntary after providing informed consent. Data confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing and securely storing all collected information. For reporting purposes, participants were coded as P1, P2, P3, and so on.

C. *Data Collection Procedures*

Data were collected from a Second Language Acquisition course (2020–2023), where students completed a reflective task via Google Classroom at the end of the course. They responded to three open-ended questions about their beliefs and strategies related to motivation: (1) What does motivation mean to you? (2) What motivates you to learn a language? (3) What do you do to motivate yourself or sustain your L2 motivation? All responses were written in English. This study focuses on Questions 2 and 3, as the first question was previously analyzed. The self-report format was chosen to capture motivation regulation as a reflective and self-directed process, allowing participants to express their beliefs and strategies in their own words. A total of 115 written responses were collected. As the researcher was also the course instructor,

students were informed that the task was ungraded, and no guidelines were given, ensuring ethical data collection and protecting students' autonomy and well-being.

D. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) was used to interpret patterns of meaning using students' language (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six steps of Braun and Clarke's TA were followed. Data familiarization started by copying and pasting the 115 responses per question into a Word document and organizing them by question to maintain focus. Responses were also imported into ATLAS.ti. for a cohesive analysis, with coding and analysis beginning by identifying question-specific codes and themes. The initial coding process identified 258 codes. Responses were categorized into two predefined themes: motivational states—*intrinsic, extrinsic, promotion, and prevention* (Scholer & Miele, 2016); and *metamotivational strategies*, including *efficacy management, regulation of value, regulation of interest, self-consequating, promotion value, and environmental structuring*, served as predefined themes. Other predefined categories were also identified: *promotion and prevention orientations*. Strategies were also categorized as *behavioral, cognitive, or emotional strategies* (Miele & Scholer, 2018a). Table 1 below illustrates example codes under each theme and category.

TABLE 1
PREDEFINED THEMES AND EXAMPLE CODES

	Predefined Themes	Codes
1	Motivational States	world, travel, people, culture, job, proficiency, self-doubt, feeling of inadequacy, and curiosity
2	Metamotivational Strategies	setting goals, watching movies, reading books, Self-talk, reflections, and reward
3	Promotion	benefits me, follow successful people, eager to know more. motivated to reach more, found a job easily, capable to learn perfectly, to get a great job, imagine the results, motivate myself with words of encouragement,
4	Prevention	mistakes, afraid of making a mistake, errors, fraud, deception

Recurring code frequency counts were used to tighten theme boundaries and reveal both dominant and underrepresented patterns. Later, tables were created to compare predefined and emerging themes and assess overlap, divergence, or consistency. The use of multiple coders and frequent debriefs in the first stages of analysis aimed to enhance rigor and minimize individual bias, ensuring interpretations remained grounded in students' own words. Table 2 summarizes the major themes identified through thematic analysis concerning the study's research questions.

TABLE 2
MAJOR THEMES EMERGING FROM THEMATIC ANALYSIS IN RESPONSE TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Questions		Major Themes	
1	metamotivational strategies	1	learners' metamotivational strategies for regulating motivation
2	preference patterns emerge in promotion vs. prevention	2	promotion-prevention imbalance
3	learners' metamotivational knowledge	3	partial and context-limited metamotivational knowledge

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The three major themes—learners' metamotivational strategies for regulating motivation, a promotion-prevention imbalance, and partial, context-limited metamotivational knowledge—are presented below and supported with illustrative student quotes and relevant previous research.

A. Learners' Metamotivational Strategies for Regulating Motivation

Key motivational states identified included *intrinsic value, promotion value, relatedness, self-efficacy, and outcome value*. Learners reported using flexible, integrated strategies to regulate their motivation. These included *interest regulation, goal orientation, value regulation, mastery self-talk, and self-reflection* (Miele & Scholer, 2018a). Many also combined *self-consequencing and promotion orientation with environmental control and future rewards*. The frequent use of verbs such as "love", "want", and "understand", along with words like "desire" and "culture", highlights *intrinsic value, driven by emotional satisfaction, personal interest, and cultural curiosity*. Learners linked motivation to *cultural identity and a desire for global communication*, while others also cited *academic success and job prospects*. Participants P3, P13, P68, P98, and P106 reported combining *self-efficacy, intrinsic value, outcome value, promotional situational awareness, and mastery self-talk to regulate their motivation*. For example, P98 stated, "I remind myself that if I acquire this language, I will acquire knowledge, culture, and self-development with it. I cherish my education and practice it as much as possible". This illustrates a multifaceted approach. P98's view underscores the interplay between language learning, acquiring knowledge, culture exploration, and personal growth, highlighting the importance of these dimensions in motivation regulation. By selecting content aligned with their interests, learners create a controlled, engaging, and meaningful language learning environment. P70's statement, "I put my dream before my eyes to reach the goal and success", reflects

her confidence in her capabilities, which is essential to self-efficacy. P70 combines promotional situational awareness with intrinsic motivation and goal orientation, using movies, songs, educational clips, and social media.

Likewise, students (e.g., P10, P76, P82, and P94) reported using strategies like mastery self-talk, self-reflection, self-reminding, self-challenging, and reframing challenges to manage their self-efficacy. P69 and P81 frequently remind themselves of their initial motivations and dreams, with P69 stating, “I remind myself every day when I get bored that I have a dream I should reach, and this time will pass quickly. Better days will come, and all these days will be worth it”. Conversely, P78 and P94 use positive self-talk to foster self-efficacy, as P78 explains, “talking to myself as if my native language was English”, while P94 states, “I motivate myself with words of encouragement. I’ve always wanted to be fluent, and this excitement of acquiring English keeps me going”. These quotes highlight students’ strong belief in their ability to regulate not only their motivational states (intrinsic motivation, value regulation, and self-efficacy) but also their metamotivational feelings, such as overcoming boredom and fostering excitement.

Students (e.g., P40, P106, P74, and P82), on the other hand, frequently combined self-efficacy with internal and external regulating techniques, such as goal orientation, self-consequencing, interest augmentation, environmental control, and external rewards. For example, P106 combined goal orientation, self-reminding of personal goals, and environmental control through interest enhancement (English movies and short stories) to regulate motivation and prevent boredom. In contrast, P82 focused on challenge reframing and visualizing the outcome. P82 states, “I also remember my goal and imagine the results. Challenges remind me that I can achieve hard things.” This quote illustrates how intrinsic reflection supported her self-efficacy.

Using strategies like interest regulation, goal orientation, regulation of relatedness, self-efficacy, self-consequencing, and value regulation to sustain engagement supports Al-Hoorie’s (2024a) argument that intrinsic goals enhance enjoyment and learning. A key driver of motivation evident across learners’ responses was personal growth, with many perceiving language learning as a means for self-improvement in both informal and formal learning contexts (Al Sultan, 2024; Wolters & Rosenthal, 2000). Prior studies emphasized external rewards as primary motivators (e.g., Al-Hoorie, 2024a; Kassem & Alqahtani, 2023; Murayama et al., 2016). In contrast, the current findings reveal that learners blend internal and external influences. This suggests that metamotivational strategies are both cognitively informed and socially situated.

Learners’ multidimensional understanding—integrating intrinsic and extrinsic drivers with self-efficacy, promotion value, interest, and relatedness—reflects accurate metamotivational knowledge grounded in personal goals and values (Al-Hoorie, 2024b). External influences, including peer interaction, teacher feedback, societal expectations, and career goals, also shaped their motivational states and strategies, reflecting their understanding of motivation as multidimensional. For example, balancing both external and internal motivational strategies was evident in P74’s response, integrating external motivators like environmental control (taking a break when feeling overwhelmed) and regulation of relatedness (interacting with friends). Likewise, P40, P10, P33, and P100 employ self-reward through positive affirmation and self-support, reflecting self-consequence regulation and value reinforcement. P40’s rich quote reflects a multifaceted motivational regulation approach, combining self-efficacy, self-consequencing, interest regulation, and a growth mindset.

Motivation is a positive feeling, and if you have a negative mindset, your motivation won’t work for you. So, what I do to keep myself motivated is I reward myself occasionally and am proud of myself for the smallest things I learned... You may think it’s silly, but you have no idea how much it helps. Another thing is that comparing myself now to how I used to be before... Seeing how much I progressed is a very powerful feeling, and it makes me want to progress more.

While P40’s use of positive emotions (pride) and self-reward illustrates intrinsic value grounded in self-efficacy, her awareness of progress over time highlights metamotivational knowledge and positive self-reflection. The phrase “You may think it’s silly” highlights her awareness of external judgment yet reflects her ability to overcome it through self-regulation. Similarly, P119 highlights the teacher’s role in sustaining motivation while acknowledging learners’ own agency. P119 emphasizes intrinsic value, self-relevant value, relatedness, promotion value, and self-efficacy in regulating her motivation. Her statement—“when I have enough space from the teacher to express my opinion in my second language, I make myself more confident and motivated to speak without hesitation”—suggests how self-efficacy is reinforced through self-relevant values (the opportunity for self-expression in L2). Students like P56, P43, P98, and P64 identified family approval, guidance, and expectations as key initial motivators. Over time, students integrated additional motivational states like intrinsic value, goal orientation, self-relevant value, self-efficacy, and outcome value, ensuring sustained effort and motivation in their learning journey.

B. Promotion-Prevention Imbalance

Findings from the second question revealed a clear promotion-prevention imbalance, with most learners (97 out of 115) expressing promotion-oriented motivation focused on aspirations, achievement, and growth. Only 12 learners referenced prevention-oriented regulation. While learners demonstrated clear awareness of key motivational states (e.g., intrinsic value, relatedness, extrinsic value, self-efficacy), their limited reference to a prevention orientation suggests a distinct promotion-prevention imbalance. Learners’ responses reveal that promotion value was integrated with intrinsic value, goal orientation, and self-relevant value. Learners expressed preferences for movies (e.g., P26, P86, P106), books (e.g., P12, P30, P78, P111), and songs (e.g., P9, P30, P72, P95). These preferences demonstrate promotion-oriented situational awareness, intrinsic motivation, value regulation, and interest enhancement. For example, learners like P13, P18, P20, and P74 highlighted the role of English in accessing specialized knowledge, global media, and untranslated content (e.g.,

manga, books, and academic research). These responses link language learning to intellectual and informational enrichment. Other learners (e.g., P1, P11, P16, P24, P33, and P103) associate learning English with personal transformation, expanding worldviews, and enhancing their cognitive abilities. P1 states that learning English “opens up the doors of new life”, suggesting a belief in the far-reaching benefits of language acquisition. P22: “I view myself as a house... Arabic is the main door... English as a huge balcony that helps me see a wider view of the world”. P87: “It has begun to amaze me and distinguish me in my family. I aspire to the top”. While the metaphor in P22’s quote demonstrates the role of English in widening her views of the world, the use of the phrases “amaze me”, “distinguish me”, and “aspire to the top” emphasizes self-relevance and personal achievement in P87’s quote.

In contrast, P10, P71, P110, and P116 expressed prevention motivation, including fear of mistakes, low confidence, lack of interest, or lack of proficiency. For example, P52 illustrates a prevention-focused state in saying, “Not knowing English nowadays makes you ignorant”, revealing a fear of inadequacy or exclusion. P52’s response also integrated relatedness, outcome value, promotion value, and self-relevant value. She explains, “What motivates me to learn English is my desire to be part of the huge community that speaks English”. External and prevention values may serve as a starting point for some learners but are commonly integrated with internal values, illustrating a flexible, adaptive approach. Findings also indicated that learners with higher self-efficacy tend to favor promotion strategies (e.g., self-consequencing and interest regulation) to enhance interest, persistence, and engagement, while those with lower self-efficacy integrate prevention and tend to adopt a mix of promotion and prevention strategies, particularly during challenges. These findings highlight how adaptive self-regulation is influenced by the social context in which learning occurs.

The current findings strongly align with Al-Hoorie (2024b), focusing on female EFL learners in Arab contexts, reinforcing the relevance and cultural consistency of this motivational pattern. These findings also align with prior metamotivation research showing an overgeneralization bias toward promotion orientation (Nguyen et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2022; Scholer & Miele, 2016). While the tasks in this study did not differ in demand, the limited motivational repertoire and unbalanced metamotivational knowledge observed suggest that gender is a stronger influence on promotion-oriented incentive preference than cross-cultural differences.

C. *Partial and Context-Limited Metamotivational Knowledge*

Findings from the third question indicate that learners’ limited use of prevention-focused strategies reflects partial and context-bound metamotivational knowledge. Learners’ regulatory choices appeared shaped by this uneven understanding of motivational components, emotional fluctuations, and external demands, with minimal awareness of prevention regulation. Although external value and prevention value were sometimes integrated with environmental control and other strategies, prevention-oriented regulation—while limited—typically emerged in emotionally driven contexts such as fear of failure or embarrassment.

For example, P26, P30, and P36 showed how emotional fluctuations like fear, frustration, and anxiety influenced strategy use. P30 transformed feelings of embarrassment and fear of inadequacy into motivation, creating a sense of urgency and purpose. P30 explained here that the fear of falling behind in family discussions pushed her to learn new English terms.

What makes me motivated is that I don't want to be low when we have some conversations or discussions with my family, and there are English terms that I'm afraid I don't understand, so I always try to dig to know some terms from movies and songs.

This quote reflects situational awareness, especially in emotionally charged or socially demanding contexts (e.g., family conversations, fear of inadequacy). By watching movies and listening to songs, she blends external pressures with intrinsic enjoyment. Similarly, P10’s reference to “Whoever learns the language of a people is safe from their deception” reflects a prevention-oriented, externally driven motivation focused on self-protection. Her use of English daily, reflection on impactful words, and recording of them demonstrate how she blended self-relevant value, interest enhancement, self-efficacy, and environmental control to avoid miscommunication.

These findings add depth and interpretation to Al-Hoorie’s (2024b) experimental work by showing how learners explain and justify their strategy use. While learners demonstrate flexibility in switching strategies within contexts, their metamotivational awareness and ability to match motivational orientation to task type remain limited. Their adaptive strategies—balancing external reinforcement with intrinsic satisfaction, as seen in P40’s and P76’s responses—may compensate for limited awareness of prevention-focused regulation. For instance, P40 relied on interest regulation and self-consequencing, while P76 transitioned from intrinsic motivation in childhood to a more goal-oriented, structured approach in adulthood.

Findings support Wolters’s (1998) and Miele and Scholer’s (2018) description of motivational regulation as a deliberate, reflective process involving awareness and manipulation of internal states. Learners’ responses highlight the need to understand how self-knowledge, task knowledge, and strategy knowledge interact in effective motivational regulation. Recognizing one’s motivational state is not enough; learners must also understand task demands and apply appropriate strategies (Al-Hoorie, 2024b; Fujita et al., 2019; Miele et al., 2020, 2024). Although learners believed motivation was flexible, this belief did not translate into articulating or demonstrating prevention-oriented strategies. The findings show that learners can identify and evaluate key motivational components but also reveal a gap in their understanding of motivational quality, particularly in balancing promotion and prevention orientations (Miele et al., 2020). This reinforces Al-Hoorie’s (2024b) argument that identifying motivational quality is more complex than judging quantity and that

learners may not always adopt “the most appropriate motivational state” (p. 60). While some may have been unaware of the importance of balancing promotion and prevention orientations, others may not have viewed it as meaningful. Nevertheless, their adaptive strategies—such as P40’s use of interest regulation (e.g., mastering new words) during challenges and self-reflection and self-consequencing (e.g., pride and rewards) during progress—may compensate for limited prevention awareness. By balancing external reinforcement with intrinsic satisfaction, P40 demonstrates a dynamic, integrated strategy shaped by cognitive, emotional, and behavioral regulation. P76 transitioned from intrinsic motivation in childhood to a more goal-oriented approach in adulthood, integrating strategies like interest enhancement, self-efficacy, and environmental control.

Since I was a child. I was good at it, so I carried on. It’s a part of my life that I’m happy with. Now that I have grown up, I have a purpose to learn English more and more.

During challenges, interest regulation and interest enhancement enabled P76’s language learning process to be engaging and enjoyable. These quotes suggest a partial but developing awareness of how motivation can be regulated. Although learners demonstrated motivational flexibility in their strategies and the belief that motivation can be managed, they rarely showed flexibility in adjusting motivational types, such as shifting from promotion to prevention. Instead, they primarily focused on goals, opportunities, and personal aspirations without considering how both approaches could support their progress. Their responses reflect meaningful, experience-based metamotivational knowledge, with motivation seen as something they can actively monitor, evaluate, and regulate through internal dialogue and reflection. The integrated strategy approach—combining interest regulation, goal orientation, regulation of relatedness, self-efficacy, self-consequencing, value regulation, and self-reflection—highlights metamotivation as both a regulatory and reflective process.

The use of self-directed tools, such as self-reflection and mastery self-talk, fosters self-insight and reinforces self-efficacy (Joë et al., 2011; Miele et al., 2020). These internal tools aligned with promotion-oriented motivation, reflecting metamotivational self-knowledge. Strategy use was shaped by emotional fluctuations and contextual demands, supporting the view of learners as intentional and reflective agents rather than passive recipients of motivation (Dweck & Yeager, 2019; Al Sultan, 2024). This aligns with frameworks that emphasize motivation as self-regulated, socially situated, and emotionally responsive (Fujita et al., 2019; Miele et al., 2020). In this study, learners regulate motivation through lived experience and personal insight rather than formal theoretical models (Miele et al., 2020; Wolters, 2003). Learners’ responses appeared grounded in strategies that had worked for them in the past rather than in a nuanced understanding of task-motivation fit or motivational quality. However, while they showed strong awareness of motivational states such as intrinsic value, relatedness, extrinsic value, and self-efficacy, their limited articulation of prevention strategies indicated a clear promotion-prevention imbalance.

V. CONCLUSION

A. Implications of the Study

This study examined Saudi female college EFL learners’ reported metamotivational knowledge and strategies. Specifically, it explored their metamotivational strategies, preference for promotion or prevention orientations, and what these patterns reveal about their metamotivational knowledge. Through the lens of a metamotivational framework and qualitative thematic analysis, the findings highlight the complex, reflective, and adaptive metamotivational knowledge and strategy use reported by Saudi female EFL learners. This supports Ross et al.’s (2023) concept of strategies as motivational repertoires. The findings also suggest that self-report methods can serve as effective tools for uncovering learners’ reflective and experiential knowledge about motivation, knowledge that may not emerge through structured assessments alone. Educators and researchers should therefore consider incorporating reflective self-report tasks along with other qualitative tools into teaching and research to capture these rich, subjective insights and better support learner-centered motivational development. The findings also suggest that explicit instruction and guided reflection are essential to help learners recognize underdeveloped components—such as prevention—and bridge the gap between lived experience and strategic awareness. While this study did not measure behavior directly, it offers insights into learners’ beliefs about how motivation functions for them. These insights offer practical implications for fostering learner-centered environments that support motivational flexibility, long-term engagement, and well-being.

B. Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. The use of open-ended self-report tasks may have been influenced by social desirability or course content, limiting the depth of responses (Alrabai & Alamer, 2024). Second, since data were collected within an SLA course and based on only open-ended questions, responses may have reflected course themes rather than providing comprehensive insights. Without structured or timed tasks, real-time motivational shifts were not captured. Future research should incorporate interviews, observational methods, and longitudinal designs to explore how motivational orientations align with the demands of language learning tasks and how strategy regulation varies across contexts and genders. Despite these limitations, the study highlights metamotivation as a promising area for understanding how beliefs, strategies, and mindsets evolve over time.

FUNDING INFORMATION

This work was funded by the Deanship of Scientific Research, Vice Presidency for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia (Grant number: KFU252220).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author extends her appreciation to the Deanship of Scientific Research, Vice Presidency for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, King Faisal University, for funding this research work. Appreciation also goes out to my undergraduate students—Anwar Jawad Al Musa, Hanan Al Rasheedi, Fatimah Issa AlDarwish, and Sara Alsabi—for their assistance and contributions to an earlier version of this manuscript.

REFERENCES

- [1] Al-Hoorie, A. H. (in press). Metamotivational beliefs about task rewards: Attitudes, perceived effects, and reported prevalence. *The Language Learning Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2025.2485942>
- [2] Al-Hoorie, A. H. (2024a). Metamotivational beliefs about extrinsic incentives. *System*, *124*, 103360. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/7rzka>
- [3] Al-Hoorie, A. H. (2024b). Metamotivation: Self-regulating task–motivation fit. *Porta Linguarum Revista Interuniversitaria de Didáctica de Las Lenguas Extranjeras*, *IX*, 49–67. <https://doi.org/10.30827/portalin.viix.29880>
- [4] Al-Hoorie, A. H. (2018). The L2 motivational self system: A meta-analysis. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, *8*(4), 721–754. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssl.t.2018.8.4.2>
- [5] Alrabai, F., & Alamer, A. (2024). The effects of teacher motivational practice on learner L2 achievement: A self-determination theory perspective using structural equation modeling. *Language Teaching Research*, *0*(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688241278625>
- [6] Al Sultan, H. (2024). “Motivation Is the Heart of Success”: A Qualitative Analysis of EFL Female Saudi Students’ Metamotivational Beliefs about Motivation. *Forum for Linguistic Studies*, *6*(6), 135–146. <https://doi.org/10.30564/fls.v6i6.7310>
- [7] Alqahtani, D. A. (2024). An Investigation Into the Relationship Between Saudi College EFL Learners’ Motivational Orientations, Learning Autonomy, and Achievement. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *14*(9), 2900–2910. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1409.25>
- [8] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- [9] Dweck, C. S., & Yeager, D. S. (2019). Mindsets: A View From Two Eras. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *14*(3), 481–496. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691618804166>
- [10] Fujita, K., Le, P. Q., Scholer, A. A., & Miele, D. B. (2024). The metamotivation approach: Insights into the regulation of motivation and beyond. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *18*(2). Portico. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12937>
- [11] Fujita, K., Scholer, A. A., Miele, D. B., & Nguyen, T. (2019). On Metamotivation: Consumers’ Knowledge about the Role of Construal Level in Enhancing Task Performance. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, *4*(1), 57–64. <https://doi.org/10.1086/700839>
- [12] Hattie, J., Hodis, F. A., & Kang, S. H. K. (2020). Theories of motivation: Integration and ways forward. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *61*, 101865. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101865>
- [13] Haque, M., Jaashan, H., & Hasan, M. (2023). Revisiting Saudi EFL learners’ autonomy: a quantitative study. *Innovation in Howard*, J. L., Bureau, J. S., Guay, F., Chong, J. X. Y., & Ryan, R. M. (2021). Student Motivation and Associated Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis From Self-Determination Theory. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *16*(6), 1300–1323. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620966789>
- [14] Kassem, H., & Alqahtani, D. (2023). Motivation, strategy use, and comprehension in foreign language reading: the case of Saudi EFL learners at the preparatory year. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *14*(5), 1290–1301. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1405.17>
- [15] Kuratomi, K., Johnsen, L., Kitagami, S., Hatano, A., & Murayama, K. (2022). People underestimate their capability to motivate themselves without performance-based extrinsic incentives. *Motivation and Emotion*, *47*(4), 509–523. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-022-09996-5>
- [16] Miele, D. B., Fujita, K., & Scholer, A. A. (2024). The role of metamotivational knowledge in the regulation of motivation. *Motivation Science*, *10*(3), 197–209. <https://doi.org/10.1037/mot0000336>
- [17] Miele, D. B., Scholer, A. A., & Fujita, K. (2020). Metamotivation: Emerging research on the regulation of motivational states. *Advances in Motivation Science*, 1–42. <https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.adms.2019.10.001>
- [18] Miele, D. B., & Scholer, A. A. (2017). The Role of Metamotivational Monitoring in Motivation Regulation. *Educational Psychologist*, *53*(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2017.1371601>
- [19] Murayama, K., Kitagami, S., Tanaka, A., & Raw, J. A. L. (2016). People’s naiveté about how extrinsic rewards influence intrinsic motivation. *Motivation Science*, *2*(3), 138–142. <https://doi.org/10.1037/mot0000040>
- [20] Nguyen, T., Carnevale, J. J., Scholer, A. A., Miele, D. B., & Fujita, K. (2019). Metamotivational knowledge of the role of high-level and low-level construal in goal-relevant task performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *117*(5), 876–899. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspa0000166>
- [21] Nguyen, T., Togawa, T., Scholer, A. A., Miele, D. B., & Fujita, K. (2022). A cross-cultural investigation of metamotivational beliefs about regulatory focus task-motivation fit. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *48*(5), 807–820. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672211025423>
- [22] Ross, J., Nguyen, T., Fujita, K., Miele, D. B., Edwards, M. C., & Scholer, A. A. (2023). Corrigendum: The relationship between metamotivational knowledge and performance. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *14*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1271795>

- [23] Scholer, A. A., & Miele, D. B. (2016). The role of metamotivation in creating task-motivation fit. *Motivation Science*, 2(3), 171–197. <https://doi.org/10.1037/mot0000043>
- [24] Scholer, A. A., Miele, D. B., Murayama, K., & Fujita, K. (2018). New Directions in Self-Regulation: The Role of Metamotivational Beliefs. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 27(6), 437–442. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721418790549>
- [25] Schunk, D. H., & DiBenedetto, M. K. (2020). Motivation and social cognitive theory. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 60, 101832. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2019.101832>
- [26] Ushioda, E. (2016). Language Learning Motivation Through a Small Lens: A Research Agenda. *Language Teaching*, 49(4), 564–577. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0261444816000173>
- [27] Wolters, C. A. (2003). Regulation of Motivation: Evaluating an Underemphasized Aspect of Self-Regulated Learning. *Educational Psychologist*, 38(4), 189–205. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep3804_1
- [28] Wolters, C. A., & Rosenthal, H. (2000). The relation between students' motivational beliefs and their use of motivational regulation strategies. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 33(7–8), 801–820. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0883-0355\(00\)00051-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0883-0355(00)00051-3)
- [29] Wolters, C. A. (1998). Self-regulated learning and college students' regulation of motivation. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 90(2), 224–235. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-0663.90.2.224>

Hajar Al Sultan was born in Saudi Arabia. She earned her PhD in Literacy, Culture, and EFL/ESL Education from Indiana University, Bloomington, USA, in 2020. She is an assistant professor in the Department of English Language at the College of Arts, King Faisal University, Al Ahsa, Saudi Arabia. With five years of experience teaching courses such as Research Methods, Graduation Project, Dialogue and Discussion, Second Language Acquisition, and Discourse Analysis, she specializes in qualitative research, second language studies, and discourse analysis. Her research reflects diverse interests and an interdisciplinary focus on EFL/ESL, language and culture, and broader themes related to individuals' beliefs, perceptions, and social interactions across educational, legal, and healthcare settings. She has published in Scopus-indexed Q1 and Q2 journals and currently leads several interdisciplinary projects exploring diverse topics in EFL/ESL settings. Dr. Al Sultan is an active collaborator across disciplines, applying mixed methods and varied research approaches.