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The Motivational Divide: EFL Teachers' Beliefs About Student Motivation

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***Abstract*—Researchers and practitioners typically view motivation as a key factor in successful language learning. As teachers strive to motivate their students in language classrooms, they develop divergent opinions regarding the extent to which their students are motivated. Characterizing this as a motivational divide, this study attempts to affirm the existence of this divide and closely investigate other related teachers' beliefs that may further reinforce it. A questionnaire was employed to explore 48 English teachers' beliefs about learner motivation. Three groups of teachers were identified: the largest percentage believed that students were motivated, followed by almost equal percentages of those who believed that students were unmotivated or those neutral. Several related beliefs seem to contribute to this divide, especially the stereotypical perceptions of Saudi students and beliefs that students do not appreciate the future value of studying English as a foreign language, along with judgments about the signs of student classroom engagement. Generally, a pattern was observed in the teachers' responses to most statements, indicating the existence of a motivational divide. This study concludes by stressing the importance of teachers' beliefs about learner motivation in effective motivational classroom practices.**

***Index Terms*—L2 motivation, teachers' beliefs, motivational divide, classroom motivation**

I. Introduction

The significance of motivation in successful language learning has been thoroughly documented. Researchers of L2 acquisition regard motivation as a crucial factor influencing language learning (Dörnyei, 2005). Drawing on their professional experience, EFL teachers also speak favorably of students who actively participate in class and show interest during lessons; they are often described as being "motivated" students. Owing to its perceived importance, the concept of motivation has attracted the attention of language acquisition researchers for several decades.

As indicated by Woods (1996), over the years, the focus of research within the field of language learning and teaching has shifted from methodology to learners, and only recently to teachers and classroom practices. Ushioda (2022) noted that "this relative lack of emphasis on language teachers' perspectives" (p. 8) is also true regarding the long history of L2 motivation research (cf. Cowie & Sakui, 2011, p. 213). She referred to Dörnyei's (1994) distinction between focus on "motivation" (the theoretical/conceptual perspective) and "motivating" (the practical/educational perspective). As an emerging concept, motivation must first be defined and conceptualized, and its importance must be demonstrated. Classroom-based language learning has become widespread, and attention must be paid to the role of educational settings. Teachers represent a key component of the teaching environment.

Consistent with recent trends in motivation research, the present study investigated EFL teachers' beliefs and perceptions of their students' motivation. It attempted to survey teachers' opinions on various aspects of learner motivation, including signs and causes of lack of motivation, possible interventions for motivating learners, and general perceptions of learner motivation. The existing literature that considers teachers' perspectives focuses more on classroom motivational teaching practices and student behavior than on the viewpoint of teachers.

II. Motivation and Teachers' Beliefs

For EFL teachers, motivation probably needs no definition, as it manifests itself in a wide range of auspicious behaviors demonstrated by *motivated* students in the classroom. Teachers "are not usually concerning themselves with the student's reason for studying, but are observing that the student does study" (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991, p. 7). However, researchers have considered student classroom behaviors simply as symptoms of high or low motivation. Motivation itself drives and encourages learners to exhibit these behaviors. Following Gardner's (2010) affirmation that "a simple definition is not possible" (p. 8), it is not surprising that several definitions of motivation in the literature are rather complex and elaborate (for an earlier attempt to categorize and criticize definitions of motivation as a psychological construct, see Kleinginna & Kleinginna, 1981). For the purposes of the current study, a more straightforward, succinct definition reflecting the conception of a typical EFL teacher could be Schunk et al.'s (2014) characterization of motivation as "the process whereby goal-directed activities are instigated and sustained" (p. 5). Despite its simplicity, this definition, as explained by Schunk et al. (2014), captures important aspects of motivation. For instance, motivation is a *process* that can be observed indirectly through student behavior; *goals* are important for motivation to be initiated and sustained; and effort, patience, and other academic *activities* are characteristics of motivated students.

For over six decades, the motivation behind learning another language has been extensively studied. Al-Hoorie (2017) provided a comprehensive overview of this extensive history of motivation research (see also Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015, pp. 72–105), distinguishing between two major early phases (in addition to the current phase). The first, pioneered by Gardner (2010), centers on the idea that language learning entails not only common external factors, but also a willingness to embrace the people and culture associated with the language (instrumental vs. integrative orientations). However, Gardner's model, primarily concerned with broader social factors affecting motivation, has faced criticism for "not being classroom-friendly" (Al-Hoorie, 2017, p. 2). One aim of the second phase of motivation inquiry was to narrow the focus of the analysis to actual learning settings, most notably the language classroom. An influential line of research within the second phase is Dörnyei's (1994, 2001) proposal of a comprehensive list of motivational strategies that are "consistent with the perceptions of practising teachers and […] in line with the current results of mainstream educational psychological research" (Dörnyei, 1994, p. 273). Researchers worldwide have attempted to validate these motivational strategies through numerous surveys of both teachers' and learners' views (Lamb, 2019b). From a historical perspective, shifting attention to the learning situation, including learners and teachers, is clearly indicative of its importance in understanding the various components of motivation.

A motivational research theme that appears to have progressively emerged from the emphasis on the learning situation is the detailed exploration of teacher beliefs and attitudes. A belief system may be defined as a "set of beliefs which is coherent, which is focused around some central issue, and which is not held by everyone in a given culture" (Linde, 1980, p. 10; quoted in Woods, 1996, p. 69). As noted by Woods (1996), a belief system is "a social system of beliefs shared by more than one person" (p. 69). It is equally important to simultaneously consider the knowledge possessed by teachers and their divergent views and beliefs about language, teaching, and students. There are distinct differences between beliefs and knowledge; beliefs, for instance, are characterized by a lack of consensus, referring to the existence/nonexistence of entities, being affective and evaluative (good/bad), containing anecdotal material (such as past experiences), and having varying degrees of strength (strong/weak) (Abelson, 1979). "Teachers' beliefs appear to reflect longstanding attitudes, 'common sense,' and their experiences in education rather than research-based knowledge" (Turner et al., 2009, p. 361). Although the distinction is not always clear-cut, when most or all of these distinctive features can be attached to a particular proposition or event, one can be confident that they may be associated more with beliefs than with knowledge. Turner et al. (2009) discuss a key element that plays an active role in teachers beliefs—teacher expectations. These are inferences that teachers make about students' future performance and potential successes. Research suggests that inaccurate expectations may "create situations in which only confirming evidence is possible" and that "initial perceptions can also bias what teachers see and how they interpret student behavior" (Givvin et al., 2001, p. 324). Teacher expectations are critical, as they may influence learning and motivation both positively and negatively. Research on teachers' beliefs—expectations included—is best conducted internally. Rather than relying on an outside observer's interpretation of certain classroom events, Woods (1996) proposed "research on participants' understanding of events in context" (p. 15). This partly implies exploring how teachers and learners understand events in context, and how this relates to a particular theoretical framework.

An inextricable link exists between teachers' beliefs and their motivational strategies. As Glas (2016) noted, "if and how teachers put motivational strategies into action depends on their own beliefs about motivation and their perceptions of the context in which they work" (p. 442). If we further accept that "almost everything a teacher does in the classroom has a motivational influence on students" (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 32), it would be reasonable to acknowledge the importance of the recently growing interest in teacher beliefs about motivational classroom practices and their effectiveness. Initially, significant consideration was directed toward understanding teachers' convictions about which motivational strategies they deemed most effective and incorporated into their teaching (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998; Guilloteaux, 2013). Specifically, some studies have addressed the question of how closely teachers' perceptions of motivation and motivational strategies align with those of their students (Gedik, 2017; Ruesch et al., 2012; Wang & Lee, 2019). Of particular relevance to this study are further investigations into teachers' beliefs that highlight less-studied details, such as teachers' conceptualization of motivation and their familiarity with common research concepts related to motivation (Cowie & Sakui, 2011), challenges teachers encounter as they strive to motivate students (Glas, 2016; Sakui & Cowie, 2012), teachers' general conceptions about motivation and their motivating practices (Muñoz & Ramirez, 2015), and the sources and manifestations of demotivation among learners (Afshari et al., 2019; Pawlak et al., 2024).

Parallel to this broad and exhaustive scrutiny of teachers' motivational beliefs, few roughly comparable studies have been conducted specifically in the setting where this study takes place—a Saudi educational setting (for a general overview of research on motivating Saudi EFL learners, see Moskovsky, 2019, pp. 16–19). Focusing exclusively on motivation techniques, Alrabai (2014a) investigated EFL teachers' beliefs regarding the techniques they employ to motivate, and matched them with the reported motivational outcome effects experienced by students. Similarly, Alshehri and Etherington (2017) studied the perceptions of motivational strategies, matching the level of agreement between teachers and students regarding the need to utilize an extensive list of strategies. Altalhi (2019) utilized instruments similar to those used in the latter study; however, similar to the former study, she also evaluated students' attitudes toward language learning. These studies primarily aimed to align teachers' perspectives with those of students; nevertheless, to attain this goal, they explored teachers' senses and insights of motivational practice, which is what the present study aspires to accomplish. Gregersen and AlKhateeb's (2022) study is distinct in how it approaches beliefs about motivation.

In an attempt to confirm the viability of the spread of "motivation contagion" between language teachers and learners, eight teachers and their students self-rated their motivation over several weeks, both immediately before and after each lesson, and various comparisons were drawn. Three additional studies are important to acknowledge, although they are relatively limited in scope or relevance. AlTwijri (2019) assessed teachers' and students' opinions about whether motivation positively or negatively affected learning. Asif (2017) examined teachers' perspectives on anxiety (an affective factor closely linked to motivation) among Saudi EFL learners. Finally, in a setting that is similar to Saudi Arabia, Bahous et al. (2011) examined why Arab Lebanese students are not motivated to learn English, from the perspectives of both teachers and students.

As evident from the cursory review above, the increasing interest in EFL teachers' beliefs and perceptions of learner motivation offers compelling evidence that a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of classroom motivation necessitates further investigation into motivation from the perspective of teachers, which has only recently received scrutiny. Many studies, including those reviewed above, have provided recommendations for future research that highlight this concern. For example, at a practical level, Bernaus and Gardner (2008) recommended that "teachers assess their students' perceptions of any strategies they employ" (p. 399). To ascertain whether teachers regularly conduct such assessments, research should delve deeper into teachers' beliefs about learner motivation and address any misconceptions that teachers may harbor about their classroom practice. On a more theoretical level, Cowie and Sakui (2011) cautioned against complex, abstract frameworks of motivation and suggested that "one way to gain a wider picture of motivation is that theories of learner motivation include teacher perspectives" (p. 226). Achieving this requires further research on teachers' beliefs about motivation across diverse teaching contexts. In response to the call for further consideration of teachers' motivational beliefs, this study seeks to complement existing research by highlighting the Saudi classroom context, wherein many important issues remain unexplored.

III. The Study

This study employed a questionnaire that investigated EFL teachers' beliefs about their students' motivation. A useful starting point when considering this issue is to seek teachers' judgments of their students' motivation levels. Motivation is not simply a key success factor in language learning, but an outcome that teachers seek; therefore, teachers never miss the opportunity to express their views about how motivated their students are (Ames, 1990). Notably, although learner motivation is a fundamental point and an issue frequently raised by many practitioners, it has been widely overlooked in research on teachers' beliefs about motivation. Useful insights can be obtained by grouping teachers into those who consider learners in their classrooms to be generally motivated and those who hold a contradicting belief. As the analysis below indicates, some teachers do not have strong opinions in either direction; therefore, a third "neutral" group may also be considered.

The perspective on whether learners are motivated provides an excellent springboard for further investigation into teachers' beliefs about learners' motivation. Therefore, this study seeks to answer two fundamental questions regarding learner motivation from the perspective of EFL teachers:

1. Do EFL teachers believe that learners are generally motivated or not?
2. How do the beliefs about various aspects of motivation (signs, causes, and motivating practices) held by teachers who believe learners are motivated compare to those held by teachers who believe that learners are not motivated?

The participants were 48 full-time EFL teachers (35 men and 13 women) from an English language teaching institute belonging to a Saudi Arabian university. All teachers had at least three years of teaching experience in the classroom, and only six participants were native English speakers. Three participants had doctoral qualifications, and the rest had master's degrees in TESOL. All the participants were chiefly involved as full-time EFL instructors in a preparatory year program for university medical, engineering, and scientific colleges. Almost half of the one-year program was dedicated to English courses (both general English and English for Specific Purposes), whereas the other half comprised specialist courses, mainly scientific courses. The program primarily aimed to help students cope with the English learning environment.

The study employed a 20-item questionnaire as its main instrument. Participants were required to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with each statement on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree). The printed questionnaire was distributed to the teachers during a half-hour break at one of the orientation sessions that took place in the week preceding the official commencement of the academic year. Teachers are believed to have had increased self-awareness during these sessions, as many practical issues related to teaching and learning were discussed and contemplated. The timing of the distribution of the questionnaire was also deliberate to ensure that the participants did not base their responses on their immediate incidental experiences, but on their overall teaching background.

The primary source of the questionnaire items was five 30–45-minute initial explanatory interviews with five teachers (four men and one woman) who did not subsequently participate in the original questionnaire study. The aim of the interviews, which occurred a week before the distribution of the questionnaire, was to provide pilot answers to a comprehensive research-based preliminary list of statements about motivation and motivational strategies. One important takeaway from these interviews was that teachers were not familiar with the bulk of research on motivation. Only one teacher remembered reading a section in a reference book about how to motivate students, but he was unable to specifically remember any of the strategies discussed. Furthermore, teachers did not recall taking part in discussions with colleagues about motivating students, although they commonly reported hearing comments from other teachers about

how motivated or otherwise their students were. This is not surprising, as language learning research suggests that teachers' beliefs "are overwhelmingly experiential in origin and make little reference to SLA theory" (Lamb, 2019b, p. 299).

Another noteworthy takeaway was that all five teachers agreed that, although admittedly with varying degrees of success, motivating students is one of their responsibilities in the classroom. This appears to be a universal belief among teachers; as Matassarin (2006) observed, surveys of teachers' beliefs in general education show that "the most relevant role of teachers is to motivate their students, and that their failure to do so effectively is a major stressor" (p. 3). Nevertheless, most teachers voiced frustration because a substantial percentage of students in nearly every language classroom experienced a "chronic motivation problem" and did not react positively to whatever strategies were used to motivate them.

The interviews demonstrated that, if this study seeks to mirror the subject teachers' perceptions of motivation, then the questionnaire statements should be jargon-free and as general and explicit as possible. After reviewing several teacher-oriented practical guides and resource books (e.g. Alrabai, 2014b; Renandya, 2014), 20 items addressing classroom motivation from four different angles—sources of motivation, reasons for low motivation, signs of low motivation, and general motivational perspectives—were included in the questionnaire. These are broad areas of motivation that cannot be comprehensively surveyed through a few questionnaire items. Therefore, the items included were only those related to issues repeatedly raised by teachers during the initial interviews.

IV. Results and Discussion

Teachers' judgment of students' level of motivation was elicited through the first item of the questionnaire: "*Students are generally not motivated to learn English.*" In addition to being a key outcome of the study, answers to this item helped categorize the participants, according to their judgments of how motivated the students were, into three groups: motivated (Group M), neutral (Group N), and not motivated (Group NM). Responses to the other items were considered in light of this classification.

The item was intentionally negatively worded so that participants would be more thoughtful when responding. Additionally, most teachers in the initial interviews leaned toward labeling students as generally unmotivated; this holds true of several studies on EFL students' level of motivation, especially in the Saudi context (e. g. Almaiman, 2005; Alrabai, 2011). On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree), choices 1–4 were regarded as indicating disagreement with the statement (i.e., students were generally motivated; Group M), 7–10 as agreement (i.e., students were generally not motivated; Group NM), and 5 and 6 as neutral (Group N). As shown in Figure 1, almost half of the teachers believed that students were generally motivated (Group M), while the other half were almost equally divided between those who believed that students were not motivated (Group NM) and those who were neutral (Group N). This distribution is inconsistent with teachers' reports during the initial interviews, as well as what appears to be the general consensus in motivation research (Afshari et al., 2019).

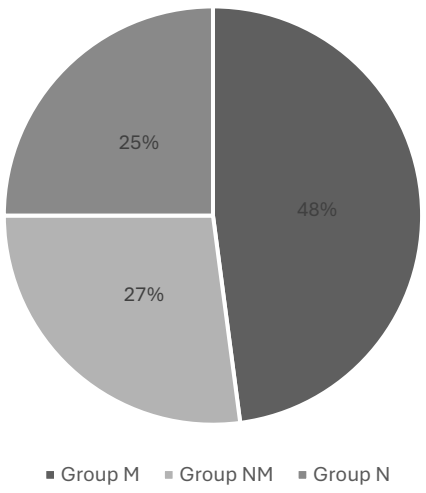

Figure 1. Distribution of Teachers Based on Their Judgments of Students' Level of Motivation

A possible explanation for this distribution is that the preparatory year academic program is highly competitive; students' achievement decides which specialization they will be allowed to join. This does not necessarily entail "true" intrinsic motivation, as it may simply be driven by an external reward, or instrumentally oriented motivation. According to Dörnyei (2001), most motivation research maintains that it is "an unfounded myth" (p. 92) that competitive classrooms are motivating, advocating more cooperation than competition. Nevertheless, competition should be encouraged to an extent that does not foster an "unhealthy competition in which some students win and others lose" (Renandya, 2015, p. 186). A balanced view of the effect of competition on motivation is that it is a double-edged sword; in a competitive

educational environment, a student may be highly motivated to succeed or may avoid engagement altogether because of fear of failure (Williams & Burden, 1997).

A. Teachers' General Perspective on EFL Students' Motivation

In addition to the first questionnaire item discussed above, six additional items addressed the teachers' general perceptions of learners' motivation. For these six items (and the rest of the items, as demonstrated below), and to facilitate comparisons, the average scores for each of the three groups of teachers—Groups M, NM, and N—were extracted and plotted diagrammatically.

Overall responses to the first item in Figure 2 ("*There is no way to motivate students who are not motivated*") indicate that teachers' beliefs align with the relatively recent cognitive conceptualization of motivation as a dynamic construct (Dörnyei, 2001; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002; Pawlak, 2012). This implies that learner motivation should not be viewed as static or unchangeable; over the course of study or even during a single lesson, some learners may begin motivated but end less so, or vice versa. These fluctuations may stem from various internal and external factors (Dörnyei, 2001). Interestingly, as noted by Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2002) this dynamic perspective on motivation "implies that teachers…should not label students as 'motivated' or 'not motivated' in some global fashion" (p. 313).

How can this perspective be reconciled with the feedback on the first item, where three-quarters of the respondents labeled students, albeit to varying degrees, as either motivated or not (Groups M and NM)? The author believes this may be linked to what was mentioned earlier about teachers in the interviews acknowledging that motivating students is one of their crucial roles in the classroom, although some students need to be encouraged to be engaged. This notion is further supported by responses to the second item in this set ("*It is one of our essential responsibilities as teachers to motivate students*"). Evidently, teachers do not perceive learners as lacking the potential to be motivated; rather, some learners may struggle to exert the necessary effort for various reasons. Motivation can only occur through close coordination between teachers and students. To borrow a common phrase, teachers "load the gun" (by exploiting many classroom variables to foster learner motivation), but it is the responsibility of students to "pull the trigger".

Some studies establishing a direct correlation between language proficiency and motivation have yielded contradictory results. For example, Sung and Padilla (1998) concluded that advanced students were more motivated than beginners, whereas Shaaban and Ghaith (2000) confirmed the opposite. The teachers' opinion on this question, which turns out to be rather weak, is sought through the third item ("*Students whose language is weak are particularly unmotivated*"). This response indicates that teachers consider language proficiency to be a less important factor in determining student motivation.

The last three items, related to teachers' general perceptions of student motivation, are comparable. They explore teachers' perceptions of variations in student motivation between learning English as a school subject and other subjects, between students from this institution and other students, and between current and past students. Not all respondents had experience or knowledge of these different contexts, yet understanding how teachers view student motivation in such juxtapositions is important, especially because reference to them is occasionally made in research on motivation. For example, because language learning is linked to several personal and social factors, it is regarded as different from other school subjects (Dörnyei, 2001). The participants of this study responded in line with this conclusion; they did not support the view that students who are not motivated to learn English are also not motivated to learn other subjects.

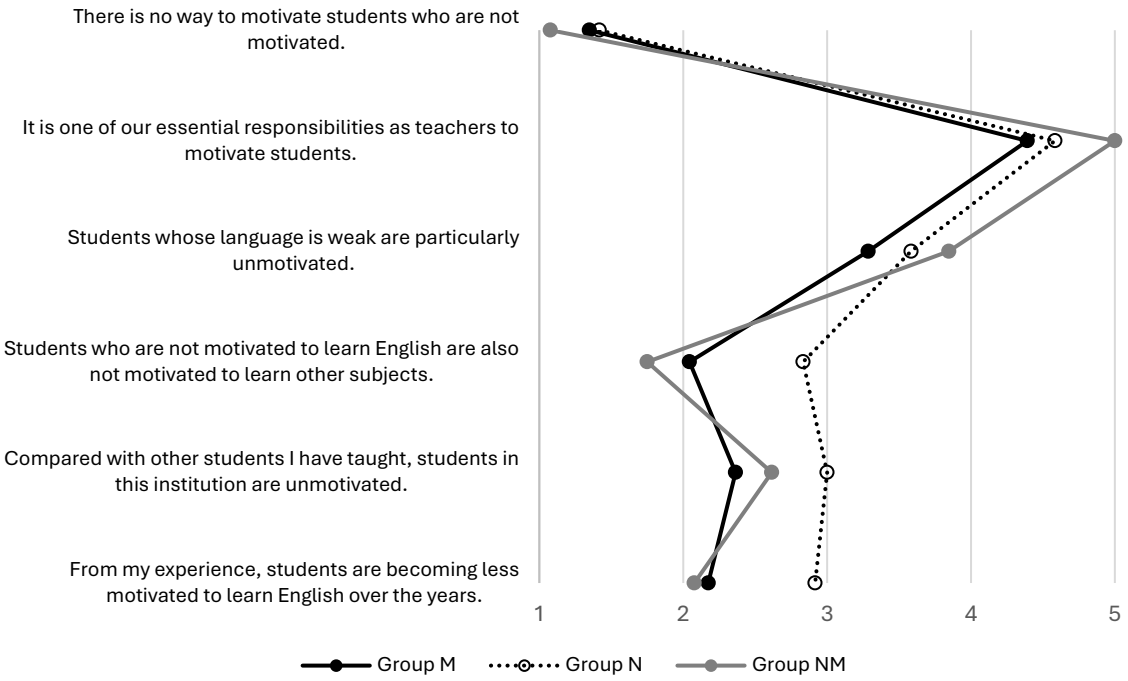

Figure 2. Teachers' General Perspective on EFL Students' Motivation

Regarding the other two comparisons, most participants did not draw a distinction in motivation levels between students from this institution (where they are currently employed) and other institutions (where they have prior work experience), or between current students and previous generations. This last observation is somewhat counterintuitive, as teachers often complain about the deteriorating quality of contemporary students, including problems with motivation and enthusiasm, relative to former students. A final notable observation is that, unlike the two extreme groups of teachers, Groups M and NM, Group N was, as expected, unequivocally neutral in these three comparative items.

B. Teachers' Beliefs About What Might Motivate Students

If teachers accept that motivating students is a crucial role in the language classroom, they must hold beliefs about which methods or strategies may or may not work. As discussed in the literature review, classroom motivation strategies are a thoroughly researched topic, and it is not possible to investigate teachers' beliefs concerning specific strategies in this broad study. The four items subsumed under this theme of questionnaire items covered four broad motivational classroom factors: technology, classroom management, communicative teaching, and assessment (Figure 3).

Technology is becoming a part of almost every aspect of our lives, including education and language learning. Despite this, few studies (e.g. González-Mujico, 2022) have investigated the effect of technology on L2 student motivation, a particularly promising line of research (Al-Hoorie, 2017; Lamb, 2019a). This classroom motivational impact of technology is recognized by participants' overall response to the first item in this part of the analysis ("*One way to motivate students is to introduce new technology into teaching*") (cf. Pawlak et al., 2024). This also applies to the use of communicative language teaching ("*One way to motivate students is to use more communicative teaching methods*"). It is clearly motivating to be in contact with meaningful and authentic language most of the classroom time (Brown, 2013). However, compared with the other two groups, Group M appeared reluctant to concede that technology and communicative teaching were motivating; Group NM had the strongest opinions on these two items.

Unlike the positive response concerning the motivational effect of using technology and communicative teaching in the language classroom, the other two items in this part of the questionnaire, which pertained to classroom management ("*Using more formal, strict procedures of class management is one way to make students more motivated*") and assessment ("*One way to motivate students is to use more difficult assessment methods*"), received negative rankings. The wording of these items was based on concerns raised by the teachers interviewed, who expressed their dissatisfaction with the testing procedures and complained about student behavior in the classroom.

For teachers in non-Western test-driven educational cultures, such as the Chinese culture (Huang, 2012), test results can be used as a motivating factor, akin to materialistic rewards, as they encourage students to study harder. Nonetheless, the respondents in this study concurred that learning contexts requiring high-stakes testing are detrimental to student motivation (Falout et al., 2009; Mora, 2011). Teachers appear to prefer the more motivating "alternative or authentic assessments" (see Renandya, 2015, p. 187) over formal, high-stakes testing. Similarly, regarding the question of "how to discipline students in a motivational (or at least not de-motivational) manner," (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 47) teachers seem particularly averse to exerting pressure on the students or threatening them to comply with class norms. As demonstrated in Figure 3, Group NM held a slightly weaker opinion on the assessment and classroom management items compared

with the other two groups. For this group of teachers, assessment and classroom management might be deemed less demotivating, with the issue of low motivation being intrinsic to the learners themselves.

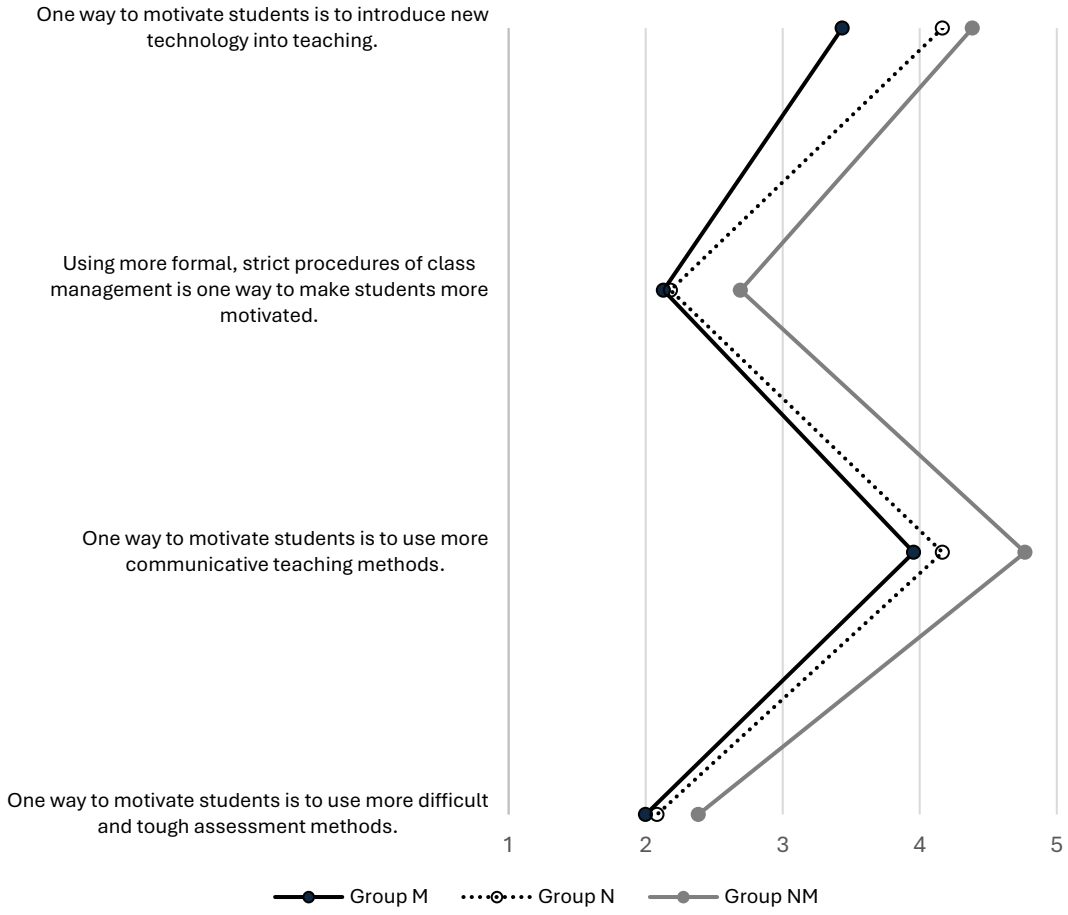

Figure 3. Teachers' Beliefs About What Might Motivate Students

In summary, the responses of all three groups of teachers to the four questionnaire items on beliefs about what motivates students in the classroom generally align with common assertions in the motivation literature. The concurrence of opinions among all three groups of teachers was a significant observation. We can tentatively conclude, without underestimating the value of the subtle nuances noted in the discussion above, that teachers' positions on student motivation do not drastically affect their beliefs regarding what may or may not function as a classroom motivator.

C. Teachers' Beliefs About the Main Reasons for Low Motivation

Teachers necessarily hold beliefs about what may influence learner motivation, either positively or negatively. The wording of the six items in this section of the questionnaire reflects the teachers' concerns during the preliminary interviews. All items were formulated such that agreeing with an item would be interpreted to mean that what the item says somehow contributes to a lack of motivation; however, disagreeing does not necessarily mean the opposite, that is, the encouragement of motivation. This is important because the goal is to allow teachers to vocalize their beliefs strictly regarding internal and external variables, which might be conducive to low motivation in the classroom.

The first two items (Figure 4) overlapped with two items discussed in the previous two sections (those related to low language proficiency and communicative language teaching), and the responses corresponded to those observed earlier. The subsequent two items explore teachers' judgments of the extent to which students value English as a university course (relative to other courses) and consider it a valuable future tool. Group M did not subscribe to the notion that students do not envisage the significance of English mastery for their future. They hold a neutral stance toward the idea that English as a subject is deemed inferior and unimportant compared with their other specialist courses. The other two groups agreed with these statements, especially regarding the inferiority and insignificance of English language courses. This outcome is unexpected because the nature of the teaching program that the teachers are largely involved in is more of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) where most of the other university subjects, such as mathematics, chemistry, and physics, are supposed to be taught, at least partially, in English, making language learning more relevant and hence acting as "a booster for student engagement" (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020, p. 21; see also: Lorenzo, 2014). The contradiction can be resolved by referring to the doubts surrounding the conclusion that CLIL programs boost motivation "since, currently, the results obtained are far from conclusive and may be grounded on stakeholders' opinions" (Lasagabaster, 2019, p. 359).

The teachers' beliefs reported here appear to confirm Lasagabaster's viewpoint, which, as he maintains, calls for more investigation especially into how divergent the preferences of CLIL students from different cultures are.

Responses to the fifth item ("*Poor materials we use represent one of the main reasons for students' lack of motivation*") were somewhat positive, although Group N agreed slightly more than the other two groups. Teaching materials are a key demotivating factor in EFL classrooms (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009), and several variables related to both format and content (Crookes & Schmidt, 1991), such as authenticity (Peacock, 1997) and relevance (Wachob, 2006), can contribute to the motivational effect of language materials. The participants in this study expressed not being completely satisfied with the motivational effects of the textbook series published by a well-known Western publisher. The teachers may have felt that the content was not pertinent to the students' specific needs and culture, and therefore, was not sufficiently stimulating.

The final questionnaire item pertaining to beliefs about the reasons for low motivation ("*One of the main causes of lack of motivation is the Saudi students' lenient, less strict view of the process of learning in general*") is particularly important. Unlike Group M, which, despite being very close to the neutral borderline, did not agree with the item, both other groups unequivocally agreed, characterizing this item as exhibiting the most variation among the groups. The motivational divide underlying this analysis may be partly attributable to these stereotypical views. Group M did not conform to this seemingly popular stereotype and consequently did not believe that students lack motivation, whereas the other two groups embraced this stereotype, holding the belief that most students are not motivated (or adopting a neutral position). Stereotypes are related to teachers' expectations; when these stereotypes are negative, they may pose a "threat" that can influence student academic performance and intrinsic motivations (Macklem, 2015, p. 64). In addition to the question of whether they are legitimate or biased, we must determine whether these sweeping expectations and related teaching practices can be adjusted.

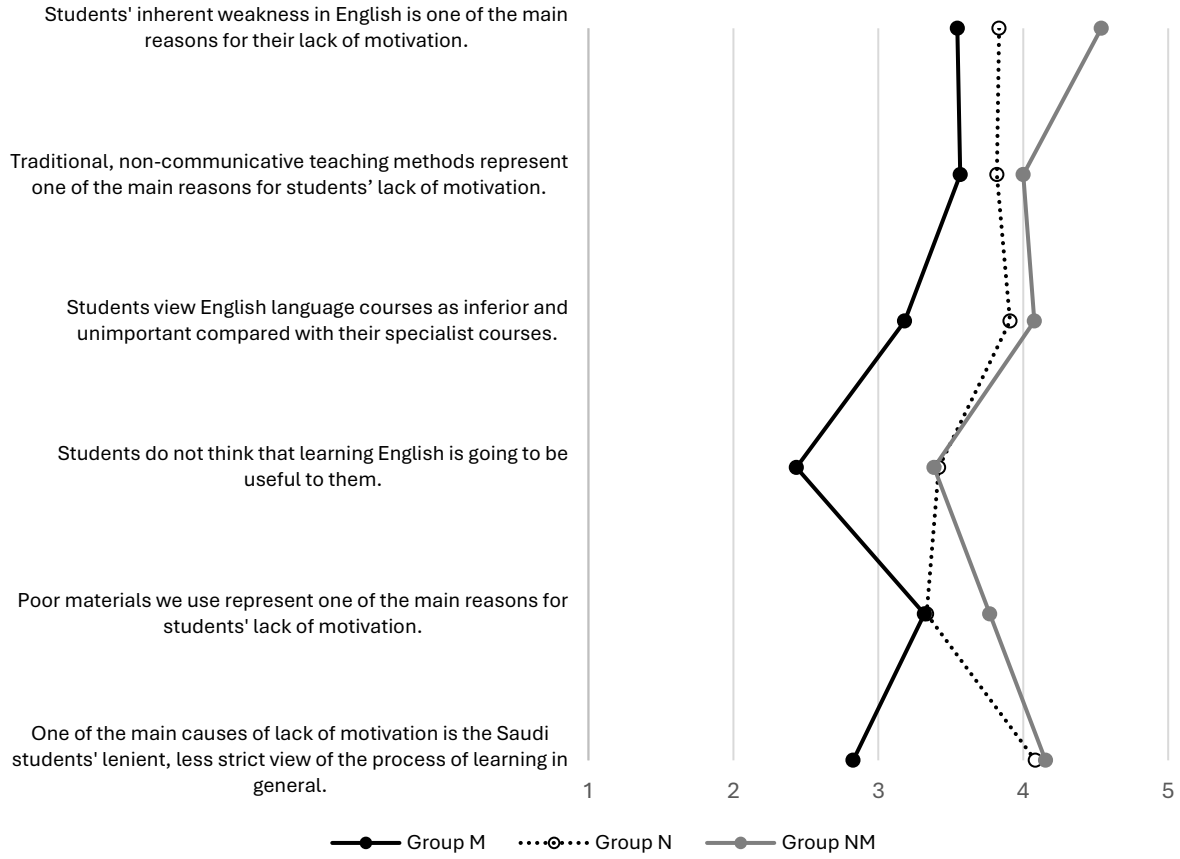

Figure 4. Teachers' Beliefs About the Main Reasons for Low Motivation

In conclusion, when responding to at least two of the six items subsumed in this section, teachers belonging to different groups did not share homogenous beliefs equally. Group M, in particular, did not accept—or at least seemed reluctant to accept—that the students' lack of motivation resulted from them being lenient and less strict about learning in general, or their view that English is inferior to other subjects and not useful in the future. Regarding the other statements, Group M agreed, but not as strongly as the other two groups, especially Group NM. Teachers' beliefs about the reasons for students' lower motivation clearly highlight a divide among teachers regarding student motivation.

D. Teachers' Beliefs About Signs of Low Motivation

The final part of the questionnaire comprised three items related to the degree of effort exerted in learning English. The most pronounced sign of learners' lack of motivation was anticipated to be not paying attention during lessons, followed by unwillingness to participate in class; the weakest sign was not using English outside of the classroom. The reference to "activities" in the definition of motivation cited above is an example of the importance placed on effort as the main component in almost all theoretical models of motivation. At the task level, teachers described students who focus attention, participate, and exert noticeable effort in general as motivated; these indicators are often referred to using the term "engagement" in the literature (see Philp & Duchesne, 2016).

As shown in Figure 5, the responses to the three items related to learner engagement ranged from neutral (Group M) to more or less definitive agreement, especially in Group NM. Unexpectedly, however, there was practically no difference in the strength of opinion on each of the three items, except that exhibited by Group N regarding the item on using English outside class. It may not seem entirely logical for Group NM, for instance, to agree equally strongly with all three statements about expending less effort, even though each statement represents a different level of learner engagement. Nonetheless, this finding suggests that such judgments are not separable from the overarching belief that students are generally unmotivated. Group NM did not believe that the students were motivated, and accordingly, did not observe any signs of active engagement. By contrast, Group M was more neutral, as they believed that students were generally motivated and did not notice serious indications of low engagement. Thus, teachers' beliefs about signs of low motivation also mark a divide among teachers regarding how motivated students are.

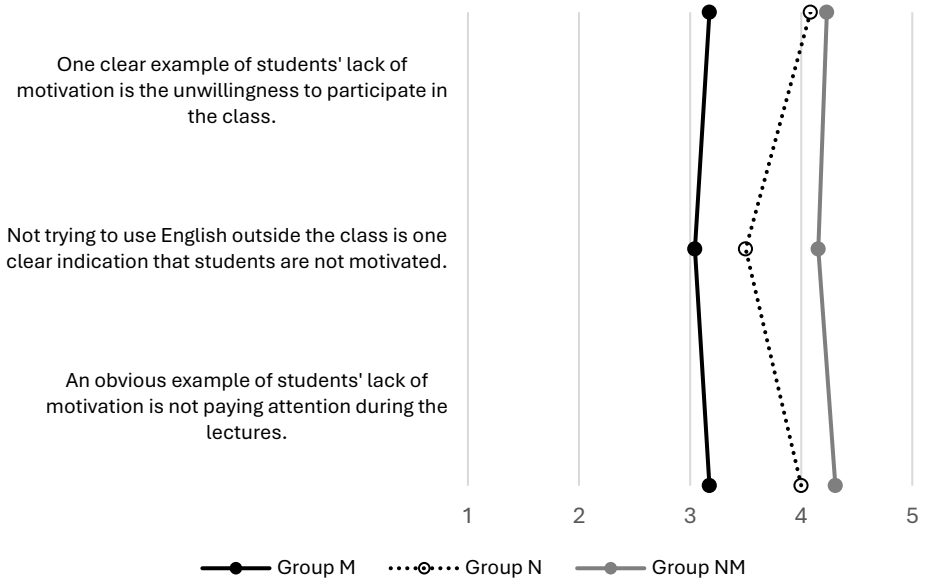

Figure 5. Teachers' Beliefs About Signs of Low Motivation

V. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore EFL teachers' beliefs about learners' motivation. Three groups of teachers were identified: those who represented the majority and believed that the learners were motivated, those who were neutral, and those who believed that the learners were not motivated. The study compared the opinions of these three groups on various aspects of learner motivation to identify specific belief variables potentially contributing to this motivational divide. Two such beliefs, related to reasons for lack of motivation, are stereotypical representations of Saudi students' attitudes toward learning, in addition to conceptions of students' underestimation of the importance of English for their future. Beliefs about the signs of learner engagement during lessons were another contributing factor. However, views related to what might motivate students and judgments about the signs of low motivation do not seem to contribute to the motivational divide. In general, there is a pattern that can be perceived as an indication of the existence of a motivational divide: for most of the statements, Group M is closest to the agreement extreme, followed by Group N, whereas Group NM is closest to the disagreement end.

This apparent pattern of motivational divide among EFL teachers is consistent with that demonstrated by Givvin et al. (2001) who noted that teachers have stable ratings for student motivation across time. Consequently, if "classroom structures have sources in teachers' beliefs" (Nespor, 1987, p. 326), research should pay more attention to teachers' perceptions and "subjective interpretations of classroom processes" (Nespor, 1987, p. 325). These results may inform pre-service teacher education programs to assist teachers in making effective classroom decisions (Mansfield & Volet, 2014). As indicated by Paran (2017) "intuitions and beliefs are not reliable when complex issues such as teaching and

learning are concerned" (p. 501); therefore, as attempted in this study, an important goal of education research is to explore and determine the root causes of such beliefs and intuitions.

Notwithstanding its limitations, especially because of its focus on one specific context of EFL learning, this study broadens the horizon for further research on teachers' perspectives on student motivation in different settings. Research on beliefs about motivation in different contexts is clearly not just useful (e.g. Hufton et al., 2003), but it should also be a crucial research objective; for instance, we should inquire into whether the motivational divide is culture-specific and what factors might contribute to this. The present study has demonstrated that researching EFL teachers' beliefs about learner motivation may provide key insights into EFL teaching practice, and that "even if teachers turned out to be ill-informed, there would be good reason for gaining more knowledge about their beliefs" (Nolen & Nicholls, 1994, p. 58). Familiarity with the "theories" and conceptions teachers (and students) bring to the classroom is essential for setting realistic goals, overcoming obstacles and struggles, and eventually providing effective language teaching (Kern, 1995).

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