

## **The relationship between autonomy, competence and relatedness with motivation to learn English**

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Drawing on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), this paper examines the relationship between the three psychological factors (autonomy, competence and relatedness) and students' motivation to learn English in Vietnamese higher education. A quantitative survey with both English major students (n = 180) and non-English major students (n = 241) yielded a number of similar and different results for these two groups. Most significantly, for both groups, when feeling cared by significant others (i.e., teachers), students reported a high level of intrinsic motivation. However, while non-English major students feel intrinsically motivated when they feel autonomous, this result was not evident for English major students. To seek further explanation for these results, six focus groups with 32 students were conducted. These students expressed a strong desire to be taken care of and approved by their teachers and peers when learning English. They highlighted that such a psychological need should be satisfied so that they may develop and nurture their passion in learning English.

**Keywords:** Autonomy, competence; EFL motivation; relatedness; Vietnamese higher education

### **Biodata**

Dr Huong Ngo is an experienced English lecturer in Vietnamese higher education. She earned her PhD degree in Queensland university of Technology in 2015. Her current research interest covers educational psychology, ELT, teacher self-efficacy and teacher education.

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### **Introduction**

Since 1986, when Vietnam embarked on its economic reform, widely known as "Doi Moi", English language has been identified the most important foreign language in the country. Currently, English has been institutionalised to be the compulsory subjects for the primary school children in Years 3, 4 and 5. In secondary and high schools, English is the mandate and important subjects. Regarding English education in the higher education level, in particular, the Vietnamese government has highlighted that Vietnamese higher education students have to study English so that upon successful university graduation, they are able to effectively use English to work in global working environments (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2012). However, empirical research evidence has indicated that Vietnamese higher education students have limited levels of English proficiency (Nguyen, 2011), and that many university graduates struggled to find jobs due to their unsatisfied levels of English competence (Vu, 2012). Recognising this, in the national education project worth over 5 billion US dollars, entitled "Teaching and learning foreign language in the national education system in the period of 2008-

2020”, the Vietnamese government has identified an urgent need to enhance the level of English proficiency for Vietnamese higher education students. It has specifically called for the effective solution from all the society, particularly foreign language policy makers, and English educators. Given the mounting research evidence that motivation significantly contributes to success in learning a second/foreign language (Gardner & Lalonde, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Vandergrift, 2005), this paper argued that it is imperative to improve Vietnamese students’ motivation to learn English to improve their English proficiency. Among a number of variables which are believed to be the predictors of motivation, this paper sought to find the associations between motivation and three basic psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence and relatedness.

### **English education in Vietnamese higher education**

English learners in Vietnamese higher education are classified into two major groups, commonly known as English major and non-English major students. The former refers to those who choose to learn English as the major component of their degree. English major students account for a small proportion of the total number of Vietnamese higher education students (To, 2010). The latter pertains to those who major in other specialist areas such as engineering, economics and law. Learning English is compulsory and accounts for a smaller part of their wider degree. Non-English major students constitute for the majority of students in Vietnamese higher education (94%).

Given the fact that English major and non-English major students have a different focus on learning English, it is reasonable to assume that they have different reasons to learn English. As a result, we need to motivate them to learn English differently. As self-determination theory, a macro theory on human motivation specifically discusses ways to motivate individuals to engage in a task, which is relevant to the aim of this research, this theory is used as the theoretical grounding in this paper and discussed below.

### **Self-determination theory**

Self-determination theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan (1985) is of the most influential motivation theories in both mainstream and educational psychology (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008). SDT embraces an ‘organismic’ (individuals have an innate propensity to interact with the external environment in order to exist and develop) and ‘dialectic’ (motivation can be enhanced or undermined by social and contextual factors) perspective of human motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This organismic-dialectic perspective is reflected in the conceptualisation of motivation below.

### ***Classification of motivation***

SDT postulated that humans engage in an activity because of two broad motives: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to the human need to feel controlled and competent when undertaking a task (Deci & Ryan, 2002b). Intrinsically motivated individuals are willing to undertake a task, often feel joyful and persist in the tasks for long time. As such, intrinsic motivation is considered to be highly self-determined (autonomous). Extrinsic motivation is defined as the motivation to carry out a task to arrive at some pragmatic end, such as learning English to get a good mark (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Extrinsic motivation is further classified into different types, some of which are more self-determined than others. Specifically, extrinsic motivation consists of 1) ‘external regulation’, the least autonomous/ self-determined type of

motivation, refers to engaging in a learning task in order to avoid punishment, 2) ‘introjected regulation’, refers to undertaking a task in order to avoid feelings of guilt or in order to seek approval of significant others such as teachers, and 3) ‘identified regulation’, which can be recognised when an individual carries out a task because the person values the task. Identified regulation is the most self-determined extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2002b).

SDT posits that different types of motivation may predict different outcomes. In second language (L2) acquisition, past empirical research has identified that higher levels of intrinsic motivation and self-determined types of extrinsic motivation (i.e., identified regulation) were associated with positive L2 outcomes such as higher levels of motivational intensity (effort), persistence, and language proficiency and achievement. In contrast, higher levels of less-determined types of extrinsic motivation and amotivation were associated with negative L2 outcomes such as low levels of effort, and low English proficiency levels (Noels, Pelletier, Clément, & Vallerand, 2000b; Vandergrift, 2005).

### ***Autonomy, competence and relatedness: The predictors of motivation***

Deci and Ryan (Deci & Ryan, 2002a, 2002b; 2011) propose that there are three innate psychological needs which underlie people’s motivation to act: a need for autonomy, a need for competence and a need for relatedness. First, the need for autonomy (or self-determination), the most important need within self-determination theory, refers to an individual’s need to have freedom of choice and the freedom to act without any control or pressure from external forces. When being autonomous, individuals “experience their behaviour as an expression of the self” (Ryan & Deci, 2012, p. 8). Second, the need for competence is the need to feel competent and effective in interactions with other people and the social environment. The need for competence encourages individuals to seek challenges that are optimal for their capacities. In undertaking optimally challenging tasks, individuals have a chance to maintain and enhance their capacities, which is critical in their growth and development process. Competence is not a skill which can be attained by an individual, rather it is an individual’s felt sense of being confident and effective in undertaking a task. Third, the need for relatedness pertains to feeling cared for, and caring for others, and feeling respected by significant others such as employers, teachers, peers and family members.

Self-determination theory postulates that three needs, autonomy, competence and relatedness are the determinants of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Specifically, people become interested in a task and/or find the task important for their growth and development only when the task engagement is perceived as voluntary (without any coercion from external forces) and the task itself is optimally challenging. Furthermore, when feeling secure and cared by other people, which characterise the satisfaction of need for relatedness, people tend to initiate the task and find the task enjoyable. In contrast, if these needs are not satisfied, there is a strong likelihood that people feel controlled, incompetent and isolated. As a result, they may find engaging in a task obligatory and uninspiring and even waste of time (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Self-determination theory emphasises that while competence and relatedness are the important psychological needs, autonomy is the most important determinant of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

## **Relationships between motivation and basic psychological needs**

A number of studies have attempted to examine the relationships between different subtypes of motivation and three basic psychological needs. Noels and colleagues' (2001) study findings suggested that for their sample of Canadian students learning English as a second language, higher levels of autonomy and competence were associated with higher levels of self-determined types of motivation (intrinsic motivation and identified motivation) and low levels of amotivation and external motivation. These findings were confirmed by Noels' (2001) study which involved American learners of Spanish as a second language. It is noted that in both studies, while the relationships between motivation and autonomy and competence were at the centre of attention, the relationships between motivation and relatedness were neglected. In a more recent study on Canadian university students' motivation to learn Japanese, Sugita McEown, Noels, and Saumure (2014), they addressed this limitation by examining the relationship between motivation and all three needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness). This study was in line with their previous studies and supported self-determination theory in that autonomy, competence and relatedness were positively and significantly correlated with more self-determined types of motivation. By contrast, these needs were negatively and significantly correlated with external regulation and amotivation. These studies provide important insights into ways to enhance students' motivation to learn a second language (i.e., by satisfying their psychological needs). However, since these studies conducted in Canada, it is not known if similar studies in another context would yield similar results. As such, the present aimed to investigate the relationships between motivation and autonomy, competence and relatedness for the two different groups of English learners in Vietnamese higher education. The results may assist in finding the ways to enhance their motivation, and the quality of the teaching and learning English.

## **Motivation to learn English in Vietnamese higher education**

Research into motivation to learn English in Vietnamese higher education is scant. Tran's (2007) research examined English major students ( $n = 30$ ) motivation in English writing classes. Through the participants' written accounts of their English learning experiences, the research found that the students had both extrinsic and intrinsic motivations to learn English writing. She argued that while both types of motivation were beneficial for the students, intrinsically motivated students were able to write more creatively. Furthermore, the study revealed that the participants felt more interested in learning English writing when they were asked to write interesting topics and given constructive feedback from teachers. In the second study, based on the interviews with English major students ( $n = 7$ ), Phan's (2010) found that although English major students demonstrated intrinsic motivation to learn English, most of the time they were extrinsically motivated. Taking a different approach, Tran and Baldauf Jr.'s (2007) survey study investigated the 'dark side' of motivation, demotivation. In this study, non-English major students revealed (through survey and students' stimulated essays) that they had experienced demotivation in their English study on many occasions. The students attributed their demotivation to their past failure in learning English and their lecturers' ineffective feedback and inefficient teaching methods.

The present study was framed within self-determination theory, a motivational theory in the main stream psychology. It was argued in this research that, understanding

students' psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) is important and this may present ways to improve their motivation to learn English.

### **The study**

The present study aimed to answer the following research question:

What are the relationships between motivation and autonomy, competence and relatedness for English major and non-English major students?

### **Method**

#### ***Participants***

In the questionnaire phase, 422 second year students in a Vietnamese university volunteered to complete and return the questionnaire. This number was made up of 180 English major students (167 females, 13 males) and 242 non English major students (119 females and 123 males). The participants age ranges were between 19 and 22 years ( $M = 20.16$ ,  $SD = .41$ ). At the time of the research, most participants (417; 98.82%) had studied English for over nine years, and only five students (1.18 %) had studied English between six and eight years. In the focus group phase, 18 English major students (10 males and 8 females) and 18 non-English major students (8 males and 10 females), who took part in the questionnaire, agreed to participate in the research.

#### ***Instruments***

In the questionnaire phase, two established measures were used: the Language Learning Orientation Scale – Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation and Amotivation Subscales (LLOS–IEA) (Noels, Pelletier, Clément, & Vallerand, 2000a) and Basic Psychological Needs Scale (Carreira, 2012). To assist the participants in understanding the measures, these were translated into Vietnamese. The four rigorous translation process can be found in Weeks, Swerissen, & Belfrage (2007).

In the focus group phase, a number of questions were used to seek further explanation for the research question. The interview questions were made, basing on self-determination theory. Examples of interview questions are “When do you feel most interested in learning English”

#### ***The LLOS-IEA Measure***

The 21-item LLOS–IEA measure developed by Noels and colleagues (2000a) assesses levels of different types of L2 motivation. The present study used the adapted version of this scale suggested by (Ngo, Spooner-Lane, & Mergler, 2015) as it was indicated to better suit the context of the teaching and learning of English in Vietnamese higher education. In this adapted version, motivation was classified into four subtypes: intrinsic motivation (e.g., ‘I am studying English because I enjoy the feeling of acquiring knowledge about the English speaking community and their way of life’); personal/ professional development motivation (‘I am studying English because I think it is good for my personal development’), obligation/avoidance motivation (e.g., ‘I am studying English because I would feel guilty if I don’t know English’) and amotivation (e.g., ‘I don’t know why I am studying English, and frankly I don’t care’). These differ in their levels of self-determination with intrinsic motivation having the highest level of self-determination and amotivation referring to no self-determination.

Participants were asked to rate the degree to which they disagreed or agreed with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7

(strongly agree). The four-factor solution was demonstrated adequate reliability with Cronbrach's  $\alpha$  of .75 for amotivation; .61 for obligation/avoidance motivation; .79 for personal/professional development motivation; and .89 for intrinsic motivation. A high mean score on each subscale indicates a high level of that construct (Gardner, 2010).

#### *The Basic Psychological Needs Measure*

Basic Psychological Needs Scale (Carreira, 2012) was developed to assess students' perceptions of autonomy, competence and relatedness in an English learning context in Japan. This measure consists of three subscales, including autonomy, competence and relatedness. Four items assess students' feelings of autonomy (e.g., 'I am willing to participate in English lessons'), four items ask about students' perceptions of competence (e.g., 'I consider myself good at English') and four items evaluate students' feelings of relatedness to teachers and peers (e.g., 'I learn cooperatively with my classmates during English lessons'). In this study, these three subscales showed an acceptable internal consistency reliability index of .75 for autonomy; .68 for competence and .65 for relatedness. Participants were asked to rate the extent to which each statement corresponds with their opinions on a 4-point scale (1= strongly disagree; 4= strongly agree).

#### **Procedure**

To recruit the participants for the questionnaire, the researcher approached all nine English major classes, containing roughly 270 students and 10 non-English major classes to invite them to take part in the research. A total of 421 students completed and submit the anonymous online questionnaire, which was based on the online survey platform provided by an Australian university. The students were asked to complete the questionnaire submit online within a period of two weeks. Those who submitted the questionnaire were invited to take part in the focus groups to discuss further the issues relating to their experiences and motivation to learn English. A total of 36 students (18 English major and 18 non-English major students) volunteered to take part in focus groups). Six English major/ non/English major students were allocated in a group to take part in the interview.

#### **Results**

The present study was interested in exploring the relationships of motivational subtypes, and autonomy, competence and relatedness for Vietnamese higher education students. The Person's product-moment correlation matrices were generated and presented separately for English major and non-English major students to see correlation patterns for these two groups. Furthermore, the data from the focus groups were analysed using thematic analysis.

#### ***The result for English major students***

The data from the questionnaire were presented in Table 1. Autonomy, competence and relatedness were all negatively and weakly correlated with amotivation, suggesting that lower levels of these three constructs are not associated with higher levels of amotivation. Autonomy and competence were positively but not significantly correlated with the remaining types of motivation (obligation/avoidance motivation and personal/professional development motivation and intrinsic motivation).

Relatedness was positively and not significantly correlated with obligation/avoidance motivation. However, relatedness positively and significantly correlated with personal/professional motivation and intrinsic motivation, indicating that the more English major students felt related to their lecturers and peers, the higher levels of personal/professional motivation and intrinsic motivation they may endorse. Of note, relatedness was more strongly correlated with intrinsic motivation ( $r = .32, p < .001$ ) than with personal/professional development motivation ( $r = .20, p < .001$ ).

In the focus groups, all but one of the English major students ( $n = 17$ ) revealed they felt interested in learning English when they felt connected to, cared for and approved by their teachers and peers. One student mentioned the good experience with her teacher while the other recalled the happy feeling when approved by her peers:

It is important that lecturers talk to students and listen carefully to know if they need any help with their study and if they are satisfied with their learning. [...]. These things have really engaged us in the lesson. (English major 3, Group 1)

My classmates often tell me ‘Excellent! You are admirable’ when I got high marks for tests of listening skills. I often just smile and tell them that I just practice listening a lot and to different listening sources. But actually, I feel proud of myself. My efforts have been recognised and acknowledged. (English major 4, Group 2)

Two thirds of English major students ( $n = 12$ ) revealed that being able to make a choice in learning was interesting. However, they emphasized that they needed support from teachers and peers so that they were able to make meaningful choice in learning. In the absence of teachers’ timely guidance and constructive feedback, learning is not stimulating.

..we can decide what we like to present in her lesson. However, since the subject is a difficult one, we do not know what to do [...], we were asked to self-study new knowledge in the course book and present our understandings in front of the class. Since it was not easy to understand, we had to ask our lecturers for help. We sent our presentation slides to them for feedback and comments. However, the feedback did not help us much... too general. (English major 10, Group 2,)

Table 1  
*Pearson’s Product-moment Correlations between Motivational Subtypes and Motivational Intensity, Autonomy, Competence and Relatedness for English Major and non-English Major Students*

Motivational Subtypes	Outcome	Predictors		
	Motivational Intensity	Autonomy	Competence	Relatedness
<b>English major students</b>				
Amotivation	-.25**	-.19	-.17	-.17
Obligation/avoidance motivation	.07	.12	.09	.18
Personal/professional development motivation	.12	.10	.09	.20**
Intrinsic motivation	.36**	.16	.09	.32**
<b>Non-English major students</b>				
Amotivation	-.37 **	-.32 **	-.26 **	-.21**
Obligation/avoidance motivation	.21**	.14	.16	.16

Personal/professional development motivation	.26**	.22**	.23**	.31**
Intrinsic motivation	.53**	.28**	.35**	.34**

\*\* Correlation is significant at Bonferroni adjusted alpha of .001 levels (2-tailed)

### ***The results for non-English major students***

As can be seen from Table 1, for non-English major students, Autonomy ( $r = -.32, p < .001$ ), competence ( $r = -.26, p < .001$ ), and relatedness ( $r = -.21, p < .001$ ) were significantly and negatively correlated with amotivation, suggesting that the more autonomous, competent and connected to significant others non-English major students felt, the less amotivated they appeared. Autonomy, competence and relatedness were positively but not significantly correlated with obligation/avoidance motivation, indicating that the higher levels of these three constructs were not associated with higher levels of obligation/avoidance motivation. Autonomy was positively and strongly correlated with the two remaining types of motivation, including personal/professional development and intrinsic motivation. Specifically, autonomy was more strongly correlated with intrinsic motivation ( $r = .53, p < .001$ ) than with personal/professional development ( $r = .26, p < .001$ ).

Competence correlated positively and strongly with both personal/professional development motivation and intrinsic motivation. It was noted that the correlation between competence and intrinsic motivation ( $r = .35, p < .001$ ) was higher than with personal/professional development motivation ( $r = .35, p < .001$ ). The above size and magnitude of the correlations between competence and personal/professional development motivation and intrinsic motivation indicated that higher levels of competence were associated with higher levels of these two types of motivation.

Relatedness was positively and strongly correlated with personal/professional development motivation ( $r = .31, p < .001$ ) and intrinsic motivation ( $r = .34, p < .001$ ), indicating that higher levels of relatedness were associated with higher levels of personal/professional development motivation and intrinsic motivation.

In the focus group, a large number of non-English major students (15 out of 18) felt motivated to learn provided that their lecturers and peers were willing to maintain a good lecturer-student relationship:

She [lecturer] was so close to us, so caring and ..., which made us confident to talk to her. I did not feel afraid of her and of learning English. [...], going to the English lesson was like going to meet and have a chat with someone I liked. It [Learning English] was enjoying. (Non-English major 1, Group 4)

My class is wonderful this year. We are like a family as everyone is willing to help each other, making learning a nice and relaxed experience. Asking peers for help is probably easier than asking lecturers, who are often busy and need to care for many people. (Non-English major 2, Group 4)

Furthermore, a great number of non-English major students ( $n = 10$ ) expressed a desire to have freedom to choose learning content and activities, to contribute to lessons, and to freely exchange personal ideas with lecturers and other peers. These students highlighted that when their need for autonomy in learning was nurtured, they would voluntarily contribute to the lesson:

It would be very inspiring if lecturers allow students to freely exchange opinions in the class. As such, I would feel confident to tell what I know to everyone. I also feel free to ask for help for what I do not know. (Non-English major 7, Group 6)

## **Discussion**

The present study sought to examine the relationships between motivation and three basic psychological needs perceived by two groups of English learners in Vietnamese higher education. Some of the main findings are discussed below.

### ***Supporting sense of belonging to enhance motivation***

One of the most interesting findings for both English major and non-English major students was that relatedness was significantly and positively correlated with personal/professional development motivation and intrinsic motivation. Noticeably, for English major students relatedness was the only psychological need variable that significantly and positively correlated with personal/professional development and intrinsic motivation. This finding indicates that when students felt connected to significant people in their reference groups (e.g., lecturers, peers), they became more aware of the importance of learning English to pursue their future profession and to develop personally and to become more interested in learning English. It seems that relatedness is an important psychological need for both English major and non-English major students. Relatedness was even perceived as the most important psychological need by English major students. This finding can be explained considering Vietnamese culture. As mentioned earlier, due to collectivism, Vietnamese people tend to connect to others in the community or group to seek for support and guidance in order to survive, develop and grow. It is a common belief that in their life, Vietnamese people spend a lot of time building good relationships with significant people in their community (i.e., class, work place). (Tran, 2008) For them, the feeling of being cared for and approved by the in-group members is essential, which greatly contributes to their self-confidence and performance later on (i.e., academic performance, work performance). Based on this cultural value, it is argued that Vietnamese students regardless of their study majors (i.e., English major or non-English major ) value a sense of being cared for and supported by significant others (i.e., lecturers). In the environment where this need is satisfied, students may feel secure and become self-confident and competent learning English. As such, they may want to challenge their ability and satisfy their curiosity and enjoy the learning of English, which, according to self-determination theory, characterises intrinsic motivation to learn English (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2012).

Another interesting and unexpected finding was that while autonomy and competence were both significantly and positively correlated with personal/professional development motivation and intrinsic motivation for non-English major, the similar finding was not found for English major students. This finding suggests that for non-English major students only, autonomy and competence were important factors, contributing to students' intrinsic motivation (and personal/professional development motivation).

### ***Supporting autonomy to enhance motivation***

According to self-determination theory, autonomy and competence are inherent components of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Research conducted in different second language learning context has lent support to this claim. For example

Noels et al.'s (2001) study in Canada, Kim's (2007) in Korea and He's (2009) study about Chinese learners learning English as a second language in the USA. All these studies emphasised the important roles of autonomy and competence in supporting intrinsic motivation. As such, the finding for non-English major students is in line with self-determination theory and lends support to the research framed within self-determination theory while that for English major students seems to be at odds with self-determination theory. Considering the above finding regarding the role of autonomy and competence for English major and non-English major, it is necessary to understand the reasons why the two groups had such different perceptions about the roles of autonomy and competence.

The differences in the finding for two groups may be due to two possibilities. First, English major students might have perceived that they had autonomy as they chose to study English as a major. In the focus groups, English major students also indicated that they were given the chance by lecturers to choose certain learning tasks (i.e., choose a speaking task to present in the class). However, non-English major students did not make an autonomous choice to study English, and were instead instructed to study the language as part of their wider degree. When further discussing in focus groups, non-English major students claimed that lecturers rarely provided them with a chance to choose their favourite learning tasks. As mentioned in Study 6, non-English major students emphasised that making choices in learning motivated them to learn English. As such, this research argues that autonomy (making choices in learning) is more important for non-English major students than for English major students. Secondly, English major students might have assumed that they had the ability to learn English, which may be one reason why they chose that major. This belief in one's ability equates to a sense of competence when studying the language. However, non-English major students, who have chosen to study an entirely different major (such as accounting or engineering), may have limited ability in English, and as such feel a lack of competence. For non-English major students therefore, their perceived levels of competence were very important. If they felt they were good at learning English (increased sense of competence), they would feel more motivated in this learning. However, if they struggled with learning English (low levels of competence), this would reduce their motivation, and even result in their demotivation (Tran & Baldauf Jr., 2007).

### **Implications and conclusions**

The present study offers important practical implications to improve students' motivation to learn English, which may help enhance Vietnamese students' levels of English proficiency. For both English major and non-English major students, it is necessary that significant people such as lecturers, peers are close to, care for and support students. A caring and supportive relationship with students may enhance students' responsibility for and self-efficacy in learning English, fostering their intrinsic motivation. Furthermore, connecting to students also gives significant people a chance to listen to students' voice about their desires and motivation for learning to better address these. Specifically, due to this research's results, lecturers should teach English practically, focusing on real-life English communication.

For English major students, significant people should assist them to build more confidence in making choices for their learning and benefit from choice making. Specifically, lecturers should encourage them to explore the knowledge independently. In addition, English major students need to be prepared better in terms of both

knowledge and skills prior to a new learning task. For example, lecturers need to model a new learning task, to provide leadership on students' on-going task and to give constructive feedback on students' task performance.

For non-English major students, to engage them in learning willingly, lecturers need to foster their competence in learning English by providing constructive and positive feedback focusing on their performance of the English task. Furthermore, significant people, particularly lecturers need to provide them with a chance to make choices in their learning (i.e., choose their favourite learning task to develop their English communication skills) to make them feel autonomous and responsible for their own learning.

The present research investigated motivation to learn English between two groups of English learners in Vietnamese higher education in Vietnam to address the existing gaps in the literature of L2 motivation. Since this is a cross-sectional research, future research which replicates this research and uses a longitudinal design is imperative. Such research may enable researchers to trace the development in students' motivation to learn English, seek thorough explanations for changes in their motivation to learn English and suggest ways to improve their motivation. Furthermore, future research may extend this research by investigating the relationship between motivation and other L2 variables identified to be important in learning a second language such as language anxiety, self-efficacy, L2 learning strategies, L2 proficiency and achievement. In addition, it is necessary to investigate the causal relationships between motivation and these variables by conducting more sophisticated techniques such as structural equation modeling.

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