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RESEARCH ARTICLE

"Motivation Is the Heart of Success": A Qualitative Analysis of EFL Female Saudi Students' Metamotivational Beliefs about Motivation

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ABSTRACT

Research demonstrates that students' performance and success are greatly affected by their beliefs and perceptions about learning. The gap in research examining metamotivational beliefs, particularly in the context of foreign language learning and in the Middle Eastern region limits our understanding of how language learners perceive, manage, and adapt their motivation in response to various linguistic challenges. This study explores the metamotivational beliefs of Saudi college EFL female students about motivation, an area often overlooked. This qualitative study draws on a research question: How do EFL female English language major Saudi students define and describe motivation? 57 written responses to a single question "What does motivation mean to you?" were collected and thematically analyzed. 5 major themes emerged from the analysis: motivation as intrinsic and dynamic; motivation as a variable feeling; motivation as personal and regulated by students' situational awareness; and motivation as extrinsic. Findings revealed that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are significant, with high intrinsic and self-relevant value, self-efficacy, self-control, and growth mindset being particularly prominent. Motivation was treated as a complex, malleable, subjective process rooted in personal drives and feelings, rather than just external value. While previous research on Saudi EFL students often emphasized the authoritative roles of teachers, this study highlights the importance of viewing students as active participants in their learning. Implications about the integration of the metamotivational approach and students as co-creators of knowledge perspective into qualitative studies when examining motivation and self-regulation are further discussed.

Keywords: Metamotivational Beliefs; Intrinsic Motivation; Self-Regulation; Growth Mindset; Saudi Students; English as a

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Foreign Language

1. Introduction

Metamotivation is a key concept developed in motivation science to enhance our understanding of motivation. According to Scholer et al.[1], metamotivation refers to "the processes by which individuals monitor and control their motivational states to achieve their goals" (pp. 437–438). Researchers propose that studying metamotivation can provide insights into effective self-regulation and the cognitive and psychological drivers of motivation, which potentially influence the strategies individuals use to achieve goals[1, 2]. From the perspective of a metamotivational approach, effective self-regulation requires managing emotions, cognition, behavior, and motivation. This approach also examines people's knowledge and beliefs about how to regulate their motivation. Metamotivational knowledge refers to people' knowledge or beliefs about how to regulate the quality and quantity of their motivation[1, 3]. Scholer and Miele[4] found that people may hold accurate and inaccurate metamotivational beliefs. Emerging research demonstrated that these beliefs play a crucial role in self-regulation, successful monitoring, and control processes[5, 6]. While the existing literature revealed that beliefs and perceptions about learning influence performance, engagement, motivation, and success[1, 7], our understanding of how people perceive motivation in response to various linguistic challenges they face is still incomplete[1, 8].

Across motivation research, the common emphasis has been on techniques to generate, sustain, and promote learner motivation in language classes (e.g.,[9, 10]). The current research has provided valuable insights into motivational factors, strategies, influences, and variables. However, little research has been devoted to students' knowledge and beliefs about motivation and their self-regulation (e.g.,[1, 8, 11, 12]). Earlier, Zimmerman[13] noted that further research is needed to understand the relationship between students' motivational beliefs and feelings and their self-regulation. Miele and Scholer[6] argue that identifying the particular aspects of motivation students assess, either explicitly or implicitly, is essential in exploring and understanding how they monitor their motivation. They further suggest that researchers should pay attention to the dynamics between different components of motivation—such as self-efficacy, intrinsic value, self-relevant value, and promotion value— along with the associated feelings and the strategies students employ to target a particular component.

There has been limited research exploring students' metamotivational knowledge and a lack of comprehensive descriptions of motivation regulation[6, 14]. The connection between their knowledge and behaviors remains unclear. Most of the current research fails to consider the impact of the student's role and beliefs in understanding motivation[15]. Ushioda[16] suggests that the locally situated understanding of motivation also provides insights into the strategies students use to motivate themselves and the factors affecting their motivation to learn languages and their language learning outcomes. The situated understanding contributes to our understanding of how English as a foreign language (EFL) students invest in their language learning and regulate their language learning[16, 17].

This study contributes to our understanding of motivation as not only an individual difference characteristic but also 'a person-in-context relational construct'[16] that needs to be acknowledged and understood from an individual learner's perspective. This study is significant because, over the past 20 years, research on Saudi EFL students has primarily centered on motivation as an emotional factor, examining its levels and types[14]. The gap in research examining metamotivational beliefs, particularly in the context of foreign language learning and in the Middle Eastern region limits our understanding of how language learners perceive, manage, and adapt their motivation in response to various linguistic challenges[5, 8]. Saudi studies on EFL emotions often rely on quantitative methods, specifically questionnaire surveys, which, while useful for gathering broad data, lack depth and may be influenced by various factors[14]. There is a notable scarcity of research on Saudi EFL female students that explores metamotivational beliefs through qualitative methods.

Rather than relying on motivation as a cognitive concept and examining the motivational factors and motivational strategies as externally imposed, determined, or regulated

by others, the current analysis takes a more constructive and dynamic approach to examine students' knowledge of components of motivation and motivational factors and strategies as self-determined and contextually dependent (e.g., [17]). This study aims to bridge the existing gap by exploring the metamotivational beliefs of Saudi EFL female students about motivation, providing a more comprehensive understanding of their motivational dynamics.

2. Literature Review

Research into Metamotivational Beliefs

Considering the shortage of research on metamotivational beliefs, the current review will include research that has been conducted internationally and locally. In Scholar and Miele's [4] study, participants were given tasks with varying motivational aspects and were asked to express their expectations based on various strategies and task fit. Participants correctly matched promotion-focused recall activities with eager activities and prevention-focused recall activities with vigilant tasks. According to this research, participants' metamotivational beliefs can be identified as normatively accurate because they align with theory and previous research. Similar findings were also found in Rose et al. [18]. Concentrating on task and strategy knowledge, they explored how accurate metamotivational beliefs about eager (promotion) and vigilant (prevention) motivation can affect task performance and self-regulation of motivational states. Using both vigilant and eager task descriptions and recall activities, participants relied on promotion recall activities when expecting eager tasks.

In a subsequent study, Nguyen et al. [3] found that Japanese and American participants held similar beliefs, with a tendency toward promotion strategy. Yet, Japanese participants showed a greater awareness of task-motivation fit for both independent and interdependent outcomes, suggesting that cultural differences and values affect individuals' motivational preferences (prevention over promotion) and situational factors (oneself vs. others). The study further addressed how metamotivational knowledge and motivation regulation can be influenced by personal, situational, and cultural factors. Hubley et al. [19] examined people's metamotivational beliefs about intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The accuracy of consequential choices and task performance was correlated with the accuracy of their beliefs. Self-relevance strategies were perceived as an effective approach for performing both open- and close-ended tasks. They further contend that situational factors and self-knowledge should be considered in evaluating metamotivational strategies and accuracy, emphasizing the need for a personal understanding of motivational states and effective strategies. In a qualitative study, Norouzi et al. [20] examined metamotivational strategies used by Iranian medical students to regulate motivation, focusing on the importance of self-beliefs, values, and goal setting. Findings underlined seven key strategies used by students, including regulating value, situational interest, self-consecrating, environmental structuring, efficacy management, relatedness, and situational awareness. These strategies helped students control and sustain motivation during their medical training.

In the Saudi context, Al-Hoorie [5] investigated teacher's and student's beliefs about the role of extrinsic incentives in students' intrinsic motivation. They were asked to predict the possible results of an actual experiment that demonstrated how intrinsic motivation can be decreased by extrinsic rewards. Results showed that both teachers and students had similar misbeliefs, emphasizing extrinsic rewards as more effective in promoting intrinsic motivation. Al-Hoorie suggested that relying heavily on extrinsic incentives is common in Saudi educational practice. From a regulatory focus perspective, Al-Hoorie [8] examined English college students' metamotivational beliefs by presenting them with language-related tasks. Findings suggested that the type of motivation should fit with the task given; as even a highly motivated student may lose their motivation if the task does not fit the type of motivation he possesses. The results also indicated that various motivations could affect performance and showed an overgeneralization bias toward promotion-focused strategies.

An exploration of Saudi EFL students' perceptions of motivation suggested similar findings, stressing the dynamics between beliefs, feelings, and other situational and cultural factors [21, 22]. However, the major emphasis was on the social environmental factors and their impact on learners' motivation, psychological factors (autonomy, self-regulation, and self-assessment) to motivation levels and types were not addressed. Overall, despite employing different methodologies, the studies share important similarities in examining re-

lationships between beliefs, choices/behavior, and outcomes. Across the reviewed research, the accuracy of these beliefs or their relationship to actual task performance was assessed using data from participants's preferences and knowledge in response to hypothetical tasks. Students are often treated as data sources across motivation research, resulting in a gap in understanding the way they reflect on their learning processes and rely on their views instead of reciting existing information [23]. For example, participants were often asked to evaluate the effectiveness of provided strategies, rather than identifying their strategies. In Al-Hoorie [8], students did not express their understanding of motivation, resulting in a lack of data that reveals the elements and factors influencing their motivation. To the best of our knowledge, only Norouzi et al. [20] used a qualitative approach and collected their data through semi-structured interviews. In response to Al-Hoorie's [8] call for alternative methods to assess metamotivational beliefs and knowledge, this study draws on qualitative methodology to advance our understanding of EFL female students' metamotivational beliefs and to increase the perceived relevance of the concept of motivation in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts. To the best of our knowledge, we did not find qualitative research in the literature that explores metamotivational beliefs in real situations and uses data gleaned from a classroom context.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Design

The study followed the qualitative study design by Merriam and Tisdell [24], which explores the meanings individuals attach to their personal experiences and captures their insights into their own words. In this approach, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, offering more flexibility in the process. This approach enabled me to gather in-depth accounts from students and examine the dynamic aspects of their interpretations, which may not be fully captured by quantitative methods. This could be a valuable tool for understanding students' metamotivational knowledge and beliefs about motivation (e.g., [25]). It is particularly effective since the data was collected through a particular reflective task, allowing students to express their perspectives in their own words.

3.2. Participants

Participants were 57 Saudi EFL female students in the English Language Department studying at King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia. The sampling was purposive because it served the objectives of our study. Informed consent was obtained from all the students. Participation was completely voluntary. All the data was anonymized and secured to ensure confidentiality. This study was approved by the KFU Research Ethics Committee.

3.3. Data Collection

Data were collected from an academic course called Second Language Acquisition offered for English major students and taught by the researcher. It was an elective course for third and fourth-year students. Participants were introduced to various topics related to SLA, such as SLA theories, interlanguage, motivation, and fossilization. Data were collected at the end of the course (2023), where students were given a task on Google Classroom and asked to respond, reflecting on their perspectives and their learning experiences. We called it a type of reflective diary because it provided factual data and personal accounts of their perspectives and understanding [26]. For this task, they were not given any guidelines for responses and were informed that it was not graded.

This task included open-ended questions about motivation and motivational strategies and included: Q.1 What does motivation mean to you? Q.2 Tell me what motivates you to learn a language? and Q.3 What do you do to motivate yourself or sustain your L2 motivation? 57 written responses posted on Google Classroom were collected for the first question. All the written responses were in English. In this paper, we only report the results of the analysis of the first question concerning the meaning of motivation.

3.4. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) was used for data analysis. TA allowed for interpreting patterns of meaning [27]. We followed the six steps of Braun and Clarke's [27] TA analysis (see **Table 1**).

We paid close attention to the exact words used and took notes to gain insight into how students describe the

concept of motivation. We also identified predefined codes and themes, including autonomy, competence, relatedness, attitudes, self-efficacy, intrinsic/extrinsic motivation types, beliefs, promotion value, and metamotivational feelings (e.g., boredom, enjoyment, hopefulness) as conceptual categories to situate our analysis within theoretical frameworks and constructs [6]. We also identified other emerging codes from the data (e.g., desire, reward, ability, drive, wants, needs, energy, goals). Tables were created to compare and identify any connections within and across categories and themes, for example, the personal understanding of motivation and situational awareness, intrinsic and self-relevant value, and autonomy. A total of 80 initial codes were identified from the initial analyses.

Table 1. Braun and Clarke's [27] TA analysis.

Step	*Analysis*
Step 1	familiarity with data
Step 2	generating initial codes
Step 3	searching for initial themes
Step 4	developing and reviewing themes
Step 5	defining themes
Step 6	presenting themes with in-depth description

The use of multiple coders and frequent debriefs aimed to enhance rigor and minimize individual bias. We also discussed coding choices and emerging patterns or themes that did not fit, until agreement was reached. To ensure credibility and confirmability, the authors did multiple rounds of analyses, reviewing predefined and emerging codes and themes. Major themes emerged around how the participants understood and related to the concept of motivation its intrinsic and extrinsic types, feelings, to situational awareness.

4. Results

The major themes that emerged from TA analysis presented the students' predominant metamotivational beliefs, which included motivation as intrinsic and dynamic, motivation as a variable feeling, motivation as personal, and motivation as extrinsic. Situational awareness was another important sub-theme that emerged in the data and was linked to the personal understanding of motivation. These themes mostly stressed particular components of motivation: intrinsic and self-relevant value, promotion value, and self-efficacy. Findings also illustrated common motivation regulation strategies and metamotivational feelings students identified in their descriptions.

4.1. Motivation as Intrinsic and Dynamic

The majority of students (51 out of 57) perceived motivation as intrinsic. Motivation was defined as a driving force that originates internally and is driven by personal interest, rather than external value (rewards or pressures). By comparing motivation to energy or power, student 1 acknowledged motivation as dynamic—it can increase or decrease. "I think that motivation is like energy or power emanating from within us that can influence our choices in learning or acquiring a language." The student's phrase "emanating from within us" also suggests a general definition of motivation as an internal source that influences choices related to language learning or acquisition. According to S1, individuals have the ability and power to regulate their language motivation and their preferences and outcomes. For S3, motivation is not fixed; it can fluctuate. "Motivation to me means a willingness to learn anything. Motivation can go up and down." Motivation is linked to her willingness to learn, suggesting that motivation drives the desire to learn without hesitation or resistance. By using "willingness to learn anything," she implied that motivation is a self-relevant value, thus emphasizing her positive attitude toward learning and her sense of autonomy, regardless of the subject or difficulty. The self-relevant value was also addressed by S4, who viewed motivation as an inner force that pushed her towards her goals and played a vital role in her progress and personal growth. "Motivation is the internal motivation that drives me to follow my goals, overcome obstacles, and achieve success. It energizes and sustains my efforts, keeping me focused." The statement highlights the multifunctionality of motivation: following personal dreams, overcoming obstacles, achieving success, maintaining focus, energy, and determination. The dynamic nature of motivation was implied in her usage of words like "drives," "energizes," and "sustains," which portrayed motivation as a continuous source of power.

4.2. Motivation as a Variable Feeling

Thirty out of 57 students described motivation as not just an abstract concept but deeply tied to emotional connections and experiences. The word "feeling" was mentioned

explicitly 14 times in the data. Across the data, the intrinsic dynamic nature of motivation and feeling was often emphasized. Feeling and motivation were perceived as variable and not static; they can evolve, fluctuate, and/or increase. Interestingly some students described motivation as a feeling while others used different feelings to describe motivation, such as passion, enjoyment, and enthusiasm. Most of the students linked positive feelings to motivation. "Motivation is what keeps me going, the power within. The feeling that nobody can control or destroy and the main meaning of every success and a good try." The student's statement emphasizes motivation as an internal force and as a source of power that emanates from within. The feeling is treated as another synonym for motivation that cannot be controlled or destroyed by external factors (nobody), suggesting that motivation is inherently personal, resilient, and autonomous. This feeling results in positive outcomes and is central to accomplishing one's goals, such as "success" or "a good try."

The word "love" was also another type of feeling that was mentioned 7 times in students' descriptions of motivation. "It's a feeling that makes me love and enjoy what I do. Also, it's a feeling that helps keep the work continuous and increase the level of internal desire." Motivation was perceived as a feeling that stimulates particular positive feelings such as "love" and "enjoyment."

Drawing on feelings, S53 signaled the intrinsic value of motivation as it not only enhances pleasure and satisfaction in activities but also strengthens internal desire. The dynamic nature of motivation was also highlighted as a driving force that increases commitment to engage with a task and sustained efforts and persistence in tasks. S13 also stated, "Motivation is a feeling and enthusiasm at the same time to do something that I love and that love motivates me to do it." While two types of feelings are mentioned —love and enthusiasm— "love" was emphasized as a key factor in generating a strong, internal drive that pushes individuals to continue and succeed. Two key aspects of motivation were also underlined: the intrinsic value and promotion value. This view suggests that the intrinsic value of motivation is derived from personal interest and the promotion value is derived from enjoyment and excitement.

Similarly, S11 perceived motivation as deeply rooted in one's intrinsic desire and feeling for something, highlighting the feeling of interest and love. "For me, motivation is the real desire to do something and make you love it." The statement "make you love it" suggests that a feeling of love is central to promoting motivation and engaging with activities. The intrinsic value and promotion value were also highlighted through perceiving motivation as a feeling of "hope," "enjoyment," "passion," "enthusiasm," and "ambition."

> Motivation for me is the hope that leads to continuity despite failure or for example, difficult circumstances. You have a motivation that this will become better, so you continue what you started, which is feeling energy and enjoying doing something.

The statement highlights how motivation is a source of hope, energy, and enjoyment, enabling the individual to be resilient and persistent through failures and challenging circumstances. Associating motivation with the feeling of energy and enjoyment suggests motivation is a sustaining force that plays a key role in improving individuals and circumstances.

S12 described motivation as, "For me, motivation is an endless energy and passion." This statement reflects the dynamic and powerful nature of motivation as a persistent drive generated from within. The use of "endless" suggested that S12 viewed it as energy and passion that do not diminish over time, underscoring the intrinsic value of motivation.

Students also highlighted that motivation can be a fluctuating feeling, reflecting a complex relationship between motivation and feelings. S28, for example, linked a self-relevant value and autonomy, treating feelings and motivation as variable and changing. S28 perceived motivation as a positive emotional state that is intertwined with feelings of enthusiasm, desire, and ambition. "It is a feeling of enthusiasm and an unbridled desire to learn something and the determination to succeed in it. Sometimes motivation is accompanied by feelings of ambition when you want to always become the best." S28 identified these feelings as relevant to external values and emotional costs such as succeeding in something and self-improvement (become the best).

4.3. Motivation is Personal

Students often used "for me," "to me," or other personal pronouns to describe motivation as a personal and subjective experience, which highlighted that understanding

of its meaning and significance varied from person to person. "For me, motivation is a way that makes you do your best. For me, motivation is a way that makes you do your best." The repetition of "for me" in this statement shows that S47 emphasized motivation as a personal experience. It also showed how a high self-relevant value is a sign of feeling the importance of motivation. The self-relevant value was also expressed by identifying the essential role of motivation in daily life. S21 reflected how motivation can be rooted in one's sense of self-worth and achievement. "Motivation means to me: making myself proud." The intrinsic value of motivation was highlighted in the use of an internal feeling (the sense of pride). This statement emphasizes how motivation was viewed as a personal experience that is derived from a self-relevant value rather than seeking recognition or approval from others.

Situational Awareness

Students showed a high level of awareness of the impact of different contextual and situational factors on their understanding of motivation, accentuating motivation as dynamic and context-dependent. Motivation was often linked to social contexts, personal state (physical or emotional), environmental factors, and/or tasks. For example, students reflected a metamotivational awareness of the goal-oriented nature of motivation (17 out of 56), where they perceived motivation as tied to their desires, personal goals, and long-term aspirations. S9 and S54, for example, defined motivation as its self-relevant value, self-efficacy, and promotion value, highlighting the goal-oriented nature of motivation and its connection to self-regulation.

S9 acknowledged the impact of external situational factors (difficulties and circumstances) on motivation while maintaining a focus on her intrinsic motivation (her desire and goals). "Motivation for me means the reason for continuity despite difficulties and circumstances. We can also say that motivation is the goal to complete the things that I want or want to achieve." This statement suggests S9's persistence to achieve positive outcomes and confidence in the ability to overcome challenges. S54 believed in the power of goals to derive and maintain motivation and to achieve positive outcomes. "Motivation for me is something I want, a goal, or a level I aspire to reach." The promotion value emphasized in the mention of "I aspire to reach" suggested S54's emphasis on maintaining motivation for personal growth.

Students also indicated a strong awareness of the fluctuating motivational states and the situational changes (lack of motivation, lack of desire, low levels of motivation, failure, and feelings of frustration), emphasizing the contextual and dynamic nature of motivation. Associating motivation to positive and negative feelings and not merely a cognitive force suggested how both were treated as dynamic, multifaceted, and multifunctional. S52 recognized that motivation is dynamic and can be regained and reactivated by attending to personal aspirations. "Motivation is my key to achieve my success, even though it sometimes seems like I don't feel it at all, and suddenly I remember my dreams and I try to gain my motivation again." According to S52, motivation can be enhanced using a resilient emotional approach, in which a high self-relevant value (her dreams) and self-efficacy are central components. S52 believed in her ability to regain motivation and regain focus on her goals. S38 reflected a complex view of motivation using her understanding of motivation (e.g., for me, makes me, my goals, encourages me, my desire) and various components.

> Motivation for me is like a cannon that makes me continue to reach my goal and encourages me to put success in mind and see my desire and goal, even if I fail, I get up and achieve without frustration

The metaphor of motivation as a "cannon" reflects its promotion value and shows how S38 viewed motivation as a powerful, driving force. The emphasis on "success," "desire," and "goal" highlighted promotion value. While recognizing failure as temporary and feelings associated with low levels of motivation: feeling of frustration demonstrated situational awareness, approaching goals through persistence and a strong personal commitment toward goals demonstrated S38's strong belief in self-efficacy. The statement highlighted how feelings of frustration and failure can be managed through self-efficacy and intrinsic and self-relevant value. While acknowledging the lack of desire as an obstacle in maintaining motivation, S39 demonstrated situational awareness by reflecting on the use of self-talk to promote and sustain motivation in various life situations. "I told myself that I can't do my best without motivation." This suggests that self-regulation (self-talk) can affect motivation levels and types in daily life.

S51, on the other hand, demonstrated situational aware-

ness by linking procrastination with the absence of motivation and recognizing the importance of having clear goals or lacking them and the impact of motivation in her daily life and emotional state. "Without it I procrastinate even in my daily life. To have no motivation is hard and the feeling of living with no goals or having the need to do so is the worst feeling ever." Procrastination and living without goals (purposelessness) were acknowledged as signs of struggle with motivation and implied a belief in the emotional cost of lacking motivation. Overall, acknowledging situational awareness stressed the complex and dynamic interaction between internal and external influences and their impact on students' regulation of motivation.

4.4. Motivation as Extrinsic

Findings also showed how students demonstrated situational awareness when defining motivation by linking intrinsic value (self-motivation) with extrinsic value (external sources), with extrinsic value as a supporting rather than a central component of motivation. S51 pointed out how the absence of external incentives might be complemented by an internal desire and willingness for self-improvement. "Sometimes I do something even if there's no reward, but I did it to know my ability."

On the other hand, S27 recognized that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can decrease and increase and can be both positive and negative, "even from the negative side such as social pressure and financial matters." S44 recognized how specific tasks (e.g., housework) and the effort involved can affect her emotional state (feeling of laziness and feeling of accomplishment). "If I want to do housework, what motivates me to perform my duty is the feeling of accomplishment after being tired." S44 demonstrated how motivation fluctuates and can be enhanced and regulated by directing attention to external rewards, feelings of purposefulness, and promotion value. S40 reflected on the multifaceted view of motivation by integrating both intrinsic (self-motivation) and extrinsic (family, teachers, friends).

> Motivation for me is like the fuel I have that urges me to work towards achieving my goals, and to make an effort to develop myself and achieve myself. Whether it is self-motivation or motivation from my family or from teachers as well as my friends.

According to S40, achieving goals and making efforts for personal growth and goal-attainment are influenced by various motivation components, such as intrinsic and self-relevant value, self-efficacy, and extrinsic value (family, teachers, and friends). S14 distinguished between the internal and external sources of motivation, identifying intrinsic value as the most prominent component and emphasizing the long-lasting effectiveness of self-motivation.

My motivation is the desire behind my actions. I believe that everyone has motivation coming from internal and external sources. You can motivate by fear, and you can motivate by reward. But both those methods are only temporary. The only lasting thing is self-motivation.

Though S14 acknowledged the effectiveness of feelings of fear (negative internal factors) or rewards (positive external sources), she also recognized that these sources are termorapy. S45, on the other hand, relied on extrinsic value to sustain motivation.

> Motivation to me is anything that pushes you to keep going. Either by giving a reward grades even your friends when they help and support each other and want achievement. Or through the way the professor encourages the students through positive energy, smile, and spontaneous interaction.

S45's statement reflected her metamotivational beliefs in both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, with an emphasis on how external sources of motivation–such as rewards, grades, peer support, and teachers/professors–can promote persistence. The strong sense of extrinsic value is supported with intrinsic value, particularly through the desire for accomplishment and social connection. The positive social interaction in nurturing a supportive and engaging environment is underlined in this statement, suggesting that emotional support is intertwined with tangible incentives (like rewards, grades) in understanding and maintaining motivation.

Below, we examine our findings through the lens of metamotivational approach, the idea of learners as co-creators of knowledge, and growth mindset perspectives.

5. Discussion

5.1. Motivation and Metamotivational Beliefs

Students' metamotivational beliefs and word choices reflected accurate metamotivational awareness [19], recogniz-

ing the key components of motivation (explicitly or implicitly)—such as intrinsic and self-relevant value, self-related value, self-efficacy, promotion value, external value— and their interconnectedness, as well as the influence of various situational factors and metamotivational feelings [6]. Their positive attitude towards themselves, toward their abilities to regulate motivation, and toward different motivational states [11, 20, 28], suggested 'motivational flexibility' [19].

Findings demonstrated the role of student's subjective experiences [11, 15, 17] in understanding motivation and metamotivational states and types, suggesting that individual differences, personal understanding, and situational awareness are intertwined with motivation [6, 11, 29]. Contrary to previous research on Saudi EFL students [14, 21, 22] and in other contexts [30–32], which showed the dominance of instrumental/extrinsic motivation, the current qualitative analysis demonstrated intrinsic motivation as more prevalent. Motivation was perceived as intrinsically valuable and personally meaningful rather than overrelines on external value (e.g., rewards, pressures) [6, 33–35]. Extrinsic value (e.g., rewards, grades, goals, tasks, social support from peers and teachers) was perceived as complementary rather than central, with metamotivational states playing a key role in guiding preferences and adjusting readiness for appropriate action [11].

Students' metamotivational beliefs were in alignment with Norouzi et al. [20], emphasizing self-efficacy and self-directed goals. In their study, medical students connected their learning to personal interests, thereby enhancing their intrinsic motivation. The notion of value regulation was also echoed in our findings, where students found intrinsic motivation through enjoyment and desire. The parallels between the two different contexts (educational and medical) suggested that managing accurate metamotivational beliefs, goals, and values is applicable, thus demonstrating consistency across different settings. Unlike Hansen et al. [30], where participants viewed motivation as static and reliant on external influences, such as rewards and outcomes, students viewed motivation as a malleable, multifaceted, multidimensional process. Situational awareness demonstrated how students recognized the dynamic nature of motivation in different contexts and circumstances [1, 11, 16]. Students demonstrated 'motivational sensitivity' [1] by linking it to situational awareness [6, 20]. They were aware of how motivation is socially and situationally shaped [16, 36] and viewed extrinsic motivation as tied to self-relevant value and autonomy. They were also aware of how interactions with other can affect their motivational states [11, 37]. The intrinsic and flexible nature of motivation was consistent with Ryan and Deci's [34] idea of autonomous and self-determined motivation, which underscores internal rather than external control.

5.2. Students as Active Agents and Active Regulators

Through the lens of metamotivational approach, students acted as "active agents" [1] or "active regulators" [38] rather than 'data providers' or 'data source' [23]. While reflecting on past/future experiences and situations, reminding themselves of their abilities and goals, and referring to social support, they demonstrated their self-efficacy [39] and confidence and the 'malleability of metamotivational beliefs' [5]. The use of open-ended questions provided insights into learners' autonomy and understanding of complex processes [22].

The analysis emphasized the role of self-regulation and self-efficacy from a growth mindset perspective. Most students expressed confidence in their capacity to regulate and improve their own motivational states, thoughts, and actions across different situations and circumstances, demonstrating a growth mindset. They stressed the role of positive feelings, goal-directed behaviors, and self-regulation in sustaining motivation. The 'motivational flexibility' [19], which evident in their commitment to addressing deficiencies, facing challenges, and adjusting their goals and emotional states according to various contexts suggests a growth mindset [40, 41]. Stressing perseverance and resilience in the face of failure and others, along with emphasizing their dreams and goals as sources of motivation are other examples of their growth mindset. The phrase "to face the obstacles that I face in life" provided by S50 exemplified a growth mindset by indicating readiness to embrace challenges rather than avoiding them. The frequent use of action-oriented verbs such as "push," "drive", and "achieve" reflects a positive attitude and resilience toward challenging tasks, failure, changes in abilities and situations, illustrating students' growth mindset. Overall, students showed their ability to make decisions and engage in self-reflection about their motivational states. Their accurate metamotivational beliefs reinforced their role as "self- reflective intentional agents" [17], reinforcing their growth mindset and readiness to regulate and improve their

own motivation.

6. Conclusions

The five major themes provide new insights into how accurate metamotivational beliefs can be tied to intrinsic and extrinsic value, feelings, self-regulation, and growth mindset. The study illustrates how metamotivational feelings impact the regulation of distinct motivation components[6, 13, 38]. These beliefs were aligned closely with their effective self-regulation, suggesting a strong connection between the two[1, 20]. As effective self-regulation depends on understanding people's knowledge of motivation, rather than just their individual differences in capacity[1], these findings suggest viewing students as learners in dialogue, who have agency and an active role in their own learning and in influencing knowledge and educational practice[23]. While previous research on Saudi EFL students often emphasized the authoritative roles of teachers, this study highlights the importance of viewing students as active participants in their learning.

7. Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations. Relying on one data collection task, "What does motivation mean to you?" and situating this research in a course about SLA major topics and issues might have affected the current analysis. The knowledge gained from self-reported data could influence the reliability of the current results. Students' metamotivational beliefs could be different from what they actually do in motivation-task fit. These beliefs are personal interpretations that could be subject to recall bias. Contextual bias is another limitation. The data collected from students who were directly exposed to knowledge about motivation and other SLA topics might influence their responses and how they perceive their motivation. Thus, learning about their metamotivational beliefs enhanced our understanding of their monitoring and control processes within this specific context[6]. Future research should incorporate larger and more diverse students from different educational contexts or language proficiency levels to bolster the current results.

Future research should continue to explore student-centered metamotivational beliefs[8] and promote autonomy in students. Using qualitative methods provided deeper insights into students' perceptions and interpretations of complex issues in SLA and learning. Building on Hubley et al.[19], future research can compare the effect of students' self-generated strategies with researcher's predefined and evaluated strategies on students' performance and motivation regulation. Recognizing how students' metamotivational beliefs and feelings about motivation can influence their actions can serve as a foundation for identifying necessary regulatory support and for designing learning environments and tasks that align with students' motivation types and levels of[38]. Future research should integrate multiple data sources, using pre- and post-study measures could help identify whether contextual influences are effective and to cross-validate responses. It would be worthwhile to explore whether similar patterns would be captured in different contexts and with different students and teachers in the Saudi context. Employing qualitative methods such as interviews may provide deeper insights into students' experiences and perceptions and add additional depth.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of King Faisal University (protocol code KFU-REC/2021-02-19, approved on February 28, 2021).

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions. Participants' consent did not include provisions for data sharing beyond the scope of this study. For further inquiries, please

contact the corresponding author.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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