



EXAMINING MA TESOL STUDENTS' MOTIVATIONS FOR JOINING POSTGRADUATE STUDIES: A STUDY OF INTRINSIC, EXTRINSIC AND DEMOTIVATION

Mawada Al-Shibani,

Ahmed Athawadiⁱ

Sabratha University,

Libya

Abstract:

For examining the motivations of MA TESOL students and the factors that influence their decisions, the self-determination theory of motivation was taken into consideration. The aims of the study were to determine the prevalent style of motivation and the factors associated with motivation. Moreover, the study aims to identify any lack of motivation. A mixed-methods design (quantitative and qualitative) was adopted involving the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) and a semi-structured interview. The findings indicate that MA TESOL students were significantly motivated to join the program. In addition, the prevalent styles of motivation were a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic, with a slightly stronger emphasis on extrinsic motivation. Moreover, the factors that influence motivation were the desire for personal growth, career advancement, and external rewards. In conclusion, this study is mainly focused on identifying styles of motivation and understanding the underlying factors that motivate graduate students to pursue a master's degree in TESOL.

Keywords: postgraduate studies, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, self-determination theory

1. Introduction

1.1 What is Motivation?

Motivation is "*the internal and external factors that energize our behaviours and direct them toward goals*" (Al-hadrawi, 2017). Academic motivation is "*a cognitive and behavioural drive to meet academic goals*". (Kotera *et al.*, 2023) The purpose of this research is to examine the motivational styles of MA TESOL students and highlight the factors that motivated them to join the academic program.

ⁱ Correspondence: email athawadi85@gmail.com, ahmed.athawadi@sabu.edu.ly

1.2 Self-Determination Theory

The core of the study is based on the theoretical framework of the Self-determination Theory (SDT): "*Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a theoretical framework of human motivation and personality based on empirical research*" (Deci and Ryan, 2000).. It emphasizes the inner psychological needs and resources that foster self-regulation and well-being. Self-determination theory adopts a different approach to motivation by examining the specific motivation underlying individual actions in a given situation. SDT recognizes that people are motivated by various factors, ranging from intrinsic interest and enjoyment to external rewards and pressures. Figure 1 presents seven types of motivation along a continuum from amotivation to intrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

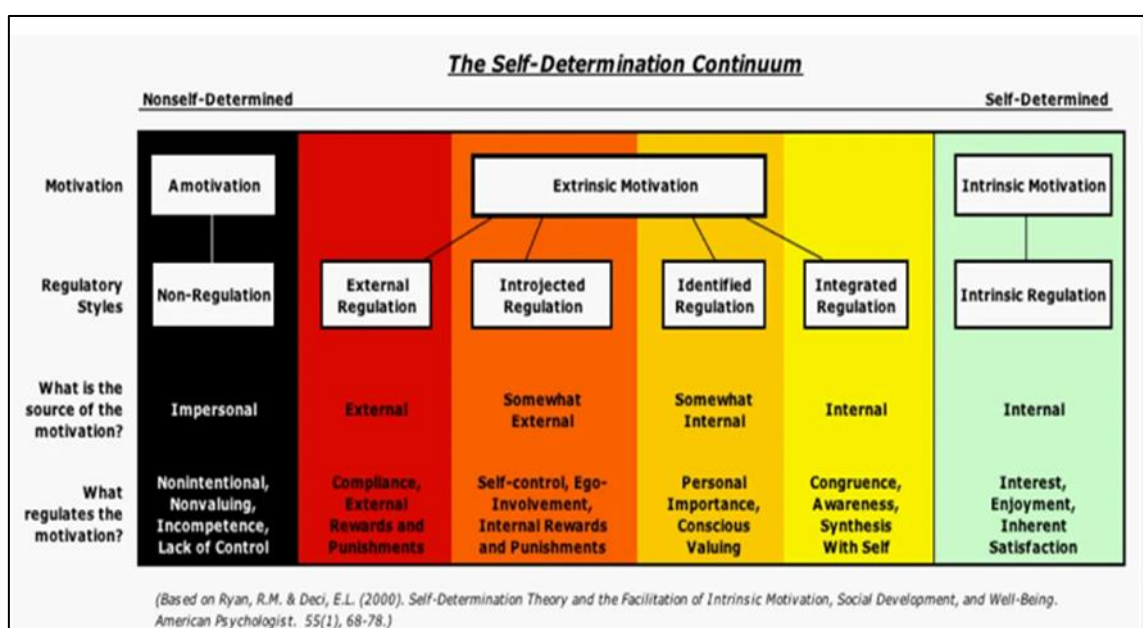


Figure 1: Types of Motivation

1.3 SDT Continuum

Amotivation is when an individual lacks the intention to act. Thus, Amotivation refers to the lack of motivation. However, intrinsic motivation is when an individual acts for pleasure or satisfaction. Intrinsic motivation is the tendency to seek challenges, explore abilities, broaden knowledge and achieve goals. Moreover, extrinsic motivation refers to the drive to do an action for its potential outcomes or to satisfy an external demand. Extrinsic motivation varies in terms of autonomy, including four different types. First of all, external regulation, which refers to the behaviors performed to attain external needs. The second type is the introjected regulation, which indicates the actions triggered by internal pressures like guilt or ego. The third type is the identified regulation, which introduces a more autonomous form of extrinsic motivation. It refers to the behaviors that are consciously accepted and identified by an individual. The fourth type is integrated regulation, the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation (Ryan, 2000).

A methodological gap was found in the literature on this research topic. The existing literature about examining postgraduate students' motivation has mostly relied on quantitative methods. However, there is a possibility of combining quantitative and qualitative methods to reach a more comprehensible interpretation.

1.4 The Research Aims and Objective

This study aims to examine the motivational styles exhibited by students enrolled in the MA TESOL program at Sabratha University. The focus of the study is mainly concerned with achieving three main objectives:

- 1) Identifying the prevalent type of learning motivation (extrinsic or intrinsic) exhibited by MA TESOL students.
- 2) Highlighting the main factors that motivated MA TESOL students to enroll in this academic program.
- 3) Tracing any evidence for a lack of motivation.

1.5 Research Questions

- 1) Are there any traces of Amotivation (a lack of motivation) among MA TESOL students?
- 2) What is the prevalent style of academic motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic) exhibited by students enrolled in the MA TESOL program?
- 3) What are the main factors that motivate MA TESOL students to join the program?

2. Literature Review

Motivation is a factor that drives behavior and performance. Exploring the motivation of students in different professions has been a topic of extensive studies in educational research. Numerous studies have investigated various styles of motivation and how they affect academic performance. However, few researchers have taken the identification of the dominant type of learning motivation into consideration. This literature review reflects the earlier studies that investigated the motivational styles of postgraduate students for completing their Master's education. The aim is to highlight the most prevalent type of motivation exhibited by students enrolled in Master's education programs and the factors fostering their motivations.

2.1 Extrinsic Motivation

In the study conducted by Al-Shredi (2024), it was noted that students' main motive was primarily extrinsic as their shared goal was to get better jobs in the future and to "*improve their financial status*". Similarly, the results of a study performed by Amani *et al.* (2022) indicate that students' motives were extrinsic as their reasons for completing their studies were to earn a higher salary, improve employment opportunities, advance their career and attain prestige or a positive reputation. Also, Haq & Shazad (2021) reported that the motives that drive postgraduate students to complete their studies are job promotion and

to obtain better employment opportunities. Moreover, the wish for career advancement, including the possibility of better employment opportunities, higher salaries, and professional development, is the common motivating factor for students to pursue postgraduate studies (Wiegerovaa, 2016). In all the previously reviewed literature, the shared motivational style of the graduate students under examination was based on extrinsic factors. According to Di and Wen (2014), some internal drivers for pursuing postgraduate studies include beliefs that higher education can lead to better job opportunities and higher salaries, a desire to expand professional knowledge and expertise and aspirations to attend prestigious universities.

2.2 Intrinsic Motivation

However, students at the University of California considered intrinsic factors such as personal achievement, recognition and growth as the main reasons for joining postgraduate studies. In comparison with participants from Hong Kong University, who were indifferent between intrinsic and extrinsic factors. (KKW Ho, 2016) Moreover, in the study of Al Habahbeh (2013), it was concluded that Jordanian students are intrinsically motivated, as their main motives for pursuing MA studies are to seek more knowledge and improve their intellect. Similarly, in a study aimed at identifying reasons students enroll in MBA programs at Kuwaiti universities, it was found that students are intrinsically motivated. Personal satisfaction and improving knowledge and skills were the main motivations mentioned by the students in the study.

2.3 A Combination of Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motives

Royani (2023) proposed that students are motivated by both intrinsic factors, such as interest in the subject matter, desire for professional development and improving knowledge and skills, as well as extrinsic factors, such as gaining better career opportunities, obtaining teaching qualifications and opportunities to work internationally. Also, the research findings of the study conducted by O'Connor (2013) indicate that students' motivations for pursuing a master's degree are multifaceted, resulting from their desires to fulfill a range of personal, professional, cultural and career-related needs and objectives. Similar to the study performed by McGee *et al.* (2016), which concluded that the main motivating factors for postgraduate students to pursue a PhD in engineering are a combination of both intrinsic and extrinsic drivers.

2.4 Amotivation

In an empirical study conducted by Hegarty *et al.* (2012), it was highlighted that there is a lack of motivation found in graduate school students, which poses a significant challenge for educators to provide a quality education. Hegarty *et al.* (2012) stated that *"graduate faculty face an uphill battle in trying to motivate students in the learning process."* What is more, Mauliya *et al.* (2020) suggested a lack of motivation as a key factor that negatively impacts a student's willingness to progress and develop academically. The research findings suggest that a lack of motivation for pursuing postgraduate studies

might result from two key factors: a lack of support or encouragement from family and poor relationships between teachers and students.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Design and Context

This study utilised an embedded mixed-methods design (quantitative and qualitative tools) to investigate the motivational styles of MA TESOL students at Sabratha University. The quantitative tool was a survey, while the qualitative tool was an interview form. The first research question highlighted is: Are there any traces of Amotivation (a lack of motivation) among MA TESOL students? The main question guiding this investigation was: What is the dominant style of academic motivation (intrinsic or extrinsic) exhibited by students enrolled in the MA TESOL program? Another question is: What are the main factors that motivate MA TESOL Students to join the program? The study is framed within the Self-Determination Theory (SDT). This theory is concerned with *"the investigation of people's inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs"* (Ryan, 2000).

3.2 Participants

The participants were postgraduate students in the MA TESOL academic program at the College of Education and Arts, Sabratha University in Libya. Students were kindly invited to participate in an online survey and interview. Survey participants were selected through total sampling as all MA TESOL students were targeted to answer the survey questions. The total population targeted in the study was about forty-four students. Nine participants from the first semester, nine from the second and 26 from the third semester. However, the number achieved was only 31 participants. Participants in the interview have been chosen using the convenience sampling method. Six female students were interviewed via online social platforms. It is worth mentioning that no credit was awarded to those who participated in the survey and the interview.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

3.3.1 Quantitative Method

First, to gather statistical data on the demotivation phenomenon among MA TESOL students, a quantitative research tool was utilized. The aim of adopting a quantitative research design is to increase the potential for objective and unbiased conclusions. In addition, quantitative research allows for greater generalizability of findings to a larger population. The research design utilized in this study perfectly aligns with the research aims. The researcher adopted the AMS from an investigation by Vallerand *et al.* (1992). Since this study focused on MBA students, the original Academic Motivation scale (college version) was modified to fit the targeted group. AMS was used to measure Amotivation (i.e. lack of motivation). The AMS consisted of 29 items, and each item was assessed using a 5-point Likert scale. The items were inserted into a Google form to be

easily analyzed and accessed via social media. The data was organized into a chart to represent the five items referring to demotivation. The purpose of using the Academic Motivation Scale was to ensure the validation of the collected data. In addition, "*this scale showed a high level of internal and external consistency in various studies*". (Javaeed *et al.* 2019) During the data analysis process, the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet was used to calculate the percentage of respondents for each item.

3.3.2 Qualitative Method

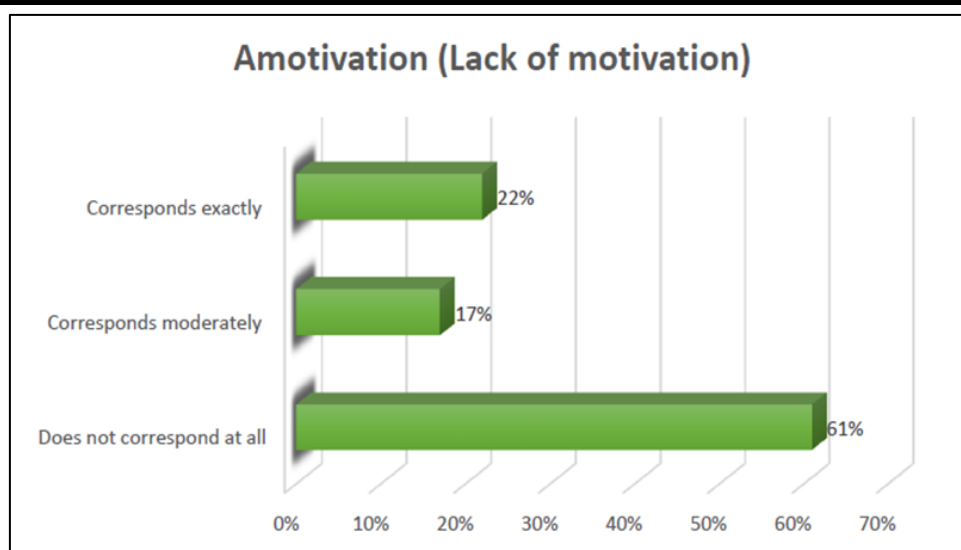
To explore the second and third research questions in depth, the researcher interviewed a sample of six female students enrolled in the MA TESOL. The aim of using interviews is to gain a better understanding of the motivation phenomenon, its types and the factors that drive students to pursue an MA degree. Participants were selected using a convenience sampling strategy. Interviews were conducted via social network platforms (WhatsApp and Messenger). The researcher sent a consent letter to each of the six interviewees to ask for their contribution in answering interview questions. A written interview guide was sent to each student. The interview consisted of five open-ended questions that explored types of motivation, the factors that influence motivation and the challenges that might generate demotivation. For the data analysis process, a thematic approach was selected to analyze data and to find the shared themes among answers.

During the process of gathering data, ethical considerations were taken into account. The researcher ensured the confidentiality of the information and the anonymity of the respondents participating in the survey. In addition, an approximate time frame was included to ease any concerns. Moreover, the researcher provided an email address for participants to ask for further information if needed.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Phase One: Quantitative data

For the sake of identifying traces of demotivation for MA TESOL students, the researcher utilized the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) created by Vallerand *et al.* (1993). In response to the first research question, the survey answers reveal that a significant portion of MA TESOL students (61%) were motivated to enroll in the academic program. Also, they are still determined to pursue their master's degrees. In contrast, 22% of the participants reported being demotivated. Only 17% of them were not sure of how they felt. Items representing the Amotivation category included lack of value, uncertainty, carelessness and self-doubt.



4.2 Phase Two: Qualitative Data

Accounting for the prevalent motivation style of MA TESOL students and the factors that influenced their motivations, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. When shedding light on the interview data set, three main themes were identified.

4.2.1 Personal Growth

Personal growth refers to the ongoing process of developing oneself. Regarding the factors that enhance graduate students' motivation, three out of five interviewees expressed their willingness to grow personally in expanding knowledge and developing teaching skills. Student A said, *"I am seeking to achieve a better version of myself as a teacher"*. The desire to improve their ways of teaching is notable. Based on this theme, we can say that these students are intrinsically motivated since they are willing to develop internally and satisfy their goals.

4.2.2 Career Advancement

The most common factor of enhancing motivation mentioned in the interview data set was the desire for career opportunities and experience in the higher education field. Four out of five students have expressed interest in obtaining professional careers and having high-paying jobs. They have elaborated on the need to develop their competencies as workers. Student B stated, *"I want to expand my career prospects, professional achievement and expertise in the field."* Accordingly, most students are extrinsically motivated.

4.2.3 Causes of Demotivation

Many highlighted factors hinder motivation and cause a loss of interest in pursuing MA TESOL degrees. First, a lack of support from instructors and the need for feedback and guidance. Student M noted, *"Some teachers are not that supportive, and when even one teacher is not supportive, it affects my motivation"*. Another cause of demotivation is the lack of

appreciation for the hard work done by students. Moreover, the difficulty of course materials has also led to a lack of motivation.

The interview results indicate that the most common type is extrinsic-external regulation. The motives for joining MA studies were mainly external, including career opportunities and work qualifications. Also, it suggests several factors causing challenges that might lead to demotivation. For instance, balancing study and life duties, struggling with complex subjects and a lack of interaction with instructors.

5. Discussion

The findings from this mixed-method study provide clear insights into the motivations behind enrolling in postgraduate studies and the factors that contribute to the enhancement or decrease of motivation for graduate students. To start with the quantitative data, the majority of respondents (61%) expressed their strong motivation. At the same time, a significant percentage (22%) of students were demotivated. This suggests that even though many students are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated, there are still many others who suffer from a lack of motivation and are trying to complete their studies.

The qualitative data shows the most prevalent types of motivation and represents several factors that affect students' motivations. Based on the interview responses, the most widespread motivation style exhibited by MA TESOL students is a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. However, extrinsic motivation was notably higher than intrinsic motivation, with more than half of the students indicating career development, external rewards and recognition as the primary factors enhancing their motivation. On the other hand, Intrinsic motives such as developing personal skills, self-satisfaction and pride in academic achievement have received less attention. This finding aligns with Royani (2023), who suggests that graduate students are motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic values like the desire to expand their knowledge and obtain teaching qualifications. The interview data further suggests the key factors shaping students' motivations. The personal growth theme indicates that some students are intrinsically motivated to expand their knowledge and develop their skills. Dörnyei (2005) claims that when a person is doing an action for satisfaction or meeting personal goals, he or she is driven by internal factors.

In contrast, the career advancement theme suggests that a significant number of participants are extrinsically motivated to pursue professional careers and attain high-paying jobs. This finding is consistent with the research done by Al-Shredi (2024), which concludes that *"students are driven by the potential for obtaining better careers and improving their social status"*. Although extrinsic motives can lead to better outcomes, it would be more beneficial to foster students' intrinsic motives to ensure long-term development and success.

MA TESOL students have reported the challenges they have encountered during their postgraduate studies. These include the lack of support from instructors, the need

for feedback and guidance and the complexity of course materials. These findings refer to the factors that result in the loss of academic motivation for students. Mauliya (2020) noted that “the lack of proper teacher-student relationship will lead to a lack of motivation.” In addition, students have expressed the challenge of balancing academic and life duties.

6. Conclusion

The present study outlines the motivational styles of MA TESOL students and identifies the factors that enhance or decrease their types of motivation. The findings indicate that a significant portion of students are motivated to pursue their master's degrees. It also proposed that postgraduate students are driven by extrinsic and intrinsic motives. However, the external drivers are slightly more dominant. Furthermore, the study highlights the factors that influence motivation, such as personal development, career advancement, lack of support and many other factors. Further research is necessary to determine whether demographic changes in population (e.g., gender or age) will result in different outcomes. In addition, accounting for a larger sample is needed to examine the validity of the findings. One of the limitations of this study is the limited time devoted to the research process. Moreover, the findings of the present study cannot be generalized because it was only conducted in one institution.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

About the Author(s)

Ahmed Athawadi is a lecturer at the Faculty of Languages in Surman, Sabratha University. He specializes in TESOL and teacher education. He holds an MA in TESOL from Oklahoma City University.

References

- Abdullah, A. M., & Saeid, M. (2016). Factors affecting students' choice of MBA program in Kuwait Universities. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 11(3), 119-128. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v11n3p119>
- Al Habahbeh, A. E. (2014). Motives of Students' Joining the Master's Program at Princess Alia University College/Al Balqa Applied University. *International Education Studies*, 7(1), 81-91. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v7n1p81>
- Al-hadrawi, H. (2017). What is motivation?. Motivation. https://www.uobabylon.edu.iq/eprints/publication_3_25164_494.pdf
- Al-Shredi, N. (2024). The Motivations for Joining the Postgraduate Program and the Challenges Confronting Libyan MA Students at the Department of English. *مجلة كلية اللغات. جامعة طرابلس-ليبيا*, 1(29), 172-200. <https://doi.org/10.56592/flj.v1i29.1068>

- Amani, J. Myeya, H. and Mhewa, M. (2022). Understanding the motives for pursuing postgraduate studies and causes of late completion: supervisors and supervisees' experiences, *Sage Open* (1)12, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221109586>
- Dornëy, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner*. London: New Jersey. Retrieved from https://www.routledge.com/The-Psychology-of-the-Language-Learner-Individual-Differences-in-Second-Language-Acquisition/Dornyei/p/book/9780805860184?srsId=AfmBOoow4yF-vnIt3rFZBsHlhrRgpbJp6Mxgw0draAbUP9KpdLb_vt1b
- Ho, K. K., Lo, P., Chiu, D. K., Kong, E. W. S., Chen, J. C. C., Zhou, Q., ... & Dalsgard, S. (2018). Intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivations of Master of Library and Information Science students: A cross-cultural comparative study. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 50(2), 141-156. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000616664564>
- Hegarty, N., Brasco, R., & Lu, F. L. (2012). What motivates students in graduate school? An empirical study. *An Empirical Study, Business Education & Accreditation* vol. 4, 39-47. Retrieved from <https://www.theibfr2.com/RePEc/ibf/beaccr/bea-v4n2-2012/BEA-V4N2-2012-4.pdf>
- Javaeed, A., Asghar, A., Allawat, Z., Haider, Q., Mustafa, K. J., & Ghauri, S. K. (2019). Assessment of Academic Motivation Level of Undergraduate Medical Students of Azad Kashmir, Pakistan. *Cureus*, 11(3). <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.4296>
- Kotera, Y., Taylor, E., Fido, D., Williams, D., & Tsuda-McCaie, F. (2023). Motivation of UK graduate students in education: self-compassion moderates the pathway from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation. *Current psychology* (New Brunswick, N.J.), 42(12), 10163–10176. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-021-02301-6>
- Mauliya, I., Relianisa, R. Z., & Rokhyati, U. (2020). Lack of motivation factors creating poor academic performance in the context of graduate English department students. *Linguists: Journal of Linguistics and Language Teaching*, 6(2), 73-85. <http://dx.doi.org/10.29300/ling.v6i2.3604>
- McGee, E. O., White, D. T., Jenkins, A. T., Houston, S., Bentley, L. C., Smith, W. J., & Robinson, W. H. (2016). Black engineering students' motivation for PhD attainment: Passion plus purpose. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, 10(2), 167-193. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JME-01-2016-0007>
- Royani, H. (2023). Motivational Factors of Graduate Students Pursuing a Master Degree in English Education at Two Selected Universities in Jambi (Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Jambi). Retrieved from https://repository.unja.ac.id/53330/6/Hilda%20Royani_Full.pdf
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American psychologist*, 55(1), 68. Retrieved from https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/SDT/documents/2000_RyanDeci_SDT.pdf

- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary educational psychology*, 25(1), 54-67. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1020>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary educational psychology*, 61. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860>
- Ul Haq, S., & Shahzad, K. (2021). Challenges faced by LIS postgraduate students in their dissertations writing. *Library Philosophy and Practice*, 1-16. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/5882/>
- Vallerand, R. J., Pelletier, L. G., Blais, M. R., Briere, N. M., Senecal, C., & Vallieres, E. F. (1992). The Academic Motivation Scale: A measure of intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation in education. *Educational and psychological measurement*, 52(4), 1003-1017. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0013164492052004025>
- Wiegerovaa, A. (2016). A study of motives of doctoral studies. *Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 217, 123–131. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.02.043>
- Wen, J., & Sha, D. (2014). Chinese students' view on motivation to pursue postgraduate studies. Retrieved from <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:732641/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

Creative Commons licensing terms

Authors will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions, and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of English Language Teaching shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflict of interests, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated on the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).