

THE ROLE OF EFL LEARNERS' MOTIVATION IN MOBILE LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract

The study of language learners' motivation has long been seen as key factor that determine success in second language (L2) learning and befitting its central role, there is a growing body of research of mobile language learning (MLL) strives to sheds light on understanding its motivational dimension. Based on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) of motivation, the more intrinsic motivated learners are the better they engage in the activity. Learners may also show different orientations other than intrinsic (i.e., extrinsic), which vary greatly in the degree to which is self determined or controlled by the learner. To maintain and promote more self determined forms of motivation, SDT emphasises that learners need to feel autonomous, competent and connected with others inside and outside the class including the teacher. Nevertheless, the role of learners' motivational orientations in the MLL context has not been addressed thoroughly in the literature. Since authentic interaction in technology is vital for L2 learning, a social networking mobile application (i.e., *WhatsApp*) will be used in this study as an example of MLL implementation to explore how learners' informal use of such application with their teacher can foster their motivation to learn an L2. A pre- and post-test will be administrated to identify any changes in motivation that attributed to the use of MLL implementation. This study may contribute to a greater recognition of the advantages and challenges of applying these devices in language learning context. This study will also reveal the extent that language learners perceive and engage in MLL.

Keywords: Attitudes, L2 Motivation, Language Learning, Mobile Language Learning, MLL

1. Introduction

Motivation in second language learning has long been seen as key factor that determines success in second language (L2) learning and befitting its central role, a growing body of research of technology enhanced language learning (TELL) strives to shed light on understanding its motivational dimensions (Warschauer, 1996; Stockwell, 2008, 2013; Al-Fahad, 2009; Al-Shehri, 2013; Alamer, 2015). 'Motivation' is defined by Deci and Ryan (2000) as "a person who feels no impetus or inspiration to act is thus characterized as unmotivated, whereas someone who is energized or activated toward an end is considered motivated" (p. 54).

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), motivation is considered one of the fundamental variables that distinguish first language acquisition from L2 acquisition. In that

children learn their first language without the need to be motivated, for example, to be like their parents or anyone else. As such, Gardner (1985) describes L2 motivation as complex constructs that involve “the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language” (p. 10). Winne and Marx (1989) assert that motivation is a condition for and a result of effective instruction. Based on these claims, it can be argued that L2 learners’ motivation can play an important role in successful mobile language learning (MLL) implementation and that, if MLL utilised properly it can increase engaged and sustained L2 learners’ motivation for language learning.

Research into L2 motivation has a long history, and one of the early pioneered work in Canada was Gardner and Lambert (1959) and has since influenced theoretical and empirical exploration in a variety of informal and formal contexts. Nevertheless, the last two decades have seen a renewed interest in motivation in L2 settings with approaches largely described as “more education-oriented” (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007, p. 154), in congruence with mainstream educational psychological research. One of the most influential frameworks that brings new insight into L2 motivation and cognitive perspectives as well as learners’ psychological needs in mainstream educational psychology is perhaps self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Central to the self-determination theory (SDT) is the distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, which can be seen as parallel to the distinction between controlled motivation and autonomous motivation. Following Noels (2001), who validated SDT to the L2 learning settings, this study employs SDT to understand the patterns of L2 learning motivation within MLL implementation that learners might exhibit. Hence, motivation is conceptualised as the extent to which the goal for performing an activity is self-determined, that is, chosen for its own sake by the individual.

Dating back to the early days of introducing computers to L2 field, there has been wide-ranging discussion of the ways digital technologies contribute to motivating students to learn a language (e.g. Warschauer, 1996; Chapelle, 2001). Nowadays, digital technology has become more sophisticated and its applications can be used in and outside the classroom, which has increased potential enhancement but also posed challenges to learning motivation. MLL, generally speaking, refers to any kind of language learning that take place when the learner is not in a fixed state and take advantage of mobile technology (Zhao, 2005). The appeal and benefits of MLL that make it exceptionally broad include the portability, the ability to play and record audio and video and cost efficiency as compared to that of a laptop/PCs (Wishart, 2008). The interesting empirical question is whether MLL implementation can relate to learners’ motivation in the learning an L2. This matter, from a motivational point of view, has received few discussions.

2. Purpose of The Study

The investigation of the effects of MLL in L2 learning has emerged in the last two decades and have long held the view that introducing up-to-date technologies into L2 settings has potential to enhance learners’ engagement and achievement (Burston, 2014). Apart from this, the lack of students’ motivation towards learning English as a foreign language is of research concerns in many contexts (see, for example, Al-Fahad, 2009; Al-Shehri, 2013; Alqurashi, 2014). These studies show that English classes fail to improve learners’ English skills and motivation, though they tend to hold favorable attitudes toward language

activities. One explanation for this could be the fact that learning a language has a unique process that differentiates it from any other academic subjects, and hence makes it more difficult to acquire. That is, English learners are required to pose greater effort and immerse themselves in this foreign language. This process requires practising written and conversational use of the target language persistently with sufficient access to the target language. However, research in EFL learning suggests that English teaching needs improvement, especially in terms of providing students with sufficient exposure to the language. Therefore, a potentially productive study exists in investigating the introduction of a new methodology, more specifically, a mobile social networking application with attention as to how such implementing interacts and affects L2 motivation. As in most developed and several developing countries, including Saudi Arabia, students generally use their smart phones in social networking or playing games. Although they are passionate about using mobiles, it has not been proved yet how introducing mobile phones implementation in the L2 setting relate to and enhance students' L2 motivation, which in turn relate to successful language learning.

The majority of the studies represented in the available literature have examined the learners' motivation within L2 motivational theories and link them with specific L2 learning experience have been addressed only rarely. The absence of research investigating learners' motivation within digital technology learning contexts in general, and even in MLL is particularly problematic. SLA scholars have been highlighting the relationship between L2 learning and the learning experience that learners are exposed to and interact with. Such interest is, undoubtedly, in line with many calls made by L2 motivational researchers who argue for broadening our understanding of what may influence L2 learning motivation. Ushioda (2009), for example, draws our attention to the importance of a range of theoretically-relevant SLA conceptualisations to inform the analysis offered of interaction processes and relations in L2 context. Providing the field of SLA with empirical reports on the benefits of MLL upon learners' motivation is urgently needed. Moreover, identifying learners' motivational orientations through well-grounded argument is necessary. This study, therefore, aims to uncover the relationship between the use of MLL and L2 motivation, and not only examine these aspects of study, but also contribute to the research of L2 learners' motivation, which might further help providing greater understanding of how utilising these new learning tools promote L2 attainment.

3. Research Questions

1. What are the motivational orientations of EFL learners who utilise MLL implementation in language learning?
2. How do these orientations relate to their language learning with MLL implementation?
3. To what extent these learners perceived MLL to promote autonomy, competence and relatedness for learning a language?

4. Review of the Literature

4.1 Motivational Theories

L2 motivational research has generated a noteworthy body of literature over the last forty years through which scholars have sought to answer the key question: what motivates

learners to learn a second or foreign language? This research inquiry is rooted in social psychologists' Gardner and Lambert's (1972) research into the well-known notion: integrative motivation. Research motivation during the 1970s and early 1980s has been largely guided by this notion and has usually concluded that achievement in French (as L2) was associated with language-learning aptitude, motivation to learn the language, and an integrative orientation. Notably, research following this model relies mostly on self-report questionnaires.

Much of the new motivational research has highlighted the importance of the identity and self in language learning motivation (Ushioda, 1996, 2009; Dörnyei, 2006, 2014; Dörnyei, Henry & MacIntyre, 2014). Such conceptualised paradigms have been reflected in a considerable amount of research in recent decades through the study of how and why motivation, with its complex construct, affects language learning achievement. Such trends have produced different educational designs and motivational techniques for classroom application (e.g., Brown & Principles, 2001; Alison & Halliwell, 2002; Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007).

4. 2 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

The concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are drawn from the psychological perspective of Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000), although until the early 2000s it was not framed to language learning. Noels and associates has devoted a great deal of research to developing its application to L2 settings (Noels et al., 2000; Noels, 2001a, 2001b; Noels, Clément & Pelletier, 2001). According to Noels (2001b), SDT theory posits that any group of L2 learners can be described as holding a diversity of orientations to (or reasons for) engaging in language learning. These orientations are significant in the way that they illuminate L2 motivation by indicating the purpose and manner of learning an L2. Some orientations can be more predictive than others of motivated engagement in the L2 learning process. In this sense, a key concept of SDT is that learning an L2 is personally important and integral to the language learner's sense of self. SDT is reflective of intrinsic motivation and some patterns of extrinsic motivation.

Deci and Ryan (1985) define *intrinsic* motivation as the type of motivation that leads a learner to pursue an “activity in the absence of a reward contingency or control” (p. 34) – a pleasurable process in and of itself. Such a form of motivation is seen in the SLA domain: a language learner “perceive[s] the learning process as voluntary and approach it with imagination and creativity, curiosity and enthusiasm” (Comanaru & Noels, 2009, p. 134). Intrinsic motivation, indeed, can be increased by perceptions of autonomy, support, and informative feedback from the teacher (Noels, 2001a). Such an intrinsically motivated learner would be expected to endorse the statement ‘I am learning English because it is enjoyable’.

In contrast to intrinsic motivation, *extrinsic* motivation is usually seen as less significant because most learners, generally speaking, creatively engage in an activity when they are intrinsically motivated (Deci & Ryan, 2000); however, SDT hypothesises that extrinsic motivation can vary greatly in the degree to which it is controlled by the learner, or by persons and circumstances apart from the learner. With regard to L2 learning, then, the

learner who feels that learning and using an L2 language is congruent with other facets of his life, and that it can help him to satisfy personally relevant aspirations, reflects an orientation called *identified regulation*. Such a learner would be expected to endorse the statement: 'I am learning English because it satisfies my personal development'. Identified regulation is considered a more self-determined form of extrinsic motivation. Other learners may learn an L2 not because they personally feel it is important for them to do so, but rather because they think they ought to, or perhaps to avoid feeling guilty (for disappointing parents or a teacher, for example). Such a learner would be expected to endorse the statement: 'I am learning English because I would feel guilty if I did not know it'. This orientation is called '*introjected regulation*', although this orientation is a less self-determined form of extrinsic motivation, the pressure for learning is probably recognised as internalized into learners' selves. Still other learners might not have any personal reasons for learning a language other than getting tangible benefits and/or avoiding negative consequences. In such cases there is likely no incentive to continue engagement. Such a learner would be expected to endorse the statement: 'I am learning English in order to get a job in the future'. This orientation is called *external regulation*.

These external orientations, as mentioned before, may be more or less self-determined, depending upon how they have become internalized, and consistent with the learner's sense of self. Apart from both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, some learners may think that there is no clear reason for, or link between, their learning and its consequences, but consider that it is factors outside of their control that are the cause. In such case, an L2 learner who feels *a motivated* may endorse the statement: 'I don't know; I truly have the impression that I am wasting my time in learning English'. In Figure 1 I reproduced a taxonomy of SDT motivational orientations based on Noels et al. (2000).

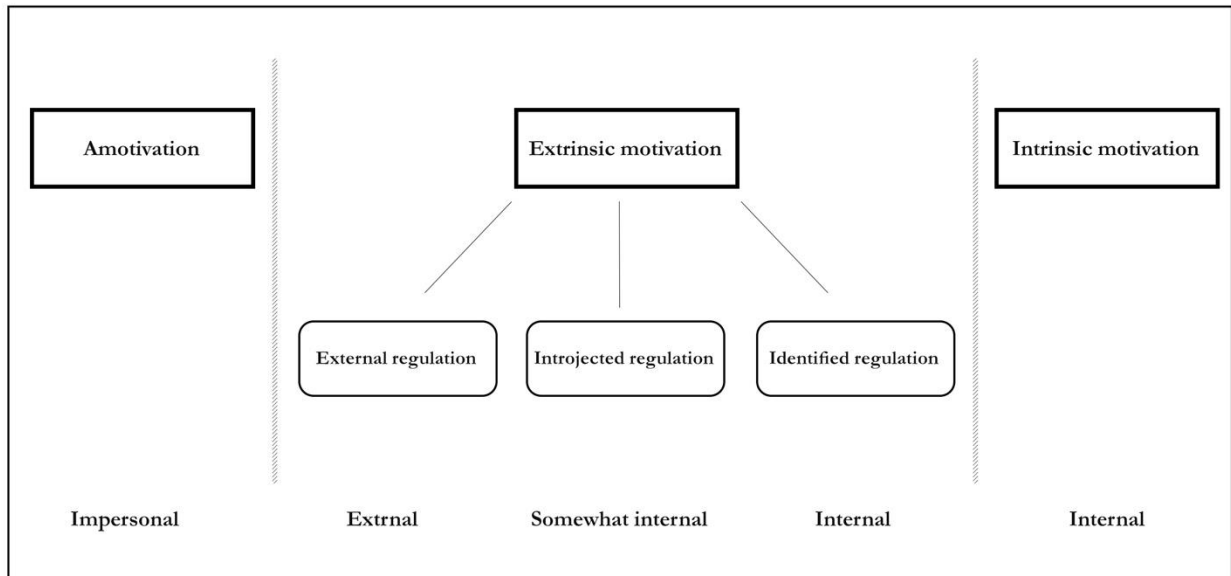


Fig 1. Motivational orientations of SDT in Noels et al. (2000)

In addition, SDT proposes a conceptualisation through which intrinsic and more self-determined extrinsic orientations can be fostered and sustained. From the initial introduction of the ultimate objectives of situated materials, the L2 course content and the style and strategies of instruction to the assessments, learners are more likely to endorse self-determined orientations. Especially when their fundamental psychological needs for a sense of competence, autonomy and relatedness are supported by circumstances and people in the learners' social world (Comanaru & Noels, 2009).

Autonomy reflects situations in which circumstances (e.g., teacher styles, course materials or the group of learners) offer choices to learners so that learners can pursue options that are personally relevant to them. As such, self-determination is probably undermined when external factors control learners' learning. *Competence* refers to the perception of learners' ability in performing an activity. Fundamentally, it has been noticed that intrinsic motivation only increases when competence support is accompanied by support for autonomy (Fisher, 1978; Deci & Ryan, 2000). *Relatedness* is fulfilled when learners have a sense of warmth, security and connection between themselves and other people, including the language teacher. While Deci and Ryan (1985) contend that autonomy is significant for more internalized regulation and stronger self-determination, competence and relatedness are perhaps also necessary.

SDT, indeed, alongside its significant psychological needs principles, is an appropriate framework for answering the present study's research questions. The construct of motivational orientations establishes comprehensive notions of self-concept in which successful language use and achievement should be internalized in the learner's sense of self. In addition, this study aims to clarify the relationship between L2 learners' motivation and MLL—in which mobile device application will be considered as a key element of motivational component of the L2 learning situation. As evidenced earlier, SDT enables us to explore

students' orientations, particularly within the MLL context. Further explanation of the learning situation and its relevance to L2 motivation will be discussed in the next section.

4.3 L2 Learning Situation and Motivating Learning

There is evidence that learning experience has a certain influence on learners' motivation and that motivation dynamically interacts with the context (Kember, 2008). Although there have been few attempts to articulate the micro motivational aspects of the learning situation (e.g., Gardner, 1985, 2010; Noels et al., 1999), the SDT through the social psychological mechanism (i.e., autonomy, competence and relatedness) can be used to understand the relation between the learning experience (e.g., the teacher's use of mobile implementation) and learners' L2 motivation (Noels, 2013). For example, McEown, Noels and Saumure(2014) study utilised SDT and asked 128 learners of Japanese to assess their teacher's supportive style. They found that greater perceptions of competence and autonomy were related to more self determined forms of motivation. The findings also show that the more sense of autonomy and competence were predicted greater academic outcomes among these learners.

Given the importance of motivation and learning experience in influencing language learning motivation and the complexity and diversity of these factors, this study aims to determine the relationship between learners' motivation and one empirical element in the learning experience (e.g., the utilisation of mobile implementation for informal language learning).

4.4 Mobile Language Learning (MLL)

The wide applications of mobile devices have influenced the ways that both teacher and learner perceived them for language learning, and provided us with a wealth of ideas and strategies to foster the implementation of L2 teaching and learning (Tai, 2012). In 2014, the literature indicates a wide interest in MLL research worldwide, with more than 345 studies for application and implementation of mobile technologies in teaching and learning L2 (Burston, 2014). The introduction of iPhone and Android devices in 2007 opened the door to more integrated MLL implementation. From that date, the direction of MLL investigation has changed to studying the extent to which these devices can enhance various language skills, such as vocabulary and grammar (Tschirhart, O'Reilly & Bradley, 2008; Stockwell, 2013), listening comprehension (Nah, 2011), and reading (Huang & Lin, 2011). Such interest reflects the desire to understand the effect of introducing these devices into the language learning domain.

When it comes to motivating learners with mobile device use and understanding learners' attitudes, the majority of relevant studies include consideration of learners' attitudes toward the use of mobile phones, whether in or outside the classroom (Thornton & Houser, 2003; Alamer, 2015), some examined teachers and students' attitudes toward using mobile phones either in the EFL or English as a second language (ESL) context (Wang, Chen & Fang, 2011; Wong & Looi, 2010) and so forth. However, far too little attention has been paid to the role of learners' motivation and orientation within the MLL environment which can determine the success of such tools for language engagement. One fundamental goal of the current study is to explore how learners' use of mobile technology relates to their motivation from a

motivational perspective and to reveal whether mobile implementation facilitates or undermines language learning motivation.

4.5 Conceptual framework of L2 Motivation and MLL as a Learning Experience

As I discussed earlier in this section, the aim of reviewing the literature was to ground the study in well-founded arguments in language learning motivation. The framework discussed aims not to determine the direction of the empirical research, but rather to guide me in understanding the context of the investigation. Figure 2 demonstrates the way that this study will be conceptualised and guided based on the literature reviewed.

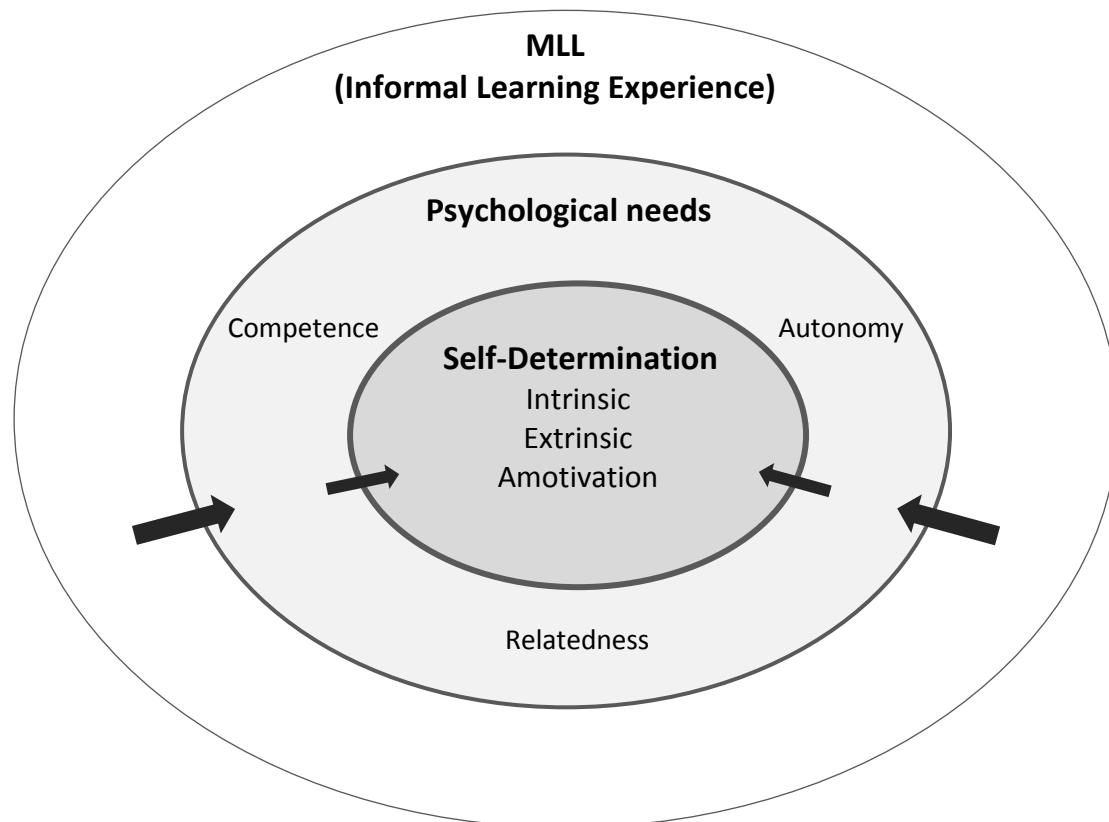


Figure 2. Diagram illustrating the conceptual framework of this study

4.6 Interaction in Language Learning and MLL

Recent research in MLL has shown that social networking mobile applications affect all levels of academia and academic settings (Aburezeq & Ishtaiwa, 2013; Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Thurairaj et al., 2014). For example, Aburezeq and Ishtaiwa (2013) investigated the perception of Arabic pre-service teachers toward the integrating of *WhatsApp*, a social networking mobile application, to enhance their instructors' instructional interaction. The use of *WhatsApp* in their context involved collaborative and individual weekly contributions

to the course in a group chat created for this purpose. In the group chat the teacher discussing course content, asking questions and responding to any requests from their instructor. Their study results show that *WhatsApp* had the power to promote three types of interaction: student-student interaction that was reported by 71% of participants, student-content interaction that was reported by 54% of participants, and student-instructor interaction that was reported by 42%. Nevertheless, some challenges associated with such social networking applications emerged in the Aburezeq and Ishtaiwa study: participants expressed the Internet connection expenses involved in using this application. They also felt that participating in the group conversation was an extra work load. The biggest challenge identified in Aburezeq and Ishtaiwa's study was the lack of students' commitment to effective participation in the platform.

4 .7 WhatsApp and Language Learning

WhatsApp is an instant messaging application available for nearly all smart phone operating systems. *WhatsApp* does not require the user to create an account, but rather it uses the mobile number as a unique account and integrates with the user's address book; thus, there is no need to memorise usernames or passwords. Since 2010, the popularity of *WhatsApp* has continued to rise worldwide, particularly in Saudi Arabia, and has become one of the top communication applications across all smart phone operating systems with roughly 400 million active users (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014). *WhatsApp* not only allows people to send and receive messages free of charge but also offers a variety of other functions; for example, the user can send different types of media such as photos, videos and audio to others, or record his or her voice and send it straightaway to other users. In *WhatsApp* any user can create and manage a group chat conversation and can add up to 100 members. With these functionalities, the *WhatsApp* simple operating scheme, along with its popularity, makes it accessible to most smart phone owners of different ages and backgrounds (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014).

To this end, this study employs the *WhatsApp* application as an example of the implementation of MLL and investigates its effect on motivating learners to learn an L2, which in turn relates to the success of language engagement. The study also investigates how such implementation can be seen to promote or hinder healthy, self-determined forms of motivation for learning an L2.

5. Methodology

This study will involve quantitative research method design for better understanding the role of implementing MLL. A pre- and post-test will be conducted to identify any changes in learners' motivation over time.

The participants of my research will be EFL students who enrolled in English Language Course in Al Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU). The participants will be drawn from a convenience sample of level 1, 2 and 3 students at the Department of English. The study will use all students in the classes, regardless of their L2 learning history, L2 proficiency level, and level of mobile familiarity. At the beginning of the term, students will be asked to complete the first questionnaire survey to measure their initial levels of motivation toward L2 learning and MLL implementation. At the end of the semester, all

participants will be asked to complete the second questionnaire survey to identify any changes in students' motivation.

5. 1 Questionnaires

The quantitative data of the questionnaire concerns the following: (1) background information, (2) measures of students' motivational orientations, (3) learning engagement and academic outcomes, and (4) perceptions of the MLL teachers' practices in providing support for students' autonomy, competence and relatedness. Most of the measures originated from instruments used in previous studies of L2 motivation. The questionnaire will be presented in Arabic and tailored to reflect the Saudi EFL context.

6. Conclusion

The study of MLL implementation has expanded rapidly in the last few decades alongside the growth of various targeted language skills and learning programs. Given the important influence of the L2 learning situation on language learning motivation, understanding the motivational orientations on the study of L2 in the MLL context is vital, but such understanding is still in its infancy and more research is needed. After reviewing the relevant literature of L2 motivation theories, it was hoped to explain how Self-determination theory was found to be suitable and perfectly fit the investigation of learners' motivation in technology-based language contexts such as MLL. Such a concept has a potential to identify why and the ways learners approach learning the language with digital technology implementations that in turn leads to predict the sustained and engaged language learning of these implementations.

The attitudes of L2 students toward utilising mobile devices were mostly reported as positive. Yet, these studies remain marginal in terms of the investigation framework, number of students involved, or duration of implementation. The growing popularity of up-to-date mobile phones in Saudi Arabia and other developed countries in the last few years makes the investigating of EFL students' motivation when utilising MLL of importance. This study may also contribute to greater recognition of the advantages and challenges of applying these devices in the Saudi educational system. This study will also reveal the extent that both language teachers and learners engaged in and utilise new mobile network applications. Moreover, it will show whether they perceive the use of mobile language learning useful in learning an L2.

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