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A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION IN EFL CLASSROOMS: Implications for Student Engagement and Learning Outcomes

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ABSTRACT
Motivation is a crucial factor influencing students' engagement and achievement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. This study aims to systematically review recent research on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in EFL classrooms and to examine their implications for student engagement and learning outcomes. Employing a qualitative systematic literature review design, 20 peer-reviewed articles published between 2020 and 2025 were selected through a PRISMA-based screening process and analyzed using thematic synthesis. The findings indicate that intrinsic motivation, driven by enjoyment, autonomy, and personal relevance, is strongly associated with sustained cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement as well as long-term language development, whereas extrinsic motivation, shaped by grades, examinations, institutional demands, and future career expectations, effectively supports short-term academic performance and task completion but is less strongly related to lasting communicative competence. The review further reveals that motivational orientations are highly context-dependent, particularly in exam-oriented and digitally mediated learning environments. This study proposes a conceptual perspective termed motivational magnetism, referring to the dynamic interaction between autonomy-supportive instruction and performance-oriented demands in sustaining learners' engagement, and suggests that EFL teachers should balance intrinsic and extrinsic motivational strategies to enhance both academic achievement and long-term learner engagement.

ABSTRAK
Motivasi merupakan faktor krusial yang memengaruhi keterlibatan dan prestasi siswa dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melakukan tinjauan sistematis terhadap penelitian terkini mengenai motivasi intrinsik dan ekstrinsik di kelas EFL, serta menganalisis implikasinya terhadap keterlibatan siswa dan hasil belajar. Menggunakan desain tinjauan literatur sistematis kualitatif, 20 artikel yang telah direview oleh rekan sejawat yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2020 dan 2025 dipilih melalui proses penyaringan berdasarkan PRISMA dan dianalisis menggunakan sintesis tematik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa motivasi intrinsik, yang didorong oleh kesenangan, otonomi, dan relevansi pribadi, memiliki hubungan yang kuat dengan keterlibatan kognitif, emosional, dan perilaku yang berkelanjutan serta perkembangan bahasa jangka panjang. Di sisi lain, motivasi ekstrinsik, yang dipengaruhi oleh nilai, ujian, tuntutan institusional, dan harapan karir masa depan, secara efektif mendukung kinerja akademik jangka pendek dan penyelesaian tugas, tetapi kurang terkait erat dengan kompetensi komunikatif yang berkelanjutan. Tinjauan ini juga mengungkapkan bahwa orientasi motivasi sangat bergantung pada konteks, terutama dalam lingkungan pembelajaran yang berorientasi ujian dan didukung teknologi digital. Studi ini mengusulkan perspektif konseptual yang disebut "magnetisme motivasi," merujuk pada interaksi dinamis antara instruksi yang mendukung otonomi dan tuntutan berorientasi kinerja dalam mempertahankan keterlibatan peserta didik, dan

menyarankan agar guru bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL) menyeimbangkan strategi motivasi intrinsik dan ekstrinsik.

1. Introduction

Motivation is one of the most crucial elements in successful language learning. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), learners' motivation determines how much effort they put into learning, how long they persist, and how they overcome difficulties (Howard, 2023). Many researchers believe that motivation is not a single concept, but a combination of different internal and external forces that influence behavior (Ramalingam & Jiar, 2022).

Intrinsic motivation refers to the drive that comes from within the learner. When a student learns English because they enjoy the process or feel personal satisfaction, it reflects intrinsic motivation (Aleidan, 2024). On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is related to external factors such as grades, teacher rewards, or parental expectations. Both types of motivation are essential, but they function differently in various classroom settings.

Motivational factors in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms are influenced by personal goals, the social environment, the teacher's attitude, the curriculum design, and even the use of technology (Moybeka et al., 2023). Students are often more intrinsically motivated when teachers use engaging methods, such as interactive tasks or digital tools. However, some learners are more focused on passing exams or meeting school requirements, which strengthens extrinsic motivation (Ng & Ng, 2015).

In real classroom situations, especially in schools and universities, many students find it difficult to maintain motivation. This is due to lack of confidence, high pressure from parents or institutions, limited exposure to English, or monotonous teaching styles (Salehpour & Roohani, 2020). Students may begin learning with enthusiasm, but over time, their motivation decreases when they face repeated failure or lack of support.

Moreover, maintaining motivation is more challenging in hybrid or online learning settings. A recent study found that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation declined when students learned English in isolation without strong teacher interaction (Meşe & Sevilen, 2021). Therefore, it becomes important to understand what motivates learners and how to support them better in different learning environments.

This paper is based on a systematic review of relevant research, with a primary focus on studies published between 2020 and 2024. Several foundational references published earlier are also incorporated to provide theoretical support and context. The paper aims to present a clear understanding of how intrinsic and extrinsic motivation operate in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, the factors that influence them, the problems students face, and how these problems can be addressed through effective teaching strategies.

Although numerous studies have examined intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in EFL contexts, most of them are fragmented and context-specific. There is still a lack of systematic synthesis that integrates recent empirical findings and explains how different motivational orientations interact with instructional contexts, particularly in digital and exam-oriented environments. Therefore, a comprehensive systematic review is needed to map current trends, identify consistent patterns, and propose an integrative conceptual perspective for understanding motivational dynamics in EFL classrooms.

2. Theoretical Review

Motivation in the EFL context is broadly defined as the internal drive that directs and sustains students' language learning behavior. Ortega-Martín (2018) explains that motivation determines the intensity and persistence of students' learning efforts, especially in foreign language acquisition where constant engagement is required. According to Oletić and Ilić (2014), intrinsic motivation arises from personal satisfaction, enjoyment, or interest in the learning activity itself, while extrinsic motivation is influenced by external rewards such as grades, teacher approval, or future job prospects. Similarly, Ng and Ng (2015) argue that intrinsic factors support deep learning and autonomy, whereas extrinsic drivers help students stay goal-oriented and responsive to structured academic demands. These distinctions form the foundation for understanding how motivation operates in EFL classrooms and why a balance between internal and external motivational forces is often necessary.

a. Understanding Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation in EFL

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), motivation is defined as the internal or external force that influences students to initiate and sustain language learning (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Motivation plays a pivotal role in second language acquisition by shaping learners' attitudes, engagement, and outcomes in formal and informal learning settings (Ng & Ng, 2015). Motivation can be categorized into two main types: intrinsic and extrinsic. According to Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation is doing something because it is interesting or enjoyable, while extrinsic motivation is doing something for a separate outcome, such as praise, rewards, or grades.

In the EFL classroom, students with intrinsic motivation engage in language learning because they find joy in the process. For example, they may enjoy understanding songs or movies in English or feel proud when expressing themselves fluently (Oletić & Ilić, 2014). Meanwhile, learners who are extrinsically motivated might focus on passing national exams, getting scholarships, or meeting family expectations and structured academic expectations (Abdullah & Iqbal, 2025). Both types of motivation are essential but operate differently and require different pedagogical approaches.

b. Factors Influencing Students' Motivation

There are various factors that affect the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of EFL learners. These factors include individual learner variables, such as self-confidence and personal goals; classroom environment; teaching methods; curriculum design; peer influence; and institutional culture (Hussain et al., 2020). For example, teachers who use student-centered activities, integrate multimedia, and provide positive feedback tend to foster intrinsic motivation (Howard, 2023). On the other hand, strict grading systems, repetitive tasks, and a lack of emotional support may push students toward extrinsic motivations or reduce motivation altogether (Moybeka et al., 2023).

Another study by Ortega-Martín (2018) revealed that the school atmosphere, teacher encouragement, and classroom materials significantly impact students' willingness to learn. When students perceive English as enjoyable and relevant, their intrinsic motivation grows. However, extrinsic pressure often dominates when students feel forced or fear failure.

c. Common Challenges Faced by EFL Learners in Maintaining Motivation

Although motivation is crucial, maintaining it consistently is challenging, particularly in long-term learning contexts. Learners may start off highly motivated, yet gradually lose interest due to repeated academic failures, monotonous teaching methods, or a lack of visible progress (Kim, 2021). Students often complain about the lack of real-life application of English in their daily lives, which weakens their intrinsic motivation (Bergés-Puyó, 2018). In contrast, an excessive focus on grades and exams tends to create anxiety, which negatively impacts extrinsic motivation (Salehpour & Roohani, 2020).

Technology can help or hinder motivation. When used effectively, as in gamified language learning platforms, it can boost engagement. However, many students reported motivation loss due to isolation and limited feedback during the pandemic, especially in poorly supported digital learning (Meşe & Sevilen, 2021).

d. The Reality of Motivation in Schools and Universities

In most schools and universities, especially in developing countries, the motivation of EFL students tends to be extrinsic. Students primarily learn English to pass exams, fulfill graduation requirements, or comply with institutional demands (Bagheri Nevisi & Farhani, 2022). Unfortunately, these extrinsic motivators are often temporary and do not lead to deep, meaningful learning. Meanwhile, classrooms that encourage freedom of expression, incorporate real-life language tasks, and allow learners to set personal goals can increase intrinsic motivation over time (Wannas & Alshaye, 2024).

Therefore, educators must understand that motivation is dynamic and context-sensitive. They must design learning environments that inspire personal interest while respecting external needs. Finding the right balance between student autonomy and structured support is crucial for sustaining long-term motivation in EFL classrooms (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

3. Research Method

This research is categorized as library research, meaning the data were collected from various written sources, such as journal articles, books, and previous research. This study aims to analyze and explain theories and findings related to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. This method was chosen because it enables the researcher to review, compare, and synthesize ideas from various authors on the same topic. This method enables a more thorough conceptual analysis by identifying consistent findings, patterns, and gaps in existing literature. This review followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure transparency and rigor in article selection. Thematic synthesis was employed to integrate findings across studies and

generate analytical themes rather than merely summarizing individual results.

Research Design

This study applied a qualitative systematic literature review design. Relevant sources were collected from academic databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, ResearchGate, and SpringerLink using specific keywords, including "intrinsic motivation," "extrinsic motivation," "EFL," "student engagement," and "learning outcomes." The inclusion criteria for this review consisted of: (1) peer-reviewed journal articles, (2) publication years between 2020 and 2025, (3) focus on motivation in EFL learning, and (4) written in English. Additionally, a few seminal articles published before 2020 were incorporated to support theoretical concepts. Exclusion criteria included non-academic documents, duplicate records, and inaccessible full texts.

Population and Sample or Subject

In total, 45 articles were initially identified. After removing seven duplicates, 38 records were screened based on titles and abstracts. Of these, 28 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Following this process, 8 articles were excluded due to irrelevance or lack of full access. Finally, 20 articles were selected and analyzed using thematic synthesis. The selection process is illustrated in Figure 1 using a PRISMA flow diagram. The final articles were reviewed using thematic analysis to identify patterns related to motivation types, influencing factors, instructional approaches, student engagement, and learning outcomes, ensuring both conceptual depth and contextual variety.

Instruments

As this is a library-based study, the primary instrument used was a structured data extraction table designed to systematically record key information from each reviewed article. The table included fields such as author name, publication year, country, research context, type of motivation studied (intrinsic/extrinsic), participant characteristics, methods used, and main findings. This structured approach ensured consistency and helped identify recurring patterns, gaps, and emerging themes across the literature. The matrix format also enabled comparison between studies based on context and outcome types.

Data Analysis

Thematic synthesis was applied to analyze the extracted data. First, key findings from each article were summarized and coded into preliminary categories based on motivation types (intrinsic or extrinsic), instructional strategies, and reported learning outcomes. Then, through iterative review and comparison, similar codes were grouped into overarching themes. These themes included: (1) sources of motivation, (2) contextual factors, (3) teacher influence, and (4) student engagement and performance. Repeated reading and cross-comparison ensured analytical rigor and minimized bias. Patterns were noted both within and across geographical regions, learning formats (online vs offline), and educational levels. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how motivation functions in diverse EFL classrooms.

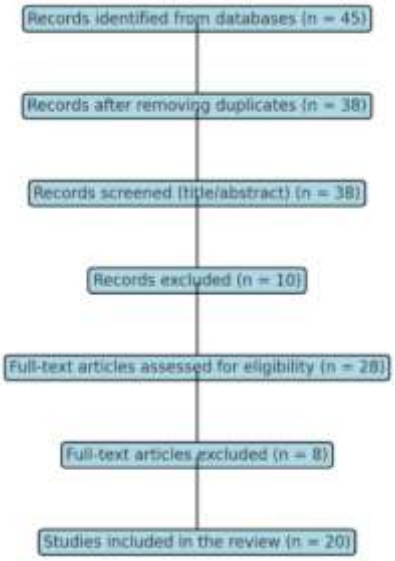


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Article Selection

4. Results And Discussion

This section summarizes the findings from the selected studies. The findings are grouped into key themes, including motivational types, influencing factors, instructional strategies, and their impact on engagement and learning outcomes.

Table 1. Summary of Reviewed Studies on Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation in EFL Contexts

Author (Year)	Country	Sample	Main Findings
Al Shuaili (2024)	Oman	High school EFL students	Intrinsic → attitudes; extrinsic → performance
Rezaee & Ghaneolhosseini (2025)	Vietnam	Online EFL learners	Intrinsic drops online; extrinsic maintains engagement
AbdAlgane & Elmahdi (2024)	Arab countries	University EFL students	Intrinsic rises with feedback; extrinsic for exams

Wannas & Alshaye (2024)	Saudi Arabia	College EFL students	"Motivational magnetism" – balance needed
Soto & Espinosa (2025)	Ecuador	High school EFL students	Most motivated by jobs/exams (extrinsic)
Hasanudin & Woretma (2024)	Indonesia	Middle school EFL students	Intrinsic in small classes; extrinsic in large lectures
Howard (2023)	UK	EFL teachers	Autonomy support fosters intrinsic motivation
Ramalingam & Jiar (2022)	Malaysia	Primary school EFL students	Self-regulated learners show higher intrinsic motivation
Kim (2021)	South Korea	College EFL students	Intrinsic → long-term language retention
Bagheri Nevisi & Farhani (2022)	Iran	Mixed EFL learners	Intrinsic and extrinsic influence different learning styles
Aleidan (2024)	Saudi Arabian	EFL Learners (literature-based studies on speaking skill)	Motivation especially intrinsic plays a crucial role in improving EFL speaking skills; motivated learners show higher confidence and fluency.
Berges-Puyo (2018)	Spain	Secondary school EFL students	Classroom materials and teacher behavior significantly enhance intrinsic motivation, leading to stronger learner engagement.
Abdullah & Iqbal (2025)	Pakistan	School students learning english as a subject	Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation positively affect academic achievement, but intrinsic motivation has a stronger long-term impact.
Hussain, Salam, & Farid (2020)	Pakistan	Adult EFL and ESL learners	Adult learners are more influenced by extrinsic factors such as career goals, while intrinsic motivation supports persistence and learner autonomy.
Mese & Sevilen (2021)	Turkey	University EFL students (online learning context)	Online learning environments tend to reduce intrinsic motivation due to isolation; teacher feedback and interaction are essential to maintain motivation.
Moybeka, Syariatin, & Tatipang (2023)	Indonesia	EFL students using AI assisted learning	AI assisted learning increases extrinsic motivation and engagement; intrinsic motivation depends on meaningful and well designed tasks.
Ng & Ng (2015)	Malaysia	ESL learners (review based studies)	Intrinsic motivation supports deep learning and autonomy, while extrinsic motivation helps learners achieve structured academic goals.
Oletic & Ilic (2014)	Croatia	University EFL students	Intrinsic motivation leads to enjoyment and sustained learning, whereas extrinsic motivation is associated with grades and external expectations.
Ortega Martin (2018)	Spain	EFL classroom contexts (conceptual and empirical studies)	Motivation determines persistence and effort in EFL learning; supportive classroom environments foster intrinsic motivation.

Salehpour & Roohani (2020)	Iran	Iranian EFL learners	Higher motivation particularly intrinsic is strongly related to better L2 speaking performance and lower anxiety.

The results of this literature review indicate that motivation in EFL settings is a dynamic interplay between internal drives and external pressures rather than two opposing forces. While Al Shuaili (2024) emphasizes that extrinsic rewards are effective for driving immediate academic performance, these results are often short-term and may not lead to communicative competence. This is supported by the "motivational magnetism" theory, which suggests that a healthy balance of both types of motivation is required to sustain long-term engagement. Furthermore, while intrinsic motivation is consistently tied to deeper learning and retention, extrinsic factors serve as a necessary "entry point" or survival mechanism, especially in high-stakes educational systems.

Instructional style also plays a crucial role in shaping learners' motivation. AbdAlgane and Elmahdi (2024) found that intrinsic motivation increased when teachers provided personalized feedback and meaningful tasks, while rigid and test-oriented instruction encouraged reliance on extrinsic motivation. In line with this, Wannas and Alshaye (2024) proposed the concept of motivational magnetism, emphasizing that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation work together rather than in opposition. This highlights the importance of balanced instructional strategies.

Learning environment further influences students' motivational orientation. Soto and Espinosa (2025) reported that many high school students were primarily motivated by external factors such as exams and job prospects, although supportive teachers and engaging materials fostered intrinsic motivation. Similarly, Hasanudin and Woretma (2024) found that intrinsic motivation was higher in smaller and more interactive classrooms. These studies suggest that classroom environment plays a key role in promoting sustained motivation.

Several studies suggest that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation should not be viewed as separate or opposing constructs. Wannas and Alshaye (2024) proposed that both types of motivation interact and complement each other in second language learning. A similar perspective was discussed by Ng and Ng (2015), who argued that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation often coexist and jointly contribute to learners' persistence and achievement in EFL learning.

The learning environment and classroom context also play a significant role in shaping students' motivation. Soto and Espinosa Cevallos (2025) found that many EFL learners were driven by extrinsic goals such as passing exams or improving future career prospects, although supportive classroom environments encouraged intrinsic motivation. This observation supports Ortega Martín (2018), who identified motivation as a key element influenced by classroom practices and learning conditions in EFL settings.

In the Indonesian context, motivational patterns were found to vary depending on classroom characteristics. Hasanudin and Woretma (2024) reported that intrinsic motivation was more dominant in interactive and smaller classes, whereas extrinsic motivation prevailed in more traditional classroom settings. Similarly, Ramalingam and Jiar (2022) found that classroom conditions and learning environments significantly influenced students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, reinforcing the importance of contextual factors in EFL learning.

Overall, these findings confirm that motivation in EFL settings is not static, but rather, is greatly influenced by instructional style, the learning environment, and cultural expectations. Intrinsic motivation is essential for long-term engagement and deeper understanding, while extrinsic motivation often acts as an entry point or survival mechanism for students dealing with academic pressure. Therefore, a balanced approach is necessary. Teachers must create classroom conditions that foster an internal desire to learn while recognizing the role of external rewards in maintaining student focus. These consistent findings across multiple contexts confirm that EFL motivation is dynamic and context-dependent. This reinforces the need for culturally responsive teaching. These diverse studies demonstrate how motivation adapts to learners' contexts, highlighting the need for flexible and inclusive instructional strategies.

In relation to student engagement, several studies found that learners who are intrinsically motivated are more actively involved in classroom activities, participate in discussions, and demonstrate higher levels of motivation and sustained classroom participation, especially when instruction aligns with students' personal goals and learning styles. For example, classes that offer student-centered tasks,

gamified materials, or real-world language use see more sustained student interaction and attention (Howard, 2023); Hasanudin & Woretma, 2024). Meanwhile, extrinsically motivated students also stay engaged, particularly when there are clear academic goals, such as exams or competitions. Beyond behavioral engagement, intrinsic motivation also promotes cognitive and emotional engagement, allowing students to invest more effort and reflection in their learning process. From Meşe and Sevilen (2021) to Ramalingam and Jiar (2022) students who are intrinsically engaged tend to self-regulate their learning, persevere through difficulties, and demonstrate creativity in language use.

Regarding learning outcomes, motivation directly influences not only academic performance but also long-term language acquisition. Learners driven by intrinsic factors often retain knowledge longer, show more confidence in communicative contexts, and develop fluency in speaking and writing. These students also tend to transfer their skills across subjects and maintain a positive attitude toward lifelong learning. On the other hand, students motivated by external rewards may perform well on standardized tests, but they may lack a deep understanding of the language and struggle to apply it in real-life situations (Al Shuaili, 2024; Bagheri Nevisi & Farhani, 2022; Kim, 2021). These distinctions highlight that while extrinsic motivation can initiate effort, intrinsic motivation is more strongly tied to meaningful, sustainable learning outcomes. Therefore, it is crucial to align classroom practices with both motivational sources to promote optimal student engagement and achievement.

A cross-comparison of the reviewed studies reveals that, while extrinsic motivation often promotes short-term achievements, such as test performance and attendance, intrinsic motivation leads to sustained cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement. Cultural and contextual differences also influence which type of motivation becomes dominant. Extrinsic motivation tends to be stronger in high-stakes environments, while intrinsic motivation flourishes in learner-centered classrooms with autonomy support. These findings suggest that motivation is not a fixed trait, but rather a dynamic state influenced by instructional practices, student identity, and socio-educational background.

Overall, the reviewed studies highlight how different motivational types influence English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning and demonstrate how pedagogical practices, cultural values, and classroom dynamics shape these effects. Studies conducted in various regions, from Oman to Indonesia, confirm that intrinsic motivation thrives in environments that promote autonomy and relevance, whereas extrinsic motivation dominates in exam-oriented systems. This comparative analysis underscores the complex, context-sensitive nature of motivation in language learning. Therefore, understanding motivation requires theoretical grounding as well as attention to instructional practice across diverse learning environments. This suggests that while extrinsic rewards can initiate learning behaviors, lasting achievement and communicative competence in EFL require the nurturing of intrinsic interest supported by culturally responsive teaching. These insights underscore the importance of designing flexible, inclusive EFL classrooms that respond to students' evolving motivational needs. By integrating strategies that cultivate intrinsic enjoyment and extrinsic achievement, educators can enhance engagement and lasting language learning outcomes.

Specifically within the Indonesian EFL landscape, the shift from traditional to more interactive learning environments proves critical for student engagement. Findings from Hasanudin and Woretma (2024) suggest that smaller, interactive class sizes in Indonesia are more conducive to developing intrinsic motivation compared to traditional, large-scale lecture settings. Additionally, the adoption of modern tools such as AI-assisted learning in Indonesia has been shown to provide a significant boost to extrinsic engagement. However, for this technological shift to foster a genuine interest in language learning (intrinsic), Indonesian educators must ensure that AI tools are integrated into meaningful, well-designed tasks rather than repetitive drills. This underscores the necessity for a pedagogical move beyond test-driven instruction toward more student-centered and technologically integrated approaches in the Indonesian classroom.

5. Conclusion And Suggestion

This systematic review confirms that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation play crucial roles in EFL classrooms. Intrinsic motivation fosters deeper learning, engagement, and communicative confidence, while extrinsic motivation supports structured achievement and academic persistence. Educators should implement balanced strategies that promote autonomy while meeting institutional demands. This study contributes to a better understanding of motivational dynamics in language learning and provides actionable insights for EFL practitioners. The main contribution of this review lies in its thematic integration of recent studies and

the proposal of a conceptual perspective termed motivational magnetism, which highlights the dynamic interplay between autonomy-supportive instruction and performance-oriented demands in shaping EFL learners' engagement and achievement. Future research should consider longitudinal and cross-cultural analysis, especially in digital learning contexts.

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