A Review of the Research into the Relationship Between Proficiency and Motivation

Kenneth BROWN

Department of English Language Education and Research

Abstract

Motivation is held to play a crucial role in the acquisition of a second language. Consequently, numerous studies have used various types of statistical analyses and motivational theories to investigate the relationship between students' L2 English language proficiency and the extent and nature of their motivation. This article reviews 30 articles which used one of the following theories of motivation, all of which are widely used in the field of second language acquisition: the socio-educational model, expectancy value theory, L2 motivational self system, and self-determination theory. Unsurprisingly, the reviewed studies consistently found that motivation and English language proficiency are correlated. In addition, many, though not all, of the studies found that motivation of a more "internalized" nature has a stronger relationship with English language proficiency than more instrumental and/or extrinsic motivation. The following information is also provided for each of the studies reviewed: locations, contexts, sample numbers, motivational and proficiency instruments, statistical analyses, and results.

Key words: proficiency, motivation, socio-educational model, expectancy value theory, L2 motivational self system, self-determination theory

Among the many conditions that are necessary to gain proficiency in a second language, motivation is commonly held by both educators and researchers to be especially important. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that numerous studies have investigated the relationship between L2 learners' English proficiency and the degree and nature of their motivation. When it comes to theoretical frameworks of language learning motivation, four have been especially influential: the socio-educational model, expectancy value theory, L2 motivational self system, and self-determination theory.

Motivational Theories

Gardner's (1985) *socio-educational model* (SM) stresses that, unlike other classroom subjects such as mathematics, science or history, a second language is integral to another culture. The implication is that the degree of learners' success in relation to their motivation will be strongly influenced not only by the beliefs and attitudes prevalent within their immediate educational environment, but also by the learners' own attitudes toward the culture represented by the second language that they are studying. One of Gardner's most influential concepts is the distinction between integrative and instrumental orientations toward motivation. *Instrumental orientation* refers to an interest in the practical benefits to learning a language. *Integrative orientation* refers to a personal desire to interact and even identify with the culture and people who are associated with the L2.

Expectancy value theory (EVT) focuses on the effect that the interaction between two key factors has on learners' choice, persistence, and performance (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). One of these factors is the learner's personal *expectation* of success, whether immediate or further into the future. The other factor is the subjective, relative *value* of an activity to the learner. This task-value can be further explained by the following four components: attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). *Attainment value* refers to "the importance of doing well on a task" (p. 72). *Intrinsic value* refers to "the enjoyment one gains from doing the task" (p. 72). *Utility value* refers to how useful a task is in fulfilling future goals. And *cost* refers to the price—in terms of effort, emotional investment, and lost opportunities—of engaging in the task (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

The most influential and widely used motivational theory in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) is Dörnyei's *L2 motivational self system* (L2MSS) (Dörnyei, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013). In a sense, this theory is an outgrowth of Gardner's socio-educational model in that it also assumes that learning another language is uniquely different from learning other subjects due to its strong connection to one's own sense of identity. However, some researchers had become increasingly dissatisfied with the concept of integrative motivation, judging that it lacked connection to more recent developments in the field of motivational psychology, applicability to many sociocultural contexts, and relevance amidst growing English-centered globalization.

Influenced by Markus and Nurius's (1986) concept of possible selves and Higgins's (1987) concept of future self-guides, Dörnyei conceptualized three components of L2 motivational self system. The first of these components is *ideal L2 self*, which refers to a learner's image of what they aspire to be in the future and motivates the learner to reduce the differences between their actual and ideal selves. Ideal self is analogous to Gardner's integrative orientation and to the more goal-oriented, internalized aspects of instrumental orientation, such as wanting to advance one's career. The second component, *ought-to self*, refers to those attributes, typically prescribed by others, that a learner perceives to be necessary to meet expectations and avoid negative outcomes. Ought-to self corresponds to the more extrinsic, more prevention-focused, and less internalized aspects of instrumental orientation, such as wanting to avoid failing a test. The third, *L2 learning experience*, refers to the learning environment including, for example, the teacher, the curriculum, peers, and so on (Dörnyei, 2009; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2013).

As I have previously discussed (Brown, 2023), *Self-determination theory* (SDT), as articulated by Ryan and Deci (2017), underscores the importance of satisfying three fundamental psychological needs—autonomy, competence, and relatedness—for fostering and sustaining human beings' innate drive for psychological growth, social connection, and overall well-being. *Autonomy* pertains to engaging in actions aligned with one's own interests and values, driven by personal volition. *Competence* involves feeling capable and effective in activities that hold significance in one's life. *Relatedness* encompasses the quality of interpersonal relationships, including feeling cared for and valued by others. *Basic psychological needs theory* (BPNT), a subtheory of SDT, explores how fulfilling or thwarting these psychological needs contributes to or impedes overall well-being.

Within the framework of SDT, various forms of motivation and their underlying dynamics are recognized (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Broadly speaking, *intrinsic motivation* revolves around pursuing activities for the inherent joy or satisfaction they bring, while *extrinsic motivation* involves engaging in actions to attain external outcomes. Contrary to previous views that portrayed extrinsic motivation as inferior to intrinsic motivation, SDT acknowledges a continuum of extrinsic motivation ranging from less to more autonomous (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b). *Organismic Integration Theory* (OIT), another subtheory of SDT, categorizes motivation types and their corresponding regulatory styles along a continuum (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, 2000b, 2017). At one end lies *amotivation*, representing a lack of motivation. Following amotivation is extrinsic motivation, which has been divided into four regulatory styles according to the degree of autonomy involved. Least autonomous of these, and contiguous to amotivation, is *external*

regulation, which is motivation arising from external rewards, threats, or punishment. This is the form of extrinsic motivation that is often contrasted with intrinsic motivation. Slightly more autonomous than external regulation is *introjected regulation,* which is associated with the avoidance of feeling guilty or the attainment of ego enhancements such as pride. External regulation and introjected regulation are considered to have "external" and "somewhat external" perceived loci of causality, respectively. Next, *identified regulation* is associated with identifying with the value of an action because it is useful on a personal level. The most autonomous regulatory style of extrinsic motivation is *integrated regulation*, by which a behavior has been consciously judged to be integral to one's needs, values, and sense of identity. Identified regulation and integrated regulation are considered to have "somewhat internal" and "internal" perceived loci of causality, respectively. Although integrated regulation and intrinsic regulation are rather similar in terms of degree of autonomy, the former retains an extrinsic quality in that it is concerned with the end goal of a behavior as opposed to the joy of doing the behavior itself. Finally, there is *intrinsic regulation* at the most autonomous end of the continuum.

Numerous survey instruments have been developed to investigate the effects of these motivational constructs. Among the more well-known of these are the following: Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), informed by the socio-educational model; Trautwein et al.'s (2012) Expectancy-Value Beliefs Inventory (EVBI) and Marsh and O'Neill's (1984) Self Description Questionnaire III (SDQ III), both informed by expectancy value theory; the survey created by Taguchi et al. (2009), informed by the L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS); and Vallerand et al.'s (1992) Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) and Noels et al.'s (2000) Language Learning Orientations Scale (LLOS), both informed by SDT.

Purpose of the Present Study

This article aims to systematically review the research into the relationship between motivation and L2 English proficiency.

Method

Google Scholar was used to search for relevant articles. Articles selected met the following pre-established criteria: (1) They investigated motivation through the lens of an established theoretical framework of motivation, and (2) they investigated L2 English proficiency, whether ESL or EFL. No time period was predetermined. Two main key words were utilized: *motivation* and *(English) proficiency*. Only studies in which the relationship between motivation and proficiency in L2 English was the main or one of the main research questions were included. In studies in which relationships other than those between motivation and proficiency were investigated, only the results related to motivation and proficiency are reported here. Unpublished documents, such as dissertations and masters' theses, were not included.

Results

Thirty studies were found that met the criteria (Tables 1–4). Many of the studies used, or adapted for use, the previously mentioned motivational instruments, especially the AMTB, at 12 of the studies, and Taguchi et al.'s (2009) survey, at 13 of the studies. Proficiency-measuring instruments used included the College English Test (CET); the Comprehensive English Language Test (CELT); the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT); the International English Language Testing System (IELTS); the Michigan Examination for the Certificate of Proficiency in English (ECPE); the Michigan English Placement Test (EPT); the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL); researcher designed tests such as multiple-choice, translation, cloze, and C-test; class exams; and self-ratings. Numerous statistical analyses were employed, including correlation, *t*-test, analysis of variance (ANOVA), structural equation modeling (SEM), multidimensional scaling (MDS), and various types of regression analyses. More specified findings are organized under separate sections according to the theory of motivation used.

The Socio-Educational Model

Nine of the 30 studies made their investigations from the perspective of the socio-educational model (Table 1). Of these, six used or adapted the AMTB, and one used the Attitude and Motivational Index (Gardner & Lambert, 1972, as cited in Teweles, 1996), which is essentially AMTB's predecessor.

Teweles (1996) found significant correlation between motivation and grammatical proficiency as measured by Part II of the CELT. However, Teweles did not investigate the relationships between proficiency and both instrumental and integrative orientations, despite including these two orientations in the survey. Two of these studies (Liu, 2012; Yamashiro & McLaughlin, 2001) found that motivation was correlated to a fairly strong degree, in the case of the former, and moderate degree, in the case of the latter, with language proficiency.

Five of these eight studies investigated the differences in effects that integrative and instrumental orientations have on proficiency. Two of the studies (Ghanea et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2020) found an almost equally positive relationship between the two orientations and proficiency. The other two studies (Brown et al., 2001; Samad et al., 2012) found motivation to be predictive of the students' proficiency in general, and integrative motivation to have a higher correlation than instrumental motivation with higher proficiency.

Liu and Dong (2023) found that integrative orientation and, to a lesser degree, development motivation (here representing internalized instrumentality) positively predicted self-reported scores on class achievement tests, while requirement motivation (here representing non-internalized instrumentality) did not.

Kim (2012) utilized both the socio-educational model and L2MSS. In terms of the former, he found that neither integrative nor instrumental orientations predicted proficiency; this stands in contrast to the other studies that utilized the socio-educational model.

Expectancy Value Theory

Five of the studies employed expectancy value theory (Table 2). Schmidt et al. (1996) designed their own questionnaires by using models that "fall generally within the broad category of value-expectancy theories of motivation" (p. 15) and found that *affect* (analogous to intrinsic motivation), *goal orientation* (somewhat analogous to intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation), and *expectancy* (confidence of success) were significantly predictive of proficiency.

Ogane and Sakamoto (1999) designed a motivation questionnaire with items based on several previous studies as well as their own intuition and organized along similar models proposed by Crookes and Schmidt (1991) and Schmidt et al. (1996); they found that English proficiency and motivation were significantly related.

Two of these five studies (Hu & McGeown, 2020; Trautwein et al., 2012), found that both expectancy and value beliefs positively predicted proficiency, with expectancy beliefs being the stronger of the two. Somewhat similarly, Dong et al. (2022) reported both expectancy and intrinsic value beliefs to be predictive of proficiency. However, whereas Trautwein et al. (2012) discovered that expectancy and value beliefs acted synergistically in their predictive ability, Dong et al. (2022) did not.

L2 Motivational Self System

Eleven of the studies, employed L2MSS (Table 3). This large number attests to L2MSS's outsized influence in SLA research.

All these studies (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Dunn & Iwaniec, 2022; Ghapanchi et al., 2011; Kim, 2102; Kim & Kim, 2011; Kim & Kim, 2104; Lamb, 2012; Moskovsky et al., 2016; Papi & Khajavy, 2021; Saito et al., 2018; Yao & Crosthwaite, 2017) found ideal L2 self to be predictive of proficiency. That being said, Lamb (2012) found this to be true only among students in the metropolitan group, and not among those in the provincial or rural areas.

Table 1

Summary of Studies Employing the Socio-Educational Model

Study	Location	Context	N	Instruments		Main statistical analysis(es)	Predictive value of motivation on proficiency		
				Motivation	Proficiency		Motivation (in general)	Integrative	Instrumental
Brown et al. (2001)	Japan	university	320	AMTB (Gardner, 1985)	Michigan EPT	discriminant function analysis (similar to multivariate analysis of variance, i.e., MANOVA)	n/a	positive	positive
Ghanea et al. (2011)	Iran	university	128	adapted from AMTB (Gardner, 1985)	Michigan ECPE	correlation, t-test	n/a	positive	positive
Kim (2012)	South Korea	primary and secondary	2,832	based on Kim (2011) and Taguchi et al. (2009)	self-ratings	regression	n/a	none	none
Liu (2012)	Taiwan	university	150	AMTB (Gardner, 1985)	GEPT	correlation, regression	positive	n/a	n/a
Liu & Dong (2023)	China	high school	3,105	adapted from AMTB (Gardner et al., 1997) and Gao et al. (2007)	self-reported test scores	regression	n/a	positive	none
Samad et al. (2012)	Iran	university	100	adopted from standardized questionnaires such as AMTB (Gardner, 1985)	IELTS	correlation, regression	n/a	positive	positive
Teweles (1996)	China and Japan	university	80	based on Gardner and Lambert's (1972, as cited in Teweles, 1996) Attitude and Motivational Index	CELT, multiple-choice, cloze, translation	correlation, ANOVA	positive	n/a	n/a
Yamashiro & McLaughlin (2001)	Japan	tertiary (junior college and university)	220	AMTB (Gardner, 1985)	CELT, cloze	SEM	positive	n/a	n/a
Zhang et al. (2020)	China	university	335	author developed	self-ratings	correlation, regression	n/a	positive	positive

Table 2

Summary of Studies Employing Expectancy Value Theory

Study	Location	Context	N	Instruments		Main statistical analysis(es)	Predictive value of motivation on proficiency				
				Motivation	Proficiency		Motivation (in general)	Expectancy	Value (in general)	Intrinsic value	Utility value
Dong et al. (2022)	China	high school	280	adapted from EVBI (Trautwein et al., 2012) and modifications by Yang and Mindrila (2020)	self-ratings	correlation, regression	n/a	positive	positive	positive	positive (but small)
Hu & McGeown (2020)	China	primary	631	drawn heavily upon Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) (Gambrell et al., 1996)	two unit tests, a midterm test, and final exam	correlation, regression	n/a	positive	positive	n/a	n/a
Ogane & Sakamoto (1999)	Japan	university	110	influenced by Crookes and Schmidt (1991) and Schmidt et al. (1996)	CELT	SEM	positive	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Schmidt et al. (1996)	Egypt	university	1,464	author developed	class placement	ANOVA, MDS	positive (in the case of intrinsic)	positive	n/a	n/a	n/a
Trautwein et al. (2012)	Germany	secondary	2,508	based on SDQ III (Marsh & O'Neill, 1984) and others (e.g., Marsh et al., 2005; Trautwein et al., 2006; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000)	shortened research version of TOEFL	SEM	n/a	positive	positive	n/a	n/a

Table 3

Summary of Studies Employing L2 Motivational Self System

Study	Location	Context	N	Instruments		Main statistical analysis(es)	Predictive value of motivation on proficiency		
				Motivation	Proficiency		Ideal L2 self	Ought-to self	L2 experience
Dörnyei & Chan (2013)	China (Hong Kong)	secondary (13 to 15 years of age)	172	based on Taguchi et al. (2009)	final exam	correlation	positive	none	n/a
Dunn & Iwaniec (2022)	Spain	secondary	1,773	adapted from Iwaniec (2014) and Taguchi et al. (2009)	Aptis for Teens (O'Sullivan et al., 2020)	Latent Variable Mixture Modeling	positive	none	positive
Ghapanchi et al. (2011)	Iran	university	141	Papi (2010)	self-ratings	correlation, regression, SEM	positive	none	positive
Kim (2012)	South Korea	elementary–secondary	2,832	based on Kim (2011) and Taguchi et al. (2009)	self-ratings	regression	positive	negative	n/a
Kim & Kim (2011)	South Korea	high school	495	based on Al-Shehri (2009)	final exam	correlation, regression	positive (but weak)	n/a	n/a
Kim & Kim (2014)	South Korea	elementary (n = 1,466); junior high school (n = 1,159)	2,625	adopted from Taguchi et al. (2009)	self-reported test scores	regression	positive	negative	n/a
Lamb (2012)	Indonesia	junior high school	527	largely drawn from Ryan (2009)	C-test	regression	positive (metropolitan group)	n/a	positive
Moskovsky et al. (2016)	Saudi Arabia	university	360	drawn from Taguchi et al. (2009), Ryan 2008), and Gardner (2004)	reading and writing test drawn from IELTS practice book	correlation, regression	negative (but weak)	none	negative
Papi & Khajavy (2021)	Iran	university	324	adapted from Papi et al. (2019)	final exam	SEM	positive	negative	n/a
Saito et al. (2018)	Japan	high school	108	adapted from Taguchi et al. (2009)	ALC Telephone Standard Speaking Test	correlation, regression	positive	none	positive
Yao & Crosthwaite (2017)	China	university	208	adapted from You and Dörnyei (2014)	self-reported scores on College English Test Band-4 (CET-4)	correlation, ANOVA, interviews (n = 7)	positive	positive (but small)	positive

Three of these studies（Kim, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2012; Papi & Khajavy, 2021）found that ought-to self negatively predicted proficiency. One of these（Yao & Crosthwaite, 2017）found that ought-to self positively predicted proficiency to a significant degree; however, the authors judged the correlation too small to be meaningful. Five of these studies（Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Dunn & Iwaniec, 2022; Ghapanchi et al., 2011; Moskovsky et al., 2016; Saito et al., 2018）found no significant relation between the two. Neither Kim and Kim（2011）nor Lamb（2012）explored this relationship. In the case of the latter, this was due to reliability issues with the ought-to scale. Although Kim and Kim's（2011）questionnaire did not include ought-to self, the authors surmise that the low explanatory power of the variables that they did investigate suggests that ought-to self could very well have had an effect on proficiency.

Papi and Khajavy（2021）looked at ideal and ought-to L2 selves by utilizing Papi et al.'s（2019）2 × 2 model of L2 self-guides wherein the two regulations are divided into the two standpoints of *own*, i.e., what learners decide on for themselves, and *other*, i.e., what learners believe others expect from them. Structural equation modeling revealed that Ideal L2 Self/Own predicted more enjoyment, less anxiety, and more eager use of the L2, which ultimately predicted higher proficiency as measured by the final exam. Ought-to L2 Self/Other, on the other hand, predicted more anxiety and more vigilant strategies, which ultimately predicted lower proficiency.

Five of these studies（Dunn & Iwaniec, 2022; Ghapanchi et al., 2011; Lamb, 2012; Saito et al., 2018; Yao & Crosthwaite, 2017）found that L2 experience positively predicted proficiency, and one of these studies（Moskovsky et al., 2016）found no correlation between the two. Five of the studies（Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Kim, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2011; Kim & Kim, 2014; Papi & Khajavy, 2021）did not investigate this relationship.

Self-Determination Theory

The five studies exploring the link between motivation and listening proficiency as viewed through the lens of SDT have yielded mixed results（Table 4）.

Three of the studies（Baleghizadeh & Rahimi, 2011; Brown, 2023; Shaikholeslami & Khayyer, 2006）found that amotivation negatively predicted proficiency to a significant degree.

Two of the studies（Harputlu & Ceylan, 2014; Teng et al., 2021）found extrinsic motivation in general to be predictive of proficiency. Although Wang（2008）found that *external utility regulation*, described as "a controlled motivation which decreases autonomy"（p. 642）, correlated negatively with proficiency, two of the studies（Brown, 2023; Shaikholeslami & Khayyer, 2006）found no significant relation between external regulation and proficiency. Shaikholeslami and Khayyer（2006）found that introjected regulation positively predicted proficiency. Two of the studies（Brown, 2023; Shaikholeslami & Khayyer, 2006）found no relation between identified regulation and proficiency.

Four of the studies（Baleghizadeh & Rahimi, 2011; Brown, 2023; Teng et al., 2021; Wang, 2008）found intrinsic motivation to be positively predictive of proficiency. Shaikholeslami and Khayyer（2006）essentially discovered the same thing; they divided intrinsic motivation into the three subtypes of stimulation, knowledge, and accomplishment, and found them to have positive, negative, and no significant relations with proficiency, respectively. In contrast, Harputlu and Ceylan（2014）found no association between proficiency and intrinsic motivation.

Discussion

First of all, it can be seen that all of the 30 studies included in this review found a significant relationship between proficiency and some form of motivation. Beyond that observation, comparing results of studies using different models of motivation is not exactly a simple task. That being said, all four of the motivational theories mentioned in this article recognize the difference between motivation that is either more internalized or more externalized. Liu and Dong（2023）point out that the differentiation between integrative and instrumental motivation in SM is similar to the differentiation between ideal and ought-

Table 4

Summary of Studies Employing Self Determination Theory

| Study | Location | Context | N | Instruments | | Main statistical analysis(es) | Predictive value of motivation on proficiency | | | | | | |
				Motivation	Proficiency		Extrinsic (in general)	Amotivation	External	Introjected	Identified	Integrated	Intrinsic
Baleghizadeh & Rahimi (2011)	Iran	university	82	AMS (Vallerand et al., 1992)	TOEFL listening	correlation	none	negative	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	positive
Brown (2023)	Japan	university	73	Agawa & Takeuchi (2016, 2017)	Pearson Education's *Placement* test	correlation	n/a	negative	none	n/a	none	n/a	positive
Harputlu & Ceylan (2014)	Turkey	university	33	LLOS (Noels et al., 2000)	TOEFL listening	correlation	positive	none	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	none
Shaikholeslami & Khayyer (2006)	Iran	university	230	LLOS (Noels et al., 2000)	mid-term and final examinations	regression	n/a	negative	none	positive	none	n/a	mixed results
Teng et al. (2021)	China	university	590	adapted from LLOS (Noels et al., 2000)	teacher-developed, university-wide test	SEM	positive	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	positive
Wang (2008)	China	university	140 and 329	author developed	final exam	correlation, regression	positive (autonomous) negative (less autonomous)	negative	negative (i.e., "external utility")	n/a	n/a	positive (i.e., "internal fulfillment")	positive

to L2 self in L2MSS as well as the differentiation between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in SDT. Eccles and Wigfield (2020) state that intrinsic value is similar to the intrinsic motivation of SDT, while utility value is similar to extrinsic motivation (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), although these concepts are conceptualized differently as a result of their having originated from different theoretical perspectives (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Only two of the studies (Dong et al., 2022; Trautwein et al., 2012) looked at intrinsic and utility value as separate orientations. From that perspective, then, 23 studies (Baleghizadeh & Rahimi, 2011; Brown et al., 2001; Brown, 2023; Dong et al., 2022; Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Dunn & Iwaniec, 2022; Ghanea et al., 2011; Ghapanchi et al., 2011; Kim & Kim, 2011; Kim & Kim, 2014; Kim, 2012; Lamb, 2012; Liu & Dong, 2023; Moskovsky et al., 2016; Papi & Khajavy, 2021; Saito et al., 2018; Samad et al., 2012; Shaikholeslami & Khayyer, 2006; Teng et al., 2023; Trautwein et al., 2012; Wang, 2008; Yao & Crosthwaite, 2017; Zhang et al., 2020) can be said to have found that more internalized forms of motivation positively predicted proficiency, while only one (Harputlu & Ceylan, 2014) found no relationship between the two.

The results were more mixed when it comes to the more externalized forms of motivation. Five of the eight studies (Brown et al., 2001; Ghanea et al., 2011; Liu & Dong, 2023; Samad et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2020) employing SM found that instrumental orientation, a more externalized form of motivation, positively predicted proficiency. As for EVT, Trautwein et al. (2012) found that utility value, which is similar to extrinsic motivation, positively predicted proficiency, but Dong et al. (2022) did not. One of the six studies (Yao & Crosthwaite, 2017) employing L2MSS found a small positive relationship between ought-to self and proficiency, three (Kim & Kim, 2014; Kim, 2012; Papi & Khajavy, 2021) found that ought-to self negatively predicted proficiency, five (Dörnyei & Chan, 2013; Dunn & Iwaniec, 2022; Ghapanchi et al., 2011; Moskovsky et al., 2016; Saito et al., 2018) found no relationship, and two (Kim & Kim, 2011; Lamb, 2012) did not include ought-to self in their survey. Finally, among the six studies employing SDT, Harputlu & Ceylan (2014) found a positive relationship when it came to a more autonomous type and a negative relationship when it came to a less autonomous type. To summarize, nine of the studies (Brown et al., 2001; Ghanea et al., 2011; Harputlu & Ceylan, 2014; Liu & Dong, 2023; Samad et al., 2012; Trautwein et al., 2012; Yao & Crosthwaite, 2017; Zhang et al., 2020) found that more externalized forms of motivation positively predicted proficiency, and four of the studies (Harputlu & Ceylan, 2014; Kim, 2012; Kim & Kim, 2014; Papi & Khajavy, 2021) found that more externalized forms of motivation negatively predicted proficiency.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this review, that the more internalized forms of motivation are indeed predictive of proficiency seems almost beyond dispute. The more mixed results regarding the more externalized forms of motivation can largely be attributed to the differing conceptions behind their respective theories of motivation. In the case of SM, for example, perhaps instrumental orientation is not all that externalized because whatever practical benefits to gaining proficiency in an L2 may arise from internal determinations on an individual level. In the case of EVT, more studies would need to differentiate between intrinsic and utility value to be able to come to any conclusions in this regard. It seems clear that, in the case of L2MSS, ought-to self is indeed much more likely to either negatively predict proficiency or to have no relationship at all. Finally, in the case of SDT, the more autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation seem a little more likely to predict proficiency than the less autonomous forms of autonomy; that being said, more research needs to be done that looks at the relationship through the lens of the full continuum employed in OIT.

The biggest takeaway is that motivation is clearly predictive of proficiency, the more internalized forms of motivation are predictive of proficiency far more often than not, and the more externalized forms of motivation may or may not predict proficiency, most likely depending on the conceptions behind the motivational theory in use.

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