



Career Advancement over Cultural Interest: Instrumental Motivation as the Dominant Force in Omani EFL Students

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Abstract: Motivation remains a central construct in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) research, yet its dominant orientation within Gulf higher education contexts remains insufficiently documented. This study investigates whether instrumental or integrative motivation predominates among foundation-level Omani EFL learners and examines the influence of gender and study level. Using a quantitative correlational design, data were collected from 450 students through an adapted version of Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (5-point Likert scale). A paired-samples t-test revealed a statistically significant dominance of instrumental motivation ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.99$) over integrative motivation ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.90$), $t(449) = -12.86$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.61$. Independent-samples t-tests indicated that male students reported significantly higher levels of both motivational orientations, though effect sizes were small to moderate. A one-way ANOVA suggested that integrative motivation increased significantly with level of study, whereas instrumental motivation remained stable. This finding suggests that instrumental motivation plays a central role in shaping learners' orientation in this context, highlighting the need for curriculum alignment with professional communication outcomes. Implications for TESOL practitioners in career-focused EFL environments are discussed.

Keywords: EFL Motivation, Instrumental Motivation, Integrative Motivation, Gender Differences, Omani Learners

1. Introduction

Language learning motivation is a vital factor in successful foreign language acquisition, influencing learners' engagement, persistence, and proficiency (Dörnyei, 2020). English serves as a global lingua franca in education, business, and intercultural communication, making motivation in English as a Foreign Language context (EFL) academically and practically significant. In settings where learners have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, sustaining motivation remains a significant challenge (Oviedo & Charpentier, 2023).

Building on Gardner and Lambert's (1972) framework, motivational orientations fall into two types: integrative motivation, reflecting a learner's openness to the target language community, and instrumental motivation, denoting goal-driven reasons such as academic or career aims. Recent studies show these orientations interact with sociocultural factors like gender and institutional context. Yet, empirical results vary across contexts. For example, girls tended to score higher on autonomous motivation within the 'moderate motivation' profile, which is considered a higher-quality motivation, stemming from internal desires and interests. For example, recent person-centered studies have found that boys often exhibit higher controlled motivation, driven by external pressures, while girls show stronger autonomous motivation (Li *et al.*, 2023). Similarly, Stenberg (2025) reported boys to have more positive feelings about school despite generally lower academic achievement.

Although instrumental motivation has been extensively documented across broader Gulf Arab EFL contexts, its specific manifestation within the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), Oman's largest governmental higher education institution, remains unexplored. Therefore, this study can be understood as a context-specific replication and extension of established motivation research, examining whether widely observed patterns



hold within the UTAS General Foundation Program and how they interact with gender and study level variables. The career-driven nature of this context suggests instrumental motivation is particularly acute, yet it is unknown how this heightened drive interacts with gender and study level among Omani learners at the Preparatory Studies Center, providing a context-specific examination within UTAS, where empirical evidence remains limited. This study addresses two questions: (1) Which motivational orientation is dominant among General Foundation Program (GFP) students at UTAS? (2) How do gender and level of study affect these students' motivation to learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL)?.

Accordingly, the study tests two sets of hypotheses. The first posits no difference (null) versus a significant dominance (alternative) between integrative and instrumental motivations among PSC students. The second hypothesis states that gender and study level either do not (null) or do (alternative) significantly affect students' motivation, with differences expected in type or degree. The research uses a quantitative design with a shortened version of Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). A 10-item Likert-scale questionnaire (1 to 5) assessed integrative and instrumental motivation among GFP students. Data were collected through self-administered surveys and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to compare motivational orientations across demographic groups. The AMTB is a validated instrument widely used in language motivation research, suitable for this context. By linking established theory with empirical investigation, this study contributes to EFL motivation literature and offers practical insights for educators and policymakers. Results may inform strategies to boost student engagement, curriculum design, and learner support in similar EFL contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Integrative and Instrumental Motivation in EFL

Motivation is widely recognized as a key factor in successful foreign language acquisition, influencing learners' engagement, persistence, and achievement (Dörnyei, 2020; Moskovsky *et al.*, 2016). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, where exposure to the target language is often limited, sustaining motivation becomes particularly important (Oviedo & Charpentier, 2023). A foundational framework in this field is the distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation proposed by Gardner and Lambert (1972). Integrative motivation reflects learners' desire to connect with the target language community and culture, whereas instrumental motivation is associated with practical goals such as academic success and career advancement (Al-Harthy, 2017). Although both orientations can coexist, their relative importance varies depending on contextual factors.

In many EFL environments, particularly those characterized by limited interaction with native speakers, instrumental motivation tends to be more prominent. This is because learners often view English as a tool for achieving educational and professional goals rather than for cultural integration. Empirical studies across various contexts have consistently demonstrated the strong role of instrumental motivation in shaping learners' attitudes and behaviors (Khazaie & Mesbah, 2014; Saragih & Subekti, 2024). While recent developments in language learning research have incorporated broader perspectives such as Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2017) and positive psychology (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2021), the integrative-instrumental distinction remains a relevant and widely used framework, particularly in quantitative studies examining motivational orientation. However, despite extensive research on this dichotomy, there is still a need for context-specific investigations that examine how these orientations manifest within particular institutional and sociocultural settings.

2.2 Gender Differences in EFL Motivation

Gender has been widely examined as a factor influencing language learning motivation, although findings remain mixed. Some studies suggest that female learners tend to demonstrate higher levels of integrative and intrinsic motivation, often linked to greater interest in communication and cultural engagement (Salehpour & Roohani, 2023). In contrast, male learners have sometimes been associated with stronger instrumental motivation, particularly in relation to career and academic outcomes (Daif-Allah & Aljumah, 2020).

However, these patterns are not consistent across all contexts. For example, Kubi (2023) reported no significant gender differences in motivation, highlighting the role of contextual variability. Similarly, recent research using person-centered approaches suggests that males may exhibit higher levels of controlled motivation, while



females tend to demonstrate more autonomous forms of motivation (Li *et al.*, 2023). Other findings also indicate that male learners may report more positive attitudes toward schooling in general, despite differences in academic performance (Stenberg, 2025). In Middle Eastern contexts, sociocultural factors such as gender roles and expectations may further shape motivational orientations (Aldosari, 2014). For instance, differing expectations regarding education and employment may influence how male and female learners perceive the importance of English. Despite these insights, empirical evidence from the Omani context remains limited, particularly in large-scale institutional settings. This highlights the need to examine gender differences in motivation within specific EFL environments.

2.3 Motivation and Study Level

Another important dimension of EFL motivation is its relationship with learners' level of study or language proficiency. Although motivation is often treated as a relatively stable construct, there is growing recognition that it may evolve as learners progress in their language learning journey.

At earlier stages of learning, students may rely more heavily on instrumental motivation, focusing on immediate academic requirements and external rewards. As learners develop higher levels of proficiency, they may become more confident in using the language, which can increase their interest in communication and cultural engagement. This shift may lead to a gradual strengthening of integrative motivation. Despite these theoretical considerations, empirical research examining changes in motivational orientation across levels of study remains relatively limited. Much of the existing literature focuses on general motivational trends without explicitly comparing learners at different stages within the same institutional context (Csizér, 2023). This suggests a need for studies that investigate how motivation may vary across levels of study, particularly in structured educational programs such as foundation courses.

2.4 EFL Motivation in Gulf and Omani Contexts

In Gulf countries, English plays a central role in higher education, employment, and international communication. As a result, EFL learners in this region are often situated in strongly career-oriented educational systems. Previous research has consistently shown that instrumental motivation is the dominant orientation in such contexts, reflecting the perceived importance of English for academic success and future employment (Al Balushi, 2022; Alghazo, 2025; Saleh & Majeed, 2021).

In Oman, this trend is particularly evident, as English proficiency is closely linked to national development goals and workforce readiness. Studies conducted in the Omani context have similarly reported the predominance of instrumental motivation among learners (Elsayed, 2020). These findings highlight the strong influence of socioeconomic factors on learners' motivational orientations. However, despite the growing body of research in the region, there remains a relative lack of large-scale, institution-specific studies that examine how motivational orientations interact with variables such as gender and level of study. The University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), as one of the largest governmental higher education institutions in Oman, provides a relevant context for such investigation. Its foundation programs are designed to prepare students for academic and professional pathways, suggesting that instrumental motivation may be particularly salient in this environment.

2.5 Synthesis and Research Positioning

Overall, the literature suggests that instrumental motivation tends to dominate in EFL contexts, particularly in regions where English is closely associated with academic and professional advancement. At the same time, findings regarding gender differences remain inconsistent, and relatively limited attention has been given to how motivational orientations may vary across levels of study within a single institutional context. Furthermore, while existing studies provide valuable insights into EFL motivation in Gulf countries, large-scale empirical evidence from specific institutions in Oman remains limited. In particular, there is a need to examine how integrative and instrumental motivations interact with gender and study level within structured foundation programs.



These gaps directly inform the present study, which focuses on three key variables: motivational orientation, gender, and level of study among UTAS foundation students. By examining these factors within a single institutional context, the study aims to provide a more targeted and context-sensitive understanding of EFL motivation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

This study considered the entire population of 450 General Foundation Program students enrolled in General English Levels 1, 2, and 3 at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS), across its Ibra and Muscat branches. Cases with incomplete responses were excluded using listwise deletion, resulting in slight variations in sample size across different analyses. Ethical approval was granted by the Review Boards of UTAS in both branches, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. The student population consists of around 52% female and 48% male students, with ages grouped into five categories: under 18, 18, 19, 20, and above 20. As UTAS is a government institution, all students were Omani and Arabic native speakers from Ibra and Muscat, or the surrounding areas. The General Foundation Program's students were selected for this study for several reasons. Firstly, the Preparatory Studies Center (PSC) offers an optimal environment for formally studying English language skills in Oman. Secondly, foundation students are an appropriate choice for this investigation because they are actively engaged in developing their English proficiency for summative assessment; so, they are aware of the challenges and motivations associated with learning English as a foreign language. The following table 1 and 2 demonstrate the frequency of participants based on their levels of study and gender.

Table 1. Frequency and percentage of participants

Level of Study	Frequency	Percentage
General English 1	90	20.0%
General English 2	145	45.8%
General English 3	155	34.2%
Total	450	100%

Table 2. Frequency and percentage of different Genders

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	232	51.6%
Male	218	48.4%
Total	450	100%

3.2 Procedure and Instrumentation

The present study employed the Integrative and Instrumental Orientation subscales derived from Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Gardner, 1985). The original AMTB includes a large number of items across multiple subscales. For the purposes of this study, a shortened version focusing specifically on integrative and instrumental orientations was developed. Ten items (five per construct) were selected based on their conceptual relevance and frequency of use in previous EFL motivation research. Care was taken to ensure that each item clearly represented the underlying construct, maintaining balance between the two motivational orientations. The questionnaire was adapted from a 7-point to a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree) to enhance clarity and response consistency among participants. All items were positively worded to minimize potential confusion. To ensure accessibility, the instrument was administered in both English and Arabic. A translation and back-translation procedure was used to maintain equivalence between the two versions. The Arabic version was translated from English and subsequently back-translated into English by an independent reviewer. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved to ensure semantic consistency. Prior to full administration, the questionnaire was reviewed by colleagues with experience in EFL research to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness for the



target population. Minor adjustments were made to wording based on this feedback. The questionnaire was administered in both English and Arabic to ensure comprehension. A translation and back-translation procedure was employed to maintain equivalence between the two versions. The Arabic version was first translated from English and then independently back-translated into English to check for consistency. Any discrepancies were reviewed and resolved to ensure semantic equivalence.

The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which indicated good internal consistency for both the integrative ($\alpha = .788$) and instrumental ($\alpha = .836$) subscales. In addition to reliability, content validity was supported by aligning all items with established theoretical definitions of integrative and instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). The two subscales were analyzed separately in line with the theoretical distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation, further supporting the construct validity of the measurement approach.

3.3 Design and Data Analysis

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design using comparative statistical analyses to examine the associations between motivational orientations and selected socio-psychological variables, namely gender and level of study. Prior to conducting inferential analyses, key statistical assumptions were examined. Normality of the data was assessed using skewness and kurtosis values, which fell within acceptable ranges, indicating approximate normal distribution. Homogeneity of variances was evaluated using Levene's test for independent samples t-tests and ANOVA, and results suggested that this assumption was not violated ($p > .05$). These checks supported the use of parametric tests. Participants' language proficiency levels were not reassessed, as had been previously established through institutional placement testing. Motivation was measured using two five-item subscales adapted from Gardner's *Attitude/Motivation Test Battery* (AMTB), each rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. The Integrative Orientation subscale measured learners' interest in connecting with the target language's community, culture, and lifestyle. A representative item is: "I learn English to interact with people from other cultures." In contrast, the Instrumental Orientation subscale assessed pragmatic motivations such as academic success and career advancement, exemplified by the item: "I learn English to get a better job." A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare integrative and instrumental motivation. Independent samples t-tests were used to examine gender differences, and a one-way ANOVA was performed to assess differences across levels of study. In addition to p-values, effect sizes and confidence intervals were reported to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the result. All statistical analyses were carried out using SPSS (Version 26.0), with the significance level set at $p < .05$.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics for the integrative and instrumental orientation subscales are presented below, revealing the participants' primary motivations for learning English. Overall, participants reported moderate to moderately high levels of integrative motivation (mean scores ranging from 3.06 to 3.65). The highest mean score was for the item "To interact more and easily with speakers of English" ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.288$), suggesting that opportunities for interpersonal communication served as the strongest integrative motive. Conversely, the lowest mean ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.311$) was associated with "People respect me more if I know English," indicating that social prestige was a comparatively weaker factor (Table 3). The moderate standard deviations across these items indicate that, while responses varied, most participants demonstrated a generally favorable integrative orientation

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Integrative Motivational Orientations

Item for Integrative Orientation	Mean	Std. Deviation
5. To interact more and easily with speakers of English.	3.65	1.288
3. To meet and converse with more and varied people.	3.50	1.237
4. To better understand and appreciate the English way of life.	3.43	1.145
1. To be more at ease with people who speak English.	3.17	1.162
2. People respect me more if I know English.	3.06	1.311



In contrast, the data indicated generally higher levels of endorsement for instrumental motivation, with mean scores ranging from 3.34 to 4.20. This reflects a strong utilitarian orientation toward learning English. Professional advancement emerged as the most salient driver, evidenced by the highest mean for the item "I will need English for my career" ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.271$). Similarly, "English for getting a good job" ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 1.293$) also received strong agreement, further underscoring the perceived economic and occupational value of English proficiency. In comparison, items such as "My parents stressed the importance of English" ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.265$) and "Read newspapers and magazines in many foreign languages" ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 1.316$) received more moderate endorsement, suggesting that familial influence and general intellectual engagement played a comparatively lesser role. The standard deviations for the instrumental subscale suggest moderate variability, reflecting that while learners differed in motivational intensity, most exhibited a consistent and strong instrumental orientation.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Instrumental Motivational Orientations

Item for Instrumental Orientation	Mean	Std. Deviation
10. I will need English for my career.	4.20	1.271
6. English for getting a good job.	4.06	1.293
8. English will make me more educated.	3.92	1.201
7. My parents stressed the importance of English.	3.57	1.265
9. Read newspapers and magazines in many foreign languages.	3.34	1.316

4.2 Dominant Orientation (Paired t-test)

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to determine the dominant motivational orientation by comparing the mean scores of integrative and instrumental motivations. The results revealed a statistically significant difference between the two orientations. The mean score for instrumental motivation ($M = 3.82$) was significantly higher than the mean for integrative motivation ($M = 3.36$), with a mean difference of -0.45 , 95% CI $[-0.52, -0.38]$, $t(449) = -12.86$, $p < .001$. The observed effect size ($d = 0.61$) indicates a practically meaningful difference, suggesting that instrumental motivation is not only statistically dominant but also substantively stronger in shaping learners' orientation in this context.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics and Paired-Samples t-test for Motivational Orientations

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Integrative Motivation	3.36	0.90	-12.86	449	< .001	0.61
Instrumental Motivation	3.82	0.99				

Note: The Cohen's d value is reported as an absolute value

Table 6. Gender Differences in Motivation (N = 450)

Motivation Type	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t (441)	p	Cohen's d
Integrative Motivation	Female	232	3.23	0.90	-3.34	.001	0.32
	Male	218	3.51	0.90			
Instrumental Motivation	Female	232	3.67	1.03	-3.47	.001	0.33
	Male	218	3.99	0.91			

Note. N varies slightly due to missing responses.

Independent-samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare female and male participants' motivation orientations. Results revealed significant gender differences in both integrative and instrumental motivation orientations (Table 6). For integrative motivation, male participants ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.90$) scored significantly higher than female participants ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.90$), $t(441) = -3.34$, $p = .001$, 95% CI $[-0.44, -0.12]$, $d = 0.32$. Similarly, for instrumental motivation, males ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 0.91$) also outperformed females ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.03$), $t(441) = -3.47$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.33$.



Table 7. Integrative and Instrumental Motivation by General English Level (N:450)

Motivation Type	Level	N	Mean	SD
Integrative Motivation	GE1	150	3.18	0.88
	GE2	145	3.30	0.90
	GE3	155	3.55	0.92
Instrumental Motivation	GE1	150	3.62	1.01
	GE2	145	3.68	1.04
	GE3	155	3.97	0.91

Note. GE = General English. SD = Standard Deviation.

Although the differences were statistically significant, the effect sizes were small to moderate, suggesting that gender accounts for only a limited proportion of variation in motivational orientation. In practical terms, this indicates that while male students reported slightly higher motivation levels, the difference is unlikely to represent a substantial educational disparity and should be interpreted with caution.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine differences in integrative and instrumental motivation across three levels of General English study (Table 7). Results indicated a significant difference in integrative motivation among study levels, $F(2, 447) = 3.19, p = .042$. Post-hoc comparisons (Tukey HSD) suggested that students in GE3 reported higher integrative motivation than those in GE1, while differences between GE2 and the other levels were smaller. In contrast, instrumental motivation did not differ significantly among study levels, $F(2, 447) = 2.54, p = .080$. These findings suggest that students' integrative motivation tends to increase with higher levels of General English, whereas instrumental motivation remains relatively stable across levels.

Post-hoc pairwise comparisons for integrative motivation revealed a significant increase associated with higher proficiency. While no significant difference was found between the GE1 and GE2 levels ($p = .256$), the GE3 group demonstrated significantly higher integrative motivation than both the GE1 ($p < .001$) and GE2 ($p = .016$) groups, indicating that integrative motivation is strongest among the most advanced learners.

The increase in integrative motivation observed among higher-level learners may suggest a change in how students relate to the language as their proficiency improves. One possible explanation is that increased proficiency enhances learners' confidence, making communicative and cultural engagement more accessible and appealing. However, given the cross-sectional nature of the data, this interpretation should be treated as a tentative explanation rather than evidence of a developmental shift. This finding extends traditional interpretations of Gardner's framework by suggesting that motivational orientations are not static but may shift as learners gain proficiency. While the dominance of instrumental motivation aligns with prior studies in similar contexts, the observed increase in integrative motivation across proficiency levels suggests a developmental shift that is less frequently emphasized in literature. It is important to note that the present study is based on cross-sectional self-report data. Therefore, the findings do not establish causal relationships or developmental changes over time, and interpretations regarding underlying psychological processes should be considered tentative.

5. Conclusion

This study examined motivational orientations among foundation-level EFL learners at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) and found that instrumental motivation was the dominant orientation, with career-related goals serving as a primary driver. While integrative motivation was also present, it appeared to vary across levels of study, with higher-level learners reporting relatively stronger integrative tendencies. Gender differences were statistically significant but modest in magnitude, suggesting limited practical impact. These findings provide context-specific evidence that, within the UTAS environment, learners' motivation is closely aligned with academic and professional aspirations. Accordingly, curriculum design at UTAS may benefit from integrating workplace-oriented communication tasks and career-relevant language use to better reflect students' motivational profiles. It is important to note that the findings of this study are based on data from a single institutional and



national context. Therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution and are not intended to be generalized to all EFL settings. While the findings may offer insights for similar career-oriented educational environments, further research across different contexts is needed to determine the extent to which these patterns are transferable. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on EFL motivation by providing a focused examination of motivational orientations within a specific institutional setting, highlighting the importance of aligning instructional practices with learners' context-bound needs and goals.

5.1 Limitations

This study is not without its limitations. Its cross-sectional design and confinement to a single national and institutional context, while providing valuable depth, necessarily limit the generalizability of the findings. The reliance on self-reported data, though validated, is also subject to social desirability biases. However, the strong internal consistency of our instruments and the clear, statistically significant patterns we identified provide a solid foundation for confidence in the core results.

5.2 Recommendations for Further Research

Future research should build upon this foundation in several concrete ways. First, a longitudinal study tracking the same cohort of students could illuminate how motivational orientations evolve as proficiency increases and students' progress into their specialized majors. Second, employing mixed methods by incorporating qualitative interviews would yield richer, more nuanced insights into the personal narratives and societal pressures that underpin these quantitative scores. Finally, investigating the efficacy of specifically designed instrumental-motivation-based teaching interventions against traditional methods would provide direct evidence for translating these findings into enhanced learning outcomes. In light of these results, it is evident that understanding the instrumental drivers of EFL learners is not merely an academic exercise but a practical imperative for educational efficacy. For nations like Oman, where English proficiency is a gateway to economic diversification and global engagement, aligning educational practices with the authentic motivations of students is a crucial step toward empowering the next generation.

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Authors Contribution Statement

All the authors equally contributed to this work and approved the final version of this manuscript.

Ethics Approval Statement

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the head of the PSC department of UTAS. Ethical approval code of the Iranian Ministry of Higher Education is issued.

Declaration of AI Use

The authors used ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Grammarly tools were used solely to improve the clarity of the text and to make minor linguistic adjustments, without affecting the study's core content or findings. The authors critically reviewed and substantially revised all AI-assisted outputs and take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

Has this article been screened for Similarity?

Yes



Conflict of interest

The Authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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