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Using Expectancy-Value Theory to Understand Motivation Patterns of Learners of English as a Foreign Language: An Exploratory Analysis

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Article information	
Abstract	The motivation of students learning a second language (L2) is undeniably critical to their success, and L2 researchers have increasingly incorporated mainstream motivation theories to study the phenomenon. While expectancy-value theory (EVT), developed by Eccles and colleagues (Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) is acknowledged as one of the most comprehensive motivation theories, it has received little attention in the L2 field. This paper reports on a cross-sectional, quantitative study that employed EVT in exploring L2 motivation among English as a foreign language (EFL) students in one Vietnamese university. Exploratory factor analysis differentiated the five EVT constructs in this sample. The constructs also showed different patterns of association with two L2-specific motivated behaviours. Expectancy for success and intrinsic value showed the strongest associations with English learning effort (r = .49 and .40, respectively) and willingness to communicate (r = .35 and .31), whereas attainment and utility values showed smaller positive associations. Cost was unrelated to learning effort and weakly negatively associated with willingness to communicate (r = -.18). The findings suggest that examining EVT constructs separately can reveal motivational patterns that may be obscured when expectancy or task value is treated more broadly. They also support further investigation of EVT as a complementary framework for L2 motivation research.
Keywords	Expectancy-value theory, L2 learner motivation, Vietnamese EFL learners, English learning effort, willingness to communicate
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1. Introduction

Motivation plays a central role in second language learning because it shapes learners' willingness to initiate, sustain, and invest effort in the prolonged process of developing another language (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Al-Hoorie & Macintyre, 2020). Understanding what motivates L2 learners is therefore important not only for explaining variation in learning engagement and achievement, but also for helping language teachers and curriculum developers create learning conditions that sustain students' participation and effort (Lamb,

2017). Since the pioneering work of Gardner and Lambert (1959), L2 motivation research developed for many years as a relatively independent field, with theoretical frameworks designed specifically to capture the distinctive characteristics of language learning (Al-Hoorie & Macintyre, 2020). More recently, however, the field has increasingly engaged with theories from mainstream educational psychology, broadening the range of motivational processes examined in L2 learning (Al-Hoorie, 2017; Boo et al., 2015; Lamb, 2017).

One influential framework that remains comparatively underused in L2 motivation research is Eccles et al.'s expectancy-value theory (EVT) (Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000, 2020). Although EVT is recognised as one of the major theories of achievement motivation in mainstream educational psychology (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Schunk et al., 2014; Wigfield et al., 2017), relatively few L2 studies have employed it (Loh, 2019). This omission is important because EVT offers an integrative account of motivation that incorporates both learners' beliefs about whether they can succeed and their reasons for engaging in a learning activity. More specifically, it brings together expectancy for success with differentiated dimensions of task value - attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost - within a single framework. Such an approach is particularly relevant to L2 learning, where learners may simultaneously differ in how successful they expect to be, how much they enjoy learning the language, how personally important or useful they perceive it to be, and what emotional or opportunity costs they associate with learning it (Nagle, 2021). Yet, the extent to which these differentiated EVT constructs can be empirically identified and meaningfully related to L2-specific motivated behaviours remains insufficiently understood (Hoang, 2021; Nagle, 2021).

Consequently, the study reported here investigates the applicability of EVT to L2 motivation among first-year English-major students at a Vietnamese university. Specifically, it interrogates whether the five EVT constructs can be empirically differentiated in this L2 context and examines their associations with two established L2-specific motivated behaviours: English learning effort and willingness to communicate (WTC) in the English classroom. Accordingly, the study addresses the following two research questions:

1. To what extent can the five EVT constructs be empirically differentiated in a Vietnamese L2 learning context?
2. How are the five EVT constructs associated with English learning effort and willingness to communicate in the English classroom?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Cognitive Psychological Theories to Explore L2 Motivation

Research into motivation within the L2 field has been largely dominated by two frameworks: one is Gardner's socio-educational model (Gardner, 1985, 2006; Gardner & Lambert, 1959, 1972); and the other is Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). These L2-specific frameworks have provided valuable insights into characteristics of motivation that are particularly salient to language learning, including the integrative orientation in Gardner's socio-educational model (i.e., language learners' positive attitudes toward the people and culture of the target language) and the ideal L2 self in Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (i.e., L2 learners' personal vision and goal as a competent user of the target language). However, their emphasis on language-specific dimensions may leave other achievement-related motivational considerations less explicitly represented (Al-Hoorie &

Hiver, 2020; Ushioda, 1998). For example, learners may invest in English not only because of an integrative orientation or an ideal L2 self, but also because they perceive English as useful for future employment, believe that they are likely to succeed in learning it, enjoy particular language-learning activities, or perceive substantial emotional, effort, or opportunity costs associated with learning it. These considerations are particularly relevant in EFL contexts where English may simultaneously function as a language to be learned, an academic subject, and a resource for future educational or career goals. As Crookes and Schmidt (1991) suggested, such circumstances require more general and comprehensive frameworks, such as cognitive theories from mainstream educational psychology, to explore L2 learners' motivation. In response, the L2 field has recently witnessed the exponential growth of research literature using different mainstream psychological perspectives to explain language learners' motivation (Al-Hoorie, 2017; Boo et al., 2015; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

Among these theoretical approaches, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000), self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986), attribution theory (Weiner, 1985, 1992), and goal theory (Elliott & Dweck, 1988) have been most frequently used in the L2 field (Boo et al., 2015; Lamb, 2017). As observed in comprehensive reviews of L2 motivational research (Al-Hoorie, 2017; Boo et al., 2015; Lamb, 2017) mainstream psychological motivation theories provide valuable alternatives for exploring language learner motivation. However, these frameworks often focus on either the reasons for engaging in achievement/learning activities (e.g. self-determination theory) or perceived competence beliefs (e.g. attribution theory, self-efficacy theory) linked to the activities. These theories, therefore, might not of themselves address L2 motivation more broadly; hence the attention to another major psychological motivational theory, expectancy-value theory, which provides a complementary perspective by bringing competence-related beliefs and differentiated reasons for valuing an activity into the same achievement-motivation framework.

2.2. Expectancy-Value Theory as a Synthesised Motivation Framework

Originating in the work of Atkinson (1957), Eccles and her associates have developed a modern expectancy-value theory that incorporates both competency-related beliefs and reasons for engaging in a learning task (Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002, 2020). The model indicates that an individual's achievement behaviours such as performance, choice and effort are influenced by their expectancy beliefs and relative task values.

The expectancy component in the model is often referred to as expectancy for success which relates to the learner's question: "Can I do this task?" and reflects "individuals' beliefs about how well they will do on upcoming tasks, either in the immediate or longer-term future" (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002, p. 119). Eccles and Wigfield (1995, 2002) emphasised the connection between the constructs of expectancy beliefs in their model and various motivational constructs discussed in other theoretical perspectives which focus on competence-related beliefs. For example, Eccles and Wigfield (2002) argued that expectancies for success, as individuals' beliefs about how well they will perform a certain upcoming task, are comparable to the notion of personal efficacy expectations proposed by Bandura (1997), as personal beliefs about whether one can do well on a given task that is essential to produce the outcome. However, there are still minor differences between the two constructs in terms of specificity and comparability. Expectancy beliefs in Eccles et al.'s model are often measured

with more domain specificity whereas self-efficacy beliefs are defined as a task-specific construct. As a result, expectancy-related beliefs indicate a more general disposition than self-efficacy beliefs (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Furthermore, comparability, for example across school subjects, can be included in items measuring expectancy constructs, such as "Compared to other subjects, how good are you at English?"

While expectancy beliefs are crucial components of the EVT model, Eccles and Wigfield (2002) have argued that, even if individuals are confident about their ability to succeed in an upcoming task, they may have little interest in doing it. Hence, the task value component in Eccles et al.'s model, reflecting individuals' desire to undertake different tasks, revolves around the questions "Do I want to do the task and why?" (Musu-Gillette et al., 2015) and these are subjective in nature. Eccles and her colleagues categorised subjective task values into four constructs: attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost (Eccles, 2005; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992, 2000).

Attainment value is defined as the "personal importance attached to doing well on, or participating in, a given task" (Eccles, 2005, p. 109). This construct is closely related to the issue of identity; that is, individuals will value the tasks which they view as integral to their self-concept or those that enable them to manifest or affirm significant facets of self (Wigfield et al., 2009). Eccles (2005) highlighted the link between this construct and notions of the psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985). Eccles (2005) also argued that attainment value is similar to identified and integrated regulation in self-determination theory. For example, a person may choose to study English because their life goal is to speak more than one language.

Intrinsic value, or interest value, refers to "the enjoyment one gains from doing the task or the anticipated enjoyment one expects to experience while doing the task" (Eccles, 2005, p. 111). Eccles (2005) claimed that this construct is conceptualised similarly with the notion of flow, the immediate experience individuals have when engaging in an activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988), and intrinsic motivation as defined by Deci and Ryan (1985). An example of intrinsic value in the context of this study is that individuals may simply enjoy listening to, reading, writing in, and speaking English.

Utility value is conceptualised as the usefulness of a task or "how well a task (is) related to (the) current (short-term) or future (long-term) goals" of an individual (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002, p. 120). For example, an individual may decide to enrol in an English major program because their short-term goal is to watch movies in English, and/or their long-term goal is to secure a highly paid job which demands the use of English. This construct is not dissimilar to that of extrinsic motivation defined by Deci and Ryan (1985).

Finally, cost is defined as the "negative aspects of engaging in the task" (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002, p. 120). These may include opportunity cost, such as giving up alternative activities; emotional cost, such as anxiety; and the effort perceived as necessary to succeed. Cost has historically received less research attention than the positive task-value components, but it has increasingly become an important area of EVT research, including debate over whether it should be conceptualised as part of subjective task value or as a distinct motivational component (Barron & Hulleman, 2015; Flake et al., 2015; Muenks et al., 2023; Wigfield et al., 2017). This construct may be particularly pertinent to L2 learning, which can involve sustained effort, anxiety associated with communicating in another language, and trade-offs with

competing academic or personal activities. The present study therefore treats cost as an important component to be examined alongside expectancy and positive task values.

2.3 The Application of Expectancy-Value Theory in the L2 Motivation Field

Expectancy-value theory is acknowledged as one of the most comprehensive and advocated motivation frameworks in educational settings (Schunk et al., 2014; Wigfield et al., 2017). In their authoritative book on L2 motivation, Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011) provide a detailed account of expectancy-value theory, highlighting its comprehensive nature. Therefore, it is surprising that this theoretical approach has seen limited application in the L2 field. The paucity of L2 motivation research employing the framework is conspicuous, as illustrated in state-of-the-art articles (e.g., in Boo et al., 2015; Lamb, 2017). Only more recently has the potential relevance of EVT to language learning been highlighted explicitly, accompanied by calls for its wider application (Loh, 2019; Wang & Xue, 2022). The reasons for this limited uptake have not been established empirically. One possible explanation is the historical prominence of theoretical frameworks developed specifically for L2 motivation, which may have reduced attention to a mainstream achievement-motivation framework such as EVT. Whatever the reason, its limited application leaves relatively little evidence about whether its theoretically differentiated expectancy and value constructs can be meaningfully identified and related to motivated behaviours in L2 settings.

Among the limited EVT L2 research was a study of English non-major students in the Japanese context by Mori and Gobel (2006) who claimed to be the first to use this theoretical framework in the field. They used EVT in combination with Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model. By combining the two theoretical perspectives, the resulting motivational constructs included integrativeness, intrinsic value, amotivation, and attainment. The original component of expectancy beliefs in Eccles et al.'s model, however, could not be distinguished empirically. These results were incongruent with how the constructs were originally conceptualised, either by Gardner or by Eccles and her colleagues, and this discrepancy was not explained further by the researchers. This suggests the need for caution when combining different theoretical perspectives in one research study. Similarly, Wilby (2019), using a framework combining goal theory, EVT, and self-efficacy theory to investigate English writing motivation among international students in the United Kingdom, was unable to recover the original EVT constructs empirically. These findings do not in themselves demonstrate that combining motivational theories is inappropriate. However, they suggest that combining conceptually overlapping constructs from multiple frameworks may complicate the empirical identification and interpretation of theoretically distinct EVT components. Rather, they reinforce the need to employ a stand-alone EVT theoretical perspective before considering its integration with other motivational perspectives.

In a more recent study, Hu and McGeown (2020) reported the emergence of two EVT general components, namely expectancy and value, among Chinese primary-school EFL students. Their study revealed that while both expectancy and value were significant predictors of students' L2 achievement, there were decreasing patterns of expectancy belief and value as students aged. While the study findings illustrate the generalisable validity of expectancy and value and their predictive power within an EFL context, the study, like other expectancy-value studies in the L2 field, measured value as a general component rather than as separate intrinsic, attainment, utility and cost constructs. Therefore, there is still a need to assess whether those

EVT individual value constructs can be identified and whether their intercorrelation, as hypothesised by Eccles and colleagues, can be observed across L2 contexts.

In the light of the background trends and deficiencies stated above, the study reported here takes a deliberately focused approach to examining EVT in a L2 context. EVT is employed as the sole motivational framework, and its expectancy and differentiated value constructs including cost are operationalised separately rather than combined into general expectancy and value dimensions. The study further contextualises these constructs for language learning and examines their associations with two L2-specific motivated behaviours: English learning effort and willingness to communicate in the English classroom. In doing so, the study investigates both whether the differentiated EVT structure can be empirically identified in this EFL context and whether distinguishing its component constructs provides additional insight into L2 motivated behaviours.

3. Methodology

This study reports on cross-sectional quantitative data collected at the beginning of a broader longitudinal investigation of Vietnamese first-year English-major students (Hoang, 2021). It examined five constructs derived from Eccles et al.'s expectancy-value theory including expectancies for success, attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost; and their associations with two L2-specific motivated behaviours: English learning effort and willingness to communicate (WTC) in the English classroom. The internal structure of the five EVT constructs examined here was evaluated using exploratory factor analysis (EFA), alongside internal-consistency analyses.

3.1 Instruments

The initial survey instrument included two components measuring the five EVT motivational constructs and the two L2 motivated behaviours. The items in the latter were adjusted from well-established classroom willingness to communicate scales (Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Weaver, 2005) and learning effort scales (e.g. Busse & Walter, 2013; Taguchi et al., 2009) in the L2 field. The development of the items in the former component was theoretically informed by the definitions and measurement approaches used in Eccles and colleagues' EVT research (e.g., Eccles & Wigfield, 1995; Wigfield et al., 1997), while also incorporating characteristics specific to L2 learning. In particular, most EVT constructs were operationalised at both a general English level and, where appropriate, at the level of individual English-language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This approach was intended to preserve the theoretical meaning of the EVT constructs while making their operationalisation relevant to the English-major context. These are outlined below.

Expectancies for Success. This construct was operationalised as learners' beliefs about how well they expected to perform or improve in future English-learning activities (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Six items were developed, comprising expectations at both general English and language-skill-specific levels, together with a comparative item. One sample item was "I expect that I will improve my English a lot this semester."

Attainment Value: Following Eccles's (2005) conceptualisation of attainment value as the personal importance of doing well in an activity, six items measured the importance participants attached to being proficient in English. Two items addressed English more

generally and four addressed the importance of proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. One sample item was “I think being good at English is very important to me.”

Intrinsic Value: Six items operationalised intrinsic value as learners’ enjoyment of English and English-learning activities (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Two items measured general enjoyment of English and English learning, whereas four focused respectively on listening, speaking, reading, and writing. One sample item was "I really like English."

Utility Value. Utility value was operationalised as the perceived usefulness of English for learners’ current and future goals (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). The initial pilot version contained seven items. Two addressed relatively immediate uses of English and five addressed its relevance to longer-term goals. These items drew partly on instrumentality items widely used in L2 motivation research (e.g., Gardner, 2006; Taguchi et al., 2009). Examples included “I am studying English so that I can watch movies and listen to songs in English” and “I am studying English to get a good job in the future.”

Cost. In EVT, cost includes negative consequences associated with undertaking an activity, including opportunity, emotional, and required-effort costs (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). The pilot instrument included items representing these dimensions. Following pilot testing, the scale used in the main survey comprised five items: two measuring opportunity cost and three measuring foreign language anxiety as an L2-specific indicator of emotional cost. For example, “Studying English means that I have to give up other activities” measured opportunity cost, while items concerning nervousness when speaking English represented emotional cost.

English Learning Effort. Six items measured participants’ perceived investment of effort in learning English. These were adapted from established L2 motivation measures (e.g., Busse & Walter, 2013; Taguchi et al., 2009) and included both general and language-skill-specific effort. One sample item was “In general, I spend lots of time studying English.”

Willingness to Communicate in the English classroom. The three willingness to communicate items sought to measure the participants’ readiness to use English within classroom contexts, as suggested by Peng and Woodrow (2010). One sample item was “I am willing to ask my peer sitting next to me in English the meaning of an English word I don’t know.”

The questionnaire items were initially written or adapted in English and subsequently translated into Vietnamese by the first author, who had more than ten years of experience teaching English, including translation courses. The Vietnamese version was independently translated back into English by a Vietnamese PhD researcher who had more than five years of professional experience in the translation industry. The two English versions were compared, and discrepancies were discussed by the two translators to refine the Vietnamese wording, following the principles of back-translation described by Sperber (2004). The Vietnamese questionnaire was then reviewed by five Vietnamese PhD researchers who had each worked in TESOL for at least ten years and were familiar with English language teaching and learning in Vietnam. They reviewed the face validity and clarity of the items, including their wording and questionnaire presentation (Hardesty & Bearden, 2004). Their feedback resulted primarily in wording refinements.

Having obtained ethics approval, the revised questionnaire was piloted among another cohort of Vietnamese EFL first year student participants ($N = 108$). Their feedback prompted adjustments to make the questionnaire more user-friendly and understandable. For example, more informal Vietnamese forms of address were adopted, and the response scales were repositioned alongside individual statements to improve readability.

Exploratory factor analysis of the pilot data generally supported the intended construct structure. Reliability analysis led to the removal of three items: one cost item (Cos.6) and two utility-value items (Ut.6 and Ut.7). Following these amendments, Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the broader set of scales ranged from .62 to .91. The cost scale had the lowest coefficient ($\alpha = .62$), which was at the lower end of acceptable reliability for an exploratory, newly developed instrument (Field, 2017) and is therefore interpreted cautiously rather than treated as evidence of strong internal consistency.

3.2 Participants and Data Collection

The study was conducted at a multidisciplinary higher education institution in Hanoi, Vietnam. The institution had offered its undergraduate English-major programme since 2008 and typically admitted approximately 150 students to the programme each year. The cohort targeted comprised 149 first-year English-major students. In their first year, students would undertake courses designed to develop English proficiency, including skill-focused units such as speaking and writing, as well as courses in English linguistics such as theoretical grammar. Of the 149 students in the cohort, 145 returned questionnaires, giving an initial response rate of 97.3%. After missing-data and outlier screening, 141 valid cases remained for analysis, representing 94.6% of the cohort.

Data were collected at the beginning of the university year, immediately following the students' orientation week and at the outset of their first semester. This timing was deliberately selected to capture participants' motivation as close as practicable to entry into the English-major programme, before substantial exposure to their university learning environment. It also preceded formal course assessments, thereby reducing the likelihood that recent assessment experiences and associated washback effects (Cheng & Curtis, 2012) would substantially shape participants' reported motivation and learning effort. Nevertheless, the data should be interpreted as representing motivation at the beginning of university study rather than motivation entirely unaffected by initial university experiences.

The questionnaire was administered as a paper-and-pencil survey by the first author, who had previously worked at the institution but had left approximately two years before data collection and had not taught, and was not expected to teach, any of the participants in the cohort. Institutional permission to conduct the study had been obtained in addition to ethics approval from the researchers' home university. To reduce potential power-related pressure, the students' current lecturers did not administer or collect the questionnaires.

After introducing the study, explaining voluntary participation, and answering questions, the first author left the students to complete the questionnaire independently. Participants were informed that they could choose not to complete or return the questionnaire without consequence. A collection box for survey completions was provided, and the researcher returned approximately 30 minutes later to collect the questionnaires. Completion typically required approximately 10 minutes.

The focus on English-major students was deliberate because English represented not only a foreign language and university subject for these participants but also a chosen field of study with implications for their future careers. At the same time, this purposive context may have contributed to relatively high scores on some positive value scales, particularly attainment and utility value. The possibility of restricted upper-range variability or ceiling effects is

therefore considered when interpreting the findings and is acknowledged as a limitation of the study.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS® version 25. Responses were first screened for missing data, outliers, and violations of statistical assumptions. Potential extreme outliers were examined using standardised scores outside ±3.29 (Mayers, 2013; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Trial analyses indicated that their inclusion affected some correlations involving English learning effort; therefore, the extreme cases were excluded. After screening, 141 valid cases remained for analysis. Although several variables showed moderate negative skewness, skewness and kurtosis values remained within ±2 and ±7, respectively (Curran et al., 1996). No data transformations were therefore applied.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted using Principal Axis Factoring with Direct Oblimin rotation to examine whether the EVT constructs could be empirically differentiated in this L2 context. EFA was preferred to Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) because the instrument was newly developed and contextualised for Vietnamese EFL learners rather than adopted unchanged from an established EVT scale. This approach also reflected the exploratory purpose of examining whether the theoretically proposed constructs would emerge in this setting. Following pilot testing, 28 items measuring the five EVT constructs entered the main analysis. Items with loadings below |.30| or problematic cross-loadings were considered for removal. Factor retention was guided by inspection of the scree plot and eigenvalues greater than 1. Based on these criteria, one utility-value item (Ut.5) was removed, leaving 27 items across five factors. Cronbach's alpha was subsequently calculated to assess internal consistency. Full item loadings are reported in the Appendix**.** Finally, bivariate Pearson correlations examined associations among the EVT constructs and their associations with English learning effort and classroom willingness to communicate. To improve the robustness of the correlational results, 1,000-sample bootstrapping was used to estimate 95% confidence intervals (Plonsky et al., 2014).

4. Findings

4.1 Factor Structure and Reliability

The data were suitable for factor analysis, with a Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value of .773 and a significant Bartlett's test of sphericity, $\chi^2 = 1949.87$, $p < .001$. The EFA yielded a five-factor solution corresponding to expectancies for success, attainment value, intrinsic value, cost, and utility value. All five factors had eigenvalues greater than 1 and together accounted for approximately 63.63% of the total variance.

Across the 27 retained items, absolute factor loadings ranged from .350 to .929, with all items loading above the predetermined |.30| criterion. Full item-level loadings are presented in the Appendix. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the five resulting scales ranged from .69 to .92 (Table 1). These findings address Research Question 1 by indicating that the five theoretically differentiated EVT constructs could also be empirically differentiated in this L2 sample.

Table 1

Correlation Matrix of Expectancy-Value Constructs (N = 141)

	α	*M*	*SD*	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3	4	5
1. IN	.81	5.44	0.81	-0.45	0.18	-				
2. AT	.69	6.45	0.40	-0.67	-0.31	.42** [.27, .56]	-			
3. UT	.74	6.06	0.68	-0.94	0.89	.30** [.16, .44]	.37** [.22, .51]	-		
4. COS	.71	3.67	1.19	-0.28	-0.39	-.34** [-.48, -.16]	-.05 [-.20, .09]	-.02 [-.19, .15]	-	
5. EXP	.92	5.39	0.79	-0.88	1.49	.37** [.20, .53]	.04 [-.12, .20]	.12 [-.07, .29]	-.10 [-.28, .07]	-

Note. IN: intrinsic value, AT: attainment value, UT: utility value, COS: cost, EXP: expectancies for success. * indicates $p < .05$; ** indicates $p < 0.01$. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval determined by 1000-sample bootstrapping.

4.2 Intercorrelations between EVT Constructs

Pearson correlations revealed significant positive associations among the three positive value constructs (Table 1). Intrinsic value was associated with attainment value ($r = .42$), utility value ($r = .30$), and expectancies for success ($r = .37$), and was negatively associated with cost ($r = -.34$). The association between intrinsic and attainment values was stronger than that between intrinsic and utility values.

In contrast, attainment and utility values were not significantly associated with cost ($r = -.05$ and -.02, respectively) or expectancies for success ($r = .04$ and .12, respectively). Cost was also not significantly associated with expectancies for success ($r = -.10$). Thus, among the value constructs, intrinsic value was the only one significantly associated with both cost and expectancies for success.

4.3 EVT Constructs and L2 Motivated Behaviours

To address the second research question, the correlations between EVT constructs and motivated behaviours of English learning effort (EFF) and willingness to communicate (WTC) in the English classroom are presented in Table 2. EFF was positively associated with expectancy for success ($r = .49$), intrinsic value ($r = .40$), attainment value ($r = .28$), and utility value ($r = .20$), but not with cost ($r = .00$). The largest associations were therefore with expectancy for success and intrinsic value.

Table 2

Correlation matrix of EVT constructs and motivated behaviours (N = 141)

	IN	AT	UT	COS	EXP
EFF	.40**	.28**	.20*	.00	.49**
	[.25, .54]	[.12, .45]	[.04, .36]	[-.19, .17]	[.33, .63]
WTC	.31**	.18*	.23**	-.18*	.35**
	[.14, .47]	[.02, .33]	[.03, .42]	[-.34, -.01]	[.17, .52]

Note. IN: intrinsic value, AT: attainment value, UT: utility value, COS: cost, EXP: expectancies for success, EFF: English learning effort, WTC = willingness to communicate in the English classroom. * indicates $p < .05$; ** indicates $p < 0.01$. Values in square brackets indicate the 95% confidence interval determined by 1000-sample bootstrapping.

A similar pattern emerged for WTC. Expectancy for success ($r = .35$) and intrinsic value ($r = .31$) showed the largest positive associations, followed by utility ($r = .23$) and attainment value ($r = .18$). Cost was weakly and negatively associated with WTC ($r = -.18$). Overall, the differentiated EVT constructs showed different magnitudes and patterns of association with the two L2-specific motivated behaviours, with expectancy for success and intrinsic value most consistently associated with both outcomes.

5. Discussion

While Eccles et al.'s expectancy-value theory is well established as one of the most influential motivation frameworks in mainstream education, it has received little attention in the L2 field. To date, this study has been one of very few attempts to employ the framework *in toto* to explore L2 learners' motivation *in situ* - that is, to examine its differentiated expectancy and value constructs as a coherent framework within an authentic EFL learning context, rather than combining EVT with other theories or reducing task value to a single general construct.

Our findings provide support for using EVT as a differentiated framework for examining L2 motivation. Most importantly, the five theoretically proposed constructs could be empirically differentiated in this Vietnamese EFL sample. The contribution is not simply that EVT constructs emerged in another educational context, but that distinguishing the individual value components revealed motivational patterns that would have been obscured by treating value as a single composite construct. The findings revealed that intrinsic, attainment, and utility values showed different relationships with expectancy beliefs and with the two L2-specific motivated behaviours. These support the notion of examining these value components separately in future L2 research rather than collapsing them into a general value factor, as in some previous applications of EVT (e.g., Hu & McGeown, 2020).

Our correlation analyses revealed that while there were several associations between EVT constructs consistent with the hypothesised relation proposed by Eccles and colleagues, there were some which were not, for example, non-significant links of expectancy for success with attainment value and utility value. Noticeably, intrinsic value was uniquely positioned: it was positively associated with attainment value, utility value, and expectancies for success, and negatively associated with cost. While these findings confirmed the relationship between value- and ability-related constructs (Jacobs et al., 2002; Wigfield et al., 1997), it extends current understanding by highlighting the central role that intrinsic value may play in connecting different constructs within expectancy-value theory.

Furthermore, EVT theorists conceptualise cost as a negative component within subjective task value (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). This study, however, has revealed cost to have limited negative associations with other value constructs, except for intrinsic value. One plausible explanation lies in the conceptual proximity between intrinsic value and the affective experience of learning: intrinsic value concerns enjoyment of an activity, whereas emotional cost captures negative affective experiences such as anxiety (Flake et al., 2015). This interpretation is particularly relevant because three of the five retained cost items in the present study measured foreign-language anxiety. Importantly, however, cost was also not significantly associated with expectancy for success. This contrasts with previous EVT research reporting substantial negative cost-expectancy relationships (e.g., Flake et al., 2015; Kosovich et al., 2015). One possible explanation is the different operational alignment of the constructs. In the present study, expectancy primarily concerned anticipated future improvement across English skills, whereas cost combined speaking-related anxiety with opportunity costs associated with studying English. Learners may therefore experience anxiety or perceive sacrifices associated with English study while still expecting their proficiency to improve. The findings of this study are theoretically important as they add weight to recent calls for further investigation of the role of cost, and whether cost should be considered as an independent construct rather than a negative component within subjective task values (Barron & Hulleman, 2015; Flake et al., 2015; Wigfield et al., 2017).

Another noticeable finding of this investigation has been that expectancies for success only significantly link to intrinsic value rather than other value constructs. In other words, while participants' expectancies for success with English were associated with their enjoyment of studying the language, these ability-related beliefs were not significantly associated with participants' perceptions of the usefulness and personal importance linked to this foreign language. These findings were not surprising given the Vietnamese context, where English has been strongly promoted through national policy as important for international integration, employment, and economic development (Nguyen et al., 2020). In a collectivist society like Vietnam (Nguyen, 2016; Phuong-Mai et al., 2005), students' utility value and even the personal importance they attach to learning English may be shaped not only by their own experiences of success with the language but also by broader social influences. These may include national narratives about the economic and professional value of English, parental expectations regarding education and career prospects (Le et al., 2020), which can reinforce the perceived importance and usefulness of English irrespective of students' prior achievement.

Regarding the second research question, the EVT constructs showed different patterns of association with the two L2-specific motivated behaviours. Expectancy for success, intrinsic value, attainment value, and utility value were positively associated with both English learning effort and classroom WTC. Cost was unrelated to English learning effort but was weakly negatively associated with WTC. Overall, expectancy for success and intrinsic value showed the largest and most consistent associations with both motivated behaviours. These findings, therefore, enrich current understandings of EVT constructs which are not only predictive of traditional motivation indicators in mainstream education, such as achievement and choice to continue (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000, 2020), but also associated with L2-specific motivated behaviours.

Noticeably, expectancy for success and intrinsic value showed the strongest and most consistent associations with both English learning effort and classroom WTC. While the

generalisability of these results, given the exploratory nature and the scale of this study, needs confirmation in future research across contexts and over time, they broadly conform to previous L2 studies which highlight the important role of intrinsic motivation (Noels et al., 2000; Noels et al., 2019) and self-efficacy beliefs (Mills, 2014; Woodrow, 2011). It bears noting that these two constructs, though drawn from different theoretical frameworks, are similarly conceptualised with intrinsic value and expectancies for success within expectancy-value theory. The findings in this study, therefore, suggest the efficacy of expectancy-value theory as a more comprehensive motivational framework that incorporates both value-related and competence-related beliefs.

At a practical level, the results indicate the need to encourage both EFL learners' intrinsic value and expectancy beliefs to ensure their learning engagement and willingness to communicate in the English classroom. To support intrinsic value, teachers can draw more deliberately on students' interests and needs when selecting topics and activities. Needs analysis has long been used in language education to connect learners' needs with course aims and materials (Seedhouse, 1995), while more recent L2 research shows that classroom and teacher-related factors can shape learners' enjoyment and motivation (Dewaele et al., 2018; Dewaele et al., 2022). Expectancy beliefs may also be supported by giving students achievable opportunities to experience progress and by providing feedback that makes this progress visible. This is particularly relevant in the Vietnamese context, where mastery experience has been found to be an important source of English-learning self-efficacy (Truong & Wang, 2019).

6. Limitations & Future Research

Several limitations need to be kept in mind when interpreting these findings. First, the study was cross-sectional and based on correlational analyses, so the relationships reported here should not be read as evidence of causal effects. Second, the sample came from one cohort of English-major students at a single Vietnamese institution. These students had already chosen English as their field of study, which may partly explain the high attainment and utility scores and limits the extent to which the findings can be generalised to other EFL learners.

The study also relied on self-report measures of motivation, learning effort, and willingness to communicate. Such measures capture students' perceptions rather than their behaviour directly and may be affected by social desirability. In addition, the measurement model was explored using EFA rather than confirmed with CFA in an independent sample. Future studies could therefore test the factor structure with larger and more diverse samples and include behavioural or observational measures alongside self-report data.

7. Conclusion

This study examined EVT as a framework for understanding motivation among Vietnamese first-year English-major students. The findings showed that expectancy for success, attainment value, intrinsic value, utility value, and cost could be empirically differentiated in this sample. Moreover, the EVT constructs appear to be useful in understanding L2-specific motivated behaviours of English learning effort and willingness to communicate in the English classroom. Accordingly, we argue for a wider use of this approach to complement existing theoretical frameworks by providing a broader, more complete understanding of student behaviour to learn a second language.

8. About the Authors

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10. Declaration of AI Use

The authors used Grammarly for identifying spelling and grammatical errors. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and content of the article.

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12. Appendix

Exploratory factor analysis and reliability results

	Factors				
	1	2	3	4	5
Factor 1: Expectancies for success (Eigenvalue = 6.41; 23.75% of variance explained, α = .92)					
Exp.3 I expect that I will improve in my English listening a lot this semester.	.929				
Exp.5 I expect that I will improve in my English reading a lot this semester.	.908				
Exp.6 I expect that I will improve in my English writing a lot this semester.	.844				
Exp.4 I expect that I will improve my English speaking a lot this semester.	.823				
Exp.1 I expect that I will improve my English a lot this semester.	.697				
Exp.2 This semester, I think I will do better in my English classes than most of my subjects.	.635				
Factor 2: Attainment value (Eigenvalue = 4.76; 17.63% of variance explained, α = .69)					
At.4 I think being good at speaking English is important to me.		.902			
At.3 I think being good at listening comprehension in English is important to me.		.876			
At.6 I think being good at writing in English is important to me.		.799			
At.5 I think being good at reading English is important to me.		.794			
At.1. I think being good at English is very important to me.		.743			
At.2. English major suits my personality.		.473			
Factor 3: Intrinsic value (Eigenvalue = 2.80; 10.36% of variance explained, α = .81)					
In.5 Reading things in English is really enjoyable to me (e.g., reading novels in English).			-.836		
In.4 Speaking English is really enjoyable to me.			-.688		
In.6 I really enjoy writing things in English (e.g., writing Facebook status, diary...).			-.562		
In.1 I find learning English is really enjoyable.			-.519		
In.2 I really like English.			-.481		
In.3 I really enjoy hearing English spoken.			-.415		
Factor 4: Cost (Eigenvalue = 1.85; 6.84% of variance explained, α = .71)					
Cos.4 I get nervous when I am speaking English in my English class.				.739	
Cos.1 I am afraid that other students will laugh at me when I speak English.				.713	

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Cos.5. I feel nervous when speaking English with a native speaker.	.496	
Cos.3 Choosing English major, I had to give up other majors that I preferred.	.443	
Cos.2 Studying English means that I have to give up other activities.	.350	
Factor 5: Utility value (Eigenvalue = 1.37; 5.06% of variance explained, α = .74)		
Ut.1 I am studying English to get a good job in the future.		.740
Ut.2 I am studying English because high English proficiency can help me to earn more money.		.730
Ut.4 I am studying English so that I can watch movies or listen to songs in English.		.427
Ut.3 I am studying English because I want to work in an environment where I will use English.		.415