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The Impact of a Pedagogical, Classroom-based Motivational Intervention on EFL Learners' Reading Achievement

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ABSTRACT

The present study is an attempt to investigate the effect of a type of motivational strategy designed to boost EFL learners' motivation on their reading comprehension ability. To achieve this goal, 69 EFL learners studying English in two intact classes were divided into two groups. The control group received the traditional method of pre-reading, reading, and post-reading activities while the experimental group was asked to write compositions about the factors that motivate people to learn English and read them in the class before starting their usual classroom activities. This intervention was supposed to enhance their motivation leading to better performance on reading comprehension. Then, two paired-samples t-test were run to compare the scores of both groups on the pre- and post-tests. The results of the tests showed a significant increase in the mean scores of the experimental group whereas for the control group mean scores did not change dramatically. The results of these statistical tests confirmed the efficiency of our proposed strategy in improving the learners' reading comprehension ability.

Keywords: Motivation, Intervention, EFL, Reading Comprehension, Iran

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1. Introduction

As Scheidecker and Freeman (2015) stated, motivation and motivating students is one of the most complicated and challenging issues for present-day teachers. One of these areas of challenge is what skills can motivate language learners and how they must be incorporated into the classroom objectives. This leads to the significance of the introduction of practical motivational strategies into language syllabus design in all areas of language practice such as reading comprehension, speaking, writing, and listening comprehension. This importance has been backed by many research endeavors. As per one, Mullen (2015) investigated the effectiveness of teachers' motivational practice in creating motivated behavior in the learners reaching the conclusion that motivational strategies do influence learners' motivation and motivation behavior, or Guilloteaux and

Dörnyei (2008) explored the effect of implementing motivational strategies in the classroom on students motivation and in the conclusion of their study, they signified the linkage of motivational practice to the learners' boosted levels of motivated learning behavior and their motivational state.

One of the areas in which motivational practice can be of utmost usability is that of reading comprehension as lack of motivation in reading may prevent learners from using their reading ability and disengage them from the activity (Davis, Tonks, Hock, Wang, & Rodriguez, 2018). Ahmadi and Gilakjani (2012) stated that reading comprehension involves creating meaning from text with the purpose of understanding the text rather than retrieving meaning from the individual words. In countries where English is taught as a foreign language and English has more instrumental values than

integrative ones, being able to read academic as well as general English texts is one of the main aspirations of those learners involved in English language education (Kharaghani, 2016). Consequently, one of the main concerns of any language classroom is that of improving the reading comprehension ability of the learners, and one of the main factors that can contribute to this aim is reading motivation. Reading motivation, according to Grabe and Stoller (2002), can enhance learners' reading comprehension. This reading motivation may be either intrinsic or extrinsic. This refers to the values the learners attribute to the reading activities in the classroom pertaining to how useful these activities might be in their future or how the activity interests them (Wigfield, Gladstone, & Turci, 2016).

From the above discussion, it is clear that the locus of motivation research is shifting from a theoretical stand toward a methodological and practical one. This article has been written in this vein. As a matter of fact, the purpose of the present study is to determine the effect of a type of motivational strategy on the Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension in order to investigate whether or not drawing learners' attention to the advantages of learning English, hence tapping their motivation, affects their level of reading comprehension. As its framework, this study draws upon Dornyei (2001)'s motivational strategies framework with the intervention program based loosely on the motivational strategies proposed in that framework. Motivational strategies are defined as "those motivational influences that are consciously exerted to achieve some systematic and enduring positive effect" (Dornyei 2001, p. 28). According to Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008), motivational strategies may refer to either instructional interventions utilized by the teacher to enhance and provoke learner motivation or self-regulating strategies applied by the individuals to maintain their level of motivation. The motivational strategy that was used in this study belongs to the teacher-applied type.

Dörnyei's process-oriented framework of motivational strategies was comprised of four aspects. These dimensions were:

- Creating the basic motivational conditions by setting up a good teacher-learner relationship in a collaborative classroom environment as well as establishing cohesive groups to which learners have a sense of belonging.

1. Generating initial motivation through augmenting learners' L2-related values and attitudes, the expectancy of success, and goal-orientedness.
2. Maintaining and protecting motivation
3. Encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation

Figure 1 is a schematic representation of these four components. This model also represented the main macro-strategies pertaining to each category. These macro-strategies were further expanded upon by more than 100 micro-strategies by Dornyei (2001).

Interested in checking the efficacy of the above-mentioned framework, the authors of this study followed a pre-test/post-test control group design to achieve the objective of the study, that is, to assess the effect of motivational practice on the Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. As a result, the following research question emerged: Is there a significant improvement in participants' reading comprehension test scores following participation in an intervention designed to increase their motivation to learn English?

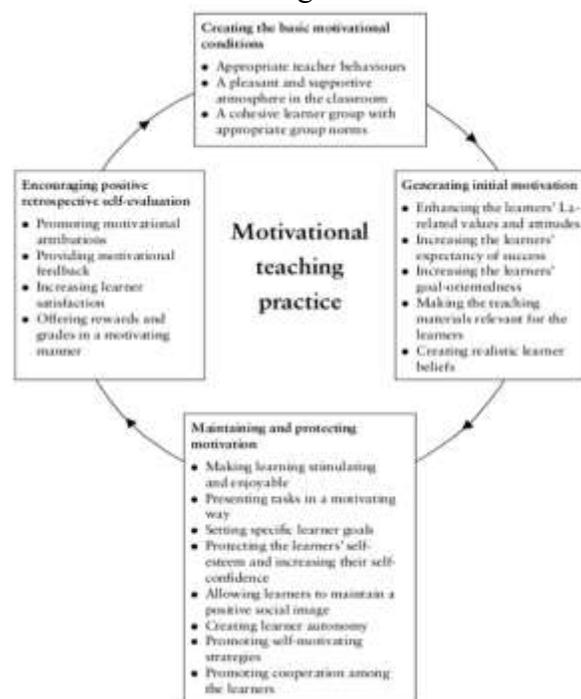


Figure 1: Dörnyei's framework of motivational strategies (Dornyei, 2001, p. 29)

2. Review of the Related Literature

Exploring the effect of motivation on learners' language achievement in general and on different language skills, in particular, has often been one of the areas of interest to the researchers (Khodashenas, Amouzegar, Kishani Farahani, Hasheminasab, & Kazemian, 2013). Among these, the relationship between motivation and the reading achievement is the focus of the present study.



An early attempt to investigate the contribution of motivation to reading comprehension was that of Cox and Guthrie (2001) in which the researchers attempted to identify the factors that account for the amount of reading on the part of learners. For this reason, they administered a motivation questionnaire, along with two more constructs, to 221 participants to determine how they predict the reading amount in learners of grades 3 and 5. The results of their study suggested the highly effective role of motivation on the amount of reading for enjoyment. Tercanlioglu (2001) was another attempt to link motivation to reading comprehension. She used an exploratory methodology to assess the mean level of Turkish learners' reading motivation, to explore gender and grade differences of their motivations to read, and to investigate the relation between reading motivations and reading frequency. Regarding the first objective which is the focus of this literature review, the author concluded that the students were both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to read.

Wang and Guthrie (2004) also drew upon the effects of motivational processes on text comprehension of 384 American and Chinese students to see to what extent the former facilitates the latter. Structural Equation Modelling was utilized as the design of the study and the final findings proposed that the model fit the data well indicating while intrinsic motivation could predict text comprehension in a positive way for both groups, the effects of extrinsic motivation were proved to be negative except when associated with intrinsic motivation. Still, in another study in an Asian context, Dhanapala (2006) conducted a study among 40 pre-university students to assess the levels of integrative and instrumental motivation for reading English as a Second Language. The findings indicated that Pakistani learners were more instrumentally motivated for reading in English in their contexts. Lower levels of integrative motivation were reported to be affecting their reading achievement.

All the studies summarized above, unanimously pointed to the strong relationship between motivation and reading suggesting higher levels of students' motivation are correlated with high levels of reading comprehension. However, as Guilloteaux and Dörnyei (2008) complained, most motivational researchers are more

interested in what motivation is and how it is related to different aspects of language achievement than how we can use this knowledge to motivate learners. This dissatisfaction with the status quo has led many researchers to look for empirical methods to motivate language learners by seeking motivational strategies and down-to-earth teaching practices that help teachers boost learners' motivation in the classroom. This gap is what constituted the main objective of the present study; to check the efficacy of a type of motivational strategy that aimed to enhance the learners' motivation and its role in increasing the reading comprehension ability of those learners.

Although we may be able to spot a couple of research endeavors concerning the above-mentioned shortcoming of motivational research on the relationship between motivation and reading comprehension, a close inspection shows the scarcity of literature in an Iranian context with barely one or two examples conducted in recent years. One of these attempts was Kharaghani (2016) who applied a quasi-experimental design to investigate the impact of a motivating reciprocal teaching and cooperative grouping intervention program on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. As for her conclusion, she stated that motivation played a significant role in increasing the learners' reading comprehension since the intervention changed motivation for reading efficacy, reading curiosity, reading challenge, competition in reading, social reasons for reading, recognition for reading, reading for grades, and compliance.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participants in this study were 69 EFL learners learning English at the pre-intermediate level in a language institute. In addition to these participants, about 10 other learners at the same level but in a different class were interviewed as the first phase of the experiment. As the researchers did not have the opportunity to select and assign the participants randomly into two groups of experimental and control (due to the regulations of the institute), they had to resort to convenient sampling procedure and the classes remained intact. Although all the students had passed the requirements of attending pre-intermediate level and were consequently homogenous, researchers would like to make sure that the participants

in both groups of control and experimental had no significant differences in terms of their reading comprehension ability. To achieve this, at the outset of the experiment, a test of reading comprehension was administered to the subjects to check for their homogeneity. The class during which the intervention program was applied was held twice a week with each session running for 105 minutes. Totally, 16 sessions were held in eight weeks for the whole semester. The participants aged from 15 to 17. The experimental group comprised 30 students and there were 39 students in the control group.

3.2. Instruments

Semi-structured interviews, the reading section of a proficiency test, the final exams for two incessant semesters as the pretest and post-test, and a pre-intermediate textbook taught at the Iran Language Institute were used as the instruments of this study. More information about these instruments is provided in what follows.

3.3. Procedures

3.3.1. Administering the proficiency test

At the onset of the experiment, the researchers administered the reading section of a standardized test of proficiency used for placement tests at the language institute (where the participants were studying) among the participants in order to examine their homogeneity in terms of their reading comprehension proficiency. The test consisted of five passages with 25 multiple-choice questions which had to be answered in 30 minutes.

3.3.2 The semi-structured interviews

The interview sessions were actually a part of one of the researchers' doctoral dissertation conducted with the participation of 10 learners from the same level of proficiency (pre-intermediate) as of the main participants'. The interviews sought to elicit the main factors that motivated learners to learn English and the elicited factors were used to design the intervention aimed at being applied at the main phase of the study. After checking the availability of the participants, they were invited to the teacher's office for the interviews and were rest assured that their privacy would be maintained. Then, they were asked to recount the factors that could have motivated them to learn English. After analyzing the qualitative data, the common factors were elicited from the responses and were used to design the intervention

program.

3.3.3 The application of the intervention program

Once the two groups' homogeneity was confirmed, the participants began the course and attended their classes for two sessions a week for one semester including 8 weeks. Each session lasted 105 minutes.

The class which the control group attended followed the routine procedure for reading comprehension. Before assigning the main reading to the participants, they were provided with some warming-up pre-reading activities and once their mind was familiar with the subject of the passage, each one was asked to read the passage silently (according to the rubrics of the pre-intermediate level at the institute). On finishing the task, the students answered some comprehension questions raised by the teacher followed by the teacher's reading and explaining the passage along the active participation of the students. Finally, the post-reading exercises were done by the participants and the teacher required the learners to study and summarize the passage for the next session. The next session, the teacher would ask about four students to present the passage and marked their performance out of 100 points. At the end of the term, each student's grades were averaged and a mark out of 100 was given to each by the teacher.

The above procedure was repeated for the experimental group, but the intervention for the experimental group was distinct in one fact. In the experimental group's class (but not the control group), every session, the teacher asked the students to think and write a paragraph about various motivating factors that may stimulate a person to learn English and present their compositions the following session. In order for the learners not to disperse in their topics of composition and for the sake of unity, the teacher chose the topics according to eight motivating factors mentioned by the participants in the interviews and assigned each theme for one reading session. These factors were:

1. Emigration
2. The government's scientific and foreign policy
3. Information Technology advancements and travel orientations
4. Attitudes toward English and its utilitarian values
5. Attitudes and empathy toward the global community
6. Transfer of religious and cultural



ideology

7. Significant others

8. Academic and occupational aspirations

This intervention was assumed to increase the students' motivation and direct their minds toward the advantages of learning English and in turn boost their achievement in reading comprehension. The idea of designing this type of motivational strategy originated from Dornyei (2001)' framework of motivational strategies in which he mentioned the bitter fact that learning in a confining place like a classroom burns the learners out and it is the task of the teacher to "actively try and generate positive student attitudes towards learning" (p. 51). As one of his proposed motivational strategies Dornyei (2001) drew upon enhancing the learners' language-related values and attitudes and points to three value dimensions including intrinsic value, integrative value, and instrumental value. The intervention we utilized in this study was believed to enhance the integrative and instrumental values related to learning English.

To check the alleged impact of boosting learners' motivation on their reading comprehension achievement through assigning them a type of motivational strategy, the students' reading comprehension mean scores in the previous term and those of the present term were compared to check for any significant improvements in the scores for both control and experimental groups. Paired-samples t-test statistical procedure was run through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to track changes in the scores.

4. Results

4.1. Independent-samples T-test Results

Although the participants in the experimental and control groups were roughly homogeneous in their proficiency according to the rubrics of the institute, to double-check their homogeneity before deciding which intact class be the control and which one be the experimental group, the reading comprehension part of a standardized proficiency test applied by the Institute for placement tests was administered to 69 participants.

Inspecting the measures of central value (mean, mode, and median) revealed a little difference between them and considering the fact that the skewness ratio fell between -1.96 and +1.96 suggested that the distribution of the scores on the proficiency test had the statistical normality

assumption hence confirming that the mean could be utilized as the best measure of tendency in the parametric tests. Independent-samples t-test was accordingly run to compare the means of both groups. Table 1 represents the results of the independent-samples t-test.

Table 1: T-test for both groups' performance on the proficiency test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	4.85	.21	-.30	67	.762	-.67	2.21	-5.09	3.74
Equal variances not assumed			-.27	35.8	.784	-.67	2.44	-5.62	4.27

Considering the F value of 4.852 at the significance level of 0.21 which is greater than 0.05 we concluded that the groups' variances were not significantly different. As a result, with the assumption of the homogeneity of the variances, the results of the t-test indicated that the mean scores of the participants in both groups were not significantly different since the p value was 0.762 which is greater than 0.05. This statistical procedure once again confirmed the homogeneity of the control and experimental groups at the outset of the experiment.

4.2 Paired-sample T-test Results

The pre-test in this study for the control and experimental group was the reading comprehension part of their final exam in their previous semester (pre-intermediate 2) which was scored out of 100 and was then compared with the participant's scores on the final exam at the end of the experimental semester (pre-intermediate 3).

To check for any statistically significant differences between the control group's pre-test and post-test mean scores and also between the experimental group's pre and post-test mean scores, the statistical procedure of paired-samples t-test was run in SPSS for both groups and the following results were rendered.

Table 2: Paired-samples test for control group

Pair 1	Copro-Copost	Paired differences		95 % confidence interval of the difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. deviation	Std. Error mean	Lower				Upper

As it is obvious from the above table, the probability value was 0.537 that is way much greater than 0.05 indicating the absence of any significant difference

between the control group’s two sets of scores. This means that there was actually a decrease in the scores (0.4871 with a confidence level of 95% ranging from -1.09 to 2.071) from the pre-test (M= 90.69, SD= 4.96) to the post-test (M= 90.20, SD=5.74), $t(38) = 0.622$ (refer to Table 3).

Table 3: Paired-samples statistics for the control group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 2	Control’s pre-test	90.6923	39	4.9638	0.7948
	Control’s post-test	90.2051	39	5.7408	0.9192

For the experimental group, however, the results of the paired-samples test were pointing to a change in the scores from the pre-test to post-test. Tables 4 and 5 summarize the findings of the paired-samples test.

Table 4: Paired-samples test for experimental group

Pair	Expres-Expost	Paired differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. deviation	Std. Error mean	95 % confidence interval of the difference				
					Lower	Upper			
1		-4.2333	11.019	2.011	-8.348	-0.11	-2.104	29	0.044

Analyzing the values of the above table, we can conclude that the experimental group’s scores had experienced a significant difference from pre-test to the post-test ($p=0.04 \leq 0.05$). To be more specific, the mean increased by 4.233 (with 95% confidence interval ranging from -8.34 to -0.11) from the pre-test (M=91.3667, SD=12.64) to the post-test (M= 95.600, SD= 3.534), $t(29) = -2.104$.

Table 5: Paired-samples statistics for experimental group

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 2	experimental pre-test	91.3667	30	12.64	2.308
	Experimental post-test	95.600	30	3.534	0.6452

Although according to the paired-samples test we can conclude that the intervention might have affected the post-test scores in the experimental group, we would like to know how large the magnitude of the effect was. To know this we need to calculate an effect size statistic, i.e. eta squared. In Pallant (2010), the formula for calculating eta squared is:

$$\text{Eta squared} = \frac{t^2}{t^2 + (N-1)}$$

After entering the data into the formula, the eta squared we found was 0.13. To interpret this value we referred to the guidelines for interpreting eta squared by Cohen (1988, 284-7). These guidelines are: .01=small effect, .06=moderate effect, and .14=large effect. Given the eta squared value we gained (0.13) we can state that the effect of the intervention was large enough for us to claim that our intervention motivated the learners in the experimental group to try and study harder than those in the control group who weren't aware of the advantages of learning English.

5. Discussion

The results of the paired-samples t-test revealed a fall in the scores of the control group’s post-test compared to those of the pre-test. This usually happens in language learning classes where the learners have to follow the often strict regulations of the methodology without knowing the consequences of what they are learning and how this learning may contribute to their success in the future, which in many cases leads to a sense of alienation from classroom and to decreased levels of performance. However, the results were promising in case of the experimental group as the mean scores of the post-test in among the experimental group experienced a significant improvement over those of the pre-test. This meant that introducing the proposed motivational intervention into the common procedures of pre-reading, reading, and post-reading was able to enhance the reading comprehension ability of the learners in the experimental group to a high degree (eta squared= 0.13).

Now we can answer our research question which was:

‘Is there a significant improvement in participants’ reading comprehension test scores following participation in an intervention designed to increase their motivation to learn English?’

The answer to our question was positive. The motivational intervention program which was designed to raise the awareness of EFL learners’ motivation toward learning English did have a large positive effect on their reading comprehension mean scores at the end of the semester following the intervention program.

The findings of our study are mostly in line with the studies regarding the effect of motivation on reading comprehension ability stated in the literature review section of this



study and many others. For instance, Ahmadi (2017), in his review of literature on the effect of motivation on reading ability, concluded that learners with high levels of motivation in reading comprehension were much more successful and would advance more than those with lower levels of motivation. Or, Kharghani (2016) reported the positive effect of her motivating reciprocal teaching and cooperative grouping intervention program on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. She concluded that motivation played a significant role in increasing the learners' reading comprehension. This is again the same as what this study concluded.

6. Conclusions and Implications

The present study was an attempt to investigate the effect of a classroom-based, practical motivational intervention, designed to enhance EFL learners' motivation, on the learner's reading comprehension ability. The findings corroborated the existence of a positive effect leading to the enhancement of learners' achievement on the reading skill. This suggests that motivation must not only be investigated from a theoretical point of view that just seeks to understand what the nature of motivation is or how much of that exists in people. Motivational researchers, however, should strive for changing the status quo and take further steps toward utilizing this rich theoretical ground of motivation in order to explore the pedagogical implications of motivation research in real educational contexts where students can be motivated by this line of research.

The introduction of motivational strategies to the field of language teaching was one of the consequences of the quest for putting motivational theories into practice, which was highlighted by Dornyei (2001)'s comprehensive framework of motivational strategies for the classroom. This framework was an attempt to prove that even an abstract, hypothetical concept such as motivation can be applied as a pedagogical tool in the hands of practitioners. The promising findings of this study, therefore, validate such a claim implying that if teachers really would like to enhance their students' language achievement, they have to first tap into their motivation and once learners' motivation to learn English is provoked, one can expect them to stick to their learning. Another implication is that these days most EFL learners, especially in Iran, are more instrumentally-motivated and

we as teachers of English have the obligation to truly and directly show them how learning English might contribute to their success in many aspects of their lives.

This study, like any other research attempt, was not infallible. The limitations the researchers faced with during this experiment were those of time, population, and resources. Since promoting motivation in learners is time-consuming and needs longitudinal studies, the present study was deficient in this vein. Also, the population of interest in our study were intact classes and lacked random sampling which might have affected the results. As per resources, the only treatment applied in the classrooms were student-constructed compositions. Further research is called for to corroborate the findings of this study by practicing more rigorous studies with different treatments and more homogeneous subjects.

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Appendix: The Interview Guide

Part I. Personal data

1. Would you please introduce yourself completely? (Parents' educational background included)
2. How long have you been learning English?

Part II political and socio-economic issues

3. How do you think your motivation to learn English is affected by the present political changes and issues in our country? (e.g. global sanctions imposed on the country, political clashes between Iran and the West, the nuclear deal, the new openings to communicate with the world, etc.)

4. A. how do you believe the economic aspirations have motivated you to learn English?

B. How important is English for your future-planned career?

C. Can you have a career without learning English?

D. If you didn't want to use English for your career, would it be worth studying it?

5. How much do you care about your country's development? How much is it important to you to contribute to it by learning English?

Part III Influences in learning

6. How can knowing English help you in your education?

7. These days many families would like to have and watch satellite TV programs which are in English. How about you? Do you believe this need can be a potential incentive for you to learn English?

Part IV Uses of English

8. A. Will you use English for educational purposes?

B. For professional purposes?

C. For social purposes?

9. Will you use English in order to be known as part of the world of native speakers of English, or would you like to be known as a person who is bilingual and belongs to a global community? If so, do you reject the idea of a specific national identity? Why or why not?

10. Are you studying English to help you understand people from all over the world or just English speaking countries?

Part V Leaving the country for achieving an ideal self

11. Where do you imagine yourself living in 2 years? (Inside or outside your hometown?)

12. If outside, how do you imagine this life abroad (how will it change)? (Expectation to improve social status)

13. If outside, what factors made you imagine yourself studying or living overseas?

14. What languages do you imagine you will be speaking and with what ratio? (50% English and 50% Farsi?)

15. Can you envisage yourself as a proficient speaker of English (or to what standard do you hope for? (Conversational, tourist or to conduct business)

16. Does learning English contribute to your success inside or outside of Iran? Give reasons

17. What opportunities can encourage you to stay in Iran?

18. What are the advantages of learning English for the development of the society in Iran?