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AN INVESTIGATION ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTIVATION AND GENDER AND AUTONOMOUS LEARNING IN IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This study adopted a quantitative approach to show the relationship between motivation and autonomous language learning. This study also used quantitative data to find out the relationship between gender and autonomous learning of students at Azad and Payamnoor Universities in Bousher city. In this study, the data were collected by means of two questionnaires, a motivation questionnaire and autonomous learning questionnaire. In order to analyze the data and examine whether there is a relationship between autonomy and the learner's motivation and also relationship between the learners' autonomy and gender, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used. From 97 students that participated in the survey, 45 were male and 52 female.

The results indicated that there was a significant relationship between motivation and autonomous language learning regardless of the gender of leaners; in other words, there was not relationship between gender and autonomous language learning. Based on the findings of the survey, some recommendations and pedagogical implications are provided for learners and teachers.

Keywords: Motivation, Autonomous Learning, Gender, Iranian learners

1. INTRODUCTION

New approaches are always emerging in English teaching and there is a tendency to see learners as passive receivers of new information and as individuals who are unable to develop the necessary skills to assess and control their progress (Rivers, 1992; Holden & Usuki, 1999). In the field of foreign language learning, despite the efforts of teachers and students, the English proficiency levels are not sufficient for university level; therefore, a growing number of research studies have focused on investigating the reason of this failure (Rivers, 1992; Brindley, 1990).

Autonomy and autonomous learning has an important and effective role in foreign language learning (Deci & Ryan, 1989). Autonomy is defined as the degree that students feel responsible for assessing and controlling their learning. As its definition shows, by feeling autonomy the students can improve a degree of self-control in their learning. In this field, a lot of questions are asked, one of which is: How can we increase a degree of autonomy in students? Some answers have been presented by researchers for this question and one of them was motivation that is defined as the tendency created in learners to achieve their goals. They believe that if learners do not have autonomy, a solution for this problem is creating motivation and if motivation is built in learners, autonomous learning may be increased in them.

According to Ridley, Schutz, Glanz, and Weinstein (1992), the metacognitive learning strategies of which autonomous learners can make use include taking conscious control of learning, planning and monitoring learning strategies and progress, correcting errors, reflecting on the effectiveness of learning strategies, and making changes to learning behaviors and strategies. The control an autonomous learner exerts over his learning demonstrates his capacity to take control of his own learning.

Socio-psychological approach to motivation which dominated the research of L2 motivation in the 1980s and 1990s was Gardner's model; as Lei (2007) said, Gardner's model of motivation addresses the differentiation between integrative and instrumental orientations and focuses on integrative motivation, and the learners' desire to integrate themselves into the culture of the target language is one of the building blocks of Gardner and Lambert's (Lambart,

1999). Noel (2003) suggests that the inapplicability of integrativeness to all sociocultural contexts and the lack of follow-up work to conceptualize "a psychological mechanism to account for the importance of the [other] orientations for L2 motivation" (p. 37) result in a shift among researchers. Some L2 researchers look for alternative motivational perspectives to account for learner motivation in other socio-cultural contexts; as a result, some theories for motivation were presented, among which Deci and Ryann's' self-determination theory was more acceptable than others because Gardner's model little helps to link between motivation and autonomy (Dickinson 1995). According to Lei (2007), among those motivational formulations, Deci and Ryan's (1989) self-determination theory has been one of the most widely-adopted approaches to account for autonomous learning. Dickinson (1995) demonstrates the possibility of Ryan interpreting Gardner's distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation in language learning in terms of a more general distinction of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

According to Deci and Ryan's (1989) self-determination theory, there are two types of motivation, namely intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic orientation, extrinsic orientation and amotivation lie on a continuum from self-determined to non-determined. An individual with a high level of self-determination is likely to demonstrate autonomy in his or her learning that leads to higher achievement.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

2.1. GENERAL OBJECTIVE

This study was an attempt to investigate the impact of Iranian undergraduate EFL learners' motivation on developing their autonomous learning. There is little research on the effect of motivation on developing autonomous language learning of Iranians' learners in an EFL context, especially at university.

2.2. THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

In this research, we aimed to determine whether the learners' autonomous learning is related to motivation and helps the learners to remove their shortcomings in their learning related to the lack of motivation. The other objective of this study was to determine if, by using motivation, we can increase the autonomous learning of Iranian EFL learners and improve their self-determination for learning. Moreover, the effect of Iranian EFL learners' gender on their autonomous learning was sought to be found.

2.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were posed in this study:

1. Does Iranian EFL learners' motivation significantly affect their autonomous learning?

2. Does Iranian EFL learners' gender significantly affect their autonomous learning?

2.4. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

1. Iranian EFL learners' motivation significantly affects their autonomous learning.

2. Iranian EFL learners' gender significantly affects their autonomous learning

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out at Azad and Payamnoor University in Bousher, Iran. The participants were second year undergraduate students from the faculty of humanities. They were from both genders (male and female). There were 45 males and 52 females. All students were non-native English speakers and they were students of bachelor of art (BA) and their age ranged from 18 to 25; also, their majors were English translation, English literature and English teaching.

The following instruments were used to gather data in this study:
1) Motivation questionnaire developed by Deci and Ryan (2009) which includes 21 items on measuring motivation using 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. The validity of the questionnaire has been estimated by Deci and Rein (2009) and Cronbach's Alpha showed that the reliability of the questionnaire for learners' motivation was 0.872.

2) A questionnaire on autonomous language learning which was developed by Zhang and Li (2004). This questionnaire contains 28 items on 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1=never to 5=always. It was designed to determine the learner's views about autonomous learning and this questionnaire enjoyed high validity as estimated by Zhang and Li (2004); also, the reliability of autonomy in language learning questionnaire was measured through Cronbach's Alpha and it was 0.800.

After 97 students were selected randomly, the above- mentioned questionnaires were distributed among the participants and then the purpose of the study was explained to the participants before filling out the questionnaires. We explained the method of filling out the questionnaire. Then we asked them to complete the questionnaire carefully and honestly. We thanked them in advance and after that we distributed the first questionnaire (motivation) and asked them to take them with themselves and return them after three days. Then, our participants were given the second questionnaire (autonomous learning) again and we asked them to take them home and complete and return them after three days.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reliability Analysis of learners' motivation

The internal consistency of the Leaner Motivation Questionnaire was measured through Cronbach's Alpha. The result is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Cronbach's alpha for learner motivation questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.872	21

Reliability analysis of learners' autonomy in language learning

The internal consistency of autonomy in language learning Questionnaire was measured through Cronbach's Alpha. Table 2 shows the result of reliability analysis.

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha for autonomy in language learning questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.800	28

As observed in this Table, autonomy in language learning questionnaire was 0.800 that is a reasonable index of internal consistency. Table 3 below presents the results of this analysis.

Table 3. Pearson's correlation between male leaner's' motivation and their autonomy in language leaning (ALL).

		Male Motivation	Male ALL
Male Motivation	Pearson Correlation	1	.985[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	45	45
Male ALL	Pearson Correlation	.985[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	45	45

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The coefficient value was 0.985 and the p-value observed was 0.000; this was lower than the level of significance selected for this study (alpha=0.05). Thus, it can be claimed that there was a highly positive significant relationship between Iranian male EFL learners' motivation and development of their autonomous learning. (Table 4)

Table 4. Pearson's Correlation between female learners' motivation and their autonomy in language learning (ALL)

		Motivation	ALL
Female Motivation	Pearson Correlation	1	.989[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	52	52
Female ALL	Pearson Correlation	.989[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	52	52

The coefficient value and the p-value were 0.989 and 0.000, respectively. As p-value was smaller than the level of significance selected for this study (alpha=0.05), it was concluded that there was a positive significant relationship between Iranian female EFL learners' motivation and developing their autonomous leaning. Based on the result of the two research questions, both male and female genders had a relationship with autonomy; therefore, differences of genders have not any significant effect on autonomy.

Table 5.Pearson's correlation between learners' motivation and developing autonomy in language learning (ALL)

		Motivation	ALL
Motivation	Pearson Correlation	1	.981[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	97	97
Autonomous in Language Learning	Pearson Correlation	.981[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	97	97

Based on the results presented in the Table, the coefficient value was 0.981 and the p-value observed was 0.000.The amount of p-value was smaller than the level of significance selected for this study (alpha=0.05). Therefore, there was a significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' motivation and developing their autonomous learning.

5. DISCUSSION

Based on the results emerging from this study, the learners' motivation was significantly correlated across autonomous language learning while gender of learners did not significantly affect autonomous language learning. This study indicated that when learners were motivated, they were more autonomous in their learning and they could better control their language learning. One important conclusion that could be drawn from this study is that although

motivation can have an impact on autonomous language learning, the point that needs to be mentioned here is that the current research results show that gender does not impact the autonomous language learning. Also, gender does not have any significant impact on motivation and autonomy. In order to examine whether there is a relationship between learners' autonomy and their learner motivation, Pearson Product Moment Correlation was conducted. The results showed that there were meaningful relationships between the participants' autonomy and learning motivation. Therefore, the findings of this study suggested that motivation has a significantly positive effect on developing autonomous language learning of Iranian EFL learners. Findings of this study showed the positive effect of motivation on developing autonomy in language learning.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined the effect of learner motivation on developing autonomy in language learning. At the core of the notion, there are the learners' ability and willingness to make a choice to be independent in class for language learning. Knowles (2005, p. 14) believes that" autonomous learners become more highly motivated and that autonomy leads to more effective work; also, there is convincing evidence that people who take the initiative in learning (proactive learners) learn more and better than do people who sit at the feet of teachers, passively waiting to be thought (reactive learners) …they enter into learning more purposefully and with greater motivation". We concluded from these statements and examination that there is an important link between autonomy and some educational theories of motivation.

To sum up the study, 97 EFL learners (45 males and 52 females) at Azad and Payamnoor University in Bousher, Iran took part in this research and filled out the questionnaires about motivation and autonomy in language learning. Statistical analysis of the collected data revealed the significant impact of motivation on developing autonomous language learning, while the gender of learners had not any significant effect on developing autonomous learning.

Rather than engaging directly in autonomy training or in further autonomous training when confronted with this kind of situation, the teacher can be better advised to begin by developing the students' motivation (Sprout, 2002). The teacher could focus on developing intrinsic motivation and helping students to believe in the effectiveness of their own effort, as these would seem to be areas where the teacher can make an impact. This would mean devoting more time to engaging in activities and working with material syllabus which the learners wish to engage in for their own sake. It could also involve the teacher in introducing into the classroom the kind of motivating activities in which learner centeredness as a learner of autonomy can be integrated. Recognition of diversity of learning style and learner preferences for the way of learning would give the teacher a wide gamut of activities to choose from.

This study sought to find out the relationships between learner motivation and autonomy in language learning using quantitative method. First, while intrinsic motivation for English is usually rather weak in average learners, building on their extrinsic motivation, teachers should encourage the learners and create opportunities for them to make use of the language. Second, learners' competence in learning English is vital to take full control of their learning. Therefore, developing positive beliefs and motivation is thus helpful in increasing their autonomy. In addition to the learners' extrinsic and intrinsic orientations, contextual factors such as physical learning support; psychological factors such as laziness, lack of interest and sense of coercion; social factors like peer support and competition; and teacher's guidance all contribute to the enhancement or inhibition of the learners 'autonomy (Lei, 2007).

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