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**The Relationship Between Learner Autonomy and  
Learner Motivation Among Iranian EFL Learners**

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Master of Arts in English Language Teaching**

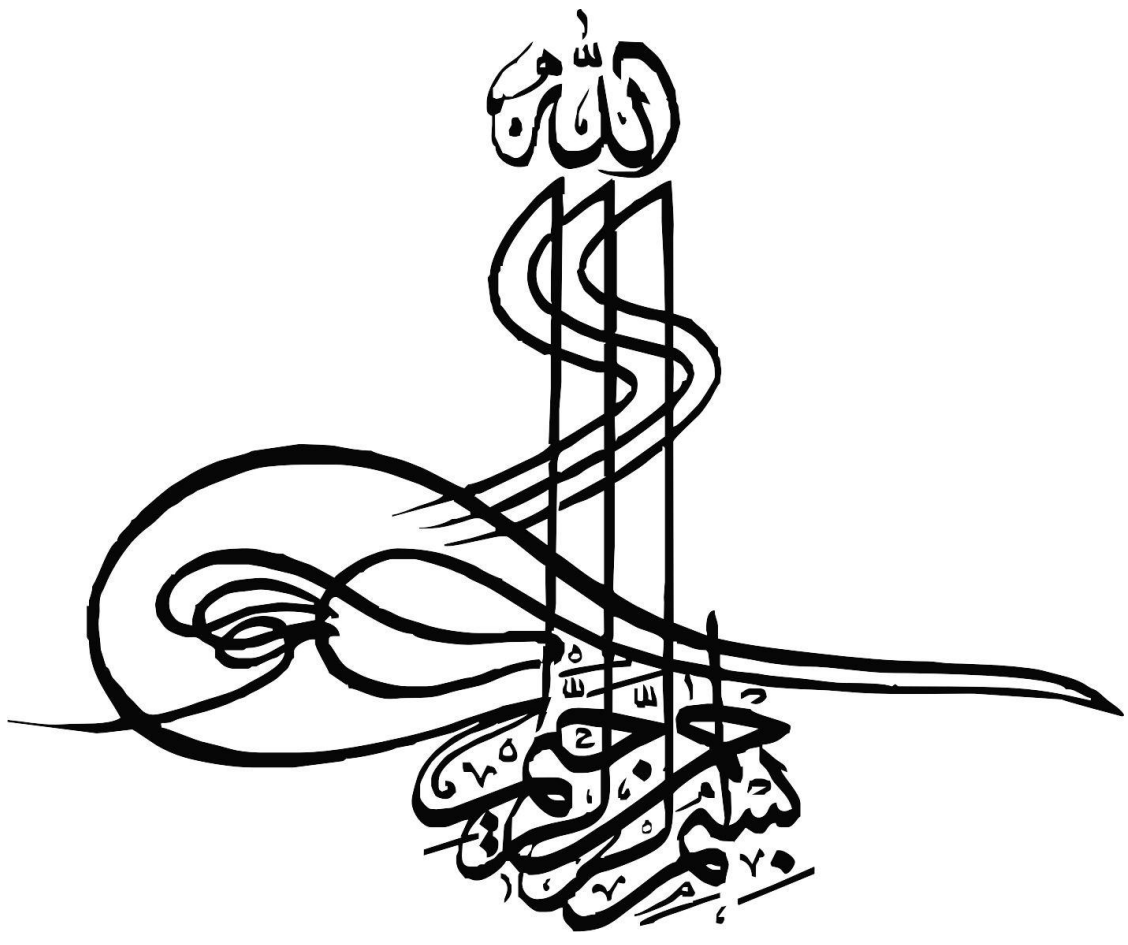
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**Dedicated to my family for their kindness,  
To my wife, for her unceasing support and encouragements,  
To my professors for their continual guidance,  
And last but not least to my supervisor, Dr. M. Mohammadi, who provided me  
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# **The Relationship between Learner Motivation and Learner Autonomy among Iranian EFL Learners**

## **ABSTRACT**

The importance of learner motivation and learner autonomy as influential components in learning a foreign language has been identified by many scholars in the field. By finding out more about the relationship between learner motivation and learner autonomy, we can uncover a number of new possibilities for improvement in the field of language teaching and learning. Thus, the current study has been planned to investigate the relationship between learner motivation and learner autonomy. The participants of this study were 192 intermediate and upper-intermediate EFL learners (87 females and 105 males) within the age range of 14-18 from three private language institutes in Urmia. Lepper, Corpus, and Iyengar's (2005) Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation Scale was used to determine learners' motivation type. Besides, Egle's (2003) Autonomy Learner Questionnaire was implemented to measure learner autonomy. The Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was applied to analyze the data obtained through these questionnaires. The findings showed that learners with extrinsic motivation tend to behave dependently. Based on the evidence provided by data analysis, most of the learners in this study had intrinsic motivation. Besides, the results revealed that there was a strong positive relationship between learners' intrinsic motivation and their independency in learning. It implies that as the learners' intrinsic motivation increases, their autonomy in learning increase respectively.

**Keywords:** learner autonomy, intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xii

### CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Statement of the problem.....	3
1.3 Significance of the study.....	5
1.4 Research questions and hypotheses.....	7
1.5 Definitions of the key terms.....	9
1.6 Organization of the thesis.....	11

### CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction .....	12
2.2 Motivation.....	13
2.2.1 Theoretical approaches of motivation.....	14
2.2.1.1 Socio-educational psychology .....	15
2.2.1.2 Attribution theory.....	16
2.2.1.3 Self-efficacy theory.....	17
2.2.1.4 Self-determination theory.....	18

2.2.2 Empirical studies on foreign language (FL) learning motivation.....	21
2.3 Learner autonomy.....	23
2.3.1 Definitions of learner autonomy.....	25
2.3.2 Characteristics of autonomous learners.....	26
2.3.3 Justifications for learner autonomy.....	29
2.3.4 Fostering learner autonomy.....	30
2.3.5 Teachers' roles in fostering learner autonomy.....	33
2.3.6 Empirical studies on learner motivation and learner autonomy..	35
2.4 Chapter summary.....	37

### **CHAPTER III: METHOD**

3.1 Introduction.....	38
3.2 Design of the study.....	38
3.3 Participants.....	39
3.4 Instruments.....	40
3.4.1 Autonomy learner questionnaire.....	40
3.4.2 Motivation questionnaire.....	40
3.5 Data collection procedures.....	41
3.5.1 Sampling.....	42
3.6 Data analysis.....	42

### **CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

4.1 Introduction.....	44
4.2 Findings.....	45
4.2.1 Descriptive statistics of variables.....	45



4.2.2 Test of normality for motivation scores.....	47
4.2.3 Test of normality for autonomy scores.....	49
4.2.4 Discussions and results of analysis for research null hypotheses.....	50
4.2.4.1 Discussion and results of analysis for H0 1.....	51
4.2.4.2 Discussion and results of analysis of H0 2.....	51
4.2.4.3 Discussion and results of analysis of H0 3.....	53
4.2.4.4 Discussion and results of analysis of H0 4.....	54
4.2.4.5 Discussion and results of analysis of H0 5.....	56
4.2.4.6 Discussion and results of analysis of H0 6.....	57
4.3 Chapter summary.....	57
<b>CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS</b>	
5.1 Introduction.....	59
5.2 Pedagogical implications.....	59
5.3 Limitations of the study.....	61
5.4 Suggestions for further research.....	61
5.5 Conclusion and final remarks.....	62
REFERENCES.....	64
APPENDICES.....	70
Abstract in Farsi.....	77

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1	Descriptive statistics for research variables.....	45
Table 4.2	One-sample Kolmogorove-Smirnove Test to test the normality Of Motivation scores.....	48
Table 4.3	One-sample Kolmogorove-Smirnove Test to test the normality Of autonomy scores.....	49
Table 4.4	Pearson’s Product –moment Correlation for the relationship between Motivation and Autonomy.....	51
Table 4.5	Pearson’s Product- moment Correlation for the relationship between Intrinsic and Extrinsic motivation.....	52
Table 4.6	Pearson’s Product-moment Correlation for the relationship between Independency and Extrinsic motivation.....	53
Table 4.7	Pearson’s Product-moment Correlation for the relationship between Intrinsic motivation and Independency.....	55
Table 4.8	Pearson’s Product-moment Correlation for the Relationship between Extrinsic motivation and Dependency.....	56
Table 4.9	Pearson’s Product-moment Correlation for the Relationship between Intrinsic motivation and Dependency.....	57

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 Self-determination and types of motivation .....	19
Figure 2.2A Framework for Developing Autonomy .....	31
Figure 4.1 Distribution of motivation scores.....	47
Figure 4.2 Distribution of autonomy scores.....	49
Figure 4.3 Scatter plot.....	54

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATION**

ALQ	Autonomy Learner Questionnaire
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EM	Extrinsic Motivation
IM	Intrinsic Motivation
L2	Second Language
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

The field of foreign/second language teaching in general and English language in particular has always been a complicated issue. It has been a constant state of movement and important changes over many years. Increasingly, changes in society and researches in fields such as psychology, cognitive psychology, sociology, linguistics and others have influenced the aims and shape of language teaching and learning around the world. These factors, among others, led to a greater interest in learner autonomy (Reinders, 2000). He adds that the shift of attention towards considering language learners' variables as a crucial factor in learning process through the last four decades has been really noticeable. He further states that this trend places emphasis on learners' variables or characteristic as a fundamental factor within teaching and learning process. He points out that this new perspective brings the change in the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom settings. It encourages teachers to give some power to the

learners and at the same time to take roles such as facilitator (Reinders op.cit.), explained by Harmer(2007) as someone who is “democratic rather than autocratic, and one who fosters learner autonomy through the use of group work and pair work and by acting as more of a resource than a transmitter of knowledge” (108).

The shift of interest to learners as a source of information for learning process led to the growth of interest in the theory and practice of autonomy in language learning and teaching (Benson, 2001)

On the other hand, as mentioned above, learners’ variables or characteristics are important factors to consider and worth to investigate in the area of second or foreign language learning. Among learners’ variables, the importance of motivation has been recognized in the field of education for decades (e.g. Gardner 2000; Dornyei 1990). With publication of the work of Canadian psychologists Robert Gardner and W.E. Lambert in 1972, the concept of motivation became a popular research topic in the field of second/foreign language (Lamb, 2004). Second language learners’ motivation has been claimed in research and theories to be a crucial factor in influencing the achievement or the proficiency level of the second/foreign language learners (Dornyei, 1994).

A meta-analysis of motivation studies has also considered motivation as the key to success in learning a foreign or second language (Masgoret& Gardner, 2003). In fact, First language acquisition seems easy and painless,

but for many people, second or foreign language acquisition process means spending long hours in a classroom setting, learning a complex topic which is seldom easy (Wachob, 2008). He further adds that especially for those who are trying to master provided material not for its own sake, but as means to achieve another end such as conducting business, English proficiency courses can seem a burden. In such situations, Teachers and students may find themselves locked in a duel, endlessly preparing for tests, stuck in outmoded paradigms of teacher/student roles and looking for materials suited to achieving the expected outcomes. In these situations the role of teachers seems to be of a lot of importance, in providing motivation to the learners in order to equip them with different strategies to boost their learning.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Since English language is the most widely used International language in the world, this language has been taught for decades in junior and senior high schools and also at the universities in Iran. However, despite the general movement in developed western and eastern countries toward using more learner-centered approach in education in general, and the interest in learner autonomy in particular, methods used to teach English in Iran except for some private institutes are mostly traditional, and teacher-centered classrooms are dominant. The most noticeable advantage of learner-centered approach to language teaching is to help language learner to acquire the skills to learn, with the aim that ultimately leads to life-long learning (Littlewood, 1996).

The other aspect of learner-centered approach is paying more attention to learners' psychological variables and their needs. Among psychological variables, motivation seems to be an important component in language learning. Dörnyei (1994) defined motivation as a multi-level construct. He also, classified L2 motivation into three levels, the language level, the learner level and the learning situation level. The language level is composed of various items such as culture, community, pragmatic values etc. This level is an answer to the question why and for what intention a learner chooses a given language. The learner level includes two items: need for achievement and self-confidence. Dörnyei (2001) clarifies this level as the individual characteristics that the learner brings to the learning process. The learning situation level constitutes three components: course-specific motivational components (interest, expectancy, satisfaction etc.), teacher-specific motivational components (affiliative motive, authority type, task presentation, feedback etc.), and group-specific motivational components (goal-orientedness, reward system, group cohesiveness). The model Dörnyei developed contains motivational components aspect of classroom language learning in foreign and second language learning situations.

Being an EFL student and also working as an EFL teacher I have confronted a lot of problems during both my own learning and teaching. During the years I taught English language in different language institute I had students, who in spite of studying English for many years continued to have poor performance in using English language. They have numerous difficulties in understanding



oral English and even more using spoken English to express themselves. Most of language learners are not interested in using every opportunity provided for them to learn English language, they are reluctant or have low level of self-confidence to take part in class activities or they are strongly dependent on their teachers in learning the foreign language.

During the course of my study for the master's degree, I found myself increasingly interested in learner motivation and learner autonomy. I recognized the importance of motivation and learner autonomy and their contribution to better language learning. By finding the fact that learner motivation and autonomy has been considerably ignored in Iran, based on the literature I have reviewed so far, this research is going to tackle these particular issues in depth and attempts will be carried out to investigate in order to see if there is, at all any relationship between learner motivation and learner autonomy in general and to see if there is any relationship between learners' type of motivation and their autonomy in particular.

### **1.3 Significance of the research**

Based on an ancient proverb, "Give a man a fish and he eats for a day, teach him how to fish and he eats for a life time". Teaching English as a foreign language in Iranian education system is similar to the first part of the proverb i.e. we just give our students a fish, it means that we provide our students prepackaged knowledge and we ignore the most important part of teaching that is teaching them how to fish i.e. teaching them "learning how to learn", this is what proponents of learner autonomy mostly emphasize. Learner autonomy has been described as " a capacity for detachment, critical

reflection, decision-making and independent action. The capacity for autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts” ( Little, 1991, p.4). On the other hand, According to Rost (2006, p.1)

Motivation has been called the “neglected heart” of language teaching. It is important to think about motivation as the essence of language teaching because of the stark realities of learning English for most of our student. All of the conditions that we know contribute to successful second language acquisition are lacking in most EFL contexts; there just isn’t enough English input in the environment, there probably aren’t enough opportunities for interaction with English speakers, there usually aren’t enough strong role models promoting the learning of English, and there may not be widespread enough social acceptance for the idea of becoming proficient in English. Because of these adverse conditions, a learner has to have extraordinary motivation in order to succeed at learning English.

As a language teacher I feel frustrated spending a very large amount of time and energy on my students but getting insufficient results. I have expressed my dissatisfaction about having a group of students who are unwilling to do homework, to use target language inside or outside the class, to take part in class activities or to make an effort to improve their language proficiency. My colleagues also complain about this issue, and it seems that it is a common problem in educational setting in Iran.. Based on my own experience, it seems that the main reasons for these kinds of behaviors are learners’ lack of motivation and also their over dependence on the teachers. Scharle and Szabo (2000) invoke the saying “you can bring the horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink” (p.4). It emphasizes the important role students face in learning process. This means that the passive presence of language learners will not result in effective learning and desired outcomes.

Despite the fact that the important role of learner autonomy and motivation appears to be universally accepted and this acceptance results in the steady increase of academic researches and publications dealing with learner

autonomy and motivation (e.g., Garcia & Pintrich, 1996; Brown, 2001; Dickinson 1987, Holec, 1985). To date, based on my research in Iran and other resources, I have not confronted any study in Iran investigating the possible relationship between learner motivation and learner autonomy. Most of researches largely focused on teaching methods and course effectiveness.

Thus, the investigation of learner motivation and learner autonomy and their possible relationship may contribute to Iranian EFL teachers' better understanding of their students' success or failure in learning English as a foreign language. Also, this study may result in students' awareness of their influential role in learning process, and this understanding might help teachers to have a more motivating classroom atmosphere with more active, responsible and motivated students. Moreover, this may encourage EFL teachers to reconsider, and possibly revise their teaching procedures that they used to use before. Furthermore, the findings of this study are hoped to function as a preliminary opinion for the other interested researchers in this area.

Based on the statement of the problem and the significance of the study, the following tentative research questions are put forward.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

- 1) Is there any relationship between Iranian EFL learner autonomy and learner motivation?
- 2) Is there any relationship between learners' intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation?

- 3) Is there any relationship between learners' extrinsic motivation and their independence in learning?
- 4) Is there any relationship between learners' intrinsic motivation and their independence in learning?
- 5) Is there any relationship between learners' extrinsic motivation and their dependence in learning?
- 6) Is there any relationship between learners' intrinsic motivation and their dependence in learning?

Based on the above mentioned research questions, the following null hypotheses are proposed

### **1.5 Research hypotheses**

- 1) There is not any relationship between learner motivation and learner autonomy.
- 2) There is not any relationship between learners' intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation.
- 3) There is not any relationship between learners' extrinsic motivation and their independence in learning