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LANGUAGE (TEFL)**

**Subject:**

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MOTIVATION IN  
IRANIAN PRE-UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND THEIR  
READING COMPREHENSION ABILITY**

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

# **BACKGROUND**

# **AND PURPOSE**

## **Introduction**

It is not sufficient to simply decode word meaning to comprehend a reading text. It is believed that to achieve comprehension in reading, an effective reader should be able to successfully implement such practices as relating the text with his or her own background knowledge, summarizing information, drawing conclusions, and posing questions at the text. Reading, simply means, “extracting the required information from [text] as efficiently as possible” (Grellet, 1988:3)”, or according to “the simple view of reading”(Grable, 1997), it is,” most likely a simple multiplication of word recognition abilities” (Grable, 1997: 1).

Carol (1988) claims that reading is the main reason why students learn English. Researchers (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Kintsch, 1998) have acknowledged the importance of students’ reading comprehension skills to success in a variety of school subject areas as well as other achievement outcomes. Good comprehenders are knowledgeable and strategic readers (Pressley, 2000).

Regarding the general importance of reading comprehension Levin &Williams (1970) contend, “if anything is true of reading, it is one of our most complex forms of information processing” (p. 3). However, reading comprehension in a foreign language attracts more attention and is regarded much more important than other skills and components because, as Alderson &

Urquhart (1984) state, an acceptable level of reading ability is necessary in academic studies, professional success, and personal development.

Although difficult to conclude and impossible to talk with certainty, the variety of studies on reading can be inferred to range over the topic related to the three scaffolding factors in reading, namely "text", "context" , and "reader" (Snow, 2002).

Today, however; most of the scholars (Carrel, 1988; Grabe, 1991) assert that although reading has much to do with the printed page, reading comprehension does not, and reading has more to do with the reader than it does with readability formulas.

In other words, “comprehension of challenging text seems to require not only cognition but also motivation” (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). The use of reading skills may not always be sufficient for a successful reading process. There is one basic factor that is almost ignored in comprehension process. It is students’ motivation which is the main concern in this study.

Among the factors influencing students’ learning, motivation is thought to be a very important reason for different achievement. Qin Xiaoqing (2002) says that motivation is a very important factor which determines the success or failure in second language learning, for motivation can directly influence the frequency of using learning strategies, willpower of learning, goal setting, and the persistence in learning. Qin (2003) also says that learning motivation

influences the learners' autonomous, learning ability, and determines the learners' confidence in overcoming learning difficulty.

Motivation is the forcing cause of many activities in reading comprehension process. On the whole, it leads to effective reading process. Effective reading depends on the time spent reading per day. Students who enjoy reading and devote time to reading every day will make more effort to understand and use reading comprehension strategies.

Regarding motivation as an effective element for students to understand a reading text (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Kintsch, 1998) have acknowledged motivational variables to impact comprehension skills as students matriculate through school.

These theories on motivation demonstrate that motivation, as one of the crucial factors determining the success in language learning, attracts much attention of the researchers. Allotting a certain amount of time to reading may be highly effective in increasing reading success.

Motivation has been regarded as one of the main factors that influence the speed and amount of time spent on reading comprehension among foreign language learners. Lambert proposes that the degree to which an individual acquires a second language may depend on motivation, attitudes towards the other community and orientations towards language learning. More specifically, motivation is conceptualized to subsume three components: desire

to learn the language, attitude towards learning the language and motivation density.

Concerning motivation and reading comprehension, there are multiple motivational pathways for the energization of students' behaviors such that some students may be motivated by their self-efficacy beliefs, whereas others may activate cognitive processes through personal interests or contextual factors.

Furthermore, factors such as improper method of English teaching during high school, compulsory nature of English in high school, lack of focus on oral skills and lack of use of English in student's real life were found to be the essential demotivating factors among Iranian students. Research that examines the different ways that motivation relates to reading comprehension speaks of the need for integrated models of motivation and cognition that has been emphasized in the motivation field (Pintrich).

Teaching students how to comprehend reading text is an important goal for high school years, especially for pre-university students and beyond, when students are expected to read required materials to gain knowledge and literary experience (Alexander & Jetton, 2000). A substantial correlate of reading comprehension in the later elementary grades is reading motivation, according to a variety of investigators (Gottfried, 1990; Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). This study examined motivation for its potential to

explain high school students' reading comprehension and to predict students' achievement in comprehension over time (Stipek, 2002).

Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) engagement model of reading comprehension development posited that reading comprehension is the consequence of an extended amount of engaged reading. Engaged reading is motivated, strategic, knowledge driven, and socially interactive; it is influenced by the kinds of classroom practices students experience (Guthrie & Cox, 2001).

This study examined the nature of motivation and reading comprehension and builds on this work by using questionnaire to examine students' multidimensional motivations and looking at how motivation relates to achievement in reading comprehension. With respect to the relations of motivation and reading comprehension, Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) engagement model suggests that motivation influences reading comprehension growth.

Although motivation and reading comprehension are correlated (Baker & Wigfield, 1999; Wang & Guthrie, 2004), and laboratory studies suggest that motivational conditions can increase reading comprehension (Guthrie & Humenick, 2004), it is unknown whether motivation predicts reading comprehension growth in classroom contexts. The present study investigated this issue.

It was of interest to see particularly how students' motivations and their achievement in reading comprehension relate to each other; these analyses would provide further information about the dimensionality of students' motivation. With respect to specific and general forms of motivation, following [Hidi and Harackiewicz \(2000\)](#), the relation of students' motivation to the amount of their achievement in reading comprehension was assessed.

Finally, with respect to different perspectives on students' motivation, as noted earlier, the research has relied on students' responses on the related questionnaire. The research needed information was gathered through a motivation questionnaire and a set of several short reading passages based on the two variables in this study. Relations were assessed among these two sources of information about students' motivation and their achievement in their English textbook reading comprehension.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Most of the recent studies which have focused on the relationship between motivation and reading comprehension have taken motivation and comprehension holistically (e.g. [Salimi, 2001](#); [walczy and Hall, 1989](#)), and have not attempted to analyze performance on reading comprehension among pre-university students regarding their different motivation level ( see



Aebersold &Field , 1998; Barnett, 1991). Considering the studies on the relationship between motivation in Iranian high school students and the degree of their achievement in comprehension, it can be stated that an analytic look at such a relationship has not yet well dug out.

Therefore, the present research was an attempt to take analytic view toward reading comprehension achievement under the light of motivation in Iranian pre-university students to continue and endorse the previous studies. A common way to perceive the students' achievement in comprehension is to make them involve as much as possible and as many students as possible in reading that provide a great achievement for the students due to deep concentration and involvement on the textbook they are reading. Motivated students show great interest in reading their textbooks and make them involved participants who are capable of producing language skills and acting well in the comprehension process. Neglecting students' motivation puts a huge obstacle in the way of reading comprehension especially for the Iranian students. It is also significant to notice if lack of involvement with English textbook in Iranian high school students is mostly an outcome of lacking motivation.

Considering the importance and necessity of learners' motivation in reading comprehension which is the general problem existing among Iranian high school students, the present study tried to investigate whether there is any

difference between students with various degrees of motivation in terms of their reading comprehension ability, and also if there is any the relationship between students' motivation and their reading comprehension. The researcher believed that nothing has been done on motivation in Iranian pre-university students and its relationship with their achievement in reading comprehension.

### **1.3 Statement of the Research Questions**

1. Is there any significant relationship between EFL learners' motivation and their reading comprehension?
2. Is there any significant difference between the low motivated and medium motivated learners in terms of their reading comprehension abilities?
3. Is there any significant difference between the low motivated and high motivated learners in terms of their reading comprehension abilities?
4. Is there any significant difference between the medium motivated and high motivated learners in terms of their reading comprehension abilities?

### **1.4 Statement of the Research Hypothesis**

Based on the above mentioned research questions, the following null hypothesis is raised:

1.H0: There is no significant relationship between EFL learners' motivation and their reading comprehension?

2. H0: There is no significant difference between the low motivated and medium motivated learners in terms of their reading comprehension abilities?

3. H0: There is no significant difference between the low motivated and high motivated learners in terms of their reading comprehension abilities?

4. H0: there is no significant difference between the medium motivated and high motivated learners in terms of their reading comprehension abilities?

## **1.5 Definition of Key Terms**

**Motivation:** Through the years, motivation has frequently been described as having three psychological functions (Ford, 1992): (a) *energizing or activating behavior*, what gets students engaged in or turned off toward learning . (b) *directing behavior*, why one course of action is chosen over another and (c) *regulating Persistence of behavior*, why students persist toward goals. These three functions can be explained differently by various motivation perspectives. Motivation in this study is operationally defined as the students' scores in the Farsi version of the Achievement Motivation Test devised by Hermans (1971).

**Reading:** Reading, simply means, "extracting the required information from [text] as efficiently as possible" (Grellet, 1988: 3)", or according to "the simple view of reading" (Grabe, 1997), it is," most likely a simple multiplication of word recognition abilities and general language comprehension abilities" (Grabe, 1997: 1). Reading comprehension is operationally defined in this study as the learners' scores in a reading comprehension test comprising ten passages extracted from the workbooks developed by Anani, Nikpour, J. and Arabshahi (2008).

**Interest:** Interest has been defined as a "relatively stable evaluative orientation toward a certain domain" (Schiefele, 1999, p.258) and described as a personal investment in an activity (Alexander & Murphy, 1998).

**Involvement:** students' sense of immersion or absorption during reading and the investment of many hours reading books and materials (Reed & Schallert, 1993). Involvement is related to interest and other internal aspects of motivation (Reed & Schallert, 1993; Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997), but can be distinguished from interest because it refers more to experiential aspects of reading and time spent reading. Further, involvement refers not only to depth of experience, but also to amount of reading.

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

Stable learning is facilitated when access to learning opportunities is expanded. In a situation like high schools in Iran where English has the status of a foreign language, in terms of Stern's (1983) categorization, it usually leads Iranian learners to resort to the written form in order to learn it.

Understanding the L2 reading process, particularly in English, is increasingly significant due to the dominant position of English as a global language in both paper-based, print, and other textual formats (Crystal, 1997). This dominance of English persists in academic teaching and learning and academic publishing to the extent that Tercanlioglu (2004) has claimed that: "in order to operate effectively in the academic world, postgraduate students must read English," (p. 568).

Farhady (1998) argues that since the language of science and technology is often English, reading in English has received priority among other skills of English language teaching. He reasons that the main goal of teaching English in many countries of the world especially within the educational program, is set to improve the reading ability of the students in order to enable them to extract incoming information from the English sources in their field of studies.

Moreover, a crucial concern of educational researchers is the investigation of the relationship and effect of different external and internal

factors on learning process and outcome. Among such factors, motivation takes a lion share of psychological variables in learning. It is one of the area which is mostly related to problem-solving behaviors and has been identified sequentially by some of the researchers.

As mentioned above, the present study tried to shed some light on the relationship (if any) between motivation in Iranian pre-university students and their performance on reading comprehension.

### **1.7 Objectives of the Study**

The present study tried to investigate whether there is any relationship between motivation in pre-university students and their performance in reading comprehension.

Alderson and Urquhart (1984) believe that reading is a complex activity in which many aspects of language, motivation, life and reading are involved. Theoretically this study can be viewed as an attempt to cast more light on the nature of EFL reading comprehension in connection with existed motivation.

### **1.8 Limitations and Delimitations**

Some limitations to the present study should be noted. First, the investigation was unidirectional and it was not done on bidirectional effects between motivation and reading ability. Some considerations should also be made with

regard to gender. Previous research has shown that gender differences in reading achievement are mediated by intrinsic motivation (Stanat & Kunter, 2001). Maybe, other psychosocial variables like personality traits might explain the remaining gender differences (cf. Steinmayr & Spinath, 2008).

Concerning the delimitation of the study, it should be noted that pre-university students were chosen as the intermediate participants of this study. To narrow down the scope of the study, other grades were ignored in this investigation, however; each level should be considered individually to get certain outcome.

# **CHAPTER TWO**

# **LITERATURE**

# **REVIEW**



## **Introduction**

The present study was an attempt to provide some useful theoretical information concerning motivation and reading comprehension and some studies directed and based on the relationship between them and some other subjects related to both motivation and reading comprehension . Accordingly, first a relatively detailed view of the motivation is presented. This section will constitute the introduction of motivation, its general characteristics, measures and different aspects of it, and examines the contribution of motivation to achievement in text comprehension. Then , the dependent variable of reading comprehension achievement and reading comprehension issues in concern with achievement are presented.

### **2.1 Motivation**

#### **2.1.1 Definition and General Characteristics**

Motivation has been described by a number of different and sometimes overlapping definitions. Motivation is the most used concept for explaining the failure or success of a learner. Dörnyei (1998) claimed that motivation is a key to learning. It is an inner source, desire, emotion, reason, need, impulse or purpose that moves a person to a particular action.

Gardner (1985), defined L2 motivation as “the extent to which an individual works or strives to learn the language because of a desire to do so

and the satisfaction experienced in this activity” (p: 10). More specifically, motivation is conceptualized to subsume three components: desire to learn the language, attitude towards learning the language and motivation density.

Brown (2007) reviewed the definitions of motivation based on the three historical schools of thought as follows:

1) *Behaviourism*. This perspective sees motivation as the anticipation of reward. Driven to acquire positive reinforcement and based on our prior experience we repeat the action to get rewards.

2) *Cognitivism*: It sees motivation as choices people make. The forces behind our decisions are the needs or drives. Ausubel (1968) identified 6 needs for the construct of motivation: the need for

a) exploration

b) manipulation

c) activity

d) stimulation

e) knowledge

f) ego enhancement

3) *Constructivism*: Each person is motivated differently and the emphasis is on social context and individual personal choices.

Motivation has been regarded as one of the main factors that influence the speed and amount of success of foreign language learners. The original

impetus in second/foreign (L2) motivation research comes from the social psychology since learning the language of another community simply cannot be separated from the learners' social dispositions towards the speech community in question (Moiinvaziri, 2008, p.126).

### **2.1.2 Origins of motivation**

In Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies, the two best-known classifications for motivation are called intrinsic/ extrinsic and integrative/instrumental motivation.

#### **2.1.2.1 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation**

Intrinsic/extrinsic motivation refers to whether the motivation is more inside a person or outside of him/her. Intrinsic motivation refers to the motivation which is originated inside a person. There is no reward except the activity itself. It means that the essence of motivated action that is, sense of autonomy and the desire is self-initiating and selfregulating while in extrinsic motivation there is an anticipation of reward from outside and a person is motivated from an outside source rather than the self.

Intrinsic/extrinsic motivation is related to the term locus of control which was first introduced by Rotter (1966). If a person places responsibility for her/his life within self, s/he has internal locus of control and is self-

motivated character and if s/he places the responsibility on others and on circumstances outside self, s/he has external locus of control. In order to achieve internal locus and self-motivation, one should be eager to give up the security of making excuses and to take responsibility of all her/his decisions and actions. Maslow (1970) believed that intrinsic motivation is noticeably superior to extrinsic because we are motivated to achieve "self-actualization".

#### **2.1.2.2 Instrumental and Integrative Motivation**

Within the field of language learning, the typical model is the division made between integrative and instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). If a person learns a language primarily for a purpose like getting a job or fulfilling an academic requirement, s/he is affected by instrumental motivation. In other words, instrumental motivation refers to the motivation to acquire a language as means of achieving goals such as promoting a career or job or reading technical texts while integrative motivation has to do with wanting to be accepted by another community. Integrative motivation means integrating oneself within a culture to become a part of that society.

#### **2.1.3 Components of motivation**

Researchers using questionnaires have found that students' motivation is multidimensional in the later elementary grades. Through factor analytic