

The Impact of Achievement Motivation on Vocabulary Learning In Intermediate EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

The present study was developed in order to investigate the impact of motivation on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary learning. One hundred and twenty English major students who studied at undergraduate level participated in this study. Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered in order to manifest the participants' homogeneity in terms of language level of proficiency. Based on their performance on OPT, a sample of 89 homogenized students were selected for the main study. The vocabulary knowledge test, extracted from McCarthy, McCarten, Sandiford (2004), was performed in order to check the participants' current knowledge of lexical items. The motivation of the participants was measured by means of Hermans' scale of achievement motivation. Based on the learners' performance on motivation test, and with regard to the cut-off score of 45, they were divided to two groups of highly-motivated and less-motivated groups. In order to address the research question and hypothesis of the study, two motivation groups were compared to each other based on their performance on vocabulary achievement test. To do this, a paired-sample t-test was performed and it was found that there were significant differences between highly and less-motivated learners and their vocabulary knowledge and the highly-motivated learners outperformed in this regard.

KEY WORDS: Foreign language learning – Individual differences - Motivation – Vocabulary learning

1. INTRODUCTION

There are some patterns and regulations in individuals' speech behavior from which differ context to context. How to face with different situations in life would lead them to form their style of behavior. People's types of behavior shape their personality. It has been constantly observed in previous studies of second language acquisition that some learners perform better than the others in a second or foreign language context. Individual differences can be one of the potential reasons for learners' different behaviors in language learning context. Crozier (1997) believed that individual differences may lead to academic success or failure in the area of foreign or second language learning. Individual differences add to our ability to predict scores on tests of academic achievement and confirm that personality factors are as important as intelligence for educational achievement. The idea that language learning varies with personality traits may suggest that some of these traits are beneficial for learners (Strong, 1983, as cited in Kezwer, 1987). As a result, it can be inferred that learners' success or failure is partly due to factors such as aptitude, personality, motivation, cognitive style, and the use of learning strategies.

Motivation is known as one of the influential factors in language learning. Different studies provided evidence that motivation is a key to success in language achievement. Research on motivation in social psychology was first introduced by Gardner and Lambert (1972). They found that aptitude is not the only factor responsible for successful second-language learning. Studies mostly pursued to find what mechanisms are involved in motivation. According to Dörnyei and Otto (1998), motivation is an arousal state that determines individuals' wishes and desires and it may affect the process of learning negatively or positively. Williams and Burden (1997) stated that motivation is a state of cognitive and emotional arousal that eventually helps individuals act consciously and provide the intention to make effort in any kind to achieve certain goals. Dörnyei (2000) adds that motivation has both a qualitative and a quantitative dimension and is a key feature of learner in successful language learning. The qualitative dimension deals with the goal, and the quantitative dimension refers to the intensity of the attempt toward the achieving the goal. Keller (1983) defined motivation as the people's choices in selecting or avoiding experiences or goals, and the extent to which they will attempt to do so. Motivation in Boekaerts' (2002) term is a personal tendency that is directly related to his/her opinions, beliefs, and judgments about objects, events, and subject areas.

Traditionally, motivation is known as one of the significant factors affecting language learning. Different definitions of motivation have been provided. Crookes and Schmidt (1991), defines motivation as the learner's orientation to the goal of learning a second language. Motivation is also described as the incentive to create and maintain intentions and goal-seeking acts (Ames & Ames, 1989). Williams and Burden (1997) asserts that "motivation is a state of cognitive and emotional arousal that leads to a conscious decision to act and give rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort" (p. 120). In other words, motivation is the combination of

the intellect and affect with perseverance. This is similar to what Gardner (1985) described for motivation that was the combination of effort and desire to achieve a goal as well as favorable attitudes towards the target goal.

It is obvious that students who are not motivated to succeed will not work hard. In fact, motivation directly affects educational achievement. Numerous studies on the role of motivation and foreign language learning have been done and most of them indicated that there is a positive relationship between motivation and foreign language learning among learners of different age, sex and levels of language proficiency (e.g., Schmidt and Watanabe, 2001; Masgoret and Gardner, 2003; Csizér & Dömyei, 2005; Bernaus & Gardner, 2008).

Gardner and Lambert (1972) suggested different types of motivations; instrumental motivation, learner's desire to learn a language for useful purposes (such as employment, travel, or exam purposes), and integrative motivation or the learner's desire to learn a language in order to integrate into the target language community. Self-Determination Theory was introduced by Ryan, Kuhl and Deci (1997) as an approach to human motivation and personality that foregrounds the importance of inner personality traits and behavioral self-regulation. These are the basis for developing individual's self-motivation and personality integration, and enhancing positive processes. One popular categorization of motivation was defined by Deci and Ryan (2000). Two types of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation refer to an internal and external incentive to do things for one's satisfaction respectively. Intrinsic motivation refers to motivation for involving in an enjoyable activity. Intrinsic motivation is developed based on innate needs for competence and self-determination. When people are free to choose to perform an activity, they look for the situations which are interesting to face with the challenges of that activity. It can help learners develop a sense of competence in their abilities.

Knowledge of second language vocabulary plays significant role in language learning (Zimmerman, 1997; De Bot, Paribakht, & Wesche, 1997). The role that vocabulary knowledge plays in second and foreign language acquisition was neglected for a long time. However, vocabulary is currently receiving increased emphasis in the language teaching curriculum. Research on second language vocabulary acquisition as a separate area of study emerged in 1980s and subsequently it has been developed by increasing number of investigations in the recent decades. The large and rich body of studies has been conducted on different aspects of vocabulary such as the role of frequency of exposure in vocabulary enhancement, the role of input, intake and output on retention of word meanings, strategies of vocabulary learning, and vocabulary acquisition through reading and the effect of computer instruction on reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition.

A few number of studies investigated the role of motivation in foreign language vocabulary learning. In these studies, for example, Gardner, Lalonde and Moorcroft (1985) investigated the effects of the aptitude and integrative motivation on students' learning rate of French/English vocabulary pairs. The results showed that the higher integrative motivation lead to faster vocabulary learning. Tseng and Schmitt (2008) believed that motivation should be perceived as a dynamic factor comprising a number of stages, and that each of these stages will affect in different ways the process of vocabulary acquisition, which is also dynamic.

Although the connection between motivation and foreign language vocabulary learning has not received much attention in research, different studies have identified a positive effect of motivation on different aspects of foreign language vocabulary learning (Elley, 1989; Gardner and MacIntyre, 1991; Fernández Fontecha, 2010).

Increasing vocabulary knowledge is the basic part of every language learning program, both as a means and as an end. Lack of adequate and profound knowledge of vocabulary is an obvious and serious problem for many students. In addition, advances in knowledge will create a larger domain of abstract and complex concepts and words that a person must master.

In Iran, like other EFL contexts, there is no exposure to foreign language out of classroom situation. In current traditional setting of language classrooms in Iran, EFL learners cannot maximally take the advantages of class time and most of their time spends in vain. Dornyei (1990) suggests that in EFL context motivational factors such as instrumental motivation should receive special attention. Oxford (1996) considers that EFL environments differ from the ESL situation and recommended that instrumental motivation be a main focus for research in EFL contexts.

Iran is a country where education and academic achievement are generally highly valued by parents and students alike, and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is part of public and private education. Most of Iranian EFL teachers and instructors are concerned about their students' passivity and apparent lack of motivation in lessons. The structure of Iranian EFL students' motivational attitudes toward learning English language has been the subject of some studies, but there are a few number of studies investigating the role of different levels of motivation in vocabulary learning.

The context of Iran is interesting for research, since learners' motivational factors have attracted much less attention. Also, a kind of paradox exists among language learners and educators, on the one hand, there is a strong desire to learn English among different classes of people in society, but on the other hand, most of the EFL learners suffer from their lack of adequate knowledge of English in order to communicate in English.

This present study was developed in order to fill the above-mentioned research gaps. In order to pursue the purposes of the present study, the following research question was posed:

- Do high motivated learners perform better than low motivated learners in learning vocabulary?

The following hypothesis is formulated to be tested in the study:

- There is no relationship between students' motivation and their vocabulary learning knowledge.

2. MATERIALS AND METHOD

2.1 Participants

Participants of this study were 120 Iranian junior students of English language majors at Islamic Azad University of Tonekabon, Mazandaran. They were male and female students whose age range was between 18 and 25. The participants' native language was Persian. They were selected for this study based on their performance, Oxford Placement Test (Edwards, 2007) that was administered at the beginning of the study.

2.2 Instruments

The instruments employed for data collection consisted of Oxford Placement Test, Touchstone vocabulary knowledge test, and Hermans' (1970) questionnaire of measure of achievement motivation.

In order to manifest the participants' homogeneity in terms of language proficiency level, a version of Oxford Placement Test called Solutions Placement Test (Edwards, 2007) was used in this study. The validity of the test is self evident. This test enabled the researcher to select those learners who were compatible with the conditions of the study. Oxford placement test has been used to determine low and high level participants in terms of language proficiency. It was administered to assess students' knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and reading. It also enabled the researcher to have a greater understanding of what level their participants were at. The test contained 50 multiple choice questions assessing students' knowledge of key grammar and vocabulary from elementary to intermediate levels, and a reading text with 10 graded comprehension questions (five true-false and five multiple choice items) (see appendix A).

A vocabulary knowledge test functioning as pretest was selected in order to measure the lexical knowledge of the participants. The test items were standardized tests of Redraft test software of intermediate level of Touchstone book by McCarthy, McCarten, Sandiford (2004). The test is composed of 25 multiple-choice items (see appendix B).

Hermans' (1970) questionnaire of measure of achievement motivation is a self report achievement motivation questionnaire which contained 29 items. The scale has nine subscales measuring the nine components of achievement motivation that have been theoretically derived. The components are aspiration level, upward mobility, persistence, task tension, time perception, time perspective, partner choice, recognition behavior and achievement behavior. Each question has four choices.

The scoring of the items is based on 9 components. The choice A was assigned one point, choice B, two points, choice C, three points and choice D, four points in items 1, 4, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 20, 23, 27, 28, 29. The scoring of the other items were vice versa as follows: Choice A, four points, choice B, three points, choice C, two points, choice D, one point. The maximum and minimum range of scores would be from 29 to 116. The cut-off score was 45 in order to distinguish between high and low motivation groups.

Questions are used to distinguish people of high achievement motivation from those of low achievement motivation on the basis of 10 characteristics. Hermans found these 10 characteristics based on his previous studies and chose them as basis and guidelines of his questions (see appendix C).

2.3 Procedure

The first step of this study was the administration of motivation inventory. The participants were answered Hermans' Scale of Achievement Motivation. Some necessary instruction regarding some abstract concepts in the questionnaire was provided by the researcher. The participants fill the questionnaire out. After analysis of their scores on motivation inventory, they were categorized into two groups of high and low motivation.

The participants' intended language proficiency level for this study was intermediate, so in order to ensure the homogeneity of the participants, a standard English language proficiency test i.e., Oxford Placement test (OPT) was administered. As was mentioned earlier, the test consisted of 50 multiple-choice items of grammar, vocabulary, and 5 true-false items as well as 5 multiple-choice reading comprehension test items. A total of 80 EFL learners participated in the study. Every correct answer in multiple-choice and true false questions was given +1 point and every incorrect answer was given 0 point. No negative score was considered for penalty in this test. The total score of the test was 60. A definite range of scores is determined by Oxford Placement Test (Edwards, 2007) to interpret the results. Considering the result of the learners' performance on the OPT, they were assigned equally to two groups of low and high level of language proficiency.

At the end of the semester, all participants of the study took the vocabulary achievement test. The students answered the items on an answer sheet. The test was corrected by the researcher and the groups of the study were compared in order to pursue the research questions of the study.

3. RESULTS

Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered on 120 Iranian EFL learners at the beginning of study. The descriptive statistics of the obtained scores such as mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, skewness and kurtosis are shown in Table 1. Regarding this table, the minimum and maximum of the scores were 9 and 68 respectively. The mean of scores was 47.16 and their standard deviation was 13.28. The relatively high degree of standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis indicate that the obtained scores are not normally distributed.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the obtained scores on proficiency test

N	Minimum				Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Proficiency Test	120	9.00	68.00	47.1583	13.28169	-1.082	.221	.881	.438
Valid N (listwise)	120								

The schematic view of obtained scores on OPT test, shown in Figure 1 also shows that the scores are scattered.

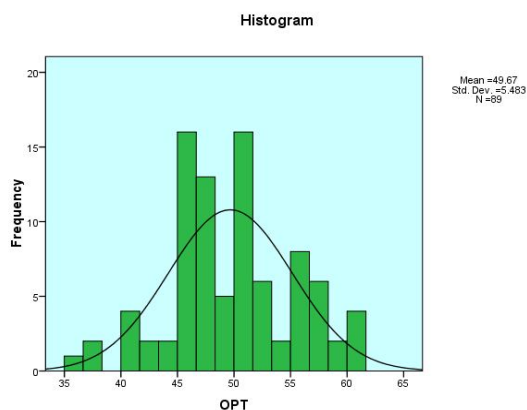


Figure 1. The histogram of obtained scores on OPT

Too distant scores from below and above the mean were omitted in order to homogenize the participants regarding their level of language proficiency. In this case, the participants who scored within a range of one standard deviation below (34) and above the mean (60) have been kept in the study. So, 31 learners were excluded from the main study. The descriptive statistics of selected scores are shown in Table 2. The mean is 49.67, and the degree of skewness and kurtosis and standard deviation indicate that the distribution of scores is normal.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the selected scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
OPT	89	36	60	49.67	5.483	-.066	.255	-.227	.506

The Figure 2 clearly shows the normal distribution of selected scores of the participants.

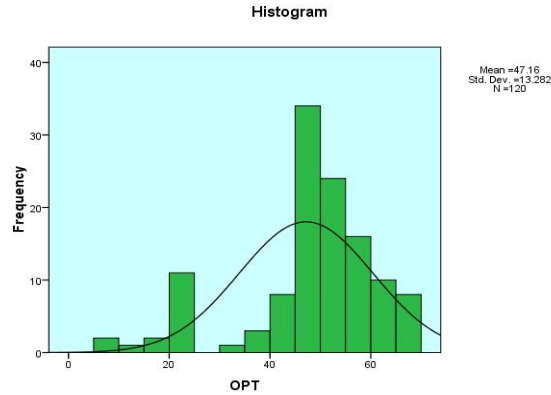


Figure 2. The histogram of the selected scores on OPT

The vocabulary knowledge test was performed in order to check the participants' current knowledge of lexical items. The descriptive statistics related to this test is provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the obtained scores on vocabulary achievement test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis		
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error	
Vocabulary Knowledge Test	89	5	30	20.22	6.212	-.394	.255	-.767	.506

As the Table 3 shows, the minimum and maximum of the scores are 5 and 30 and mean and standard deviation of the obtained scores on vocabulary knowledge test are 20.22 and 6.21 respectively.

The motivation of the participants was measured by means of Hermans' scale of achievement motivation. The descriptive statistics of this test is provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the motivation test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Motivation	89	12	111	71.11	19.677	-.841	.255	.784	.506

The maximum and minimum of the participants' scores were ranged from 12 to 111. As it was mentioned in chapter three, the cut-off score for distinguishing between high and low motivation groups was 45. Based on this criterion, the descriptive statistics of less-motivated and highly motivated groups are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of high and low motivation group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Highly-motivated	76	49	111	77.38	12.693	.162	.276	.334	.545
Less-motivated	13	12	45	34.46	11.318	-.855	.616	-.222	1.191

As Table 5 indicates, 13 learners (out of 89) were identified as less-motivated participants and most of the participants ($n = 76$) were highly motivated. Figure 3 depicts this difference.

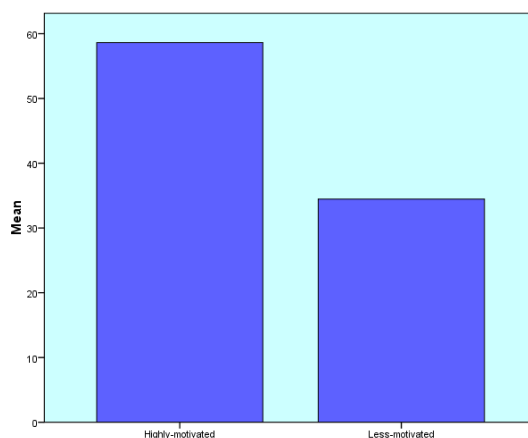


Figure 3. The frequency of high and low motivation groups

In order to test the hypothesis of the study, a paired sample t-test was performed. The paired sample statistics, in a comparative view are provided in Table 6.

Table 6. Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Highly-motivated	77.38	76	12.693	1.456
	Vocabulary Knowledge Test	20.16	76	6.125	.703
Pair 2	Less-motivated	34.46	13	11.318	3.139
	Vocabulary Knowledge Test	21.15	13	6.694	1.857

The result of paired sample t-test is provided in Table 7.

Table 7. Paired Samples Test between vocabulary knowledge of highly and less motivated groups

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig.
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Highly-motivated - Vocabulary Knowledge of Highly-motivated group	57.316	14.408	1.653	54.024	60.608	34.681	75	.000
Pair 2	Less-motivated - Vocabulary Knowledge of Less-motivated group	13.308	12.632	3.503	5.674	20.941	3.798	12	.003

The obtained values of mean differences and t-test between vocabulary knowledge and high-motivation group were 57.31 and 34.68. These values in less motivated group were 13.30 and 3.79 respectively. It indicates that highly-motivated group outperform on vocabulary knowledge test. Also, significant differences were found between the scores of highly-motivated students and their vocabulary knowledge ($t = 34.68$, $p < .05$) and less-motivated students and their vocabulary knowledge ($t = 3.79$, $p < .05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis of the study was not accepted.

4. DISCUSSION

The present study was developed in order to find how much vocabulary learning is related to academic motivation of Iranian university students. Based on the results of this study, the null hypothesis of the study was rejected.

Dornyei (2002) designed a quasi-experimental and correlational study was to determine to what extent a learner's motivation during a task was influenced by a partner's motivation. The significant impact of motivation on task performance was found. These results were in line with the findings of this study.

Similarly, in a study by Spratt, Humphreys and Chan (2002), they found that the higher a learner's motivation, the more likely a learner is to participate in extracurricular activities using English and consequently achieves more success in learning English. The present study confirmed what Spratt et. al (2002) had found.

Huang and Ma (2007) studied the relationship between learning strategy, motivation, and autonomy on L2 vocabulary learning. This study was conducted over one academic semester with both control and experimental

groups. They found that intrinsic motivation was highly correlated with self-assessed ability in vocabulary learning. This result confirmed the result of this study.

Deng (2010) was pursued to construct and validate an instrument to measure motivation for vocabulary learning. It was found that the learners' motivation for vocabulary learning did not differ between reading for leisure and academic goals. Also, English native speakers had higher motivation for vocabulary learning than English language learners. The students from different majors had significant different in their motivation to learn vocabulary, while no difference was found for students with different genders and average GPAs. These findings were in line the findings of the present study.

In another study, Thanh and Huan (2012) measured the impact of task-based language learning on motivating non-English majors to acquire vocabulary at a community college in Vietnam. The findings indicated that the participants were motivated to learn vocabulary and their vocabulary achievement improved after the experiment. These findings were in line with those of the present study.

The results of this study supported the findings of Sadeghi (2013) study in that motivation help EFL learners develop academic achievement and language learning strategy use. Also, Nation (2001) found that students need to be highly motivated to produce words because this is a more demanding task than recognizing words. In a similar way, Tseng and Schmitt (2008) provided a model that integrates vocabulary knowledge and motivation and supports the significance of motivation in vocabulary learning.

Ghanea, Zeraat Pisheh and Ghanea (2011) investigated relationship between the learners' integrative and instrumental motivation and English proficiency among Iranian EFL learners. The results, in line with those the present study, showed that both types of motivation has significant relationship with English language proficiency.

Humaida (2012) conducted a study to examine motivation to learn English language among Sudanian students of faculty of arts. The results of his study indicated that there is no significant difference between motivation and EFL learners' level of language proficiency and their age. The findings of Humaida's (2012) study was contradicted the results of the present study.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provided the evidence that there is a significant difference between highly-motivated and low-motivated learners in terms of English language vocabulary learning in such a way that highly-motivated learners possess higher levels of vocabulary knowledge. In other words, the individual differences of learners regarding their motivation level were significantly related to their achievement in vocabulary knowledge. In simple terms, the higher the students' level of motivation, the higher their vocabulary knowledge. The result of the study showed that most of the Iranian students participated in the study had very high motivation towards learning English vocabulary.

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