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An investigation into the relationship between L2 reading motivation and reading achievement

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between learners' motivation towards reading in a foreign language and their reading achievement on a chosen reading task. For this purpose, 114 freshman students enrolled in English Language Teaching department of a major state university in Turkey took part in the study. Data were collected through a scale on foreign language reading attitudes and motivation, and a reading comprehension test. The data gathered through these two instruments were subjected to statistical analyses. Based on these analyses, the question as to the types of reading motivation dominantly favoured by the learners, as well as whether there was a significant relationship between students' motivation and attitudes towards reading in English and their reading achievement were answered. The statistical analysis indicated that the learners were primarily motivated to read in English due to the linguistic utility of texts, followed by extrinsic utility value of reading, intrinsic value of reading and their own reading efficacy respectively. The study did not identify a significant correlation between students' reading motivation scores and reading achievement scores. Since situated reading motivation appeared to be a more probable indicator of reading achievement, a call for further research was made to explore reading achievement in relation to situational interest.

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Keywords: motivation; attitudes; reading achievement in a foreign language

1. Introduction

As a prominent individual learner difference with an extensive influence on second / foreign language learning process, motivation has always been an issue of primary importance for L2 researchers and practitioners alike.

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Indeed, for second and foreign language learners, motivation might be regarded as a precondition for success since lack of motivation can damage a language learning process to a great extent even when all the other essential conditions are provided (Dörnyei, 2005, 2010). Therefore, with its vital importance for the process of L2 learning, motivation has been one of the issues at the top of the agenda of L2 researchers for decades (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Gardner, 2007; Ushioda, 2010). The attractiveness of the topic might be attributed to the complex and multifaceted nature of L2 motivation for the most part.

The complex construct of motivation has been an impetus for the recurrent attempts to define and describe the concept with its constituents. Accordingly, the concept has been subject to various distinctions ranging mainly from instrumental & integrative motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) to intrinsic & extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The attempts to elucidate the motivational constructs evident in L2 learning have also resulted in the emergence of various models of L2 motivation (see for example Deci & Ryan, 1985; Dörnyei, 2005; Gardner, 1985). Arising as a social psychological construct, motivation then started to be addressed from a cognitive situated perspective, and developed into a dynamic construct in time due to a process-oriented perspective as opposed to the former models viewing it as a static concept (Dörnyei, 2005).

1.1. L2 reading motivation

Despite the multitude of research studies on L2 motivation, the primary focus has been on language learners' motivation and attitudes towards communication with speakers of the language learnt; however, due mainly to not having such an opportunity, foreign language learners are mostly dependent on reading texts in terms of target language input (Mori, 2002, 2004). Building on the idiosyncratic nature of L2 motivation for foreign language learners, the domain-specific structure of the relevant concept (Grabe, 2009) points to the presence of some specific motivational constructs pertaining to reading.

Departing mainly from the studies of L1 reading motivation, the initial L2 reading motivation research was grounded on models of reading motivation in first language. One such prominent model of L1 reading motivation belonged to Wigfield and Guthrie (1995), who explored the relevant construct under three major categories: (1) *competence and reading efficacy*; (2) *achievement values and goals*; and (3) *social aspects of reading*. These categories involved a total of eleven sub-components as well. This noteworthy endeavour to delineate the construct of motivation to read in first language was accompanied by the development of the Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1995). The multidimensional structure of L1 reading motivation was also corroborated by empirical findings of a study in which the aforementioned questionnaire was administered to reveal the underlying aspects of reading motivation (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997).

Guided by this multidimensional construct of motivation to read in the first language, Mori (2002) explored the constituents of foreign language reading motivation and developed a questionnaire to investigate Japanese students' motivation towards reading in an EFL context. Statistical analysis performed to discover how the questionnaire items were related to one another and converged on specific motivational constructs revealed a four-factor resolution comprised of (1) *intrinsic value of reading*; (2) *extrinsic utility value of reading*; (3) *importance of reading*; and (4) *reading efficacy*. The multifaceted structure of L2 reading motivation was also acknowledged by several other studies (e.g. Erten, Zehir Topkaya, & Karakaş, 2010; Kondo-Brown, 2006).

As opposed to the earlier attempts to elucidate the nature of L2 reading motivation based on the construct and existing models of motivation to read in first language, Erten et al. (2010) noted that the underlying constructs of L1 and L2 reading may differ from one another both cognitively and psychologically. Without taking any existing theories of motivational make-up as a reference point, the aforementioned study attempted to discern the specific aspects involved in foreign language reading motivation. The Foreign Language Reading Motivation and Attitudes Scale (FLRAMS) developed for this purpose indicated a four-factor structure involving *intrinsic value of reading*, *reading efficacy*, *extrinsic utility value of reading*, and *foreign language linguistic utility* (Erten et al., 2010). Of these four factors, intrinsic value of reading referred to the items reflecting reading as an engaging and enjoyable activity; reading efficacy signified the way the learners evaluated their own skills of reading in foreign language; extrinsic utility value of reading indicated the contribution of reading in terms of self-development, future careers or education; and lastly foreign language linguistic utility emphasized the benefits of reading with respect to language development.

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