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Exploring the Role of Motivational Factors in the Academic Achievement of EFL Learners

Ekrem Solak¹

Amasya University, Turkey

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore the role of motivational factors in the academic achievement of EFL learners. The research was conducted at a State University, Faculty of Education in Turkey. The participants were 230 freshman prospective teachers from four different academic majors taking English class. Attitude/Motivation Test Battery which was composed of two parts as demographic part and the questionnaire was used to collect data about the participants' views on motivational factors influencing their academic achievement. Then, the data collected from the questionnaire was compared with the test scores of the participants at the end of the semester. The results of the research suggest that most of the motivational factors had a significant difference in the academic achievement of Turkish EFL learners. Furthermore, gender and academic major were directly affected by the motivational factors.

Keywords: *motivation, motivational factors, role of motivation in achievement, language learning*

¹ Ekrem Solak is an assistant professor at ELT Department at Amasya University. E-mail: ekremsolak@gmail.com

Introduction

Motivation is the driving force which guides us to achieve goals. Motivation is one of the major factors that is required to achieve anything in life. Motivation pushes the individual to do whatever it takes to become successful. Wigfield and Tonks (2002) and Gardner (2001) maintain that a motivated individual strives to achieve the goal, is insistent and attentive to the task, enjoys running for the goal, regards success as positive reinforcement, and uses strategies to reach the goal. Therefore, *motivation can be considered as goal-directed behavior*. (Demir, 2011).

Review of Literature

Historical perspective in the study of foreign language learning motivation

The first empirical research on second or foreign language learning motivation was conducted in Canada during 1950s, and the focus was the identification of variables on English-French bilingualism. At that time, Gardner and Lambert were the pioneers of socio-educational model of second language acquisition in school contexts and their most important contribution to the field has been that learning a second language is unlike learning any other subject. (Gardner & Lambert, 1959).

The social psychological approach of Gardner and his Canadian colleagues dominated language learning motivation research through the 1960s, 70s, and 80s and the aim of this approach was to integrate social psychology and individual psychology to explain differences in motivation to master the language of another community. This approach proposed that learner's attitudes toward second language and the target language community would affect their L2 learning behavior. (Gardner, 1988)

Later on, Gardner (1985) produced Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), which was originally developed to assess the major affective factors involved in the learning of French as a second language in Canada (Gardner 1985). The AMTB has contributed to the popularization of motivation research and it has been used in many different parts of the world to investigate students' motivation to learn second languages (Mondada & Doehler, 2004).

During 1990s, Crookes & Schmidt's (1991) cognitive-situated model which was an enrichment of social psychological approach and Dörnyei and Ottó's innovative (1998) process model of second language motivation dominated the field. The process-oriented period can be characterized as an increasing emphasis on viewing motivation, not simply as a static product, but also as a dynamic process fluctuating over time. In other words, identifying what factors in language education affect learner motivation and at which stage in the long process of L2 learning has become one of the main streams of study in motivation (Dörnyei, 2005).

Motivation and types of motivation

Dörnyei (2001), who has been one of main figures in motivation studies, defines the motivation as follows:

...the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritized, operationalized and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out.

For Dörnyei (2001), motivation is directly related to what people prefer to do, their patience to continue the behavior and their tryings on it. There are three items expressed in the direction and magnitude of human behavior (Dörnyei, 2001):

- why people decide to do something,
- how long they are willing to sustain the activity
- how hard they are going to pursue it.

According to McDonough (2007), motivation is what moves people to act, to learn English, to learn to teach English, or to teach it. McDonough (2007) lists the four (4) elements of motivation as follows:

- the reasons why we want to learn,
- the strength of our desire to learn,
- the kind of person we are, and
- the task and our estimation of what it requires of us.

Traditionally, two sets of constructs have been proposed to explain the motivation: (1) Instrumental and integrative motivation, proposed by Gardner (1985) and his colleagues, and (2) intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, by Deci and Ryan (1985).

Richards (2003) summarizes the constructs as follows:

Instrumental Motivation: Wanting to learn a language for the practical benefits it brings.

Integrative Motivation: Wanting to learn a language in order to interact with and become similar to valued members of the target language community (p. 14).

Deci and Ryan (2002) state that the intrinsic motivation refers to activity performed for its own sake to provide pleasure or satisfaction.

Extrinsic Motivation: Driven by external factors such as parental pressure, societal expectations, academic requirements or other sources of rewards or punishment (p. 14)

It is generally accepted that the teacher plays the most important role in affecting his/her students' motivation to learn. (Richards, 2003; Sawyer, 2007). Dörnyei (2001) states:

Broadly speaking, if a teacher is motivated to teach, there is a good chance that his or her students will be motivated to learn' (p. 156).

He believes that teachers can do little to influence students' extrinsic motivation, there is a lot they can do to enhance their intrinsic motivation. Dörnyei (2001) summarizes:

...the available research evidence and theorizing suggest that teachers' values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour, as well as the general level of their commitment towards the students, their learning and the subject matter, constitute some of the most prevailing influences on student motivation. (p. 180)

There are two main insights on the framework of second language motivation. First, Dörnyei (1994) divides his framework into three main categories as language level, learner level and learning situation level. At language level, he emphasizes

integrative motivational and instrumental motivational subsystems. At the learner level, he mentions the need for achievement, self-confidence, language use anxiety, perceived L2 competence, causal attributions and self-efficacy. He classifies the learning situational level as the course-specific motivational components (interest, relevance of the course to one's needs, expectancy of success, satisfaction), teacher-specific motivational components (affiliative drive, authority type and direct socialization of motivation) and group-specific motivational components (goal-orientedness, norm and reward system, group cohesiveness and classroom goal structure).

Second, Williams and Burden (1997) present a framework of L2 motivation primarily based on factors affecting L2 learner motivation, and separate them into two categories as *internal* and *external factors*. As internal factors, they take into consideration the intrinsic interest of activity (arousal of curiosity, optimal degree of challenge), perceived value of activity (personal relevance, anticipated value of outcomes, intrinsic value attributed to the activity), sense of agency (locus of causality, locus of control re: process and outcome, ability to set appropriate goals), mastery (feelings of competence, awareness of developing skills, self-efficacy), self-concept (realistic awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses in skills required personal definitions and judgments of success, self-worth concern, learned helplessness), attitudes (to language learning in general, to the target language, to the target language community and culture), other affective states (confidence, anxiety, fear), developmental age and stage, gender.

As external factors, they mention significant others (parents, teachers, peers), the nature of interaction with significant others (mediated learning experiences, the nature and amount of feedback, rewards, the nature and amount of appropriate praise, punishments, sanctions), the learning environment (comfort, resources, time of day, week, year, size of class and school, class and school ethos), the broader context (wider family networks, the local education system, conflicting interests, cultural norms, societal expectations and attitudes)

Method

The aim of the study and research questions

This research aims to determine the role of motivational factors influencing academic achievement of Turkish Foreign Language learners. Since motivation is the major factor directly influencing success in every effort, determining the role of motivational factors helps to understand and become aware of participants' views toward English language learning and guide them to the specified goals by tackling any problems if there are any. It is also believed that the results of the study will highlight the needs of the learners in some aspects and give ideas to the instructors while designing syllabus and developing and choosing materials. Therefore, this study will answer the following research questions:

1. Are there any significant differences about the role of motivational factors in terms of gender?
2. What are the motivational factors influencing the academic achievement of the participants?
3. Are there any significant differences about the role of motivational factors in terms of academic majors?

Participants

The research was conducted at a State University, Faculty of Education in Turkey. The participants were 230 freshman prospective teachers majoring on social sciences (n=36), pre-school education (n=58), primary school teaching (24) and science teaching (112). Subjects were at the elementary level in English Language and took up the English class 3 credits a week. The group whose native tongue was Turkish had similar characteristics with respect to age and educational background. Gender distribution was 172 (75%) females and 58 (25%) males.

Instruments and Procedure

Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (Gardner, 2004) was used to collect data about the participants' views on the role of motivational factors influencing their academic success. The questionnaire was used in numerous scientific studies on motivation and translated into some languages. The questionnaire had two parts; The first part involved three types of demographic data of the participants like gender, cumulative point grade average of the English class and academic major. The second part was composed of 104 items and there were 12 scales (factors) as Interest in Foreign Languages (10 items), Parental Encouragement (8 items), Motivational Intensity (10 items), English Class Anxiety (10 items), English Teacher Evaluation (10 items), Attitudes toward Learning English (10 items), Attitudes toward English-speaking people (8 items), Integrative Orientation (4 items), Desire to Learn English (10 items), English Course Evaluation (10 items), English Use Anxiety (10 items), Instrumental Orientation (4 items). The second part of the questionnaire was designed in the form of six point likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6).

The questionnaire was administered in Turkish language to make participants comprehend all the items thoroughly. It was given to the participants at the end of the semester to collect reliable data on both academic achievement of the participants and their experience about language learning. In the questionnaire, relevant data extracted were analyzed using an SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and results were presented in tables.

Findings and Results

Table 1

The Relationship between Motivational Factors and Gender

Scales	Gender				
		N	M	SD	p
1 Interest in Foreign Languages	Male	51	44,01	9,28	,033*
	Female	163	47,07	8,78	
2 Parental Encouragement	Male	52	24,88	9,98	,051
	Female	165	28,32	11,28	

3 Motivational Intensity	Male	50	33,82	7,94	,001*
	Female	164	38,37	8,87	
4 English Class Anxiety	Male	53	35,56	11,34	
	Female	172	39,27	10,67	,030*
5 English Teacher Evaluation	Male	52	43,51	9,04	
	Female	170	42,46	10,90	,0527
6 Attitudes toward Learning English	Male	53	40,60	13,91	
	Female	165	44,76	11,52	,031*
7 Attitudes toward English-speaking people	Male	50	24,50	8,48	
	Female	166	27,83	8,22	,013*
8 Integrative Orientation	Male	53	15,62	4,20	
	Female	170	17,47	4,95	,015*
9 Desire to Learn English	Male	53	38,01	10,41	
	Female	167	41,73	8,64	,010*
10 English Course Evaluation	Male	49	33,57	12,95	
	Female	170	37,45	11,82	,049*
11 English Use Anxiety	Male	51	36,07	9,78	
	Female	164	37,39	9,40	,390*
12 Instrumental Orientation	Male	49	16,36	4,53	
	Female	172	18,55	4,57	,003*

*: $p < ,05$

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation and significant difference in terms of gender. According to the data, there was a significant difference in scales 1,3,4,6,7,8,9,10,11,12 between males and females. In other words, scales on interest in foreign languages ($p = ,033 < ,05$), motivational intensity ($p = ,001 < ,05$), english class anxiety ($p = ,030 < ,05$), attitude toward learning english ($p = ,031 < ,05$), attitude toward english speaking people ($p = ,013 < ,05$), integrative orientation ($p = ,015 < ,05$), desire to learn english ($p = ,010 < ,05$), english course evaluation ($p = ,049 < ,05$), english use anxiety ($p = ,390 < ,05$), instrumental orientation ($p = ,003 < ,05$) were in favor of females. On the other hand, there was no significant difference in scales 2 and 5 which were about parental encouragement ($p = ,051 < ,05$) and english teacher evaluation ($p = ,05273 < ,05$).

Table 2*The Relationship between Motivational Factors and Academic Achievement*

Scales	Scores	N	M	SD	p
1 Interest in Foreign Languages	60+	176	47,82	8,25	,000*
	60-	38	39,50	9,14	
2 Parental Encouragement	60+	179	27,69	11,49	
	60-	38	26,57	8,82	,574*
3 Motivational Intensity	60+	177	38,65	8,71	
	60-	37	31,10	6,73	,000*
4 English Class Anxiety	60+	185	37,55	10,84	
	60-	40	42,35	10,53	,011*
5 English Teacher Evaluation	60+	82	43,29	10,08	
	60-	40	40,07	11,95	,079*
6 Attitudes toward Learning English	60+	178	46,11	10,37	
	60-	40	33,27	14,44	,000*
7 Attitudes toward English-speaking people	60+	179	28,10	8,044	,000*
	60-	37	22,05	8,28	
8 Integrative Orientation	60+	183	17,92	4,45	,000*
	60-	40	12,97	4,50	
9 Desire to Learn English	60+	182	42,69	7,72	
	60-	38	31,94	10,64	,000*
10 English Course Evaluation	60+	179	38,64	11,64	
	60-	40	27,40	10,12	,000*
11 English Use Anxiety	60+	179	36,15	9,40	
	60	36	41,66	8,69	,001*
12 Instrumental Orientation	60+	185	18,87	3,96	
	60-	36	13,97	5,68	,000*

***: p<,05**

Table 2 displays mean, standard deviation and significant difference in terms of academic achievement. In this analysis, 60+ scores were considered successful and 60- scores were taken into evaluation as unsuccessful. In this context, there was a significant difference in scales 1,3,4,6,7,8,9,10,11,12 in terms of academic achievement.

In other words, scales on interest in foreign languages ($p=,000<,05$), motivational intensity ($p=,000<,05$), english class anxiety ($p=,011<,05$), attitude toward learning english ($p=,000<,05$), attitude toward english speaking people ($p=,000<,05$), integrative orientation ($p=,000<,05$), desire to learn english ($p=,000<,05$), english course evaluation ($p=,000<,05$), english use anxiety ($p=,001<,05$), instrumental orientation ($p=,000<,05$) were in favor of successful language learners. On the other hand, there was no significant difference in scales 2 and 5 which were about parental encouragement ($p=,574<,05$) and english teacher evaluation ($p=,079<,05$).

Table 3*The Results of ANOVA Test*

scales	F	Sig. (p)	Levene statistics sig.(p)	Post-hoc test
1 interest in foreign languages	3,886	,010*	,065	Tukey
2 parental encouragement	2,972	,033*	,906	Tukey
3 motivational intensity	2,341	,074	,112	-
4 english class anxiety	1,468	,224	,103	-
5 english teacher evaluation	7,735	,000*	,000*	Dunnet C
6 attitudes toward learning English	5,462	,001*	,228	Tukey
7 attitudes toward English speaking people	3,320	,021*	,765	Tukey
8 integrative orientation	3,244	,023*	,662	Tukey
9 desire to learn english	1,860	,137	,670	-
10 english course evaluation	6,500	,000*	,858	Tukey
11 english use anxiety	4,337	,005*	,679	Tukey
12 instrumental orientation	2,748	,044*	,380	Tukey

***: $p<,05$**

Table 3 indicates results of the ANOVA test which was used to find out whether there was a significant difference in accordance with participants' academic major. According to the data collected, it was understood that there was a significant difference in scales 1,2,5,6,7,8,10,11,12 in terms of academic majors of the participants. However, no significant difference was found in scales 3,4 and 9. Upon determining the scales which had significant difference, Levene Test analyzing the homogeneity of variances, was used to specify the type of post hoc test. According to the data collected from Levene Test, Scales 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 were found homogeneous and thus Tukey test was used for these scales which had significant difference, $p > .05$. Since no homogeneity was found in scale 5, Dunnett C test was utilized for this assessment, $p = .00 < .05$.

Table 4

The Relationship between Motivational Factors and Academic Majors

Scales	Academic majors	<i>M</i>	Mean difference	<i>p</i>
1 interest in foreign languages	Pre-school education/Social sciences teaching	49,45/44,14	5,30749*	,031
	Pre-school education /primary school teaching	49,45/43,39	6,06324*	,031
2 parental encouragement	Social sciences teaching/ primary school teaching	30,51/22,42	8,08658*	,042
6 attitudes toward learning English	Science teaching/ Social sciences teaching	46,16/38,28	07,87619*	,005
	Science teaching/primary school teaching	46,16/38,50	7,66190*	,033
7 attitudes toward English speaking people	Pre-school education/ primary school teaching	29,18/22,91	6,27214*	,014

8 integrative orientation	Pre-school education/science teaching	18,68/16,66	2,01754*	,049
10 english course evaluation	Pre-school education/Social sciences teaching	37,61/29,96	7,64943*	,019
	Science teaching/social sciences teaching		9,08630*	,001
	Science teaching /primary school teaching	39,05/29,96		
		39,05/31,65	7,40287*	,033
11 english use anxiety	social sciences teaching /Science teaching	41,80/35,33	6,46355*	,002

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0,05 level.

Table 4 displays the results of Post-Hoc test on the relations between academic majors in terms of scales. In scale 1 which was about the interest on foreign languages, there was a significant difference between preschool education and social sciences education –primary school teaching ($p=,031<,05$). The difference was in favor of pre-school education (mean: 49,45/44,14-43,39). As for scale 2 which involved parental encouragement factor, there was a significant difference between social sciences teaching and primary school teaching ($p=,042<,05$). The difference was in favor of social sciences education. (30,51/22,42). As of scale 6 on attitudes toward learning English, significant difference was found between Science teaching/ Social sciences teaching ($p=,005<,05$) and Science teaching/primary school teaching ($p=,033<,05$). In terms of the relations between Science teaching and Social sciences- primary school teaching, the difference was in favor of science teaching (46,16/38,28-38,50). In scale 7 which was about attitudes toward English speaking people, there was a significant difference between Pre-school education and primary school teaching ($p=,014<,05$). The difference was in favor of pre-school education (29,18/22,91). In addition, there was a significant difference between Pre-school education and science teaching in terms

of integrative orientation as stated in scale 8 ($p=,049<,05$). In this factor, difference was in favor of pre-school education (18,68/16,66). As of in scale 10 which was on English course evaluation, there were three groups. In the first group, Pre-school education and Social sciences teaching, ($p=,019<,05$), in the second group, Science teaching and social sciences teaching ($p=,001<,05$), in the third group, Science teaching and primary school teaching ($p=,033<,05$) had significant difference between each other. While significant difference was in favor of pre-school education in the first group (37,61/29,96), it was in favor of the science teaching in the second group (39,05/29,96), (39,05/31,65). Finally, scale 11 which was on english use anxiety, had a significant difference between social sciences teaching and Science teaching ($p=,002<,05$) in favor of social sciences teaching (41,80/35,33).

Discussion

The results of this study suggest that gender, academic achievement and the academic major had significant difference in motivating Turkish EFL learners to learn English. As of gender' role, it can be stated that females were more motivated than males in most of motivational factors. This conclusion was in parallel to Bacon & Fienmann's finding (1992) that declared higher levels of motivational factors reported by females as compared to males. Suleiman (1993) also revealed gender-related motivational differences among Arabic ethnicities studying EFL at Arizona State University. In addition, Oxford *et al.* (1993) noticed gender differences in motivation and strategy use in their study of high school students and reported girls appeared to surpass boys. More specifically, in this study females' interest level for learning English was higher than males. Similarly, females' desire to learn English had a more significant effect than males. Females' attitude towards learning English and English speaking people were more positive than males. Furthermore, females' English class and English use anxiety level was lower than males'. Moreover, females' integrative and instrumental orientation to learn English was stronger than males. This finding contradicted to Ludwig's findings which suggested that "men were more likely to enroll in language courses because languages are potentially useful (instrumental motivation) rather than intrinsic (with integrative motivation)" (Ludwig, 1983). Another contradictory finding to this study was from Baker & McIntyre (2000) who revealed that "The male immersion students showed the highest job-related orientation while female non-immersion students showed the highest travel, knowledge, and personal achievement" (Baker & McIntyre,2000). On the other hand, there was no significant difference on parental encouragement and English teacher evaluation in terms of gender. Contrary to this finding, (Chavez, 2000) found out that female university students of German in the USA were found to be more likely than male students to express concern with satisfying the teacher and correctness of their contributions. In another study by Sung & Padilla (1998) proved that no gender differences could be found regarding parents' encouragement. All in all, gender difference plays an important role in language learning on behalf of females.

As of the role of motivational factors in the academic achievement of Turkish EFL learners, there was a significant difference between motivational factors and the academic achievement of the participants. In this context, successful language learners were more interested in foreign languages, integratively and instrumentally oriented, had more motivational intensity and desire to learn English, less class and English use anxiety, positive attitude toward learning English, English speaking people and English course. On the other hand, parental encouragement and English teacher evaluation did

not cause a significant difference for achievers. In the literature about this topic, in comparison integrative motivation to instrumental motivation, Gholami et al (2012) found out in their study that students with integrative motivation significantly outperformed those who were motivated instrumentally. Goodman et al. revealed in their study that (2011) intrinsic motivation is the strongest predictor of academic performance, followed by effort. Comparing these findings with this study, there was no significant difference between integrative and instrumental motivation in this research.

As from the role motivational factors in terms of academic major, some of the majors surpassed others in the use of various motivational factors. It can be stated that participants from pre-school education were more interested in foreign languages than those from social sciences and primary school teaching. Secondly, parental encouragement factor had more positive effect on social sciences students in comparison to primary school teaching students. Next, science teaching students' attitude toward learning English was more optimistic than social science teaching and primary school teaching students. Following this, pre-school education students' attitude toward English speaking people was more positive than primary school education students. In addition, pre-school education students were more integratively motivated than science teaching students. After this, in terms of English course evaluation, there were three groups which surpassed other groups. Pre-school education to Social sciences teaching; Science teaching to social sciences teaching and primary school teaching had significant difference between each other on behalf of pre-school education and science teaching. Finally, in accordance with English use anxiety there was a significant difference between social sciences teaching and Science teaching in favour of social sciences teaching. In the current literature, few scientific studies were found in terms of the role of academic major in language learning. However, Zhenhui (2011) found out that there did exist significant differences between social science students and science students in terms of career interest as a motivational factor.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that most of the motivational factors influence the academic achievement of foreign language learners. Moreover, gender and academic majors also have a deep effect in this process. In the light of data collected in this research, following suggestions can be done to boost the performance of Turkish Foreign language learners. (1) learners should be both integratively and instrumentally motivated to learn English at the very beginning of this process. The instructor plays the most important role on this way. He/she should be a good motivator by recognizing his/her students. (2) cultural awareness and differences should be created in learners to familiarize them with foreign people and cultures. The importance of the concept of linguistic relativity should be highlighted. (3) English use anxiety and English class anxiety should be reduced in learners by emphasizing the fact that making mistake is a natural process in learning a foreign language. (4) gender differences should be taken into consideration in the language classroom. In other words, it should be understood that each gender has unique characteristics and different motivating factors. (5) each academic major has peculiar characteristics which make them different from others. Therefore, in a language classroom, an English class should be prepared and presented according to the characteristics of the target group. (6) Finally, motivational factors, gender and academic major should be taken into consideration while designing syllabus and developing materials for a specific target group.

This study explores the role of motivational factors in the academic achievement of EFL learners and the role of gender and academic major on this way as well. As an implication for future studies, a new syllabus can be designed and in parallel new materials can be developed for different academic majors by considering varying gender characteristics.

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