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The Relationship between EFL Learners' Level of Language Awareness and Their Motivation and Achievement

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at examining the relationship between EFL learners' level of language awareness with their motivation and achievement. Moreover, the relationship between gender, language awareness, motivation and achievement was also investigated. The participants included 120 male and female EFL learners from different language institutes in Kurdistan province selected based on convenient sampling. The learners were then asked to complete the language learning motivation and language awareness questionnaire. The learners were requested to respond to all the items. Finally, the questionnaires were scored and along with the final exam scores as achievement scores of the learners were analyzed to address the research questions. The results of statistical analyses indicated that there was a positive and significant relationship between EFL learners' level of language awareness and motivation. Moreover, there was a significant and positive relationship between the EFL learners' level of language awareness and their achievement. It was also found that there was a significant relationship between gender, language awareness, motivation and achievement of Iranian EFL learners with female participants outperforming the male learners.

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There is a general consensus among learners, educators, teachers, materials developers, and scholars that motivation plays a crucial role in obtaining mastery over a second or foreign language (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). Fortunately, there are valuable studies (e.g., Csizer & Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei, 1994; Dörnyei & Otto, 1998; Kikuchi, 2009; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009; Tanaka, 2005) conducted on the

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contribution of motivation to L2 learning. The study of motivation in language learning has a long history. According to many researchers (e.g., Dörnyei, 2001a, 2001b; Gardner, Lalonde, Moorcroft, & Evers, 1985; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Warden & Lin, 2000), motivation can be considered as one of the main influential factors in a person's success in a second or foreign language learning context. In the same vein, Ely (1986), Spolsky (1989), Scarcella and Oxford (1992) (all cited in Dörnyei, 1994) assert that motivation is an essential factor for L2 learning since it has an effect on different aspects of L2 learning. One of the important concepts associated with language learning is language awareness.

According to Danilewicz (2011), language awareness, namely, being sensitive to the nature of language and its significance in everyday life caught the attention of researchers and educators only in the second part of the 20th century. It is very tricky to define language awareness (Ellis, 2012). In fact, it can be categorized as a psycholinguistic phenomenon and given its cognitive nature with respect to the subject-matter knowledge about the language (mostly grammar), learners benefit from becoming more sensitive to how linguistic means are used in communication (Morawski & Budke, 2017). Therefore, this concept has always been discussed in terms of whether or not teaching can contribute to raising linguistic consciousness (Garrett & Cots, 2017).

A review of the literature on motivation (Brown, 2000; Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Csizer & Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei 1998; Noels, Clement & Pelletier, 1999, 2001; Pae, 2008; Ramage, 1990) indicates that this construct makes important contributions to learners' L2 learning since it is strongly linked with continuous L2 study as well as long-term retention of the L2 content (Brown, 2000; Liu, 2007; Noels et al. 2001; Oxford & Shearin, 1994; Ramage, 1990). Researchers have also found that a great number of English language learners believe that their lack of success in learning ESL/EFL is rooted in lack of motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2010; Falout, Elwood, & Hood, 2009; Hu, 2011; Kim, 2009). This fact has made many researchers attempt to identify the variables related with motivation among second language learners (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2010). One of the variables which might bear relevance to motivation is language awareness. Language awareness has been recently subject to many studies (e.g., Barany, 2016; Berry, 2014; Del Pozo, 2017; Ellis, 2012; Garrett, & Cots, 2017; Helena Araújo e Sá, & Melo, 2007; Lankiewicz, Wąsikiewicz-Firlej, & Szczepaniak-Kozak, 2016; Lo, & Lin, 2014; Morawski, & Budke, 2017; Svalberg, 2007).

In the view of Szczepaniak-Kozak (2016) although language awareness has been explored in many different studies, it has not been fully investigated in English Language Teaching contexts and there is still room for carrying out further investigations. Moreover, Berry (2014) maintains that language awareness should receive more attention in ELT as it can provide awareness not only concerning the language under instruction but can also provide learners insights into the culture and sociolinguistic aspects of the languages. Likewise, Svalberg (2007) notes that language awareness provides fresh opportunities for language teaching in schools. It prevents going to the extremes of too much emphasis on correctness and thorough neglect. In fact, taking such an approach involves more than the utilitarian view of (foreign) languages; FLs need to be viewed as a living phenomenon which shapes our lives and worlds as well as serves as a repertoire of resources which can be shaped by individuals. According to Byram (2006), our own existence, identities and social lives can be shaped by language awareness. In order to fulfil the objectives of this study, the following research questions are formulated:

- Q1.** Is there any significant relationship between the EFL learners' level of language awareness and their motivation?
- Q2.** Is there any significant relationship between the EFL learners' level of language awareness and their language achievement?
- Q3.** Is there any significant relationship between the gender of EFL learners' and their level of language awareness, motivation and achievement?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The participants of this study included 120 EFL students from different English language institutes in Kurdistan province. 65 participants were female and 55 were male. The age range of the learners was from 18 to 32. Convenient sampling was used for choosing the participants; that is, the participants were chosen on the basis of their availability at the time of data collection. Therefore, there was no random sampling. The participants of the current study had been placed at the advanced level of language proficiency since they had passed all the final exams for each term at the institute.

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. Foreign language motivation questionnaire

The motivation questionnaire used in the current study (Appendix A) was a foreign language motivation questionnaire developed by Taguchi, Magid, and Papi (2009) for the Iranian context. To this end, the Persian-translated version of the motivation questionnaire was employed. The questionnaire had been translated by Taguchi et al. (2009) into Persian, and its reliability was reported to be .83 and thus at a satisfactory level. According to Taguchi, et al., the questionnaire was developed on the basis of Dörnyei, Csizer, and Nemeth's (2006) study. The original version of the questionnaire was developed in Japanese and piloted on 345 participants in Japan. The reliability index of the questionnaire in Japanese ELT context was reported to be .78 and thus had an acceptable level of reliability. The Japanese version of the instrument was then modified for use in China and Iran for Taguchi, et al.'s investigation. The questionnaire is based on a 6-point Likert scale with two sections. The total number of items is 76. This questionnaire is based on a 6-point Likert-scale, namely strongly disagree, disagree, to some extent disagree, to some extent agree, agree, and strongly agree for the first section and no/not at all, not a lot, have no feeling, to some extent yes, yes a lot, and yes very much for the second section. The participants' scores are calculated by adding the scores from both sections. Therefore, the scores can range from 76 to 456. The questionnaire has been piloted several times and has a satisfactory level of reliability (Dörnyei, 2010). The reliability indices of the questionnaire in previous studies as reported by Taguchi et al were .78, .81 and .83 for the Japanese, Chinese and Iranian contexts, respectively. Since reliability is sample dependent, the questionnaire was piloted on 30 Iranian EFL learners having similar characteristics to the main participants and its reliability was measured through running Cronbach's Alpha for the current study.

2.2.2. Language achievement test

In order to evaluate English language learners' achievement, the institute's Achievement Test for the intermediate level was employed. This test included 60 items and a writing section. The sixty items were on the listening and reading, vocabulary and grammar. Ten points were also allocated to the writing section of the test. Therefore, the maximum score was 70 for the achievement test.

2.2.3. Language awareness questionnaire

Language Awareness test developed by Hellenic American Union (2015) was used for measuring the participants' language awareness. This questionnaire measures EFL learners' awareness of language and grammatical knowledge. All items worth one point. In this questionnaire, there are six sections and

totally 56 varied items namely: Form and use, General errors, Pragmatic competence, Semantic differences, grammatical terminology, Reading comprehension.

2.3. Procedure

Initially, the researcher piloted the instruments on 30 EFL learners having similar characteristics to the main participants of the study to ensure that the instruments were reliable enough for the current research context. Next, one hundred and twenty male and female EFL learners in different language institutes in Kurdistan province were chosen based on convenient sampling. Then, the researcher gave them a brief description about the purposes of data collection. The learners were then asked to complete the language learning motivation and language awareness questionnaire. The students were invited to take their time and answer the items in the questionnaire carefully. Moreover, for ethical considerations, the students' participation in the research was voluntary and they were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided in this study. They were told that the collected data were used for research purposes only. The participants were given the questionnaires and asked to take them home to complete since based on the regulation of the institutes, the researcher was not allowed to take the class time for this purpose. However, the managers of the language schools gave permission for providing the learners with a description of the questionnaires items and how the learners were supposed to respond to the items. The learners were requested to respond to all the items. Finally, the questionnaires were scored and along with the final exam scores were analyzed to address the research questions.

3. Results

3.1. Reliability of the Instruments

Reliability analysis of the motivation questionnaire, achievement test and the language awareness test was sought through checking the internal consistency on data collected from a pilot sample of 30 EFL learners. Therefore, Cronbach' Alpha was employed to examine the reliability indices. The reliability indices are found in Table 1.

Table 1
Tests of Cronbach's Alpha for L2 Motivation Questionnaire and Achievement and the Language Awareness Test

| | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Cronbach' Alpha |
|--------------------|----|---------|----------------|-----------------|
| Motivation | 30 | 271.733 | 18.827 | 0.83 |
| Language Awareness | 30 | 32.321 | 6.5235 | 0.71 |
| Achievement | 30 | 38.445 | 7.6184 | 0.77 |

As Table 1 shows, the Cronbach' Alpha was found 0.83, 0.71 and 0.77 for L2 motivation questionnaire and achievement and the language awareness tests, respectively, which are acceptable indices of reliability.

3.2. Answering Research Question One

The first research question of the current study aimed at finding any significant relationship between the EFL learners' level of language awareness and their motivation. To explore this research question, the researcher first checked the normality of the data sets to determine whether to use parametric or non-parametric tests. To this aim, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality was used. Table 2 displays the results.

Table 2
Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality for the Motivation Questionnaire and Language Awareness Test

| One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test | | | |
|---|----------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| | | Total Motivation | Total Language Awareness |
| N | | 120 | 120 |
| Normal Parameters ^{a,b} | Mean | 269.9333 | 31.4800 |
| | Std. Deviation | 93.71203 | 13.77849 |
| Most Extreme Differences | Absolute | .138 | .148 |
| | Positive | .084 | .067 |
| | Negative | -.138 | -.148 |
| Test Statistic | | .138 | .148 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | | .321 | .580 |

a. Test distribution is Normal.

As Table 2 shows, the significant values of Kolmogorov-Smirnov were found 0.321 and 0.580 for L2 motivation questionnaire and language awareness test, respectively. This indicates that the data were normally distributed. Therefore, the parametric statistical test was the appropriate test to be used in the present study. Thus, the researcher decided to use Pearson correlation coefficient to address the research question. Table 3 displays the results of descriptive statistics for the motivation questionnaire and language awareness test.

Table 3
The Results of Descriptive Statistics for the Motivation Questionnaire and Language Awareness Test

| | N | Range | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | Variance |
|--------------------------|-----|--------|---------|---------|----------|----------------|----------|
| Total Motivation | 120 | 338.00 | 85.00 | 423.00 | 269.9333 | 93.71203 | 8781.945 |
| Total Language Awareness | 120 | 52.00 | 2.00 | 54.00 | 31.4800 | 13.77849 | 189.847 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 120 | | | | | | |

Table 4 demonstrates the results of Pearson correlation coefficient for the motivation questionnaire and language awareness test.

Table 4
Results of Pearson Correlation Coefficient for the Motivation Questionnaire and Language Awareness Test

| Correlations | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|
| | Total Motivation |
| Total Motivation | 1.000 |
| Total Language Awareness | .321 ^{**} |

| | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Total Motivation | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .762** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 120 | 120 |
| Total Language Awareness | Pearson Correlation | .762** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 120 | 120 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As seen in the above Table, the correlation coefficient index between motivation and language awareness test turned out to be .76 which is significant at 0.01. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant and positive relationship between the EFL learners' level of language awareness and their motivation.

3.3. Answering Research Question Two

The second research question of the present study aimed to discover any significant relationship between the EFL learners' level of language awareness and their language achievement. To address this research question, the researcher checked the normality of the data sets to determine whether to use parametric or non-parametric tests. To this aim, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality was applied. Table 5 shows the results.

Table 5
Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality for Language Awareness and Achievement

| One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| | | Total Awareness | Language Achievement Total |
| N | | 120 | 120 |
| Normal Parameters ^{a,b} | Mean | 31.4800 | 40.0104 |
| | Std. Deviation | 13.77849 | 16.44705 |
| Most Extreme Differences | Absolute | .148 | .146 |
| | Positive | .067 | .069 |
| | Negative | -.148 | -.146 |
| Test Statistic | | .148 | .146 |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) | | .580 | .119 |

a. Test distribution is Normal.

As Table 5 shows, the significant values of Kolmogorov-Smirnov were found 0.119 and 0.580 for L2 motivation questionnaire and language awareness test, respectively. This indicates that the data were normally distributed and thus the researcher employed Pearson correlation coefficient to address the research question. Table 6 shows the results of descriptive statistics for the achievement and language awareness test.

Table 6
The Results of Descriptive Statistics for the Achievement and Language Awareness Test

| N | Range | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | Variance |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|
| Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic | Statistic |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----|-------|------|-------|---------|---------|----------|---------|
| Total Language Awareness | 120 | 52.00 | 2.00 | 54.00 | 31.4800 | 1.25780 | 13.77849 | 189.847 |
| Achievement Total | 120 | 62.00 | 7.00 | 69.00 | 40.0104 | 1.50140 | 16.44705 | 270.505 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 120 | | | | | | | |

Table 7 demonstrates the results of Pearson correlation coefficient for the achievement and language awareness test.

Table 7

Results of Pearson Correlation Coefficient for the Achievement and Language Awareness Test

| Correlations | | Total Language Awareness | Language Achievement Total |
|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Total Language Awareness | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .689** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 120 | 120 |
| Achievement Total | Pearson Correlation | .689** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 120 | 120 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As seen in the above Table, the correlation coefficient index between achievement and language awareness test turned out to be .68 which is significant at 0.01. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant and positive relationship between the EFL learners' level of language awareness and their achievement.

3.4. Answering Research Question Three

The third research question of the current study aimed to find any significant relationship between the gender of EFL learners' and their level of language awareness, motivation and achievement. To explore this research question, the researcher employed independent samples t-test to find any significant differences between motivation, language awareness and achievement across gender. Table 9 demonstrates the results of descriptive statistics for the motivation, language awareness and achievement for the male and female participants in the study.

Table 8

Results of Descriptive Statistics for the Motivation, Language Awareness and Achievement for the Male and Female Participants

| Group Statistics | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|----|----------|----------------|-----------------|--|
| | Female and Male Groups | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | |
| Total Motivation | Male | 55 | 201.2182 | 59.32762 | 7.99973 | |
| | Female | 65 | 328.0769 | 76.60191 | 9.50130 | |
| Total Language Awareness | Male | 55 | 20.2800 | 10.39254 | 1.40133 | |
| | Female | 65 | 40.9569 | 7.92791 | .98334 | |
| Achievement Total | Male | 55 | 26.9045 | 11.64479 | 1.57018 | |
| | Female | 65 | 51.1000 | 10.77255 | 1.33617 | |

As Table 8 indicates, the means for the motivation (201.21<328.07), language awareness (20.28<40.95) and achievement (26.90<51.100) are all higher for the female participants compare to those

of male participants. To check whether these differences are significant independent samples t-test was run. Table 9 depicts the results.

Table 9

Results of Independent Samples t-test Comparing the Motivation, Language Awareness and Achievement across Gender

Independent Samples Test

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------|---|----------|------------|
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Total Motivation | Equal variances assumed | 3.626 | .159 | -10.00 | 118 | .000 | -126.858 | 12.68441 | -151.977 | -101.74016 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -10.21 | 117.13 | .000 | -126.858 | 12.42056 | -151.456 | -102.26076 |
| Total Language Awareness | Equal variances assumed | 5.740 | .118 | -12.35 | 118 | .000 | -20.67692 | 1.67431 | -23.992 | -17.36134 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -12.07 | 99.846 | .000 | -20.67692 | 1.71192 | -24.073 | -17.28045 |
| Achievement Total | Equal variances assumed | .476 | .492 | -11.81 | 118 | .000 | -24.19545 | 2.04833 | -28.251 | -20.13920 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -11.73 | 111.28 | .000 | -24.19545 | 2.06175 | -28.280 | -20.11007 |

As presented in the above table, there was a significant difference between the motivation of female and male learners ($F=3.62$, $t=10.0$ $p<0.05$). Moreover, there was a significant difference between the language awareness of female and male learners ($F=5.7$, $t=12.35$ $p<0.05$). Similarly, there was a significant difference between the achievement scores of female and male learners ($F=.47$, $t=11.81$ $p<0.05$). Thus, it can be concluded that there was a significant relationship between gender, language awareness, motivation and achievement of Iranian EFL learners with female participants outperforming the male learners.

4. Discussion

The present study aimed at investigating the relationship between EFL learners' level of language awareness with their motivation and achievement. Moreover, the relationship between gender, language awareness, motivation and achievement was also investigated. The results of statistical analyses indicated that there was a positive and significant relationship between EFL learners' level of language awareness and motivation. Moreover, there was a significant and positive relationship between the EFL learners' level of language awareness and their achievement. It was also found that there was a significant

relationship between gender, language awareness, motivation and achievement of Iranian EFL learners with female participants outperforming the male learners.

The finding of the present study indicating a significant and positive relationship between EFL learners' level of language awareness and motivation is in line with Hall (2011) who proposes that motivation is a fundamental factor in order to learn a language. As Hall maintains having awareness for the language may also contribute to motivation for learning the language. Hall further notes that the knowledge about a particular subject acts as a harbinger for learning. Furthermore, he points out that teachers often attribute language learners' achievements or failures mostly to the lack or presence of motivation.

Concerning the relationship between the EFL learners' level of language awareness and their achievement, Pae (2008) maintains that intrinsic motivation must be improved if learners intend to increase their learning. This, in turn, will result in increased L2 achievement (Pae, 2008). Teachers also have to raise the students' L2 success expectations. This is supported by achievement motivation model developed by Atkinson and Raynor (1974). Based on this theory, learners are more likely to engage in an activity when they have the impression that they will be successful in that particular activity.

Concerning the findings of the present study regarding the significant differences between male and female participants in terms of language awareness, motivation and achievement, it should be noted that in previous studies gender differences have been reported in human social and cognitive development. Studies have shown that females are more interested towards social activities than males, females tend to be less competitive and more cooperative than males (Eagly & Karau, 2002). It has also been claimed that females are better than males both in second and first language acquisition (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). Studies in different cultures indicate more frequent strategy use by females than males, particularly the social strategies (Green & Oxford, 1995). Sunderland (2000) also found that males and females are different in language learning and the strategies they adopt to approach language learning.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the present study, language teachers should be given awareness concerning the relationship between motivation, language awareness and achievement. They should also be given awareness concerning how to motivate learners more in an attempt to improve their language awareness and achievement. Based on the findings, it can also be stated that gender differences do have an effect on learning different skills and their components. Therefore, foreign language instructors are encouraged to take benefit from taking this point into consideration to improve students' learning. Material developers may also greatly benefit from taking the role of gender in mind when developing materials in order to strike a balance in the materials so that both genders are equally treated and given the opportunities for learning. Curriculum developers can also gain benefits from the findings of the present study. In designing curriculums, they can consider the results of this study. Drawing on the findings of the present investigation, they may want to consider the role gender has when it comes to language awareness and consequently design curriculums which suit both sexes.

Last but not least, the learners themselves can be given awareness in terms of how gender can be related to different areas of language learning and thus assisted in the process of language learning. To this end, the areas of strengths and weakness can be elaborated on for the learners by teachers. Moreover, in the light of the findings of this study, teachers may intend to consider the strengths and weaknesses of both genders in teaching and attempt to compensate for the weaknesses by focusing on the strengths.

Based on the principles of descriptive research, there are a number of areas which were not touched in this study. This study can be replicated with a larger group of participants to find out whether the same results would be obtained or not. It is suggested that the variables of this study be compared in

the light of other individual differences e.g. age, level of proficiency etc. This study can be replicated employing some qualitative instruments to increase the validity and reliability of the results and interpretations. Other studies can inspect the way different cognitive styles might affect the findings. Similar studies can be carried out to investigate the role gender may have in learning other language skills and components i.e. vocabulary, pronunciation, writing, writing accuracy, etc. Other experiments can be done in a qualitative manner exploring the reasons behind the differences revealed by the findings of this study.

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