



On the role of Attitudes and Motivation in students' performance in Iranian university entrance exam

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Received: 01.02.2015; Accepted: 05.05.2015

Abstract. The Iranian University Entrance Exam, Konkoor, is a nation-wide exam used as the criteria to enter higher education in Iran. This exam includes almost all subjects of high school, including English language. This study investigates the effect of Iranian students' attitudes toward learning English and motivations for learning English on their performance in "Konkoor ". The sample of the study included of 383 male and female students of four high schools in Dehloran west of Iran. A correlational research was designed and "Attitude/Motivation Test Battery", AMTB, was adapted as instrument of the study. Results showed that female students were more motivated than males, and their attitude toward learning English was also more positive. The study also showed that junior students of high school are more motivated than seniors. No significant difference was found between high school students in motivational orientations and they all had positive attitude toward learning English as a foreign language. Finding, thus, supports the need to motivate students to have a better performance in Konkoor and other educational objectives.

Keywords: Motivation, Attitude, Learning English, Konkoor.

1. INTRODUCTION

Iranian Universities Entrance Exam (UEE) or Konkoor is the biggest wall between students and universities in Iran. As in many other countries where a university entrance exam is the only criterion for student selection, limited space and resources in Iran terminate many talented and enthusiastic applicants who seek access to higher education. Motivation has been widely appreciated by both teachers and researchers as one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second/foreign language learning. The original impetus in second/foreign (L2) motivation research comes from social psychology since learning the language of another community simply cannot be separated from the learners' social dispositions towards the speech community in question. Here comes the important role of motivation and student's attitude are thought to have an important effect on learning English and as Dabbagh Ghazvini and Khajepour (2011) mentioned "These factors are deep within the students' minds."(P: 1210)

In the early years of studies about the effect of Motivation on learning foreign language , Gardner and Lambert (1972), divided motivation into two very general orientations: instrumental and integrative . Instrumental motivation refers to a desire to learn a language because it would fulfill certain utilitarian goals, such as getting a job, and passing an examination. Integrative motivation refers to a desire to learn a language in order to communicate with people of another culture who speak it; the desire is also there to identify closely with the target language group (Al Rifai, 2010). Since each of these orientations can be

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the reasons for motivated students in learning English, in the present research, the instrumental motivation among Iranian students for a better place and field in a better university is examined. In spite of the conceptual differences, however, most researchers agree that motivation is related to persons' choice of a particular action, persistence with it, and effort expended on it (Manolopoulou-Sergi, 2004). Brown (2001) argues that motivation is right only when its full complexity is recognized and applied appropriately in the language classroom (Mohammadi, Moenikia, Zahed-Babelan (2010).

2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between motivation and attitude with Learning L2. Although many previous studies have been done on this relationship in different context and there was usually a meaningful relationship, few devoted to Iranian context in general and University Entrance Exam in particular. Therefore, the present study intends to investigate the relationship between motivation for and attitude toward Learning L2 in high schools to pass University Entrance Exam (UEE) in Iran, known in Persian as Koonkor. The topic was studied due to the fact that UEE plays a great part in the student's life. In this research the role of gender differences is investigated as well. Stated otherwise, the main goal of this study is to investigate if motivation plays any role in improving student's English section.

Research Question:

1. Dose Motivation play any role in improving students' English scores in University Entrance Exam, Konkoor?
2. Dose genders play any role in Learners Motivation and Attitude toward learning L2?
3. Dose motivational orientations play any role in students' performance on English section in University Entrance Examination?
4. Is there any meaningful difference between senior and junior students' motivation and attitude with their English score in University Entrance Examination?

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Lambert (1963) has proposed a social psychological model in which he has emphasized cognitive factors such as language aptitudes and intelligence as well as affective factors such as attitudes and motivation. In his model, he proposes that the extent to which an individual successfully acquires a second language will depend upon ethnocentric tendencies, attitudes towards the other community, orientation towards language learning and motivation (Dabbagh Ghazvini, Khajehpour, 2011). As Dornyei mentioned learning an L2 is in many ways different from learning other school subjects. While an L2 is a Learnable school subject in that discrete elements of the communication code (e.g., grammatical rules and lexical items) can be thought explicitly, it is also a social event that requires that incorporation of wide range of elements of L2 culture (Dornyei, 2003).

Dabbagh Ghazvini, and Khajehpour (2011) the level of the relationship between students' own cultural background and the background projected by the L2 culture often influences their attitudes toward L2 in particular and toward their motivation to learn it in general.

Mohammadi, Moenikia and Zahed-Babelan (2010), in their research about the relationship between motivational systems and second language learning, showed that the motivation of female students was significantly more than male students, and finally the mean score of female students' second language learning was significantly more than male students. These findings are coherent with findings of the previous studies (Brown, 2001; Dornyei, 2003; Gardner, 2000; Manolopoulou-Sergi, 2004; pintrich, 2003; Ryan, & Deci, 2000; and Skinner, & Madden,

2009). All of these studies indicated that motivation is an important factor in second language learning, and having this motivation is the basic brick of the students Attitude toward learning a second or foreign language.

Dabbagh Ghazvini and Khajehpour, (2011) in their research showed that the female students are more integrative motivated and male students are more instrumentally motivated to learn English. In addition, the female students had more positive attitude toward learning English than their male counterparts and were also more inclined to bilingualism. However no study so far examined UEE as a variable.

Brown (2001) in his work maintained that English language teaching has moved into a post-methodological era and that teachers should base their pedagogy on principles that will “form the core of an approach to language teaching” (pp. 54-55). He has divided twelve principles into three categories: cognitive, affective, and linguistic. Dornyei (2003) had two purposes in his work, the first one was overviewing the history of studies that had been done about the effect of motivation on learning other languages and the second one to create theoretical context of that articles, which made the way easier for further studies. Manolopoulou-Sergi (2004) highlights the importance of the motivational construct for the foreign language learning (FLL) process. In his article he argued that motivation is likely to play a significant role at all three stages of the FLL process as they are discussed within the information processing model of FLL, namely, input (first encounter with the new material), central processing (connections between new material and existing knowledge), and output (demonstration of the acquired knowledge). Pintrich(2003) introduced and asked seven questions and tried to answer them which suggested as important directions for current and future motivational science research efforts in order to shows that a motivational science perspective on student motivation in learning and teaching contexts is developed that highlights three general themes for motivational research. The three themes include the importance of a general scientific approach for research on student motivation, the utility of multidisciplinary perspectives, and the importance of use-inspired basic research on motivation.

Similar works had also been done in Iran (e.g., Dabbagh ghazvini, & Khajehpour, 2011). However, the great gape of previous studies is that none of them tried to find out the relationship between students' Motivation and attitude toward L2 on their result in university entrance exams in Iran (known in Persian as Konkoor).

4. METHOD

4.1. Participants

The population of the study included 383 female and male high school students; all of them have to pass an exam similar to Konkoor every month, which called "sanjesh test". Their age is between 14 to18, and they had been chosen through available sampling method from the population.

4.2. Instrument

Attitude/Motivation Test Battery: International AMTB Research Project was used in this study. As in the study conducted by Dabbagh ghazvini, and Khajehpour(2011), this study also adapted the attitude and motivation scales of the original 6-point Likert Scale format of Gardner's Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) (Gardner, 1985) to a 5-point scale, ranging from ‘Strongly Agree’ to ‘Strongly Disagree’ for easier answering of students. The AMTB was reported to have good reliability and validity (Gardner, 1985; 1980; Gardner and Smythe, 1981) and the internal consistency estimate of reliability for the modified questionnaire

was calculated, and Cronbach's Alpha was 0.7. Since the students came from different academic and socio-economic backgrounds with different levels of proficiency in English, the translated version of the questionnaire was administered. 33item were answered by students and the results were analyzed by SPSS software.

4.3. Procedure

From five different high schools in Dehloran west of Iran, 383 students were asked to indicate on a five point scale how important each reason was for their learning English as a foreign language. Their result in "Sanjesh" tests in one month was compared with their answers to AMTB 33item questionnaire. The students answered the questionnaire with their freewill in their own classes in familiar and friendly place, which reduced the element of stress in the result of their answerers. The students' responses to the questionnaire were analyzed through both

Table 1. Mean and Standard deviation of the Gender.

Group Statistics

	gender of the respondents	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total Motivation	male	192	87.1047	16.89097	1.22219
	female	191	115.3194	9.02322	.65290

descriptive and inferential statistics.

5. RESULT

Table 2. Independent T-test for the equality of the means of table 1

Independent sample Test

		Level's test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95%confidence intervalof the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	sig.(2tailed)	Mean Difference	std.Error difference	Lower	uper
Total Orientatio	Equal Variances assumd	125.93	.000	-20.362	380	.000	-28.21466	1.38565	-30.9391	-25.4901
	Equal Variances not assumd			-20.362	290.276	.000	-28.21466	1.38565	-30.9418	-25.4847

An independent sample T-test was conducted to compare the means for motivation in males and females. As can be seen in the table above, there was a significant difference in the scores for males (M= 87.1047, SD= 16.89097) and females (M= 115.3194, SD= 9.02322) conditions; [t (209.276) = -20.362, p= .000]. These results suggest that motivation really does have an effect on students' performance in University Entrance Examination for both genders.

Table 3. Mean and Standard deviation of the scores for senior and junior students

Group Statistics

	educational level of the respondents	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Total Motivation	seniors	192	88.0471	17.53321	1.26866
	juniors	191	114.3770	10.53487	.76228

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Table 4: Independent T-test for the equality of the means of table 3

Independent Sample Test

		Level's test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95%confidence intervalof the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	sig.(2tailed)	Mean Difference	std.Error difference	Lower	uper
Total Orientation	Equal Variances assumd	101.704	.000	-17.790	380	.000	-26.32984	1.48005	-29.2399	-23.4197
	Equal Variances not assumd			-17.790	311.370	.000	-26.32984	1.48005	-29.2420	-23.4176

Table 5: Mean and Standard deviation of the scores of Second and Third grade students

	the education level of the respondents	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Motivational Orientations	second grade junior high school	192	101.5278	11.52929	1.10941
	third grade senior high school	191	102.3613	10.18867	.93399

An independent sample T-test was conducted to compare the means for motivation of seniors and juniors. As can be seen from the table above, there was a significant difference in the scores for seniors (M= 88.0471, SD=17.53321) and juniors (M=114.3770, SD= 10.53487) conditions; [t (311.370) = -17.790, p= .000.] These results suggest that motivation really does have an effect on students' performance in University Entrance Examination for both seniors and juniors.

Table 6: Independent T-test for the equality of the means of tabl

Independent Samplr Test

		Level's test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95%confidence intervalof the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	sig.(2tailed)	Mean Difference	std.Error difference	Lower	uper
Total Orientation	Equal Variances assumd	.012	.914	-.578	225	.564	-.83357	1.44156	-3.67425	2.0071
	Equal Variances not assumd			-.575	214.650	.566	-.83357	1.45022	-3.69205	2.0249

An independent-sample T-test was conducted to compare the means for motivational orientations in juniors and seniors. As can be seen from the table above, there was no significant difference in the scores for juniors (M=101.5278, SD=11.52929) and seniors (M=102.3613, SD=10.18867) conditions; [t (214.650) = -.575, p= .000.] These results suggest that motivational orientations do not have an effect on students' performance in University Entrance Examination for both seniors and juniors.

6. CONCLUSION

In this study the Motivation and Attitude of high school students had been examined for relationship with their presents in university entrance exam. The other studies such as, Al Rifai, N. (2010), Dabbagh Ghazvini, S. & Khajehpour, M.(2011), Dornyei, Z.(2003), Williams,M.(1994) are almost done the same work. However before this study there weren't any other studies about (UEE) like Konkoor in Iran. Results showed that the females were more motivated than males, and their attitude toward learning English was also more positive. On the other hand results showed that junior students of high school are more motivated than seniors. But what haven't done in it are the other factors that can effect on this presents in English section of Konkoor. The social conditions, economic conditions, and family backgrounds were not been considered.

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