The Role of Social Support on Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation among Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

The role of motivation continues to play a fundamental role in the field of learning English as a foreign language (EFL). EFL Learners are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. Accordingly, those who learn L2 for their own self-perceived needs and goals have intrinsic motivation while those who pursue a goal in L2 learning only to receive an external reward from somebody else are extrinsically motivated. The aim of the study was to explore if social support from different sources influence the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. It was hypothesized that motivation would be associated with social support such as support from parents, siblings, and EFL teachers. This study aimed at exploring the effects of social support on motivation among 60 intermediate Iranian EFL male and female learners. To this end, using a validated researchers-made questionnaire and conducting semi-structured interviews with a random of 15 participants, the current study examined the effects of social support on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among Iranian EFL learners. The results revealed that support from others (i.e., parents, siblings, and EFL teachers) significantly influenced both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. It could be claimed that those L2 learners who are supported intrinsically and extrinsically are more motivated to learn English. It might be recommended to the EFL teachers and parents providing situations in which L2 learners benefit from different kinds of motivations.

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Keywords: Intrinsic Motivation; Extrinsic Motivation; Social Support

1. Introduction

Studies on L2 learning show that motivation is one of the affective variables that extensively distinguish L2 learners (e.g., Matsumoto & Obana, 2001; Yu & Watkins, 2008). Some researchers believe that motivation can

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compensate for insufficiency in language aptitude and learning (e.g., Oxford & Shearin, 1996; Williams & Burden, 1997).

According to Gardner and Lambert (1959, 1972), motivation is a key feature in L2 learning. Motivation is not only a central factor in human life but also a key factor in L2 learning (Coleman, James, Galaczi, & Astruc, 2007). As Lier states (1996, p. 98), motivation plays such an important role in L2 learning that without its existence even the most gifted learners cannot achieve their goals. Moreover, Deci and Ryan (1985) discuss that a supportive learning situation is associated with motivation. Therefore, it indicates the fact that motivation is a variable which radically influences L2 learning and that motivation is stimulated by support from others. As encouragement and support by parents and teachers rise, L2 learners would like to benefit English learning and are more willing to learn English.

With regard to L2 learning, Gardner and Lambert (1959, 1972) differentiate integrative motivation from instrumental motivation. They define integrative motivation as L2 learners’ wishes to recognize themselves as a part of L2 community and become a member of it. In addition, they describe instrumental motivation as practical value learners find in L2 learning such as the future career perspective.

Regarding the nature of language learning motivation, the scholars have considered alternative models. One alternative that has been introduced is the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. As Ryan and Deci (2000) postulate, intrinsic motivation is engaging in an activity because it is enjoyable and satisfying to do. They believe that intrinsic motivation is based on instinctive needs for competence and self-determination. Extrinsic motivation contrasts intrinsic motivation in which it refers to the performance of an activity to attain some distinguishable outcome. Moreover, extrinsic motivation refers to doing actions to achieve some instrumental aim such as earning a reward or avoiding a penalty.

Vallerand (1997) divided intrinsic motivation into three types: (1) intrinsic motivation to know (IM-Knowledge), (2) intrinsic motivation toward accomplishment (IM-Accomplishment), and (3) intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation (IM-Stimulation).

Accordingly, based on the findings of a study conducted by Carreira (2005), IM-knowledge is the motivation associated with doing an activity for the pleasure for developing knowledge and new ideas. IM-accomplishment refers to motivation associated with attempting to recognize an object or master a task. And IM-stimulation is related to motivation based on the sensations aroused by doing a task that is fun and excitement.

Moreover, it is believed that extrinsic motivation can play a crucial role in learning. For instance, Deci and Ryan (1985) claim that learners who initially have no motivation to act can be motivated. In the field of education, Deci and Ryan (2002) divide extrinsic motivation into four levels: (1) External regulation refers to a behavior decided through external means available to individuals. For example, children perform in order to gain something or avoid consequences controlled by others (Deci & Ryan, 1985), (2) Introjected regulation is a stage of internalization and involves in an internal motivation. However, it is a demanded motivational orientation. For instance, children try to do their homework; otherwise they feel guilty (Ryan, Connell, & Deci, 1985), (3) Identified regulation is another stage of internalization through which individuals get autonomy. In fact, they feel that performing an action is worthwhile and causes them to gain accomplishments (Deci & Ryan, 1985), (4) Integrated regulation is considered as the most autonomous level of extrinsic motivation. Ryan et al. (1985) argue that “all the various identifications or values that one hold are integrated with one another into a coherent, conflict-free hierarchy, and thus allow for smooth autonomous choice and functioning” (p. 36).

Concerning the function of motivation on L2 learning, a panel of researchers (e.g., Change, 2010; Wong, 2008) has noticed the relationship between social support and learners’ motivation. In a study conducted by Phan (2010), it was reported that the teachers’ support impacted the participants’ motivation to learn English. With regard to social support, family members, especially parents, play an important role in giving support to students’ learning. In order to internalize values, objectives, and desires that their parents appreciate, children need to be prepared with
autonomy, structure, and engagement by their parents (Grolnick, Deci, & Ryan, 1997). Moreover, Gardner (1960) conducted a study in Canada to investigate the role of social support on integrative and instrumental motivation. The results revealed that parental support was related to integrative motivation because the parents had positive attitudes toward the Canadian community.

Moreover, in a study conducted by Noels (2001), the relations between awareness of teachers’ communicative technique and students’ motivation were investigated. It was found that the teacher’s behaviour influences the students’ generalized feelings of autonomy and competence. Besides, as the teacher praised and encouraged students informatively and got involved in the students’ learning, the students felt competent in learning Spanish. Noels also found that the integrative orientation was strongly correlated with intrinsic motivation and identified regulation.

Following the research on motivation and social support, this study is to examine social support (from parents, EFL teachers, and siblings) and intrinsic and extrinsic motivations among Iranian young EFL learners. In brief, based on the context and needs defined at the outset, and the review of relevant literature in the field just presented, this study explored the following question through the quantitative analysis of the questionnaire-based data as well as the complementary interpretive analysis of the transcribed interview data.

- Does social support (i.e., from parents, EFL teachers, and siblings) affect L2 learning intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among Iranian young EFL learners?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

The participants comprised 60 Iranian EFL learners, 28 males and 32 females whose ages ranged from 12 to 16. It is worth mentioning that gender was not a controlled factor in choosing the participants.

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. Student's Questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed to explore the effects of social support, namely parents, EFL teachers, and siblings, on L2 learning intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among Iranian young EFL learners. The student's questionnaire consisted of 26 items in six sections: six items to parents social support in English language learning, two items to EFL teachers social support in English language learning, three items to siblings social support in English language learning, seven items to parents motivation in English language learning, five items to EFL teacher motivation in English language learning, and three items to siblings motivation in English language learning. Items comprised a statement accompanied by a four-point Likert scale attached to descriptors ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (always). Moreover, the items in the questionnaires were written in English. The content validity of the instruments was ensured through reading the related literature, the development and use of a detailed item specification as the blueprint, experts’ judgments, and pilot testing. The construct validity of the questionnaires was examined using factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value was .63. Additionally, the results of the Cronbach’s alpha for student's questionnaire was .87, indicating good internal consistencies.

2.2.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interview was also conducted randomly on a sample of 15 of the participants to explore the effects of social support, namely parents, EFL teachers, and siblings, on L2 learning intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among Iranian young EFL learners. The EFL teachers were interviewed, too.
3. Results

The objective of this article was to explore the effects of social support (i.e., from parents, EFL teachers, and siblings) on L2 learning intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among Iranian young EFL learners. Both quantitative and interpretative approaches were utilized to the data analysis to be able to safely make claims about the objectives of the study.

3.1. The Chi-Square Results of Parents’ Social Support and Motivation in Questionnaire

The results of the chi-square tests of parents’ social support and motivation are exhibited in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Items &amp; Dimensions</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental Support and Motivation</td>
<td>Caring about the time of the class</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recording English programs</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spending as much money as they can afford on English materials</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practicing English with me</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forcing me to learn English</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asking about my English classes and exams</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 1 demonstrates, the effect of social support from the parents among the participants was statically significant in Items 1, 3, 5, and 6. An inspection of the chi-square results revealed that most of the participants in the study chose “often” or “always”. The results of the chi-square test for the EFL teachers’ social support and motivation are demonstrated in Table 2.

3.2. The Chi-Square Results of Teachers’ Social Support and Motivation in Questionnaire

The results of the chi-square tests of teachers' social support and motivation are exhibited in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Items &amp; Dimensions</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Chi-square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers Support and Motivation</td>
<td>Introducing new CD and materials</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giving positive verbal and nonverbal emotional feedback</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Table 2 indicates, the results related to “teachers’ support and motivation” in the student’s questionnaire were statistically significant. In fact, most of the participants selected “often” or “always” for items in teachers’ social support subscale. Table 3 shows the results of the chi-square test for the siblings’ support and motivation on the students’ questionnaire.

3.3. The Chi-Square Results of Siblings’ Social Support and Motivation In Questionnaire

The results of the chi-square tests of siblings’ social support and motivation are exhibited in Table 3.

![Table 3. The Chi-Square Results of Siblings' Social Support](image)

As Table 3 illustrated, the effects of social support from siblings on the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among the participants were not statically significant.

4. Discussion

The analysis of interviews and the chi-squares showed that parental and teachers’ support was significant on EFL learning. This may suggest that Iranian parents and teachers support and motivate EFL learners in different ways. The findings of this study are in line with some other previous studies. For instance, Chao (1994) found that, in the Asian contexts, parental care and love are connected to children’s positive outcomes. In addition, Dörnyei, (2001) states that the teacher’s role in the classroom is so important that “almost everything a teacher does in the classroom has a motivational influence on students” (p. 32).

Concerning motivation in L2 learning, Schimdt, Boraie, and Kassabgy (1996) argue that extrinsic motivation is as the one to obtain an external reward and intrinsic motivation as the one to get sufficient rewards from the activity itself. They claim that intrinsic-extrinsic difference is the same as integrative-instrumental distinction. They believe that instrumental and integrative motivations are subtypes of extrinsic motivation because both are related to goals and outcomes. They also concluded that instrumental and integrative motivations are not a dichotomy, that is to say that one does not rule out the other. There are some L2 learners who have both instrumental and integrative motivation and those who have neither instrumental nor integrative motivation.

Therefore, it can be claimed that Iranian L2 learners who are supported by their parents and teachers are extrinsically motivated. They may be inspired to learn English to be able to become part of English community and make friends, to travel abroad to study, and to get a well paid job. The parental and instructor’s support stimulates L2 learners to have both integrative and instrumental motivations which are subtypes of extrinsic motivation.
Moreover, it can be inferred that Iranian L2 learners are intrinsically motivated by their parents and teachers. Based on Carreira (2005), intrinsic motivation is associated with a performance that gives the pleasure to raise knowledge and new ideas, with being aware of a purpose or master a task, and with the feelings stimulated by doing a task, that is fun and excitement. Therefore, it might be said that parental and teachers’ support intrinsically enthruse Iranian EFL learners. Parents and instructors may encourage their children to learn English in order to increase their knowledge in using computer, to travel to foreign countries and talk with tourists to have fun and excitement, to improve their English, and find self-confidence in using their English.

5. Conclusion

The focus of current study was on social support (from parents, EFL teachers, and siblings) and intrinsic-extrinsic motivation. It was found that the participants of the study were supported by their parents and instructors; therefore, they are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to learn English. It is indicated that providing financial support, involving in the children’s learning English, convincing the children learning English and the like, parents support their children and increase their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations to learn English. Furthermore, EFL teachers can have a significant role on the success of L2 learners learning English. Explaining the merits of learning English such as studying abroad, using English both written and spoken sources, being able to use technology suitably, and finding a well-paid job are a few examples indicating EFL teachers’ support.

References


Appendix A. Student's Questionnaire

Student ID: Age:

Directions: This questionnaire composed of statements concerning social support and encouragement from parents, EFL teachers, and siblings in learning English. Please indicate the frequency of time they encourage and support you learn English.

1= Never 2= Sometimes 3= Often 4= Always

1. My parents do not care about the time of the class to take me and to pick me up from the institute.
2. My parents try to record the English programs (e.g., talk show and cartoons).
3. My parents spend as much money as they can afford on English materials (e.g., CDs, movies, and private teacher) for me.
4. My parents know English and help me to practice English.
5. My parents force me to learn English.
6. My parents ask about my English learning (e.g., English classes and exams).
7. My teacher introduces new CDs and materials (e.g., CDs, books, and movies).
8. My teacher gives positive verbal and nonverbal emotional feedback.
9. My sibling(s) helps me in buying English materials.
10. My sibling(s) takes me to and picks me up from the language school.
11. My sibling(s) practices English with me at home.
12. My parents encourage me to learn English to go abroad to study.
13. My parents encourage me to learn English to get a well-paid and high-position job.
14. My parents encourage me to learn English to be able to make friends among English people.
15. My parents encourage me to learn English to travel to foreign countries.
16. My parents encourage me to learn English to use the computer effectively (e.g., sending emails, using video calls, and using voice calls).
17. My parents encourage me to learn English to be a good model for younger siblings.
18. My teacher encourages me to learn English to go abroad to study.
19. My teacher encourages me to learn English to get a well-paid and high-position job.
20. My teacher encourages me to learn English to be able to make friends among English people.
21. My teacher encourages me to learn English to travel to foreign countries.
22. My teacher encourages me to learn English to use the computer effectively (e.g., sending emails, using video calls, and using voice calls).
23. My sibling(s) encourages me to learn English in order to translate English text(s) for him/her.
24. My sibling(s) encourages me to talk to tourists.
25. My sibling(s) encourages me to talk to tourists.
26. My sibling(s) encourages me to learn English in order to have good job opportunities in future.