Unveiling the Mystery: Investigating L2 Reading Motivation in an EFL Classroom

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Abstract

Research in L2 reading motivation has gained impetus and provided many insights into understanding the components of motivation and factors that affect L2 learners in terms of reading motivation. Although many studies can be found on L1 reading motivation, studies on L2 reading motivation seem to be relatively meager. Since action research encompasses a sequence of events and an approach to problem solving, the present study addressed to examine whether; (1) this sample of Turkish University students differ in terms of their intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation and (2) a change in methodology has an impact on the L2 reading motivation. Participants responded to a Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ) and took part in focus group interviews. Results revealed that L2 reading motivation was affected by extrinsic factors mostly and the changes in methodology and the instructional elements had a crucial effect on intrinsic and mostly extrinsic motivation, reading amount and performance. Results foreshadowed insightful methodological changes.

1. Introduction

It is widely accepted motivation which is a multifaceted construct with different components is crucial for most fields of learning and in its simplest terms, 'motivation is some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things so as to achieve something' (Harmer, 2007:98). According to Guthrie and Wingfield, reading motivation is defined as 'the individual's personal goals, values, and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes, and outcomes of reading' (2000:405).

The significance of reading motivation for reading achievement is undeniable and according to some researchers 'the field of reading motivation is an underexplored area' (Kim, 2010:863). Research in reading motivation has gained impetus and provided many

insights into understanding this complex process involving many factors which interact with each other and its relation to reading comprehension. Wang and Guthrie (2004) proposed "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Reading Motivation Model". Intrinsic reading motivation which comes within the individual is related to valuing books as a source of excitement or enjoyment and being personally interested in the topic covered by the material. Extrinsic reading motivation, on the other hand, refers to obtaining external recognition, rewards or incentives such as good grades and attention from teachers or parents (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The factors which trigger extrinsic motivation may substantially differ in various age groups. Namely, while parents typically have the bedrock influence on younger children, school and peers influence older children primarily. This model hypothesized that intrinsic motivation consists of three constructs; curiosity (desire to read about a specific topic), involvement (readers' pleasure due to being involved in reading an interesting text) and preference for challenge (synthesizing complex ideas in a text). On the other side, extrinsic motivation is comprised of five constructs which are recognition (the pleasure in receiving a tangible form of recognition for success), grades (the desire to be favourably evaluated by the teacher), social reading (the process of sharing the meanings gained from reading with friends and family), competition (the desire to outperform others in reading) and compliance (reading because of a goal or external requirement) (Wang and Guthrie, 2004).

Two other important aspects of reading which play a role in L2 reading motivation are extensive reading and intensive reading. Extensive reading which refers to reading in quantity 'is intended to develop good reading habits, to build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure, and to encourage a liking for reading' (Richards and Schmidt, 2002:193). Intensive reading which requires reading in detail with specific learning aims is a way of increasing learners' knowledge of language features and their control of reading strategies (Nation, 2009). A good reading programme should allow room for both practices so as to increase the reading amount and motivation.

Although many studies can be found on L1 reading motivation, studies on L2 reading motivation seem to be relatively meager. In an attempt to understand L2 reading motivation of a small group of Turkish students by illuminating the factors lying behind it and applying necessary methodological changes accordingly, I conducted an action research in an EFL classroom. Considering 'action research is both a sequence of events and an approach to problem solving' (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005:4), the present study aimed to address the following research questions:

1. Do Turkish University students differ significantly in intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation in L2 reading?

2. Does a change in methodology have an impact on the L2 reading motivation of this group?

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

Respondents of the study were 30 Turkish university L2 learners who were enrolled in the English language program at the Advanced Level. The average age of the participants was 19. Their language learning background prior to this course varies substantially and about a half has never studied English before. It was their second year in the prep programme. They have the same cultural background and Turkish is their mother tongue. The learners had been studying this level for eight weeks and had four lessons a day five days a week. It was a blended course in that class contact hours were combined with online activities and materials that were provided through Course Management System (CMS).

In terms of student profile they were an enthusiastic group of learners most of whom were observed to be keen on and actively participating in all activities. They were responsive to working in a variety of methodologies and activities, but mainly liked pair and group work. All of them were visual learners. Most of the students have problems with grammar and vocabulary. Learners have to complete these levels successfully in order to have a seat in the exemption exam. The students who successfully pass the exemption exam are admitted to their freshman year.

2.2 Data Collection Instruments

There were two instruments used in this research: a motivation for reading questionnaire (MRQ) and focus group meetings. The motivation questionnaire with 44 motivational items which cover the constituents of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (see appendix 1) was adapted from Wang and Guthrie's (1997) MRQ with 53 items: challenge (5 items), involvement (6 items), curiosity (6 items), grades (4 items), competition(6 items), social (7 items), compliance (5 items), recognition (5 items). Participants indicated on a 4-point Likert scale from 'a lot like me' to 'very different from me', the extent to which they would agree with the statements. During and after the intervention process based on the outcomes of the motivation questionnaire, three focus group meetings with a total number of six students for each meeting were organized in order to help the participants reflect on their motivation and reading performance and see whether there were any changes in their amount

of reading. Focus group meetings were conducted in office hours and each lasted for about an hour.

Table 1

Constructs of the MRQ Questionnaire

Constructs	Questions defining this construct
Intrinsic Motivation	
challenge	2,5,7,13,16
involvement	6,11,17,23,25,27
curiosity	4,9,12,15,19,22
Extrinsic Motivation	
grades	3,30,41,44
competition	1,8,32,35,40,43
social	10,20,24,31,33,36,39
compliance	18,26,28,37,42
recognition	14,21,29,34,38

The motivation questionnaire was given to 30 students including 16 female (53,3%) and 14 male (46,7 %) students in both classes, but due to time constraints the focus group meetings were conducted with 18 students including 11 female (61,1 %) and 7 male (38,2 %) students. Before the research started, they had been briefed about data collection procedures and how the data would be used. Additionally, they were reassured that refusal to participate would not affect their grades.

As there two types of data, different data analysis procedures were required. Quantitative data obtained from questionnaire were analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and qualitative data obtained from the focus group meetings were recorded, transcribed and coded for each category.

2.3 Procedure

Participants were given MRQ questionnaire to identify their motivation in terms of extrinsic and intrinsic constructs. Then, as a result of literature review intervention techniques were specified to cater for the observed problem of lack of motivation in L2 reading within this group. After exposing the learners to intervention focus group meeting were held to determine whether intervention led to a difference in their perception of L2 reading motivation.

2.3.1 Intervention.

'In effective classrooms, the teacher uses many motivational mechanisms and does so often, so that instruction seems to be overflowing with attempts to motivate students' (Pressley & Fingeret, 2007: 233, cited in Grabe, 2009). After reflecting on this comment and evaluating the results of the motivation questionnaire, necessary actions were taken and certain changes were employed in teaching methodology. As a consequence of literature review regarding L1 and L2 reading motivation, a framework guided the improvement of methodological practices to boost motivation. In addition to utilising suggestions that stemmed from various sources discussions with other EFL instructors guided the intervention attempts to increase L2 reading motivation of the students. Among these sources, Guthrie (2001) seemed to be the best in identifying ten instructional elements that formed the foundation for engagement and motivation in reading. These elements can be listed as conceptual orientation, real-world instruction, autonomy support, collaborative learning, praise and rewards, interesting texts, strategy instruction, evaluation, teacher involvement and cohesion. Considering the linguistic problems of the learners, a combination of some these strategies were screened against the linguistic needs of the learners and finally the miraculous touch of technology was added into this combination of intervention attempts.

2.3.1.1 Language Support.

Grabe stated 'one major L2 issue is students' more limited language knowledge in the L2 and the need for greater scaffolding with language support' (2009). Most of the respondents of this study had linguistic issues. Some of them directly stated that they did not understand complex sentences and the others confessed this when they were asked to paraphrase, summarize or translate certain parts of the texts in intensive reading. Therefore, reduced relative clauses and noun clauses were consolidated through controlled and semi controlled activities. Moreover, participles and inversions were introduced and practised through exercises. In order to consolidate the meaning and use of newly met structures, learners were additionally asked to perform two way translations using these grammatical structures with the target words of the week, which in turn fostered lexical knowledge. As for the issues with limited range of vocabulary, although pre- teaching vocabulary is a good way of dealing with this issue, learners may become too dependent on this practice. Keeping this in mind, vocabulary was analysed with the learners through student-centred activities such as choosing the target words and preparing mini power point presentations in groups or pairs to teach target words to their peers.

2.3.1.2 Strategy Instruction.

As Guthrie (2001) stated, strategy instruction includes the explicit teaching of behaviours which help learners find relevant knowledge from text. Students should have the required skills and strategies in order to get information out of written resources (Collins and Cheek, 1999). Reading comprehension and thus reading motivation can be empowered with explicit strategy training. This may involve coaching and scaffolding with clear explanations for why to use them and how to use them (Paris, Wasik and Turner, 1991). In line with this argument, learners were firstly asked to share the reading strategies they use with other learners in groups and after that they were explicitly taught to find main and supporting ideas, recognize text cohesion at word and sentence level, deduce the meanings of words and infer the purpose of the text. Each objective was introduced and practiced through reading exercises concentrating solely on the particular objective. After all of them were practiced in this way, learners were provided with mixed exercises.

2.3.1.3 Collaborative Learning.

Collaboration, which encourages the skills of cooperation and negotiation, is significant for 'activating and maintaining learners' intrinsic motivation' (Guthrie, 2001). Additionally, it fosters learner autonomy in that it allows students to make their own decisions in group. Since the learners had positive group dynamics, it was easy to get almost all the tasks in groups and pairs. In order to increase the amount of extensive reading and intrinsic motivation, I started a forum activity called 'Article Stop' on CMS where learners were asked to share interesting articles they liked (see appendix 3) and comment on each other's article. However, half of the class participated in the forum sharing their articles, but none of them made a comment, which directly highlighted the fact that they put their articles for the sake of fulfilling what they were told to do.

2.3.1.4 Using Interesting Texts.

According to Csikszentmihalyi "the chief impediments to learning are not cognitive. It's not that students can't learn; it is that they do not wish to. If educators invest a fraction of energy they now spend trying to transmit information in trying to stimulate the students'enjoyment of learning, we could achieve much better results stimulate the results" (1991:115).Reflecting on this argument, one of the chief responsibilities of a teacher is to provide students with interesting texts which, in other words, texts with' important, new and valuable information' (Wade, Waxon and Kelly, 1999). Students were provided with ample reading texts ranging from leaflets, advertisements, reviews, web pages, magazine and academic articles on familiar topics which were meaningful and interesting.

2.3.1.5 Use of Technology.

Computers are increasingly being used for instruction because they hold several advantages such as 'improving reading comprehension, facilitating grammar and vocabulary acquisition, reinforcing the benefits of strategy training and fostering student motivation toward reading' (Kim, 2002). In our school, all the students are provided with a notebook computer and CMS is used to foster learning. In order to augment extrinsic motivation, students were asked to complete the weekly reading materials on CMS. The course book itself had also online component and students were able to see their scores and monitor their improvement by receiving immediate feedback by using the companion web-page of their course book. As for fostering intrinsic motivation, learners were asked to read about news at home or abroad through the Internet and pick up one specific event related to business, health, science, education, sports, entertainment or art. Each learner was asked to learn about it indetail by either reading the online newspapers or news websites and orally reflect on it for five minutes at the beginning of the first lesson. This activity additionally fostered autonomy in that learners have the right to choose their own reading text depending on their interests. As Marrow (1996) advocates, the amount of reading and achievement increase if students are supported in choosing from a wide selection of texts.

2.3.1.6 Teacher Involvement.

Guthrie asserted that 'the involved teacher knows about the students' personal knowledge and interests, cares about each student's learning, and holds realistic, positive goals for students' effort and learning' (2001). Teachers have a dramatic effect on student affect. For instance, when students feel that the teacher has little or no interest in them, they are likely to lose their motivation. However, when the teacher is helpful and caring, they are likely to have a higher motivation and their self-esteem is likely to increase. Knowing the significance of student affect, teacher involvement was maximised by trying to assist the students by having a caring and helpful attitude and treating all of them equally.

2.3.1.7 Praise and Rewards.

Praise and rewards play a substantial part in student reading motivation, specifically when they are used effectively. Wlodkowski (1985) suggests a '3S-3P' approach to awarding praise that is sincere, specific, sufficient and properly given for praiseworthy efforts in a manner preferred by the learner. Over-complimenting students might result in counterproductive results in that they might become too dependent on praise and thus be unaware of what progress they are making. Monitoring learners' scores and progress through

CMS and the online component of the book, I sent group e-mails thanking the students who had shown progress with a star next to their names.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 MRQ

The mean scores of motivational constructs displayed significant differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivational constructs. The mean value for intrinsic motivation was calculated as 46, 3 %. However, the mean value for extrinsic motivation was estimated as 69, 9 %. The constructs for intrinsic motivation were challenge, involvement and curiosity. Among these constructs, curiosity had the highest mean value (18, 6%), which implied the fact that some learners desired to read and learn something new. Challenge ranked the second with a mean value of 14, 5 %. This construct was expected to have the lowest value and the results displayed that some learners liked to be challenged at an increased level of difficulty. Involvement had the lowest mean value which was 13, 2% and this exhibited that having pleasure owing to being involved in reading was the least important factor for the participants. The constructs for extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, were grades, competition, social, compliance and recognition. Among these five constructs, competition was the strongest predictor for extrinsic motivation with a mean value of 17, 3 %, which signalled that most learners wanted to be the best in reading. Social ranked the second with a mean value of 14, 6 %, which implied that it was important to share the reading gaining with friends and family for some learners. Interestingly, compliance ranked the third with a mean value of 13, 6 %, which displayed that external goals and requirements are not as important as social factors. Recognition followed it with a mean value of 13, 1. Finally grades had the lowest mean value which was 11, 3 %, and this result showed that participants had the least concern for being favourably assessed by the teacher. This might be related to two main factors. Firstly, CPG (class participation grade) which is given by the teacher has only 5% effect on a student's overall course grade. Secondly, students only receive a Pass or a Fail when they finish the course, in other words their pass grades are not assigned in letters (A, B, C or F) or descriptors (Distinction or Merit). Briefly, the mean scores highlighted the fact that this small group of Turkish University students are much more extrinsically motivated than intrinsically in L2 reading.

Table 2

Frequency of MRQ Results

Constructs	Mean	Constructs	Mean
competition	17,30	grades	11,26
social	14,60	compliance	13,63
involvement	13,20	curiosity	18,56
challenge	14,53	Extrinsic total	69,86
recognition	13,07	Intrinsic total	46,30

The motivation questionnaire had interesting results foreshadowing significant methodological implications. As Grabe (2009) denotes, motivation is significantly affected by what happens regularly in the classroom. Having considered this contention, activities and tasks to increase both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation were devised.

3.2 Focus Group Meetings

Focus group meetings revealed interesting results. Firstly, participants were asked if they enjoyed reading more and 8 participants (44, 4%) said 'Yes', 5 participants (27, 8 %) said 'No' and the other 5 said (27,8 %) 'It depends on the topic', which showed that there was a remarkable increase in intrinsic motivation. When they were asked if they thought there was a change in their reading amount, all participants (100%) stated they did more reading. 8 participants (44, 4%) related this increase in their reading amount to understanding texts better, which showed that language support worked well for most learners and 10 participants (55, 6%) associated it with the coming exam, which denoted that extrinsic motivation for reading was much higher than before. Participants were then asked about the text types they read and 9 (50%)participants said 'newspapers, articles and reading assignments on CMS', 5(27,8%) participants said 'reading texts on CMS and articles related to the themes in the course book' and 4 (22,2%)participants said ' only reading assignments on CMS'. Except for those 4 participants, it can be concluded that participants made efforts to learn something new, which was another good signal for a rise in intrinsic motivation. However, it is significant to note that whether learners read extra materials just because they were asked to do that or because they really started to like reading newspapers or articles is a question mark and this should be further investigated. Next, they were asked if they thought reading was still difficult for them. 12 (66, 7%) participants said 'No', 4 (22, 2%) participants said 'depends on the language and vocabulary', the other 2 (11, 1%) said 'depends on the topic'. This made it

clear that some learners still needed support regarding language and interesting materials. When they were asked if they thought there was a change in their reading performance, all participants (100%) said 'Yes', which highlighted that having learners reflect on their performance by writing short reports worked well and helped them monitor and thus become aware of their improvement. Correlating this result with 5 participants' statement ' I still don't enjoy reading' for the first question, we can assume that extrinsically motivated students may display high reading achievement without liking to read (Baker& Wigfield, 1999) and extrinsic motivation may foster their achievement despite their negative approach toward reading.

Finally, they were asked if they thought there was a change in their reading motivation 8 participants (44,4%) said 'Yes' and 5 of them stated 'I enjoy it more' and the other 3 related this increase to higher performance. 3 participants (16,7%) said 'No' , 2 participants(11,1%) said 'depends on the topic', 4 (22,2%) participants said 'depends on the scores I get' and 1 participant (5,6%) said 'depends on stress'. Except for those 3 participants who voiced a direct 'No' answer, most learners observed a change in their reading motivation either extrinsically or intrinsically.

In the light of these results, it can be advocated that the changes in methodology and the instructional elements which were used in combination had a crucial effect on intrinsic and mostly extrinsic motivation, reading amount and performance. Among the seven elements in intervention, three of them which are teacher involvement, language support and interesting texts were observed to have the utmost significance for this change in L2 reading motivation.

Accordingly, teachers should have a good rapport with their students by listening to their concerns, understanding their needs, monitoring them closely and providing an adequate support since reading motivation is closely associated with the feeling of social support in the classroom. Secondly, teachers should help learners with grammar and vocabulary support so as to foster comprehension, which in fact requires a lot of time and practice. Last but not least, teachers should provide their learners with highly interesting texts which are personally relevant and suitable for their level inside and outside the classroom in order to promote both intensive and extensive reading.

4. Conclusion

There are possible limitations of this action research. To begin with, the participants and their friendly relationship with the researchers might have had an effect on their responses in focus group meetings and they might have generated responses which they assume

researchers wanted to hear. Another issue concerns the timing of the action research. Since these learners were in the last module preparing to sit the Proficiency exam, their motivation towards every skill was mainly extrinsic. In this sense, expecting changes in intrinsic motivation in five weeks' time when there was a substantial exam pressure on learners is an additional concern. Last but not least, time constraints in data collection process were another setback. Although the motivation questionnaire was given to 30 students, the focus group meetings were conducted with 18 students owing to time limitations. Therefore, this research might have fallen short in reflecting the real percentages of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. It is significant to underline that this is a small scale piece of research and therefore for further evidence with regard to L2 reading motivation.

Notwithstanding these limitations, we believe that it was a fruitful study with noteworthy implications for teaching and promoting L2 reading, providing valuable insights into the multifaceted relationship between motivation and L2 reading. As language teachers we were assured of importance of encouraging students to be engaged in extensive L2 reading activities and fostering intrinsic motivation by providing interesting reading materials and by engraining the message that 'reading tasks are challenges to be mastered rather than obstacles to be avoided' (Kim, 2010:878).

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Biodata

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