

The impact of learner-centered approach on Learners' motivation in Iranian EFL students

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the impact of learner-centered approach on Iranian EFL learners' motivation. To this aim, a pre-test post-test design was selected. The participants in this study consisted of 50 Iranian high school students, 25 male and 25 female, who were studying in two public high schools in Shiraz, Iran. The age of the participants ranged between 15 to16. Sampling method of the study was convenient sampling. The instrument used in the study was Motivational Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ). To analyze the data, paired samples t-test and Multivariate analysis of variance were used. Results showed a significant impact for the learner-centered approach on EFL learners' motivation. However, no statistically significant difference was found between Iranian EFL students on their learning motivation due to their gender.

Keywords: Learner-centered Approach; Motivation; EFL learners.

Introduction:

English language teaching (ELT) is a field exposed to many changes due to its dynamic nature. Among these changes, the worldwide trend from teacher-centered approaches to learner-centred approaches in recent years can be mentioned which has caused major changes in terms of curriculum, materials and methods of teaching and learning (Vo, 2007). Student-centered learning, closely related with constructivism, is a method of instruction wherein the cornerstone of teaching and learning process is the learner.

As put by Baldauf and Moni (2006), in learner-centered approaches, teachers should change their traditional roles from teller to coordinator and from material users to teaching material providers. The traditional teacher-centered methods of language teaching were characterized by a teacher-fronted classroom atmosphere in which learners competed rather than cooperated with each other. However, today, ELT has observed a significant shift from teacher-centeredness to learner-centeredness (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Although In the past few decades the focus of language teaching has been shifted from teacher-centered approach to student-centered one (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei& Thurrell, 1995, as cited in Liang, 2002), in the Iranian educational system, still predetermined course books and curriculums constitute the main part

of teaching processes and all major educational policies (e.g., school systems, curriculum standards, course books, examination system, and so on) are determined and controlled strictly by the Ministry of Education (Khajavi & Abbasiian, 2011). Although a look at the existing trend of ELT shows the recent worldwide popularity of learner-centered approaches, still traditional teacher-centered approaches are common in the Iranian EFL teaching context.

What worsens the situation is that in the current educational materials, learners' needs have not been much taken into account. In such a situation, a low level of motivation in the learners is naturally expected. It is while many researchers have proved the significant role of motivation in English language teaching and learning processes. Very few or relatively none of studies focused on the effect of learner-centered approach on EFL learner's motivation and also the effect of students' gender on their learning motivation; considering the significance of motivation in language teaching and language learning, the researcher found a large gap in this area, especially in Iran as an EFL context. Finding this gap, the researcher decided to shed more light on this specific area of language teaching and learning.

The findings of this study can be beneficial for researchers, ESL/EFL learners and teachers, and those who work in this field and attempt to provide a better situation to learn a language accurately. The result of this study is helpful for teachers to provide a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere and for learners to know that they can have active role in learning. The present study is primarily aimed at investigating the impact of learner-centered approach on EFL learners' motivation. A secondary objective of the study is to see whether there is a significant difference between Iranian EFL learners on their learning motivation due to their gender.

Theoretical basis of research:

The learner-centered approach is rooted in humanistic school of thought in psychology with a strong influence in educational psychology, pedagogy and language teaching; in humanistic approaches the emphasis is on the significance of the learner's inner World, his feelings, thoughts and emotions (Williams & Burden, 2002). Erikson's theory that learners' emotions and feelings are as important as their cognition in the process of learning. Maslow is another important figure in the realm of humanism and introduced the notion of needs pyramid, he believes, teachers should try to generate a secure classroom environment wherein learners feel a sense of belonging. Rogers believes that 'teachers should see their learners as clients with specific needs to be met. Freeman (2000) believed that learner-centered teaching means teaching language based on the personal concerns of learners and encouraging them to have a participatory and active role in language learning processes. Mehdinezhad (2011) proposed that learner-centered teaching is as an approach which takes learners' needs and interests into account. According to him, teachers should plan topics and learning experiences based on students' interests and their level of understanding.

Falchikov and Boud (1989) believed that one of the manifestations of learner-centeredness is those teaching methods wherein students have some control over and responsibility for the assessment process, and learners are allowed to make choices and take control of what to study and how to study.

According to Joshani-Shirvan (2008), the learning-centered approach is a comprehensive method encompassing all the stages of teaching-learning chain from selection of the materials to learner motivation. He continued that the syllabus, the materials, the methodology and the evaluation procedures should be based on the learners' situation and needs.

According to Ahmadi (2011), "motivation is one of the most appealing, complex variables used to explain individual differences in language learning" (p.8). In this regard, Dörnyei (2009) believes that motivation

is one of the most important concepts in the field of psychology, learning language and language education, which is commonly used to explain learners' success and failure in learning.

According to Dörnyei (2007), there are three phases in second language motivation research: a *social-psychological period*, a *cognitive-situated period* and a *process-oriented period*. From historical perspectives, motivation research in second language acquisition is associated with Gardner's social-psychological approach and the highly influential integrative-instrumental motivation dichotomy (originally proposed in the early 1960s), which dominated the field for quite a while.

Research methodology

The population, sample and sampling

The participants in this study consisted of 50 Iranian intermediate EFL high school students, 25 male and 25 female, who were studying in grade one of two public high schools in Shiraz, Iran. The age of the participants ranged between 15 to 16. They were two intact classes that existed before this study administration and were not built specifically for the purpose of this study. This implies that this study was devoid of random sampling. In other words, convenient sampling was used in this study. Besides, all the participants were native speakers of Persian. Educational setting of the study consisted of two public high schools in Shiraz, Iran. The participants and educational setting of the study were selected based on the availability considerations.

Research tools

The instrument used in this study was Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ), developed and designed by Pinrich and DeGroot (1991). It was composed of two sections, namely Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire and demographic information. It consisted of 44 items on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "1= not at all true of me" to "7 = very true of me". It was divided into motivational and learning strategies subscales which were measured self-efficacy, task value, control of learning, cognitive strategy use, metacognitive strategy use, test anxiety, intrinsic and extrinsic. The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated through Cronbach alpha as 0.93.

The Analysis of Data

Data analysis of this study was done at both descriptive and inferential levels, using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. At the descriptive level, mainly means of the groups were calculated in the pre-test and post-test. At the inferential levels, in order to investigate if the observed difference between the pre-test and post-test was significant and if the effect of learner-centered approach on EFL learners' motivation was significant, a paired samples t-test was run. And to see, the effect of learner-centered approach on EFL learners' motivation significantly differ for males and females, multivariate analysis of variance was applied. The results of which have been shown in the following section:

Table1. Descriptive statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	motivationpre	2.1200	50	.71827	.10158
	motivationpost	4.1800	50	.69076	.09769
Pair 2	strategypre	2.0400	50	.78142	.11051
	strategypost	3.9600	50	.78142	.11051
Pair 3	intrinsicpre	1.9200	50	.63374	.08963
	intrinsicpost	4.0000	50	.75593	.10690
Pair 4	extrinsicpre	2.1000	50	.67763	.09583
	extrinsicpost	4.1200	50	.52060	.07362
Pair 5	taskpre	2.2600	50	.87622	.12392
	taskpost	4.1400	50	.60643	.08576
Pair 6	controlpre	2.3000	50	.76265	.10785
	controlpost	4.1600	50	.58414	.08261
Pair 7	anxietypre	1.9200	50	.77828	.11006
	anxietypost	4.1800	50	.66055	.09342
Pair 8	efficacypre	2.1000	50	.73540	.10400
	efficacypost	4.1400	50	.72871	.10306
Pair 9	cognitivepre	1.9000	50	.73540	.10400
	cognitivepost	4.0600	50	.71171	.10065
Pair 10	metacognitivepre	1.9800	50	.62237	.08802
	metacognitivepost	4.1000	50	.70711	.10000
Pair 11	resuorcepre	1.8800	50	.77301	.10932
	resourcepost	3.9200	50	.77828	.11006

In order to answer the first research question, Paired sample t-test was utilized. The inferential results are presented in Table.2

Table2. Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
					Lower	Upper	
Pair 1	Motivationpre-motivationpost	-2.06000	.81841	.11574	-2.29259	-1.82741	.000
Pair 2	strategypre – strategypost	-1.92000	1.06599	.15075	-2.22295	-1.61705	.000
Pair 3	intrinsicpre – intrinsicpost	-2.08000	.87691	.12401	-2.32922	-1.83078	.000
Pair 4	extrinsicpre – extrinsicpost	-2.02000	.68482	.09685	-2.21462	-1.82538	.000
Pair 5	taskpre – taskpost	-1.88000	1.13641	.16071	-2.20296	-1.55704	.000
Pair 6	controlpre – controlpost	-1.86000	.96911	.13705	-2.13542	-1.58458	.000
Pair 7	anxietypre – anxietypost	-2.26000	1.02639	.14515	-2.55170	-1.96830	.000
Pair 8	efficacypre – efficacypost	-2.04000	.96806	.13690	-2.31512	-1.76488	.000
Pair 9	cognitivepre – cognitivepost	-2.16000	1.01740	.14388	-2.44914	-1.87086	.000
Pair 10	Metacognitivepre-metacognitivepost	-2.12000	.87225	.12335	-2.36789	-1.87211	.000

Pair 11	resuorcepre – resourcepost	-2.04000	.96806	.13690	-2.31512	-1.76488	.000
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As one can notice from Table 4.2. the improvement of learners' motivation and learning strategy use from pre-treatment to post-treatment phases are measured for all subscales of MSLQ. The results indicated that learner-centered instruction was effective as all sig. Thus, it can be claimed that learners report significantly higher motivation and strategy use after learner-centered instruction. In order to determine whether or not male and female learners are significantly different in terms of their motivation and learning strategy use, Multivariate analysis of variance was used to analyze the data collected through the administration of MLSQ.

Table3. Between-Subjects Factors

	Value Label	N
gender	1.00	male
	2.00	female

The results of multivariate test are presented in Table 4. **Wilks' Lambda** in the section entitled gender is the first evidence that should be considered.

Table4. Multivariate Tests

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.939	53.501 ^b	11.000	38.000
	Wilks' Lambda	.061	53.501 ^b	11.000	38.000
	Hotelling's Trace	15.487	53.501 ^b	11.000	38.000
	Roy's Largest Root	15.487	53.501 ^b	11.000	38.000
gender	Pillai's Trace	.216	.950 ^b	11.000	38.000
	Wilks' Lambda	.784	.950 ^b	11.000	38.000
	Hotelling's Trace	.275	.950 ^b	11.000	38.000
	Roy's Largest Root	.275	.950 ^b	11.000	38.000

a. Design: Intercept + gende

b. Exact statistic

As it can be seen in Table 4. the sig.value in Wilks' lambda row is .506 and above .05 indicating that learners' gender does not significantly affect their motivation and learning strategy use. Tests of between subject effects should also be inspected to determine the effect of gender on all subscales of MLSQ. Table 5. shows the results:

Table5. Tests of Between-Subjects Effect

Source	Dependent Variable	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model		1	.320	.615	.437
		1	2.132E-014	.000	1.000

Intercept		1	.500	1.091	.302
		1	.180	.231	.633
		1	.020	.034	.855
		1	.320	.523	.473
		1	.500	.923	.341
		1	.080	.129	.721
		1	.020	.036	.850
		1	.020	.051	.823
		1	.320	.530	.470
		1	224.720	432.154	.000
		1	184.320	449.561	.000
		1	220.500	481.091	.000
		1	255.380	327.410	.000
		1	264.500	445.787	.000
		1	184.320	301.341	.000
		1	220.500	407.077	.000
		1	208.080	334.713	.000
		1	180.500	327.190	.000
		1	196.020	496.253	.000
		1	176.720	292.906	.000
gender	motivation pre	1	.320	.615	.437
	Intrinsic	1	.000	.000	1.000
	Extrinsic	1	.500	1.091	.302
	Task Value	1	.180	.231	.633
	Control of Learning	1	.020	.034	.855
	Self-Efficacy	1	.320	.523	.473
	Test Anxiety	1	.500	.923	.341
	Learning Strategies	1	.080	.129	.721
	cognitive	1	.020	.036	.850
	metacognitive	1	.020	.051	.823
	Resource management	1	.320	.530	.470

As it can be noticed from Table 2. the sig.value for all subscales of motivation and learning strategy use included in MSLQ is below and therefore not significant. It can be concluded that the intrinsic, extrinsic, task value, control of learning, self -efficacy, test anxiety, cognitive strategy use, metacognitive strategy use, and resource management subscales of MLSQ are not significantly affected by learners' gender.

In order to double-check the effect of gender on learners' motivation and learning strategy use, another multivariate analysis of variance was conducted on the data gathered through post-treatment administration of MLSQ. The results are presented in Tables 7.& 8.

Table6. Between-Subjects Factors

		Value Label	N
gender	1.00	male	25
	2.00	female	25

Table7. Multivariate Tests

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.997	1077.048 ^b	11.000	38.000	.000
	Wilks' Lambda	.003	1077.048 ^b	11.000	38.000	.000
	Hotelling's Trace	311.777	1077.048 ^b	11.000	38.000	.000
	Roy's Largest Root	311.777	1077.048 ^b	11.000	38.000	.000
gender	Pillai's Trace	.283	1.366 ^b	11.000	38.000	.228
	Wilks' Lambda	.717	1.366 ^b	11.000	38.000	.228
	Hotelling's Trace	.396	1.366 ^b	11.000	38.000	.228
	Roy's Largest Root	.396	1.366 ^b	11.000	38.000	.228

a. Design: Intercept + gender

b. Exact statistics

Table8

Source	Dependent Variable	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model		1	.020	.041	.840
		1	.000	.000	1.000
		1	.000	.000	1.000
		1	.180	.484	.490
		1	.080	.231	.633
		1	.020	.045	.833
		1	.180	.334	.566
		1	1.280	2.145	.150
		1	.500	.987	.325
		1	.500	1.000	.322
Intercept		1	2.487E-014	.000	1.000
		1	873.620	1795.110	.000
		1	848.720	3067.663	.000
		1	800.000	1371.429	.000
		1	856.980	2305.776	.000
		1	865.280	2496.000	.000
		1	873.620	1963.191	.000
		1	856.980	1591.913	.000
		1	784.080	1314.101	.000
		1	824.180	1626.671	.000
gender		1	840.500	1681.000	.000
		1	768.320	1242.566	.000
	Motivation post	1	.020	.041	.840
	intrinsic	1	.000	.000	1.000
	extrinsic	1	.000	.000	1.000
	Task value	1	.180	.484	.490
	Control of learning	1	.080	.231	.633
	Self-efficacy	1	.020	.045	.833
	Test anxiety	1	.180	.334	.566
	Learning strategy	1	1.280	2.145	.150
	Cognitive	1	.500	.987	.325
	Metacognitive	1	.500	1.000	.322
	Resource	1	.000	.000	1.000

As it can be seen, the results confirmed that male and female learners are not significantly different in terms of all subscales of motivation and learning strategy us

Conclusion:

Results of the study showed a significant impact for the learner-centered approach on EFL learners' motivation. This finding is consistent with Joshani-Shirvan's (2008) argument that the learning-centered approach is a comprehensive method encompassing all the stages of teaching-learning chain from selection of the materials to learner motivation.

Also, the results support finding of Liang's (2002) study wherein the effect of learner-centered learning on EFL junior high school learners' motivation towards learning English as a foreign language was investigated and a significant effect for learner-centered learning was found.

Moreover, the finding confirms Mushi's (2004) finding that learner-centered methods increase the chances of active participation of learners in the teaching and learning processes; and this increases learners' motivation for learning a foreign language.

Additionally, similar results were found by Lea, Stephenson, and Troy (2003) who investigated higher-education students' attitudes towards student-centered learning and found that learners attributed their higher motivation to the comfortable atmosphere of classroom.

The other finding of the study was that there is not any statistically significant difference between Iranian EFL students on their learning motivation due to their gender. However, because no parallel study was found in this regard in the literature, naturally no comparison in terms of confirmation or disconfirmation is possible.

In general, findings of the present study may be justified by Mehdinezhad's (2011) view that proposed that learner-centered teaching is as an approach which takes learners' needs and interests into account. Also, the rationality of the findings may be implied in McCombs and Whisler's (1997) belief that learner-centered teaching as an instructional approach focuses on individual learners, their prior knowledge, needs, and living contexts.

All in all, the findings may be considered rational in the sense that the learner-centered approach gives more opportunity to learners' activity, participation and engagement in class activities. And this increased engagement leads to increased motivation in the learners. Also, as argued above, the learner-centered approach takes learners' needs and wants into account, and this may encourage them to take a more active role in the classroom which consequently leads to an increase in their motivation level.

Here this academic work reaches to its concluding part. The bottom line is that there is a significant impact for the learner-centered approach on EFL learners' motivation, and there is not any statistically significant difference between Iranian EFL students on their learning motivation due to their gender.

These findings may be informative for stakeholders in ELT including policy makers, curriculum planners, language teachers, etc by giving them useful insights about the effectiveness of learner-centered approach on EFL learners' motivation which is considered as one of the influential factors in any kind of learning including EFL learning.

Given the recent popularity of learner-centered approach in ELT realm, it is hoped that the results of this study improve ELT status quo in EFL contexts in general and Iranian context in particular.

Practical suggestions:

The study findings may give insights to stakeholders in the field, including curriculum planners, tutors, and policy makers about the positive effect of learner-centered approach on EFL learners' learning motivation, and the need for incorporating this issue in planning educational programs.

Also, according to the finding that no significant difference was observed between male and female EFL learners in terms of the effect of learner-centered approach, the other implication of the study for ELT teachers, students, curriculum planners and policy makers may be absolute potential of learner-centered approach in improving EFL learners' learning motivation.

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