Motivation and the Choice of Language Learning Strategies

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Abstract—**The present study aims at investigating the relationship between intrinsic/extrinsic motivation and language learning strategyuse among Iranian EFL learners. Motivation is viewed within the framework of Self-determination Theory (SDT), in which intrinsic and extrinsic types of motivation are not antagonistic, and extrinsic motivation is seen along a continuum. To this end, 72 participants filled in two questionnaires on motivation and language learning strategies. The results indicated that intrinsic motivation was significantly related to cognitive and metacognitive strategies. However, extrinsic modes of motivation, namely, *identified* and *external* types of motivation were not significantly related to the use of language learning strategies. Yet, *integrated* mode of extrinsic motivation was negatively associated with memory and affective language learning strategies, and *introjected* motivation was negatively associated with cognitive strategies. In addition, it turned out that Iranian learners were mainly intrinsically motivated towards learning English language, and used metacognitive strategies more frequently than other types of strategies.**

Index Terms—**intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, language learning strategies**

I. INTRODUCTION

Language learning strategies are one of the cognitive variables that are highly associated with success and achievement. Chamot and O'malley (1990) defined language learning strategies as "the special thoughts or behaviors that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information" (P.1). Similarly, Oxford (2003) pointed out that language learning strategies help the learners with "perception, reception, storage, retention, and retrieval" stages of language learning (P. 274). Not only are the choice and frequency of language learning strategies determining factors in success and higher achievement, but the capability to mix the strategies that are convenient to a certain situation is also of paramount importance. In this regard, Studies show more proficient learners not only use more and a wider range of language learning strategies, but also have the ability to mix different types of strategies in a harmonious manner to satisfy the needs of a certain task (Oxford, 2008). It might be interpreted that if learners are equipped with language learning strategies, then they will engage actively in the process of learning.

Like any other area of study, language learning strategies have also taken many directions each focusing on one certain aspect of this concept. Chamot (2004) has outlined five main directions in language learning strategy research: first, studies dealing with strategy identification that means determining the language learning strategies used by learners (Vossoughi & Ebrahimi, 2003; Nikoopour, Amini Farsani & Nasiri, 2011; Nikoopour, Amini Farsani & Kashefi Neishabouri, 2011); second, taxonomies or strategy classifications which have their agenda in putting single strategies among larger groups of strategies (Rubin, 1981; Oxford, 1990; O'malley & Chamot, 1990); third, investigating factors influencing the use of language learning strategies such as personality types, age, gender, years of language learning, learning styles, attitude, aptitude, motivation and language proficiency (Akbari &Talebinezhad, 2003; Chang, 2005; Sheikh Al Eslami & Khayer, 2006; Sobhaninezhad, 2006; Ziahosseini & Salehi, 2007; Magogwe & Oliver, 2007; Nikoopour & Amini Farsani, 2010; Rahimi, 2005); forth, the effect of context and culture on strategy use (Wharton, 2000; Oliveras-Cuhat, 2002), and finally, research studies dealing with strategy instruction (Oxford, 1990; Tabrizi, Nikoopour & Amini Farsani, 2010).

However, there is a split among scholars regarding the identification of language learning strategies among different learners. For example, Nikoopour, et al. (2011) found that metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used, whereas memory strategies were the least frequently used. In the same vein, Hong-Name and Leavell (2006) as well as Vossoughi and Ebrahimi (2003) reported metacognitive strategies as the most frequently used and memory as well as affective strategies as the least frequently ones. Furthermore, Sadighi and Zarafshan (2006), Ziahosseini and Salehi (2007), Kavasoglu (2009) and Nikoopour, et al. (2011) showed that metacognitive strategies were most frequently used by learners. Oxford and Ehrman's (1995) study, on the other hand, revealed that compensation strategies were more preferred by learners, and Lan and Oxford (2003) concluded that Taiwanese elementary learners utilized compensation and affective strategies more than other types of strategy. These inconsistencies might be the result of some extraneous variables like *age*, *gender, level of proficiency,* and *motivation*.

Motivation as one of the sources contributing to individual differences has been widely examined with respect to its relationship with language learning strategies. Dornyei and Otto (1998) defined motivation as "the dynamically changing cumulative arousal in a person that initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritized, operationalized, and (successfully or unsuccessfully) acted out"(P.65). Dornyei (1998) emphasized the importance of motivation by saying that not only does motivation act as a trigger to initiate language learning and increase the chances to maintain the back breaking process of learning, but it can also compensate for some learners' deficiencies such as lack of aptitude. Unlike many theories on motivation that focus only on the amount of this variable, Self-determination Theory (SDT) is concerned with difference in type. Deci and Ryan (2000), classified motivation into intrinsic and extrinsic, and the latter into four categories based on the degree of autonomy and self-determination. Within the framework of SDT, *intrinsic motivation* is the most highly autonomous type of motivation that derives from one's inherent interest. *Extrinsic motivation* is viewed on a continuum and classified into four types of *integrated regulation* that is the most self-determined, self-regulated, internalized and less controlled type of extrinsic motivation, and justifies performing actions that are personally valued; *identified regulation* which stands for those forms of motivation in which learners have personally identified the value of certain actions; *introjected regulation* that characterizes learners' performing some sort of behaviour for avoiding a feeling of pressure or guilt and gaining self-esteem; and *external regulation* that is the most heteronomous forms of motivation that justifies learners' doing certain actions for satisfying external demands. Dornyei (2005) named SDT as one of the most influential theories in the field of motivation, some of whose aspects have been adopted by many researchers.

In a study done by Chang (2005), he found that Taiwanese learners were more externally and as a result, more extrinsically motivated towards learning English language. However, Ziahosseini and Salehi (2007) revealed that Iranian learners were more intrinsically motivated.

Studies on Motivation and Language Learning Strategies

As Benson and Gao (2008, p. 27) stated, since language learning strategies seem to be "malleable", there have been many studies focusing on the effect of other individual differences such as motivation on this variable (Chang, 2005; Sheikh Al Eslami & Khayer, 2006; Ziahosseini & Salehi, 2007; Yin, 2008). Benson and Gao (2008) classified individual differences into two categories: first, supposedly innate attributes like age, gender, aptitude as well as learning styles; and second, supposedly acquired attributes such as motivation and attitudes. With regard to the relationship between motivation and language learning strategies, Yang (1999) showed that high motivation and learners' beliefs resulted in the use of strategies, and this in turn, reformed learners' beliefs and elevated motivation. Moreover, strategy training, as McDonough (2005) stated, has positive effects on learners' motivation via increasing self-confidence or self-esteem. Wenden (1991) also suggested that strategic instruction fosters learners' autonomy, a factor that is very determining in reaching optimal motivation.

The logic behind using language learning strategies is due to so many factors such as the learner's age, career orientation, gender, attitude, aptitude and motivation (Oxford, 1986). Besides, the interaction of motivation and learning strategies is obvious in Rubin's representation of knowledge and beliefs in which he viewed knowledge and beliefs of having five components: task knowledge, self-knowledge, beliefs, background knowledge, and strategy knowledge. In this model, there is a reciprocal relationship between strategy knowledge and self-knowledge that consists of style and motivation (Rubin, 2005). Inspired by previous studies in this area, and due to the salient significance of these two variables on the learning process, the researchers try to provide reasonable answers to the following research questions:

1. Which categories of language learning strategies are used most frequently by Iranian EFL learners?
2. What is the commonest motivational orientation of Iranian EFL learners towards learning English language?
3. Is there any significant relationship between motivation and language learning strategies?

II. METHOD

Participants

Seventy two upper-intermediate EFL learners from intact classes in three institutes in Tehran, aging from 16 to 42 participated in the present study and filled in the items in demographic information part, motivation questionnaire and language learning strategy questionnaire. Among 72 students who participated in this study, 24 were male and 48 were female.

Instruments

For the purpose of the present study, 15 students attended the pilot study and filled in the Persian version of motivation questionnaire formulated by Chang (2005) based on Deci and Ryan's classification of motivational orientations. The motivation questionnaire consisted of five subscales; namely intrinsic, and extrinsic motivation (integrated, identified, introjected and external regulation), that explored students' motivational orientation on a continuum based on the degree of their autonomy and self-regulation. The reliability index for the questionnaire was reported as 0.82 based on Cronbach's Alpha.

The second instrument utilized throughout this study was a 50-item Persian version of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) that is highly reliable and the most frequently used measure of assessing language learning strategies (Oxford, 1990). The reliability index based on Cronbach's Alpha for this questionnaire was reported to be 0.88. SILL contained six sub-categories; namely, memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective and social strategies.

Procedure

The questionnaire on motivation was piloted with 15 students and revised in order to remove any potential ambiguities. After the completion of the pilot study, the questionnaires were administered to 72 upper-intermediate EFL students participating in general English courses held in three language institutes in Tehran. The researchers were present while students were filling in the questionnaires, giving them the opportunity to ask questions that might pop up in their minds. Subsequent to this stage, the data were fed into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences(SPSS), the 16th version, and Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for motivation and language learning strategy questionnaires to check for their reliability.

III. RESULTS

Having done the data entry, the researchers went through data analyses. To be explicit enough, each research question is analyzed separately.

A. Analysis of the First Research Question

1. Which categories of language learning strategies are used most frequently by Iranian EFL learners?

In order to probe the first question of the study, the descriptive statistics for each subcategory of language learning strategies were calculated. The comparison of the means revealed that metacognitive strategies (M=3.91) were most frequently used by Iranian language learners, followed by social strategies (M=3.79), cognitive strategies (M=3.57), compensation strategies (M=3.49), memory strategies (M=3.45), and affective strategies (M=3.07) which were reported to be used the least.

Taking Oxford's (1990) key to understanding mean scores on SILL-based instruments into account: high use=4.5 to 5.0 (always or almost always used) and 3.5 to 4.4 (usually used), medium use=2.5 to 3.4 (sometimes used), Low use = 1.5 to 2.4 (usually not used) or 1.0–1.4 (never or almost never used), Iranian learners were high users with regard to metacognitive, cognitive and social strategies, and they were medium users in terms of memory, compensation and affective strategies.

TABLE 1.
MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGY TYPES

Learning strategy types	Mean	Standard deviation
Memory strategies	3.45	.616
Cognitive strategies	3.57	.540
Compensation strategies	3.49	.523
Metacognitive strategies	3.91	.547
Affective strategies	3.07	.658
Social strategies	3.79	.741

B. Analysis of the Second Research Question

2. What is the commonest motivational orientation of Iranian learners towards learning English language?

Table 2 indicates the descriptive statistics for different motivational orientations. The results showed that Iranian learners were mainly intrinsically oriented (M=4.31) towards learning English language, i.e. they had inherent interest in learning the language. Integrated motivation (M=4.12), introjected motivation (M=3.64), identified motivation (M=3.16) and external motivation (M=1.87) stood in the lower ranks respectively. The low mean for external motivation indicated that they rarely learned English for satisfying their external demands.

TABLE 2.
MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION FOR MOTIVATIONAL ORIENTATIONS

Motivation types	Mean	Standard deviation
Intrinsic motivation	4.31	.467
Integrated motivation	4.12	1.00
Identified motivation	3.16	1.13
Introjected motivation	3.64	.970
External motivation	1.87	.695

C. Analysis of the Third Research Question

3. Is there any significant relationship between motivation and language learning strategies?

In order to find out the relationship between motivational orientations and language learning strategy types, Pearson Product-moment correlation was used. The result of this analysis was summarized in Table 3.

TABLE 3.
CORRELATION BETWEEN MOTIVATION TYPES AND LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

	Memory	Cognitive	Compensation	Metacognitive	Affective	Social
Intrinsic	.127	.248*	.067	.283*	.009	.126
Integrated	-.290*	-.082	-.002	-.004	-.380**	-.101
Identified	-.205	.030	-.091	.032	-.238	-.004
Introjected	-.130	-.246*	-.131	-.117	-.138	-.195
External	.063	-.067	.058	.001	.024	-.037

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed) . **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

As can be shown from the table 3, a positive relationship was found between *intrinsic* motivation and metacognitive (r=.283) as well as cognitive (r=.248) strategies. In addition, intrinsic motivation showed a relatively moderate relationship with memory (r=.127) and social (r=.126) strategies, and low correlation with compensation (r=.067) and affective (r=.009) strategies.

A negative and significant correlation was identified between *integrated* motivation and affective (r= -.380) as well as memory (r= -.290) strategies. The correlation between integrated motivation and other strategy categories was negative and relatively low. A medium to high negative correlation was found between *identified* motivation and affective (r= - .238) as well as memory (r= -.205) strategies. The relationship of this type of motivation with other strategy categories is low and mainly negative. Furthermore, *introjected* motivation negatively correlated with cognitive strategies (r= -.246). Not very significant correlation was found between introjected and other types of strategies. Finally, *external* motivation indicated very low and positive correlation with memory (r=.063), compensation (r= .058), affective (r=.024) and metacognitive (.001) strategies as well as low and negative correlation with cognitive (r= -.067) and social (r= -.037) strategies.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the current study demonstrated that metacognitive strategies (M=3.91) were most frequently used by Iranian language learners. These findings are consistent with the results of the studies by Vossoughi and Ebrahimi (2003), Sadighi and Zarafshan (2006), Hong-Name and Leavell (2006), Ziahosseini and Salehi (2007), Kavasoglu (2009) and Nikoopour, et al.(2011) where metacognitive strategies were most frequently used by learners. It shows that Iranian EFL learners mainly utilized strategies that were concerned with planning, organizing and evaluating the learning process. However, the results are inconsistent with the findings of Oxford and Ehrman's (1995) study in which compensation strategies were more preferred by adult learners, and Lan and Oxford's(2003) study in which they concluded that Taiwanese elementary learners utilized compensation and affective strategies more than other types of strategy. It might be interpreted that these inconsistencies might be due to some different factors, such as nationality, contexts of situation, gender, age, level of proficiency, attitude, and motivation.

As for other language learning strategies, Iranian EFL learners preferred to use other strategy subcategories as social (M=3.79), cognitive (M=3.57), compensation (M=3.49), as well as memory strategies (M=3.45). The high mean for social and cognitive strategies suggests that Iranian EFL learners have identified the significance of these two types of strategies, and they tried to facilitate the process of learning and communication using these strategies. Finally, affective strategies (M=3.07) were reported to be used the least, i.e. Iranian EFL learners did not frequently use strategies to deal with their own feeling while learning English. The same results have been reported by Vossoughi and Ebrahimi's (2003) study, where affective strategies owned the lowest mean or were used least frequently by American Persian and Persian learners. Hong-Name and Leavell (2006) came up with similar findings, i.e. affective and memory strategies were the least frequently used types of strategy. Similarly, Sadighi and Zarafshan's (2006) as well as Nikoopour, et al.'s (2011) studies revealed that memory strategies were the least preferred type of strategy by Iranian EFL university students. With the same token, Ziahosseini and Salehi (2007) reported similar results; they showed that the lowest frequency went to the affective strategies (M=2.46).

Having computed the mean for each of the motivational orientations, it turned out that Iranian EFL learners were mainly intrinsically oriented towards learning English language. The findings are inconsistent with the study done by Chang (2005) who found that Taiwanese learners were more externally and as a result, more extrinsically motivated towards learning English language. However, the results are consistent with the findings of the study by Ziahosseini and Salehi (2007) who revealed that Iranian learners were more intrinsically motivated. This shows that Iranian learners mainly had inherent interest in learning English, and this language was appealing to them. The results also implied that they chose to learn the language willingly since intrinsic motivation is the most highly autonomous type of motivation. In addition, the high mean for integrated (M=4.12), identified (M=3.16) and introjected motivation (M=3.64) compared to external motivation (M=1.87) disclosed that for Iranian EFL learners, learning English was personally valued. Moreover, it can be concluded that Iranian EFL learners have identified the value and importance of learning English. This is while some others try to learn language to gain self-esteem. Few learners committed learning English to satisfy external demands like getting rewards, course requirements or satisfying their parents' expectations.

Regarding the correlation analysis between motivation types and language learning strategy categories, the researchers found a positive and significant relationship between intrinsic motivation and metacognitive as well as cognitive strategies. It shows that learners who were inherently interested in learning English used strategies concerning planning, organizing and evaluating the learning process, as well as strategies dealing with "identification, grouping, retention and storage of language material, and the language use strategies of retrieval, rehearsal and comprehension or production of words, phrases and other elements of the L2"(Schmitt, 2002) more frequently than other types of strategies. This is also in line with Pintrich's(1999) statement that "The use of metacognitive strategies to control learning is closely linked to motivation and self-regulated learning (Benson & Gao, 2008, p. 90). Nevertheless, only medium to low correlation was found between intrinsic motivation and other types of strategies, namely memory, social, compensation and affective strategies. Similar results were found by Ziahosseini and Salehi's (2007) study where intrinsic motivation significantly correlated with metacognitive (r=.27) and cognitive strategies(r=.24) with the only difference that it also significantly correlated with memory strategies(r=.28).

Integrated motivation showed negative and significant correlation with affective and memory strategies. In addition, it had low and negative correlation with cognitive, metacognitive, compensation and social strategies. This revealed that integrated motivation is not significantly associated with the use of these language learning strategies. The same lack of association is also true for other extrinsic modes of motivation namely identified, introjected and external motivation. There was positive and low correlation between identified motivation and both cognitive as well as metacognitive strategies. Moreover, there is positive and low correlation between integrated motivation and memory, compensation, social and affective strategies, that evidences the lack of association between this type of motivation and language learning strategy use.

The results also showed that there was a negative and significant correlation between *introjected* motivation and cognitive type of strategies, which suggests that the more introjected-oriented learners are or the more tendency they have towards learning English language for avoiding a feeling of pressure or guilt and gaining self-esteem, the less cognitive strategies they use. The correlation between introjected motivation and other types of strategy is negative and low.

Finally, the least self-determined type of motivation or *external* motivation did not show any significant relationship with different categories of strategies. In fact, there were positive and low relationships between external motivation and memory, compensation, metacognitive and affective strategies, as well as negative and low correlation between external motivation and both cognitive and social strategies. The findings showed that different modes of extrinsic motivation were not mainly associated with the use of language learning strategies. The same result was reported by Ziahosseini and Salehi's (2007) study despite the fact that they viewed extrinsic motivation as one whole entity not placing it on a continuum. Nevertheless, Chang (2005) found positive and significant correlations between integrated motivation and cognitive strategies, introjected motivation and cognitive strategies, and identified motivation and all types of language learning strategies. Yet, like what was found in this study, a negative correlation was reported between external motivation and cognitive strategies in the study by Chang (2005). A possible explanation for the findings may be that those students who studied English language for the sake of language itself and had inherent interest in learning the language made more use of language learning strategies, while those learners who had some extrinsic reasons for learning the language rarely used language learning strategies even if they chose to learn English willingly.

V. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Pedagogically speaking, the fact that Iranian EFL learners were mainly intrinsically motivated towards learning English implies that they had one necessary but not sufficient criterion for an optimal learning. Therefore, this advantage can be utilized by the teachers, and they can guide students to the right direction by equipping them with some working tools like language learning strategies.

In addition, results revealed that Iranian EFL learners were high users concerning metacognitive, cognitive and social strategies, and they were medium users in terms of memory, compensation and affective strategies. Due to positive and

significant correlation of metacognitive and cognitive strategies with intrinsic motivation, teachers are suggested to focus more on instructing these two types of strategies that have great influence on intrinsic motivation.

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