

The Relationship of Self-Regulated Learning and Motivational Learning Strategies with Intermediate EFL Learners' Achievement

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to determine to what extent the Iranian L2 learners make use of motivational and self-regulated learning strategies and also the relationships between motivational beliefs, self-regulation strategies use, and L2 learning achievement are as the major focus of this study. The statistical population of this study consisted of 70 EFL learners who were selected regarding to their proficiency level after running Oxford Placement Test. The measurement tools of this study were Motivational Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) developed by Pintrich (1990), which used to determine the L2 learners' motivational level. Self-Regulated Learning Strategies (SRLS) questionnaire developed by Zimmerman and Pones (1988) was run to reveal L2 learners' behavior toward these strategies. The internal reliability of the questionnaires was also obtained (0.87) for SRLS questionnaire and (0.83) for MSL questionnaire with using alpha Cronbach test. In addition to the questionnaires, a semi-structured interview was held to deepen the results gained through the questionnaires. The collected data based on the two questionnaires were analyzed through frequency tables and the percentages of learners' responses, and correlated with the participants' final exams scores through Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The findings of the study revealed that the participants in the current study were high motivational strategies users whereas, low performers at employing self-regulation strategies. These findings are directly related to students' weakness in employing self-regulated learning strategies which points to the fact that motivation as a component is necessary for making progress in learning but by no means is sufficient by itself.

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Key Terms: Iranian Intermediate L2 Learners, Motivational Learning Strategies (MLS), Self-Regulated Learning Strategies (SRLS), Cognitive learning strategies, Metacognitive awareness, Metacognitive regulation

1. Introduction

The framework for understanding the psychological basis of learning has gradually shifted from behaviorism to cognitivism since the 1960s (Anderson, Reder, & Simon, 1995). The past twenty years have witnessed a large body of second language research targeting language learning strategies (e.g. Macaro 2001; Schunk, & Zimmerman 1989; Yamamori 2002). The majority of the work in the learning strategy literature had practical goals to explore ways of empowering language learners to become more self-directed and effective in their learning. In general, strategy specialists (Pintrich, 2002; Schunk, 2002; Zimmerman 2008), believe that learners with strategic knowledge of language learning, compared with those without, become more efficient, resourceful, and flexible, thus acquiring a language more easily.

During the past few years, a number of theories have been proposed to describe how students become pro-active and regulators of their own learning (Henderson, 1986). Understanding the concept of self-regulation is important in the development of these achievement capabilities for both teachers and students.

According to Zimmerman (2001), self-regulated learners are individuals who are "metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active participants in their own learning process" (p. 4). Such students personally initiate and direct their own efforts to acquire knowledge and skill rather than relying on teachers, parents, or other agents for instruction. In terms of metacognitive processes, self-regulated learners plan, organize, self-instruct, and self-evaluate at various stages during the acquisition process. From a motivational vantage, self-regulated learners perceive themselves as autonomous, self-efficacious, and intrinsically motivated. In terms of behavior, self-regulated learners select, structure, and even create social and physical environments that optimize acquisition. According to this view, effective learners become aware of functional relations between their patterns of thought and action and social and environmental outcomes (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1998).

In general, studies show that the following characteristics differentiate students who self-regulate their learning from those who do not (Corno, 1993;

Weinstein, Husman, 2000; Winne, 1995; Zimmerman, 1998, 2000, 2001, 2002): 1.They are familiar with and know how to use a series of cognitive strategies (repetition, elaboration and organization), which help them to attend to, transform, organize, elaborate and recover information.2.They know how to plan, control and direct their mental processes toward the achievement of personal goals (metacognition).3.They show a set of motivational beliefs and adaptive emotions, such as high sense of academic self-efficacy, the adaption of learning goals, the development of positive emotions towards tasks(e.g. joy, satisfaction, enthusiasm), as well as the capacity to control and modify these, adjusting them to requirements of the task and of the specific learning situation.4.The plan and control the time and effort to be used on tasks, and they know how to create and structure favorable learning environments, such as finding a suitable place to study, and help-seeking from teachers and classmates when they have difficulties.5.To the extent that the context allows it, they show greater efforts to participate in the control and regulation of academic tasks, classroom climate and structure (e.g. how one will be evaluated, task requirements, the design of class assignments, organization of work teams).6.They are able to put into play a series of volitional strategies, aimed at avoiding external and internal distractions, in order to maintain their concentration, effort and motivation while performing academic tasks.

In summary, if we narrow down what characterizes these students, it is that they see themselves as agents of their own behavior; they believe learning is a proactive process, they are self-motivated and they use strategies that enable them to achieve desired academic results.

Self-regulated learners are not only distinguished by their proactive orientation and performance but also by their self-motivated capabilities. So motivational strategies used for learning are among other variables influencing learning achievement. These strategies refer to the behaviors associated with learning and development (Pintrich, 2002). As Gardner (1985) believed motivation is an internal force that energizes the individual for action and determines the direction of that action, attitudes toward the subject and methodological or course design condition.

So, the purpose of conducting the present research can be summarized in the following research questions: 1. to what extent do EFL learners make use of motivational learning strategies? 2. To what extent do EFL learners make use of self-regulated learning strategies? 3. Is there a relationship between the self-regulated and motivational learning strategies and intermediate EFL learners' L2 achievement?

2. Methodology

The population size of statistical society was calculated 90 female EFL learners. They were at the age range of 16-23. They were intermediate language learners who studied English at Navid Language Institute in Shiraz. All the participants were given the Oxford placement test (Allan, 2004) in order to control the proficiency variable and to have a homogeneous group, and those whose proficiency scores were between one standard deviation below and above the mean were selected (70 participants) to be included in the study. A 31-item Self-Regulated Learning Strategies (SRLS) questionnaire developed by Zimmerman and Pones (1988) was used to collect the data related to self regulated learning strategies. The data related to motivational strategies for learning was collected by administering a 36-item Motivational Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) developed by Pintrich & Degroot (1990). In addition to the questionnaires, a semi-structured interview was held to deepen the results gained through the questionnaires. A tape-recorded face-to-face semi-structured interview with a sub-sample of L2 learners was used in this part of data collection. The total means of students' final exams scores for three consecutive semesters, as last instrument, were regarded as an index of their learning progress.

3. Results

To probe the extent to which EFL learners make use of motivational learning strategies, the frequency and percentage of using each motivational learning strategies was computed for the responses between level 5(moderately agree) and level 6 (strongly agree) on MLS questionnaire. Table 1 shows percentage of making use of different strategies on the motivational learning strategies questionnaire:

Table 1. The Percentage of Using Motivational Learning Strategies

Motivational learning strategies	percentage
Intrinsic goal orientation	56.25%
Extrinsic goal orientation	78%
Task value	75.66%
Controlling of learning belief	35.5%
Self-efficacy	53.5%
Rehearsal	82.5%
Elaboration	50.83%
Organization	66.66%
Critical thinking	43%
Total means	60.21%

As the data and the percentages revealed in Table 1, the participants are high motivational learning strategies users. Out of all cases of motivational learning strategies, rehearsal strategy was the one employed and favored more (82.5%) by the learners, and controlling of learning belief was the least frequently used strategy (35.5%). As it is quite obvious in Table1, 60.21% of the students (i.e. the overall mean

for percentage of all strategies) have used motivational strategies in their learning, indicating that the students are sufficiently self-motivated and possess an adequate amount of incentive for learning. The following figure shows the extent of using such strategies graphically:

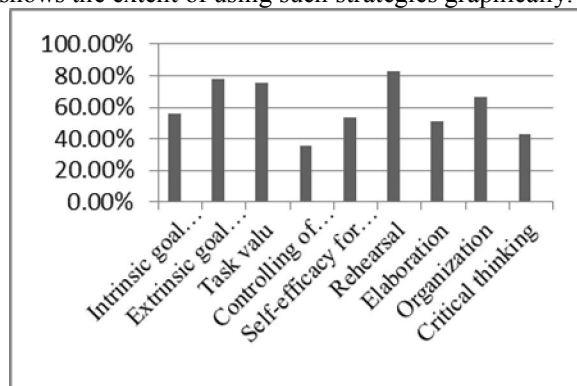


Figure 1. Graphical Representation of the Percentage of Employing Motivational Learning Strategies

The other objective of the current study was investigating the extent of using self-regulated learning strategies by learners. To address this objective a 31-item SRLS questionnaire developed by Zimmerman and Pones (1988) was used to gather the data. The purpose was to determine to what extent learners make use of these strategies in their learning process. The frequency of using each self-regulated learning strategies was computed for the responses between level 5 (moderately agree) and level 6 (strongly agree) on SRLS questionnaire. Table 2 depicts the percentage of making use of different strategies on the self-regulated learning strategies:

Table 2. The Percentage of Making Use of Self-Regulated Learning Strategies

Self-regulated learning strategy	percentage
Metacognitive self-regulation	21.87%
Time and study environment	27.75%
Effort regulation	21.12%
Help seeking	30%
Peer learning	22.33%
Total means	24.61%

The percentages in Table 2 indicate that the employing of self-regulation strategies by learners generally and in all cases are low significantly and they have downgraded between level 3 (slightly disagree) and level 4 (slightly agree) and as it shows out of all cases of self-regulated learning strategies, **Help seeking strategy** was the one employed and favored more (30%) by the learners, and **Effort regulation** was the least frequently used strategy (21.12%) and the gained means of the Table 2 shows that self-regulation learning strategies are, more or less, employed by only 24.61% (the total mean) of the learners.

The following figure shows the extent of using these strategies graphically:

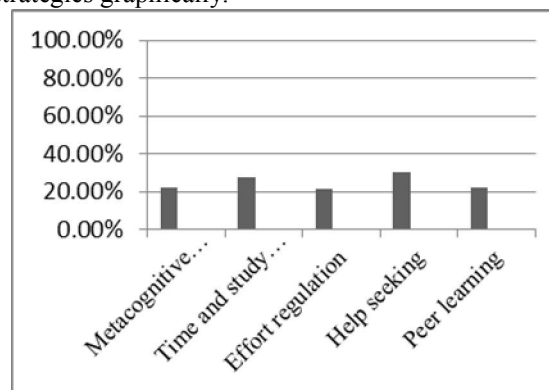


Figure 2. Graphical Representation of the Percentage of Employing Self-Regulated Learning Strategies

Figure 2 evidently reflected learners' restricted level of employing self-regulated learning strategies. As a result, regarding self-regulated learning strategies, the participants in the current study were found to be low self-regulated strategy users (24.61%) and therefore they are not self-regulated enough. These results support the idea that learners are not familiar with self-regulation strategies sufficiently.

Figure 3 clearly revealed the comparison between employing motivational and self-regulated learning strategies by L2 learners.

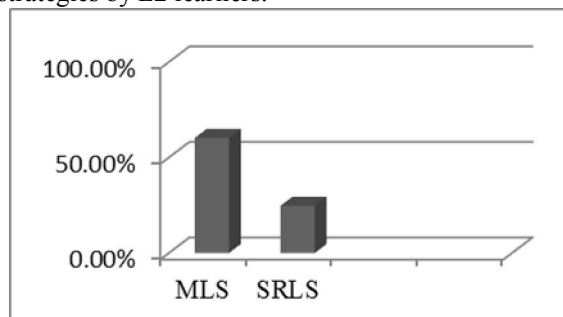


Figure 3. Graphical Representation of Employing Motivational Learning Strategies In Comparison With Self-Regulated Learning Strategies

To probe if there is any significant relationship between applying the self-regulated learning and motivational learning strategies and intermediate EFL learners' L2 achievement, Pearson product-moment correlation was run on motivational learning and self-regulated learning strategies. It was also conducted on MLS, SRLS and learners' final exam scores and finally on learners' achievement. Table 3, shows the result of Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient between motivational learning and self-regulated learning strategies questionnaire:

Table 3. The Relationship between Learners' Motivational and Self-Regulated Learning Strategies

	MQ total	SR total
MQ total Pearson correlation	1	-.788**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
N	70	70
SR total Pearson correlation	-.788**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
N	70	70

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

As Table 3 shows, a significant negative correlation coefficient ($r = -.788$, $p = .000$) between motivational and self-regulation variables could be traced. The lack of any significant relationship between motivational and self-regulation variables may indicate that those language learners who are high-motivated in language classroom will not necessarily be better on employing self-regulated learning strategies. Therefore, it can be inferred that a high level of motivation, does not necessarily mean that the learners are highly self-regulated in their learning process.

Table 4. The Relationship between Learners' Final Exam's Scores and MLS and SRLS

	MQ total	SR total	FES
MQ total Pearson correlation	1	-.788**	.856
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
N	70	70	70
SR total Pearson correlation	.788**	1	-.751
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
N	70	70	70
FES total Pearson correlation	.856	-.751	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
N	70	70	70

As it is indicated in Table 4, the relationship between applying ML and SRL strategies by learners and getting an idea of how much learning progress they made was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Table 4, shows that the L2 learners' level of motivation is correlated to their final scores ($r = .856$ & $p = .000$), since the more students were motivated to learn the better scores they got on their final exams. However, the low level of self-regulated strategies by the L2 learners has caused a negative correlation between self-regulation strategies and L2 learners' final scores ($r = .751$ & $p = .000$), which made the learners' final scores and, thus, their learning outcome generally lower than what was expected. These findings are directly related to students' weakness in employing self-regulated learning strategies which were used generally more or less by a majority of L2 learners, but what makes a difference in how the learners were making progress in their learning was related to their knowledge of **how** to employ these strategies during their learning process, since Zimmerman's findings (2007) suggest that self-regulated learners are aware of their level of

knowledge, are able to set their goals, employ realistic goals for the development of their knowledge, take advantage of environmental resources, and assess their understanding and knowledge. As a result, the researcher's findings point to the fact that motivation as a component is necessary for making progress in learning, but by no means is sufficient by itself.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The results indicated that Iranian L2 learners are self-motivated and show high degree of eagerness and interest in getting involved in learning English. They engage in L2 learning not only for the reasons such as grades, rewards, evaluation by others (Extrinsic Motivation), but also for challenge, curiosity and mastery (Intrinsic Motivation). According to the interview, Iranian L2 learners are motivated to learn L2 because of their desire to communicate and affiliate with foreigners and desire to understand other cultures and become global citizens, so they know the reasons why they are participating in L2 learning. Based on the interview, the Iranian L2 learners had a higher degree of extrinsic motivation than the intrinsic one because they believed that preserving their identity is so important to them and aspiration related to intrinsic motivation might affect their identity and fear of identifying with English (western) culture and values may be related to their socio-cultural and religious affiliation.

Another important and also interesting finding concerns with the control of learning beliefs strategy (35.5%). It refers to learners' beliefs that their efforts to learn will result in positive outcomes. But many of participants believed that external factors such as the atmosphere and the environment of the institutes, teachers and the way of their teaching are the basic reasons of their negative outcomes. The other pressing limitation the learners mentioned in the interview was the short hours which do not let their teachers work on four skills adequately. An overcrowded classroom in institutes is another problem. They believe due to lack of enough time and possibly financial resources the management sometimes decides to accommodate as many students in a class as possible which certainly diminishes the quality of learning. Therefore, the large number of students in the classroom results in instructor's limitation in applying effective communicative methods with almost no student talking time in the class.

It should be pointed out that the findings of the questionnaire revealed that the participants were not strong enough to make use of strategies like elaboration (50.83%) and critical thinking (43%). These strategies help the learners integrate and connect new information with prior knowledge. On the contrary, they mentioned that for preventing to forget, they have to rehearse (82.5%) their materials. Iranian

students don't have any real English life opportunity to benefit from or even any chance to employ and put their English knowledge in to practice out of classes. So they just have to rehearse and memorize their material to prevent them from being forgotten.

Secondly, to what extent EFL learners make use of self-regulated learning strategies. As Mason (2004) mentioned, training programs that promote self-regulated learning have been found to be beneficial for learners' learning. The analyses of the present study results revealed the significant lack of applying self-regulated learning strategies (24.61%) among Iranian L2 learners. There is a lack of ability to manage and regulate time and study environment by Iranian L2 learners (27.75%). It shows that they do not get deeply involved in scheduling, planning and managing their study time and place. Effort-regulation (21.12%) reflects a commitment to completing their study goals, even when there are difficulties or distractions. Most of the participants mentioned that when course materials are dull and uninteresting, they cannot manage to keep working until they finish. Help seeking (30%) includes both peers and instructors. But the findings obtained from the interviews indicated that when participants face difficulties in materials, they cannot identify someone to provide them with assistance. Because they believed, on the one hand, the way of learning in classes is very competitive and learners make a big effort to do an excellent job on their own assignments, on the other hand, there is not friendly relationship between learners and their teacher. The other point to be mentioned is that collaborating with peers has been found to have positive effects on achievement. Sharing dialogue with peers can help a learner clarify course material. But a few participants (22.33%) believed that when they are studying, they set aside time to discuss the course material with a group of their classmates.

Thirdly, Based on third research question, a null hypothesis was formed stating that there is no relationship between the self-regulated learning strategies and motivation for learning and the progress made by intermediate EFL learners. The analyses revealed that there is not a positive correlation between self-regulated learning strategies and motivation for learning (-.887). Thus it can be argued that the lack of any significant positive relationship between motivational and self-regulation variables may indicate that those language learners who are high-motivated in language classroom will not necessarily be better on employing self-regulated learning strategies. The results also, revealed that the L2 learners, who had higher level of motivation, got better scores in their

final exams. In other words, it can be inferred that the higher the level of motivation, the higher the student's achievement and progress. However, the low level of self-regulated strategies by the L2 learners has caused a negative correlation between self-regulation strategies and L2 learners' final scores (-.751), which made the learners' final scores and, thus, their learning outcome generally lower than what was expected.

These findings were directly related to students' weakness in employing self-regulated learning strategies which were used generally more or less by a majority of L2 learners, but what makes a difference in how the learners were making progress in their learning was related to their knowledge of **how** to employ these strategies during their learning process.

So, providing a proper context for the application of self-regulated learning strategies among students should be regarded as one of the most important objectives of the educational system, consists of teachers and material developers, as it is expected the educational system to increase students' awareness on how to use self-regulated learning strategies to promote the efficiency of students' learning outcomes.

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